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**Media Culture, Artifact and Gender Identity:
An Analysis of Bratz Dolls**

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Media Culture, Artifact and Gender Identity:

An Analysis of Bratz Dolls

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Thesis submitted to the
Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
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Department of Communication
Faculty of Arts
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Abstract

It could be argued that girl's play is witnessing a drastic transformation. This alteration is fostering much debate surrounding young girls and their notion of self identity. Neil Postman (1982) argues that childhood no longer exists as it has disappeared through the mass media. Likewise, Sharon Lamb (2001, 2006) argues that young girls are continually being sold the ideal attitude and a hyper-sexualized self identity through the media messages and products they consume. Such a problematic transformation raises several concerns with regards to girlhood studies. My research asks how MGA Entertainment's Bratz dolls place identity formation into question. By exploring the aforementioned notions, my research explores girl's play and identity and looks at how it contributes to the shaping of how a girl's choice in play impacts girlhood. I argue that such a claim would be best explored and answered through interviewing young girls and their mothers.

Media Culture, Artifact and Gender Identity: *An Analysis of Bratz Dolls*

Table of Contents

Dedication

Acknowledgment

Abstract

Introduction

<i>Statement of Problem</i>	1-2
<i>Purpose of Study</i>	3
<i>Rationale of Study</i>	3-7
<i>Key Terms</i>	7-8
<i>Overview of Thesis</i>	8-9
<i>Chapter Summary</i>	10

Chapter One: Literature Review

<i>Dolls with a Culture: Bratz</i>	12-13
<i>The Evolution of Girl's Play</i>	13-17
<i>Consumerism: Revisited</i>	18-22
<i>To Objectify or Not to Objectify: Girls as Objects through Play</i>	23-24
<i>Girlhood: Packaged, Sold, Delivered</i>	24-30
<i>The Disappearance of Girlhood?</i>	30-34
<i>Why Bratz?</i>	34-36
<i>Chapter Summary</i>	36-37

Chapter Two: Research Design and Methodology

<i>Research Design</i>	37-39
<u><i>Methodology:</i></u>	39-40
<i>Participants</i>	40-41
<i>Procedures</i>	41-43
<i>Data Collection</i>	43-44
<i>Data Analysis</i>	44-45
<i>Limitations</i>	46-47
<i>Chapter Summary</i>	47

Chapter Three: Results and Analysis

<i>Introduction</i>	47-48
<i>Results</i>	48-49
<i>Traditionalism Lost: Mutation</i>	50-57
<i>The Disappearance of Girlhood: Precocity</i>	57-62
<i>Search for Identity</i>	62-69
<i>Consumerism and Behaviour</i>	69-72

Media Culture, Artifact and Gender Identity: *An Analysis of Bratz Dolls*

Table of Contents

Continued

Chapter Three: Results and Analysis (cont'd)	
<i>A 'Passion for Fashion': Its Relevance</i>	73-75
<i>Chapter Summary</i>	76
Chapter Four: Discussion	
<i>Introduction</i>	77-78
<i>Sharon Lamb on the loss of traditionalism in girlhood</i>	78-81
<i>The notion of the disappearance of girlhood through the works of Postman and Barber</i>	81-84
<i>An identity to call my own: Girls and their search for identity according to Lamb and Brown</i>	84-87
<i>"I love shopping, I love clothes!" Juliet Schor's 'Born to Buy' theory</i>	87-91
<i>The Hyper-Sexualized 'new' you: Lamb and Brown on hyper-sexualized fashion for girls</i>	91-94
<i>Chapter Summary</i>	94-95
Chapter Five: To Conclude	95-102
References	103-107
Appendices:	
Appendix A: <i>Recruitment Text: Mothers</i>	
Appendix B: <i>Recruitment Text: Girls</i>	
Appendix C: <i>Interview Guide: Mothers</i>	
Appendix D: <i>Interview Guide: Girls</i>	
Appendix E: <i>Consent Form: Mothers</i>	
Appendix F: <i>Consent Form: Mothers for their daughters</i>	
Appendix G: <i>Assent Form</i>	
Appendix H: <i>Research Ethics Board (REB) Approval</i>	
Appendix I: <i>Thematic Analysis Data Chart</i>	

This thesis is dedicated to the late Jennifer Lyn Richmond: a near and dear friend, who
will forever remain in my heart and soul.

You inspired me, Jennifer, and I will remain eternally grateful for *all* that you instilled in
me as a friend, as a person and most importantly – as a woman.

With love,
Lo

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Introduction

Trends and brand loyalties continue to evolve over time, especially where children are concerned. Marketers are continually encouraging children to set trends and as Juliet Schor (2004) notes, “In the first half of the twentieth century, products were mainly sold through mothers” (p. 39), whereas today, children are the direct targets of advertising as they are a market within themselves. This thesis explores the various notions surrounding the presumed innocence of childhood and examines questions pertaining to girl’s play.

The 1990s and 2000s brought forth a revolution in youth empowerment as “kids [now have] unprecedented power on their parents’ spending power” (Schor, 2004, p. 42). With children and their buying power on the rise, it is not surprising to see girl’s toys and the cultural products that surround them becoming more influential. It is for the purposes of this research that the appeal of MGA Entertainment Inc.’s Bratz dolls (characterized by an oversized head, seductive eyes, full lips and a petite frame) will be explored and this artifact will also help determine whether there has been a definitive change in girl’s play.

Statement of Problem

The research presented in this thesis will examine what has changed with regards to the traditionalism associated with girl’s play. Historically, the notion of ‘play’ was an act of mimicry as “kids toys often resembled the material inventory of the adult world: they were miniatures of mother’s and father’s real worlds” (Hjarvard, 2004, p. 43). Essentially young girls would play with dolls in an effort to emulate their mother’s lives. Therefore, this historical notion of ‘play’ raises several concerns with regards to the toys that girls are playing with today. Therefore, it could be argued that Bratz dolls are a toy, which may be presented and framed as a vulgar taste

transgressive – an overt display of vulgarity which continues to evolve over time. The ‘presentation’ of these dolls therefore questions what has changed and what has granted this transformation of a girl’s taste through the toys that she chooses to play with; by precisely asking what types of influence, if any, do Bratz dolls have on young girls and their identity construction?

In her analysis of *Hustler* magazine, Laura Kipnis (1996) shares her deep offense and disgust by the grotesque display and depiction of the female body in this pornographic magazine. Kipnis equates vulgarity with pornography. For Kipnis (1996), “vulgarity becomes a form of class solidarity” and a “mode for undermining authority” (as cited in Lehman 1997, p. 38). In defining the female body in *Hustler*, Kipnis (1996) asserts that “the *Hustler* body is a battleground of opposing social and cultural forces” (p. 128). As a researcher, Kipnis’ definition of vulgarity inspired the creation of term vulgar taste transgressive. There is something distinctly intriguing about Bratz dolls, and as a researcher, this is where the formation of this study was first born. The representation of these dolls is a deliberate choice to which the Bratz dolls push the social boundaries and the idea that offends a common sensibility: the cultural construction of childhood is innocence. Whereas, a vulgar taste transgressive is a bold, new term and contribution to communication scholarship which emphasizes an overt influence on the hyper-sexualized notions and in this study – these are the hyper-sexualized notions of girlhood which place both innocence and traditionalism of play into question. Vulgar in and of itself was not bold enough; it took the three words of vulgar, taste, and transgressive to truly situate the depiction of the highly sexualized Bratz dolls as they are marketing disturbing messages that are so *very* oppositional to the cultural conventions of girlhood.

Purpose of Study

This thesis examines whether Bratz dolls present a vulgar taste transgressive, which is directly promoted towards young girls; this thesis explores the aforementioned notions of identity construction and asks what this means for the traditional concept of girlhood, which framed and defined a child as innocent. This project's primary research involved in-depth interviews with mothers and their daughters respectively. In essence, this thesis explores whether Bratz dolls place girlhood identity formation into question as it also explores what has changed with regards to girl's play and the former innocence of girlhood.

Rationale of the Study

In order to properly situate the literature that surrounds girlhood and identity construction it is important to first define the Bratz brand in an effort to situate the impact that Bratz dolls have had and continue to have on young girls and the 'tween' market. Although the term 'tween' did not exist in the early 1960s, the Girl Scout publication *American Girl* addressed itself to something called the 'tween-ager,' which meant girls between the ages of eleven and sixteen. In *Branded: The Buying and Selling of Teenagers*, Alissa Quart (2003) asserts that a "new intensity in marketing to tweens has brought out the more venal tendencies in brand sages; [as] they look at every place of children's vulnerability, searching for selling opportunities" (p. 72). According to fashion designer Betsey Johnson, "five year olds want to look like their twelve year old sisters and teens and young twenty-somethings look great and little girls want to do the same thing and do it faster" (as cited in Linn 2005, p. 132). Therefore, youth culture scholars such as Susan Linn (2005) assert that such strategic marketing results in "girls especially, even very young girls, being targeted for clothing and accessories that are more appropriate for their older

friends and relatives” (p. 132). Since MGA Entertainment Inc. realized that the youth market was on the rise, the company conducted a great amount of market research, including focus groups, to decipher exactly what young girls were searching for in a doll. MGA Entertainment Inc. claim that “the name, look, colour scheme, and extension products of Bratz are influenced by the feedback provided through tween girls” (McAllister, 2007, p. 248). Given the results that MGA Entertainment Inc. retrieved from their market research, the company:

plugged into tween-friendly cultural trends such as hip-hop (hence the ‘z’ in Bratz); girl-power icons (that often equate sex with power) such as Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera; Japanese visual media such as Anime (as seen by Bratz’ huge eyes); and an emphasis on ‘fun consumption,’ including fashion and shopping activities. (p. 248)

In order to explore whether Bratz dolls place identity formation into question, it is important to define identity theory. Identity theory links to one’s attitudes, relationships and behaviours. Identity scholars such Stryker, 1968; Stryker & Burke, 2000 argue that “the self consists of a collection of identities, each of which is based on occupying a particular role” (as cited in Desrochers, Andreassi & Thompson, n.p, 2002). James Maddux and Jennifer Gosselin (2002) assert that “‘self’ and ‘identity’ are concerned largely with the question ‘Who am I?’ (as cited in Leary & Price-Tangney, 2002, p. 218). One could argue that from a young girl’s perspective, especially, this question of ‘Who am I?’ is one that truly and relentlessly resonates. The ‘Who am I?’ question is one that will be discussed further in Chapter Three as this analysis is exploring if play with Bratz dolls places girlhood identity formation into question.

This Bratz analysis would not be complete without considering Mattel’s Barbie as Bratz dolls are continually compared to this Mattel doll. When Mattel first introduced the doll in the late 1950s, Barbie was nothing short of being named as ‘innocent.’ In fact, “Barbie was designed to keep girls on the hook as unsatisfied customers and at the same time, and amongst other things, [she] promoted the idea of women as sex objects” (Dixon, 1990, p. 92). The major

concern for Bob Dixon (1990) is that because Barbie was directly promoted as a sex object, this raised several implications for young girls as Mattel attempted something 'new' in the realms of marketing. In fact, Barbie was framed and presented as a way of life, meaning that young girls, playing with these dolls would also view themselves as sexual objects.

Bob Dixon's work corresponds with Sharon Lamb as in *Secret Lives of Girls*, Lamb (2001) explores several notions with regards to how young girls are continually objectified as sex objects in the media. Essentially, young girls are simply viewed as objects and this is apparent through media 'objects' such as Britney Spears. For Lamb, young girls actually take pleasure in being objectified and these young girls are objectifying themselves to gain a sense of power. Lamb (2001) asserts, "American culture now knows the dangers of girls' self-objectification in so far as it means dressing up to look pretty" (p. 40). Lamb's work questions whether pretty is epitomized through wearing makeup and showing off one's midriff and if young girls gain a sense of power through such over displays of sexuality.

It could be argued that one contemporary tween craze that exemplifies Lamb's notion of beauty and objectification as power is MGA Entertainment Inc.'s Bratz dolls. Lamb argues that, "by sexualizing themselves, [young girls] both differentiate themselves from their mothers and celebrate their objectification" (p. 41). According to Lamb, it is through such celebration and overt objectification that young girls wish to play with cultural products which celebrate this sexual objectification.

With reference back to Barbie, Lamb (2006) believes that Bratz dolls are a "brazen act of disrespect to the icon of the doll world" (p. 217), the 'icon' being Barbie. However, in an attempt to compete with the seemingly 'brattier' brand, Mattel quickly attempted to diversify its brand "into the multicultural My Scene Barbie" (p. 217). The strategic line of Barbie dolls are quite

similar to MGA's Bratz line as they wear a lot of make-up, dress in a provocative way, and have an overt concern for all things related to fashion. For instance, Nia, one of the My Scene Barbies was born in Mexico City, whereas the other My Scene Barbies are from the United States and are of Caucasian or African American descent. It is interesting to note the claim Mattel reinforces as they are continually "adapting its line to bring competing definitions of *good role model* and *acceptable fantasy object* within its own conception of Barbie and to present its offerings as precisely those that fulfill consumer needs" (Rand, 1995, p. 29). Conversely, Lamb (2006) argues, "Barbie has long been called a bad role model for young girls partly because of her obsession with all things-pink-fashion" (p. 217). Lamb believes, therefore, that Barbie was so "predictable, so suburban and so white" (p. 217). For that reason and with the attempt to compete with Bratz dolls, Lamb (2006) believes that "MGA Entertainment Inc. saw an opportunity in the face of the unrealistic icon of womanhood; Bratz dolls could be credited for simply *not* being Barbie" (p. 218).

Scholars, such as Matthew McAllister (2007) in *Girls with a Passion for Fashion*, believe that Bratz dolls present many vulgarities even though they pride themselves as the only girls with a 'passion for fashion.' McAllister (2007) defines *fashion*, from a Bratz perspective as:

sassy young females with provocatively stylish, some even say 'street walker' clothes. [The Bratz brand has attracted] much attention, including criticism of the brand and its manufacturer MGA Entertainment Inc., as critics of Bratz mainly focus on the brand's overtly sexual appearance given its young target market and seeming celebration of adult activities such as alcohol consumption via their pool-side or dance-club play sets, as one of which came with champagne-glasses. (p. 244)

Therefore, the implications of Bratz' sexual images, according to McAllister, may be more fully understood through an examination of the hyper-consumerism that surrounds the brand as he argues that many young girls search for a self-identification with the dolls through the joy they experience while shopping and buying. McAllister (2007) believes that the Bratz

dolls “reinforce for some, the idea that a life’s passion *is* for fashion and also for a commodity orientation and a hyper-consumable society” (p. 256). However, one could argue that Bratz dolls are therefore encouraging young girls to be superficial and to preoccupy themselves with their physical image. McAllister believes that Bratz dolls suggest that young girls can create their own identity and gain power through fashion and make-up.

Benjamin Barber’s work (2007) will also be explored, as Barber argues that consumerism corrupts children and branding, for instance, forces individuals to lose their own identity. Additionally, Neil Postman’s (1982) work argues that the media has caused childhood to disappear. This research is exploring the reasons and causes for such a transformation in girl’s play. This change in play is seemingly problematic: it appears as though play has evolved in so far as the notion of mimicry is now questionable as girls are now playing with arguably offensive and vulgar toys such as a Bratz dolls.

From the surface, this change is problematic as it is placing an arguably offensive toy such as a Bratz doll in a mimesis. This research will specifically explore how MGA Entertainment Inc.’s Bratz dolls place girlhood identity formation into question by exploring the following key research questions: Do Bratz dolls place girlhood identity formation into question? What has changed with regards to girl’s play and the former innocence of girlhood?

Key Terms

In order to fully understand the following study, an explanation of the key terms and their intended meaning is explained in detail below. This explanation will allow for a precise understanding of the terms used throughout this thesis.

Identity is a set of characteristics and beliefs which shape how someone behaves, believes and functions in society.

Hyper-sexualization is the desire for young girls to behave in an overtly sexualized manner. Sharon Lamb's work (2001, 2006) asserts girl's play has become a display of hyper-sexualized behaviour through objectification of one's self.

Bratz Culture is a set of values and behaviours that girls develop that emulate what the Bratz girls say, do and how they act. Matthew McAllister's work (2007), asserts that the Bratz dolls reflect and amplify how young girls experience joy through consumerism.

Girl culture is a belief system and set of attitudes that young girls share or rely upon in order to develop their 'own' identity.

Overview of Thesis

The Introduction clearly outlines this study's background, statement of problem, purpose, rationale and the key terms associated with the study.

As the literature review chapter of this thesis, Chapter One outlines the literature review and theoretical framework. It is here that key theories that discuss girlhood, identity and girl's play are illustrated. The literature review will help examine the research questions further.

Chapter Two clearly outlines the research design and the methodology used for the thesis. Twenty qualitative in-depth interviews were conducted for the thesis and this chapter clearly outlines the interview process. Chapter Two also summarizes a key description of the study's participants, the procedures which were undertaken, the data collection and analysis processes and the limitations associated with the in-depth interview process.

Chapter Three outlines the results from the 20 in-depth interviews conducted with the study's participants. Chapter Three also provides a summary of the participants' responses to the

interview questions in addition to a comprehensive analysis of these responses. The data, which has been analyzed through the means of thematic analysis, has been divided into five key themes (see Appendix I).

Chapter Four presents a forum in which the data will be further discussed within the context of the five themes presented in Chapter Three. However, these data findings will also be examined and placed within the greater context of the communications studies field.

To conclude, Chapter Five will discuss the study's findings and final interpretations. Chapter Five also serves as the means to provide final conclusions to the research questions: Do Bratz dolls place girlhood identity formation into question? What has changed with regards to girl's play and the former innocence of girlhood? Furthermore, Chapter Five will provide insight towards how the study could make a significant contribution to the field.

With regards to appendices, this thesis also provides key documents which correspond to the Full Review for Research Ethics Board (REB) which was submitted on October 28, 2008.

The following are the appendices which are referred throughout the thesis:

Appendix A: *Recruitment Text: Mothers*

Appendix B: *Recruitment Text: Girls*

Appendix C: *Interview Guide: Mothers*

Appendix D: *Interview Guide: Girls*

Appendix E: *Consent Form: Mothers*

Appendix F: *Consent Form: Mothers for their daughters*

Appendix G: *Assent Form*

Appendix H: *Research Ethics Board (REB) Approval*

Appendix I: *Thematic Analysis Data Chart*

Chapter Summary

In this chapter the Bratz brand and its surrounding culture were introduced and defined in addition to current notions and definitions pertaining to girlhood, identity and the aforementioned transformation in girl's play have been introduced, explored and developed. Furthermore, as a key contribution to communication scholarship, it was here that the term vulgar taste transgressive was introduced and defined. By examining the background of this topic, thorough defining the problem statement and purpose of this study, this chapter has outlined how this study will attempt to understand the reasons and causes for such a transformation in girl's play. This thesis will specifically ask whether Bratz dolls place girlhood identity formation into question, as this study explores what has changed with regards to girl's play and the former innocence of girlhood.

In the next chapter, a literature review on related academic discourse surrounding young girls, girl's play and their identity construction will be explored and analyzed through the following theoretical framework: Sharon Lamb (2001, 2006) as she examines the hyper-sexualization of girls and how young girls objectify themselves through play; Benjamin Barber (1995, 2007) who argues that markets corrupt children as individuals' status as citizens is transformed into being a consumer; Neil Postman (1982) who argues that the notion of childhood is, in fact, disappearing; and Susan Linn (2005), Juliet Schor (2004) and Matthew McAllister (2007) as their respective theories discuss the growth in the commercialization of childhood as children are now the direct targets of advertising.

Chapter One: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

A certain shift appears to be occurring with regards to girlhood theory and girl's play. Therefore, it is important to consider the work of key scholars in childhood studies in order to establish, define, and explore how the Bratz brand affects girls through girlhood culture and also a girl's identity construction. Since a 'shift' in theory has occurred, it is important to consider both 'historical' theories in addition to the contemporary ones, as the Bratz dolls are relatively new; they only first appeared on store shelves in 2001.

Since there is a wide variety of communication theorists who have studied girlhood, identity and girl's play, it was very important to limit the theorists selected for this literature review. Furthermore, the theories chosen for this review, deal specifically with certain key themes, which have been divided into seven distinct categories. First, in *Dolls with a culture: Bratz*, it is discussed how MGA Entertainment has tailored their market of dolls to girls in a very specific and strategic way. This section also discusses Matthew McAllister's (2007) theory which argues that the Bratz dolls are a brand of integrated spectacular consumption through the doll's strategic use of sexualization, commodification and globalization. Second, in *The evolution of girl's play*, key theorists who claim that girl's play has been transformed from its presumed innocence of girlhood are explored. Here, certain key findings from the *Report of the APA Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls* (2007) are discussed. Third, in *Consumerism: Revisited*, Juliet Schor's *Born to Buy* (2004) theory is explored of how children are gaining a vast amount of experience as consumers at a very young age as the consumer marketplace has now become an avenue that is targeted for children by children. Next, in *To objectify or not to objectify: Girls as objects through play*, Sharon Lamb's *Secret Lives of Girls* (2001) is explored as this section examines how girl's play has become an overt display of hyper-sexualized

behaviour through objectification of one's self. In the following section, *Girlhood: Packaged, sold, and delivered*, one of Sharon Lamb's more recent works with Lyn Mikel-Brown (2006) is analyzed as these authors assert that girls are not only being sold products and toys – they are, in fact, being sold their own 'packaged' identity. Next, in *Disappearance of Girlhood?* Neil Postman's *Disappearance of Childhood* (1982) thesis is juxtaposed to a more recent prose from Benjamin Barber (2007), *Consumed*, as Barber believes that it is the overt influence of consumerism which is granting for a disappearance of childhood. In the final section of this literature review, *Why Bratz?* A number of the theories that ask some of the reasons that parents would be encouraged or, at times, coaxed into purchasing these dolls are explored. Here, Alissa Quart's *Branded: The buying of selling of teenagers* (2003) theory is explored as she asserts that parents are led to such said purchases through ways of self guilt.

Dolls with a Culture: Bratz

Matthew McAllister (2007) argues that MGA Entertainment Inc. went straight to the source itself one creating the Bratz doll: they went to kids to find out *exactly* what they wanted to play with. On the surface, it is surprising to some that young girls would want to play with such an arguably offensive doll as the dolls provoke such a hyper-sexualized image. As it will be discussed later with these research findings, this thesis will explore whether mothers find these dolls appalling. In an effort to continually situate the Bratz dolls and the 'tween' culture that surround them, it is also important to illustrate the impact that Mattel Inc., and their most renowned doll Barbie, have had on the toy industry as Barbie and Bratz are two dolls that are constantly being juxtaposed. A vast amount of theory has surrounded both the cultural similarities and differences that exist between Barbie and Bratz. For the Bratz dolls, their

“marketing success, controlling 40 percent of the fashion-doll market, led commentaries to declare the brand as ‘Barbie’s new rivals’” (McAllister, 2007, p. 248). Similar to Barbie, McAllister (2007) asserts that the “Bratz are into consumption – consuming fashion, media, licensed products, but, unlike the older-appearing Barbie, Bratz can precisely model for tween girls how they can display consumption spectacularly right now, at their current age, not when they are 19” (p. 250). McAllister (2007) argues:

sexualization, commodification, and globalization converge to highlight the Bratz lifestyle as spectacular consumption as the lifestyle that is constructed by the brand – the provocative clothes; the cosmetics-enhanced look; the adult-oriented accessories is typically cited by critics who are disturbed by the overt sexuality in these branded products. (p. 250)

As he raises several interesting notions with regards to how Bratz dolls encourage hyper-consumption and hyper-sexuality by encouraging childhood consumerism activities such as shopping, McAllister (2007), discusses how shopping is overtly naturalized with Bratz dolls as it is simply *just* a way of living. For, with these dolls, “shopping becomes part of the specific Bratz brand identity and characters’ lifestyle and, it is assumed, part of the target market’s identity/lifestyle as well” (p. 250).

The Evolution of Girl’s Play

As previously mentioned, in the past, toys have been viewed as a child’s means to imitate their parents’ lifestyle. This depiction may seem stereotypical; however social analyst Stephanie Coontz (1993) refers to the 1950s and 1960s as “the way we never were.” Susan Linn (2005) pushes Coontz’ (1993) theory further by asserting that “it is indisputable that the era of idealized, or modern, childhood, whatever its particulars, was historically unique, even improbable” (p. 189). Therefore, we are left to wonder: what basis is one to go by? What were the more ‘traditional’ means of play for young girls?

Conventionally, toys were viewed and defined as educational tools. In *Toys, Play and Child Development*, Jeffrey Goldstein (1994) argues, “the purpose of toys has practically always been educational” (p. 47). Goldstein (1994) asserts that young “girls with wooden log dolls and miniature cooking utensils were supposed to practice their future adult roles in society” (p. 47). However by comparing Goldstein’s theory to Bratz dolls, how then does a provocatively dressed toy such as a Bratz doll support the notion of educational growth? Fundamentally, are parents purchasing these dolls for their children so they learn what it is like to live vicariously through these dolls, dress in a scantily-clad way and for the lack of a better term be a ‘brat?’ Although such questions seem rather cynical, it seems as though these dolls are an exception to so many rules, and with so many negative psychological and sociological aspects of a child’s presumed innocence, it is quite intriguing to explore the notions associated with their presence on toy shelves and in young girl’s arms. Consequently, how can there be a justification to such claims?

In their *Report of the APA Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls* (2007), which outlined the impact that media products such as Bratz dolls have on young girls, the American Psychological Association (APA) reported that “doll play is a popular activity for children, especially girls”, therefore concerns are raised when “sexualized dolls are marketed to girls” (APA, p. 13). Therefore, one could assume that child’s play theory is presently witnessing a taste transgressive. This taste transgressive could be argued as being a vulgar taste transgressive and the doll which best describes this vulgar taste transgressive is the Bratz doll. This vulgar representation raises the following queries: How are these dolls socially accepted even though an apparent conflict and tension exists between inherently good taste and inherently bad taste? What has changed and what has granted this transformation of a child’s taste through the toys that they

choose to play with? Is there anything that is inherently good about Bratz dolls? Exactly what type of influence do Bratz dolls have on young girls?

Unquestionably, one area of particular popular culture interest is that of the discourse that surrounds the marketing and appeal of dolls to girls. A doll may be defined as “a figure that [is] a miniature representation of the human body [which] quickly became endowed with the attributes of life” (King, 1977, p. 6). Such a representation of human form raises certain questions with regards to *exactly* what toys children are playing with. If a doll that a child plays with is being defined as a “miniature representation of the human body,” how are children and their parents reacting to such a display and definition? It is important to note, however, “marketers are aware that advertising will be more successful if they can appeal both to children and their parents” (Gunter, Oates & Blades, 2005, p. 22). Therefore, it is through such an appeal, that parents are encouraged to purchase a toy for their child meaning that both parent and child are satisfied. This appeal raises the query: What types of interpretations or definitions exist between parent and child, and are there differences of opinion in this regard?

Gunter, Oates & Blades (2005) assert that advertisers “encourage children to view products such as toys as fun, whereas parents are approached via a more educational route to persuade them to consider toys as learning tools” (p. 22). Essentially, children’s toys are advertised “to certain age groups as helping to improve abilities such as thinking, social skills, motor skills, or character development” (p. 22). According to Marianne Szymanski (2000), “the appeal that is most attractive to children is simply fun” (as cited in Gunter, Oates & Blades, 2005, p. 22).

In an effort to help answer some of these aforementioned queries, it is also very important to reflect on the connotative meanings associated with their name: Bratz. There is a certain

attitude associated with the Bratz brand Sharon Lamb (2001) asserts, “Young girls resist the good girl ideal” (p. 43) and MGA Entertainment Inc. is supporting such a theory through their name and logo. Their logo, despite the name ‘Bratz’ features a strategically placed halo above the ‘a’ in Bratz. MGA Entertainment Inc.’s Bratz dolls support Lamb’s notion of resistance and allow a space and ideal where young girls live vicariously through their Bratz doll. In essence, by playing with a Bratz doll, young girls appear to be resisting the notion of being a *good girl*. Since the Bratz dolls seem to encourage young girls to be brats, it is interesting to also discuss how MGA Entertainment Inc.’s founder and CEO Isaac Larian exerts many ‘brat’ like tendencies. Larian “never passes up an opportunity to mock, provoke or otherwise try to annoy his main rival, Mattel: ‘Mattel can’t even say our name, they call us ‘our nearest competitor’. I’m thinking of changing our company name to MNC Entertainment – Mattel’s Nearest Competitor” (as cited in Palmeri, 2005, p. 76). Such cynicism extends when he was asked about Mattel’s latest sponsorships with teen idols, “I don’t care if they sign the Olsen twins and call it Bulimic Barbie, kids don’t want to play with Barbie anymore” (Palmeri, 2005, p. 76). In addition to his ‘brat’ like comments, Larian, more often than not finds himself in the court room as he has duelled with Mattel, George Lucas, McDonald’s Corp. and Nordstorm Inc. Larian asserts however that he “doesn’t like to end up in court, but [he] will make sure [he] defends MGA’s rights” (Palmeri, 2005, p.76). In more recent news, and after a very long battle, Mattel won against a recent legal battle with MGA Entertainment Inc. In this most recent battle, Mattel was suing MGA over the image and ideal of the Bratz doll, claiming that MGA stole this image and idea from Mattel. Mattel “won the rights to the \$1 billion-plus Bratz franchise earlier (last) year in a lawsuit against MGA and former Mattel Barbie designer Carter Bryant, who invented the Bratz concept while

under contract to Mattel” (Keating, 2008, n.p). Mattel has now gained exclusive rights to the Bratz brand, drawing and all things related.

Sharon Lamb believes that “there is no doubt that the spunky, sassy, girl-of-the-millennium attitude of Bratz dolls has given Barbie a run for her money and if sales are an indication, girls and parents alike see something cooler and more fun in these multicultural dolls” (Lamb, 2006, p. 217). In a CBC radio interview, Susan Linn mentioned several concerns with regards to how a child’s imagination is threatened and how parents are presently “raising children in a culture which is filled with noise and distraction with pre-packaged play” (as cited on CBC Radio, 2007, n.p.). Linn believes that “kids play less creatively with media toys” and that “creative play is not lucrative as it’s a threat to corporate profits” (as cited on CBC Radio, 2007, n.p.). Where then, does this leave children and child’s play theory?

Since Bratz dolls arguably present a vulgar taste transgressive, which is directly promoted and targeted, at girls, this analysis will also explore the following notions and will ask what such notions mean for the traditional concept of girlhood, which originally positioned a girl as the innocent victim of the mass media. In addition to referring to the presumed innocence of girlhood, this analysis will also establish how Bratz dolls, as a vulgar taste transgressive, create a new definition of what taste is all about. For instance, parents, who are deemed as socially responsible, are purchasing these vulgar dolls for their supposed ‘innocent’ daughter and are ‘satisfied’ with their purchase. Furthermore, since Bratz dolls are arguably deemed as an inappropriate toy for a young girl to play with, what is such an assumption saying with regards to taste culture and how has such a shift been established?

Consumerism: Revisited

It could be argued that girls are now a market within themselves and that consumerism allows girls to feel a sense of power. It is important to note that Bratz dolls on the surface portray the notions of girl power and empowerment through their marketing appeal. Bratz is a *highly* marketable brand. Girls have access to an assortment of Bratz products as their line is more than *just* dolls – the Bratz label sells a wide variety of products ranging from clothing and school supplies to bedroom décor and make-up. However, this notion of empowerment is a distortion of the original meaning, as it is a form of backlash and manipulation, instead of the supposed empowering nature that many believe the dolls portray.

The term *empowerment* originates from the Amerindian notion of being born through a sense of self, meaning that everything is within one's self. One is to work his or her whole life to continuously strive at developing the highest potential possible, but this must be discovered and achieved by working one's whole life in order to express it as it is only then that this potential can be explored. In the Amerindian culture, one remains in control of their own internal self and richness, yet the person must continually be cautious of this control being denounced in one's self. Therefore, to be empowered and to be controlled means that one has power within themselves and must strive for the rest of his or her life to express to others the capabilities that they possess.

This notion of empowerment is commonly misused by marketers and this is apparent with Bratz dolls. Here, young girls are marketed an image of fashion and popularity – *all* that young girls strive to be: beautiful, popular and desired. Consequently, Bratz dolls are, in fact, misusing the notion of empowerment as they are fostering a distortion of the original sense of the

meaning. The Bratz dolls distortion of empowerment is a form of backlash which will be discussed later in this thesis as Susan Faludi's (1991) *Backlash* will be briefly explored.

Benjamin Barber (2007) argues that "we are consumers all the time." For Barber (2007), "we want to get the gatekeepers out of the way, that's parents...parents out of the way so they can market to children and turn the parents into children so they can market to them as well." In *Jihad vs. McWorld: Terrorism's challenge to democracy* (1995) Barber emphasizes that because of this growing influence of consumerism and capitalism, individuals are then forced into a transformation from citizen to consumer. Thus, allowing children to grow up in a capitalist society where consumerism is a driving force of influence. For Barber, one of the key narratives that bound society is consumerism and that with globalization, "the two have combined to produce a single and singularly corrosive narrative" (Barber, 2008, n.p). Barber believes that consumerism "has meant the transformation of citizens into shoppers, eroding America's sovereignty from within" (Barber, 2008, n.p). He affirms that this trend has proved to be a "ruinous blow to democracy – to our capacity for common judgement, citizenship and leadership itself" (Barber, 2008, n.p). Barber asserts that consumerism affects society as a whole and "tellingly, President Bush after 9/11 did not invite Americans to sacrifice or work hard in order to defeat terrorism; he invited them to go shopping" (Barber, 2008, n.p). This transformation from citizen to consumer has occurred because "citizens cannot be understood as mere consumers because individual desire is not the same thing as common ground; public good are something more than a collection of private wants" (Barber, 2008, n.p). Barber questions where this leaves consumers. There is a vast amount of theory surrounding the notions of consumerism and power in the marketplace by giving people what they want. Barber claims that "the market, indeed, does not tell us what to do; it gives us what we want – once it gets through telling us

what it is that we want. It promises liberty and happiness while, in truth, delivering neither” (Barber, 2008, n.p).

Juliet Schor (2004) asserts that “the new discourse of kid empowerment is the idea that ads and products help children to feel powerful” (p. 179). This newfound marketing opportunity was “limited until the introduction of television programs specifically for children and in 1954, ABC aired its highly successful *Mickey Mouse Club* in the after-school period, and Mattel advertised on the show” (Schor, 2004, p. 39). Schor (2004) argues that Mattel, as it is synonymous with its doll ‘icon’ Barbie, helped to solidify, “by the late 1950s, a long and profitable relationship between television and toy commercials” (p. 39). While children were watching their favourite television show, they were directly targeted by advertisements. Evidently, such an influx of advertisements called for intense regulation, since children, with their presumed ‘innocence,’ had to be protected from what they were seeing in such advertisements.

For Schor (2004), “toy advertisements, which are second to food in terms of size of expenditures, are the most highly regulated category” (p. 40). Such regulations prove vast, from an ad not implying that a toy can do things it clearly cannot to a child distinguishing between realistic and fantasy play. This analysis attempts to define and illustrate how children’s toys and the discourse that surround them have changed and it is important to mention that there have been several key decades, which have fostered much debate surrounding advertisement’s effects on children. Schor (2004) asserts that, the 1980s for example, advanced several changes in children’s advertising as “companies began to see more potential in selling to kids” (p. 41).

Schor (2004) pushes her theory further illustrating the 1980s as the decade that: witnessed the dramatic upsurge in kids’ influence power as there were fewer of what marketers called the ‘authoritarian mom’ – the woman who, in the words of Paul Kurnit

said, ‘No way, no how is there going to be a pre-sweetened cereal in our house no matter how hard Johnny tries to convince her.’” (p. 42)

With this ‘authority’ in the past, a mother in the 1980s was far more likely to be tolerant and willing to purchase the products that she was offered, perhaps even at first glance.

In 1982, Neil Postman argued there was evidence that the traditional notion of childhood was disappearing. He asserted that such evidence could be seen “in the merging of the taste and style of children and adults, as well as in the changing perspectives of relevant social institutions such as the law, the schools, and sports” (Postman, 1982, p. 120). Postman’s theory, even though it first appeared twenty eight years ago, is still discussed throughout the realms of children, adolescence and the media. Such a theory raises the relentless query: has childhood *really* disappeared? Moreover, is this a form of identity construction, where young people are opting to eliminate childhood and divulge their tastes directly into adulthood?

Since Postman’s first introduction to a “disappearance of childhood,” there has been a myriad of theories and terms, which have supported the notion that the traditionalism associated with childhood is, in fact, disappearing. Before Postman’s thesis, it was in the 1960s that marketers saw a new market emerging. Because of the baby boom, in “1960 there were 37 million boys and girls ranging in age from five to fourteen” (Quart, 2003, p. 72). Meaning that this newfound ‘boom’ presented an unprecedented growth in marketability and retailers were accordingly marketing their products specifically towards children. It was also during the 1960s that the ‘tween’ market developed. Tween, which is a combination of the words *between* and *teen*, is a market that is continually growing at an increasingly rapid rate – in essence, tweens buy *all* sorts of things. In the 1960s, a newfound market intensity to target tweens “brought out the more venal tendencies in brand sages as [marketers] looked at every place of children’s vulnerability, searching for selling opportunities” (Quart, 2003, p. 72). It could be argued,

therefore, that tweens are, in fact, a modern day representation of Postman's "disappearance of childhood".

In *Born to Buy*, Juliet Schor (2004) argues that "cultural trends have further undermined modern childhood as parenting norms have shifted to become more egalitarian, and the media typically depict highly empowered children and childlike adults" (Schor, 2004, p. 202). The concern for Schor is how children are managing to cope with this newfound *power*. Are children using their media expertise to decipher between a good media and a bad media? Where do parents stand and do they actually have a say? Or, are they to just sit back and watch their children take over the shopping cart? Schor argues children are completely immersed in the consumer culture that they almost become numb to the entire experience and it equally becomes a natural part of their identity. Moreover, by the age of one, kids are "watching *Teletubbies* and eating food of its promo partners Burger King and McDonalds; kids can recognize logos by eighteen months and before reaching their second birthday, they are asking for products by brand name" (Schor, 2004, p. 19). For Schor, such an overtly brand centered identity raises several concerns as children are becoming consumers at a much younger age and at a far more rapid rate. By the age of six or seven, "girls are asking for the latest fashions, using name polish and singing pop music tunes" (Schor, 2004, p. 19). Once again, such young consumerism and commercial power supports Postman's thesis for a disappearance of childhood.

It is apparent that girls are now the targets of continuous marketing appeals and youth advocates such as Susan Linn (2005), co-founder of the *Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood*, asserts that such strategic marketing results in "girls especially, even very young girls, being targeted for clothing and accessories that are more appropriate for their older friends and relatives" (p. 132). But how is this consumerism affecting girl's play?

To Objectify or Not to Objectify: Girls as Objects through Play

On the surface, one could assume that Barbie may be defined as the more innocent of the two dolls with her carefully applied make-up, beautiful blonde hair, and her tasteful sense of fashion. However, it is important to note that when Mattel first introduced the doll in the late 1950s, Barbie was not framed and marketed as being ‘innocent.’ In fact, “Barbie was designed to keep girls on the hook as unsatisfied customers and at the same time, and amongst other things, [she] promoted the idea of women as sex objects” (Dixon, 1990, p. 92). Bob Dixon (1990) argues that because Barbie was directly promoted as a sex object, this raised several implications for young girls as Mattel attempted something new in the realms of marketing. As in the case of Barbie, she was framed and presented as a way of life, meaning that young girls playing with these dolls would also view themselves as sexual objects.

Concerns have grown exponentially with regards to the negative impressions that Bratz dolls have on young girls. These concerns will be further explored in the analysis and discussion section of this thesis. However, from a communications studies perspective, scholars such as Matthew McAllister (2007) argue that Bratz dolls present many vulgarities even though they pride themselves as the only “girls with a passion for fashion!” McAllister (2007) defines the Bratz fashion as provocative. Therefore, the implications of Bratz’ sexual images, according to McAllister (2007):

may be more fully understood by an examination of the hyper-consumption orientation of the brand as Bratz reflects and amplifies the association of young girls’ self-identity with commodities, and the joy many in this group experience while shopping and buying. (p. 244)

Notions of self-image and self-respect are questioned amongst mothers as Sharon Lamb (2001) argues that “there is an exception that children should be innocent, and that girls especially should be innocent of sexuality” (p. 54). For Lamb (2001) young girls actually take

pleasure in being objectified and this newfound objectification is done *by girls for girls*: in essence, young girls are objectifying themselves to gain a sense of power.

In *Out of the Garden*, Stephen Kline (1993) argues that “Barbie was carefully and consciously designed not just as another plaything, but as a personality” In fact, for Kline (1993) Mattel “didn’t depict Barbie as a doll, they treated her as a real-life teenage fashion model, and so Barbie was provided with a ‘back-story’ – a narrative that established her personality profile with an imaginary but familiar universe” (p. 170). In essence, Kline is equating Barbie as being a real person. Kline (1993) argues that in the campaigns to market toys to children on television and as the role of fantasy rapidly emerged as a key dimension, Mattel “realized something more important persists to this day: the play situation in which one places a toy becomes fantasy for the child and the fantasy presented becomes as important as the product” (p. 170).

Kline (1993) asserts that Barbie’s “attraction as a doll was that children identified with her character rather than with her ‘role’ as a toy, hence, the way in which they played with her changed” (p. 170). From a Bratz perspective, the same notion remains –that is, young girls can actually dress-up like their prized Bratz dolls and live out their ‘fantasy’ through purchasing Bratz clothing in *their* size.

Girlhood: Packaged, Sold, Delivered

In *Packaging Girlhood: Rescuing our Daughters from Marketers’ Schemes*, Sharon Lamb and Lyn Mikel Brown (2006) argue that young girls today are faced with a myriad of issues that they must attempt to overcome. Lamb and Brown (2006) argue that the “problem is one of image: what choices, what ways of being a girl are offered to young girls as they make their way in the world” (p. 1). Lamb and Brown’s research introduced them to young girls across

the United States and the authors looked into the messages and images being targeted towards young girls. Lamb and Brown (2006) examined “the message [the marketers] are selling through their practice, a message about normal girlhood packaged in the form of that little pink purse, the sexy performer who wears it, the tight low-rider jeans it is attached to, and the pouty hot body it is supposed to attract” (p.1). Essentially, young girls are surrounded by unrealistic stereotypes through today’s media: the music videos they watch, the magazines they read and the song lyrics they listen to. The authors assert that young girls are continually being ‘sold’ something; in essence, they are being ‘sold’ a packaged form of identity.

This ‘packaged’ form of identity only depicts the negative stereotypes that young girls are presented in the media: the perfect body – that ‘desirable’ image. Maddux and Gosselin (2002) assert that the ‘Who am I?’ question is one that is continuously put into perspective when one is searching for their identity. This question becomes quite problematic if young girls are using these negative images they see in the media and reflecting upon their own identity construction. With reference to Bratz dolls, the hyper-sexualized image that the dolls portray is arguably problematic because young girls may feel as though this is an image that they too should portray. This notion of mimicry will be further discussed in Chapter Three.

It is Lamb and Brown’s hope that parents will begin talking and listening to their daughter in the hopes of understanding their thoughts and fears towards the consumer society that surrounds them. The authors (2006) believe that “parents can help their daughter read the [media] culture [that surrounds them]” (p. 3). Lamb and Brown’s work illustrate how valuable this parental influence and presence is in a young girl’s life. In an effort for young girls to understand, interpret, accept and, at times, reject, the media messages presented before them on

television, on the radio and in magazines, a parent's opinion is, more often than not, what is needed the most.

Lamb and Brown (2006) assert that “until about age six, children can't fully distinguish reality from fantasy, and children eight and younger lack the ability to appreciate the various tricks that advertisers and marketers use to grab their attention to persuade them” (p. 5). Such a claim raises certain concerns within the realms of defining girlhood. As previously mentioned, the *Report of the APA Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls* (2007) raised several interesting findings with regards to clothing and how young girls are now resorting to ‘older’ fashions to express themselves. The APA Report (2007) discusses “the thong, an item of clothing based on what a stripper might wear, is now offered in ‘tween’ stores as well in women's departments, often with decorations that will specifically appeal to children” (p. 14). Lamb and Brown (2006) assert that “little girls become ‘twins’ before you can blink an eye and corporations are delighted with the buying potential of girls as young as seven or eight” (p.5). Essentially the common concern for parents is that “girls are buying into a culture that has them growing up too fast – is the marketers' dream come true: a crossover market!” (p. 5). It may be argued, therefore, that this “crossover market” encourages girls, as young as seven or eight years old, to portray themselves in an older and inappropriate ‘fashion’.

With regards to such messages and marketing techniques, David Buckingham (2000) and Neil Postman (1982) affirm that “retailers have accordingly become more ‘child oriented’ in their sales techniques; spending on advertising directed at children has grown exponentially, and there has been a marked increase in more general promotional activities aimed at children” (p. 147). Both Lamb and Brown (2006) argue that marketers are strategically packaging messages and are learning “how to get girls attention in new and spectacular ways” (p. 5). For Lamb and

Brown (2006), such spectacular ways may be witnessed in any clothing store as “many brands now market clothing in sizes 4-16, which means that [a] little girl can be very much the big girl when it comes to that halter, camisole or denim mini-skirt” (p. 13). They continue in arguing that “marketers study children to understand what will grab attention and make it more difficult for parents to point their children in healthier directions” (Lamb & Brown, 2006, p. 4). Such ‘healthier directions’ are a parent’s direct attempt to keep their daughter away from negative influences throughout the realms of clothing and fashion. Since adult clothing is now available in child-like sizes, this raises certain implications with regards to how young girls are continually being pressured into growing up quickly.

Lianne George (2002), in an article that appeared in the *National Post* entitled “Tween fashion means being different, just like everyone else”, argued that “twens are teenage wannabes, but it isn’t about looking provocative, it’s about being stylish and fashionable: they have an opinion at that age” (n.p). Such a claim, counters what is explored throughout *Packaging Girlhood* as the authors are arguing that “there used to be a distinction between little girl and pre-teen” (Lamb & Brown, 2006, p. 16), however today’s consumer market, which is directly targeted towards children, is positioning provocative clothing directly at children. Lamb and Brown (2006) assert that they were “continuously surprised by the ways little girls are enticed to look older” (p. 16).

As was previously mentioned, young girls are aging at a rapid pace and this is raising several concerns for parents. However, one element that is continually emphasized throughout *Packaging Girlhood* is that “preteen girls remain close to and seek guidance from their parents and still see family as an integral part of their lives: this means that parents can be wonderfully influential during these years” (Lamb & Brown, 2006, p. 25). Since it is argued that parents

remain as a key influence in their daughter's life, Lamb and Brown (2006) believe that parents must make a valiant effort to talk to their daughter about choices in fashion especially when they are being subjected to t-shirts in stores which display the words *You suck!* and *Cute, but psycho* across the chest.

Such stereotypical displays of t-shirts may be found in department stores throughout the world. Accordingly, Lamb and Brown (2006) argue that this more "public display of the stereotype – boys' smarts and girls' social interests, could be a kind of backlash" (p. 43). This packaged 'backlash' raises the query: Is "packaging of girlhood" a facet of this vulgar taste transgressive which is apparent with Bratz dolls? If so, what are the direct implications on girlhood and parenting? In essence, where does this leave girls?

In *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women*, Susan Faludi (1991) claims the relentless 'attack' against women throughout the 1980s had a profound effect and influence on women's studies and on society's reactions and opinions to what was surrounding female culture. The backlash against women also fostered a lot of media attention on the discourse surrounding the inequalities and battles that women were subjected to during that decade. Faludi offers a detailed probe inside the 1980s backlash against American women and she, in fact, refers to this 'invasion' as an 'undeclared war.' In relation to this thesis, it could be argued that Bratz dolls portray the same type of 'Fashion Backlash' that Susan Faludi discusses in her theory. Faludi (1991) argues that "apparel makers had begun promoting the 'idea of women as dressed-up dolls'" (p. 182). This notion of promoting women as dolls leaves room for troublesome misinterpretations where young girls and their play is concerned. Faludi's work relates to Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1999) as she argues that children enact their gender each and every day. Instead of maintaining a

consistent identity, girls and boys create their identities through their actions. It is important to note that these actions are within the constraints of gender identity and cultural norms.

Lamb and Brown (2006) assert that “play is everything to a child, and girls should have the opportunity to experiment, practice, invent and imagine anything in play” (p. 210). They believe that parents should continually encourage their daughter to be imaginative throughout playtime. However, such ‘freedoms’ raise certain implications when thinking of how young girls may be imitating the images and harsh realities they are witnessing in today’s media.

With reference back to MGA Entertainment’s Bratz dolls, Lamb and Brown (2006) assert that “what makes Bratz work for preteen girls *is* the pretence of choosing a lavish lifestyle” (p. 218), meaning that young girls can play with their Bratz doll and live vicariously through play. Lamb and Brown (2006) believe that the immense popularity behind the Bratz dolls is due to the fact that they present a front as “they disguise these same obsessions with a sassy know what they want attitude” (p. 219).

This analysis would not be complete without a closer look at the notion of girlhood and the symbolization of shopping. Even by looking through the images found in “books, television, and movies, [one] can see that even the youngest girls are barraged with messages of the near-orgasmic pleasure of shopping” (Lamb & Brown, 2006, p. 244). Girls are also exposed to such messages through play with the avant-garde Bratz and My Scene Barbie dolls. It could be argued, therefore, that this is a stereotype that girls have a difficulty overcoming. Shopping becomes problematic within the realms of shopping is how it has been and is interpreted as a stereotypical representation of a young girl’s identity: *you* are a girl therefore *you* love to shop. However, the authors also discuss the connection shared between mothers and daughters when shopping. Such an emotional link between the two allow mothers to see, first hand, the items of

clothing that their daughters want or the music they may want to buy and so on. This emotional link between mothers and their daughters grants mothers that added knowledge that will, inevitably assist them in getting to know their daughter *that* much better. Since shopping is a major theme of interest between mothers and daughters it was therefore very important to touch on this element in the in-depth interviews with mothers and daughters the findings of which will be discussed in Chapter Three.

The Disappearance of Girlhood?

From the outset, one could argue that activities such as shopping, wearing make-up, and an overt concern for fashion are activities traditionally tailored to adults and not young ‘innocent’ girls. In this respect, McAllister (2007) argues that young girls are encouraged to shop and wear make-up and *do* many adult-like activities. McAllister’s theory draws several parallels to David Buckingham’s work as in *After the Death of Childhood* (2000), Buckingham argues, “Children are now being ‘hurried’ through childhood by their parents and schools and by the media” (p. 21). One could argue that MGA Entertainment Inc. is participating in this ‘death of childhood’ as they foster an environment that encourages young girls to dress and act in an adult-like manner. Buckingham (2000) asserts, “It is only in the last couple of decades that capitalism’s restless search for new markets have come to focus intensely on children” (p. 147). Buckingham (2000) continues in arguing that:

the past fifty years have seen a remarkable increase in the scope and scale of consumer activity and the central issue is to do with how we interpret and respond to children’s growing involvement in areas of ‘adult’ life from which they have traditionally been excluded. (p. 146)

With regards to advertising, Buckingham believes that children hold a great deal of power and that children “far from being passive victims of commercial culture, children are [instead] seen as all-powerful, sovereign consumers” (p. 148).

Consequently, it could be argued that the Bratz dolls parallel this “disappearance” of childhood through the ways in which the dolls are presented in the media, since the Bratz “radiate a cartoon-like, street-smart, in-your-face-combination of sex and toughness” (Linn, 2005, p. 143). Therefore, one could argue that the Bratz dolls are creating a culture that is encouraging this “disappearance of childhood.” Susan Linn (2005), argues that this so-called ‘tween’ market is encouraging young girls to purchase at a younger age and that “kids are getting older younger” (p. 143).

Most recently, a vast amount of marketing and discourse has surrounded “sexy” clothing, which is readily available in teen and child sizes. While “girls may have little control over how they are represented in the media, they have more control over the identity they create via their clothing choices” (APA, 2007, p. 14). There is evidence that this overt display of hyper-sexualization has been occurring for a while now. As the American Psychological Association (2007) asserts that the sexualization of:

girls in clothing advertisements first appeared at least as early as 25 years ago with such advertisements as a girl in jeans dropping her rag doll by her side, with the headline *I3 going on 18* (1981) and the controversial Calvin Klein ad in which the 15 year old Brooke Shields declared, ‘nothing comes between me and my Calvins.’ (p. 14)

Therefore, this image of young girls asks: What does this say for the “disappearance of childhood”? Are girls, in fact, growing up too quickly?

As previously mentioned, children have gained a considerable amount of ‘power’ in the marketplace. In *The Disappearance of Childhood*, Neil Postman (1982) argues, “Advertisers

have recognized children may not have much disposable income of their own, but they possess a form of ‘pester power’ that exerts a significant influence on the purchasing decisions of others in the household” (as cited in Buckingham, 2000, p. 147). Here, children are viewed as consumers who are worth being the target of advertisements, as this target market is paying attention to what they see and hear in these ads. Postman’s (1982) theory is particularly relevant to the discourse that surrounds Bratz dolls as he argues that “there is evidence to be seen in the merging of the taste and style of children and adults” (p. 120). Postman (1982) wrote about the damaging of media on young people and that these effects have changed over time. Postman claims that “for an idea like childhood to come into being, there must be a change in the adult world” (Postman, 1982, p.20). This change came with the invention of the printing press in the middle of the 15th Century thus creating “a new symbolic world that required, in its turn, a new conception of adulthood” (Postman, 1982, p.20). This new form of adulthood, in fact, excluded children meaning that it became essential for children to find another world to occupy – “that other world came to be known as childhood” (Postman, 1982, p.20). Here, childhood existed because children were not privy to the secrets of the adult world through reading and literacy. For Postman (1982), with the inception of television, childhood began to disappear as:

television erodes the diving line between childhood and adulthood in three ways, all having to do with us undifferentiated accessibility: first, because it requires no instruction to grasp its form; second, because it does not make complex demands on either mind or behavior; and third, because it does not segregate its audience. (p. 80)

This can only mean one thing: children have access to *all* that adults do and for Postman this *all* access to media poses “a serious challenge to both the authority of adulthood and to the curiosity of children” (Postman, 1982, p.90).

Susan Linn (2005) believes that “many parents still find it hard to make a connection between their children’s behaviour and what kids absorb through their media experiences” (p.

144). Linn's (2005) theory raises the notion of what children are absorbing from the media and more importantly how they are using this influence in their daily lives. Such experiences can have adverse effects on children and with such mixed discourse surrounding the Bratz dolls culture, it is difficult to *just* assume the impact that these dolls have on children. However, from the surface, it is apparent that these dolls have a direct effect on children as in the way they are marketed to kids. For instance, there are certain lines of Bratz dolls, which are "marketed in bikinis, sitting in a hot tub, mixing drinks" (APA, 2007, p. 13). Bratz dolls also "come dressed in sexualized clothing such as miniskirts, fishnet stockings and feather boas" (APA, 2007, p. 13). The American Psychological Association (APA) reported (2007) that Bratz dolls "may present no more sexualization of girls or women than is seen in MTV videos, however it is worrisome when dolls designed specifically for 4 to 8 year olds are associated with objectified adult content" (p. 13).

Susan Linn (2005) continues by asserting that children "who by nature are more impulsive, more curious, or even more sensual than other children, or for children whose parents can't or won't educate them about sex, the barrage of media messages can be devastating" (p. 144). In essence, Bratz dolls are "both contributing to and feeding on a culture in which girls play being 'sassy', [which] is the toy industry's favourite euphemism for sexy" (Talbot, 2006, n.p.) and such 'sassiness' raises the query: Are young girls 'powerful' enough to see beyond the Bratz dolls and the negative images they portray? Further in the analysis section of this thesis, the results from the qualitative, in-depth interviews will be revealed as mothers and their daughters discussed the topics of girlhood, identity and girl's play.

As previously mentioned certain tensions have existed between seeing children as vulnerable and seeing children as powerful forces in today's mass media. In *Children's*

Television: The Art, the Business and How it Works, Cy Schneider (1987) reinforces the notion that “we must stop treating children as helpless, gullible sheep who need to be carefully watched and protected” (p. 2). As Schneider (1987) believes that children are not as easily influenced as many believe, as “they will not buy (or ask to buy) everything that is cleverly advertised to them and in reality, children are intelligent and sceptical” (p. 2).

Additionally, despite the fact that children are young and traditionally seen as vulnerable, Schneider (1987) argues that despite “their lack of experience, they are not that easily fooled” (p. 2). Since Schneider is equating children with having a certain degree of media awareness and power, it is interesting to learn the contrasts that exist between scholars who view children as powerful and those who view children as innocent victims of the mass media and the vast amount of ‘negative’ cultural products that surround tween culture. Do Bratz dolls truly ‘empower’ young girls? Why are young girls *so* drawn to these dolls?

Why Bratz?

It is interesting to note that the recurring theme that surrounds girlhood and child consumerism is the notion of empowerment. It is equally interesting to contrast this with MGA Entertainment Inc.’s claim that the Bratz dolls represent all that is empowering for young girls, as it is through the socialization that is associated with the Bratz culture that young girls are able to make friendships, learn about fashion through play, and empower themselves as young girls. The Bratz dolls “reinforce for some, the idea that a life’s passion is for fashion and also for a commodity orientation and a hyper-consumable society” (McAllister, 2007, p. 256). However, one could argue that Bratz dolls, therefore, are encouraging young girls to be superficial.

Sharon Lamb (2006) raises several concerns with regards to how young girls are playing with Bratz dolls and are mirroring the Bratz' 'sense' of fashion; for instance, one line of Bratz dolls advertises a type of "fashion emergency and on the box [it] says 'you've gotta look good'" (p. 223). The box then suggests a 'totally hot halter' and the concern for Lamb (2006) is that the "box cover asks girls who are seven years old and up" (p. 223). Therefore, how are young girls to know *what* to wear at the age of seven and is a 'totally hot halter' an appropriate sense of fashion for a seven-year-old girl? If it is deemed inappropriate for a young girl to dress so scantily, where are young girls to turn for positive influences?

Another increasingly apparent occurrence with young girls, according to Sharon Lamb (2006) is that "the latest move for younger girls is dressing like [their] doll as in dressing to play" (p. 20). Such "dressing to play" for Sharon Lamb is illustrated with MGA Entertainment Inc.'s Bratz dolls as "Lil' Bratz and Bratz, in which pink with black is explicitly connected to sexualized clothes and animal print, over a sweet pink baby doll with a devilish costume over the halo and wings" (p. 20) inundate toy store shelves. As a result, if the Bratz dolls are defined and presented as offensive through fashion and young girls enjoy dressing up like their favourite doll, why then are parents purchasing their child a deliberately vulgar doll; and on the same note, why are young girls subsequently influenced by this type of doll?

Alissa Quart (2003) in *Branded: The Buying and Selling of Teenagers*, asserts that the increase of "single parents who often work long hours and are motivated by guilt on their kids, [has] contributed to the rise in 'in-betweeners' spending" (p. 70). These overworked parents are a main reason why "advertising to tweens is so popular as the easily manipulated tween buyer is now more able to manipulate an overworked parent into spending out of the parents' shame over their increased absences" (p. 70).

This chapter has highlighted key theorists who discuss topics that will be further explored in the chapters to follow. Susan Faludi's (1991) *Backlash* theory and Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1999) theory are only looked at briefly in this chapter, as these theories are beyond the scope of this thesis. Therefore, it was more important to concentrate on the following theoretical frameworks for the literature review: Sharon Lamb (2001, 2006) as she examines the hyper-sexualization of girls and how young girls objectify themselves through play; Benjamin Barber (2007), who argues that markets corrupt children and infantilize adults; Neil Postman (1982) who argues that the notion of childhood is disappearing; and Susan Linn (2005), Juliet Schor (2004) and Matthew McAllister (2007), who discuss the growth in the commercialization of childhood, as children are now the direct targets of advertising and products. Consequently, this theoretical framework will help to answer the two following research questions: Do Bratz dolls place girlhood identity formation into question? What has changed with regards to girl's play and the former innocence of girlhood?

Chapter Summary

This chapter has examined the literature that surrounds the notions of girlhood, identity construction, and girl's play. This chapter has also looked into the aspects concerning tweens and the cultural products that are associated with this newfound culture of girl's play theory, through the artifact of MGA Entertainment Inc.'s Bratz dolls. This chapter also explored several notions with regards to how young girls are directly targeted by such cultural products and how it is through this direct targeting and marketing that children have become more media savvy, knowing exactly what to *do* with the media, which is presented before them.

With reference back to the traditional notions of child's play theory, the first being the notion of mimicry and the second notion being toys as a means to educate – the Bratz dolls and

the culture that surround them certainly seem to rebel against such educational notions as, from the surface, the dolls wear provocative clothing and they have a certain ‘brat-like’ persona.

The literature review has provided evidence that illustrates that a change in girl’s play has occurred. From the outset, it could be argued that such a transformation of taste has fostered much debate and discourse with regards to how young girls are growing up too quickly. The following chapter will outline the research design and methodology used for this thesis as the research questions surrounding this change in girl’s play continues to be explored through this analysis of Bratz dolls.

Chapter Two: Research Design and Methodology

This chapter describes the research design and the methodological approach used in this qualitative study. This chapter will outline, in detail, how participants were recruited, the procedures, the data collection methods used, key approaches to the data analysis, and the limitations encountered from this research design. Essentially, this chapter will offer a concise understanding of exactly how this study was conducted.

Research Design

Since there are certain sensitivities related to the topics of girlhood and identity construction, it was very important to consider these sensitivities when creating the study’s research design. Therefore, a qualitative research design involving in-depth interviews was chosen as “qualitative research is particularly useful for studying sensitive topics” (Keyton, 2006, p, 60). A key aspect to consider was that young girls were being interviewed in this study. Due to the strict sensitivities of interviewing minors and to ensure Research Ethics Board (REB)

approval for this study (see Appendix H), it was important to provide a clear outline for the REB application. As a researcher, it was important to use a structured approach thus allowing for the research focus to remain constant. Since topics such as girlhood, identity and girl's play are quite general, it was therefore beneficial to tailor the interview guide (see Appendices C & D) so that it captured key themes and topics that this analysis was hoping to explore with both participating parties.

These structured in-depth interviews created a space where girls and mothers respectively could share their thoughts and experiences freely. For the girls who participated in this study, they were informed that they would be having a little conversation about all things girl related: shopping, toys and music; mothers were given the same information and told that it would allow them to remember their childhood and reflect back on the toys and games they liked to play with when they were little girls.

The open-ended questions used in the respective interview guides allowed for a very rich discussion on the topics of girlhood, identity and play. Furthermore, according to Joann Keyton (2006), open-ended questions “can help a researcher probe for more detail” (p. 274). Such probing allowed for more follow-up questions to be asked, therefore providing very rich qualitative findings that will be outlined in the following chapter.

In *The Handbook of Interview Research: Context and Method*, Jaber Gubrium and James Holstein (2002) offer a detailed account of what constitutes interviews for the purposes of research. In the chapter entitled *In-Depth Interviewing*, John Johnson (2002) argues that “as the name implies, in-depth interviewing seeks ‘deep’ information and understanding” (p. 106). In order for this method of qualitative data collection to be “effective and useful, in-depth interviews develop and build on intimacy; in this respect they resemble the forms of talking one

finds among close friends” (p.104). Therefore, since personal anecdotes about girlhood and thoughts on identity construction were being sought out, this form of one-on-one, face-to-face interaction with the study’s participants helped ensure that the participants were comfortable and at ease when discussing these personal topics.

In *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2005) Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln, Andrea Fontana and James Frey assert that “interviewing is one of the most common and powerful ways in which we try to understand our fellow humans (p. 697-698). Ultimately, as a researcher, this was one of the key goals of the study: to understand the participants’ responses thus ensuring that the data was, in turn, able to be analyzed and interpreted effectively.

Methodology

This analysis attempts to look inside the minds of both mothers and their daughters within the realms of the dolls that young girls play with and that mothers purchase. This analysis will examine such questions as: Do mothers purchase toys for their children against their own personal wishes? How are mothers enticed to purchase a doll that is, from the surface, interpreted as having a negative impact and influence on their child?

The purpose of this thesis is to examine MGA Entertainment Inc.'s Bratz dolls in order to find out if this arguable offensive doll has lasting impacts on girl’s play. This research explores girl’s play and identity and looks at how it contributes to the shaping of how a girl’s taste choice in play impacts girlhood. To this end, qualitative methods were used in order to fully understand both mothers and daughters perspectives on the cultural artifact that is being explored for the

purposes of this research: Bratz dolls. Participants' perceptions were analyzed using thematic analysis. This method of data analysis provided answers to this study's research question.

Participants

With the intent to focus on young girls and their mothers who have an awareness of Bratz dolls and in order to establish their thoughts and opinions on these dolls 20 participants (10 mothers and their respective daughters) were recruited for this study. Children, youth and the media was a keen research interest of mine throughout my undergraduate coursework; therefore, a network of mothers (and their daughters) had been developed as they had expressed an interest in participating in this study, once REB approval was received. For recruitment, this personal network of mothers and daughters was contacted as they were invited to then participate in the study (see Appendices A & B). Since this personal network did not complete the complete sample for the study (N=20), referrals from the initial personal network were used. They had told some of their friends about this study; and they were keen on participating. This technique is known as snowball sampling.

In order to participate in this study, both the mothers and their daughters had to have an awareness of Bratz dolls. It is important to note that this awareness did not necessarily mean that the mothers or daughters had to like or dislike the dolls, meaning that the participants I recruited were not asked to choose between this dichotomy. Instead, they were simply asked to have an awareness of the dolls. As for the girls who were recruited, two key recruitment criteria were that they were between the ages of 6 and 12 and that they had an awareness of Bratz dolls. All of the girls (N=10) that participated in this study were between the ages of 6 and 12. This study, which was submitted for Full REB Review on October 29, 2008, received REB approval on February 25, 2009, prior to the collection of the data.

Keyton (2006) asserts that snowball sampling is used when “the research topic is controversial or a specific population of participants is difficult to find” (p.128). In this case, the study would have been delayed significantly if community organizations or a school board were involved in the recruitment of the girls for this study; and it was for that reason that snowball sampling and network sampling were relied upon instead. They were the most time-efficient and effective ways to recruit participants. Since the purpose of this study is to explore girl’s play and identity and how it contributes to the shaping of how a girl’s taste choice in play impacts girlhood, a very specific population was required for this study. For this reason, network sampling and snowball sampling were used to recruit participants.

Procedures:

This study was conducted through the careful implementation and execution of structured in-depth interviews. These interviews were 45 minutes to an hour in length for the mothers and 20 to 30 minutes in length for the girls. Evidently, as a qualitative researcher, it was important to keep the interviews with the girls relatively shorter than the ones with their mother in order to keep the girl’s attention spans focused on the topic at hand. Although the respective in-depth interviews were structured in a very similar ways, through themes, it was important to keep the interviews with the girls relatively shorter than the ones with their mother. The key themes used in the interviews were: *Girlhood*, *Shopping and Consumerism*, and *Image*. For the girls, the *Girlhood* section discussed toys, past-times and Bratz dolls. For the mothers, this section also discussed the three aforementioned themes; however, one of the main focuses was to reflect back to when they were a young girl and to remember what they played with when they were younger. It was decided to use this approach as this study was interested in comparing their responses in play to those of their daughter. For the mothers, the *Girlhood* section also asked the mothers’

opinions on the Bratz dolls, and it was here that mothers discussed whether they purchase Bratz dolls for their daughter.

For the *Shopping and Consumerism* section, the girls were asked questions regarding their thoughts on shopping. For the mothers, they were asked whether their daughter accompanies them while shopping; it was here that mothers would reveal if their daughter has an influence on their purchasing decisions. Finally, for the *Image* section of the interviews, the girls were asked whether they play ‘dress-up’ with their friends, and for this section mothers were asked if they would allow their daughter to wear make-up when playing dress-up. As a researcher, it was important to raise the topic of make-up as it was through this means that mothers shared their thoughts on image ideals and beauty in girls and thus the data would help identify how many of the mothers believed that girls are seeing and doing too much, too soon.

After receiving REB approval for the study, respective recruitment documents (see Appendices A & B) were distributed to mothers and daughters. Once those were returned and signed, interviews were scheduled with the mothers and the daughters, respectively. All 20 interviews were conducted between March 10, 2009 and April 30, 2009. Prior to conducting the interviews, consent forms were used for the mothers (See Appendices E & F) and assent forms were used for their daughters (see Appendix G). The interviews were carried out subject to the participant’s availability and they were all conducted in the comfort and privacy of the participant’s homes. As a researcher, it was believed that this would be the most convenient place for both the mothers and the daughters participating in this study. As a researcher, it was also believed that the girls, especially, would be far more comfortable in the comfort of their own home. Many of the girls brought their favourite toys with them to the interview; thus allowing

me to learn more about their play habits and preferences in dolls. These instances and other key findings will be discussed and explored further in the results and analysis chapter of this thesis.

Data Collection

Since minors were being interviewed for this study, it was very important to conduct in-person interviews, as phone interviews would not capture the exact meaning and reasoning behind the girl's responses. Therefore, it was also essential to conduct the mothers' interviews in-person.

The interviews allowed the three themes of *Girlhood*, *Shopping and Consumerism* and *Image* to be explored; further as these three general themes divulged additional information. Topics such as television, friends and hobbies are just some of the topics that arose and this allowed for deeper inquiry inside the minds of both sets of participants. That said, one could assume that the structured interviews, at times, became somewhat semi-structured as the topics and questions set forth granted further related discussion. Therefore, participants were encouraged to share their stories regarding, from a mother's perspective, instances where she had seen a particular advertisement for a Bratz doll or a discussion she had previously with a mom regarding these dolls. As a researcher, it is this *exact* data that one hopes for – the stories, as these stories allow for a more detailed discussion of the topic at hand. The semi-structured format, at times, also granted the flexibility to ask follow-up or probing questions in order to gather more details.

Since girls between the ages of 6 and 12 years were being interviewed alone without their mother being present, it was very important for the REB to fully understand and see evidence of the exact questions that would be asked of the girls participating in this study. It is for that reason that prompting questions were also included in order to ensure that the REB knew the

exact questions the girls would be asked. All of the interviews were also audio-recorded in order to ensure accuracy for the verbatim transcriptions and also to ensure that attention was not focused on note taking throughout the interview. It was also believed that the girl's attention span would not have been kept if notes were taken through their interview. Although, as a researcher, the research intentions were very formal, this was not the image that this study wanted to portray to the girls participating in this study. Instead, it was important for the girls to feel as though they were having a 'chat' with someone about the toys they play with so on and so forth. This relaxed approach to interviewing the girls proved successful and the results of the interviews will be discussed in Chapter Three.

For the purposes of confidentiality, it was imperative that the confidentiality of the participants remain protected, and for that reason the identity of every participant will remain strictly confidential. According to the REB approval, it was decided that pseudonyms be used in place of the participants' real names; this was a key step to protect the participants' anonymity.

Data Analysis

Once all 20 interviews were completed, each interview was transcribed verbatim as per REB requirements and approval. This also proved to be an effective way to analyze the data as when listening to the interviews, the same analytical views were not gained as they were from seeing the mothers and girls respective responses in writing.

As previously mentioned, the interviews were divided into three sections: *Girlhood*, *Shopping and Consumerism*, and *Image*. According to Keyton (2006), "in almost every case, a qualitative researcher will have the need to categorize and code data" (p. 293). Therefore, thematic analysis was used to interpret the data collected for this study. As Keyton (2006) noted

“Categories may emerge from the data” (p. 293) (Boily, 2009 and Boily and Rousseau, 2009).

Therefore, it was only fitting to use thematic analysis to analyze the interview data.

Richard Boyatzis (1998) defines thematic analysis as “a process for encoding qualitative information; the encoding requires an explicit ‘code’” (p. 161). In thematic analysis, a code may be defined as a “list of themes; a complex model with themes, indicators, and qualifications that are causally related; or something in between these two forms” (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 161).

Boyatzis (1998) defines a theme as “a pattern found in the information that at the minimum described and organizes the possible observations or at the maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon” (p. 161). According to Keyton (2006), thematic analysis identifies themes “in textual data based on three criteria: recurrence, repetition and forcefulness” (p. 295-296). For Jennifer Attride-Stirling (2001), thematic analysis seeks to “unearth the themes salient in a text at different levels” (p. 387).

As previously mentioned, all of the interviews were transcribed verbatim. These transcripts allowed key themes and relationships that emerged from the data collected to be identified. Participant responses were coded and then compared and contrasted. The mother’s responses were then juxtaposed with their daughter’s response to see what relationships, if any, existed between the data. It is important to reinforce the fact that both parties (mother and their daughter) did not have to share the same views on Bratz dolls in order to participate in this study. Therefore some interesting linkages between a mother and her respective daughter’s responses were revealed.

In order to fully illustrate some of the study’s key findings, participant quotations were included in order to fully support the findings. This also reinforced the themes and arguments which were presented throughout this analysis.

Limitations

It is important to note that the research design of this study did present some limitations. One of these limitations could be attributed to the demographic background of my participants. For this study, only ten Anglophone girls between the ages of 6 and 12 and their mothers were invited to participate in this study. It is important to also reinforce the fact that these participants had to have an awareness of Bratz dolls. That said, these criteria and sample size contributed to a narrower sample of individuals, thus not representative of the entire province of Ontario, for instance. The reason that only Anglophone mothers and daughters were selected for the purposes of this research is because Bratz dolls merchandise items and movies are not as readily available in French.

Another evident exclusion to mention was the fact that fathers were not included in this study. Fathers were purposely excluded from this study as the discourse that presently surrounds this thesis is dealing with girlhood and identity which would be best explored through speaking with mothers. With that being said, as a researcher it was important to establish whether the young girls interviewed mirror their mother and if the 'like mother like daughter' claim remains.

The fact that all of the participants are Anglophone and the exclusion of other languages such as French has the potential of limiting the results of this study. Ethnic backgrounds were not purposely concentrated on for this study, only language and working knowledge of MGA Entertainment's Bratz dolls. Therefore, future studies should include a more demographically varied population, both in the gendered sense and linguistically, as it would be interesting to research what fathers think of the Bratz dolls.

Scheduling conflicts and other difficulties were prepared for when scheduling the interviews, however none were encountered. The mothers seemed very appreciative that the

interviews were scheduled around their respective schedules and in the privacy of their own homes. Interviews were conducted over weekends and evenings in order to accommodate the schedules of the participants.

Chapter Summary

Chapter Two outlined the methodology used for this study. By offering a detailed account of the procedures, data collection methods, approaches to data analysis and the limitations a clearer understanding of the research design adopted was unveiled. All of the study's participants were Anglophone residents of Ontario (specifically recruits from the Eastern and Northern cities of Northern Ontario) who had knowledge of Bratz dolls. Ten of the 20 participants were girls between the ages of 6 and 12 years. The remaining 10 participants were their mothers. By discussing the specific advantages and disadvantages of the procedures, data collection and data analysis, Chapter Two provided the justification for conducting structured in-depth interviews. Also, due to the sensitivities associated with working with minors, an explanation in using a qualitative research design was also described in this chapter.

Chapter Three: Results and Analysis

Introduction

This chapter provides a detailed overview of the data gathered from the in-depth interviews conducted with 10 girls and their mothers. All participants had an awareness of MGA Entertainment's Bratz dolls. Each respective interview focused in on the following themes: *Girlhood, Shopping and Consumerism, and Image*. This chapter provides a summary of the participants' responses to the interview questions in addition to a comprehensive analysis of

these responses. Both respective groups of participants' interview responses have been analyzed and consequently coded into themes through thematic analysis. These themes emerged from the data and were therefore categorized as a result of their recurrence. Consequently, the emic principles of research are respected as this study attempts to explore and understand the taxonomy and meaning of this presented precocity in young girls. These themes have been divided into five subsections and they will be illustrated throughout this chapter (see Appendix I).

Results

The interpretation of the data was carried out by using the constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This method was most effective for this thesis as it is employed through reducing data to a manageable state, which in turn granted for a more effective means of analyzing the data through thematic analysis. Consequently, the interview transcripts were read, in their entirety, in order to examine all participants' responses. In order to ensure that no data or emerging themes were missed, it was important, therefore, to read the data several times in order to learn the specific themes and patterns that were emerging from the data. It is important to note that the constant comparative approach allows themes to emerge directly from the data itself. Furthermore, the themes that will be presented in this chapter were not pre-determined as the categories to follow emerged directly from the interview data itself. Themes were then coded by hand throughout the duration of the re-reading process to ensure that all presented themes were categorized and labelled accordingly.

As previously mentioned, the intent of this study was to focus on young girls and their mothers who have an awareness of Bratz dolls in order to establish their thoughts and opinions on these dolls. The following analysis contains the responses and quotations from *all* 20

participants in this study. As previously mentioned, the transcripts of all participants were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim, therefore key quotations are provided in the analysis that follows. The rationale to select all 20 participants for this analysis was due to the fact that each and every interview contributed and revealed insightful data findings.

As previously mentioned, the interviews were first divided into three overarching themes: *Girlhood, Shopping and Consumerism*, and *Image*. It was this study's hope to then generate more focused data from these themes in order to then create key themes and patterns that would emerge from the data itself. Since thematic analysis was used to interpret the interview data, it was continually interesting to see how themes emerged from the data itself. Therefore, the interview data has been further divided into the following five key themes: *Traditionalism Lost: Mutation, The Disappearance of Girlhood: Precocity, Search for Identity, Consumerism and Behaviour*, and *A 'Passion for Fashion': Its Relevance*.

The in-depth interviews opened up a forum for participants to share their thoughts regarding girl's play, image and Bratz dolls. Some of the mothers that were interviewed were very passionate about their views against Bratz dolls, in so far as they refuse to have the dolls in their homes. Mothers such as Cheryl asserted "I could not spend one dollar supporting that!" when asked if she has ever purchased a Bratz doll for her 6 year old daughter Jennifer, who knows she is not allowed to play with Bratz dolls "because how they dress." Whereas other mothers such as Tracy admitted that "I know all of their names: Cloe, Yasmin, Jade and Sasha! Maybe I would have to say their movie is a guilty pleasure."

Traditionalism Lost: Mutation

As has been reinforced throughout this thesis, the purpose of this research is to examine the appeal of MGA Entertainment Inc.'s Bratz dolls and through an exploration of this artifact, to explore whether there has been a definitive change in girl's play. The girls shared their admiration for television shows, 'tween' stars, (such as Hannah Montana, Selena Gomez and Zack and Cody) and toys that girls played with and 'idolized.' From Hannah Montana to Twilight – these girls are continually 'in tune' with *the* latest tween crazes. With regards to Bratz dolls, it was interesting to learn how some of these girls have changed the ways in which they play with Bratz dolls. For instance, Colleen, who used to play with the dolls on a more regular basis, and whose mother Jenna claims she knows "a lot about Bratz dolls because [her] daughter was totally involved with Bratz for about 1 to 2 years," now enjoys playing Bratz on her Nintendo Wii as she shares, "I have the game of it on my Wii, they are kind of cool a little bit, but I have grown out of them already." When I asked Colleen why she no longer plays with Bratz dolls she shared, "They always think dumb things and I don't like them because they have fishnet things on them...so kind of like older clothes have fishnets." Colleen does, however, admit that she plays her Wii Bratz game "because you can dress them up sometimes and you can make them look like a hippie." Therefore, Colleen still enjoys using her imagination with the Bratz dolls, but she remains hesitant regarding what the dolls wear and their so-called 'fashionable' attire. Colleen recognizes this so-called 'fashionable' representation that the Bratz dolls claim to represent through their *'the only girls with a passion for fashion'* claim.

Callon and Latour (2006) argue that the concept of a cultural artifact must be viewed through its use. Carrie, who "used to play with [Bratz]," shared that "mostly every girl in my class plays with Bratz dolls." Carrie, who admits that she's "not really a girly girl" and used to

play with the dolls when she “was really little” shared that she “luckily” lost her Bratz doll.

When asked why she no longer plays with Bratz dolls, she asserted: “I told you already, I’m *not* a girly girl. I like boyish stuff like animals.” Carrie’s mother Lynne, who does not find Bratz dolls to be a “dangerous situation” for girls, claims that for two days Carrie was *really* into Bratz dolls “and I though uh oh...then if all of a sudden [it was] every birthday, Christmas, Easter ...*everything* was Bratz! Bratz! Bratz! I would *not* go into that.” The notion of “everything Bratz” is problematic for mothers such as Lynne. Lamb and Brown (2006) affirm that girls are being ‘sold’ and ‘packaged’ the *ideal* image. Lynne is very intrigued by Bratz dolls and the change in play that they have fostered as she asks herself the following in relation to why her daughter would want to play with a Bratz doll:

I would ask: what was it that she finds so attractive to them? That would be interesting to me. I know she is already a lady and she wants to be a teenager [and] I can imagine that for her, this would lead to teenage things and I would [play] with her [with] that and kind of make sure that I am involved in that thinking.

Lynne involves herself in Carrie’s play with Bratz dolls. For Lynne, she’s primarily concerned with Bratz dolls’ clothing as she finds that it “is terrible” and when asked how she would get involved in playing with Bratz dolls with her daughter she explained:

I would really not like to see my daughter totally getting absorbed with fashion things and I don’t want her to have the impression that a woman has to look sexy, right? Especially girls...I mean there is *nothing* wrong with sexuality and sex and so on, it is just how a woman dresses.

For Lynne, the image of the Bratz dolls themselves pose a problem for her, however, Lynne also raised an interesting point when she shared her thoughts on the Bratz name itself:

English is my second language, the name does not say anything to me...but I seem to think it is a bad word, isn’t it a spoiled child or something? That did not trigger anything for me, but if I think I would understand it emotionally. It is one of the reasons I wouldn’t touch it. The name itself...I am amazed about the marketing department. I wonder if they tested the name. That is the *last* thing you want to link your child with.

Gail's thoughts on the Bratz name echo Lynne's:

The only thing I don't like is the name of it. I know the media use the name brat differently like a spoiled celebrity, but sort of viewed as yes, they are spoiled. But in the UK, it is a really derogative word and I think it is changing its meaning. I think they will change it in the dictionary in about five year's time. But it is a *really* derogative word to call somebody a brat that is the bit that I don't like. In the UK, when we say it, it is quite an insult. It is more, I think in the UK, it is like a swear word. I cannot describe it, but it is different here.

Merriam-Webster's dictionary defines the noun *brat* as: "a very troublesome child"

(Merriam-Webster's, 2010, n.p). Therefore, the arguments that both Lynne and Gail raised are quite valid as, simply put, a brat refers solely to a troublesome child. For these two mothers, they see MGA Entertainment's use of the name Bratz as a very strategic move on the basis that these dolls are, in fact, in their view, alluding to being troublesome girls. With regards to their name, Gail continued in sharing that her daughter Jodie "used to say brat [and] now she says Bratz...that's the worst bit of the doll!" For Gail it is not the image of the Bratz that is most troublesome to her, it is their name as it refers to being a troublesome girl.

With regards to purchasing these 'bratty' dolls, Nancy refuses to purchase them for her daughter Melissa. When asked if she has ever purchased a Bratz doll for her daughter, she stated:

No, because...I just...the whole persona: the make-up...I don't enjoy that, at least with Barbie doll or Little Pet Shops, they don't come developed. I know Barbie is kind of developed, but she doesn't wear all the make-up and the garments. I just find them a little...they are not what I would like to promote.

When asked to clarify this Bratz persona, Nancy shared:

If you get sucked into the whole persona with you know, the internet games and I know they have movies, play DVDs...if you get sucked into all *that*, the lingo is picked up – that they speak and the slang that they speak. I am trying not to encourage it.

Therefore, for Nancy it is not the name of the doll itself it is the Bratz persona that troubles her the most. Rather she feels as though this extends to that of a young girl's

personality through the language that girls use as well and this ‘change’ in girl’s play is something she would rather not encourage. For Nancy, the language and the lingo that Bratz dolls use is not something that she would like to encourage. The Bratz website uses a distinct type of language. Upon arriving at the site, young girls are greeted with the following message “*Be patient, it takes time to look this good*” and when leaving the site, a pop up ad appears and reads as follows “*Until next time. Take care. Keep it real, and above all else be beautiful!*” (MGA, 2010, n.p). The website offers games and other online activities for young girls to participate in. It also introduces girls to the Bratz dolls through their online profiles which describe such things as their hobbies, interest in boys and key personality traits.

In speaking with 9 year old Erinn, she also referred to this Bratz persona. Erinn referred to something that the Bratz dolls called ‘Brattitude.’ Erinn defined this as, “the Bratz have a ‘tude...and attitude, but their attitude is nice with all of us.”

Tracy, the mother of 7 year old Ann shared that even though she loves the Bratz dolls and does not feel as though they have an influence on young girls, she does admit that the Bratz language has had an impact on her daughter.

I can’t say that she didn’t pick up on some of the jargon that they have, or be like....well, she will get dressed up and say, ‘I have a passion for fashion!’ and that is from Bratz, but she is not dressed like them. She is dressed in her own clothes the way *she* likes, so she is just...I think it depends on the girl.

Six of the mothers that participated in this study revealed that they played with Barbie as a young girl. Many of these mothers shared that Barbie was a better role model for girls. Cheryl, who has banned Bratz from her home, allows 6 year old daughter, Jennifer to play with Barbie:

One of the things is that Barbie is a better role model. One of the Barbie toys is a Veterinarian set and she wants to be a Vet when she grows up. Whether it came from seeing Barbie as a Veterinarian or whatever, but you know there is a link there... like if you play with the Bratz doll, you want to be just like Bratz. I am ok with Barbie because they are not saying every single Barbie *is* a Veterinarian, but there are options with

Barbie and different settings to aspire to...I don't think Barbie wears all that make-up and all the 'bling' and extra stuff.

Here, Barbie is viewed as the more innocent of the two dolls. With regards to her play with Barbies as a young girl, mothers such as Geraldine shared that she "could dress her up, fix her hair [and] give her baths." Geraldine argued that play with Barbies varied as "you had the camper, jet ski and all this...a lot of things you could play with her."

Gail, who grew up in the UK, played with her Cindy doll as a young girl. According to Gail, "Barbie wasn't as well known I would think, as Cindy at the time" and with regards to Bratz dolls she shared that:

[Bratz] are really voluptuous dolls, really. I don't disapprove of them, but I can see why girls like them...they are far more...not that children would latch onto this, but they are far more sexy than Cindy [was]. Cindy is a more traditional doll. The Bratz are just a little more different. Their clothes are, you know, what teenagers would be liking.

With regards to Barbie, Charlene shared that "Barbies [were] definitely number one...loved Barbies!" Charlene would "just play for hours – just an imaginary life with Barbies." For Charlene, this imaginary life is where her main parenting anxieties are raised as she is concerned that if her daughter were to play with Bratz, that she too would share an imaginary world with Bratz dolls. It for that reason that Charlene "made the decision to pack all the Bratz stuff up and put it in the closet for a while and then [they] made [their] last move about a year ago, and [they] got rid of them, [they] donated them."

Charlene feels as though the main problem today is that "parents are *so* far removed from their kids because of their busy lifestyle." Charlene admits that "it wasn't until my friend who I said 100% does not allow Bratz dolls...it wasn't until she brought that point to me, I really had not thought about it until that point. I had seen a couple of them" but had never really thought

about how the dolls, themselves, could have an influence on her daughter. It is for that reason that Charlene asks herself the following:

How many parents sit down and watch TV with their kids? My husband and I sometimes will sit down with the girls, and as a family, we'll watch a Hannah Montana episode. But, it wasn't until I did that *really* understood what the show was about, and I have to be honest, I don't like the way that she talks, it annoys me a little bit. As far as the show, I am kind of on the fence, as do I *really* want my youngest daughter, who is only 6, do I *really* want to let them both continue to watch the show, where I don't fully agree with the behaviour of this young lady?

As previously mentioned both Nancy and Lynne were also troubled by the language and slang that the Bratz dolls use; in addition to the Bratz name itself. When asked exactly what it was that annoyed and troubled her most about the language that Hannah Montana uses, Charlene stated:

I think it might be...I think it is just the slang. When the kids are so young, like here in Canada, the kids are *so* young, they don't get that it is an accent. It is just *that* twang. Do I *want* them to pick up on that? So I think that with Bratz dolls, how many parents have *really* thought about how these toys or shows are influencing their daughters? Why are these girls going around dressed the way they are? I mean we didn't dress like that growing up. I mean, so *what* has changed? How many parents *really* think about that? What is happening in my daughter's life to make her go down that road?

Charlene, who was first introduced to the Bratz dolls when her eldest would attend friends' birthday parties, had never heard of these dolls before and upon seeing the dolls for the first time, she thought "some company is trying to compete with Barbie but kind of to an extreme level." However, in her conversations with other mothers, she felt, and "right from the beginning some kind of uneasy feeling" as she asked herself the following question:

Why [does] this children's toy have to be to this level of the way that it looks? It wears an extreme amount of make-up, and the glitzy clothing. I mean children would *not* wear that and why are we putting it on a child's doll?

Charlene still does not allow her daughter to play with Bratz at daycare, but she did share that “it is just [that] they are not in our house and she is not going to be playing with them for hours on end, like I played with my Barbies.”

For mothers such as Charlene, concerns are raised with regards to how girls are playing with Bratz. On the other hand, there are some mothers who do not see the Bratz dolls as having a negative impact on their daughter’s play. For instance, Sharon who believes that there are “more positives than negatives” about the Bratz dolls, shared that her daughter Erinn used to play Bratz dress-up as “they dress-up and play like Cloe and Yasmin. They would try to dress like them. They had Bratz make-up, so they just used that.”

Cheryl’s comments on the Bratz dolls are far different than those of Sharon. When Cheryl was first introduced to Bratz she shared:

I [had] seen a few commercials and I [had] seen them in the store, and just from what I [had] seen from that, I did not want to go any further into knowing anything else. I just thought that the image they were portraying, that they dress provocatively and from what I saw from the commercials, they act sexy.

Cheryl, who refuses to purchase Bratz dolls for her daughter or to allow her daughter to play with them shared “I do not like the image that they are representing, the shirts are super short, the skirts are short, they are wearing heels and boots and I just do not think that is a good example.” For Cheryl, toys should act as age-appropriate models, and for that reason that she keeps a close eye on the television shows and toys that her 6 year old daughter Jennifer is exposed to:

I have never said to her, you cannot watch Hannah Montana, but I stick to things that are age-appropriate. I *know* it will get harder as she gets in higher grades in school and the other kids and this is what they are allowed to do and maybe she will ask for more of it, but I keep saying ‘Watch *Little Bear*, watch things that are appropriate for your age.’ Like, if Hannah Montana came on TV, she would have no idea who she is. I just think it is unbelievable to be grown up *that* much quicker.

Cheryl's concerns for *all* things Bratz related has brought her to discussions with other mothers. Cheryl, admits that one of her friends, who allows her daughter to play with Bratz dolls

does not agree with my point of view and she says that what her daughter plays with is no problem, and in the same conversation the other day, [her friend] said that she had issues with her 6 year old wanting to roll up her shirt to make it shorter and [her friend] wondered where that was coming from and I said 'look at what she's playing with!'

The majority of the mothers interviewed felt as though the Bratz dolls image and persona are not setting a good example for young girls. As this theme illustrated, some of the mothers refuse to have Bratz dolls in their respective homes as they feel as though the dolls portray a poor representation of girlhood and innocence. Six of the mothers who participated in this study played with Barbie, and as this theme reinforced, these mothers feel as though Barbie set a better example: she had a career, for instance. With regards to Bratz dolls, these mothers simply see the image of the dolls and many of them refuse to look any further.

The Disappearance of Girlhood: Precocity

This theme will examine how mothers believe that young girls are being forced into precocity. As noted in the literature review of this study, young girls are continually being subjected to societal pressures to look, dress and act a certain way. One of the key themes derived from the data was that many of the mothers feel as though young girls are being introduced to adult-type fashions, topics and realities at too young of an age. These realities raised some very interesting discussions with some of the mothers in this study. Many of the mothers interviewed believe that their daughters are seeing too much, too soon and that Bratz dolls act a means of encouraging this; it would be similar to the catalyst of this accelerated.

Cheryl is *very* much against all that the Bratz dolls represent and when asked what words come to mind when thinking of Bratz dolls, she shared the following: “slutty...I do not know, like trashy is a better word...ditsy image.” Cheryl continued in sharing:

I just think it makes little girls grow up too quickly. I have seen the different Bratz toys they have in the store and just some of the dress-up clothing in the toy section, maybe not a boa, but just some of the clothes they have girls dress-up in I think they are too grown up. Even for myself, as a grown up, I would *never* wear the clothes that they have as their ‘dress-up’ clothes. It is not that I have totally brainwashed her that they are bad, but I just kind of explain to her why I don’t want her playing with them; whether she understands that or not, but she was actually given a Bratz suitcase for her birthday...it went in the garbage.

Varied responses were noted with regards to the influence that Bratz dolls have on girls, as some of the mothers felt as though the dolls have an influence, whereas others did not. Neil Postman (1982) argued that the media has contributed to the disappearance of childhood. When asked if Bratz dolls have an influence on girls, Cheryl was adamant when stating the following:

Absolutely! If that is what you are going to be playing with and what you will be watching I do not see you aspire to that, but you would have to be normal. You know, that *is* how girls dress, so I do think it would definitely influence them in the clothes they want to wear and buy. There is another thing, Bratz are very materialistic. From what I have seen...the diamonds...and again, this is *not* what I want to show her.

Gail, who does not seem to concern herself too much with the influence that the Bratz dolls hold, she shared that “I think if you have a moral guidance at home, it really makes no difference.” For Gail, it is the parent’s responsibility to provide the education on morals and values at home. When asked if Bratz dolls have an influence on young girls, Gail shared:

No, not at all. I think the only way the toys have an influence is because of the materialistic aspect rather than the toy itself. And that is about having and wanting all sorts of things, whereas the actual toy itself, I think just interests the person at the time.

Gail has, however, noticed that some kids’ brands market a distinct look and style to young girls:

Brands...style, you know...bra and knicker sets, the Bratz do them. And they are sort of like black and red ...too much, really. And the midriff showing and they are more 'teenagey' at this age in the UK...much more! [Girls] are not as grown up here...they are not trying as hard. I am not aware of it compared to the UK. And even if you are surrounded by Bratz dolls, unless there was something very free and easy going with it in the family, I can't think that it would influence a child, particularly.

Gail has a hard time understanding the key purpose of Bratz dolls, even though she "has nothing against [the dolls]," Gail "would be very surprised if [her daughter] asked for one." Gail realizes that young "girls wants to be like teenagers" and she does agree with some of the other mothers in the sense that she sees this trend of growing up sooner "starting a little earlier now than in [her] day." Gail does admit that girls are growing up and becoming more 'teenagey' at an earlier age, but she is not placing this occurrence on Bratz dolls. As for the dolls, themselves she has no comment regarding their sense of fashion. For Gail, the primary educational foundation for moral and good judgement starts at home.

Gail is not completely certain whether the dolls have an influence or not but she thinks that "it is more to do with one child who gets a doll and children like to have what everybody else has got. You can make *anything* into a trend!" When asked to elaborate on trends, Gail shared her thoughts on the former, ever-popular at the time, Cabbage Patch Dolls:

I can remember the Cabbage Patch Dolls were fashionable. They were the most hideous looking things, but everyone *had* to have one, and a lot of parents said, 'well, why should *my* child miss out? They *have* to have one as well.' There are hundreds of dolls on the market, and they are *all* attractive to little girls. So, I do not know why [Bratz] would be *any* more popular.

Charlene believes the Bratz have an influence on girls. Charlene, who has made the decision to not purchase Bratz dolls, has discussed her decision with other mothers, "I know one specifically, who will not allow her children to play with them; she is *very* much against the idea. I think they definitely could [have an influence] with the combination of so much of what is going on today."

When asked to describe her thoughts on this, Charlene shared:

The Hannah Montana...a lot of what is on TV, unfortunately goes for more than just the girls...for *everything*. It is amazing the influence of what is on TV and the movies and how it comes into our lives. So I think, unfortunately, to make money so many companies are taking it to the extreme of the dolls and the toys and the shows and the accessories. Now you can't go into a store now and find accessories that don't match whatever is on TV, there are accessories that go with that.

Charlene's 8 year old daughter Christine feels as though "Bratz have really cool clothes and they are fun to play with." It is important to note that Charlene and her husband have decided to no longer have Bratz dolls in their house, so the only place that Christine is able to play with the dolls is at daycare or at a friend's house. Christine continued in sharing that although Bratz dolls have caught her eye, she admits that some of the Bratz dolls' clothing are "crazy":

When I look at them, I see them as stylish people. People with big heads [*giggles*], and are really cool. There is one in particular that I play with. There is one with her hair to the side and her hair is just nice and all the rest of them are just crazy.

When speaking with Dena, she feels as though the Bratz encourage young girls to dress in inappropriate ways. She feels as though the Bratz, who are young girls themselves, do not dress appropriately. Dena stated that the Bratz dolls clothing is:

not appropriate for kids that age. Obviously at one age, at one point in time girls will eventually want to dress like *that*. But I think you want to hold it as long as possible. It is little girls playing with them. It is like saying it is ok for you to dress like that as well.

Even though Dena recognizes the fact that at one point in time girls will want to dress in such fashions, she feels as though, it is very important for mothers to encourage their daughters to remain little girls through the way they act, play and dress for as long as possible. Dena feels as though the Bratz image "is all like grown up, like trying to make a little kid look like a grown up: the hair, the eyes, miniskirts, tight stuff." Even though Dena admits she does not like Bratz dolls, her 12 year old daughter Emily is still allowed to play with them. She continues in sharing,

“I only bought her one. I was never particularly happy with the whole way they look like and stuff like that, so I never really bought any.” Dena shared that when she would purchase a Bratz doll, she would “try to get the best looking in the sense that they weren’t wearing really provocative clothing and stuff like that.” Dena was most pleased to share that her daughter “is over them.”

Emily, Dena’s 12 year old daughter’s comments parallel what her mother was sharing with regards to how the dolls dress and how they present themselves. When asked what Emily knows about Bratz dolls, she shared the following:

I know that their head is ten times the size of their body and their clothes is kind of what kids would never wear, like tank tops and stuff like that. They have a lot of accessories and stuff.

When Emily did play with Bratz dolls, she enjoyed playing with them “because it was just clothes and I could not wear [them] and maybe I would pretend, I went to a movie and it was just fun to play with them. I *really* liked their clothing.” Emily’s favourite Bratz at the time was Cloe. Cloe wore clothes that Emily really liked.

She had those flirty jeans with black high heels and red silky dress with a red flower on it and I never really changed her stuff and also I liked their hair...how they put their hair back and stuff.

When Emily was asked if this outfit of Cloe’s is something that she would ever want to wear, Emily shared that she would not wear such an outfit because “it is just a little bit too revealing and stuff.” Even though Emily liked Cloe’s sense of fashion and admits that she liked the way that Cloe looked, Emily admits that she liked her two favourite Bratz dolls for other reasons: “I think it was because of [their] personality,” she admits, “it was almost like my friends and me or something.” Therefore, at the time, Emily’s intrigue with the Bratz dolls was not because of their image, per se, it was because of their personality.

One of the mothers that participated in this study, Tracy, is a big fan of the Bratz dolls. Tracy listens to their music and watches their movies and television specials. When asked about her thoughts on the Bratz dolls, Tracy shared the following:

Personally, as a grown up, if I had a body like that, I would dress like *that* too! I mean honestly, who *wouldn't*? I wouldn't and I don't mean the super tiny short skirts and stuff like that, but I mean some of their outfits are *really* cool, but lately the ones that she has been getting, have been cool adults. They have been sports ones. She got one from my mom...really nice...a Chinese theme with a nice long pretty dress. I think it really depends on which one you get.

When asked whether Tracy feels as though Bratz dolls influence her daughter, Tracy shared her thoughts on how her daughter interprets Bratz dolls attire.

She has never been like 'I want to dress like that!' It does not affect her in *that* way. If it was, then maybe I would try to convince her to buy the other [dolls]. She has never shown any sign of wanting to dress like them. I think it depends on the girl. I mean Ann could have easily went the other way with it, she could have been 'Oh, I *want* to dress like *that*, I *have* to have my hair like *that*.' Well, she was not at all, it was *just* her doll and that is where it stayed.

Each and every interview conducted presented something new – a new finding and a new thought. This theme has explored the notion of precocity and it is evident that many of the mothers interviewed believe that young girls are maturing and growing up at a *much* faster pace. Furthermore, some of the mothers interviewed argue that Bratz dolls help contribute to this precocity.

Search for Identity

The third key theme that arose from the interview data was that of how young girls are continually searching for an identity to call their own. As it has been presented throughout this thesis, young girls are *always* searching for the latest toy craze to purchase and enjoy. Trends are continually being set and it was interesting to learn how some of the girls viewed such trends as a means of searching for their 'own' identity.

One topic that generated a number of comments from both sets of interviews was the discussion surrounding the Bratz movie. The movie generated a number of findings as many of the participants in this study claimed that the movie and the play with the dolls differs slightly. *Bratz: The Movie* (2007), which was a live-action film based on the four Bratz characters, Cloe; Sasha; Yasmin; and Jade, features the four best friends as they enter high school. Together, they endure the adolescent pressures of jealousy associated with high school. The jealousy primarily stems from the fact that the girls are also a musical group (also called *Bratz* in the film). Girls such as 12 year old Valerie, “prefer [the movie] to playing with the Bratz dolls because I like movies a lot...I don’t really play with toys anymore.” For Valerie and her friends, “Bratz got out of fashion...everybody stopped playing with them and I did not like them anymore...I started into music.”

For 9 year old Erinn, she enjoyed the movie “because instead of dolls, they actually talk on TV, so you don’t have to make them talk and their clothes look real instead of on a doll.” Erinn’s statement would concern such mothers as Dena who feels as though the Bratz dolls are dressed as though they are “ready to hit the streets.”

Tracy found that “their movie [was] really good!” When asked what she liked the most about *Bratz: The Movie* (2007), Tracy shared that the movie could act as a means of defending the way that the Bratz dolls present themselves.

It is so different because people look at them and they think when they are dressed so scantily, some of them look like that... like their movies are so different because they promote friendship and being there for your friends and friends ‘til the end.’ And I have watched it with Ann to make sure it wasn’t about anything bad and it was just like they have a ‘passion for fashion’ and how...what is wrong with that!? Maybe they could put some clothes on, but in the movie they are fully dressed, like they don’t have any short skirts or anything like that. They don’t do anything like the dolls do which I found kind of funny ‘cause I thought it was kind of a walking contradiction.

Tracy expected that *Bratz: The Movie* (2007) would mirror the Bratz dolls image that they portray and market on toy store shelves. However, after watching the movie itself, she learned otherwise. Tracy approves of her daughter Ann watching Bratz movies and playing with the dolls. After our discussion about the movie, Tracy shared a very interesting anecdote about her friend from Europe. One day, she was over at her friend's house and she was sitting in her living room only to notice that her friend had a painting of a woman. Tracy described the artwork for me:

She has a picture of a painting of a woman naked from her breasts up and her head is beautiful. But she is sitting in her living room and her son is little and I am sitting there and I am like, 'Your son is walking around looking at this naked woman in your living room!' She is like, and I never thought of it this way about Bratz until she said this, 'Well, would I rather he be looking at something, or would I rather he be looking at Bratz dolls? I would rather him look at a woman for *who* she is [and] *what* she is instead of him looking at this little doll in a short skirt.' And I thought, 'Ok, that makes a little more sense.' So after that my mind *completely* changed on them. It just took that *one* thing.

Tracy treated this above situation as an awakening. She asked herself whether her daughter truly was influenced by the image that Bratz dolls present. As she states, "I didn't really care, I didn't care that she never looked at them like that. She never wanted to dress like them; she never wanted to *be* like that." However, Tracy's mind was changed after the conversation that she had with her friend about the painting "because what she said made a lot of sense. She *should* look at herself respectfully, and not be like *that*." Even though Tracy admits that her daughter "was never like that" and that she never "worried about her" in that sense, she did question whether "she should play with them anymore."

After Tracy discussed the topic of the Bratz dolls image with her friend, she noticed that Ann's interest in Bratz dolls changed slightly.

I think it was more like we didn't really go look at them at the store anymore. She would not want to check out all the toys. She didn't want to do that anymore. We talked about

it and I was telling her that ‘You know like you know you are not going to ever dress like that.’ And she said, ‘No, I will never dress like that.’ She had an awareness of it.

With regards to her daughter’s ‘relationship’ with the Bratz dolls, it was very important, as a mother, for Tracy to ensure that her daughter was not viewing these clothes as an ideal image of what a young woman *should* be wearing. After the conversation that Tracy had with her daughter about the Bratz dolls’ image and clothing they wear, Tracy shared that “she decided on her own what she wanted” and Ann, to this day, continues to play with Bratz dolls – she made this decision on her own. However, her mother asserts that Ann has an awareness of their clothing and image.

When Tracy’s daughter, Ann, was asked about the Bratz dolls’ clothing she laughed and stated that she would be allowed to wear the clothes that the Bratz dolls wear “Ya! When I’m sixteen!” Therefore, it is apparent, that Ann views Bratz doll clothing as a more mature sense in fashion and that those clothes are not appropriate for young girls to be wearing. Even though she admits that the dolls “have a lot of pretty clothes,” Ann did point out that they also wear “short skirts up to here (pointing at upper thigh).”

Lamb and Brown (2006) assert that young girls are being sold and packaged an ‘ideal’ identity and when playing with Bratz, Ann does equate her group of four friends with the four Bratz characters, “there is four of us and there is four Bratz.” When asked how her core group of four friends play with Bratz dolls, Ann explained the following:

With Bratz dolls, we say like there is a popular girl and there is a nice girl, and she tried to turn the nice girl into a popular girl because she likes her but still wants to be popular. Well, let’s say *all* popular girls are rich so they buy their own clothes, [Bratz] have a lot of pretty clothes, they get their ears pierced, they have a lot of jewellery, but they put on too much make-up!

What Ann shared with me raised several interesting notions. Firstly, Ann refers to the Bratz as being very materialistic as she refers to their jewellery, make-up, and clothes. Ann does

state that Bratz dolls have “a lot of pretty clothes” but she continuously refers to the materialism of the Bratz brand.

Jenna, mother of 8 year old Colleen has also seen the Bratz movies and her thoughts on the movie parallel those of Tracy. Jenna shared that her only knowledge of Bratz dolls “is because of the movies.” Jenna shared that she does not like the Baby Bratz movies; she instead likes “the older Bratz movie and the Bratz reality movie.”

It is *really* good. They are actual *real* people. So, if you haven’t seen the movie, you would never know that the Bratz are more about friendship and helping each other out and if you get in an argument, you would still work things out together. Whereas, if you only see the dolls and what they look like, you might think, and because their name’s Bratz, you might think they are brats like whereas, in reality, they are actually really good and have good friendships with each other.

Note how Jenna referred to “you guys” as she was discussing Bratz dolls, thus alluding to the fact that she sees her daughter and her group of friends through these Bratz dolls; if her daughter and her friends were having an argument, they could refer to any one of the Bratz dolls movies and use their means of problem solving as a key example to follow.

Charlene would not agree with such a claim; she admits that “it is hard to get in the mind of a 6, 7 or 8 year old” but she does feel as though the Bratz dolls could have a negative influence on young girls. For Charlene, the Bratz

are glamorous looking little dolls with cool clothes and then you know they have nice earrings, nice boots, so I mean they are, I would in the eyes of a child, they have a nice image...I mean they are not ugly dolls. The whole purpose is to make them look like these beautiful girls or young women. I have to say by looking at them, I don’t even know what age they are supposed to be. It is hard to tell.

For Cheryl, there are many aspects of the Bratz dolls’ image that she would rather not encourage. For Cheryl, Bratz dolls are “all about their make-up...the hair.” Cheryl does admit that she wears make-up and gets her hair done but she also mentioned that she does not want her “6 year old asking to wear lipstick and make-up.” Cheryl continued in stating that, “she has

[worn make-up] and when in the bathroom ... we put a bit on and that is fine, but it is not something that she *needs* to want to do *every* day.”

Dena, mother of 12 year old Emily feels as though the Bratz dolls set forth an image of perfection and that this image poses problems for young women. Dena feels as though young girls are already subjected to far *too* many notions of perfection where image is concerned and that the last pressure they need is from the toys and dolls that they play with.

Bratz, aside from their dressing, they are perfect looking dolls and I think, just like everything else in the world, they teach a child we are supposed to look a certain way. I mean, we are all, only maybe 5% of women in the world will be as beautiful, they don't have an extra ounce of fat, or their feet are not too big or their eyes are not too small or too big...like *nobody* is perfect. I think that any of the toys out there for girls modeling any of that stuff...there is not any saying, you know what, love yourself for who *you* are. The whole situation is that the world tells you that you have to look a certain way and that is beauty and *nothing* else.

Dena has seen the Bratz movie and she enjoyed it, “the movie was nice” she shared, “it was all about friendship and stuff like that.” Dena does, however, remember that “they were dressed a little bit provocative” but like Tracy and Jenna, Dena did not find that the clothes they wore in the movie were as bad as the clothes that the dolls wear. As a young girl, Dena played with Barbie, but she did admit that, similar to Bratz dolls, Barbie also presents some superficial tendencies and fashions.

The same thing with Barbies, they are not as provocatively dressed as these, but they *still* have the perfect body. A lot of kids can look at that as [and think] ‘I need to be perfect,’ and it is not. I mean *all* toys, depending on what you look at; all have their upsides and their down sides.

Of all of the mothers that were interviewed, it was Tracy's interview that stood out the most with regards to the topic of identity and self-image. Tracy has discussed the topics of Bratz fashion with her daughter Ann, as Ann knows that she is not allowed to wear such clothing. On

the topic of fashion, Tracy, whose dream job is to be a stylist, admits that “sometimes I talk her out of stuff” that Ann wants to wear.

Sometimes she thinks it looks good and it actually doesn't. I tell her some days and I am so straightforward with Ann and I never sugar coat things with her. I will tell her, 'That does *not* look good, you *need* to go change that or it doesn't match or this doesn't look good with that, or if you are going to wear jeans, then you need to wear this.' I will tell her that she looks like a bum and she will go change. She says, 'Ok' and changes. If she is getting dressed up to go outside and play only, its clothes from her play drawer, colours that don't match well. But, if she is getting dressed to go out somewhere or school...but she is getting really good at it. In the morning, since I had the baby, I am still in bed and she will get her own clothes and then ask me if it is ok...and usually it is ok.

For an 8 year old girl to be in such a stringent environment relating to fashion can only lead to a more superficial and pressured self image. Ann's mother was adamant about the clothes that her daughter wears and the fact that she *must* match and look stylish.

When speaking with Ann, she shared that when she plays Bratz dress-up with her friends they “play with [mom's] dress-up shoes and we pretend to be like the Bratz dolls and we don't like to be that mean.” Here, Ann associates the Bratz dolls with being mean. Earlier, I shared that she also finds that the Bratz dolls are the popular girls at school. Throughout Ann's interview, she also used terms such as 'drama queen' to describe the Bratz dolls. These mixed messages are directly targeting young girls such as Ann. As previously stated, Ann's mother, Tracy, admits that her daughter has been influenced by the lingo that the Bratz dolls use in their movies. In her interview, Ann stated that she likes the language that the Bratz dolls use, “but not in the movie...like in the cartoons... ‘Oh, I broke a nail!’” Here, Ann is referring to the Bratz character Sasha, who Ann admits “puts on too much make-up.” Ann has an awareness of the language that the Bratz dolls use in their movies; however, as her mother Tracy previously stated, Ann has used the lingo herself.

Tracy also raised the topic of make-up and she shared that she would put blush on her daughter before she would take the stage for a ballet performance.

She doesn't like it or want it. She doesn't want mascara or *anything*. I have tried...when she was young, I was curious. If I am wearing blush or bronzer, I will put some on her like *everyone* does. I tell her she doesn't need it. She is beautiful the way she is. I mean we are all, I think in our family, just naturally blessed to have good skin and I want to keep her skin nice. She asked me do I use [make-up]. I tell her 'I don't overdo it.' I put a little of that, not to any extreme, you cannot wipe it off with a spoon (*laughs*). She's gorgeous as it is.

The theme of identity construction and self-image were dominant themes in both the mothers and their daughters' interviews, respectively. Some of these mothers are concerned for the well-being of their daughter as these girls are continually being exposed to the 'ideal' self and the 'perfect' body.

Consumerism and Behaviour

The fourth key theme that was captured in the data was the influence of consumerism on young girls and their mothers. The introduction of this thesis refers to how young girls are continually setting trends as they are relentlessly inundated with advertisements for toys and products, all of which are *must* haves. Each mother and daughter had interesting shopping stories to share, and this section of this thesis will highlight some of the key findings on this topic.

Similar to her discussion regarding identity and self-image, Tracy's interview stands out in dominant form relating to the topics of shopping and consumerism. Tracy's daughter Ann shared, "I love shopping, I love clothes!" and Tracy makes a point of involving herself in her daughter's purchasing decisions.

If she picks something that I think does not look good, she does not get it. I am very much like that. I usually pick out most of her stuff. And she has no problem with that,

but I don't think there is anything wrong with having your own sense of style as a child. But if you are trying to put red and pink together, it doesn't look good. I am *not* going to buy it. I am spending money on her clothes, like she...even though she is the one wearing it, I am going to make sure that she looks good.

Tracy's overt involvement with Ann's 'style' is quite apparent, and of all of the mothers interviewed, Tracy remained the *most* concerned with the so-called daily fashion choices that her daughter makes. Tracy shared that Ann enjoys shopping at Wal-Mart "because the High School Musical stuff and the Hannah Montana stuff. It is her favourite when it is my money for clothes." However, as previously mentioned, self-image seems to be something that Tracy is continually promoting to her daughter. Benjamin Barber (2007) argues that children are corrupted by marketers and that we live in a society where citizens such as children lose their status as citizens and instead become consumers.

Lynne dislikes shopping with her daughter because her daughter seems to want *everything*. When asked if she brings her daughter Carrie shopping with her, she stated, "No! (*laughs*) Did you ever shop with a child!? She wants *everything*! 'Oh mommy, I want this! And then there's tears...it's a nightmare!" When Lynne is accompanied by her daughter, she does "a big curve around the toy section, in all fairness it *is* tempting. It is *not* easy to accept that you do not have a budget for a toy *every* time."

Jenna's daughter Colleen is now into fashion and picking out certain items of clothing to make an outfit.

She likes to buy fashionable things. She likes to layer clothing. She will go to La Senza Girl and pick out an outfit and she will never just get one shirt, because for her, she relates it with having a whole outfit. To be totally fashionable she *has* to have the whole thing. Or, you know, she picks up a couple of things here and there.

Jenna also shared that Colleen is very much into “shiny things, sparkling clothes [and] things that stick out.” Colleen’s favourite stores are La Senza Girl, Ardene’s and Claire’s, because for Jenna these stores “have a bunch of little things that she can buy.”

Sharon, mother of 9 year old Erinn becomes very frustrated when shopping with her daughter because “sometimes [Erinn] just does down there [the Bratz aisle]...she could spend an hour just looking at what is new.” Sharon finds that “on the negative side, [Bratz] are *so* expensive; they can be over sixty dollars depending on what one. Since it is a trend, your kids *must* have them, they *want* them!” Sharon has decided that because MGA Entertainment Inc. is always releasing the *latest* Bratz dolls she has actually told her daughter that she has “to work towards getting it” and that purchasing a Bratz doll for Erinn should be seen as a reward and not just an everyday occurrence. For Sharon, she feels as though she must remain with this plan in mind because her daughter “just sees it on TV or something like that and they come out with a new one...she will tell me ‘Mom, I *want* it!’ or something like that.”

With regards to shopping, Charlene shared that she very much enjoys shopping with her daughter Christine because “she is at an age where she can make the decision now, up until a year ago, we just simply bought all her stuff.” Christine is starting to learn about style and for her mother Charlene “it is nice to be able to hold something up and ask her if she likes it and she will have the opinion yes or no.” Christine’s favourite store is Wal-Mart and Charlene realizes this is because “clothing at Wal-Mart equals the Hannah Montana line for her.” Charlene continued in sharing that “if she goes into the clothing section, she knows that the back wall is the Hannah Montana stuff.”

With reference to Wal-Mart, many of the girls who picked Wal-Mart as their favourite store are both Hannah Montana and High School Musical fans. It is important to note that Wal-

Mart carries both of these lines of clothing and accessories. Naomi Klein (2003) asserts that brands and markets are very powerful where children are concerned.

Some of the girls in this study were not really interested in shopping. For instance, Jodie will only go shopping “if it is gift shopping,” whereas, Melissa loves shopping at stores such as La Senza Girl “because they have Hannah Montana, Zack and Cody, dog shirts, Capri’s and they bubble bath, lipstick and eye shadows and yah!” Melissa also enjoys trying on clothes at her favourite stores.

Yeah, when you go to the shopping mall and you try on all this stuff and you like it and then you take it and put it on one side of the wall and you like it and then you put something on the other side of the wall and you don’t like it.

For Melissa, the whole aspect of shopping excites her. Likewise, Erinn enjoys shopping for “Bratz, toys and clothes.” She, in particular, enjoys shopping at stores such as Ardene’s because they have “nice clothes there like Cloe the Bratz doll and you can get [hair] extensions there and nice wallets and little key chains and slippers and *all* that stuff.”

This thesis is indicative that young girls are continually subjected to marketing campaigns and trendy influences from a variety of areas. Wal-Mart was revealed as a favourite store amongst the girls as both the Hannah Montana and High School Musical respective lines of clothing are available at this store. These young girls use a family department store, such as Wal-Mart, as an avenue to support and purchase the latest trends. It is for that reason that some of the mothers in this study dislike shopping with their daughter, as today it just *too* easy for children to be subjected to marketable influences.

A 'Passion for Fashion': Its Relevance

The final key theme that arose from the interview findings was that of how the Bratz dolls' style is interpreted from both a mother's perspective and a girl's perspective. The opinions of both the mothers and their respective daughters with regards to the clothing that the Bratz dolls wear will be revealed in this theme.

Dena, mother of 12 year old Emily has discussed the topics of girlhood and identity with other mothers. In her discussions, the topic of Bratz dolls has also arisen.

We cannot believe what these dolls look like now. They are ready to hit the streets. Everything is *so* short. I mean, I am sure that all the parents that buy these dolls for their kids, would not want to see their kids like that at their age or *any* age. Anything that a kid plays with will have some kind of influence in the way they see things...not what it is.

When Dena was asked to share what words come to mind when thinking about Bratz dolls, Dena said, "H...o....e (spelled out)...I *really* do not like them." Lynne finds that the way the Bratz dolls dress is "advanced, far too suggestive....there is no modesty...very loud, therefore, I do not like that too much." When asked to elaborate on her meaning of advanced fashions, Lynne said:

Well, you know, I think if you, as a parent, balance it and I mean...I am kind of...if you...if there is not too much TV influence in the same way, if you are not buying too much mini-skirts like that or you know if you...then it is not a danger, but it *does* influence how important clothes are.

For Lynne, the first words that come to mind when looking at Bratz dolls are "sexy, fashion, make-up, girly girlish...I don't know why but not a clean character. I associate with tricky...not mean, but something like that." Lynne opened up and shared her personal thoughts and feelings on what comes to her mind when she sees the types of clothes that the Bratz dolls wear.

I don't like to show skin too much and there is still....I don't know how you have to be looking at this child pornography thing and she is only eight and not fully developed and

there are sick people who would think...things like that come to mind. I would want her to be in middle-modest. Having the colour, the style or maybe shiny stuff, but not high heels...nothing naughty...belly showing...things like that. I don't talk too much about it. I try to keep Carrie away from a lot of things. A single influence can *really* harm her, *really*. No matter what it is, it is *always* balanced with emotionally healthy other stuff.

One of the key phrases that Lynne shared was that she wouldn't want her "daughter to be their friend. She is far too young to, to me ... they are older...the way they are dressed." It is important to note that many of the mothers and the daughters in this study questioned the exact age of the Bratz dolls. With regards to their age, Lynne believes that they are "kind of they are like pre-teenagers." Previously, MGA Entertainment did have a line of Bratz dolls called Baby Bratz, which were, of course babies. These miniature dolls came fully equipped with a blanket, a bottle on a chain and a changing bag. The Baby Bratz also wore make-up and suggestive adult-typed lingerie such as thong underwear. Upon a recent visit to the Bratz website, it was discovered that this line of the dolls no longer exists. It appears as though the Baby Bratz line has now been replaced by Bratz Kidz. This helps to distinguish the age of the Bratz dolls, as the Bratz are entering high school and the Bratz Kidz are grade-school aged girls. It is important to note that many of the girls and mothers questioned the age of the Bratz dolls themselves because of their more mature choices in attire. In actuality, the Bratz dolls are not adults, they are young girls, who are from the movie's definition of their age, about the enter high school.

Even though she approves of her daughter Colleen playing with the Bratz line of dolls, Jenna does not like the Baby Bratz line of dolls. For Jenna, she finds that "some of them dress ok, but some of the babies are in their underwear and like thongs, but the older Bratz dress really good. They are like fashionable and really don't show anything too provocative or anything." Jenna also approves of her daughter wearing the clothes that the Bratz dolls do:

Oh for sure. A lot of the clothing I would let her wear. I would obviously not let her walk out in public in her underwear, but the other ...the older ones, which she kind of...I think, would relate to would be the older ones...and they wear actually nice clothing.

Sharon feels as though “some of them are a little provocative, I guess you could say,” but overall she is fine with how the Bratz dolls dress. Her daughter, Erinn plays Bratz dress-up and Sharon described this activity for me.

It is not negative. It is...some of them have fur coats and stuff like that, so it is alright. ‘I’d love to have this scarf and hat and the purses,’ she says. And she likes the Bratz accessories...there is Bratz clothing and make-up.

Erinn believes that the Bratz dolls represent being best friends. Erinn’s favourite Bratz doll is Cloe because of the clothes that Cloe wears. Erinn shared that her mom *might* let her wear such clothing “that would be a maybe!”

Because of her tops and because I am *so* young, her tops have like no straps...strapless tops. My mom doesn’t like me wearing dresses to my knees, she likes me to wear dresses down and because the shoes on them are *too* high! The heels are *way* too high! I would *not* be able to walk in them!

Nancy admits that she grew up with a “very strict mom” and feels as though the Bratz represent more negative aspects than positive ones. As a young girl, Nancy was never allowed to wear make-up while playing dress-up. Nancy feels as though the Bratz clothing and their image, itself, is a very negative one.

I think they reflect poor self image and you know the revealing clothing and I don’t think girls need [that] especially when it is *all* over the magazines, and every...it is all over the media, you know – the hair, make-up, weight, style – I don’t think we need to have a toy that promotes that as well.

Mothers such as Lynne find that the Bratz dolls “are very ‘fashioneey,’ I mean for me, they are *always* looking very fashionable,” whereas mothers such as Dena think the Bratz dolls appear as though they are “ready to hit the streets.” This juxtaposition of image representation will be discussed further in the following chapter.

Chapter Summary

This chapter explored the results from the in-depth interviews conducted with all 20 participants in this study. The results from these interviews revealed 5 key themes which were discussed in this chapter. First, this chapter discussed the notion of traditionalism of girl's play as being mutated as young girls are continually changing the ways in which they play with toys. The second theme that was discussed was that of precocity and how girls, starting from a very young age, are being exposed to many mature fashions and overt displays of hyper-sexual images and fashions, thus only encouraging and enabling young girls to act and dress in a non age-appropriate manner. Next, the theme of searching for one's identity was discussed as young girls, at times, use the toys that they play with as a means to find their 'own' identity. Following this, the next theme that was revealed from the data was that of the overt influence of consumerism on both mothers and their daughters. This theme explored the consumer behaviour of the girls as they continue to want and 'need' the next and best 'thing.' The final key theme which was explored was that of the relevance of how mothers and daughters shared their thoughts and opinions on how the Bratz dolls dress in addition to their opinions on the Bratz' overall appearance.

In the following chapter, a discussion will take place with reference back to key theorists which were explored in the literature review. It was apparent that the interviews revealed key examples which could be contrasted and compared against the theories which were explored in Chapter One. By discussing and juxtaposing the interview findings with that of the theoretical framework presented in the literature review, the research questions posed in Chapter One will be discussed, analyzed and explored.

Chapter Four: Discussion

After all of the interviews were conducted, it was important to then reflect upon how the five themes illustrated in Chapter Three (see Appendix I) mirrored some of the theories discussed in the literature review of this thesis. It is equally important to note that although the findings of this study have uncovered a number of themes and patterns between participant responses and their thoughts on Bratz dolls, these findings must also be examined in the greater context in which they were revealed. Chapter One outlined key communication studies scholars who have contributed insight to many of the themes that were revealed in the data findings. Furthermore, it is in this chapter that this analysis within a greater context of the field will be illustrated.

In order for this to occur, it is important to build upon the themes that were explored in Chapter Three and juxtapose these against key theorists who discussed these topics. To begin, this chapter will juxtapose Sharon Lamb's theory of *Secret Lives of Girls* against the first theme discussed in Chapter Three, which explored how the traditionalism of girl's play has been lost and has since mutated. Next, Neil Postman (1982) and Benjamin Barber's (1996, 2007) respective theories will be examined, as their notions surrounding the disappearance of childhood will be defined. Next, Sharon Lamb and Lyn Mikel-Brown's theory of *Packaging Girlhood* (2006) will be examined as it will be juxtaposed with the data revealed from the theme of young girls and their continued search for their 'own' identity. Following this, Juliet Schor's (2004) theory will be explored as it examines how childhood has increasingly become commercialized. Finally, Sharon Lamb's theory on the hyper-sexualization of girls (2001, 2006) will be explored further as this theory will be illustrated with the both sets of participants'

responses as comments surrounding the Bratz dolls appearance and their 'passion for fashion' will be demonstrated.

The five categories that follow will compare and contrast the data that was revealed from the interviews as the following two research questions, introduced in Chapter One, will be answered: Do Bratz dolls place girlhood identity formation into question? What has changed with regards to girl's play and the former innocence of girlhood?

Sharon Lamb on the loss of traditionalism in girlhood

In *Secret Lives of Girls*, Sharon Lamb (2001) discusses how today's culture has developed an understanding of the implications associated with a girl's image.

American culture now knows the dangers in girls' excessive preoccupation with looking pretty (in terms of eating disorders and low-self esteem), not to mention the way such preoccupations draw girls away from mind and skill enhancing endeavours. (p. 39)

As a researcher, there was a need to assess the argument from both sides: those who believed that Bratz dolls have an influence on girls and those who do not. It was interesting to see how some mothers were very concerned about their daughters playing with these dolls. However, other mothers did not feel as though the Bratz dolls hold an influence on girls. Colleen, for instance, was very much aware of the Bratz dolls' image as she commented on their adult-like fashions of "fishnet things." Lamb (2001) argues that "mothers and fathers are in collusion with girls' self-objectification in so far as it means dressing up to look pretty" (p. 40).

Sharon shared that her 9 year old daughter Erinn enjoys dressing up like the Bratz characters Cloe and Yasmin when she plays Bratz dress-up with her friends. When Sharon told me of this play, she indicated that her daughter would try to dress like these dolls and use the Bratz line of make-up. Such play for Lamb (2001) reinforces the notion that young girls "totally

embrace and invest in the idea that a woman is constructed – constructed of pretty, sexy and lacy things.” (2001, p. 43). Even though there were mothers such as Cheryl who forbids her daughter to play with the dolls, others such as Sharon see more positive aspects about the Bratz dolls than negative ones. On no occasion did mothers refer to the dolls as being ugly or unattractive. Instead, the mothers who did not approve of the Bratz dolls used such words as: “slutty,” “hoe,” “trashy.” From the outset, these words have one thing in common: these three words are descriptors. They are descriptive words that depict a highly sexualized image of the self, which is, as Lamb (2001) reinforces the notion that “girls resist the good girl ideal” (p. 43). There is nothing positive or encouraging about the words “slutty,” “hoe,” or “trashy.” It is important to reinforce the fact that the mothers used those three words to describe a little girl’s doll. This is what is most troubling to some of the mothers in this study as they are concerned for their daughter’s well-being. In its simplest terms, the dictionary defines a doll as “a small-scale figure of a human being used especially as a child's plaything” (Merriam-Webster, 2010, n.p). For mothers such as Cheryl and Charlene, Bratz dolls emulate an image that is, in fact, a misrepresentation of a woman’s ideals and respect for herself.

Lamb (2001) argues that play is not *just* play, as play “affects your mind and soul and could send you in directions you don’t want to go” (p. 47). Here, Lamb (2001) is arguing that play is more than *just* play, as many anthropological works demonstrate. Play is a means of socialization: it is a cultural artifact. For Michel Callon and Bruno Latour (2006), an artifact’s meaning is not simply that it *is* an artifact or an object, its meaning is instead connected or intertwined through its uses in a social and cultural environment. This could be said for Bratz dolls as some of the mothers I interviewed were concerned with this newfound social-use of play.

For mothers such as Charlene and Cheryl, this is *exactly* where their concerns for their daughters remain. They do not want to expose their daughters to this doll for *that* exact reason. In the realms of tradition of play, Lamb (2001) believes that “there is an expectation that children should be innocent, and that girls especially should be innocent of sexuality” (p. 54). Therefore, the aforementioned negative descriptors leave a lot of room for interpretation.

Likewise, it was interesting to learn how many of the mothers described the dolls as being “attractive,” “fashionable” and “fashioneey.” When juxtaposing these three descriptors with the three previous ones it is quite obvious that they are placed at both ends of the extreme: the depiction of a vulgar taste transgressive versus the more positive and alluring notions surrounding being a woman. Lamb (2001) argues that the “idea of normal is constantly shifting” (p. 59), and this is illustrated with the Bratz dolls as young girls are continually searching for normalcy, even though trends and the like are relentlessly changing. The traditionalism of a little girl having a doll that she plays with for hours on end has shifted. Today, young girls are exposed to countless toys, games and products for their enjoyment and liking. It is apparent that what troubles some of these mothers the most about Bratz dolls is the fact that these hyper-sexualized images are taking the traditionalism and innocence away from girlhood. Lamb (2001) argues that “girls want to be desiring individuals, they have desires, but to own these desires, to make them their own makes them feel slutty or unnatural or unfeminine” (p. 66).

Mothers such as Cheryl want to keep her 6 year old daughter Jennifer as young as possible as she continually encourages her daughter to watch age-appropriate television shows such as *Little Bear*. Lamb (2001) also asserts that all “good girls lead a double life” as in public they are sweet, innocent, lovely and well-behaved” (p. 227) yet, behind closed doors, girls will act out in a not-so-innocent way. Lamb’s claim could be supported through juxtaposing it

against 8 year old Colleen's interview who, when asked if she plays with Bratz dolls stated, "yes, but only in privacy." As previously mentioned, Colleen admitted that her play with Bratz has changed as she now, predominantly, plays with the dolls on her Nintendo Wii.

As mentioned in Chapter Three, mothers such as Lynne, who is very intrigued by Bratz dolls, directly involves herself with her daughter Carrie's play with Bratz dolls. Lynne's main concerns surround the image of the Bratz dolls as she wonders exactly what it is that attracts girls to these dolls. She understands that young girls want to be just like teenagers, but her main questions surround the notion of attraction to the dolls themselves. Lynne's involvement in her daughter's play is an aspect that Sharon Lamb (2006) has discussed in her more recent work *Packaging Girlhood* with Lyn Mikel Brown. For Lamb and Brown (2006), the goal of a mother's involvement in her daughter's play "isn't to make your daughter sceptical about the world, but about the people who are presenting a narrow view of it and thereby limiting her opportunities" (p. 294).

The notion of the disappearance of girlhood through the works of Postman and Barber

When juxtaposing Neil Postman (1982) and Benjamin Barber's (2007) theories surrounding childhood, it is interesting to juxtapose the two theories as one associates the media as contributing to the disappearance of childhood and the latter blames consumerism for corrupting the notions and traditions associated with childhood.

As previously mentioned in Chapter One, Barber (1996) argues that citizens such as children lose their status as citizens and, instead, become consumers as markets act as a means of corrupting children. When juxtaposing Postman (1982) with Barber's theory it is interesting to compare how Postman's view of childhood disappearing differs from that of Barber. Postman

(1982) argues that there are numerous societal developments that constitute for this disappearance of childhood. For Postman (1982), there is such “evidence of the blurred boundaries between children and adults” and this may be seen in “the disappearance of special clothing styles for children” (p.15-16). Postman also argues that it is the media that has contributed to the disappearance of childhood.

For Postman, this disappearance of childhood has come through the media but also in clothing styles for children, for instance. Recall that this was a topic of discussion that was raised in the interviews. When referring to the Bratz dolls clothing, both the mothers and the daughters had a significant amount of insight to share on this topic. From a mother’s perspective, the opinions on the Bratz dolls clothing shifted towards both ends of the spectrum: those who were completely disgusted with the Bratz dolls clothing and those who did not share too many thoughts on the topic. For mothers such as Sharon, she feels as though her daughter uses her imagination when playing with Bratz dolls and that playing with Bratz dolls is a very positive thing: “The positive of it...I feel that it gives them more confidence to play by themselves with all the different outfits, they can dress them up and switch outfits...kind of use their imagination to play.”

Sharon’s thoughts are more surrounding the play with the Bratz dolls whereas, mothers such as Dena argue that the Bratz dolls mirror the image of a prostitute as they “look like they are ready to hit the street.” Dena finds that the Bratz dolls clothing “is all like grown up, like trying to make a little kid look like a grown up: the hair, the eyes, the mini-skirts, tight stuff.”

Lynne was not overly impressed when she was first introduced to Bratz dolls in so far as the way the dolls are dressed. For Lynne, “the way they are dressed, it is like suggestive...there is no modesty.” However, for Lynne, it is her involvement in her daughter’s play with toys that

allows her direct access in an effort to help her decipher exactly what is it that attracts her daughter to Bratz dolls. Curiosity was an overarching theme throughout Lynne's interview, and it is this curiosity that has led her to ask her daughter more questions regarding the toys that she chooses to play with.

Neil Postman (1982) argues that children's clothing has disappeared. Although his thesis is almost 30 years old, many of Postman's arguments are quite prominent to the discussions surrounding modern day girlhood theory. Postman argued that the clothing industry experienced a drastic change between the 1970s and 1980s:

Twelve-year old boys now wear three-piece suits to birthday parties and sixty-year old men wear jeans to birthday parties. Eleven-year old girls wear high heels, and what was once a clear marker of youthful informality and energy, sneakers, now allegedly signifies the same for adults. (p. 128)

It is important to consider this. Almost thirty years ago Postman saw this change. In a more modern-day sense, Postman's argument is still relevant. In a *National Post* article entitled "Tween fashion means being different, just like everyone else," Lianne George, reports that "twens are teenage wannabes, but it isn't about looking provocative, it's about being stylish and fashionable: they have an opinion at that age" (George, 2002, n.p). As a researcher, it was important to see this first hand, and upon visiting the local shopping centre to see these changes in girl's clothing, it was very apparent that the racks had a clear and distinct message to share: T-shirts with the words *You suck!* and *Cute, but psycho* across the shirt's chest filled the racks. Eight year old Melissa, who loves shopping for clothes, referred to how she loves t-shirts. After listening to Melissa's interview, she did not go into too much detail about t-shirts, but she did, however mention that there are designs on the t-shirts. Reflecting back to the interview with Melissa's mother, it is important to note that Nancy believes that the Bratz dolls "reflect poor self image" and that their clothing is very revealing. It would be interesting to learn if Melissa

supported some of the types of clothing which can be found in stores for girls. Therefore, twenty eight years later, Postman's thesis is still *very* relevant.

An identity to call my own:

Girls and their search for identity according to Lamb and Brown

It was quite apparent that the young girls who participated in the study were quite enthusiastic and passionate about the toys they play with, the music they listen to and their friends. These 10 girls each had a very unique personality and each and every time an interview was conducted, something new was revealed. La Senza Girl is 8 year old Melissa's favourite store because "they have Hannah Montana, Zack and Cody" clothing; 8 year old Christine would love to wear the clothing the Bratz wear "because of the colour and design"; 8 year old Carrie, who shares she's "not a girly girl," finds that Bratz dolls are "gross"; 12 year old Valerie shared that her mom would never let her wear the clothes the Bratz dolls wear because they "show off the belly button a bit"; although 6 year old Jennifer is not allowed to play with Bratz dolls she still likes the way they dress "because they look nice"; 12 year old Emily likes "shopping for shoes, accessories and clothes"; 7 year old Ann finds that her favourite Bratz doll, Cloe, is a "drama queen"; 8 year old Colleen doesn't like Barbie; 9 year old Erinn shared that she visits the Bratz website "five...six times a day" because she enjoys playing online Bratz games such as *Love Match*; and that 7 year old Jodie used the words "cool, exciting, beautiful, adventurous!" when asked what words come to mind when thinking about the Bratz dolls.

From the outset, one can see that these girls shared a number of small details of importance in their interview. One common thread that was revealed from the interviews was

the fact that the girls all had something to share with regards to the Bratz persona and the personality they associate the Bratz dolls to portray.

The girls used such words as: “fashionable,” “cool,” “wow,” and “nice skin” to describe the Bratz dolls. As previously stated, for the most part, the mothers did not share such enthusiasm when describing the dolls themselves. As the mothers, many of them described these dolls as: “fashionable,” yet “trashy” and “excessive.”

Chapter One discussed Lamb and Brown’s (2006) *Packaging Girlhood* theory as these two authors argue that young girls are being sold an image through the media – as they are, in fact, being sold their very own ‘packaged’ identity. Lamb and Brown’s theory is directly related to Nancy’s interview. When asked her thoughts on the dolls, Nancy shared that the Bratz dolls “reflect poor self image” through the “revealing clothing” they wear and Nancy reinforced the fact that she doesn’t “think girls need [this] especially when it is all over the magazines.” Here, Nancy is referring to the Bratz being the epitome of what a young girl thinks that she *should* be: “you know, the hair, make-up, weight, style...I don’t think we need to have a toy that promotes that as well.”

When speaking to the girls about the Bratz dolls clothing and their image, on only one occasion did any of the girls refer to the Bratz dolls as being unattractive. Eight year old Carrie, who prided herself as not being “a girly girl,” revealed the following when asked her thoughts on the Bratz dolls: “to me, they are gross (*giggling*)...well, because of the way they look...but also because I am more interested in animals than Bratz.” Carrie’s interests have shifted as now she admits that she is more interested in other activities relating to animals. Whereas, the other nine girls in this study used such words as: “great,” “high fashion,” “flirty jeans,” “really nice,” “fashionable,” and “popular,” to describe the Bratz dolls.

With regards to the images that are presented to young girls, Lamb and Brown (2006) argue that

We look at the message they're selling through their practice, a message about normal girlhood packaged in the form of that little pink purse, the sexy performer who wears it, the tight low-rider jeans it is attached to, and the pouty hot body it is supposed to attract (p. xi).

Here, Lamb and Brown (2006) assert that the messages and images that young girls are subjected to are presenting them with the ultimate ideal: the flawless body and the perfect wardrobe. These images and realities are what troubles mothers such as Cheryl and Charlene the most as they believe that a young girl's exposure to Bratz dolls could only foster these types of ideals and realities. Recall that Cheryl has never allowed her daughter to play with Bratz dolls and that Charlene recently decided to donate all of her daughter's small collection of Bratz items to charity. If her daughter were to ever receive a Bratz doll at a birthday party, Charlene asserts that she would "Yep...re-gift it!" Lamb and Brown (2006) argue that

while any parent can look at these trends and say, 'Well, *my* daughter doesn't do that,' and feel safe, this *Fear Factor* world has become the red herring that drives parental concerns, distracting them from realizing their daughters' lives are filled with stereotypes and narrow images (p. xii).

The concern raised by Lamb and Brown (2006) was also something that was revealed from the interview data. Mothers such as Cheryl asserted, "I do not like the image that they are representing...they are wearing heels and boots and I just do not think that this is a good example." The image that the Bratz dolls present is something that mothers such as Cheryl fear. That is, she fears that her daughter would ask to dress this way as she argues, "I do think it would definitely influence them in the clothes they want to wear and buy."

When the girls were asked about the *Bratz: The Movie* (2007) they all seemed to enjoy seeing these Bratz girls on the big screen. It seemed as though these Bratz were what young girls

aspired to be, as they were “great,” “high fashion” “really nice,” “fashionable,” and “popular” girls. However, mothers such as Lynne, who involves herself deeply in her daughter’s interests shared, “I would really not like to see my daughter totally getting absorbed with fashion things and I don’t want her to have the impression that a woman has to look sexy, right?” The argument that Lynne rose mirrors what Lamb and Brown (2006) argue when they state that “knowledge is power and knowledgeable parents have the power to influence their daughters” (p. 10).

Lamb and Brown (2006) believe that it is very important for parents to pay attention to what products are being sold to girls as it has a lasting impact on their development:

What a girl is sold when she is younger comes back to affect her as a teen, and that the cute, sexy, boy-crazy shopper image is everything from Bratz dolls to board games, from beginning readers to cheerleading, will emerge in the ‘free choice’ of teen girls to become a daring *Sex in the City* girl. (p. 293)

“I love shopping, I love clothes!” Juliet Schor’s ‘Born to Buy’ theory

Every girl that participated in this study enjoys shopping to some degree. Whether it was 7 year old Jodie who enjoys shopping for gifts, or 12 year old Valerie who enjoys shopping for “mostly clothes, shoes and accessories,” these young girls enjoy shopping.

In *Born to Buy*, Juliet Schor (2004) argues that childhood has become commercialized as “today’s commercialization is coinciding with major changes in the nature of childhood itself. In comparison with baby boomers, today’s youth have earlier exposure to and more involvement with adult worlds” (p. 15). In essence, children are beginning to shop at a much younger age.

In an interview on *Conversations with Harold Hudson Channer* (2007), Benjamin Barber asserts that “we are consumers *all* the time” (n.p). In his interview with Channer, Barber (2007) defines something that he refers to as ‘Buzz Marketing.’

It’s funny, but it’s obscene as well. They’ll go to a 15 year old and they’ll say to her I got a great new perfume...I’ll tell you what we’re going to do...we’re going to give you the

perfume, we might even pay you something...you're going to wear it and you're going to go around telling your friends, 'Hey! I found a great new perfume!' as if you just found it by yourself. She doesn't tell anyone she's being paid or that she's working for the company... 'Found a great new...smell it! You ought to be wearing this perfume!' You get this so-called peer-to-peer marketing. (n.p)

Barber (2007) claims that this form of marketing to children has effects on childhood as "it turns our kids into liars and it gets them talking to each other and using their social relations to sell them stuff in a stealth matter – *that's* a new market" (n.p).

As I previously stated, 8 year old Carrie does not pride herself as a being a "girly girl," but when asked her if she enjoys shopping, she shared the following:

I love shopping for clothes. Whenever I look at the clothes, to me they look kind of...some of them are like dresses, they have 'Princess' words on them, I am not interested in them...what I am interested in is *really* cool jeans, funky t-shirts, cool socks!

The girls listed the following stores as their favourite places to shop: The Children's Place, La Senza Girl, Ardene's, Claire's, Giant Tiger, Toys R Us, The Bay and the one store that drew in particular attention was how several of the girls indicated that their *favourite* store was Wal-Mart. It was not long after this fact was shared that the data revealed that the girls enjoy Wal-Mart because both the Hannah Montana and the High School Musical lines of clothing are available at Wal-Mart.

Naomi Klein (2003) argues that we live in a branded world and that this world has an impact on the products that children desire. In *The Corporation.com 2.0*, a film by Mark Achbar, Jennifer Abbott and Joel Bakan (2003), Naomi Klein shared that "we are so inundated by these brand images and we're so entwined with them" (n.p).

Schor (2004) asserts that "kids can recognize logos by eighteen months, and before reaching their second birthday, they're asking for products by brand name." (p. 19). Perhaps this is the reason that mothers such as Sharon and Lynne dislike shopping with their daughters.

Sharon shared, “I scream! That is what I do!” because her 9 year old daughter Erinn “could just spend an hour just looking at what is new” when walking down the Bratz dolls aisle. Likewise, Lynne does not like shopping with her daughter because “she *wants* everything!” Schor (2004) argues that “by age six and seven, girls are asking for the latest fashions, using nail polish and singing pop music tunes” (p. 19). The girls that were interviewed shared that they look for clothes, shoes, accessories and toys when shopping.

On the contrary, some mothers treasure the shopping moments shared with their daughter. Recall that Charlene shared that she particularly enjoys shopping with her 8 year old daughter Christine because “she is at an age where she can make the decision” meaning that when she takes her daughter shopping, she enjoys the fact that her daughter can directly involve herself in the purchasing decisions made. Charlene asserts, “we will let her have her own opinion now” when shopping. Charlene also shared that her daughter’s favourite store is Wal-Mart. Charlene shared that Christine is a “good kid...she just follows where Mommy and Daddy are going and yes if she goes into the clothing section, she knows the back wall is the Hannah Montana stuff.” Perhaps this is why Charlene still enjoys shopping with her daughter, as her daughter simply follows along and does not ask her parents for specific items whilst shopping with them.

The girls that were interviewed know *exactly* where to find these brands, as for these girls they are following the trends which are set out before them. This is what Naomi Klein refers to as ‘Cool Hunting.’ For Klein (2003), the cool hunting industry began in the early 1990s and then exploded throughout the course of the decade. Klein (2003) defines Cool Hunting as the following:

Essentially the premises that corporations don’t understand what young people want. And that there needs to be a kind of middle man, middle man industry that will be the liaison

between youth culture and the brands. To explain and decode so that these companies are better able to create brand images that are direct reflections of youth culture. And of course the time span between when something is a genuine idea, genuinely sort of independent organic idea within youth culture, and when it is sold back as a brand has become so compressed that it's completely insignificant. But cool hunters sort of comb the back alleys of our culture, interview kids, video tape them. It's basically corporate journalism. (n.p)

As previously stated, mothers such Lynne dislike shopping with her daughter because she feels as though her daughter wants *everything*. The *Media Awareness Network* (2009) defines 'Pester Power' as "children's ability to nag their parents into purchasing items they may not otherwise buy. Marketing to children is all about creating pester power, because advertisers know what a powerful force it can be" (n.p). Eight year old Colleen enjoys shopping with her mom "a little bit...sometimes she says no and that bugs me!" When speaking to Colleen's mother Jenna, she did not mention any details regarding Colleen pestering her for anything in the stores, instead she shared that Colleen "likes to buy fashionables things" and that "she goes down the aisle for sure" to see what new Bratz dolls have been released.

Cheryl Idell's "Nag Factor study" conducted in 1998 by Western Initiative Media, looked at "how nagging kids affect purchases of apparel, quick-service restaurants and place-based entertainment" (Selling to Kids, 1999, n.p). Idell's (1998) study revealed the following:

70 percent of parents are receptive to their children's product requests. A third of them are what she called indulgers, that is, impulse buyers who don't mind their children's requests for nonessentials. 15 percent are kid pals... Another 20 percent are conflicted, who dislike kid advertising and don't like their children's requests for nonessentials, but find them hard to resist. That leaves only 13 percent unaffected by nagging, a bare necessities group...conservatives whose purchases are well considered. (As cited in Schor (2005, p. 61)

The participants in this study shared some very interesting shopping stories and these stories led to some fascinating discussions. Mothers such as Lynne struggle when shopping with her daughter because "it is not easy to accept that you do not have a budget for a toy every time."

While, mothers such as Geraldine shared the following words “Oh, I love it! I love it!” when asked if she enjoys shopping with her daughter. These examples provided for some interesting discussion as I was able to see the illustrated effect that ‘Pester Power’ has on a household budget, in addition to learning *exactly* what it is that girls shop for and where they look for it.

Schor (2004) asserts that there is an age compression occurring in the marketplace as kids are now, more than ever, being targeted as they are growing older at a more advanced pace. She asserts that “marketers have even coined an acronym to describe these developments. It’s KAGOY, which stands for Kids Are Getting Older Younger” (p. 56). Schor (2004) believes that this social trend has “become part of the license for treating kids as if they were adults” (p. 56).

The Hyper-Sexualized ‘new’ you: Lamb and Brown on hyper-sexualized fashion for girls

This theme discusses how choices in fashion also affect how girls are viewed in society. As previously mentioned, the girls that were interviewed continually commented on how attractive the Bratz dolls were: how they loved their hair and make-up. They also spoke of the dolls’ hobbies and their interests in music. But more often than not, the girls commented on the Bratz style, their image and their clothes. For 12 year old Emily, the Bratz dolls clothing “sometimes...they are just like um way too revealing” or for 9 year old Erinn “the shoes on them are way too high...the heels are *way* too high!”

Lamb and Brown (2006) argue that there used to be a clear distinction of what constitutes being a little girl and what constitutes being a pre-teen. These authors (2006) argue that this disappearance has encouraged society to be “continuously surprised by the ways little girls are enticed to look older” (p. 16). Mothers such as Charlene raised this concern in her interview: “I mean, children would not wear that and why are we putting it on a child’s doll?” Charlene does

not like what the Bratz dolls represent as, in her opinion, the Bratz represent all that is excessive – she finds that their image is exactly just *that*...excessive.

The exact age of the Bratz dolls was also a topic that arose in the interviews. It seemed as though both the mothers and the daughters who were interviewed struggled with deciphering *exactly* how old the dolls were. From *Bratz: The Movie* (2007), it is evident that Cloe, Sasha, Jade and Yasmin are about to enter high school, meaning that the Bratz are approximately 14 years of age. However, girls such as 9 year old Erinn or 7 year old Ann associate the Bratz as being closer to their age as they compare their core group of friends with the Bratz dolls.

Lamb and Brown (2006) discussed how the dolls that young girls play with have the potential to hold an influence on them. They argue that dolls, for instance, are far more than *just* a doll “it’s a type of girl, an attitude, a toy, a lip gloss, a fragrance, a secret” (2006, p. 20). They assert that “clothes make the girl, or so girls are led to believe, especially as they move into their preteen years” (p. 26).

As it has been previously stated, that is the one aspect of the Bratz dolls that the girls spoke of the most – the Bratz dolls’ clothing. Their colour, their design, and their style – the girls interviewed were very in tune to *what* the Bratz dolls wore and *how* well they wore it. Lamb and Brown’s (2006) study consisted of surveying over 600 girls across the United States “to find out what is in their world” (p. 10). Their survey results revealed that “the very clothing that girls think is ‘cool’ is also the item parents are forbidding their daughters to wear” (2006, p. 30). Lamb and Brown’s finding is *very* similar to what was revealed from this study as several of the girls echoed the same words when asked them if they would be allowed to wear the same outfit as their favourite Bratz doll: “no, it shows off the belly button a bit”; “Ya! (*giggling*) when I am 16!”; “That would be a maybe!?” were just some of the responses received.

It seems as though the Bratz dolls are pushing many social, ethical and societal boundaries. Eight year old Colleen feels as though the Bratz dolls “are like fashion, but they go too much far.” For Colleen, Bratz are going to the extreme with their sense in fashion. Recall that Colleen was also the young girl who commented on the fact that she dislikes that the Bratz dolls wear fishnet stockings “so kind of like older clothes have fishnets.” Here, Colleen is associating such sexy clothing as being an adult-type item of fashion.

Lamb and Brown (2006) assert that although adult-like fashions and items of clothing are being targeted to a *much* younger audience does not mean “girliness hasn’t been forgotten. If it had, what would marketers do with all those accessories that mean girlhood?” (p. 53). Meaning that girls will *still* be girls however, it seems as though they will *be* girls at a more adult-like level. Girls now shop, play and socialize at a different level.

Take the Bratz website for example. Nine year old Erinn shared that it is a site that she enjoys visiting “five...six times a day.” Erinn described her favourite part of the Bratz website is the *Love Match* game. The following is Erinn’s description of the game:

I love ‘Love Match’! It is a love meter actually you put a boy’s and girl’s name and it goes up saying not a chance, love is in the air or you are definitely meant to be. One little thing bad and it goes [to] try to find a guy, there is no love in the air, and the thing goes higher love in the air and when it goes up to the very top it is a perfect match. It might pick a boy, one career and that might be your future if you like it. It might pick a mansion and that might mean that you will be rich when you are older!

This idealistic life: the mansion, the man, the money – this is a game that young girls such as 9 year old Erinn are playing on the Bratz website. Do young girls such as Erinn see the Bratz dolls as *real* people?

Seven year old Jodie sure does. To Jodie, Bratz dolls “look just like a sparkle in their eye.” For Jodie, Bratz dolls *are* real. Earlier, I shared that she was “thinking of wow words”

when describing the dolls for me, but it is important to note that for Jodie the Bratz are very much the real deal.

They are nice and if they were right next to you, you would feel comfortable and they are not scary and I am comparing this to what I have watched – so I think that they are helpful, so they would help you.

There is such innocence in what Jodie is sharing. She imagines that if you needed help you could count on a friend *just* like a Bratz doll. Jodie has also seen the Bratz television series and she shared that “Bratz people in their show are really good and never make mistakes.” These idealistic representations are what troubles Lamb and Brown (2006) the most as it reinforces the notion that “girls of any age can have fun being sexy” (p. 29-30).

Chapter Summary

This chapter explored the five key themes which were discussed in Chapter Three. This chapter has evaluated these themes, which were derived from the interview data, and has juxtaposed them against key communications studies theories. Sharon Lamb’s *Secret Lives of Girls* (2001) was explored as she discusses how young girls seek out areas in which they can find examples to mirror and learn from. This chapter also discussed Benjamin Barber (2007) and Neil Postman (1982) and their notions surrounding a newfound definition of childhood as for Barber (2007) children are now the targets of a newfound consumer market. With regards to Postman (1982), key examples of his thesis were revealed in my study as, although this work was first introduced almost thirty years ago, it is still quite relevant to modern-day discussions surrounding girlhood theory. Lamb and Brown’s (2006) *Packaging Girlhood* was also discussed as it revealed how the girls in this study are continually searching for something to call their own – whether it be a doll, a toy or a song, these girls are continually purchasing the latest trends in

order to keep up with other girls. Naomi Klein (2003) and her notions surrounding the influence of brands was also discussed as it was complimented by Juliet Schor's (2004) theory on girls and consuming products and trends on the market. It was interesting to learn how much of an impact and influence shopping has on both mothers and their daughters. To conclude, Lamb and Brown's (2006) theory surrounding the hyper-sexualization of young girls was referred to of how this hyper-sexy image is displayed on toys store shelves with MGA Entertainment Inc's Bratz dolls.

Chapters Three and Four are indicative that Bratz dolls *do* place girlhood identity into question from both a mother and a daughter's perspective. This change in play has comprised the former innocence of girlhood and girl's play. The following chapter will conclude by providing interpretations and insight into the following two research questions: do Bratz dolls place girlhood identity formation into question? And what has changed with regards to girl's play and the former innocence of girlhood?

Chapter Five: To Conclude

When applying to the Master's of Arts in Communication program in the spring of 2007, I introduced myself as someone who has a proven ability to conduct meaningful research and a demonstrated compassion for the well being of children and youth. This demonstrated genuine concern for children and youth and their well being is exemplified through continued work with Ottawa's Ronald McDonald House, which is a home-away-from-home where families reside when their children are terminally ill at the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario. It is through experiences there that I have witnessed, in some cases, the illnesses rob these children of the traditional innocence that is associated with being young and being a child. In essence, their

illness forces them to grow up quickly and lose that *exact* innocence that is traditionally associated with being a young. In my view, today's media 'products' are encouraging children to grow up too quickly, yet my work for Ronald McDonald House has instilled the notion that growing up too quickly is not always the greatest way to spend one's childhood and that those precious childhood years should remain innocent, pure and peaceful.

This thesis has been a remarkable and inspirational academic journey. The above study has examined MGA Entertainment's Bratz dolls in order to decipher whether these dolls, through creating a change in girl's play, place girlhood identity into question. In-depth qualitative interviews conducted with (N=20) 10 girls between the ages of 6 and 12 and their mothers were carried out in order to gather the necessary data thus granting the opportunity to fully understand both a mother and her respective daughter's perceptions on Bratz dolls. One of the key research goals was know what they thought of the dolls – their honest and true opinions and that is *exactly* what was captured. The aim of this study was to understand whether Bratz dolls place girlhood identity formation into question. In addition to examining what has changed with regards to girl's play and the former innocence associated with girlhood.

Girl's play has evolved significantly. Mothers are making efforts to involve themselves with their daughter's play because there are growing concerns for the influences that surround girls. Girls are subjected to a newfound consumer market – themselves and this has made a significant contribution to the mutation of girl's play. The concerns that these mothers have for their daughters stems further with regards to the images and appeals that some of these products market to children and this concern was raised for Bratz dolls as well. The data revealed that parents are concerned for their daughters as they recognize that media images and products do not always encourage the 'best' image for young girls. More often than not these images which

are portrayed in the media are unrealistic and unhealthy. Mothers are concerned and it is for that reason many of the mothers find that the Bratz dolls are all that is excessive. The girls that I interviewed love to shop. That said, some of the mothers that were interviewed did not enjoy having their daughter accompany them while shopping because they felt as though it was too much pressure on them and their budget. Children are far more aware of the products being targeted to them in addition to knowing exactly where to find them. As previously mentioned, brands such as Bratz are highly marketable to children as they are readily available in family department stores and like making such products that much *more* attainable and marketable to children.

As this thesis has revealed, it is *very* apparent that girl's play has changed and that it *will* continue to change and evolve as time passes. Each interview revealed something new and interesting about today's girl culture. The girls that participated in this study were *so* innocent and *so* young – yet, *so* very much subjected to the negative images of perfection and idealism that are disseminated through the mass media. Within the realm of toys, it was the Bratz dolls clothing and style that raised the most concerns. Some girls were conscious to this image, whereas others were not.

With reference to Merriam-Webster's definition of a doll; here, a doll is defined as “a small-scale figure of a human being used especially as a child's plaything” (Merriam-Webster, 2010, n.p). When comparing this definition to Bratz dolls, there is no mistaking the fact that Bratz dolls are a direct and negative representation of a woman. What is even more troubling to some of the mothers that were interviewed was the fact that these dolls are representing and portraying all that they do not wish to expose their daughters to: the ‘bling,’ the make-up, the

mini-skirts, the ‘Brattitude,’ and the sex appeal. As it has been my stated throughout this thesis, both the girls and their mothers were affected by the images that the Bratz dolls portray.

This image is, in fact, a social construction of reality: a hyper-consumed, hyper-sexualized self – an almost ‘too perfect’ image. The Bratz dolls operate between the ‘real world’ and a ‘fantasy world.’ Therefore, it could be argued that Bratz dolls are an Avatar. An Avatar is just that – a fantasy-styled representation of the perfect human form as Avatars can be custom-designed so that one can make a truly unique appearance. It is therefore possible to argue that Bratz dolls are a type of Avatar: a woman that could *never* be.

Many of the mothers interviewed argued that the image the Bratz dolls portray is completely unrealistic and untrue societal representation. What was most troublesome to mothers such as Dena was the fact that play with a Bratz doll only encourages and promotes this type of hyper-sexual behaviour and style. As it was illustrated in this thesis, many of the mothers that I interviewed were quite passionate about this topic and this passion was exuded as mothers such as Cheryl and Charlene refuse to have Bratz dolls in their homes.

For the mothers, Bratz dolls, albeit “fashionable” and “attractive” are all about just that – image: the jewellery, the hair, the make-up, the svelte figure. However, that may be how they viewed the dolls: “hoe”; “trashy”; “excessive”; and “provocative” were just a few of the descriptors that the mothers used when describing the Bratz dolls.

For the girls, the majority thought that they were: “nice”; “great”; “fashionable”; “too revealing”; and “beautiful.” For the most part, the girls did not see the negative aspects of the dolls. For them, Bratz dolls are stylish, popular and beautiful dolls with clothing that they would love to wear. As a researcher, it can be concluded that this is the *exact* concern for the mothers: these girls and their innocent minds do not see, for the most part, the hyper-sexualized nature of

the dolls themselves. The notion that both the mothers and the daughters defined Bratz as being excessive was very interesting: the fancy clothing, the jewels, the popularity; the high-social life – all that a young girl *wants* it be. This analysis leads to the notion of excess as expressed and developed in Benjamin Barber (1995) and Marc Augé's (1992) work. Some of the girls were in awe of how fashionable the Bratz dolls were – it seemed as though they glorified their clothing and style in so far as some of the girls idolized their image and referred to that “sparkle in their eye.”

Subsequently exactly what *are* the implications of a girl's play with Bratz dolls? It seems as though in the cases of Ann and Erinn, they compare their group of four friends with the four Bratz characters as they dress-up and act like them. Such play would greatly concern a mother such as Nancy as she believes, among other mothers that Bratz dolls “reflect poor self image.” Nancy's thoughts are that girls do not need that added pressure “especially when it is *all* over the magazines.” And it is. Young girls are continually being subjected to the ideal self and these images of perfection will only continue to be present in a young girl's life throughout her adolescent and young adult years. Many of the mothers recognized this and it is for that mothers such as Cheryl are trying to keep her daughter young for as long as she possibly can.

The mothers defined Bratz dolls as the ‘sexy’ doll, the excessive doll and the doll that many of them do not want their daughter exposed to. Many of the mothers argued that Bratz dolls do not set a good example for girls and that this is their main rationale for not encouraging play with Bratz dolls.

Earlier in this analysis, the question of what has granted this transformation in girl's play was raised. How has girl's play transformed from being something *so* innocent from that of a young girl playing with a doll in an effort to emulate their mother's lives, to that of play with a

hyper-sexual doll? As previously mentioned, traditionally, kid's toys represented the adult world. Therefore, *exactly* what has granted this change? The data in this thesis explores that the overt influence of consumerism has granted this change in girl's play. As a starting point, it is those early adolescent years, where individuals are being transformed from having a citizen status to a consumer status (Barber 1995, 2007). Girls are constantly being sold something – whether it is a t-shirt with the words ‘*Cute*’ on the chest or a High School Musical school bag at Wal-Mart, young girls are continually subjected to the next and ‘best’ thing. As it has been illustrated, this has granted, for what is now known as, a disappearance in girlhood as young girls as consumers, are thus being hurried through childhood. Therefore, these young consumers are then introduced to more ‘mature’ dolls such as Bratz – with their adult-like fashions and ‘Brattitude,’ young girls have this newfound girl image to look upon as a way of dressing, acting and being.

Consequently, Bratz may be defined as vulgar taste transgressive: a doll that is overtly sexual in the ways in which she dresses, the make-up she wears and the attitude (‘Brattitude’) she possesses. As a researcher, it was fascinating to see how the young girls were so nonchalant in the ways in which the Bratz dolls clothing and persona were presented to them. They did not see the dolls’ image in the same manner that their mother did. For the mothers – Bratz are offensive dolls, yet for girls, they are fashionable and popular girls that many of these girls would simply love to be. This is troublesome for mothers as this only makes an even more significant contribution to young girls’ precocity.

In more recent news, MGA Entertainment has released a new line of dolls called ‘Moxie Girlz.’ MGA, who have been involved in some recent court battles with Mattel concerning the design of the Bratz dolls, developed this new line of dolls “in the event that the federal appeals

court reverses the previous decisions” (Hyland, 2009, n.p) to allow MGA Entertainment Inc. rights to continue to manufacture the dolls. ‘Moxie Girlz’ have a softer and kinder image – they do not wear as much make-up and their clothing is not as suggestive as Bratz. Upon arriving at the Moxie Girlz site the following message appears: *“Every girl has the strength to do something amazing. Anything is possible as long as you stay true and never give up on your dreams!”* (MGA, 2010, n.p). Further research could examine what brought on this change in their doll design as this new direction for MGA Entertainment Inc. is very different from the Bratz dolls. The company still manufactures and markets the controversially sexy Bratz dolls, yet has created a new line of dolls for girls, but the question remains, *why?* Why has MGA Entertainment made this effort to soften their image? Are ‘Moxie Girlz’ the new Bratz? The ‘Moxie Girlz’ website provides a definition of the noun moxie and it defines this noun in three distinct ways: *“positive attitude and confidence; the courage to go for it; and energy in everything you do”* (MGA, 2010, n.p). As some of the mothers in this study shared, they believe that the Bratz dolls are more than just an image and that, in their movies for example; they show young girls how to be a good friend. However, what is most difficult for the mothers to overcome is the Bratz dolls image. For mothers, it is difficult to look beyond their image and believe that a doll, who is as overtly sexy as a Bratz doll, could have such sound morals and values. The ‘Moxie Girlz’ is another play on words. The word, when broken down may be defined as mock see – meaning that young girls are to mock the behaviour they see in these dolls. Does this mean that MGA Entertainment is encouraging young girls to mock the ‘Moxie Girlz’? Is it a sound assumption to believe that MGA Entertainment has decided to take on a new and ‘safer’ direction for young girls?

This analysis involved 10 girls and their mothers. Many of these mothers are concerned for their daughter’s well-being because of the negatively stereotypical media images of

perfection that surround them. Many of the mothers interviewed argued that Bratz dolls contributed to their overarching fear of their daughters' well being. Some of the mothers argued that the Bratz dolls are too developed and that they are unlike Barbie and that this notion of development is not something that they would like to promote to their little girl. Others felt as though the Bratz dressed like prostitutes. As a researcher, one must ask: since when is it socially acceptable to have a child's doll dressed as a prostitute? It remains *very* apparent that Bratz dolls have pushed and questioned many societal norms and boundaries and it is for that *exact* reason that Bratz dolls *do* place girlhood identity formation into question as they continue to redefine exactly what *is* socially acceptable within the realms of girl's play.

Little girls should lead simple and easy lives: they should *not* have to worry about the negative images and stereotypes presented in the media, they should *not* be sold something, and they should *not* be seen as consumers or being forced into making *that* choice. Children should not have to make *that* choice. They should be free – free to be young and to truly enjoy *being* young while they *still* can.

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Appendix A:

Participant Text: Mothers

Dear Participant:

My name is Lauren Levesque and I am a Graduate Student in Communication at the University of Ottawa. I am in the process of writing my thesis and I am conducting interviews for my qualitative research study entitled *Media Culture, Artifact and Gender*.

I am looking to interview mothers who are familiar with Bratz dolls and would be interested in sitting down for a one hour interview with me. We would be discussing such topics as girlhood, image/identity and girl's toys. The purpose of this study is to interview mothers about their childhood and to discuss what toys they purchase for their daughter.

I am also hoping to interview your daughter for the purposes of this research. The interview with your daughter would be no longer than 30 minutes in length and she and I would be discussing the same topics.

If you are familiar with MGA Entertainment's line of Bratz dolls, and would be interested in being interviewed, please write your name and phone number below and I will be contacting you to schedule an interview at your convenience.

Many thanks for your anticipated participation and I look forward to meeting with you soon.

Best,

Lauren Levesque, B.A. Hon.
Graduate Student
University of Ottawa

Name: _____

Phone Number: _____

Appendix B:

Participant Text: Girls

Hi There!

My name is Lauren and I am student from the University of Ottawa.

- Are you between the ages of 6 and 12?
- Have you ever heard of Bratz dolls?
- Would you be interested in having a little talk about them with me sometime?

If you answered **YES** to all *three* of those questions, I would like to invite you to be a part of my study for school. We will have a nice little talk about what it's like to be a girl! My project is all about being a girl and we will talk about things such as: shopping, friends, toys and much more!

Sound good to you? If so, please print your name at the bottom of this letter, and we will come up with a time that works!

Looking forward to talking with you soon!

Lauren Levesque

Print your name here:

Date:

Appendix C:

Interview Guide: Mothers

Interview Guide for Mothers

1.0 Introduction:

I would like to begin by thanking you for being a part of today's interview, it is greatly appreciated. I will be asking you a series of questions with regards to girlhood, girl's toys and shopping. If you have any questions, or if there is a question that you do not feel comfortable answering – please just let me know. Our interview will be recorded, so that I am able to get all of your answers verbatim. If you do not have any questions, I will start the interview.

2.0 Girlhood Defined:

What types of toys or games did you play with as a young girl?

Prompts:

- What were some of your favourite toys and games?
- As a young girl, did you play with dolls such as Barbie?
- What did you and your friends do for fun?
- Did you ever play 'dress up' with your friends and wear make-up?

As a young girl, what were some of your favourite past-times?

Prompts:

- As a young girl, did you like music?
- If so, what type of music did you like?
- Did you have a favourite singer? A favourite song?

Please tell me what you know about Bratz dolls.

Prompts:

- Do you know any of the Bratz dolls names?
- Have you seen the Bratz movie?
- Have you ever purchased Bratz dolls for your daughter? If so, do you still purchase Bratz dolls for your daughter?

If she answers yes to purchasing Bratz:

- Do you like the way the Bratz dolls dress?
- What motivates you to purchase a Bratz doll?
- What type of influence do you feel these dolls have on young girls?
- Have you ever been to the Bratz official website with your daughter? If so, please describe the experience.

If she answers no to purchasing Bratz:

- Is your daughter allowed to play with Bratz? Please explain.
- What words come to mind when thinking about Bratz dolls?
- Do friends of yours purchase Bratz dolls for their daughter?
- Do you feel that Bratz dolls have an influence on the growth of young girls?

3.0 Shopping and Consumerism

Do you enjoy shopping with your daughter?

If she answers yes:

- If so, when you go shopping, what do you enjoy shopping for with her?
- Does your daughter have a favourite store?

If she answers no:

- You mentioned that you do not like shopping with your daughter, why?

4.0 Image

Does your daughter ever play 'dress-up' with her friends?

Prompts:

- When playing dress-up do you allow your daughter to wear your clothes and make-up?

This concludes the interview; do you have anything to add?

Thank you for your participation.

Appendix D:

Interview Guide: Girls

Interview Guide for Girls

1.0 *Introduction:*

I would like to begin by thanking you for being a part of today's interview. I am just going to be asking you a few questions and if you have any questions, or you don't feel like answering at any time – please just let me know. Our interview will be recorded on this little tape recorder (show the child the device), so that I am able to get all of your answers in detail. Don't be shy, to ask me to repeat any of the questions either! Do you have any questions before we start? Alright then, let's get started!

2.0 *Girlhood Defined:*

What types of toys or games do you play with?

Prompts:

- What are some of your favourite toys and games?
- What do you and your friends do for fun?
- Do you ever play 'dress up' with your friends?

What do you like to do when you have free time?

Prompts:

- Do you like music?
- If so, what type of music do you like?
- Do you have a favourite singer? A favourite song?

Have you ever heard of Bratz dolls?

Prompts:

- Please tell me what you know about the dolls.
- Do you know any of the Bratz dolls names?
- Have you seen the Bratz movie?
- Do you play with Bratz dolls?

If she answers yes to playing with Bratz:

- Why do you like playing with Bratz dolls?
- What do you love the most about Bratz dolls?
- How many dolls do you have?

- Do you have a favourite Bratz doll? If so, what type? What is her name? Please describe her for me.
- How long have you played with the Bratz dolls?
- What do you think of their clothes?
- Do you ever watch any of the Bratz cartoons or movies? If so, do you have a favourite one?
- Have you ever been to the Bratz website? If so, what types of things do you do while you're there?

If she answers no to playing with Bratz:

- Have you ever played with a Bratz doll? If so, when did you stop playing with Bratz? Why?
- What words come to mind when thinking about Bratz dolls.
- Do you have friends that play with Bratz?

3.0 Shopping and Consumerism

Do you enjoy shopping?

If she answers yes:

- If so, when you go shopping, what do you enjoy shopping for?
- Do you have a favourite store?
- Why is [name of store] your favourite store?

If she answers no:

- You mentioned that you do not like shopping, why?
- Have you ever enjoyed shopping?

4.0 Image

Do you ever play 'dress' up with your friends?

Prompts:

- Let's talk about your 'dress up' time. What types of things do you do?
- Do you play 'dress up' at your house, or your friends' house?

Those are all of my questions; do you have anything to add?

Thank you so much for sharing your thoughts with me!

Appendix E:

Consent Form: Mothers

CONSENT FORM



uOttawa

Université d'Ottawa
Faculté des arts

Communication

University of Ottawa
Faculty of Arts

Communication

Title of the Study: *Media Culture, Artifact and Gender Identity*

Invitation to Participate: I am invited to participate in the abovementioned research study conducted by Lauren Levesque, who is a graduate student in Communication at the University of Ottawa.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study is to interview mothers about their childhood and to discuss what toys they purchase for their daughter.

Participation: My participation will consist essentially of a one hour private interview with the primary researcher, Lauren Levesque. The interview with Lauren Levesque will be scheduled according to my convenience.

Confidentiality and Anonymity: I have received assurance from the researcher that the information I will share will remain strictly confidential. I understand that the contents will be used only for the researcher's thesis and that my confidentiality will be protected as the information shared in the interviews will not be shared with any other source. Anonymity will be protected as my real first and last name will never be used in any written publication. If I am quoted, a pseudonym will be used in the place of my real name.

Volunteer Participation: I am under no obligation to participate and if I choose to participate, I can withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions, without suffering any negative consequences. If I choose to withdraw, all data gathered until the time of withdrawal will be destroyed.

Potential Risks and Benefits: There are no potential risks in participating in this study. A benefit with regards to this study is that you would have the opportunity to talk about your childhood and what toys you purchase for your daughter.

Statement of Consent: I have read the above information, and have received answers to any questions I asked. I consent to participate in the above research study conducted by Lauren Levesque of the Department of Communication at the University of Ottawa, under the supervision of Dr. Lise Boily, University of Ottawa and Dr. Rukhsana Ahmed, University of Ottawa.

☎ 613-562-5238

📠 613-562-5240

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Ottawa ON K1N 6N5 Canada

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CONSENT FORM

Your Signature _____

Date _____

Your Name (printed) _____

In addition to agreeing to participate, I also consent to having the interview audio-recorded.

Your Signature _____

Date _____

Signature of person obtaining consent _____

Date _____

Printed name of person obtaining consent _____

Date _____

If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the researcher, Lauren Levesque at _____ Or you may contact Dr. Rukhsana Ahmed, University of Ottawa, at _____

If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, I may contact:

Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research
University of Ottawa - Tabaret Hall
550 Cumberland Street - Room 159
Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5
Tel: 613. 562. 5841
email: ethics@uottawa.ca

There are two copies of the consent form, one of which is mine to keep.

Appendix F:

Consent Form: Mothers for their daughters

PARENTAL CONSENT FORM



uOttawa

Université d'Ottawa
Faculté des arts

Communication

University of Ottawa
Faculty of Arts

Communication

Title of the Study: *Media Culture, Artifact and Gender Identity*

Invitation to Participate: My daughter has been invited to participate in the abovementioned research study conducted by Lauren Levesque, who is a graduate student in Communication at the University of Ottawa.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study is to interview mothers and daughters, respectively to discuss the notion of girlhood and to discuss what toys young girls play with.

Participation: My daughter's participation will consist essentially of a 20-30 minute private interview with the primary researcher, Lauren Levesque. The interview with Lauren Levesque will be scheduled according to my daughter's convenience.

Confidentiality and Anonymity: I have received assurance from the researcher that the information my daughter will share will remain strictly confidential. I understand that the contents will be used only for the researcher's thesis and that my daughter's confidentiality will be protected as the information shared in the interviews will not be shared with any other source. Anonymity will be protected as my daughter's real first and last names will never be used in any written publication and if my daughter is quoted, a pseudonym will be used in the place of her real name.

Volunteer Participation: My daughter is under no obligation to participate and if she chooses, and I consent for her to participate, she can withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions, without suffering any negative consequences. If my daughter chooses to withdraw, all data gathered until the time of withdrawal will be destroyed.

Potential Risks and Benefits: There are no potential risks for your daughter in having her participate in this study. A benefit with regards to this study is that your daughter would have the opportunity to learn more about herself and what it means to be a girl. The interview is short in length and covers fun such topics as shopping, toys and friends.

Statement of Consent: I have read the above information, and have received answers to any questions I have asked. I consent for my daughter to participate in the above research study conducted by Lauren Levesque of the Department of Communication at the University of Ottawa, under the supervision of Dr. Lise Boily, University of Ottawa and Dr. Rukhsana Ahmed, University of Ottawa.

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PARENTAL CONSENT FORM

Your Signature _____ Date _____

Your Name (printed)

Your Daughter's Name

In addition to agreeing to participate, I also consent to having my daughter's interview audio-recorded.

Your Signature _____ Date _____

Signature of person obtaining consent _____

Date _____

Printed name of person obtaining consent _____

Date _____

If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the researcher, Lauren Levesque at _____ Or you may contact Dr. Rukhsana Ahmed, University of Ottawa,

If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, I may contact:

Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research
University of Ottawa - Tabaret Hall
550 Cumberland Street - Room 159
Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5
Tel: 613. 562. 5841
email: ethics@uottawa.ca

There are two copies of the consent form, one of which is mine to keep.

Appendix G:

Assent Form



uOttawa

Université d'Ottawa
Faculté des arts
Communication

University of Ottawa
Faculty of Arts
Communication

ASSENT FORM

This assent form is a type of 'permission form' that I would like us to read together!

Title of Study: Media Culture, Artifact and Gender Identity

Principle Researcher: Lauren Levesque, University of Ottawa

Why am I doing this study?

I will be asking you questions about all sorts of things that have to do with being a girl! We will be talking about shopping, the toys you play with and much more! I will be asking you questions about this stuff to learn more about YOU and the things you like and dislike!

Why are you being asked to be in the study?

I am looking to talk to girls aged 6 – 12 years old, who have an awareness of Bratz dolls, so that I can learn more about the toys you play with and why you play with them.

What if I have any questions?

If you have questions at any time, please do not hesitate to ask me!

Do I have to be in this study?

No, not at all! If at any time, you feel as though you're tired of answering these questions, please let me know. Nobody will be upset or angry with you. I will also asking your Mom questions too!

What happens after the study?

When we are finished our talk together I will be typing out your answers, because this interview is being recorded. If you want, I can show you a copy of this and we can go over it together. I will then use the information you gave me in my report for school.

ASSENT FORM

Assent:

If you decide that you don't want to be in the study, even if we've already started, then all you have to do is let me know.

_____, [print your name]
would like to be in this research study.

_____ (date of assent)

_____ (name of person who obtained assent)

_____ (signature of person who obtained assent)

Appendix H:

Research Ethics Board (REB) Approval



Université d'Ottawa University of Ottawa
 Service de subventions de recherche et déontologie Research Grants and Ethics Services

Ethics Approval Notice
Social Science and Humanities REB

Principal Investigator / Supervisor / Co-investigator(s) / Student(s)

<u>First Name</u>	<u>Last Name</u>	<u>Affiliation</u>	<u>Role</u>
Lise	Boily	Arts / Communication	Supervisor
Lauren	Levesque	Arts / Communication	Student Researcher
Rukhsana	Ahmed	Arts / Communication	Co-Supervisor

File Number: 11-08-03

Type of Project: Master's Thesis

Title: Media Culture, Artifact and Gender Identity

Approval Date (mm/dd/yyyy)	Expiry Date (mm/dd/yyyy)	Approval Type
02/25/2009	02/24/2010	Ia

(Ia: Approval, Ib: Approval for initial stage only)

Special Conditions / Comments:

N/A



Université d'Ottawa University of Ottawa

Service de subventions de recherche et d'éthologie Research Grants and Ethics Services

This is to confirm that the University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board identified above, which operates in accordance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement and other applicable laws and regulations in Ontario, has examined and approved the application for ethical approval for the above named research project as of the Ethics Approval Date indicated for the period above and subject to the conditions listed the section above entitled "Special Conditions / Comments".

During the course of the study the protocol may not be modified without prior written approval from the REB except when necessary to remove subjects from immediate endangerment or when the modification(s) pertain to only administrative or logistical components of the study (e.g. change of telephone number). Investigators must also promptly alert the REB of any changes which increase the risk to participant(s), any changes which considerably affect the conduct of the project, all unanticipated and harmful events that occur, and new information that may negatively affect the conduct of the project and safety of the participant(s). Modifications to the project, information/consent documentation, and/or recruitment documentation, should be submitted to this office for approval using the "Modification to research project" form available at:

http://www.rges.uottawa.ca/ethics/application_dwn.asp

Please submit an annual status report to the Protocol Officer 4 weeks before the above-referenced expiry date to either close the file or request a renewal of ethics approval. This document can be found at:

http://www.rges.uottawa.ca/ethics/application_dwn.asp

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the Ethics Office at extension 5841 or by e-mail at: ethics@uOttawa.ca.

Signature:

Leslie-Anne Barber
Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research
For Peter Beyer, Past-president of the Social Sciences and Humanities REB

Appendix I:

Thematic Analysis Data Chart

THEMATIC ANALYSIS – DATA CHART

Code	Theorist (s) Explored	Findings/Evidence	Conclusions/Thoughts
<i>Mutation</i>	Lamb (2001) argues that young girls take pleasure in the hyper-sexualized nature of play.	-The girls were very much aware of the, at times, negative image that the Bratz portray (Colleen). -Cheryl forbids her daughter to play with the dolls; mothers such as Sharon see that the dolls have more positive aspects than negative ones.	-When some of the mothers used the negative descriptors of slutty; hoe; and trashy to describe the Bratz dolls, it was fascinating to juxtapose this against the dictionary definition of “doll.”
	Callon and Latour (2006) argue that the concept of this cultural artifact must be viewed through its use.	-Mothers used words such as: slutty; hoe; and trashy when describing the dolls. -Bratz dolls, when defined as a cultural artifact, become something that is disconnected from its original meaning.	-Mothers such as Dena, Cheryl, Charlene are concerned that the innocence associated with girlhood is then taken away from young girls.
	Lamb and Brown (2006) argue that girls are being sold and packaged the ideal image, which is in fact a ‘packaged’ form of identity.	-Some of the mothers used such words as: attractive, ‘fashioney’ and fashionable to describe the dolls. -Cheryl wants to keep her 6 year old daughter as far away from Bratz dolls as possible and instead encourages her daughter to focus on more age-appropriate toys and television programs such as <i>Little Bear</i> .	-When juxtaposing both set of descriptors (the negative ones listed above and the more positive ones listed later) it appears as though the mothers’ thoughts on Bratz dolls are from both sides: the vulgar taste transgressive versus the more alluring image of being a fashionable and stylish young woman.
		-Lynne directly involves herself in her daughter’s play.	-Lynne’s involvement in her daughter’s play is a way in which this mother believes that she’s able to protect her daughter.
			Final thought: <i>Girl’s play has evolved significantly. Mothers are making efforts to involve themselves with their daughter’s play because there are growing concerns of the influences that surround girls. Girls are subjected to a newfound consumer market – themselves and this has made a significant contribution to the mutation of girl’s play.</i>

<i>Precocity</i>	Postman (1982) argues that childhood is disappearing. Barber (1995, 2007) argues that markets force citizens to become consumers.	-Both the mothers and girls were confused as to the exact age of the Bratz dolls. -Sharon believes that her daughter's play with Bratz dolls is all positive is it gives her daughter more confidence to play on her own. -Dena finds that the Bratz dolls clothing is very 'grown-up' and that the dolls, themselves, appear as though they are "ready to hit the streets." -Lynne was not impressed with the Bratz dolls when she was first introduced to them. She finds that there is no modesty to their attire.	-<i>Bratz: The Movie</i> (2007) depicts the dolls as approximately 14 years of age as they are about to enter high school. -Postman (1982) argues that children's clothing has disappeared – this is as 'tween' fashions are very mature as girls are encouraged to dress as though they are teenagers. -These mothers are concerned – they do not want to see their daughters grow up and aspire to be a Bratz doll. <u>Final Thought:</u> <i>Barber argues that markets are now corrupting children as children are continually subjected to marketing campaigns and products strategically marketed to them. Mothers are growing more concerned with regards to the images and appeals that some of these products market to children and this concern was raised for Bratz dolls as well.</i>
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Identity Search	Lamb and Brown (2006) argue that young girls are being sold an image – and that is themselves.	-Each girl interviewed had a very unique personality and charm. -Carrie shared that she doesn't like Bratz dolls because she is not a "girly girl." -Each girl had something to share with regards to the Bratz dolls' persona and the personality that they see these dolls as portraying. -The girls used such words as: fashionable, wow, cool, nice skin – when describing the Bratz dolls. -Some of the mothers described the Bratz as being fashionably, trashy and excessive. -Mothers such as Nancy shared that the Bratz "reflect poor self image" through their "revealing clothing." -Mothers such as Cheryl and Charlene fear that exposure to Bratz dolls will foster ideals of poor self image. -<i>Bratz: The Movie (2007)</i> was a very popular topic.	-The girls find these dolls to be very fashionable and this is a deep concern for many of the mothers in this study. -Some of the mothers felt as though the Bratz were fashionable yet some were completely disgusted with the dolls' appearance. -This "poor self image" is where some of the mothers are deeply concerned, they do not want their daughters to feel as though they <i>need</i> to look or act a certain way. - <i>Bratz: The Movie (2007)</i> was discussed and even mothers who do not like the Bratz dolls did not mind the movie, itself. Final Thought: <i>The data revealed that the mothers are concerned for their daughters as they recognize that media images and products do not always encourage the 'best' image for young girls. More often than not the images that are portrayed in the media are unrealistic and unhealthy. Mothers are concerned and it for that reason that many of the mothers find that the Bratz dolls are all that is excessive.</i>
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Consumerism and Behaviour	Schor (2004) argues that children are 'born to buy.' Barber (1995, 2007) argues that children are corrupted by markets and transformed into consumers. Klein (2003) argues that brands and markets are very powerful where children are concerned.	-Most of the girls interviewed <i>love</i> to shop. - The Children's Place, La Senza Girl, Ardene's, Claire's, Giant Tiger, Toys R Us, and The Bay were amongst the favourite stores listed among the girls. -Klein (2003) argues that "we live in a branded world." -Mothers such as Sharon dislike shopping with her 9 year old daughter Erinn because "she wants <i>everything!</i>" -Whereas, mothers such as Charlene celebrate this type of consumer culture as she appreciates the fact that her daughter can make some of her own choices (Wal-Mart example). -Schor's (2004) KAGOY (<i>Kids are getting older younger</i>).	-The girls enjoyed talking about shopping and it was very apparent that consumerism has had an impact/influence on each participant in this study. -Klein's (2002, 2003) argument remains: <i>we do live in a branded world and this world has direct impacts on children and their families.</i> -Kids <i>are</i> getting older at a younger age. They are shopping and consuming just as adults would do. Final Thought: <i>The girls interviewed love to shop. Some of the mothers that were interviewed do not like to have their daughter accompany them while shopping because it is too much pressure on them and their budget. Children are far more aware of the products being targeted to them in addition to knowing exactly where to find them in the store.</i>
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<i>‘A Passion for Fashion’: Its Relevance</i>	Lamb (2001) argues that young girls take pleasure in being sexually objectified. Lamb and Brown (2006) argue that young girls are being packaged and sold their ‘own’ image.	-Mothers such as Charlene were absolutely disgusted with the Bratz clothing: “I mean, children would not wear that and why are we putting it on a child’s doll?” -Notion of excessiveness was raised when referring to the Bratz dolls. -The girls are aware that their mother would not let them wear the same type of clothing that the Bratz dolls wear. (“No, it shows off the belly button a bit” - Valerie).	-Some of the girls were in awe of how fashionable to Bratz dolls were – they ‘glorified’ their clothing and style. -The notion of all things excessive was very apparent: the fancy clothing, the jewels, the popularity; the high-social life – all that one <i>wants</i> to be. -The image that is being depicted of these dolls is a social construction of reality – a hyper-consumed, hyper-sexualized self. -The Bratz dolls operate between the ‘real world’ and a ‘fantasy world’ – an Avatar. <u>Final Thought:</u> <i>The girls that were interviewed spoke very highly of the Bratz dolls sense in fashion, whereas their mothers did not. Many of the mothers felt as though the Bratz dolls’ clothing is excessive and in poor taste. It is therefore possible to argue that Bratz dolls are a type of Avatar: a woman that could never be.</i>
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