

PARENTAL PERCEPTIONS OF MARKETING TO YOUNG CHILDREN:  
A FEMINIST POSTSTRUCTURAL PERSPECTIVE

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This study examined parental perceptions of marketing to young children using a feminist post-structural theoretical framework to specifically examine the following questions, 1) To what extent are parents aware of the marketing tactics being directed toward young children? 2) How do power/knowledge relations and practices produce parent's multiple subjectivities as they parent their children in regards to commercial culture? 3) How can early childhood educators adapt pedagogy and practice in order to meet the needs of children growing up within the context of a commercialized childhood?

In-depth unstructured interviews revealed that parents within this study tend to view themselves as solely responsible for their children and do not support governmental regulation of the advertising industry. In most cases, the parents in the study empathized with marketers trying to sell their products to children. Furthermore, while participants in this study were concerned about how consumer culture influences children's subjectivities, they were more concerned about "adult content" than corporate access to children. Many of the parental perceptions uncovered mirror neoliberal discourses including an emphasis on individual responsibility, the belief that government regulation is censorship and the privileging of economic rationale by systematically representing children as sources of profit.

This study utilized Deleuzian and Foucauldian concepts in order to make visible the practices and discourses that discipline children and parents as consumers within

the United States neoliberal assemblage(s). This analysis also revealed the very contradictions and complexities that are dramatically shaping parents and young children within the United States' consumer cultural landscape(s).

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction to the Problem

Historically, children have been targeted as a segment of the consumer market, but today children are being groomed from birth to become super-consumers (Bakan, 2011). There are several factors that have led to unprecedented corporate access to children. The deregulation of the advertising industry in the 1980s opened up the floodgates to advertisers, putting fewer restrictions on advertising to children and creating an explosion in cable television that expanded youth programming and promoted corporate “kidculture” (McNeal, 1999). This, combined with the explosion of new technologies (Internet, home video game consoles, portable music players, DVDs, home computers, portable handheld video game systems, MP3 players, DVRs, electronic interactive toys, internet connected smart phones, and tablet computers) of the current era has completely changed advertising (Schor, 2004).

These “new times have ushered in a new era of childhood” (Steinberg & Kincheloe, 2004, p. 1). Currently, media use is beginning in infancy, with on any given day 29% of babies under the age of 1 watching up to an average of 90 minutes of television per day. That number jumps to 64% of children 12-24 months of age (Rideout, 2011). Preschool children spend between 4.1 to 4.6 hours per day using screen media. By the time children are 8 years old they are spending more time with screen media than they do in the classroom (Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010). It stands to reason that if children are spending more time with media than in school, consumer culture has become the central curriculum of childhood (Bakan, 2011; Schor,

2004). Corporate marketing utilizes screen media to gain access to children for several purposes, to use children to influence their family budgets, create brand loyalty in children and also market products to children directly. But what other messages are being taught in this new corporate curriculum? How are children's social worlds being influenced by this shift? What messages are children learning and are parents and educators aware of these messages?

## 1.2 Specific Purpose

The purpose of this study was to critically examine how parents perceive the role of corporate marketing to their young children. The underlying argument of this study was that marketing through the use of the media is becoming a new disciplinary power. While there is a small group of experts and parents who are organizing around this issue, they are predominantly from the middle class and use protectionist discourses that are based on humanist narratives and developmental psychology (Schor, 2004). Of interest was whether parents from across the social strata are aware and/or concerned about the shift in corporate power and to what extent. Also of interest was how early childhood educators can work with parents to adapt pedagogy and practice in order to meet the needs of children growing up within the context of a commercialized childhood.

## 1.3 Research Questions

The study was designed and guided by the following research questions:

1. To what extent are parents aware of the marketing tactics being directed toward young children?

- a. What are parents' perceptions of the messages within advertisements to children?
  - b. To what extent do parents perceive marketing to young children as playing a role in the production of children's subjectivities, particularly in regards to gender, race, sexuality, socio-economic or political beliefs?
  - c. To what extent (if any) do parents relate an increase in advertising to children with any broader social issues?
2. How do power/knowledge relations and practices produce parents' multiple subjectivities as they parent their children in regards to commercial culture?
- a. What measures (if any) are parents taking to limit their children's exposure to advertising?
  - b. What attempts (if any) have parents made to educate their young children about the intentions of advertising?
  - c. To what extent do parents express a desire to limit or restrict corporate influence on children?
3. How can early childhood educators adapt pedagogy and practice in order to meet the needs of children growing up within the context of a commercialized childhood?
- a. How can early childhood educators work with parents to promote critical media literacy skills in young children?
  - b. What are some ways that curriculum can be used to counter the messages parents are most concerned with that are being promoted in advertisement (i.e., materialism, gender bias, violence, etc.)?

- c. What are “lines of flight” (i.e., counter discourses, forms of advocacy between parents and the early childhood field) that could serve to disrupt and to renarrativize the discourses surrounding advertising to children?

#### 1.4 Rationale for the Study

The United States is at the core of consumer-focused globalized society. Americans work longer hours, have more debt and save at lower rates than the rest of the world (Schor, 1999). Consumerism is part of the national identity, with shopping even being linked to patriotism as was evident when President George Bush told citizens during a 2006 press conference:

As we work with Congress in the coming year to chart a new course in Iraq and strengthen our military to meet the challenges of the 21st century, we must also work together to achieve important goals for the American people here at home. This work begins with keeping our economy growing. ... And I encourage you all to go shopping more. (The White House Office of the Press Secretary, December 19, 2006)

Several current trends in society, the economy and technology have been part of reshaping the experience of childhood. While, the Western construction of childhood is relatively new (approximately 150 years), this “newer” version of childhood is influenced more by corporate consumer culture than any other generation in the history of the world (Steinberg & Kincheloe, 2004). From birth, children are being targeted as future customers. Advances in technology have given corporate marketers unprecedented levels of access to young children. Current estimates show that marketers will spend approximately \$15-17 billion per year to advertise to children in the United States. This is a significant increase when one considers that in 1983, advertisers were spending a mere \$100 million. This dramatic increase in advertising spending has been fueled by new technologies such as the Internet, social networking, video games, and personal

smart phones. Research has estimated that on average children view approximately 40,000 advertisements per year (Kunkle & Gantz, 1992; Kunkel, Wilcox, Cantor, Dowrick, Linn, Palmer, 2004).

Schor (2004) discussed two very dichotomous paradigms of childhood that tend to be pitted against each other within the debate about children and advertising. They are *the vulnerable child* and *the empowered child* paradigm. Although these paradigms are overlapping and related in some ways, naming and dividing them in two categories helped organize the literature and defined the views about childhood from which the research stems.

The assumptions that make up *the vulnerable child* paradigm are rooted in developmental psychology and are reflected within the research and advocacy surrounding marketing to children. Much of the research centers on young children's inability to understand the intent of advertising and their inability to distinguish between entertainment and advertising. It is believed that children are too impressionable to understand the evils of contemporary culture (e.g., sexuality, violence, materialism, unhealthy products). Modernist assumptions about children have constructed younger human beings as being less capable (physically, intellectually, and emotionally) than older adults, innocent, vulnerable and in need of protection from adults (Cannella, 1997).

In contrast to the vulnerable child paradigm is the empowered child paradigm. This model challenges positivist developmental views of childhood arguing that the modern child should be viewed as an active agent who is savvier than children of the past and capable of making informed decisions. Market researchers and some

postmodern scholars have adopted this more active and empowered view of the child (Cook, 2008). The field of media literacy stemmed from this paradigm and has been touted as a way to combat some of the negative effects of advertising and empower children to think more critically about consumer messages (Brown, 1991, 2001; Share, 2009).

While the vulnerable child view is one that has been deconstructed by postmodern scholars as based in humanism, the empowered child perspective is one that ignores the imbalance of power relations between corporations and families. There is very little research that examines the issues of marketing to children from other perspectives than the two mentioned above. Critical scholars have called for a third paradigm that recognizes a need to rethink consumer culture. Schor (2004) has called this the paradigm *integrated child and adult critical perspective*. This perspective asserts that the public good is more important than private economic interests. It also emphasizes, that a culture centered on consumption is unhealthy for children and adults. Research based on this third paradigm examines issues of power and privilege and works towards the dismantling of the structures that support them (Cook, 2008).

According to Giroux (1997), corporate influence has become so powerful that it is undermining the efforts of parents and educators to teach democracy and issues of the collective good. Giroux argues that neoliberal policies have led to the deregulation of the broadcasting industry and the allowance of a handful of mega corporations that control the media (e.g., Disney, Nickelodeon, and Time Warner Cable). These policies have also allowed marketing in public schools and very few privacy laws to protect children from data harvesting by companies. Also within a neoliberal context, “individual

responsibility” has become emphasized over practices that promote “the public good”. This focus on individual responsibility often translates into blaming parents for not shielding their children from the excesses of consumer culture (e.g., childhood obesity, youth violence, teen pregnancy, materialism, etc.).

Parents are often blamed for being too busy, too lazy or too permissive. Working women and the women’s movement are especially implicated in this line of reasoning (Eyers & Psychoglin, 1996). While parents do have a major responsibility to raise their children, what is lacking in this argument is the sheer size and scope of the corporate agenda and the amount of money they have at their disposal to accomplish it. Linn (2001) president of the Campaign for a Commercial Free Childhood and a professor at Harvard University described the power differential by stating that parents are “playing David to corporate Goliaths” (para. 17). The argument that parents can serve as sole gatekeepers to protect their children from advertising is completely debunked when new technologies, stealthy marketing tactics, and marketing in public schools are factored into the equation.

As health experts, child psychologists, educators, and advertisers continue the public debate surrounding these issues, parents’ voices have been predominately silent (Kania, 2011). Many of the experts and activists pushing for restrictions on advertising to children have argued that there is no public support for changing current advertising practices. In actuality there is little research about parental opinions of advertising and its influence on young children (Adler, Lesser, Neringoff, Robertson, Rossiter, & Ward, 1980; Blades, Gunter & Oates, 2005; Cook, 2000; Pine & Nash, 2001; Young de Bruim & Eagle, 2003). Even less research has been conducted in the United States regarding

parental beliefs about government policies to limit or ban corporate access to children. The limited studies that have been conducted with parents in the United States have shown that while they are concerned about the negative impact of advertising to children, they are less likely to desire government regulation than parents from other countries (Kania, 2011; Moore, 2006). According to the information gathered during my literature review, the studies that have been conducted on parental perceptions in marketing to children are predominantly from the fields of marketing or developmental psychology and tend to utilize quantitative methodologies. There is not any qualitative research in existence that has been conducted on parental perceptions of advertising to children in the United States using a critical post-structural feminist perspective.

Studies from other countries suggest that parental support was a key factor in the successful enacting of bans on advertising to children (Campbell, Crawford & Hesketh, 2007; Dens, Pelsmacker & Eagle, 2007; Hudson, Hudson & Peloza, 2008; Ip, Mehta & Coveney, 2007; Kelly, Chapman, Hardy, King & Farrell, 2009; Morley, Chapman, Mehta, King, Swinburn, & Wakefield, 2008). In order to increase public support to change current advertising practices to children in the United States, parental perceptions on the subject need to be addressed.

### 1.5 Organization of the Dissertation

This study is comprised of a traditional dissertation structure, not unlike most dissertations in the field of education. It has been organized with an introduction, a review of the literature, a discussion of methodology, and results sections. Thus the dissertation is structured as follows:

- Chapter 1: Introduction



- Chapter 2: Literature Review
- Chapter 3: Methodology
- Chapter 4: Themes
- Chapter 5: Discussion
- Appendices
- References

Chapter 1 is an introduction to the study and includes the introduction to the problem, the purpose of the study, the specific research questions, the rationale for the study, the organization of the proposal, a brief summary of the study's theoretical framework, an overview of the study's limitations, delimitation and assumptions and finally definitions relevant to the study.

Chapter 2 is a literature review and is comprised of three major sections. The first section includes a section on the historical context of the issues surrounding advertising to children. Included in the section is an explanation of childhood as a Western social construction. Also discussed are the paradigms of the child that can be found throughout the literature review on advertising to children.

The second and largest part of the literature review discusses parents and their role within the issue of advertising to children. This section includes parental responsibility within a neoliberal context, and provides an overview on the research about parental perceptions of advertising to children. This research includes the findings that marketing to children is a source of parental stress. In order to mediate some of the negative aspects of advertising to children, parents use a variety of strategies including restrictive mediation and active mediation and both are discussed in

the literature review. Finally, parental concerns over corporate/media influences and the undermining of a parents' role as gatekeeper and protector of their child(ren) are addressed.

The third large part of this chapter summarizes the philosophical and theoretical perspectives and concepts that framed the study, specifically, postmodernism, poststructuralism, and feminist poststructuralism. Also included in this section of chapter, are explanations of several theories in relation to this dissertation. They include Foucault's theories of discourse and disciplinary powers and Deleuze's critique of capitalism and his theory of societies of control.

Chapter 3 focuses on the methodology of the study. This chapter explicitly describes the adaptations and applications of a critical post-structural feminist research methodology being used in the study. Specifically included is a theoretical discussion of the merits, limitations and dangers of interviewing. Also included in this chapter is a description of the study's initial design, including the participants, the plan for data collection, as well as the rationale and process of data analysis.

## 1.6 Theoretical Perspectives

### 1.6.1 Poststructural Feminisms

A poststructural feminist perspective was utilized in order to examine parental perspectives on advertising to young children in the United States. Poststructural feminist research critiques (e.g., Benhabib, 1995; Braidotti, 1991, 1994; Britzman, 1995; Butler, 1992; Davies, 1993; Flax, 1990; Fuss, 1989; Grosz & Grosz, 1995; Hekman, 1990; Lather, 1991; Spivak, 1993; St. Pierre, 2000; Walkerdine, 1990; Weedon, 1987) are diverse, however, they all have in common a commitment to the deconstruction

of/or the unfastening of humanism including the liberal feminist project (St. Pierre, 2000). Dissatisfaction with metaphysics, poststructural feminists have concluded that the bi-products of humanism are as harmful to women as to other groups of people, explaining that the systematic belief in humanism has allowed patriarchy, homophobia, racism and other forms of oppression to thrive (St. Pierre, 2000).

Poststructural feminists use Foucault's work on knowledge and its relationship to power to uncover discourses that have been used to oppress women and others who have been exploited or marginalized. This view allows for diverse and competing views of reality to exist simultaneously. At the same time that dominant discourses are challenged, new possibilities are limitless. There is not a single truth but small truths that are localized, contextualized, diverse and messy. These truths challenge what we think is reality, and "replace our lust for absolutes" with vague notions of multiple perspectives (Lather, 1991, p. 6).

At the very heart of this epistemology is the doubt that any one method, way, belief, political system or structure is the "right" way. It is in fact, suspicious of all truth claims being masques that conceal political, social, and religious or other local power struggles (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). Therefore, a feminist poststructural research process involves continuous reflection. The aim of this perspective is not to reject everything but rather to systematically critique it. Furthermore, as St. Pierre (2000) noted a feminist poststructural methodology must continuously question knowledge, power and truth in regards to who benefits from it and who is being hurt. Within the postmodern space, the question of who created the knowledge is as important as the knowledge that is created (Harding, 1991).

Poststructuralists, Michael Foucault (1926 - 1984) and Gilles Deleuze (1925 - 1995) developed several theories, which are particularly powerful for use when examining the neoliberal context of corporate marketing to children within the United States. These concepts include: Foucault's analysis of discourse, disciplinary societies, the panopticon, and Deleuze's critique of capitalism and *control societies*.

### 1.6.2 Foucauldian Concepts; Technologies of Power

Foucault's analysis of discourse was used throughout this study to reveal how structures of power can be uncovered and disassembled. Foucault (1972/1969) describes discourse as the area between conscious and unconscious thought. It is a group of thoughts or statements that have influence on the formation of concepts. These concepts are forced into language, signs, body movements, tonal cues, gestures and interactions. Discourse is the way people communicate their beliefs and values in order to create, challenge or solidify social structures.

Discourse gives researchers an alternative way to examine data by shifting our focus from simply analyzing text (or in this case data) to the study of how text is socially and politically constructed (Luke, 1995). According to Foucault (1972) discourse is shaped through knowledge and epistemologies that define, construct and position human beings as objects. This includes how people are treated, how they are socially organized, as well as, how social and organizational structures are constructed. Foucault's theory of discourse gives scholars a tool to analyze power and knowledge based on the discourses being circulated. It also, asserts that shifts in power are possible through the ability to change or redirect discourse (Hekman, 1990).

Summaries of Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1977a) and Donzelot's *The Policing of Families* (1979) were included within the literature review in order to trace the origins of the discourse that are central to this study. These discourses include: the shift from the collective to an emphasis on disciplining the individual, the belief children will be the economic future of the nation, often referred to as the salvation narrative, and the construction of the child who needs protection (Cannella, 1997). Each of these discourses contains related themes that run throughout the literature review on marketing to children.

Disciplinary societies developed as European economies moved from a feudal system towards capitalism and statehood in the eighteenth century. Foucault examined the rise of disciplinary power and how the relations of production and desire utilize technologies and apparatuses of control to discipline the subject. Disciplinary power is not as forceful as the power that was exercised by the sovereignty in an obvious sense, but instead uses the power of conformity to achieve its purpose. This change in structure created a society in which power is more pervasive and is exercised from a variety of sources (e.g., schools, factories, prisons, health care systems). Foucault pointed out that while disciplinary power was not an entirely new phenomenon, what was new was the scale in which it was happening. Very systematically, Foucault lays out characteristics of disciplinary power: 1) Discipline needs physical space or enclosures, 2) Discipline requires ranking, 3) Discipline requires observation, 4) Discipline requires surveillance.

The panopticon is used as a metaphor by Foucault (1977a) to represent disciplinary power's perfection of power. In reality, the panopticon was an institutional

building concept designed by Jeremy Bentham in the 18<sup>th</sup> century in England. The circular building's central feature was an observation station with all of the cells and grounds built around it. The panopticon which translated mean "all-seeing", allowed for administrators, teachers or prison guards to view into each cell without themselves being seen by the cell occupants. In effect, this created the impression that everyone was being watched at all times. According to Bentham, occupants would in turn behave as if they were being observed.

Foucault (1977a) called the panopticon "the perfection of power," because little force was needed, as it was not the staff but rather the occupants who were actually disciplining themselves. The panopticon "arranged things in such a way that the exercise of power is not added on from the outside, like a rigid, heavy constraint, to the functions it invests, but is so subtly present in them as to increase their efficiency by itself increasing its own points of contact..." (p. 206).

The concept of the panopticon can be a useful way to think about the power dynamics at work within this new landscape of marketing to children (Bakan, 2011; Brignall, 2002). Marketers create a "360-degree world" in which the child is constantly barraged by commercial messages both overtly and covertly. The goal in marketing is for a product to create a buzz. This idea has burgeoned into a new type of marketing. Buzz marketing's goal is to have "infinite consumer touch point possibilities (Schor, 2004). These include television, radio, internet ads, sponsored events, product placement in movies, games and television, graffiti, billboards, social media sites, product packaging, point of purchase displays, posters, editorials in the media, etc. While children are watching, hearing and reading advertisements and corporate

messages, marketers are watching children with the goal of turning them into a customer. Foucault described it as "an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugations of bodies and the control of populations" (Foucault, 1988, p. 140). This research explored the idea that marketing is a technology of power used as a form of subjectification.

### 1.6.3 Deleuzean Concepts; Neoliberalism and Control Societies

Deleuze and Guattari's works *Capitalism and schizophrenia: Anti-Oedipus* (1977) and *A thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia* (1987) had a major influence on the formation and articulation of this study. Their schizo-analysis of capitalism argued that corporate capitalism is an interconnected, networked, rhizomatic system that has been successful at overtaking life in all its forms. Outlining all of the concepts within in their work would be too vast and complex a process for the purposes of this study. Therefore only the concepts that were most pertinent to this study were discussed, these included corporate capitalism, rhizome, signifying rupture and control societies.

Issues of state regulation and corporate power were central to this study on advertising to children. Deleuze and Guattari's work (1987) described the globalized economy as:

a universal cosmopolitan energy which overflows every restriction and bond, a mobile and convertible substance such as the total value of annual production. Today we can depict an enormous, so called stateless, monetary mass that circulates through foreign exchange and across borders, eluding control by the States, forming a multinational ecumenical organization, constituting a de facto supranational power untouched by governmental decisions. (p. 453)

Since the deregulation of the 1980s in the United States, state control over what is advertised to children has been weakened and the corporation has been taking on more

and more power. Neoliberal discourses that support deregulation, free trade, individualism and competition have helped corporations to gain and maintain power (Giroux, 2004).

In his essay, "Postscripts on Societies of Control", Deleuze (1990) explained that as capitalism continues to shift from a production-based economy to a service based economy, the sales center would become the center of the corporation. Deleuze argued, "marketing has become the new instrument of control" (p. 181). This shift, according to Deleuze, is transforming disciplinary societies into control societies. Control societies have less to do with rigid enclosed spaces but instead rely on open flexible spaces that are in constant motion. Control is maintained through neoliberal discourses and practices including a strict audit culture that is constantly assessing the individual. Marketing within a control society is rapid, flexible, and ever-present with a central message of consumption.

Setting up a binary such as disciplinary vs. control seems to go against the messiness, complexity and creativity in Deleuze's other work. This study avoided conceptualizing this in a linear, progressive manner. Rather, Foucauldian and Deleuzian concepts were used together in order to examine marketing as a technology of control.

### 1.7 Study Limitations and Delimitations

It was anticipated that specific limitations and delimitations would occur within this study. They were as follows:

There was geographical limitation in that the parents interviewed were all living in North Texas. Also of limitation, was the fact that this study focused on young children



and as such, imposed age restrictions. The population included parents of children between the ages of 2 through 8 years old.

## 1.8 Study Assumptions

The assumption was made that those who take part in the study were parents of children between the ages of 2 years old through 8 years of age. It was assumed (and required) that the parents have at least one television set in their home and that these parents allowed their children to watch some television and/or visit the Internet at least upon occasion. Finally, it was assumed that all of these parents wanted what was best for their children and attempted to answer the interview questions to the best of their ability.

## 1.9 Definitions and Terms

### 1.9.1 Marketing

There are several formal definitions of the term *marketing* however for the purposes of this study, the term marketing was used to refer to the processes that are apparent and visible to the consumer, specifically, a product or service promotion and/or advertising. Six marketing techniques commonly used by companies to promote products and services to children were identified: television advertising, in-school marketing, sponsorship, product placement, Internet marketing, and sales promotions (Hawkes, 2002).

### 1.9.2 Neoliberalism

Foucault (2008) described neoliberalism as a view of the world that analyzes “non-economic behavior through a grid of economic intelligibility” (p. 248).

Neoliberalism promotes free markets as the best way to dispense rewards and capital

to those who deserve it. Therefore, policies such as free trade and free markets are promoted as beneficial not only to capitalism but to spreading democracy as well. Neoliberalism is based on classic liberalism, which is a philosophy that espouses the individual should be unencumbered from the intervention of the state in order to act in his or her own self-interest (Olssen & Peters, 2005).

Neoliberal discourses assert that social justice is best attained through minimal government interference (Harvey, 2005). This includes the need for federal social welfare programs. Proponents of neoliberal policies undermine these programs by using discourses that focus on individual responsibility, accountability, competition and self-ownership. Giroux (2004) asserts, “Wedded to the belief that the market should be the organizing principle for all political, social, and economic decisions, neoliberalism wages an incessant attack on democracy, public goods, and noncommodified values” (p. 495). The “public good” is thought of as a subjective term and neoliberal discourses about “individual rights” are used to justify the dismantling of public programs. Over the past 30 years, neoliberal policies have led to a rollback of funding and support for programs that support and protect the overall public good. For example, agencies such as the Environmental Protection Agency and the Federal Communications Commission have moved away from their intended purposes of environmental and consumer protection towards policies that favored corporate interests.

Neoliberal policies are often disguised in discourses that promote a shift from the collective good to the individual subject (Rose, 1999). Within this argument, individual choice and autonomy is viewed as freedom. This is seen as an opening up of possibilities rather than a restraint (Deleuze, 1992/1990). This freedom of choice allows

for the justification of social inequities and/or corporate irresponsibility. For example, fast food restaurants are unrestricted in their advertising to children to eat unhealthy food, because it is a parent's *choice* whether or not they will allow their child to eat fast food. The argument is framed around individual rights and freedoms, rather than those of the common good.

### 1.9.3 Corporate Capitalism

Suarez-Villa's *Technocapitalism* (2012) defines corporate capitalism as the power of business corporations over society. Such power tends towards hegemony and is therefore used to refer to the wide-ranging influence of corporate power on society, including its governance, and on nature.

### 1.9.4 Latent or New Capitalism

New or latent capitalism describes the shift in the economy that occurred in the 1980s as markets became deregulated, privatized, globalized and transformed by advances in technology (Sennett, 2011). This new economy is in constant state of insecurity, flux or transition. Employer/employee relationships have changed as organizational structures have gone from relatively stable corporate pyramids to rapid and flexible entities. Overall, work has become more temporal and there is a focus on employee adaptability, flexibility and marketability. New capitalism embraces neoliberal discourses of individual responsibility, free markets, deregulation and risk-taking.

### 1.9.5 Deregulation

Webster (2012) defines deregulation as the act or process of removing or reducing state regulations. Investopedia (2013) defined deregulation "as the reduction

or elimination of government power in a particular industry, usually enacted to create more competition within the industry” (para 1).

#### 1.9.6 Consumerism

Bauman (1992) defined consumerism as “the production and appropriation of symbolic goods with the aim of constructing identity and relations with other people” (Keller & Kalmus, 2009, p. 355).

#### 1.9.7 Postmodernism

Postmodernism disputes the belief that any one method, way, political system or structure is the “right way.” It challenges the notion of universal truth and is in fact, suspicious of all truth claims as masques that conceal political, social, and religious or other local power struggles (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). The aim of postmodernism is not to reject everything but rather systematically critique it and reveal subjugated knowledges and deconstruct political, social or cultural beliefs or truths that help those in power maintain control and oppress others.

#### 1.9.8 Discourse

Although, there is a large body of work in existence on *discourse*, it was Foucault’s work that served as the theoretical foundation for this dissertation and it was his analysis of discourse that was used. According to Bovè (1990), discourse allows the researcher

a privileged entry into the poststructuralist mode of analysis precisely because it is the organized and regulated, as well as the regulating and constituting, functions of language that it studies. Its aim is to describe the surface linkages between power, knowledge, institutions, the control of populations and the modern state as these intersect in the functions of systems of thought. (p. 54-55)

Foucault (1972/1969) describes discourse as the area between conscious and unconscious thought. It is a group of thoughts or statements that have influence on the formation of concepts. These concepts are forced into language, signs, body movements, tonal cues, gestures and interactions. Discourse is the way people communicate their beliefs and values in order to create, challenge or solidify social structures.

Foucault gives researchers an alternative way to examine discourse by shifting our focus from simply analyzing a text to the study of how text is socially and politically constructed (Luke, 1995). According to Foucault (1972) discourse is shaped through knowledge and epistemologies that define construct and position human beings as objects. This includes how people are treated, how they are socially organized and how social and organizational structures are constructed. Foucault's theory of discourse is significant because it gives scholars a tool to analyze power and knowledge based on the discourses being circulated. Furthermore, it asserts that shifts in power are made possible because of the ability to change or redirect discourse (Hekman, 1990).

#### 1.9.9 Neoconservatism

Neoconservatism, is a political ideology that combines aspects of traditional conservatism with political individualism and support for neoliberal aspects such as the free market economy. Neoconservatism arose in the United States in the 1970s as a reaction against communism and the counter-culture of the 1960s. Neoconservatives often align themselves with fundamentalist religious groups because they view the problems of modern culture directly related to the decline in religion and a lack of respect for authority (Gerson, 1996).

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Introduction

Several bodies of literature have influenced and informed this study of parental perceptions on advertising to children. Most of the literature included in this chapter provides a framework or a reference point for concepts that are presented in future chapters. The literature review is purposefully selective, however, the content included is meant to provide the information that was used to formulate the research questions and contextual background of this study.

This chapter is comprised of three major sections. The first section includes a section on the historical context of the issues surrounding advertising to children. Included in the section is an explanation of childhood as a Western social construction. Also discussed are the three paradigms of the child that can be found throughout the literature review on advertising to children.

The second part of the literature review discusses parents and their role within the issue of advertising to children. This section includes parental responsibility within a neoliberal context; it provides an overview on the research about parental perceptions of advertising to children. This research includes findings that marketing to children is a source of parental stress. In order to mediate some of the negative aspects of advertising to children, parents use a variety of strategies including restrictive mediation and active mediation and both are discussed in the literature review. Finally, parental concerns over corporate/media influences and the undermining of their role as gatekeeper and protector of their child(ren) will be addressed.

The third part of this chapter will summarize the philosophical and theoretical perspectives and concepts that framed the study, specifically, postmodernism, poststructuralism and feminist poststructuralism. Also included in this section of chapter, are explanations of several theories in relation to this dissertation. They include Foucault's theories of discourse and disciplinary powers and Deleuze's critique of capitalism and his theory of societies of control.

## 2.2 Part 1: Historical Contextual Background

### 2.2.1 Constructions of Childhood

Childhood is a historical, cultural and contextual construction (Wyness, 2000; Cannella, 1997; Burman, 1994; Bloch, 1992, 1987; James & Prout; 1990; Aries, 1962). The concept of childhood has changed across cultures and historical time periods. It even varies between and among theorists.

#### 2.2.1.1 Western Constructions of Childhood

Studying the Western enlightenment discourses about childhood can aid in tracing how they are still present in current thinking about the construct of childhood and what it means to be a child. Aries (1962) argued in *Centuries of Childhood*, that children in France were considered to be small adults and were treated as such, during the middle ages. It was the Christian churches' emphasis on reason during the enlightenment period (roughly between the thirteenth and eighteenth centuries) that the construction of childhood came into being. The modernist thinking of this time period emphasized the importance of identification, classification, structure and ordering. Block (1995) explained that as the church began to target the individual soul as a site for salvation, they also began to focus on the need to protect the reformed from the

nefarious world of the unsaved. In order to safeguard and control their own, they had to initially identify that group. Younger people became identified as children and older people as adults. The creation of the adult/child dichotomy set up a power structure in which the adult was in power (Cannella, 1997). The child was created as “other” and placed in a subjugated position.

The school became a site for the protection and the guidance of the young flock. It is modernist progressive thinking that was infused in the very structures of the institution of schooling. For example, the idea that children need to be ordered based on age is a progressive notion that implies children develop in a linear constant fashion. It is also one that is based on the idea that younger children need to be protected from their older more worldly classmates (Cannella, 1997). This idea can be seen throughout the art and literature of the time, with children being characterized as innocent, pure and helpless (Cleverly & Phillips, 1986).

This view did not, however, protect children from being part of the work force when needed. For example: during the Industrial Revolution in Europe and the United States children were recruited in droves to work in the early textile mills and then later factories and mines (Thompson, 1967). Children worked long hours under dangerous conditions for little pay. It was not until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century that a movement to give children special legal right and protections as a vulnerable population. Zelizer, (1985) argued that during this time period attitudes about children began to change. Children who were almost considered replaceable began to be considered, “sacred, priceless and irreplaceable” (Schor, 2004, p. 15). Governments throughout the much of world began to recognize a need to protect children from



exploitation and outlaw child labor. This led to the United Nations formally adopted the 1959 Declaration of the Rights of A Child. Throughout the world local penal codes were created to hold adults criminally responsible for abuse, neglect and the exploitation of a child. Mead's (1955) statement exemplified this shift when she stated, "to adults, children everywhere represent something weak, helpless and in need of protection and supervision" (p. 7).

The rise of developmental psychology in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century further reified children, separating them from others and making universal assumptions about them as a whole. These assumptions stem from the belief that children held within them universal truths that are awaiting discovery and stem from a positivist paradigm. This paradigm subscribes to the existence of an absolute truth or reality. The goal of research is to perfect methods that lead to an increased probability of getting closer to the "truth." Research is thought to be objective, in other words the knowledge has no relationship to the knower. Thomas Cook (1985) exemplified this belief when he stated, "the goal of good theories is to explain and predict phenomenon" (Cook, quoted in Greene, 1990, p.25). Knowledge can be supported with evidence that is collected through an objective and tested process of evaluation. Generalizability and the ability to replicate research becomes the goal of empirical inquiry. Knowledge is thought to build upon itself with researchers looking to fill in the gaps (Greene, 1990).

Psychology came to represent "a paradigmatically modern" field (Burman, 1994, p. 157 cited in Cannella, 1997). Rationality, objectivity, reason and intellect were privileged over other ways of knowing and being. The practices of measuring, sorting, classifying, testing, judging, identifying and sorting of children (and others) became

commonplace. Developmental psychology was heavily influenced by Piaget's theories of cognitive stages of development. These theories have been used as a blueprint to map and sequence human development into distinct stages. According to Piaget, all children pass through four stages in the exact order and most children pass through them at the same age. These stages include; cognitive development: sensorimotor stage (birth-2), preoperational stage (2- 7), concrete-operational stage (7-12) and formal-operational stage (11-12, and thereafter). Piagetian theories have greatly influenced the Western construction of childhood and have led to a widespread belief in the existence of a "universal child". This is the idea that younger human beings can be understood through pre-identified classification systems that can be generalized and applied to all children.

Developmental psychology and the advertising industry have been allies and enemies for a long time. Advertisers have studied the work of Piaget and simply adopted and aligned the ages and stages of growth with a model of consumption. Cook (2004) made the case that it was developmental psychology that gave advertisers a blueprint for how to market to parents. Parents are marketed to, based on their child's developing needs. For example, educational toy companies utilize academic research to promote their products as developmentally appropriate. The parent of a toddler may be sold a push toy, explaining that at this age a child should be seeking out independence and exploration. A segment in *Parents Magazine* is another such example:

Toys are an investment in a child's development, and toy shopping is serious business. Toys that are too easy will bore your babe. Those that are too advanced will aggravate him. But pick one that's just right for his skill level, and

you'll be giving him hours of education, exploration, and enjoyment. (Marianne Szymanski, 2013)

Cook's (2004) research on the historical discourses in marketing to children found that it was actually the clothing industry in the 1930s who popularized the term "toddler" as a stage when in actuality it was simply a clothing size (2T, 3T, 4T, etc.). Along the same lines, teen clothing lines came into fashion around this same time. The creation and segmentation of these markets helped to support and cement the adoption of the naturalization of childhood. The naturalization of childhood describes the phenomenon in which something that has been socially and culturally constructed begins to be thought of as a natural, universal human characteristic. Cook argues that within consumer culture, marketers believe that they are simply matching an innate childhood need or desire with a product or message. Completely missing, is the notion that these consumer desires do not exist in other cultures or even in their own culture until relatively recently.

Several current trends in society, the economy and technology have been part of reshaping the experience of childhood. While, the Western construction of childhood is relatively new (approximately 150 years), this "newer" version of childhood is influenced more by corporate consumer culture than any other generation in the history of the world. From birth children are being targeted as future customer and advances in technology have given corporate marketers unprecedented levels of access to young children. Current estimates show that marketers will spend approximately \$15-17 billion per year to advertise to children in the United States. This is a huge increase when one considers that in 1983, advertisers were spending a mere \$100 million. This dramatic increase in advertising spending has been fueled by new technologies such as the

Internet, social networking, video games and personal smart phones. Research has estimated that children view approximately 40,000 advertisements per year (Kunkel, Wilcox, Cantor, Dowrick, Linn & Palmer, 2004).

#### 2.2.1.2 Paradigms of the Child with the Issue

The body of research on advertising to children tends to fall into three broad paradigms regarding the nature or construction of childhood. Although these paradigms are overlapping and related in many ways, naming and dividing them in three categories can help organize the literature and define the views about childhood from which the research stems. Schor (2004) titled the three broad paradigms of childhood within the debate about children and advertising 1) the vulnerable child, 2) the empowered child, and 3) an integrated child and adult critical perspective.

##### 2.2.1.2.1 The Vulnerable Child

Coalitions of parents have joined with health and education experts to fight against what they see as the predatory practices of advertisers. These groups argue that the commercialization of childhood is having devastating effects on children's physical, mental, emotional and spiritual wellbeing. They focus on advertising's unintended, harmful effects (Atkins, 1980; Kunkel, 2001; Young, 1990). Interestingly these coalitions represent a broad cross-section of the political spectrum. Organization such as Commercial Alert are concerned mainly with the corporate influence welded over children and are more in line with other Ralph Nader corporate protectionist groups (Nader, 2002). On the opposite side of the political spectrum, the Motherhood Project is neoconservative politically, but they have joined forces with this coalition because they are concerned with the messages of sexualization and glamorization of the celebrity

culture that goes against wholesome “family values”

(<http://www.motherhoodproject.org>).

The Campaign for a Commercial Free Childhood’s, (CCFC) mission is to “support parents’ efforts to raise healthy families by limiting commercial access to children and ending the exploitive practice of child-targeted marketing. In working for the rights of children to grow up—and the freedom of parents to raise them—without being undermined by corporate interests, CCFC promotes a more democratic and sustainable world” (<http://www.commercialfreechildhood.org/about-ccfc>). The American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Psychology Association are both part of this coalition and have passed resolutions stating their opposition to advertising to young children. Many of the groups listed above have joined forces with each other to push for legislation that protects children from advertising and corporate influence.

The groups that oppose advertising to children tend to hold a protectionist view of children. This is the belief that children are innocent and need to be protected from the corruption of the outside world. The goal is the protection of children because they are viewed as vulnerable to advertisers and can be taken advantage of by the savvy advertising industry (American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on Communications, 1999). In fact, in the video *Consuming Kids* (2006) advertisers are likened to pedophiles that are grooming children in order to take advantage of their innocence.

Sociologists and anthropologists have criticized the vulnerable child model for several reasons, firstly for being biologically essentialist. It fails to take into account children’s individual personalities and characteristics. This model paints children as almost zombie-like creatures that are unable to withstand the influence of advertisers

who through advertisers are able to control their tastes, desires and behaviors. They critique this model for being too simplistic. Children are seen as subjects without agency and therefore must be protected by adults.

Several sociologists have pointed out that the coalition fighting the commercialization of children are simply taking part in the time-honored tradition of the older generation worrying about the younger one being corrupted by a new technology. This is often referred to as a “moral panic”. These sociologists point out that comic books and radio were also protested as a corrupting influence (James, Jenk & Prout, 1998). Walkerdine (1988 & 1993) deconstructed child psychology for casting its gaze on the child and thus making it a subject, one who is considered abnormal if he or she does not fit into the predetermined molds that have been prescribed. Walkerdine also problematized the gendered constructs within developmental psychology. The norm is a male and as such behaviors that are “male” such as independence, power and risk-taking are rewarded. In patriarchal societies, these behaviors are discouraged in girls. Instead cooperation and submissiveness are encouraged. Erica Burman’s (1998 & 2007) feminist critique of developmental psychology illustrated how various practices in psychology were used to control lower socio-economic and minority families, regulate behavior and stigmatize mothers.

A final critique of the vulnerable child model is that it is elitist (Buckingham, 2002). Critics point out that the majority of the members of the coalition to ban advertising are educated, white middle to upper class parents. Some have critiqued them as classists who worry that the consumer culture is vulgar. Walkerdine, (1988) likens fear of technology to “fiction functioning in truth” (p. 7). She questions whether

the governing are projecting their own fears and fantasies onto the governed.

Walkerdine compares this to the fear of the oversexed black man that Fanon (1963) wrote about when describing how phobia and fetish combine to create subject.

#### 2.2.1.2.2 The Empowered Child

The empowered child model views children as agents. Steinberg and Kincheloe (2004) exemplify this view as they challenged positivist developmental views of childhood arguing that “we need to embrace the child as an active agent capable of contributing to the construction of his or her own subjectivity” (p. 7). Market researchers as well as some critical childhood studies scholars promote media literacy awareness as a way to combat some of the negative effects of advertising (Brown, 1991; 2001). Media literacy curricula teaches children about the television and advertising industries, discusses the intent of advertisements and aims to provide children with the skills they need to think more critically about media. It is a field of study to itself and as such, there is a large body of evidence that shows media literacy can be an effective intervention for teaching children to think critically about advisements (Brucks, Armstrong, & Goldberg, 1988; Donohue, Henke, & Meyer, 1983; Feshback, Feshback & Cohen, 1982; Hobbs & Frost, 2001; Peterson & Lewis, 1988; Rapaczynski, Singer & Singer, 1982; Roberts, Christenson, Gibson, Mooser, & Goldberg, 1980; Singer, Zuckerman & Singer, 1980).

Share (2009) stated, “Critical media literacy challenges the positivist conception of children as voiceless passive entities that need to be controlled and regulated by adults” (p. 101). Curiously these are the very same arguments that are being made by marketers who want to be able to market to children (Cook, 2008 & Schor, 2004).

Kurnit’s (2000) research found that the majority of parents perceive that children are

getting “older” faster these days. The majority of participants agreed with the following statements:

Marketers say that kids today are growing up faster than ever before. Some even say that kids between the ages of 3 and 5 today, are more like 8 and 9 year olds from decades past in terms of their brand knowledge and influence, as well as play patterns and relationships with toys, etc. (Kurnit, 2000, para. 11)

#### 2.2.1.2.3 A Third Way? Avoiding Dichotomous Thinking

Critics of the vulnerable child perspective point out that much of this research really focuses on the harmful effects on children, as if these same issues do not affect adults. By separating children from adults, the discourse centers around what is appropriate for children at what age and how children should spend their time (screen time versus outdoor time). The discourse is about controlling and protecting the innocent child until that child is developmentally ready to enter the “adult world.”

This third perspective asserts that a hyper-consumerist culture is not good for anyone. The aim within this perspective is to break down the child-adult dichotomy and examine the negative effects of advertising as a culture. Certainly, adults suffer from obesity, tobacco addiction, alcoholism, poor body image, excessive debt and impulsive spending. Giroux (1998) examined shifting constructions of childhood but warned that it is often easy to revert to nostalgic notions of a more innocent age. These illusions “allow adults believe that children do not suffer from adult greed, recklessness and perversions of the will and spirit” (p. 265). Children are complex beings and not the blank innocent slates that they are often portrayed as in the anti-consumerism, anti-child advertising discourses (Schor, 2004).

Steinberg and Kincheloe (2004) coined the term the “corporate construction of childhood” and examine not only the growing scope of corporate influence on children’s



lives but the fact that there are only a handful of mega corporations wielding the most power in the kids market. These companies have an enormous influence not only over children but their money has given them a large amount of influence over regulators and policy makers.

...youth may be experiencing the indeterminacy, senselessness, and multiple conditions of postmodernism, but corporate advertisers are attempting to theorize a pedagogy of consumption as part of a new campaign to appropriate postmodern differences among youth across racial, class, gender and sexual lines. The lesson to be learned from the market's approach to multiculturalism is that differences among youth matter politically and pedagogically, but not simply as a way of generating new markets or registering difference as a fashion index. (Giroux, 1996, p. 47)

In a powerful critique of one major multinational multi-media conglomerate, Giroux (1997) uncovers how Disney publicly positions itself as socially responsible corporation that promotes healthy family entertainment where childhood is constructed as a time of innocence, yet is:

a powerful cultural force and corporate monolith that commodifies culture, sanitizes historical memory, and constructs children's identities exclusively within the ideology of consumerism. Far from being a model of moral leadership and social responsibility, Disney monopolizes media power, limits the free flow of information, and undermines substantive public debate. In doing so, it corporatizes public space and limits the avenues of public expression and choice. (Giroux, 1997, para 3)

A critique of the empowered child model is that it ignores the power imbalance between multi-billion dollar corporation and the children they are trying to influence. Advocates for a third way, point out that it is not only children who need sole protection from the evils of corporate culture, but rather everyone is playing David to their Goliath (Schor, 2004). For example, groups working to promote anti-consumerist messages are often blocked by media representatives who refuse to air their messages. One such

example of this was the award-winning, anti-tobacco campaign, known as The Truth campaign. Schor (2004) described her frustration with this stating:

to date, this strategy has been stymied by the fact that truly powerful anti-ad messaging is difficult to get on the airwaves and almost impossible to sustain. The Truth campaign was ended quickly. The networks have repeatedly refused to show Adbusters anti-consumerist ads, in part on grounds that they will offend their advertisers. Surprisingly, there are no First Amendment rights for groups that want to promote an anti-consumerist message. Media outlets are corporate entities that depend on other corporate entities to earn profits, and they have historically resisted messages that jeopardize that relationship. (p.114)

Beyond the giant power differentials, the empowered child model is critiqued for believing that consumers always act in their own best interest, based on making rational decisions. This does not take into account that marketing can and often does mislead individuals and influence their tastes and/or their self-concept. If this were not the case, corporations would not be spending billions of dollars annually on trying to influence children. Schor (2004) has argued for a third way. She calls this the integrated child and adult critical perspective. Schor explains that the worlds of children and adults are quickly merging as aspects of consumer culture impact us all. Rather than aiming to solely protect children from the many toxic bi-products of corporate influence, we should be fighting to make the world safer and healthy for all of us.

### 2.2.2 A Historical Overview of Advertising to Children

Children have always had a role in economics and a relationship to and with consumer capitalism since its inception (Schor, 2004). It is the role of goods and marketing them to children that has changed over time. Advertising is not a new concept. In fact, archeologists have found signs marketing rental property back to Roman times. What is of particular interest especially from a critical perspective is the timing of when advertising to children begins to gain some momentum.

### 2.2.2.1 Pre-Television Era

Prior to child-labor laws, children were workers and thus considered human capital within capitalist societies. As children were taken out of the workforce they began to take on the role as consumer. Historians have reported that in as early as 1870 children were purchasing toys as symbols of status. Around that time, Marshall Fields devoted an entire catalogue to the marketing of toys (Schor, 2004). In 1874, the British Parliament passed legislation that prohibited merchants from targeting children and enticing them to purchase goods. No such law was enacted in the US at that time but the majority of advertising for children's clothing and toys targeted mothers directly rather than children. Schor (2004) points out children were considered passive consumers and were considered to have little influence on their parents purchasing decisions. Advertisers focused on convincing parents that their product was good for their child. For example, milk was advertised as good for children because it contained vitamin D. This is referred to within the advertising industry as "the gatekeeper model".

The invention and popularity of radio brought with the arrival of children's programming. The original children's radio shows were not much more than a single radio announcer reading stories over the airways. There were no advertisers and the ratings were very poor. According to West (1987) it was advertising executives for Ovaltine who first used the radio to market their product directly to children. They believed that if they could get children to ask their mothers for the inexpensive chocolate drink they would be able to increase sales. These ad executives felt they needed a popular radio show in order to get a large audience. It was the advertising executives who developed *Harold Gray's Little Orphan Annie*, a show that was wildly popular for

children, in order to sell their product. Next, Kellogg's, General Mills and other major companies developed shows and reproduced this model (West, 1987).

Two main factors have been attributed to the growth of advertising to children after the World War II era; the invention and widespread popularity of the television and the population explosion known as the baby boom. Within 5 years, the population of American children grew over 50%. Advertisers seized on this growing market. Children began to watch television at a young age and advertisers were able to access them in very personal and impressionable ways. During the 1950s products such as the Barbie, the Big Wheel, Frosted Flakes and Sugar Pops were regularly advertised on television (McNeal, 1999). By the 1960s children were annually spending roughly \$2 billion of their own money and they were estimated to be influencing their parents purchases by the billions.

In 1969, James McNeal, the pioneer of marketing to children and a leading researcher in the field, was the first person to recognized children as an individual specialized market. He argued that children actually represent three markets. Children are: 1) primary spenders: they have access to their own money to spend on items that they desire, 2) influencers: they have a huge influence over what their parents buy, 3) future customers: they will be tomorrow's adult consumer. At this time, there were some concerns brought into the public arena about the effects of advertising on children but there were few academic studies on the subject (Kunkel, 1990).

#### 2.2.2.2 Public Debate Heightened Surrounding Issue

By the 1970s, McDonald's, Toys R Us, Burger King and Bubble Yum were part of the childhood consumer culture. It was during this decade that over 300 research

papers were published on the topic of children as consumers. Public debate grew over consumer protections for children. Action for Children's Television (ACT), a children's advocacy group pressured the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) to limit or ban marketing to children (Story & French, 2004). In 1974, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) introduced the first government regulations on children's television programming (Kunkel, 1990). These limits on television were three-fold. The first restriction set limits for the time that a broadcaster could allot to advertisements (9.5 minutes per hour on weekends and 12 minutes per hour on weekdays). The second rule made it mandatory for broadcasters to create a well-defined division between the content of the children's programming and advertising. According to the Federal Trade Commission:

The purpose of this separation policy is to protect young children who have difficulty distinguishing between commercial and program material and are therefore more vulnerable to commercial messages. If a program fails to adequately separate program and commercial material, the entire duration of the program may be counted as commercial material. (FTC, 1974)

The broadcaster was also required to provide a buffer statement between programming and commercials, as such children are accustomed to hearing, "we will return to the program after this commercial break". The third rule put an end to any host selling. This practice had been a staple in the industry. No longer were program characters permitted to overtly sell products during or directly following their television programs. For example, the Flintstones were no longer able to sell Pebbles cereal during the commercial break.

During this time, there were multiple studies done to assess the impact of these new regulations. One study found that the "commercial buffer" gave some auditory

clues that helped give children a cue that a commercial was coming on, but the results were not significant. (Butter, Popovich, Stackhouse, Garner, 1981). While Stephens, Sutts and Burdick (1982) found that while preschoolers could distinguish the buffer as a separator, they were unable to articulate the difference between a commercial and programming.

The advertising and broadcasting industries were “shocked” by this attempt to regulate advertising to children (Kunkel & Roberts, 1991, p. 39). They worked together to create a campaign based on the first amendment, arguing that advertising is considered free speech under the constitution. They worked to not only influence the public but to put financial support behind congressional candidates to limit the Federal Trade Commission’s authority (Kunkel & Watkins, 1987).

#### 2.2.2.3 Deregulation in the 1980s

In 1980, Congress passed the FTC Improvements Act, which effectively took away the commission’s authority to regulate advertising to children. In 1984, echoing the marketplace policies of the Regan administration, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) dropped all of its regulations limiting commercial content to children stating that “marketplace forces can better determine appropriate commercial levels than our own rules (FCC, 1984, p. 33598).

The deregulation of the 1980s also brought with it explosive growth in specialized media for children. As cable television expanded, children got their own networks such as Nickelodeon and Fox, whose programming was directed at a young demographic. The Kids Choice Broadcasting network brought a radio station aimed at children and Sports Illustrated Kids launched a kid’s magazine. Kid’s clubs sprang up as businesses

competed to reach children at younger and younger ages. Items once only marketed to adults began to want part of the kids market (e.g., designer clothes, technology, banking, credit cards and hotels). Television programs were created with the intended purpose to sell products. Examples include *He-Man*, *The Care Bears*, and *Masters of the Universe*. In fact, in 1987 there were over 40 shows that had toys available for purchase (Wilson & Weiss, 1992). In 1988, Condry, Bence and Scheibe found that 67% of all toy advertisements contained links to television shows. This advertising strategy worked as evidenced in McNeal's (1999) report that in 1989 children aged 4 to 12 were responsible for spending \$6.1 billion of their own money.

By the year 2000, children (12 and under) were reported to spend \$27.9 billion of their own money and were estimated to influence \$249 billion in parental spending (Lawlor & Prothero, 2003). McNeal (1999) offered several societal explanations for the massive increase in children's spending power over the past generations: 1) an increase in dual income families, 2) a decrease in the number of children families are choosing to have, 3) parents are better off financially because they are having children at older ages, 4) an increase in divorce has led to parents giving children material gift to make up for a broken family, 5) parents feelings of guilt for working long hours, 6) parents are giving children allowance in order to keep up with social trends/peer pressure. Children growing up in the new millennium are also, exposed to more corporate advertising than any other generation before them. As evident in this countrywide survey that found 97% of children ages 6 and younger have products based on characters from TV shows or movies (Rideout, Vandewater, & Wartella, 2003).

#### 2.2.2.4 The Technology Boom

The technology boom has opened up new platforms for advertising as most children have access to the following in their homes; internet, movies, print, radio, television, cable television, home video game consoles, portable music players, digital video disks (DVDs), home computers, portable handheld video game systems, MP3 players, digital video recorders (DVRs), electronic interactive toys, internet connected smart phones and tablet computers. While not all children have access to all of these technologies, a growing number of children do and they are spending an increasing amount of time with it (Robb, Gutnick, Takeuchi, & Kotler, 2011).

Children are considered a very influential segment of the US economy (Kunkel, 1990, McNeal, 1999) and are being heavily targeted by advertisers from birth. Children are also a captive audience and are being exposed for long periods of time to a hyper-consumer environment. The average amount of time a typical school aged child spends on the computer, smart phone, television or other electronic device is 7 hours (Rideout et al., 2010). Weekly children watch on average 26 hours of television. Babies and toddlers (age 2 and under) watch television on a daily basis. Infants under the age of 1 spend roughly 49 minutes a day using screen media (Robb, Gutnick, Takeuchi, & Kotler, 2011). Children between the age of 2 and 3 years old spend an average of 1 hour 51 minutes per day using screen media. Children age 4 to 6 are watching TV or playing on-line for two hours per day (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2006).

On any average day, 71% of children in the highest income bracket (ages 5 to 9) use the Internet, compared with 51% of children the same age in a middle-income bracket. Although children from the wealthiest families access the Internet at greater



rates, they spend less time online. In fact, wealthier children tend to spend less time with every form of media except print (Gutnick, Robb, Takeuchi, & Kotler, 2011). In effect, it is children who are from lower income families who will spend the most time with media and be exposed to more advertisement over the course of childhood. While there is some federal oversight aimed at what advertisers are able to market to children on television there are no federal laws that apply to advertisements on the Internet. Marketers are getting increasingly savvy and using this unregulated territory to groom consumers. With 95% of children found to have Internet access by age 11, there are many opportunities for advertisers to have access to children in cyberspace (Clark, 2012).

### 2.2.3 Governmental Regulation of Advertising to Children

Worldwide there is vigorous debate about who should police or regulate advertising to children (Gunter, Oats, & Blades, 2005; Wartella, 1999; Young, de Bruin, & Eagle, 2003). Individual countries have taken various approaches to the regulating of broadcast advertisements aimed at children. In the United States, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) creates the guidelines and polices the advertising industry. However, pro-business lobbies have effectively convinced congress to strip away at the authority of the FTC. The FTC has all but abdicated its role as regulator and left the advertising industry to self-regulate, claiming that it is the least intrusive and most responsible way to regulate (Gray, 2005; Linn, 2005).

In 2005 the Federal Trade Commission held a hearing to address major concerns with marketing to children including violence and unhealthy food marketing, but concluded that they would not step in and regulate the industry. Instead the FTC

strongly requested improved self-regulation explaining that there were possible First Amendment considerations that could be violated in addressing the areas that may be harming children. The burden of regulation was handed off to the National Advertising Review Council (NARC). NARC was put in place the Children's Advertising Review Unit (CARU) in 1974 as a self-regulatory program to promote responsible children's advertising. CARU is administered by the Council of Better Business Bureaus (CBBB) and members of the children's advertising industry sign a pledge to adhere to recommendations and also to fund the organization. In reality, the organization was put in place as a public relations ploy. A 2013 study found that self-regulations within the food industry have been largely avoided by creating loopholes to get around recommendations (Harris, Sarda, Schwartz & Brownell, 2013).

As early as 1976, Burr and Burr reported that advocates for children were doubtful that self-regulation would create a solution. Ellen Fried of the Yale University's Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity argued that self-regulation "hasn't really worked in any industry." She explains that, "A watchdog won't bite the hand that feeds it" (Martin, 2005, para.16). First lady Michelle Obama's White House Task Force on Childhood Obesity Report (May 2010) stated that government regulation "may be helpful or even necessary to fully address the childhood obesity epidemic." The task force went on to state, "Effective voluntary reform will only occur if companies are presented with sufficient reason to comply. The prospect of regulation of legislation has often served as a catalyst for driving meaningful reform in other industries and may do so on the context of food marketing as well" (p. 31). The report read like a warning to the food industry stating, "If voluntary efforts to limit the marketing of less healthy foods

and beverages to children do not yield substantial results, the FCC could consider revisiting and modernizing rules on commercial time during children's programming" (p. 32).

Government regulation of advertising to children is regulated in many other nations throughout the world. For example, in 1991, Sweden banned all advertising aimed at children and they did so with the majority of their population's consensus. The Swedish government has explained their rationale for the popularity of these regulations as based on the belief that children under the age of 12 are not able to fully understand a commercial's intent and are not fully capable of being educated consumers. In 2000, Sweden's leader took the helm of the European Union and attempted to convince fellow members to follow their lead and enact a total ban on direct advertising to children. The total ban may have passed had it not been for the intense objection of the United Kingdom (Oats, Blades, & Gunter, 2003). The United Kingdom's answer to the political pressure was to initiate a media literacy program in its schools to better educate children as consumers. The program, named Media Smart, was a compromise argued for by advertisers. Rather than enact a total ban on advertising aimed at children, in 2009, the European Union passed the EU Audiovisual Media Services Directive. This directive lays out regulations on advertising to children that apply to all 28 European Union members:

Advertising shall not cause moral or physical detriment to minors, and shall therefore comply with the following criteria for their protection:

1. It shall not directly exhort minors to buy a product or a service by exploiting their inexperience or credulity.
2. It shall not directly encourage minors to persuade their parents or others to purchase the goods or services being advertised.
3. It shall not exploit the special trust minors place in parents, teachers or other persons.

4. It shall not unreasonably show minors in dangerous situations.
5. Children's programs may only be interrupted if the scheduled duration is longer than 30 minutes.
6. Product placement is not allowed in children's programs.
7. The Member States and the Commission should encourage audiovisual media service providers to develop codes of conduct regarding the advertising of certain foods in children's programs.

The EU Audiovisual Media Services Directive is broad and has been adopted and enacted within the various countries in a multitude of ways. For example, Greece has a ban on children's toy advertisements during a typical child's waking hours (from 7 am until 10 PM). They also have a complete ban on the advertising of toys that encourage or glorify war. In Sweden and Norway advertising to children under the age of 12 is completely banned. In Denmark and Belgium there are also government restrictions on advertising to children.

The worldwide obesity crisis has led to increased attention and public support for government regulation of advertising to children (Kania, 2011). In 2007, the United Kingdom put in place advertising restrictions to significantly limit the exposure of children under 16 to high fat, salt or sugar in advertising. In a comparative study conducted between New Zealand and Belgium (Dens, De Pelsmacker & Eagle, 2007) parents within both countries expressed a high desire for government regulation of advertising to children.

Parental attitudes about the marketing of unhealthy food products to children and parental perceptions of advertiser's influence on their children were the two most important factors that led to a desire for government regulation in the countries named above. These examples were mentioned in order to illustrate the importance of studying parental perceptions in this country.

#### 2.2.4 Current Context; Children as Targets

Government regulation of advertising to children is so hotly contested because children are seen as one of the major source of new customers. In his 1992 book, *Kids as Customers*, McNeal advises companies that they only have two options when it comes to creating new customers: 1) convince someone to switch to their brand from a competitor or 2) get a customer who is newly entering the market. Children fall into the second category and as such are highly valued and sought out by companies wanting to gain their brand loyalty as early as possible. Consider the following quotations that come from companies marketing their products to children:

The fresh neurons of young brains are valuable mental real estate to admen. By seeding their products early, the marketers can do more than just develop brand recognition; they can literally cultivate a demographics' sensibilities as they are formed. (Beder, 2009, p. 37)

Hey, I want to own the kid younger and younger and younger. Mike Searles, the president of Kids "R" Us. (Ruskin, 1999, p. 42)

When it comes to targeting kids as consumers, we at General Mills follow the Procter and Gamble model of *cradle to the grave*. We believe in getting them early and having them for life. (Ruskin, 1999, p 42.)

Research that comes from the field of marketing and advertising encourages businesses to begin advertising early (McNeal, 1999). This is much in part, because the social learning model is the most popular theory utilized in marketing research (Moschis & Smith, 1985). The social learning model explains that it is environmental factors that shape and mold an individual's socialization. Of specific interest is the theory of consumer socialization which attempts to lay out how children "acquire the skill, knowledge and attitudes relevant to their functioning as consumers in the market place" (Ward, 1974, p. 2). The literature and subsequent studies on the consumer

socialization process acknowledge that children learn consumer skills and acquire their attitudes about advertising from a variety of places, including their parents, friends and the mass media and overall culture they are part of (Carlson & Grossbart, 1988; Moschis & Churchill, 1978; Ward, 1974; Ward, Wackman & Wartella, 1977).

From birth babies are surrounded by logos and company images that have been created to attract infants and strategically placed so that the infant will begin to recognize them (McNeal. & Yeh, 1997). There are several methods that companies employ to glean information about what may attract and ultimately appeal to infants and toddlers. Marketers observe children at home, laboratories, stores, child care centers, and even go into the bathroom looking for how children interact with products (Barbaro & Earp 2008).

Advertisers also employ child development psychologists to help them design branding strategies for infants. Beyond using their knowledge of child development, these market researchers also use neuromarketing with infants as young as six months of age, as a tool to locate what makes infants want to buy (Moore, 2005).

Neuromarketing utilizes science to get an inside look of the human brain while it is performing experimental and controlled tasks. Babies are hooked up to machines and shown images. Neurological images of the infant's brain are relayed to market researchers who are able to see which images excite particular parts of the baby's brain. According to Barbaro and Earp (2008) this kind of neuromarketing is being used to develop products and brand loyalty in infants before they can even talk.

While babies may seem too young to be making links between screen media and product characters, research has shown that by 3 months of age, 40% of US infants are

watching screen media on a daily basis and that increases to 90% by the age of 2 year old (Zimmerman, Christakis & Meltzoff, 2007). Market researchers claim that babies, as young as 6 months of age, have shown preferences for particular brands (Hood, 2000). These preferences are attributed to the characters, icons and images that not only adorn baby products and clothes but also are seen on popular children's books, television shows and movies (Thomas, 2007).

Kurnit's (2000) research from the field of marketing, found that the majority of parents claim their children are able to recognize brands and make purchase requests by the age of 1 years old. Kurnit discusses future implications of his research by suggesting that marketers and media programmers should be: 1) creating more television programming for the 1 - 3 year olds, 2) creating new products for the 1 - 3 year old market segment and, 3) target directly to the 1 - 3 year old consumer.

The purpose of early marketing is to introduce a brand early enough so that it becomes part of the fabric of a child's life and even their identity. There is not much research on young children and identity (Chaplin & John, 2005) or what Escalas and Bettman (2005) referred to this as a forming of *self-brand connection*. Research indicates that adults use products to develop and express their identity (Belk, 1988; Kleine, Kliene, & Allen, 1995; Sirgy, 1982; Solomon, 1983; Wallendorf & Arnould, 1988). These products are often chosen based on consumer preference for brands (Fournier, 1998; Gardner & Levy, 1955; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2011; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). People form associations between their own self-concepts and the images that companies strategically project through marketing and advertising.

The self-brand connection formation happens through a matching process in which the consumer selects a product that reflects his or her self-image (Birdwell, 1968; Dolich, 1969; Gardner & Levy 1955). Escalas and Bettman (2005) elaborated on the three parts of the self-brand connection process. First, consumers must already have brand associations in order to be able to relate to them. Secondly, the consumer must already have some idea of their self-concept, whether that concept is of their current self, their desired self or their future self. The final part of this selection process is the matching piece. The consumer compares products in order to find the one(s) that are compatible with their self-concept. Researchers have begun to examine how and when self-brand connections are formed during childhood. Self-concepts are formed during childhood and according to child development experts tend to become more complex as a child ages (Fischer, 1980).

Nancy Shalek, the president of the Shalek Agency, asserted that advertisers use and manipulate self-concepts in order to turn a profit. She was quoted by Schor (2004) as saying: Advertising at its best, is making people feel that without their product, you're a loser. Kids are very sensitive to that. If you tell them to buy something, they are resistant. But if you tell them that they'll be a dork if they don't, you've got their attention. You open up emotional vulnerabilities and it's very easy to do with kids because they are the most vulnerable. (p. 65)

#### 2.2.5 Summary

The findings of this section of the literature review examine the historical contextual background pertaining to the issue of advertising to children. Topics consisted of the following 1) Western construction of childhood, 2) paradigms of the child within advertising, these included the vulnerable child, be empowered child, and the possibility of a third less dichotomous paradigm, 3) a historical overview of advertising to children, including how technology and deregulation increased corporate



access to children. By tracing the rise of technology and the historical events that led to the deregulation of advertising, the current situation can be viewed in a clearer context.

## 2.3 Part 2: Situating the Parent within the Issue

### 2.3.1 Parental Responsibility within the Neoliberal Context

Within the neoliberal context, parents are central in the debate about advertising to children in the United States. Neoliberal discourses of individual choice and responsibility have left the advertising industry largely unregulated. It is often the parents who are told that if they do not like particular products or messages it is their choice and responsibility to restrict their child's access to these items. Parents are not only given these "choices" but are often the first blamed for making the wrong ones when harmful effects from the commercial culture begin to affect their children (e.g., childhood obesity, youth violence, etc.). The underlying argument is that parents simply aren't doing their jobs.

Schor's (2004) qualitative investigation of the advertising industry confirmed this "blame the parent discourse" when she gathered data through interviews with marketing executives. Over and over again, marketers justified their work by explaining that it was parents who were responsible for protecting and shielding their children from consumer culture. For example, Ken Viselman, the media producer who brought the United States the *Teletubbies* espoused, "The reason there's childhood obesity is because caregivers don't have enough time to spend with their children. So what they're doing is giving their kids 8 hours a day of TV a day" (Schor, 2004, p. 183). Underlying this argument is a message that blames working mothers for being busier

than women from past generations who stayed home, cooked “wholesome meals” as opposed to fast food, and supervised their children.

Within the advertising industry in the United States it is common to blame the individual (the parent) for their failure to protect their child(ren) from the ills of commercial culture. This position is part of the individualism promoted through neoliberal discourses. Barber (2007) explained, “Parents are embattled gatekeepers at best, who year by year watch their hold on their children compromised, eroded, outflanked, and eventually wholly loosened by their rivals in the marketplace” (p. 231). A survey done by the Center for the New American Dream (2000) found that parents have conflicting opinions about parental responsibility. Forty-three percent of parents believed that “blaming advertisers is an excuse that parents give because they do not know how to say no”. An equal number (43%) of parents felt it is becoming more difficult to set limits with kids because so much advertising is aimed at them making them feel they need certain things to fit in. The remaining parents (12 %) of parents agreed with both statements.

While 43% percent of parents may not blame advertisers, most of the parents surveyed have serious concerns about the tactics used by advertisers aimed at children. Seventy-eight percent of parents believe that marketing to children while in school should be banned. Seventy percent believed that advertising and marketing aimed at kids had a negative effect on their values and how they see the world. Seventy-eight percent of parents felt that marketing and advertising puts too much pressure on children to buy things that are expensive, unhealthy, or unnecessary. Furthermore, the majority of parents believed that television programmers should

reduce their advertising to children and that Internet providers aren't doing enough to limit advertising to kids.

### 2.3.2 Parental Perceptions of Advertising to Children

While there is a large body of research on adult attitudes towards marketing, little research has been done on parental attitudes towards advertising aimed at children (Oates, Blades & Gunter, 2003; Austin, Bolls, Fujioka & Englebertson, 1999; Young, de Bruim & Eagle, 2003).

The research on the general public's attitudes towards advertising has primarily been conducted in North America and Europe (Alwitt & Prabhakar, 1992; Chan & McNeal, 2003a; Mittal, 1994). Public criticisms of advertising tend to fall into three broad categories: 1) They are false or misleading, 2) They promote negative values (i.e. materialism), 3) They can convince people to purchase things that they do not need (Donohoe, 1995). Of particular concern to the industry is the previously mentioned adverse perceptions of advertising that could potentially impact advertising effectiveness or even worse, lead to increased support for governmental regulation (Calfee & Ringold, 1988; Pollay & Mittal, 1993).

Research also suggests that a person's demographic category (i.e.: race, gender, religion, income and education) does not influence their attitude as much as one may assume. Several studies have shown that African American consumers tend to have more positive attitudes about advertising than Caucasians (Bauer et. al, 1968; Bush, Smith & Martin, 1999; Tolley & Goett, 1971, Whittler, 1991). Of interest, Durand and Lambert's (1985) study found that person's attitude had less to do with race and more to do with whether they felt alienated politically and/or as a consumer.

Beyond the general public criticism of advertising, there have been relatively few research studies on the perceptions of parents from the United States towards marketing or advertising to children (Oates, Blades & Gunter, 2003; Young, de Bruim & Eagle, 2003). The studies that have been done have overwhelmingly been conducted by marketing researchers in trade publications or by foundations.

In 1976, Burr and Burr conducted a landmark study in the United States of parental attitudes about advertising to children. This study interviewed 400 parents of children from age 2 to 10 years of age. Parents were overwhelmingly unhappy with the amount of advertising that was directed to children; they felt that it was misleading and took advantage of young children. Parents especially disliked the promotional items placed in sugary cereals and many admitted that they purposefully left their children at home when shopping or avoided the cereal aisles altogether. Over 65% of parents interviewed wanted the government to regulate advertising to children; however, more than 50% stated that they felt the state of advertising was a reflection of our society and they doubted that the government could make it more truthful. The research findings were published in the *Journal of Advertising* with the authors' following conclusion:

It is possible that, sooner or later, parents are going to collectively exert a strong influence on legislators for greater control, in spite of their cynicism that probably nothing can be done. On the basis of this research, it seems appropriate to assume that "self-regulation" may be the only corrective approach which could reverse parental frustration and thwart a "parental backlash" at the national level. (Burr & Burr, 1976, p. 41)

To date, parental concerns remain virtually the same as they did at the time of Burr and Burr's study. Parents continue to show concern about the content and tactics used by marketers. Overall parents tend to have negative attitudes towards advertising to children. Sixty-nine percent of parents are alarmed by the amount of advertising their

children encountered (Vandewater, Rideout, Wartella, Huang, Lee, & Shim, 2007). They remain concerned that advertisements are misleading (Gunter, Oates & Blades, 2005). Parents believe that the more television advertisements children watch the more products they will desire. They are also worried that marketing led to an increase in product requests and that these requests often lead to parent-child conflict. Parents were also concerned that the messages contained in advertisements undermine a parent's authority to be the main influencer(s) in their children's life (Grossbart & Crosby, 1984). In a 2011 survey of 1,384 parents of children ages birth through 8, over half stated that their children's food preferences were influenced "a lot" by TV ads, and one third reported being are worried that advertisers promoted materialism to children while making false and/or deceptive product claims (Rose, Bush & Kahle, 1998).

These concerns were not limited to television advertising. According to the Pew Internet and American Life Project, 62% of parents surveyed showed concerns that while online their children would encounter advertisers or marketers who will exploit or take advantage of them. This is a legitimate concern, since some toy advertisers have been circumventing Federal Communications Commission (FCC) policies by encouraging children to visit their unregulated websites (Madden & Rainie, 2007).

While parents express concern for their own children, several research studies have shown that parents tend to perceive other people's children to be more influenced by sex, violence and materialistic media messages than their own children. This phenomenon is referred to as third-person perceptions (Hoffner & Buchanan, 2002; Nathanson, Eveland, Park, & Paul, 2002; Tsfati, Ribak, & Cohen, 2005). With such few studies of parental attitudes on marketing to children within the United States, it is

important to also examine existing international studies on the issue. A 2007 study conducted in Belgium examined parental attitudes regarding advertising to children with an emphasis on food advertising. A survey of 485 parents across socio-economic backgrounds found that parents were most likely to mediate their children's television viewing if advertising led to family conflict or to their children pestering them for products that met with their disapproval. Parents were not likely to restrict or limit their children's television viewing based on concerns that their children are unable to comprehend an advertiser's intent. Similarly, parents in Belgium were also less likely to restrict their children's television viewing based on a concern about television advertisement's negative influence on their children's attitudes and/or development (Dens, et al., 2007).

Young, de Bruin, and Eagle (2003) asked parents in Sweden, New Zealand and the United Kingdom about their attitudes of advertising to children. Parents were most concerned about the sheer number of advertisements that children were exposed to and that these advertisements would lead their children to ask for things that they did not need. Another concern was that young children did not completely understand the intended purpose of advertising. Of interest, is that while there were varying percentages of responses from different countries, parents' main concerns and attitudes were similar across all three countries. All parents wanted more stringent regulations of advertisers. This was especially interesting given that Sweden has very strong regulations about advertising and the United Kingdom's regulations are loose in comparison. The National Family and Parenting Institute (NFPI) also conducted interviews in the United Kingdom and revealed that 84% of parents believed that corporations market to children too much and too young. Additionally, 86% of these

same parents perceived targeting children creates “false wants and expectations” (Horgan, 2005, p. 75).

### 2.3.3 Parenting Styles Linked to Perceptions about Advertising

There is a body of research that links parenting style with perceptions about advertising to children (Bakir & Vitell, 2010; Carlson & Grossbart, 1988; Carlson, Grossbart, & Walsh, 1990; Evans, Carlson & Grubbs, 2013; Grossbart & Crosby, 1984; Lacznia, Mueling, & Carlson, 1995). Studies utilized Baumrind’s (1971) earlier research on parenting styles, that broke parental behavior into four categories; authoritarian, authoritative, permissive and uninvolved. She observed two main aspects of parenting; warmth and control. Control refers to the rules and discipline a parent enacts and warmth refers to a parent’s willingness to accept and respond to their child’s needs.

Authoritarian parenting styles tend to be very controlled, with a lot of rules, punitive discipline and little warmth. Authoritarian parents tend to have a “my way or the highway” approach to parenting. In contrast, authoritative parents do set boundaries but are also warm and responsive to their child. They negotiate boundaries and leave room for their interaction. Permissive parents are warm but have little control or discipline. They give into their children’s desires for fear of disappointing them. Uninvolved parents are neither warm or show much control. They minimize the amount of time they spend with their children and can be neglectful.

Crosby and Grossbart (1984) found that authoritarian parents tend to have a much more negative attitude regarding food advertisements than permissive parents. Authoritative parents were not significantly different than the other parents. Carlson,

Laczniak, & Muehling (1994) also found that authoritarian parents tended to have an extremely negative view of toy-based television programs, whereas authoritative and permissive parents were not as concerned about them. Interestingly, parents of all styles had a negative opinion of 1-900-number advertisements that were advertised to children (Laczniak, Meuhling, & Carlson, 1995).

#### 2.3.4 Marketing as a Source of Parental Stress

Children's increased exposure to advertising has been shown to increase their requests for material good such as toys, sugary snacks and entertainment items (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2003b). These increased requests have been shown to create parental stress that can lead to parent-child discord. This discord often leads to parent-child conflict and comes about when: 1) children are exposed to commercials and in turn ask for the products advertised, 2) parents refuse to purchase the item(s), 3) child becomes angry, frustrated or disappointed (Atkin, 1980; Robertson, 1979). Young children will often whine, cry, nag and throw tantrums when they are disappointed. In fact, this phenomenon has been studied by market researchers and is called the "nag factor" or in Britain it is referred to as "pester power." Isler, Popper and Ward's (1987) study on the nag factor found that only 13% of parents are not influenced by the nag factor. The other parents in the study indulge, give in or are conflicted by their child's attempts to influence a product purchase.

Several studies show that parents agree that marketing directly to children adds to increased financial stress and familial strife. For example, in a qualitative study on parental stressors in the United Kingdom parents listed their children's request for material goods as a huge parental stressor. Parents identified the financial pressure



they felt to provide name-brand clothing, cellular phones and toys as major sources of conflict and stress in their homes (Sidebotham, 2001). Parents also felt that if these items were not being advertised directly to their children they would have fewer requests for them. The largest concern for these parents was that without these items their children would not fit in with their peers. These findings corroborate the findings of the National Family and Parenting Institute (NFPI) whose interviews revealed that 84% of parents in the United Kingdom believed that corporations market to children too much and too young. Furthermore 86% of these same parents perceived targeting children creates “false wants and expectations” (Horgan, 2005, p. 75). On the other side of the parent-child relationship, Atkin’s (1975, 1978) studies found advertising’s negative side effects on children included disappointment, frustration and anger at parents when they were denied a product that they wanted. Other studies conducted corroborated these findings (Goldberg & Gorn, 1978; Sheikh & Moleski, 1977).

It is important to note that there are many mitigating factors that influence parent-child conflict about the intent of advertising and socioeconomic status. These include, but not limited to, a child’s age, the child’s gender, parent/child communication. There have been several studies that have explored the moderating influence of each of these factors. These findings make the case that all of the factors are at play in complex and multiple ways in relation to advertising and parent-child conflict. While age has not been found to affect the relationship between advertising and unhappiness (Churchill & Moschis, 1979; Goldberg & Gorn, 1978; Moschis & Moore, 1982), age is a major factor in relation to parent-child conflict, with younger children being more likely to come into conflict with their parents than older children (Isler et al., 1987; Valkenburg & Cantor,

2001). Roedder (1981) posited that younger children were more susceptible to this because they were more easily persuaded by commercials and therefore more likely to ask for the advertised goods from their parents. This supports the argument that young children are more vulnerable to marketers than older ones because they lack the critical thinking skills to discern advertiser's intent. Brucks, Armstrong & Goldberg's (1988) study also support the theory that it is a younger child's lack of cognitive ability to produce counterarguments to advertisements that increases purchase requests and leads to parent-child conflict.

Parent-child conflict may tend to be more substantial for boys than for girls (Atkin, 1975). It has been generalized that boys tend to be more repetitive and resolute in their pestering of their parents than girls (McNeal, 1999; Sheikh & Molwski, 1977; Ward & Wackman, 1972). Cowan and Avants (1988) found that girls often used their charm to influence their parents to purchase advertised items they desired while boys tended to resort to more bullish tactics to get what they want. Atkin (1978) suggested that girls are therefore less likely to be involved in parent-child conflict because their attempts at persuasion are less abrasive than boys.

Families from a low socio-economic bracket tend to have more parent-child conflict from advertising-related purchase requests than higher income families (Young, 1990). Moore and Moschis (1981) explained this effect as the result of increased exposure to advertising. They found that low-income children watch more television and thus are exposed to more advertisements than their wealthier peers. This lack of consumer education among children from low-income households may leave them more vulnerable and less able to be critical of advertisements (Donohue & Meyer,

1984). Two studies generalized that parents who are identified as low-income are less likely to talk to their children about the intent of marketers (Gunter & Furnham, 1998; Robertson, 1979). This argument stems from a body of research that indicated parents who discuss the intent of advertising along with other consumer education were able to help decrease the number of appeals for advertised goods and counter the adoption of materialistic values (Moschis & Churchill, 1978; Moschis & Moore, 1982; Prasad, Rao, & Sheikh, 1978). Noticeably lacking in this literature is the theory that low-income families are less able to purchase the desired items requested and frequently say no more often than parents who are better off financially.

### 2.3.5 Parental Mediation of Advertising

One strategy used to avoid parent-child conflict brought on by advertising is to limit a child's exposure to advertising as much as possible. This strategy is often referred to as *parental mediation*. So while marketers are spending immense amounts of money to advertise to children, many concerned parents are working to outsmart them (McNeal, 1999). In fact, parental mediation is widely believed to be the most effective way to counteract undesirable advertising effects, especially for young children (Donohue & Meyer, 1984). Parents can and do have a major influence on their children (Austin, et al., 1999; Gilman, Rende, Boergers, Abrams, Buka, Clark & Lipsitt, 2009; Resnick, Bearman, Blum, Bauman, Harris, Jones, Shew, 1997). While there is a large body of literature on the effectiveness of parental mediation in regards to television, there is only a small, albeit growing, body of literature on the parental mediation of children's advertising exposure (Boush, 2001).

In the field of communications, researchers have examined parental practices aimed at reducing the influence of risk associated with media (e.g., Gentile & Walsh, 2002; Nathanson, 2001). This literature suggests there are four major strategies parents employ to prevent or reduce advertising's undesired effects: 1) parents are able to make and enforce rules and/or limitations on their children's media use, 2) parents model behavior that refutes or affirms media messages, 3) parents communicate norms that may influence the way their children seeks out information or influences what their children choose to watch, 4) parents actively examine and reflect upon media content with their children. Part of this mediation may include *co-viewing*, the practice of watching television (or other media messages) with their children (Nathanson, 2001; Nathanson, et al., 2002). These strategies can be further broken down into two distinct categories that have been labeled: *active* and *restrictive* advertising mediation strategies (Bijmolt, Claasen, & Brus, 1998; Buijzen, 2009; Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2005; Wiman, 1983).

#### 2.3.5.1 Restrictive Mediation Strategies

Concerns about the media's harmful messages are the main reason parents are enacting restrictions (Dorr, Kovaric, & Doubleday, 1989; Nathanson et. al, 2002; Van Der Voot, Nikken, & Lil, 1992, Warren 2003). While reports vary about the actual percentages, the majority of parents from the United States report employing limits on media usage. Children are more likely to have time limitations placed on being online (59%) as opposed to playing video games (42%) and viewing television (39%). Approximately 70% of children stated that their parents set boundaries about where they are allowed to go online or the types of video games they are able to purchase and

play. It is challenging to give a figure on the percentage of parents who have put an Internet filter on children's computers and/or hand held devices. Reports range from 26% of parents to 41% of parents of online teens (Gentile & Walsh, 1999). At least two-thirds of parents surveyed in a study conducted with parents from the United States found that participants enforced restrictions on a rule that children are not permitted to use media (TV, internet, video games) until after their homework and their other responsibilities are complete (Schmitt, 2000). According to the Kaiser Family Foundation's (1999) report *Kids and the Media @ the New Millennium*, approximately 50% of children say that their parents have established some guidelines about either television content or time limits on viewing (Madden & Rainie, 2007).

International studies have shown that it is not only parents from the United States who practice restrictive practices to limit their children's use of advertising. Chan and McNeal (2003b) found that approximately 90% of Chinese parents set boundaries such as limiting the amount of time their children spend viewing television or exerting control over which programs their children are able to watch. In Belgium, parents were most likely to restrict their children's exposure to advertising if it led to family conflicts, namely nagging them for unhealthy or undesirable products (Dens, et al., 2007).

Koolstra and Lucassen (2004) reported that there are discrepancies between what parents report as their mediation efforts and the actual amount and/or limitations that they impose on their children's media access. This is often the case, because the overwhelming majority of studies conducted are done through self-reporting mechanisms such as questionnaires. Moreover, as advertising has moved from

television to computers, personal gaming systems, cellular phones, classrooms, etc. it is becoming more and more difficult for parents to serve as gatekeepers.

#### 2.3.5.2 Active Mediation Practices

Active mediation practices are varied but tend to include intentional communication about the intent of advertisements. Parents may discuss the importance of being a skeptical and informed consumer. Often active mediation practices include a parent sharing and explaining how their personal values contradict with those of the advertisement. Beyond discussion parents model behavior that will either refute or support the messages children receive from advertisement. Active mediation includes parents going beyond the modeling of behavior, to an examination and reflection upon advertiser's intent and content with their children. Part of this mediation may include *co-viewing*, the practice of watching or viewing media messages (such as advertisements) with their children (Nathanson, 2001; Nathanson et al., 2002).

#### 2.3.5.3 Active versus Restrictive Mediation Practices

There have been three studies to date that have attempted to compare the effectiveness of active versus restrictive mediation practices on children's understanding of advertiser's intent. Interestingly, the first two reached conflicting conclusions. Wiman (1983) concluded that restrictive mediation was the most effectual method while Bijmolt et al. (1998) determined that active mediation was the most compelling mediation strategy.

Buijzen and Valkenburg (2005) also conducted a study that looked at the effectiveness of different styles of parental mediation (active versus restrictive) influence children's requests for advertised goods, materialism and rates of parent-child conflict.

In addition to determining whether active or restricted measures were more effective, the authors were also interested in whether a family's communication styles were a factor in the reduction of unwanted advertising effects. They found that talking with children about consumer issues was most successful at negating purchase requests, parent-child conflicts and the adoption of materialistic attitudes.

### 2.3.6 Summary

So far, this is what we know in regards to situating the parent within the issue of advertising young children: 1) within the neoliberal context, parents are central to the debate about advertising to children in the United States, 2) compared to the number of research studies done with the general public regarding perceptions of advertising, there have been relatively few studies on the perceptions of parents from the United States towards marketing or advertising to children, 3) parental styles are links to perceptions about advertising, 4) marketing to children has been shown to increase parental stress and family conflict, parental mediation is widely believed to be the most effective way to counteract undesirable advertising effects. These practices include active and restrictive mediation. Active mediation includes parental discussions about the purpose of advertisements, co-viewing media messages and modeling positive consumer behavior. Restrictive mediation practices include time and content limitations being placed on children.

## 2.4 Part 3: Areas of Research within the Issue of Advertising to Children

The research on advertising to children falls into two main categories focusing on: 1) A child's ability to watch, recognize, understand and remember advertisements, 2) A child's reaction to the advertisement (Kunkel, 1990).

#### 2.4.1 Children's Ability to Understand the Intent of Advertisements

In the 1970s, developmental psychologists and early childhood educators fought for a ban on advertising to children on the basis that young children are not developmentally able to understand the intent of advertisers. Piaget's theories are the most cited theory in research about children's limited understanding of advertising (Young, 1990). Developmental psychologists argue that children under the age of 7 or 8 are unable to fully comprehend an advertisement's persuasive intent. They base this on Piaget's developmental theory that explains young children lack the ability to conceptualize another person's perspective because they tend to be egocentric (Carroll & Steward, 1984; Flavell, 1979; Kurdek & Rodgon, 1975; Selmen, 1971; Shantz, 1975).

Roberts (1982) asserted that adults are able to recognize and in essence defend against or factor in particular aspects of commercials: 1) advertisers may not have the same interests as the viewer, 2) commercials are meant to convince the viewer, 3) these messages are biased, and 4) commercial messages need to be interpreted through defensive filters. It is widely accepted that it takes two key processing tasks for a child to "achieve a mature understanding of advertising messages" (Kunkel, et al., 2004, p. 5). The first task is to be able to distinguish between programming and advertising content. The second task needed to understand advertising is the ability to understand the advertiser's persuasive intent.

Children between the age of 4 and 5 years old are able to understand the difference between programming and advertisements on television (Blatt, Spencer and Ward, 1972; Ward Reale, & Levinson, 1972). However, this ability is mainly based on their ability to perceive that commercials are shorter than television programming and/or



commercials are funnier than regular children's programs. In response, television programmers began to create a "buffer" message in their programs to separate commercials from children's shows (e.g., "We will be back after we take a break for these messages"). However, studies found that putting a buffer or a separator between programming and commercials did not help children better understand the difference between programming and content (Butter, Popovich, Stackhouse, & Garner, 1981; Palmer & McDowell, 1979; Stuts, Vance & Hudleson, 1981).

It became widely accepted that the two tasks needed in order to achieve a mature understanding of advertisements develop in children over time (John, 1999; Young, 1990). Therefore, children's age became viewed as the most important factor in determining a child's understanding of advertising (Ginsburg, 2007; Gunter & Furnham, 1998; Young, 1990). In one of the first studies on this topic, Ward and Wackaman (1973) found that 53% of the 5-6 year-olds and 41% of the 7-8 year olds were unable to determine the advertiser's intent. Roedder (1981) asserted that children under the age of 7 had less experience and domain-specific information at their disposal and are therefore unable to filter commercial messages like older children. Other similar studies also found that age was the most determining factor when it comes to understanding the intent of advertising (Blosser & Roberts, 1985; Roberts & Rossiter, 1974; Ward, Wackman, Wartella, & Wartella, 1977). It is this body of research that is most cited by scholars and activists when making the case that children under the age of 8 are unable understand the purpose of marketing messages. While these studies were done on television advertisements, children's age is also directly correlated with the number of

online advertisements that children were able to identify (Ali, Blades, Oats, & Blumberg, 2009).

Some critics have argued that children are savvier now than children from past generations. However, recent studies have also garnered the same results, with less than half of the children under 8 years of age able to identify or recognize the intent of advertisements (Oates, Blades, & Gunter, 2002). Another critique is that as children are more experienced with advertising they will gain experience that will help them to better navigate as a consumer. Disputing this theory, Comstock and Paik's (1991) study found that children who watched significant amounts of television were not any more able to identify the persuasive intent of commercials than their peers who had less experience viewing advertisements.

#### 2.4.1.1 Advertisements are Misleading

Parents, as well as consumer protection advocates are concerned that advertisements are misleading (Gunter, Oates & Blades, 2005). Often products are described as being "the best ever" or "better than the competition's". The advertisements exaggerate the fun by visual and audio clips that create expectations that far exceed the products description. Fantasy settings are used in advertisement to attract children's attention, but young children may not be able to realize that these special effects and situations do not come with the product (Barcus, 1980; Rajeki, McTavish, Rasmussen, Schreuders, Byers, & Jessup, 1994). Products are pitched as fun, hip, cool with little details of the actual product. What is being sold is the symbolic idea of the product. Celebrities and characters are used to endorse products. Atkin (1980) found that children believed that characters such as Fred Flintstone actually ate

the cereal he advertised and also that he was recommending it because he believed it was healthy and delicious.

#### 2.4.2 Children's Reactions to Advertisements

There is a second body of research within this literature review that focuses on children's reactions to advertising. The majority of this research examines what children understand about the messages within advertisements and how it effects children's actions. Schor (2004) argues that if advertising didn't work then companies wouldn't be spending billions of dollars annually on it. The question is to what extent are children influenced by the harmful messages inside of advertising? The next section of this study examines the issues of messages within advertising: 1) unhealthy products such as tobacco, alcohol and junk food, 2) violence, 3) gender roles and sexualization, and 4) materialism.

##### 2.4.2.1 Unhealthy Products

There is a large body of research within the health field that has demonstrated a link between the advertising of alcohol and tobacco products with youth tobacco and alcohol use (Atkin, 1995; Grube, 1995; Strasburger, 2001). It is widely accepted that alcohol and tobacco use in children and teens is not in the best interest of public health. A ban on advertising these substances is currently in place in the United States.

Much like the push to ban alcohol and tobacco from television, health advocates are targeting junk food advertising as detrimental to public health. Food advertising has been studied since the mid 1960s in the United States (Gamble & Cotugna, 1999). Sugary breakfast cereal, high calorie snacks and fast-food advertisements make up a bulk of advertisements on children's television.

In 1992, Kunkel and Gantz found that only 2.8 % of all foods advertised were what experts would consider nutritious. With childhood obesity at all-time high, there has been a huge surge in the amount of research being done on the impact of advertising on children's diet. For example, a World Health Organization (WHO) (2002) report targeted the advertising of junk food as the likely culprit of the worldwide childhood obesity crisis. Studies found a high correlation between the number of hours children viewed television and their eating preferences (Dietz, 1990; Horgen, Choate & Brownell, 2001; Harris, Bargh & Brownell, 2009; Troiano & Flegal, 1998). These studies made the case that it is not the sedentary lifestyle that is to blame, rather it is the junk food advertisements. Other studies have documented just how effective these advertisements are in shaping and changing eating behavior (Borzekowski & Robinson, 2001; Galst & White, 1976; Goldberg, Gorn, & Gibson, 1978; Taras, Sallis, Patterson, Nader & Nelson, 1989).

Fleming-Milici, Harris, Sarda and Schwartz (2013) conducted a study of 2,454 parents with children age 2 - 17 for three consecutive years (2009, 2010, 2011) to learn about their perceptions regarding food marketing and how it affects their children's food preferences which indicates that many parents would support policies to limit unhealthy food and beverage marketing to children. Seventy-two percent to 81% of parents stated that they were as concerned about unhealthy food marketing as they are about alcohol and cigarette marketing to children. The percentage of parents who believe that food marketing negatively affects their children's food choices rose from 59% in 2009 to 65% in 2011. Interestingly, this is the same time period that the Children's Food and Beverage Advertising Initiative was in place. This may indicate that parents do not think

self-regulation efforts are working. The majority of parents were in favor of regulation that prohibits junk food advertising to children under 12, including advertising in schools, TV advertising, viral marketing, mobile marketing and online advertising.

In 2010, the World Health Organization (WHO) made 12 recommendations on food and non-alcoholic beverage marketing to children. These recommendations were also endorsed by the 63rd World Health Assembly. The policy recommendations laid out clearly the steps that countries needed to take in order to reduce the marketing of unhealthy foods to children (See Figure 1). So far the United States has yet to adopt these and is relying on the industry to self-regulate advertising foods to children.

1. The policy aim should be to reduce the impact on children of marketing of foods high in saturated fats, *trans*-fatty acids, free sugars, or salt.
2. Given that the effectiveness of marketing is a function of exposure and power, the overall policy objective should be to reduce both the exposure of children to, and power of, marketing of foods high in saturated fats, *trans*-fatty acids, free sugars, or salt.
3. To achieve the policy aim and objective, Member States should consider different approaches, i.e. stepwise or comprehensive, to reduce marketing of foods high in saturated fats, *trans*-fatty acids, free sugars, or salt, to children.
4. Governments should set clear definitions for the key components of the policy, thereby allowing for a standard implementation process. The setting of clear definitions would facilitate uniform implementation, irrespective of the implementing body. When setting the key definitions Member States need to identify and address any specific national challenges so as to derive the maximal impact of the policy.
5. Settings where children gather should be free from all forms of marketing of foods high in saturated fats, *trans*-fatty acids, free sugars, or salt. Such settings include, but are not limited to, nurseries, schools, school grounds and pre-school centres, playgrounds, family and child clinics and pediatric services and during any sporting and cultural activities that are held on these premises.

6. Governments should be the key stakeholders in the development of policy and provide leadership, through a multistakeholder platform, for implementation, monitoring and evaluation. In setting the national policy framework, governments may choose to allocate defined roles to other stakeholders, while protecting the public interest and avoiding conflict of interest.
7. Considering resources, benefits and burdens of all stakeholders involved, Member States should consider the most effective approach to reduce marketing to children of foods high in saturated fats, *trans*-fatty acids, free sugars, or salt. Any approach selected should be set within a framework developed to achieve the policy objective.
8. Member States should cooperate to put in place the means necessary to reduce the impact of cross- border marketing (in-flowing and out-flowing) of foods high in saturated fats, *trans*-fatty acids, free sugars, or salt to children in order to achieve the highest possible impact of any national policy.
9. The policy framework should specify enforcement mechanisms and establish systems for their implementation. In this respect, the framework should include clear definitions of sanctions and could include a system for reporting complaints.
10. All policy frameworks should include a monitoring system to ensure compliance with the objectives set out in the national policy, using clearly defined indicators.
11. The policy frameworks should also include a system to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of the policy on the overall aim, using clearly defined indicators.
12. Member States are encouraged to identify existing information on the extent, nature and effects of food marketing to children in their country. They are also encouraged to support further research in this area, especially research focused on implementation and evaluation of policies to reduce the impact on children of marketing of foods high in saturated fats, *trans*-fatty acids, free sugars, or salt.

*Figure 1.* 2010 World Health Organization recommendations.

#### 2.4.2.2 Marketing Violence

The marketing of violent movies, games and toys are something that parents have cited as a concern. Huston, Watkins, and Kunkel (1989) reported that an average

elementary school student will have viewed 8,000 murders and 100,000 violent acts on television by the time he completes the 5<sup>th</sup> grade. Gerbner and Signorielli (1990) reported children's Saturday morning cartoons were twice as violent as prime-time adult television. On average, they found that 20 - 25 violent acts were being committed per hour. A study by the Center for Media and Public Affairs (1995) reported that commercials were 30% more violent than in 1992. Violence in commercials has been related to the trend in program-length commercials (Kunkel, 1988). These shows (e.g., *Heman, Masters of the Universe*) were designed with the express purpose of selling toys. Of concern, is that children view violent acts on television, go out and purchase the toys and act out violence in their play.

Bakan (2011) interviewed Gentile, a leading expert on media violence and gaming during his study on the corporatization of childhood. Gentile was quoted stating that he was "perplexed that the same parents who take pains to keep children from witnessing violence in the home and neighborhood, often do little to keep them from viewing large quantities of violence on television, in movies, and in video games" (p. 43). He went on to explain that parents are left in the dark because the industry works so hard to neutralize their concerns.

There is a large body of research on childhood aggression and violent advertising. Past research indicates that watching violence on television may cause children to be aggressive towards other (Huesmann, Lagerspetz, Eron, 1984; Heusmann, Moise-Titus, Podolski & Eron, 2003; Sanson & Muccio, 1993). In the landmark study on violence and television, Bandura, Ross, and Ross (1963) showed some children a violent film and a control group film. The group who viewed the

violence was more aggressive during their outdoor play. Huston-Stein, Fox, Greer, Watkins and Whitaker (1981) found that commercials used violence to enhance the entertainment value and appeal of their products. Sanson and diMuccio (1993) found that children who viewed male oriented shows and played with male-oriented toys were more aggressive than those who played with neutral toys and viewed neutral programming. This supports the research that found advertisers use gender stereotypes to advertise, with girls being sold beauty products and boys being sold violence (Browne, 1998; Kolbe & Muehling, 1995; Macklin & Kolbe, 1984; Strom Larson, 2001).

#### 2.4.2.3 Gender Roles and Media Sexualization

Marketers have been using the developmental concept of gender differentiation for years. Frost (2005) asserts that socialized gender identities are cultural, they take on a whole new level of importance within the appearance obsessed consumer driven context of latent capitalism. Image and appearance can take on an importance that overshadows other aspects of self-concept. Girls are socialized to view themselves as objects with the mass media fueling the fire in the search for perfection (Hill, 2011). Popular media celebrates certain ideals and Boden's (2006) qualitative study highlighted how young girls' subjectivities were formed through identifying with and idolizing pop stars and actresses in the mass media. Identity formation combined with brand loyalty has led to a boom in plastic surgery for children under 18. Quart's (2003) research found that girls in particular felt pressure to be perfect and this led to Quart coining the term "body branding". Girls are targeted by consumer messages that tell them their most important feature is their appearance (Little & Hoskins, 2005). Dittmar,



Halliwell & Ive (2006) conducted a study examining the influence of Barbie and girls' feelings about their body and found that girls as young as five years old felt contempt for their own physique.

Marketers often use sexualized images of girls. In a seminal study on the sexualization of girls in the media, Levin & Kilbourne (2009) uncovered the ways consumer culture subjects young girls to overtly sexualized versions of toys, clothes, images, etc. They assert that children tend to have a desire to be or act older and advertisers play on this. Stores sell lacey thong underwear, padded push up bras and belly shirts to children as young as five years old. For example a pair of toddler girl's underwear had printed on it, "so many boys so little time" (Bakan, 2011), another belly shirt made for a girl age 4 or 5 read *property of the boys locker room*. The study uncovers how the prevalence of pornography has leaked into the mainstream and is filtering down to our children. Adults are becoming desensitized to the overt sexual nature of the images in consumer culture. Looking at the transformation of the toys that young girls play with uncovers a progression of the sexualized images and toys (See Figure 2).





Figure 2. Example of toys becoming slimmer, sexier and pinker, comparison of 1980s (on left) to current (on right).

#### 2.4.2.4 Materialism

There is mounting evidence that advertising to children can instill materialistic values and can harm children’s physical and psychological wellbeing. Marketers spend billions of dollars to teach children what Bakan (2011) calls the “central curriculum of childhood” which is the idea that life, it’s meaning, and the people in it are all connected and dependent on their relationship to material things. Materialism is often defined as a preoccupation with wealth and material possessions (Belk, 1985). Also related to materialism is the belief that money and personal belongings are the way to find happiness, beauty and success (Fournier & Richins, 1991; Wulfemeyer & Mueller, 1992).

There have been several academics who espouse that exposure to advertising can encourage materialistic values in children (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2003a & 2005; Greenberg & Brand, 1993; Kasser, 2002; Liebert, 1986; Pollay, 1986; Wulfemeyer & Mueller, 1992). However, most studies on the correlation between advertising and materialistic values have correlations ranging from small to moderate, with  $r=.13$  to  $r=$

.32 (Atkin, 1975; Churchill & Moschis, 1979; Moschis & Churchill, 1978; Moschis & Moore, 1982). Two experimental studies were also conducted and collaborated the correlation studies (Goldberg & Gorn, 1978; Greenberg & Brand, 1993).

In the correlation studies participants are often asked to rank (on a scale of 1 to 5) particular statements, such as when I grow up I want to make a lot of money. Or I prefer to play with a toy rather than a friend (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2003a). Several of these studies found positive and significant relationships between frequency of television watching and materialism (Atkin, 1975; Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2003b; Moschis & Churchill, 1978; Moschis & Moore, 1982).

Several studies have examined the link between children's media use and the effects that increased exposure to materialistic values and/or attitudes can have on their well-being (Nairn, Ormrod, & Bottomley, 2007). Exposure to marketing has been linked with the increased adoption of materialistic attitudes in children as young as preschooler age (Goldberg & Gorn, 1978). Kasser, (2002) asserts that children are grown, groomed, targeted, manipulated and made to feel insecure and anxious from birth to be more susceptible to advertising. In his book, *The High Price of Materialism*, an emphasis on materialism has been associated with a lower concern for environmental and social issues and higher tendency of having anxiety and depression.

Children today are more aware of brands than any other generation in history. By the time they are teenagers they have upon average 145 discussions that include brand names per week (Bachmann & Roedder, 2003). Buijzen and Valkenburg (2000) reported that there is a link between the amount of television children watched and the number of products they requested as Christmas presents. Cross-cultural comparative

research found between Japan, the United States and the United Kingdom found similar results with children in the United States watching more television and requesting the most purchases (Robertson, Ward, Gatignon, & Klees, 1989).

There is a large body of scholarly work that has examined the relationship between materialism and life-dissatisfaction in adults (see Wright & Larsen, 1993 for an overview). However, there has been little research done with children on this issue. Scholars have utilized the social-comparison theory to hypothesize that exposure to television and advertising may lead children to compare their lives with the idealized, beautiful people who inhabit the media world (Atkins, 1975; Robertson, Rossiter, & Ward, 1985). Martin and Kennedy (1993) conducted the only study to date with a group of girls on this topic and found that increased amounts of television advertising did not lead the girls to feel dissatisfaction with their lives.

Sirgy (1998) explored another hypothesis regarding how exposure to advertising may increase materialistic values and in effect contribute to an individual's life-dissatisfaction. The hypothesis espouses that first, advertisements lead to materialistic attitudes and secondly, that materialistic people perceive material possessions as the crucial to happiness. Therefore, people who have internalized these values, spend the majority of their time working to obtain objects. When these objects fail to produce the level of expected happiness, individuals experience life-dissatisfaction.

Materialism is also a concern in other parts of the world. A UNICEF Report (2007) found that children in the United Kingdom scored low on a scale of quality of life in comparison to the other countries being rated. The report identified the United Kingdom's materialistic culture, combined with its high levels of social inequality as a

key reason for the lower score for children's wellbeing. The survey, which was conducted with children across several European countries, concluded that:

Consumerism appears to have become inextricably enmeshed in children's relationships with family and friends ... families in the UK, more so than in Sweden and Spain, use the purchase of new material objects (particularly new technology) in an attempt to compensate for relationship problems and social insecurity. In the United Kingdom parents and children seemed to be locked into a compulsive consumption cycle (2007, p. iii).

The report centered on a tug-of-war that children described as the desire for quality time with their parents and their own intense feelings of desire for electronics, brand name clothes and other expensive items. Children explained that they did not have as much time to spend with their parents who felt compelled to work long hours. In contrast children in Spain and Sweden felt much less pressure to purchase consumer items. The UNICEF report highlighted the differences in culture and governmental priorities between the countries and suggested a shift in national priorities for the United Kingdom, moving toward a more collective focus.

#### 2.4.3 Summary

The research on advertising to children fall into two main categories, a child's ability to watch, recognize, understand and remember advertisement and a child's reaction to the messages within advertisements. The first body of research found: 1) young children are unable to recognize advertisements, 2) they have difficulty differentiating between commercials and programming, 3) they do not understand the intent of advertising, 4) advertisements are misleading. The second body of knowledge that was presented examined the messages within advertising and how children reacted to these messages. These findings are as follows: 1) the advertising of unhealthy products such as alcohol, tobacco, and junk food have contributed to a rise in youth

tobacco and alcohol use and the childhood obesity epidemic, 2) the marketing of violent movies, games and toys have led to a general desensitization of violence and the use of gender stereotyping to sell violent toys to boys, 3) marketers are using the developmental concept of gender differentiation to sell girls highly gendered and sexualized toys, clothing, media products, 4) there is mounting evidence that advertising to children can instill materialistic values that may harm children's physical and psychosocial well-being. Critical scholars have called materialism the "central curriculum of childhood". What is not known is to what extent parents are aware or concerned about many of these messages. Finally, the section contained studies that showed countries with a more collective focus tended to be more apt to regulate advertising, while countries with more of an individualistic culture, such as the United States, tended to blame the individual for the ills brought on by advertising.

## 2.5 Part 4: Theoretical Perspectives and Concepts Informing the Study

Throughout the literature on marketing to children, there is a clear delineation between adult and child. Children are seen as separate from adults and in need of protection. This adult/child dichotomy is one that allows for the broader society to justify the ills of consumer culture (violence, materialism, sexualization, etc.) for adults, while at the same time claiming that children need protection from them. The *protectionist paradigm* is set up in opposition to the *empowered child* paradigm further dichotomizing the issue. Too often experts choose one side of the paradigm or the other, as if children are either completely helpless or totally empowered. Postmodern theoretical frameworks offer especially powerful tools for looking at these issues in new and fresh ways. This is because postmodernism allows for diverse and competing views of reality

to exist simultaneously. Critical postmodernists also work to uncover existing power structures and the discourses that are being used to justify, support and help those in power remain in power. The next section will discuss the theoretical frameworks and relevant concepts that will be utilized in this study.

### 2.5.1 An Overview of Postmodern Theories

Over the past forty years, there are several theories that have been lumped together under the terms *post-structuralism* and *postmodernism*. These theories have derived from many different fields including literature, sociology, art, history, psychology, linguistics and philosophy. In many ways postmodernism defies definition. A definition may in fact, violate the philosophies' own abhorrence of absolutes, truths and rigid boundaries. Gannon and Davies (2007) struggled with this when they stated, "Every definition creates exclusions that might (and should) be contested" (p. 72).

Postmodernism and poststructuralism often include contradictions and are often complex and messy. Postmodernism is composed of many diverse perspectives that are grouped together. Theorists are often put under the umbrella of postmodern yet do not agree with one another. Butler (1992) has asked if the motive to group these theories that clearly share little structure is in fact to "colonize and domesticate them" (p.5). Complicating matters is the fact that postmodernism and poststructuralist are often used interchangeably even though there are differences between these terms (Lather, 2000). Lather (1993) distinguishes between them stating that "postmodernism raises issues of chronology, economics, and aesthetics whereas postructuralism is used more often in relation to academic theorizing after structuralism" (p. 688).

### 2.5.1.1 Modernity

Perhaps the easiest way to explain postmodernism is to first provide a brief summary of modernity, which in many ways was what postmodernism was a reaction against. Much of Western European thought stems from modernity or what many refer to as the Enlightenment Period or the Age of Reason, which took place in the seventeenth and eighteenth century. A central theme from this time period was a strong belief in universal truth and that these truths or laws could and would be discovered by science. Hume was perhaps the strongest proponent of the idea of universal truth or natural law.

It was within this context in Western Europe, the project of modernity came into fashion. This project basically set about to solve political, economic, social problems through the use of science. An example of the optimism and belief that science will save mankind can be seen in Condorcet's (1794) book *Esquisse d' un tableau historique des progress de l'esprit humain*. In it he stated, "one day the moment will come when the sun only shines over free human beings who do not acknowledge any other master than their own reason" (p. xi).

This project ushered in the cultural enlightenment as well as the technical age of industry. The idea that humankind was progressing in a linear fashion, from simple to complex in a positive pre-determined direction was born from modernity. Along with this concept, was the idea that the world was progressing from messy and chaotic to ordered and structured. Knowledge was believed to accumulate and build, which would lead to a scientific truth that would set us free. Individualism also gained importance in



this era. Individuals were thought to be able to rise out of their class, culture or context through education, reason and self-control (Cannella, 1997).

Eventually poverty, oppression and ignorance disappear, as reason, science, knowledge and technology improve every aspect of humanity. Postmodernism was born in the early twentieth century. It grew out of a disappointment with modernity and challenged many of the assumptions that stemmed from it. The industrial revolution did not end poverty and social injustices, as many believed it would. World War I and World War II showcased to many that science and technology could just as easily be usurped for death and destruction as for peace and equality. Additionally, there was a shift in the arts, literature and philosophy, which questioned the privileging of scientific knowledge over other kinds of knowledge. The solid boundaries between science, philosophy, and theory were blurred.

Jean-Francois Lyotard (1984/1979) began to critique modernism's optimism, its reliance on absolute truth and the idea that humankind is progressing linearly. He argued that modernity was reliant on "grand narratives" which are broad overarching philosophies or beliefs that people tell themselves in order to make meaning of events and situations. Lyotard asserted that people had lost faith in these narratives. He explained that modernity was dead and that the post-modern period was upon us.

#### 2.5.1.2 Postmodernism

In contrast, the postmodern period is one that is characterized by "micro-narratives". These are small truths that are localized, contextualized, diverse and messy. They challenge what we think is reality, and it "replaces our lust for absolutes" (Lather, 1991, p. 6) with vague notions of multiple perspectives. At the very heart of

postmodernism is the doubt that any one method, way, belief, political system or structure is the “right” way. It is in fact, suspicious of all truth claims being masques that conceal political, social, religious or other local power struggles (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). The aim of postmodernism is not to reject everything but rather to systematically critique it. Furthermore, as St. Pierre noted (2000) we can never be completely free of modernity or humanism, because postmodernism was created within modernity and thus reacts to it while at the same time re-inscribing it at the same time.

The work of postmodern philosophers, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) exemplify the messiness of the post-modern era. Their style of writing was non-linear and almost written with the sole purpose to confuse, complicate and disorient the reader. Postmodern critiques are often labeled difficult to read and dismissed. St. Pierre (2000) explains that humanism is easy to understand because the themes within them are considered common sense. In contrast, postmodern themes are new and foreign; however, this is exactly the point, to force the reader to think differently.

Postmodernists also critique language in order to make evident the way that it is used in the production of powerful structures that classify, objectify and oppress. Derrida (1974/1967) introduced the idea of differance. This concept blends the French verbs “to defer” and “to differ”. Differance is the idea that language creates dichotomies. In other words the structure of language makes it very difficult to refer to one thing without comparing it to another. For example in English we cannot have “good” without a “bad”, “tall” without a “short” or “rich” without the concept of “poor”. This limitation of language sets up false binaries that create hierarchies. These

hierarchies are responsible for creating “the other”. Furthermore, language is always contextual and therefore meanings are always changing, shifting and open for dispute.

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) used metaphors in order to avoid binaries and open up new spaces for thinking. One such metaphor taken from nature is their concept of the *rhizome*. It is a root system that differs from other plants in that it has no beginning and no end. It is always nomadic, in the middle, and resisting time and organization. Deleuze introduced several principles of the rhizome that further expand on this metaphor, in order to attempt an escape from binary thinking. One such principle of the rhizome is that of multiplicity, the concept that within the rhizome there are numerous possibilities that can go in several directions. A *signifying rupture* is yet another principle that states that the rhizome may be broken or ruptured in a certain place and give way to new *lines of flight*. These lines of flight can be new ways of thinking, being or existing. However, one must recognize that there is always a danger that we may meet up with the same lines that are looking to reorganize or reterritorialize (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

Derrida (1974/1967) created the methodology of deconstruction to examine binaries and to challenge dominant discourses. He was concerned mainly with using deconstruction as a tool for philosophy and the French educational structure. In the United States it rose to prominence as a literary theory (Holub, 1992). Nonetheless, deconstruction is a critical tool used to “dismantle the metaphysical and rhetorical structures that are at work, not in order to reject or dismantle them but to re-inscribe them in other ways” (Derrida, quoted in Spivak, 1993, p. lxxv).

### 2.5.1.3 Poststructuralism

Poststructuralism is a challenge to the building and creation of truth-based systems that explain how things work such as, Freudian psychoanalysis, or Piagetian psychology (Cannella & Bailey, 1999). Structuralists believe that there are predetermined meanings to events and actions. Poststructuralists warn against taking structures or meanings and having them stand independent from the context (political, historical, and cultural) in which they were created. Foucault (1997) explained:

We have to dig deeply to show how things have been historically contingent, for such and such reason intelligible but not necessary. We must make the intelligible appear against a background of emptiness and deny its necessity. We must think that what exists is far from filling all possible spaces. To make a truly unavoidable challenge of the question: What can be played? (p. 139-140).

Poststructural analyses help us to stand back and attempt to describe concepts that seem “natural” and attempt to look at them differently (St. Pierre, 2000).

Foucault (1971/1970, 1972/1969) was interested in how language creates oppressive structures of power. His work on language and discourse greatly influenced critical scholarship. Foucault did not create theories but instead used histories or genealogies to map out how power-relations, discourses of normalization, subjugation, and individualization have affected the course of history. He wanted to expose the variety of ways that resistance to power takes and thus encourages new spaces to open up. His work examined the ways in which dominant discourses produced regulatory conditions through the desire to be *normal*. Foucault’s work on discourse changed the way poststructuralists think about language and how it works to shape and organize the world. Poststructuralists do not ask for the meaning of things, rather they ask “how does discourse

function? Where is it to be found? How does it get produced and regulated? What are its social effects? How does it exist” (Bovè, 1990, p. 54)?

#### 2.5.1.4 Feminist Poststructuralism

In the 1980s, feminist scholars such as Patti Lather (1991), began to blend together the use of critical, postmodern and poststructural perspectives into what she called a critical poststructural feminist approach. Other prominent feminist scholars who have been identified as “poststructuralists” include; Rosi Braidotti, Judith Butler, Joan Scott, Bronwyn Davies, Linda Nicholson, Jane Flax, Diana Fuss, and Elizabeth St. Pierre (St. Pierre, 2000). These scholars expressed dissatisfaction with humanism. They have concluded, in fact, that the bi-products of humanism are as harmful to women as to other groups of people. The systematic belief in humanism has allowed patriarchy, homophobia, racism, and other forms of oppression to thrive (St. Pierre, 2000). Working in this postmodern space opened up new ways for challenging the dominant constructions and created possibilities for asking new types of research questions. Gannon and Davies (2007) asserted that doing poststructural feminist research goes beyond asking questions such as what is, but instead what should be.

A critical feminist approach embraces many of the tenants of post-modernism and poststructuralism while challenging others. Critical feminists trouble dominant constructions of language, discourse, power, absolute truth, and rationality. Critical post-structural feminists acknowledge that patriarchy cannot be replaced by some other dominant construction of what Tong (1998) called “a matriarchal unitary truth” (p. 279). This reflects the influence of Foucault’s (1977b) notion of power and the warning that one type of oppression cannot simply be replaced with another. Anytime a “truth” is

constructed it has the power to include and exclude. This was the case when, early on in the feminist movement, straight white middle class women attempted to speak for all women. Women of color and Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgendered (LGBT) feminists resented being represented by a feminism that denied the differences within the movement. Postmodern /poststructural perspectives have helped feminists embrace pluralism and the diversity that exists within the sisterhood. It opened up new spaces for resistance and helped uncover new ways of knowing and being.

As multiple voices began to be heard, feminist scholars began to speak of “feminisms”. These included Black feminism, Chicano feminism, Eco-feminism, and LGBT feminisms. These women challenged a feminism that tackles gender inequalities without addressing race, gender and socio-economic status. (Collins, 1990; Hooks, 1990; Zavella, 1987). In 1995, Crenshaw coined the term *intersectionality theory*, which takes into account the multiple intersections of gender, ability, culture, race, socio-economics, and class. She stated that these factors combine to create an intersection of these identities. These fragmented identities (black, female, scientist) became a rich source for feminist inquiry (Harding, 1987).

Feminists of color were in a unique position to understand what Collins (2000) called *intersecting oppressions* because they were situated at the apex of oppression, being both oppressed for their race, gender, and often socio-economics. She asserted in her groundbreaking work, *Black Feminist Thought (2000)*, that power relationships are far more complex than permanent oppressor and perpetual victims. Seducing, pressuring, and forcing members of subordinated groups to replace individual thought with dominant discourses that justify oppression, is one way that power operates. In

other words when people begin to believe the discourse they are trapped within, they accept them as permanent. *Structural domains of power* are housed in all organizations and institutions and serve to hold power for those that are in power or are the dominant. *Hegemonic domains of power* are used by the dominate in power to try and change the discourse in order to maintain power or justify inequalities that exist.

Collins (2000) also critiqued postmodern / poststructural perspectives. While she admitted that postmodern perspectives can provide powerful and useful methods to challenge and decenter white male centers of power, she warned that there are limitations to its usefulness to women of color. She explained that it is difficult to decenter hierarchical power without first coming from a seat of authority. Collins also critiqued Foucault for robbing feminists of human agency and leading to relativism.

In *Disciplining Foucault; Feminism, Power, and the Body*, Sawicki (1991) addresses this issue when she contemplates whether Foucauldian poststructuralism can be used to further the causes of feminism(s). Sawicki argued that poststructuralism can help feminists embrace pluralism, open new spaces for resistance; help uncover new ways of knowing and being. For example, Foucault's (1970/1966) archeology traces how language has developed binaries, categories, and hierarchies in which to classify and sort everything. It is women who are often the ones oppressed by these structures, as they are on the wrong side of the binary. Foucauldian poststructuralism challenges the idea that language is a reflection of reality and is a powerful tool to deconstruct these structures.

Likewise, Foucault's theories on discourse, knowledge, disciplinary power, resistance and freedom have been utilized in several poststructural feminists' critiques

(e.g., Benhabib, 1995; Braidotti, 1991, 1994; Britzman, 1995; Butler, 1992; Davies, 1993; Flax, 1990; Fuss, 1989; Grosz, 1995; Hekman, 1990; Lather, 1991; Spivak, 1993; Walkerdine, 1990; Weedon, 1987). However, Foucauldian post-structuralism has limitations. To begin with, she explains that feminists cannot overlook the fact that Foucault was a European white male and therefore came from a position of power and privilege. Sawicki (1991) encourages feminists to keep what works and throw out the parts that stifle or silence multiple ways of knowing and being. Lather (1996) describes this as the work of “doing it” and “troubling it” (p. 3).

While poststructuralism and critical feminism(s) share similar ontological and epistemological foundations they cannot be essentialized. Each perspective holds tensions within their own borders and certainly between them (Koro-Ljungberg, 2004). Lather (2000) asserts that blending these borders can open up one’s own perspective. This blending of theories is what she is referring to when she uses the term doubled-practices, a play of Derrida’s (1982/1972) concept of doubled science. This is the practice of blending together two distinct theoretical lenses in order to create a new space from which to work. Lather calls this the “space-between”. These new spaces work with and against each other, the tensions critiquing each other in order to expand the theoretical space. It is the work of doing it and critiquing it simultaneously. In this study, Foucauldian and Deleuzeguattarian perspectives are utilized, while at the same time there is an acknowledgement and awareness that white European males developed both perspectives.



### 2.5.1.5 Rethinking the Individual

Poststructuralism demands that the individual, one of the most powerful yet commonplace concepts, be reconsidered (St. Pierre, 2000). The individual is constructed within Western humanist terms as a fixed, rationale, independent and self-aware entity, possessing free will, which is expressed through language and deed (Butler, 1995). The self is sealed off from the outside separating the subject from the object(s) on the outside. This fixed boundary creates the illusion of an a-historical, a-political individual who is able to use objective rationale to observe objects and predict and control them.

Within humanism, the self/other sets up a central binary from which to view the world. The humanist goal is freedom from all that holds one back. The metanarrative is that humankind is progressing linearly towards the ultimate utopian emancipation (Lyotard, 1984/1979). Therefore, the assumption can be made that within this narrative, the individual possess innate human agency. There have been challenges to the humanistic view of the individual, most notably from Marxism and psychoanalysis. Marx argued that an individual is the product of his or her society in which economic relations and class plays a major role in the production of the subject. Psychoanalysis decenters the subject through the conceptualization of the unconscious individual who is unable to be rational. Poststructural critiques of Marxism and psychoanalysis have critiqued both ideologies for being truth-oriented and totalizing. However, both were attempts to discredit the humanist construction of the self (St. Pierre, 2000).

## 2.5.2 Relevant Theoretical Concepts

The next section of this chapter will closely examine the poststructural concepts and themes that have shaped the research questions of this study. A discussion of the histories of power based on the work of Foucault and Deleuze serve as theoretical framework from which to conceptualize the discourses within corporate culture and marketing to children. The Foucauldian concepts of disciplinary power, the panopticon and biopower are used to conceptualize how the relations of production and desire in early capitalism utilized technologies and apparatuses of control to discipline the subject. Deleuze and Guattari's critique of capitalism will be discussed as well as Deleuze's theory that neoliberal policies are moving us from *disciplinary societies* towards *control societies*.

### 2.5.2.1 Foucault's Disciplinary Societies

Foucault's work differed from revolutionary models, such as Marxism, in that it focused on how institutional and cultural practices formed people as individuals. This is very different from the humanistic model that pits classes against one another or focuses on the powers of the State versus the people being ruled. Foucault (1984) argued that power is everywhere. Power depends on resistance and that this resistance or tension creates power. He did not deny that power could be forced, but at the same time, he stated, "Power is exercised only over free subjects and only in so far as they are free" (p. 206).

#### 2.5.2.1.1 Discourse

Foucault asserts that an individual is the product of historical, linguistic and cultural discourses. St. Pierre (2000) refers to Foucault's archeological analysis as

“where he begins to define the subject as a function of the statement” (p. 24).

Discourse is shaped through knowledge and epistemologies that define, construct and position human beings as objects. In this way, the subject can be defined as a product or object of material practice. *Objectification* is the operation of the material and discursive practices that are used to naturalize possibilities for certain discourses and to silence others (Foucault, 1990). In other words, discourses make some subject positions appear viable and “logical” while making either appear undesirable or limited. In this way discourses can limit human agency.

Discourse is designed to regulate, normalize and govern. It shapes how people are treated and socially organized, as well as, how organizational structures are constructed (Foucault, 1972). These ideas about knowledge and power stem from what Foucault called the construction of “regimes truth”. These truths become the ways people are governed, ordered and disciplined. But this discipline is not only top-down. The power comes at the point when an individual or a society internalizes these “truths” as his or her own and self-regulates. At this point, individuals and/or society repeat these “truths”, circulate them and regulate each other.

#### 2.5.2.1.2 Disciplinary Power

In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Foucault’s (1977a) archeological analysis traces the origins of the prison system while uncovering a fundamental shift in culture from a focus on the social body to one that focuses on the individual. With this shift, Foucault argued that new opportunities emerged for people to exert their power.

Ransom (1997) described disciplinary power as:

A new kind of power arose with novel tactics and new strategic objectives. At the heart of this change was a displacement in the theory and practice of statecraft

away from the sovereignty of the monarch and towards a concern for “government” where the latter refers not only to the person governing but to a wide variety of efforts in the public and private spheres to shape the material at one’s disposal .... Governance, as it turns out, had less to do with forcing people to do what the sovereign wanted and more to do with steering them in the desired direction without coercion (p. 28).

Disciplinary power is not as forceful in an obvious sense, but instead uses the power of conformity to achieve its purpose. This change in structure creates a society in which power is more pervasive and is exercised from a variety of sources (e.g., schools, factories, prisons, health care systems). These sources use physical space or enclosures, time management systems, ranking systems, observation, and surveillance to control the subject. *Disciplinary societies* developed in the eighteenth century and expanded to reach their peak in the early twentieth century during the industrial period. Foucault examines the rise of disciplinary power and uncovers several principles that will be used in the analysis of this dissertation on the parental perceptions of advertising to children. Therefore, a brief summary of Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* is provided.

In the old system of law, which flourished roughly during the 9th and 17th centuries, the body of the condemned was put through a process of torture that was meant to uncover and discover *the truth* (Foucault, 1977a). The body reproduced the crime and also gave clues as to ultimately whether one could be “saved” or damned based on the way the condemned behaved during the public trial and torture. The criminal often gave a last speech, asked for forgiveness and warned others of the dangers of criminality. It was almost as if during this process, the condemned were purified or had paid penance. In many ways the circus or spectacle of the public trial was a way that the entire social body mourned as well as acknowledged the crime. The public execution contained a reenactment of the crime and as the public execution

ritualized the punishment, it became part of a communal healing process. This apparatus of punitive justice, the execution, was a visible act that was done to correct the balance of power. The criminal had challenged the authority of the king and needed to be corrected. Torture was an exercise in terror. Public execution was also a political tactic. In fact, the main purpose of the public punishment was that it was an exercise of power and the administration of justice. Even if someone committed a crime that did no harm, a person was punished in order to show who was in authority.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, reformers called for less cruelty and barbarianism. This shift was accompanied by the idea that the social body as a whole had been harmed by the crime. There was a consensus that men made a pact, agreed to live by society's rules and when they broke this social contract they had to be punished. In short, rule breakers are an enemy to the public good of society. Foucault traced how the shift coincided with a change in the economy from an agriculturally based economy to a production-based economy. Reforms called for less cruelty, less pain, and less focus on the torture of the body and more on reforming the soul. Reformers envisioned that the punishment would match the crime. For example, a lazy man would perform manual labor and would be transformed. The focus was on the soul and there was a belief that performing acts of penance could reform a criminal. In actuality, imprisonment became the main focus and means of punishment. This was certainly not the reformers' intention and is a great example of the unintended consequences of reformers' well-meaning intentions.

As the old system of laws were being changed a new type of power structure, *disciplinary power*, began to replace sovereign power. Foucault pointed out that while

this was not a new phenomenon, what was new, was the scale in which it was happening in France at the time. Very systematically, Foucault lays out characteristics of disciplinary power. He used the French military as the model to explain the techniques of power being used to turn young soldiers into obedient *docile bodies*. These techniques spread to other institutions (e.g., schools, factories, hospitals). They were: 1) discipline needs physical space or enclosures, 2) discipline requires ranking, 3) discipline requires observation, 4) discipline requires surveillance.

*Physical space* is meant to enclose, contain or constrict bodies. As an individual moved “freely” from one space to the next, they encountered distinct areas that controlled their behavior. For example, the military designed barracks in an effort to prevent the trouble that young soldiers could get into by staying in town. Boarding schools with dorms contained and controlled students, monasteries kept worldly temptations at bay. Manufacturers created towns for industry and installed gates that locked the workers in until it was time to go home. Physical space is also a way to partition and separate bodies. In schools children were broken into manageable, controllable groups. Prison cells were also created for this purpose. Physical space became a way to produce functional sites. The influence of these spaces can be seen everywhere. Hospitals, schools, office buildings are all constructed with this purpose to eliminate confusion, bring order and get the optimum amount of efficiency out of the bodies within the space.

Discipline also requires *ranking*, order and adherence to time-tables. Ranking requires standardization and this is accomplished through the creation norms and assessment. Schools and factories take on structure designed to bring order and

efficiency. They add bells and time cards to structure time. Discipline also demands the body perform particular gestures in order to be obedient and efficient. For example, in the military every part of a soldier's body must be in the exact position. His eyes must face forward, head held at a certain angle, feet moving in exact rhythm. These methods began being used in factories and classrooms. Primary schools began to create codes invested in exactly how the pupil's body should be utilized in the classroom. The body becomes something that must be productive at all times.

*Observation and surveillance* were used to ensure that docile bodies were being trained and efficient at all times. During the rise of disciplinary power, Napoleon was building military camps that became "a diagram of power". They were built so that the captains could observe their troops and paths were built so that control could be maintained. Schools, prisons, and other buildings were modeled after this. British philosopher, Jeremy Bentham conceptualized a model prison with a similar goal. He called it the *panopticon*. This building's central feature was an observation station with all of the cells and grounds built around it. The panopticon, when translated means "all-seeing", allowed for prison guards to view inside each prisoner's cell without themselves being seen by the prisoners. This in effect, created the impression that the prisoners were being watched at all times. According to Benthaem, prisoners would, in turn, behave as if they were being observed. Foucault (1977a) called the panopticon the *perfection of power*, because little force was needed, as the prisoners were actually disciplining themselves. The panopticon "arranged things in such a way that the exercise of power is not added on from the outside, like a rigid, heavy constraint, to the

functions it invests, but is so subtly present in them as to increase their efficiency by itself increasing its own points of contact...” (p. 206).

Disciplinary power works by determining what is normal and then creating standards that define normal. This conformity is best achieved when the subject is guided gently towards normality without being made aware that it is happening outside of their own direct will (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999). Discourses about what is *normal* and *natural* were circulated and adopted over time. Practices and assessment were developed to ensure that individuals conform. The rise of several academic and professional fields of study became instrumental in the shaping of normalizing discourses and the policing of the individual (e.g., sociology, psychology, medicine, social work, education). Foucault’s theory of discourse shows how once discourse becomes accepted it becomes difficult to think outside of what seems normal or natural. One of the lures of hegemony is that it allows those in power to blame others for their failures because of their own divergence from the norm (Eubanks, Parish & Smith, 1997).

#### 2.5.2.1.3 Donzelot and the Policing of Families

As mentioned, discipline societies relied on physical enclosures to maintain control such as the school, the hospital, and the factory. However, the family realm was not a physically enclosed space but also required disciplining. Donzelot’s (1979) *The Policing of Families* utilized Foucault’s method of genealogy to examine how several fields emerged in order to fill this gap and discipline the family sphere. Just as Foucault’s work studied the development of the prison system, Donzelot’s study traced the origins of the modern social welfare system in France that was created to support



and police families. This work uncovered several taken-for-granted discourses about children and families that was discussed throughout this dissertation. For this reason a brief discussion of Donzelot's work is provided below.

Old societal customs were based on the absolute power of the monarchy. The sovereign used the family system to organize and maintain control of his subjects. This system was based on the feudal economy. Husbands were responsible for his wife, children, servants and property. He was taxed according to his "property" (which included his family, his land and his livelihood – whether that was farming, shop keeping or tradesmanship). Women were considered property and the parents would save up money in order for their daughters to have a dowry in which to be married. There were strict and intricate social rules regarding who could marry who and these rules were based on social standing. Fathers were responsible for the deeds and misdeeds of their children and thus maintained tight control. The church was also a major part of this system. At the time children were pronounced legitimate or illegitimate depending upon the morality of their parent's partnership. Societies were close knit and control was maintained through this system.

As industry began to draw people into the cities, these old ways of being and knowing began to change. Since the sovereignty of the state was no longer absolute, the state lost much of its control. The inhabitants' lives were also transformed as they moved to the cities. Men and women were being hired to work in the factories and thus competing for jobs. Children were either working or on the streets. There were men who were away from their families and working in the city. They would father illegitimate children. Women in the city who were unable to support themselves turned

to prostitution in large numbers. The numbers of working class people living in overcrowded conditions increased. There was a strong belief that the working class was immoral, unhygienic, lazy, and wicked.

In the mid-eighteenth century, scholars and politicians began to take notice of these changes in the population. The bourgeoisie feared that if ancient familial power structures crumbled, they would lose their land rights, inheritances, and social standings. Donzelot traced the power struggle between the wealthy class struggling to maintain power and those who argued that the state should be taking care of the working class. The tension between individualism and collectivism shaped the structures of industrialized disciplinary society into social and economic structures rife with contradictions.

#### 2.5.2.1.4 Historical Origins of Current Discourses

Several discourses emerged during this time period that continue to thrive and influence the Western humanist construction of the child. One such discourse is a belief that society should invest in children's wellbeing in an effort to save the nation's future. This discourse has been called *the salvation narrative* (Cannella, 1997). Donzelot asserts that the main issue of concern was not the wellbeing of the children, rather the future interest of the country. For example, within this discourse was the issue of the high mortality rates in children's homes for abandoned children. These children were dying at a rate so rapid that they would not live long enough to repay their debt to the country. At this time, these children were seen as the product of their parent's immorality and were raised to serve in either the army or be sent to help colonize other countries. Without their service, the country would suffer economically.

Another discourse that gained prominence during this time was the belief that children need shielding and protection from the ills of society. This protection was often from the unsavory nature of the poor, who were believed to be wicked and lazy. Donzelot provides an example of this protectionist (and classist) discourse in the warnings that physicians and social workers of the time gave to wealthy women. They were to attend to their own children and shield them from the immoral and unsavory behavior of their house help.

In fact, the protection of children became not only a national priority but helped to launch several new fields (e.g., family physicians, psychiatrists, social workers). Championing the cause of the family not only legitimized these professions but also led to the creation of jobs within their fields. These jobs give rise to a small but new social class - the professional. It becomes the professional's task to protect children from learning the wicked ways of their parents (e.g., sloth, filth, immorality) before they become permanent habits.

Surveillance was a central apparatus of control used to rule the family. Teachers became the first informants, as they were with children on a daily basis and could be relied upon to tell whether the child was clean, fed, and well supervised. Neighbors, clergy, shopkeepers became the eyes and ears of those interested in the protection of children. Around this time, a new type of physician, the family doctor emerged. In ancient times, midwives took care of women and children. However, with the concern about the infant mortality rate along with the concern about the practices of swaddling and hiring nursemaids, the doctors needed a way to influence the family. They found a natural partnership with the bourgeois mothers of the family. This elevated the status of

women to primary caretaker of the family and protector of health. Family doctors wrote books on health and child development, which set the stage for the child development experts of today.

At the same time, the juvenile court system began some partnerships of its own. The court needed someone who could be in the trenches to watch and investigate families whose children may need some “prevention” or who were considered to “be in danger”. Social workers began doing home visits and creating case files during this time period. Psychologists were beginning to work their way into the family court system. Psychiatry had, up until this point, been the domain of either the schools or the army, and was used as a disciplinary function. It was focused on managing children who could not perform in school or adults who were unfit to serve as soldiers. They aimed to expand their domain into the court systems.

Psychologists lobbied for laws that would make it mandatory for every child who was brought before the court to have a psychiatric evaluation. The judges resisted this challenge to their authority, but non-the-less, what psychiatry began was expanded during this time. One of the characteristics of psychiatry was that it often pointed the finger of blame at the family while identifying and compiling long lists of disorders and classifications. Psychoanalysis was used by the state in an attempt to control and improve the family. Parents no longer had the right, to turn their children into failures. Well-meaning reformers passed several initiatives in order to “protect” children and “help” families. More often than not, these interventions were met with very poor result due to unforeseen consequences. Here are a few examples of these reforms:

- The state attempted to tax single women in order to encourage marriage. This led to women marrying men who neither provided for them nor contributed “fatherly duties”.
- The creation of an anonymous system for mothers who abandoned their children, only led to a massive amount of children being “abandoned”. The discovery that these children were actually being fostered by their natural mothers who were then being paid by the state as “foster parents”.
- Welfare was dispensed with many moral and ethical conditions that were attached to it. This system encouraged families to find the loopholes or simply play the game.

Donzelot’s genealogy paints a picture of a social welfare system that is based on deficit models that stem from classist discourses that privilege economic interests. These discourses were repeated throughout this dissertation, especially in the literature review on advertising to children. Child development experts use the same protectionist discourses today. A prime example of this can be seen in the Report to the American Psychological Association Task Force on Advertising to Children (2004).

Developmental psychologists argue that advertising to children under the age of 8 should be banned because it takes advantage of children’s limited cognitive and social abilities as well as promotes violence, unhealthy eating, and materialism. The report set up a binary between children and an adult, implying that advertising after the age of 8 is less harmful. This report also lists several areas that need further research, thus expanding the “experts” role and professional reach.

### 2.5.2.1.5 Where is Human Agency?

Foucault's theories of discourse and disciplinary power have been criticized by poststructural feminists for being excessively totalizing, leaving no room for human agency (Scheurich & McKenzie, 2008). Butler (1992) explained there is agency even within discourse and material practice, although it is complex and intertwined:

My position is mine to the extent that "I" -- and I do not shirk from the pronoun -- replay and resignify the theoretical positions that have constituted me, working the possibilities of their convergence, and trying to take account of the possibilities they systematically exclude" (p. 9). She goes on to explain, the "I" who would select between them is always already constituted by them . . . these "positions" are not merely theoretical products, but fully embedded organizing principles of material practices and institutional arrangements, those matrices of power and discourse that produce me as a viable "subject." Indeed, this "I" would not be a thinking, speaking "I" if it were not for the very positions that I oppose, for those positions, the ones that claim that the subject must be given in advance, that discourse is an instrument or reflection of that subject, are already part of what constitutes me (p. 9).

As such, the complex dance between totalizing discourses that shape the individual and the power of human agency was central to this study. Although discourse works to produce the subject, history has shown that individuals do often choose rather consciously or unconsciously to act in very diverse and divergent ways.

Similarly, Foucault's theories should not lead one to believe that there is no hope for change. Discourses can change and have changed throughout history. Foucault (1983) rejected the idea that poststructuralism would lead to apathy stating:

My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which is not the same as bad. If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do. So my position leads not to apathy but to hyper- and pessimistic activism (p. 343).

Much like Foucault's warning, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) explain that the work of an activist will never be finished. This can be understood in their principle of a

signifying rupture. They assert that a rhizome can be broken, shattered at any given spot, but it will start up again on one of its old or on new lines. In other words, a rhizome can never completely escape the old because even if it is able to find new lines of flight, these lines are still part of the rhizome. There is “always a danger that you will reencounter organizations that restratify everything, formations that restore power to a signifier, attributions that reconstitute a subject” (p. 9). They go on to explain, “Groups and individuals contain micro fascisms just waiting to crystallize” (p. 10). Again, this is the idea that the work will never be done. Unlike Marx, who advocated for a revolution as the solution, Deleuze and Guatarri describe the postmodern context with which we live as a messy, complex one, going in many directions, bursting with possibilities for movement. They explain that while politics is by no means an apodictic science, it precedes with experimentation, groping in the dark, injection, withdrawal, advances and retreats. The factors of decision and prediction are limited. Yet human agency is implied throughout their work and is exemplified in statements such as this: “it is an absurdity to postulate a world super government that makes the final decisions” (Deleuze & Guatarri, 1987, p. 461).

#### 2.5.2.2 Deleuzean Concepts

##### 2.5.2.2.1 Critique of Capitalism

Like Foucault, Deleuze was interested in examining large systems of power. His work offers a particularly powerful way to think about the issues of marketing, corporate influence and the shifting power dynamics between public institutions and private interests. Deleuzean concepts are especially helpful because so much of the literature on the issue of advertising is based on dichotomies – the adult/child,

protectionist/empowered child, liberal/conservative politics, etc. Deleuzean concepts worked to challenge these binaries while at the same time exploring the complexity and multiplicities of difficult issues.

Specifically, Deleuze and Guattari's (1977/87) work on capitalism is a powerful tool that I hope will help illuminate the ways that latent capitalism has been able to gain an increasing presence in all aspects of life, including marketing to children. Deleuze and Guattari collaborated on several projects, *Anti-Oedipus* which was followed by *A Thousand Plateaus*, written almost a decade later. Both volumes share the subtitle, *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. While they are vastly different in style and content, the first volume focuses on a critique of Marx's reliance on the State and academia's over-reliance on psychology. The second volume focuses on outlining Deleuzeguattarian nomadic thought (Massumi, 1992). There are several threads that connect these two works, namely that each volume contains an overarching critique of capitalism.

Deleuze and Guattari asserted that it is capitalism's schizophrenic tendencies that often lead to anxiety and crisis. Capitalism stems from the merging of two separate flows, the flow of capital and the flow of labor. Because these two flows are unbalanced and incapable of reaching equilibrium they are in constant motion, often producing spillage that allows for lines of flight to escape. The capitalist assemblage takes advantage of these lines of flight, using them to shift flows of desire towards accumulation and consumption. Desire and capitalism are similar because both share the schizophrenic propensity to abolish already existing entities. Capitalism deterritorializes existing structures and replaces despotic power with economic power codes (Holland, 1991). *Anti-Oedipus* traces how capitalism was able to use the natural



flows of labor coupled with the regular cycles of investment and divestment to rapidly deterritorialize most of the earth. This process relies on subjectification in order to maintain control over the zones of production (Deleuze & Guattari, 1977a) therefore grand narratives have to be perpetuated.

*A Thousand Plateaus* shows a world that is “produced and defined by capital” (Holland, 1991). Capitalism is replaced by *machinic enslavement*. It does not usher in a new era of wealth. Rather it enslaves its subjects with an illogical ethic of greed. The machine codes for profit but cannot recognize when it has produced enough. It cannot stop coding and therefore production, efficiency and profit over-code can encroach on territories that cannot be measured by such codes. The machine knows nothing of what cannot be measured. Joy, love, community, knowledge, and nature are not of value to the machine. This new model of latent capitalism no longer needs subjectivity. It moves beyond the need to convince others of its use, it can plug directly into the body and the unconscious mind. The machine grows so large that it controls nation and international organizations. It is constantly attempting to warp desire into a perverse need to consume. In order to gain a better understanding of this process, a brief explanation of desire is provided.

### 2.5.3 Considering Desire within the Neoliberal Assemblage

#### 2.5.3.1 Desire as Energy

For Deleuze and Guattari (1987) the critique of capitalism centers on the production of desire. Desire is described as a productive force that is a core part of every living being. The Deleuzeguattarian conceptualization of desire originates from Nietzsche's will to power, a life force that exists as an “instinct within all living things for

growth and expansion” (Nietzsche, 1968, p. 148). In the simplest terms, desire is energy. It is in continuous motion. It is always searching, “striving to become more or different” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1977). Desire is life and the continual process of movement and transformation that expands life (Colebrook, 2002). This expansion of the idea of desire, includes the concept of desiring-production, which is a process of looking outside of one’s self in order to appropriate or bring in what is different. The process of desiring-production is described as a pleasurable one and one that is social in nature (Deleuze and Guattari, 1972).

#### 2.5.3.2 The Desire to Become

Deleuzeguattarian perspectives suggest that we are always poised between two possibilities; a life that can speed up its rate of change in order to become radically different and a life so habituated to its style of change that it ceases to become or ceases to live (Colebrook, 2006). The process of becoming begins with a desire for movement. It is more directional than calculated (Massumi, 1992). In its most basic form, becoming is a tension between modes of desire, the desire to become and the desire to remain the same. Becoming can be an escape from something that it perceives to be a constraint (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). It takes place as one becomes uncomfortable with existing limitations. In other words, a desire is often brought about because one is uncomfortable, anxious or unhappy with the current state of being. It is a system in crisis searching for equilibrium or balance. But beyond simple change from one thing into another existing thing, becoming is about the desire for transformation. It is not imitation, rather it is the creation of a completely new entity. The act of becoming utilizes difference rather than clinging to the same. Becoming is a

political affair that embodies the desire for movement, freedom, and more ethical existence.

### 2.5.3.3 Desire does not Lack

Deleuze and Guattari envision a desire that does not lack for anything (Ewald, 1994). Desire is a force that has been brought together by the cosmos but is without a predetermined plan or path. It is not a hole that needs filling or an itch that needs scratching. Desire is not want. Neither is desire smart or full of agency (Tuck, 2010). However, this does not mean that desire cannot be directed, focused or even manipulated. Desire can be culturally contextual (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994) and it can be (and I would argue) influenced by the hyper-consumer neoliberal context many of us live within.

Desire is constantly being harnessed into a desire for an object, but this is not its true form. Rather, desire is a process. Massumi (1992) conceptualized desire within capitalism as a “straight-jacketing of desire (desire turned against itself)” (p. 82). Desire becomes deformed and perverted into a need for accumulation. We move from becoming into having. This is the idea that desire can get “short-circuited by an infinite fed-back loop of metaphysical redundancy” (p. 84). In the middle of this loop is an object of intense desire that creates the illusion that it can be obtained and create fulfillment. Energy is then spent on the process of chasing the object of desire rather than other pursuits. I would argue that this high-jacking of desire is necessary from a corporate marketing standpoint in order to promote consumerism and serve the purpose of market capitalism. But how does this happen?

Capitalism is built on what Stoll (2008) called “the great delusion”. This is the

false belief that continuous economic growth is possible and will lead to world prosperity. Unlimited economic expansion is a myth born from the project of modernity with its blind faith in technology and progress. If economic growth goes unchecked it can lead to devastating consequences such as ecological devastation. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) explain that in the past, entrepreneurs looked to fulfill legitimate needs for people and then used marketing to showcase their product. Today, in wealthier nations consumers have their basic needs met (this is not meant to trivialize the poor who live among the wealthy). In order to continue to expand, marketers must create what Marx called imaginary needs and peddle them with new methods. The fact is that 12 percent of the earth's population controls over 60 percent of the world's consumer spending (Worldwide Watch, 2011). This percentage of the market has to be continually stimulated to purchase at increasing levels in order to create economic growth.

In other words, the problem with capitalism is that the inequity it creates leaves impoverished nations unable to purchase the goods that they need and the wealthy with income without legitimate needs (Barber, 2007). In business there is no such thing as producing too much, only shoppers buying too little. For example, my mother brought me home in a box and I slept in a dresser drawer near the foot of her bed until I was old enough to move into a crib. Today, parents in the United States are bombarded from conception with items that experts deem 'necessary' in order to bring a child into the world. One of the most repeated and published "baby" quotes comes from Elinor Goulding Smith who said, "It sometimes happens, even in the best of families, that a

baby is born. This is not necessarily cause for alarm. The important thing is to keep your wits about you and borrow some money” (1957, p. 9)!

#### 2.5.3.3.1 Control Societies

In *Essay Postscripts on Societies of Control*, Deleuze (1990) expands upon this critique of latent capitalism envisioning a new system of power. Deleuze asserts that much of world is currently transitioning from *disciplinary societies* towards *control societies*. To support this argument, Deleuze points out that virtually every disciplinary system is in crisis (e.g., school system, factories, health care system, family) and all efforts by government to save these structures are failing.

Control societies are taking over from disciplinary societies. These ultra-rapid forms of free floating control are taking over from the old disciplines at work. Within these societies, control is not confined to a localized area (e.g., the factory); rather it is housed within networks of searchable databases that are constantly being mined for information. Lived experiences are captured as data and stored digitally. Communication is electric and virtually instantaneous. Control is more open, but equally persistent. Old systems of discipline may exist but they begin to lose their borders and begin to look more and more like the corporation. This can be seen in education, as the university begins to function more and more like a corporate entity (Giroux, 2007).

The corporation is likened to a gas, in that it is ever present, constantly changing and adapting. Control is maintained by the perpetuation of an audit culture. Within this culture, the individual is constantly being micro-managed through assessments, performance based pay and continuous staff training and development. This culture is

essentially one that pits individuals in constant competition with each other for jobs, promotions, and resources.

Deleuze explains that latent capitalism is no longer one whose focus is on production as globalization has led to the outsourcing of production to the country with the cheapest labor. Latent capitalism relies on the selling of services and the opening up of markets. The sales center becomes the center of the corporation and as such, “marketing become the new instrument of control” (p. 181). In business there is no such thing as producing too much, only shoppers buying too little. In order to continue to expand, marketers must create what Marx called *imaginary needs* and peddle them with new methods. Marketing within a control society is “both a pedagogy of consumption and the variable valuation of instant, constant communication in the regime of the digital” (Rai, 2010, para. 14). Deleuze makes the connection between marketing and Foucault’s genealogies of disciplinary power in the following quote:

Family, school, army, and factory are no longer so many analogous but different sites converging in an owner, whether the state or some private power, but transmutable or transformable coded configurations of a single business where the only people left are administrators. Even art has moved away from closed sites and into the open circuits of banking. Markets are won by taking control rather than by establishing a discipline, by fixing rates rather than by reducing costs, by transforming products rather than by specializing production. Corruption here takes on a new power. The sales department becomes a business’ center or “soul.” We’re told businesses have souls, which is surely the most terrifying news in the world. Marketing is now the instrument of social control and produces the arrogant breeds who are our masters. Control is short-term and rapidly shifting, but at the same time continuous and unbounded, whereas discipline was long-term, infinite, and discontinuous. A man is no longer a man confined but a man in debt (Deleuze, 1990, p. 181).

#### 2.5.3.3.2 Marketing as the New Disciplinary Power

There is something very structural about the way many scholars have interpreted Deleuze's (1990) *Essay Postscripts on Societies of Control* (Birchall, Woodbridge, Hall, 2012). Considering that Deleuze warned about the dangers of binary thinking, it is ironic that this essay sets up an *either/or* situation pitting disciplinary societies versus control societies. Furthermore, the idea that society is moving from one form of control to the next also seems to be very linear and progressive. This again seems to go against the messiness, complexity and creativity in Deleuze's other work.

Rai (2010) posits that control and disciplinary powers are actually convergent. He envisions marketing within a control society as a "discipline of attention" (para. 14). In order to transmit constant communication to the subject, marketing relies on forms of attention. Marketing requires docile bodies (and minds) much like disciplinary power. Rai argues that Foucault warned that discipline is exerted through the use of language, discourse, visibility, and *habit*. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault goes into great detail on how discipline is exerted over the body through the formation of habits. He explains that habits are formed through a partitioning or parceling of time to create daily patterns. Gestures are imposed upon the body and are embedded in the body's muscle memory. The religious orders utilized routines to discipline their priests through daily prayers. The military broke down their new recruits through a series of exercises. This discipline was imposed from the outside to create habits with the purpose of turning the body into an obedient, docile form. Modern corporate media has become a habitual activity for most children in the United States, with the average child using "entertainment media" for 7 hours and 39 minutes per day (Rideout, Foehr, Roberts, 2010). Not only are

children viewing, hearing and reading marketing messages for extended amounts of time, but also today marketers are using media to view children.

The concept of the panopticon can be a useful way to think about the power dynamics at work within this new landscape of marketing to children (Bakan, 2011; Brignall, 2002). Marketers create a “360-degree world” in which the child is constantly barraged by commercial messages. The goal is for a product to create a *buzz* or a *swarm*. This idea has burgeoned into a new type of marketing. *Buzz marketing’s* goal is to have “infinite consumer touch point possibilities (Schor, 2004). These include television, radio, internet ads, sponsored events, product placement in movies, games and television, graffiti, billboards, social media sites, product packaging, point of purchase displays, posters, editorials in the media, etc.

As important as these overt messages are, covert advertising is becoming just as common. Marketers are using technology to disguise commercials within the social and entertainment landscapes of the digital age. Not only do complex software programs capture a child’s every internet search, they are also watching every purchase made, photo posted, game played, “friend” made and entertainment preference. Companies are data harvesting this information and creating complex profiles of young children (Rowan, 2011). Through online games, social media sites, downloadable free phone applications, online-sweepstakes and widgets, marketers are able to have direct access to children in very private and personal ways. Popular viral marketing strategies include embedding commercial messages into games, videos, songs, music lyrics, etc. Word-of-mouth marketing utilizes social media and social gaming sites to get children to market their products to each other. Marketers virtually drop out of sight and give the



appearance that their friends are recommending a product or sharing a video, game or contest.

Schor (2004) quoted an advertising executive she interviewed from a large agency as boasting, “We’ll have ten or fifteen more ways of encircling the consumer in ten years. Surrounding almost every move you make, that would be ideal,” and for consumers who don’t like us telling them what to buy then we’ll use “covert messaging. Use their best friend” (p. 75). With covert marketing, the division between entertainment, friendship and advertisers disappears from view just like the prison guards of the panopticon (Bakan, 2011). What is left is the perfect power of surveillance and children “disciplining” or marketing to each other.

#### 2.5.4 Summary

This last section of the literature review examined the theoretical perspectives and concepts informing the study. They included: 1) a discussion of postmodernism and how this philosophy challenges all truth claims and encourages the researcher to search for localized, contextualized, diverse and often messy micro narratives, 2) a discussion of poststructuralism and how this helps the researcher to look at concepts that seem “natural” and deconstruct them, 3) a description of feminist poststructuralism, which is a blending of critical, postmodern and post-structural perspective, 4) an examination of the Foucauldian concepts of disciplinary power, and the panopticon are used to conceptualize how the relations of production and desire in early capitalism utilized technologies and apparatuses of control to discipline the subject, 5) an overview of Deleuze and Guattari’s critique of capitalism, including a

discussion of desire within the neoliberal assemblage and Deleuze's concept of *control societies* and the argument that marketing is becoming the new disciplinary power.

## 2.6 Overall Summary

Marketing is also not only being directed at children but it is also part of a *surveillant assemblage* that harvests their personal data, preferences, social networks, etc. (Haggerty & Ericson, 2000). Data flows fast and freely back and forth between consumer and commercialized assemblages, always watching like Foucault's panopticon. For children growing up in this highly commercialized and persistently surveillant culture, the Orwellian interpretation of "bigbrotherism" is too simplistic. Yet rapidly changing marketing technologies and the saturated nature of the consumer culture children live, do shape the way childhood is being constructed. Children's identities are being linked to corporate agendas with the sole purpose of capturing a consumer for life. Businesses posit their marketing to children as an act of empowerment, co-opting the children's empowerment movement by equating freedom with the power to consume (Hill, 2011).

Cook (2004) contends that at the heart of the paradigms of childhood argument is a battle for which model of the "person" - not just the child- will prevail. Personal agency is central to this issue, much like it is in the work of Foucault. Research that embraces the complexity, multiplicity and messiness of the postmodern neoliberal context children are growing up within. Furthermore, while academics are split between these two competing models of childhood, it is the parents who truly are caught in the middle. Parents struggle to meet the desires of their children while at the same time ward off the messages coming at them from all directions. Increased regulation of

advertising may provide some respite but protectionist views are extremely limiting. The aim of this research is to uncover parental perceptions about the consumer context in which children are living and reconceptualize and reframe the issues of advertising to children in all of its complexity, contradictions and messiness.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an explanation of the critical qualitative research methodology used in this study. Specifically included are theoretical discussions of the merits, limitations, and dangers of an interview. Also included in this chapter is a description of the study's participants, the data collection plan as well as the rationale and the process that was used for data analysis. An overview of the interview as a method of data collection is provided at the beginning of this chapter. This is followed by a postmodern critique of the interview and a section on *self as researcher*. Next, the procedures that were used to develop the initial research design are described, including the procedures for data collection, participant selection and data analysis.

#### 3.2 Initial Design

The research project's main goal was to critically examine parental perceptions about the role of corporate marketing in their young children's lives. A series of interviews were conducted in order to gain a deeper understanding of how parents perceive the advertising aimed at children.

##### 3.2.1 Research Questions

As participants shared their opinions, personal experiences, and perspectives, data was collected in order to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent are parents aware of the marketing tactics being directed towards young children?

- a. What are parents' perceptions of the messages within advertisements to children?
  - b. To what extent do parents perceive marketing to young children as playing a role in the production of children's subjectivities, particularly in regards to gender, race, sexuality, socio-economic or political beliefs?
  - c. To what extent do parents relate an increase in advertising to children with any broader social issues?
2. How do power/knowledge relations and practices produce parents' multiple subjectivities as they parent their children in regards to commercial culture?
- a. What measures (if any) are parents taking to limit their children's exposure to advertising?
  - b. What attempts (if any) have parents made to educate their young children about the intentions of advertising?
  - c. To what extent do parents express a desire to limit or restrict corporate influence on children?
  - d. How do parents perceive their position of power within the neoliberal assemblage?
3. How can early childhood educators adapt pedagogy and practice in order to meet the needs of children growing up within the context of a commercialized childhood?
- a. How can early childhood educators work with parents to promote critical media literacy skills in young children?

- b. What are some ways that curriculum can be used to counter the messages parents are most concerned with that are being promoted in advertisements (i.e.: materialism, gender bias, violence, etc.)?
- c. What are “lines of flight” (i.e.: counter discourses, forms of advocacy between parents and the early childhood field) that could serve to disrupt and to renarrativize the discourses surrounding advertising to children?

### 3.2.2 Theoretical Framework

Theory guides research, whether we are aware of it or not. Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated, “As we think, so do we act”. In many ways the construct of research is the embodiment of modernity and the very concept that postmodern perspectives challenge. Yet many scholars have accepted that the construct of research will not be going away. Therefore, they have engaged in a search to reconceptualize research in a way that challenges its modernist notions of truth, power and science. But can the construct of research really be redeemed (Lather, 1991)?

There are people who are doing work to identify new critical research methodologies that are kinder and more reverent. A critical poststructural aim would be to deconstruct a truth without creating new truths to replace the ones being deconstructed (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2007). The questions asked from a postmodern/poststructural perspective are different. They are not about causation, essentialization or generalization. Postmodern questions search to uncover, examine, and deconstruct. They look like:

- Who gets to speak? Who is silenced? What does this discourse produce?
- Can there be research that does not claim to create new truths?

- Can ethnography avoid the subjectification of its subjects?
- Whose research is it? Who will gain from the research?

What kind of language will be used to distribute it and is that language exclusionary?

- Do research subjects have input on the final product?

Poststructural feminist perspectives fit under the broader paradigm of qualitative inquiry. Paradigms represent overarching theoretical frameworks that explain beliefs about reality, knowledge, and the relationships between who and what can be known. Qualitative research, the paradigm developed by Yvonna Lincoln and Egon Guba (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, 1987, 1988 Lincoln, 1989; Lincoln & Guba, 1985, 1986) is often referred to as naturalistic or constructivist inquiry. This perspective asserts that reality and thus knowledge is socially constructed. As such, nature and the material world are all completely socially constructed and reality is dependent on the person who is constructing the meaning. Therefore, knowledge is multiple and any meanings that exist between people have to be mutually agreed upon. These mutual agreements are temporary and contextual (Eisenhart, 1988). Poststructural qualitative research is one that strives to allow for many different readings, for multiple interpretations and to leave data open for many different purposes. This approach allows for ruptures, contradictions and even room for emphasis on addressing the many ways that differences can range (Clarke, 2005).

Baker (1997) argued that the qualitative researcher's role needed to move away from being data collectors to becoming data generators. Certainly the purpose of this research was to generate new knowledge. As mentioned earlier, there is a huge gap in

the literature on advertising to children that addresses parental perspectives and no known research on parental perspectives on this issue that have been conducted from a poststructural feminist perspective. In order to conduct this research it was important to go beyond simply describing and making meaning of the narratives that the participants shared in the interviews.

### 3.3 Interview as Method

In this study, the method of the interview was utilized which in many ways seems to contradict the very poststructural feminist perspective that was being used. It was important to acknowledge from the very onset that interview methodologies were based on post-positivist assumptions. The idea that the interview was used as a tool for the researcher to fully understand another's intentions, desires, inner subjectivities, and meanings was problematic from either a positivist perspective or an interpretive one. As such, researchers from poststructural perspectives have deconstructed just about every aspect of the interview (Fontana & Frey, 2005; Fontana & Prokos, 2007). Some of the aspects critiqued included the interview as a disciplinary power, power imbalances within the interview, the role of the researcher, the role of the participants, the interview as a gendered construct, the colonizing effects of the interview, how interview data should be analyzed and who should be able to claim ownership over the interview data and final research. The following section of the study was an attempt to address some of these concerns, but first a brief description of the traditional interview was provided in order to emphasize the differences between a poststructural interview and a traditional one.



### 3.4 Troubling the Traditional Interview

The traditional view of interviews originated from the natural sciences. It is the view that stems from the positivist perspective that the human being is a vessel and all that is needed to get to the “truth” is the perfect methodology. The focus becomes on the wording of the questions, the objectivity of the researcher, and the willingness of the participant to “open up”. Even more interpretive perspectives of the interview tend to suggest that a person’s core being is fixed and stable and that the interviewer’s job is to “get inside a person’s head” and figure it out (Spradley, 1979, p. 10). McCracken (1988) called the unstructured interview “the most powerful method in the qualitative armory, no instrument is more revealing and able to take us into the mental world of the individual (p.9). From a naturalistic perspective, interviewing is more about a desire to understand another rather than to explain. Patterson (2001) stated, “The purpose of interviewing then is to allow us to enter into another person’s perspective. Qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable and able to be made explicit” (p. 341). Van Manen (1990) asserted that an interview could give the reader insight into the lived experiences of the informant and the meaning that they have constructed.

This notion of the interview as being some incredible tool to gain access into another person’s head mirrors the patient/psychologist relationship. A skilled expert asks questions and if willing, the participant shares his or her construction of what they believe to be their private self (Holloway & Jefferson, 2008). Problematic is that the “private self” was constructed by psychology as a normative descriptor and its existence is culturally and socially constructed (Rose, 1997). Moving away from the notion of the

interview as therapy, some have constructed the interview to look more like a relationship between priest and his parishioner. The long protracted interviews of Douglas (1985) suggested that it is an interviewer's skill at building trust which produces what he called "soul communions" (p.9).

As previously stated, no matter which perspective that is taken, the scientific or the interpretive, the problem lies with the idea that the interview can be used as a tool for the researcher to fully understand another's intentions, desires, inner subjectivities, and meanings (See table 1). This is problematic on many levels. Firstly, because the individual self is a social and political construction, a construct that is still not recognized or identified within many cultures (Cannella & Bailey, 1999). A person's identity is not a fixed object. It is fluid, multiple, complex, at times contrary, and messy (Davies, 1993). It crosses borders (Anzaldua, 1999) and is sometimes fractured (Spivak, 1993). Therefore how can we ever truly understand it?

Table 1

*Differences Between Interviews based on Philosophical Perspectives*

Philosophical Perspective	Purpose of the Interview	Interviewer	Interviewee	Type of Interview	Interview Data
Positivist/ Postpositivist	To extract the truth	Skilled and objective	Truth-teller if giving an honest response	Structured Interview	Objective data is transferred from interviewee to interviewer
Interpretive	To understand the individual or context	Empathetic listener / human encounter	Participant trying to explain/reveal inner self	Unstructured Interview	Shared knowledge leading to greater understanding of interior/exterior realities socially situated
Poststructural	To uncover discourses and power structures	Admits to bias and works to equalize the power-imbalances in interviews	As partners involved in the production of localized accounts the subject is de-centered	Unstructured Interview	Attempts to uncover discourses, perceptions, localized accounts of socially constructed knowledge

### 3.5 Troubling Language and the Interview

Spivak (1993) and other poststructuralists have challenged the notion that language is transparent and that words correspond to specific things. In consequence, the interviewer cannot fully understand the person being interviewed without viewing them through their own complex and fluid subjectivities. In other words, even if it is possible to enter into another's consciousness, our past experiences, language and the meanings we attach to it, prevent us from being about to interpret it and thus convey those meanings to anyone else verbally or through text.

All writing, speech, signs and thought arise from language. All discourse is sewn together from other discourse, text from other text. Intertextuality constrains us (Porter, 1986). Therefore in an interview, the meaning of questions and/or the answers to them is all filtered through the meanings that are attached to them. There is potential for creating new meanings when we try to leave what we know about language and move

away from it towards “the-in-between-ness” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). This is the idea that all knowledge is formed in the in-between spaces of articulation and in-articulation. When researcher and participant grapple with the creation of thoughts that have yet to be produced, they are in a kind of “no-man’s-land” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 293) in which the ideas are blurry. They are struggling with the limits of language. But at the same time this struggle also brings them together. They are connected. This is the idea that “I” cannot exist without “you” and “you” cannot exist without a “me”. In an interview, if we embrace the limits of language and our own ability to understand “the other” we are able to begin the process of opening up and creating the “unthought” (Semetsky, 2003).

### 3.6 The Interview as a Disciplinary Power

The one-on-one interview is a Western construction that focuses on and privileges the individual. Viruru and Cannella (2006) point out that in many indigenous collectivist cultures the concept of an interview or even of the “individuals’ opinion” is completely foreign. Foucault (1977a) argued that individual identity is a modern construction whose aim is to take the gaze away from those in power. The individual as subject is the focus of historical, linguistic and cultural discourses designed to regulate, normalize and govern. Foucault argues that the individual subject needs to be de-centered as the foci of study.

From a Foucauldian perspective, the modern interview society and its interest in individual opinions are part of our society’s move towards increased technologies of surveillance. Brinkmann (2011) used Foucault’s work on disciplinary powers to trouble the notion of the interview. He argued that the interview is part of a newer, sexier

technology of the self. Within this neoliberal context, personal information becomes commodified. Subjects offer up their most personal details in an effort to be good and dutiful subjects within the modern panopticon. Brinkmann warns researchers that as a method, the interview is extremely limited because the knowledge gleaned is simply a mirror image of society's larger discourses.

Foucault also deconstructed psychology as a disciplinary institution that normalizes and disciplines. The interview has been critiqued as having been heavily influenced by psychology. Nikolas Rose's (1997) work laid out an argument that showed how the *private self* was constructed by psychology along with normative descriptive data and measurement. Interviewing protocols heavily mimic the role of psychologist and patient. Holloway and Jefferson (2008) explain that like the psychologist, interviewers are seen as the "authority" and are somehow privy to a "truth" about those interviewed because they understand the entire picture. In contrast, the subject omits parts of their stories because they don't want certain parts known. The interviewer, like the therapist, is trained to figure this out and thus piece together the "truth" based on his expert training and knowledge.

### 3.7 Power Imbalances within the Interview

With the interpretivist/constructionist turn, the role of the researcher was called into question. The idea of an unbiased objective interviewer whose sole purpose is to record data from a passive receptacle of knowledge was obliterated. It was replaced by the notion of a researcher whose subjectivities informs his or her constructions of research and influence the interview process. Postmodern researchers went beyond

this to further deconstruct the role of the interviewer by examining the role of power within the interview process.

The interview is purposely structured to give the interviewer power over the interviewee. For example, the interviewer knows the questions ahead of time. He or she sets the tone and pace of the interview. Spradley (1980) instructs the researcher to start with friendly conversations and slowly introduce the elements of the interview to help guide and teach the informants how to respond as informants. This idea of the interviewer as teacher also sets up an imbalance of power. Along these same lines, the researcher is asking the respondent to open up and disclose personal information without doing so in return. For example, Fontana and Frey (2005) discouraged the researcher from sharing his or her personal opinion and or getting too involved in a “real” conversation with the informants. Yet researchers are often encouraged to build a friendly rapport with those they interview.

Some have argued that the idea of building rapport can be a very problematic construct that is often manipulative and self-serving. Wong (1998) offered up the notion of “friendship rapport” while at the same time troubling it. This was an attempt to describe the dynamics of the relationship that occurs between the researcher and the respondent while exploring the ethics of how it has traditionally been constructed. Springgood and King (2001) also trouble existing notions of rapport but in the end determine that it is a concept that should be done away with in the field of critical social science. Lincoln (2010) asserted that qualitative researchers have moved past rapport towards the notion of authentic respect that includes the acknowledgment of the differences between the researcher and those that he or she works alongside.

### 3.8 The Interview as a Gendered Construct

The social sciences have a long held tradition of ignoring women all together. Medical research clinical trials were done with male subjects and the results were generalized to women if applicable (or not). Very little research was done about, on or by women. For example, the original and widely used text *The Focused Interview: A Manual of Problems and Procedures* (Merton, Fiske, & Kendall, 1956) did not even mention issues that may arise based on gender differences between researchers and respondents. This is just one of many examples that feminist scholars have pointed out, showing how women in United States' society have been ignored, silenced, and unrecognized by researchers (Reinharz & Chase, 2002).

Feminists have made the case that the traditional interview protocol stems from masculine constructs. Oakley (1981) asserted that the interviewer is thought to embody masculine characteristics. He is dominant, in control, objective, emotionally detached, scientific, rational, and proper. The respondent is thought to be passive, immature, helpless, submissive, childlike, irrational, and a subordinate. The interviewer's job (the male) is to ensure that the respondent (the female) is not sentimental or too emotional. The interviewer's task is to get them to focus on the objective, which is the concrete and measureable (male) task at hand.

### 3.9 Can there be a Feminist Poststructural Interview?

From a Foucauldian perspective, the purpose of the interview should decenter the subject rather than further cast its gaze upon the individual. This is in dramatic contrast to feminist views of the subject, as identity, specifically gender, which is central to feminist theories. Therefore, the idea for feminists to decenter the subject, creates

tension with poststructural theories. Further complicating these tensions, is this fundamental question - should we make a person the center of inquiry? This is where some poststructuralists and some feminists disagree. The next section attempted to explore these tensions while posing the question, can there be a feminist poststructural interview?

### 3.9.1 Foucauldian Views on the Subject

Foucault (1977a) traced the rise of the individual subject as a social and political construction. He rejected the idea that people had an “inner self” and calls this a discourse that was created to control and regulate. His historical archaeologies traced the shift in societies from the collective to focusing on the individual. In *Technologies of the Self*, Foucault (1988) showed how technologies of power, such as normalization and knowledge were turned inwards. It is the idea that one must confess and that this process of confession normalized them. People are encouraged to open up and share their private selves. He called this process the “the dream of the transparent society” (p. 190).

Foucault’s work helps the researcher trouble the idea of the interview as a tool for opening up a person’s inner life. He reminds us that because identity is socially constructed, much of what a person would share in an interview is simply a reflection of the larger discourses in society. Foucault also helps us think about how we need to be careful not to fall into the trap of believing that the “opening up” of a person is somehow a “good” thing. It reminds us that transparency is a product and project of modernity. Foucault (1988) also challenged the notion that we can never truly know our own intentions, the way we create meaning or why we act in certain ways. He asked “at



what price can subjects speak the truth about themselves?” Again this calls into question of what can be known and by whom? Foucault’s work has made me question whether I had the “right” to ask certain questions or even do interviews at all.

### 3.10 A Postmodern Feminist Perspective on the Subject

Identity, specifically gender, is central to feminist theories. Therefore the idea for feminists to decenter the subject creates tension with poststructural theories.

Postmodernist feminists (Butler, 1990; Braidotti, 1994; Swacki, 1991) have used Foucauldian perspectives to examine power and the possibilities for the resistance against patriarchy. Foucault helps feminists throw off the old revolutionary models based on enlightenment and think about social change in a different light. Swacki (1991) explained that, “Freedom does not basically lie in the discovering or being able to determine who we are, but in the rebelling against those ways in which we are already defined, categorized and classified” (p. 27).

Poststructural Feminist Bronwyn Davies (1993) challenged Foucault’s version of identity formation for being too simplistic and totalizing. She argued that there had to be room for human agency. Otherwise people would never be able to step outside of the norms dictated to them by society. Davies expanded on and in many ways redefined Foucault’s notion of identity formation. She asserts that identities are always changing, complex, contradictory, and multiple. While identities are influenced by race, class, gender, sexuality, culture, religion, politics, and a multiple of other factors, individuals are constantly negotiating, navigating, internalizing, rejecting, accepting and/or contradicting them all at the same time. Anzaldua (1999) in *Borderlands/La Frontera* spoke to these multiple identities when she talked about living in between, within,

among, and outside borders. As a Mexican, American, Chicana, lesbian, academic, writer, and activist living in poverty, she learned to absorb, take on, take off, and navigate each of these identities.

Davies (1993) emphasized that identity formation is not some abstract concept but that it is a very real process that can be very emotional. For women who have been marginalized, terrorized, and subjugated by colonialism, identity formation can lead to “fractured identities (Spivak, 1993). Speaking to these painful emotions associated with identity formation, some have questioned the research that makes the subject the center of investigation when it is the issue of subjectivity that has led so many women to feel like they lead fractured lives.

A feminist lens helps the researcher to trouble notions of identity and subjectivity. While researchers generally agree that a participant’s race, gender, age, class, past experiences play a role in shaping one’s social location (Reinharz & Chase, 2002). Feminist perspectives remind us that they do not define them. Also that, these subjectivities are not fixed and cannot be assumed. Rather the interview can help provide data that represents contextually situated stories or accounts of particular subjects or events (Roulston, 2010).

### 3.11 Interview as Transformative Encounter

While we are never able to fully understand another’s intentions, inner subjectivities and meanings, that does not mean that we cannot attempt to understand each other and in doing so more fully understand the topic of study. While the majority of this section has troubled the entire construct of the interview, I believed that it was possible to attempt a feminist poststructural interview. Interviews are problematic at best

and an intrusive disciplinary power at worst. Yet, it is my belief that interviews can be worthwhile opportunities to enter into meaningful dialogues. These conversations can provide the researcher and the participant temporary glimpses of understanding and insight. Butler (2001) calls these opportunities *transformative encounters*. Below is an excerpt where she describes them:

We do not present ready-made selves to one another, we do not encounter the other and then simply present what is already true about us, what is already constituted in us, what is already known about us. In our encounter with the other, we are perhaps always somewhat strange to ourselves, for the other address us in ways that make assumptions about who we are, what we stand for and what the limits of our thinking and commitments might be. But if we undergo the experience of dialogue then we enter the *conversation* as one kind of person but emerge as another kind (Butler, 2001, p. 82).

As the researcher, it is important to be open to this kind of transformative process. Ellis and Berger (2002) have suggested that the interviewing process is not simply a funnel from which information is simply extracted and translated via the researcher. Rather, they view interviewing as “a sea-swell of meaning making” in which it is the job of the researcher to try and relate their own experiences to the people they are interviewing (p. 853).

The challenging of the power constructs within research and specifically within the interview is central to this discussion. Oakley re-conceptualizes what a feminist interview should look like, while accusing the structured interview protocol of being “morally indefensible” (p. 252). She also argues that asking women to disclose of themselves without self-disclosure is actually counter-productive. Lather (1991) also espoused that the researcher should be upfront about her opinions and the issues of power related to the interview.

However, issues of self-disclosure are argued among feminists today. While most feminists would argue that some self-disclosure is important, the issues of what and how much is often debated (Blum, 1999). Because feminists often do research with women about personal issues such as patriarchy, sexual exploitation, motherhood, and domestic abuse, trust and rapport are built when the interviewer shares some of her own personal history. Problems can arise when the researcher assumes that the participant's opinion or perspective is the same as hers. For this reason, I did not share my opinions in the interview unless asked. Also, I did not assume that anyone shared my opinion, as I believe this is arrogant and would have gotten in the way of my attempt to understand the participants.

Finally, Oakley asserted that the fear of researcher bias must be thrown out, not only in feminist research but also throughout the social sciences. That it should be replaced with the idea that researcher involvement is a natural way that people get to know and trust each other. This trust is built when research is done together not "on" or "for" others. Fine's (1994) work on the researcher/participant relationship is central to feminist inquiry and addressed in the next section.

### 3.12 Working the Hyphens

Michelle Fine's (1994) *Working the Hyphen* questioned the practice of "othering" in our work. Othering has been defined in this case as the separating or differentiation between one's self and another group or individual in order to hold the "other" to a different set of morals or standards. It is about understanding difference as inferior (Pickering, 2001). The problem with *othering* is that it is often done in ways that are so subtle that it goes undetected even by researchers whose aim is social justice.

Representations are formed when, we as researchers try to separate and distance ourselves from our subjects. When we write as an invisible authoritative voice, as narrator.

According to Hall (1991), we need to be investigating the space between “us” and “them”, blurring these boundaries. We have to recognize that representations are always politically situated. Therefore qualitative research cannot be regarded as value-free. Race, gender, class, and ethnicity always shape it. Research is a political act. Fine (1994) asserted that when we write about those who are oppressed or who have been *othered* we further *other* because we are separating ourselves from their situations, from the context. *Engaging the hyphen* situates us inside the struggle, inside the context *with* our participants.

But how do we do this as researchers who don't really live “the struggle?” Isn't it arrogant to think that as a white middle class educated woman that I can go in and save “the other”? That I can even “help”? Surely the act of me speaking for “the other” is perpetuating colonial research practices. This is the tension. Sometimes there is a tradeoff. The researcher “plays the system” in order for the stories of “the other” to be heard. It is a fine line. Trading principles for social justice. Fine warns against romanticizing the *other*. That the researcher cannot back off from analysis, and that if this happens the data can become objectified, flattened, and neatly categorized.

### 3.13 Data Collection

Qualitative interviews have the potential to become very lengthy. Fatigue was not an issue because I planned for follow-up interviews. Included in the Proposal Appendix was the interview protocol: the general interview questions, the grand tour

questions and/or topics as well as the order the questions were asked. After an initial in-depth interview, selective participants were given a second and a third interview when needed. Each interview lasted about one to one and a half hours. I took notes during the interview and also asked for permission to digitally record each interview in order to record tone of voice and catch anything I was unable to type.

The interviews that were conducted were based on Fontana and Prokos (2007) notion of the postmodern interview, which emphasized the multiple meanings that could emerge within the interview. The interview data was a co-construction between the interview and the interviewee. It emphasized the collective and troubled the masculine positivist traditional structure that put the interviewer “in control”. Research is done together *with* never *for*. In other words, the interview provided opportunities for the researcher and the participant to have genuine discussions about whose story was being told, how and why certain aspects of it were interpreted in particular ways (Fine, 1994).

The first interview served as an opportunity to introduce the study and allowed for the interviewer and the participant to meet each other and build a rapport. Grand tour questions were used and the interviewer only asked short questions for clarification. Spradley (1980) described the purpose of these questions is to get insider descriptive knowledge. The questions asked were very open-ended and participants were encouraged to elaborate and expand on their answers having shared their own personal experiences and opinions. Follow up questions were used to either probe for more information about or to clarify the participant’s previous answer(s).

The second interview built upon the information that was given in the first interview. It moved from a relay of content from participant to interviewer and became a more active process. One such interview style that I was interested in exploring during the interviews was one that Brinkmann (2011) calls the *epistemic interview*. This is an interview style that is based on the Socratic method. Its purpose is to uncover or “arrive at *episteme* through dialectical processes of questioning” (p. 64).

It is important to unpack what is meant by the term *episteme*, before the interview process can be discussed. *Episteme* is the Greek word that means knowledge or “to know”. The enlightenment version of *episteme* was more of a traditional interpretation of knowledge based on the scientific method. In contrast, Foucault (1980) used *episteme* to explain the historical assumptions that ground knowledge and discourse. He explained the possibility that there are multiple epistemes that co-exist at the same time and have multiple influences on power structures. Foucault’s genealogy can be viewed as a systematic approach to uncover the epistemes and the historical conditioning rules that formed them.

As previously mentioned, the epistemic interview style is based on the Socratic Method. Socrates would ask a person to give an account of their life with it showing how they lived in relationship to what they believe. Foucault (2001) talked about this method and made the distinction between this and some kind of public confession. It is similar to an oral history with the purpose of serving the public good. However, the interviewer questions the participant asking for the participant’s rationale or philosophy behind a statement. The emphasis is on sharing for the benefit of others, rather than prying into a person’s private life as a voyeur or putting someone on trial. Butler (2005)

called these conversations an opportunity for people to “give an account of themselves, exhibited by the *logos* by which they lived” (p. 126). The purpose of this interview is to focus on what the participant says. The interviewer does not try and play psychologist and explain “why” these things are said. As such, both researcher and participant take each other’s opinions, thoughts and beliefs seriously.

During the interview, the researcher takes the role of Socrates, at times, respectfully questioning them. Brinkmann (2011) explained that at the core of this method is the idea that the researcher is “not a spectator who objectifies the conversation partner and his arguments by ignoring their normative claims or statements or looks at them in terms of causes (psychological or sociological) that may have brought this person to entertain such beliefs” (p. 66). Hence, the participant is not treated like a patient, or a consumer who is always right, or like a child who cannot explain or defend her own knowledge claims. The participant is taken seriously as a partner in the knowledge that is being created.

Lastly, I shared emerging themes with participants and heard their feedback. As a critical researcher, I believed that it was always my ethical responsibility to give everyone interviewed a copy of the interview transcripts as well as copies of the draft for review before anything was published. I did not give the participant a copy so that they could edit it or “sign off on it”. Rather, I asked for participants to give me feedback about whether they believed I accurately and responsibly represented their stories. Derrida (1994) stressed that this is part of becoming free from the “text of responsibility”. This does not mean that I believed that each and every participant would agree or even



care about the way that I chose to analyze the data. However, I certainly wanted to provide an opportunity for participants to be part of this process.

### 3.14 Interview Quality

While the interviews I conducted were more open and flexible than “traditional” interviews, this did not mean that quality had been sacrificed. Skill and quality are important, but they should not be defined as the ability to get closer to “the truth”. Instead the notion of “truth” should be replaced by one of “authenticity”. Nunakoosing (2005) suggests that quality interviews consist of the interviewer being acutely aware of their own subjectivities, the flow of dialogue, and theoretical perspectives to build relationships with participants. The interviewer Kvale (2006), reiterated this when he mentioned that interviewers should hone their skills so that they become expert “craftsmen” able to create research so powerful that its validation is weaved within its final product like a “strong piece of art” (p. 22). In order to do this, Kvale created six criteria for quality interviews: 1) interview questions need to be “spontaneous, rich, specific and relevant” (p. 145), 2) they should be brief and the interviewee should be the one doing most of the talking, 3) the interviewer should try to do her analysis whilst interviewing, 4) they should ask for clarification throughout the process and ask follow up questions that lead to more in depth understandings of what is being said, 5) the interviewer should also attempt to “verify” his or her understanding of the interviewee’s meanings and versions of the story, 6) a quality interview should be “self-communicating”, in other words there shouldn’t be much of a need for extra wording or descriptions about the subject because it explains itself.

### 3.15 Data Analysis

There are several components that makeup data analysis. A major piece of analysis is the researcher. Therefore, I have included a narrative section in order to describe who I am, as a person, as well as what inspired me to study the topic of advertising to children. Also included was the plan for how I intended to analyze the data. This plan included the traditional qualitative method of unitizing while at the same time experimented with what Jackson and Mazzei (2013) have called “plugging in”. This is inspired by Deleuzean concepts and provides a means of working with and against interpretive methods in order to “decenter some of the traps in humanistic qualitative inquiry” (p. 265).

#### 3.15.1 Self as Researcher

Qualitative inquiry stems from the interpretivist paradigm, and this interpretivist knowledge is based on the concept of researcher as instrument (Cassell, 1980, p. 414; Guba and Lincoln, 1981). Qualitative perspectives go beyond acknowledging researcher subjectivity, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985) “the knower and what is known” cannot be separated (p. 37). In other words, qualitative researchers posit that research is value-laden. In fact, many argue that “social inquiry is only meaningful because it involves values” (Smith, 1983, p. 47). Interpretivist research represents a move away from the oversimplification to complexity and dissimilarities. It is not about the need to be searching for a formal theory; instead it is about asserting the value of theoretically infused analysis. It is important for the researcher to position herself within the research in order to acknowledge the intrinsic subjectivity of biographic research. For that reason, I believed it was important to situate myself within this study.

I was born in the 1970s, the Caucasian child of an anthropologist turned missionary. I spent a significant portion of my childhood in East Africa. Some of my first memories were of playing among my preschool classmates in a small Ugandan village. I am not sure when I became aware of the fact that I was different from most in East Africa. As if my blond hair and pale skin weren't enough to attract attention, my parents had named me "Kenya" after the country they loved. My childhood was a jumbled up mix of experiences that strung together add up to little more than snapshots of a life lived in the *borderlands* (Anzaldua, 1991). At a very young age my father was arrested, and my mother and I were hidden by villagers and snuck out of Uganda during Idi Amin's reign of terror.

I remember feeling out of place in the United States when we returned. My mother tells a story of me dropping my drawers and peeing in my grandmother's lawn at a family gathering. I suspect that "third culture kids" like myself collect these types of stories along the way. It was not until I entered middle school that I returned to Africa, after my father, having left academia for religion, took us to Kenya as missionaries.

We spent the summer in a small compound full of guesthouses for missionary families in transition when we arrived in Nairobi. As a thirteen year old, I was in shock to discover that Kenya only had one television station and that programming only came on for two hours in the evening. I wondered what I would do to pass the time. As it turns out, my siblings and I met other children outside, we built forts, played chess, created elaborate espionage games, read books and I even took up sewing. I spent five very formative years in Kenya, graduating from a small international boarding

school that overlooked the Great Rift Valley. During that time, I lived without a television, access to movies, radio, and fashion magazines.

At eighteen my parents remained in Kenya, but sent me to the United States for college. On the outside I looked like an American and spoke like an American but I was missing a central piece of the American curricula. I had not been subjected to advertising telling me what a woman should look like, how a girl should act to attract a boy, what material things I needed to own in order to gain acceptance, how I should relate to people from other races, etc. My college years were a “wake-up call”, as I came to understand just how much I had missed being away from the consumer culture.

The time I spent in Kenya shaped and molded me in ways that even now I have difficulty defining. Changes in technology and globalization would make it virtually impossible to replicate my childhood experience of being shielded from consumer culture. Satellite television, movies, music, social media, the Internet, and with them advertising can be found in almost every remote location on the globe.

As a new mother I remember reading a list of “necessary items” given to me by a parenting expert and feeling completely overwhelmed. I was informed that I would need to purchase all of these items before the baby arrived. Within a week of my first prenatal wellness check, I began receiving “complimentary” parenting magazines in the mail. They were filled with articles about the necessary items needed to be a successful parent.

As a young woman living paycheck to paycheck, it was only a matter of time before panic set in. How could I possibly afford all of this? If my childhood in Africa had taught me anything it was that a baby can be brought up on love and very little else if

need be. But that was not the voice inside my head that I listened to. Instead a new rationalization took hold, the idea that as a parent I needed to make sacrifices for my child. I decided that I would take on more at work in order to pay for these items. I would get a credit card. I would push my husband harder to earn more. I did not believe that I was being materialistic; I had simply accepted that I would need all of these things. I believed that in order to be “a good parent” I needed this “stuff”.

Apparently many of our young friends got the same memo, because before long our houses were “too small” and we all had to look for new ones to contain our “stuff”. Little did I realize that this was just the beginning and that at the time my unborn child was already being targeted as a consumer. In the hospital, I had difficulty breast-feeding, without my knowledge or consent, the nurses began feeding my daughter a brand name formula. I was informed of this the day I was sent home, with a “complimentary” bottle cooler prominently displaying the formula company’s logo on it and stuffed full of formula samples and coupons. This was just the beginning of my awareness of consumer culture and how it is a central component of childhood.

From Disney’s Princesses to Star War Legos, there has never been a time in history where corporate influence has had such an impact of the construction of childhood. Yet, it is too simple to state that all children are being made into “autobots” who define themselves through their purchases and adopt commercially promoted social norms. If anything a postmodern feminist lens promotes complexity, messiness, and contradiction. Human agency cannot be overlooked. In my personal life, I have experienced this first-hand. I have a daughter who could care less about material things, refuses to care about her appearance and rails against most things “popular”. At

the same time, my son could spend hours shopping online. He tends to be motivated by the pleasure of purchasing and would rather buy some “thing”, “anything” over the opportunity to share an “experience”. Both children have been raised under the same roof with parents who promoted the same values. This experience of raising two children similarly also reminds me of the complexity of the human condition.

I shared this personal information to inform the reader that I came to this work with personal experiences, beliefs and perceptions about the issues surrounding this study. Interpretivism posits that research is value-laden. Some may consider this a limitation, however, many, myself included, would agree that “social inquiry is only meaningful because it involves values” (Smith, 1983, p. 47). It would be unethical for me to pretend that I am an objective researcher without any opinions regarding advertising to young children. As a feminist, I am offended by gender-based toy marketing that often perpetuates sexism by promoting beauty products and baby dolls to girls and violent toys to boys. As someone who is concerned about social justice, I am troubled about the materialistic messages that are promoted through advertising. With all of this said, this study was not solely about my perceptions. In fact, it was about me trying to understand other parents’ experiences, perceptions and beliefs. I wanted to know if I was alone in my concern about these issues. I wanted to explore the similarities and differences parents shared within this rapidly shifting commercial culture.

Wright Mills (1970) explained that “many personal troubles cannot be solved merely as troubles but must be understood in terms of public issues (p. 248). I believe that because of my unique insider/outsider experiences, I am in an interesting position

to examine how and/or if parents perceive advertising aimed at young children. The purpose of this section was not to navel gaze, rather to connect my experiences to others, in order to explore questions about identity and search for emancipatory and transformative solutions to the problems that we face in this rapidly changing postmodern world.

### 3.15.2 Unitizing and Categorizing the Data

Data analysis is a crucial component of trying to get a sense of the interview and the participant as a whole or what Giorgi (1975) called a *gestalt*. In this process, the researcher must be careful not to sacrifice the whole while dissecting data into parts. As mentioned earlier, it is important that analysis begin while conducting the interview (Roulston, 2010). This means that I asked as many follow up questions as needed, to try to illicit an understanding of what the participant was trying to communicate. This required that I possess what Strauss and Corbin (1990) refer to as *theoretical sensitivity*, which is the ability to pay attention to the “subtleties of meaning in the data” (p. 33). It is a kind of insight into what to look for in the data and how to decipher what is relevant and what is not.

The next step was to review the data that was transcribed during the interview. According to Potter and Hepburn (2005) there is not a neutral or value-free way to transcribe the interview. They argue that the researcher makes choices based on their own subjectivities about what to put in the notes, which method of recording devices to use (tape recording vs. video recording) and all of these choices influence which data gets recorded. These choices influence data analysis. For example, if the interviewer only takes notes, then only the written word will be privileged in the interview transcript.

Unless hand motions, sighs, body language are recorded etc. It is virtually impossible to record every word stated, not to mention, the words transcribed will be further filtered by what the researcher is able to write down or chooses to write down or remember. This again makes the process subjective. Whereupon, it is important to choose a method of transcription that can help capture the overall communication event, including the interpersonal dynamics that are sometimes omitted when only words are captured as data. The interview was recorded using Voice Memo for iPhone and transcribed utilizing the software application Express Scribe. I also took hand written notes that included not only the words those interviewed said, but also the verbal and nonverbal cues such as the emphases, the pauses, turn taking, etc. (Hycner, 1985). Likewise, I kept the interviewer (myself) included in the transcripts in order to see the interplay and interactive aspects of the interviewer. Much is lost when the interviewer is omitted from the transcripts (Potter and Hepburn, 2005). Along these same lines, it was important to read the interview transcripts several times in their entirety before I began the actual process of categorizing and “plugging in”.

After I reviewed the interview transcripts, unitizing was the first step used to begin analyzing the data. Unitizing, as defined by Lincoln and Guba (1985), is the smallest part of information about something that can stand-alone. This not only facilitated analysis but also assisted in organization of large amounts of data into sizable chunks. Each interview transcript was read and using a pencil, a bracket was drawn around each section to indicate that it was a unit. The units from each interview were numbered and then cut out and placed on index cards. Each index card was coded in order to make referencing the original interview transcript possible. As all interview



transcripts were coded, the emerging themes were compared with each other looking for discursive themes categories. This process is referred to as “constant comparison” (see Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.341).

Memos were recorded in a journal after the transcription, coding, and unitizing of interviews during the analytical phase. These memos or journal entries have been described by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as short messages that the researcher writes throughout the process of data analysis. The memos within the journal included a) reaction(s) to a particular interview or piece of data, b) a thought regarding the data’s relation to the theoretical lens, c) a shift or problem with the methodology, d) emphasis or thoughts on particular data that directly answered specific research questions.

After the index cards were created, they were checked and re-checked. New and emerging themes were compared to the existing ones. When no new themes emerge, it was assumed that the data had met the saturation point and the themes were identified (Glasser & Strauss, 1967). These themes were identified as patterns, categories or themes that pertained to the beliefs or perceptions that parents hold regarding advertising to their children. Along with these themes, subcategories were identified, which allowed for deeper analysis.

While I have chosen to code the data, this does not mean that I was unaware of the Post-structural feminists such as Lather (2007) have critiqued coding for being seeped in the positivist perspective. Because coding stemmed from grounded theory it is important to discuss some of the aspects of coding that tend to be resistant or in opposition to the postmodern turn. Briefly, these critiques are: 1) coding can lead to commonalities and lead to either deemphasize differences or hide them, 2) a similar

issue is the encouragement of researchers to choose one main social process and then call the others sub processes. This again deemphasizes complexities and oversimplifies the issues, 3) as equally problematic is the practice of removing “negative” cases or “outlier” cases, 4) also “the search for purity” in grounded theory has also been troubled as a problem with coding. It is the idea that people and things need to be kept separate and boundaries need to be not only set but also strictly adhered to. Each of these issues tends to lead to the oversimplification of complex issues, situations and contexts.

Even with these critiques, coding has been used by researchers from a variety of perspectives. Clarke, (2005), argued that “open coding” can allow for ruptures, contradictions and even the flexibility, especially if the researcher is willing to look at the data and think about what is not there. In this way, silences are also aloud to “speak”.

### 3.15.3 Plugging in the Data

Similarly, Jackson and Mazzei (2013) discuss the struggle to analyze data while working within and against the interpretive. In their recently published book, *Thinking with Theory in Qualitative Research: Viewing Data Across Multiple Perspectives*, Jackson and Mazzei challenge poststructural researchers to use theory to go beyond writing up simplistic narratives that are too often the product of coding that has been reduced to predictable themes free of the context in which they were situated within. Instead of throwing out coding entirely, Jackson and Mazzei suggest that the researcher work to rethink and “decenter some of the traps in humanistic qualitative inquiry”. They argue that much of qualitative research ignores or simply glosses over the complexities of society. For example, most interview methods “center” the subject, yet researchers

utilizing a Foucaudian theoretical framework would argue that the subject should be decentered. Jackson and Mazzei use a construct they envisioned to rethink data that is based on the phrase, “plugging in” and is found in Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) *A Thousand Plateaus*. “Plugging in” is a process of production, in which a new form of knowledge, “*the assemblage in formation*” (p. 263) emerges not as a stable and finished product but as an ever changing, shifting machine. The assemblage does not represent truth, rather it represents a rhizomatically intertwined entity that is connected and emerges from the machine(s) from which it was *plugged into*. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) spoke of three of the fields that make up an assemblage, “the field of reality”, “the field of representation”, and “the field of subjectivity” (p. 23). Jackson and Mazzei (2013) liken the *field of reality* to data, theory, context, and methods, *the field of representation* to the production of new knowledge and the process of destabilizing meaning and finally *the field of subjectivity* to the process of “becoming researcher” (p. 263).

Thinking of research as the assemblage that is an ever-moving construction that is plugged into the machine helps us to avoid over simplification and creating a fixed and centered subject. It also allows us to challenge many of the limitations of traditional qualitative inquiry. For example, Jackson and Mazzei (2013) “use theory to *think* with their data (or use data to think with their theory)” (p. 264). This process included several things. First, it allows the researcher to plug the data into various theorists and concepts in order to open and create new ways of thinking. Jackson and Mazzei (2013) describe three processes that are key to “plugging in”:

putting philosophical concepts to work via disrupting the theory/practice binary by decentering each and instead showing how they constitute or make one another;

2. being deliberate and transparent in what analytical questions are made possible by a specific theoretical concept (e.g., deconstruction or performativity) and how the questions that are used to think with emerged in the middle of “plugging in”; and 3. working the same “data chunks” repeatedly to “deform [them], to make [them] groan and protest”(Foucault, 1980, p. 22-23) with an overabundance of meaning, which in turn not only creates new knowledge but also shows the suppleness of each when plugged in (p. 264).

I used these three guidelines to analyze and work *within and against interpretivism* in this study. As such, in working *with interpretivism*, I unitized the interview data and broke this data into codes and themes. However, at the same time, I used theory (Foucault’s disciplinary societies, and the panopticon and Deleuze and Guattari’s critique of capitalism, and control societies) to help extend and push the limits of understanding. Because I did not use any one theorist’s work in its entirety, I was able to avoid using theory as truth and falling into the trap of thinking that any one theorist has the full “answer” (Jackson and Mazzei, 2013, p. 265).

### 3.16 Writing up the Study

Gubrium and Holestein (2003) encourage researchers to experiment with different “representational forms that they believe can convey respondents’ experience more on, if not in, their own terms” (p. 20). Some researchers have tried to do this by leaving participant’s voices unedited. Certainly, this is a way to ensure that the researcher doesn’t make changes that alter the participants’ meanings. However, some have critiqued this as equally problematic because while the researcher voices are polished and flawless the participant voice is left raw and unpolished. Marcus (1993), a poststructuralist anthropologist challenges researchers to create what he called “evocative portraits” of the people and situations that are being represented. This is the idea that we need to give the reader access to multiple voices in the text in order to

avoid a monological view of the data. It's not so much that we need to be better at representing people, more that we are acknowledging that people are representing themselves to some extent or at least that the researcher is a partner in the process (Visweswaran, 1988).

In *Troubling the Angels: Women Living with HIV Aids*, Lather and Smithies (1997) experiment with the formatting of the text in order to avoid presenting a neat monological story about women with AIDS. In *Getting Lost*, Lather's (2007) "book after the book", she explained that she wanted to provide layers upon layers and leave the work of figuring out what it means to the reader to create what Marcus (1994) has called a "messy text." These layers included the women's stories broken up into sections throughout the book. The women's stories were told in narrative form without analysis. Researcher analysis was put in separate margins running below the narrative. This again was to trouble the notion of the researcher as an authoritative yet invisible narrator. Five inter texts were created with stories about angels. Lather explained that they were used to give the reader a "breather" and to stop the information flow coming too fast.

Lather's text was written, in essence to interrupt the normal way that the reader reads a book. The angels gave the contextual historical backgrounds without interrupting what the women were saying. Lather discussed that she chose to put in what Deleuze (1993) called "folds", into the book to add even more layering. For example, Lather inserted quotes into the beginning of each section. These quotes were taken from a group of students who previewed the book and reacted to it. What Lather does in this text is to conduct an inquiry while at the same time conveying the idea that

the notion of inquiry is problematic. Lather (1991) explained that “the fragmentation in the text, the detours and delays unsettle the reader into a sort of knowing that is not so sure of itself (p. 288)

Bjerrum-Nielsen (1995) spoke about seducing the reader and how text can affect how the reader relates to the author and research. Lather (1999) called the way readers accept the story being told at face value, *comfort text*. I tried to steer away from writing a text that provided a linear and monological view of the parents in this study. Reading authors who question the traditional way we represent knowledge in text has helped me to think about ways it was possible to share research with the reader.

### 3.16.1 Ethical Issues

There are ethical issues that arise regularly in the research process. Komesaroff (1995) coined the term “micro-ethics” which was the term he used to describe how he attempted to think about the difference between the small daily choices we make in research versus the large “big picture” ethical issues. Guillemin and Gillam (2004) made this distinction when they talk about procedural ethics and “ethics in practice”. Procedural ethics include large issues that we address with the IRB boards such as informed consent and professional guidelines for research. “Ethics in practice” are often situations that could not have been foreseen or planned for. They are “ethically important moments” that present themselves and in that moment the researcher must make a decision about how to proceed (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, p. 265). Sometimes these decisions are obvious but many times the choices can be complex and the clear and ethical path that should be taken is murky and difficult to navigate. This is where a researcher must be reflexive in order to navigate. Reflexivity is an ongoing journey and

not a destination. Much of this reflexivity will hinge on the researcher's knowledge of his or her inner values and beliefs about research. We need to continuously be asking ourselves, why am I doing this research? Who is it helping? Who could it harm? Researchers need to place themselves in their participant's shoes and ask how the creation of knowledge may impact their lives. What dilemmas could this interview create for the participant?

### 3.16.2 Procedures

The remaining parts of this chapter explain the procedures I followed as I began this study. The first section detailed why and how participants were chosen and the measures that were taken to obtain their informed consent.

#### 3.16.2.1 Participants

By definition, qualitative research is typically more concerned with matters of description than with those of quantity. Therefore, qualitative research studies commonly have a small number of participants (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1996). The number of participants in this study were approximately ten parents whose child(ren) ranged in age from 6 months to 8 years old. The sample was based on each parent's unique characteristics that added value to the study. Ideally, they differed in gender, socio-economic status, marital status, ethnicity, religion, and educational status.

In an effort to reach many types of parents, I recruited participants through personal contacts within the community of Denton, Texas. The participants who were chosen to participate in the study were based on their eligibility (must be parents of young children aged 6 months to 8 years old) and their demographic makeup

(racial/ethnic, socio-economic, gender, and marital status), which provided a purposeful sample (as seen in Table 2 below).

Table 2

*Participants Being Interviewed*

Participant /pseudonyms	Ethnicity	Age	Gender	Marital Status	# of Children	Children Age/ Gender
#1 (Annie)	Caucasian	34	Female	Divorced	2	Twins f/6
#2 (Bonnie)	Caucasian	34	Female	Married	1	f/7
#3 (Clive)	Caucasian	35	Male	Married	1	f/7
#4 (Rachel)	Caucasian	40	Female	Married	2	m/9 & f/7
#5 (Indigo Blue)	African American	45	Female	Married	2	m/4 & f/12
#6 (Jack)	African American	44	Male	Married	2	m/4 & f12
#7 (John)	Caucasian	38	Male	Married	2	f/ 7 & m/8
#8 (Lisa)	Caucasian	38	Female	Married	2	f/7
#9 (Sunshine)	Hispanic	25	Female	Separated	1	m/2
#10 (Ricki)	Hispanic	32	Married	Married	2	f/3 & f/15

### 3.16.2.2 Informed Consent

All participants were asked to sign an informed consent form (in Appendix B) before their first in-depth interview. The purpose of the consent form was to describe the purpose of the study, explain the protocol for the study and outline and request voluntary participation. The form also provided a detailed explanation of the procedures that were put in place to maintain confidentiality of the participants. These procedures included the storage of all research data in a locked room, the encoding of all interview



transcripts and records with a system that provided anonymity (e.g., an alias or number) and the promise to destroy all data after three years.

## CHAPTER 4

### THEMES

This chapter presents the themes that have been revealed through a process of unitization (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), interpretation and analysis. While traditional dissertations often present research “findings” in chapter 4, it is important to note, that the term “findings” will not be used in this study. As it is problematic to imply that the research process is unbiased and that “findings” can emerge from the data and be represented as “truth”. In contrast, this chapter is presented with the full disclosure that the knower cannot be separated from what is known, and that the themes presented provide a mere glimpse into the perceptions of marketing to children. These themes are contextual. The themes presented cannot be generalized - not to other populations, but not even in regards to the participants within the study. Within each theme lie contractions, simplifications, biases, complications and ultimately messiness. Excerpts from the interview transcripts are provided to highlight examples and further insight into each theme, but are not in any way meant to imply that all participants held identical perspectives. It is also worth noting that even the participant who made the statement may also hold contradicting views at the same time, as perceptions are messy and can be oversimplified and should not be.

This chapter consists of several sections: 1) the review of the purpose of the study and the research questions, 2) a summary of the major themes that were identified in relation to the research, 3) a description of the participants’ cultural consumer context(s), 4) a summary of the key themes in relation to the research questions asked, 5) the identification of key discourses within the interview data.

#### 4.1 Summary of the Research Study

This study examined how parents perceive the role of corporate marketing to young children. Of particular interest was how early childhood educators can work with parents to adapt pedagogy and practice in order to meet the needs of children growing up within the context of a commercialized childhood. In depth interviews were conducted with participants and analyzed using a poststructural feminist philosophical perspective to analyze issues of power. This chapter will be organized not by theme as is often the case in qualitative studies such as these, rather the first two research questions will be addressed and the themes that were identified will be discussed within this format. The third and final research question will be addressed within chapter five. The research questions guiding this study were:

1. To what extent are parents aware of the marketing tactics being directed toward young children?
  - a. What are parent's perceptions of the messages within advertisements to children?
  - b. To what extent do parents perceive marketing to young children as playing a role in the production of children's subjectivities, particularly in regards to gender, race, sexuality, socio-economic or political beliefs?
  - c. To what extent do parents relate an increase in advertising to children with any broader social issues?
2. How do power/knowledge relations and practices produce parents' multiple subjectivities as they parent their children in regards to commercial culture?

- a. What measures (if any) are parents taking to limit their children's exposure to advertising?
  - b. What attempts (if any) have parents made to educate their young children about the intentions of advertising?
  - c. To what extent do parents express a desire to limit or restrict corporate influence on children?
3. How can early childhood educators adapt curriculum to meet children's needs within the context of a corporatized childhood?
- a. What are some ways that curriculum can be used to counter the messages that are being promoted in advertisement (i.e.: materialism, gender bias, violence, etc.) that parents are most concerned with?
  - b. What are "lines of flight" (i.e.: counter discourses, forms of advocacy between parents, and the early childhood field) that could serve to disrupt and to renarrativize the discourses surrounding advertising to children?

During the process of unitization (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), there were several themes that were revealed within the data. These included: 1) parents view themselves solely responsible for their children, 2) parents were more concerned about "adult content" than corporate access to children, 3) parents empathize with marketers trying to sell their products, 4) parents are concerned about how consumer culture influences children's subjectivities, 5) parental perceptions mirror neoliberal discourses.

Each of the themes also assisted in answering the research questions. Below (see Table 3) is a chart that explains how the headings in the following chapter relate to the research question and address the specific questions being asked.

Table 3

*Research Questions in Relation to the Chapter Headings*

<b>Research Questions</b>	<b>Chapter Headings</b>
1. To what extent are parents aware of the marketing tactics being directed toward young children?	Parents Aware of Increased Marketing Targeting Young Children
a. What are parent's perceptions of the messages within advertisements to children?	Parents More Concerned with "Inappropriate Content" than with Corporate Marketing Children Only Programming Provides Unprecedented Corporate Access
b. To what extent do parents perceive marketing to young children as playing a role in the production of children's subjectivities, particularly in regards to gender, race, sexuality, socio-economic or political beliefs?	Parental Concerns Regarding Identity Formation Gendered Target-Marketing Issues of Body Image Issues of Race and Ethnicity Materialism, Justification & Guilt Expensive Purchases; Guilt and Justification Special Occasion/You Earned It Purchase Spoiled vs. Providing More
c. To what extent do parents relate an increase in advertising to children with any broader social issues?	Power Relations with the Neoliberal Assemblage
2. How do power/knowledge relations and practices produce parent's multiple subjectivities as they parent their children in regards to commercial culture?	Power and Knowledge; the Discourses within the Data Parents Empathize with Marketers Parental Concerns Regarding Advertisements Targeting Young Children
a. What measures (if any) are parents taking to limit their children's exposure to advertising?	Parental Perceptions of Control
b. What attempts (if any) have parents made to educate their young children about the intentions of advertising?	Parental Responsibility for their Child's Consumer Education
c. To what extent do parents express a desire to limit or restrict corporate influence on children?	Governmental Regulation as Censorship

4.2 Participants' Cultural Consumer Context(s)

The ten participants in the study all reside in various suburbs situated within the Dallas/Fort Worth Metropolis. They all considered themselves part of the middle class socio-economic group. All of the participants in this study worked outside of the home

in some capacity. Most had grown up in the United States. They were all parents of at least one child under the age of 8 years old.

Participants in this study reported having multiple televisions in their homes, at least one personal computer or laptop, and all had smart phones. Only one participant did not have cable television and this had been a recent decision that was made based on budget concerns. The majority of participants in this study had Netflix subscriptions and digital video recorders (DVRs). Participants' children had a variety of technology in the home from Kindles, iPads, iPods, tablets, Nooks, cell phones, personal gaming systems, and televisions in their rooms and cars. Approximately half of the participants in this study reported that they have the television on in the background the majority of the time in their homes.

The need to complete household tasks was given as the main reason participants in this study did not always sit down and watch television programs with their young children. Some explained that their children fast-forwarded through most commercials. Fathers tended to watch their own programming at the same time their child was watching. While other participants in this study used television as a means to be able to sleep in on the weekends while their children were either watching pre-recorded programs or viewing a children's channel.

Participants in this study remembered having watched commercials as children and many of them admitted to watching a lot of television as a child. Several could even sing advertising jingles from their childhood. They reminisced about the toys they had requested from their parents and admitted that the advertisements were a major reason they wanted them. Some even stated that it was advertisements from childhood

that still influence their adult brand preferences. Participants in this study were in agreement that advertising to children is very effective. As parents of young children, they had experienced times when their own children had asked them to view a commercial and purchase the product being advertised.

Many participants in this study admitted that they rarely viewed advertisements aimed at children, therefore had a difficult time remembering or describing the advertisements. Even though, they rarely watched commercials aimed at their children, they were aware of the many ways advertisers target young children as consumers. According to participants in this study children were exposed to the following marketing venues and/or tactics: 1) the use of infomercial advertisements on children's channels, 2) licensed characters sales of fast food and store-bought food, 3) television advertisements that send children to company websites, 4) billboards, 5) radio, 6) magazines, 7) catalogs, 8) product placement in video games, 9) advertisements on cell phones, 10) personal gaming devices and e-readers, 11) product placement in movies and television shows, 12) store displays, 13) social media tie-ins, 14) sweepstakes, 15) advertisements online, on websites such as YouTube, Twitter, etc.

#### 4.3 Parents Aware of Increased Market Targeting of Young Children

Overall, participants in this study were aware that marketers target children and that advertising to children has reached unprecedented levels. Participants in this study perceived a huge increase in the amount of advertising, especially compared to their own childhoods. They attributed this to 1) an increase in children's only programming and 2) the technology boom opening up new venues for advertising. Participants in this study expressed concern about this increase for a variety of reasons including; 1) the

sheer amount of money being spent on advertising, 2) the frequency of advertisement, 3) the aggressiveness of advertisements. Sunshine, the mother of a two-year old, expressed it this way:

They're exposed to a lot more I think than we were. Like, advertisements might have been like on TV, they might have been a little bit, probably marketed in the store. I remember seeing candy at the checkout, that kind of thing. But now, it's everywhere, Young kids have tablets and phones and all kinds of stuff, and there's advertisements that pop up, and they probably watch a lot more movies and TV than we ever used to. They just are constantly hit with stuff, you know, to buy, buy, buy, and the billboards now are, well not all of them, but there's some that are electronic and they're constantly changing and oh my gosh, yeah. Buy this... buy this...buy this, even to very young kids (Sunshine, January, Interview).

Participants in this study were very aware that the cable television, along with newfound technologies has increased advertising to children in ways that would have been unimaginable one generation before us. Toys have changed, television has evolved, and more than ever, parents are being called upon to maneuver in new ways. Participants in this study exhibited some anxiety regarding the increase in sheer size and scope of products that are being marketed to children today. In the past, participants in this study mentioned they recalled two or three hot items, that as children, they felt like they had to have each year. Now, they explained that there was just so much to choose from. An example of this comes from Lisa:

I think it's problematic that there's so much more to want these days... I worry, are they picking the right thing? Like are they, put all their eggs in the wrong basket? Or am I picking the right thing? Should I do, not have gotten the unicorn pin and gotten this instead? Do you know what I mean? So yes, it's stupid to worry but you know are we getting them the right thing? Like should they be asking for more technologically advanced products? They've never had the one, what do you call them? The VTEC readers or the Leap Frog, we never got any of that but sometimes I'm like, should I have had the leapfrog stuff? I mean you know there's more? I would say more for my part is I'm angsty that way. There's definitely more angst about it, I think then probably my parents had. I'm sure my parents were just like yours are, Holly Hobby kitchens, that and they were done.



So I do, I think that parents are under more pressure. At least I am (Lisa, December, Interview).

#### 4.4 Children Only Programming Provides Unprecedented Corporate Access

Consistently throughout the interviews, participants in this study identified “children only” programming as the significant change in the landscape of advertising to children. While, participants in this study remembered watching television on Saturday mornings for cartoons and other programs with their families, they were aware that their children were able to view children’s shows and therefore advertisements 24 hours a day. When asked to recall the advertisements participants in this study remembered from their childhood, products such as dish detergent, car dealerships, Jell-O, and toys were mentioned. Parents understood that marketers currently target their children and are able to do so now because television markets are segmented and children are their own demographic.

Participants in this study did not necessarily view this increase in children’s programming and the subsequent increase in advertising to children as a negative. Rather, participants in this study viewed “children only” programming as a benefit, with advertising a necessary, although annoying, by-product. This benefit served two purposes, not only was it entertainment for young children but it was *free* from “adult content”. In every interview the term “inappropriate adult content” surfaced. Participants in this study used this term without further explanation, unless they were asked to be more specific. Participants in this study pointed out that on “regular television channels” sexualized images, homosexuality and violence concerned them, whereas, they didn’t think these images were present on “children only” channels.

In order to avoid “adult content” most participants in this study had rules about which channels their children were allowed to view. These were in essence the channels that catered to children. These channels, listed in the frequency that they were mentioned: 1) Disney, 2) Disney Junior, 3) Nickelodeon, 4) The Cartoon Network, 5) Public Broadcasting, 6) The Discovery Channel. Participants in this study stated that these channels provided a particular peace of mind, knowing that they would not expose children to adult content. Much in the same way, participants in this study allowed their children to go online to sites they deemed as “kid friendly”. These sites included: 1) Disney.com, 2) Barbie.com, 3) Monsterhigh.com, 4) Mattel.com, 5) Lego.com, 6) PBS.com, and 7) YouTube.

As mentioned, participants in this study, were aware of many tactics used to market to kids. One such tactic, the infomercial, was the most frequently mentioned and the most disliked by participants. An infomercial is a television commercial which when presented generally includes a phone number or website and presents the product in a way that is meant to be informative and persuasive. The use of the infomercial on children’s television channels was seen as the most aggressive, annoying and effective advertising practice. In interview after interview, participants in this study shared that their children were constantly requesting them to call in or go online to purchase the products advertised in the infomercials that their children viewed. Participants in this study admitted to watching these infomercials with their children to appease them and sometimes even purchased these products, even though they felt sure the products would be a disappointment. An excerpt from Rachel’s December interview is an example of this.

Rachel: The kids watch Disney channel shows over there [her parents' house] and they see all of the infomercials and both of them, their entire Christmas list is infomercials.

*Interviewer: So tell me what are on their Christmas lists this year?*

Rachel: This year, it's the tummy stuffer, number one thing, the tummy stuffer and Daisy also wants the watch light friends.

*Interviewer: Are these things you think that they will actually enjoy once they get them?*

Rachel: No, not at all.  
(Laughter)

Rachel: And she wants a twirling fairy thing that she has seen on the commercials and on the commercial it really flies and she thinks she is going to get this and it's really going to fly.

*Interviewer: She does and how old is she now?*

Rachel: She will be 8 in January.

*Interviewer: Okay and she is still thinking that it really will fly?*

Rachel: Yes.

*Interviewer: When she gets it, what will happen?*

Rachel: Well we already got it for her because it's the number one, my parents got her the tummy stuffer that I refused to buy and they got her the flashlight friend that I refused to buy that infomercial stuff.

*Interviewer: That's on Disney Channel, is that right?*

Rachel: We did her a flying fairy thing because it's at Wal-Mart and um, she is going to play with it for about ten minutes and it's going to get tossed in the corner.

*Interviewer: But she wants it?*

Rachel: That's what she wants more than anything (Rachel, December, Interview).

The products advertised through infomercials made it onto the majority of the children's Christmas lists and were purchased. These items included: 1) Pillow Pets, 2) Stompies, 3) Stuffies, 4) Flashlight Pets, 5) Glow Pets, 6) Seatbelt Pets, and 7) Slushie Magic. Examples of Flashlight Friends and Glow Pets can be seen below in Figure 3. These are photos of just some of the many products being sold via infomercials on children's channels.



Figure 3. Flashlight Friends and Glow Pets advertisements.

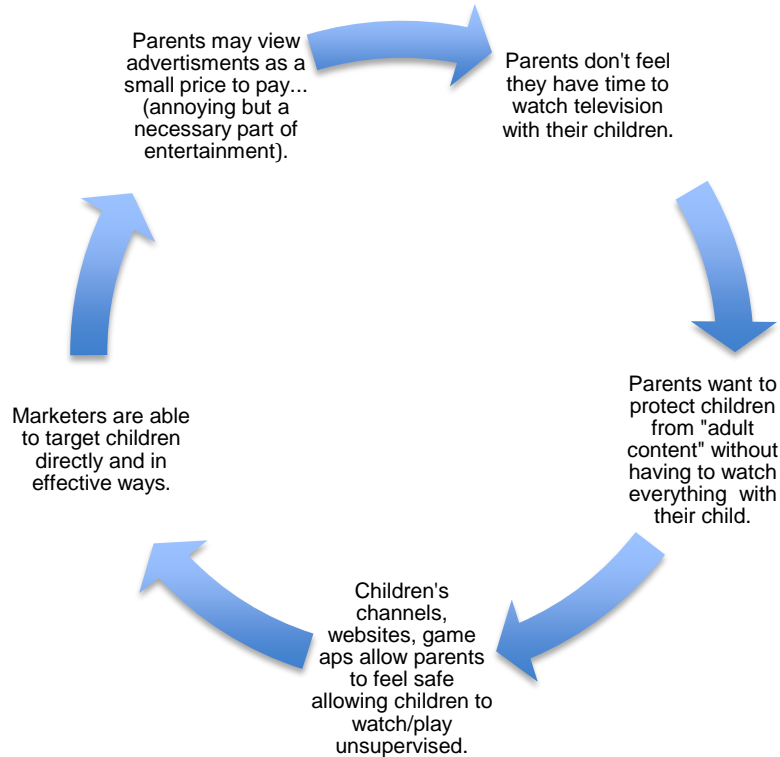
Another concern for participants in this study is that these infomercials are repeated over and over again. The participants in this study explained this in the following excerpts.

I get that whole advertising thing... if I'm trying to sell something, how else am I going to get it out there? But I think that, they can cut down on the amount of advertising that they do... for instance, if I have Jonathan watching Disney on a Saturday morning between nine and twelve, he may see the same commercials six times. So to me it's almost like it's embedding it there, pushing it there... Because you know the first time they see it they may not want to, but by the fourth or fifth time they see it they are like, yeah I need to get that! (Indigo Blue, January, Interview).

Repetition, they advertise the same advertisement, that I can remember the pillow pets, the stompies, toys..., that my kids claim they want and I end up getting even though I know they won't care about at all. But they have those infomercials on repeat on the channels they watch and play them over and over again and kids think they have to have them. They even sing the song - like the Lalaloopsy song over and over again and sure enough that was the only thing that she (pointing across the room to one of her daughters) wanted for Christmas (Annie, December, Interview).

Beth wanted one of those glow pillow pet glow pets, Grace wanted one of those flippy hats that you squeezed the contraption. Yeah, those both were definitely on their lists and they were also the long commercials that played over and over again, asking the kids to tell their parents to call in and order (Lisa, December, Interview).

While participants, in this study tended to be annoyed with infomercials, deeming them misleading and aggressive, they seemed matter-of-fact about their purpose as being a necessary evil. Advertisements, including infomercials, were considered a small price to pay for the peace of mind "children only" programming affords. This peace-of-mind, creates the illusion of parental monitoring, yet in essence, parents are doing the exact opposite as they are lulled into believing that if their child is watching a kids channel, then they are safe from "inappropriate content". This perception that "children only" programming is safe, gives marketers direct access to children in very private and personal ways and often times without the presence of a parent to monitor the messages being conveyed. This cycle of parental concern over "inappropriate content" and the way it has given corporations increasingly unlimited access to children can be seen below in Figure 4.



*Figure 4. Cycle of corporate access via children only programming.*

The second factor participants in this study attributed to increased advertising to children was the rapid changes in technology. To varying degrees, participants were aware that with increases in technology comes increase exposure to corporate marketing. Participants in this study expressed concerns that technology has forced companies to increase their marketing budgets, which has increased the prices of products. Technology was also blamed for making toys more expensive, as they have become more sophisticated.

While participants in this study perceived two causes for this increase in advertising to young children (“children only” television programming and technological advances), noticeably missing from the discussion was any indication that they understand the role that deregulation has played in transforming the broadcasting

industry. Nor was the increase in corporate political influence given as a possible reason that advertising to children has boomed over the past 30 years.

#### 4.5 Parental Concerns Regarding Advertisements Targeting Young Children

Participants in this study listed several concerns that they had about advertising. They perceived that advertising was misleading, deceptive, pushy, and repetitive. They did not believe that their young children could recognize the difference between programming and commercials, or fully understand the intent of advertising.

Participants in this study are most concerned with protecting their children from viewing inappropriate “adult content” within advertising. Issues of marketing’s influence on young children’s subjectivities are also concerns for them. These issues included gender, body image, race, ethnicity and materialism.

Participants in this study perceive advertising to be misleading. They expressed concern that commercials often lead to their child being let down after purchasing the product. This was attributed to the graphics in the commercials showing children doing amazing stunts and really outrageous things with the products in order to increase the excitement factor of advertising. Participants in this study mentioned that their children were especially disappointed when they brought home a toy and found that it paled in comparison to the perceived “reality” of the commercial. Bonnie, explained this disappointment in the following excerpt:

Bonnie: Her nana got her one [an Easy Bake Oven] for Christmas, it will get played with one time and she will play with it once and put it in her closet and she will never play with it again. She wanted an easy bake oven, had to have this easy bake oven, we used it twice and she walked away before the food even finished cooking out of it, both times. She didn’t even eat the stuff; she got tired of it and walked away. She likes to cook but once she was done cooking, she was done and so standing and waiting for it cooking, she doesn’t care about that,

she likes the preparation and making it, so I think that a lot of toys that are out there, are a total waste. They don't add any value.

*Interviewer: Why do you think people buy them?*

Bonnie: Because their kids want them, because the commercials are flashy (Bonnie, December, Interview).

Participants in this study also perceive advertising as very aggressive and pushy. They disliked the way advertisers make children feel like they will be missing out if they don't have a particular product, giving the child the idea that everyone else has it and they need it. Rachel described it as pushiness in the following excerpt:

Advertisements themselves, it's just pushing more of you need this rather than this would be fun to have. It seems like really pushing... you need this and the kids interpret this as, I need this rather than oh it would be kind of fun to play with and everybody's got one and you are the only person in the world without one. It seems like that kind of mentality. (Rachel, December, Interview).

Participants in this study perceived that their young children did not fully recognize the difference between program and commercials or understand the intent of advertising. Participants in this study did perceive that the messages within commercials did lead to increased product requests, however they felt empowered to deal with such requests, often explaining that it was within their role as parent to say no to these requests.

Participants' most frequent concern with media messages (including advertising) was what they referred to as "inappropriate adult content". Participants in this study used this term often without further explanation, unless they were asked to be more specific. They pointed out sexualized images, homosexuality, violence, alcohol, witchcraft, magic, and weight loss commercials as sources of adult content in advertisements that they would prefer their children not view. For the most part they



perceived these “adult” messages in general advertisement but most felt that they were not found within advertisements for children. But they were concerned that children were exposed to them when watching channels that did not cater solely to children. Many participants in this study attributed their concerns about adult content to their strong religious beliefs.

I base them on the Bible - and I'm trying to do the best I can to live by example. It seems like everyone drinks, smokes, has teenage sex, that's why women dressed sexy.... all I can do is love my kids... that's the way. That's all I can do. And live by example. And have faith. Faith that my kids will find the right path (Ricki, January, Interview).

#### 4.6 Parental Concerns Regarding Identity Formation

Participants in this study were aware that consumer culture has an impact on their children's number of product requests and preferences for material items. However when asked about just how much influence advertising plays in the production of a child's subjectivities, participants in this study perceptions varied. The main topics discussed were 1) gender-targeted marketing, 2) girl's perceptions of their bodies, 3) race/ethnicity, and 4) materialism.

##### 4.6.1 Gendered Targeted-Marketing

The issue of marketing particular toys to children based on gender was an area that was discussed as a matter of concern for several participants, in this study. Most of them reported that marketing based on gender was effective, with their girls wanting toys that were marketed to girls and their boys wanting toys that were advertised to boys. The question of whether their girls preferred pink, sparkly, “girly girl type” toys or whether marketing played a role in their child's preferences was one that was difficult for participants in this study to answer. In her December interview, Lisa stated, “That's like

asking which came first, the chicken or the egg?” Of interest, nearly every girl had requested the Nerf bow and arrow set for Christmas. This particular item had been heavily marketed and featured a girl who looked strikingly similar to the star of the very popular movie the Hunger Games (shown below in figure 5). Participants in this study were surprised when their daughters requested a Nerf product, as it was the first time for many of them to be interested in any product made by Nerf. Bonnie’s daughter was the exception, her mother stated, “Well she and her dad play with the Nerf guns all of the time, so she is excited to have something made for girls.”

Rachel’s daughter also wanted a Nerf bow and arrow set. Below is an excerpt from her interview.

All the toy marketing makes me crazy too, this is a girl toy and this is a boy toy and you don’t mix them and the kids pick that up, from this is the toy aisle at the store, this is the boy aisle and this is the girl aisle and you don’t mix them, um just this year I thought it was interesting like Daisy has shown zero interest in Legos ever and she has shown zero interest in anything like Nerf guns or axes or bow and arrows and Ashton has tons of both of them and loves them so they are actively around our house and she could pick them up and play with them anytime she wanted but has no interest and this year we are walking down the girl aisle and for Christmas present ideas and she saw a pink and purple Nerf bow and arrow and Nerf gun and she wants them and she saw all the little my friends Lego sets and she wants them and I’m like, but we have them at home and you never play them, I don’t want the orange boy ones, I want the girl ones. Then why not let them know that they could have an orange and white also. (Rachel, December, Interview).



*Figure 5.* Nerf Rebelle bow and arrow set.

Fathers in turn, seemed to appreciate when their daughters showed interest in Nerf or other traditionally male activities such as video games, hunting, fishing, etc. One father, described his daughter as being “the best of both worlds” explaining how she was the perfect balance between feminine and masculine. However it was noted, that boys were not encouraged to play with toys perceived to be for girls. A young mother expressed frustration with her family members after being chastised for purchasing her two-year-old son a play kitchen. Describing her son’s Christmas list, she retold the incident:

When I see all the commercials I’m like oh he needs that, he wants that, he has no idea he could’ve got 2 books and like a stick and he would have been happy. I saw all of the stuff and I am the one reading the ads that come, oh my gosh he has to have that, ya know, but ya know, it was more in kind of my head I think, and his grandparents head, so he got all this junk that he did not need. And then it started an argument cause at school he really likes to play in the home center that they have in his preschool, I mean he loves, he stays in the kitchen and pretends to cook all the time, so I got him a little kitchen for Christmas, and it started this whole thing cause everyone’s like you shouldn’t be doing that and...and I’m like he’s not gonna be gay because I got him a kitchen (Sunshine, December, Interview).

#### 4.6.2 Issues of Body Image

Mothers in the study also perceived marketing to play a role in the way their daughters view their own body. They blamed the constant marketing of weight loss products in general, compounded by an emphasis on being “fit and healthy” as a major concern. Mothers mentioned that dolls were often impossibly thin, the girls in advertisements were thin and magazine covers promoting weight loss plans were a constant presence in their daughters’ lives. Incidentally, these had indeed made an impact on their daughters own view of their bodies. Participants in this study expressed frustration, some confiding that they themselves had dealt with body image issues and had been extra careful not to say negative things about their own bodies in front of their children. One went so far as to admit to steering her daughter away from ballet and dolls like Barbie in an effort to protect her self-image. Others worried that the fight against childhood obesity and the emphasis on “healthy eating and getting fit” is backfiring, as their young girls make comments about “feeling fat”. Below are a few excerpts from interviews where the issue of weight and body image were discussed.

On TV, all the weight loss commercials or magazines, I think it was *Good Housekeeping* that with every issue is a picture of some woman and it’s about how much weight she has lost. My daughter [age 6] recently told me that she did not ever want to have kids because she didn’t want to be fat. So that’s one of the bigger ones that concerned me, is all of the weight loss, um the weight issue commercials and tired of being overweight tired of not fitting into your pants, tired of this tired of that, you know, none of them say join a gym or stop eating those cookies, they all say take this pill or have this surgery or that type of thing, that kind of bothers me (Bonnie, December, Interview).

Rachel had a similar concern with her daughter and in the excerpt below she describes her daughter’s issues with body image:

Rachel: Ashley is aware of body types, very, and has been from a young age, so I don’t know, some of it has, it is everywhere about the body image and

everything and I worry about this for her and she has been aware of it even before we ever exposed her to any kind of TV, so I don't know if it's a general aesthetic or if she is seeing pictures in the stores of manikins or if it's just how she views life but she has always been very much into "I'm flat bellied" and her brother has a flat belly and why doesn't she have a flat belly and she sees women out in the world and says I wish I had a flat belly like her and I wish my mom had a flat belly.

*Interviewer: How old was she when she started saying all this?*

Rachel: Two, she was two.

*Interviewer: Wow.*

Rachel: We would be in the Target parking lot and she'd be, she's pretty, I wish my mommy looked like that, thanks a lot honey (Rachel, December, Interview).

#### 4.6.3 Issues of Race and Ethnicity

Participants of color, in this study also discussed how they perceived their child's self-image being impacted in regards to issues of race and ethnicity. They explained that they have seen a shift towards more diversity in advertisements. Along with this general shift in the consumer cultural landscape, they were also aware of the targeted marketing of specific ethnic groups. The growing number of cable channels has further segmented the media market, leading to several channels that cater to particular ethnic groups in this country. Participants in this study were conflicted as to whether these channels encourage pride in one's culture and ethnicity or simply capitalize upon it. Participants from Hispanic and African-American backgrounds noted that there was far more products being marketed to them and they increasingly recognized "themselves" in advertisements. Spanish television also was heralded as being a place where children can hear their language, as well. But when Sunshine was asked who she perceived advertisements targeting Hispanics, she stated,

Um, I think, it's hard. It's a grey area, it's not like you can't say it's really bad or really good I guess. I think it's good that they have people that are colored in more places, but really they're just using it to market it to that community so they'll buy more of their stuff. They're not really using it to like, create equality or anything in television, they're just using it so you know, and more people buy their stuff (Sunshine, December, Interview).

Another interesting theme was that parent's racial identity might influence their perception of particular products aimed at children. For example, in several interviews participants in this study discussed their daughter's interest in particular dolls. Of the Caucasian participants interviewed, all expressed disapproval for Mattel's line of Bratz dolls. These dolls were viewed as overtly sexual with their large lips and bolder fashions. Many of these same participants in this study did not have a problem with their child playing with Barbie dolls (see photos of each doll in Figure 6 and Figure 7). In contrast, an African American mother, when asked the same question about her daughter and doll play conveyed that she was relieved that her daughter never showed an interest in Barbie. Below in her words is her rationale:

I've paid attention to Barbie commercials, I've noticed that even though they have many different colors and kinds of Barbies, when I see them advertised it's only the Caucasian Barbie. The Bratz dolls, the ones that she likes, it's a group of girls that are friends, the Bratz girls are all friends, and it's four, and all four different and so I think that makes a difference with that... so you don't really have to address that because it's a pack of dolls. I mean you can always just buy one of them, but when they advertise, they advertise as a whole. They advertise like the four. These are Bratz fashions, the Bratz rock dolls, you know when it's Barbie, and it's the one Barbie. She was never interested so, I didn't have to be concerned with that (Indigo Blue, January, Interview).



*Figure 6. Advertisements for Barbie Dolls.*



*Figure 7. Advertisements for Bratz Dolls.*

#### 4.6.4 Materialism, Justification, and Guilt

None of the participants in this study used the word “materialism” or specifically pointed out that they were concerned that their child’s self-image or self-worth was being impacted by the consumer culture. However, they expressed concerns that children felt peer-pressure to have expensive things and that sometimes they put pressure on themselves to give their children material items. Participants also felt

conflicted in their consumer behaviors wanting to give their children more than they had but at the same time not wanting to spoil them. Bonnie explained it by stating:

She [her daughter] sees these commercials and she thinks she just has to have it in order to be happy, you know and there is always that peer pressure thing that everyone wants to have the same thing, that everyone else has um, but when we were kids, we played, it was go ride your bike outside or go build a fort, also I grew up farther out in the country than here, so that makes a difference too. It also plays a difference on how you grow up is where you grow up. Um, we would rake leaves and make a pile or a maze out of leaves in the yard or ride four wheelers or things like that and be outside making experiences more that inside playing with stuff and um, there's an overwhelming amount of commercials for just products now and every product has accessories but they need to have these accessories to go with those types of things and they are very expensive. You know, the Nintendo was the big thing and it was the predecessor to the Atari and they were expensive game systems but they weren't, they didn't break the bank and you know, get a couple of games and that was it, but now it's you have to buy a ps4 and an Xbox One and they both came out at the same time and that's a thousand dollars, two of those and the games are forty dollars and fifty and sixty dollars a piece or you have to buy the Orbz foot spa and the additional Orbz stuff to go with it (Bonnie, December, Interview).

#### 4.6.4.1 Expensive Purchases; Guilt and Justification

While purchasing a \$300 toy for a young child may have been unheard of in the past, is not necessarily the case anymore. Technology has made products more expensive and people are feeling a bit conflicted about the morality of spending large amounts of money on young children. Participants in this study expressed guilt and a need to rationalize their purchases, especially to older family members. Participants in this study were concerned with being judged by their own parents for purchasing too many toys or being frustrated with the grandparents for purchasing too many gifts. Overall, participants in this study reported that there were a lot of judgments attached to how much stuff should children have. Participants in this study shared stories of being judged and/or admitting to feeling the need to justify their purchases. In her January interview, Indigo Blue described the issue, "I could see my other family



members holding their tongues on Christmas morning, when they saw all of the gifts my children received.” (Indigo Blue, January, Interview).

#### 4.6.4.2 The Special Occasion/You Earned It Purchase

Another tactic parents used to teach their children about the importance of spending wisely (or justifying their purchases) were to only make purchases for their children on special occasions or when their child really deserved the “treat”. Annie, a mother of twin girls, explained her purchasing behavior by stating in her December interview:

At times I’ve said yes [to an item] even though the only reason that they want it is because they see the commercial. I get a little whining but we don’t buy a lot of stuff unless it’s really what they want and it’s economical or if it’s a special occasion or they’ve gotten good grades or something, then I will buy it but if they are just asking ask I don’t buy it. (Annie, December, Interview)

When asked which special occasions deserved a purchase, the most popular occasions included holidays, birthdays, and positive report cards.

#### 4.6.4.3 Spoiled versus Providing More; Conflicting Sentiments

Participants in this study who grew up with less tended to be more concerned that their children would be spoiled and ungrateful. They were concerned about their child having too much, reported having argued with their spouse or other family member(s) about purchases. Ricki explained this conflict:

We [he and his wife] are a hundred percent different. Because I grew up with almost nothing and she grew up with everything. That is the total reason. Every day, it’s constantly on my mind. I see how they [his children] have rooms full of stuff. I try and explain to them how I grew up but they don’t get it. I show them examples of how I grew up and take them to Mexico and other places even here in the US where Americans are living in places, poorer than you can even imagine. Here in Texas. There are people here in the United States that don’t have what we have - I’m always showing them examples. (Ricki, January, Interview)

Expressing conflicting sentiments, many of the participants in this study who were worried about spoiling their children, also expressed a desire to provide more for their children than they had growing up. Sunshine, the mother of a two year-old boy described the pressure she felt to provide for her son:

I think it's more of pressure from myself. I don't feel like I have to keep him up with other kids or anything yet, cause he's not really, I mean he goes to school but they're all two. I think I'm more hard on myself, like I want him to have stuff that I didn't have, or you know. And I didn't grow up like in a crazy terrible home or anything, but it was in a single parent home with my grandparents. My dad was in jail, you know, it was just a different life than the one my son has grown up in and I guess I just, you know, you want him, you want your kids to have more than what you had, at least that's how I feel. So I just put all this extra pressure on myself, just from me. (Sunshine, January, Interview)

#### 4.6.4.4 The Educational Item Purchase

The educational claims of marketers often help parents justify expensive purchases. For example, during the interview process, many participants in this study proudly displayed educational applications that they had uploaded onto their phones and explained that their children love them and are learning the alphabet, to count, etc. Some participants in this study also perceived a need for early exposure to technology in order keep up or at least “not fall behind” other children. There is a perception that children who have access to technology and especially educational technology items (i.e.: one parent used the example of V-tech products) are given an early advantage or a “step up” educationally, although many admitted to having doubts about how the applications, e-readers, and educational computer programs actually were accomplishing this. Some participants in this study did question the motives of marketers, who often make claims regarding the educational merits of their products. One couple referred to the 2010 class action lawsuit in which Disney's Baby Einstein

Company was convicted for making false claims about the educational benefits of their videos for babies. They admitted that they too had “bought into” the idea that their children were benefiting educationally from viewing Baby Einstein products.

In summary, when asking the research question, “to what extent are parents aware of the marketing tactics being directed toward young children”, the following findings were revealed; 1) participants in this study are aware that their children are the target of vast amounts of marketing from a variety of sources on a daily basis, 2) participants in this study are more concerned with “inappropriate content” than with corporate marketing, 3) children’s only programming (i.e. children’s television channels and children’s websites) provide unprecedented corporate access to children, and 4) participants in this study do have concerns regarding marketing’s effect on their children’s identity formation in regards to gendered target-marketing, issues of girls’ body image, race and ethnicity, as well, as concerns that consumer culture may lead to materialism.

#### 4.7 Power Relations with the Neoliberal Assemblage

Parents are very aware that they are competing with many outside influences for the time, attention and education of their children. Yet participants in this study did not take an “us versus them” approach to the issue of advertising to children. In fact, throughout the interviews, they showed empathy for marketers. Overall, participants in this study perceive themselves as carrying the burden of the ultimate protector, mediator, and educator when it comes to the issue of consumer culture. Unwavering in their opinions that they are ultimately responsible for their children’s media exposure

and consumer education, they subscribed to the neoliberal notion of individual responsibility and free unregulated trade.

#### 4.7.1 Parents Empathize with Marketers

While participants in this study admitted to being unhappy with some aspects of advertising and the product requests that they attributed to them, almost every one of them made comments that showed empathy for the marketers. Below are some of the excerpts from the interviews that support this:

If I'm trying to sell something, how else am I going to get it out there? (Ricki, January, Interview)

I think, still think it's on the parent restrict, to allow your kids to see [the commercials]. As a company it's your job to market your product as best you can because you're in the business of selling that product. (Jack, December, Interview)

If there weren't any commercials then how would the channels make more money and stay in business, they have to advertise somehow to have money. (Rachel, December, Interview)

Even when expressing frustration with advertisements, participants in this study empathized with advertisers. For example, Clive explained that he did not like that companies use licensed characters (i.e.: Dora) on products because it drove up product costs. For example, a package of crackers costs more because the food company has to pay to put a licensed character on it. Yet empathizing with companies he went on to explain that it was understandable because the company sells more crackers with the character on the box. This empathy for the marketer was a thread that was woven throughout many of the interviews. They viewed marketing to children as a job that some people did to earn money.

Furthermore, participants in this study did not verbally challenge the role of corporate influence; rather they seemed resigned to the idea that the current reality was here to stay. Nor did they seem to be too concerned with protecting their children from advertising or blocking corporate access to their children (so long as it did not contain inappropriate adult content). They alluded to the overall commercial culture by stating things like “that’s just the way things are” “it’s the times we live in”. An example of this acknowledgment can be seen in the interview excerpt below:

I think technology branding is everywhere you go unless you decide to live in a box, there is very little you can do, kids go to school and they talk to different people, networking, so they are going to, they will tell them about some things that their parents let them, a lot of things they are going to be exposed to, I think it’s very hard all the different ways to get the media out, can’t keep your kids closed in a box, there are too many different avenues (Jack, December, Interview).

This acknowledgement of the sheer scope of commercial culture was in no way an excuse for participants in this study to let down their guard. Rather, they felt empowered to serve as gatekeepers and fairly confident that they had tools available within their reach to do the job, even if they admitted the job was monumental. John, the father of two young girls explained:

I think parents just have to be in charge. You have to, I feel strongly, you have to pay attention to what your kid is doing and watching and take care of it yourself. I quite often come out and if I find them watching commercials and I say, where’s the remote, give it to me and fast forward through commercials (John, December, Interview).

#### 4.7.2 Parental Responsibility for their Child’s Consumer Education

Another contradiction found within the study was that while participants in this study claimed to be ultimately responsible for educating their children about the purpose of advertisements, most had not done so. Furthermore, they could not recall having

had a conversation about the purpose or content of advertising with their own parents when they were children. Reasons given for not having discussed advertising varied. Some participants in this study mentioned that they planned to educate their children when they are older, but many admitted that they never thought about it until being interviewed. All were open to having conversations with their children.

The participants in this study, who had discussed the purpose of advertising with their children, had done so organically when the topic presented itself in the form of product requests from the child. Rachel explained:

No, they don't [understand the intent of advertising], they think we really need it and so I have talked to them some about it, trying to educate them about the commercial doesn't always tell the truth. They are telling you what you want to hear so that you will want to buy their product because sometimes there's things on TV that they are advertising that is not, is not going to be fun or the way it says it is (Rachel, December, Interview).

#### 4.7.3 Parental Perceptions of Control

Participants in this study felt empowered to serve as the gatekeeper between advertisers and their child. Participants in this study employed several strategies to limit a child's exposure to advertising. These strategies were often referred to as *parental mediation* (McNeal, 1999). In fact, parental mediation is widely believed to be the most effective way to counteract undesirable advertising effects, especially for young children (Donohue & Meyer, 1984). These mediation methods included: 1) utilizing technology to bypass commercials, 2) restricting their children's media use to commercial-free options, 3) restricting their children's exposure time or media access, 4) co-viewing and discussion (see table 4).

Participants in this study utilized technology to bypass commercials, which primarily included the use of a digital video recorder (DVR), whereby the child or parent,

recorded television programming and the child fast-forwards through the advertisements. The second option included choosing channels, websites, etc. which do not contain advertisements (i.e.: Public Broadcasting Service, Disney Jr., etc.). Participants in this study also used Netflix for this same purpose, as well. The third option reduced children's access and exposure to advertising by setting time limits and/or using other media restrictions, such as: 1) no television in the child's bedroom, 2) not leaving the television on at all times in the home, 3) putting restrictive parental controls that limit the exposure time and/or content on personal computers, tablets, gaming devices, etc., 4) using media time must be earned (see Table 4).

Table 4

*Parental Resistance to Consumer Influences*

Participants	Children's Age	Restricting Exposure Time	Restricting Commercial Exposure	Content Control
Annie	6 and 6	Co-Viewing and Discussion	Netflix for Kids, Disney Jr., No Cable Subscription	Netflix for Kids, Disney Junior
Bonnie	7	Self-Regulates (Child does not watch a lot of television)		Disney Channel, Nickelodeon, Parental Controls on Kindle Fire
Clive	7	Self-Regulates (Child does not watch a lot of television)		Disney Channel, Nickelodeon, Parental Controls on Kindle Fire
Rachel	7 and 9	Earn 30 minutes of media time for the computer, television or iPod	DVDs, PBS Kids, Netflix for Kids	PBS, Nick Kids, Disney, Parental Controls for Websites
Indigo Blue	4 and 12	Limited due to busy week schedule. Parental Control, screen time for cell phone	Netflix for Kids, Zoodles for Nook, Disney Jr.	Nickelodeon, Disney, Cartoon Network, Disney Jr., Parental Control for games for the Nook
Jack	4 and 12	Limited due to busy week schedule. Parental Control, screen time for cell phone	Netflix for Kids, Zoodles for Nook, Disney Jr.	Nickelodeon, Disney, Cartoon Network, Disney Jr., Parental Control for games for the Nook
John	7 and 8	School days are limited to one show, 22 minutes, Co-Viewing and Discussion	TiVo, PBS, Disney Jr.	Discovery, Disney Jr., Disney, No Major Network TV Channels, Approved websites and Co-viewing
Lisa	7 and 8	School days are limited to one show, 22 minutes, Co-Viewing and Discussion	TiVo, PBS, Disney Jr.	Discovery, Disney Jr., Disney, No Major Network TV Channels, Approved websites and Co-viewing
Sunshine	2	Television time varies, 1 to 2 hours	Disney Jr.	Pre- approved games for small children on cell phone, Disney Jr.
Ricki	2 and 15	2 to 3 hours per day, TVs in both children's rooms		Parental Control- no iPod use in bedroom because of the internet

Participants in this study did appear to be conflicted about their children's media usage. They admitted to knowing about the American Pediatric Academy's recommendation that there be no screen time for children under two. However, the majority of participants in this study admitted that they did not follow this



recommendation completely. But also, they all reported to having children that didn't watch "too much" television or get "too much" screen time. Participants in this study described busy lives and crammed weekday schedules as the main reason their children had limited screen time. Weekend media use was less restricted because it was viewed as "downtime". This view, in the majority of households, led participants in this study to admit that there were no hard and fast rules about media time.

They used technology to help them monitor their children's media content and usage. For example, one mother put a timing application on her daughter's phone that tracked the users screen time. When her child had used the allotted time for games and music, her phone would shut down. Other participants in this study used applications to create separate family accounts on personal computers, tablets, e-readers, Netflix, and gaming systems. These applications worked to keep adult content separate from children's content.

Several comments were made about media and technology in general, such as "*children these days*" were too reliant on technology for entertainment. Concerns about attention deficit disorder, lack of imagination, lack of respect for authority, and a loss of interest in playing outside, were revealed by participants in this study in relation to the increase of technology used by children in their daily lives. They did not mention being concerned about how technology provides unique opportunities for companies to glean children's personal data, nor did they mention being particularly worried about the intimate access marketers had to their children.

#### 4.7.4 Governmental Regulation as Censorship

The majority of participants in this study were not in favor of government regulation of advertising to children. A few of them even equated government regulation of advertising with censorship. One participant called the idea of government regulation “creepy and big brotherish”. This often coincided with the same conversations about advertising to children being an annoying and problematic practice, but one that had its purpose. When asked if the participants in this study knew of any regulations in regards to advertising to children that were currently in place, the overwhelming majority was unaware of any that existed. One parent mentioned that she believed the marketing of alcohol and tobacco to children specifically should be banned. However, she was unclear about whether this was actually a law. None of the participants in this study were aware of any regulations regarding advertising to children in other countries.

Of interest, although participants in this study were against government regulation, they did have changes they’d like to see enacted. They identified restrictions that they would put in place, if they were “in charge”. The most consistent answers were as follows: 1) fewer commercials per program, 2) less repetition of advertisements during the same time period, 3) lowering the volume on commercials (as they tend to be louder than programming). A few participants in this study had suggestions that were not mentioned by other participants. These suggestions included: 1) showing the same number of advertisements for “girls toys” as for “boys toys”, 2) restricting commercials that advertise beer, underwear, or violent shows during regular programs that are shown during midday. These suggestions came with several comments that they did

not believe any of these changes were likely to happen. Overall, they were resigned to the fact that this is the way it is, that regulation would be too challenging in this environment and that they were against it.

Some participants in this study mentioned that lack of regulation did make the job of being the gatekeeper challenging. One participant admitted that being the sole gatekeeper came with limitations. An example of this can be seen in Lisa's response to the question of who was responsible for monitoring her daughters' exposure to commercial culture:

Well first it's mine, but I can only control when she is with me, but I think advertisers have responsibility in that as well. Social responsibility perspective, if they are going to be advertising during prime hours when children are going to be watching TV on channels, during shows that are for children, you know, they should be mindful of the audience that it is going to be projected to, but ultimately it comes down to, you know, what I allow in my home. When she goes somewhere else and the parents have different opinions, then she could be exposed to different things there (Lisa, December, Interview).

This idea that other participants in this study had different values and different mediation strategies was an issue that parents struggled with. They worried that their children would view "inappropriate adult content" or play with "inappropriate" toys or video games when they were not within the realm of their own supervision. Many felt like they had empowered their children to make good decisions when they were outside of their jurisdiction, but others confided that there were indeed limits to their own ability to act as gatekeeper.

As noted earlier, participants in this study initially were adamantly opposed to any government regulation. However, when faced with the limitations of their ability to "protect" their children from outside influences where addressed they often paused and struggled with the contradictions of their position. This struggle often gave them room

at least to reconsider or give caveats to their earlier statements regarding their opposition to government regulation of advertisements. This process can be seen in the excerpt below from Clive's interview in December:

*Interviewer: Whose responsibility do you think it is to protect children from any harmful messages in advertising?*

Clive: I think it's the parents' responsibility.

*Interviewer: Okay, so you mentioned it was the parents' responsibility, do you feel like you can monitor everything that is advertised to Stacy?*

Clive: After I said that, I was thinking about that, and the parents should be aware of what channel the kid is watching and how long they are watching and that type of stuff. That's a good point because I mean, how are you going to sit there and watch every single, you know, I would hope that certain channels had certain things in place to only allow appropriate stuff... (Clive, December, Interview).

#### 4.8 Power and Knowledge; the Discourses within the Data

Critical theory espouses that political and social actions are closely linked to ontology and that discourses are formed in order to garner support for the existing power structures. Discourses are designed to regulate, normalize and govern. They shape how people view the world, as can be seen throughout the interviews with participants, in this study. There were several discourses identified within the data. These included: 1) the neoliberal discourse of individual responsibility, 2) government regulation is censorship, 3) individual freedom is equated with choice, 4) adult/child dichotomy, 5) child as innocent, 6) child as empowered, 7) the privileging of economic rationales. Many of the above discourses are steeped in modernism and/or neoliberalism. They have become so engrained in American culture that they are rarely ever questioned.

Corporate marketers are the ones who benefit from the discourses of anti-government regulation and “blame the individual mentality”. Yet parents have adopted these neoliberal discourses as their own. The next chapter will discuss how these discourses interact with parental perceptions of advertising to children and how these discourses impact young children within the context of the neoliberal assemblage.

#### 4.9 Summary

There were several themes that were revealed during the process of analysis. These included: 1) participants in this study view themselves solely responsible for their children, 2) participants, in this study were more concerned about “adult content” than corporate access to children, 3) participants, in this study empathize with marketers trying to sell their products, and 4) participants, in this study are concerned about how consumer culture influences children’s subjectivities (issues of gender, body image, race, ethnicity, and materialism) 5) parental perceptions mirror neoliberal discourses. The next chapter will discuss these issues along with how early childhood education can utilize these insights in order to help parents in raising their children in the commercial context in which they live.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

The purpose of the study was to better understand how parents perceive corporate advertising aimed at their young children. Specific questions were developed to examine the extent to which parents were aware of the advertising tactics being used to market to young children, how parents perceived their own role within the issue and how early childhood educators can adapt curriculum in order to meet the needs of children growing up within the context of a commercialized childhood.

This chapter provides a summary of the main themes and discourses that were identified within the analysis and how they relate to previous scholarship in the field. It also examines the implications of the study and how they relate to larger issues of corporate access to children and subsequent issues related to social justice within early childhood education. Suggestions based on this study's implications for early childhood education are directed towards classroom teachers, early childhood education curricula, parent education, early childhood pre-service teachers, policy makers, activists and researchers.

#### 5.1 Review of the Study

A post-structural feminist perspective was utilized to examine parental perceptions of corporate access to young children within a neoliberal context. Broadly, research questions addressed the following questions:

- 1) To what extent are parents aware of the marketing tactics being directed towards young children?

2) How do power/knowledge relations and practices produce parents' multiple subjectivities as they parent their children in regards to commercial culture?

3) How can early childhood educators adapt curriculum to meet children's needs within the context of a corporatized childhood?

In depth interviews were conducted with ten parents to address the specific research questions that were identified for the study. Five major themes were revealed while unitizing the data during analysis, these included:

- 1) Parents view themselves solely responsible for their children.
- 2) Parents were more concerned about "adult content" than corporate access to children
- 3) Parents empathize with marketers trying to sell their products.
- 4) Parents are concerned about how consumer culture influences children's subjectivities.
- 5) Parental perceptions mirror neoliberal discourses.

There were several discourses identified within the data. These included:

- 1) The neoliberal discourse of individual responsibility
- 2) Government regulation is censorship
- 3) Individual freedom is equated with choice
- 4) Adult/child dichotomy
- 5) Child as innocent
- 6) Child as empowered

## 7) The privileging of economic rationales

Jackson and Mazzei (2013) method of “plugging in” data to particular poststructural concepts was used to analyze particular chunks of data related to these discourses. This was inspired by Deleuze’s concepts of *Control Societies* and Foucault’s conceptualization of *Disciplinary Societies* and the *panopticon*. “Plugging in provides a means of working with and against interpretive methods in order to “de-center some of the traps in humanistic qualitative inquiry” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013, p. 265).

## 5.2 Discussion

### 5.2.1 Addressing the Specific Research Questions

When examining the first specific research question developed for the study: *to what extent are parents aware of the marketing tactics being directed toward young children* the following points of analysis emerged:

- **Included** in the discourse surrounding the issue of advertising to children was awareness by participants of the increase in targeting children as a profit source.
- **Included** were concerns about the way advertisements take advantage of children through deceptive, pushy, and aggressive practices.
- **Included** in the discourse but marginalized within the dominant, was awareness that advertising influences children’s’ subjectivities in regards to gender, race, body image.
- **Included** within the discourse was the acknowledgement by participants in the study that corporations co-opt gender and ethnicity for the purpose of profit.



- **Excluded** were explicit conversations about awareness of corporate power within the issue. Noticeably missing were 1) viewpoints that attributed an increase in advertising to the deregulation of the advertising industry, and 2) viewpoints that connected increased advertising to children to increased corporate political access.

When examining the second specific research question developed for the study, *how do power/knowledge relations and practices produce parent's multiple subjectivities as they parent their children in regards to commercial culture*, the following points of analysis emerged:

- **Included** were political positions that support current advertising practices, such as 1) the perception that government regulation is censorship, 2) the viewpoint that parents are solely responsible for their children's consumption and education in regards to consumer culture.
- **Included** were examples of parents empathizing with marketers and the privileging of economic discourses.
- **Included** were discourses that represented children as innocent and in need of protection from adult content such as overt sexuality, violence, alcohol and drugs.
- **Excluded** were explicit discussions about the imbalance of power between corporations and parents.
- **Excluded** from the discourses were discussions about the collective good of the children.

### 5.2.2 Neoliberal Technologies of Power

Discourses are formed in order to garner support for the existing power structures. They shape how people view the world, as can be seen throughout the interviews with participants in this study. Discourses are designed to regulate, normalize and govern. Foucault (1977a) explains that power comes at the point when an individual or society internalizes these discourses and claims them as their own. None of the participants involved deluded themselves into thinking that marketers had an ethical agenda or any other motives other than selling their products to children. Participants demonstrated this when they espoused neoliberal discourses that, in many cases, conflicted with their own personal interests. These discourses included: 1) The neoliberal discourse of individual responsibility, 2) individual freedom is equated with choice, 3) government regulation is censorship, 4) adult/child dichotomy, 5) child as innocent, 6) child as empowered 7) the privileging of economic rational. Several of these aforementioned discourses were deconstructed by critical scholars such as Giroux (2004) for being influenced by neoliberalism and Cannella (1997) for being based in modernism.

The five major themes, from the analysis of data, were also compared with the main discourses discussed in the literature review in advertising to children. These being: 1) parents view themselves solely responsible for their children, 2) participants, in this study were more concerned about “adult content” than corporate access to children, 3) participants, in this study empathize with marketers trying to sell their products, 4) participants, in this study are concerned about how consumer culture influences children’s subjectivities, 5) parental perceptions mirror neoliberal discourses.

The purpose of Table 5 is to view the themes that were identified through unitization with the discourses within them. Also included in the table is a column that identifies the ideological influences within the discourse. Additionally in the table particular discourses identified within the study (individual responsibility, individual choice and government regulation as censorship) were grouped together and placed under the discourse identified as “the rugged individual” (Giroux, 2004).

Table 5

*Discourses Influencing Parental Perceptions*

Themes	Discourses	Influences
1. Parent’s view themselves solely responsible for their children	The Rugged Individual	Neoliberalism
2. Participants, in this study were more concerned about “adult content” than corporate access to children	Child as Innocent Adult/Child Dichotomy	Neoconservatism Christianity Modernism
3. Participants, in this study empathize with marketers trying to sell their products	Privileging of Economic Rationale	Neoliberalism
4. Participants, in this study are concerned about how consumer culture influences children’s subjectivities	Adult/Child Dichotomy	Christianity Modernism
5. Participants, in this study reject government regulation	Privileging of Economic Rationale  The Rugged Individual	Neoliberalism Christianity Neoconservatism

The next three sections discuss the five themes found within the study in relation to the seven discourses, and influences (Table 5). The first section titled *Discourses of Individual Responsibility, Free Trade and Deregulation* discusses how three of the discourses as espoused by participants throughout their interviews were influenced by the strong culture of individualism that is commonly expressed within the United States.

These three discourses are 1) the neoliberal discourse of individual responsibility, 2) individual freedom is equated with choice, and 3) government regulation is censorship; the rugged individual. The second section, titled *The Adult/Child Dichotomy and Innocent vs. Empowered* examined the next three discourses identified which were 4) adult/child dichotomy, 5) child as innocent, and 6) child as empowered. This section explores how changing constructions of childhood, as expressed by participants, are being used to benefit marketers. The final section on discourses within the data discusses 7) the privileging of economic rationale. This section discusses the particular actions based on economic rationale over alternatives that may benefit the public good. All of these discourses will be addressed through the “plugging in” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013) of Deleuze’s (1990) theory of control societies within neoliberal, capitalist assemblages.

#### 5.2.2.1 Discourses of Individual Responsibility, Free Trade and Deregulation

This study supports the findings of Kania, (2011) and Moore (2006) whose studies on parental attitudes of advertising to children, have shown that parents from the United States are less likely to be in favor of governmental regulation than parents are from other countries. In agreement with these two earlier studies, parental rejection of regulation can be attributed to the strong culture of individualism in the United States. Individualists promote the exercise of one's goals and desires and values independence, self-reliance, and personal responsibility. From an individualistic perspective, free trade, deregulation and personal choice are equated to personal freedom (Giroux, 2004). As revealed through the themes in this study, participants

viewed regulation of advertising as an infringement on the rights of advertisers and as a threat to their child's individual right to learn about products through advertising.

Deleuze (1987) considered the culture of staunch individualism an inevitable precondition of the functioning of capitalism. Individualism is able to excuse one's conscience from caring about one's community, while also making one blind to the contradictions in one's own beliefs. This was made apparent throughout this study, as participants contradicted their own stated interests for their children and their families. For example, in this study participants empathized with marketers and economic rationale to defend practices that they also viewed as potentially harmful to their own children and annoying at the very least. When groups of people act in direct opposition to their own interests and in fact fight for objectives that are counter to their own benefit, it goes beyond the issue of ideology. It is too simplistic to say that the participants in this study have been tricked or fooled. Deleuze and Guatarri (1977) posit that one must look at the issue of desire, and in many cases, it is the person or group's desire to be part of the capitalist machine and that explains why they act in ways that contradict their own interests.

For instance, several participants expressed a desire to provide more for their child(ren) than they had growing up. This desire for material goods is part of the consumer cultural landscape. It is part of the American Dream. So while participants, in this study find parts of the capitalist machine worrisome (gendered toys, materialism, etc.) ultimately they have also accepted it. Ultimately this desire helps those in power (the marketers) stay in power (Deleuze & Guatarri, 1977).

### 5.2.2.2 The Adult/Child Dichotomy and Innocent vs. Empowered

As mentioned in the literature review, the creation of the adult/child dichotomy sets up a power structure in which the adult is in power and the child is created as “other” and placed in a subjugated position (Cannella, 1997). Consequently, children are often perceived as an extension of their parents and thus an extension of their parental consumer desires. The aforementioned power structures were inherent within participants’ discourses, specifically in relation to discourse on 4) adult/child dichotomy, 5) child as innocent, and 6) child as empowered. These were inherent because participants themselves had all grown up in the 1980s during the deregulation of advertising to children. Participants in the study had come of age during the economic boom of the 1990s and thus were as much a part of consumer culture as their children. For that reason, they may have had difficulty recognizing the issues related to corporate power since consumer influence is part of their own subjectivities. This finding is in contrast to the work of many activists and developmental psychologists who argue that parents support “vulnerable child” discourses that aim to shield children from the adult world of consumerism (Schor, 2004).

In contrast, participant’s constructions of childhood supported Cook’s (2000) argument that parents have shifted their views on the construction of childhood to align more with marketers. Cook explained that parents have gone from espousing the “vulnerable child paradigm” to the “empowered child paradigm”(Schor, 2004). The empowered child paradigm views children as active agents who are savvier than children of the past and capable of making informed decisions (Steinberg & Kincheloe, 2004). The majority of the literature on the issue of advertising to children pits these

two paradigms against each other. As a result, these two conflicting paradigms are seen as stand alone, separate views that are opposites or dichotomies.

Additionally, participants identified with both of the paradigms, using protectionist discourses such as “child as innocent” to support the *vulnerable child paradigm* when it came to “adult content”. Yet when it came to issues pertaining to consumerism, parents viewed constructions of childhood through an *empowered child paradigm*. As a result, participants mentioned that they only worked to protect children from exposure to sexual content, violence, profanity but no longer viewed commercial culture as something that belongs solely to the adult world.

This shift in thinking on the part of participants coheres with marketers’ agendas in offering children only programming. Study participants were confident that by restricting their children to particular channels and websites, offered by the aforementioned marketers, they were protecting their children from harmful content. Commercials were excluded from this harm based on the fact that most participants in this study viewed their children as “empowered” to deal with commercials. This cultural shift in the way participants approached constructions of childhood supports one example of how latent-capitalism is able to use cultural shifts to its advantage and profit. Indeed it is the ability to utilize shifts and take advantage of change that is at the heart of Deleuze and Guattari’s (1977) critique of latent capitalism.

### 5.3 The Privileging of Economic Rationale

Analysis of data also indicated that participants in this study were concerned with how their children’s subjectivities were being affected by commercials and they were annoyed by the pushiness of advertisements aimed at children. In spite of this,

participants repeatedly empathized with marketers trying to earn a profit. That is, this study found that participants were very aware that their children were being targeted as consumers and in spite of this they used economic rationale to justify and empathize with those profiteering from children. Furthermore they made comments like “that’s just the way it is” indicating that they were aware that *people over profit rationale* was problematic, but that they were resigned to it. This privileging of economic rationale, as indicated by participants in this study, is a key component of neoliberal societies. Feminist economists Gibson-Graham, 2006) explained this “culture of thinking”, (p. 3) has made it challenging for people to imagine a world that can function differently. Notwithstanding, this shift or culture of thinking coheres with the perception that capitalism is able to break up preexisting identities and instantly re-fashion them into capital or commodity (Deleuze & Guatarri, 1977). For example a child in the neoliberal assemblage has a numeric value as a “future worker” and a “future (and current) consumer” and thus contributing and perpetuating the consumer culture.

Also, participants’ discourses on empathizing with marketers supported the contention that simple cost-benefit analysis is the best way to make decisions on the child as the consumer or future consumer of capitalist goods, which were previously based on ideology. In many ways capitalism has been able to free us from the narratives that relied on ideology to thrive (i.e. notions of fixed identity) (Cannella & Wolff, 2014). Unfortunately, as the themes and related discourses inherent in this study have shown, the danger now lies in the relentless pace at which capitalism expands limits, dismantles existing structures, and reterritorializes them to serve its purpose of perpetuating today’s children as consumers.



Moreover, participants in this study desired changes to be made to the tactics marketers used and the messages within advertising. More specifically, participants were opposed to the frequency and pushiness of commercials aimed at children as well as the gendered messages. Even so, participants within the study rejected regulation of the industry, over and over again empathizing with companies and their need to make money. This discourse as subscribed to by participants is what Deleuze and Guatarri (1977) refer to as the capitalist machine coding for profit but unable to recognize when it has produced enough. The capitalist machine knows nothing of what cannot be measured. Joy, health, community, equity, knowledge, and nature are not of value to the capitalist machine. This also coheres with Massumi who contends, "Private interests defined in monetary terms will almost always win out over other forms of desire" (1992, p. 139). That is, the themes and discourse inherent in this study are proof of marketers' desire for profit instead of promoting the common good. The next section of this chapter will discuss how neoliberal discourses have shaped the participants' subjectivities within the study and how the capitalist assemblage is able to use insecurities, guilt, and anxiety to expand.

### 5.3.1 Subjectification with the Assemblage

#### 5.3.1.1 Building Empathy with Consumers

The parents within this study agreed that marketing to children was very effective. Many reported having formed a preference for a particular brand based on the commercials they saw when they were children and this coheres with the idea stated in the literature review about the effectiveness of advertising to children (Kunkel, et al., 2004). Accordingly, this supports the literature that claims that companies create

personal relationships with their customers through years of branding leading to brand recognition and brand association and thus brand loyalty (Thomas, 2007). Moreover, some of the participants, specifically parents who hailed from a minority background claimed that racial identity had been recoded into a brand and at targeted minorities, who were previously ignored by the very same advertisers and marketers. Evidently, this discourse exposes an assemblage that does not code for “social good” instead coding for profit. Currently, the demographics are shifting within the United States and marketers know that in order to stay profitable they will need to appeal to more than the dominant group in power who they have catered to for years. This shift is about profit not a moral shift and many of the study participants, especially participants who were from minorities, understood this.

#### 5.3.1.2 Shifting Flows of Desire towards Accumulation and Consumption

Marketers are also aware that parents have influence (and in many cases the final say) over what young children purchase, therefore they are always eliciting feedback and working to stay ahead of shifting consumer desires and point them towards consumption (McNeal, 1999). This is a function of market economy and is the art of the dominant group in power (Deleuze & Guatarri, 1977). In this study, this was inherent when participants reported that there were two major tactics marketers used effectively in getting them to purchase the items their children were requesting. The first was that they purchased items for their children if it was a special occasion and the second was that they would purchase an item if it would be beneficial to their child’s education.

These two tactics for purchases (holidays and educational products) are relatively new marketing tactics and ones that have exploded recently (Schor, 2004). Specifically, holidays and events that in past generations had elicited a congratulations or a religious observation, now they have become reasons to purchase gifts for children. This has led to the creation of “new special occasions”. Participants in the study reported feeling pressure to purchase items for their children when going on vacation, Valentine’s Day, going to the zoo or an amusement park. This commercialization of special events is a new way that capitalism works to “open up” markets and thus supporting the view of scholars that neoliberalism is expansionary (Deleuze & Guatarri, 1977).

Another such opportunity to “open up markets” is the explosion of the “educational” toy market. Participants in this study explained that they felt better about an expensive purchase if they knew that the toy or new technology would benefit their child educationally. This example from the study, demonstrates not only capitalism’s taking advantage of new markets but also its tendency to play on participants’ insecurities about their child falling behind educationally.

The educational toy market and the creating of more and more special occasions that require purchases involve the intentional creation of wants and needs amid a gross overage of production; making one’s desire float between the real and the imagined. It is this ability to manage flows of desire as they arise and adapt by creating a new axiom is what allows capitalism to expand rhizomatically. In *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guatarri (1977) state “the strength of capitalism is that it is always capable of adding a

new axiom to the previous ones” (p. 250). This was revealed within the study participants desires towards accumulation and consumption.

#### 5.3.1.3 Thriving off of Insecurities

The consumer culture, that the participants in this study live within, tends to thrive on the production of insecurities. Participants described their lives full of media images from television commercials, magazine covers, billboards and movies. These images are portraying models that are impossibly thin and then airbrushed to perfection in order to create an ideal, which is an illusion that does not exist. Participants in this study, especially the mothers, were most concerned with the insecurities that they believed these images instilled. Participants reported that their daughters’ were showing signs of the self-loathing of their own bodies at very young ages. For example, one of the parents reported that her two-year old began asking for diet products and saying she felt fat. At the center of this argument is the idea that people who are happy do not make good consumers. A happy consumer is less likely to be a needy consumer. The billion-dollar beauty, diet and fashion industries are built on this very notion.

#### 5.3.1.4 Patriarchy within the Neoliberal Assemblage

Similarly participants in this study were concerned that companies are using the tactic of gender marketing of toys because it makes them money. The parents in the study reported that girls are purchasing toys based on whether they were marketed as “girls toys” or “boys toys”. Even participants who discouraged their children from choosing toys based on gender marketing, reported that their girls were drawn solely to the toys marketed in pink, sparkly, “girlie” packaging. Furthermore, even toys that were traditionally male, such as the Nerf bow and arrow set, were only requested by girls

after they were marketed in pink and advertised specifically to girls. Some participants in this study reported that these aggressive gender-marketing practices made it difficult for participants who wanted to avoid the perpetuating of patriarchal stereotypes.

This study supports the information in the literature review that finds gender-based marketing based in sexist stereotypes. Specifically, parents reported that the majority of toys marketed to their daughters were either dolls or beauty products. Participants also reported that the toys marketed towards boys were more action-based. The marketing of toys based on these defined gender-roles supports and perpetuated patriarchy. Patriarchy is the current social system in which males are rule and females are subordinate.

Patriarchy is such a dominant and oppressive system that it has yet to be recoded. While Deleuze and Guatarri (1977) argue that capitalism is strong enough to replace and recode all ideology, including religion and patriarchy. This has yet to happen with patriarchy. In fact prominent feminist economists Gibson-Graham (2006), argue that capitalism and patriarchy rely on each other's very existence to thrive. In fact, one perpetuates the other. Globalization has been built on the model of cheap labor through the subordination of women in international factories (Young, Wolkowitz, McCullah, 2013). Women factory workers are paid less than their male counterparts simply because they are female. Ironically, many of the products they produce are in turn perpetuating gendered stereotypes (pink and purple, sparkly dolls and dramatic play kitchens). Participants did not make the connection between cheap female labor and the toys that are produced and perpetuate gender bias and patriarchy. Even so, from a Deleuzean lens, it is important to make note of how these practices of gendered

toy marketing go beyond even the issues of advertising to children and work to support and maintain patriarchy within the capitalist neoliberal assemblage.

While data analysis was approached through a Deleuzian theoretical framework, it is important to note that patriarchy existed prior to capitalism and was supported by the Christian church. The majority of parents in this study identified themselves as Christians and attributed many of their values and beliefs stemmed from their faith. In the literature review, the political and ideological alliance between neoliberalism, neoconservatism and Christianity was discussed in regards to the issue of advertising to children. This strange pairing of often contradicting beliefs comes together in what Lakoff (2004) the “strict father family model”. This is a model that relies on patriarchy for its very existence.

When one looks at neoliberalism, conservative fundamentalist Christianity and neoconservative policies it is challenging to see how they all fit together and support each other. For example, how do anti-abortion, anti-gay marriage, pro-Israel, anti-welfare, lower taxes and privatization all fit together to create a cohesive context? Lakoff (2004) argues that it is the frame of the “strict father family model” that brings all of these policies into harmony. This model combines James Dobson’s view of the strict father who protects his family from the evil world. The strict father teaches his family about morality in a world that has clear right and wrongs. Children are in need of discipline and guidance and need to be shown the right way. This framework meshes beautifully with conservative Christians who see God as “the strict father” who protects. Neoliberals tend to see the free market as their strict absolute. Both groups see the poor as being punished for their sin and their laziness. While these groups do not

always see eye to eye they often are able to come together, make compromises and ultimately form a political super-base.

## 5.4 Recommendations

### 5.4.1 Implications to Early Childhood Teachers and Curriculum

Postmodern scholars struggle with providing implications for practice, mainly out of the fear that concrete suggestions will become prescriptive or hegemonic. However, Foucault (1980), spoke of the interconnectedness of knowledge and power and espoused that change could come about from renarrating the ideas about what is known. In other words, knowledge can be used as a form of resistance to hegemony and oppression. Black feminist scholar, Collins (1990) warned that it is in fact, difficult to de-center hierarchical power without first coming from a seat of authority. Therefore, in this section, I argue that early childhood educators are uniquely situated within this culture to help parents and children navigate the commercial landscape. They are also in a position to make curriculum changes that reflect the shifting constructions of what it means to be a child in this new consumer culture.

This research study is important because early childhood educators can only become part of the solution if they themselves understand just how much children are being shaped by the consumer cultural landscape. There are three main ways that early childhood educators can help children and families begin to think critically about the consumer culture in which they live, 1) Teach children critical thinking skills, 2) Provide counter-narratives that challenge dominant hegemonic narratives such as patriarchy, racism, materialism and individualism, 3) Work with parents and educate them on the importance of teaching their children about advertising.

This study demonstrated that there is a clear need for critical consumer education in the Early Childhood Classroom. Participants in this study viewed themselves as the ultimate educator for their children on consumer issues, yet the majority of participants, in this study admitted that they have not discussed advertising with their young children. Most participants also could not recall their own parents ever educating them as children on how to be critical consumers. This leaves a huge gap in the education of children about the intent of advertising and the messages within advertisements.

Within this study, participants identified most with the “empowered child paradigm”, which means that they allow their children to view advertising and make important consumer decisions. Yet children aren’t being educated about the purpose of advertisements, the deceptive tactics used to get them to want to purchase products and the messages within the commercials. Furthermore, it is not only very young children who aren’t being taught about this issue. Unlike educators in the United Kingdom, Australia and Canada, kindergarten through 12th grade teachers in the United States are not teaching media literacy (Share, 2002).

#### 5.4.1.1 The Need to Teach Critical Thinking Skills

Young children are developing their lens’ from which they view the world. The consumer cultural landscape is a major factor that influences children’s perceptions, attitudes, and values (Banks, 2000). Whether schools and parents choose to educate young children about advertising or not, children are getting a consumer education. Advertisements are shaping children’s subjectivities and perceptions of how they view themselves and each other. Collins (2000) affirms that dominant representations of



women and people of color in the media have helped to entrench hegemonic ideologies. As these ideologies become naturalized and internalized by children they fade into the hegemonic background and out of view. What is out of view is rarely questioned. Without critical questioning, patriarchy becomes normalized. The “othering “ of subordinated groups becomes internalized. Neoliberal discourses are adopted as commonsense. It is up to classroom teachers to help children to question these dominant views of the world that are being used to “other” women and other marginalized groups.

There are many ways classroom teachers can begin to do this. Firstly, teachers need to begin teaching children to think critically about the world around them. This can be done with children from birth. Nicoll (1996) asserts that from a developmental perspective, children as young as infants moving towards the independence of toddlerhood are ready to be taught to think critically. They should be taught the skill to recognize that there are alternative viewpoints and begin to develop a sense of autonomy and understand that it is acceptable to explore them. Curriculum that encourages problem solving, decoding, independent thinking will help children develop critical thinking skills (Share, 2002). Classrooms who use developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) are already more likely to be modeling open-ended thinking skills, as opposed to classrooms that are teaching children to memorize or through “skill and drill” methods (Nicoll, 1996). Teachers should value differences of opinion in the classroom, allowing children to voice their dissent and give reasons for their viewpoints. Teachers should model open-mindedness and tolerance for differences and encourage children to

communicate their rationale, making persuasive arguments. This type of classroom environment opens up space for critical thinkers to thrive, grow and develop.

Another way that teachers can educate children about advertising is by teaching critical media literacy. Critical media literacy is a pedagogical method that utilizes the media to teach children how to question the messages within it (Kellner & Share, 2007). Children view media, question it, reflect on it, challenge it and even use technology to create their own alternatives to it. While there is no prescriptive critical media literacy curricula that will offer a one-size fits all solution, there is research that shows children as young as three can benefit from such a curricula (Valsquez, 2004). Young children have a very keen sense of fairness and are able to understand equity.

Through critical media literacy, children should be taught to question advertisements. While teachers shouldn't give children the answers, they should guide them by asking some of the following critical questions: 1) Who are the advertising messages coming from? 2) Why are these messages being sent? 3) Who do these messages help? 4) Who do these advertisements hurt? 5) Are these images creating stereotypes?

#### 5.4.1.2 Teachers Need to Provide Counter-narratives to Messages in Advertising

Early childhood classrooms should be a place that provides counter-narratives to the sexist, materialistic, individualistic messages that are found in advertising. Foucault explained that both larger social knowledges and episteme and more local places use discourse to define, construct and position human beings as objects (Foucault, 1977). Discourse shapes how people are treated, how they are socially organized as well as how social and organizational structures are constructed. These ideas about

knowledge and power stem from what Foucault called the construction of “truth”. These truths become ways that people are governed, ordered and disciplined. But this discipline is not only top-down. The power comes at the point when an individual or a society internalizes these “truths” as his or her own and self-regulates. At this point, individuals and/or society repeat these “truths”, circulate them and regulate each other (Foucault, 1977).

Foucault (1977), suggest that creating change is about the deconstruction of the current hegemonic social orders. The “truths” that we have accepted as a culture. In order to create change, educators need to not only deconstruct hegemony they need to create spaces where counter-hegemonic discourses can thrive. Part of the lure of hegemony is that it allows those in power to blame others for their failures because of their own divergence from the norm (Eugene, Parish & Smith, 1997). In education, this has been a major part of the discourse. From politicians blaming administrators to teachers blaming parents for the “crisis”. Critical educators like McLaren (1994) and Apple (1993) assert that the real problem with schools are not that they are failing in their mission, but in that we fail to recognize their true mission, which is to perpetuate the status quo. Unlike the myth of the democratic school that exists to educate all equally, schools actually exist to sort people by gender, class and race. McLaren (1994) coined the term, social reproduction as the way in which society develops processes in which to preserve the well-stratified and well-preserved system of social privilege.

Teachers can resist being part of the status quo by teaching an anti-bias curriculum (Derman-Sparks, 1989). This curriculum celebrates differences while

recognizing oppression. Teachers should provide alternative views that challenge the dominant in regards to all types of diversity including gender, race, body size and economic social justice. Classroom materials need to be free of gender bias and ethnic stereotypes. Teachers need to actively look for teachable moments to refute and dispel gendered messages and encourage girls and boys to explore interests that may be “off limits” or “discouraged” because of their gender.

As evident from this study, it is important for educators to find ways to emphasize the importance of collectivism within their classrooms. Neoliberal discourses thrive in an individualistic culture at the expense of the common good. Teaching children about the importance of social responsibility through democratic and collective processes can play a small but important role in creating positive change. This process may also include more emphasis on environmental responsibility and the value of people and experiences over material things.

#### 5.4.2 Implications for Early Childhood Parental Education

Most of the participants within this study expressed a desire to educate their children about advertising after being interviewed. They made comments such as, “I haven’t talked to my kids about advertising but that’s only because it never occurred to me to. Now that I’ve thought about it, I will”. This comment and others like it, made it very evident that participants in this study were not opposed to educating their children about advertising, and beyond that, they feel responsible to do so. Early Childhood educators are uniquely positioned to be able to help parents have these critical conversations. As teachers, you can encourage parents to discuss the intent of advertising and the messages within it. Through classroom newsletters, parenting

classes, personal discussions, early childhood educators can partner with parents in this process.

Participants within this study were very anxious about which materials they should purchase for their children. Early Childhood Educators can help to educate parents about how the advertising industry plays off their own insecurities and anxieties as parents. It is important to share with parents that they do not need to purchase expensive toys for young children in order to give them a developmental advantage. Early childhood educators can ease parents' minds by educating them on the importance of parent/child interactions over expensive toys. Early childhood professionals can create opportunities for families to learn about low cost equipment and toys that are beneficial educationally. They can also provide opportunities for families to share or trade items that are needed, rather than having to purchase new ones. Early childhood educators can also promote low cost community experiences for parents such as hikes, play dates and the park, trips to the beach that emphasis the community.

#### 5.4.3 Implications for Early Childhood Pre-service Teachers

It is crucial for pre-service teachers to understand just how much commercial culture is influencing the context in which young children are being raised. Advertisements play a role in shaping the way children think about the world. While consumer culture most likely will be common place to these new teachers, they need to be aware that only 100 years ago it was considered in bad taste for companies to profit from children (Kapur, 1999). Pre-service teachers need to study this context in order to understand how constructions of childhood have changed. They also need to

understand the context in order to be prepared to meet the needs of the children they are teaching. It is also important for teachers to understand the choices parents are making within this context. As such, it is recommended that pre-service teachers be taught how changing constructions of childhood are shifting parental perceptions about their children's interaction with media, as well as within their broader consumer culture(s).

While textbooks may teach on issues of gender and self-image it is highly unlikely that teachers will understand the complexities of the situation without being given some examples. The discourses found within this study could provide personal accounts of the issues faced by parents and children within their own cultural consumer landscape(s). Personal narratives, such as the interview excerpts could also provide pre-service teachers with human voices that bring the issues of gender and oppression to the forefront. For example, a pre-service teacher needs to understand that while it may not have been the norm even ten years ago, children as young as two may be proficient on an iPod, may already have concerns about getting "fat", or have embedded bias's about gender. Also, pre-service teachers may be able to challenge their own perceptions of advertising, commercialism, systems of oppression, gender, etc. after being made aware of the discourses, as exemplified by the themes and discourses inherent within this study. This is important, because teachers cannot teach critical media skills or provide counter-narratives to oppression if they themselves are not aware and/or critical of them.

#### 5.4.4 Implications for Policy

The participants in this study were not in favor of government regulations on advertising to children. The culture of individualism and the rugged individual is very strong in Texas as well as the belief that government regulation is censorship. This means that parental support of legislation to limit advertising may not be supported unless legislatures could appeal to parents' concern over "inappropriate content".

#### 5.4.5 Implications for Activism

In order to move from a neoliberal capitalistic society that privileges economic profit over the public good, we will need to work towards a more collective culture. As we attempt to think about activism and resistance, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) offer up several concepts and insights that can help us begin to think about how our work can proceed, as we think about activism and resistance. One such concept is that of becoming-other. Becoming-other is an intentional and directional attempt to create change. It starts with the idea that we can begin to move beyond the discourses that we have taken for granted as common sense "truths". This is an invention born out of creativity, a leap towards a trajectory that is unknown. It is a delineation of the norm.

While this can happen at the individual level, Deleuze and Guattari emphasize that becoming-other is a collective process. Even if one is able to escape, it will affect everyone. Becoming-other is the acknowledgement that "every abstract machine is linked to other abstract machines, not only because they are inseparably political, economic, scientific, artistic, thinking, physical, and semiotic – but because their various types are as intertwined as their operations are convergent" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 514). In other words, activism must emphasize the importance of the collective over

the individual. For example, we must focus on moving beyond simple solutions, such as protecting children from gendered messages and materialism towards creating a society that values gender equality, relationships over “things”.

#### 5.4.6 Suggestions for Future Research

There are several possibilities for future research, because this study was such a broad examination of parental perceptions of marketing to young children. One example is research that creates possible ways of supporting critical media literacy for parents of young children. If parents are more aware of some of the messages embedded in advertising to children, they may be more empowered to resist corporate influence in their own children’s lives. Similarly, there is a need for research that examines the impact of critical media literacy in early childhood education classrooms. If children were taught from a young age to be more critical of the messages they were receiving in advertising, they may be better equipped to resist these messages. Finally, Deleuze and Guattari’s (1977, 1987) critique of capitalism highlights a need for research that is aimed at exposing the inner workings of the capitalist machine. While it is important to show capitalism’s collateral damage, it is equally, if not more important, to begin to envision new creative alternatives to move the assemblage in a different direction. One such attempt may be research that envisions spaces that are positioned in between capitalism and non-capitalism, what others have called the “third way” (i.e. Cameron & Gibson-Graham, 2003; Gibson-Graham & Cameron, 2007; Siraj-Blanchford, 2009, Speth, 2008).

As Foucault (1987) reminds us, power is reversible, unstable, and relations are never fixed. Alternatives do not originate from those with the power (Werlhof, 2008).



Most social movements begin as small groups scattered throughout the world that eventually link to produce change. Lather (2012) once called this “popcorn activism” because tiny pockets of change can produce chain reactions. The good news is that there are alternatives. In Latin America, the Indios have returned to practicing their traditional methods of agriculture and commerce. They have established mini-markets to trade produce and are able to sustain both their lands and their peoples (Bennholdt-Tjmsen/Miles, 1999). In India similar communities are being organized that promote “living democracy” (Shiva, 2001). In Australia and Spain there are various types of “social enterprises” whose mission is servicing the needs of the community over maximizing profits (Cameron & Gibson-Graham, 2003). These are businesses that reinvest their surplus in the community in order to provide housing projects, education or community infrastructure rather than high salaries (Gibson-Graham & Cameron, 2007).

Social-democratic societies such as Norway should not be overlooked as models of a blended economy (Wolff, 2013). Norway remained practically unscathed by the 2008 economic downturn, mainly because of government regulations on banks. Norway’s natural resources are publically owned and as such Norway’s citizens benefit from the income they generate. While it is true that Scandinavian countries are highly taxed, their quality of life is among the worlds highest (Johnson, 2013). This quality includes access to universal health care, government subsidized childcare and generous family leave policies. The countries also regulate advertising to children.

## 5.5 Closing Remarks

As someone who is deeply concerned about children and social justice, this study has been especially important to me. Children are growing up within an increasingly commercialized culture, one that supports the view of children as “profit centers”. While the participants within this study were providing some resistance, they themselves have internalized many of the discourses that support the corporate takeover of childhood. It is my hope that this study will provide some awareness of these issues and serve as a springboard for activists, educators, and parents who are interested in collective action to create positive change, not only for children, but also for all of us. We must collectively come to the recognition that we can no longer pump up the economy at the expense of our environments, our children and overall wellbeing.

APPENDIX A  
IRB APPROVAL



A green light to greatness.

OFFICE OF RESEARCH INTEGRITY AND COMPLIANCE

November 4, 2013

Supervising Investigator: Dr. Karthigeyan Subramanian  
Student Investigator: Kenya Wolff  
Department of Teacher Education and Administration  
University of North Texas

Re: Human Subjects Application No. 13528

Dear Dr. Subramanian:

As permitted by federal law and regulations governing the use of human subjects in research projects (45 CFR 46), the UNT Institutional Review Board has reviewed your proposed project titled "Parental Perceptions of Marketing to Young Children." The risks inherent in this research are minimal, and the potential benefits to the subject outweigh those risks. The submitted protocol is hereby approved for the use of human subjects in this study. **Federal Policy 45 CFR 46.109(e) stipulates that IRB approval is for one year only, November 4, 2013 to November 3, 2014.**

Enclosed is the consent document with stamped IRB approval. Please copy and use **this form only** for your study subjects.

It is your responsibility according to U.S. Department of Health and Human Services regulations to submit annual and terminal progress reports to the IRB for this project. The IRB must also review this project prior to any modifications. **If continuing review is not granted before November 3, 2014, IRB approval of this research expires on that date.**

Please contact Shelia Bourns, Research Compliance Analyst at extension 4643 if you wish to make changes or need additional information.

Sincerely,

Patricia L. Kaminski, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor  
Department of Psychology  
Chair, Institutional Review Board

PK/sb

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS

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940.369.4643 940.369.7486 fax www.research.unt.edu

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APPENDIX B  
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

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University of North Texas Institutional Review Board

Informed Consent Form

Before agreeing to participate in this research study, it is important that you read and understand the following explanation of the purpose, benefits and risks of the study and how it will be conducted.

**Title of Study:** Parental Perceptions of Marketing to Young Children

**Student Investigator:** Kenya Wolff, PhD Candidate, University of North Texas (UNT)  
Department of Teacher Education and Administration

**Supervising Investigator:** Dr. Karthigevan Subramanian

**Purpose of the Study:** You are being asked to participate in a research study which will investigate parents' attitudes and beliefs regarding advertising to young children.

**Study Procedures:** You will be asked to participate in a series of two or three face-to-face interviews (approximately 1 to 1 ½ hours each). The interviews will be audio recorded and the data collected during the interviews will be assembled into a final research report.

**Foreseeable Risks:** There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to participants involved in the study.

**Benefits to the Subjects or Others:** This study is not expected to be of any direct benefit to you, but we hope to gain a better understanding of parents' beliefs about advertising to children in order to better inform policymakers who regulate the advertising industry.

**Compensation for Participants:** You will receive some children's books (up to a \$20 value) as compensation for your participation in this study.

**Procedures for Maintaining Confidentiality of Research Records:** The confidentiality of your individual information will be maintained in any publications or presentations regarding this study. Each participant will be assigned a random code, which will be used in the final report to insure confidentiality. During the research process, the digital audio files will be coded and stored in a locked file cabinet. The researcher will transcribe the audio files and they will not be used for any other purpose without the participant's prior written consent. At the conclusion of this study, the audio files will be stored in a locked filing cabinet for three years past the study for possible future analysis. After the three-year period, audio file data will be destroyed using a software product, such as Eraser, specifically designed for the destruction of electronic records.

**Questions about the Study:** If you have any questions about the study, you may contact Kenya Wolff at [REDACTED] or Karthi Subramanian at ([REDACTED])

Office of Research Services  
University of North Texas  
Last Updated: July 11, 2011

Page 1 of 2

APPROVED BY THE UNT IRB  
FROM 11/4/13 TO 11/3/14  
KB

**Review for the Protection of Participants:** This research study has been reviewed and approved by the UNT Institutional Review Board (IRB). The UNT IRB can be contacted at (940) 565-3940 with any questions regarding the rights of research subjects.

**Research Participants' Rights:**

Your signature below indicates that you have read or have had read to you all of the above and that you confirm all of the following:

- Kenya Wolff has explained the study to you and answered all of your questions. You have been told the possible benefits and the potential risks and/or discomforts of the study.
- You understand that you do not have to take part in this study, and your refusal to participate or your decision to withdraw will involve no penalty or loss of rights or benefits. The study personnel may choose to stop your participation at any time.
- You understand why the study is being conducted and how it will be performed.
- You understand your rights as a research participant and you voluntarily consent to participate in this study.
- You have been told you will receive a copy of this form.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**For the Student Investigator:** I certify that I have reviewed the contents of this form with the subject signing above. I have explained the possible benefits and the potential risks and/or discomforts of the study. It is my opinion that the participant understood the explanation.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Student Investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

APPROVED BY THE UNT IRB  
FROM 11/4/13 TO 11/3/14  
*[Signature]*

Office of Research Services  
University of North Texas  
Last Updated: July 11, 2011

APPENDIX C  
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL



**INTRODUCTION:** The purpose of this research project is to better understand parents of young children perceptions of advertising to young children.

**Interview 1 Grand Tour questions:**

1) As I stated when I scheduled this interview, I'm interested in hearing your thoughts on advertising to children. Starting with your own childhood, can you tell me any childhood memories you may have related to commercials you viewed on television?

Some probing questions may include:

Did you watch much television as a child?

Do you think that marketing to children was different then?

If yes, how so?

What kinds of things were advertised to you?

Did your parents have any rules about television watching?

Do you remember them talking to you about the purpose of advertising?

2) As a parent now, what are some things that you have noticed about corporate marketing or advertisements to your own child(ren)?

Some probing questions may include:

What are some products that your child has requested?

Have you noticed that your children ask for these products after being exposed to advertisements?

What are some ways that you deal with these requests?

Can you provide an example of a time when your child asked for a product that you did not want to purchase?

What effect do these product requests have on your family?

3) Do you think marketers have gotten more or less aggressive in their advertising tactics to children in comparison to when you were a child? If yes - can you explain how so? If no, can you explain why not?

Some probing questions may include:

How has the rapid change in technology played a role in advertising to children? Does this concern you? If yes, how so? If no, please explain why not?

4) What are some concerns that you may have about advertising to children?

5) What are some ways that you or your spouse have attempted to limit or restrict your child's exposure to advertisements?

Some probing questions may include:

Have you discussed the intent of commercials with your child(ren)? If yes, what are some of the things that you discussed? If no, do you plan on discussing advertising to your children? At what age(s) do you think it would be beneficial?

Do you restrict your child's media usage? If so, what are some of the rules you have put in place? Can you give an example of how you enforce these rules in your home? What are some of the outcomes that you have had? Do you feel you and your spouse are similar in your approach to implementing these rules? Can you give me an example of a time that you and your spouse have disagreed on the implementation of these rules?

6) To what extent are you aware of the advertising tactics that are being used to capture your child as a consumer? Can you list some of these tactics?

Some probing questions may include:

Are there some things about these advertising tactics that concern you? If yes, what? Why? Why do you think these advertising tactics are being utilized?

7) To what extent are you aware of some of the ways advertising to children is restricted in other countries? Tell me more about this. Can you

tell me why? If no, what are some of the ways you think advertising to children may be limited throughout the world?

8) Do you believe that advertising should be regulated in the United States? If yes how so? By whom? Why? If no, please tell me more... why? What influenced your beliefs about this? Yes, how so?

9) Whose responsibility is it to protect children from messages in advertising? Please explain why you feel this way.

10) Is there anything you would like to add about advertising to children?

### **Interview 2 and 3:**

Questions asked during the second and possibly third interview would be created based on themes that emerge. The second and possible third interview will also be used to clarify and expand on answers given in the first interview. It is very possible that not every participant will have a second or third interviews, this will be dependent on the chunks of data that emerge and the direction that the study takes, as this process will be very much emergent.

APPENDIX D  
RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

1. Hello, my name is Kenya Wolff. I am a doctoral candidate at the University of North Texas, Denton, in the Teacher Education and Administration Department and I am working on a research study about *parental attitudes regarding advertising to young children* with Dr. Karthi Subramanian.
  
2. I am approaching you because we are looking for study participants who are parents of young children between the ages of 6 months and 8 years old and I understand that you may meet that criterion. Is that correct?
  - If individual says “no, I do not have young children”, then I will say thank you for your time and hang up the phone.
  - If he/she says yes, then I will continue.
  
3. Are you interested in hearing more about our study? Is it OK for me to continue?
  - If individual says “no, not interested”, I will say thank you for your time and hang up the phone.
  - If he/she says yes, then I will continue or make plans to call again at a more convenient time.

Advertising that targets young children has increased dramatically with invention of new technologies. Parents are often asked to deal with the impact of advertisements aimed at

children yet there have been very few research studies that have specifically explored the beliefs and attitudes of parents concerning advertising to young children.

This research will involve a series of two or three face-to-face interviews each lasting approximately 1 to 1 ½ hours. The data collected during the interviews will be assembled into a report, which will serve as my dissertation project and may also be used in presentations or research articles.

Your participation in this study will be confidential, and there are no foreseeable risks or discomforts. Your responses will not be linked to your name in any written or verbal report of this research project. To ensure that data collected during the interviews accurately reflects your perceptions, a summary of the interview will be sent to you for review, further input, clarification, and corrections.

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts that could come to you from participating in this study but you are always able to quit being a participant at any time. Possible benefits of this research include contributing to a better understanding of parent's beliefs about advertising to children. This new knowledge may also be used to inform policymakers who regulate the advertising industry. As a participant you will be given children's books (up to a \$20 value) for your participation in the study.

4. Do you have any questions?

Answer any questions.

5. Do you think you would like to take part in this research?
- If no, thank the person for their time and hang up.
  - If yes, schedule a time and place to meet in person to go over the consent form and schedule the first interview. After making appointment, I will say “thank you for your time and I look forward to meeting you.”



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