

Critical Analysis of American Girl

By: Kimberly Chin

In this weeks review I would like to take a moment and critically analyze the pros and cons of this generations newest 'it doll' American Girl. It has taken North America by a storm through its charm, innocence and aura of the everyday American Girl, but to many it is seen as a brand that has gone overboard creating youth to participate in an obsessive consumer culture.

At first glance the doll has a unique standpoint where the consumer has the opportunity to create a custom made doll so that the child can relate to it on a much more personal level, whether it be the colour of the dolls skin, texture of the hair, to the shape and colour of the eyes. Due to the growth and development of globalization and immigration, it is more than ever integral to consider the inclusivity that the market must offer to the other cultures that populate north America. Another option to consider is that the consumer has the opportunity to purchase a pre named doll along with a book or DVD that provides historical fiction revolving around the dolls identity for the child to build off during play time. "The combined theories provide a multidimensional explanation of literacy play as mediated activity with commercial toys and child-made artifacts through which children access, animate, and author identity texts. (Wohlwend, pg. 62) The books and DVD provide empowering stories of these little girls that are educated and often promoting social justice.

From a critical lens one can see this as an elitist product that promotes children to participate in consumer culture. A doll and a book alone come up to a whopping \$200.00 USD. After browsing on the American Girl website it is evident that they have created a whole world for the doll to exist in, ranging from hundreds of outfits, doll houses, cars, pets, food items, sporting activities, accessories, books, DVDS, special holiday editions. It overlooks boys who play with dolls as it purely caters to girls and the roles that the company has presented. In the article *Damsels in Discourse: Girls Consuming and Producing Identity Texts through Disney Princess Play*, Wohlwend had a similar point involving Disney Princess consumption "The girls' play with Disney Princess dolls and texts was situated in gendered discourse within an activity system

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of global consumerism. As consumers, children participate in worldwide networks of distribution and consumption through multiple activities with Disney Princess products: purchasing licensed merchandise, displaying favourite dolls and clothing, or viewing television and video.” (Wohlend, pg. 65)

American Girl presents a complex representation both positive and negative when critically analyzed through the lens of consumption and its effects on the consumer. It can help young girls self identify with a doll that represents them and their ethnicity and culture which is quite special and unique. On the other hand, I view it as is excessive, exclusive, expensive and overall excludes far too many from socioeconomics, and the gender roles that they present and chose to portray. Dolls have always been a staple in ones youth, it just depends on what your overall values are within it.

Source

Wohlwend, Karen E. (2009). Damsels in Discourse: Girls Consuming and Producing Identity Texts through Disney Princess Play. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 44, 1, p. 57-83