ABSTRACT

THESIS: Parents’ perceptions of the Barbie doll’s new looks

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The Barbie doll has been a relevant idol for the ideal body shape to adolescents and children worldwide since its creation in 1959. As the doll maintains popularity and continues to adapt a more adolescent appearance, the importance of recognizing the doll’s influence on body image in children increases. A previous study has reported that adolescents and children are more susceptible to their surroundings than adults (Dittmar et al., 2006). The evolution of media and its continued outreach to younger audiences has made it one of the most dominant influencers in children’s perception of body image. Considering toys, specifically the Barbie doll, a form of media, we can assume that that body shape illustrated by the doll impacts the body image of children. Previous studies have recognized a negative effect caused by the thin figure of fashion dolls on the body satisfaction of adolescents and children (Anschutz & Engels, 2010; Dittmar et al., 2006; Dittmar, 2009; Starr & Ferguson, 2012). Parents’ perceptions of the Barbie doll and their concerns of its influence on their children’s body image may influence them to approve or disapprove of the doll as an appropriate role model for their children. Mattel has released a Fashionistas line of Barbie dolls with variances in body shape (tall, petite, and curvy) (Barbie: The new fashionistas, 2016). This pilot study seeks to determine the perceptions
of 37 parents and guardians aged 18 and older with a female child or children between the ages of 3 and 8 years old regarding the body shape of the original Barbie doll, as well as the body shapes of the curvy, petite, and tall Barbie doll body styles. Results indicated that while the majority of participants (59.5%) believe the original Barbie doll to be a positive influence on body image, there are still physical characteristics to the doll’s body shape (e.g. size of waist, hips, and chest) parents would make to illustrate a more positive body image to their children. Comparative statistics found that gender, age, and employment with a midwestern university correlate to variations in parents’ perceptions of the Barbie doll and the body shapes presented in the *Fashionistas* collection.