ENTERTAINING TWEENS: REPRESENTING ‘THE TEENAGE GIRL’ IN ‘GIRL VIDEO GAMES’

by

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Abstract

Research conducted during the 1990s revealed that video games increasingly represent the medium through which children are first exposed to technology, that early gaming can enhance future technological literacy, and that girls tend to play video games less frequently than boys. These findings preceded efforts by feminist entrepreneurs, followed by established video game producers, to develop ‘girl games.’ Such ‘girl-centred,’ ‘girl-friendly,’ and girl-targeted video games now represent a lucrative branch of the contemporary video game industry.

In this project, I utilized a multi-method approach to explore how ‘the ideal teen girl’ is re/constructed in three tween-aimed ‘girl games.’ My discourse analysis of the ‘dominant’ messages in the games includes an examination of various available feminine subject positions, and how ‘race,’ class, and (hetero)sexuality are implicated in these positions. My analysis of semi-structured interviews that I conducted with eight tween girls provides insight into their everyday readings of the ‘girl games.’

Unlike earlier research that framed girls as passive recipients of ‘damaging’ messages included in gendered texts, my findings suggest that the girls in my study engaged in active and diverse readings of the interactive texts. The multiple ways in which the girls recognized, identified with, resisted, and/or reworked elements of the feminine subject positions demonstrated their management of such contradictory images of ideal girlhood. According to my analysis, while several girls engaged in sceptical readings, none of the girls ultimately rejected the video game messages, or linked them to the wider social order in which they are produced, and which they work to re/produce.

My research also revealed that the girls’ identification of and with the subject positions was shaped and augmented by knowledge they had gained from previous exposure to associated transmediated representations (television, movies, music, and fashion products). My research suggests that while ‘the ideal teen girl’ re/constructed for tween gamers reflects contemporary notions of girlhood, as she is active and capable, she reaffirms Western standards of hegemonic femininity. The rules of play, beauty ideals, behaviours, and priorities of consumption included in the games work to re/construct White, middle-class, heterogendered ‘teen femininity’ as normal and ideal.
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CHAPTER ONE

GAMEBOY ADVANCE[D]: THE DEVELOPMENT, DISSEMINATION, AND EXPLORATION OF ‘GIRL’ VIDEO GAMES

Introduction

An early prototype of current commercial video games emerged from the military-industrial complex\(^1\) of the Cold War when, in 1966, military circuit designer Ralph Baer connected a television monitor, computer, and symbol generator and produced a simple game that involved two digital circles chasing one another (Herz, 1997). With the advancement of technology, elements of this basic video game became more sophisticated in terms of graphics and gameplay, and resulted in the production and dissemination of arcade games (1971) followed by home console games (1974) (Herz, 1997). Today’s gamer can play video games not only on her/his computer or home video game console, but additionally on her/his lap top, personal hand-held gaming system, cell phone, personal digital assistant, I-Pod, or MP3 player. First viewed as a ‘niche market’ or ‘curiosity’ in the early 1970s, the video game industry\(^2\) has become “the fastest growing and most profitable children’s cultural industry” (Kline & Banerjee, 1998, ¶ 1), which generates approximately 31 billion dollars (U.S.) per year, worldwide (“Canada’s 1\(^{st}\),” 2006).

Recent comparisons demonstrate that profits from the video game industry continue to grow and have, in fact, eclipsed revenue from books, music, and films (Berger, 2002). While it is impossible to definitively identify what underlies the unprecedented popularity and commercial success of the video game medium, several contributory factors can be cited. Fromme (2003) speculates that two elements of the
video game industry can help explain why and how it has become such a dominant form of popular media. First, he suggests that technological improvements have allowed for easier, more immediate and 'user friendly' access, installment and operation of video games. Fromme (2003) further notes that game developers and marketers recognize that pre-adolescents and adolescents represent influential consumer groups, with significant 'purchasing power.' For economic reasons, therefore, video game companies target these groups by advertising in older media (such as television, movies, and magazines) that have already proven to be youth-oriented. In this way, super-systems⁴ are created wherein children ‘follow’ familiar characters from established media into the relatively new realm of video games.

Current scholarship regarding children’s play culture cites that home-based activities, inclusive of television and video game play, have largely replaced outside play for many children (Tandy, 1999). Increased suburban traffic, apartment/condo dwelling, distance from designated playgrounds, as well as generalized fear of strangers, have led to increased restriction on youths’ independent mobility. The neighbourhood street which “in the past represented a place for children to play in safety near their home,” is now often regarded as “a place of danger” (Tandy, 1999, p. 162). Video games represent an interactive⁴ medium that children can use within their home, and yet allows them to engage in virtual environments ‘outside’ their home. It has been suggested that, unlike pre-existing media such as literature, movies, and television, video games offer players a sense of freedom and control similar to more traditional ‘backyard play’ (Jenkins, 1998). Because a child feels as though she/he can (to varying degrees, depending on the specific game) select which world she/he enters, create a new world to enter, choose the qualities
of the protagonist, and how the protagonist responds to her/his environment and to other characters, the video game world can appear to be an immersive "world where no territory is off-limits" (Herz, 1997). However, as Gailey (1993) warns: “[g]ames [...] particularly commercially successful ones, are apt to replicate in their structure the values and activities associated with the dominant ideology” (p.82). Thus, while a gamer might feel as though she/he is playing in a gameworld wherein she/he directs the action and adventure, she/he continues to be constrained within the game’s parameters, which can re/iterate and re/construct the social expectations and understandings, rewards and punishments, and power hierarchies that surround her/him in everyday life. One of the main objectives of my research is to explore how pre-adolescent female gamers construe and negotiate the complicated relationship between video games, as cultural products, and their lived experiences.

Research which emerged during the 1990s revealed not only that video games were becoming the medium through which children are first exposed to technology, but also that children as young as kindergarteners coded computers and computer games as a masculine past-time (Vail, 1997), and further that females played less frequently than male gamers, comprising only 25 per cent of video game purchasers (Cassell, 2002). Such findings preceded marked efforts to expand the range of available video games and to encourage increased participation of girl gamers. “In the mid 1990s unprecedented numbers of women were becoming entrepreneurs, starting new businesses, at twice the rate of men in fact” (Cassell, 2002, p. 5). In acknowledgement of such demonstrated gendered trends in technology “some of these entrepreneurs started companies to equalize the playing field for girls in technology” (Cassell, 2002, p. 5). Feminist
entrepreneurs were followed quickly by mainstream video game production companies in the development and marketing of 'girl games,' video games that are 'girl-centred,' 'girl-friendly,' and, thus, girl-targeted.

Mattel’s *Barbie Fashion Designer* (1997) video game was an early and successful effort to create and engage a 'girl-game' consumer. Selling 500,000 units within the first two months on the market, Mattel’s undertaking attested to the profit potential of such games (Dickey, 2006; Cassell, 2002). Since this early example, other game companies, including Sega, Purple Moon, Her Interactive, The Learning Company, and Buena Vista Games have contributed to the increasing number of 'girl games,' also termed 'pink software,' in the industry (Dickey, 2006; de Castell & Bryson, 1998). This phenomenon, which emerged from "an unusual and highly unstable alliance between feminist activists (who want to change the 'gendering' of digital technology) and industry leaders (who want to create a girls' market for their games)" (Cassell & Jenkins, 1998, p. 4), has stimulated ongoing discussion and debate within the academic community.

Personal motivation for this project stems from my early experiences with video games as well as my admitted discomfort with technology. A child during the 1980s, I remember the mix of excitement, awe, and apprehension that followed the initial dissemination of video game consoles and games into North American homes. In 1990, when I was eight years of age, I remember demanding of my parents an explanation regarding why, unlike many of my peers, I could not have a Nintendo Entertainment System. It was that Christmas that my grandmother surprised my two sisters and me with a Nintendo [Appendix A]. My grandmother’s expressed reason for this gift was that it was both 'progressive' and 'forward-looking' and therefore we should become familiar
with this new medium. While we played the gaming system for many hours during that Christmas break, and casually into the following years, by eleven years of age I had stopped gaming entirely. As my interest waned in the characters, story lines, and challenges offered by the available games, I pursued hobbies and activities unrelated to technology.

It is only now, and with reference to existing literature in this area, that I recognize that my experience reflects a trend: many females lose interest in gaming around the age of puberty (Vail, 1997). To this day, while I have some agility with technology as a work tool (as my 100 word per minute typing speed demonstrates), I have limited familiarity and facility with (gaming) technology as entertainment. Some academics claim that the relative absence and negative portrayal of female characters within mainstream video games can contribute to the belief that playing video games is a 'masculine' leisure activity (Martin, 1999). Further, "[s]ignificant correlation has been found between children's use of video games and their general use of computers" (Martin, 1999, p. 4), as well as their technological literacy. Thus, it seems particularly important and consequential that female youth feel that it is acceptable for them to play video games, and that they have positive interactions with this medium (Inkpen, Klawe, Lawry, Anderson, Mutindi, Sedighian, Leroux & Hsu, 1994; Martin, 1999; de Castell & Bryson, 1998).

Literature Review

Changes in the technology, accessibility, content, marketing and consumption of video games have inspired increased interest and research regarding this popular
electronic phenomenon. It has been estimated that 80 per cent of British Columbia youth engage with video games at least occasionally (Kline & Banerjee, 1998) and, thus, the role that this medium plays in the lives of this cohort has emerged as the focus of an important and expanding area of study. Early research suggested that video gaming represented a primarily male pastime (Provenzo, 1991), but more recent research acknowledges that female gamers account for a significant and growing segment of the gaming population. Such findings have encouraged fresh consideration of video game content and reception.

Whereas early scholarship in this area primarily involved content analysis, participant observation, and laboratory experimentation concerning violence in video games and the potential behavioural, physiological, emotional, and cognitive ‘effects’ on young players, more current literature has included concentrated analyses of the gendered images and themes which operate within mainstream video games (Dietz, 1998; Gailey, 1993; Glaubke, Miller, Parker & Espejo, 2001). In reference to her examination of the portrayal of female characters and violence within video games, Dietz (1998) suggests that “[t]he most common portrayal of women was actually the complete absence of women at all” (p. 433). She goes on to argue that in the limited number of video games that did include female characters, these characters were portrayed in an “overwhelmingly traditional and negative” manner (Dietz, 1998, p. 426).

Robin Johnson’s (2006) work represents a more contemporary example of video game analysis related to gender representation. She investigates “the ways in which gender is performative as constituted through the players’ repetitive gaining of experience for the video game character” (p. 2), in the video game Grand Theft Auto:
San Andreas (Houser, 2004). Johnson (2006) applies three of the seven layers which comprise Konzack’s (2002) framework for video game analysis: gameplay, meaning, and referentiality. Based on her findings, Johnson (2006) suggests that, in order to accomplish the lead protagonist’s masculine gender subjectivity, the gamer must engage in specific behaviours related to physical masculinity, (hetero)sex appeal, and respect. Johnson’s methodology and discussion helped inform my consideration of the re/construction of ‘teen girl subjectivity’ within girl games.

While such studies, like earlier work related to ‘media effects’ associated with television, film and magazines, have provided valuable and necessary insight into the stereotypical re/constructions of gender, my research project, which includes interviews with girls, problematizes “[t]he theoretical line of reasoning that hypothesizes […] causal relationship[s]” (Dill & Dill, 1998, p. 407) between media messages and audience cognition and behaviour.

Among studies that have been more directly concerned with female gamers, there appears to be a tendency to focus on the ways in which they differ from their male counterparts. Such scholarship has explored gender differences with respect to time commitment to video games, game genre preferences, desired game features and common sites for gameplay (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 1998; Inkpen et al., 1994; Kline & Banerjee, 1998; Kafai, 1998), rather than the complex relationship between females and video games.

Children Now, a “leading national [American] public policy organization working to ensure children have a healthy and diverse media environment” (Children Now, 2007) utilized such research to create a thirteen point ‘girl-friendly scale’ for video games.7
This scale was used to determine whether, and to what degree, the ten most popular video games (for seven platforms) incorporated aspects that tend to appeal to girls. According to the Children Now organization (2001), there is a demonstrated lack of girl-focused and girl-friendly video games on the market, and a need for critical consideration of video game content and structure in order to develop a product that would encourage more girls to engage with this medium.

Another body of relevant literature, inspired by the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (BCCCS) and its early challenge of the "simple transmission model of media" (Williams, 2005, p. 451), suggests that gamers are not "passive recipients of messages coded in games" (Gailey, 1993, p. 82). Gailey (1993) combined content analysis of popular video games, participant observation, and interviews in order to explore some of the implications related to the representations of gender, class, race, and technology in video games. She suggests that rather than merely absorbing or rejecting game content and messages, gamers can work to "interpret [...] and thereby alter [...] values embedded in the games and play process" (Gailey, 1993, p. 82). She cites several examples wherein girls addressed the 'problem of identifying' with a male avatar by explicitly perceiving themselves as 'the brains,' or 'puppet' master, behind his actions. This finding that "girls resolved the active male/passive female dilemma through placing themselves in a management position" (p. 89), informs my investigation of my participants' negotiation of gendered subject positions within video games.

Gailey's use of mixed-methods enables her to address the active manner in which girls interact with game content but, from my perspective, her inclusion of the voices of
girl gamers is limited. Gailey's recognition of the intersectional nature of identities within game content contributes to my analysis of the heterogendered, racialized, and classed depictions within three 'girl games.' I also go on to consider the ways in which the heterosexual imaginary\(^8\) operates to organize these identity categories within these games. Further, where Gailey (1993) focuses on the relative absence and passive presence of female characters within mainstream games, I focus on how girl gamers assign meaning to the re/construction of female characters within newly released 'girl-centred' games, designed specifically for their consumption.

Although relatively little scholarship concerning the video game medium has directly addressed 'girl-games,' there does exist some related literature which explores the implications surrounding the design, marketing and dissemination of 'girl-games.' Cassell (2002) provides an insightful perspective regarding the meanings behind and consequences of this recent development. She effectively addresses different sides of the popular and academic debates regarding the creation of 'girl games.' With reference to works by Seiter (1993), and insights from girl game designers, she ponders:

"Can't traditional femininity be good, be a viable choice for girls and women? [...] So, highlighting traditional femininity and demonstrating that it's okay is one very good thing about these girl games (Cassell, 2002, p. 8)."

Cassell (2002) goes on to briefly describe three early 'girl-games' and discuss how they "demonstrat[e] a rather unidimensional and stereotypical view of girlhood" (p. 8). She argues that this pattern "risks ghettoizing girls as a population that needs 'special help' in their relation to technology" (2002, p.1) and can work to re/construct and reinforce the essentialist notion that 'masculinity' and 'femininity' are distinct and dichotomous. As an alternative to designing games specifically for girls, or, conversely, encouraging girls
to ‘beat boys at their own games,’ Cassell (2002) proposes a more flexible game-design philosophy wherein the player is central to character and narrative creation, and thus can ‘perform themselves’ through technology.

    de Castell and Bryson (1998) add a queer, educational perspective to the available body of literature concerning ‘girl-games.’ With reference to their previous studies, the authors discuss and problematize the interrelationship between the video game industry’s commercial interests, current vocationalism within the education system, and parents’ efforts to maximize their children’s technological use and expertise. Most pertinent to my research is their discussion concerning Phoenix Quest, an educational game designed in the EGEMS project (Electronic Games for Education in Math and Science) at the University of British Columbia, in an effort to increase girls’ participation in technology. The authors provide brief excerpts from this game to demonstrate that such games, normally conceptualized and created by men, are superficial attempts to “capitalize on girls’ purported inclinations” (p. 245), and thus ultimately fail to provide the intended educational benefits to girls. The authors pose two provocative questions: “[w]hose interests will be served in making use of these purportedly ‘essential’ differences as a basis for creating ‘girl-friendly’ computer mediated environments? [And], [m]ost importantly, are we producing tools for girls, or are we producing girls themselves [...]?” (de Castell & Bryson, 1998, p. 251).

    While Cassell as well as de Castell and Bryson provide valuable and critical insight related to the social and cultural implications surrounding the ‘girl game’ phenomenon, my research will contribute an additional perspective because it includes
interviews with a group of girls who have engaged with three ‘girl games,’ in order to explore how they negotiate the games’ re/constructions of ‘the teenage girl.’

Carr (2006) addresses the changing role of female avatars within contemporary video games and discusses the ‘complicated task’ of analyzing gender in video games. Carr’s insights regarding methodology are particularly relevant to my current analysis. She suggests that researchers studying ‘the gendered body on-screen’ should consider representational as well as ludic elements of games. She further points out that players’ partial and shifting perspectives and actions must be taken into account. Carr states, for instance, that no matter how value-laden, ‘biased’ or simplified an avatar might appear, because a video game represents “a structured framework for spontaneous play” (Pearce, cited in Carr, 2006, p. 166), “a trait expressed by the game, through dialogue, via gestures or actions, or by an avatar’s body, might become either emphasized or irrelevant—depending on the player’s actions and priorities” (Carr, 2006, p. 165). In my exploratory project wherein I conduct a discourse analysis of three ‘girl games’ and interviews with gamers, I strive to address Carr’s (2006) call for more ‘satisfactory conceptualizations’ of gender representations, ‘reading positions’ and player subjectivity involved in video game play.

My project has also been informed by literature related to girl studies. More specifically, because I argue that the representations of the ‘ideal teen girl’ included in ‘girl games’ are intended for a pre-teen female audience, studies on ‘tween culture’ are particularly relevant. Flowing from earlier works of Modleski (1982), Radway (1984) and Frazer (1987), such scholarship underscores that girl-targeted and consumed media represent an important area of research. As indicated by Durham (2003), “girl-oriented
genres,” in addition to “soap operas, romantic fiction, and women’s magazines are now recognized as significant social projects deserving of rigorous intellectual attention” (p. 24). The growing body of research related to ‘tween culture’ has explored the implications surrounding the construction of the tween group as both a marketing and cultural demographic.

Cook and Kaiser (2004) suggest that in order to understand the contemporary tween, one must consider “its inception in, and articulation with, the market exigencies of childhood – specifically girlhood – as they have emerged since the Second World War” (p. 204). The authors explore some of the discourses related to the historical ‘subteen’ and ‘preteen,’ and the more contemporary ‘tween,’ in order to demonstrate that the tween “as an age-based category of the life course, has maintained a simultaneous existence as a gendered (and simultaneously racialized, classed and sexualized) [...] category” (p. 205).

Cook and Kaiser (2004) argue that while the notion of ‘the tween’ is ambiguous and ever-shifting, it has, nevertheless, been construed as a “definable, knowable commercial persona and a stage of youth” (p. 218).

In her recent dissertation, Guthrie (2005) explores how tween-targeted texts, including magazines, books, films, and television shows, contribute to the discursive construction of the contemporary tween. Like other authors concerned with how the tween is portrayed in popular media (Durham, 2003; Cook & Kaiser, 2004), Guthrie (2005) suggests that ‘the ideal tween’ represented in these texts is predominantly White, conventionally pretty, heterosexual, and middle to middle-upper class. I am suggesting that contemporary ‘girl video games’ represent a relatively new type of text that is targeted at pre-teen girls, and works to re/present and re/construct the tween.
Mitchell and Reid-Walsh's (2005) compilation on tween studies offers expansive insight into tween-focused methods of research, the range of experiences of tweens, and the cultural texts which re-produce 'the tween.' Most relevant to my work here is Harris's (2005) exploration of some of the "uses, problems, and pleasures of 'tween' cultures for girls and for those who study them" (p. 209). Harris examines aspects of the moral panics regarding 'the tweenie' among both lay and academic communities, and goes on to suggest that the contradictory messages included in tween-targeted media are "often negotiated deftly by girls themselves" (p. 209). Harris's discussion concerning how 'the tweenie' reflects changing notions about 'girlhood,' and allows us to question the constructedness of both 'childhood' and 'youth,' has contributed to my contextualization of 'the tween' category within wider social and cultural power relations.

It is necessary to clarify my use of terminology throughout my thesis. I use the term 'tween' to refer to pre-teengirls between the ages of eight and thirteen years. My use of this term does not reflect my participants' self-identification, or a belief on my part that this is a distinct and coherent stage of life. Rather, it recognizes that 'tweens' are increasingly perceived as a discrete market niche and, following, cultural group. I refer to the video game characters as representative of 'the ideal teen girl,' based on my assumption that the games re/construct a specific type of 'teen girlhood' specifically for tween girl gamers younger than the protagonists.

In her anthology, Hopkins (2002) addresses some of the contradictory discourses related to the 'new girl hero,' and suggests that "the cute but powerful girl-woman is now a dominant theme in mainstream popular culture" (p. 1). Hopkins (2002) explores some
of the advantages and limitations of contemporary celebrity-centred ‘girl power.’ With several specific examples of young female protagonists/icons on television, the cinema, and in magazines, Hopkins (2002) recognizes that in today’s girl-aimed ‘fairytales’ and fantasies

[the girl hero embodies the contradictions of the postfeminist era: she is both radical and conservative, real and unreal, feminist and feminine. But as much as our culture has changed, some things stay the same – while female power is now common knowledge, its mediated ideal is not a maternal or mature woman but rather a lithe, lean ‘girl’ (p. 6).]

I am suggesting that the Lizzie McGuire 3: Homecoming Havoc, That’s So Raven 2: Supernatural Style and Hannah Montana video games exemplify how current popular media encourages girls to “live through someone else – someone supposedly more talented, exciting and enchanted,” and how “[e]ven Disney heroines have been updated to reflect changing perceptions of girls and girlhood” (Hopkins, 2002, p. 216 and p.140).

Hopkins’s (2002) discussion concerning debates that frame girls as “passive victims or brave resistors” (p. 9), and her suggestion that young women who have grown up in the multimedia age are “quite adept at navigating” (p. 10) these girl-targeted texts, both contribute to my analysis of my participants’ commentaries.

Research Questions

Feminist scholars have recognized and addressed how, since the early decades of the 1900s, popular media such as literature, television, theatre, film. and magazines have participated in the identification, engagement, and re/construction of ‘female adolescence’ and ‘femininity’ (Inness, 1998; Kearney, 2004; Massoni, 2006; McRobbie, 1991, 2000; Currie, 1999; Scheiner, 2000). I contend that the video game industry represents a “new media […] to which established teen-girl texts [have been] adapted”
(Kearney, 2004, p. 287). The recent release of girl-targeted games reflects the media’s recognition of the fact that female pre-teens represent a significant, influential, and relatively untapped consumer group within the video game industry.

In order to gain an understanding of how ‘teenage girlhood’ and ‘the teenage girl’ are re/presented and re/constructed within three ‘girl games,’ I begin by considering what gendered subject positions are present within these ‘girl-games,’ and how ‘race,’ class, and sexuality are implicated in these positions. This analysis provides insight into the manner in which such symbolic constructions work to engage the female reader as a feminine subject, as well as to hierarchize the different subject positions, values, and practices associated with performing teen femininity.

Interviews with tween girl gamers explore how my study participants responded to games ‘made especially for girls.’ From these interviews, I identify which of the subject positions constructed within the games are recognized, identified with, resisted, reworked and/or rejected by the participants. Our discussions enable me to investigate how girls negotiate and reconcile their understandings and experiences of ‘femaleness’ with the texts’ heterosexed, classed and raced discourses of femininity.

Mindful of, and inspired by past scholarship regarding the potential for pleasure as well as resistance within gendered realms of entertainment (Radway, 1984; Frazer, 1987, Currie, 1999), I examine how the girls discuss their interactions with the ‘girl games.’ I explore to what extent the girls enjoyed playing as the virtual ‘ideal teen girl,’ or, alternatively, whether they renegotiated and resisted this ideal.
Theoretical Framework

Several streams of theoretical thought have influenced my formulation and investigation of these research questions. Scholars in the fields of sociology, cultural, media, and leisure studies (Inness, 1998, 2000; McRobbie, 1991, 2000; Currie, 1999) have noted the lack of academic consideration of the leisure interests, experiences, and related perspectives of female youth. This neglect has also been acknowledged by scholars engaged in research concerning contemporary video gaming (Cassell and Jenkins, 1998). In my project, I conduct a critical discourse analysis of ‘girl-centred’ video games, and, additionally, move beyond this analysis to gain an understanding of meaning-making by girl gamers. In this way, and as recommended by Smith (1987), I contend that the expressed perspectives of girl gamers represent a useful and important ‘point of entry’ from which “the relation of the local and particular to generalized social relations” (p. 157) can and should be explored.

My research is informed by a feminist poststructuralist analytic. I suggest, therefore, that feminine subjectivity, re/constructed in the games, and recognized and mis-recognized by the female gamer, is not coherent, unitary or fixed, but rather contradictory, multiple, and discursively constructed. My deconstruction of the various subject positions within the ‘girl games,’ and my analysis of eight semi-structured interviews with female gamers are also informed by Foucault’s (1980) acknowledgement of the productivity of discourse.

Smith (1988) references works by Marx and Engels in order to understand the discursive construction of femininity. She states that “[s]ocial forms of consciousness, ‘femininity’ included, can be examined as actual practices, actual activities, taking place
in real time, in real places, using definite material means and under definite material conditions” (p. 38). In light of her approach, I focus primarily on girl gamers’ experiences with the games, and the relation between their use of these texts and their lived practices. In this way, I acknowledge that while gender is discursive it is “simultaneously […] experiential and material” (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, p. 154).

As “subjectivity is most obviously the site of the consensual regulation of individuals” (Weedon, 1987, p. 112), moral regulation theory, initially advanced by Corrigan and Sayer (1985), also contributes to my investigation. In my analysis of the ‘girl-games,’ I consider the manner in which re/presentations of ‘the teenage girl,’ produced specifically for tween consumption, work to re/construct certain identities and experiences “as right, as natural, as expected within common sense” (Corrigan, 1990, p. 280). In this way, hetero-gendered ‘femininity’ is “confirmed and conformed” (Corrigan, 1990, p. 281) within common sense. Further, “the recognition and expression of […] differences” related to “class, gender, ethnicity, age, religion, occupation, locality” and sexuality etc. (Corrigan & Sayer, 1985, p. 4) are unacknowledged and obscured.

Personal or individual agency has become a contested issue among postmodernists, poststructuralists, and feminists. As suggested by Weedon (1987), “[t]o be effective, they [discourses] require activation through the agency of the individuals whom: they constitute and govern, in particular ways, as embodied subjects” (p. 112). Consistent with Butler’s (1992) approach to this concern, I maintain that the notion of a discursively constructed subject does not negate the materiality of the subject, “but, rather, [provides] a way of interrogating its construction as a pregiven or foundationalist premise” (p. 9). In my research I therefore address “what possibilities of mobilization are
produced on the basis of existing configurations of discourse and power” (Butler, 1992, p. 13) by considering the manner in which girl gamers rework, resist, and/or reject elements of the girl-game discourses.

Leonard (2003, 2006) has pointed to the lack of intersectional analysis within contemporary game studies. As suggested by Leonard (2006), I critically address the interrelationship between ‘race,’ class, sexuality, and gender within the video games. Thus, theories of intersectionality helped to frame my study. This theoretical base allows me to explore the manner in which these identity categories are mutually constitutive.

Several anti-racist and postcolonial scholars have addressed the link between popular representation, racial construction, and power relations. Their work also informs my exploration of the re/construction of ‘the teen girl’ within these games.

Power in contemporary society habitually passes itself off as embodied in the normal as opposed to the superior. This is common to all forms of power, but it works in a peculiarly seductive way with whiteness, because of the way it seems rooted, in common-sense thought, in things other than ethnic difference (Dyer, 1988, p. 45).

From this perspective, the idealized teen within contemporary ‘girl games’ can be regarded as contributing to the construction of “a discourse of a hegemonic (White) femininity” (Collins, 2005, p. 193). Davy (1995) conceptualizes ‘White womanhood’ as an institution. She suggests that “it is at the intersections of gender and race with ‘middle-classness’ that White women embody and perform an institutionalized whiteness” (p. 198). Thus, it seems important to critically consider how the beauty ideals, behaviours, clothing, and priorities of consumption included in the games work to construct ideal (White) teen femininity, and, concomitantly, flawed femininities. Rather than “ignor[ing] white ethnicity” and thus “redoub[ling] its hegemony by naturalizing it”
(hooks, 1990, p. 171), I hope to address how the games’ representations of “shared and universal similarity” (Gray, 2004, p. 85), in terms of characterization and narrative content, work to produce a “point of view [that] constructs and privileges white middle-class audiences as the ideal viewers and subjects” (Gray, 2004, p. 71).

Ingraham’s (1994) notion of the heterosexual imaginary also helps to guide my research. Ingraham (1994) emphasizes the need to recognize heterosexuality as an institution that works to organize gender, across class, ‘race,’ and sexuality. This notion is relevant to my exploration of the manner in which hetero-romantic themes are operative within Lizzie McGuire, That’s So Raven, and Hannah Montana, and allow for heterosexuality to “circulat[e] as taken for granted, naturally occurring, and unquestioned” (p. 204).

Methodology

In this section, I address some of the ontological and epistemological assumptions that underlie my approach to this study. My research both affirms and enacts Smith’s (1999) claim that discourse works to order, organize, and reinforce the everyday thoughts, perceptions and practices of those who “enter and participate in them, reading/watching/operating/writing/drawing texts” (p. 75). My understanding of discourse is informed by Weedon’s (1987, 1997) use of Foucault’s conceptualization of discourse as “ways of constituting knowledge, together with social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and the relations between them” (p. 105). Consistent with this perspective, I recognize the productivity of oral, written, and virtual texts, as well as bodily practices that constitute a shared system of meaning.
According to Smith (1988), “[t]he concept of discourse allows us to ‘magnify’ for examination the ideological work which produces ‘femininity’ as a set of relations arising in local historical settings without segregating it from the economic and social relations in which it is embedded and which it both organizes and is determined by” (p. 55). Accordingly, I maintain that ‘girl-(video) games’ represent a contemporary form of fictive re/presentation (Weedon, 1987) which can mediate a girl gamer’s knowledge, interpretation, and everyday ‘doing’ of ‘tween femininity.’

In the course of this project I conducted two types of discourse analysis. Initially, I examined the feminine subject positions constructed through three ‘girl’ video games – *Lizzie McGuire 3: Homecoming Havoc, That’s So Raven 2: Supernatural Style*, and *Hannah Montana.* In this analysis, I approach video games as a type of ‘cultural text’ (Currie, 1999). It is important to recognize that “[t]o call a game a text is not to deny that it involves play, mutability, chance, interactivity or change […]. A text is composed for some kind of purpose beyond the everyday, the disposable or ephemeral” (Buckingham, 2006, p. 120). In Chapter Two I discuss my methods of video game analysis in more detail.

I also conducted a discourse analysis of transcripts generated by semi-structured interviews with eight girl participants. This analysis recognizes that “[d]iscourse also involves the talk women do in relation to such texts” (Smith, 1988, p 41). The participants’ accounts of their active engagement with these virtual femininities reveal that “[w]ithin discourse there is play and interplay” (Smith, 1988, p. 54). Thus I begin to explore and understand how the games operate as ‘social texts,’ as they are read and
re/negotiated in the girls’ everyday lives (Currie, 1999). Chapter Three of this thesis contains an in-depth discussion of my analysis of the transcripts.

At this point in my thesis, it is important for me to elaborate on the rationale behind my multi-method approach and, further, address implications related to the manner in which I have chosen to incorporate these analyses into this text. My discourse analysis of the three video games represents an ‘academic reading’ (Currie, 1999), that examines some of ‘preferred’ or ‘dominant’ messages (Hall, 1997) involved in the re/construction of ‘the teen girl’ within these interactive texts. Here, I consider some of the ludic as well as representational elements of the games, in order to “speculat[e] on the intent of the publisher and the way life is represented” (Pecora, 1999, p. 51), and on how power underlies the patterns of meaning. This analysis cannot, and was not intended to speak to the meaning-making by girl gamers. My discourse analysis of my discussions with the girls provides insight into the ‘everyday readings’ (Currie, 1999), or the “more fluid, more active and ultimately more engaged process of reading in which readers typically participate in the creation of textual meaning” (McRobbie, 1991, p. 142).

I have struggled with my decisions related to the separation and ordering of my two analyses within my thesis. This process reflects my recognition that there are inevitable differences between researcher readings concerning girl-targeted texts, and the everyday readings by the intended audience of young girls. Of course, my social positionality, and academic and political motivations, have framed my experiences with the texts, and my findings are reflective of ‘reading as research’ (Currie, 1999). In this way, and in this section of my thesis, I consider what feminine subject positions are available to the ‘feminine spectator.’ My subsequent analysis of the girls’ meaning-
making provides insight into their 'reading in the real world,' and how, as embodied readers, they actively struggle over the meanings of these texts (Hall, 1997; Ang, 2001).

My separation of the two discourse analyses necessarily influenced the manner, and degree to which, I have addressed the relationship between the readings. In Chapters Four and Five I discuss some of the similarities and differences between my meaning-making of the games, and that of the girls, but this is not the primary focus of my investigation. I recognize, too, that there are both strengths and limitations associated with my decision to place my reading of the games (in Chapter Two) before my analysis of the girls’ readings (in Chapters Three and Four). I offer my analysis of the games early in the thesis in recognition that the reader (of my thesis) is likely unfamiliar with the content and structure of these recent games, which are part of a recently emergent 'girl game' genre, within a relatively new medium. This organization is not intended to privilege my readings, or to communicate to the reader that my readings are more ‘accurate,’ ‘valid,’ or superior (Foley & Voithofer, 2003).

Locating Myself within My Production of Knowledge

Before concluding this introductory chapter, I want to acknowledge my location within my production of knowledge and, further, reveal some of the obstacles and struggles that I encountered throughout this project. Through a brief examination of my social positionality with respect to age and education, gender, ‘race,’ class and sexuality, I hope to recognize some of the ways in which my position within these categories has inevitably influenced my research topic, methodology, data production and analysis.
I entered into this project with the understanding that, as a twenty-five year old researcher seeking to interview girls between the ages of eight and thirteen years, I would have to critically consider several specific ethical issues throughout my research project. Contemporary scholars continue to question whether and how adult researchers conducting youth studies can centre young participants as 'subjects' as opposed to 'objects' of research and, following, how such studies can be conducted 'for' and not merely 'on' youth (Mauthner, 1997). While there are ethical concerns associated with recruitment, consent, and privacy in all research projects, these issues are further complicated when 'intergenerational inequalities,' or the 'power dynamic of age' (Mauthner, 1997) come into play.

Accessing the girls recruited into my study proved more difficult than I initially anticipated. During the first few months of recruitment I posted calls for research participants in malls, community centres, and libraries in a number of different communities in the Greater Vancouver area. I hoped that these different locations might help me to access a diverse group of girls within my target population. I then utilized my personal social network – I sent calls for participants via e-mail to friends, peers and family members who, in turn, circulated them among their social and employment networks. Ultimately, I gained access to all eight of my participants through personal referrals, or the snowball method. It thus seemed that only when parents were introduced to me through personal connections were they willing to trust my motivations and conduct, and consent to their daughters' participation in my project.

Because the prospective participants in my study were under the age of majority (19 years) in Canada, the Behavioural Research Ethics Board required that I attain
parental/guardian consent as well as assent from the participants. However, as effectively articulated by Halse and Honey (2005), "[t]he tacit assumption underpinning the idea of parental consent is that parents know what is in the best interests of their daughters and are capable of protecting their interests" (p. 2151). By following this protocol, I unintentionally took part in sustaining the assumption that girls are 'incompetent' subjects who cannot give free and informed consent. I was particularly aware of this issue in the several situations wherein my initial contact with the girls was through and with their parents (via e-mail, telephone and/or face-to-face meetings).

I was further concerned that prospective participants might feel pressured or obligated to assent to participation in the study if their parents had previously consented. I addressed this issue by speaking privately with participants before we commenced the interviews. In these preliminary conversations, I reiterated that the girls need not participate even if their parents had already consented and, further, that they could withdraw from the study at any point without penalty or hard feelings. While the assent form addressed these points in writing, I believe that discussing them in person, without the presence of parents, allowed for more open discussion. Additionally, the girls’ verbal assent gave me an opportunity to assess their level of eagerness to participate.

Another issue related to the age differential between adult researchers and youth concerns the relationship established prior to and during interviews. To be consistent with Ethical Review Board directives, I had minimal interaction with the participants prior to the interviews. The length of interview sessions varied according to practical considerations, such as parental and participant commitments, as well as participant comfort and attention span. Because all interviews lasted no longer than an hour and a
half, I had limited time in which to establish some measure of trust and familiarity with the participants. While ethical constraints are intended to protect the prospective participants, “at the same time, they prevent researchers and potential participants from developing the personal relationships” (Halse & Honey, 2005, p. 2154) that facilitate comfortable and productive exchanges. Notably, one of the richest and most comfortable interviews occurred with the participant with whom I had the most contact before the interview. The two of us spoke on the telephone on several occasions, exchanged e-mails, and, further, had the chance to chat informally for approximately twenty minutes before we commenced the interview. I believe that even in this limited time frame we were able to establish a rapport that allowed her to see that, in addition to being an adult with a post-secondary education, I was genuinely interested in her ‘everyday’ activities, interests, and opinions.

Parental interest and involvement in the project varied quite dramatically. Probably because I was introduced to all of the girls via personal referrals, parents and participants seemed to have an underlying measure of trust in me. In my first contact with the parents, I asked whether they would prefer to set up a meeting wherein we could chat about the project, and look over the consent forms, or rather that I simply drop off the forms for them to review and sign. Parents of only two participants chose to meet with me prior to my interviews with their daughters. Notably, in these cases my connections with these parents/daughters were more remote than with the other referrals. During my meetings with these parents, we discussed the objectives of my project, what participation would entail, and the consent and assent forms. Additionally, when they expressed interest, I provided these parents with a copy of the interview questions
These meetings seemed to reassure the parents about me, and the value of my project. Contact with the other participants’ parents was more limited.

Prior to conducting all of the interviews, I was clear with the parents that, while I did not have to be alone with the participant during our discussion, I would be audio recording the interview, and thus I would prefer to meet with the girls in a relatively quiet location. Although I offered to conduct interviews in local community centres, all parents opted to invite me to their homes. Except in one instance, the parents were present in the home during the interviews. These parents dropped in to serve the snacks that I had provided. I interpreted this to be a fairly unobtrusive way to ‘check on us,’ and it did not seem to distract the girls or to disrupt the flow of our conversations. On only one occasion did a participant’s parent remain in the interview room for part of the interview. For approximately fifteen minutes, this mother read a newspaper at the kitchen table while I chatted with the participant in her family room. Again, her presence did not seem to interfere with the relaxed nature of the interview.

I made the decision not to offer parents a copy of the interview transcripts because, although technically this was an option, I felt subjectively that this was an infringement of the confidentiality assurance I had provided the girls, and I worried it might make them more self-conscious during the interviews. None of the parents requested a transcript. At the close of each interview, I invited both the participant and her parents to contact me if they would like to receive a summary of my findings from the interviews, and/or information about how to access the final thesis.

For the most part, my interactions with both participants and parents went smoothly. On three occasions there was some confusion or miscommunication that
resulted in girls/parents forgetting about arranged interviews or meetings. From my perspective, this was most often related to the need to accommodate to the different schedules, and modes of communication, of parents and girls. Particularly because the older girls had some measure of independence, it was sometimes difficult for me to know how best to arrange meetings, and, further, to ensure that all parties were aware of these arrangements.

After reviewing the transcripts I now recognize that while I attempted to make the girls realize that I was interested in their honest opinions, they nevertheless did seem to want to please me. During the coding of transcripts I noticed that on different occasions when a participant would express dislike for a specific part of a game, she might then follow up by stating “[b]ut it was o.k., like the whole part was good” or “[b]ut it was o.k., it was o.k.” In retrospect, I recognize that these statements are likely indicative of hesitation on the part of the girls to criticize the video games under discussion, and that perhaps I should have reassured them, once again, that I had no personal investment in the games.

In reflecting on my role as a “particular, socially constituted, knowing self” (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, p. 109), I also want to acknowledge how my gendered, raced, classed, and sexed identities have influenced my selection of this area of research, and my access to, and interactions with, research participants. After submitting a question regarding my research project to a member of the Behavioural Research Ethics Board (BREB), I received a response that assumed that I was female. Presumably, because my sample consists of girls who self-identify as female, who are between eight and thirteen years of age, and who are thus a ‘vulnerable population’ (Guidance Notes,
2006), my gender represented one determining factor in the evaluation of my application for ethics approval. After receiving the aforementioned email from the BREB, which explicitly pointed to and then problematized the 'gender-neutrality' of my first name, I included the title 'Ms.' in front my name, not only in my ethics approval application, but also in my recruitment advertisements and consent forms. As indicated by Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002), "the way you present yourself in terms of multiple possible aspects of identity and social location, will be critical in negotiating the engagement of your participants, and in how they respond to you" (p. 157). Parents of prospective participants were likely more convinced of the legitimate academic motivation behind my interest in their daughters' experiences because I self-identified as female. Thus, by explicitly gendering myself I aimed to positively influence the number of parents/legal guardians who consented to their daughter's participation in my study.

My feminine gender likely impacted my interactions with participants. This 'shared identity' might have encouraged the female participants to feel comfortable discussing their experiences with the 'girl-games,' and their everyday performances of femininity. However, this presumed 'sameness' or 'insiderness' can be associated with both "pluses and minuses" (Twine, 2000, p. 3) within the research context. Female participants might have assumed that because I am female and have also played the video games, that we share similar understandings of the game content and, further, that I am already aware of how these meanings relate to the everyday/every night performances of 'tween' gender. From this perspective, my femaleness might have precluded disclosure of valuable information.
In order to be diligent in achieving a self-reflexive understanding of my position within the production of knowledge, I must move beyond consideration of gender similarity to “identify the fragmented and multiple intersecting identities/subjectivities of both researcher and researched” (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, p. 159). My interpretations of the raced representations of ‘teenage girlhood’ within video games, as well as my experiential knowledge of ‘femaleness,’ are inevitably linked to my position as a White, European-Canadian woman. Further, while seven of the eight participants in my study were European-Canadian, I must acknowledge that the one Asian-Canadian participant might have questioned my ability to understand or empathize with her experiences, which are “specific to her place in [...] the racial stratification system” (Olesen, 2005, p. 243).

My research pursuits and processes have also been shaped by my position as a middle-class educated academic. My advantaged socio-economic status enabled me to access and engage with video games in the past, and thus contributed to my current interest in this relatively expensive entertainment genre. The games that I analyzed range in price from $35 to $60, and are played on a personal, portable video game system (a Game Boy Advance or a Nintendo DS) that retail for approximately $150. It is important to recognize that because my sample includes only girls in the greater Vancouver area with access to video game consoles and video games, they represent “a relatively affluent group in the world’s economy” (Inness, 2000, p. xii).

While, due to the age range of my participants, and related ethical considerations and constraints, during the interviews I did not explicitly discuss my own, or the participants’ sexual orientations, I must be mindful of how my heterosexuality has
influenced my own experiences of ‘femininity’ and my readings of the heterosexed portrayals of ‘the teen girl.’ Further, I must acknowledge the omissions and resulting silences that might occur due to the limitations imposed on the interview process, as well as distrust and caution on the part of the participants who might be questioning their sexual orientation, who might not be heterosexual, and/or who might not identify with the heteronormative elements of the games.

In this section I have attempted to situate myself within my research project. I cannot claim that I have fully acknowledged the manner, and degree to which, my social and methodological positionalities have inevitably influenced my research. Further, the fact that I can “specify what differences exist, what they mean, whether they matter, and how they should be represented in findings” (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, p. 107) underscores the powerful and authoritative role that I assume within this production of knowledge. While it is important to recognize that such self-conscious acknowledgment, ‘confession’ or ‘apology’ does not work to correct the differences and/or inequitable power relations within the research process (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002), I hope that by writing myself into the text (Fonow & Cook, 2005) I can begin to move toward my goal as a feminist researcher to produce “less false, less partial and less perverse representations without making claims about what is absolutely and always true” (Olesen, 2005, p. 256).

In the following chapter, I discuss my discourse analysis of the video games. I begin by addressing the methods I used in this analysis, and continue to describe several feminine subject positions that I perceived within the games. In Chapter Three, I introduce my discourse analysis of the transcripts from the interviews I conducted with
eight girl participants. Here, I describe my methods of transcript analysis and explore the participants' entry points to the games. This discussion focuses on the role video games play as a leisure activity in the girls' lives and the influence of transmedia intertextuality on the girls' understanding of, and experiences with, the video games. Chapter Four focuses specifically on the participants' negotiations with the subject positions that they recognized, identified with, resisted, and/or. In Chapter Five I conclude by providing some final thoughts regarding the findings of my research project, stipulate some of the strengths and limitations of my current analysis, and offer avenues for future research in the area of girls and video gaming and 'girl games.'
CHAPTER TWO

VIRTUAL FEMININITIES: FEMININE SUBJECT POSITIONS IN THREE ‘GIRL’ VIDEO GAMES

“Structurally, the player is also encouraged to see the game through the eyes of this particular character, often seeing events from this particular perspective a majority of the time, and only occasionally from the perspective of other characters” (Consalvo, 2003, p. 177).

Methods

The first component of my project consists of a critical discourse analysis of three popular contemporary ‘girl games’: Lizzie McGuire 3: Homecoming Havoc (2005), That’s So Raven 2: Supernatural Style (2005), and Hannah Montana (2006). I selected these games because of their broad dissemination and commercial success (“Buena Vista,” 2005). My choice was further based on the fact that these games can be played on a Nintendo DS platform, which currently represents the most popular video game console in North America (Ham, 2006). These games are produced by Buena Vista Games, the interactive entertainment sector of the Walt Disney Corporation, which has established itself as one of the primary producers of ‘girl games’ (Chapman, 2005). Additionally, all three games feature a single female protagonist and are recommended by Disney for girl gamers aged ten years and older (Disney games, 2005).

I must acknowledge that my selection of these specific games is also related to my personal and academic interest in Walt Disney productions. From the age of three years to the age of ten, every Spring Break my parents, two sisters, and I would trek to Disneyland in our camper van. I have fond memories of these trips which represented an escape from school and a time for me to reconnect with my family, and, in particular, to engage with and learn from my big sisters. Today, however, I self-identify as a feminist sociologist and throughout my education I have read, and myself engaged in critical
deconstructions of the raced, classed, and heterosexed representations of Disney characters from movies such as Aladdin, Beauty and the Beast, Cinderella, Pocahontas, and the list goes on. I have watched with mixed feelings as Disney has evolved, and contributed to the increased presence of the ‘new girl heroes’ (Hopkins, 2002) in mainstream media. I contend that Buena Vista’s recent design, creation and marketing of video games which feature ‘teen girl life’ and which are targeted at pre-teen girls exemplify how Disney has “attempted to extend the Disney experience through all ages and spheres of life” (Levine, 2005, p. 75). Unlike the ‘Disney princesses’ of the past, however, ‘girl heroes’ now appear in video games. The games thus offer girl gamers subject positions which they can take up in their exploration of the interactive, virtual ‘girl gameworlds.’

In my analysis of the video games, and consistent with Weedon’s discussion of gendered subject positions, I explore how class, ‘race,’ and (hetero)sexuality operate within the discursive construction of ‘the teenage girl’ in the three video games.

Gendered subject positions are constituted in various ways by images of how one is expected to look and behave, by rules of behaviour to which one should conform, reinforced by approval or punishment, through particular definitions of pleasure which are offered as natural and imply ways of being a girl or woman and by the absence within particular discourses of any possibility of negotiating the nature of femininity and masculinity (Weedon, 1987, p. 99).

I focus specifically on the feminine subject positions made available via the games’ female protagonists and supporting female characters, and how these positions relate to the games’ overall goals, systems of penalization and reward, and the specific activities and challenges necessary for successful completion of the games.

My approach was also shaped by reference to three of Konzack’s (2002) seven layers of video game analysis, which he claims may be applied selectively by the
researcher. Konzack's (2002) layers include: hardware, program code, functionality, gameplay, meaning, referentiality, and socio-culture. The first three layers refer to the structural and technological components of computers and games. Konzack suggests that researchers using these should analyze the "physical nature of the playground" (p. 91-92) including the wires, signals, hardware, source codes, and the mode of interface. Due to the focus of my analysis, and, further, to my limited technical knowledge of computers, I do not consider these elements. I have also excluded his socio-culture layer of video game analysis, wherein the researcher considers "the interaction not just between computer game and player but the interrelationship between all participants of the game" (p. 98). Such an ethnographic analysis would require time and financial resources beyond the scope of my current project.

I referenced elements of the remaining three layers that Konzack (2002) includes in his framework: gameplay, referentiality, and social meaning.16 With respect to gameplay, in Chapter Two I consider the character positions offered to the gamers, the goals and sub-goals within the game narratives, as well as the systems of reward and penalty. I address referentiality by exploring how the games reference other mediated texts, and how the girls' knowledges of other, associated transmediated texts influence their engagement with the games. Also, in terms of social meaning, I explore the wider, more connotative17 significance related to some of the images and actions included in the games, and associated with various feminine subject positions.

My preliminary analysis of the three video games consisted of familiarizing myself with the game narratives by playing through and completing them. During this initial stage of gameplay, I noted those game elements that I felt were relevant to my
research questions and that I wanted to revisit later on in my analysis. I then reconsidered each level/mini game by re-playing them in order “to explore alternate branches of exploration, dialogue, choices, etc.” (Consalvo & Dutton, 2006, Interaction Map section, para. 3). During this stage I took more detailed notes and began to more critically consider cross-game themes.

Before I discuss my findings I must acknowledge that this analysis is not exhaustive. I identify and discuss the following feminine subject positions as those that I found to be the most recurrent, recognizable, engaging, and meaningful. Further, and as I will discuss later in this section, the positions are at times contradictory. They are not always consistent or mutually exclusive. I recognize that other gamers and scholars, with different social positionalities, educational backgrounds, theoretical vantage points, entrypoints to the games, and gaming abilities etc. might recognize different positions. Nevertheless, in this chapter I explore some of the multiple and contradictory feminine subject positions included in three ‘girl games’ - *Lizzie McGuire 3: Homecoming Havoc*, *That’s So Raven 2: Supernatural Style*, and *Hannah Montana.*

**Video Game Synopses**

*That’s so Raven 2: Supernatural Style* (Buena Vista Games, 2005) is the second video game produced by Buena Vista Games based on the Disney Channel television show, *That’s So Raven*. In both the television show and video game, Raven (played by Raven Symone on the show) is portrayed as a “typical teenager who just happens to be psychic” (“Characters”, 2008). In this game, the player acts through the Raven avatar and advances through “twenty action packed levels” and “through 6 different
environments" (Buena Vista Games, 2005), including the school, mall, zoo, sci-fi
convention, concert, and fashion show. The main goal of the game is to collect items to
design a fashion line, and get to a fashion show to showcase Raven’s designs. As the
gamer progresses through the game, she must put together pieces of Raven’s psychic
visions, defend against opposing characters, and practice assembling outfits for the
avatar.

The Hannah Montana (Buena Vista Games, 2006) video game is based on the
Disney Channel television show Hannah Montana. The game narrative revolves around
Miley Stewart (played by Miley Cyrus), a girl who is “secretly living a double life”
wherein she is a “normal teen by day” and a “famous pop star Hannah Montana by night”
(Buena Vista Games, 2006, p. 3). The gamer acts through the Miley avatar, and (at
several points in the game) through her best friend, Lilly, as she progresses through three
levels and four different locations. The gamer must solve the mystery of which character
is threatening to expose Miley’s secret popstar identity as she utilizes gadgets, and
interacts with other characters, at the school, mall, beach, and stadium. A bonus feature
of the game allows the gamer to stylize the Hannah Montana avatar by combining clothes
and accessories for her.

Lizzie McGuire 3: Homecoming Havoc (2005) is Buena Vista’s third video game
based on the Disney Channel’s Lizzie McGuire show, starring Hilary Duff. In this game,
the player acts through the Lizzie avatar in order to “reach her goal to become
Homecoming Queen” (Buena Vista Games, 2005, p. 5). The structure of this game is
different from the other two. While the game centres around the Homecoming storyline,
gameplay entails progressing through ten stages inclusive of one hundred short, arcade-style mini-games that challenge the players’ reflexes and speed.

**Feminine Subject Positions in Three ‘Girl’ Video Games**

*‘The Competitor’*

One of the first feminine subject positions that I recognized in the games under discussion is one that I termed ‘the competitor.’ Within each gameworld the video game narrative and structure combine to prompt the gamer’s participation in female competition. The opening scene in *Lizzie McGuire* reveals that the gamer must adopt the Lizzie avatar and strive to earn the Homecoming Queen title by gaining enough popularity to beat the opposing non-player, female character, Kate. The opening dialogue exchanged between these characters occurs as a cut-scene, a scene that is pre-rendered and automatic, so that the gamer watches as it unfolds before she progresses through the game’s ten levels (Figure 1). The cut-scene establishes rivalry between the girls, and, further, clearly links Lizzie’s interest in the Homecoming title to her desire to defeat Kate. As indicated by King and Krzywinska (2006), “[c]ut-scenes […] provide a reminder of the particular characterization that has been provided” (p. 186) to the gamer. I am arguing that, in this way, female competition for status within the school is constructed as foundational to the game’s narrative.
The importance of 'the female competitor' subject position is clearly reinforced at the end of each of the ten levels of *Lizzie McGuire*, when the gamer must engage her avatar in a dance competition against Kate. Notably, in these mini-games Lizzie dances on a stage beside a disembodied image of Kate’s head. Kate’s eyes dart back and forth as she anxiously observes the gamer’s/Lizzie’s progress. Further, the gamer’s success is associated with Kate’s dismay as she cries when the gamer beats the mini-game (Figure 2). In this way, without even representing Kate in her entirety, the game producers quickly communicate her role as a competitor. A quick glance at this symbolic construction on the console screen informs the gamer that this secondary character threatens her chance of advancing to the next game level.
While female competition does not represent the central goal in either That's So Raven or Hannah Montana, it is nevertheless an underlying element of many of the sub-goals of these games. In both games, non-player female characters appear to block the gamer’s movement through the gameworlds. The gamer can bypass these opposing characters only by engaging in specific behaviours: she can throw pies at them, duck and roll past them, trap them, dress in disguises (see Figure 3) to avoid interaction, throw a paper airplane at them, or engage in insulting verbal banter. Such same-gender antagonism is confirmed by the terminology that Buena Vista includes in its walkthrough for the Raven game. This text frames the opposing female characters as “rival girls” and “enemies.”

Figure 3 – This figure has been removed because of copyright restrictions. Figure 3 includes a screenshot from That’s So Raven 2: Supernatural Style (2005), wherein the Raven avatar is pictured in a cheerleader costume as she faces opposing female characters.

It is important to recognize that while it is not mandatory for the gamer to engage in female competition, if she wants to successfully complete the game she cannot avoid some degree or type of confrontational exchange. Further, if a gamer attempts to avoid competition, her avatar is penalized in some manner. For example, in That’s So Raven the protagonist loses ‘health status,’ which is represented by three red hearts in the upper
left hand side of the screen (Figure 4). When a gamer does not engage with, or defend against, opposing characters the hearts drain of colour. If the gamer allows all of the hearts to lose colour, her avatar will ‘die’ and she must restart the level.

Figure 4 – This figure has been removed because of copyright restrictions. Figure 4 includes a screenshot from That’s So Raven 2: Supernatural Style (2005). The gamer’s ‘health status’ is represented by the outline of hearts in the top left hand side of the screen. In this image, the gamer has lost two of three hearts because she has not defended against the opposing female characters.

Another example where game structure necessitates female competition appears early in Hannah Montana, when the gamer is told “[y]ou’ll have to be careful and say the right thing” in order to bypass characters blocking her avatar’s path. In these instances, the gamer must choose between two dialogue options. From my first encounter with the opposing non-player female characters Amber and Ashley, it became apparent to me that there was a pattern with respect to the type of dialogue ‘choice’ sanctioned by the game’s structure. After these characters insult Miley, the gamer must select between two responses: “Oh please, we need to go, let us pass,” or “Well with all that fast food you’re eating soon it’s the elephants [sic] shoes you’ll be filling.” While I initially tried to select the former, more civil response, I soon learned that only the latter more confrontational response would deter the two characters and allow me/my avatar to progress through the gameworld.
In her relevant discussion of components of the Tomb Raider game, Carr (2006) addresses the manner in which game structure works to limit the influence of gamer input on character representation, game action, and game narrative. She suggests:

The player’s apparent freedom to intervene between trait and act is, of course, only a matter of degree: it is possible to play Lara Croft as a harmless person who doesn’t shoot people or steal things, but she won’t survive for long in Tomb Raider unless she gets her guns out (Carr, 2006, p. 50).

Similarly, gamers who choose to not engage in virtual gendered competition will not last long within the ‘girl’ gameworlds of Lizzie McGuire, That’s So Raven, and Hannah Montana.

The female competition in all three video games is heteronormative: it is linked to ‘successfully’ performing idealized femininity in order to attain or secure popularity among peers and/or with a male love interest. As previously discussed, this link is particularly evident in Lizzie McGuire, wherein the central goal is to become Homecoming Queen. As indicated by Best (2000), “[h]igh school proms exist within (and sustain) a normative order of heterosexuality, their very organization working to organize sexual relations and socializing them toward heterosexuality” (p. 255). Notably, when the Lizzie gamer finally completes the tenth and final dance competition against Kate, it is Ethan, the Homecoming King, who announces Lizzie has won the Homecoming Queen title (Figure 5). This title thus seems representative of status within the virtual school, as well as within the patriarchal, heterosexual order. By depicting Lizzie, ‘the girl next door’ (Disney games, 2005) in this manner, girls who do not conform to such popular notions of ‘feminine’ behaviour and appearance, or who do not subscribe to heteronormative institutions such as Homecoming are, by omission from the game, constructed as ‘unusual,’ ‘abnormal,’ or non-existent.
As indicated by Guthrie (2005), in her analysis of popular literature, television and cinema targeted at the tween market:

these narratives fall neatly into the stereotype that women cannot work together because they are always competing. Instead of discouraging girls from competing, these narratives actually encourage the competition by awarding the protagonist whatever prize (be it a boy, or a grade, or adulation of her peers) for which they fought (p. 84).

In these ‘girl’ gameworlds, the gamer is personally and practically rewarded for engaging in such virtual gendered confrontations: confrontation is necessary to successfully get through a level, continue gameplay, ‘win’ the game prize [the boy and the Homecoming Queen title in Lizzie McGuire, celebrity in Hannah Montana, and the boy and a spot and success in a fashion show in That’s So Raven], and beat the game.

‘The Helper’

While the number of female characters in mainstream games has increased in recent years, the majority of these characters continue to represent victims, bystanders, props, or rewards (Children Now, 2001; Leonard, 2006; Carr, 2006). In contrast to this ongoing and troubling trend, female protagonists are central to the three ‘girl games’
under discussion and are portrayed as relatively active and capable. Nevertheless, the representations of these female protagonists reflect the “many complex and contradictory meanings” associated with contemporary ‘girlhood’ (Hopkins, 2002, p. 2). Although the games are centred on female protagonists who accomplish various personal goals as they work through the gameworld, the theme of helping others is also evident throughout these games.

In her analysis of comic books targeted at pre-teen girls, Walkerdine (1984) acknowledges that unlike boy-aimed comics which feature “public bravery and public fights against injustice,” the girl-aimed comics communicate the importance of ‘private endurance’ and sacrificing for others (p. 167). Consistent with this finding, the protagonists/gamers in the video games under discussion perform many good deeds: finding a teacher’s notes, finding a book for a peer, babysitting a little brother etc. Unlike some of Disney’s boy-targeted games wherein the gamer must work to “thwart evil plans” (Disney, 2007), complete “missions against the most notorious villains” (Disney, 2007), or fight against a prehistoric creature that “threatens to destroy the galaxy” (Disney, 2007), gamers engaged in these ‘girl games’ largely participate in social negotiation and navigation. In Hannah Montana and That’s So Raven in particular, in order to progress through the gameworld and achieve personal goals, often the gamer must first command the avatar to perform favours for supporting characters (Figure 6).
Figure 6 – This figure has been removed because of copyright restrictions. Figure 6 includes a screenshot from *That's So Raven 2: Supernatural Style* (2005) wherein Raven is told by her father that she must babysit her little brother in order to get concert tickets.

The significance of helping others is reinforced and demonstrated within the *Hannah Montana* gameworld wherein an inventory category identified as ‘Gifts’ sets up a virtual space in which the gamer stores presents for other characters and “items another character has asked you to find for them” (Buena Vista, 2006, p. 14) (Figure 7). Throughout this game the gamer must gather clues and information from different secondary characters in order to successfully complete the game by figuring out who is threatening to expose Miley’s secret superstar identity as Hannah Montana. The game’s instruction manual explains this element of the game in the following manner: “Some characters you talk to in the game will give you important information about your investigation. Others might ask you to do something for them before telling you what you need to know” (Buena Vista, 2006, p. 10).

Figure 7 – This figure has been removed because of copyright restrictions. Figure 7 includes a screenshot from *Hannah Montana* (2006). The image features the ‘Gift’ inventory and ‘Give’ command.
I am suggesting that the girl protagonists in these games embody qualities of both the contemporary ‘girl hero’ as well as the ‘traditional heroine’ (Hopkins, 2002). They are goal-oriented and determined but, as they move through the gameworld, they are also called upon to engage in altruistic, dutiful and ‘good’ behaviours (Hopkins, 2002).

‘The Fashionable Female’

Physical appearance

When engaging with these ‘girl games,’ gamers adopt a third-person perspective. So, while a gamer can choose if/when her avatar should walk/run/jump/throw things/collect game items/talk to other characters etc., she has no choice with respect to the pre-rendered appearance of her animated avatar. Thus, the virtual representation of Lizzie, Miley and Raven is an important element of gameplay. As indicated by King and Krzywinska (2006),

[t]he fact that the player’s sense of being-in-the-game-world is mediated is made explicit in third-person games because the player-character can be seen, [sic] as an entity clearly separate from the player. The character is designed to-be-looked at, as well as to-be-played with, which raises a number of issues involving the manner in which characters are represented (p. 100).

This pre-rendering of physical appearance stands in marked contrast to many contemporary mainstream video games outside the girl-game genre, wherein the gamer can choose between characters, or even generate a new character by selecting his/her height, skin colour, hair colour, eye colour, and dress etc.

Contemporary scholars have addressed the increase in female teen protagonists and stars within recent television, film, music and news media and, further, have
identified “the common tropes of tween representation” (Guthrie, 2005, p. 23). Durham (2003) suggests that “the new girl heroes are overwhelmingly White, fine-featured, and almost always blonde” (p. 26). Because all three video game protagonists are based on characters from popular tween-aimed Disney television programs, their physical personae loosely resemble those of the three actresses (Raven Symone, Hilary Duff, and Miley Cyrus/ Hannah Montana). Consistent with Durham’s (2003) observation, the Lizzie avatar reaffirms Western standards of beauty: she is White, has long blonde hair and blue eyes, and is dressed in denim capris, a pink, midriff-bearing tank top, and orange platform sandals. This clothing reveals her lean figure and emphasizes her femininity.

The physical portrayal of the main character in Hannah Montana seems particularly meaningful. Miley is represented as thin, with long, wavy brown hair, blue eyes and in ‘feminine’ attire consisting of a skirt, a fitted t-shirt with a shrug over top, and a necklace. A striking physical metamorphosis occurs when the gamer navigates Miley into the ‘secret wardrobe,’ where she assembles ‘superstar designs’ for the protagonist, and watches as the avatar turns into the superstar alter-ego of Hannah Montana. When the avatar morphs from Miley, a “normal teen,” into Hannah, a “famous pop star” (Buena Vista, 2006, p. 3), she is rendered with long, straight blonde hair, blue eyes and noticeably larger breasts (Figure 8). While this remarkable shift in physical appearance allows the protagonist to lead a ‘double life,’ it ultimately links the blonde/blue-eyed physique with celebrity status and, thus, works to uphold it as more desirable, ideal, and acceptable.
The Raven character in *That’s So Raven* is based on Raven Symone, an African American actress who stars on the TV series of the same name. On this show and in her appearances as a musical entertainer, Raven is beautiful, has relatively light skin and fine-features, but is refreshingly full-figured. However, and notably, the animated version of Raven presents a noticeably slimmer, and, thus, a more conventionally beautiful teen girl.

The inclusion of more ‘multi-cultural’ characters and settings within contemporary tween and teen media has been acknowledged by several scholars (Guthrie, 2005, Durham, 2003). Guthrie (2005) suggests that while Disney should be applauded for presenting African-American protagonists as positive role models, and for trying to maintain some form of racial parity in their shows aimed at tweens […], it must be pointed out that Disney can be found guilty of trying to ‘white wash’ their African-American characters (p. 89).

While racial or ethnic stereotypes like those found in many mainstream video games (Leonard, 2003, 2006) are not as apparent in the games under discussion, I am arguing that through the re/construction of middle-class femininity, Whiteness is affirmed as an ‘unmarked’ norm in all three video games. As indicated by Collins (2005), “[a]ll women
engage an ideology that deems middle-class, heterosexual, White femininity as normative [...]. These benchmarks construct a discourse of a hegemonic (White) femininity that becomes a normative yardstick for all femininities” (p. 193).

While Raven is an African American character, she is represented as physically, culturally, socially, and economically similar to her White counterparts. Within the video games, all of the protagonists are lean, conventionally attractive, and dressed in well-coordinated, ‘feminine’ clothing. Further, each game includes sub-goals that reinforce the appropriateness and desirability of consumption-related activities, particularly the collection and utilization of fashion-related items in order to perform this femininity. In this way, the ‘saturation’ of the category of woman with middle-classness, and with the category of Whiteness reflects ‘institutionalized whiteness’ (Davy, 1995) and re/produces an ideal that few women (including White women) can ever attain.

From my perspective, the commercial success of the That’s So Raven show and, following, the video game under discussion, reinforces Collins’ (2005) argument that skin colour “no longer serves as a definitive mark of racial categorization” (p. 194) and, further, that in contemporary popular media, “the black middle-class can periodically stand in as a normative ideal” (Gray, 2004, p. xxii). In his critical race work, Gray (2004) discusses the ‘Cosby moment’ as a time when, in the 1980s and with the introduction of The Cosby Show on television, popular media began to move beyond stereotypical, negative portrayals of African Americans to include portrayals of middle to middle-upper class African Americans. Notably, Raven Symone began her acting career on The Cosby Show. Further, T’Keyah Crystal Keymah, the actress who plays her mother and acts as a producer on the Raven television show, also appeared on The Cosby Show.
Within the *That’s So Raven* video game, Raven’s efforts to attain ‘supernatural style’ and to create “her fashion line” and show it at “the season’s premier fashion show” (Buena Vista, 2005) reveal the middle-classed nature of the game narrative. Like Gray (2004), I maintain that while this representation of a middle-class African American protagonist “effectively represen[ts] middle-class blackness as one expression of black diversity,” it also works to “submerge other sites, tensions, and points of difference by consistently celebrating mobility, unlimited consumerism, and the patriarchal nuclear family” (p. 82). The narratives, goals, and sub-goals that underlie all three of the video games under discussion do not identify or address any ethnic or cultural differences or struggles related to being a visible minority.

In this way, while the girl gamer takes up Raven as her avatar within the *That’s So Raven* gameworld, she does not seem to be “presented [with] black subjectivities and cultural traditions as alternative perspectives on everyday life. That is to say, as a cultural and experiential referent, blackness [is not] privileged or framed as a vantage point for critical insights” (Gray, 2004, p. 83). Thus, within each of the three gameworlds the pre-teen gamer is presented with avatars and storylines that are strikingly homogenous as they construct and affirm ‘the teen girl’ for tween players.

**Consumption and performing technologies of the self**

In all three games the gamer, acting as the protagonist, is encouraged to perform femininity through the use of different tools. Consalvo and Dutton (2006) suggest that researchers should consider the type, prevalence and manner of accumulation with respect to objects that appear in video games in order to understand what is most valued.
within the gameworld. In the games under discussion, gamers collect or are rewarded with a variety of game items symbolic of 'fashion.' For instance, in the Raven game the gamer collects three types of 'fashion coins.' The level 'progress' summaries in two of the games reveal the importance attributed to these items/tools by tracking the gamer's collection of them (Figure 9). Thus, while the accumulation of these game items is not mandatory, their importance is signified by the fact that the gamer's progress is tracked according to how many of these items she is able to collect.

Figure 9 – This figure has been removed because of copyright restrictions. Figure 9 includes a screenshot from That's So Raven 2: Supernatural Style. (2005). This 'summary screen' tracks the gamer's collection of specific game items, including the 'top,' 'bottom,' and 'accessory' 'fashion coins.'

The manner in which the gamer performs technologies of the (feminine) self differs from game to game. In Lizzie McGuire, the gamer participates in a variety of arcade-style mini games wherein she dresses and accessorizes Lizzie in stages (shoes, shirt, and then earrings etc), paints her nails, dyes and curls her hair. In That's So Raven and Hannah Montana, the gamer is more actively involved in stylizing the avatars. In both of these games, the gamer can personally design outfits for the avatar by engaging in multi-step processes. In That's So Raven the gamer selects a top, bottom, and hair style/head accessory (hat, scarf, bow etc.) which then appear on the Raven avatar. Further, if she has collected a game item called a 'tint wheel,' she can also alter the
colour of these fashion items. In Hannah Montana, the gamer can select the colour, pattern, and logo for clothing items that she can incorporate into outfits for the avatar. In this way, gamers gain some (temporary) creative control over the avatar’s physical appearance. This interactive game element represents an opportunity not available to girls who engage with these characters/actresses via other media such as television, magazines, on stage, and in the movies.

In her analysis of teen magazines, McRobbie (1991) acknowledges that these texts encourage female readers to engage in processes of female embodiment through fashion, but in more ‘individualized’ ways.

The emphasis now is on personal choice and the creation of a ‘beautiful’ individual identity. Readers are still encouraged to spend time on themselves but not to do so slavishly. There is a greater ‘fun’ element, a pleasure in experimentation and a suggestion that this should not be taken too seriously (McRobbie, 1991, p. 175).

I am suggesting that these ‘girl’ video games offer similar invitations and prescriptions. Gamers are prompted to put time and effort into creating ‘stylish’ virtual outfits, but, nevertheless, these outfits ultimately reflect a certain degree of “customized style” (McRobbie, 1991, p. 181). For example, the instruction manual for Hannah Montana reveals the conflation of personal and expected aesthetics: “Get creative and design your very own superstar-style outfits for Hannah!” (Buena Vista, 2006, p. 18). This excerpt communicates to the gamer that while she should be ‘creative’ and design new outfits according to her taste, these outfits should also conform to ‘superstar-style’ standards.

From my perspective, the multi-stage process of stylizing the avatars in the ‘fashion portfolio’ and ‘wardrobe’ segments of the That’s So Raven and Hannah Montana games reveal some of the work involved in performing teen femininity. This
work is framed as naturally desirable and enjoyable for the tween gamer. The video
game manuals describe the ‘cool activities,’ ‘special objects,’ and the ‘new and fun
outfits’ that gamers can create in these ‘Bonus’ and ‘Special Material’ sections of the
games (Buena Vista, 2005, 2006). In this way, social expectations related to the
thoughtful, effortful, appropriate styling of female bodies are framed not in terms of
necessity or imperative, but rather in terms of fun and self-expression. In McRobbie’s
(1991) words, “a necessity is transformed into a pleasure, an imperative into an act of
self-love, or of self-gratification” (p. 176-177).

It is important to recognize how some of the game elements work to contain the
gamer’s creativity within established parameters. When putting together an outfit for
Raven or Hannah, the gamer is offered selections that are pre-rendered and therefore
work to constrain the gamer’s creative input (Figure 10). Further, the game structure
includes rules related to these tasks. For example, when designing clothes for Hannah,
the gamer is instructed that she is only permitted to place logos on tops, and not on any
other clothing items.

Figure 10 – This figure has been removed because of copyright restrictions. Figure 10 includes
two screenshots from Hannah Montana (2006). The images show the ‘Secret Wardrobe’ sections
of the game, wherein gamers stylize the Hannah avatar.
A further "undeniable element of regulation" (McRobbie, 1991, p. 175) related to the video game structure occurs in *That's So Raven* when the gamer views the clothing options available to her. Raven’s head, mid-section and legs are segmented and rotate separately to reveal the different hair style/hair accessory, top, and bottom options. Further, if the gamer has not collected all of the available clothing options, the relevant body part is replaced by an image of a star (Figure 11). These images are reminiscent of 'body-isms' that have been identified in advertisements wherein "the focus is usually on women’s bodies or body parts sometimes eliminating their heads altogether" (Aubrey, 2006, p. 160). Driscoll (2002) addresses the use of this method of representation in girl magazines when she suggests that “[t]he partial image fragments the girl’s body and focuses on the possible perfection of that formal component of her body” (Driscoll, 2002, p. 247). I am suggesting that the disembodiment that occurs in Raven’s virtual dressing room: encourages the gamer to assume the role of spectator and, following, to systematically and critically gauge her outfit combinations piece by piece by piece.

Figure 11 – This figure has been removed because of copyright restrictions. Figure 11 includes a screenshot from *That’s So Raven 2: Supernatural Style* (2005). The images shows the fashion portfolio. Raven’s head is replaced by a star as the gamer moves through the different hair style and hat options.

While for most of the game the gamer can choose not to enter into the ‘Bonus’
Fashion Portfolio, at several points in the game she must participate in ‘Fashion Rehearsals.’ In these sections she is told to “Create new outfit combos. Check the meter to see how judges might score your outfit” (Buena Vista, 2006). So as the gamer selects and puts together outfit pieces, she is encouraged to ‘rehearse’ or practice for the final fashion show at the end of the game (Figure 12). Thus it becomes apparent that the gamer’s virtual accomplishment of feminine style is regulated, and that while she is given some degree of creative choice within these practices, she “may not go so far as to refuse the compulsion to participate in these technologies of the self” (McRobbie, 1991, p. 174).

Figure 12 – This figure has been removed because of copyright restrictions. Figure 12 includes a screenshot from That’s So Raven 2: Supernatural Style (2005). The image shows the ‘Fashion Rehearsal,’ wherein the gamer can check the judges’ rating of her outfit via the coloured meter.

In addition to analyzing the elements that are included in these games, it is important to consider those that are excluded. While all three games feature a virtual shopping mall setting, and, further, require gamers to collect and utilize game items, the relationship between consumerism and economic status is rarely addressed. Only one of the three games that I analyzed included game items representative of money. But, in this game (That’s So Raven), while the gamer must have money in order to ‘purchase’ character biographies and photographs for her virtual scrapbook, she can collect clothing items and accessories even if she does not possess money. Thus, unlike many
mainstream games wherein money is crucial to the acquisition of clothing, food, weapons and, ultimately, to survival, in the worlds of these girl games there is no such relationship. While consumption represents a central theme in each of these games, the game narratives and structures work to obscure the assumption of middle to middle-upper class social positioning.

The games' depictions of 'friendly' female protagonists surrounded by expansive homes (Figure 13), and who have access to extensive wardrobes construct such luxuries and privileges as 'normal,' desirable, and ultimately attainable. Hopkins (2002) suggests that "[t]he rapid rise from poverty and/or obscurity to wealth and status is a dream held by millions of girls around the world" (Hopkins, 2002, p. 59). For contemporary female gamers, these video game portrayals can thus represent "stor[ies] of wish-fulfillment" (p. 56).

Figure 13 – This figure has been removed because of copyright restrictions. Figure 13 includes a screenshot from Hannah Montana (2006) that shows Miley's/Hannah Montana's home in the game. The home is a large white mansion, located on an oceanfront beach.
'The Celebrity’ and ‘the Consumer of Celebrity’

As indicated by the previous discussions concerning subject positions, other-evaluation and other-definition represent significant elements of all three games. The gamer is prompted to aspire to, or take up, celebrity subject positions within the virtual school, fashion, or music industries depicted in these gameworlds. Hopkins (2002) identifies and discusses this relatively recent trend in popular girl-targeted media when she suggests that

[t]he new girl hero is a girl in pursuit of media visibility, public recognition and notoriety. She wants to be somebody and ‘live large’. In the postmodern world, fame has replaced marriage as the imagined means to realizing feminine dreams. Romance may be an attractive after-effect, but fame is the ultimate girl fantasy (p. 4).

In Lizzie McGuire, the Homecoming Queen title is the ultimate prize and thus this position is framed as aspirational. The text on the video game cover communicates to the gamer that she should “win the affection of the student body and become popular enough to become Homecoming Queen.” The game’s sub-goals further reiterate the underlying narrative that peer-approval, rather than personal achievement, is foundational to success within the virtual school. At the end of each mini-game the gamer hears an audio recording of audience noise. If the gamer fails to complete the task, she hears a crowd express regret and disapproval. If she succeeds, she hears applause and cheers. It is important to recognize that the audio recording played at these points in the game features primarily masculine voices. Thus, while the gamer’s progress is actually related to her gaming skills, she is made aware of an imaginary, predominantly masculine audience that confirms her successes and/or failures within the gameworld.

The gamer is also encouraged to engage with a celebrity subject position in That’s
So Raven. One of the central goals of this game is to design a fashion line and present it at a fashion show that represents the final segment of the game. After the gamer designs an outfit for Raven to model, she watches a cut-scene wherein her avatar walks down a runway as photographers take pictures, and judges hold up score-cards to rate her outfit (Figure 14). The final game screens consist of a newspaper or magazine page that features a photograph of Raven in the gamer’s outfit. I argue that this conclusion connects individual efforts related to the physical performance of femininity (via fashion) with public recognition, admiration, and fame. The final game screen also includes the phrase “Believe in yourself and you too can be a Superstar! Congratulations.” (Figure 15). While the gamer has just completed the game by acting as and through Raven, the final message of the game directly addresses the gamer, and simultaneously presumes and endorses her celebrity-related hopes and desires.

Figure 14 – This figure has been removed because of copyright restrictions. Figure 14 includes one of the final game screens from That’s So Raven 2: Supernatural Style (2005). The gamer’s score is displayed on a virtual newspaper cover.
In *Hannah Montana*, the gamer adopts an avatar that “has a dual identity – a normal teen by day, famous pop star Hannah Montana by night” (Buena Vista, 2006, p. 3). In this way, unlike the other two games under discussion, the Hannah Montana gamer can assume the subject position of an established ‘superstar.’ Miley, the ordinary teen avatar, transforms into the extraordinary Hannah avatar when the gamer navigates her into the ‘secret wardrobe.’ In this back stage space, the gamer can design and assemble outfits and watch the normal, identifiable Miley turn into a blonde bombshell celebrity. Thus, rather than achieving superstar status by participating in activities involved in becoming a musical entertainer (such as playing the guitar that sits in the corner of the virtual dressing room), the game’s narrative and structure seems to communicate that consumption and ‘dressing the part’ is one of the main factors that separates the everyday girl from the famous girl. In this way, Buena Vista has managed to “combin[e] the allure of [...] star image with the popular ordinary teen themes of surviving school” (Folkins, 2005, p. 55). While the girl gamer experiences Miley’s daily struggles with school and with her peers, she also gains the opportunity to enter through “the secret wardrobe doors” (Buena Vista, 2006, p. 17) into the world of celebrity.
Walkerdine (1984) suggests that in order to understand cultural forms, practices, and the production of girls as subjects, one must move beyond examining “series of roles or simple identities or images which are fitted on to girls” (p. 182) to consider “the production, fixing, and canalization, of desire” (p. 183). I am suggesting that the clothes, accessories, lifestyles, popularity, and celebrity made available to the girl gamer in these virtual ‘girl’ gameworlds, can contribute to fantasies related to hetero-gendered femininity, romance, and class mobility.

The importance of feminine celebrity is further emphasized within the games when gamers are encouraged to consume celebrity-related information. In the special features sections in two of the games, gamers can ‘unlock’ or ‘purchase’ material regarding the video game characters, or the actors who play the characters on the related television programs. It has been suggested that contemporary pre-teens and teens increasingly prefer stories dealing with the actual lives of stars, as opposed to stories based on fictional romantic heroines. McRobbie (1991) has recognized the “facts, snippets and informational fragments” in teen magazines, and suggests that they contribute to the “endless flow of information about the stars – about their lives, their future plans, their next record, their next tour, the houses they hope to buy and so on” (p. 144).

From my perspective, the ‘bios’ and ‘profiles’ included in the ‘girl’ video games are strikingly similar to the star blurbs included in teen magazines (Figure 16). These texts provide details about the character’s/star’s past, zodiac sign, accomplishments, and hobbies. In other words, while the profiles address the stars’ extraordinary
accomplishments in the television and music industries, they also highlight their more everyday interests and activities such as music, sports, cooking, animals etc. (Figure 18).

Figure 16 – This figure has been removed because of copyright restrictions. Figure 16 includes two examples of actor ‘bios’ in That’s So Raven 2: Supernatural Style. The bio on the left provides the gamer with information regarding Raven’s ‘extraordinary’ accomplishments. The bio on the right provides the gamer with more ‘ordinary,’ everyday information about her.

The incorporation of these two types of information reflect Dyer’s (1979, 1986) early identification of the ordinary/extraordinary paradox in ‘celebrity culture.’ The profiles provided within That’s So Raven and Hannah Montana work to construct a feeling of closeness and identification with the female icons who are framed “not just as distant, empty ideals but as imagined friends and mentors” (Hopkins, 2002, p 4). Similar to the teen magazines analyzed by McRobbie (1991), the games depict these teen celebrities and, following, teen celebrity as accessible. In this way, the (feminine) desires to learn about stars and, further, to transform into a star are simultaneously endorsed, encouraged, and fulfilled.

Contemporary scholars of ‘celebrity’ have identified a shift in audience expectations and responses to stars, evidenced by the increasing focus on stars’ ‘everyday’ personalities, activities, and interests (Holmes, 2005). In his historical analysis of ‘celebrity culture,’ Gamson (1994) identifies two common stories of celebrity that have coexisted for over a century. The first attributes celebrity to talent and
accomplishment, and the second to a "publicity apparatus." He also notes that "Over the course of this century, however, the balance between them has shifted dramatically" (Gamson, 1994, p. 17). Holmes (2005) summarizes this development in the following way:

[...] While, for example, in the Classical Hollywood period, the emphasis may no longer have been on 'greatness or great 'genius,' explanations of fame still peddled narratives pivoting on conceptions of a 'natural rise.' [...] However, particularly in the post-war period with its de-centralisation of stardom and explosion of media outlets, the increasing visibility of the publicity machine itself began to pose a threat to such myths (p. 15).

The interest and pursuit of information about stars' personalities and everyday activities was apparent in popular texts of the 1940s, concerning stars such as Bette Davis and Ginger Rogers (Gamson, 1994). But contemporary 'celebrity culture' involves an increasing public awareness of how money and other resources are employed in the construction of celebrities. Today's audience participates in judging the worthiness of celebrities as it works to decipher between a star's image and 'authentic self' (Dyer, 1985, 1979; Gamson, 1994; Holmes, 2005; Ferris, 2007).

It is noteworthy that all three game titles are eponymous with the female characters and/or actresses. Further, two of the three lead fictional characters featured in the 'girl games' under discussion have the same first name as the actresses who play them on television. I suggest that this crossover works to blur the lines between the 'real' teen icons, and the fictional teen girls they represent on-screen. While Raven Symone (Raven Baxter), Hilary Duff (Lizzie McGuire), and Miley Cyrus/ Hannah Montana (Miley Stewart/ Hannah Montana) may possess talent, I argue that the influential role of concentrated media coverage in contemporary celebrity production is evidenced by the
girls' extensive appearances in numerous (fictional and 'biographical') transmediated texts (Holmes, 2005).

'The Best Friend': 'The Tom Boy' and 'the Air Head'

I will now address several additional gendered subject positions that I recognized within the games. While these positions are subsidiary, they are apparent and, from my perspective, are significant because they can help gamers to actively negotiate and potentially question the dominant game narratives. I am suggesting that these subject positions reflect the 'slippage' that Gailey (1993) acknowledges as existing within popular video games and, further, the multiple and contradictory discourses related to contemporary tween and teen femininity.

While girl gamers must adopt the physical persona of the main protagonist within each gameworld, the inclusion of other, secondary female characters provides additional feminine subject positions with which the gamer can identify. Two of the video games incorporate a 'best friend,' non-player female character who differs from the protagonist with respect to physical appearance, personality, priorities, and interests. I argue that the different iterations of 'the best friend,' including 'the tom boy' and 'the air head,' reflect the "historically and socially specific discursive production of conflicting and competing meanings" (Weedon, 1987, p. 86) with respect to feminine subjectivities.

Lilly is a best-friend character who appears in the Hannah Montana game. Like Hannah Montana, Lilly is depicted as thin, with long, straight, blonde hair and blue-eyes. However, her manner of dress presents her as a less 'feminine' female. Lilly is rendered in jeans, runners, a loose fitting long-sleeved t-shirt, with a short-sleeved t-shirt layered
over top (Figure 17). Further, the only accessory that Lilly wears is a red toque. Lilly’s look is noticeably more casual and athletic than the lead character’s form-fitting and briefer feminine attire. Buena Vista’s video game manual seems to frame Lilly’s way of being a girl as ‘different’ in its description of her as “adventurous, athletic, a tomboy [who] rides a skateboard” (Buena Vista, 2006).

Figure 17 – This figure has been removed because of copyright restrictions. Figure 17 includes a screenshot from Hannah Montana (2006) that shows the ‘fashionable’ Miley and the ‘Tom Boy’ best friend character, Lilly.

At various times throughout the game the gamer must engage in timed race challenges, wherein her avatar rides a skateboard, scooter, or roller blades through an obstacle course. Notably, she can only perform these activities as Lilly (Figure 18). In this way, Lilly is portrayed as sportier than Miley, who is noticeably absent during these game segments. Further, the centering of Lilly in these athletic competitions seems to speak to Miley’s lack of interest in, or skills, related to performing these types of traditionally ‘masculine’ activities. This subject position thus seems to problematize ‘the competitor’ position I previously identified. While Miley is depicted as engaging in
competitive verbal confrontations, by omission from the races she is portrayed as
disinterested in more independent, athletic forms of competition.

Figure 18 – This figure has been removed because of copyright restrictions. Figure 18 includes a screenshot from Hannah Montana (2006) wherein the gamer completes the race challenge via the Lilly avatar.

Buena Vista manages the relationship between Miley and Lilly in a revealing manner. If at any point during the game the gamer needs assistance or guidance, she can click on a help icon (a question mark symbol) and Lilly appears to provide advice to Miley and, thus, to the gamer. Notably, when Lilly appears on screen she is shown to step out of the Miley avatar. This technical decision produces a dramatic visual result; the gamer witnesses a ‘tom boy,’ or a more ‘masculine’ female persona emerge directly from the corporeal representation of an ideally ‘feminine’ character.

McRobbie (1991) recognizes the manner in which popular media producers often manage different and contrasting feminine identities by attributing them to separate characters in the narrative. She goes on to say that “[t]his splitting allows the reader to see her own internal but coexisting divisions made manifest but also handled – and therefore resolved – through the distinct personalities of the girls” (McRobbie, 1991, p. 208). The virtual ‘splitting’ off of the ‘alternative’ Lilly from the ideal Miley seems to acknowledge and produce contrasting discourses of teen girlhood.
The ‘best-friend’ subject position is also recognizable within That’s So Raven. In contrast to Raven, her best friend Chelsea is tall, thin, White and has red hair. Dialogue, facial expressions, and physical gestures also help to reveal several additional differences between the protagonist and her best friend. Unlike fashion-conscious Raven, Chelsea is more interested in the environment and animals than she is in consumer culture. Further, while Raven utilizes slang and sarcasm throughout the game dialogue, Chelsea’s dialogue portrays her as being slower and more easily confused. Guthrie (2005) addresses the inclusion of ‘air head’ characters within tween-aimed media. She suggests that while the main characters “are always smart (though not the ‘brain’)” (p. 23), she recognizes that “the tween protagonists’ best girlfriends are always at least slightly less smart/or attractive than the main characters” (Guthrie, 2005, p. 88). So, while the girl gamer might identify with Raven’s quick thinking and witty outlook, she might also appreciate Chelsea’s more accessible nature.

Another important observation with respect to ‘the best friend’ positions within these games is that while Raven has a White best female friend in the game, Lizzie and Miley (as White characters) do not have visible minority best friends. So while White gamers can identify with the White ‘fashionable female’ or a White ‘best friend’ position, visible minority gamers are not offered this opportunity. In this way ‘racial parity’ within these teen narratives is problematic (Guthrie, 2005).

While the best friend characters incorporated into these two games can be seen to offer additional subject positions to the gamer, I argue that these characters also serve as ‘foils’ for the protagonists (Guthrie, 2005) and, thus, work to underline and reconfirm the
protagonists’ ways of performing femininity as ‘normal’ and ‘ideal.’ Further, Buena Vista’s inclusion of such multiple, contradictory subject positions, while unequally showcased within the game narratives, allows for the engagement of a more diverse, thus larger, target group (Weedon, 1987).

‘The Bad Girl’

At different points throughout the three games under discussion, the protagonists engage in assertive and/or defiant behaviours that counter other elements of ‘the ideal teen,’ particularly those associated with ‘the helper’ subject positions. These behaviours stimulate the consideration: “‘[g]ood girls’ are not always good – but where and how is their badness lived?” (Walkerdine, 1984, p. 182). Unlike past media representations wherein the ‘good girl’ and ‘bad girl’ discourses were consistently constructed as ‘mutually exclusive’ (Walkerdine, 1984), contemporary ‘girl heroes’ often re/present what has been referred to as a “new mode of femininity” (Hopkins, 2002, p. 2). In Hopkins’s (2002) words, “[i]n contrast to the invariably pro-social, altruistic behaviour of the classic heroine, the new girl hero may exhibit verbal and physical aggression” (p. 6).

Several of the mini games in Lizzie McGuire require the gamer to engage the avatar in physically aggressive behaviours in order to progress through the game. Within these episodes, the gamer uses a sling-shot, or throws objects such as a paper air plane, school books, pies, and other cafeteria food to defeat her opponent (most often Kate), and to successfully complete the level. Similar examples of physical aggression are also evident in That’s So Raven. At numerous points throughout this game, the gamer, through Raven, must engage in some form of defiant behaviour to defy authority figures.
For example, when confronted by a security officer she is presented with two options. She can put her avatar into a costume (most often an employee uniform) in order to sneak into restricted areas within the virtual mall, zoo, convention centre, and the stadium (Figure 19). If she chooses not to disguise her avatar, she must physically confront the male security officer. In these scenarios, the gamer rushes to press a combination of buttons so that the officer releases Raven. Figure 20 depicts the officer’s reaction to Raven’s forceful physical resistance.

Figure 19 – This figure has been removed because of copyright restrictions. Figure 19 includes a screenshot from That’s So Raven 2: Supernatural Style (2005) wherein Raven wears a sci-fi convention costume in order to pass by a security officer and enter into a ‘restricted’ area.

Figure 20 – This figure has been removed because of copyright restrictions. Figure 20 is a screenshot from That’s So Raven 2: Supernatural Style (2005) wherein the security officer reacts to a physical confrontation with Raven.

‘Bad girl’ modes of behaviour included in Hannah Montana seem to directly contradict and problematize ‘the helper’ subject position. In level one the gamer must retrieve and return homework to a character named Rico in order to gather information
from him. When Miley (and the gamer) learns that Rico enlisted another peer to complete his homework, she announces that she has thrown his papers into the ocean and declares: “No more cheating for you. Toodles, Rico.” While this excerpt works to emphasize the protagonist’s disapproval of Rico’s cheating, and thus her own morality and integrity, it also represents a moment of resistance. The ‘helper’ subject position is complicated as the protagonist is framed not as a mere passive heroine, but as an assertive heroine with limits to her generosity.

I suggest that the humour, slang, and sarcasm included in the game dialogue of That’s So Raven and Hannah Montana can be interpreted as another means by which girl gamers might question normative expectations of feminine behaviour. In these games the avatars use contemporary colloquial expressions and insults such as “Grody,” “Oh Snap!” and “Gruesome twosome.” In their study wherein middle school girls created their own video games, Denner, Bean, and Werner (2005) noted that the young gamers often designed scenarios that similarly “reject[ed] the good girl image” (p. 6). The authors go on to suggest that the girls “use humour and defiance of authority to play with gender stereotypes and reject the expectation that girls are always well-behaved” (p. 8).

From my perspective, while the protagonists in these ‘girl games’ are framed primarily as kind-hearted, helpful, and thus appropriately ‘feminine,’ they are also portrayed as self-directed and assertive. The moments of boldness and defiance point to contradictory and competing feminine subject positions within the games, and offer “sufficient slippage to make playing them exciting” (Gailey, 1993, p.82).
Conclusion

In this chapter I have examined several of the gendered subject positions and modes of femininity that I recognized within the three ‘girl games,’ by analyzing some of the ludic as well as representational elements of the games. Carr (2006) suggests:

the meaning of gender in a game needs to be examined in terms of its rules, and in terms of representation. Yet meanings are also created through processes of use, interpretation and reception – which implies that the meaning of a particular representation could also be investigated as it emerges during play, at the hands of a socially and culturally situated user (p. 166-167).

In the following chapter, I will shift to my discussion of the interviews I conducted with eight girl participants.
CHAPTER THREE

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE SCREEN: CONTEXTUALIZING GIRLS' GAMING

Methods

The second component of my research entails in-depth, semi-structured interviews with eight girls aged eight to thirteen years, who acknowledged some interest and experience with video gaming and who had access to a video game console. As previously discussed, I attempted to generate my purposive sample by way of recruitment: advertisements in local community centres, libraries, and malls, but ultimately gained access to all of my participants by way of personal referral, or the snowball method. I provided each participant with a $20 gift certificate to a local mall. Because of the age of my participants, I gained written informed consent from their parents/legal guardians as well as verbal and written assent from the girls themselves. Confidentiality was explicitly defined and guaranteed. I conducted five individual interviews with one girl at a time, and one group interview with three friends. In this case, a group format was most convenient due to scheduling and to parental and participant comfort.

I selected this age group for several reasons. Like the majority of ‘girl-games’ recently released on the video game market, the video games that I selected are all rated ‘E,’ for ‘Everyone’ (six years and over), by Entertainment Soft Ware Rating Board, the organization responsible for officially rating video games (ESRB, 2005). However, because the player of these games must navigate and progress through different levels, including timed speed challenges, the cognitive and motor skills required by the game are more appropriate for gamers aged ten years and older (Disney, 2006). Further, my assumption is that the ‘teen’ storylines and characters featured in these three games are
most interesting to pre-teen or tween gamers. By selecting the age range of eight to thirteen years I thus encountered girls with various levels of gameplay ability, and different experiences related to performing femininity.

After each interview session, I either transcribed the interview in its entirety, or reviewed the audio recording and took notes in order to make any changes I felt necessary to the interview script before I conducted the next scheduled interview. My analysis of the transcripts entailed coding, wherein I familiarized myself with each transcript by reading through and summarizing each section in the margins. I then noted when similar themes emerged across transcripts, and ‘chunked’ or sorted these excerpts into separate documents. My identification of themes was related to the structure of the interview script, which consisted of four sections: ‘contextual information,’ ‘games,’ ‘characters,’ and ‘application.’ I thus looked for themes across transcripts that corresponded with these general topic areas. These sections allowed me to progress in my information gathering from ‘fact’ based, concrete topics (such as the average time a participant spent gaming, her usual location for gameplay, etc.), to more demanding, subjective topics related to the girls’ opinions.

Because I hoped to gain an understanding of the girls’ perspectives on the re/construction of ‘the teen girl’ in the video games, I looked for patterns across transcripts related to their recognition and negotiation of feminine subject positions. This line of analysis was related to my review of related literature (Weedon, 1987), and entailed consideration of similarities/differences in the girls’ commentaries regarding their engagement with game activities, characters, character traits, and rules of play. I also studied the girls’ comments on the screenshots that I incorporated as visual stimuli.
into the interviews, and that reflected subject positions that I considered meaningful
during my readings of the games. I was careful to maintain intact copies of all transcripts
in order to avoid losing track of the contextual position and related meaning of the
excerpts.

Before I enter into a discussion of my findings, I think it is important to reiterate
that this chapter and Chapter Four include my analysis of the girls’ interpretations of their
experiences with these games. In these chapters, I explicitly indicate when I am referring
to the girls’ perspectives and when I am referring to my own. In this way, I endeavour to
avoid positioning myself “as the ‘exper[t],’ saying what [the participants] ‘really meant’”
(Lather, 2001, p. 209). I hope that by continuing to “articulat[e] how, how not, and
within what limits” (Fine, 1992, p. 219) I have analyzed the girls’ commentaries within
my thesis, I continue to acknowledge the influential role I have played in both creating
and representing the findings.

In the following section I provide a brief description about the social positionality
of the participants who took part in this study. I gathered this information from forms
that I provided to the participants and their parents. These forms solicited information
regarding the girls’ age, grade level and school, ‘race’/ethnicity, parents’ employment,
and place of residence. In some cases, and for various reasons, the forms were not
completed. The names contained in this discussion are based on pseudonyms created by
the participants.

I think it is important to recognize that while popular discourses provide various
modes of subjectivity, an individual’s access to and/or identification with various subject
positions are “governed by historically specific social factors and the forms of power at
work in a particular society” (Weedon, 1987, p. 95). Thus, relations of power work not only to hierarchize subject positions within discourses, but also to “determine the range of forms of subjectivity immediately open to any individual on the basis of gender, race, class, age and cultural background” (Weedon, 1987, p. 95). Nevertheless, because of the small size of my sample, and the related lack of diversity within my sample, throughout my analysis I do not attempt to link themes with the specifics of the girls’ social positionalities.

The Participants

Melissa

The first girl whom I interviewed was Melissa. Melissa is Asian-Canadian, was eight years old and had just completed grade three at the time of the interview. Melissa lives with her mother, father, and her older brother in a townhouse in Vancouver. Her father is employed by a research institute.

Melissa explained to me that while she played video games on the computer (both online and software games), she did not have regular access to a video game console. According to Melissa, her mother, in particular, did not want to purchase a video game console for fear that the children “would be on there, like, all the time [...]. Instead of doing useful things.” Melissa was able to participate in the project because she borrowed a Nintendo DS console from her neighbour — something she and her brother did from time to time. While Melissa seemed keen to participate, she was rather shy/quiet relative to the other participants.
Luna

Luna was the second participant I interviewed. Luna is European-Canadian, was thirteen years old and had just completed grade seven at the time of the interview. She lives with her mother, father and younger brother in a house in North Vancouver. Her mother works for a mining company and her father advises small business enterprises.

Luna was one of the most confident and talkative participants whom I interviewed. I believe that the rapport that I established with Luna in our discussions prior to the interview contributed to a more comfortable, in-depth, and richer interview session. Luna seemed to understand that I was interested in anything that she had to say about the games, and seemed eager to talk with me. Luna expressed to me that she shared the family computer with her brother, and occasionally borrowed her brother’s GameBoy Advance console.

Hermione

Hermione was the third participant that I interviewed. Hermione is European (French)-Canadian, was twelve years old and had just completed grade seven at the time of the interview. Her mother is a professor at a university and her father is a general manager of a sports organization.

Hermione lives her with mother, father, and older sister in a house in North Vancouver. She told me that she shared a computer and video game console (Play Station) with her older sister. While articulate, Hermione was relatively reserved and quiet in our discussions.
May

May is European-Canadian, was thirteen years old and had just competed grade seven at the time of our interview. Her mother is employed as a dental consultant. May lives with her mother and younger brother in a townhouse in Burnaby.

I interviewed May with her two friends, Kaite and Stacy. May expressed to me that she played video games on her mother’s computer (which she shared with her mom and her brother) and shared a video game console (Play Station) with her younger brother. May was a very confident participant. The interview I conducted with her and her friends was very dynamic. Perhaps because the girls had known each other for many years, they sometimes finished each other’s sentences, and reiterated and reinforced each other’s opinions, while at other times they disagreed with one another. From my observations, May was a leader in this group of friends.

Stacy

Stacy is European-Canadian, was twelve years old and had just completed grade six at the time of the interview. Her mother is a dental assistant and her father is a municipal employee. Stacy lives with her mother, father, and younger brother in Burnaby. I am not sure what type of residence Stacy lived in, because I conducted the group interview at her friend May’s townhouse.

Stacy informed me that she shared a video game console (Play Station) with her younger brother. While slightly less talkative than her friend, May, Stacy seemed self-possessed and sure of herself. She was the only one of the eight participants who freely expressed that she was not very fond of the three video games under discussion.
Kaite

Kaite is European-Canadian, was twelve years old and had just completed grade seven at the time of the interview. Her mother is employed as a bookkeeper/accountant. Kaite lives with her mother and father in Burnaby.

Kaite expressed to me that she shared a computer with her parents and a video game console (Play Station) primarily with her father. Kaite also owned a personal, portable Nintendo DS gaming platform. Although Kaite was obviously comfortable and quite expressive during the interview, she was slightly less assertive than her friends.

Merisa

Merisa is European-Canadian, was ten years old and had just started grade five at the time of the interview. Her mother is not formally employed and her father is self-employed in the computer industry. Merisa lives with her mother and older sister in a house in North Vancouver.

Merisa communicated that she shared a laptop with her older sister (Serina), and had her own Nintendo DS gaming console. Merisa was a confident and talkative participant. She was a keen video game player, and eager to chat with me about her experiences.

Serina

Serina is European-Canadian, was thirteen years old and had just started grade
eight at the time of the interview. Her mother is not formally employed and her father is self-employed in the computer industry. She lives with her mother and younger sister in a house in North Vancouver.

Serina shared a laptop with her younger sister, and had her own Game Boy Advance console. Serina seemed candid and happy to chat with me, though at times appeared to be somewhat self-conscious and thus slightly tentative during our discussion.

Locating Video Games within the Participants' Lives

Time and Space for Gameplay

As specified in my recruitment advertisements, all participants had expressed interest in, and experience with, video games, in addition to access to a video game console. Nevertheless, I had little additional information about the role that video games played in the girls’ everyday lives. In order to gain some related insight, I questioned the participants about their video gaming habits (including time devoted to, and location for game play), and their perspectives on video gaming as a pastime.

Various scholars have attempted to delineate and apply typologies to research participants in order to address variation among gamers, such as time devoted to video gaming. For example, in his study, Fromme (2003) suggests that young gamers (aged nine to thirteen years) generally fall into three categories: ‘non-gamers,’ who have never played video games or used to play but no longer do; ‘casual gamers,’ who play mostly on weekends or just once in a while; and ‘regular gamers’ who play several times a day, everyday, or at least once a week. Carr (2005) makes a distinction between the ‘hardcore gamer,’ who engages in hours of gameplay daily, and the ‘casual gamer,’ who plays less frequently.
Kerr (2005) suggests that "[r]esearch that tries to differentiate between different player types often leads towards overly simplistic categorizations" (p. 7). My participants’ discussions concerning the place of video games in their lives quickly revealed to me that a coherent or ‘non-messy’ narrative (Lather, 1997) about how girls perceive and engage with video games in their everyday lives was an unrealistic and, further, undesirable goal. The girls’ commentaries demonstrated that experiences and perspectives varied from participant to participant. Further, even individual participants referenced shifting behaviours and expressed seemingly contradictory points of view with respect to video games.

While none of the girls with whom I spoke would identify as a ‘hardcore gamer,’ according to my analysis of the transcripts, and most did not even identify as a ‘gamer’ [a term that from many of the girls’ perspectives seemed reserved for “nerdy kids” (Serina) or people who had “like Game Boy, DS, Play station, X Box…everything” (Stacy)], video game play did seem to represent a regular leisure activity for them. Serina suggested that while she played a lot when she was younger, she played less frequently at the time of the interview. She continued to tell me, however, that her participation in the research project encouraged her to dig her old games out of her closet and begin to play again. The time that the other participants devoted to video game play varied: the girls played anywhere from two times a week from between ½ hour to five hours per session, to every day for an hour or more.

In order to further assess the place of video gaming in the girls’ everyday lives I posed questions concerning where, when, and how they tended to access these games. Seven of the eight participants had access to both computers and some type of video
game console (a portable console, a TV console, or both). Melissa was the exception: while she had access to and played video games on the family computer, her access to a video game console (specifically, a Nintendo DS) was via a neighbour. As indicated by Melissa, she borrowed this console “not that often.”

The portability of the recently released handheld game consoles (such as the Game Boy Advance and the Nintendo DS), was identified by the majority of the girls as a convenient and desirable feature. Several of the girls who owned, or had access to, such consoles discussed taking them on family trips or playing in the car on the way to school, and referenced peers who played them during breaks at school.

The majority of the girls I spoke with discussed the need to actively negotiate time and space in which to play video games. Four of the eight girls (Luna, May, Stacy, and Melissa) had brothers with whom they shared computers and/or consoles. One participant (Kaite) shared a console with her father and most often played with her male cousins. Three other participants (Hermione, Serina and Merisa) shared computers and/or game consoles with their sisters.

During a group interview, May and Stacy responded to my question concerning where in their households they most often engage with video games:

C: So when you play games where in the household do you usually play them? Like if you’re in the house?

Stacy: There’s a TV in my brother’s room so that’s where we play – in his room. […]

May: My brother’s room because that’s where the Play Station is always located. Because he likes to play it, so yeah.

C: Yeah? How does it work with sharing do you find?
May: Ohhh. {frustration} My brother is such a bad sharer. And he always gets mad at me because I forget the discs in there. Or like he has a disc in there and he’ll come back and play it and I just take it out and I leave my disc so he knows I’ve been in his room. He’s like “You didn’t ask me”, and I’m like “Well, you know what Mike, I have to play some games too sometimes!”

Kaite: Sometimes she just blames it on me…

Stacy: Well, it’s not… my brother’s not very good at sharing. Because like some are, like, um like one player games so we have to take turns. And that’s the ones I like to play. So, yeah, he’s not very good at sharing. But like when he’s not home that’s when I play it, usually.

Here, both May and Stacy reveal that their ‘family’ video game consoles are located in their brothers’ rooms. Thus, the girls must negotiate both time and space in which to play video games. This causes obvious tension between siblings, and, in particular, frustration for the girls. In order to manage the situation, both girls expressed that they play predominantly when their brothers are outside of the home.

When I asked Melissa how often she plays games on the computer, she described how she accesses her family computer:

Melissa: Um, well my brother goes on every morning, so I try to go on after school.

C: Mhm. What do you mean you ‘try’?

Melissa: Yeah, because my brother sometimes he’s like “I need to use the computer for homework!” [imitating brother in animated, whiney voice] Because I can’t go on the computer when he’s doing homework

C: Right...

Melissa: …even if he’s not using it!

In this way, Melissa addresses how household rules concerning sharing the computer with her older brother determine when and how often she can play video games.
It would be misleading to suggest that the participants who shared video game consoles and computers with female siblings did not experience some degree of frustration. While Merisa (who shares a computer with her older sister, Serina) suggests that sharing is usually uneventful, and when questioned if she gets as much play time as she would like suggests “[y]eah, usually,” my discussion with Hermione revealed a different scenario. Further, at one point in the interview Hermione described how her older sister manages to play more frequently than she does: “[laughs] It normally just ends up with us yelling at each other. But then…it normally ends up her just playing it, and then I’ll watch and then I’ll end up eventually playing it. So.” Nevertheless I think it is important to recognize that in these two households, wherein female children share computers and video game consoles, the shared equipment is kept in communal rooms. Based on her findings, Walkerdine (2007) suggests that parents’ regulative strategies related to video game play are strongly gendered. She comments that, while parents often cite their daughters’ lack of interest in gaming as the main reason they do not regulate the girls’ play, “in fact girls are strongly regulated against game playing” (Walkerdine, 2007, p. 210), and, more specifically, video game consoles in the home are most often purchased for sons. Nevertheless, because I did not interview the girls’ parents, I cannot presume to question the (conscious or sub-conscious) reasons behind the placement of video game consoles within their homes.

Ambivalent Perspectives on Gaming

In Walkerdine’s (2007) exploration of the “complex positioning of girls with
respect to games” (p. 209), she recognizes that there can be an element of ambivalence in girls’ attitudes and behaviours toward gameplay. Throughout the course of my interviews, several girls seemed to express contradictory perspectives on the role of video games in their lives. At different points, participants enthusiastically suggested “I do play computer games a lot,” “I play a lot of Play Station games,” and “I kind of play a lot of Play Station games.” They further described different video games as “exhilarating,” “I can’t stop playing,” “it’s really addicting,” “I liked every part [of the game],” “it was really good.” However, at other times, the girls seemed to contradict and/or minimize their interest in gaming. After they expressed frustration related to negotiating for video gameplay time, I asked May and Stacy whether they get as much play time as they would like. They responded as follows:

May: Uh not that much. But it doesn’t really matter to me, ummm...yeah. I’m o.k. with that, I have other things to do.

C: Mhm. Yeah?

Stacy: Yeah it’s just like May, I have better things to do than play video games. [giggles]

Thus, while the girls expressed that they enjoy gaming and become frustrated when they are prevented from playing, they also indicated that they have “better things to do than play video games.” These seemingly contradictory sentiments seem to reveal some ambivalence with respect to the place of video games in their lives.

Serina and Hermione seemed to similarly point to the uncertain and shifting position of video gaming in their lives when they framed this pastime as a sort of transitory phase. When I asked Serina for her perspective on why she played video games more often when she was younger, she replied: “I think as you get older you get
more preoccupied with other stuff.” Hermione similarly addressed video gaming as a passing leisure activity in her life.

C: Do you wish you had a Gameboy? Like, is that something you’d consider buying ever or…?

Hermione: I think so

C: Yeah? What about it do you think would be good to have?

Hermione: Because it’s so like, small, and you can bring it everywhere. So, yeah.

[...]
C: Do you think you’ll ever end up getting one?

Hermione: I don’t think I will, cuz I don’t think I’ll have as much interest in video games when I get older.

In this way, while Hermione expresses some interest in purchasing a portable video game console, she ultimately suggests that she doubts she will purchase one because she anticipates her interest in video gaming will wane as she ‘gets older.’

I am arguing that these discussions with the participants revealed that video games do not fit into their lives in uncomplicated or unproblematic ways. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that video gaming represents a regular leisure activity for them. Further, as indicated by Carr (2005), while “[h]ardcore gamers might be more committed, […] it does not follow that they are more representative or more credible than their casual counterparts” (p. 468).

“[T]hey’ll be like ‘oh, win this video game’”: Transmedia Intertextuality and Girls’ Entrypoints to the ‘Girl’ Games

In addition to analyzing video gaming as a pastime within the participants’ lives, it is important to consider the girls’ entrypoints to the three games under discussion.
Games have their own dimensions, distinct from those of other media forms [...] But games are also social-cultural products, involved in the broad processes through which meanings are circulated in the societies in which they are produced and consumed. Games do not exist in a vacuum [...] They often draw upon or produce material that has social, cultural or ideological resonances, whether these are explicit or implicit and whether they can be understood as reinforcing, negotiating or challenging meanings or assumptions generated elsewhere in society (King and Krzywinska, 2006, p. 168).

In her study concerning the commercial development and success of, as well as children’s responses to, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (1984), Kinder (1991) suggests that while transmedia intertextuality was present in television and radio of the 1940s and 1950s, “by the 1980s this intertextuality and its commodification had been greatly elaborated and intensified” (p. 40). With the ongoing development and increasing accessibility of technology, as well as the expanse and influence of contemporary conglomerates such as the Walt Disney Corporation, it now seems particularly important to situate my participants within the surrounding transmediated environment of children’s cultural products (Kinder, 1991; Kearney, 2004; King & Krzywinska, 2006; Carr et al., 2006).

As noted in Chapter Two, all three of the video games under discussion are based on tween-aimed characters and narratives from established, girl-targeted Disney television shows. Thus, when analyzing gamers’ reactions to such contemporary video games it is important to consider some of the different discourses directly and indirectly referenced by the games. Carr (2006) suggests:

Each player is a culturally and socially situated subject who is manipulating a keyboard or a console control [...] The game may overtly reference non-game texts [...] or other, non-computer games [...]. Images or figures from within the game may reappear in other contexts. [...] For these reasons, part of the meaning of a game resides in its relationship to wider cultural contexts (p. 165-166).
Early in the research, I began to recognize the significance of the transmediated nature of these video games. After one participant saw the games that she would be playing for the study, she questioned whether I worked for the 'Family Channel.' In this way, the participant immediately recognized the association between the 'Family' or Disney Channel television shows, and the game. As I proceeded with interviews, I became increasingly aware of the ways in which the transmediated intertextuality of *Hannah Montana, That's So Raven,* and *Lizzie McGuire* influenced the girls’ experiences with these games. According to my analysis of these discussions, the “network of intertextuality constructed around” (Kinder, 1991, p. 122) the popular, tween-aimed fictional characters and narratives, as well as the associated teen celebrities, was a factor that helped shape the participants' understandings of, and engagement with the games.

**Previous Exposure**

Other authors have acknowledged gamers' recognition of the appeal of transmediated cultural products such as video games (Kinder, 1991). In addition to expressing their enjoyment of transmediated texts, the eight girls with whom I spoke also expressed awareness of some of the implications surrounding the conglomerated status of video game production companies, and the ‘branding’ of artifacts by teen icons (Guthrie, 2005). Every participant recognized that Buena Vista Games, the video games’ production company, was a faction of the Walt Disney Corporation. When I asked the participants if they were familiar with the video games before playing them for my project, many of the girls quickly transitioned into a discussion concerning their past and/or current engagement with the related television programs.
Luna: Yeah I used to watch it...

C: The game...?

Luna: Oh, the game? I used to watch the show.

C: O.k.

Luna: And then, she became... and then she ... Raven did a thing, and then she started promoting games on the channel that they played the show. So I heard about it. Like, it was like if you enter the contest you can win a free That’s So Raven game and that’s when I first heard about it.

May and Stacy similarly slipped into a discussion concerning their exposure to the games via the Disney television shows.

C: So had you heard about or seen any of the three games?

May: Yeah. I’d seen the Raven one and I think maybe the Lizzie. But I haven’t watched the Family Channel in a long time, so I can’t really.... Because it’s usually on that channel. And I did hear about Hannah Montana cuz....

When asked to expand on the manner in which she had heard about the games, May continued:

May: Um, sometimes after the shows they’ll like play it. Or, like, you can like win stuff on the channel, like they’ll be like “Oh, win this video game.” Or they’ll promote it on it. So sometimes watching I’ll be like “Oh, hey, that looks kinda cool.”

C: Yeah? How about you two? [to the two other participants]

Stacy: Yeah, like May, because I used to watch Family like a lot. And then that’s when like I think the games came out and stuff. So I saw that quite a lot, like, after the shows.

Kaite: I saw like two of them. Like the same thing.

In these excerpts, the girls reveal that they were made aware of the video games through transmedia advertising, and invitations to enter contests in particular, on the ‘Family’ or Disney Channel. Luna seems to further demonstrate her familiarity with Raven’s
established persona as a teen celebrity when she references Raven’s evolution from a television actress/character to a video game protagonist and, following, a promoter of the Disney product.

I felt it was also important to discern whether, and to what degree, the participants were familiar with other transmedia iterations of the tween-aimed characters, stories, and associated teen celebrities outside the realms of television and video games. Every participant expressed some related knowledge. In my interview with May, she referenced *The Lizzie McGuire Movie* (2003) and stated “[t]he Lizzie McGuire movie – I loved that. Oh my gosh!” Kaite similarly revealed her familiarity with this movie and associated music when she added “Oh yeah, I bought the movie soundtrack to that!”

Luna and Merisa described their exposure to, and experiences with, the movies and music related to the established narratives and icons, as well as their understandings of Disney’s transmedia distribution techniques.

Luna: Um, well, because what happens is the channel where *That’s So Raven* was playing was called the Disney Channel. And then that’s where they’d play... have Disney Channel music and then they had Disney Channel productions, so they would play them online. I mean, on TV. And she made a movie called *The Cheetah Girls* and *The Cheetah Girls 2*. And that..., and I saw *The Cheetah Girls*, the original on chan...the...TV. And then my friend and I had a sleepover and we rented it again.

And later on:

Luna: Um, I don’t have any of her CDs, but I heard her sing once. Because there was... on the channel that they show the show um she, they play little music videos during the breaks sometimes and I saw a couple of her music videos there. [...] And then at Claire’s, the...there’s a store...the store, blah, the store called Claire’s, um, and they have like Disney channel songs playing. And so sometimes you hear Raven in there.

Merisa: Um, well I just listen to the music on TV [...]. [U]sually on Family Channel. Music videos... They just randomly play. So. It’s mostly Hannah
Montana but sometimes That’s So Raven and sometimes Lizzie McGuire [...]. Um, [they usually play the music videos] after shows or in between shows. Um, but usually late at night or early in the morning. Or...middle.

In this way, May, Kaite, Luna and Merisa spoke to their respective engagement with the teen characters and stars via television, movies, DVDs, music, music videos, movie soundtracks and even at a local shopping mall. Luna went further to explicitly identify and individually name several of Disney’s multimedia factions, including its music and movie production companies. Another revealing element of this discussion concerns Luna’s reference to the store Claire’s. Following this interview, I did further research and discovered that Claire’s is affiliated with the Disney Corporation and thus sells the accessories and cosmetic lines inspired by the popular Disney television shows. Notably, Luna’s cross-media awareness and literacy is revealed when she describes how she has heard ‘Disney channel songs’ and Raven, in particular, while in the Claire’s store.

Engagement with the Video Games

During the course of the interviews, it became increasingly apparent that the girls’ past experiences with other transmedia texts influenced their recognition of, and engagement with, the feminine subject positions offered by the video games. During my analysis of the games I personally perceived the characterizations of the protagonists and the non-player, secondary characters to be fairly flat and hollow. As indicated by Carr (2006), “[m]any avatars are simulations of people – and simulations are simplified models. Simplification involves leaving things out. The inclusions and exclusions built into a simulation might reflect cultural and social values (or biases, or assumptions), as well as game design decisions” (p. 166). With this in mind, I was surprised by the degree to which the participants seemed engaged by the characters’ personalities and interests. I
am arguing that when my participants referenced their knowledge of the teen characters derived from other media, their appreciation of the games’ characters was thereby fleshed out and, following, their identification of and with the subject positions was augmented.

In my discussion with Luna, she suggested that the best-friend character Chelsea was her favourite character in That’s So Raven, even though she was a minor, non-player character.

Luna: She’s not so much in it... And then she’s not really in the 2nd or 4th one (levels), so she had a little role. But I thought it was like the TV character and she was good.

When I asked Luna to elaborate and to identify what she liked about the Chelsea character, she continued:

Luna: Um. Well, I'm a vegetarian and so is she. And she likes the environment and [indistinguishable] and stuff and I really like stuff like that too.

C: Did you learn about that in the game or the TV show or both...?

Luna: Um. More the TV show, like I knew she didn’t eat meat from one of the episodes. And then in another episode she entered the talent show and she was singing about ‘save the trees’ or something like that. So, that was it too.

Luna thus ascribed characteristics to Chelsea that are not addressed at any point in the game narrative. While in the second level of the game Chelsea exclaims that she is excited to be at the zoo, this is the extent of the game’s reference to her passion for animals and the environment. Further, while Chelsea is depicted in the television show as a vegetarian who is involved in animal rights and environmental activism, these traits are not included in the game’s representation of her. I am suggesting that, in this way, Luna’s previous exposure to the That’s So Raven television show influenced her interpretation of Chelsea, and her identification with this secondary character within the
gameworld. While Chelsea did not have a large part in the game, Luna seemed most engaged by her.

In a group interview, Kaite and Stacy explained to me why the ‘best-friend’ character, Lilly, was their favourite character in the Hannah Montana game.

Kaite: Well like her clothing is unique, and she doesn’t really lie to people and that [indistinguishable] either.

Stacy: And she like, she’s very caring, like in the shows too. And um she’s really funny too, in the shows. And she has a different style. Her own like little style going on. So yeah.

Here, Kaite references qualities evident in both the video game and television texts, while Stacy’s reflections are based on what she has gathered about Lilly from watching the television show.

In summary, I am suggesting that the participants’ active interpretations of the games were obviously and inevitably related to their position within a media-rich culture wherein they have engaged with different iterations or recyclings of the characters and narratives from That’s So Raven, Lizzie McGuire, and Hannah Montana. My discussions with the girls revealed that every participant entered into video game play with some prior knowledge, based on exposure to related texts within the realms of television, music, movies, and fashion. I am arguing that in the cases of Luna, Kaite, and Stacy, the girls were able to identify with the less developed, secondary ‘best friend’ positions, in part, because of their familiarity with the television series.

King and Krzywinska (2006) address the limited development of video game characters when they suggest that characters “are often kept relatively undefined, leaving plenty of space to be occupied by the player” (p. 185). I maintain that with respect to the
‘girl-games’ under discussion, Buena Vista assumes and relies on the player’s previous understandings of the player-characters and non-player characters to occupy some of this ‘space.’ In this way, such transmedia intertextuality “positions young spectators […] to recognize, distinguish, and combine different popular genres and their respective iconography that cut across movies, television, comic books, commercials, video games, and toys” (Kinder, 1991, p. 47).

Conclusion

It is important to recognize that while no participant explicitly criticized or problematized the transmediated production of the games and associated artifacts, every participant recognized that Buena Vista Games was a faction of the Walt Disney Corporation. Further, the participants revealed their awareness of the intentional, aggressive transmedia marketing and distribution strategies used by Disney in order to promote the video games. The Disney Corporation’s continued growth and convergence with other North American and global multimedia production companies have thus secured its position as a dominant producer of ‘girlhood.’ The popular association of Disney with “childhood, family, fantasy, and fun” (Wasko, 2001, p. 3) has also contributed to the wide dissemination and acceptance of Disney’s representations of ‘the teen girl,’ while forestalling other, potentially more transgressive, representations within the video game community.

Glos and Goldin (1998) conducted interviews with game producers outside the Disney Corporation. These discussions reveal some of the challenges experienced by smaller, lesser known companies, related to gaining the funding and/or influence
necessary to market ‘girl games’ within video game stores, and to reach potential purchasers via advertising. Contemporary girls might not be aware of, or have access to, games that challenge the hegemonic ‘teen femininity’ re/created by Disney. One example of a video game that works to complicate the re/production of social identities and relations is a CD Rom game entitled ‘Runaways,’ produced by Kinder and Harris at the School of Cinema-Television at the University of California (Cassell & Jenkins, 1998). This game encourages the gamer to question commonly accepted binaries when she generates her character by selecting among multiple options for each of the categories of ‘race,’ ‘ethnicity,’ ‘biological sex,’ ‘gender,’ and ‘sexual orientation.’ Games offering such alternative representations have not been able to make significant inroads into the mainstream video game marketplace.

Having addressed my methods of transcript analysis, background information about my eight participants, and some elements of the girls’ gaming habits and entrypoints to the three games under discussion, in the following chapter I conduct a more in-depth analysis of the participants’ re-workings of different feminine subject positions that they perceived within the games.
CHAPTER FOUR

PLAYING (WITH) THE GAME: PARTICIPANTS' RECOGNITION AND RE/WORKING OF FEMININE SUBJECT POSITIONS

"The input of players and their ability to determine the actions of an avatar (to some degree or other) means that, while avatars are characterized, there are important differences between avatars and characters in films and novels. A trait expressed by the game, through dialogue, via gestures or actions, or by an avatar's body, might become either emphasized or irrelevant - depending on the player's actions and priorities. While a partial account of an avatar's meaning is possible, the actualization of the avatar and its traits will vary from player to player, and even session to session" (Carr, 2006, p. 165).

In order to gain a sense of the types of feminine subject positions the participants recognized within the games, I questioned the girls about their favourite and least favourite activities included in the games. Such questions were inspired by my understanding that gender is reenacted and reconfirmed through the (virtual or corporeal) performance of specific activities (Scott, 1992). I thus felt that the girls' perspectives on different game activities would help reveal how they recognized, resisted, re-worked and/or rejected various feminine subject positions within the games. As indicated by Johnson (2006), "[a]ccording to Scott (1992), subjects are constructed through the performance of experiences, and this process is also displayed in the acquisition of experience for characters in video games" (p. 1).

During the interviews, I asked each participant to name her favourite character. I then proceeded to ask what, specifically, she liked and disliked about the character, and if/how she thought she was similar/dissimilar to the character. Additionally, I asked the participant if any of the characters included in the game(s) reminded her of anyone in her real life. My intention was that these questions would allow me to explore how the girls reconciled the virtual representations of 'teenage girlhood' with their lived experiences of
between girlhood. I suggest that the participants’ responses to these questions speak to both the contradictory representations of ‘the teen girl’ included in the games, as well as to the diverse, multiple, and shifting ways in which the participants negotiated the different feminine subject positions, and those available to them in their everyday lives.

“[I]t’s just like, like classic girl fight”: Girls’ Reactions to ‘The Competitor’

All eight participants expressed recognition of the subject position that I termed ‘the competitor,’ although their interpretations and reactions to this position varied. Luna expressed that her favourite element of Lizzie McGuire was the dance competition between the Lizzie avatar, and the opposing female character, Kate, at the end of each game level. She described this game segment in the following way:

It was Lizzie McGuire and she was dancing and then because she wanted to beat Kate. And then so Kate’s head is at the top and she would be like “Oh whatever she’ll make a fool of herself,” and she was like kind of smirking and then once it goes up she’s like “oh she’s getting good.” And then her face goes like down. And then she’s like…and once you win she starts crying. It’s funny. It’s like a cartoon and then she goes... “ghghg” [imitating crying]. It’s like, she’ll start sobbing. So that’s funny.

Serina similarly described her feelings about this virtual competitive interaction.

Referring to Kate’s emotional reaction to losing the dance contest, she stated: “it was just kind of amusing to watch her face change.”

When shown a screenshot of Raven interacting with the opposing female characters that the participants deemed “gangster girls,” “bossy girls,” and “mean” girls, Hermione suggested:

It was kind of funny because, I don’t know, they kind of like if you didn’t roll underneath them they’d hit you. And so, I don’t know, I think it’s just like, like classic girl fight.
Luna, Serina, and Hermione thus expressed that they found these competitive exchanges entertaining. Hermione’s association of competitive game elements with the “classic girl fight,” and Luna’s suggestion that the competition in Lizzie McGuire was “like a cartoon,” demonstrate their familiarity with such depictions of gendered conflict in popular reconstructions of ‘girlhood.’

Other girls with whom I spoke expressed some discomfort with the female competition constructed in the video games under discussion. When I asked Merisa if she would change any part of That’s So Raven, she suggested that she would change the type of interaction between the Raven avatar and the secondary, non-player female characters:

Um, I think I would change the part where you had to like, where there was like these people chasing after you, like those three girls or something. And they kept on like trying to bully you. Yeah, that’s probably what I would change.

She went on to describe, in more detail, how she would change this game element:

“[u]m, I’d change it to be like people trying to talk to her and she had to go really fast. But if she went past them, they’d be like still talking... So.” While Merisa acknowledged that she would change these encounters because “if you keep on trying to go past them then you lose a life,” she also seemed to express some uneasiness with what she refers to as ‘bullying.’ She indicated that she would rather the secondary characters just attempt to speak with Raven, not “sla[m] lockers” into her.

The girls had mixed reactions to the antagonistic dialogue between the characters Miley, Lilly, Amber, and Ashley in Hannah Montana. While Melissa admitted that she “liked to see what they were going to say, because some of the things are really mean [giggles...],” May reacted differently. May suggested that she and her friends, Kaite and
Stacy, were surprised by the “really mean things” included in the game’s dialogue.

When they engaged with these parts of the games, they were “like, ‘oh geeze, that’s not very nice!’” When presented with a screenshot featuring dialogue between the female characters, May described her reaction:

May: They’re telling her off. They’re like dissing her. Like, ‘You’re the Gods of bad makeup.’ Something like that.

C: So what were your feelings about those encounters? We touched on it before but…

May: I was like ‘aggh, stop it!’ Get by them!

Here, May expressed that at this stage of the game she wanted to just ‘get by’ the characters and thus circumvent the confrontational interactions. Later on in the interview, May discussed how she managed dialogue selection during interactions with the opposing female characters:

One time I tried…oh, it was kind of easy. But like when I first started to play the game I picked the one that sounded the best, like the one that was kind of appropriate and everything. And it didn’t get me anywhere. So I tried the bad parts and now, I’m kind of like, I’m like “o.k., always the bad one.” The worst one [dialogue choice] there.

According to May, and consistent with my experiences with the game, while she initially tried to select the response that she perceived to be the most ‘appropriate’ or pleasant, she recognized that in order to get by, she had to pick “the worst one [dialogue choice] there.” Here, May expressed frustration with the constraints placed on her gameplay by the game, and thereby recognized that female competition is embedded in the game narrative and structure. In this way, she reflected on her experiences of “the play between the user’s input and the game’s supplied characterization” (Carr, 2006, p. 50) that I also recognized and addressed in my discourse analysis of the game. As indicated by Carr (2006), “[l]imits are […] imposed by dialogue options because they are supplied
by the game” (p. 51). Further, such narrative and design decisions, as well as the general game organization “make certain traits and acts necessary to scoring and progress” (p. 51). May suggested that while she attempted to avoid engaging in insulting verbal banter, she ultimately had to comply with the game’s structure in order to move forward in the game.

Several other participants described behaviours that I have identified as constitutive of the ‘female competitor’ subject position, and recognized how their performances of these behaviours were shaped by the game structure. According to my analysis of That’s So Raven, a gamer can get by opposing characters (female characters, male ‘nerd’ and ‘bully’ characters, and crowds) by jumping over/around them, by wearing a costume, by ducking and rolling past them, and/or by throwing pies at them. The girls who played this game described different ways in which they responded to these game elements. For instance, when I asked May and Stacy whether they used costumes to get by the female confrontations in That’s So Raven, they expressed to me:

Stacy: Well you had to, right? Or else you couldn’t get past.

May: Or else you would die.

In the following excerpt, Luna described different tactics, but acknowledged the ways in which her behaviours were rewarded and punished within the game.

Well if you ran into them [opposing female characters], like you’re supposed to try and crawl under them or jump over them. And if you ran into them, you’d lose life and they’d be like... and they would go like this [imitates the characters by raising her arms up], like they’d wave their arms. And then, and then you’d fall backwards. So...and then you...you’d lose like half a life I think it was.

Thus, these girls recognized that in order to continue with gameplay, they had to perform specific, competitive behaviours to avoid losing “half a life” or “dying.”
In my discussion with Serina, she addressed how she negotiated 'the female competitor' subject position. When shown a screenshot of an encounter between the Raven avatar and the other female characters, she stated:

Serina: Oh, yeah, I didn't like how they always like hurt you when you went by them. That was pretty annoying, except yeah. Just...I also didn't like how that crowd hurt you when you went by them. That was really annoying too.

C: So what did you do to get by them?

Serina: I just went through them and then got a little heart thing afterwards.

Here, Serina suggested that in order to get by the crowds of opposing, non-player characters in That's So Raven, she directed her avatar through them and then replenished her 'health status' by collecting additional hearts in order to avoid 'dying.' As indicated by Carr (2006), "[t]ogether, the ludic and the representational facets present the player with a set of offers, demands and invitations that are selectively actualized through play" (p. 165). In this way, Serina negotiated the game's incitement to defend against the opposing characters by opting to avoid competitive modes of conduct, and to suffer the consequence of diminished 'health status.'

While three of the girls with whom I spoke recognized the heterosexuality of the protagonists by identifying the characters' opposite-sexed "boyfriend" or love interest, none of the participants explicitly questioned or problematized the heteronormativity of the female competition re/constructed in the games. My decision to refrain from directly questioning the girls about their perspectives on the hetero-romantic themes was another factor that likely precluded more detailed discussions.

In order to gain some insight regarding the girls' perspectives of the heteronormative nature of the female competition re/constructed in the games, I presented
the girls with a screenshot from *That's So Raven*. In this image Devon (Raven’s love interest) asks Raven where he can find Chelsea (her best friend). This occurred at a point in the game when Raven misunderstands one of her psychic visions of Chelsea and Devon together. Luna described this game sequence as follows:

Luna: That was in the first one I think it was, like, one of the first things you saw. And that’s her [Raven’s] boyfriend and [...] that’s when she was getting a little suspicious I think. Because [he] was asking if she’d seen Chelsea [...] and she [Raven] thought that they [Chelsea and Devon] were doing something behind her back, like, and she wasn’t really sure what was happening.

C: Does that ever happen, like, at [your] school?

Luna: Not really, because none of us really have boyfriend boyfriends.

Here, Luna revealed the game’s early construction of heteronormative relationships between Raven, her “boyfriend,” Devon, and Chelsea. Luna suggested that she and her peers do not engage in such competition in their everyday lives primarily because they do not have “boyfriend boyfriends” (romantic male partners, as opposed to male friends). This explanation also revealed her acceptance of this type of heterogendered competition as ‘normal.’ In this discussion she drew on the heteronormative “dating discourse,” and the related assumption that she and her friends will transition from “desiring [...] boys-as-friends to desiring the boys themselves and boys-as-boyfriends” (Renold, 2006, p. 505). Further, Luna implied that at this stage female competition over males might occur.

In my discussion with Merisa, she also described a competitive exchange concerning Raven and Chelsea:

Merisa: You had to get Chelsea away from Devon. To give him the [concert] tickets. Um, before Chelsea kisses him. So it was pretty weird.

C: What was weird about that do you think?
Merisa: Um the fact that Chelsea was cheating on her best friend and stuff. While Merisa failed to recognize that Chelsea ultimately does not kiss Devon, and that this was a red herring in the game, her discussion is revealing. Later in the interview, when I asked Merisa to further explain why this game sequence was “weird,” she suggested that, according to her experiences with the characters on television, Chelsea wouldn’t “[u]h, like go with Devon. [...] and hide it behind her [Raven’s] back,” but “usually Raven would probably do that to her.” Thus, while Merisa questioned the consistency of the transmediated character representations, she did not question the appropriateness of the heteronormative relations and competition depicted in the game.

It is noteworthy that the game text does not refer to Devon as Raven’s ‘boyfriend.’ Thus, the girls’ (Luna, Merisa, Hermione) casual positioning of Devon as the “boyfriend” revealed their familiarity with popular texts wherein “heterosexuality […] appears as the assumed and unacknowledged structure organizing women’s lives” (Ingraham, 1994, p. 210). That Raven and Devon’s romantic relationship is not explicitly named within the game works to further normalize and naturalize the institution of heterosexuality, and to preclude imagination of different, more fluid gender and romantic/sexual identities and relations. The ‘taken-for-grantedness’ of this heterosexed order, wherein Raven “sees her bestfriend with her boyfriend and gets suspicious,” is consistent with Renold’s (2006) suggestion that “children’s normative gender identities are inextricably embedded and produced within hegemonic representations of heterosexuality” (Renold, 2006, p. 491).

The different ways in which the girls recognized, and reacted to, the subject position of ‘the competitor’ complicate my earlier analysis of this position. While Luna
and Hermione did not explicitly question, or express discomfort with, the competitive encounters in *Lizzie McGuire*, their description of them as "cartoon-like" and "classic," reflect their recognition of the stereotypical nature of this subject position. Further, the girls specified that it was the exaggerated nature of the competitive interactions between the avatar and supporting female character that they found most "amusing." I argue that, in this way, their relatively positive reactions to this gendered subject position should not be read as evidence of naïve acceptance of it. In my discussion with several other girls, they expressed uneasiness, and even frustration, with respect to the necessity to engage their avatar in confrontational behaviours in order to progress through the gameworld. These findings thus prevent a simplistic conceptualization of such stereotypical re/constructions within girl-targeted texts as “fixed and either accepted or rejected by individuals” (Mills, 2003, section 2.3, para. 1).

**Dis/Identifying with ‘the Fashionable Female’ and ‘the Best Friend’**

When I asked each participant to identify which character, among the protagonist, and the supporting, non-player characters, was her favourite in the game, every participant named either the female protagonist or the protagonist’s best female friend. In these discussions, many of the girls recognized the contrasting modes of femininity represented by these characters: the ‘fashionable’ and ‘girlie’ femininity embodied by the protagonists, and ‘the tom boy’ femininity embodied by the ‘best friends.’ For instance, Melissa succinctly acknowledged that Miley and Lilly were “very different,” and were portrayed as “lik[ing] a lot of different things.” In this way, these girls recognized what Foucault (1994) conceptualized as “dividing practices,” wherein a
subject is constructed by means of contradistinction with other subject positions. As reiterated by Weedon (1997), “while a discourse will offer a preferred form of subjectivity, its very organization will imply other subject positions and the possibility of reversal” (p. 106).

In the following sections, I explore how the girls recognized and engaged with different, and even seemingly contradictory, components of ‘the fashionable female’ and ‘the best friend’ subject positions. As indicated by Carr (2006), “[t]he meaning attributed to an avatar by a player is likely to be provisional and shifting rather than static” (p. 167). The girls’ perspectives concerning the virtual appearance, activities, and rules of behaviour related to these subject positions (Weedon, 1987) varied, and, further, shifted according to the specific game under discussion.

“[...]I’m kind of a person that likes to go to the mall. And she likes to go to the mall” – Girls’ perspectives on ‘the Fashionable Female’

“I like girlie more”

After naming Miley as her favourite character in Hannah Montana, May addressed why she preferred this character:

May: I just don’t really like Lilly. I like girlie more.

Kaite: She’s (May’s) girlie...

C: Yeah? Why do you (to May) think you prefer Miley?

May: [...] She like she has really nice style. I like the stuff she wears.

Kaite: I think she (Miley) like kind of relates to May because she’s girlie.

May and Stacy: Yeah...

Kaite: She’s [May’s] always been girlie.
May: Always.

May’s comments, wherein she disidentified with Lilly and then identified with Miley, seem to support my earlier argument in Chapter Two that ‘the best friend’ serves as a foil for ‘the fashionable female.’ May clearly distinguished between Lilly and ‘girlie,’ in order to explain her affinity for the more conventionally feminine Miley. In this excerpt, May confirmed Kaite’s description of her as ‘girlie,’ and suggested that one of the reasons she liked and identified with Miley, was because of her ‘nice style.’ Pomerantz (2005) suggests that girls use style to position and understand themselves and others within the social world. She discusses how style serves “[a]s a social skin,” and represents “a significant locus of embodied subjectivity for girls in the school, where it is one of the most visible and accessible cultural practices used to negotiate identity” (p. 36). May referenced “the stuff [Miley] wears” and, following, pointed to Miley’s position as a ‘girlie’ girl. Later in the interview, May elaborated on her view of Miley’s style [who she refers to as ‘Hannah’ in this excerpt], as she commented on the physical appearance of some of the supporting characters:

Um, some of the outfits the other people were wearing. Some...were like huge lipstick, bad makeup and like short skirts and everything. But Hannah Montana was good, because she had good style. She actually wore something appropriate. I was like “good job, Hannah Montana.” And Lilly, and the rest of them. It was just those two people.

Here, May distinguished between Hannah’s/Miley’s more “appropriate,” “good style,” and the “huge lipstick, bad makeup and like short skirts” worn by the two opposing female characters, Amber and Ashley. She further linked Hannah’s “good style” to her overall “goodness.” In my discussion with Melissa, she similarly framed Miley in terms
of being a ‘good girl.’ When I asked why Miley was her favourite character, Melissa simply stated: “Um, I don’t know, she’s…she’s really nice. […] She’s a nice girl.”

“Yeah, some differences”

Throughout my conversations with the girls, I noticed that even when they seemed to be engaged by specific subject positions, they also recognized and voiced limits to their identification with them. For example, May spoke to differences that she perceived between herself and ‘the fashionable female’ subject position represented by Miley. She stated: “I’m not that girlie, because I don’t really wear skirts all the time. She always wore a skirt. I usually wear shorts or pants and stuff. But I do wear girlie tops. And yeah, but. Yeah, some differences.” While May earlier stipulated that she has “always” been girlie, here, she clarified that her ‘girlieness’ and Miley’s ‘girlieness’ differ, as she noted that she is not as girlie as the avatar. In this way, May seemed to at once affirm the fixity of her personal ‘girlie’ identity, and to locate her personal style within a range of styles reflective of the ‘fashionable’ ‘girlie girl’ position (Pomerantz, 2005).

In my discussion with Serina, she also addressed limits to her identification with ‘the fashionable female’ when she worked to reconcile her everyday interests and activities with those included in the games. While Serina admitted that Chelsea was her favourite character, because “I don’t like Raven at all so I didn’t really like her in the game,” she continued to discuss her recognition of, engagement with, and preference for activities related to ‘the fashionable female’ subject position represented by Raven. When I asked Serina if she was similar to Chelsea in any way, she responded:
I don’t think so because she’s like a tree hugger kind of person - she really likes the outdoors and I don’t really. I’m not like that. I like shopping… I’m more… I guess I’m more like Raven except I don’t want to be a fashion designer because I think I’d be really bad at it. Yeah.

In this discussion, Serina differentiated between liking the outdoors and liking shopping, and associated these activities with different categories or types of people: “a tree hugger kind of person” and “a fashion designer.” While she suggested that she is “more like Raven” because she “likes shopping,” she delimited the extent of their similarities.

Performing the ‘fashionable female’

The girls’ discussions concerning the activities that I maintain constitute ‘the fashionable female’ within the games further reveal how they recognized and negotiated this subject position. When asked if she could relate to any of the activities featured in these games, Luna entered into a “comparison reading,” or a reading of the text wherein she compares her experiential knowledge related to performing pre-teen girlhood, to the representations of ‘teenage girlhood’ included in the fictional games (Currie, 1999). Such “comparison helps establish the boundaries of ‘typical’ teenage experience; its analytical significance includes the ways in which comparison brings together experiential and discursive knowledge” (Currie, 1999, p. 250). With respect to the sub-goals included in That’s So Raven, Luna stated:

Well, I do shop a lot. And I do try to find the shorter lines with my friends. […] And then I never really made an outfit before, I’ve like designed them on sheets but I’ve never, like, made it. So I’ve never collected pieces of clothing or, like, put them together. So.

And with respect to Lizzie McGuire, she expressed:

Not so much, it was like, it was like one of those where you had to press at the right moment and I was putting on earrings and I was like ‘I’ve put on earrings
before.’ And then there was... you had to click the button and put the lipstick on the right way, and I’ve put lip gloss on. But like, it’s like, but I don’t have to click the button and put it on the right way, I just ... like, I just put it on.

Here, Luna compared some of the virtual tasks to her experiences shopping, selecting check-out line-ups with her friends at the mall, designing clothes, and putting on earrings and lip gloss. In this way, Luna revealed her familiarity with the gendering behaviours included in the games. She discussed how her personal experiences and techniques differ from those featured in the games when she highlighted how the structure of *Lizzie McGuire* shaped how she adorned her avatar with earrings and lipstick within the virtual gameworld. More specifically, she recalled how she had to put lipstick on “the right way” by clicking the console button at the right time in order to pass the mini-game. Luna contrasted this with her real life experience wherein she “just put[s] it [lip gloss] on.” As indicated by Currie (1999), with reference to Smith (1988), “although taken for granted, the everyday act of ‘being a girl’ is an accomplishment; it entails gendering the female body” and, further, “gendering requires acquisition of technical knowledge about make-up, dress, diet, and self-presentation” (p. 248). Even though she did not explicitly acknowledge the expectations, rules, and skills surrounding this beauty ritual in her everyday life, Luna’s comments revealed that she already possessed the knowledge necessary to “put on” earrings and make-up and, further, that these acts are part of how she performs femininity.

As discussed in Chapter Two, the wardrobe sections of *That’s So Raven* and *Hannah Montana* engage the gamer in multi-step processes in order to dress the female avatars. Throughout the interviews, the girls expressed mixed perspectives regarding
these game elements. In my discussion with Serina, she named this part of That’s So Raven as her favourite activity.

Serina: Um, I like...I liked when I hmm...I liked when I finished the levels and then I got to, like, make her outfits the best. Yeah, that was fun.

C: What was the most fun about that? The wardrobe part?

Serina: Um, I don’t know. Well, cuz I actually like picking out people’s outfits so I think that made it more fun for me. Yeah. And then you got to like change the colour and I thought that was so cool! [giggling]

In this way, Serina acknowledged that she appreciated some of the activities associated with ‘the fashionable female’ subject position because, in her everyday life, she enjoys “picking out people’s outfits.”

The wardrobe section of these games was the expressed favourite of several other participants. These girls suggested that they liked this game feature because “[y]ou can choose which style you like” (Merisa), and “you choose a pattern or a colour [...] and like a design. Like, ummm, like something you want to embroider on it” (Melissa).

These girls indicated that they enjoyed the creativity involved in using the virtual beauty tools, and seeing their work displayed on the avatars. Melissa described it this way: “and then you can make her [the Hannah avatar] like view it. Like put it on her.”

Other girls with whom I spoke expressed different reactions to the wardrobe sequences. Luna suggested that while she spent some time “mixing and matching” outfits for Raven, she “tried to concentrate more on the game.” Hermione told me that she was not fond of this part of the game, “because there wasn’t really like a point to it like you just like made an outfit and see what happens.” Interestingly, these girls cited a lack of creative control and freedom as a drawback to this game element. For instance, May suggested that rather than having to explore the gameworld, locate, and then collect
fashion coins in order to expand the virtual wardrobe, she would have preferred to “just
get the clothes automatically.” Luna’s statement that she would have preferred it if “they
gave you more colour variety,” revealed a similar frustration with the parameters set up
by the game structure.

As discussed previously in Chapter Two, in her work on teen magazines,
McRobbie (1991) notes that pre-teen girls are encouraged to develop a teen feminine
identity by engaging in multiple processes wherein one fashions “a more public identity
made manifest through the display of a personal or personalized style” (p. 181). The ‘girl
games’ under discussion involved the girls in similar technologies of self. Nevertheless,
while some of the girls (Melissa, Merisa, Serina) were excited by the opportunity to
design and create fashions for the characters, others (Luna, May, Stacy) focused on the
limits with respect to the number and variety of clothing items and colours available to
them. So, while the video game instruction booklet for Hannah Montana invites the
gamer to “[g]et creative and design your very own super-star style outfits” (Buena Vista,
2006), some of the girls did not feel that the game afforded them the opportunity, or the
virtual resources necessary, to create and display a “personalised style” (McRobbie,

Situating ‘the fashionable female’ within virtual and lived relations

As evidenced in the previous sections, the girls in my study engaged in
comparison readings in order to recognize, interpret, and/or negotiate some of the subject
positions included in the games. In addition to discussing the physical presentation,
traits, and activities constitutive of ‘the fashionable female’ subject position, May, Stacy,
and Kaite critically considered the surrounding social relations depicted in the virtual gameworlds. As the girls engaged in a dynamic discussion about the relationship between ‘the fashionable female’ and other characters in the game, they examined how ‘girlhood’ is performed, negotiated, and regulated within That’s So Raven, and within their school. While it is important to note that the girls’ comparison readings of these fictional texts “blur the relationship between the discursive and everyday worlds” (Currie, 1999, p. 253) of tween girlhood, they led some of the girls to express scepticism related to the video game text.

During our discussion about the interactions between characters in That’s So Raven, May, Stacy, and Kaite commented on the game’s inclusion of “gangster girls,” “nerds” and “bullies.” The girls suggested that these character representations were both “stereotyped” (May) and “unrealistic” (Stacy). They explained that nerds “don’t really look like that” (May), that the bullies’ physiques were exaggerated “even for like a video game” (May), and that “boys don’t look like this in school” (May). The following few excerpts are derived from their more detailed discussion about being “cool,” and about being female within both the virtual school, and within their actual school.

May: And the only way you could get past the school was if you were cool. The nerds beat on you...

Stacy: Like there was...in the locker you got, like, you push B and then you get this like cheerleading outfit. So you put that on when you went by the bullies. And I found that very, like, like if people are going..., if like eight year olds or nine year olds are going to play this game, they’re going to think that ‘oh, well maybe I have to be cool to get around in school, too.’ Right? And it’s not like that at all. And...I found that...and if you weren’t wearing that thing or...you would like, they would punch you or something.

May: They would like make the locker door [...] hit your face or something. And then you would die.

[....]

Kaite: We’re all basically kind of friends at our school.
May: Yeah. We don’t really care.

Stacy: Yeah. And then like in high school it’s not even, I don’t think ...

The girls thus questioned the constructedness of the video game text as they pointed out inconsistencies between the discursive representations and their experiential knowledges. Stacy suggested that, according to her personal experiences (although she admits she does not have any experience with high school), one does not need to be “cool” or a “cheerleader” to “get around in school.” She further commented that the power relations depicted in the game could mislead younger gamers.

Later in our discussion, the girls expressed mixed perspectives as they continued to assess the ‘truth value’ of the video game text, with respect to ‘the fashionable female’ subject position, and the rules associated with performing acceptable femininity.

Kaite: But I think in schools like if you aren’t wearing some type of clothing then you will get made fun of.

May: Yeah, but like...

Stacy: But she [Raven] like, they were like, but she had like good clothes right, but she had to become like a cheerleader just to get by.

May: Yeah, so they wouldn’t hit her.

[…]

May: No one really makes fun of you [at their school]

Kaite: Yeah.

May: …but like kind of people like look at you and they’re like… ‘oh!’

Kaite: They’re like staring and stuff

May: Like “oh that’s doesn’t’ really match”

Kaite: But like there’s some kids in our school that like don’t actually have the most ‘in’ clothing…so.

May: Yeah.
Kaite: Like I know some girls like that don't have the most 'in' clothing. And then some other girls I hear talking about them. And, it's just not nice.

May: I know. I don't really care what people wear, I'm not like that. But like if it's something that's really outstanding and it really doesn't match, I'm like 'oh.'

Stacy: It's actually in, and it's in a game, right? So like kids are going to get that impression [unclear]

May: It doesn't really matter, I don't really care. But like...

Stacy: [giggling] I don't really care but I care...

In this way, the girls questioned the consistency of the messages within the text, and referenced their everyday experiences related to standards of dress for girls at their school, in order to more critically consider the discourses of 'girlhood' and 'teenagehood' included in the video games. On two occasions, Stacy pointed out an inconsistency that she perceived to occur within the video game, when the 'fashionable' Raven, who is depicted in "good clothes," still has to "become [dress like] like a cheerleader just to get by." May struggled as she tried to make sense of the enforcement of standards of girlhood in her school. While she initially suggested that, unlike in the video game, "no one really makes fun of you," the girls ultimately recognized some of the social consequences for girls who do not wear "good clothes" or "'in' clothing" at their school.

Near the end of the excerpt, May stated that she does not care what her peers wear, but also that she notices and reacts to clothing that is "outstanding." Stacy's summary statement "I don't really care but I care...," highlighted the ambivalence in May's comments.

In these excerpts, although the girls did not specify what constitutes 'in' clothing, they acknowledged the existence of rules of behaviour, and attendant approval and punishment related to performing 'girlhood' within the school. The girls seemed to
reference a shared understanding of the 'nerd-popular' categorization that has been recognized within 'girl culture' (Gonick, 2005). The acts of looking, talking, and making fun that they discussed represent some of the practices that, as Gonick (2005) suggests, "girls use in the intricate and on-going project of becoming certain kinds of feminine subjects" (p. 48).

While the girls questioned the accuracy of the virtual depictions of "nerds," "bullies," "cheerleaders," "cool," and "in clothing," and expressed some discomfort with the specific manner in which these categories are negotiated within their school, they did not question that they exist within their everyday lives. Unlike my researcher reading of the text, the girls did not move beyond their scepticism, to link these cultural representations to the wider social order in which they are produced, and which they work to re-produce.

"She's just kind of different from everyone. She's like [...] unique": The Participants' Perspectives on the 'Best Friend'

My discussions with the girls revealed that, although secondary, 'the best friend' persona played a significant role in the girls' meaning-making. While all of the girls referenced 'the best friend,' Luna, Kaite, Stacy and Merisa, in particular, engaged in detailed discussions concerning their perspectives on the virtual physical rendering, traits, and behaviours associated with 'the best friend.' In these discussions, several of the girls seemed to perceive 'the best friend' as a form of subject position, one that they referenced in their more critical discussions of the idealized femininity embodied by 'the fashionable female.'
‘The tom boy’

In the group interview, Stacy and Kaite named Lilly (Miley’s best friend) as their favourite character in *Hannah Montana*. Both girls identified Lilly’s “style,” in particular, as one of the main features that appealed to them. They suggested that her “clothing is unique,” and that she “has a different style. Her own like little style going on.” This naming of Lilly as “different,” references her divergence from a way of being or, as I have argued in my analysis of the games, a way of doing femininity, that the girls perceived to be more conventional. In this way, Stacy and Kaite seemed to both acknowledge and appreciate Lilly’s departure from the protagonist’s more traditionally feminine, or “girlie” style:

C: Yeah? What’s her style? How would you describe her style?

Kaite: Skater.

Stacy: Skater, kinda like Tom Boy. But still like she is still kinda girlie.

Kaite: It is still kinda girlie. Yeah.

Here, the girls linked the clothing style of the character to a subject position they call “Skater” and “Tom Boy.” Other scholars (Mazzarella & Pecora, 2007; Kelly, Pomerantz & Currie, 2005; Pomerantz, 2005) have addressed ‘skater girlhood’ as a subject position in contradistinction to emphasized femininity, as it entails “active appropriation of previously boy-dominated spaces and activities” (Mazzarella & Pecora, 2007, p. 114). Notably, in the above quotation, Stacy and Kaite complicated this subject position by acknowledging that while Lilly is sporty and “Tom Boyish,” she is, nevertheless, also “still kinda girlie.” To my mind, the girls suggested that while this ‘best friend’ character
is 'different,' and while she has "an intended edge" (Mitchell & Reid-Walsh, 2005, p. 4), she is still located within the realm of acceptable femininity.

In order to gain insight into how the girls related the virtual constructions of 'the tom boy' to their experiential knowledges, I asked Kaite and Stacy if they were similar to Lilly in any ways. May (their friend) stepped in to suggest that she "think[s] Kaite is."

She then continued to explain:

May: And like in grade five, that's when...that's how she reminds me of. Like you (to Kaite) were always like that in grade five.

Kaite: Tom Boy'ish?

May: Yeah.

Kaite: Yeah.

C: Mm? How about you, Stacy?

Stacy: I don't really relate to her. But I did go through like this Tom Boy stage. But not really. […]

Kaite: I kind of went through a huge Tom Boy stage. I always wore like shorts and... Yeah.

In this way, Kaite concurred that she was similar to Lilly when she was in grade five (approximately two years before the interview). In this excerpt, the girls framed their experiences with 'the tom boy' subject position as a temporary 'stage,' and one that is associated with specific style decisions, such as Kaite's tendency to wear shorts. In this way, the girls seemed to draw on the discourse of 'the tom boy' subject position as a phase in the 'normal' development of girls. As indicated by Cockburn and Clarke (2002), 'the tom boy' is less accepted "during adolescence when […] definitions of 'male' and 'female' become more salient […], and girls are expected to grow out of any
‘tomboy’ tendencies” (p. 656). This discursive management of the ‘the tom boy’ reflects ongoing heterosexist and, further, homophobic ‘destiny narratives’ wherein early ‘gender-inappropriate’ behaviours or appearances are believed to lead to later queer practices and/or identities (Rand, 1995). Rand (1995) states: “the suspicion that this particular first [tomboyhood] causes or prefigures this particular second [dykehood] is certainly a part of popular lore” (p. 111).

In our discussions about Hannah Montana, Kaite clearly expressed a preference for and affinity with Lilly’s interest in sports and her portrayal as a ‘tom boy,’ yet when we later discussed That’s So Raven, she seemed equally engaged with the ‘fashionable female’ subject position. When I asked Kaite if she could relate to the more conventionally feminine Raven avatar, she expressed: “Actually, yeah. I like fashion designing.” Further, at several other points during our discussion she reiterated: “I love fashion designing” and then “Fashion’s like...that’s what I want to like do.” In this way, Kaite seems to position herself as sporty, and then subsequently as “a clothing freak” who is interested in becoming a fashion designer (like Raven). While such statements might appear to be inconsistent, such “[c]ontradiction draws attention to the way that positioning is a dynamic process of negotiating multiple (but limited) Subject positions that have been made available to girls today” (Kelly et al., 2007, p. 388).

In my discussion with May, she also expressed ambivalence with respect to the contradictory feminine subject positions within the games. While at one point she recognized and identified with Miley’s ‘girlie style,’ and named her as her favourite character in Hannah Montana, she later indicated that the skateboarding race challenges represented one of her favourite activities included in this video game. She stated: “I
liked the sk...the skateboarding part it was like really like exhilarating. Because the other parts you just kind of walked around.” In this way, May expressed that she preferred the more active behaviours performed by ‘the best friend’ character Lilly to the game activities wherein you just ‘walked around’ the virtual gameworld to collect information etc. As discussed in Chapter Two, I argue that Lilly’s presence and involvement in sports (like skateboarding) often associated with masculine interests and abilities, in combination with Miley’s exclusion from these game elements, reiterate the binary constructed through the “popular discourse of ‘sporty/tomboy’/ ‘non-sporty young woman’” (Cockburn & Clarke, 2002, p. 253). Nevertheless, the skateboard game segments invite gamers such as May to engage in virtual behaviours that, however briefly, contradict the popular expectation that “in order to be a ‘teenage girl’ they are required not to take part in sport – especially ‘boys’ sports’” (Cockburn & Clarke, 2002, p. 253). In this way, while the appearances, behaviours, and priorities of ‘the best friend’ and ‘fashionable female’ subject positions are represented as separate and distinct, the girls actively negotiated the complex and contradictory discourses as they identified with different femininities embodied by these characters.

The ‘air head’

The majority of participants described the best friend characters in That’s So Raven and Hannah Montana as an “air head,” “a dumb blonde,” “a dumb red,” and “really stupid.” While several participants described the secondary characters’ ‘lesser’ intelligence as humourous, many of the girls also suggested that it was one of the reasons they were engaged by, and identified with, them.
After her friends suggested that Kaite was like Lilly, the “dumb blonde” character, she admitted “Well sometimes she acts like a dumb blonde, and sometimes I kind of do that too.” Later in our discussion, when I asked the girls if any of the characters in That’s So Raven reminded them of anyone in their lives, Kaite admitted “Um, probably the Chelsea girl. Probably got...got reflected on me. [...] I have my blonde moments a lot.”

In my discussion with Serina, she also acknowledged her similarities to the character, Chelsea:

Um, well she’s really like kind of ditzy and I can kind of relate to that because I don’t always get things right away and then my friends are always like ‘ba ha ha.’ And they think it’s really funny but I don’t because I don’t get it. And...so I can kind of relate to that and I like that about her. Yeah.

After suggesting that Chelsea was her favourite character in That’s So Raven “because she’s kind of dumb and funny. Like, like she’d say funny things but like not mean them to be funny,” I asked Luna if she knew anyone in her everyday life that reminded her of the character. Her response was as follows:

Luna: A lot of my friends do it, like we all do it sometimes. And we’re like, ‘Oh yeah,’ and we’ll all of the [sic] sudden burst out laughing. And we’ll be like “Uhm I didn’t mean to be funny.” And then we’re like, ‘Oh...oh, oh sorry.’ Like, so, we all kind of do it, but not...not one person is, like, always doing it.

C: Doing...like...what’s ‘it?’

Luna: Like, it’s...like we’ll say something, like we’ll say it wrong

C: O.k.

Luna: Like I say ‘libary’ instead of ‘library’ so my friend always makes fun of me, because she...she’s like a pronunciation, or whatever the word is, freak.

In the above excerpts, Luna, Serina, and Kaite described moments in which they misunderstood something or mis-spoke. They expressed that “the air head” best friend
represented an accessible subject position, one that they could comfortably relate to. While the ‘ideal teen’ constructed in contemporary popular culture is fashion- and image-conscious, she is also intelligent, talented, and capable (Hopkins, 2002; Guthrie, 2006). In this way, “[e]xpectations for girls have risen [...] (‘girls can do anything’) and pressures to (over)achieve can be overwhelming” (Hopkins, 2002, p. 177). The girls who identified with Chelsea and/or Lilly seemed reassured by the ‘less than perfect’ (‘less than the ideal teen girl’) ‘best friend’ subject position.

During my reading of That’s So Raven, I recognized ‘the air head’ as a relatively minor iteration of ‘the best friend’ subject position. I was therefore surprised by the degree to which these girls were engaged by this position. Further, I did not even perceive an ‘air head’ subject position in my analysis of the Hannah Montana game content and dialogue. This disparity between the two analyses confirms my observation in Chapter Three, that my academic reading of the re/construction of ‘teenage girlhood’ in the games provides an understanding that is necessarily incomplete and partial. The girls’ everyday readings of these texts were shaped by their position within the everyday world (Smith, 1987), and, more specifically, with their experiential knowledge related to other transmediated texts wherein Lilly was constructed as an ‘air head’ subject position.

The absent ‘best friend’

While That’s So Raven and Hannah Montana offered girls the opportunity to identify with the protagonists’ best friends, Lizzie McGuire did not. The majority of the girls with whom I spoke mentioned the exclusion of Miranda, Lizzie’s best friend on the
associated television show, from the video game. Their related discussions reiterated and confirmed the significance that they attributed to 'the best friend' position.

When I asked Stacy to tell me about her favourite character from *Lizzie McGuire*, she suggested that “there was actually only Lizzie,” but that “when I watched...when I watched the uh show I really like uh her friend, Lizzie’s friend. [...] Miranda or whatever her name is. [...] but she wasn’t in the game, so.” When I asked Luna if she was similar to any of the characters in *Lizzie McGuire*, she echoed Stacy’s recognition of the exclusion of Lizzie’s friend:

"Not so much. Like, not really. I didn’t really relate to anyone in Lizzie McGuire. Cuz she had two friends but they weren’t in the game. So not really. [...] I think I’d probably relate to them a bit more."

Here Luna suggested that because the game producers excluded Lizzie’s best female friend (Miranda), as well as her best male friend (Gordo), from the game, she did not really identify with any of the characters.

In my conversation with Stacy and Kaite, they explained why they liked Miranda:

Stacy: Well she was just...like, she was different like Lilly like in Hannah Montana. She was just...

Kaite: She was unique.

Stacy: Yeah.

I argue that when the girls compared Lilly and Miranda they demonstrated their recognition that 'the best friend' position recurs in Disney’s television and video game texts. Their description of both characters as 'different' and 'unique' seemed to frame 'the best friend' position as a welcome departure from the more 'mainstream,' dominant femininities featured prominently in the video games. The girls comments seemed to
reveal that this ‘slippage’ (Gailey, 1993) offers some measure of room to maneuver within the discursive construction of hegemonic femininity (Kelly et al., 2005).

“It was like a mystery”: ‘The Detective/ Explorer’ Subject Position

While the participants touched on elements of many of the gendered subject positions that I previously discussed in Chapter Two, they also identified additional subject positions that I failed to recognize and critically consider in my analysis of the games. While I must acknowledge that I likely overlooked, and/or did not hear or misheard other observations by the girls, I noticed that the majority of the girls referenced one additional subject position in particular. When asked about their favourite parts of the games, the girls described various activities that involved similar modes of behaviour, techniques, and goals that constitute what I refer to as an ‘explorer/detective’ subject position.

During the group interview, May and Stacy described one of their favourite parts of Hannah Montana in the following manner:

May: And like [to] find things. I liked using that like, flashlight [imitating using a flashlight in real life]. Pay close attention. Oh yeah!

C: What did you like about that?

May: Um, because it was a dark room and also I have like the best eyesight. So I’m like “Oh yeah, right away, there we go.” And I played like over and over, I made like several accounts. And I’m like, “There it is. O.k. go faster and faster each time.” It was pretty good.

Stacy: That was a good part in the game, too. I liked like finding stuff in the game. I like those types of games, so. Yeah.

Luna and Hermione spoke to what they enjoyed most in That’s So Raven:

C: Which was your favourite activity?

Luna: Definitely the mall.
C: The mall? Like what activities in the mall did you like?

Luna: I liked when you had to figure, I liked when you had to figure out how to get to the tickets. Because there was, like, a line up of people and you’re like “man, I don’t have time to wait in the line,” and then you had to look around and if you looked up there was, um, lamps, that she jumped on and then went into the air vent and climbed through. And then you had to, like, press the buttons, it was like a Simon Says kind of thing. It was like, A, B, C, D, DD... and like you had to press them. And then if you got it right you’d get the tickets. And then, that was probably it.

Hermione expressed:

There was one where there wa...there was...I think there was seven doors and you had to pick one that would lead you to an animal pit. Except, all...you had to pick one of the doors and most of the doors either lead you back to the very beginning or just back to like that hallway. So, that was confusing [...]. Yeah I liked that one.

Finally, in Merisa’s discussion of That’s So Raven, she recounted that one of her favourite game activities occurred when she had to find a “secret door up in the sky.”

When asked why she liked this part of the game, she commented “[u]m, I just liked it because there was, like you had to get in it but you didn’t know how at first. And then you just kind of gradually got there and then walked in the door.”

In these examples, the girls addressed different moments in the games wherein they had to accomplish various sub-goals. Nevertheless, all of these scenarios involved thinking creatively and working to solve puzzle-like goals in order to progress through the game level. The girls discussed how they used different tools within the virtual gameworlds (their eyesight, a virtual flashlight, their observational skills, and patience), in order to address the demanding challenges. In this way, while social negotiation and navigation are central to most of the activities within these games, five of the eight girls mentioned activities wherein they worked independently, through their avatar, to get past obstacles. Merisa’s suggestion that she enjoyed Hannah Montana because it was “more of a mystery” reiterated the girls’ recognition of, and engagement with, an ‘explorer/detective’ subject position.
When discussing their perspectives on the characters included in the games, several girls referenced traits related to 'the explorer' subject position. These girls associated strength, independence, and determination with the protagonists' behaviours. Merisa expressed that she liked Raven "because um she ha...usually has to solve mysteries and stuff." May suggested that, in addition to liking Miley's "nice style," she admired this character "because she’s like strong trying to figure out herself and everything." Hermione attributed similar traits to Raven when she suggested: "I just like how she’s [Raven] so, like determined to do things even though some of the things are really crazy." And later in our conversation: "I think we’re a little bit similar in how, like, cuz like I’m pretty determined too. And I like fashion too." In these excerpts, the girls recognized that the appropriately 'girlie' protagonists are also portrayed as self-directed and driven. In this way, the girls acknowledged some of the seemingly contradictory qualities embodied by the characters. Hopkins (2002) suggests that the "new breed of female character" (p. 3), "the cute but powerful girl-woman [who] is now a dominant theme in mainstream popular culture" (p. 1), incorporates "characteristics once typically associated with masculinity" (p. 4). In this way, the virtual characters' "courage and determination" (p. 4), as well as their creative intelligence and problem solving abilities, reflect how these 'girl heroes' differ from the "servile heroines of the past" (p. 3). Serina’s suggestion that "she [Lizzie]...she’s, like, kind of like hero’ish," seemed to reiterate the girls’ recognition of, and appreciation for, the multifaceted nature of these virtual 'ideal teen girls.'
Conclusion

My analysis of the girls’ commentaries sheds some light on the feminine subject positions that they recognized within the games, and also on the different and complex ways in which they negotiated the gendered expectations and consequences re/constructed in the games. I argue that the “[g]irls’ ambivalent (dis)identifications with [...] the shifting and fluid subject positions” point to the “complexities and multiplicities” (Pomerantz, 2005, p. 106-107) involved in the discursive construction of teen girlhood within the mediated video game texts, and within their everyday lives. In the following chapter, I conclude by situating my findings within the broader realms of video games, contemporary ‘girl culture,’ and girl studies. I also address several limitations of the present study, and outline additional areas for future research that I uncovered throughout the research process.
CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

Conclusions
As I conclude this thesis, numerous new ‘tween artifacts’ are being introduced into the lucrative market segment that works to engage pre-teen girls in “a culture of their own that distinguishes them both from boys their own age and older females” (Harris, 2005, p. 209). As indicated by Mitchell and Reid-Walsh (2005), “tween culture has been growing at a rapid pace, almost exponentially it seems,” as “new dolls […], clothing […], films about young adolescent girl culture […], and novels […] appear on almost a monthly basis” (p. 2). It is my hope that my exploratory research advances the growing body of scholarship concerning girls and girl-targeted media, particularly because it recognizes that video games represent one of the most recent media forms to contribute to the discursive construction of ‘teen girlhood.’ Since my selection and analysis of the three games under discussion, Disney Interactive Studios (formerly Buena Vista Games) has released numerous new ‘girl games’ onto the market, including two new Hannah Montana games, and another That’s So Raven game.

The relatively recent development and dissemination of ‘girl games’ and ‘pink software’ that focus on girl protagonists, and include ‘girl content,’ raise fresh issues and recall familiar tensions related to gendered media texts (Seiter, 1993; Wartella & Jennings, 2000). Walkerdine (2007) recognizes that “the debate about whether games are good or bad for children and young people continues to rage and games are blamed for any manner of social ills” (p. 1). Involved in this discussion is the fear, expressed by parents, educators, as well as academics, that video game interactivity can lead to the more immediate ‘absorption’ of negative game messages, with ‘deleterious effects’ on
young gamers (McAllister, 2004; Bushman & Anderson, 2001). Another relevant concern relates to the mass-marketing and mass-distribution of girl-targeted products, which supposedly work to rush girls into an exploitative, image-conscious, and consumption-driven ‘tween culture’ (Harris, 2005).

‘Girl games’ invite girls to enter into a technological leisure realm that, despite the recent and ongoing growth in female game producers and players, stems from “a primarily male industry that [has tended] to assume a male audience” (Carr, 2006, p 169). Seiter’s (1993) discussion concerning the creation and marketing of girl-targeted television series in the early 1980s remains relevant. She suggests that while, due to their stereotypically ‘feminine’ content, these cultural products were “designated as the trashiest, most saccharine, most despicable,” these shows were the first that did not assume a primarily male audience, and, further, “did not require girls to cross over and identify with males” (p. 145). In our discussion, Merisa suggested that, to her, ‘girl games’ signal that video games have become a more acceptable leisure activity for girls. When I asked her to describe her feelings about video games produced ‘specifically for girls,’ she stated: “[u]m, happy because then girls can play video games too. Um, and it’s not just that [they] can. Um, like um most people think that boys can only play sports and actually girls can too. So, yeah. That’s why.” While, like the girl-targeted television series referenced by Seiter (1993), ‘girl games’ can, and have, been regarded as a step away from video games that exclude female player characters, or those that portray female characters as props, bystanders, or victims, through this project, I have argued that it is important to critically consider the ways in which the ‘ideal teen girl’ is re/constructed within these games.
My multi-method approach to the three 'girl games' allowed me to conduct an in-depth analysis of the virtual re/construction of 'the teen girl,' and to move beyond a discussion of the overall 'goodness' or 'badness' of these virtual representations, to explore how eight girls make meaning of the games in their everyday lives. My academic analysis of the subject positions dominant within the texts, and my analysis of the girls' readings of the games, have shown that while *Lizzie McGuire 3: Homecoming Havoc, That's So Raven 2: Supernatural Style*, and *Hannah Montana* incorporate teen characters and narratives based on established Disney television shows, it is important to understand some of the implications surrounding their reiteration within an interactive medium, directed at a tween audience.

As girl gamers venture through the virtual worlds, they are encouraged to take up different feminine subject positions. In this way, "computer games are actualized through play: the user is a player, as well as a viewer, a reader, a consumer and a spectator" (Carr, 2006, p 164). I do not intend to imply that girls who engage with constructions of 'the teen girl' within so-called 'passive' media forms such as television, film, and literature, unquestioningly consume dominant messages. It is important to recognize, however, that when girls interact with the video games, they actively engage with, and participate in, the virtual re/construction of 'teen girlhood.' Luna and Merisa addressed video game interactivity when they compared watching television with playing video games. Luna suggested that if she were given the choice between engaging with the *That's So Raven* television show or playing the game, she would choose "the game because, like, you can do new stuff and if not it'd just be watching the same thing over and over and over again." Merisa similarly suggested that she preferred video games.
"because you can't really do anything with TV." These girls thus appreciated that their interface with the games allowed them some form of control within the gameworld.

My study has shown that the interface between the gamer and the game also results in immediate feedback that works to either reward or punish the gamer, according to how she negotiates the available feminine subject positions. As addressed in Chapter Four, girls discussed how, via trial and error, they learned to enact specific behaviours in order to progress through the gameworld. For instance, May described how she ultimately recognized that she had to select insulting (competitive) dialogue in order to continue gameplay, or to "get [...] anywhere" in Hannah Montana. In this way, while gamers can negotiate certain elements of the games, "the rules of the game[s] clearly reward certain modes of participation rather than others" (Carr, 2006, p. 183).

My discussions with the girls confirmed my contention based on my own readings that, like other contemporary girl-targeted texts, these games do not provide coherent images of ideal girlhood (Currie, 1999; Guthrie, 2005; Durham, 2003; Hopkins, 2002). Instead, girl gamers engage with complicated and contradictory discourses concerning 'the ideal teen' within these virtual 'girl' gameworlds. The girls with whom I spoke explicitly recognized the ideal teen's "nice," "girlie" style, and 'goodness,' but also her determination and competitive edge. Serina's suggestion that Lizzie "always tries to like save the day," references how contemporary notions of 'girlhood' have evolved.

While some girls cited the wardrobe sections as among their favourite game elements, five of the eight girls with whom I spoke identified favourite activities associated with a subject position that I failed to recognize in my reading, but that I have since termed 'the explorer/detective.' This finding made me aware that I had, perhaps,
concentrated on more obviously and traditionally gendered subject positions – the 'feminine' 'fashionable female' and 'helper,' as well as the 'masculine' 'tom boy' etc. These girls expressed that they enjoyed the avatar’s strength and determination, and described how they worked within the gameworlds to solve puzzles that were “a bit tricky” (Luna) and “like a mystery” (Merisa). In these types of activities, the gamer (as ‘the explorer’), often utilized tools to work independently, against circumstances, to complete sub-goals.

Hopkins (2002) addresses how contemporary representations of girl protagonists portray them as increasingly self-driven and capable. She suggests that “[I]ike the classic fairytale princess, the (post)modern pop heroine is portrayed as pretty and young, poised somewhere between a girl and a woman. But today’s Cinderellas don’t just wait for a handsome prince – they overcome obstacles using their own ambition and attitude” (p. 59). The contradictory re/construction of ‘the teen girl’ in the video games under discussion reflects elements of the discourse of ‘Girl Power’ that emerged in the 1990s (Hopkins, 2002, Gonick, 2006). This discourse has been lauded for “represent[ing] a “new girl”: assertive, dynamic, and unbound from the constraints of passive femininity” (Gonick, 2006, p. 2). Other feminist scholars argue that popular reconstructions of ‘Girl Power’ are problematic because they work to depoliticize contemporary feminist objectives and struggles, by framing female ‘empowerment’ as an individualistic goal, attainable via self-realization and consumption. Buena Vista uses descriptors such as the “girl-next door” (Buena Vista, 2005), and “a normal teen” (Buena Vista, 2006), to cast its video game heroines as identifiable and accessible to tween gamers. But, as my research has shown, while these avatars are re/constructed as active and capable, they are also raced,
classed, and hetero-sexed in ways that contribute to the discursive construction of an ‘ideal teen girlhood’ few girls (if any) could ever attain.

It is important to note that, while in Chapter Two I deconstructed elements of racialization and heteronormativity within the games, in my interviews with the girls there was no explicit discussion concerning these important issues. Before I submitted my application to the Behavioural Research Ethics Board, I was informed via e-mail that one of the committee’s main “concerns” was “the nature of your [my] questions given that you are [I am] talking about femininity” (personal communication, August 25, 2006). This was an early reminder that the topics and questions that I included in my interview script would be reviewed and approved or rejected by the Board, and later by prospective participants’ parents. My decision to ask the girls more general questions about game content and character representations and, following, to avoid questions more directly related to issues of ‘race’ and sexuality, has contributed to an obvious and admitted silence in my study. While, as addressed in Chapter Four, I paid attention to the girls’ discussions of the protagonists’ love interests/ ‘boyfriends’ etc., I did not attempt to extend these conversations with the girls. I now acknowledge that my hesitation could contribute to sustaining assumptions that youth do not, cannot, or should not critically reflect on their experiences with popular re/constructions of characters and narratives that are raced and (hetero)sexed.

I realize I entered into this project with the hope that I would gain greater clarity about whether the girls most enjoyed engaging with the ‘ideal teen girl’ within the virtual gameworld, or, alternatively, whether they enjoyed actively negotiating and resisting this ideal. What I ultimately gained was a more informed understanding of, and appreciation
for, the multiple, complicated, and shifting ways in which these girls recognized and
negotiated various feminine subject positions.

The girls' commentaries did not point to a single interpretation of the games. One
of the most revealing examples of this occurred in our discussions concerning 'the
fashionable female' and 'the best friend'/'tom boy' subject positions. As suggested in
Chapter Four, the girls explicitly recognized the contradictory nature of these feminine
positions. The manner in which the girls dis/identified with these two positions, and
expressed dis/like for the associated activities, varied from girl to girl, and from game to
game. I now recognize that the contradictions that arose in these discussions reflect the
competing discourses of 'ideal teen girlhood' included in the texts (Currie, 1999; Kelly
et. al, 2007). Further, the girls' engagement with contrasting characters and activities
demonstrated their practiced management of such contradictory messages, and their
familiarity with the "demands of contemporary femininity which blend together
traditional masculinity and femininity" (Walkerdine, 2007, p. 50). Within the parameters
delineated by the games, the girls appeared to pick and choose which positions they
focused on, preferred, and which they tried to negotiate within the gameworld.

In my analysis of the games, I recognized 'the best friend' subject position as a
secondary position that worked to reiterate a hierarchical order wherein the feminine
'fashionable female' reigns as 'normal' and 'superior,' yet several of the girls expressed
preference for the 'best friend.' In our discussions, and in contrast to the dominant
readings of the games, several girls expressed that they preferred 'the best friend'
specifically because she embodied qualities (such as her athletic behaviours, unique style,
‘air headed’ ways, and vegetarianism) that obviously differed from the more privileged and ideally feminine protagonist.

Comparison reading led some girls in my study to suggest that the video game representations were “unrealistic” and “stereotyped,” and that “kids [who play the game] are going to get that [wrong] impression.” While, according to my analysis, these readings did not lead any of the girls to ultimately reject the video game messages, or to link them to surrounding power relations, they reflect the girls’ active engagement with the video games. In this way, my analyses confirmed the need to move beyond the desire to produce knowledge made ‘neat’ by framing such contemporary popular media texts as either ‘oppressive’ or ‘empowering,’ and girls as either ‘passive victims’ or as ‘brave resistors’ (Hopkins, 2002; Lumby, 1999).

It is important to remember that focusing exclusively on the girls’ multiple and diverse readings of the feminine subject positions available in the games “risks losing sight of the issue of media power” (Thornham, 1998, p. 227). As my research has shown, the central, ‘winning’ avatars in these ‘girl games’ are girls whose bodies and practices are “marked in socially intelligible ways” (Durham, 2003, p. 27). While the central female characters reflect more contemporary notions of ‘girlhood,’ in that they are portrayed as self-directed and competent, they nevertheless reflect Western standards of hegemonic femininity. The games work to interpellate tween gamers into virtual ‘girl’ gameworlds, wherein the re/construction of teenagehood concentrates on the outward display of femininity. The gamers are encouraged to participate in the accomplishment of idealized middle-class, White, heterogendered femininity, as they collect fashion items, work to dress and accessorize the avatars, and engage in social negotiation within
relatively homogeneous, heteronormative virtual environments that are portrayed as ‘natural’ or inevitable. Further, in all three games, these practices are linked to other-approval and ‘success’ within the virtual school in *Lizzie McGuire*, the fashion industry in *That’ So Raven*, and the music industry in *Hannah Montana*. In this way, and as indicated by Durham (2003), “the oppositional gestures offered by these new ‘girl heroes’ are swiftly recuperated within larger, conventional discourses of race, class, beauty, desire and embodiment” (p. 23).

The ‘teen girl’ foregrounded in these games, and re/constructed by the associated teen icons, operates to “personify [idealized] feminine energies and potentialities” and, thus, to reflect and reaffirm that which is “desirable and covetable” (Hopkins, 2002, p. 195) for her audience. I argue that the creation and marketing of associated fashion, cosmetic, accessory, fragrance and even furniture lines aim to address resultant feelings of ‘lacking’ or incompleteness, and point to the position of ‘girl games’ within an extensive, multimedia, commodity-based network of meaning surrounding contemporary girls (Cook & Kaiser, 2004).

I suggest that the creative and active ways in which the girls negotiated the feminine subject positions within the games “should be understood not as an example of ‘audience freedom,’ but as a moment in […] an ongoing struggle over meaning and pleasure which is central to the fabric(ation) of everyday life” (Ang, 2001, p. 184). I argue that the video games under discussion reveal a sort of ‘anticipatory enculturation’ related to the notion of the ‘tween’ category, which “encode[s] anticipatory statuses and identities to be acted out in the present, all the while preparing the ground for entry into a particular articulation of heterosexual female culture” (Cook & Kaiser, p. 223). While
the teen icons Raven, Lizzie, and Miley/Hannah are portrayed across media as ‘typical’ (Buena Vista, 2006) of surrounding society, it is important to recognize that “the specialness of [such] stars may be [...] that they are the only ones around who are ordinary!” (Dyer, 1979, p. 50). I suggest that deconstruction of the gendered practices enacted by tween girl gamers, and how they are virtually rewarded and punished within the games, offers a ‘disjunctive moment’ that reveals the reproduction of ‘teen femininity.’ The ‘teen’ behaviours, priorities, and preferences re/created in the games do not represent ‘natural’ stages in a girl’s predictable progression from ‘female childhood’ to ‘adult womanhood’ (Harris, 2005) but rather values and practices that are culturally constructed and learned.

Limitations of the Current Study

As with most studies, it is important to acknowledge that this project has limitations related to its historical, social, and cultural specificity. I composed this text at a point in time already removed from when I first played and analyzed the games, and from when I spoke with the girls. I entered into this project with the understanding that, “no matter how up-to-date [I] attempted to be in [my] selection of games, they would be passé” (Buckingham, 2006, p. 13) by the time I publish my thesis. The video game industry continues to grow and evolve at a rapid pace, and, thus, while the three games that I analyzed were relatively new on the market when I began, several sequel games have already been released. Buena Vista Interactive (since renamed Disney Interactive Studios) has released a Nintendo DS video game entitled That’s So Raven: Psychic on the Scene (November, 2006), a Nintendo DS game entitled Hannah Montana: Music Jam (November, 2007), and a Wii game called Hannah Montana: Spotlight World Tour
In this way, the refashioning of these teen characters and narratives reflects advancements in technology, as well as new discourses surrounding girlhood.

I should further identify that I limited my analysis to three 'girl games' which represent only a fraction of 'girl games' currently available to contemporary gamers. Additionally, these games are all produced by Buena Vista games and, thus, are admittedly homogenous in terms of (Disney) game content and structure. It is important to recognize that other game companies have made diverse games for girls, and that my analysis therefore does not presume to be representative of the entire genre.

With this research I sought to provide a rich and critical exploration of 'girl games' and how girls assign meaning to them, however I am cognizant that my final analysis remains imperfect and partial. As discussed in Chapter One, while I initially distributed calls for participants in a variety of locations and communities, I ultimately gained access to all of my participants via personal referral. This method of recruitment both shaped and limited the diversity of my participants. My small sample consists of eight girls between the ages of eight and thirteen. All of the girls are middle-class, and seven of them are European-Canadian. While the socioeconomic make-up of the group is likely related to my focus on a relatively expensive leisure activity, I acknowledge that like many "Western researchers interested in studying and writing about contemporary girlhood," my research is limited to the experiences and perspectives of "relatively privileged girls" (Inness, 2000, xii). The inclusion of more girls of different 'racial' and ethnic minorities would have allowed for greater insight regarding the multiple and complex ways in which a girl's social positionalities intersect and influence her experiences of femininity.

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Because my study concentrates on how girls negotiate ‘girl’ video games, it does not address the numerous girl gamers who engage with a wide variety of video game genres, including action-adventure, sport, fighting, and racing games, which are commonly presumed to appeal to ‘male’ interests, preferences, and practices (Carr, 2005). I have become increasingly aware that because my “findings are open to multiple readings, and so can be interpreted in different ways” (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, p. 160), they could be used “in unanticipated ways that could themselves contribute to further subordination” (p. 163) of girls within the video gaming community. For example, by focusing on girls’ experiences with ‘girl games,’ and exploring the elements of these games which they find most enjoyable, my study could be regarded as confirmation of the assumption that girls represent “a population that needs ‘special help’ in their relation to technology” (Cassell, 2002, p. 1). In other words, because more mainstream, ‘masculine’ video games are perceived as involving superior technical knowledge and abilities, my research could inadvertently marginalize girl gamers by reinforcing the belief that they only engage with, and succeed at, ‘simple’ games, such as those included in my study.

I became aware of a further limitation of my research when Luna and Melissa expressed that their brothers had ‘helped’ them with the games, and, further, that the boys also wanted to take part in the study. Additionally, Merisa told me that her male cousin had borrowed, played, and enjoyed Hannah Montana. In this way, my demographic focus on the games’ intended audience precluded the inclusion and consideration of boys’ experiences and interpretations of ‘girl’ games.
Avenues for New Research

Throughout the course of this project I recognized several avenues for new research with respect to girls and ‘girl’ video games. During my discussions with the girls, I became aware of additional themes that I was unable to address at this point in time, but that I feel warrant further exploration. In passing, the girls commented on their gaming sessions, and how they consulted one another for guidance. I think that much could be gained from a study that incorporated participant observation of girls as they engage with ‘girl games.’ In order to explore how female gamers manage the demands of contemporary femininity while playing mainstream video games that represent one “site for the production of contemporary masculinity” (Walkerdine, 2007, p. 48), Walkerdine (2006) videotaped the gameplay of participants in her study. Her analysis entailed consideration of some of the verbal and physical components of gameplay, as girls interacted with ‘cute and cuddly’ avatars, male avatars, and femme fatale avatars. I think it would be valuable to look at how young girls interact with their peers during gaming sessions, while they negotiate the complex and contradictory demands of ‘femininity’ re/constructed by the types of teen avatars included in girl-targeted games.

While I have addressed some of the ways in which the transmedia intertextuality of the video games under discussion influenced the girls’ readings of them, I recognize there is a need for further related research. Several girls with whom I spoke referenced the makeup and accessory lines associated with the teen characters and celebrities featured in the games. For instance, Serina mentioned that one of her friends owned a pair of That’s So Raven brand jeans, and Luna that she owned a lipgloss and necklace from Hilary Duff’s (the actress who plays Lizzie McGuire on television) cosmetic and
accessories lines. Other authors have recently recognized the production and dissemination of such tween artifacts, and Disney’s creation of ‘lifestyle brands’ associated with tween icons including Raven, Lizzie, and Hannah Montana (Folkins, 2006; Guthrie, 2005). I think it would be worthwhile to explore how, in their everyday accomplishment of teen femininity, girls attribute meaning to taking up fashion and beauty products that are named after, and promoted by, the transmediated ‘ideal teen girls.’

In my analysis of the games I recognized several recurring masculine subject positions that could be referred to as ‘the male love interest,’ ‘bully,’ and ‘nerd.’ Ingraham (1994) argues that “to become gendered is to learn the proper way to be a woman in relation to a man, or feminine in relation to the masculine” (p. 215). I suggest that because the cultural and social re/construction of ‘femininity’ is inextricably linked to that of ‘masculinity,’ a more in-depth consideration of the ways in which ‘tween boyhood’ is represented in ‘girl games’ would contribute to a more thorough understanding of how the ‘genders’ and ‘sexes’ are discursively re/constructed as ‘naturally’ mutually exclusive, distinct and dichotomous.

The latest wave of ‘girl games’ offers a number of topics for future analysis. Several girls in my study expressed that they would have enjoyed the games more if they had been offered additional avatars. More specifically, girls mentioned that they would like to have the opportunity to ‘take up’ the best friend characters, or even generate new, original avatars to assume within the virtual gameworld. Notably, the new That’s So Raven: Psychic on the Scene (2006) game allows gamers to act as Raven, Chelsea, or even their male friend Eddie, as they navigate through the gameworld. Additionally, the
Hannah Montana: The Spotlight Tour (2007) game is played on the new Nintendo Wii video game console which involves a more sophisticated mode of interactive interface, wherein the gamer stands in front of the television screen and utilizes a motion-sensor controller. Thus, gamers now physically execute movements they desire the Hannah Montana avatar to virtually enact on-screen. These changes add new dimensions to, and further complicate, the relationship between the gamer and the ‘taking up’ of subject positions within the games.

Another interesting development is Disney’s production of an interactive Wii game, Disney Princess: Enchanted Journey (2007), wherein the gamer generates an avatar in order to interact with classic Disney princesses. The advertisements for this game suggest that the “Disney princesses need your help,” and that, via the game, the gamer can “explore classic Disney worlds” and “awaken the princess in you” (Disney Princess, 2007). These games are targeted at a younger age group than the girls in my study, but the implications surrounding the reiteration of these traditional heroines within such an interactive form warrants critical consideration.

I think it is important to acknowledge that in my discussions with some of the older girls (Luna, 13; May, 13; Serina, 13; Stacy, 12 Kaite: 12), they expressed that they would recommend the video games in my study to girls younger than themselves. Such comments are consistent with researchers’ recent “recognition of the downward shift in age of much of girls’ consumer culture” (Mitchell & Reid-Walsh, 2005, p. 5), and, further, that “so many of the texts analyzed within adolescent culture are in fact marketed covertly as well as quite blatantly towards the under-tens” (p. 2). While I tried to gather a group of girls between the ages of eight and thirteen years of age, the majority of the girls
with whom I spoke were at the older end of this age spectrum. In order to understand why these girls assumed younger girls would enjoy the games more, I asked them to identify specific elements of the games that they thought a younger girl might like. When I asked Luna to explain why she thought the storylines in Lizzie McGuire would be more appropriate for younger girls, she responded: “because it’s like, like it’s never happened to them before. But with older ones it’s like, one of my friends did have a boyfriend and then she had boyfriend troubles and it was kind of just like, it’s like I could watch it on TV or in real life like...so.” Luna’s comments reflect popular constructions of tweenhood as a stage of life wherein one “seeks to move out of ‘tweenhood’ and thus up the age prestige ladder” (Cook & Kaiser, 2004, p. 206). While she (mistakenly) references television instead of video games, she seems to imply that the representations of ‘teen girlhood’ are most interesting to a younger, less experienced, tween audience.

I suggest that future research with a larger group of girls who are at the earlier stages of ‘tweenhood’ would address what “appears to be almost an invisibility of younger girls in girl studies” (Mitchell & Reid-Walsh, 2004, p. 2). Further, this research would provide insight regarding how the girls’ positioning within a supposed ‘in-between’ stage, or an ‘age of preparation’ (Cook & Kaiser, 2004, p. 156), influences their negotiation of the ‘ideal teen girl’ in ‘girl games."
Chapter One

The term ‘military-industrial complex’ has become increasingly contested in recent years. I use the term here to refer to the link between the military, arms industry, and related commercial interests. For more information concerning the historical and theoretical antecedents of the term see Moskos, 1974.

Throughout this paper, I will use the term ‘video game’ to refer to all electronic, interactive, computer-generated games. These games include those played on computers (home computers, laptops etc), home consoles that connect to the television (such as Play Station, Nintendo, X-Box etc) and personal, portable consoles (Nintendo DS, GameBoy Advance etc). Additionally, I include video games played on capable personal electronic equipment such as cell phones, Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs) etc.

I am using Kinder’s (1991) definition of a supersystem: “a network of intertextuality constructed around a figure or group of figures from pop culture […]”. In order to be a supersystem, the network must cut across several modes of image production; must appeal to diverse generations, classes, and ethnic subcultures […] must foster ‘collectability’ through a proliferation of products” (p. 123).

By ‘interactive’ I refer to a communicative process wherein children’s input, via a chosen interface (keyboard, joystick, controller etc), influences what occurs next in the video game. For more detailed discussion about interactivity in video games see Berger (2002, p. 9-10) and Herz (1997, p. 155).

Currie (1999) defines ‘the cultural’ as “the products and practices which engage us in meaning-making” (p. 11). She distinguishes this from ‘the social’ which she describes as “the everyday organization of people and resources necessary for meaning-making to be possible” (p. 11).

In a study conducted by Sherry (2001) in the United States, 64 per cent of adolescent females reported that they played at least one hour of video games per week.

The 13 point ‘girl-friendly’ scale used by Children Now (2001) included: creative components, puzzle elements, cooperative play, available solicited help, female player-controlled characters, realistic settings, positive unsolicited feedback, slow or variable pace, predictable rules, clear explanation of rules, absence of violence, killing, and evil characters.
Ingram (1994) defines the heterosexual imaginary as “that way of thinking that conceals the operation of heterosexuality in structuring gender and closes off any critical analysis of heterosexuality as an organizing institution” (p. 203).

Today, ‘tween’ usually refers to youth (mainly female youth) between the ages of anywhere between seven or eight to thirteen or fourteen years. The term also reflects the popular perception of ‘tweens’ as a group between childhood and teenagehood (Cook and Kaiser, 2004).

According to Davies and Harre (1990), “subject positions” are made available to readers within discourse. A ‘subject position’ “incorporates both a conceptual repertoire and a location for persons within the structure of rights for those that use that repertoire. Once having taken up a particular position as one’s own, a person inevitably sees the world from the vantage point of that position and in terms of the particular images, metaphors, story lines and concepts which are made relevant within the particular discursive practice in which they are positioned. At least a possibility of notional choice is inevitably involved because there are many and contradictory discursive practices that each person could engage in. Among the products of discursive practices are the very persons who engage in them” (p. 46).

See Weedon (1987) with respect to her conceptualization of feminist poststructuralism.

Weedon (1987) defines subjectivity as “the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to the world” (Weedon, 1987, p. 32).

By ‘misrecognition’ I refer to Weedon’s (1987) use of Althusser’s work to address how an individual’s “recognition of herself as the subject of the ideology” also “assumes that she is the author of the ideology which constructs her subjectivity” (p. 30-31).

Foucault’s characterization of discourse as productive refers to the interrelationship between discourse and power. Contemporary feminist poststructuralists continue to consider discourse as productive of social life and subjectivities (Weedon, 1997).

‘Ludic’ stems from the Latin word ‘ludus,’ meaning ‘game’ (Buckingham, 2006). In my thesis, when I refer to ‘ludic elements of a video game,’ I am referencing the structured elements, or parameters, of the game (for example, specific rules) (Carr, 2006).
16 Konzack (2002) uses the term ‘game-play’ to refer to “positions, resources, space and time, goal (sub-goals), obstacles, knowledge, rewards or penalties” (p. 93) within a video game. His concept of ‘referentiality’ involves the influence of other video games and other media on the video game under study. He suggests that the study of ‘meaning’, includes attention to symbolic pictures, sounds and/or text. His ‘socio-culture’ layer of analysis pertains to “how computer games are actually used in real life” (p. 98).

17 In semiotics, connotative meaning refers to the secondary, cultural meanings of a sign. See Berger (1984) for a discussion concerning the use of the term in semiotics, and the manner in which “connotative meanings of signs turn into myths or reflect myths (and reinforce them)” (p. 48).

Chapter Two

1 Throughout this thesis, Lizzie McGuire, That’s So Raven, and Hannah Montana will refer to the video games Lizzie McGuire 3: Homecoming Havoc, That’s So Raven 2: Supernatural Style, and Hannah Montana.

2 Avatar stems from a Sanskrit word ‘descent,’ and means an incarnation on Earth and in human form. Within contemporary gaming communities the term has come to refer to a virtual persona that represents and is controlled by the gamer. In this way, “[i]t is by means of the avatar that the player becomes embodied in the game, and performs the role of protagonist” (Carr et al., 2006, p. 72).

3 A non-player character is a virtual character that is not manipulated by a human gamer.

4 A walkthrough is a textual document normally produced by the video game company or a gamer that guides gamers through games by providing key information about the game. These texts are usually on company websites, online, in gamers’ blogs or in video gaming magazines. I found the That’s So Raven 2 walkthrough on Buena Vista’s website.

5 In Hannah Montana, the gamer’s progress is also blocked by two male characters, Oliver (Miley’s friend) and Jackson (Miley’s older brother). From my perspective, it is noteworthy that in these interactions, the game structure generally demands that the gamer select the more polite or accommodating dialogue option.
In 2002, Children Now found that 64 per cent of characters were male, 19 per cent were non-human, and 17 per cent were female. With respect to player-controlled characters, 73 per cent were male versus 15 per cent female.

Davy (1995) uses Wiegman’s (1994) conceptualization of ‘saturation’ as occurring when social categories “don’t simply overlap but so thoroughly saturate one another that gender […] rarely refers to the same constellation. Differences in racial positioning must therefore be understood to produce quite different (feminine) genders” (p. 15).

Foucault’s (1984, 1994) concept of the technologies of self refers to practices that humans utilize on themselves in order to understand themselves, and, following, to constitute themselves as subjects with and within relations of power.

Lizzie’s (White) best friend character, Miranda, does not appear in the video game but is an important character on the related television program.

Chapter Three

Kinder (1991) suggests that intertextuality “has come to mean that any individual text […] is part of a larger cultural discourse and therefore must be read in relationship to other texts and their diverse textual strategies and ideological assumptions” (p. 2). Following, ‘transmedia’ intertextuality refers to “intertextual relations across different narrative media” (Kinder, 1991, p. 2).

Chapter Four

‘Heterogender’ is a term conceptualized by Ingraham (1994) that “foregrounds the relationship between heterosexuality and gender” (p. 204). More specifically, ‘heterogender’ refers to “the asymmetrical stratification of the sexes in relation to the historically varying institutions of patriarchal heterosexuality” (Ingraham, 1994, p. 204).
Currie (1999) refers to 'sceptical' readings as those "which resist or challenge dominant meanings" and, more specifically, "readings in which girls draw attention to the constructedness rather than [purported] 'reality' of texts" (p. 255-256).
Works Cited


145


Mattel (1997). *Barbie Fashion Designer* [CD Rom].


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Appendix A

Christmas 1990 – Gifting of the Nintendo Entertainment System. Casson (left), Grandma Curling (centre), Maryn and Kalan (sisters)
Appendix B

Interview Script

I) CONTEXTUAL

1. Can you tell me how often you normally play video or computer games (hours/day/week)? Do you play on video game consoles or computer/net? Which do you play more often? Why?

2. Where do you usually play video games? (in your room? Family room? Share room? Do you have your own room?). Portability...

3. Do you have any limits on how much you play video games? (do your parents enforce rules about time spent playing games? Any rules re: sharing?) How do they monitor your playing time? Do you share with siblings? How does that normally work out?

4. When you normally play games, do you usually play alone or with others? Who? (siblings/friends?).

5. What about other people at your school? Is it common for them to play games? Who plays specifically? (Girls? Boys?) Why do you think that is?

6. How do you normally select which games to play? [Do you ever buy computer or video games? Who buys them for you?]

7. How did you first become interested in playing games? When was this? What got you interested in them? (friends, siblings etc.)

II) GAME

8. So which of the games did you end up playing? Why did you pick it/them? (details, activities, characters, difficulty ... etc?)

9. Had you heard about or seen any of this/these games before? Where/When?
   • Have you seen the associated TV shows? Do you watch it regularly? Do you like it? How do you think the TV show compares to the game?
FOCUS DISCUSSION ON FAVOURITE GAME

10 a) Which game was your favourite? Why was it your favourite?

10 b) Were you familiar with the characters in the game before you played it? Had you ever seen them before? (T.V., music, movies...?)

11. Overall, what did you think of the game? (Did you enjoy playing the games?) What did you enjoy? [as much detail as you want to give me...]

12. Which parts were your favourite? (activities?). Describe them. Why, specifically, did you like about them? What are some of the other activities that you do in the game? Do you do those activities in your everyday life?

13. Did you ever beat the game? Yes/No. Can you walk me through the first time you beat the game? What was involved, and how did it make you feel?

14. Did you ever use any of the bonus features of the game? [ie: That’s So Raven: fashion portfolio, character profiles, purchase photos etc. Hannah Montana: wardrobe, bios, videos etc.] Did you like them? What did you like about them? Anything you didn’t like about these parts? Why? How would you change them if you could?

CHARACTERS

FOCUSING ON FAVOURITE GAME...

15. How did you feel about the characters in the game?

   • Are the characters in the game realistic? How? How are they not?

16. Who was your favourite character in the game?

17. Why is she/he your favourite? What do you like about her/him??

18. What do you not like about her/him?

19. In what ways are you similar to this character? In what ways are you different?

   *20. What are her/his interests? What activities does she/he enjoy? Are you interested in any of those activities?
•If yes: how often do you do that? Do you participate in them alone? With peers?

21. Any ways you’d like to be like that character?

22. Did any one of the characters remind you of someone you know in real life? In what ways?

23. How old do you think the characters are? What grade are they in? [Why do you think this?]

24. Present Visual Stimuli:

So now I'm going to show you a few images from the game. I just want you to tell me what you think about the image – what’s going on in the image, your feelings, whether you like it or not whatever. And then I might ask you a couple questions about each image. O.k?

Questions according to screenshots presented to participants

III) APPLICATION

24. Did you talk to anyone about the game/s? [friends/siblings?] How talk? Call each other? Play together? What specifically did you talk about? (can you give me an example…)

25. Did you ever have any difficulty in the game? Can you walk me through a time where you had some trouble in the game? [Like beating a level or knowing what to do?] What did you do to get by? (advice, manual, internet, cheats, forums etc.)

26. Did you use the instruction manual?

27. Did you ever go online for help? (walkthroughs, cheat codes, forums etc?). Did you use cheats of any kind? Do you normally use cheats or walkthroughs/forums? Who created the walkthrough/cheat code that you used? [another player, Buena Vista]. What did they help you do?

How did you know about these resources?

*28. If you were to recommend the game to someone, who would it be? [ie: a target group that might enjoy the game gender/age/interests]. If recommend for younger age group, ask: What makes you think it was made for people younger than you are? How old? What do you think a younger person would like about it?
29. Did anything annoy you about the game? What? What would you change about the game? [If you were to add a character, what would they be like? Would you add activities etc? Why?]

30. Knowing what you do about the game, would you have purchased it yourself? Why? Why not?

31. How is this game similar/different to the games you usually play? [In what ways...? What games do you usually play? (computer and console games?).]

Sooo, we've almost talked ourselves out of time. I have just a few more questions and basically I'm just trying to understand the role that technology, in general, plays in your lives...

IV) OTHER MEDIA

32. So, other than video games what other types of technology do you use frequently? (like T.V., CD players, ipods, computer, emails, msn or icq, facebook? etc). What do you use the most frequently? What is most enjoyable? How do video games compare with respect to enjoyment?

- How does your time with music/tv/movies compare to that with video games?
- Which of these activities do your parents monitor?

33. Would you call yourself a 'gamer'? Why/Why not? How would you define a gamer?

34. How do you feel about game companies making video games especially for girls? How are they different from other games on the market?

35. Is there anything else that you would like to discuss concerning this video game or video games in general? Anything else come to mind?

'Thank you!!!
Appendix C

Consent Form

Entertaining Female Adolescents: Pre-teen Girls and Representations of ‘the Teenage Girl’ in Contemporary ‘Girl-Video Games’

Principal and Co-Investigators:
Dr. Becki Ross, Prof., Dept. of Sociology, UBC, Dr. Dawn Currie, Prof., Dept. of Sociology, UBC, Ms. Casson Brown, Graduate Student, Dept. of Sociology, UBC.

Project Background and Purpose: This research project is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, and represents one aspect of the co-investigator’s/researcher’s (Casson Brown) graduate thesis. The final research paper will be published and accessible to the public. This research project has been designed to gain an understanding of the manner in which girls interact with contemporary video game technology. More specifically, the study will explore how girls between 8 and 13 years of age interpret the representations of teenage girls in ‘girl-games’ (video games produced for, and targeted toward female players).

Study Procedures: Should you decide that your daughter/charge can participate in this research project, and should she then assent (agree) to your signed consent, her participation in the research project will progress as follows. She will select one of three video games that the researcher (Ms. Casson Brown) will lend to her. These games are produced by the interactive entertainment sector of the Walt Disney Corporation, and are rated ‘E’ by the Entertainment Software Association. This rating means that the games are designed for ‘Everyone,’ six years and older. After becoming familiar with the game by playing it, your daughter/charge will meet with the researcher and one other girl participant for one interview session in order to discuss her perspectives on it. This interview will last no longer than two hours and will take place in a location mutually agreed upon by you (the parent/legal guardian), the participant (your daughter/charge) and the researcher prior to the interview. The interview will be audio-recorded on a digital recorder, to facilitate later transcription and analysis.

Confidentiality: All identifiable data will be kept in confidence. Only the researcher and her supervisors will have access to the original audio recordings of the interview and/or transcribed copies of the interview. After interviews, each subject will be assigned a coded identification. The record of subject names and corresponding assigned code identities will be secured in a locked metal filing cabinet. Your daughter/charge will not be identified by name in any reports/publications related to the completed study.
The original files related to the interview (audio files, as well as text transcription files) will remain in a password-protected (encrypted) file on the researcher’s personal computer, and a back-up copy of the files will be maintained in an encrypted external hard-drive. Any hard paper copies of the transcriptions will remain in a locked metal filing cabinet. After the thesis report is completed, all files related to the interviews will be deleted from the researcher’s personal computer. The back-up copy will be maintained on an external-encrypted hard drive and secured for five years, at which time it will be destroyed by erasure/deletion. One hard paper copy of the transcripts and code key will also be maintained in a locked metal filing cabinet for five years, at which point they will be shredded.

**Risks and Benefits:**

In the unlikely event that keeping information obtained in this study private would immediately put your child or someone else in danger, the researcher has the ethical and legal obligation to breach confidentiality in order to protect those involved. Such circumstances could include suspected child abuse or neglect as well as threats made by the participants toward themselves and/or others.

There is no guarantee that your daughter/charge will directly benefit from taking part in the proposed study. However, she may gain a feeling of importance and validation as a result of participating in this research. Additionally, she may take pride in contributing to the advancement of research and knowledge concerning females and technology.

**Remuneration/Compensation:**

We are very grateful for your daughter’s/charge’s participation in this study. To show appreciation for you and your daughter’s time commitment and support, snacks will be provided at the interview. After the interview, your daughter/charge will receive a $20 credit/gift certificate from a video game store. Should your daughter/charge decide to withdraw from the study she will still receive the gift certificate.

**Contact Information about the Project:**

If you have any questions or require any further information about the project please feel free to contact Ms. Casson Brown (co-investigator) at [contact information] or at [contact information].

**Contact Information about the Rights of Research Subjects:**

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Behavioural Research Ethics Board of The University of British Columbia.
If you have any concerns regarding your daughter’s/charge’s treatment or rights as a research participant, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at (604) 822-8598.

Consent:

It is our intention that your daughter’s/charge’s participation in this research project will prove to be a positive experience. Your consent to her participation is completely voluntary. Thus, you can refuse to consent to her participation, and you can withdraw your consent at any time during the study without any consequences to you or your daughter/charge.

Following your consent, your daughter’s participation in this study remains voluntary. She will be asked to provide explicit verbal and written assent and may refuse even if you consent. Your daughter can also refuse to answer any questions and may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records.

Your signature indicates that you consent to allow your daughter/charge to participate in this project. You do not waive any of your/your daughter’s/charge’s legal rights by signing this consent form.

I, ________________________________________, agree to allow my daughter/charge, (please print your name)

_________________________________________, to participate in the project outlined above. (please print your daughter’s/charge’s name)

My approval of her participation in this project is voluntary and I understand that I can withdraw my approval at any time.

_________________________________________
Parent/Legal Guardian Signature Date

_________________________________________
Co-Investigator’s Signature Date
Appendix D

Agreement (Assent) Form

Entertaining Female Adolescents: Pre-teen Girls and Representations of ‘the Teenage Girl’ in Contemporary ‘Girl-Video Games’

Researchers:
Dr. Becki Ross, Professor, Department of Sociology, UBC,
Dr. Dawn Currie, Professor, Department of Sociology, UBC,
Ms. Casson Brown, Graduate Student, Department of Sociology, UBC,

About the Research Project: This research project is designed to gain an understanding of how girls interact with technology. The study will explore how girls interpret and interact with ‘girl video games’ (video games made especially for girls).

Study Procedures: If I agree to be in this study I will select and play one of three video games that the researcher (Ms. Casson Brown) will lend to me. After I become familiar with the game, I will meet with one of the researchers and a girl around my age to talk about the video game. We will talk for no longer than two hours. This meeting will take place in a location that my parent(s) and I agree to. The interview will be audio-recorded. There are no right or wrong answers to the interview questions. Because the researchers are curious about my experiences and feelings, I only need to answer the questions honestly.

Privacy (Confidentiality): All information about me will be kept private. When the study is completed, the researcher will write a report about what she has discovered, but this report will not say my name or that I was in the study.

Gift (Compensation): Because the researchers are thankful for my participation, after the interview I will receive a $20 gift certificate to a video game store. The researchers will also make snacks available during the interview. If I decide to withdraw from the study, I will still receive the gift certificate.

Who can I contact if I want to ask questions?: If I have any questions I can contact Casson Brown (the graduate student researcher) at [contact information], or at [contact information]

Agreement (Assent): I have thought about being in the study. By writing my name at the end of this form, I agree to be in the study. I understand that even if my parents have agreed to let me take part in the study, it is up to me whether I do or not.
If I agree to take part in the study, I can refuse to answer any questions during the interview. Even though I agree to be in it now, I know I may feel differently later on and can ask to stop being in the study at any time.

________________________
Participant Name

________________________
Participant Signature       Date

________________________
Co-Researcher’s Signature  Date
Appendix E

Certificate of Approval – Behavioural Research Ethics Board
CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL - MINIMAL RISK AMENDMENT

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Becki L. Ross
DEPARTMENT: UBC/Arts/Sociology
UBC BREB NUMBER: H06-80930

INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CARRIED OUT:

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<td>Point Grey Site</td>
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<td>Other locations where the research will be conducted:</td>
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CO-INVESTIGATOR(S):
Dawn H. Currie
Casson C. Brown

SPONSORING AGENCIES:
Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) - "Entertaining Female Adolescence/teens: Pre-teen Girls and (Re)presentations of the Teenage Girl in Contemporary Girl-Video Games"

PROJECT TITLE:
Entertaining Female Adolescence/teens: Pre-teen Girls and (Re)presentations of the Teenage Girl in Contemporary Girl-Video Games

Expiry Date - Approval of an amendment does not change the expiry date on the current UBC BREB approval of this study. An application for renewal is required on or before: December 14, 2007

AMENDMENT(S):

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<th>Date</th>
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The amendment(s) and the document(s) listed above have been reviewed and the procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

Approval is issued on behalf of the Behavioural Research Ethics Board and signed electronically by one of the following:

Dr. Peter Suedfeld, Chair
Dr. Jim Rupert, Associate Chair
Dr. Arminee Kazanjian, Associate Chair
Dr. M. Judith Lynam, Associate Chair
Dr. Laurie Ford, Associate Chair