OBJECTS OF AFFECTION: PRODUCING AND CONSUMING TOYS AND
CHILDHOOD IN CANADA, 1840-1989

By

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the significance of toy production, distribution, marketing and consumption to Canadian understandings of childhood. Drawing on Patrick J. Ryan’s concept of the discursive landscape of modern childhood and Daniel Thomas Cook’s commercial persona of the child consumer, it explores the effect of toy controversies on a number of social, political and economic issues between the arrival of manufactured toys in Canada in the mid-nineteenth century and the rise of postindustrial capitalism. The toy industry, the social sciences, consumer activists and the Canadian state all played a pivotal role in raising the social significance attached to toy consumption. In the end, debates about toys highlighted popular manifestations of complex political and social issues by placing children and their material culture at the symbolic centre of “adult” conflicts.
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A thesis is not just a series of words on a page, but also the culmination of sometimes hard to justify personal and professional choices. In this vein, I want to dedicate this thesis to my wife Melissa Extross for her unwavering support and affection and my parents for giving me the space to follow my dreams. A honourable mention goes to the furriest member of my family, Maggie, who always knew just when I needed a distraction.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract

Acknowledgements

Table of Contents

List of Figures

Chapter One: Toys and Childhood in Canada and Abroad 1
   a. Canadian Historiography and the Global History of Toys 5
   b. Researching Toys, Children and Popular Culture 27
   c. Structure of the Thesis 48

PART I – THE MODERN TOY IN VICTORIAN CANADA, 1840-1919 53

Chapter Two: "A Relic of Inestimable Worth[?]": Gender, Desire and Rise of the Toy Commodity in Victorian Canada 54
   a. Making the Toy Commodity, Making the Toy Consumer 58
   b. The Domestic Life of Toys 74
   c. Early Concerns about Toys 87

Chapter Three: Toy Famine: Marginal Children, the Great War and the Rise of Canadian Toy Manufacturing 97
   a. Philanthropy, Need and Working-class Children 99
   b. Race, Ethnicity and Proper Playthings 110
   c. German Toys and the First World War Toy Famine 118

PART II – TOYS IN TRANSITION, 1920-1959 142

Chapter Four: “Canadian Toys for Canadian People”: The Canadian Toy Business and Consuming Children 143
   a. Expanding and Consolidating the Canadian Toy Industry 146
   b. Toy Consumption and Its Discontents 168
   c. Second-Hand Toys and Marginal Children 184

Chapter Five: “A Grave Psychological Undertaking:” Psychology, Toy Consumption and the Developing Child 199
   a. Constructing the ‘Normal’ Child 203
   b. Managing Consumption, Managing Play 215
   c. Marketing, Psychology and the Educational Toy 238


Chapter Six: From Consumables to Culture: Intellectual Property, Television
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advertising and the Transformation of the Toy Industry, 1960-1989</td>
<td>255</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. From Consumer Industry to Culture Industry</td>
<td>262</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Labour and the Decline of Toy Production</td>
<td>280</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. From Fads to Crazes</td>
<td>290</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Seven: Objects of Scorn: Play Value, Safety and the Social Life of Toys</td>
<td>309</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Testing for Play Value</td>
<td>312</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Testing for Safety</td>
<td>324</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Guns, Dolls and Political Children</td>
<td>333</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion: After Toys?</td>
<td>362</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>379</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1 – The Friction Gunboat 4
Figure 1.2 – Ryan’s Landscape of Modern Childhood 44
Figure 2.1 – The Carnival of Toys - A Dream of Childhood 53
Figure 2.2 - Import of British Toys by Colony 59
Figure 2.3 - Import of Toys into British North America and the Dominion of Canada by Country of Manufacture 1840-1910 63
Figure 2.4 – Studio Photographs of Children 84
Figure 2.5 – The New Photographic Aesthetic 86
Figure 3.1 – Coin Bank 112
Figure 3.2 – Canadian Toy Market Share by Country of Import 119
Figure 3.3 – Percentage of Total Toy Imports by Country of Origin 126
Figure 4.1 – Scouts and Guides at Work 190
Figure 4.2 - Trooper L.R. Stoutenberg of The Fort Garry Horse painting toys for St. Nicholas Day. Doetinchem, Netherlands, 22 November 1945 194
Figure 6.1 – Average Hourly Wages in the Toy Industry, 1960-1984 283
Figure 6.2 – Gender Distribution in Canadian Toy Factories, 1962-1974 286
Figure 6.3 – Average Number of Manufacturing Employees per Firm, 1960-1984 288
Figure 7.1 – Anti-War Toy Campaign Poster 337
CHAPTER ONE
Toys and Childhood in Canadian and International Perspectives

December is the most fitting, or perhaps the most dreadful month to start writing about toys. They are seemingly everywhere. Window displays are bursting with the newest and trendiest commodities for the discerning child and parent. The aisles of Toys R’ Us are overflowing with action figures and character dolls. Other stores like Scholar’s Choice offer “educational” playthings for the niche market of predominantly middle and upper-class “helicopter parents,” convinced that the right toy will transform their child into the next Albert Einstein. In department stores, one can find a little of everything. Even the world weary anti-consumer, secluded away in their home, can’t escape the advertisements overflowing their inbox for early online Black Friday Sales or Boxing Week Blowouts. I am surrounded by an endless stream of invitations to browse, purchase and desire playthings. Perhaps it isn’t surprising that toy browsing has become an occupational hazard of my immersion in this consumer maelstrom.

One day last December, I wandered over to the toy aisles to see what was available. The Discovery Channel had their own line of planetarium alarm clocks, carnivorous plant gardens and other scientific toys. Right next to Discovery Channel display were bright blue Avatar action figures, inspired by a recent film. The new arrivals in toyland were accompanied by the latest incarnation of Hasbro’s G.I. Joe. The next aisle over (with suggestively pink signage) was filled with dolls of unimaginable variety, including the iconic “Queen of Dolls,” Barbie. The weekly flyer and signage announced an overabundance of specials to entice would-be buyers into holiday purchases.
Aside from their strong presence in stores of every stripe, toys are also in the news. Some of these stories are reassuring, like the Canadian Toy Testing Council’s annual picks of “can’t-miss gifts for parents looking for safe and reliable playthings.” Others offer parents a cautionary tale regarding the potential dangers of toy consumption. Last year, controversy came in the form of a warning from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) that Video Girl Barbie – the fashion doll favourite with a built in camera – might be used by pedophiles hoping to make child pornography. The dire announcement was issued despite the absence of specific instances of child exploitation. The FBI’s overblown concern is in contrast to other toy related incidents that highlight very real and immediate issues. Fisher-Price voluntarily recalled ten million toys due to, among other things, ill-placed decorative tricycle ignition keys breaking the hymens of young girls and causing genital bleeding. Similarly, it is hard to ignore the Public Interest Research Group’s 2010 report detailing the high levels of lead in playthings. In response to similar reports in 2009, the Canadian federal government planned to reduce allowable levels of lead in toys from 600 to 90 parts per million. But as one parent asked, why, if they pay $20 for these objects, do they contain any lead at all? When changes finally came into force, Canada’s Conservative government launched an extensive advertising campaign during the 2012 holiday season touting their efforts to protect Canadian families from

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dangerous toys. The advertisement depicted a number of seemingly innocuous playthings participating in a police lineup of suspects waiting to be identified by an imperiled child. As it turned out, the toxic toy was an innocuous looking teddy bear. Advertising like this highlights the dangers toys might pose, the difficulty in detecting those dangers, and the power of regulatory institutions to identify and address the failures of industrial capitalism.

Manufacturers have received a good deal of criticism and repeated demands for action on these and other issues. Most of the harsh words in recent years have been directed at factories in the global south and in emerging economies like China and India. Poor working conditions and unsafe practices help to produce the highest profile, though not the weighted majority, of toy safety problems. Most safety problems, like the tricycle ignition key mentioned above, are the result of design errors made by employees at corporate headquarters in the global north. Even errors that are the result of production reveal greater complexity than current media scripts allow. When toy problems are weighted based on overall production, India and China have better toy safety ratios than our NAFTA partners in Mexico and some European countries.¹

Inappropriate, dangerous and undesirable toys produced by impersonal transnational corporations are a seemingly constant threat to children otherwise happily engaged in play. Our children’s toys are just waiting to poison, lacerate, or visit any

¹ See Hari Bapuji, Paul W. Beamish, & Andre Laplume, “Toy Import and Recall Levels: Is There a Connection,” Research Reports, (Vancouver: Asia-Pacific Foundation of Canada, 2007) & “Toy Recalls and China: One Year Later” Research Reports (Vancouver: Asia-Pacific Foundation of Canada, 2008). Along with pointing to the predominance of design flaws as the source of recalls, the reports also convincingly demonstrates that toys are marginally safer than in the past and that Chinese toys have proportionally lower rates of defect than toys produced in Mexico, Italy and Germany.
number of unrecognized evils upon them. It is fascinating how these little pieces of rubber, plastic, silicon and wood become invested with the potential to either destroy or entertain children.

Some of these concerns are rooted in the assertions of a number of social scientists that correlations exist between complex social and psychological issues and certain kinds of playthings. Persistent doubts about the validity of this “science” have done little to quell the enthusiasm of journalists and social activists for claiming a causative relationship between toys and major social and political problems. The National Rifle Association’s (NRA) scapegoating of violent video games for the 14 December 2012 shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, CT is only their latest attempt to divert attention from American gun culture. Those across the political spectrum often play versions of this old and insidious game of commodity politics.

The toy has become a colossus: straddling the entrance to the supposed safe-harbour of childhood; separating it from the rough seas of late-capitalism. We wish it was a barrier, yet all too often its open stance functions more like a passage, facilitating the intermingling of intimacy and the economy, the sacred value of family and the profane.

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3 Ibid.

valuation of the market. This is at once a new phenomenon and a very old one.

We want unproblematic toys – agents for good in the material life of childhood. Yet, since the moment they became children’s commodities, playthings have been perceived as a problem almost as often as a positive force. The reasons for this are many and complex, weaving together the economic, political, social and intimate. They are also deeply historical.

My own family aptly illustrates the shifts over time in the history of adult conflicts over toys. My sister, raising three children of her own, is concerned about Chinese made toys, especially the health risks associated with lead poisoning. These issues were different one hundred years ago. German toys would have likely been the main source of concern for my great-grandparents. German toys dominated the Canadian market, despite efforts on the part of manufacturers and retailers to hide this fact. The classically “Canadian” Eaton’s beauty doll, for instance, was manufactured in Germany up until the First World War and again for much of the interwar period.5

Born into a working-class family, my grandfather had few manufactured playthings. But the one he held onto until his death was a hand-me-down mechanical toy called a “Friction Gun Boat” designed to move in a wave motion along the floor when the toy was pulled back. Made of metal and wood, the toy can be found in a wholesale catalogue from the beginning of the twentieth century.6 The underside of the battleship clearly displays its place of manufacture as Germany. Though it was lost long ago, the

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6 Nerlich & Co. Fall Winter Catalogue, 1900-1901, (Toronto: Nerlich & Co., 1900), 80. The 8.5 inch boat was sold wholesale at a half dozen for $4 and given typically low profit margins on toys probably retailed for around $1.
boat would have once sported a Union Jack in order to obscure its place of manufacture and appeal to the imperial sensibilities of English-Canadians.\(^7\)

Figure 1.1 – The Friction Gunboat

My grandfather likely received this toy in the early to mid-1920s once an older male sibling was done with it. Today our problems with this toy would be many. We would wonder about the lead content of the metal or paint used in its production. We might question the appropriateness, as many did in the interwar and postwar periods, of giving children a toy that glorifies war and militarism. We may be troubled about what it says about masculinity. But for my great-grandparents’ generation the problem was its “Made-In-Germany” label, plain and simple. A toy of German origin in the British Empire in the 1910s was controversial, with tensions on the rise between the Empire and the Second Reich. During the First World War, German toys, like my grandfather’s battleship, were all but absent from store shelves. That it came into my grandfather’s possession in spite of these tensions is evidence of the profound limits class placed upon toy consumption. Toys were still largely a seasonal luxury for his family. They were passed down or acquired second-hand in many instances. In an upper or middle-class

family, a toy such as this may well have been been discarded for its German ties long before the 1920s.

Concerns about battleships made in Germany in the 1910s and 1920s centred on the ethnic and nationalist boundaries they threatened to violate. War toys were no more innocent in the early-twentieth century than they are today. However, the reason for our unease is very different from that of our great-grandparents. The need to understand these strange continuities and subtle shifts forms the main impetus for this thesis. By studying the history of conflicts around toys, it is possible to acquire new insights into the history of a number of central issues in Canadian culture and society. Especially interesting is the impact of children’s consumer culture on the meaning and outcome of political and economic transformations and the very meaning of childhood itself in modern Canada.

**Canadian Historiography and the Global History of Toys**

Given the interesting position toys occupy in the lives of families, it should come as no surprise that a number of scholars have provided an array of thoughtful historical studies. These accounts are varied and conflicting, ranging from enthusiast love letters to a particular type of toy to scintillating exposés of corporate power and market manipulation. Yet, none of these works specifically studies the adult conflicts around toys in a sustained or satisfactory fashion. According to a Quebec publication from 1900, “Nations are defined by their toys.”¹ If true, then Canada is still awaiting its defining historical monograph. Canadian history offers few account of children’s consumer culture, let alone a study specifically focused on toys, making it an excellent focus for

Studying toys as historically significant objects originated as an antiquarian and cultural project during the first half of the twentieth century. Essays like Walter Benjamin’s “Old Toys” highlight the rising interest of museums and nostalgic adults in playthings during this period. Early academic efforts like Leslie Gordon’s *Peepshow into Paradise* or Antonia Fraser’s *A History of Toys* stressed the universality of childhood as a developmental stage and the value of toys to all cultures. In the face of social and cultural change, the child and their need for toys remained a fixed transhistorical fact.

The bulk of toy histories are written by enthusiasts to inform collectors and fans about specific types of toys. Studies of this nature proffer some qualitative or quantitative evidence concerning how certain playthings were received. They are indispensable for

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piecing together often ambiguous chronologies and for providing a window onto the world of toy collecting, a practice that developed and expanded throughout the twentieth century. They are also limited by their largely descriptive and uncritical approach. Enthusiast histories tend to gloss over or ignore controversies altogether, frequently dismissing the wider social context around toy production and consumption. Major shifts in the social and economic life of toys are often explained away as instances of toys “changing with the times”.

Art historians, archaeologists and some anthropologists have used toys to evaluate the folk art, gift-giving and intimate lives of past and present cultures. Collectively, these efforts provide important insights into the social value of toys for particular cultures. Unfortunately, they also de-emphasize the unequal relationships of toy production and ignore some of the dynamics of contestation and controversy that can punctuate the world of playthings. Their impressive efforts to “read” social meaning from objects frequently


forego grounding their insights in wider social and political contexts. I am necessarily interested in the meaning of toys and their materiality to some extent. My focus, though, is on how these meanings are established and deployed through networks of production and consumption, rather than their distillation through material culture.

In culture studies, toys have largely been analyzed for their ability to reflect and evoke certain temporally specific cultural meanings or practices, often privileging the voices of toy producers over those of consumers in their analysis. Scholars have highlighted issues ranging from technology and environmentalism to gender and sexuality.\(^7\) Studies tend to emphasize the impact of macro forces on toys, rather than the role of conflicts over toys in establishing these supposedly larger forces. Most frustrating is the tendency to “read” the toys as self-evident texts based principally in their materiality and marketing rather than their material and discursive deployment in a number of social and cultural contexts.

There are some very clear exceptions like Erica Rand’s study of the subversive uses

of Barbie or Elizabeth Chin’s careful ethnography of African-American girl consumers.\textsuperscript{8}

In \textit{Powerplay: Toys as Popular Culture} Dan Fleming challenges assertions that the materiality and marketing scripts associated with toys are the major analytical problem. Flemming highlights what he calls the “ascetic” definition of childhood, which characterizes children as passive and innocent victims. It authorizes adults to use young people as proxies in struggles over consumption and everyday social life.\textsuperscript{9} Indeed, it is this “systemic” process of denying children’s agency and simultaneously engaging in the construction of all their material and popular culture that produces a self-replicating series of crises.\textsuperscript{10} Rob Latham reaches similar conclusions in his discussion of consuming youth.\textsuperscript{11} The circular production of problems described by Latham and Fleming is a recurrent aspect of the history of toys and central to the process of constituting social forces and facts. The complex and dissonant reactions these crises can generate are an excellent reminder about the interpretive limits of studying conflicts about toys without referring to consumers and producers in tandem.

More closely associated with my approach are the numerous historians who have written on the history of toys. As a whole, they have been successful in charting the conflicted relationships at the centre of the social and cultural life of toys. This large group can be divided into those who take structuralist and poststructuralist approaches to the history of toy consumption and production. Recent work, building on the early efforts

\textsuperscript{10} \textit{Ibid.}, 3.
of Gordon and Fraser, has opted for a national focus, drawing the bulk of its inspiration from recent American historiography. Specifically, the work of Gary Cross and Mariam Formanek-Brunell helped to reignite serious scholarly interest in the history of toys in the early and mid-1990s.

Structuralist histories have tended to give at least some legitimacy to concerns about toys in their own right. Unfortunately, they have done so in a fashion that is highly inconsistent with the complexity of children’s status as consumers. These scholars tend to prefer simplified stories about the “effect” of toys on children. Structuralist histories offer a critical assessment of the dangers posed by the promotional efforts of the global toy industry and the corresponding expansion of consumer desire on children’s “proper” growth and development.\(^\text{12}\) What is an admirable critical strength in this scholarship is also one of its fundamental weaknesses. In order to examine the impact of the market on children, these scholars often essentialize both. They offer a universalized definition of proper childhood, condemning present patterns in children’s social life that fail to live up to this ideal.

In the argument’s most simplistic form, capitalism spoils pristine childhood innocence and goodness. In more sophisticated incarnations, capitalism merely disrupts the proper social relations of the family. Rather than an analysis of the assumption that toys are dangerous or essential to childhood, it becomes yet another cry for more

protection and regulation targeted at young people. It is incapable of critically investigating conflicts over toys because it is invested in establishing new battlegrounds and declaring winners in old ones. Gary Cross’ comments from *Kid’s Stuff* are illustrative:

> The progressive legacy of protecting the young from premature entry into the labor market needs now to be extended to include the consumer market. If there is no escaping the appeal of goods, equally childhood should be more than an education in shopping…Most important, we cannot use toys or any other goods as a substitute for genuine contact with the next generation. The piling up of gifts or playthings cannot replace actual time spent with children.\(^\text{13}\)

I am sympathetic to many aspects of this statement. Yet, part of the difficulty in assessing the risk posed by consumption to children lies in the fact that “children themselves have become objects of commodity spectacle and hence a full range of consuming adult desires.”\(^\text{14}\) Childhood, the toy, the market and even risk are not fixed entities. Their shifting locations and meanings provide the most complex objects of historical inquiry and the most interesting insights.

Many other works share a number of Cross’ basic assumptions. The idiosyncratic *Good Toys, Bad Toys* by the natural-scientist-cum-historian Andrew McClarry focuses on changing understandings of “bad toys” in the United States. In a series of thematic chapters, McClarry charts a different kind of “bad toy” whether racist, sexist, hazardous


McClary’s book is primarily interested in settling the score and establishing whether toys are better or worse today than they were one hundred years ago. This is certainly a good historical question and his investigation is illuminating. It also raises a myriad of more complex avenues of inquiry about the history of these evaluative criteria themselves, and thus, the utility of accepting them as analytic categories. McClary’s own conclusion which is strikingly positive in contrast to other scholars. Nevertheless, his lack of a consistent research strategy and under-theorization of the issue makes for a problematic book that takes as a given the subjects and categories it investigates.

Also firmly in the structuralist camp is Kenneth D. Brown’s The British Toy Business. Brown charts the emergence, growth and decline of toy production in Britain in a thoughtful and informed manner. Written in the early-1990s, Browne’s history is a more traditional social history of business. It devotes the bulk of its attention to toy production, situating business developments in their wider socio-economic context through the thoughtful use of statistics, archival documents and published sources. The role of commerce and business culture is pivotal in the history of the toy for economic and cultural reasons. Brown’s attention to these factors offers a helpful counterpoint to American efforts centred almost exclusively on consumption and marketing.

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16 McClary, Good Toys, Bad Toys, 180.
17 His other book on the subject is a more celebratory history of toys that have become “timeless” in the lives of twentieth century children. See Andrew McClary, Toys With Nine Lives.
Brown’s portrayal of the toy business as a purely linear history of progress and decline is problematic. The toy industry shows little evidence of approaching economic challenges in a consistent and linear fashion. As chapters three, four and six will show, business often struggled with these shifting realities and developed heterogeneous responses, which failed at least as often as they succeeded. Attention to these failed initiatives is sometimes just as informative as charting the ones that helped business survive and succeed.

Structuralist histories show little interest in counter-cultures of consumption despite offering critical insights on the power of cultural producers to shape individual lives. Furthermore, these studies often ignore the experience of those outside the middle-class, relying on a static definition of childhood and consumption that leaves little space for the heterogeneity of consumer society.

In contrast, those taking a poststructuralist approach tend to offer a more nuanced account of toy history. Rather than drawing on Gary Cross, many in this group can trace their lineage to Miriam Formanek-Brunell’s Made to Play House. The book’s central triumph is to put dolls at the centre of adult concerns about the role of commodities in producing an idealized femininity and girls’ resistance to these efforts. Formanek-Brunell takes a number of histories to task for their “inattention to historical context” and their tendency to vilify or reject, girls’ popular culture. By crafting a less totalizing

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21 Ibid., 1.
account than that of Cross, Formanek-Brunell is able to insert resistance as a meaningful act into her study. Her focus on the gender tensions that animated the design and production of dolls is particularly enlightening.

Lisa Jacobson’s *Raising Consumers*, while not exclusively interested in toys, challenges the notion of childhood as a stable identity. According to Jacobson, the ideal child consumer was a boy and was offered more consumer options than girls. The patriarchal status quo allowed boys more freedom in their present and future lives as men, which extended to their consumption patterns.\(^\text{22}\) Studies like Jacobson’s highlight the complexity and limitations of fundamental categories like “the child” or “the toy” drawing our attention towards disruptions and tensions within these concepts.

Scholars in China and Japan have studied toys in light of their relationship to nationalism, gender and as global commodities.\(^\text{23}\) The focus has typically been on the degree to which toys reflect certain ideologies or discursive systems. The work of Anne Alison stands out for its emphasis on the role of Japanese toys in constituting Japanese global power through their proliferation of a particular aesthetic of “commodity cuteness” and fantasy play.\(^\text{24}\) The idea that toys are active historical agents, rather than the residue of history, is central to this study. It provides us with a framework to analyze toys as tools that help to make childhood or capitalism, not as passive evidence of them. Alison and others highlight the transnational nature of toy culture as well as the role of local and

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national iterations and responses in shaping its meaning.  

Studies of the German toy industry are some of the most theoretically ambitious historical accounts of the toy. David Hamlin and Bryan Ganaway stand out for their impressive efforts to unpack the social and economic importance of toys. The history of toys in Germany is also empirically significant for this thesis. German toys dominated the Canadian market during the late-nineteenth century and opening decade of the twentieth century.

However, there are significant methodological problems that hamper both of their efforts. Toys remain a dependent variable. In the words of David Hamlin, they are a “heuristic device”: significant in so far as they allow the interrogation of broad social forces like liberalism, modernity or the meaning of technology. Functionalist approaches to material culture like this turn toys into objects that merely reflect rather than participate in the production of socio-cultural meanings. This approach draws scholarly attention towards controversies solely for the purpose of reading them as distillations of social forces. On the rare occasions when they do explicitly affect these “bigger” issues, toys are easily substituted for any number of other goods or institutions that form a small part of these overarching totalities. According to Hamlin “there seems

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26 At present there is a lively debate about toy production and consumption centering around the continued significance of artisan produced toys in late Wilhelmine Germany and its meaning for modernity in German culture. See Hamlin, *Work and Play* & Bryan Ganaway, *Toys, Consumption and Middle-class Childhood in Imperial Germany, 1871-1918*, (New York: Peter Lang, 2009).

little reason to assume toys were wholly unique items of consumption. Social forces are the focus. Toys only help to locate and survey them. It makes for excellent histories of modernity or liberalism, but does not illuminate the history of toys beyond their potential as dependent variables in the social world. “Social forces” are often the late products of material and interpersonal forces. Toys function more like nodes in a network, bringing other subjects and objects into relationship with one another and helping to establish the parameters and boundaries of conflicts and controversies. It is this thesis contention that rather than only recording history, toys helped to make it.

Poststructuralist histories offer a number of fruitful avenues for exploration. They highlight the complex and contingent nature of childhood and consumer culture as well as the wider social significance of toy consumption for a number of economic and social conflicts. At times, the attention given broad social and cultural constructs has made these histories less engaged with the actual commodity they investigate. Furthermore, in their eagerness to insert the voice of children into their narratives, some scholars have read certain behaviours somewhat grandiosely as resistance, when the activities in questions might better be categorized as dissent or dissonance. As Alison Pugh puts it in her excellent ethnography of children’s consumer lives, “consumption…is neither capitulation, since children actively reinterpret and contest store bought meanings, nor resistance, in that children quickly turn to global commodities to do their cultural work.”

A history of toys can add to the vibrant international historiography on a number of

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fronts. The Canadian context in particular presents a unique opportunity to develop the history of consumption and childhood. Canadian history is represented by several well-written, thoughtful histories of consumer society. Canadian historians have been busy examining consumption practices, retailing, the history of specific national and regional commodities, the place of promotion and advertising in commodification, and histories of consumer activism.\(^{30}\)

Emerging from these diverse investigations are a number of approaches that fall along a spectrum from producer to consumer-centred. Closer to the producer-centred approach are Michael Dawson’s study of tourism in British Columbia and Keith Walden’s work on grocery store advertising.\(^{31}\) Drawing on American scholarship by Robert Leach, Rolland Marchand and others, their histories center their investigation on cultural producers.

The problem associated with the limited attention given to consumer subjectivity is captured succinctly by Magda Fahrni’s injunction to carefully consider whether


consumption fosters “apolitical, unreflective” dependence, or is itself an “engaged and political act.” Similarly, Donica Belisle also finds the dismissal of consumer subjectivity problematic. According to Belisle anti-consumerist histories, whether written on the left or right can be borderline anti-feminist because of women’s long standing association with home management and consumption.

A number of scholars like Joy Parr, Karen Dubinsky, Jarett Rudy, Donica Belisle and Loraine O’Donnell have offered a more nuanced analysis of the role of consumers in response to the objections of Fahrni and Belisle. This group has charted what Parr describes as a “third way,” focused on the interplay between consumers, producers and public institutions to highlight the tensions characteristic of consumer life. This is a highly effective and fruitful approach, offering nuanced and thoughtful studies of consumption. In spite of their many strengths, the definition of consumer actions as resistance by some of these authors can border on the hyperbolic. Equally troubling, labour rarely enters into their narratives. They are, nevertheless, incredibly helpful for thinking about consumption in a less top-down, more circular fashion.

On the other hand, Canadian historians of childhood have examined the life of

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34 Parr, *Domestic Goods*, 4.
laboring children, the experiences of parenting and growing up in Canada, child and family leisure, the development of educational and government programs targeted at children and the creation of new age groups like “the teenager.” However, there are few sustained studies of children’s commercial culture.

This is not to say that Canadian historians have been oblivious to the material culture of childhood generally, even with respect to toys. Playthings have received occasional attention through the work of historians interested in other phenomena. Children’s toys were a common feature of Aboriginal societies well before European contact. They were often manufactured by family members to help train children for adult

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roles.\textsuperscript{37} A similar didactic quality is detectable in the playthings of New France.\textsuperscript{38} The social relations of their production and the utility ascribed to them were markedly different than those associated with the modern toy. Pre-modern toys were manufactured in the home for family members, rather than mass-produced or “put-out”. Playthings were primarily understood as training, despite being used for a wide range of play activities. These pre-modern toys were designed to facilitate the passage from childhood to adult competency in a particular task or vocation.\textsuperscript{39}

Toys began to take on a heightened significance in the lives of families during the long nineteenth century under the growing influence of bourgeois notions of domesticity. Visual sources from Upper and Lower Canada suggest the presence of simple toys in the middle-class family. Playthings were increasingly tied to children’s amusement, as much as their education.\textsuperscript{40} The growing market for toys led to the uneven emergence of a robust wholesale and retail trade and a weak seasonal manufacturing industry in the later half of the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{41}

\textsuperscript{40} Noel, \textit{Family Life and Sociability in Upper and Lower Canada, 1780-1870}, 151-152. As we shall see in chapters two and three, traces of toys were very prevalent in other written sources like trade publications, newspapers and magazines, particularly after mid-century.
\textsuperscript{41} Comacchio, \textit{The Infinite Bonds of Family}, 23. While Comacchio dates toy production to the 1860s there is evidence that some small-scale manufacturing of toys began as early as 1850. Furthermore, though this may be a reasonable approximation for the start of domestic industrial or proto-industrial toy production in Canada, the Navigation Returns show that Canadian’s had long been importing toys from Britain and Germany for
As late as the 1920s and 1930s, toys remained a luxury for most families. They were given at Christmas or at birthdays to renew and make material the intimate bonds of family, though the majority of presents were of a “practical” nature. The interwar years laid the foundation for the precipitous rise in overall toy consumption, catalyzed by the postwar baby boom. Children’s play became increasingly aligned with leisure activities, just as leisure became more deeply imbedded in market relations. The ‘boomer toy box was filled to new levels with “ageless standards” and “new fads” promoted through the medium of television. It marked the beginning of a trend that has only intensified through our present North American experience of dizzying mega-toy stores and year round toy purchasing.

The limited number of histories of children’s consumer life generally and the absence of a sustained study of toys specifically has meant that this part of Canadian social, cultural and economic history remains little more than a general outline. Along with this thesis, Stephen Kleine’s work on children’s popular culture, Katharine Rollwagen’s analysis of the children’s clothing industry in Canada and Kendall Garton’s forthcoming history of dolls in postwar Canada will help rectify this situation.
The absence of sustained domestic toy manufacturing means that Canada has always been heavily reliant on imported toys to satisfy consumer demand. Studying Canada requires a more sustained consideration of other actors, along with the usual suspects of marketers and manufacturers to adequately explain the growing significance of toys. It also has the advantage of forcing us beyond the comfortable boundaries of the nation-state.

This thesis contends that the “national” process it investigates is fundamentally bound up in transnational networks of production, consumption and meaning. According to the American Historical Association Round Table on Transnational History, “…the most effective transnational historical studies are those that examine how cultural practices and ideologies shape, constrain or enable the economic, social, and political conditions in which people and goods circulate within local, regional, and global locales.” Consequently, the kind of transnationalism I am referring to is a very modest one. It is not on the scale of works like Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynold’s *Drawing the Global Colour Line*, which surveys immigration and race policy throughout the Anglo-American world. It is more in line with works like Kristin Hoganson’s *Consumers’ Imperium* and Antoinette Burton’s edited volume *After the Imperial Turn*. In this vein I am particularly interested in how toys were given particular local or regional meanings in

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Canada and the impact of these efforts on other transnational, national and regional connections. This issue is all the more interesting given that in overlapping succession Germany, then Britain and America, Japan and finally China acted as the principle toy suppliers to the world.\textsuperscript{51}

Thinking transnationally does not deny the significance of the nation-state, but rather encourages the study of objects, actors and ideas as they move between these porous entities. According to Chris Bayly: “it's very important to stress that the ‘nations’ embedded in the term ‘transnational’ were not originary elements to be ‘transcended’ by the forces we are discussing. Rather, they were the products—and often rather late products—of those very processes.”\textsuperscript{52} Understanding Canada as a process elaborated through the exercise and circulation of power through subjects, objects and institutions can include national and transnational actors.\textsuperscript{53} The story told here is a Canadian one. It also maintains a persistent appreciation for the flows and circulation – regional, national and global – that shape the possibilities within this particular social and political space.

There remains the question of chronology. Several historians working in other national contexts on the history of toys and consumption more generally, have identified the period from 1850-1900 as central to the emergence of the modern toy commodity. The shift can be traced to the work of normalization conceived out of the human and

\textsuperscript{51} Cross & Smitts. “Japan, the U.S. and the Globalization of Children’s Consumer Culture”; Alison, \textit{Millennial Monsters}.

\textsuperscript{52} “AHR Conversation: On Transnational History,” 1449.

\textsuperscript{53} While Ian McKay’s approach of reconnaissance outlined in the Liberal Order Framework fits awkwardly with histories of popular culture because of its tendency to frame all conflicts as ideological struggles of a resisting and heterogenous “left” against a hegemonic “liberal order,” it nevertheless displays an appreciation for Canada as an uneven and continuous project. See Ian McKay, “The Liberal Order Framework: A Prospectus for the Reconnaissance of Canadian History,” \textit{Canadian Historical Review} 81, no. 4 (2000): 617-645.
statistical sciences and put into practice through various institutions during the period.\textsuperscript{54} Normalization as a strategy of governance was principally attached to children and childhood as a stage of life. The child and an individual’s childhood were viewed as a place of strategic importance in the fashioning of proper subjects.\textsuperscript{55} In practice, this often meant the extension of white, bourgeois, heterosexual norms of childhood and adulthood to other classes and ethno-cultural groups through the promotion of a particular understanding of toys and play.\textsuperscript{56} The mid-nineteenth century is a critical period for understanding how toys became an unquestioned part of children’s life and a problem in need of regulation, supervision and classification into various positive and negative categories.

The end date poses more of a problem. Some historians might consider it simply too recent for proper research, and the time period as a whole far too extensive to allow for “deep” or “detailed” research and analysis. My decision to tread so close to the present, though unorthodox, is informed by careful theoretical, methodological and empirical considerations.

On the one hand, Foucault directs our attention to how and why toys and childhood emerged as problems in need of increased governance through the mobilization of


\textsuperscript{55} Foucault, \textit{Psychiatric Power}, 125 & Michel Foucault, \textit{Abnormal: Lectures at the College de France, 1974-1975}, (Palgrave & Macmillan, 2004), 301.

\textsuperscript{56} Cross, \textit{Kid’s Stuff}, 48.
specific tactics, strategies, institutions and discourses. Indeed, the way that the relationship between toys and various subjects was represented and the institutional contexts in which toys were deployed or regulated went through significant changes between the mid-nineteenth and late-twentieth century. These changes led to the proliferation of connections between toys and childhood and a variety of social, cultural political and economic issues. These are fundamental historical questions in need of investigation through what Foucault calls histories of the present. This term does not denote a whiggish explanation of how we came to live in the best possible of worlds or a progressive narrative explaining the inevitability of the present. It is open to alternatives not taken, disruptions between intent and effect and ultimately profound and radical shifts. A history of the present emphasizes that which is close-at-hand and its transformations in an effort to cast existing relations in new light. It is with this intent that I have undertaken this particular study of toys.

The end date allows this thesis to chart the transition of toy manufacturing and retailing from a consumer industry to a cultural industry between 1960 and 1989. The emergence of television advertising in the mid 1950s is the most visible example of the shift to post-industrial capitalism. This ongoing and incomplete process was supported by the emergence of a robust regime for safeguarding intellectual property within the framework of an emerging global knowledge economy. It encouraged toy makers to protect their products by registering their creations and promoting them through strong media narratives and vertically integrated product lines. By the early 1990s, the toy had been radically transformed to fit within this emerging system of production and

57 Ibid., 155 & 160-161.
consumption.\textsuperscript{58}

Methodologically speaking, the tendency to dismiss broad chronologies can be highly problematic. Historians often assume that an expansive chronology and a highly analytical and informed study are incompatible. The fear is that diachronic studies will produce a “popular” history with limited critical force and significance. This now common sense assumption is the result of the way historians have taken up Gertzian thick description and certain aspects of the poststructuralist inspired linguistic, visual and spatial turns. Some scholars insist on reading each “text” as a reflection of the whole ideological landscape. This approach has produced illuminating histories that provide insight into a number of phenomena poorly served by traditional approaches to history. It has also encouraged some historians engaged in diachronic studies to adopt an episodic approach in order to find a balance between charting change over time and the need to offer a thick, theoretically robust, account of events.

It is not my intent to reject these fruitful approaches, but simply to suggest that there are other, equally valid, ways of doing history that sit uncomfortably with their basic assumptions. Specifically, the length of a time period is not necessarily inversely related to the depth or critical force of a work. Chronology is an empirical and theoretical decision. A study that follows a shorter chronological span can simply answer different kinds of questions and reveal different trajectories of historical change, than one that takes the long view.

Tackling such a long chronology places the thesis’ focus on change over time in a

number of sustained controversies. For instance, concerns about toy guns have been understood in very different ways since the late nineteenth century. Initially toy guns were seen as a nuisance associated with boyish mischief. Their projectiles were also linked to fatalities resulting from tetanus infections. By the interwar period, concerns about juvenile delinquency rendered the toy gun problematic for prosecutors and the police. In the late postwar period, the psychological danger for boys associated with violent play took centre stage. The problem object remained the same, but the nature of the controversy was markedly different from one period to another. Understanding these shifts requires close analysis of the subtle changes and elaborate convergences of various factors. By choosing such a wide time period I am not providing a whirlwind tour of toys in Canada, but intend to generate a grounded interpretation that takes seriously the very slow evolution of Canadian social and economic life.

*Researching Toys, Children and Popular Culture*

These are relatively bold assertions about trifles of “low” or “popular” culture, as many of my friends and colleagues have reminded me explicitly and implicitly at numerous times. When I explain my thesis topic to people I am often greeted with sly grins and a wink, letting me know that they admire my ability to game the system. Even at its most well intentioned, being told that this topic must somehow be “more fun” than something that is presumably more “serious” reveals an all-too-common assumption that studying toys is “trivial” or even “useless.” In some respects, this attitude is understandable. Popular media, whether visual, digital or print, abound with caricatures of adults who are interested in toys. Many of these representations are painfully
unflattering, calling to mind the image of a troll-like unkempt and unwashed male skulking in his parents’ basement, terrified of natural light and human contact.

Stereotypes of this nature are only given further credence by their deployment in academic studies. Since Neil Postman’s declaration that childhood and adulthood were collapsing into one another because of television’s influence, a number of scholars have lamented the supposedly stultifying effect of popular culture on human development.59 Benjamin Barber and Gary Cross see any fascination with popular culture as evidence of a widespread “puerility” leading to the creation of what Cross calls the “man-boy” or the “gremlin child.”60 When commentary on consumption and popular culture reaches this level of discourse, it functions as little more than elitist laments about the “masses” or about a group of individuals whose social life is unfamiliar to the author. Rather than rescuing these objects from the trash heap of all things derided as popular or low, as Walter Banjamin has suggested historians should, Barber, Cross and others apologize for dragging their readers within the scent of such refuse.61

Furthermore, the connections between toys and children’s popular culture raises important questions about methodology that must be addressed. In their thoughtful and profoundly reflective Researching Children’s Popular Culture: The Cultural Spaces of Childhood, Claudia Mitchell and Jacqueline Reid-Walsh offer their readers an opportunity to set aside many preconceptions and approach the topic of children’s culture on its own terms. Their interrogation of the unexamined assumptions that underpin

methodologies in the study of childhood highlight the way that nested academic hierarchies and subject positions frequently shape research agendas. The attention to questioning hierarchies of knowledge is particularly relevant for historians since our field relies on a hierarchy between researcher and research subject as well as a hierarchy between types of empirical evidence: archival/museological, oral and published.

These distinctions are central problems for any historical study that seeks to investigate popular phenomena like toys rather than the machinations of great statesmen, enduring institutions or organized resistance. The preference historians’ show for source hierarchies has been attacked in a number of ways over the last 30 years by those inside and outside the discipline. In *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, Jacques Derrida argues that the documents found within archives attain much of their authority by virtue of the archival institution which transmutes them into an artifact invested with a “privileged topology.” The alchemy of the archive is a widespread and deeply held belief. Time and again colleagues have asked me where I will find archival materials or when I will be investigating artifacts within a museum, assuming that these are the indisputable gold standard of “real” historical research. Paradoxically, the supposed ephemerality and disposability of popular culture mark it as what Foucault would call a heterotopic space which fits awkwardly into the systems of social ordering undertaken by

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62 Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 2-4. While focused primarily on its display functions, the museum as a research institution similarly creates value in the objects it curates simply by collecting them and arranging them with other similar objects, not unlike the archive. However, while archives try to maintain a sense of the context of manuscript production through the fond, the museum frequently erases many of the contexts that surround the curated objects offering a relatively superficial provenance. Only when displayed, are these items recontextualized.
the archive and library.\textsuperscript{63}

The preservation of materials central to the history of toys might best be described as incidental. Toys appear intermittently in government manuscript collections like the Industry Canada Fonds, the Department of Trade and Commerce Fonds, the Ministry of Labour Fonds, and the Department of Indian Affairs Fonds. Also useful were the files of a number of women’s and labour organizations as well as and family-focused civil society groups like the National Council of Women, the Canadian Labour Congress, Voice of Women, the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, Boy Scouts of Canada and the Canadian Welfare Council. Corporate records in public archives like the T. Eaton Co. Fonds at the Archives of Ontario have been similarly helpful for understanding the retailing and distribution of toys. Provincial, institutional and city archives like the Archives of Ontario, the Bibliothèque et Archives Nationale du Québec, the Manitoba Provincial Archives, the City of Toronto archives, the City of Vancouver archives, University of Toronto Thomas Fisher Rare Book Room, University of British Columbia Special Collections, McMaster University and others all held manuscripts and published sources of varying utility to this project. Discovering the lone pertinent file or collection of pages often meant poring over finding aids or searchable databases. Sometimes an explicit reference was evident, at others, it was a focus on children or consumerism that suggested something was worth a closer look. Under these circumstances, there were as many dead ends as there were pertinent discoveries.

Photographers, professional and amateur, have been capturing children’s private and public lives on camera since the mid-nineteenth century. The Notman Collection at the McCord Museum, the Ken Bell Fonds and Library and Archives Canada and the Glenbow Museum’s collection of photos were all particularly helpful. Similarly, the Canadian Museum of Civilization and the McCord Museum both have extensive collections of historical toys.

The sheer number and diversity of archival and museological sources point to the wide ranging presence of toys in Canadian history, as well as the difficulty in finding more than a small snippet of information on them. There may indeed be more information out there to discover, buried in small county museums, or hidden in the corporate archives of the Canadian Toy Association (CTA) and international toy giants like Mattel and Hasbro. Indeed, most disappointing was the absence of a collection of materials from either the Canadian Toy Manufacturers Association or the Canadian Toy Importer Association, the precursors to the CTA. The resistance of the private sector to outside historical research meant that I was unable to assess their presumably rich collections. Indeed, the Canadian Toy Association began dodging my calls and offering only silence as a response to my numerous entreaties.

Conversely, The Canadian Toy Testing Council, a toy testing body with a fifty-year history, granted me access to what remained of their collection. Sadly, they had disposed of nearly all of their documents before 1990. After seeing my shocked look, an employee confessed to me that she didn’t think anyone would be interested in that kind of history.

Furthermore, I did not exploit the full wealth of the Copp Clark Fonds at McMaster University. Their toy related contents are extremely modest, but they contain a great deal
of information on board games, which might offer some fascinating information for a project on gaming. Similarly, the archival holdings for Dupuis et Frères Department Store and the Hudson’s Bay Company may enrich the picture of retailing gleaned from the Eaton’s papers. There are also many, many more photographs pertaining to toys that suggest the impressive possibilities of a visual history of children’s play or popular culture.

Published sources remain by far the richest repository of information and form the backbone of this thesis. Newspaper, magazines, pamphlets and government reports constitute the bulk of my primary sources. Canadian daily newspapers, which reprinted original and syndicated material from across the Atlantic world, magazines, professional and trade journals, government reports and even scholarly publications contributed important insights. Such an eclectic mix of sources would have been impossible to survey only a few decades ago. My ability to complete a project like this is heavily indebted to the work of countless librarians, archivists, computer programmers, web designers and others who help to produce tertiary sources like indices and searchable databases. There is no greater revolution happening in history right now than the growing repository of digitized sources. It means a fundamental shift in the way historians research, but also in the kind of scholarly projects that are now possible. It is a potent reminder that the fundamental work of the historian is to make sense of the past with novel approaches to research and analysis.

My reliance on tertiary sources raises its own methodological issues. The problem with the curatorial effects of search engines in particular, lie in their linguistic biases and technological limitations. One of my first tasks was to familiarize myself with the
particular structure of each database. Some, like Early Canadiana Online brought back precise results, requiring an equally precise search for the numerous synonyms for toys, including terms like “Joujoux.” Others, like the Globe and Mail and Toronto Star search engines were shockingly imprecise, frequently returning results that included any three letter word it mistook for “toy.” Most of the searchable databases I used fell somewhere in between these two poles. Thus, the perception that researching with a search engine is somehow easier or less reliant on a specialized skill set is plainly mistaken. As a historian you must be as familiar with the strengths and limitations of your search engine as you are with those of any archive or museum finding aid in order to use them effectively.

The heavy use of tertiary sources and published materials also adds an additional curatorial layer to the production of historical knowledge. Once the materials are collected, the historian must actively alienate them from their initial context and reconfigure them into a set of relationships that more clearly highlights while simultaneously attempting to keep the significance of their initial context in mind. Put in the simplest terms, the historian must engage in an explicit process of deconstruction and reconstruction which shapes the narrative possibilities of any historical text. It places the emphasis on the relationship established by the basis of the inquiry, over the initial relations established by the historical document or objects initial use. All historians must deal with this methodological challenge in any study. It is simply more explicit for the historian that relies on published or digital sources.

Given the above, an astute scholar may ask how it is that I account for the circulation of these numerous published “popular sources?” This question is one of the effects of the archival institution’s dominance as the principle source of historical
evidence. The reality is that much of what arrives in archives had limited circulation when it was created, often taking the form of memos exchanged between a handful of people ensconced within the same institutional setting. The broad circulation of archival documents happens only after their transmutation by the archives. This gives the historian who excavates it a privileged position in the knowledge/power dynamic. By “discovering” sources, historians adopt the role of *agent provocateur*. Unfortunately, many archival sources are of limited utility for the study of popular culture whose assumed ephemerality make it an unlikely topic of “serious” discussion by “serious” historical actors whose papers form the bulk of archival holdings. There is no great fond or series or even volume of documents on toys – it is a file here, a page or two there scattered across a myriad of different manuscript collections.

Museums do a much better job of collecting objects associated with popular culture. However, the method of cataloguing often separates them from the context of their production or consumption. The scant contextual details that accompany most museum objects encourages a particular kind of research methodology that hopes to discover history by reading the object itself as a distillation of social and cultural meanings and values. The toy held within the museum becomes a mere heuristic device.

Oral sources raise a different set of issues than do the archive and museum. For some researchers doing the history of childhood, a major cause for criticism and source for anxiety is the presence or absence of children’s voices. Oral history interviews remain extremely useful for providing a window into a number of issues and allowing the inclusion of dissonant perspectives.⁶⁴ They can illuminate popular phenomena like toys,
which exist in fraught relationship with more traditional historical sources.

A study of toys based on oral histories would be different than the one presented here. Examining controversies around toys means examining their public deployments and manifestations. The private practices themselves, while rich and interesting, are of secondary importance. As Neil Sutherland has pointed out, oral histories are not a silver bullet. All recollections and interviews are situated in the moment of their production, not in the past, and so must be read every bit as critically as any other source. Furthermore, their authority is also external to the source, emerging from assumptions about the authenticity of the informant. There is a persistent danger that if not used carefully, oral histories centred on childhood can reinscribe the politics of childhood authenticity. As Daniel Thomas Cook persuasively argues, children’s voices are usually mediated through adults in some way or another when they come to us as scholars. Children as much as adults are involved in the representation of particular kinds of childhood for strategic purposes whether to please adults or to speak truth to power from a position of relative disempowerment. Oral history offers much to recommend it and its addition would only enrich this study. However, the evidence available through childhood recollections is less pivotal to the history of toy controversies than it would be for a study focused on children’s production of their own play culture.

Instead of falling into the default status of treating published sources differently from archival, museological or oral sources, I have opted to analyze sources based on the

_Cultures_ 1, no. 2 (2009): 129


medium of their transmission: print, visual or auditory. This somewhat simplistic division helps to clarify questions of audience and networks of circulation. It takes the fixation away from the more traditional emphasis on the rarified status of a source as the basis of its authority. Newspapers too can be “read against the grain,” or mined for data unavailable elsewhere. Similarly, whether they have been plucked from a dusty box in the hallowed halls of Library and Archives Canada or noted from Google Newspapers online collection, I have endeavored to further treat them based on the way they represent information: as factual or ideological. The former seeks to inform by providing rich details and information, the later offers a more discursively and narratively rich account in an attempt to convince the reader of a particular argument. In practice, these overlap. Discourse and narrative are often explicitly or implicitly embedded in factual sources and ideological sources frequently use “facts” to make their case. These distinctions help us to think about how the source was produced, for what purpose and how it might be read.

The point of this approach is to delegitimize the implicit hierarchy between kinds of primary sources that the institution of the archive, the museum and the authentic informer generate. Dispensing with this hierarchy is vitally important for studying popular culture. It allows us to probe the active role of our research subject in shaping socio-political conflicts and outcomes. In this respect, I have found the work of Bruno Latour on actor-network theory informative for rethinking the subject-object dichotomy as well as the anthropocentric assumption typically embedded in the terms “actor” and “agency”.

Latour contends that “for scientific, political, and even moral reasons, it is crucial that enquirers do not in advance, and in place of the actors, define what sorts of building
blocks the social world is made of.”67 These are not the things in the social world doing the acting, instead they are the things being made and remade within each relationship and encounter. This has radical implications for our understanding of the agent.

Typically, we envision agents or actors as human subjects who willingly do things. Objects, in contrast, form the passive background manipulated by the subject-actor or some social force.

Yet, as Latour points out, objects have agency too. They circulate, create friction in the flow of certain ideas, generating outcomes unintended or undesired by subject-actors. When objects like the toy become associated with a particular problem or issue – whether it is gun violence, gender roles or child development – the toy does not simply mirror these issues. It becomes an actor within the network that arises around a particular problem. This is something that will arise time and again throughout the history recounted here. Toys had profound implications for supposedly “more serious” social and political conflicts, which in turn affected the meaning of the toy in question. Following the actors, (broadly defined) rather than looking for mystical social forces within them is a cornerstone of this thesis’ approach.

In his highly productive merger of Foucault and Latour, Canadian philosopher Ian Hacking persuasively argues that along with the ability of such networks to produce social forces and realities, they also produce kinds of subjects and, I would add, kinds of things, including the toy.68 Networks are not merely generative of that which is outside them, but also of their constituent parts as they are brought into concert with one another.

This approach is particularly useful for studies of popular culture, like toys, because of their supposed pervasiveness and ephemerality.

All of this means that defining the toy is particularly challenging, not least of all because of the relatively recent development of its contemporary meaning. “Toy” was first deployed to describe children’s playthings in the sixteenth century. Its meaning at the time was imprecise referring to a number of small articles including buttons, pins, buckles, broaches and ornaments, rather than objects designed for use in children’s play.69 “Toy” originally had a similar meaning to our present day term “trinket” or “knick-knick” up until the late nineteenth century.70 A similar etymology to the word toy can be detected in Canada. In Roughing it in the Bush, Susanna Moodie highlights the challenges of the less well-to-do in Canada’s backwoods with a rapprochement for their social betters: “Oh! Imagine ye who revel in riches - who can daily throw away a large sum upon the merest toy…”71 In this instance “toy” clearly meant a bauble or trinket, rather than a child’s plaything.

Susanna Moodie and British historians remind us that the making of “consumer society” was an uneven process that hit different commodities, and hence different groups at different times.72 The toy emerged only as a modern commodity directed primarily at

71 Susanna Moodie. Roughing it in the bush, or, Life in Canada. (Hunter, Rose, 1871), 503.
children in the mid-to-late nineteenth century in Canada. The frequent lack of differentiation between toy stores and fancy good stores in business directories from the nineteenth century demonstrates a similar reality for consumers at the time. To what degree the term toy denoted a children’s plaything is highly ambiguous. The lack of precision is not peculiar to the nineteenth century. By the mid-twentieth century, adult amusements were sometimes being described as “toys”. In the 1980s, the rising popularity of video games raised important questions about the boundaries of the toy commodity. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, it would seem that things are no clearer than at the beginning of the nineteenth. While the user is different in each of these definitions, the deployment of the object in non-productive activities is what unites them. So while consistency in the place of a toy deployment shows some consistency, its association with childhood is highly historically specific.

Consequently, scholars who cover children’s consumer culture offer problematic


As Steve Penfold points out, the donut only emerged as a popular commodity in the 1960s, quite late during the long development of the consumer society. See Penfold, The Donut, 11-12

Board of Customs and Excise of Great Britain Fonds, MG43-CUST, LAC.


definitions of the toy. For Daniel Thomas Cook, the toy is at once in need of a “nuanced, grounded interpretation” yet somehow is simultaneously recognizable for what it is without the presence of its user, the child. Gary Cross sees toys as an easily discernible commodity category, divisible into good and bad sub-categories like the “educational toy” and “fantasy toy,” respectively. David Hamlin’s insistence on the toy as heuristic device relies on their perceived ability to “instantiate the diversity of the human world and put it on display.” Put in another way, their totalizing and miniaturizing logic makes them perfect to examine other things.

All of these accounts privilege the materiality of the toy or the marketing copy attached to it. They imply that the toy is easily intelligible to researchers. This is an assertion that I want to challenge directly. As the Strong Museum of Play’s Toy Hall of Fame makes abundantly clear, the materiality of toys is not so straightforward. There, the stick and blanket share a place of honour with Star Wars action figures, doll houses and Hot Wheels miniatures. The first two objects are toys by virtue of their use in play, the latter three by commercial design and marketing. Their materiality is secondary in all instances. As Brian Sutton-Smith’s work clearly demonstrates, toys perform a myriad of cultural functions, not always intended by manufacturers and not at all evident in their material composition.

Consequently, the term toy primarily describes a particular subject-object

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77 Cook, *The Commodification of Childhood*, 20
78 Gary S. Cross makes a distinction between fantasy or fad toys which engage children’s imaginations and encourage consumerism, while the “educational” toy rooted in didactic play central to social reproduction across generations. For Cross, the former is a negative influence on children while the later is mostly positive. See Cross, *Kid’s Stuff*.
relationship. The child is either present or their presence is implied by the invocation of childhood before a particular object is distinguishable as a toy. The commodification of the toy is a discursive and cultural process, not solely a material one. Materiality is primarily implicated in the semiotic meaning attached to toys. For instance, wooden toys became synonymous with local consumption and nostalgia. The materiality of toys is implicated at times in its meaning and at others is very clearly not. The toy is an abstraction to describe a number of highly heterogeneous objects that become relatable only through the kind of subject they implicate as user: the child.

Toys also complicate this subject-object relationship, and their status as a commodity, through their association with the subject-subject relation of adult and child. Toys were not only alienated commodities, but ideal gifts. In Gifts and Commodities: Exchange and Western Capitalism since 1700, James Carrier argues for the importance of making distinctions between the gift, which includes “all things transacted as part of social…relations” and the “commodity…a purely monetary relation [which is] transient and impersonal.”

Understood as positions on a spectrum rather than binary states, Carrier claims that these ideologies are at the heart of tensions in western consumerism. Commodity relations assume that the relations of an object’s production and its materiality are the exclusive markers of its value and meaning. The “gift” and the ceremonies that surround its exchange denies the status of the object as an alienated commodity emphasizing the emotional basis of exchange and the obligations it encodes between

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83 Ibid., 20.
giver and receiver. Since many consumers in modern capitalist economies have little choice, argues Carrier, but to turn to alienated commodities in order to acquire gifts, there is a profound tension and ambiguity at the root of consumption and significant overlap and interpenetration between “commodity” and “gift.”

Unlike other children’s goods like the clothing or food, toys were almost always given as gifts. As Allison Pugh highlights, children and parents regularly call upon toys and other commodities to perform a number of social functions not easily reducible to economics. Pugh ultimately concludes that “calling children the conduit of commercial culture is a bit like faulting fish for the water in which they swim.” Ultimately the implication is that –

The hidden crisis of consumption emanates from the social conditions that imbue commercialized goods with powerful meanings like belonging and care, harnessing them to the market… children’s lives are shaped by the distortions of interpreting belonging and care through commodities and commodified events. If adults capitulate to the demands of dignity, they are offering support to the equation of possessions with meaningful connection, merely staving off for another day the problems of exclusion and alienation.

The status of toys as gifts and commodities make them particularly vulnerable to this complex role as a savior from and source of social and economic alienation. Consequently, any discussion of children’s toy consumption – academic or otherwise – is fraught with tensions and complexities. It is by highlighting these tensions and controversies, rather than the objects themselves, which helps to ground our

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84 Ibid., 21-24.  
85 Ibid. 146-148.  
87 Allison Pugh, Longing and Belonging: Parents, Children and Consumer Culture, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2009), 26  
88 Ibid., 218 & 226-227.
understanding of the toy and its place in the lives of children and adults.

This also raises questions about how we define the “child” and the “adult” and how to investigate them. Cook concludes that the agentive and innocent child consumers are not so much a who but an it: a “commercial personae.” 89 In turning his attention to consumption, Cook writes that: “…commodification is not merely some process imposed upon independent, individualized children which has turned them into consumers, nor is it something that soils pristine autonomous childhood.” 90 Instead, consumption should be viewed as fundamental to defining modern selfhood and modern childhood. Indeed, the implication is that children are only recognizable as such when they are embedded within what Patrick J. Ryan has called the discursive landscape of modern childhood.

Ryan claims that childhood is inseparable from the idea of modern selfhood and lies at the root of the erection of disciplinary institutions and technologies central to modern governmentality. 91 Consequently, he pushes conceptual boundaries beyond Cook’s spectrum of innocent and agentive, making the case for four distinct, but interconnected, discourses of modern childhood that can be mobilized in numerous ways.

89 Ibid., 19
90 Cook, The Commodification of Childhood, 6-7.
According to Ryan, this discourse originated in the early-modern reformation. It was reinforced by the enlightenment thought of Locke, utilitarians like James Mill, and the romanticism of Rousseau. The discourse characterizes children as a blank slate that is “socialized” into becoming a certain kind of adult, in an effort to prevent social disorder and delinquency. This discourse was prevalent in mental hygiene and the child saving movements. Both groups saw poverty, including its material deprivations as a threat to the formation of good character among children.

The authentic child is rooted in a different set of assumption. Drawing its

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92 Ibid., 11-12
93 Ibid., 13-16
94 Ibid., 19-22 & 23-28
inspiration from the romantic reaction to the seventeenth and eighteenth century
definition of “selfhood,” the authentic child was pristine, innocent and uncorrupted by the
social world. A “noble savage” within the home, the authentic child needed sheltering
and protection from the influences of the world that they might grow into their true
selves. This persists today with our interest in protecting children from the influence of
the market or in the culture of cuteness that has dominated much of adult-child relations
over the last 150 years.

Though sharing few assumptions, the authentic and conditioned child are not
antithetical. According to Ryan, they form a couplet whereby certain groups have
sometimes used them to reinforce particular actions. Socialization to bourgeois norms
became the means by which children could be recognized as authentic. Thus, these are
not mutually exclusive discourses but instead a description of general positions on an
open landscape.

The political or agentive child sees the child’s efforts at self-representation as
fundamentally competent rather than innocent. The conceptualization of children as
individuated selves with rights and responsibilities grew out of the discovery and
elaboration of a children’s market among the middle and upper-classes during the early-
modern period. This discourse is most popular among creators of children’s commercial
and popular culture. The agentive child is described as discerning, self-aware and media-

\footnote{Ibid., 17-18.}
\footnote{Ryan, “Discursive Tensions,” 28-30.}
The second portion of this couplet is the developing child. The developing child sees the child as a psycho-biological organism that grows and develops along objectively identifiable and regular trajectories. The work of Arnold Gessell, Benjamin Spock or other Child Study experts like Canada’s William Blatz are indicative of this approach. A relatively late arrival, the developing child has been a powerful tool to refute the entreaties of marketers to children and has also been an effective ally of those same marketers in the creation of “educational” toys. As a couplet, the objective assessment of a subject’s level of development becomes essential for their eventual recognition as rights bearing adults.

Ryan plots these discourses on a Cartesian plane. Their potential to inform and shape multiple projects means they often function in tandem in a three-dimensional discursive matrix. These discourses are widely discernible in the history of children’s consumption, often reinforcing or dismissing certain claims about the child consumer and the toy. Collectively, the four discourses provide a meaningful narrative structure to various unsubstantiated assumptions about what a child is or is not, and a framework for decoding and encoding their actions.

The very status of the child and its connection to modern selfhood is a feature of childhood’s fundamental status as a state of non-adulthood. Children, unlike the working-class or racialized subjects, must cease being children and become “adults.” Adulthood is the gold standard of modern selfhood and has been historically defined as able-bodied,

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99 Ibid., 559-564.
white, heterosexual, middle or upper-class and male. This is where the long history of
describing those who deviate from these norms as childish and child-like comes from.\textsuperscript{100} There is a tendency inside and outside the academy to see childhood as a separate
identity. Yet, its status as a temporary state indicates that “the child” functions primarily
as a negative distinction and catalogue of deficiencies. Childhood marks certain subjects
as “non-adults” and in need of supervision and guidance.

Proceeding from this, claims about childhood then are really claims about
adulthood and its boundaries. Making more adults is the primary purpose of childhood
whether through “natural development,” “socialization,” by “acknowledging their
uniqueness,” “promoting their autonomy” or some combination of the four. Claims that
seem paradoxical – such as those that children are simultaneously remaining children for
too long and at the same time growing up too fast – make perfect sense when we accept
that the ideology of childhood is first and foremost a negative designation for non-adults.

Identification as a child is also acknowledgement that the subject in question is the
child \textit{of someone}. Childhood implies a relationship of dependence and domination as
much as a deficient adult. This feature is central to recasting oppressive inequalities as a
benevolent and natural state of tutelage. The relationship between adults and non-adults,
and concerns about the boundaries between them, is at the root of conflicts about the
modern toy. As such, toy consumption should not be understood as an economic activity

\textsuperscript{100} For example see Corinne T. Field, “Are Women…All Minors? Woman’s Rights and
the Politics of Aging in the Antebellum United States,” \textit{Journal of women’s History} 12,
no. 4 (2001): 113-137; Seth Koven, “Remembering and Dismembering: Crippled
Children, Wounded Soldiers and the Great War in Great Britain,” \textit{American Historical
Review} 99, no. 4 (1994): 1167-1202; Anna Mae Duane, \textit{Suffering Childhood in Early
America: Violence, Race and the Making of the Child Victim}, (Athens, GA: University of
Georgia Press, 2010).
in a narrow sense. It is instead a complex process of bricolage that brings together and
aligns not only kinds of things to make new meanings, but kinds of subjects with
profound social implications.¹⁰¹

Clearly, the history of toys lies at the centre of Canadian and international
historiography on childhood and consumer culture. Recent historical interest in toys,
though robust, suffers from an under-theorization of analytical categories and research
methodologies. As the preceding discussion demonstrates, a Canadian study of the
history of toy controversies can contribute a great deal to national and international
histories.

Structure of the Thesis

In the pages that follow, I will be investigating conflicts between adults about toys
and childhood in its many contexts and manifestations. This is a chronological study
taking the reader from the mid-nineteenth century to the later twentieth in order to
understand the changes and continuities in the history of toys and childhood in Canada.

The first period is covered in chapters two and three and deals with the expansion
of the modern toy commodity between the mid-nineteenth century and the end of the
First World War. Chapter two charts the growing prevalence of toys in Canada, drawing
primarily on published sources circulated throughout the Dominion as well as
government documents and photographs. It examines the networks of Canadian
wholesalers, international toy producers, marketers, retailers and advice writers in
creating a consumer market for toys in Canada.

The expansion of toy consumption was often contested. The gendering of the child consumer as male and the increased availability of mass-produced and mass marketed toys lead to complaints about middle-class children’s toy consumption and the moral and physical dangers it posed. Feminists, conservative social critics and medical professionals highlighted a number of issues associated with the rise of the manufactured toy.

Chapter three takes us beyond the middle-class to examine marginal children and their relationship to mass-produced and mass-marketed toys. These early efforts to extend the toy commodity had major implications for the emergence of an indigenous Canadian toy industry during the First World War. Indeed, the class and racial boundaries of Canada’s emerging consumer society helped reformers to construct the material needs of children as the absence of a childhood. Toys and the time and space to use them became indicative of a parent’s competence and modernity. When German toy production disappeared from Canadian stores at the beginning of the First World War, philanthropic efforts first used among marginal children and families were mobilized to address the toy famine in the name of “rescuing childhood.” Child savers and philanthropists embraced anti-modern production techniques to provide toys to children and challenge the male dominated industrial toy business emerging under state support. The conflict led to a debate about the status of toys as commodities and gifts and about the relationship of Canadian manufacturers to mothers and children.

The second section, comprising chapters four and five, covers the period from 1920-1959 stressing the enshrinement of toy consumption as an essential component of good parenting and normal childhood. Chapter four looks at the toy business from the perspective of production, marketing and retailing. Central to the growth of toy
consumption during this period was an emphasis on marketing directly to children as individual consumers rather than as part of a family unit. The increasing sophistication of marketing techniques – including tie-ins and licensing agreements – and the elaboration of spectacles of consumer leisure all helped to expand the market for toys in Canada. These developments were not free of concerns. The inability of many on the margins of Canadian consumer society to access toys coupled with workers’ persistent difficulty in securing better wages and working conditions ensured continued strife in the social life of toys.

The fifth chapter looks at shifts in expert opinion brought about by the expansion of psychologically-inspired advice. Psychology caused friction for existing toy producers. Paradoxically, it was also heavily implicated in the expansion of toy consumption among Canadians. These efforts ultimately raised the profile and significance attached to toys. They led to widespread concerns over war toys and their effect on children. Similarly, psychology influenced the development of toy testing as an important source of commercial knowledge for consumers and business alike.

The last section, comprising chapters six and seven, covers the period from 1960-1989 and looks at the emergence of contemporary Canadian toy culture. Chapter six explores changes in the Canadian toy business with a particular focus on the transformation of the toy industry from a consumer industry into a cultural industry. The rising importance of toy creations as intellectual property led to the expansion of television toy advertising as well as activism against marketing – especially in Quebec. Furthermore, dramatic changes in the labour-capital relationship in an increasingly open Canadian economy fundamentally undermined the sustainability of toy production in
Chapter seven looks at two versions of toy testing that rose to prominence during the period and their implication for Canadians’ understandings of toy consumption. On the one hand the Canadian Toy Testing Council engaged in a largely business-friendly program of toy testing that examined “play value” from the perspective of popular psychology. The other approach was more medicalized and undertaken by the product safety branch of the federal government. It was principally focused on the prevention of bodily threats from toys. These different approaches and institutional structures provided the capacity to establish and evaluate threats from toys, leading to a more acute politicization of toy production and consumption. Sustained concerns over war toys and dolls demonstrate the intersections between toy testing and “adult” political concerns in Canada.

Running through each chapter is a series of problems and controversies that arise repeatedly in a number of different ways. Gender, class and race shaped the meaning and significance of toy consumption. Similarly, medical and psychological accounts of the child established certain toys as dangerous and in need of regulation or censorship. Likewise the relationship among parents, children and the market was a frequent source of tension. Workers and managers often found themselves struggling to find their place and stay afloat in a dynamic and rapidly changing global industry. Again and again, these appeals, anxieties and arguments drew on specific discourses of modern childhood and reinforced numerous prevalent, but contradictory assumptions about what a toy was. Some toys looked like objects of great promise, yet in the same moment another toy could be an object of scorn and concern. In the numerous conflicts about toys, adults
constantly engaged in a redefinition of their children’s relationship to the market, the structure of Canadian capitalism and the meaning of childhood.
PART I – THE MODERN TOY IN VICTORIAN CANADA, 1840-1919
CHAPTER TWO

"A Relic of Inestimable Worth": Gender, Desire and Rise of the Toy Commodity in Victorian Canada

Figure 2.1 – The Carnival of Toys - A Dream of Childhood


The cornucopia of playthings in pictures like this one and in shop windows throughout the Dominion “instantiated the diversity of the human world and the human imagination and put it on display.”¹ The “Carnival of Toys” invokes dreams of economic plenty and the pleasure of consumer indulgence made possible by the veritable wonderland of children’s commodities. The picture confronts and excites the audience with the imperial exotic in the form of elephants and giraffes, regales them with the

¹ Hamlin, Work and Play, 13.
fanciful world of nutcrackers and princesses, and soothes with the familiar promise of celluloid companions or toy soldiers. “For children, this image offered a window into a boundless world of toys. For adults the image represented something different. To them it must have seemed that “great industries [had] sprung up for the sole purpose of pleasing [children],” by making “things that they can neither drink nor eat nor wear, but [are] very valuable to them for all that.”² Truly, children’s playthings – regarded as curious trifles only a generation before – were quickly becoming “relic[s] of inestimable worth.”³

Yet, the dream world of the male child these toys inhabited also signaled the highly gendered and aspirational nature of Victorian Canadian toy culture. As part of their performance of gender, boys and girls found themselves in very different, but never divergent, relationships with the toy commodity. Advertisers like G.A. Holland’s of Montreal captured this division succinctly in their 1912 promotion of “dolls…[and] most anything the heart of any girl could desire…[and] for those boys who have the inquiring mind, there are mechanical and electrical toys of every kind.”⁴ They weren’t selling to children, they were selling to girls and boys. Toys were intended to act as one of the earliest markers of gender difference.⁵

The “Dream of Childhood” was not always a pleasant one either. For some adults, and children it could be nightmarish. As exciting as toys were, they were sometimes viewed as harbingers of danger and disorder; an ominous sign of the changing material and social world that surrounded and penetrated Canadian families. The arrival of

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² “Children’s Toys,” Canada Presbyterian, Dec. 28, 1877, 142.
manufactured toys in large quantities after mid-century sparked a litany of written and visual narratives invoking the usefulness, desirability and even danger posed by toys. Advertisers, women’s advice writers, social critics and pedagogues all took to newspapers and magazines to discuss the toy with regularity, though not always in glowing terms.

Conservative male social critics saw a threat to the patriarchal family in the rise of manufactured toys. Feminist writers viewed doll play with similar suspicion. For them it seemed little more than training for a girl’s future life of subjugation. The bodily threat posed by toy guns, rooted in their tendency to blur the lines between adulthood and childhood was similarly troubling for some parents and medical professionals. These varied concerns demonstrate the growing importance and uneasy place of manufactured toys in the social and cultural life of middle and upper-class Canadian families.

The emergence and ascendance of the modern toy is best understood in the context of changes in economic and family life underway during the long nineteenth century. European early modernists have located the birth of the consumer society in the period between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. As some of these studies indicate, early modern modes of consumption were defined by the purchase of semi-finished goods for further household production, during what one scholar has called the “industrious revolution.” The principle focus of women’s consumer lives was provisioning, rather than homemaking.

This picture is even more complex in northern North America, where modes of

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consumption more characteristic of the early-modern phase survived well into the nineteenth century. Elizabeth Mancke and Beatrice Craig have concluded that “women consumed in the market to produce in the home,” in British North America between the late-eighteenth and mid-nineteenth century. After mid-century, female consumers increasingly purchased finished goods for the purposes of homemaking in response to increasing labour demands outside the home and rising norms of middle-class respectability.

Under this rubric of domestic life, the family and home were to become a moral haven away from the dictates of the market rather than a place of production. Studies like Joy Parr’s *The Gender of Breadwinners* have shown the folly of assuming that the abstraction of separate spheres defined the working lives of men and women. The burden of homemaking fell very heavily upon women rather than men, even in families where women were the principle wage earners. The need for finished products, coupled with

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8 Ibid., 104.
the heightened moral and cultural value of home life led to an increased emphasis on children and their material surroundings. These changes paved the way for the integration of parts of children’s lives into the mechanisms of market exchange, forming the basis of what Peter Stearn has identified as the second phase in the development of a consumer society.\footnote{Stearns, “Stages of Consumerism,” 109-114.}

The toy commodity is symptomatic and constitutive of this monumental shift in family economy and consumer practice. The ascendancy of the toy is central to the so-called commercialization of childhood in the United States, Canada, Germany and Britain.\footnote{See Brown, \textit{The British Toy Business}, 41-44; Cross, \textit{Kid’s Stuff}, 26-37; Hamlin, \textit{Work and Play}, 21-60; Ganaway, \textit{Toys, Consumption and Middle-Class Childhood in Imperial Germany},” 27-69.} Children’s consumer lives then, as now, are not easily separated from the relationship of men and women with the market and with their children.

\textit{Making the Toy Commodity, Making the Toy Consumer}

Homemade toys were a feature of the lives of Aboriginal children as well as the first European settlers in northern North America.\footnote{Ledgers of Imports into Colonies Under Countries. Board of Customs and Excise of Great Britain Fonds. MG43-CUST6. Library and Archives Canada; Noel, \textit{Family Life and Sociability}, 151; & Craig, \textit{Backwoods Consumers and Homespun Capitalists}, 202; It is also necessary to keep in mind that indigenous Canadians and earlier colonial subjects of New France and elsewhere made toys for their children and relatives on a somewhat regular basis. See for instance Dawe. “Tiny Arrowheads: Toys in the Toolkit,” 303; Seguin. \textit{Les Jouets Anciens de Quebec}, 37-39; & Moogk, “Les Petits Sauvages” 47-48.} This pattern did not simply go away with the arrival of manufactured toys in large numbers. Commodified toys bound the material culture of what was initially a very small number of children to international networks of production and consumption. Gary Cross and Gregory Smits have argued...
that the toy industry was a transnational one almost from its very inception.\textsuperscript{16} This was especially relevant in Canada during the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, due to the late and limited development of Canadian toy manufacturing.

According to Beatrice Craig, toys can be found in general stores as early as the late eighteenth century. Trade statistics show that imported toys were a feature of at least some young Canadians’ lives as early as 1812.\textsuperscript{17} However, it is clear that the market for imported toys remained relatively stagnant before mid-century. Toys were a luxury item for a relatively small stratum of Canadian families. Furthermore, the expansion of imported toys after 1840 was regionally incongruous. The Canadas repeatedly accounted for more than half of imported toys, with the remainder taken up by Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Newfoundland.

Figure 2.2 - Import of British Toys by Colony

\begin{figure}[h]
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\caption{Import of British Toys by Colony}
\end{figure}


\textsuperscript{16} Gary Cross & Gregory Smits, “Japan, the U.S. and the Globalization of Children’s Consumer Culture,” 874.

\textsuperscript{17} Craig, Backwoods Consumers and Homespun Capitalists, 202; Noel, Family Life and Sociability, 151; Ledgers of Imports into Colonies Under Countries. Board of Customs and Excise of Great Britain Fonds. MG43-CUST6. Library and Archives Canada
If we move our attention to a sample of newspapers and surviving business and city directories for the period, it is possible to glimpse the expanding availability of manufactured toys for consumers. The Montreal Directory of 1842 contains two explicit references to the sale of toys. William Greig and R. Sharpley identify themselves as dealers in fancy goods, including British, German and French toys.\(^\text{18}\) Almost a decade later, the Canada Directory of 1851 includes a full-page advertisement by J.W. Skelton advertising for fancy goods and toys from the same three nations.\(^\text{19}\) The Quebec directory of 1858 lists three toy dealers in the city.\(^\text{20}\)

Newspaper advertising for toys was similarly small-scale during the period. Miss Van Der Smissen’s toy advertisements in the 1845 *Toronto Globe* were indicative of the period. “Toys! Toys!! Toys!!” in bold letters across the top proclaimed the “extensive assortment of toys imported direct from manufacturing place in Germany.”\(^\text{21}\) Other


\(^{21}\) [Miss Van Der Smissen], (Advertisement), *Globe*, 7 Jan 1845, 3. See also *Globe*, 14 Jan 1845, 4; *Globe*, 11 Feb 1845, 4; *Globe*, 1 April 1845, 4; *Globe*, 22 April 1845, 4;
advertisements employed a similar style, like those of Sanford & Fuller and the Charles J. Cooke Fancy Store.22

It is clear from these directories, advertisements and trade statistics that manufactured toys (likely produced through some kind of putting out system) were a discernible feature of the Canadian commercial landscape by at least the 1840s.23 As the evidence for this period is scant, it is difficult to determine how common toys were among the ranks of the upper and middle-classes.24 The quantitative information furnished by the state and information on toy retailing provides us with a somewhat out of focus snapshot of the world of children’s toys at mid-century. This information also had added significance for contemporaries. It provided Canadians with knowledge about the toy as a commercial good. By recording the movement of “toys,” it helped to bring into being the toy as a certain kind of commodity and allowed prospective buyers (wholesale and retail) to locate potential sources for manufactured toys.

In The Taming of Chance, Ian Hacking argues that statistical information exploded in the early nineteenth century around the Atlantic world.25 This has profound implications for historians studying the movement of goods and people across the globe. Statistics do not so much describe social reality as inscribe it.26 Over the course of the long nineteenth century, what began as an explosion of statistical information evolved...
into a complex statistical apparatus divided into several interrelated branches. Before this time, there was less emphasis on tracking categories of goods with the same degree of specificity. The “avalanche of printed numbers” intensified and reinforced the need to sort them into increasingly precise sub-categories; to make up not only kinds of people, but also kinds of things.27 “The toy” was an abstraction aimed at representing the growing number of dolls, whirligigs, miniature perambulators and toy soldiers crossing the borders of British North America. Toys prior to the 1810s were filed in trade ledgers under miscellaneous fancy goods, undifferentiated from other objects in this broad commodity category, including buttons, thimbles, and other “small notions.” By mid-century toys were given their own category that referred to children’s playthings at the exclusion of other previously aligned adult objects.28 By the end of the First World War “toys” and “dolls” were even divided on official government trade statistics, showing a greater degree of specificity and attention to detail, particularly around gender.29 Separate categories nicely coincided with the ideal of separate spheres as dolls became increasingly associated with girl’s play. The quantitative information of the trade ledger coupled with the qualitative information of the business directory and advertisements highlights the increased importance of toys. More fundamentally, it constituted “the toy” as a commodity with a certain degree of integrity – as an object identifiable for what it was.

The initially slow expansion of the toy trade turned into an explosion in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Between 1875 and 1880 imports grew by nearly a third.

27 Hacking, The Taming of Chance, 3.
They tripled between 1880 and 1885 and more than doubled again from 1885-1890. In the three decades from 1880-1910 the importation of toys, and in all likelihood their consumption, grew twenty-five times.

**Figure 2.3 - Import of Toys into British North America and the Dominion of Canada by Country of Manufacture 1840-1910**


City directories demonstrate the increased availability of playthings. The 1871 directory to the province of Nova Scotia lists one toy seller, Nelson, Wood & Co.30 By the 1890s there were five toy retailers.31

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Directory identifies dedicated toy stores in Coldwater, Kingston, St. Catharines, and Toronto. By the 1890s Winnipeg, Brandon, Regina and Rat Portage (later renamed Kenora) all boasted local toy retailers.

In other national contexts, the growth of Canadian toy manufacturing as part of a more generalized economic expansion played a significant role in expanding access to toys. In Canada, manufacturers failed to seize the opportunity. There is some evidence of attempts at toy manufacturing throughout the nineteenth century. What toy manufacturing there was arose out of efforts to use up left over materials from other industries. Trade statistics show a minuscule number of toy exports from British North America to Bermuda and Jamaica starting in 1837 and on occasion thereafter. Unlike Germany, Britain and later the United States, toy manufacturers struggled in Victorian Canada. The Ontario Toy Co. located in London, ON serves as a good example. It was forced to declare bankruptcy in 1883 only a year after incorporating with a workforce of fifty and building an expansion on their factory. Business directories show a handful of

36 “Manufacturers’ Notes,” The Monetary Times, 14 April 1882, 1268; [Ontario Toy Co. Closed], The Monetary Times, 28 Sep 1883, 345.
manufacturers at any given time. Few of them were large or successful enterprises. Before the First World War, the Canadian Manufacturers’ Association lists only four members as toy manufacturers. An industry notorious for its boom and bust cycle resulting from low margins and a seasonal market failed to respond to tariff inducements. Rates reached thirty-five percent *ad valorem* on children’s toys in the 1880s. Yet importing toys from efficient and cost effective manufacturers elsewhere in the world proved a more practical way to satisfy toy demand than attempts to establish toy manufacturing in Canada.

So how do we account for the large jump in toy consumption in the face of persistent failures to establish a sustainable manufacturing industry? The wholesale toy business was pivotal in extending commercial access to toys across the Dominion. Two firms in particular are indicative of these efforts: the wholesaler/retailer (and eventually manufacturer) H.A. Nelson & Sons and the wholesaler/retailer Nerlich and Co. based in Montreal and Toronto respectively, both firms were able to expand their trade in toys. Their expansion was facilitated by a successful Canada-wide mail order business established following the completion of the Intercolonial Railway in 1872 and the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1885. The development of the wholesale trade meant that imported toys from more cost-effective manufacturers outside of Canada could be distributed with relative ease across the Dominion. Toys and other consumer goods became more easily (and perhaps more cheaply) available to Canadians outside the immediate vicinity of cities like Montreal, Toronto or Halifax.

The example of Nerlich & Co. is perhaps most instructive. Founded in Toronto in

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37 [List of Members of the CMA]. *Industrial Canada*, June 1908, 967.
1858, by Henry Nerlich, a watchmaker and immigrant of German extraction, Nerlich found the watch making and repair business insufficient to provide a living. He began importing jewelry, fancy goods and toys from his native Germany. In an effort to make the business sustainable, Nerlich developed a wider wholesale network with the smaller towns surrounding Toronto to compliment his retail sales in Toronto. According to the company’s official history, the quick sale of some German toys and dolls in 1861 surprised Nerlich and encouraged him to focus on this area. The establishment of a mail order service soon followed.

Finding trips to Germany to search for stock time consuming, the company established an office in Berlin at the end of the 1870s. By 1880 Nerlich & Co.’s success forced them to relocate to a new warehouse on Front Street in Toronto. Eventually even that building was demolished to make room for an eight-story warehouse and office facility totaling 108,000 sq ft. In the 1890s, its wholesale territory expanded to include Ontario, Manitoba, the North-West Territories and British Columbia. By the end of the decade it added Quebec and maritime retailers to their distribution network just as their major competitors, H.A. Nelson and Sons, were moving west from its base in Quebec and Atlantic Canada. Of the 114 pages of the Nerlich & Co.’s 1900-1901 wholesale catalogue, 71 pages were taken up by various kinds of toys. By the eve of their fiftieth birthday in 1908, the company operated a collection of offices, warehouses and stores in Toronto, Montreal, Quebec City and Berlin, Germany. Its toy stock had origins in Canada, France, Britain, Germany, Austria, Japan and the United States. The firms

39 Ibid.
success is visible in the stylized pages of their fiftieth anniversary publication; decorated with gold-leaf and filled with dozens of portraits and warehouse pictures, taken by the famed Notman studios of Montreal.41

Publications like the *Bookseller and Stationer* provided their readers in the retail trade with detailed information on the latest toys available and summaries of wholesale catalogues.42 Their articles helped retailers to identify possible merchandise without requiring them to either spend a great deal of time sifting through catalogues or making inquiries with the wholesalers directly. Trade publications helped bind together wholesaler and retailers in distribution networks. Similarly, many wholesalers would use these trade publication to advertise directly to retailers regarding their existing wares, soliciting them to place an order with them rather than their competitors.43

The expansion of toy wholesaling occurred at the same time that retailers and advertisers were changing the way they did business. In the 1880s, retailers would often boast of their wide selection and sale prices. They also began using images of toys in order to attract toy consumers. A. Mohr’s store in Quebec City advertised for the over “5000 seven and ten cent toys on sale.”44 Like a number of other retailers, H.W. Wilson & Co. of Ottawa used sales as a means to clear out excess Christmas stock at “less than cost.”45

The rise of the department store in the last quarter of the nineteenth century

41 Interior of Nerlich & Co. Store, Montreal, QC, 1908 (Photograph), William Notman & Sons Collection, McCord Museum.
42 *Bookseller and Stationer*, July 1900, 14-15; *Bookseller and Stationer*, November 1899, 16; *Canada Bookseller and Stationer*, April 1896, 17; *Bookseller and Stationer*, Aug. 1900, 10.
44 [A. Mohr], advertisement, *Quebec Daily Telegraph*, 27 Nov 1884, 5.
brought the joy and excitement of shopping to Canadian consumers on a scale previously unheard of. The ability of department stores to offer low prices to urban shoppers and those farther afield via the mail order business helped to expand toys geographically and across classes.\textsuperscript{46} Toys took up an increasing number of pages in nineteenth century Eaton’s and Simpson’s catalogues. From a few pages in the 1870s and 1880s, Eaton’s toy pages expanded to a dozen or more by the first decade of the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{47} Catalogues also demonstrate attempts to attract an economically diverse set of consumers to their toy counters. Prices could vary greatly between “5 cents and $10.”\textsuperscript{48} The middle and upper-classes were the major consumer cohort for toys. Members of the lower-middle and working-class likely purchased toys on occasion, in small numbers, as well.

New advertising techniques pioneered by department stores and adopted by smaller retailers were a major factor in expanding the interest in toys.\textsuperscript{49} Advertisements began to include stylized drawings of specific playthings. Santa Claus increasingly appeared as a central figure in promotions. By aligning toys with the Christmas holiday, what were clearly commodities, could be sold as objects with a more nuanced and complex valuation. Toys became bearers of sentiment and love to be given to children by adults, as signs of the latter's generosity and caring. They were the perfect gift - a status, which increasingly clashed with their commodification.

Unsatisfied with the seasonal limitations of the toy market, advertisements by

\textsuperscript{46} Belisle, \textit{Retail Nation}, 13-14 & 27-28.
\textsuperscript{47} See T. Eaton Co., \textit{Eaton’s Catalogue, (Fall/Winter), 1884-1914}, (Toronto: T.Eaton’s Co); While the 1884 catalogue has one page dedicated to toys, by 1888 there were three pages, six by 1892-1893, and 18 pages by 1894-1895. By the 1890s photos of toys predominated in the catalogue.
\textsuperscript{48} Belisle, \textit{Retail Nation}, 13-14
Simpson’s and Eaton’s began promoting a small selection of toys in the summer months. A T. Eaton Co. advertisement from 8 August 1890 declared “children always seem to have a leaning toward this store, and we take special delight in pleasing them [with] candies, playthings, velocipedes and picture books at prices they can afford.” By the end of the nineteenth century, toys had become so central to certain parts of the Christmas retail trade that smaller retailers in seemingly unrelated fields began offering them as free promotional items to lure shoppers away from department stores. The Clapp Shoe Co. of Toronto offered their customers free toys reasoning that “shoes are a necessity and may take the place of many a high-priced toy…the toys, trinkets and notions you get with the shoes - free.”

Beginning in the 1890s, marketing texts and images highlighted important shifts in the representation of child and adult toy consumers. Some advertisements began to depict children receiving gifts around the Christmas tree or in the home. It was not long before advertisers began appealing directly to children under parental supervision as potential shoppers. For instance, Simpson’s Department Store began holding a “Children’s Day” around the beginning of December to promote toy sales. An advertisement in 1891 featured a drawing of a child accompanied by the caption “My Mamma is going to take me to Simpson’s” to see the toy displays of which there is “no like display in Canada.” R. Walker & Sons’ advertisement for their “Santa Claus Headquarters“ from 1896 similarly featured a young girl speaking on the phone declaring

50 [T. Eaton Co.], advertisement, Globe, 8 Aug 1890, 6.
51 [Clapp Shoe Co.], (advertisement), Toronto Star, 19 Dec 1895, 2.
52 [Simpson’s], advertisement, Toronto Star, 7 Dec 1895, 2.
53 [Simpson’s], advertisement, Toronto Star, 21 Dec 1896, 2.
“Hello Santa Claus” followed by a list of toys she might like. These advertisements increasingly moved away from advertising the product or its price and began to stress the experience of pleasure children and parents would derive from moving through the consumer spectacle of toyland.

The toy as a major object of consumer desire facilitated children’s participation in consumption. In the interwar years children’s clothing retailers encouraged women’s consumption on behalf of their children as a form of maternal care. One way that retailers promoted the consumer activity of women and children was through the promotion of what Daniel Thomas Cook calls *pediocruality*, defined as taking the children’s view in advertising and consumption. This general shift in the children’s wear industry may well have drawn its inspiration from late-nineteenth and early twentieth century innovations in toy retailing.

Retailers offered visual and written appeals for children to visit their stores. A T. Eaton’s advertisement called on parents to indulge their children’s desire for toys by shopping either with them or on their behalf. John Murphy Co. invited children and parents to the store, declaring “Mothers! Spend half an hour in doll-town with your children.” Goodwin’s of Montreal took a similar approach encouraging “every boy and girl in the city and the parents of all of them to come and see…a wonderful world to suit

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54 [R. Walker & Sons], advertisement, *Toronto Star*, 22 Dec 1896, 12.
childish tastes." Charles Ogilvy Ltd. asked his customers with families to “bring the little ones, they will be delighted.”

Many parents and children were receptive to these entreaties. In 1912, Faulkner’s of Ottawa was host to an “exceptionally large crowd of kiddies” thanks to their “greatly enlarged toyland.” “Hosts of children” as well as parents could be found wandering the various “toylands” of the Winnipeg “admiring this marvelous toy…and enjoying the sights of the gifts which are more numerous and original than ever this year.” Eaton’s was surely echoing the Christmas aspirations for many children and parents in their 1911 advertisement, declaring “toys are just as much a part of a child’s life as clothing.”

With the advent of “toylands,” and changes in advertising in the closing decade of the nineteenth century, a special space was created by retailers for children to participate in the pleasure and power of consumption. It seems that numerous upper, middle and even a few working-class children and their parents took up this invitation. Child consumers were encouraged to visit retail spaces, though never as autonomous consumers. They were expected to act as co-consumers, subject to parental guidance. Clear limits and qualifiers existed for children’s presence in retail spaces, including adult accompaniment and proper behaviour. The C. Ross Co. of Ottawa made these conditions explicitly clear in their advertisements: “Children are welcome if accompanied by their parents or guardians; they’re welcome unaccompanied, if they kindly not handle things

60 [Charles Ogilvy Ltd.], advertisement, Ottawa Citizen, 26 Nov 1909, 2.
63 [T. Eaton Co.], advertisement, Toronto World, 6 Feb 1911, 3.
roughly.”64 This period marked the beginning of pediocularity. However, the competence of the child consumer remained in question. It seems indicative of what Ryan calls the conditioned child who through proper adult guidance and socialization can develop the necessary competencies to participate fully in consumer society.

Retailers also identified a sharp distinction between male and female child consumers. In its most obvious and well-documented form, certain toys were gendered male or female. The Eaton’s Fall/Winter Catalogue from 1893-1894 depicted all dolls as either androgynous or female. All wagons and mechanical toys with human like-figures in them depicted men.65 By 1900, the gendering of toys was more explicit. As the Sayer Electric Shop put it: “For boys the selection is easy…as all boys want something that goes, something he can experiment with, start or stop as he wants, build up or take down…”66 Girls’ consumption was portrayed in a decidedly more orderly reserved and sentimental fashion: “Let your little girls become friendly with the dolls.”67 This distinction was more acute when certain toys became fashionable and sought after. The “Khaki fever” – a desire for military toys that referenced the South African War - and the teddy bear are two toy fads that demonstrate this trend. G.A. Holland & Co. of Montreal dressed their Santa Claus up in Khaki for Christmas 1900. They played upon adult imperial fantasies, raving about the “captured Boer firearms and ammunition” on display in their toy department.68 An Eaton’s advertisement from 1901 captures this development in sharp relief: “The girls gaze with longing eyes upon the dolls and the dolls’ houses, the

64 [C. Ross Co.] advertisement, Ottawa Citizen, 6 Dec 1909, 7.
66 [The Sayer Electric Shop], advertisement, Montreal Tribune, 19 Dec 1912, 3.
toy sets of dishes and furniture and kitchen utensils…the boys swarm around the iron toys, the guns that shoot, the horses, wagons and sleighs…” 69

Military activities during the period were typically understood as a male domain. Yet, there was nothing specifically masculine about teddy bears from a material standpoint. The John Murphy Co. was adamant about distinguishing their stock of teddy bears as toys for boys. 70 Clearly, their association with Theodore Roosevelt and the culture of manliness he embodied, as well as the growing acceptance of G. Stanley Hall’s theory of recapitulation allowed the bears to embody masculine ideals. 71

The association of toy fads with boys demonstrates that retailers understood the consumption of boys and girls differently. The “longing” emotive gaze of girls directed at toys reflected themes of motherhood and domesticity in contrast with the “swarming” of boys around toys that conveyed technological progress and martial virtues. Boys were expected to interact with the toy commodities in an active, bodily fashion. In contrast, girls were often engaged in the more passive activity of looking. Girls’ consumer desire for toys seems to have been understood as more orderly and deferential to parental and ostensibly male authority, possibly in keeping with prevailing notions of appropriate female behavior and womanly virtue. Boys’ desire, on the other hand, manifested in visible and physical ways, demanding, as it were, to be satiated in kind. The potential existed to read these distinctions as implying a disruptive and disorderly boy consumer in contrast to the more docile girl consumer. Consumption highlighted the patriarchal order

69 [T. Eaton Co.], (advertisement), Toronto Star, 7 Dec 1901, 20.
70 [The John Murphy Co.], advertisement, Montreal Gazette, 29 Nov 1913, 24.
of Canadian social life and attempted to duplicate it among children.

*The Domestic Life of Toys*

If advertisers offered a qualified ‘yes’ to the presence of children as toy consumers, the ability of young people to take up their invitation was under the purview of mothers throughout the Dominion. Women maintained a cautiously optimistic tone regarding the expanded presence and availability of toys. Historians studying other national contexts have identified shifts in child rearing and educational advice during the period as a pivotal factor in the rise of the toy commodity. In fact, women’s magazines and educational journals provide a wealth of information on the advice given to parents regarding the acquisition and use of toys.

According to Valerie Korinek, middle-class anglophone women in Canada did without a national publication until the arrival of the *Canadian Home Journal* in 1895. They relied on imported American and British publications like *Godey’s Lady Book*, *The Ladies Home Journal* and the *Delineator*. Their French-speaking counterparts had a series of short-lived intermittent publications. Magazines like the above provide insights into prevailing attitudes towards toys. However, it would be presumptuous to assume that the readers followed the advice any less critically than their descendants of the 1950s and 1960s.

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74 Ibid.
75 Ibid., 71-72.
Advice on the proper use of toys made its way into Canada beginning at mid-century. The *Journal of Education for Upper Canada* claimed it was a necessity for a young boy to have a set of blocks because “every mother should feel that the subject of toys, trifling as it may appear, is worthy of her serious consideration.”76 The issue of February 1863 provided educators with detailed instructions on how to make and use a magic lantern for educational purposes.77 Promoting toys for educational purposes during this period was framed in terms borrowed from Pestalozzi, Froebel and Spencer.78 Specifically, the articles claimed that object-lessons from toys were crucial to education and “should be extended to range of things far wider, and continued to a period far later, than now.”79 Increasingly, advice stressed the role of the “play impulse” in education and emphasized the importance of finding toys that pleased children as much as adults.80

The transition from a didactic understanding of toys to one that encouraged an appreciation for the pleasure derived from play was a slow and uneven process in advice literature. An 1861 article from *Godey’s Lady’s Book* titled “Children’s Playthings” celebrated the utility of simple toys for teaching real world lessons. The tendency of children to destroy toys could be an opportunity for mothers to teach the importance of “order and economy” to proper play.81 In an article from October of the same year toys

80 [Editorial Note], *The Canada Educational Monthly*, Apr 1899, 139-141; see also “Orders of Study in Primary Instruction,” *The Educational Record of the Province of Quebec*, Oct 1883, 255.
were suggested as a means to instill the value of “good taste,” preparing children to detect the difference between “the ill-arranged and vulgar [and the] graceful and becoming.”

The promotion of toys in these early years stressed their capacity for training far more than amusement. Contrasting the experience of working-class children with those of the middle and upper-class, *Godey’s Lady Book* claimed that:

…the children of the poor are as happy with a penny toy, with a bit of broken china, a rag baby or their mud pies as the offspring of the rich with their endless variety of playthings, selected with so much care from the most expensive shops. It is not until they become acquainted with the conventionalities of the world, and find they lack what is most important in the world's eye, that discontent creeps into the heart…

The capacity for amusement was considered innate to the child. The toy was not essential for stimulating this particular impulse. Pleasure was understood as incidental to play, so the focus was placed on the ability of the toy in question to train or educate. The failure of a mother to use toys to establish particular tastes and capacities would leave children ill-prepared for adulthood. Advice stressed the utility of toys for disseminating the values of middle-class domestic organization, professional aptitude and personal cleanliness. This emphasis sometimes placed manufactured and homemade toys in tension. By the 1870s *Godey’s Lady’s book* was promoting certain mass-produced amusements, as their glowing reviews of Milton Bradley board games indicate.

Nevertheless, they continued to offer their readers directions on the construction of appropriate toys from cardboard and other left-over materials in order to demonstrate the middle-class virtue of frugality.

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84 “[Milton Bradley has Sent us the Following Games],” *Godey’s Lady Book*, Jan 1873.
85 “How to Make a Few Impromptu Toys,” *Godey’s Lady Book*, Jan 1872; “Bed for a
Advice about toys gradually began to shift in the 1880s. The “Fun for the Fireside: A Help For Mothers” column, began emphasizing the pleasure derived from the use of playthings alongside their utility for training. In March 1880, the column claimed that “balloons, kites, and other toys that float in the air are generally very much admired by children and amusement can be found in the manufacture of a home-made parachute.” Each month the column would suggest a new way to use manufactured and homemade toys to further new play scenarios sure to “amuse” or “entertain” children.

The Ladies Home Journal, launched in 1884, picked up where Godey’s Lady’s Book left off. Mrs. F.A. Warner of Michigan in her column “Amusing the Baby” advised mothers to make a small rag doll for girls or a white fluffy bunny for boys in order to keep them amused when they are put in their crib to fall asleep. The magazine contained instructions on making balls, dolls or other toys for the purpose of entertaining children. According to the 1886 article “How We Amuse the Babies,” the purpose of all these playthings, whether store bought or homemade, was to “keep little meddling fingers out of mischief, and little minds and tongues employed so they will not wear mama out.”

The connection to training was not wholly abandoned. In November 1887 the magazine claimed that failure to provide these amusements would lead children to “take to dangerous or wicked pleasures when they are older.” After all, “the games of the

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88 Helen Ayre, “How We Amuse the Babies,” Ladies Home Journal, Jan 1886, 3.
nursery are as much a part of the child’s education as are the daily tasks he learns in the school room.”90 Like advertising scripts, many of these embraced gender distinctions in toys. According to Elisabeth Scovil, bells, mechanical toys and military miniatures were best for boys. Girls would be well provisioned with dolls houses and dolls to develop “the mother instinct”.91

The emergence of entertainment and pleasure as a major factor in toy selection and consumption shows clear connections with changing expectations of family life and motherhood. Faced with an increased workload inside and outside the home, women may have placed more emphasis on toys as parenting aids rather than as educational tools. This shift meant that pleasure became a significant principle for measuring the value of the toy rather than the educational opportunities it provided. This dovetailed advertisers’ emphasis on the pleasure children derived from toy shopping. In an expanding consumer society where new commodities arrived on a regular basis, it was essential to help children establish a strong relationship to material objects.

This literature further demonstrates a subtle but growing ambivalence and even hostility towards manufactured toys. Magazines claimed that the publication of instructions for homemade toys was primarily of benefit to those that “have an abundance of spare time and less money.”92 Some authors used the opportunity to contrast homemade and manufactured toys in order to highlight the inferiority of the later. According to *Ladies Home Journal* writer Mrs. F.A. Warner, homemade toys “will please

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them [children] quite as well as boughten toys, and certainly last much longer.”

For one mother, “the very word ‘toy’ implies something that is intended to amuse…[though] very many of the most elaborate and costly toys do this for a short time…” Frederica Kunze was more adamant:

Why is it that children care so little for expensive toys? One reason may be, that they are so frail as well as elegant, that the child has to be constantly cautioned not to injure them, and the restraint thus put on him destroys all pleasure in the toy. But I think by far the greater reason is that the toys of today…are so elaborate and complete that they leave nothing for the child to imagine. The trouble with children now-a-days is, that they have too many toys.

Along with reading imported magazines, parents could find similar articles printed in popular Canadian publications. Religious and family publications from the nineteenth century in Canada were essential to disseminating ideas about the use of toys for child rearing. Magazines like the Northern Messenger stressed the importance of toys and children’s play, encouraging parents to provide children with playthings, a space in which to play and designated time for these activities. In an 1899 issue the Messenger even advocated for the direct consumption of toys by children, stressing the need to provide children with an allowance with which to purchase toys. Dew Drops, Sunbeam and on occasion the New Dominion Monthly would publish articles or fictional stories that conveyed similar advice.

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93 Ibid.
Women's sections in Canadian daily newspapers likewise viewed toys as necessary to a proper nursery. In “Nurseries Good and Bad,” mothers were reminded that a good nursery “is usually a sunny room filled with everything pleasant for children [and] equipped with toys.” But as Toronto World columnist Elinor Murray reminded readers on several occasions, “toys need not be expensive to be good…simple, home-made articles should be used whenever possible.” Murray also stated that manufactured toys like marbles and building blocks “are a must” for their educational results and their ability to “form the connecting link between his little world and the big world of reality.” Similarly, the Montreal Gazette discerned in boys’ play with construction toys something “more than a pass-time [that] rises to the dignity of a course of education.”

According to Murray, the direct participation of children in toy consumption was perfectly acceptable: “Some long day before Christmas rush you will surely take the kiddies through the wonderland of the toyshops and I hope you will note the effect of the different toys.” Murray reminded mothers that children were better than adults at discerning their needs and wants when it came to playthings:

…instinctively the hands go out towards the first choice but hardly have they touched the wonderful toy when the dancing eyes catch sight of something else quite different but equally entrancing…soon he makes his choice; and if you wander away to other counters, how impatiently he begs to go back to see once more the toys of his choice…some need prompts the desire to possess it and you might understand the boy better if you sought to analyze the expressed wish concerning it.

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“Good Morning,” The Sunbeam, 18 Sep 1880, 1.
102 "Child's Education by Play," Montreal Gazette, 17 Oct 1903, 10
104 Ibid.
Pleasure was an increasingly important consideration, thought to enhance the educational potential of certain playthings.

Advice literature also offered suggestions for supervising play, including toy rationing. Whether mass-produced or homemade, too many toys were thought to lead to "overstimulation" and other behavioural problems. Henrietta Gruel counseled mothers to put away all but three toys from the "deluge" at Christmas: "Children cannot have too many toys, if they are well chosen, but they must be taught to play with them if they are to serve a good purpose, aside from merely keeping little ones quiet." 105 The author of "The Ennui of Childhood" cautioned mothers that children with too many toys "become selfish, egotistical, imperative and offensive…” 106 Elinor Murray encouraged her readers to manage children’s access to toys: "It [is] a good plan to put away the new toys…leave the favorite out…and as soon as it becomes worrisome replace it with a new one…[and] you will find that toys last longer and give far more pleasure than if all were played with or kept in sight all the time." 107 Murray considered this the best course of action because

...one of the most powerful causes of restlessness and nervousness in children is the abundance of toys and amusements showered on them by parents, relatives and friends...it is a case of over-feeding causing under-nourishing...it is not the kind of parenting that will make happy contented, unspoiled, self-controlled Canadian children. 108

Francophone women received similar advice from a number of short-lived Quebecois periodicals. Le Réveil, Le Coin du Feu, Album de la Minerve, La Journale de Française and Mère et Enfant provided advice to mothers about a myriad of topics.

including toys. According to the author of “Les Joujoux,” “the moment that we put a long-desired toy in the possession of a child they become entirely and ideally happy.” 109

*Le Coin de Feu* provided mothers with advice on the proper use of toys and on making toys with a distinctive Catholic theme. 110 In *La Journale de Francoise*, mothers were given advice on the construction of a toy pig from a lemon, dolls from rags, a floating frog from an old egg shell, and an explanation of the joys of playing with lead soldiers. 111

In “Conseiles de Mère Grognon,” in all likelihood written by a man for mothers, we find some of the same concerns about overstimulation evident in Anglophone publications: “Avoid providing…children with new or continuous amusement…[for it will make them] demanding, tyrannical and insatiable.” 112 It concluded by cautioning mothers that “negligence in this area…is criminal.” It is clear that toys were regarded in a similar manner in francophone publications.

In short, the consumption of toys in middle-class households was a source of interest and concern among advice writers. Toys were celebrated as educational tools and parenting aids, but also derided for their potential to overstimulate and disrupt children’s orderly development. Taken together, the approach advocated in advice literature after 1880 could best be called *managed consumption*. It permitted the consuming children to play with toys on the basis of pleasure, but it also stressed the need for well trained and properly informed mothers to balance the desire of children with more didactic educational objectives. It was not consumption *on behalf of children* or *by children*, but

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112 “Conseille de Mere Grognon,” *Le Coin de Feu*, 3 March 1894, 73.
rather consumption with children. It placed clear boundaries on the purchase and use of appropriate toys under appropriate circumstances. By the beginning of the twentieth century women’s advice literature was concerned with solving a tension between the increased legitimation of children’s consumer desire, especially for toys, and the need to provide proper toys at the appropriate time in order to achieve child-rearing goals. Toy consumption was a matter between mothers and children specifically.

This balancing act ultimately led to the proliferation of concerns about the value and place of manufactured toys in middle and upper-class children’s lives. The issue of economic limitations and the possible negative effects of over-indulging children’s consumer desire loomed over the heads of mothers. Toys became less about ensuring class position through the duplication of skill and taste and more about entertaining children in order to allow women to engage in the necessary labour for homemaking. Having more expensive manufactured toys needed to be justified along lines like those pursued by advertisers about the enjoyment children experienced from shopping for toys and the potential of playthings to help train young boys and girls. In contrast, women’s advice literature was moderately critical about the possibility of such toys to entertain once brought inside the confines of the bourgeois nursery.

Unfortunately, the above tells us little about how parents responded to advice. Photographs offer a useful if somewhat limited means of gauging their responses. Specifically, the toy provided new opportunities to put a proper childhood on display by painting and later photographing children with toys.113 This became a mark of adult affection for their children and provided an account of the proper material surroundings.

113 Calvert, Children in the House, 110-115.
of childhood.

Toys were mentioned infrequently in children’s or parent’s diaries from the late eighteenth century and first three-quarters of the nineteenth century. In contrast, paintings frequently depicted children in possession of toys.\textsuperscript{114} The presence of toys helped to identify the subject as a child and to communicate intimate aspects about them, including their favourite plaything. These images were the products of skilled artists and were often only generated by the wealthiest of families.

By the 1860s photography had emerged as a new method for memorializing children. The Notman collection at the McCord museum in Montreal features a number of photographs of children with toys dating from as early as 1863. Most of these professional photos mimic the paintings that preceded them insofar as they are formal, posed, and often show the child in “buttoned-up costumes [with] rigid expressions.”\textsuperscript{115} The professional studio portrait was the extent of most child and adult experience with photography before the last decade of the century.\textsuperscript{116}

Figure 2.4 – Studio Photographs of Children

Source From Left to Right: Missie Harriet Frothingham and Drum, Montreal QC 1867. William Notman, Miss E. Dorothy Benson, N-1986.5.2.19; Master Robert Reford, Montreal, QC, 1870. William Notman I-49593.1; Master H. Grier with Toy Horses

\textsuperscript{114} Noel, \textit{Family Life and Sociability}, 151-154.

\textsuperscript{115} Nancy West, \textit{Kodak and the Lens of Nostalgia}, (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 2000), 76.

\textsuperscript{116} \textit{Ibid.}
Subjects were photographed with only one or two playthings, perhaps indicating a favourite toy and suggesting a belief in rationing toys. Interestingly, the toys seem to be exclusively of the manufactured rather than homemade variety, highlighting the social value attached to being able to afford such playthings. It also highlighted the growing status of the middle and upper-class home as a space of leisure than work where children were increasingly valued for their sentimental uselessness, rather than their productive labour.\(^{117}\)

Photography seemed to reflect rather than merely represent reality, bestowing upon photographic images the authority to retrain the human eye.\(^{118}\) Beginning in the 1890s a new way of photographing children began to emerge which blended older elements of portraiture with the emerging documentary style preferred by social reformers.\(^{119}\) The photos strived for a sense of realism. They attempted to capture the child in the midst of play, as if they had stopped for only a second for the camera, engaging with their toys in a “reality” that was as much induced as captured.


This new aesthetic of the child in action was a product of a revolution in photography resulting, in part, from the introduction of the film-based amateur camera by Kodak.\textsuperscript{120} Following Kodak’s introduction of the Brownie in 1900 – an inexpensive and durable camera - many middle-class families could duplicate this aesthetic without large cumbersome equipment, professional expertise or a proper studio. Baby books and family albums emerged as a major form of record keeping that put on display the child at play. Children were photographed with toys or sometimes posed around them. “Baby’s First Christmas” was often the page in the baby book where the child’s material possessions, especially their toys, were catalogued. The baby books of Edra Sander and Fredrick Lambart contain a pictorial of the first Christmas. They also include lists of the toys they received in subsequent years, photos of tea parties and hobby horse play and other representations of blissful children at play.\textsuperscript{121} They reveal a definite increase in the number and prominence of toys in children’s lives. The photographs of children at play show that even in the midst of plenty, children used only one or two playthings at a time.

\textsuperscript{120} Nancy West, \textit{Kodak and the Lens of Nostalgia}, 1-2
\textsuperscript{121} See Lambart Family Fonds. MG30-C243 Vol. 7 Library and Archives Canada & E.S. Fergusson Collection, MG30-C217 Vol. 7, Library and Archives Canada.
along gendered lines. Boys built block towers while girls pushed dolls around in carriages. When the photographs of play are contrasted with the toy lists in baby books, it suggests that managed access to toys may have been a common practice, or at the very least was represented by parents as such. Furthermore, the embrace of a more documentary style of photography stressed children engagement with their toys, in accordance with the increased emphasis on the pleasure children derived from their playthings.

Kodak allowed parents to put on display their successful adoption of modern child-rearing practices, including the prominent place of toys. These childhood records were conscientiously kept and shared amongst friends and family, thereby helping to reinforce certain norms about children and the need for toys in their daily life. They clearly reflect the enthusiasm about toys, mass-produced and home-made, that punctuated family life by the dawn of the twentieth century.

*Children and Toys Outside the Home*

In contrast to the managed consumption advocated by advice literature, some conservative social critics saw a tremendous moral dilemma in the provisioning of children with manufactured toys. The presence of children in stores raised questions about their receptiveness to adult authority. By the turn of the century, the rise of the toy commodity and shifts in consumer preference, encouraged and indulged by advertisers, became a matter worthy of concern.

According to the *Montreal Gazette’s* article “The Toy Militant,” the rise of violent playthings in response to the Afrikaan War generated a “burning military ardour” among
young boys. The intense desire resulted in the “proverbially sacred realm [of] the nursery [being] penetrated.” For houses without a nursery to contain the war-like sentiment “so much the worse”.\textsuperscript{122} The author equated changes to the male child’s participation in the market with the subversion of parental authority by advertisers: “By what occult means the purveyor of toys anticipated the spirit of war and the demand for war-like toys[?]”\textsuperscript{123} A year later the paper celebrated the decline of “Khaki fever” seeing in it “a good omen that the future [male] citizens of Canada [will] find pleasure in boxes of tools, and other things with which they can work and employ themselves in producing.”\textsuperscript{124} The danger was in the encouragement of a pleasure-based relationship to toys not the violent themes they evoked. For critics, the principle threat to proper socialization stemmed from the intensity of desire and the effect of advertising on consumer demand. The similar language used to describe the “violent fancy” for “silly toys” like the teddy bear further reinforces this interpretation.\textsuperscript{125}

The presence of children in retail stores during the holidays was considered a major disruption to parental authority and class hierarchies. The children “thronging into the streets” resulted in the “little aristocrat…rubbing shoulders with the ragamuffin.” The writer goes on to declare that the browsing of the Christmas season and all its disruption and disorder has encouraged them to “either leave town or isolate myself from society until the toy and doll season is over.”\textsuperscript{126}

In some cases, the concern about children’s consumption reached a near panicked

\textsuperscript{123} \textit{Ibid}.
\textsuperscript{124} “The Khaki Day Done,” \textit{Montreal Gazette}, 26 Dec 1900, 19.
\textsuperscript{125} “Toy Market Change,” \textit{Montreal Gazette}, 21 November 1910, 10
\textsuperscript{126} “Topics for the Tea Table,” \textit{Toronto Star}, 29 Nov 1899, 6.
tone. The author of “The Vanishing Child” lamented the “disappearance of the old-fashioned child. In the place of a natural being…we have little [boy] manikins who are worldly wise in the cradle, base before they get into trousers, and pessimists before they even sprout a moustache.”\textsuperscript{127} The effect of mass-produced toys on children’s behavior was of particular concern:

“Small girls used to be contented for indefinite periods with the doll families of which…[a] beautiful rag baby was often favorite…one notices everywhere that more elaborate playthings are in vogue. Children no longer invent games for themselves and, therefore, are not contented with simple toys…”\textsuperscript{128}

The ability of advertisers to awaken in children a seemingly unnatural and precocious demand for manufactured toys became a major source of concern. Improper socialization was thought to result from exposure to the modern toy, robbing children of their authenticity and innocence. Conversely, old-fashioned amusements ensured proper socialization into the authentic child.

In “Hoodoo McFiggin’s Christmas,” conservative academic and humourist Stephen Leacock declared that “this Santa Claus Business is played out.”\textsuperscript{129} A long-standing veblian critic of consumption, Leacock ironically and humorously inverted consumer roles between parents and children to demonstrate the problematic relationship engendered by Canadian consumer society. Hoodoo, “a good boy—a religious boy,” bought his father cigars and his mother a diamond broach with his saved allowance. However, his prayers for “an air-gun, and a bicycle and a Noah’s ark” ultimately went unanswered. Instead, Hoodoo received a pair of boots, celluloid collars, a toothbrush and

\textsuperscript{128} \textit{Ibid.}
a pair of pants. Leacock recounts Hoodoo’s good natured and absurd joy at unwrapping each unexpected present. When Hoodoo finds his parents, wearing the broach and smoking cigars “a light seemed to have broken in upon his mind…that next Christmas he will hang onto his own money and take chances on what the angels bring [for his parents].”

Leacock’s inversion of usual familial relations serves to underscore the negative effects of consumption on children and adults alike and its disruptive effect on order in the patriarchal family. The commodified Christmas Leacock describes generates only disappointment and selfishness among family members. Similarly, the opening of Leacock’s *Arcadian Adventures with the Idle Rich*, depicts Canada’s wealthy elite as well-provisioned babies ordering around their weary adult servants. For conservative critics, adult consumption was trivial and infantilizing, but in a strange contradiction, the consumption of children created a precocious and worldly semi-adulthood.

Feminist critics, on the other hand, focused on how toys were used. Girls’ play with dolls was identified as a major influence on young women that encouraged them to accept patriarchal subjugation. Thomas Webster argued in *Woman Man’s Equal*, that “from the hour of woman’s birth to her death, there is a continuous system of belittling

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130 Ibid., 285-286.
131 Ibid., 286.
133 On the image of the female consumer as overly desirous and infantilized by the market see Donica Belisle, *Retail Nation: Department Stores and the Making of Modern Canada*, (University of British Columbia Press, 2011), 100 & 126. On the anti-feminist claim that women’s exposure to the changing economic world outside the home would be corrupting see Veronica Strong-Boag, “Independent Women, Problematic Men: First and Second-Wave Anti-Feminism in Canada from Goldwyn Smith to Betty Steele,” *Histoire Sociale/Social History* 29, no. 57, (1996): 10-11
her.” The beginning of this patriarchal order could be traced to childhood:

Emma and John, as children, play together…Their toys are suited to their sex – Emma’s a doll, John’s a toy carriage and ponies. For a time all goes on harmoniously; they use each other’s toys indiscriminately; for as yet their minds have not been contaminated by outside influences.”

According to Webster, once a contest over the toy erupts, girls will be chastised for asserting their interests. Yet, when boys take up a girl’s toy they receive a gentle reminder that “Little boys should never stoop to play with girl’s toys.” For Webster, play with toys was central to teaching that “girl’s must be yielding, submissive, and dependent…[while] boys may be overbearing, or rough.” Similarly, in Glimpses of Fifty Years: The Autobiography of an American Woman, Frances E. Willard was emphatic: “Let me be clear, here and now…I believe that boys and girls should be trained very much alike and have the same toys…perhaps the fact that a doll is so early placed in the girl’s arms may help to account for her dulled curiosity, her greater passivity, her inferior enterprise, bravery and courage.” Where “one is degraded…[and] the other is elevated” lay the foundation of patriarchy.

Canadian feminists were much less explicit in exploring the same connections. Of the published sources surveyed, only Nellie McClung’s Times Like These brings up the connection in veiled terms: “A little girl’s first toy is a doll, and so, too, her first great sorrow is when her doll has its eyes poked out by her little brother. Doll’s have suffered

Thomas Webster, Woman Man's Equal, (Cincinnati: Hitchcock and Walden, 1873), 153.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid., 154.


Thomas Webster, Woman Man's Equal, (Cincinnati: Hitchcock and Walden, 1873), 154.
many things at the hands of their maternal uncles.”

Feminists critics, in contrast to their conservative foils, tended to focus on the passivity and inferiority created by girls’ play with dolls. The issue was not with doll play per se, but with its denigration as a feminine and inferior activity leading to the subjugation of women. Inequality in play was identified as one of the foundations of patriarchy and gender inequality. This led feminists to advocate for gender-neutral play for boys and girls.

Critics were also concerned about the impact of toys on the bodies and health of Canadian children. Some of these dangers were universal to both genders. The Montreal Gazette advised its readers that accidental blindness was avoidable “if greater care by parents was exercised in not permitting children to play with pointed instruments, knives, scissors, button hooks, toy firearms and matches.” According to the Sanitary Journal and the Journal of Education for Upper Canada, yellow and green paint used on toys, made of chromate of lead and arsenate of copper respectively, could poison children. Balloons could also be a choking hazard. A report from the Globe in 1898 described the death of an infant in Scotland from nicotine poisoning when he was given a pipe as a plaything. In the midst of a diphtheria outbreak in Toronto, health officials specifically warned parents not to allow their children to share toys in order to avoid the spread of the disease.

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140 Nellie McClung, *Times Like These*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), 22-23.
143 “A Convent Student's Sad End,” *Quebec Daily Telegraph*, 21 Mar 1887, 3.
144 “[Pipe given as plaything],” *Globe*, 16 Jul 1898, 6.
145 “[Contagious Disease],” *Globe*, 30 May 1882, 4.
However, the matter of toy guns, projectile or incendiary toys implicated boys far more than girls. The misuse of toy pistols was considered a health threat. According to the *Montreal Witness*, “the toy pistol promises to rival the most fatal diseases to youthful lives in the number of its victims…from lockjaw.” The article went on to advocated for parental restraint over their purchase as well as for a law banning their manufacture and sale. A similar article a year later gave a gruesomely detailed description of the painful death caused by lockjaw, concluding that “the toy pistol deserves the sternest condemnation.”

According to the *Quebec Saturday Budget*, an infant accidentally “blew half the head of another child off” when a toy cap was put inside an old musket. The *Montreal Tribune* advised parents against giving toy guns to children because they were “a source of worry and annoyance.” The *Globe* observed with great interest as American cities like Boston and Baltimore banned the sale of toy pistols. The allure of toy guns for boys was considered ingrained. Lighting firecrackers to “frighten younger children and women” was considered a nuisance but many still excused the behaviour, passively lamenting that “boy’s will be boys.” The *Victoria Times Colonist* similarly complained about the “catapult nuisance” resulting from the provisioning of young boys with slingshots.

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149 “News of the Week,” *Quebec Saturday Budget*, 11 Jun 1881, 1.
The age-appropriateness of toy guns and projectiles and the lack of parental oversight by mothers during play were framed as the major cause of injury and death. Furthermore, adults also had difficulty distinguishing between a toy pistol and the real thing. Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, several reports demonstrated the propensity of adults to use toy weapons to disrupt meetings, steal from others or threaten neighbours. Toy pistols were often mistaken for real weapons.\(^{154}\) Once it was established that an assailant was using a toy, charges were reduced or dropped.\(^{155}\) Incidents like these demonstrated for adult readers that toy guns were too close to the real thing. Toy pistols blurred the boundaries between adult and child by violating the prevailing logic of the toy commodity. The danger lay in the tendency to misuse toy guns, not the toy itself.

In response to the potential danger of giving toys like the above to young boys, critics stressed the need for parental and, in some cases, municipal action to prevent their acquisition. Some critics highlighted the actions and experience of their user, rather than the effect they may have on the moral fiber or attitudes of the child. Couched in the medical language of bodily risk, the concern about boys play with these items rendered them dangerous but not corrupting.

Social and medical concerns about toys constituted distinctive discourses, despite their shared tendency to police the boundaries around boyhood, girlhood and childhood. The former were concerned with the structure of family life and the morality of the child. The later was preoccupied with their bodily health and the age-appropriateness of their

\(^{154}\) "Perrault Pistol Incident," *Montreal Gazette*, 7 Apr 1906, 11; "Wound will not be fatal," *Montreal Gazette*, 11 Jan 1904, 3;

material surroundings. In an era where the ideal of the sacrilized family remained as strongly connected with a moral economy as their consumer desire was with the ascendant market economy; among experts for whom psychology was still a somewhat suspect, mystical and emerging discipline, the pathologization of specific types of toys made little sense.

Middle and upper-class Canadians, as well as some members of the working-class, saw toys as central to the modern world of childhood in the later nineteenth and early twentieth century. They accepted the invitation of advertisers to allow their children to participate in the consumer society as co-consuming subjects. The dream of childhood could be sweet, but there were still a number of tensions that swirled in the imaginations of Victorian consumers. The world of toys was a divided one, relying on clear gender distinctions between boys’ and girls’ playthings and the character of their respective consumer desire. This ultimately allowed children and their toys to function as sites for the elaboration of controversies around gender and consumer desire among the middle and upper-classes. Conservative critics and feminists saw certain toys as a threat to the sanctity of the patriarchal family or the liberation of women, respectively. The issue of over-consumption and over-stimulation provided a justification for the continued supervision of children’s play and consumption despite advice writer’s overall acceptance of toys in the bourgeois home. Toys emerged by 1914 as important childhood commodities that required serious consideration on the part of adults and children alike. If middle and upper-class Canadians invited their children into the consumer market with a degree of apprehension and concern, the question remains as to how those on the
margins of the world of toys engaged with this emergent commodity. In turning to this issue in the next chapter, a more complex and problematic relationship to manufactured toys and their consumption emerges.
CHAPTER THREE

Toy Famine: Marginal Children, the Great War and the Rise of Canadian Toy Manufacturing

For Toronto’s Fanny Yarmolinsky Christmas meant new toys. Writing to Santa Claus in 1912, Fanny asked for a doll, a carriage and a piano. These toys were warranted because, in her words, “I’m getting on in school very well and I eat my porridge every morning.”¹ Her desire for toys, like the desire of other middle-class children, was supposedly justified by the respect and deference she had shown through her upright behaviour. For Fanny, the acquisition of toys involved little in the way of financial calculus. The prevailing assumption that children must be kept separate from the economic world beyond the walls of the bourgeois home was clearly not lost on her. Fanny was not every early twentieth century child. A decade before Fanny put pen to paper, an anonymous mother also living in Toronto wrote to “Madam Gossip,” offering a window into a different more materially limited world of toys:

No doubt you know of a great many people whose children have toys that they do not care to play with any longer. My children (I have two boys and a girl) ask me constantly for toys. I will not buy them cheap toys and I cannot afford to purchase the kind I should like my darlings to amuse themselves with.²

Her wish list included “…a doll…[with] two or three sets of clothes…” for her daughter and “…a woolly lamb, a furry dog, a toy sword, gun and drum apiece…” for her two boys.³ For this unidentified mother, likely of lower-middle or working-class means, “proper” manufactured toys were out of reach, despite importuning on the part of her children.

¹ “For Santa [Letter to Santa by Fanny Yarmolinsky],” Toronto World, 21 Dec 1912, 1.
² “Topics for the Tea Table,” Toronto Star, 14 Nov 1899, 6.
³ Ibid.
These two letters illuminate the class tensions that punctuated Canadian toy consumption during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. They demonstrate the overwhelming success of toys in capturing the imaginations of a broad spectrum of parents and children in Canada. They also raise a number of pertinent questions. How can we account for the gulf between consumer desire and material reality, and the tensions it encoded and propagated? What impact did these tensions have on the place of toys in the lives of young Canadians and their families?

For marginal children – those left outside the ideal of middle-class childhood because of racial or class status – manufactured toys purchased in stores were difficult to come by. As our second letter suggests, there was a relatively large circulation of these toys through philanthropy. Marginal children offered an altogether different challenge to those attempting to reform childhood than did their middle-class counterparts. They seemed to have too few toys, and those they did possess were often the “wrong kind.”

As the child saving movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century gathered steam, the matter of how working-class and non-white (especially Aboriginal) children were raised became of central importance. Concerns were focused on ensuring that children of more limited means had access to toys and other tools for amusement and development. Philanthropy and colonialism became major avenues through which the commoditized toy was extended to those unable or uninterested in purchasing manufactured toys. Playthings became more than commodities: they were recast as tools in the refashioning of working-class and non-white children’s lives.

This chapter builds upon the last by covering sites formally integrated with the
market – catalogues and business publications – and some far more peripheral to capitalist accumulation, including orphanages, residential schools and church missions. The ability of toys to transcend the narrow world of advertisements and marketing and to travel by way of other socio-political processes helped to make them into an indispensable part of Canadian conceptualizations of childhood. Their emergent status as ideal gifts, elaborated in chapter one, was central to this process. The circulation of toys through non-market mechanisms generated friction when Canadian toy manufacturing finally took off during the First World War. Business, government and women’s organizations hotly debated the meaning and socio-economic place of manufactured toys in Canadian consumer lives, helping to extend middle-class norms among the families of marginal children.

*Philanthropy, Need and Working-class Children*

The moral economy of philanthropy and child saving encouraged middle and upper-class Canadians, already serious consumers of toys, to extend access to playthings beyond the stratosphere of Canadian society. The movement to save children was part of more general efforts at social reform undertaken during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. According to Mariana Valverde, the social emerged as a realm in which a myriad of ills – crime, poverty, sexual deviancy and so forth – could be identified as problems that could be dealt with and solved. Philanthropy was understood by reformers as an improvement on the “indiscriminate alms giving” of charity. It was focused on “retraining the poor in habits of thrift, punctuality and hygiene” through
various technologies of liberal governmentality. Social reform included a specific focus on saving poor, delinquent and marginalized children in order to transform them into obedient and industrious adults. This was supposed to be achieved through what sociologist Xiaobei Chen calls the “gardening governmentality” focused on nurturing children through techniques akin to those used in cultivating plants. These disciplinary projects were focused on overcoming the presumed, and sometimes all too real, violence and neglect marginal children experienced. As the work of Chen and Valverde indicate, child saving was focused on areas that had been furiously experimented with in the bourgeois home. It was a public and political manifestation of attempts to “domesticate” the intimate lives of marginal families.

According to J.J. Kelso, one of the key child savers of the nineteenth century, the movement tried to avoid removing children from their homes. Instead it focused on “remov[ing] the thorns in their path” and “raising maternal instincts.” This included using the material surroundings of working-class homes to “break up bad habits by keeping the children so busy with interesting things to do…”. Those charged with raising children were encouraged to provide “wholesome reading, recreation and

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6 Ibid., 1; Andre Trumel has argued that the absence of attention to these efforts in Quebec historiography stems from the fact that “the history of children (and child protection) did not take the form of such a movement; child protection was organized and monitored differently.” This may be true at an institutional level, but projects and activities undertaken by reformers in English and French Canada show clear similarities. See Andre Trumel, “Historiography of Children in Canada,” in Nancy Janovicek & Joy Parr (eds.) *Histories of Canadian Children and Youth*, (Oxford UP, 2003), 11.
7 J.J. Kelso, *Thoughts on Child Saving*, (Warwick and Rutter, 1898?), 5.
amusement…[that left] no idle time, or inclination for brooding over foul thoughts.”

Kelso and others accepted the “necessity for play,” supervised by adults to ensure that those of good character would not be brought into “close and intimate association with other children of corrupt mind and evil language and habits.”

Middle and upper-class adults like Kelso were increasingly invested in organizing and regulating the parenting practices and play of working-class families to make them conform with their own performances of middle-class respectability. Consequently, working-class children’s desire for toys was problematic in a very different way than the demands of middle and upper-class children. It was not a matter of too many unnecessary toys, but of too few toys of any kind. If left unsatisfied, desire for toys had the potential to produce crime and social disorder by forcing children to acquire playthings through illegal means. The Duchess of Marlborough, in a speech reported in several Canadian papers, was emphatic about the connection between unsatisfied demand for toys and juvenile delinquency:

The children of the rich are now perhaps overdone with toys - overdone with games. But the children of the poor have yet to enter into their heritage of play. This is our work - to create an attractive alternative for the life of the streets…[street] children…do not know how to play. They will not become interested in any game that they cannot gamble in.

The need to extend to toys and other bourgeois material surroundings of childhood to working-class families was seen as an important practice for establishing the class position of philanthropists and safeguarding the established social order in Canada.

9 J.J. Kelso, “Play Grounds and the Play Spirit,” (Empire Club, 1908); J.J. Kelso. “Crowding Children Together,” in [Child Welfare Pamphlets and Leaflets], (s.n.: s.i., n.d.).
10 "Women's Duties," Montreal Gazette, 4 Apr 1908,11.
These claims were reinforced in the minds of child savers by stories of shoplifting. An 1868 report from the *Montreal Witness* described the capture of a “gang” of young thieves, age ten to seventeen, caught stealing from the “better class of homes.” \(^{11}\) They were arrested after Mr. Martineau, a toy retailer, reported the thefts to police. \(^{12}\) The loot taken by the children included toys and dolls. \(^{13}\) A similar story from New York, reprinted in the *Montreal Gazette*, explained the “unusual” case of shoplifting in one of the larger department stores involving girls age eight to thirteen. \(^{14}\) Police claimed they were caught with $40 worth of goods, including three teddy bears, seven dolls, a doll’s dress and other “assorted fancy goods.” \(^{15}\)

When “real life” stories were unavailable, middle-class reformers simply made up some of their own. In these consumer fables, as I am calling them collectively, working-class children were represented as overly knowledgeable about economic limitations. They were forced to balance their consumer desire with their need to provide for the family as fully autonomous consumers. Their presence in retail stores, almost always without adult accompaniment, formed the basis for a moral tension around their desire to consume for themselves and the requirement that they spend what little money they had on others. The child always makes the selfless choice and is rewarded by a benevolent middle or upper-class adult.

One German story that appeared in various publications all over the Atlantic

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\(^{12}\) Ibid.
\(^{13}\) Ibid.
\(^{15}\) Ibid.
world at the end of the 1870s was “Lotte’s Christmas.” It opens with an image of “a lovely toy-shop”. According to the author, this shop was “a perfect fairy-vision to the little girl who stood looking through the plate-glass windows upon the numberless, beautiful things so temptingly displayed…”. There is a profound uneasiness, a tempting aspect to this image that suggests the possibility of moral peril for our would-be consumer. The reader learns of Lotte’s economic dilemma: she has little in the way of money. Lotte is a very astute and discerning consumer who wonders if perhaps a less posh toy store might offer her a better bang for her buck. As Lotte watches an adult customer leave with many toys, she imagines that she may have enough money for five items. Disappointment strikes, as things are “much dearer than she imagined.” A wealthy lady lingers and interrogates Lotte after she purchases toys that seem peculiar for her age and gender. Lotte is buying for the children of an impoverished widow with her own money. After discovering that Lotte did not have a mother, that her father was underemployed in seasonal work and that Lotte had earned the money she was spending, the wealthy lady decides to visit Lotte on Christmas Eve with a vast array of presents, including many toys.

The Canadian setting of “What a Dollar Did” provided a similar moral injunction. A soiled dollar bill, first given to a “strangely mature” young girl, is virtuously used to purchase medicine for her mother rather than the attractive toys she truly desired from a Young Street toyshop. As the bill circulates through the families of one tenement

apartment, as each working-class child forgoes temptation to spend the bill judiciously, it eventually ends up in the hands of the well-to-do landlord. The wealthy hero of the story rewards the sensible acts of his tenants through the distribution of a Christmas basket including toys to all the families in the building.21

In these stories, the working-class child consumer was represented as a particular kind of socio-economic problem. The peril of market exposure is present, but is ultimately muted by the lack of financial means. The issue is one of unsatisfied demand rather than untempered desire. Middle and upper-class adults were called on to legitimize and satisfy the want of working-class children. These tales were designed to reinforce the moral and economic superiority of the middle and upper-class while demonstrating how the deserving poor, of which children formed a part, might be reformed, educated and rewarded. Their status was contingent on the ability to display appropriate restraint in the face of temptation. Yet, children were also distinct from hard working adults in this category. They were depicted as easier to save and as more capable of virtuous conduct. Their youth was thought to have spared them from overexposure to worldly corruption. In a strange and fantastical inversion of the power relations of Canadian society, working-class children offered the possibility of redeeming their parents and the problematic desire of middle and upper-class members of their cohort.

Stories, real and imagined about children, were not the only way these connections were established. By the 1880s a number of journalists were concerned about the unequal access to Christmas toys in Canada. According to the Toronto Daily Mail, the working-class would learn soon enough “how some children receive costly presents while

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others just as good are passed by with dolls and toys not half so nice.”

Quebec feminist columnist Robertine Barry, known by her pen name Françoise, highlighted the stark contrast in consumer lives: “How many children will receive no visit nor toys from Santa Claus or Baby Jesus. If you saw everyday what I see, the numerous children, noses pressed to the glass, examining avidly these marvels cruelly assembled before them, you would not smile [at the toy displays].” Sometimes concerns extended to rural Canadians for whom urban commentators assumed “there were no toy stores,” and no access to toys. The writer of “The Christmas Shop” claimed that Canadians, as inheritors of the British Christmas, had an obligation to provide material comforts to those less fortunate:

The other evening the writer stood beside a woman, poorly clad, who led a little child by the hand…looking at the Christmas toys and gauds. The little boy said nothing. He only glued his small nose against the pane. His mother looked white and worn, and very tired…and was looking in on the lighted pageant inside the window with sad eyes indeed. Now what good could a quarter of a dollar bring to her and her little man?

Paul Miliane implored the readers of L’Ami de la Lecture to think of “the children of the poor…who have no toys.” The Montreal Gazette captured the dichotomy most succinctly:

While one half of the good city is breathless with the excitement of the season, the other half toil on, having no time, to say nothing of means, to participate in the festivities. While many a comedy is being performed in some toy shop…many a tragedy is being enacted in some dimly-lighted side street…while for some there will never be a Christmas, thanks be to charity that number is kept as small as possible.

Working-class children offered some of the more compelling examples for middle

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23 Ibid.
and upper-class reformers. Poor children in hospitals and orphanages were considered especially worthy subjects for the charitable provision of toys.

Appeals to the wider community for donations to provide needy children with toys were frequent and effective. In 1879 The Canadian Independent asked its “young readers” for donations of toys for children at the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto. An 1894 report from the Globe encouraged readers to donate toys to the “homeless and hopeless…[children] of disease dirt and hunger” in need of the Children’s Shelter’s services. The Montreal Day Nursery, a day care for working-class mothers, faced a “serious problem” in 1913. They required dolls and toys for the 107 children under their care. The Catholic Church Extension Society of Canada distributed toys to the poor. In 1912 the Toronto Star printed a quarter page appeal for donation to the Santa Claus Fund. Its main mission was “to meet the Christmas expectations of more than 5000 friendless children of poverty.” Toys were central to meeting their needs: “Food and clothing do not minister to the natural childish desire to play. Indeed, when the body has been nourished and clothed, there arises within it more strongly than ever the craving for amusement. It is just this need which the Santa Claus Fund seeks to meet.”

Elinor Murray solicited donations on behalf of children in Toronto hospitals through her weekly column.

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29 “Cry of the Children,” Toronto Globe, 12 Sep 1894, 4.
34 Ibid.
The absence of toys provided a material means for philanthropists to establish the bourgeois ideals of home and childhood as the norm to which all Canadians should aspire. Furthermore, it established working-class children and their tendency to engage in productive labour as undesirable and socially disruptive.

Appeals like these often met with success. Mrs. Rogers and Mrs. Brough donated “a quantity of toys” to the Toronto Infants’ Home. In 1903, children of the Montreal Protestant Orphan asylum were taken out for a picnic and given toys to keep. Children were encouraged to get involved at Parkhill Methodist Sunday school in Toronto by bringing in old toys to be donated to the less fortunate. Ms. Moore, Ms. Brock and Ms. MacLeannan joined the younger philanthropists with donations of their own.

In order to highlight the regularity of these appeals and responses, the Ottawa Protestant Orphans’ Home will serve as a useful case study. The Ottawa Citizen printed appeals for toy donations on a number of occasions. In 1910, for instance, the Citizen reminded residents that the orphanages of the city required “toys in addition to the necessities in the various homes...[in order to] add largely to the children’s happiness.” The annual reports of the Protestant Orphans’ Home, beginning in 1866, highlight a pattern of frequent toy donations. The report for 1866 does not list toys specifically, but the Treasurer’s report indicates $4.40 was spent on “sundries” and “numerous articles for the use of the home” which may have included toys. Two years later, in 1868, Miss

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36 "Infants' Home," Toronto Daily Mail, 10 Jan 1889, 3.
Meredith was thanked for donating “tops and marbles” for the use of the children.41

In 1890, the home was regularly recording large gifts in the form of presents and children’s amusements. G.B. Burland was singled out for his large donations ensuring “gifts for all.” The report from 1893 highlighted the “bounties” they received at Christmas.42 In 1895 Col. Jeffrey Burland was regularly paying for Christmas festivities including the provision of toys. In 1898 the Epworth League donated several gifts.43

T.D. McFarlane also became a major benefactor to the home. He provided gifts for the children and took them on outings to see the store windows and Christmas displays every year.44 McFarlane’s Christmas activities became so valuable to the orphan home that the report praised him for providing “not only the comforts, but the pleasures of life” by way of a “well filled stocking”.45 In 1905 Knox Presbyterian Church Junior Christian Endeavour, the Children’s Guild of Emmanuel and Mr. Burland were praised for their toy donations.46 By emphasizing the role of pleasure and the need to satisfy it to justify the distribution of gifts, it moved philanthropy beyond essential principles of economic security. It formed the basis for a reorientation and reformation of desire towards the economic and material, and away from the physical and bodily forming a link between the social reform and social purity movements.

41 Annual Report 1868, Ottawa Protestant Orphans Home, MG28-I37, Vol. 1, 21, LAC.
45 Ibid.
Sometimes charity would extend well beyond cities. Congregations at Ravenscliffe and Seguin Falls in the Diocese of Algoma received toys and other Christmas favours as part of the children’s missions.47 The Sunshine Society of western Canada provides another compelling example. The society was a volunteer organization whose stated Benthamite objective was “to give the greatest amount of happiness to the greatest number of people at the smallest possible expense.”48 To meet their goal they operated an annual toy mission, which solicited donations from members in order to provide toys to needy children. Donations were taken whether in kind or in cash in order to provide toys to as many children as possible.49 These accounts often emphasized the poverty of rural families and the joy and excitement toys would provide them with.

The child saving and the social reform movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century attempted to fashion children who resembled their own middle and upper-class offspring. Part of these efforts included the extension of manufactured toys to the working-class through philanthropic distribution. Unlike concerns about Fanny and other middle-class children’s overconsumption of toys, child savers lamented the lack of toys among children in working-class families similar to that of our anonymous mother. They provided manufactured playthings in a comparatively uncritical fashion to marginal children deemed “deserving”. Consequently, philanthropy emerged as an important conduit for the circulation of toys, the performance of middle-class respectability and the refashioning of working-class desire.

The toy consumption of racially marginalized subjects was a more complex phenomenon. On the one hand, race entered into the world of children’s playthings in the depictions of racial others in toy form, imbuing certain playthings with an imperial exoticism. On the other, racially marginalized children in Canada and elsewhere were thought to need “civilizing,” partly through the use of manufactured toys. The dialectic of the west as modern, developed, universal and superior and other parts of the world as pre-modern, underdeveloped, particularistic, and inferior underpinned efforts to deploy manufactured toys in the name of empire. Accounts about the utility of toys for children generally rested upon assumptions about the universality of an authentic childhood characterized by desire for toys.

Marketing efforts attempted to make manufactured toys appear timeless and universal by connecting them with historical playthings around the world. An article from the *Bookseller and Stationer* titled “The Origin of New Toys” boldly declared that “all “new” toys are, roughly speaking, the adaptation of some old invention to modern ideas.”

Mechanical toys, like the two boxers or clowns controlled by twine were traced to a twelfth century design by a German Abbess. Doll houses, spinning tops, horses and carts were described as recent variations on fourteenth century inventions with other articles claiming a provenance in the later medieval period. In an 1897 article, “Some Very Old Toys” the author stated that toys and toy-selling could be dated to the pre-modern world. Allegedly, “the dusky-faced children” of ancient Egypt and the pre-

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contact Inca “loved dolls...just as much as children of our own land do today.”

These conclusions were drawn from an examination of the collections of various museums as well as recent archaeological excavations. In “Playthings of Ancient Children” toys were traced back “to prehistoric times.” According to Montreal Life, modern toys were connected to the playthings of ancient Egypt, imperial Rome, and the indigenous cultures of the South Pacific. Arguments like these helped to establish the manufactured toy as an object with deep historical roots that formed a natural part of the material culture of all children regardless of their race or ethnicity. It also suggested that the manufactured toy was superior to these earlier playthings: the logical outcome and most perfect manifestation of progress in the world of toys.

The claim of timeless universality allowed manufactured toys to mimic and absorb the diversity of the world, communicating through catalogues, advertisements and even their physical presence the racial and ethnic hierarchies of the global order. Non-white subjects represented as toys provided powerful tools to replicate and communicate the ethnic and racial topography of western modernity. Toys like the “Two Jolly Blacks” mechanical toy advertised by W. Godbee Brown’s of Montreal or the mechanical bank in Figure 3.1, stressed the exotic and childlike essence of people of African descent.

52 “Some Very Old Toys,” Bookseller and Stationer, July 1897, 2.
53 Ibid.
56 [Two Jolly Blacks Advertisement], Montreal Gazette, 27 Dec 1879, 1
Clearly advertised to white children and parents, toys like these provided the possibility of possessing and controlling racialized others. Similar advertisements could be found in the Eaton’s 1907-1908 Fall and Winter Catalogue where the “Sunbeam Coon Special” doll offered children the opportunity to own their own “African” doll.\textsuperscript{57} The 1909-1910 catalogue description of the “Negro Doll” demonstrates that racialized toys were intended for younger children two to three years old. The catalogue copy always stressed the bright colours and the “amusing” stereotypical black features, suggesting an exotic allure for white consumers.\textsuperscript{58} Similar characteristics were assigned to toys that depicted other racialized subjects.\textsuperscript{59} In a short vignette from \textit{Dew Drops}, a white child held a tea party with “her big Chinese doll and the little black faced dolly.”\textsuperscript{60} Henrietta D. Grauel’s Efficient Housekeeping column suggested that “a John Chinaman Doll or a

\textsuperscript{57} T. Eaton’s Co., \textit{Eaton’s Catalogue, Fall & Winter, 1907-1908}, 285.
\textsuperscript{60} “The Dolls Tea-Party.” \textit{Dew Drops}, [Vol. 1, no. 3 (Jan. 16, 1897)], 12.
Japanese Lady” would be great favourites for younger children.61

In her article on Eaton’s merchandise that was either sourced from abroad or that exemplified “foreign” aesthetics, Lorraine O’Donnell claims that these products allowed consumers to travel on “virtual voyages.”62 The attraction stemmed from a desire to enact colonial fantasies. Representations of racial others were easily inserted into imperial hierarchies allowing consumers to play out scripts of domination and control over indigenous and non-white subjects at home.63 Clearly, toys offered a medium through which to produce and possess the rest of the world.64

In a similar fashion, the provisioning of racially marginalized children in Canada and around the world with toys made assertions of western superiority and universality visible. Since the arrival of European settlers, missionaries and state officials on the shores of the new world, colonization efforts have targeted children in the hope of speeding up the assimilation of indigenous adults into colonial society.65 In many cases,

the very same magazines that would provide advice on the place of toys in middle-class households featured articles on the importance of manufactured toys in efforts to “uplift” racially marginalized children and their families. An article titled “Hindoo Girls and Their Dolls” described a ritual, apparently carried out around Dasserah festival, where young girls were required to “destroy their dolls” by throwing them into a tank of water. Thankfully, according to the article, “the…cheap…dolls are easily replaced.” The relationship these girls have with their dolls is contrasted with the ones they developed upon receiving European toys from missionaries: “An English doll is a marvel to a Hindoo girl…[and] fills her with wonder.”

American missionaries made a similar case about the children of Bengal in *The Canadian Missionary Link*. Bengali adults “in habits and education have little in common [with white adults, but] their children might be members of the same family [as white children].” These girls were often only in possession of “rude, ill-shaped” dolls. “An American five-cent doll is a marvel of beauty compared with it.” The author followed with stories that stressed the wonder and excitement experienced by adults and children in India when confronted with a manufactured doll. This made them ideal donations to the missions. Similar arguments were made about children in various regions in Africa, Asia and the South Pacific. Canadian children were encouraged to send toys to

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missionaries as part of their Sunday school education, to help attract families for religious conversion. These articles demonstrate the emphasis placed on children’s toys for enticing children and families into a dialogue with colonial agents. These efforts rested on assumptions about the universality of childhood and the superiority of western manufactured toys.

Cultures beyond the borders of the Canadian state were not the only “others” that held a fascination for white Canadians. The belief in the “disappearing Indian” sparked a renewed interest in documenting and investigating Canadian Aboriginal cultures. Written accounts of Aboriginal child-rearing practices present toys in a similar fashion as articles on other colonized peoples. They represented children’s desire for and use of toys as universal, even though non-western toys were portrayed as inferior. S.L. Frey’s *The Mohawks*, published in 1898 interpreted “miniature pottery” found at archaeological digs, as a toy because of its similarity to play-china given to white children.

Irving C. Rosse’s account of the Inuit at Wrangle Island, while critical of the Inuit fashion of carrying children as “contrary to that of civilized custom,” took a more supportive stance on children’s use of toys. According to Rosse, “the play impulse

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manifests itself...in various ways...I have seen a group of boys, sailing toy boats in a pond, behave under the circumstances just as a similar group has been observed to do at Provincetown, Cape Cod.” Similarly, “dolls...answer the same purpose that they do in civilized communities - namely the amusement of little girls.” The Point Barrow Inuit allegedly had few playthings. Those present were considered similar to the toys of “civilized children.” Each object was equated with European and North American toys like tops, buzz toys, whirligigs or mechanical toys.

The presence and use of toys by Aboriginal children was portrayed in a positive light, though the “primitive” nature of the playthings and the unfamiliar social contexts in which they were deployed often formed a basis for criticism. Charles Francis Hall’s commentary on Inuit burial customs found it “curious” that children’s playthings would be buried with them. In “Playthings of the Indian Children,” the author argued that Aboriginal children of the United States and Canada enjoyed playthings and had many of them. However, they allegedly required manufactured playthings to replace their “dolls that are rags.”

Bureaucrats in the Department of Indian Affairs and their missionary allies in residential schools also attempted to promote modern manufactured toys among

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72 Irving C. Rosse. *The First Landing on Wrangel Island with Some Remarks on the Northern Inhabitants.* (s.i.: s.n., 1883), 194-195
73 John Murdoch, *Ethnological Results of the Point Barrow Expedition,* (s.i.: s.n., 1883), 376-385.
Aboriginal children. As part of the colonization strategy of the Canadian government, Aboriginal children were encouraged to attend the infamous residential schools where physical, emotional and sexual abuse were real dangers. The schools were designed to provide students with an assimilationist education in the trades or home management (depending on their gender) that devalued Aboriginal culture and language. Each school was required to submit a report at the end of the year. They were subsequently compiled and published in the Department of Indian Affairs’ Annual Report. The 1887 statement of expenses for the High River Industrial School indicates a payment of $25.01 for the purchase of toys. 76 Alfred Hall, the Principal of the Indian Girls’ Home in Alert Bay, BC reported on the quality of amusements, which included dolls, a doll house, block letters, balls and skipping ropes. 77 Several reports highlighted the role of toys in educational efforts. 78 These “thoroughly and distinctly white toys,” as one Principal put it, were

considered significant to assimilationist efforts. The supposed attraction of Aboriginal children to manufactured playthings reinforced assumptions about the universal utility and appeal of the modern toy.

The case of aboriginal Canadians illustrates the complex relationship between manufactured toys and racially marginalized children. It shared some commonalities with concerns about working-class children in that it identified a shortage of “proper” toys. It also perpetuated discourses of colonial possession and domination central to the performance of whiteness among administrators, missionaries, educators and toy consumers.

*German Toys and the First World War Toy Famine*

Tensions surrounding the foreign production of toys in Canada brought issues associated with marginal children to a head in what would become one of the most significant toy controversies in Victorian Canada. It was centred primarily on the distribution of German-made toys. Germany dominated world toy markets, and in particular, those of small countries with no indigenous industry of their own, like Canada. Up to 1890 the United States toy industry provided some competition to German imports, but by 1895 it was clear that Germany was emerging as the dominant player in the Canadian toy trade. German imports accounted for around half of the toys brought into Canada between 1890 and 1914, capturing market share from American and British manufacturers. In its assessment of the Dominion Navigation Returns for 1900, the *Globe* found that “Germany furnishes us with the bulk of our toys and dolls, with the United

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States a poor second.”

Figure 3.2 – Canadian Toy Market Share by Country of Import

Prior to the 1910s, German domination of the toy industry was viewed with almost exotic interest by North American consumers. There was a tendency to invest German-made toys with the class, and I would add racially-based narrative of “the folk.” Ian McKay’s terminology refers to the process by which “urban cultural producers…constructed the Folk of the countryside as the romantic antithesis to everything they disliked about modern, urban and industrial life.” McKay is explicit in his claim that this was an international phenomenon rooted in antimodernism. The romantic interest in German toy production was one manifestation of the Folk. Those who envisioned German toy production in this manner offered positive and negative assessments of German toy making, particularly where the labour of women and children was concerned.

According to the *Journal of Education for the Province of Ontario*, “toys for the million were peculiar to the age…the chief seat of their manufacture is in the dense woods of Germany.” From Germany flowed not only cheap toys “sold at a profit for a penny” but also “some of the best modeled toys in the world”. As late as 1912 *Maclean’s* was celebrating the “old-time fairy story” of the Leipzig toy fair, and the generations upon generations who have continued to make children’s playthings in Germany’s “toy towns”. Discussions of the long tradition of toy production and the fanciful excitement of the toy fair invested German toy making with a sense of exoticism and timeless antimodernism, characteristic of the folk.

The global ascendancy of the German toy industry was considered inseparable from its reliance on the labour of women and children. The organization of labour in the German toy industry into a hybrid system featuring elements of the cottage industry as well as newer industrial methods was a source of exotic interest and concern for commentators. Many articles felt that the dominant position of the German toy industry stemmed from its origins and persistence as a “medieval” industry that deployed “domestic” labour, in a system reminiscent of early-modern production. This was contrasted, positively or negatively, with toys produced in other countries, like France, whose materials may have been ”mere scraps” but whose labour was allegedly done by men in factories.

The *Montreal Gazette* marveled at the particular organization of German toy

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85 “French and German Toys,” *Canada Bookseller and Stationer*, Jan. 1896, 17.
production, but also described it as indicative of social backwardness: “There are families…it is said by travelers…whose members have done nothing else for the last three or four generations…the father, mother and sons may all be engaged in the one occupation and know no other handicraft…through years of practice and labor they become…proficient as artisans.”

Toy production allegedly happened in cottages “back among the hills in some remote part of Germany.” The division of labour in these so-called “toy towns” was meant that a certain village or set of families would specialize making one component or another of the toy, which was later assembled in factories in larger centres like Nuremberg. The questionable use of cheap, rural and non-adult male labour, was allegedly keeping Canadian producers from being competitive with German manufacturers.

In the same year, the Toronto Globe’s article “Where Toys Are Made” invited readers to think about the German toy producing regions in a fantastic and exotic way: “Sonneberg is the real home of Santa Claus, the magic realm…from which so many legends of giants, dwarfs and fairies have emanated.” The article listed the multitude of toys that were produced in the area from which “every civilized country in the world receives its quota of toys.” Their supremacy was not a new development but “dates back to the beginning of the seventeenth century.” This unique and wonderful fairy-land was only possible because of the prevalence of domestic labour. A “considerable percentage” of the doll making happened in homes where “over 2000 women and girls” were involved in the production of doll clothes alone. The three images that accompanied the article all showed children at work in homes or small workshops, highlighting their

87 Ibid.
position as toy makers.  

As tensions between the British Empire and the German Reich deepened after 1910, commentary became more explicitly anti-German. The alleged use of child labour in German toy production became a particular source of outrage and condemnation for critics. Florence Kelly, a member of the Consumer League, was invited to the Margaret Eaton School in November 1913 to give a talk on exactly this issue. According to Kelly, Canadian mothers should refuse German playthings as “it was a well-known fact that children of 3 years of age assisted in the making of toys for the foreign markets.” Even toy retailers would cease to defend German toys. In 1912, Henry Morgan Co. boasted that “Germany has contributed not more wonderful toys than these.” A year later, the tone of Montreal merchants like Murphy’s had become more subdued regarding the presence of German goods: “Only by importing in big consignments direct from German and French makers have we been able to obtain better values.”

According to David Hamlin’s study of toy production and consumption in Germany, Canadian accounts of German toy manufacturing were only partially correct. The German toy industry responded to the rise of a global mass market in the three decades prior to the First World War by developing “extremely heterogeneous ways of fabricating toys.” Areas like Nuremberg, which specialized in metal toys, expanded the use of machinery and built ever-larger mechanized factories. In contrast, areas like Sonneberg, which specialized in dolls, saw the expansion of independent producers

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88 "Where Toys are Made" Globe, 26 Dec 1903, 4.
90 [Henry Morgan & Co. Ltd], advertisement, Montreal Gazette, 5 Dec 1912, 22.
91 [Murphy's of Montreal], advertisement, Montreal Gazette, 13 Dec 1913, 24.
92 Hamlin, Work and Play, 62.
working under a system of contract labour producing toy components. The labourers in the wooden toy producing area of Erzegebirge simply worked harder for longer hours and less pay to meet the growing demand.

In Sonneberg and Erzegebirge where labour predominantly happened in homes and involved the efforts of multiple family members, the exploitation of women’s and children’s labour presumably increased as families faced growing demand and declining prices. In Nuremberg production increasingly occurred in a factory setting. Thus, the idea that German toys were produced in circumstances that exploited women’s and children’s labour to a greater degree than in other countries seems to be something of an exaggeration, or at the very least, an oversimplification.

As the guns of August roared across Europe in 1914, and a number of men (and boys), enlisted to fight for the Empire, a ban on German imports placed upward pressure on toy prices across Canada. Nearly overnight, the entire supply chain, from retailer to buyer to consumer faced the singular challenge of a toy market free of German toys. The transition was anything but smooth and left a gaping hole in Canada's toy market. Newspapers were quick to sound the alarm about the impending “toy famine.” The Montreal Daily Mail found a creative way of expressing these concerns in the form of a dialogue between a toy soldier and a Noah’s Ark:

What will become of the thousands of little wooden soldiers whose masters have left the Black Forest in Germany to fight for their kaiser? And what will become of the thousands of very young Americans who have depended upon the men in the Black Forest for their toys?…Santa Clause will have to get along with native products this year, and, of course, they’ll be what was left over from last year, but no new regiments of red and blue wooden soldiers.

93 Ibid., 78-92.
94 Ibid., 92-95.
95 "Local Toy Famine May Come From War," Montreal Daily Mail, 10 August 1914, 1.
The *Saskatoon Phoenix* similarly asked if “the war [will] put Santa Claus out of business?”\(^{96}\) This was not merely a Canadian concern. According to the Department of Trade and Commerce *Weekly Report* for 28 September 1914, “the Germans to a large extent control the market for toys in the British overseas Dominions.”\(^ {97}\) From Greenwich to Cape Town, from the North Pole to Adelaide, and everywhere in between, the world supply of toys for Christmas 1914 was in question.\(^ {98}\)

If newspapers and government officials were concerned about where toys would come from, Canadian retailers were positively panicked. They initially tried to find a speedy replacement in the form of Japanese imports. Several of the large and medium-sized department stores in Canada sent buyers to Japan, with German samples in tow, to see if they could procure suitable imitations at comparably low prices. An unidentified western Canadian department store sent over eight thousand samples to Yokohama in 1914 to procure replacement goods.\(^ {99}\)

Japan had emerged as an important minor player in the Canadian market in the opening decade and a half of the twentieth century. In some cases, Japanese production was a welcome addition to the toy supplies of Canada and the rest of the British Empire. Others were dismissive of Japanese toys and toy manufacturers on largely xenophobic and racist grounds. Dolls produced in Japan to look “white” during the war were

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96 "Toy Famine May Come as Result of German War," *Saskatoon Phoenix*, 10 Aug 1914, 3.
considered unacceptable for white children. As the Canadian Trade Commissioner for Australia was intent to point out in 1915, “Some Japanese dolls are quite good, but the dolls having black hair and eyes, do not appeal to white children, not having the complexion of their own race.” A year later, a British consular communiqué reprinted in the Department of Trade and Commerce *Weekly Bulletin* was even less enthusiastic about Japanese toys:

> The Japanese point of view differs so radically from that of the British child that it is extremely difficult, almost impossible, for a Japanese toy designer to originate anything suitable for the British trade… the Japanese instinct or ideal of slanting eye-brows, greenish eyes, and “rosy” cheeks in the wrong place unfortunately mar the result… their efforts to meet “foreign” taste results in productions which are certainly foreign to any sublunary race.

Japan was seen as an important source for cheap toys of relatively low quality, “driving out” German goods of comparable make, not as a potential principle supplier to Euro-American toy consumers. Yet again, the products destined for the “civilized world” and its settler colonies were contrasted with the “uncivilized” playthings manufactured and used by non-whites. Nevertheless, Japan’s increased market share points to the important role played by Japanese toys during the First World War.

Furthermore, the end of German toy imports into Canada led to a fundamental shift in the sourcing of Canadian toys. The United States extended its share of the Canadian market significantly from 30 percent to 70 percent of imports. The market share of the U.K. actually declined. Most of their production was redirected to serve local demands.

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103 Brown, *British Toy Business*, 82-83.
A focus on imports alone obscures the growth and development of indigenous toy manufacturing in Canada during the same period. Total imports actually declined during the early years of the First World War to just over $60,000 as a result of limited supply, shortages in shipping, as well as an increase in Canadian-made toys.\textsuperscript{104} The Department of Trade and Commerce included a supplement in its \textit{Weekly Bulletin} for 31 July 1916 titled “Toy Making in Canada.” The report highlighted the Canadian market’s need for over $1,000,000 in toys to satisfy demand. Imports for 1915 and 1916 fell well bellow this mark, generating upward pressure on prices.\textsuperscript{105} Even under these favourable circumstances, the Canadian government opted to provide additional support to toy

\textsuperscript{104} See Dominion of Canada, \textit{Trade and Navigation Returns} [1914-1919], (Ottawa: Queen’s Printer).

manufacturers throughout the war in order to establish a Canadian toy industry that would compete in world markets. Government and media boosterism framed the new industry as an important pillar for satisfying children’s consumer desire, combating child labour and extending the war effort on the commercial front.\textsuperscript{106} This insulated the toy industry from possible accusations of profiteering that would haunt other manufacturers.

Part four of the \textit{Globe} series on new industries in Canada celebrated the toy industry: “Canadian Santa Claus has lost his ‘Made-in-Germany’ sack, but the kiddies will not be deprived of his annual visit at the proper time. His new sacks will be labeled ‘Made-in-Canada’ in big letters…the new Canadian toys for Canadian children are made by adult labor, under proper conditions.”\textsuperscript{107} According to the \textit{Victoria Daily Times}, “the point is that Canada hopes never again to require anything in the way of toys from Germany.”\textsuperscript{108} For the \textit{Monetary Times}, the success of the German toy industry could not be divorced from the workers it employed “over half of whom are women and girls,” a method that Canadian manufacturers would not adopt.\textsuperscript{109} At the height of the propaganda campaign against Germany, articles went so far as to stress the irony of Germany’s former position in the toy trade: “The same nation whose soldiers used little Belgian children as shields…[and] which rejoices when bombs dropped from Zeppelins kill innocent English children…is the one which before the outbreak of the war made toys for children all over the world.”\textsuperscript{110}

\textsuperscript{110} “Canada To Make Bid for the Toy Trade,” \textit{Victoria Times}, 21 Mar 1916, 2.
In response to the sudden uptick in Canadian toy production the Department of Trade and Commerce redoubled their efforts to expand the foreign and domestic market for Canadian toy manufacturers. Long serving Conservative Minister of Trade and Commerce Sir George W. Foster, and his Deputy Minister and former trade commissioner to Jamaica, Watson Griffin led the public push in support of the fledgling Canadian toy industry. The department helped to organize a series of toy exhibitions beginning in 1916. Their stated objective was, “to show the style of toys formerly imported into Canada and the toys now being made in Canada, and to stimulate Canadian manufacture of the same…” The conference, which commenced the day after the exhibition on the 28 March 1916, was chaired by George Foster and was designed to provide networking opportunities for Canadian toy manufacturers, retailers and wholesalers and all other manner of “practical toy men.” The event received national press coverage. The Monetary Times thought the Exhibition and Conference “proved very successful…toy buyers from all quarters the world will find it advantageous to visit Canada once a year to order Canadian toys as they formerly visited Germany.” The conference also led to the organization of the Canadian Toy Manufacturers Association (CTMA) by the forty or so Canadian toy makers and a number of the larger toy buyers.

111 See Department of Trade and Commerce, Weekly Report, 1 Dec 1908: 832 & 836
114 “Canada’s Toy Industry,” The Monetary Times, 14 Apr 1916, 22.
115 “Has German Exhibits,” Toronto Star, July 29 1916, 2; While there were 40 firms by 1916, only two years earlier in 1914 there were 24. See “Local toy Dealers Speak of Changes,” Victoria Daily Times, 4 Dec 1915, 13; To appreciate the degree to which the first world war sparked the establishment of toy manufacturing firms see also Industry Canada Fonds, Corporations Branch, LAC, RG 95, Vol. 2748, Vol. 2776, Vol. 2699 & Vol. 2740.
The creation of a lobby group for the toy industry came at the direct encouragement of George Foster, who declared to the conference participants that “if you want to have the Department of Trade and Commerce help you, you must put yourselves in the form of a permanent organization.” The CTMA was an autonomous organization designed to “promote the production of toys for home and foreign consumption and for the holding of an annual toy fair.”

Even as manufacturers wrapped themselves in the flag in the name of profit, it is clear that some industrialists were uncomfortable with the anti-German propaganda surrounding the use of child labour. P.R. O’Neill’s “unusually interesting” speech argued that “there is a widely prevailing idea in Canada that German toys are nearly all made in homes, that toy making is not a factory industry. Twenty five years ago, this was probably true…[but] there is no doubt that the last year before the war the toys made in factories very greatly exceeded those made in homes.”

On the child labour issue, O’Neill was even further out of step with the prevailing media discourse regarding German toy production: “There is an exaggerated idea in Canada in regard to the extent to which Germany employs child labor.” O’Neill conceded that it was used “to a limited extent,” but he made the case that this was not unique to Germany. O’Neill claimed he had encountered factories on his last trip to Britain where toys were being made by children after school hours. O’Neill argued that Canadian children would do well to mimic their British counterparts and work two hours after

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116 [Briefs], Alderson News, May 11, 1916, 2. “Toy Makers Organize.” Victoria Daily Colonist, 30 Mar 1916, 9. The CTMA went through a number of name changes over its lifetime. At various times it was called the Canadian Toy Manufacturers Association, Canadian Playthings Manufacturers Association and the Canadian Toy Association.

school making toys in order to “train their eyes and their hands…[that] they would be better men and women afterwards.” Indeed, the characterization of children’s labour in this way placed it squarely within the same moral economy as philanthropic efforts to distribute used toys. It suggested that the choice, rather than compulsion to work among young people could help build middle-class and white identity.

Interviews conducted with various toy manufacturers demonstrate the importance they placed on children’s involvement in toy promotion and production. Ralph Connable, General Manager of Woolworth Canada felt that providing women and children with money for doll manufacturing conducted in their homes would be a good way to stimulate toy production in Canada. Two years after the conference, Mr. Wildman, proprietor of the Beaverton Toy Works, swore off child labour to “maintain the race that won at Vimy,” but still supported “getting hints from children” in order to improve their designs and final products. Thus, the nascent Canadian toy industry followed advertisers by placing children as actors in their own right at the symbolic centre of their business. Unlike their retailing brethren, they made little space for mothers to participate in a children’s world of toys.

The CTMA and the Department of Trade and Commerce would wait only a few short months before the next toy exhibition. The second toy fair, held as part of the Canadian National Exhibition in August of 1916, was larger and for a different audience. The CNE exhibition promoted Canadian toys directly to consumers. By

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118 Ibid.
119 “Canada’s Opportunity,” Toronto Star, 14 October 1914, 1.
121 “Has German Exhibits,” Toronto Star, July 29 1916, 2.
1917 confidence in the Canadian toy industry was clearly growing. Victoria celebrated
the successful attraction of new toy manufacturers. Others claimed the Canadian toy industry
was “stabilized”.

Similarly, local exhibitions of toys had been going on in cities across Canada since
the beginning of the war. Montreal, Vancouver, Victoria, Edmonton and Halifax all held
exhibitions of a markedly different character than national efforts. Rather than focusing
on factory-produced toys, these efforts placed an emphasis on handicraft toys and worked
to promote them to Canadian consumers. The Canadian Handicraft Guild, centred in
Montreal and women’s organizations across the country took a leadership role in these
activities, blending an antimodern emphasis on the superiority of craft production with
modern philanthropic efforts. Drawing on their previous experience in the social and
moral reform movements from the preceding decades, women’s organizations attempted
to organize toy production that privileged the workshop and home over the factory as the
ideal site of toy production. It offered the opportunity to reaffirm their status as the

123 “Would Manufacture his Invention Here,” Victoria Colonist, 18 May 1919, 15; “Toy
Factory is Established Here.” Victoria Colonist, 30 Nov 1919, 40.
124 “Canadian Toy Manufacturers,” The Monetary Times, 23 Feb 1917, 7.
125 Melinda Young, "Manufacturing of Toys Now A Stabilized Industry," Globe, 27 Aug
1918, 14.
126 In her study of the Guild, Ellen McLeod offers a brief summary of the competitions
run by the handicraft guild for Canadian-made toys. McLeod also points out that while
the guild included members from both genders, the war-time circumstances transformed
it into a predominantly female organization. See Ellen McLeod, In Good Hands: The
Women of the Canadian Handicraft Guild, (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press,
1999), 174.
principle guardians of home and hearth and to invest this status with a social and political value that extended beyond the confines of the bourgeois home. Children and their materials surroundings were a potent way for women to assert themselves economically and politically in Victorian Canada.

Beginning in 1914 and continuing throughout the war, a number of stories and columns in Canadian publications encouraged women to become involved in toy production as a handicraft. Janet Brooks, writing for the Montreal Daily Mail in 1914 claimed that “one of the first things that suggests itself as work for women is toy making. The season is opportune and the distraction of toyland for many weary months offers an opportunity that will not occur again for at least a generation…Toy making is easy: It is suited to women.”¹²⁷ The Toronto World claimed that women who “otherwise would have been in distress and want are happily engaged in making soft toys.”¹²⁸ Similarly, an article from Saturday Night by Leslie Horner endorsed women’s work in the toy trade and the high quality of craft produced toys.¹²⁹ In contrast to the labour of German women, the participation of Canadian women in craft production was generally endorsed as a significant contribution to the war effort. Furthermore, craft production embodied several of the positive aspects of the folk previously associated with German production before the war.

Women’s groups relied on disabled soldiers as possible craft toy producers. The Canadian Handicrafts Guild (CHG) as well as organizations like the Khaki League (KL)

¹²⁹ Leslie Horner, “Jewellery and Toy Making as Professions for Women,” Saturday Night, 3 May 1919, 25
and the Quebec Home Workers’ Patriotic Toy Industry Committee (QHWPTIC) encouraged the employment of returned soldiers in the production of craft toys.\textsuperscript{130} QHWPTIC employed “convalescent soldiers” in order to produce toys, a sale of which was held at Chateau Frontenac with prizes for the best toys provided by Ms. S. McLennan.\textsuperscript{131} Begun by Mrs. Lorenzo Evans, the organization worked throughout the war, creating and exhibiting craft toys using the labour of disabled soldiers.\textsuperscript{132} The craft toys were displayed in Quebec, Montreal and Toronto.\textsuperscript{133} By 1917, their toys were being exported to the United States. Mrs. Evans also established a similar organization in the Bahamas, formed while she vacationed there in late 1916.\textsuperscript{134} Similarly, the KL workshop was busy turning out Noah’s Arks and other Christmas toys by 1917 using the labour of returned soldiers.\textsuperscript{135} By December, they allegedly had produced enough toys to meet the Christmas demand of the city.\textsuperscript{136} The St. Jean Baptiste Society sponsored a show of toys produced by wounded and sick soldiers in France, which included model tanks and appliances.\textsuperscript{137}

The toys made by these soldiers were often described in positive terms such as “practical and ornamental.”\textsuperscript{138} Ms. Evans hit on the themes of patriotism and thrift in her

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{130} “Made in Canada Toys” \textit{Montreal Gazette}, 1 Dec 1915, 4. The use of disabled soldiers in toy production dates back to the Napoleonic wars. On the infantilizing discourse regarding disabled soldiers that facilitated this convergence see Koven, “Remembering and Dismembering,” 1167-1202.
\item \textsuperscript{131} “To Encourage Home Industry,” \textit{Quebec Telegraph}, 16 Dec 1916, 9.
\item \textsuperscript{132} “Prizes for Home-Made Toys,” \textit{Quebec Telegraph}, 23 Aug 1917, 3.
\item \textsuperscript{133} “Home-made toys made by soldiers,” \textit{Quebec Telegraph}, 19 Dec 1916, 8.
\item \textsuperscript{134} “Home Made Toys Cause Pleasure,” \textit{Quebec Telegraph}, 26 Feb 1917, 3; “Patriotism in Bahama Islands,” \textit{Quebec Telegraph}, 6 Feb 1917, 3.
\item \textsuperscript{135} “Soldiers Work on Christmas Toys,” \textit{Montreal Daily Mail}, 22 Aug 1917, 2.
\item \textsuperscript{136} “Soldiers Busy on Christmas Toys,” \textit{Montreal Gazette}, 7 Dec 1918, 14.
\item \textsuperscript{137} “Toys Made by Soldiers,” \textit{Montreal Gazette}, 4 Dec 1918, 4.
\item \textsuperscript{138} “Former Soldiers Offer Nice Toys,” \textit{Montreal Gazette}, 11 Dec 1920, 3.
\end{itemize}
efforts to promote craft toys: “It behooves every patriotic and loyal Quebecker to encourage their home industry and buy Quebec made toys [as] they are unique in their way, and they are at the same time inexpensive.”

The push for craft toys produced by the labour of women, the disabled or the unemployed enjoyed wide influence in other parts of the country as well. In the organization of the Victoria Toy Exhibition, women’s groups took a very active role, which included promoting the goods of toy manufacturers alongside those of craft toy makers.

In a slightly different take on efforts in Quebec, the Walmer Road Baptist Church and the Industrial Toy Association in Toronto used the labour of the unemployed to make craft toys, beginning in 1914. In Edmonton, the Suffrage League suggested that idle carpenters be redirected towards producing toys for the Christmas trade. They were able to get the Hudson’s Bay Company and Pryce Jones to agree to purchase the local production. In one particularly dark twist on this theme, German POWs held at Hearst in northern Ontario were put to work manufacturing mechanical toys for the Canadian market. Promoting toys that were produced by disabled or wounded soldiers became a selling point for local retailers.

Women’s organizations also inserted themselves into discussions about toy distribution and consumption. The war led to a significant rise in prices for toys.

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139 Ibid.
141 “Work is Provided for Many Classes” *Toronto World*, 16 Jan 1915, 5; ""Made in Germany" Toys are Doomed," *Toronto World*, 6 Mar 1915, 7.
Consequently, the number of children for whom toys were unaffordable may have increased. The charitable activities of organizations charged with providing marginal children with toys before the war expanded their efforts to include the children of soldiers in their annual distributions at teas, orphanages and other gatherings.\textsuperscript{144} 

Canadian women and their organizations also made it a point to flex their consumer muscle, challenging toy manufacturers to produce toys that lived up to their standards as “the chief purchasers of toys.”\textsuperscript{145} At the Meeting of the Local Committee of the Women of Toronto, a resolution was passed detailing consumer expectations for the nascent toy industry immediately after the conclusion of the first toy conference. The resolution grew out of consumer and child labour activism undertaken by the Canadian National Committee of Women (CNCW). Previously the CNCW called for an end to child labour and for Canadian manufacturers to stamp their goods “Made in Canada.”\textsuperscript{146} Betina Liverant argues that consumer activism in the decade before the war centred on price inflation.\textsuperscript{147} Lobbying efforts led to two government investigations into the cost of living as well as the collection of the first systematic statistics on the changing price of goods.\textsuperscript{148} This activism on place of manufacture, child labour and “essential goods” was extended to toys during the war years as fears of a shortage mounted.

\textsuperscript{145} Toronto women’s Committee Resolution re: Canadian Toy Industries, National Council of Women of Canada Fonds, LAC, MG 28 I25 Vol. 68 File #4.
\textsuperscript{146} Child Labour Resolution, National Council of Women of Canada Fonds, LAC, MG 28 I25 Vol. 68 File #4; Made in Canada Resolution, National Council of Women of Canada Fonds, LAC, MG 28 I25 Vol. 68 File #4, LAC.
\textsuperscript{148} Ibid.
The resolution on toys drew from all these sources. There were explicit ties to the earlier made-in-Canada resolution and there is a claim to unwavering support for the emergent industry “due to the fact that in this country child labour is not used.” The resolution itself sets out clear guidelines for manufacturers of toys to follow in order to produce desirable commodities that offered value for money.¹⁴⁹ Toys had to be “durable, artistic and otherwise satisfactory to child nature…[and] Canadian artists [must] be employed in the work of designing Canadian toys.”¹⁵⁰ The resolution suggested that toys needed to be high quality and well suited to properly socializing children into authentic innocents under the control and guidance of parents.

The resolution also advised retailers to create a special department for made-in-Canada toys. This dovetailed with explicit concerns about imported Japanese toys. The CNCW claimed that retailers “[should] purchase only those toys used in the respective countries – not those made there especially in accordance with the ideas prevailing there as to what foreign trade demands.”¹⁵¹ It did not take long for women’s groups in other parts of the Dominion, including Alberta, British Columbia and Quebec to endorse the resolution as well.¹⁵²

The toy resolution was one more example of women’s growing authority in the toy industry as consumer activists intent on securing products that met their needs. They also positioned themselves as major advocates and regulators of children’s involvement in the market. Their demand that toys must “appeal to child nature” clearly indicates a partial

¹⁴⁹ Toronto women’s Committee Resolution re: Canadian Toy Industries. National Council of Women of Canada Fonds, LAC, MG 28 I25 Vol. 68 File #4, LAC
¹⁵⁰ Ibid.
¹⁵¹ Ibid.
emphasis on how children would use the toys. In short, the resolution demonstrates a clear resonance with advice literature’s advocacy of managed consumption and proper socialization explored in the last chapter.

Consumer activism was not the only way women challenged the toy industry. There were clear tensions between the industrial and craft models of toy production. In its article on the British toy industry, *Saturday Night* demonstrated how these models could conflict with one another. The article claimed that the wholesale trade was in chaos because “the idea seemed to prevail that any kind of labor, however unskilled or unsuitable, could be switched on to produce playthings.” Though proper toy factories flourished, “all the philanthropic sentiment in the country seemed to be bent on starting toy making industries…doomed to failure.”

Certainly this article about the “British” toy industry was designed to apply to developments in the Canadian context.

If the folk was no longer evident to Canadians in the German industry, it had easily found a new home in the support of craft toy production. Janet Brooks, a columnist with the *Montreal Daily Mail*, wrote a series of opinion pieces singing the praises of craft toy production and warning against the toy manufacturing industry. Brooks supported the use of women and disabled soldiers as a source of labour for producing craft toys. She claimed that craft toy production was essential for Canadians because it “appealed to quiet home loving people.” It was not the mechanical toys or the newest inventions that children enjoyed playing with. Instead, “the toys that are really best beloved by children

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are the hand-made ones of wood and rudely colored.”156 In 1916, writing about the
planned toy fair at the CNE, Brooks attacked Japanese toys on grounds that imported toys
“have no national significance”, as well as manufactured toys, stating:

Of late years commercialism has dragged itself over everything, toys included, and
whereas, it was formerly the case that a nation’s toys reflected its artistic leanings,
its ingenuity and above all its ability to think back to childhood…expediency and a
desire to coax the dollars to the home…have spoiled even the children’s [toy]. It
makes as great a difference in the child’s character to play with a frankly
commercial toy as it does to form habits of deceit and to practice dishonesty.157

In contrast to the heady pronouncements of business, the government and certain
journalists, Brook’s 1917 article “Toy Making not Well Developed” took aim at the
inability of large toy manufacturers to produce cost effective goods in sufficient
quantities.158

In his survey of a similar debate in Wilhelmine Germany, Bryan Ganaway has
argued that at the centre of conflicts between factory and artisanal toys was a profound
disagreement over the relationship of technology to “middle-class values.”159 The
Canadian debate went well beyond the question of technology, challenging the very role
of large capitalist corporate enterprises in the production of children’s goods. Arts and
crafts production offered an alternative means of organizing the division of labour and
financing production, which was at once antimodern and modern; critical of technology
and the corporation, but supportive of modern methods of governing the social world.

156 Janet Brooks. "Many Opportunities Are Open to women," Montreal Daily Mail, 31
Oct 1914, 4.
Aug 1916, 5.
Jan 1917, 6.
159 Bryan Ganaway, “Engineers or Artists? Toys, Class and Technology in Wilhelmine
In the end, the benefits the Canadian toy industry accrued during the First World War proved difficult to sustain into the postwar period. The end of the war did not wipe Germany off the map, allowing formerly minor players like Japan and Canada to dominate the world’s toy markets. It marked the beginning of a German resurgence. Japan and the United States remained competitive after the First World War. In contrast, Canadian toy producers faced declining prospects at home and abroad.\textsuperscript{160} Canadian toy exports declined from a high of nearly $1,400,000 in 1920 to under $20,000 by 1923, highlighting the short-lived success of the Canadian toy industry.\textsuperscript{161}

Claims that “…in all human probability, the great bulk of the toy production of the world will not come from that quarter [Germany], or from any particular quarter, any more,” seemed absurd by 1918. The majority of Canadian toy manufacturing had been reduced to minor finishing work on toys manufactured elsewhere.\textsuperscript{162} By the early-1920s, many of the toy manufacturers that celebrated their founding in 1914, would be long defunct.\textsuperscript{163} Even as the toy industry began to stabilize in earnest after 1925, it would take it another decade to approach its First World War heights.

The craft toy industry functioned as an implicit (and sometimes explicit) critique of large scale mass-produced toys. Its survival on a small scale into the inter-war years and beyond formed an important counter-point and symbolic alternative to the mass-produced

\textsuperscript{161} See Dominion of Canada, Trade and Navigation Returns [1914-1919], (Ottawa: Queen’s Printer).
\textsuperscript{162} "Canadian Toys may be Exported," \textit{Quebec Telegraph}, 24 May 1917, 4; "Fine Exhibition of Canadian Toys," \textit{Montreal Gazette}, 7 Dec 1918, 4.
\textsuperscript{163} Industry Canada Fonds, Corporations Branch, RG 95, Vol. 2748, Vol. 2776, Vol. 2699 & Vol. 2740, LAC.
Fanny Yarmolinsky and the anonymous Toronto mother are indicative of persistent tensions in Canadian toy consumption during the period. Before and during the First World War, concerns about the place of manufactured toys in Canada were framed by established understandings of working-class and racially marginalized consumers. The war brought these class and racial tensions to the fore leading reformers to extend and intensify their efforts. The Canadian government and the toy industry were central to the establishment and promotion of Canadian toy manufacturing during the First World War on patriotic and nativist grounds. By wrapping themselves in the flag, manufacturers could avoid questions about child labor posed by Canadian activists and government propaganda.

It was ultimately the activities of women, in the areas of production, distribution and consumer activism that would have the longest-lasting impact on the social and cultural life of toys in Canada. Framed by an earlier experience with middle-class philanthropy and child saving, the “toy famine” resulted in the mobilization of philanthropic activity to produce and distribute toys to a wider array of Canadian children and families alongside established market activities. By promoting craft toys, Canadian women sent a clear message to manufacturers about the kind of labour relations and the quality of products, which would attract their hard-earned dollars. The activism around toy production, distribution and consumption is indicative of a “briskly accommodating resistance” that foretells the intensification of consumer activism in interwar and postwar
Craft producers and philanthropists acquiesced to the basic orthodoxy of consumer culture, while simultaneously challenging its particular organization. Through consumer activism and craft toy production, Canadian women offered an indirect, but poignant critique of the toy industry.

What was ultimately not at issue was children’s need for toys. The prospect of a “toy famine” wiped away many of the earlier concerns about children being overstimulated or having too many toys, at least temporarily. In this context, Canadian women would ultimately validate the importance of a Canadian toy industry and the need for children to have access to a wide assortment of playthings. Rather than turning toys into unnecessary trifles, the war made them indispensable to Canadian families.

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PART II – TOYS IN TRANSITION, 1920-1959
CHAPTER FOUR

“Canadian Toys for Canadian People”: The Canadian Toy Business and Consuming Children

Efforts to establish a world-class toy industry in Canada during the First World War ultimately fell short. But the ensuing debate had a lasting legacy for consumer activists and those engaged in toy production, distribution and retailing. The closure of toy firms following in the 1920s led the surviving manufacturers to seek out new ways to expand the market for their goods and control production costs. The intensification of marketing efforts and the creation of new retail strategies helped to expand consumer demand for toys during the inter-war period among middle and upper-class consumers. The arrival of a Second World War created another set of circumstances conducive to experimentation with new materials and methods of production. By the 1950s Canada had a small, but successful indigenous industry. It increasingly promoted its goods along nationalistic lines in the face of stiff international competition from the U.S. and Japan. The growing success of the Canadian toy industry was rooted, at least in part, in the efficient exploitation of its labour force. Toy companies and managers relied on strategies that drew on class-based, patriarchal and racialized systems of power to keep their workforce compliant. The interwar and early postwar period form an important pivot for the toy industry that allowed it to reach its apex as a successful consumer industry.

In his history of toys in America, Gary Cross similarly identifies the 1920s and 1930s as an important period. Cross’ focus on consumption leads him to highlight the distinction between “educational toys” and “fad toys,” defined by their marketing and
prospective consumers.\footnote{Cross, \textit{Kid’s Stuff}, 82-146.} The early postwar years are dealt with separately as a golden age of toy production and consumption. The expansion of television and advertising towards the end of the 1950s and during the early 1960s emerges as the major site of antagonism.\footnote{Ibid., 147.} While Cross’ insights are interesting, his periodization creates an artificial division between the interwar and postwar period that obscures a number of important continuities.

As Catherine Gidney and Michael Dawson have argued, dividing the “interwar” from the “postwar”, the 1920s from the 1930s or even the nineteenth from the twentieth century in an arbitrary fashion can pose major problems for historical interpretation.\footnote{Michael Dawson & Catherine Gidney, “Persistence and Inheritance: Rethinking Periodization and English Canada’s Twentieth Century,” in Christopher Dummitt & Michael Dawson (Eds.), \textit{Contesting Clio’s Craft: New Directions and Debates in Canadian History}, (London: Institute for the Study of the Americas, 2009), 48-49.} An over-reliance on political demarcations can actually negatively impact the analytical possibilities for social and cultural histories that fit awkwardly into official chronologies. All of these issues are pertinent to the history of toys. The First World War inaugurated a modern and industrial toy manufacturing business in Canada. The period from 1919 to 1960, though plagued by major social and political upheavals, does not offer any evidence of a radical break with the past. In many cases the shifts discernible in the 1950s were rooted in changes underway in the 1920s or earlier.\footnote{Michael Dawson and Lizabeth Cohen make a similar point about the significance of the interwar period and Second World War to postwar tourism in British Columbia and the expansion of postwar consumer culture in the United States, respectively. See Dawson, \textit{Selling British Columbia}, 8 & Cohen, \textit{A Consumer’s Republic}.}

Furthermore, as Michael Gauvreau and Nancy Christie have pointed out, the early postwar years are best understood as a complex period defined by the mediation between...
older values and institutions and emergent ones. In the toy industry the continuity between the interwar and postwar periods are many. In the British toy industry, for instance, the Depression led to concentration and bankruptcies as well as a fifty percent expansion in toy consumption that carried through into the postwar era. The development of toy production and consumption in Canada fits this pattern.

Toy consumption, in absolute terms, exploded following the Second World War. This was largely a result of the increased number of children associated with the “baby-boom.” Looking at real per child expenditures on toys in Canada tells a somewhat different story. In real terms, per child expenditure grew from under $10 in 1914 to $80 by 1945. Conversely, the period from 1945 to 1960 witnessed an increase of only a few dollars. Undoubtedly, the Second World War, the Depression and postwar reconstruction lead to disruptions and changes for Canadian toy producers. However, the various political and economic upheavals did not fundamentally alter the trajectory of toy production and consumption over the period.

Beyond the general contours of the industry, it is necessary to offer conclusions only tentatively and conditionally at times. The sources surviving from this period are often poorly preserved or imprecise. For instance, only one issue, published in 1941, remains of The Sports Goods Journal of Canada - the Canadian toy industry’s only trade publication. Similarly, many manufacturers of toys only produced playthings on a seasonal or ad hoc basis. Thus, when examining labour action at large industrial concerns like Dominion Rubber it is not always clear to what extent toy workers or other labourers

were engaged in strikes. Indeed, the nature of the toy industry defies easy categorization. Consequently, establishing conclusions with a high degree of certainty is often challenging.

That said, articles and advertisements that appeared in the popular press on the industry offer some insights. Archival records also offer quick glimpses into the industry. In many instances, published materials reveal the importance of manufacturing and retailing to the history of toys. Indeed, it is impossible to disconnect the social and cultural conflicts over toys from the economics of their production, distribution and consumption.

*Expanding and Consolidating the Canadian Toy Industry*

The early 1920s were marked by a precipitous decline in the number of toy firms in operation. The boom in toy manufacturing during the First World War failed to create a stable and internationally competitive indigenous toy industry. By 1925 Canadian toy exports had shrunk to a low of $22,559. Over the same period, imports grew from $1,534,728 to $1,771,758, making up a sizeable proportion of the toy supply in Canada. As early as 1920 the *Montreal Gazette* was sounding the alarm over the reappearance of German toys in Montreal stores.\(^7\) Concerns about the “weird assortment of articles from the orient,”– a likely reference to Japanese toys – demonstrates the declining fortunes of Canadian producers and the persistence of nativist sentiments towards imported toys fostered during the war.\(^8\)

Positive declarations regarding the “quiet but steady development of the

\(^7\) "German Toys Sold in Local Shops," *Montreal Gazette*, 6 Dec 1920, 3.
\(^8\) *Ibid.*
[Canadian] toy industry” were ultimately unfounded.\(^9\) Canadian producers were unable to match price points on imported toys even with a protective tariff in place.\(^10\) Toy production stagnated during the first half of the 1920s suffering from competition in the domestic market and a declining position in foreign markets due to the expansion of toy production in Germany, Japan, the U.S. and Britain.\(^11\)

The Canadian government was unwilling to simply ignore the industry’s declining prospects. Exhibitions, co-sponsored by the Department of Trade and Commerce and the Canadian Toy Manufacturers Association, continued to promote “Canadian Toys for Canadian People.”\(^12\) Similarly, the Department of Trade and Commerce renewed its search for opportunities in foreign markets, claiming that where British and American firms had found success Canadian firms could follow.\(^13\) In fact, the United Kingdom, Newfoundland, Australia, New Zealand and the U.S. took the bulk of Canada’s exports.

Even with the slight recovery in the Canadian toy industry after 1925 global competition continued to be robust. Imports grew from $1,771,758 in 1925 to a staggering $2,691,408 in 1930, or by fifty percent in five years. The United States and Germany accounted for over 17 percent of imports each, while Japan and the United Kingdom comprised a combined 20 percent. It is hard to overstate the degree to which the toy industries of these four nations battled for control of the Canadian market. This was also indicative of a global toy industry that was becoming more concentrated and

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\(^10\) "German Toys Sold in Local Shops," *Montreal Gazette*, 6 Dec 1920, 3.
\(^12\) "Canadian Playthings for Canadian Kiddies," *Globe*, 15 Dec 1922, 20.
stable after the turmoil of the war and its immediate aftermath. In this context, Canada ranked as little more than a second rate toy producing country.  

The Depression had a profound affect on the global toy industry. It disrupted established patterns of trade, providing opportunities for the mobilization and deployment of capital in the toy industry to expand production, despite growing human misery and deprivation. Unlike the challenges during the 1920s, toy makers in the 1930s actually witnessed small but important gains.

The Depression was also witness to a fast and precipitous decline in the overall value of toy imports. This was in keeping with broader trends in the world economy as the retreat of various nations behind tariff walls slowed international trade to a crawl. Between 1930 and 1932 toy imports dropped from just over $2,600,000 to $1,300,000, remaining in that range until after 1940. Santa was declared “an enthusiastic importer of toys,” but this would become less and less true throughout the 1930s. By 1938, British toy imports into Canada stagnated at 10-12 percent while Japan’s market share grew to 17 percent, largely at the expense of German producers. The United States remained the principle supplier to Canada, holding a market share of around 50 percent. By 1936, Germany’s productive capacity in the toy industry was cut in half because of the effects of the Depression and hyperinflation on the German economy. Germany’s previous status as a major producer of dolls and wooden toys left a hole in the market that

16 Ibid.
Canadian toy producers eagerly attempted to fill.\(^{18}\)

Rather than reducing toy sales, the depression had an altogether more complex effect on toy consumption. While Canadian unemployment throughout the depression ranged from 25 percent to over 30 percent, those who were employed partially benefitted from declining prices. Many in the middle and upper-classes found their purchasing power remained constant, or even improved, over the course of the economically troubled 1930s. Given that new toy consumption was still largely confined to these groups, it is reasonable to conclude that the negative effects of the depression may have been moderated by the nature of the consumer market for toys. This is further supported by the clear upward trend in real per child toy consumption. Canadians spent an average of four times as much on a child’s playthings in 1938 as they did in 1914.

This conclusion is further borne out by the evidence of growth and consolidation in the toy industry. Mergers, like that of Dominion Toy with Reliable Toy Co. in 1933, led to an initial expansion of employment and helped to generate economies of scale within the factory system for surviving firms.\(^{19}\) Victoria and Toronto, along with other Canadian cities, made concerted and successful efforts to entice toy producers to relocate.\(^{20}\) The Department of Trade and Commerce went to great lengths to identify export opportunities for Canadian toy manufacturers through the promotion of Canadian toys at industry fairs and exhibitions, particularly in the United Kingdom. In 1936, for


instance, Canadian firms sold nearly $500,000 in contracts for dolls to U.K. and European retailers and wholesalers.\textsuperscript{21} This came on the heels of expanded Canadian market share in its former mother country during the mid-1930s as the U.K. became a more robust importer of toys. Canadian dolls were a favorite.\textsuperscript{22} Canadian toy makers also found new markets in the Caribbean, particularly in the Bahamas and Jamaica.\textsuperscript{23} Tariff reductions agreed to by the Canadian government, the U.K. and other former British possessions at the 1935 Ottawa conference may have helped smooth the flow of toys and other consumer goods, despite failing to bolster overall trade.\textsuperscript{24}

In fact, the number of toy firms in operation in Canada in 1938 was actually greater than it had been at any time during the 1920s. From 1931 to 1938 the number of firms grew from thirty-one to forty-five. Even with clear signs of expansion, Canadian production still fell short of demand. The \textit{Globe and Mail} reported a toy shortage in 1938.\textsuperscript{25} In response to such a clear business success in the midst of a depression, \textit{Maclean’s Magazine} and the \textit{Canadian Magazine} published triumphalist accounts of the Canadian toy industry. “The toy industry of Canada is flourishing,” cooed Andy McStay, citing $5,000,000 in production.\textsuperscript{26} McStay singled out dolls as the “Dominion’s chief contribution to the world toy markets,” even as Disney’s Snow White claimed the title for

\textsuperscript{24} "Notable Developments for Canadian Trade," \textit{Ottawa Citizen}, 1 Oct 1937, 8.
\textsuperscript{25} "Canadian-Toy Scarcity No Fault of 45 Firms," \textit{Globe and Mail}, 8 Dec 1938, 4.
\textsuperscript{26} Angus McStay, "Toys," \textit{Maclean’s}, 15 Dec 1938, 21-22 & 30.
most popular doll in Canada.\textsuperscript{27} Additionally the decline in doll imports over the 1930s from $325,883 in 1930 to $119,269 by 1938 suggests the strong position of Canadian doll production. Toy imports in 1938 were only 55 percent of their 1930 level. Doll imports had fallen to a mere 36 percent of 1930 levels. The Canadian toy industry seemed once again to be on an upswing.

Aside from new export opportunities and reduced foreign competition in the Canadian market, the survival of the Canadian toy industry in the 1920s and its slow development in the 1930s rested heavily on the exploitation of its workers. In constant 2012 dollars, wages remained stagnant and then declined slightly between 1926 and 1941 from $5.57 an hour to $4.85.\textsuperscript{28} The downward pressure on wages for unskilled and semi-skilled labour in Canada, so central to toy production, may have actually improved the competitiveness of Canadian factories in a notoriously low-margin business. Naturally this competitive advantage came at great human and socio-economic cost for workers and their families. The available evidence suggests that labour was brought in line by management through the strategic exploitation of gender and racial divisions within the workforce, allowing the low-wage environment to persist throughout the period.

The average wage obscures some of the more extreme instances of poor pay and working conditions that were felt unequally by men and women. Canadian toy workers in one factory were being paid by the piece equivalent to $0.30-$0.35 an hour. Men ranged from $0.40 to $1.20 an hour and women earned flat weekly wages of $7 to $12.50 a week.\textsuperscript{29} The lower wages commanded by women made them particularly attractive

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{28} Statistics Canada, Industry Profile: Toys and Games, (Ottawa: Queen’s Printer, 1960).
\textsuperscript{29} Report Prepared for the Toy Tinkers Inc., Evanston Illinois, Toronto Area Industrial
employees for toy producers. It is important to note that these wage rates were for businesses engaged primarily in toy production. For those that made toys in order to use up scrap materials, wage rates could be higher. For instance, the comparatively well-paying Dominion Rubber Co. was hit by two strikes, one in April and then again in June of the same year. Workers were earning $20-$25 a week. However, 270 men and 630 women engaged in a thirteen-day strike in response to a thirty percent cut in wages. The dispute ended with the workers going back to work and no concessions being made on the part of management. Women were particularly active in the labour dispute.

A 1934 strike at the Reliable Toy Co. factory in Toronto plainly illustrates the gendered nature of labour in the toy industry and its complex implications for workers and employers. Indeed, a third of the 150 workers at the plant who went on strike were women. They demanded recognition of their union, a forty-four hour work week and a thirty percent increase in pay. The strike was a direct response to Reliable’s thirty percent cut to wages and an increase in the length of the workweek to sixty-five hours. Reliable responded by shutting down the plant and reopening it a month later offering workers their jobs back with no appreciable increase in compensation. When many refused, Reliable brought in scab labour – primarily female – in an attempt to exploit the gender diversity prevalent among the strikers. This practice prompted a violent altercation that only served to stoke sympathies for the company. Three women scab labourers were injured when a striking male worker threw a brick into the cab containing the women and

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30 Dominion Rubber Co. T-2753 Department of Labour Fonds, LAC, RG 27 Vol. 341 File 60.
31 Dominion Rubber Co. T-2752 Department of Labour Fonds, RG 27 Vol. 340 File 20 12 April 1928, LAC
a Reliable manager serving as their escort. The incident inspired a great deal of media coverage that was sympathetic to the injured women, and Reliable. The media claimed that the majority of strike leaders were young male workers despite evidence that women were highly active. Some were even charged with police obstruction because of their aggressive picketing activities.\(^\text{32}\)

This suggests that the gender dynamics of toy factories had an important effect on the prospects and outcome of collective action by employees. Management strategically attempted to exploit divisions between workers in order to break strikes and generate public support for their draconian methods. Media reports helped to assign blame to young male workers while painting women as passive victims, obscuring the extent of worker solidarity and helping to justify managerial repression.

The realities of labour in the toy industry contrasted with media representations of toy workers. *Canadian Magazine*’s profile of toy manufacturing in 1938 depicted a predominantly female workforce smiling while they engaged in various manufacturing tasks to produce dolls. It is clear that bourgeois ideas about the domesticity of female labour and the social meaning of Christmas shaped representations of women’s work in factories. They were effectively removed from existing scripts about labourers and the working-class and re-imagined as benevolent assistants to the symbolic figurehead of Christmas: Santa Claus.

Furthermore, it seems clear that Canadian toy manufacturers like Reliable were heavily inclined to hire young, female or immigrant workers under the impression (often mistaken) that they were easier to exploit and would work for less money. Arnold Irwin

confessed his long-standing preference for female immigrant workers:

As long as we can operate a business in the family context…they [the workers] will not go to a third party like a union to protect their rights…Our girls would rather have more cash than all the other things you might have…our biggest problem with female staff is making arrangements so that they can take vacation when their husband does or so that they can return to [their homeland].

According to Irwin, the great advantage of female, immigrant labour was its supposed passivity and amenability to paternalistic managerial techniques. This reinforces Donica Belisle’s findings regarding female retail labour at Eaton’s department store. According to Belisle, male managers used paternalism as a tactic to thwart attempts by female staff members to unionize.

The Reliable toy strike is something of an oddity in comparison to the representations of labour conditions offered up by most media and factory owners. Major labour action undertaken in the toy industry between the wars was relatively rare and often unsuccessful. The low margins and the seasonal nature of work prior to the 1950s likely made it easier to dismiss “problem” employees at the end of productive seasons and minimize the wages paid to workers. The lack of consistent labour action was reflective of a high level of job insecurity associated with a seasonal industry rather than of a content and docile work force. In short, if times were good for Canadian toy manufacturers during the Depression, it was because conditions were abysmal for the majority of their workers.

The arrival of the Second World War drastically altered the source of Canada’s toy supply. By 1940 German and Japanese toy imports as well as those of other Axis

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33 Interview Arnold Irwin, Toronto, Sep 20 1977, Interviewer Cynthia Thompson, AO, RG 47-27-3-1, Tape 2 Side 2.
34 Belisle, “Negotiating Paternalism,” 74.
countries had slowed to a trickle or had been eliminated.35 As the war ramped up and British industry transitioned to war production, imports fell from the U.K. and then the U.S. after 1941. By the close of the war toy imports were a mere one-third of 1940 levels. The elimination of foreign competition led to rapid growth in the Canadian toy industry.

The expansion during the Second World War was different than that experienced during the First World War. Rather then a toy famine, the Second World War was characterized by minor shortages beginning in 1943.36 According to the Bookseller and Stationer, the toy trade seemed to be business as usual save for the increased presence of Canadian-made playthings – a direct result of which was the tripling of toy production in Canada in 1941.37 In all likelihood, the excess capacity present in Canadian industry as a result of the depression helped toy makers respond quickly to the changing circumstances. Consequently, the indigenous toy industry and a small number of American imports were able to satisfy most of the demand for toys.38

The Canadian government sprang into action yet again to support toy makers. In 1939 the federal government’s issued an Order in Council declaring toys non-essential goods, thereby limiting their importation. They were offering Canadian producers nearly unimpeded access to the domestic toy market.39 This led to a number of new entrants into the industry hoping to make a quick dollar by putting together very basic third-rate

37 “Toy Fair Shows Big Year Ahead of Canadian Toys,” Bookseller and Stationer, 15 March 1941, 13.
38 "Wartime Cannot Ruin Doll Trade," Saskatoon Star-Phoenix, 11 Dec 1940, 5.
playthings while charging first-rate prices. The rationing of materials, coupled with
decreased exports led to inflation in the price of toys, which was eventually brought into
line in 1942 by the Prices Board.

The Federal government supported the toy industry by sponsoring toy fairs throughout the war and by continuing their attempts to find export markets for Canadian wares in the U.S., Britain, the British West Indies, Australia, New Zealand and Latin America.\(^{40}\) These efforts were all designed to take advantage of the elimination of Japanese and German competition. For instance, the 1944 Toy Fair held in Toronto featured over 70 toy manufacturers from across the Dominion.\(^{41}\) In a profile of the Samuels Brothers doll factory published in *Saturday Night*, the proprietors gushed about the Department of Trade and Commerce’s role in helping them build their business:

“Their [the dolls] success in all…corners of the globe…can be attributed to the various Canadian Trade Commissioners abroad.”\(^{42}\)

Government support of toy manufacturers sprang from the belief that the toy industry would not compete with manufacturing directed at the war efforts. In fact, the government saw a secure and steady source of toys as central to efforts on the home front to “help bolster the morale of the country…[as children’s] happiness was contagious.”\(^{43}\) However, support for the industry was conditional. Government toy industry expert Harry

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\(^{42}\) "Canada Manufactures Dolls for All Nations," *Saturday Night*, 29 Mar 1941, 5.

B. Krug told members of the toy industry present at the CTMA’s annual banquet that it must avoid competition for the domestic market in order to create economies of scale. The government, declared Krug, would not support a “reckless business.” Thus, unlike the relatively simplistic industrial strategy during the First World War of expanding toy production, Krug’s statements demonstrate the government’s clear intention to develop internationally competitive firms by promoting monopolistic competition at home rather than the establishment of a competitive domestic market.

The Second World War also had a major impact on the material composition of toys. In 1941 the use of metal and rubber for toy production was banned and sales of metal toys ceased altogether in early 1943. Simultaneously, parents were encouraged to recycle what metal toys they did have for war industries. Given the gendering attached to certain kinds of toys the Canadian press concluded that rationing efforts would harm the play of boys more so than girls. This reflects the long-standing concern with boys’ access to playthings. Rationing also led to a reduction in the quality of toys for girls and the elimination of dolls with added mechanical features. As a replacement, toys like erector sets, dolls and toy vehicles were made with wood, paper, cardboard and plastics. Canada’s highly competitive lumber industry meant that simple unadorned wooden toys could be produced cost effectively for

45 "Ban Production of Metal Goods Until War Over," Ottawa Citizen, 17 Dec 1941, 18; "No Rubber For Manufacturing Non-Essentials," Ottawa Citizen, 26 Dec 1941, 15;
46 "Wooden Toys get Yule Call 'Tin Soldiers' Needed for War," Toronto Star, 8 Nov 1941, 2.
47 "Wooden Toys get Yule Call 'Tin Soldiers' Needed for War," Toronto Star, 8 Nov 1941, 2; "Wartime Cannot Ruin Doll Trade," Saskatoon Star-Phoenix, 11 Dec 1940, 5.
48 "Wood and Plastic Toys Will Get Call this Year," Ottawa Citizen, 22 Oct 1943, 1.
Canadian consumers.\textsuperscript{50} Indeed, the media attempted to put a more positive spin on material rationing, claiming that the new toys made of lighter materials would allow Santa’s sleigh to move faster.\textsuperscript{51} When toy prices climbed by fifty percent in 1940, the Saskatoon Star-Phoenix told its readers that it was not a price increase, but reflected the superior quality of the toys available since “cheap” German and Japanese toys could no longer be found.\textsuperscript{52} The move to plastic from metal was similarly spun as a victory for toy safety as “children often cut themselves on the sharp edges of metal toys, especially after the latter reach the broken stage.”\textsuperscript{53} According to Florence King, the war had allowed the Canadian toy industry to flourish.\textsuperscript{54} When labour shortages in the toy industry forced children to assemble many of these playthings themselves at home it was celebrated as yet another play feature.\textsuperscript{55}

It was not an easy time for business. Some toy companies found it difficult to keep up with demand. The data on inflation adjusted per child expenditure on toys clearly shows that overall demand increased during the war. H.M. Clubine & Co. and Reliable Toy took out ads in the Sports Goods Journal of Canada to apologize to retailers for unfilled orders.\textsuperscript{56} As the Reliable toy ad explained: “No one regrets the difficulties we are encountering these days in doll deliveries more than ourselves…bear in mind that we

\textsuperscript{50} “No electric Trains, Meccano Sets, But Many Wooden Toys on the Market,” Montreal Gazette, 15 Nov 1943, 7.
\textsuperscript{51} “Wood and Plastic Toys Will Get Call this Year,” Ottawa Citizen, 22 Oct 1943, 1.
\textsuperscript{52} “Quality of Toys Now Much Higher,” Saskatoon Star-Phoenix, 6 Dec 1940, 3.
\textsuperscript{53} “[Trade Note],” Edmonton Journal, 16 Oct 1943, 4.
\textsuperscript{54} Florence King, “Ingenuity and High Standards Have Created a Canadian Toy Industry,” Saturday Night, 16 Dec 1944, 26-7.
have our worries, too…” which included difficulties in obtaining raw materials and a
general labour shortage.\textsuperscript{57}

Peter McInnis’ study of Canadian industrial relations during the 1940s indicates
that labour shortages were the principle issue affecting the home front.\textsuperscript{58} As a relatively
low paying and non-essential industry, toy manufacturers would have had little choice but
to stand by and watch as their male and female employees “simply walked away from
low-paying work and into something better.”\textsuperscript{59} The introduction of price and wage
controls in 1943, as well as efforts by the National Selective Service to freeze the labour
market and limit labour mobility, ensured that some workers were available to the toy
industry, albeit at the expense of fundamental rights.\textsuperscript{60}

The regulation of labour mobility only applied to those leaving activities deemed
central to either social reproduction (like teachers) or war industries. This means that as
jobs opened up in war work, workers in the toy industry had a greater possibility to move
up to something better than those in industries deemed more important to victory over the
Axis. The limitations placed on workers, the high degree of bureaucratic regulation,
coupled with more lucrative opportunities in essential industries helps to explain the
general lack of labour strife during the Second World War. Many workers simply voted
with their feet.

The postwar boom built on many of the developments from 1920-1945. The early
postwar period was characterized by a population explosion, growth in real wages and the

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 24.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 27 & 32-33.
tendency for Canadians to display this new prosperity through the acquisition of an increasing number of consumer goods. Toys were caught up in this consumer expansion, much to the delight of Canada’s toy men. The media held out hopes that “the development of the Canadian toy industry gives promise of an end to the reliance on foreign countries.” According to a syndicated Canadian Press story from November of 1945, prospects for Canada’s toy industry were looking “bright…Canada, from a nation almost wholly dependent on toy imports, in two years has become nearly self-sufficient in providing toys for her three million children.” The easing of restriction on materials and labour had also led to the improved availability of workers and an increase in the selection of toys. Still, forty percent of manufactured toys continued to be made of wood.62

Older companies like Reliable enjoyed new levels of prosperity after the return to peacetime production. Already the largest doll manufacturer in the British Empire before the war, Reliable’s postwar conversion from lifejackets back to plush toys meant $500,000 a year worth of playthings were being manufactured in its Toronto factory alone.63 The tripling of Canadian toy production during the war was attributed to the expansion of existing industrial firms and the growth of new ones, often from humble beginnings in the family home.64 For instance the Munro family of Toronto turned a wartime basement enterprise producing miniature hockey games into an industrial

61 "Many New Products will be Available," Saskatoon Star-Phoenix, 17 Dec 1945, 10.
62 "Outlook is Bright for Canadian Toys," Calgary Herald, 5 Nov 1945, 1; "Christmas Toy Picture Bright," Saskatoon Star-Phoenix, 5 Nov 1945, 2.
63 Linda Bruce, "Toys Go Native," Maclean's, 15 Dec 1945, 47.
64 Ibid.
endeavour with a factory and 30 employees.\textsuperscript{65} Regent Toys, founded after the war’s end in Cornwall by James Holwill Jr. and Gerry Rogers, used the labour of returned soldiers, to produce toys for the Canadian market. From a kitchen factory, it grew into a small industrial enterprise shipping toys across Canada.\textsuperscript{66} An industry widely considered to require very low initial capital investment, the toy business was an appealing option for many entrepreneurs.\textsuperscript{67}

Toy production was also highly concentrated in Ontario, Quebec and British Columbia. According to the Canadian Toy Manufacturers Association, the industry was comprised of 250 firms in 1945, fully five times as many as existed in 1939. Foreign and domestic sales topped $18,000,000 at war’s end. Clearly, the destruction of the German and Japanese toy industries and the major shortages prevalent in Britain at the time limited competition for Canadian toys in foreign markets. As P. Grant Jones of \textit{Foreign Trade} reported, “Canada enjoys the reputation of being one of the world’s foremost producers of toys, ranking in importance with the United States and Britain.”\textsuperscript{68} According to \textit{Sport Goods and Playthings}, the export market was not only central to the present success of the toy industry, but to its future growth and development.\textsuperscript{69} The trade publication conceded that the Canadian toy industry had few problems with distribution. Production had always been its Achilles heel.\textsuperscript{70}

The CTMA attributed the toy industry’s impressive growth to its facility “catering

\textsuperscript{65} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{66} "Beginning of an Enterprise," \textit{Canadian Business}, May 1946, 58-59
\textsuperscript{67} P. Grant Jones, "Canadian Toys Create Happiness for Children in Many Lands," \textit{Commercial Intelligence Journal}, 21 Sep 1946, 442-446.
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{69} Quoted in P. Grant Jones, "Canadian Toys Create Happiness for Children in Many Lands," \textit{Commercial Intelligence Journal}, 21 Sep 1946, 442-446.
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid.
to the modern trend that recognizes educational value in toys and spreading
merchandising over the year by stressing such holidays as Easter and Halloween and
remembering that every day is some child’s birthday.” Toy producers attributed their
success to developments they had pioneered during the interwar years. In the minds of
business leaders and journalists the government was absent from their account of postwar
prosperity. Canadian Business declared in 1948 that “Canada’s bustling and booming toy
industry is a top-drawer exhibit of postwar free enterprise at work.” When factors
outside of the entrepreneurial skill of toy manufacturers were discussed it was typically
limited to the acknowledgment of a lull in foreign competition. Even with all the
circumstantial and state assistance, media coverage of the toy industry stressed the
entrepreneurial know-how of owners as the key ingredient for success.

The high times immediately following the war were ultimately short lived. The
number of toy firms in Canada declined from 250 in 1946 to just 110 in 1948. Sales
growth also slowed to just over $2,000,000 over the same period. The toy industry was
facing renewed and reinvigorated foreign competition and a saturated domestic market by
the late 1940s. Toy firms began merging in order to reduce competition and generate
economies of scale in production.

The most pressing issue was Canada’s de facto exclusion from trade with the
sterling block of countries because of the dollar shortage. The roots of Canada’s export

71 "New Canuck Toys Go to Town Will Cram Every Santa Bag," Toronto Star, 30 Nov 1946, 10.
73 Ibid.
74 Ibid.
75 P. Grant Jones, "Canadian Toys Create Happiness for Children in Many Lands,"
troubles with Britain and the former empire lay in the interwar years with the emergence of the sterling block. In an effort to retain its economic dominance over its former empire in the interwar period, Britain endeavored to act as banker to the emerging Commonwealth. They encouraged Dominions and self-governing colonies to make their local currencies convertible to the pound at a set rate. British support for the establishment of central banks in the Dominions, including Canada, was one avenue Britain used to pursue this policy, with mixed results.\textsuperscript{76} Canada opted instead to align itself with the United States and the dollar block because of the growing exchange of natural resources and industrial products with their neighbor to the south.

Following the war, Britain found itself heavily indebted to Canada and the United States. It was also facing a shocking balance of payments deficit with the rest of the sterling area. In 1948 Britain’s declining fiscal position led its government to go back on its earlier promises. It suspended convertibility between the pound and dollar. Whitehall also moved to restrict imports from all dollar countries in order to avoid a run on the pound.\textsuperscript{77} Most of the sterling area followed suit.\textsuperscript{78} The result was a massive reduction in purchases from Canada and the U.S. As a “non-essential” commodity, toys were severely limited, and at times, completely excluded from importation into the sterling area. This currency block formed an important export market for Canadian toys before and during the war. Canada’s exclusion forced the toy manufacturers to compete in dollar countries.

\textit{Commercial Intelligence Journal}, 21 Sep 1946, 442-446.
against the United States. Meanwhile, the American domestic market was reserved for national toy manufacturers by a seventy percent *ad valorem* tariff on imported toys, effectively shutting Canadian producers out.

By 1950, the full weight of Britain’s economic retreat from the multilateral world economy was being felt. Reliable toys struggled to find enough quota space to meet the demands of customers interested in buying their wares. They were exporting between $160,000 and $200,000 worth of goods to Britain before the war. In contrast, their quota for 1950 was set at $36,368.52. The persistence of restrictions on trade to Britain ensured that Reliable faced significant challenges in extending their business.

The Dee & Cee Toy Co. similarly found itself in frequent correspondence with the Canadian Department of Trade and Commerce about the small size of their quota. They were keen to reappropriate parts of their U.K. quota to the British West Indies to take advantage of export opportunities there. Furthermore, Britain’s devaluation of the pound in 1949 led to a drop in the real price for U.K toys, raising competition in the Canadian domestic market. The numbers are revealing. Canadian toy exports dropped from an annual high of around $2,000,000 in 1946-1948 to just over $150,000 by 1953.

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80 Reliable Toy to Fredrick Bull, letter, 16th Jul 1946, Department of Trade and Commerce Fonds, RG20 Vol. 1379 File Pt. 1 Pt. 2, LAC
81 Reliable toy to P.G. Jones (CIS), letter, 9 Sep 1946, Department of Trade and Commerce Fonds, RG20 Vol. 1379 File Pt. 1 Pt. 2, LAC
82 Dee Cee Toy Co. Ltd. To Department of Trade and Commerce, (letter), 17 May 1956 Department of Trade and Commerce Fonds, RG20 Vol. 1379 File Pt. 1 Pt. 2, LAC
Between 1945 and 1955 toy imports rose from $150,000 to almost $2,000,000. Growth in the domestic market fueled by the 6,700,000 children born between 1946 and 1961, helped fuel rising imports and carried the Canadian toy industry through the early 1950s in relatively good condition. This meant more overall sales, but only a five percent increase in per child expenditures. The retreat of Canada’s traditional toy markets from the world economy coupled with Canada’s association with the dollar block left manufacturers with few opportunities other than expansion in the domestic market. Canada’s relatively small consumer market meant the likelihood of manufacturers developing into large, competitive firms in the global toy industry became increasingly remote.

Workers secured important gains during the early postwar years because of the new pact between labour, capital and the state. Under the new arrangement unions traded in the strike for the negotiating table in exchange for regular, though modest, wage increases and improvements in working conditions. In the early postwar era, it provided a way for workers to gain access to a greater proportion of profits, even though it would have deleterious effects on the labour movement in the end.

However, the new arrangement did not mean an end to strikes. Toy workers actively organized and pressed their claims for better working conditions and wages. The 1949 strike at the Canadian plant of Lines Bros. a British toy firm, was indicative of the persistent efforts of workers to fight for job security and wage increases. In Vancouver

84 Doug Owram, Born at the Right Time, 30.
85 Peter S. McInnis, Harnessing Labour Confrontation, 15.
86 Lines Bros., Department of Labour Fonds RG27 Vol 474 Strike 82 August 1949, LAC.
in 1948, the first local of the Toymakers Industrial Union was organized by men and women to give a voice to the particular concerns of toy workers. Those in the retail trade were similarly active in the early postwar years. Workers at Steadman’s, Woolworth, the Hudson’s Bay Co. and others chose to walk the picket line. Retail job action demonstrates the concerted attempts by predominantly female retail staff to replace the paternalistic managerial system. Labour activism during the period clearly improved working conditions in the toy industry overall. Real average hourly wages in the toy industry increased significantly from $5.69 to $8.72 by 1949, reaching a high of $9.52 by 1959.

Problems in the international toy market continued to take their toll on business. The Toronto Star complained of a twenty-two percent decline in production from 1952-1953. More worrying still, only half of the $50,000,000 spent on toys was being used to purchase Canadian-made playthings. Declining tariffs on toys and a resurgent Japanese toy industry increased the pressure on Canadian producers. Japanese imports doubled after the tariff reduction in 1952 to just over $1,000,000 annually. In spite of simmering hostility on the part of some consumers and retailers to carrying Japanese-produced toys,

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87 Application for a Local Union Charter, Canadian Labour Congress Fonds, MG28-I103 Vol. 81 File 8, LAC
88 Department of Labour Fonds, RG 27 Vol 307 File 128 Reel #T-2694 Retail Clerks Winnipeg MN; Retail Clerks, Steadman’s Fort Frances, ON Sep 1957 RG27 Vol 525 File 193 T-4139; HBC Victoria and Retail Clerks Intn’l protective assoc local 279 Vol. 1778 File 7-55-142, LAC
89 Belisle, “Negotiating Paternalism,” 74.
90 Statistics Canada, “Industry Profile: Toys and Games Industry.”
92 Anne Alison, Millennial Monsters, 35-65.
Canada was Japan’s second-largest customer by 1958. Similar, though less dramatic increases were evident in imports from Germany and the United States. Complaints about the prevalence of “low wages and living standards” in these competitive foreign toy industries buttressed the Canadian industry’s calls for further tariff protection and support.

By the mid-1950s Canadian manufacturers were also beginning to lament what they saw as an outmoded domestic distribution system. In practical terms, this complaint was about the role of wholesalers in the toy trade. Wholesalers were central to the establishment and expansion of modern toys in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. In the 1950s they were seen as an impediment to the efficient distribution of toys in the postwar era. Manufacturers complained that around half of the toys sold to retailers still passed through wholesalers, resulting in increased prices for consumers and retailers.

In reality, the amount of toys handled by wholesalers as a share of the total had been cut in half by the mid-1950s. The Canadian Toy Importers Association, the lobby group for the wholesale toy trade, was concerned about their declining position. Indeed, manufacturers were increasingly selling to larger retailers directly, slowly but surely shrinking the wholesale market for toys. By 1959, the festering tensions between toy wholesalers and importers and toy manufacturers led to a split in the industry over Canadian industrial policy. Manufacturers lamented the “dumping” of cheap “foreign”

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toys especially those from Japan and the United States onto the Canadian market as a result of low import tariffs. The Canadian Toy Importers’ Association, fundamentally disagreed with the Canadian Toy Manufacturers’ Association, claiming instead that with a 30 percent import duty and a 10 percent sales tax on the wholesale of foreign toys, Canadian manufacturers were already well protected. The allegations of “dumping” may well have been exaggerated on the part of manufacturers. Nevertheless, it was clear that Canadian toy makers were now facing stiffer competition at home as well as abroad.

*Toy Consumption and its Discontents*

Initially the history of toy retailing between 1920 and 1959 was defined by the persistence of Victorian marketing and retailing techniques. Many companies continued to stress older scripts about value, amusement and pleasure to perspective consumers. As Arnold Irwin pointed out in an interview, prior to the mid-1950s the “whole toy business…[was] geared to in store demonstrations and to demonstrations in the schoolyard” rather than mass marketing. This somewhat oversimplified account speaks to the slow evolution of marketing and sales techniques among major retailers like Eaton’s, H.A. Nelson & Sons, the Hudson’s Bay Company and Simpson’s. In the 1940s, the small shortages resulting from the war led retailers to return to their Victorian

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100 Interview Arnold Irwin, 20 Sep 1977, Interviewer Cynthia Thompson, AO, RG 47-27-3-1, Tape 1 Side 1.
marketing scripts. They highlighted low stock levels and good prices as a means to get consumers into stores early in the season so they wouldn’t miss out on important purchases.\textsuperscript{102}

In fact, merchandising and sales were undergoing significant shifts. Creating the “fairy world” necessary to promote toy consumption was becoming more intricate and refined. Bright, colourful decorations were seen as a necessity. Retailers adopted the practice of keeping only a few items of each kind on the shelf with the rest in the back, stressing variety and the requirement to buy soon. Displays were designed to be dynamic and busy without being overwhelming.\textsuperscript{103}

The perception that selling to children involved treating children in a wholly different fashion constituted a major shift in the period. Salesmanship in the interwar period emphasized the unique nature of the child consumer as agentive and distinct from adults. According to the \textit{Sport Goods Journal of Canada}, “many, many times we [in the toy industry] place too much emphasis upon good buying, good selling good display and good retail management generally, forgetting…the human element…”.\textsuperscript{104}

Selling to children rather than to adults, required salespeople to “help…select just the playthings that will best suit [a child’s] need and desire.”\textsuperscript{105} To this end, toy retailers were advised to avoid hurrying child consumers, encouraging them to spend as much

\textsuperscript{103} Eaton’s Window Display Photos, T. Eaton’s Fonds, AO, F-229-304-1-21 [1930s].
\textsuperscript{105} \textit{Ibid.}
time as they possibly could browsing the store at will.\textsuperscript{106} The goal was for toy merchants to “seek greater sales through friendliness rather than intensive salesmanship.”\textsuperscript{107} The whole approach to toy merchandising and sales was to be reoriented in order to place the agentive consuming child at the centre of toy retailing efforts and to emphasize their autonomy.\textsuperscript{108} A 1927 article discussing toy merchandising specifically stressed the importance of taking the children’s view in all merchandising choices: “It is the children who must be sold first, and if an attractive window display can get the youngsters talking about toys to their parents, it is certain that sales will result.”\textsuperscript{109} Victorian marketing attempted to appeal to children, as well as adults, to drive toy sales. These early efforts made it clear that children were to be accompanied and supervised in spaces shared between the generations. The interwar years saw the injunction for parental oversight fade into the background as children were invited to explore and inhabit the retail space unaccompanied. Children were pictured not only as desiring, but as autonomous in all but the financial sense.

Toy retailers and manufacturers were also keen to intensify initial efforts in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century to expand the toy industry from a seasonal affair to a year-round children’s industry. The \textit{Sport Goods Journal of Canada}, the \textit{Bookseller and Stationer} and the Ontario Retail Merchants Association suggested that

\begin{flushright}
106 \textit{Ibid.} \\
107 \textit{Ibid.} \\
\end{flushright}
creating a year-round toy counter or section would “rectify the seasonal nature of the toy industry.” The Canadian Toy Manufacturers Association sponsored a “Children’s Day,” in the 1920s, to help drive sales of toys in the summer months. Similarly, Eaton’s expanded summer toy offerings in catalogues. Year-round toy sales were intended to capture the interest of adults by enticing their children into the store: “Not many stationers realize the great potential possibilities of a year-round toy department. Toys help to sell other merchandise. If the parents bring the children into the store then the parents will buy as well as the children. The great thing is to sell the children on the store first.”

Consequently, the act of taking possession of the toy – of establishing an identification with it – was now part of the experience of shopping and was intended to occur in the retail space of the store. The stress placed on parents’ emotional relationship to their children, established the toy as a gift from parent to child. This “ideology of the gift,” as James Carrier calls it, minimizes the materiality and cost of the toy and instead stressed the sentiment behind the object as the central thing being exchanged. By this logic, the impersonal and alienated toy commodity became the mark of a deeply felt and intimate connection.

The Victorian tendency of dividing toys by gender and age also evolved during the interwar period. Boys could have any kind of toy, including some dolls. Girls were

offered a comparatively limited selection of appropriate toys.\textsuperscript{114} Sydney Harris lamented the inequality fostered by these gender distinctions throughout the Dominion:

Hundreds of aggressive and ingenious toys are available for boys to break, but what does one get for a little girl… dolls, of course. One reason girls have so many dolls of all sizes and shapes is that there is little else on the market for them. As a result, of course, she quickly appropriates many of his [her brother’s] toys, and the Harris ménage is frequently in a bitter state of civil war. Yet one cannot really buy guns and cement-mixers and rocket-ships for a girl.\textsuperscript{115}

Boys were provided with “realistic” electric railroads and model engines for the “mechanically minded.” Dolls and dollhouses were the usual fare for girls, much as they had been in earlier times. Girls were also offered toy household equipment that suggested in form – if not in function – the new “modern conveniences” of postwar homemaking. This was a far cry from the wonderland offered boys, which ranged from antimodern fantasies of cowboys and Indians to the futuristic world of Buck Rogers or the nuclear home laboratory – complete with uranium-235 samples. Girls were often excluded from the use of technological toys throughout the interwar period.\textsuperscript{116}

The gendering in toy sections also brought to light persistent tensions in the role of nostalgia and progress in toy selection for both genders. In the articles “Terrible Lizard! The Dinosaur as Plaything” and “Toy Robots in America, 1955-75: How Japan Really Won the War” Ron Tanner makes the case that the debate between antimodernism and modernism became increasingly important in shaping American toy boxes

\textsuperscript{115} Sydney J. Harris, "Girls' toys Inadequate," \textit{Ottawa Citizen}, 1 Dec 1959, 6.
throughout the twentieth century.\footnote{Ron Tanner, “Toy Robots in America, 1955-75: How Japan Really Won the War,” \textit{Journal of Popular Culture} 28, no. 3, (1994): 125-154 & Ron Tanner, “Terrible Lizard!” 53-55.} Nostalgia and progress were seemingly effective touchstones in the rapidly changing world of the 1920s-1960s. They also tended to exacerbated tensions between accounts of the child consumer that stressed their agency and those that highlighted their natural innocence. Nostalgia and progress shared a deep ambivalence about the present as insufficient: either too modern or not modern enough. Both helped to generate sales by appealing to adult memories of their own childhood and the present child’s future status as an adult.

Progress manifested itself in a number of ways beginning in the interwar years. In 1926 the \textit{Globe} assured its readers that “[Grandpa] must envy his grandson the Meccano out of which may be made…all sorts of engineering devices…fascinating as well as instructive.”\footnote{“Toys of Modern Childhood Amaze Sedate Older People,” \textit{Globe}, 24 Dec 1926, 7.} According to the \textit{Toronto Star}, “the number and variety of toys now provided for children are a constant source of wonder to the older folk. Modern store toylands have something new every year.”\footnote{J.C. Royle, "The Trend in Toys is Toward Wheel Goods," \textit{Toronto Star}, 15 Feb 1927, 12.} Some of these newer trends included the rising popularity of toy airplanes, science kits and toy cars.\footnote{“Science, Genius, Art and Great Skill Combine to Perfect Christmas Toys,” \textit{Globe}, 17 Dec 1928, 6; Gladys Huntington Bevans, “You and Your Children,” \textit{Toronto Star}, 26 Jun 1930, 31; "Toy Trend Stresses "Learning By Doing,"" \textit{Globe}, 15 Mar 1937, 34.} In 1935 the \textit{Winnipeg Free Press} declared to its readers that “Santa Claus has electrified his pack,” as electric washing machines, electric irons, electric movie projectors and electric trains all could be found in toy form. Just as the home needed to modernize, so too did the toys within it as faster toy automobiles, electric looms and sewing machines were made available to
consumers.\textsuperscript{121}

When the media declared that the world was in a space age or nuclear age, rocket guns, space helmets, space ports and spaceship push and pull toys all graced store shelves for boys. Girls, on the other hand, were offered a less expansive selection of the latest in “scientific house cleaning.”\textsuperscript{122} As one article succinctly put it: “All in all, it seems to be just a few steps from ‘play-pretend’ to ‘for-real’ with toys acting as her introduction to an adult world.”\textsuperscript{123} Articles like “Toyland Becomes a World of Reality” highlighted the trend towards realism in toys including the wide selection of toys that mimicked adult activities for both genders.\textsuperscript{124}

Whether futuristic or realistic, the discourse of progress was central to these developments. As one toy manufacturer explicitly and succinctly made clear, “a child…is, above all, a realist. So long as the only toy car was a piece of bent metal with four wheels on it, he was content. But he wasn’t fooled. What was good enough for us in our childhood isn’t good enough for our sons and daughters. They know there are toys just like the real thing and they are satisfied with nothing less.”\textsuperscript{125} Progress offered adult and child consumers the opportunity to dream about the child’s future. The modern presumption of constant change removed toy consumers from considering the purchase as an event confined to a particular time and space, and re-contextualized it as an investment in social and individual progress.

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{121} “Toy World This Year Been Electrified By Good Old Santa Claus,” \textit{Winnipeg Free Press}, 18 Dec 1935, 26.
\bibitem{123} “Christmas Crop of Dolls Tell Approach of Santa,” \textit{Ottawa Citizen}, 4 Dec 1958, 24
\bibitem{125} Ronald Boxall, “The Toy Business Pays in Millions,” \textit{Quebec Chronicle-Telegraph}, 22 Dec 1956, 7
\end{thebibliography}
In contrast, nostalgia’s antimodern orientation spurred the promotion of “traditional” toys and the indulgence of adult reminiscences of their own childhood. Like progress, the goal was to allow parents to relate to children. But in this instance, it was by returning to their own childhood. Furthermore, whenever writers invoked the return to “traditional” toys – many of which were only developed in the late nineteenth century – they often used concepts like timelessness to reinforce claims of childhood innocence and universality.

Exhibits of traditional toys at museums, galleries, the CNE and even corporate headquarters across North America attracted adults and children alike. The first doll convention held at the City Museum of New York in 1958 was attended by doll collectors from across North America. According to the curator of the toy collection, women provided the bulk of the museum’s artifacts and formed the majority of convention attendees. “Women form close, deep attachments for dolls. They hate to see them thrown out and want them to have a good home.” This idea that women were somehow more prone to nostalgia and sentimentality than men also characterized descriptions of children’s toy consumption. For all the toys based on modern housework, many commentators still asserted that dolls should be the principle playthings of girls. They became the traditional toy par excellence. Lillian Campbelle and Ronald Boxall

described them as timeless, claiming that they “basically hadn’t changed in a thousand years.”¹³⁰ Dolls were often described as consistent, and even best sellers.¹³¹

For boys, cowboy play was most closely identified with nostalgia. A 1956 Canadian Press survey of toy sales showed that rocket ships, space guns, and electric housekeeping equipment were losing ground. In their place, antimodern “traditional toys – dolls for girls and cowboy outfits for boys –” were on the rise.¹³² In 1958 it was “familiar, traditional, playthings still in top place.”¹³³ Indeed, the late 1950s were dominated by this short-lived nostalgic shift back to “traditional” playthings in response to the dislocation of war and depression and the expanded place of technology in Canadian’s everyday lives.

Toy purchases were rendered temporally and spatially flexible by the discourses of progress and nostalgia. Toys could connect consumers to the moon or the Wild West across vast distances of time and space. Nostalgic adults could recapture the time of their childhood. Forward looking adults and children might fantasize about a young boy’s or girl’s future social role in adulthood. This made it easier for toy consumption to transcend the mundane act of purchase and implicated children’s play in the debate about modernity.

However, nostalgia also became a vehicle for mobilizing criticisms of the modern toy industry. Concerns about futuristic toys relied heavily on the discourse of the

¹³¹ “Christmas Stockings Will Contain amazing Variety of Toys This Year with Almost Every Mechanical Device on the Adult Market Imitated,” Calgary Herald, 17 Dec 1938, 28.
innocent timeless child and its supposed corruption by modernity. Betty Mason complained that “the atomic age and space race and the toys they inspired made us feel old and out-of-touch with the world, for we are of the generation whose heart’s desire was a doll, a pair of skates or a sled.”\textsuperscript{134} The return to “traditional” toys meant that “even the oldest among us can feel young again.”\textsuperscript{135} Some lamented that the yo-yo – a “high class” toy of yesteryear – had become the “plaything of street urchins.”\textsuperscript{136} In some cases the preference for modern toys was contrasted negatively with the play of historical, non-white children:

\begin{quote}
Toys that mother and dad played with when they were children are being snubbed by modern American youngsters, who demand ultra-modern effects on their playthings…While the Egyptian child was content with a crude figure whose arms moved…American children are calling for streamline trains, autos, airplanes, and other toys reflecting the trend of the times.\textsuperscript{137}
\end{quote}

In many instances toy manufacturers were blamed for this frenetic pace of change in Canadian childhoods: “Toy manufacturers are constantly inventing new toys, dressing old ones in new disguises, or packaging them in different cartons to attract buyers.”\textsuperscript{138} Some openly wondered why toy manufacturers “haven’t turned their attention to the kind of toys tiny tots really love.”\textsuperscript{139} According to Ronald Boxall, the 1950s toy box could easily be divided into two categories: “novelties,” which were “here today and gone tomorrow,” and “toys,” which “don’t change.”\textsuperscript{140} In the end, this distinction between toys

\textsuperscript{134} Betty Mason, "And Santa, Don't Forget…" \textit{Saskatoon Star-Phoenix}, 19 Dec 1953, 3.
\textsuperscript{135} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{136} “Jig-Saws 'Homework' to Past Generation," \textit{Toronto Star}, 1 Mar 1933, 24.
\textsuperscript{137} "Modern Playthings Reflect Trend of Mechanical Age; Rag Dolls Outdated," \textit{Calgary Herald}, 22 Dec 1934, 25.
\textsuperscript{138} Ibid.
and novelties rested heavily on the discourses of antimodernism and the innocent romantic child: “I could not sleep as a child unless my Teddy Bear was tucked up beside me in bed; neither can my two small sons.” Toys became the principle way for bringing children directly into pressing adult concerns over the realities of postwar life in Canada. They established concerns about the presence, past and future as conflicts about the nature of childhood.

Another set of toy trends that attracted journalistic attention centred on popular media personalities. The royal family, the Dionne quintuplets and Shirley Temple were turned to as inspirations for toy design in order to draw upon their wide popularity. The 1935 Dionne Quintuplet dolls were a major interest for Canadian toy consumers. The dolls began production shortly after the Dionne’s birth in 1934 under license to the Madame Alexander Doll Co. of New York. The very same year several Canadian and American companies began producing knock-offs, like those of the Superior Manufacturing Company of Montreal. As the quints grew, Madame Alexander and its rivals updated the dolls to reflect the girls’ changed appearance.

The Shirley Temple doll, launched in 1935, offered consumers a fully developed character doll in contrast to the baby-doll representation of the quintuplets. In the mid-1930s Shirley Temple’s success in a slew of films resulted in the production of a wide array of children’s merchandise, including toys. These were quite popular in Canada

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141 Ibid.
142 Alexander Doll Co. [1937-1940], Dionne Quintuplets Official Guardian Records, RG 4-53-0-6, B408378, AO.
144 Ibid.
along with several Disney character dolls before 1937. That same year, the Dionne and Shirley Temple dolls lost their place to another set of celebrity dolls: those of British Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret Rose. This was inevitable in the opinion of the Montreal Gazette as “[w]hen the choice is between a juvenile movie queen and Princesses of the blood royal, the former just fades out of the picture.”

The Canadian media began to track the toy consumption practices of notables like the Dionne quintuplets and the British royal family. Beginning shortly after their birth in 1934, the Dionne’s toy acquisitions became a topic of media fascination. Canadian papers reported on toy purchases made for the Dionne girls. Dr. Allan Defoe revealed in an interview that he had purchased rattles, stuffed animals, teaching toys and a mechanical trapeze for the Dionne’s on his trip to New York. Similarly when “Papa Dionne” went to buy gifts again in 1937 in New York City, his haul included tea sets, cleaning sets, ringer washers, stoves, laundry sets, toy sewing machines and other stereotypically female toys. An enormous sum, $1500, was spent on toys to “keep them [the Dionne girls] entertained” during two weeks of filming a feature on the famous siblings in 1936.

When other notables visited, they often exchanged gifts with the quintuplets.

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146 Ibid.
148 As Mariana Valverde has demonstrated, the Quints were a topic of intense interest, in large part because they were managed as nationalized property. See Mariana Valverde, “Families, Private Property and the State: The Dionnes and the Toronto Stork Derby,” Journal of Canadian Studies 29, no. 4 (1994/1995): 15-35.
149 “Dr. Dafoe Plays Part of Santa,” Calgary Herald, 17 Dec 1934, 3.
151 “Quint Film Makers Pay $1500 for Toys,” Toronto Star, 2 Sep 1936, 2.
Shirley Temple brought the Dionne’s toys when she visited in 1935.\textsuperscript{152} The Keys quadruplets from Waco, TX offered the quintuplets toys during their summer visit in 1936.\textsuperscript{153} In 1935 Queen Mary was “much amused” upon receiving Dionne dolls, purchased for her at the British Industry Fair.\textsuperscript{154}

Observing the quints playing with toys was one of the main attractions for those who came to visit them at the Dafoe nursery, constructed specially with a pane of glass to allow public observation of the children.\textsuperscript{155} The country’s interest in the quints and their toy purchases waned during the Second World War as the Dionne children slowly but surely left childhood behind.

Stories like these about ray guns, scientific house cleaning equipment, the Dionne’s or the royal family were another kind of consumer fable. Unlike the cautionary and moralizing tales, which focused on the working-class, these were about the middle-class and the privileged elite. The stories offered images of a world where all desires for toys were satisfied and, through this satisfaction, happy and successful children and adults could be fashioned. Consumers could enter this fantastic realm by reading about futuristic and nostalgic toys or the actual consumer activities of the Dionne’s and the royal family, and then make purchases to reinforce and represent these interests materially. It allowed Canadians to imagine themselves as symbolically connected to the world of fame and celebrity, the future and the past. That these toys were popular sellers shows the appeal of these consumer fables. They reinforced other efforts to expand the

\textsuperscript{152} “Shirley Temple Presents Dolls to Quintuplets,” \textit{Calgary Herald}, 23 Dec 1935, 18
\textsuperscript{153} “Quads Visit Quints and Get Big Thrill,” \textit{Montreal Gazette}, 12 May 1936, 8.
\textsuperscript{154} “Queen Interested in Canadian Toys,” \textit{Montreal Gazette}, 21 Feb 1935, 9.
Retailers were also active in creating their own promotional characters that were inserted into narratives of consumption. The increased prominence of the commercialized middle-class Christmas was central to these efforts. As Susan G. Davis has argued, Christmas festivities in urban America during the nineteenth century were still dominated by a tradition of disorder, mischief and revelry among the working-class. After 1850 this carnivalesque celebration of Christmas competed with the emerging middle-class definition of the holidays as a time of family intimacy facilitated by commercial gift giving. According to Steve Penfold, the first half of the twentieth century was characterized by the efforts of retailers to design ever more impressive Christmas and consumer spectacles in line with middle-class expectations.

The Santa Claus parade was indicative of this shift. Begun in very modest form in 1905, by the 1920s the parade became an important local spectacle incorporating Santa Claus, corporate mascots, and characters from children’s popular culture. It also began reaching a wider Canadian audience via radio, and later television, broadcasts.

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157 See Tommy R. Thompson, “Sales, Santa and Good Fellows: Celebrating Christmas in Omaha,” Nebraska History 68, no. 3 (1987): 127-141; While historians continue to debate the extent to which these new middle-class traditions were invented by business, or an outgrowth of changing definitions of respectability, it is clear that Christmas was becoming increasingly centred on the family and on the exchange of mass-produced gifts throughout the late-nineteenth and early twentieth century. See Neil Armstrong, “Christmas in Nineteenth Century Britain and America: A Historiographical Overview,” Cultural and Social History 1, no. 1 (2004): 118-125.
159 Ibid., 6.
Pivotala a number of other Canadian retailers sponsored or created their own Santa Claus parades across the country. Santa Claus and other characters were increasingly associated with toy consumption.

In the 1970s Eaton’s asked Canadians to submit their fondest Christmas memories, prompting recollections that highlighted pleasure, amusement and Santa and his parade. Myrtle Campbell, a resident of Thornloe, ON, in the north of the province during the 1920s, fondly recalled the excitement and joy she experienced when her mail-order parcels arrived at the railway station. For Edith Kett and Eva Louzon of 1930s Toronto, the parade was unforgettable. Kett was particularly fond of Peter the Clown, who led the parade for several years. Shirley Grigoire had fond memories of the banter between Santa and the elf tinkerbell on the Eaton’s Christmas radio broadcast. Margaret Howe, also of Toronto, turned to verse to express her memories of the parade which she watched “until little feet grew tired” and the joy of visiting Santa in the Eaton’s store, from which came her first teddy bear.

The innovations in retailing in the 1920s and 1930s continued to pay dividends for the toy industry in the early postwar period. Toy sales boomed following the Second

World War, topping $50,000,000 by the mid-1950s. Summer vacation and back-to-school sales had all become common practice by 1949. Toys had become “a year round affair” by the close of the 1950s, with the Christmas trade accounting for only 50 to 60 percent of total sales.

Advertisements from the 1950s increasingly placed the children’s perspective at the centre of their scripts. In 1950, for instance, the Hudson’s Bay Co. reminded parents to shop early because “your little ones have waited and waited and waited for Christmas to come. Don’t disappoint them by failing to secure the gifts they have set their hearts on.” As the Eaton’s advertisement in the Ottawa Citizen reminded its readership in 1954 “Generally, through a child’s eyes, Christmas means T-O-Y-S!” A toy manual issued to Eaton’s toy departments in the 1950s gave precise and detailed instructions on the way to display, wrap and merchandise toys to make them appealing to shoppers.

Punkinhead, a teddy bear-like character, was featured prominently in free children’s books like “Punkinhead’s Toy Workshop Adventure” or the Eaton’s televised Christmas specials. Throughout the 1950s he was used as yet another fictional character to provide narrative purpose to Christmas toy consumption.

Maureen Lasrek remembered fondly her time in the Eaton’s toyland in the 1950s when every year, a few weeks before Christmas, her mother would take her to the fifth

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169 "Child’s world at Christmas is Made of "Like Real" Toys," Ottawa Citizen, 30 Nov 1954, 10.
floor to browse the toys and ride a mechanical train. Afterwards they would head to the
annex to see the mechanical Punkinhead that Maureen “was sure was real”. As Mrs.
Leland Ball, formerly of Toronto’s east end put it, by the 1950s “Eaton’s and Christmas
were synonymous,” largely because of these important innovations in retailing. Major
department stores continued to capture much of the trade. Nevertheless, toys expanded
into a number diverse retail environments, including, grocery stores, pharmacies, and
clothing stores. Many of the retailers offered year-round toy departments, just as
department stores and stationary stores had begun doing in the interwar years.

Second-Hand Toys and Marginal Children

Yet, not all childhood memories were of realized consumer desire and wonder at
the world of consumption. Jean McDermott of Port Perry, ON remembered the economic
challenges associated with meeting her Christmas demands. McDermott, a child in the
mid-1920s, had set her heart on the Eaton’s Beauty Doll. She was disappointed when
the doll was nowhere to be found among her Christmas presents. McDermott decided to
let her parents know the full degree of her sadness. She finally received the doll at her
birthday when her parents were able to afford it. Another letter writer, who asked to
not have her name revealed, recalled growing up in Winnipeg during the Great

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Vol 162 File 614, AO.
173 Mrs. Leland Ball to T. Eaton’s Co., 21 Nov 1977, [Letter], T. Eaton Co. Fonds, F229
Vol 162 File 614, AO.
174 Frances Oakes Baldwin, "No Turnips for Young Canada," Canadian Business, Dec
1953, 23.
175 T. Eaton’s Co., Eaton’s Catalogue, Fall-Winter, 1924, 390
176 Jean McDermott to T. Eaton’s Co., [letter] 20 Nov 1977, T. Eaton Co. Fonds,
Depression. She also found that her Christmas demands were not easily met. Consequently, she confessed that she and her friend would often go to Eaton’s to “look,” which also sometimes involved helping themselves to candy and other merchandise.177

Many children were prevented from participating in the growing consumer festival of Christmas by material limitations. The consumer spectacle surrounding Christmas characterized toy consumption as an activity independent of the economic circumstances of Canadian families. It coded the inability of parents to satisfy their children’s demand as a moral failure rather than a symptom of economic inequality. The increased prominence of gifting toys meant that a broad cross-section of Canadian society faced tremendous pressure to provide playthings to their children even during tough times.178 A fictional dialogue published in the Saskatoon Star-Phoenix illustrates the importance placed on sheltering children from economic hardship:

“Well I heard Santa Claus say to Mrs. Santa Claus that there was a “Depression” in the mortal world and so I figured I might as well rest. The children won’t be getting near so many toys this year because their mothers and fathers won’t let them ask for hardly anything because of this depression and some of them haven’t written at all.”179

In response to the challenge of the Depression the elves decide to work twice as hard to produce toys so that all the children could have a proper Christmas.

Concerns about the access of working-class families to toys were dramatized in many formats by the press. Stories about shoplifting were particularly effective as consumer fables about the working-class. According to the Quebec Telegraph, the theft of over $1,000,000 of toys each year had a simple cause: “Love of children, who want,

178 Ibid.
179 “The Elves and Depression,” Saskatoon Star-Phoenix, 24 Dec 1931, 16.
and those parents have no way to get them toys and clothing are found to be at the bottom of many thefts.”¹⁸⁰ In 1933, the Vancouver Sun declared the theft of toys by a mother at Christmas to be a “tragic drama of mother love.” In an attempt to spur middle and upper-class readers to action it asked rhetorically, “Would you force mother into such straits? Can you sit by calmly whilst parents strive frantically to find something to cheer up the holidays? Hundreds of them will have to face their children Christmas day empty handed.”¹⁸¹

Fables like these were easily mobilized in efforts to improve the lot of the poor and rail against the growth of modern middle-class consumerism. Harold Winch, a member of the British Columbia Provincial Legislature representing the left-wing Cooperative Commonwealth Federation felt the sight of Santa Claus was “enough to make you sick.” He advocated banning Santa from sidewalks and stores because “little trusting children, who have no hope in the world of three square meals December 25, much less gifts of toys, are given impossible promises by Santa Clauses who are in no position to carry them out. Until every family in this province is assured of all income suitable to meet modern demands, I would debar Santa Claus.”¹⁸² These comments clearly illustrate the social and cultural value placed on providing a proper Christmas, including toys, regardless of material circumstances.

In her study of consumption among working-class families in the United States during the interwar years, Susan Porter Benson claims that consumption “was not a mass phenomenon but rather a class phenomenon.” The vast majority of American families

¹⁸⁰ “Montreal Shop Lifters' Huge Haul for Year,” Quebec Telegraph, 15 Dec 1920, 7.
¹⁸¹ “Tragic Drama of Mother Love,” Vancouver Sun, 21 Dec 1933, 13.
outside the middle and upper-class were excluded from participating in the mass market. Consequently, they often turning to homemade and second-hand goods to meet their consumption needs.\textsuperscript{183} Values like mutuality and reciprocity loomed large, demonstrating the persistence of a moral economy alongside the market economy in working-class lives.\textsuperscript{184}

This did not put them wholly outside of Canadian consumer society. The circulation of second-hand goods was indirectly bound up with the circulation of new goods. Furthermore, second-hand goods were also partially contingent on middle-class recognition of their utility for those on the margins of consumer society. Toy transfers between regions and from white middle-class Canadians to working-class or immigrant others helped to make material the bonds of the emerging Canadian consumer society.

Interwar toy distribution shared a great deal in common with the philanthropic efforts pioneered in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century to provide children with toys. During the 1920s and 1930s middle-class philanthropists distributed toys to those deemed needy by virtue of their citizenship, class or institutionalization. One mother writing to the \textit{Montreal Gazette} in 1921, asked for second-hand toys that other children had “grown bored of.”\textsuperscript{185} Institutions like the Salvation Army solicited donations by reminding \textit{Globe} readers that they visit the poor and “foreign” populations of Canadian cities “where playthings are few or none at all.”\textsuperscript{186} At Montreal’s Church of Messiah, the distribution of toys to thirty families on welfare ensured that the younger

\textsuperscript{184} Ibid., 8-9.
\textsuperscript{185} “Want Christmas Tree,” \textit{Montreal Gazette}, 16 Dec 1921, 5.
\textsuperscript{186} “One Million Visits a Week,” advertisement, \textit{Globe}, 15 Mar 1920, 8.
members received “…the full Christmas dues of childhood.” Similarly, those living in remote or rural areas such as new settlers in the west or northern Ontario and Quebec were also deemed needy. In the Gaspé, where work was scarce in 1938, the local bishop appealed for a donation of “one toy and one useful article” per child.

The “procession of need,” as the *Vancouver Sun* called it, was simultaneously titillating and awful to middle and upper-class Canadians. The media coverage encouraged them to do something helpful while simultaneously allowing them to marvel at the tragedy of unfulfilled consumer desire among marginal child consumers. Toy donations held the promise of protecting needy children against the harsh realities of their family’s material circumstances.

The philanthropic distribution of toys harkened back to the earlier moral economy of mutuality and reciprocity, even noblesse oblige in some ways. However, it did so in a way that tied these practices ever closer to market mechanisms. The philanthropic distribution and production of toys went through a series of important changes that brought together the worlds of industrial toy production, nation building and second-hand toy distribution. Philanthropists gradually moved away from craft production in the 1920s and 1930s, adopting semi-industrial divisions of labour. Similarly, changing gender roles placed men in positions of authority as labourers and organizers of many toy distribution efforts. Furthermore, the labour employed in refurbishing second-hand toys increasingly fell on the shoulders of older children and adolescents, rather than women or the differently-abled.

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187 “Santa Claus at Church of Messiah,” *Montreal Gazette*, 20 Dec 1923, 5
The Boy Scout toy repair shop was at the forefront of the shift. The toy shops began humbly in 1924. Four shops were established as part of the Scout’s annual Christmas “good turn.” By 1931, the network of toy shops had surpassed one hundred.  

Chief Scout Dr. James Robertson was at the forefront of these efforts. Robertson had served in a number of voluntary capacities with humanitarian organizations and as chair of the Royal Commission on Industrial Training and Technical Education before leading the Scouts. As chair of a royal commission, Robertson was charged with investigating the best way to organize and implement vocational education schemes in Canada, primarily targeted at the working-class. Over the course of his work, Robertson became increasingly convinced of the value of vocational training for all children in developing their character and steering them away from delinquency.

Voluntary manual labour in the toy shop was emphasized as part of the Scouting movement’s focus on educating the body and character of Canadian youths. In a speech given at the 1935 Annual General meeting, Robert Baden Powell made this connection explicit, declaring: “I see the boys in Canada have been encouraged to do service by mending toys at Christmas, etc. This is so good for the boys themselves.” Thus, distributing toys to working-class and immigrant children was just as much about training middle-class children and adolescents as assisting those identified as in need.

190 Report of the Committee of the Privy Council 14 Mar 1911, James W. Robertson Fonds, University of British Columbia Special Collections, Vancouver, BC.
192 Minutes Annual meeting 16 May 1935, Boy Scouts of Canada, LAC, MG28-I73 Vol. 1 File No. 11.
The Calgary Boy Scouts were particularly assiduous in documenting their activities through the medium of photography during the period. A set of photographs at the Glenbow Museum shed light on many of their activities, including the meaning attached to the labour of Scouts and Guides.

Figure 4.1 – Scouts and Guides at Work

Source: From left to right: “Santa’s Helpers [c. 1920],” (photo), NA-4487-5 & “Scout and Guide Workshop [c. 1930]” (photo), NA-4487-7, Glenbow Museum, Calgary, AB.

As the first of the two photos in Figure 6.1 indicate, the status of Guides and Scouts as labourers was shaped by the timing of their efforts. Since the toy repair shop operated around Christmas, their labour could be recast as help, as a gift in and of itself, and removed from the social and cultural relations, which helped to shape it. The picture depicts a Scout and a Guide posing with Santa Claus. The promotional photo represents the Scout and Guide as elves and helpers rather than workers. The second image, on the other hand, clearly shows that the work undertaken by these “elves” relied on techniques like the division of labour in order to render production efficient. The division of labour was also used to reinforce the gender norms associated with toy consumption in the space of production. Since the toys were second-hand, and the labour was understood as help or education, it obscured the market relations that underpinned

193 Carrier, Gifts and Commodities, 169.
the toys and recast them as pure gifts.\textsuperscript{194}

Each workshop primarily employed older male children and adolescents to fix toys by painting them, replacing screws or performing other minor repairs. Girl Guides were charged with repairing dolls, stitching plush toys or otherwise performing work typically gendered female on toys identified with girls.\textsuperscript{195} Local charitable and relief organizations subsequently distributed the toys to younger children of the working-class and new immigrants. The connection between second-hand toys and the integration of marginal child consumers and their families into Canadian consumer society was explicit: “Many of these are families of new Canadians who have hardly got a footing in the land of their adoption, while others are on farms where crop failures have left little spare cash for celebrating the festive season.”\textsuperscript{196} Need, established by the class and citizenship status of families, determined who did or did not receive toys. Accordingly, “poor children in the crowded cities whose parents are more vitally concerned with where the next meal is coming from than with buying presents, and children of immigrants settled on the lonely farms throughout western Canada and in northern Ontario have been looked after…”\textsuperscript{197}

Most Scouts created an impressive distribution network to send their toys to needy families. Toy repair shops in Oakville, Toronto or Montreal would often send toys to local children as well as to Northern Ontario and the Prairies.

Fire fighters, the Junior Red Cross, individual citizens and others also repaired

\textsuperscript{194} \textit{Ibid.}, 146.
\textsuperscript{197} “Toy Shops Big Success,” \textit{Saskatoon Star-Phoenix}, 22 Dec 1932, 4.
and distributed second-hand toys. Unlike other philanthropic and toy repair efforts, which were primarily local in nature, the Boy Scout toy repair shops were regional and national in their reach. If the statistics reported in the media are correct, in 1932 the Scouts distributed toys to seventy-five thousand children, and by 1937 the Scout/Guide Toy Repair shops were sending toys to one hundred thousand children, or a little more than three percent of Canadian children under the age of fifteen.

The success of the Scout toy shop shows the importance of second-hand toys in expanding the reach of mass-produced toys, if only indirectly. Second-hand toys derived much of their power from their circulation through a moral economy of need that defined who was deserving and who was not based primarily on middle-class standards. Furthermore, in this hierarchical moral economy, middle-class adolescents and children were given the opportunity to join their parents in performing middle-class respectability.

According to Franca Iacovetta, postwar immigrants of continental European origin were generally understood as outsiders in need of containment and reform. All aspects including their family life needed to be remade to reflect the ideal of the Canadian democratic family. Settlement house workers and advice writers focused on reforming the families of new Canadians in ways reflective of white, middle-class norms, which

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201 Franca Iacovetta, Gatekeepers: Reshaping Immigrant Lives in Cold War Canada, (Toronto: Between the Lines Press, 2006), 174
included the proffering of advice on organized play and consumption. Efforts to reform children’s play habits and the family more generally was not an invention of the postwar period. Advice and information of this nature was widely disseminated beginning in the 1920s. Consequently, Iacovetta’s insights are equally relevant to this earlier period, even though the flow of new immigrants was smaller by comparison. As a gift, rather than an alienated commodity, second-hand toys were meant to communicate affective bonds between members and prospective members of a national consumer society.

When war struck again in 1939, philanthropic efforts emerged as central to addressing the issues associated with the domestic supply of toys and the rationing of raw materials. The government funded war-time day nurseries for working mothers solicited donations of old and used toys for use by the children in their care. In the event that toys were non-functional the women’s voluntary service were willing to repair them. The Boy Scouts and Girl Guides, joined by other groups of children and returned soldiers, continued their work from the 1920s and 1930s repairing and distributing toys to those identified as needy. In contrast to the missionary efforts described in chapter three, the international philanthropy undertaken during the Second World War aimed to address the need of foreign children for toys to boost civilian morale during the war. The Toy Club for Blitzed Babies, the Canadian Women’s Army Corps and soldiers stationed

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202 Ibid., 171.
in Britain all distributed toys to local children. Similarly, Canadian soldiers and their allied counterparts often engaged in toy making and distribution among newly liberated parts of Europe to curry favour with local population. Photographer Ken Bell captured some of these efforts:

Figure 4.2 - Trooper L.R. Stoutenberg of The Fort Garry Horse painting toys for St. Nicholas Day. Doetinchem, Netherlands, 22 November 1945.

Many of the toys were of a general nature, though, some depicted popular American children’s characters like Pluto the dog. After Germany’s surrender in 1945, occupying Canadian forces continued to use toy distribution in their propaganda efforts. The First Highland Battalion stationed in Hanover gave toys to local children at Christmas parties into the 1950s. Canadian soldiers stationed in Gaza after the Suez crisis similarly

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207 Lieutenant H.A. Taylor of the Fort Garry Horse painting ‘Pluto’ dogs for children on St. Nicholas Day, Item No. 58801, Ken Bell Fonds, MG31-D246, LAC.

distributed toys to win the support of locals.\textsuperscript{209}

Following the Second World War, significant changes in the philanthropic distribution of toys led to the increased penetration of the formal market into the lives of marginal children and families. Second-hand toys played an important but declining role following the war. Need began to be defined in less explicitly classist or racialized terms. It was increasingly associated with circumstances of disaster and corresponding relief efforts in an extension of the logic of war-time distribution to peace-time circumstances.

Flooding in Manitoba in 1950 elicited a response from across Canada and Britain including the donation of substantial numbers of toys.\textsuperscript{210} The Hudson’s Bay Co. donated a number of supplies, including toys to the disaster relief efforts at Gagnon, QC, in 1960 where a fire burned the majority of the town.\textsuperscript{211} After a major mine disaster in Springhill, NS, Lions Clubs across Canada and the United States donated toys to be distributed among the children of mining families.\textsuperscript{212} When a strike at General Motor’s Oshawa, ON plant stretched on until Christmas, Local 222 of the United Auto Workers distributed refurbished toys to the children of striking workers.\textsuperscript{213} Class and race continued to dictate the vulnerability of families to human-made and natural disasters, including poverty. However, poverty and other crises of need were increasingly viewed as temporary states.\textsuperscript{214} Class and race formed the implicit context, rather than explicit basis, for

\textsuperscript{210} "Manitoba Given More British Aid," \textit{Edmonton Journal}, 7 Jun 1950, 16.
\textsuperscript{213} "Toys, Turkeys for All Despite Oshawa Strike $8,000,000 wage Loss," \textit{Toronto Star}, 24 Dec 1955, 11.
\textsuperscript{214} This shift looks a great deal like what Michel Foucault has described as the shift from disciplinary apparatuses to securitizing apparatuses. See Michel Foucault, \textit{Security}
distributing toys.

Consequently, the period also witnessed a slow and fitful decline in the distribution of second-hand toys. Montreal’s Catholic Welfare Bureau distributed over five thousand new toys in 1957. Operation Toylift, an aerial distribution of toys to orphaned children across North America used exclusively new toys. War brides — who arrived in Canada after the war with their new husbands — were welcomed to their adopted country with new toys for their children.

The turn to new toys was partially due to the growing prevalence of plastics. The Pembroke firemen ceased their annual toy repair shop because most of the new plastic toys could not be repaired once broken. It was also reflective of a shift in charitable giving towards more cash gifts and new goods, signaling the increased marketization of philanthropy and changing attitudes towards poverty. According to Elinor Barnstead, director of the Red Feather Agency, the increased prominence of cash gifts was advantageous as “the mother is usually the person who knows best whether a child wants Santa Claus to bring skates, a doll or a new sweater.” Cash gifts were often broken up with a small amount being passed on directly to children so that “children could learn the joy of giving as well as receiving.” For Barnstead, it was important “that wherever

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217 See “Christmas Distribution of Toys to War Brides, Calgary, 1946,” (photo), NA-3370-4, Glenbow Museum, Calgary, AB.


220 Ibid.
possible children feel it is their parents who make Christmas giving possible.\textsuperscript{221} The intention was clearly to maintain the dignity of working-class families and acknowledge their competency and agency. This acknowledgement was highly limited to their role as consumers and increased the integration of working-class families into Canadian consumer society. Marginal children and families were no longer regarded as the poor. Instead, they were experiencing poverty – a distinction that placed its emphasis on their immediate material and social circumstances rather than their position within Canadian social and economic hierarchies.

Innovations in toy retailing and manufacturing during the 1920s and 1930s helped to set up the postwar boom. The massive expansion of per-child toy expenditure during the decades between the wars and efforts to integrate marginal children and families into Canadian consumer society, intensified the impact of the baby-boom on toy consumption. Toy men in the interwar years developed numerous techniques to grow their industry that paid dividends after the war. Along with the expansion and intensification of production in Canada, the expanded focus on year-round toy sales, narrative and character-driven marketing efforts and the repositioning of child consumers as agentive and autonomous helped to expand the market for toys.

This was a good thing for those who owned and managed enterprises. For those who worked in them the toy industry continued to offer relatively poor job security, low wages and challenging working conditions. However, by the postwar era, labour action was beginning to slowly address some of these issues. In contrast, the problems

\textsuperscript{221} Ibid.
associated with toy trends and the cost of toys continued to generate tensions in toy consumption for new Canadians, the working-class, and middle-class parents.

But there was another set of men and women outside the toy business intent on pushing the expansion of toy boxes across the nation. Their efforts were undertaken not in the name of profit, but with the stated goal of making “normal” children.
CHAPTER FIVE

“A Grave Psychological Undertaking:” Psychology, Toy Consumption and the Developing Child

The efforts by manufacturers and retailers to expand the reach of the toy commodity received aid from one of the most unlikely sources: child psychology. Consumption was central to the discourse of the developing child. The production and dissemination of highly institutionalized expert knowledge about children during this period reveals a great deal about the effect of constructs like ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’ on the social meaning ascribed to the desire for, purchase and use of toys by Canadian children and adults. Psychology’s intervention into the material lives of Canadian families was nothing short of a radical refashioning of the meaning and place of toys. It invested toys with an enhanced role, raising their potential to drastically affect the development of Canadian children, while simultaneously justifying their expansion in Canadian households.

According to Patrick Ryan, the discourse of the developing child understands children and childhood as a set of progressive natural changes resulting from biological or environmental influences. Consequently, this discourse pressed heavily on the use of age grading and developmental stages, supported by empirical controlled research to establish universal “facts” about the child. Evaluating the normalcy of the child and correcting manifestations of abnormality formed the primary objective of these efforts. It situated any abnormality or normality found in adults within the experience and

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1 Ryan, “Discursive Tensions,” 12.
2 Ryan, “How New is the “New” Social Study of Childhood,” 559-561.
conditions of their own childhood. The use of this discourse to provide advice on toy consumption and play helped transform insights about the normal and abnormal child into commercially relevant knowledge.

Mona Gleason, Julia Grant, Norah Lillian Lewis and Cynthia Comaccio have all pointed to the increase in expert childrearing advice in Canada and the United States throughout the interwar and postwar period. Psychology emerged at the end of the nineteenth century in Canada. In the period after the First World War this new discipline spoke with growing authority about a number of issues, including child growth and development. As experts shifted their focus to include considerations about emotional and social issues, the material surroundings of childhood came under increased scrutiny. Psychology’s interventions ranged widely from injunctions about feeding and growth to sexual development. Similarly, the contexts in which it was deployed were many from the evening paper, to the classroom and even the summer camp.

The expansion of psychology in the interwar and early postwar period coincided

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3 Foucault, Psychiatric Power, 125.
6 While studies of sexuality and sexual development are somewhat removed from the main object of study in this thesis, there are intersections with notions of pleasure and desire that have implications for consumption. These will be dealt with below. On psychology and sexuality as it pertains to children in Canada see Mary Louise Adams, The Trouble with Normal & Elise Chenier, Strangers in Our Midst: Sexual Deviancy in Postwar Ontario, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008).
with the political and social reconfiguration of consumption as a fundamental component of democratic citizenship and the expansion of the toy industry and toy consumption discussed in the previous chapter. The link between psychology and consumption has been investigated in a historical context by a number of scholars like Anne McClintock and William Leach who use psychology as a tool in unpacking the meaning, appeal and dynamics of consumption. Scholars, like Gillian Swanson have turned their attention directly to the effect of psychology on consumer culture. Swanson and others offer brilliant analyses of how psychology sought to organize consumption and situate certain causes of abnormality in the acquisition and deployment of objects.

Histories devoted to exploring the link between psychological science, children and children’s consumer industries remain scant. In the case of toys, Gary Cross has argued that psychology’s “educational” toys and the world of fantasy or character toys could not have been farther apart: “While toymakers were selling Brownies and Kewpies, psychologists and teachers were promoting plain wooden blocks…” Ultimately, according to Cross, psychology and the advice it inspired was hijacked by marketers,

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11 For example Cook, The Commodification of Childhood, 75-76 & 90-91; Cross, Kid’s Stuff, 121-146.

12 Cross, Kid’s Stuff, 121.
advertisers and the toy business. Once emptied of its meaning, psychological discourse allowed the toy business to market “educational toys” of sometimes dubious value and “fad toys” with the air of scientific authority.13

In Canada, it is clear that the toy industry appropriated the language of psychology and the discourse of the developing child. Sometimes “fad” and “educational” toys were sold together using the same advertising scripts that drew on psychological advice. However, given that psychology was advocating expanded access to toys and other commodities for children during the interwar and postwar years, reducing this manifestation to commercial misappropriation is too simplistic. Developments in Canada suggest the history is one of convergence rather than simple hijacking.

To probe the connection between psychology and toy consumption, it is essential to evaluate the way in which “scientific” knowledge about the developing child, its play and playthings was produced. This chapter will begin by investigating the process for creating and disseminating knowledge about children and their toys by those in the mental hygiene and child study movement. The second part will examine popular manifestations of this discourse found in advice literature and in the conflict over dangerous toys. Finally, the chapter will end with a discussion of the use of psychological discourse by the toy industry in order to expand toy consumption. Ultimately, the use of psychological science by toy manufacturers and retailers precipitated a backlash among professional psychologists and some of the popularizers of psychology that raised important questions about the nature and meaning of the child consumer.

13 Ibid., 145.
Constructing the ‘Normal’ Child

By the 1920s, professional psychology was defined by two related but somewhat different approaches to studying and evaluating children’s development: mental hygiene and child study. As Mona Gleason has argued in *Normalizing the Ideal*, psychology in general was “brought out of the laboratory and into public spaces” in large part as a result of the efforts of the Canadian National Committee on Mental Hygiene (CNCMH). In this early stage, the CNCMH was a critical source of funding and enthusiastic support for efforts in child study departments. Mental hygiene and child study invested psychology with a lasting social mission: to establish, identify, and police the boundaries of what constituted “normal” behavior in the home, the classroom and – I would add – the aisles of department stores.

The preoccupation of psychology with children was present from the beginning. The CNCMH focused on infant health, juvenile delinquency and testing for mental deficiency from its earliest days. The early 1920s witnessed some of the first Canadian pronouncements on the psychological significance of children’s toys. K.M.B. Bridges’ article “Factors Contributing to Juvenile Delinquency” identified a “…lack of toys, play facilities and space,” as major causes of delinquency. This was mainly because “toys foster constructive tendencies in children and also provide some education and discipline

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in acceptable form.”\textsuperscript{18} In a reiteration of Victorian concerns about overconsumption, Bridges also cautioned that playthings either too elaborate or too numerous would undermine a child’s sense of value and the primacy of property.\textsuperscript{19}

One of the defining characteristics of the mental hygiene project was to understand and “correct” children defined as abnormal or deficient through an emphasis on heredity, and environmental factors. This is where a subtle, but important, contrast is discernible between those who studied mental hygiene and those involved with the related child study movement. Mental hygiene and child study shared many assumptions, but they focused on different aspects of the developing child. Child study tended to focus on elaborating the “normal” course of child development in contrast to mental hygiene’s fascination with the abnormal child. Child study and mental hygiene were not competitors. They were mutually supportive approaches to producing the discourse of the developing child in its normal and deviant variants.\textsuperscript{20}

William Blatz and the Department of Child Study at the University of Toronto offer an illustrative case study of the difference and interconnectedness between mental hygiene and child study. Much of Blatz’s early funding came from those aligned with the mental hygiene movement in which he was an eager participant.\textsuperscript{21} Instead of seeking to generate knowledge about the abnormal or defective child and their surroundings, Blatz became increasingly interested in normal children. Blatz went on an extensive tour of child study departments and institutes in the United States, prior to becoming a founding member of the faculty at the University of Toronto’s Institute of Child Study in 1925.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{20} Gleason, \textit{Normalizing the Ideal}, 8.  
\textsuperscript{21} Gleason, \textit{Normalizing the Ideal}, 40.
During his travels, he paid close attention to the procedures at sister institutions used to measure and evaluate children, including their play.\textsuperscript{22} Under the guidance of Dr. Edward Bott, Blatz and a number of women staff members at the institute put into place several of these procedures for evaluating play in order to track and measure children.

Establishing the characteristics of the normal child began long before experimental observation. The definition of normal promoted by Blatz and his staff was a product of their anglo-celtic, middle-class assumptions.\textsuperscript{23} Children were screened before admission to the school to ensure they conformed to these expectations. For instance, a 1926 report on the class backgrounds of the 40 families that had pupils in the nursery school revealed that the vast majority of breadwinners were middle managers, doctors, lawyers or business owners.\textsuperscript{24} A 1928 \textit{Chatelaine} profile of the child study institutes at McGill University and the University of Toronto even went so far as to explicitly state that 'normalcy' was established as part of the pre-admission process. Those deemed abnormal or deficient, often by virtue of their class background or other characteristics were placed in a special nursery for needy children elsewhere in the city.\textsuperscript{25} According to Ellen Stapleford of the Parent Education division, “underprivileged” parents and their children often demonstrated signs of abnormality. She equated their social status to a low facility with language, low intelligence, inadequate faculties and over-eagerness.\textsuperscript{26}

\textsuperscript{22} [Notes from Site Visits to Other Institutes of Child Study], W.E. Blatz Papers, University of Toronto Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, M-134, Box 6 File 2.
\textsuperscript{23} Gleason, \textit{Normalizing the Ideal}, 13-14.
\textsuperscript{24} Report of Parent Education Division 4 Jan 1926, W.E. Blatz Papers, University of Toronto Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, M-134, Box 15 File 2.
\textsuperscript{25} Frances Lily Johnson, “Where a Child can be a Child,” \textit{Chatelaine}, Mar 1928, 28, 44 & 47
\textsuperscript{26} E. Stapleford, Parent Education Reports From Leaders 1934, W.E. Blatz Papers, University of Toronto Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, M-134, Box 25 File 6.
Indeed, “only children of normal mentality” were considered for acceptance to the institute’s nursery school. The assumptions that underpinned normalcy also extended to children who were differently-abled. Arthur Hazlit, a boy without the ability to hear or speak, was grudgingly admitted for only one term with the condition that he could in no way “interfere with the routine of the school.” These assumptions placed the play behaviours and experiences of middle-class anglo-celtic children front and centre in defining normalcy. This is in stark contrast to mental hygiene’s obsession with working-class and non-anglo-celtic families in their investigations of abnormality.

For those admitted to the preschool, the collection of information on their ‘normal’ play began with the establishment of a “play history” for each new pupil. The form filled out by parents asked them if there was space to play outdoors and indoors in the home. It included questions regarding the play habits of children: Do they play alone or with others? What are the length and timing of play periods? And pivotally, what kind of toys are provided and preferred?

Observation of children’s play formed one of the cornerstones of investigation at the nursery school. Pupils were given free play time from 9am-12pm. The predominantly female staff watched and recorded observations on their play habits in order to “observe and decode” the normal child. Form F was used to record the time a play activity was begun and ended, the material used and the task undertaken, whether the play occurred

27 Staff Meeting, 12 May 1926, W.E. Blatz Papers, University of Toronto Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, M-134, Box 17 File 6.
28 Staff Meeting 19 Jan 1927, W.E. Blatz Papers, University of Toronto Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, M-134, Box 17 File 4.
29 “Admission Form,” W.E. Blatz Papers, University of Toronto Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, M-134, Box 17 File 1.
30 Ibid.
indoors or outdoors and whether the play was solitary or with others.\textsuperscript{31} Parents who attended the parent education courses held by the institute were provided a similar form to track their children’s play at home in order to guard against the development of abnormal patterns. Switching play activities too quickly or too slowly and a lack of variation between solitary and social play were all identified as warning signs.\textsuperscript{32}

In 1935, Blatz, Millichamp and Fletcher’s \textit{Nursery Education} provided a comprehensive overview of the process:

Observations are made periodically upon each child’s play with materials in the playroom and on the playground. Development is indicated, first, by a decrease in passive behavior and hence an increase in active use of play materials and in ideational play activity; secondly, by a decrease in the number of activities per unit time and hence increase in continuous span of one activity…Observations are made once a month upon each child for a period of five minutes divided into twenty, five second intervals.\textsuperscript{33}

The observation sheets were coded with a set of letters. Each indicated something different, whether active play when a child was engaged in movement, passive play when the child was idle, routine passive or active when play was in the presence of a play material, but not directed at it, as well as imaginative play with or without materials.\textsuperscript{34} Play was subject to evaluation on lines that stressed its temporal duration and productive qualities.\textsuperscript{35}

Furthermore, the efforts of staff to systematize knowledge about the play of a

\textsuperscript{31} Annual Report 1928 29 Nov 1927, W.E. Blatz Papers, University of Toronto Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, M-134, Box 15 File 31.
\textsuperscript{32} “St. George School for Child Study Parental Education Divison Annual Report 1925-1926,” W.E. Blatz Papers, University of Toronto Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, M-134, Box 17 File 7.
\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Ibid}.
\textsuperscript{35} See Comaccio, \textit{Nations are Built of Babies}, 116-118
group of children already pre-selected for their supposed normalcy helped to hide many of their assumptions. It subsumed the initial selection beneath a scientific, empirical methodology that enabled the production of systematized and “objective” knowledge about what constituted the “normal” course of growth for the developing child.

As early as 1926, the female staff at the Institute of Child Study including Hellen Bott, were charged with making a study of toys in response to the demands of parents enrolled in the parent education program. This first meeting sparked several forays into the creation and acquisition of toys. Bott developed a prototype of a “play suit” for children to wear. Mrs. Dingle expanded the toy holdings of the nursery with “active” and outdoor toys. A year later Blatz was happy to announce at the staff meeting that the first information on toys resulting from the investigation was now available thanks to Bott’s efforts. At the same meeting, Mrs. Dingle was charged with securing additional wagons, carts and shovels to alleviate a perceived shortage of toys for cooperative play at the nursery school.

These early efforts culminated in a series of conclusions about children’s play and their toys that had far reaching socio-economic consequences beyond the laboratory. For instance, Parents and Preschool Children co-authored by William Blatz and Hellen Bott, focused primarily on “the training of the ‘normal’ child.” Blatz and Bott looked at

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36 Report of Parent Education Division 4 Jan 1926, W.E. Blatz Papers, University of Toronto Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, M-134, Box 17 File 3.
37 Staff Meeting 6 Oct 1926, W.E. Blatz Papers, University of Toronto Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, M-134, Box 17 File 11; Staff Meeting, 17 Nov 1926, File 12; Staff Meeting 8 Dec 1926, File 13.
38 Staff Meeting 19 Jan 1927, W.E. Blatz Papers, University of Toronto Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, M-134, Box 17 File 3.
39 Ibid.
scenes that would be familiar in many middle-class households such as the advantages and disadvantages of taking toys to bed. The book blended authoritative expert advice with testimonials from mothers.\textsuperscript{41} In the same vein, Blatz and Bott ultimately endorsed play as a state essential to childhood and reflective of “the desires of the individual [child].”\textsuperscript{42} To satisfy their impulses, Blatz and Bott identified an array of playthings divided by age and gender including water tables, sand boxes, blocks, balls, tinker toys, carts, stuffed toys and peg boards, whether homemade or store-bought.\textsuperscript{43} They readily endorsed mechanical toys for older children. All of this pointed to a greatly expanded variety of playthings for the ‘normal’ child’s short attention span.\textsuperscript{44} The production of knowledge about normal children at the Institute of Child Study established toys as an essential environmental factor in allowing children’s natural fondness for play to grow and develop through various age-specific stages.

Other childhood experts were also applying lessons from psychology to the question of playthings, none in a more direct fashion than nurse Harriet Mitchell, educational secretary for the Mental Hygiene Institute. Her pamphlet, \textit{Play and Play Materials for the Preschool Child}, published by the Canadian Council on Child and Family Welfare in 1929 and twice in the 1930s and again in the 1940s, treated play and toys just as seriously as Blatz and Bott. For Mitchell, “the thing that most needs to be understood about play is that it is a necessity and not a luxury…and is as necessary to

\begin{footnotes}
\item[41] \textit{Ibid.}, 122.
\item[42] \textit{Ibid.}, 129, 153-160.
\item[43] \textit{Ibid.}, 162-164.
\item[44] \textit{Ibid.}, 165.
\end{footnotes}
healthy development as are food and rest.”45 After dividing up play and the material involved into several subsets based on age and type, Mitchell turns her focus to issues ranging from how to use play to develop desirable habits like cleanliness, respect for property and cooperation in a variety of play spaces.46 For Mitchell, play with the right kind of toys and materials varied based on age and gender from baby dolls to toy vacuums, stuffed animals to Meccano sets. Parents were called upon to use careful planning in the selection and use of toys as well as in the provisioning of time and space towards satisfying normal children’s need for play.47

Knowledge about the normal child produced by Blatz, Bott, Mitchell and others had a significant impact on mental hygiene. According to K.H. Rogers, mental hygiene had a “new emphasis on other things of importance for normal development besides physical care…there is a changed appreciation of the importance of play.”48 Colleagues like Karl Burnhardt and N. Chant echoed Blatz and Bott even offering distinctions between “toys” with one use and superior “play materials” with multiple uses.49 The Health Services Branch of the Canadian Medical Association sponsored an op-ed in the Montreal Gazette, prompted by a number of requests, which specifically employed age grading to recommend toys.50 According to Dorothy Millichamp of the Institute of Child

46 Ibid., 7.
50 Health Service of the Canadian Medical Association, "The Normal Baby," Montreal
Study, “the toy list is obviously not the prescription for all ills, not a patent medicine to be prescribed without diagnosis.” She still nicely summed up the new injunction for Canadian parents: “We are right to be ‘toy conscious,’ for it now becomes obvious that toys must do much of our work for us [as mothers].” Consequently, toys were invested with a new social function. Along with their status as commodities and gifts elaborated in earlier chapters, toys were now a form of diagnostic and treatment tool central to monitoring and establishing the normality or abnormality of the developing child.

Experts like Blatz and Mitchell attempted to push their influence beyond the ivory tower. Institute for Child Study publications like *Nursery School Procedure* reinforced the methods employed at the Institute in other crèches and preschools. It was particularly influential on the many wartime day nurseries created for working mothers during the Second World War and middle-class efforts like the movement by Gertrude McGill to start co-operative play groups based on principles of child development.

Much of the advice about normal children and their toy consumption was directed specifically at women and mothers. In a series of four articles published in *Chatelaine* between 1928 and 1930, Frances Lily Johnson stressed the need for mothers to purchase simple constructive toys like blocks instead of complex or mechanical toys. After all, according to Johnson, “every boy and girl loves to feel a sense of mastery over material.”

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Gazette, 15 Sep 1928, 9.
They required toys that were not in anyway “complete” or closed off to creative play. This meant selecting toys that were age appropriate, varied, but not too numerous to avoid “overwhelming” the child. They were a principal method by which children were able to practice and put to work their developing sense of self.

Along with being discerning consumers, mothers had to carefully supervise their children’s play to ensure the right lessons about cooperation and sociability were being absorbed. The institute continued training other experts through their summer school in social work and their diploma program in child study. Partnerships with school boards meant testing for “normalcy” as well as the establishment of child study programs in high school for young women in the early 1940s.

The staff of the Institute of Child Study also found many willing, if selective, collaborators happy to popularize their ideas in the form of advice columns and news stories. Gladys Huntington Bevans, a regular syndicated columnist in Canadian newspapers, happily repeated psychological advice for her readers. In an article titled “Psychologie des Jouets,” many of the basic tenets of the mental hygiene and child study movements were distilled for francophones in western Canada. The article cautioned against the plethora of “passive toys,” described as mechanical or slickly merchandized. It encouraging parents to purchase wooden blocks, simple dolls, dominos or other items

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that promoted “active play.” When faced with a question from a reader about a “precocious” rather than “normal” child, another syndicated columnist, Myrtle Meyer Eldred used knowledge about the developing child to formulate a solution: give the child playthings designed for older children so as to “neither hamper nor push the intelligent child.”

Newspapers often endorsed new books or leaflets that promised guidance to parents in acquiring and using toys to benefit their children.

Consequently, by the 1940s and 1950s, toys and play took on a new seriousness that stressed the importance of careful management and selection of playthings by mothers. Several advice columnists offered popular distillations of the principles briefly outlined above. The Montreal Gazette highlighted the productive nature of play and the need for parents to carefully consider toys: “The play needs of children merit the same intelligent consideration that is given to providing the kind of food necessary to wholesome growth…[p]lay is just as important to the best development of the child as are food and rest…[i]t is largely through play that the child learns.” Advice writer Lettice Street’s commentary on bedtime toys was borrowed from Blatz and Bott. In 1951 Saturday Night published a profile of Dr. Blatz, bestowing upon him the title of “child-care’s bad boy”. The provocative title was merely an enticement to a glowing review of Blatz’s ideas and efforts in the nursery school, including his more “humane and honest” approach to disciplining children.

62 Lewis, Advising the Parents, 22.
65 Dora Conover, “Dr. Blatz: Child-Care’s ‘Bad Boy,’” Saturday Night, 8 Dec 1951, 12 &
Similar articles abounded throughout the interwar and postwar period describing the value of dolls, wooden blocks and other age appropriate, expert approved playthings for stimulating creativity and supporting constructive play.\textsuperscript{66} Many of these were written with input from staff at the Institute of Child Study like Hellen Bott, Frances Lily Johnson or from other similar institutes across North America.\textsuperscript{67} Significantly, these columns often blended the discourse of the developing child with other discursive formations – specifically the authentic and conditioned child.

However, the discourse of the developing child promoted by psychology and its popular collaborators did not inspire an easy consensus. In 1920 Winifred Black, a women’s columnist with the \textit{Quebec Telegraph}, explained that older relatives frequently ridiculed a new mother for accepting advice from “baby experts.”\textsuperscript{68} Given the impasse, Black suggested that mothers needed to each find their own path. Other authors continued to stress older Victorian approaches like toughening children up or insisting on fewer toys and commodities.\textsuperscript{69} In the postwar period, articles like “Don’t Let the Child Experts Scare You” were dismissive of the “permissive parenting” advocated by child psychology. Allegedly, Blatz’s methods would place unmanageable burdens on parents by treating

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\textsuperscript{68} "Winnifred Black Writes About Baby-Advisors," \textit{Quebec Telegraph}, 2 Apr 1920, 11.
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things like feeding schedules and play with an unwarranted seriousness. The polemic decried the tendency to develop rules for all children as well as child study’s fixation on the first five years of life as somehow deterministic of future prospects and aptitudes. Pivotal, these dissenters drew on assumptions regarding the patriarchal structure of Canadian families and the discourses of the competent child and authentic child to varying degrees in order to make their case against psychology and the developing child. These voices, however, were increasingly in the minority.

As child psychology’s stature grew, so too did the willingness of supporters to offer public advice on a number of popular issues, including the acquisition of toys. By offering mothers advice about what toys to provide to their children and in which quantities, expert-friendly advice acted as an important form of commercial knowledge. Claims about the developing child and their play included recommendations about how toys should be used in play and also what kinds of toys should be acquired, how many and in what manner. Toys and play were now scientifically serious subject matter, not just a fairy-dream or novelties designed to please the whims of an agentive child consumer. Psychology’s status as “science” gave advice about play and toys an enhanced degree of authority among Canadians generally who, as the last chapter demonstrated, were increasingly eager to provide toys to their children.

Managing Consumption, Managing Play

Psychologically-inspired advice about toys added significantly to the material burdens of Canadian mothers. Experts and their popular collaborators advocated the

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expansion of toy boxes in order to facilitate greater and more varied play with a wider assortment of toys. Psychologists rarely explicitly advocated buying more toys. However, the material demands of their program for fostering normal play would have left most mothers with few options but to purchase at least some of her children’s playthings.

Rigid age grading – the belief that children of particular ages required certain playthings in order to develop normally – formed the backbone of many of the injunctions about managing toy consumption. For columnist Gladys Bevans it meant purchasing the right blocks of varying types at defined intervals as children developed.\(^\text{72}\) In her 1 December 1930 column, Bevans applied this logic to all toys, lamenting that children often received gifts “unsuitable to their age” and that “it is a mistake to rush children into using things for which they are not yet ready…the child is often bored or irritated by a plaything that is too advanced for him.”\(^\text{73}\) Accordingly, recognizing the child’s “stage of development” was key to choosing the right toys.\(^\text{74}\) As the *Toronto Star* reiterated:

Choosing toys for the youngsters is no longer a simple joyous job. It is a grave psychological undertaking…the informed toy buyer goes out to-day knowing full well that the rattle he puts in a babe’s hand Christmas morning may influence his character for life and the tools or gadgets he buys for the toddlers and elder ones may decide their future careers.\(^\text{75}\)

The article encouraged mothers to take special care to find age-appropriate toys, offering specific examples for age ranges between birth and 12 years old.\(^\text{76}\) The Ontario Department of Health and the Mental Hygiene Institute of Montreal even issued

\(^{74}\) Ibid.
\(^{75}\) "Choose Children's Toys According to Their Age," *Toronto Star*, 21 Dec 1933, 30.
\(^{76}\) Ibid.
pamphlets explaining age grading for young children to ensure parents purchased proper
toys. Children from one to three months needed soft dolls, rubber balls and rattles, while
those from three to six months required all rubber toys.  

Age categories used in advice columns, or in the form of news stories, were
almost identical to those promoted by Hellen Bott and Harriett Mitchell. It demonstrates
the prevalence of the discourse of the developing child beyond the walls of the institute.
Furthermore, age grading meant that toys had a planned obsolescence, barring the
addition of new children who might use hand-me-downs. Parents were expected to
upgrade toys as their children grew up, sometimes at intervals as short as three months. It
may not have explicitly encouraged parents to buy more playthings, but it did offer a
scientific justification for the more frequent acquisition of toys.

Toy typologies were also central to expanding the toy boxes of normal children.
Typological categories encouraged parents to buy an assortment of different kinds of toys
at each stage to encourage the development of the multiple capacities innate to the
developing child. Myrtle Eldred was one of many who counseled parents to provide a
wide variety of different kinds of playthings to children. The Ontario Department of
Health suggested that children needed toys for solitary and group play.

As psychological knowledge about children’s play and toys gained greater
credence, categories proliferated. Toys were increasingly subdivided into more refined

77 "Select Playthings According To Ages," Globe, 20 Apr 1937, 10; "Toys Listed for
78 See H. Bott, “Observations of Play Activity in a Nursery School,” General Psychology
Monthly 4, No 1 (1928): 44-88; Mitchell, Play and Play Materials for the Preschool
Child; Frances Lily Johnson, “Educational Toys for Children,” Chatelaine, May 1928;
groupings named for the skills they were supposed to develop. Parents were expected to provide toys that stimulated the development of manual skills, colour recognition, creative building and design, factual knowledge and imaginative and dramatic play. Winnipeg Children’s Hospital occupational therapist Lois Macdonald preferred the categories of active play, constructive/creative play, dramatic/imaginative play, and social development. Acquiring large numbers of different types of toys was avoidable, according to experts, by finding less didactic playthings. This meant that in choosing toys parents were encouraged to pick less structured, more open-ended playthings. For instance, the weekly column “Among Ourselves” claimed, “the toys which give most lasting joy are those which the children can use in many different ways.”

Typologies like these encouraged parents to acquire more toys as a result of the multiple play needs of their children within each age category. Yet, it also implied that the quality of play was a result of having the correct toy rather than the efforts of the child. Toys were invested with a heightened social agency in relation to children as a result of their psychological significance. They could either help children along the path of development or disrupt their normal evolution.

Similarly, advice writing attempted to modify the timing of toy purchases. Injunctions to develop rationing strategies to deal with the “deluge” of new toys at Christmas were common in Victorian Canada. They highlighted concerns about thrift as well as the threat of overstimulation. Psychology invested these concerns with an expanded scientific authority. Mothers were implored to examine existing toys before

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shopping to see how purchases could enhance existing playthings. Nancy Page of the Toronto Star advised her readers to keep many of the toys received at Christmas in storage as she did with her own son Peter, in order to achieve the appropriate play intervals prescribed by psychologists: “…rather than loading him down with so many toys that he never played for any length of time with any one of them.” Similarly, Gladys Bevans counseled mothers to not “let your small children welter around in a confusing sea of playthings for days after Christmas.” In some cases, the advice given to mothers instructed them to buy a small number of toys year round, rather than large amounts at Christmas to help with their budgeting and to avoid the child becoming “overstimulated.”

Desire and pleasure emerged more explicitly in discussions of children’s play preferences. Advice writers stressed the need for parents to listen to their children in determining the right toys. In large part this emphasis on children’s desires stemmed from a belief in “developing” children’s need for skills and interests. Bevans, for instance, saw toy purchases as a major avenue by which to develop children’s innate interests.

Meeting the needs of children implied listening to their demands and closely observing play behaviour to determine what a child liked and how this might change over time. The injunction to indulge children was underpinned by an acknowledgement of their status as developing. Preference became indicative of the level of development and

83 “Home-Made Helps,” Quebec Telegraph, 23 Dec 1920, 12.
84 Gladys Huntington Bevans, "You and Your Children,” Toronto Star, 18 Dec 1929, 29.
an important consideration in the selection of toys.\textsuperscript{87} The emphasis on delight and preference meant romantic ideas about the innocence of the authentic child could be deployed to reinforce the discourse of the developing child. For Dorothy Millichamp of the Institute of Child Study, “the very young child is a wanderer in time and space, and all that matters to him is the present moment and the present activity.” By manipulating this ahistorical sense of childhood as a natural phenomenon that pleasure and play could be rendered productive and developmentally relevant through the deployment of appropriate toys.\textsuperscript{88}

The validation of children’s desire and pleasure was one way of acknowledging the child’s competence and agency. This was how Myrtle Eldred framed it when she stressed that “the two year old can make his own choices of what to play from a liberal selection of toys within reach…while he cannot dictate when he shall go to bed, he can dictate how he shall go (carried, or under his own motive power, with or without a toy).” Children who refused to nap must be “compromised with” by providing them with toys to play “quietly” with for an hour.\textsuperscript{89} Acquiring toys for children meant taking into account the child’s viewpoint: “Let us imagine ourselves living in a world of giants who are attempting in every situation, to force us to conduct which is pleasing to them… [p]arents should be more sensitive to the world as it seems to a child.”\textsuperscript{90} Children were presumed to

\textsuperscript{87} "Purchase Toys Carefully," \textit{Toronto Star}, 21 Nov 1953, 6.
have an inborn drive to play. Mothers were responsible for acknowledging and supporting their child’s autonomy in this area. And exactly how long did this need for play last? Increasingly advice writers suggested that the need to play and have appropriate toys to do so extended beyond early childhood until early adolescence.\textsuperscript{91}

Clearly, this is another instance of pediocularity - the insistence that adults take the child’s view. In this context it operated as a kind of moral and ethical framework to guide adult toy buying. By emphasizing children as developing, the normal child could act as a touchstone for what constituted appropriate playthings. It was not so much an injunction for mothers to see \textit{as} a child, but instead, to observe \textit{how} children see the world around them and interpret these activities with reference to stages of development.

The emphasis on autonomy also underpinned distinctions between the parental roles of mothers and fathers. New York Principal Angelo Patri argued that mothers needed to give children “more healthy neglect.”\textsuperscript{92} Patri’s recommendation in many ways reflected concerns about the state of male children’s masculinity.\textsuperscript{93} Mothers were allegedly doting or overbearing in regulating play behavior or choosing toys. Fathers, in contrast, were painted in a positive light as playmates for their children. Dorothy Dix declared that a good father was “humane with his children,” playing with them, mending their toys or going on walks with them. These were all heralded as signs of a healthy

\textsuperscript{92} Angelo Patri, "Our Children," \textit{Globe}, 3 Sep 1937, 29.
\textsuperscript{93} On the “problem” with boys’ masculinity during the period and its connection to psychological science see Julia Grant, “A ‘Real Boy’ and Not A Sissy: Gender, Childhood and Masculinity, 1890–1940,” Journal of Social History 37, no. 4 (2004): 829–851.
father-child relationship.\textsuperscript{94} In one instance Myrtle Eldred went so far as to encourage mothers, on top of all their other responsibilities, to make time to act more like dad:

\ldots[\textit{H}]ow many mothers actually play with their children\ldots So often a mother does all the necessary but wearisome tasks for her children and leaves it to grandparents or daddies to get down on the floor to play with them. Just to provide the child with the comfort of living and a host of toys for solitary enjoyment does not free the mother from the obligation to play with him too.\textsuperscript{95}

Parents were encouraged to use toys to develop and expand their relationships with their children. An underlying gender assumption held that mothers required further prodding in order to participate in their child’s new world of consumer pleasure. For fathers, this presumably came naturally.

Space also became a major factor in the consideration of normal children’s play with toys. In fact, the spaces of play were increasingly age graded. For the very young, advice writers promoted playpens as the ideal enclosure. According to Myrtle Eldred, the playpen “…has come into such universal use the last generation…”.\textsuperscript{96} They were advantageous for their capacity to keep children safe, allowing mothers a respite without them feeling “guilty” so long as it was “filled with their toys.”\textsuperscript{97} Of course, there were drawbacks as eventually the growing child “resents restrictions of his freedom to move about and he has every right to do so.”\textsuperscript{98}

As children moved into the toddler phase, many writers encouraged parents to provide a large space for indoor play that was properly furnished. Victorian nurseries

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\textsuperscript{94} Dorothy Dix, "Dorothy Dix's Letter Box," \textit{Saskatoon Star-Phoenix}, 10 Jun 1930, 9.
\textsuperscript{95} Myrtle Meyer Eldred, "Your Baby and Mine," \textit{Toronto Star}, 1 Oct 1941, 28.
\end{flushleft}
were increasingly modified into so-called “playrooms,” though the terms were used interchangeably during the interwar period. The playroom was designed to be a noisy and active space, in contrast to the more reserved environment of the nursery. The Montreal Gazette captured this change perfectly in 1928, declaring that “the patter of children’s feet underneath attic eaves is changing to faint echoes of footsteps from what used to be the ‘preserve room’ down in the basement…” 99 Playrooms were intended to have either soundproof walls or be well removed from adult sections of the house. The purpose was to permit independent and boisterous play. 100 They were designed to be separate worlds for children with gendered spaces for their would-be users and lavatories designed specifically for children. 101 Dora Smith Conover explained the new relationship the playroom implied between parents, children and the middle-class home: “Children can quite readily be taught to know their place, but first it is only fair that they have a place and a really satisfactory one, both from the children’s and the adult’s point of view. Not only in their own rooms but in every family room and also in the basement and garden.” 102

The new emphasis on outdoor play was a significant change from earlier understandings of play space. Play in the streets – an activity stigmatized due to its association with working-class childhood – continued to be viewed in a dim light and subject to censure. Backyards, in contrast, were celebrated as important play spaces. 103 As

100 Gladys Huntington Bevans, "You and Your Children," Toronto Star, 1 Feb 1930, 23.
the *Toronto Star* declared “pink and white children are no longer in style.” Instead play outdoors needed to be emphasized as it “teaches the child to use his mind and body…when he runs, climbs, throws his ball; he is learning to move with balance and skill…his muscles are growing strong and quick to act.” Sandboxes and water tables became important play apparatuses. Thus the places of play became highly seasonal. Playrooms or nurseries were for rainy days and winter months while the spring and summer was a time to play outdoors. Furthermore, the gendered language apparent in quotations like the above continued to highlight the differing expectation between girls and boys. Boys were considered more active when at play, while girls continued to be characterized as more reserved.

The Canadian Welfare Council stressed the value of good playground equipment for child development, a fact allegedly supported by “any psychologist.” In their multi-year study undertaken with assistance from the Canadian Council for Mental Hygiene and McGill University professor of psychology Dr. Getty, the Canadian Welfare Council investigated the value of outdoor recreation and the state of recreation facilities in the Dominion. Their report, issued in 1928, was accompanied by a cross-Canada speaking tour designed to promote the establishment of recreational parks for those who did not have a backyard. In the following year, playground equipment was tested to determine

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which set was best for children.\textsuperscript{110} Publications like “New Ways to Play – A Quarter Century of Recreation” and “Children Need a Place to Play” published by the Canadian Welfare Council in 1949 and 1950 respectively, brought home their message about the essential need of all children for outdoor play.\textsuperscript{111} For those whose means did not afford them a backyard, parks with play equipment were built in cities to create an approximation of the bourgeois backyard ideal.\textsuperscript{112}

This thinking ultimately created a discursive space for parents to interpret children’s behaviour in stores and the playroom as indications of toy preference and to deploy these preferences on their behalf. Children, so the thinking went, had a right to play, a right that needed to be facilitated by the acquisition of aesthetically pleasing, age appropriate and varied playthings by parents. The efforts of psychologists and advice writers highlighted the growing number and variety of toys and play spaces a normal child was expected to have access to. The reality of an ascendant consumer society ensured that the market was one of the most important sites for satisfying the toy requirements of the normal child. However, this advice only applied within the realm of “normal” play behaviours. Improper play and consumption was frequently interpreted as either a cause or a sign of abnormality. Under these circumstances the past or present conduct of the mother was typically scrutinized.

\textsuperscript{110} Playground Equipment, 1929, Canadian Welfare Council Fonds, LAC, MG28-I10, Vol 8 File 42
\textsuperscript{112} On the importance of playgrounds in social reform see Dominick Covallo, \textit{Muscles and Morals: Organized Playgrounds and the Urban Reform, 1880-1920}, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981) & Shirley Tillotson, \textit{The Public at Play: Gender and the Politics of Recreation in Post-War Ontario}, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 36 & 117-118. While playgrounds emerged as part of the social reform movement it is clear that they were connected to psychological ideas about child development by the 1920s.
Failure to effectively manage consumption on behalf of her child was a matter of concern. The absence of toys or play in a child’s life was a matter for concern. Crying and anger could result from boredom if the wrong toys or insufficient playtime was provided. Destructive play was thought to result from children’s exposure to incorrect toys: “Normal children” engaged in destructive play because a “…gift is of no value in their estimation (price plays no part in their estimate) as a source of joy, amusement or entertainment.” For Myrtle Eldred such destructive symptoms were a clear sign of parental “mismanagement” and could be rectified with toys less challenging or less boring to the child. Advice writers claimed that “punishment does not help destructive behavior,” but that additional consumption might. When a child refused to play outside, Frances L. Ing and Louis Bates Ames, suggested purchasing more outdoor toys to entice the child into the backyard. For a boy who continuously stuck fingers and other objects into electrical outlets they suggested pegboard toys as an alternative for the behaviour.

Mildly undesirable play might also require increased supervision. Myrtle Eldred implored mothers to teach their children the right way to play: “The right way of playing with toys should be as much a part of their use as eating one’s food off tables instead of

If a child showed a lack of interest in toys, according to experts, this was a clear sign of a mental health issue in need of attention. If children failed to share or recognize the principle of private property, it was because their mother had allegedly failed to properly supervise them. Toys could be characterized as the source and solution to abnormality. They were one of the first places a mother was expected to turn.

Mary Haworth offered several particularly forceful criticisms of mothers. When “Casie” repeatedly demonstrated an unwillingness to share her toys, Haworth declared the behaviour abnormal. It was allegedly indicative of “a selfish or anti-social conditioning, inasmuch as outgoingness or a ready spirit of co-operation, on familiar ground is a more natural trait of self-expressiveness in a healthy personality three years old.” The source of this dire and abnormal personality disorder was purportedly her mother’s improper supervision of Cassie’s play: “Possibly you emphasize material values to the neglect of good human relations; and as regards Cassie’s nice toys, perhaps you stress handling them carefully as priceless treasure, instead of (1) letting her feel free to experiment with them, and (2) encouraging her hospitality to include small visitors in the fun.”

Similarly, Haworth blamed the grandmother of a male child, “Rex”, for his habit

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120 “Experts Say Don’t Fuss,” *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 19 Sep 1958, 10.
of repeatedly stealing a neighbouring boy’s toys and then denying it. The failure of the grandmother to discipline her charge led Haworth to declare “Rex” just “the latest victim” of this grandmother’s poor parenting.\(^{124}\)

Howarth was similarly critical of mothers’ ability to address supposedly effeminate bahaviour on the part of male children. One mother’s new husband “Dick,” labeled her son “Johnny,” “a sissy and mama’s boy” because of his tendency to “entertain himself with books, puzzles and colors” instead of “more boyish toys.” Haworth’s advice was typical. She began by blaming the mother for leaving the child with grandparents during her difficult divorce and then proceeded to describe how Johnny’s “anxious bewilderment” resulted in a “rebellion” against Dick’s standards of boyhood.\(^{125}\) As Julia Grant has effectively demonstrated, such popular concerns about gender roles were easily grafted onto psychological discourses, rendering them all the more significant and forceful.\(^{126}\)

However, mothers were subject to the greatest degree of scrutiny when they supposedly failed to protect their children from dangerous playthings. Though not a purely psychological concern, it nevertheless drew on the discourse of the developing child to highlight the potential for physical and cognitive harm. Predominantly male public officials and health professionals asserted their authority to conduct surveillance and regulate the conduct of children and mothers in the name of protecting what Mona

\(^{125}\) Mary Haworth, "Youngster's "sissy" Ways Are Worry to His Parents," *Ottawa Citizen*, 4 May 1951, 10.
\(^{126}\) Grant, “A ‘Real Boy’ and Not A Sissy,” 83.
Gleason has referred to as the “public child.”\textsuperscript{127} Those offering advice on the prevention of bodily harm associated with toys stressed two categories of danger: contaminated or toxic toys and physically harmful toys.

Concerns about microbes and harmful chemicals ranged widely from questions about the presence of lead paint in playthings and the continued risk of tetanus from projectiles, to those focused on the cleanliness and sterility of toys.\textsuperscript{128} Toys could also cause physical damage through misuse or manufacturing errors. Choking hazards, sharp edges, flammable celluloid toys and projectiles like Japanese darts, air guns and peashooter were all singled out for their potential for harm.\textsuperscript{129} Along with avoiding poisonous substances mothers were encouraged to sterilize toys regularly to prevent the transmission of germs and diseases.\textsuperscript{130} By the 1940s mothers were expected to spend an hour a day sterilizing surfaces, toys and any object that may touch the baby’s mouth.\textsuperscript{131} Failure to follow this advice was grounds for chastisement and ridicule.

This shift reflected the popularization after 1900 of the medical consensus regarding the germ theory of disease and the growing influence of the discourse of the

\textsuperscript{131} "Your Baby and Mine," \textit{Toronto Star}, 2 Nov 1940, 2 & "Expert Care Taken of Babies at C.N.E." \textit{Toronto Star}, 4 Sep 1941, 4.
developing child. While the germ theory revealed the hidden action of microbes to mothers and health officials, the developing child reminded them that children were especially vulnerable. Furthermore, germ theory had sociological implications. The application of what Linda Singer refers to as “epidemic logic,” recast toys as vectors for disease and danger. This was crucial to attempts to re-situate harm within the toy itself, which could now be characterized as psychologically, socially or medically contagious. The child’s status as developing generated a heightened sense of their fragility and vulnerability to external and internal threats.

This approach was increasingly evident in advice literature as early as the 1930s. In a letter to Myrtle Eldred one mother complained that “it is appalling to discover so many dangerous contrivances on the market...warn your readers of the grave danger of innocent appearing playthings presented to babies.” B.B. guns and chemistry sets might burn or blind unsuspecting children. In the 1950s the Montreal Fire Department began warning parents to avoid flammable toys altogether. This particular conceptualization of public and consumer safety made mothers responsible for providing the first line of defense. It also placed predominantly male authority figures in the role of arbiters of proper parenting. Paradoxically, it created a space for women, and mothers in particular, to assert their special role in regulating children and their relationship to toys.

It allowed them to challenge their own surveillance by pointing at toys as the main source of the problem. Indeed, Myrtle Eldred asserts the effectiveness of vigilant mothers in efforts to avoid dangerous toys: “I wonder if the most effective control of any industry isn’t the refusal of informed mothers to purchase harmful products? Mothers need most of all to use their imaginations.” Yet again, women asserted themselves in the market through consumer activism around toys. However, the availability of new resources in the form of epidemic logic and the discourse of the developing child shaped their efforts in important ways. Toy guns and war toys offer a particularly interesting pair of case studies on the impact and limits of this pairing.

Toy guns raised important issues for feminist and peace activists as well as multiple levels of government in Canada. The language of the 1913 revisions to the Criminal Code created a great deal of confusion about the status of toy guns for salesmen, the police and government officials. Prohibitions on the ownership of concealed “offensive” weapons listed “air guns” among regular pistols, revolvers, skull crackers and bowie knives.  

The use of the term “air guns” confused a number of law enforcement officials and air rifle retailers. Clarence E. Casey, a lawyer from Amherst, NS, wrote the minister of justice on behalf of his brother to inquire as to whether or not he could continue to wholesale “toy air guns for boys.” Local police levied fines against the store based on their interpretation of the 1913 amendments to the criminal code surrounding offensive

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Deputy Minister of Justice E.J. Newcombe replied to Casey, following a series of internal-memos aimed at clarifying the intent of the legislation, to inform him that the permit requirement applied only to concealable weapons, not full air rifles. Similar instances occurred in 1926 in Orillia, ON and 1927 in Winnipeg, MB where a great deal of confusion is evident about the legal status of toy guns. Clearly the concern was about the ability of threats to spread easily throughout Canadian society while remaining hidden from the view of responsible adults and officials.

Toy guns also constituted a legal problem because of their relationship to crime. In the aftermath of the First World War, a glut of firearms found their way into Canada raising concerns about gun violence. Several criminal acts, including some committed by minors, involved the use of toy guns. Changes to the criminal code between 1934 and 1938 raised the penalty for armed robbery and required all pistol owners to carry a permit. It may have also inadvertently incentivized the criminal use of toy guns in place of real ones. Compounding matters, a judge in 1947 ruled that a toy pistol did not constitute an offensive weapon.

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139 Clarence E. Casey to Minister of Justice, [letter], 21 Mar 1922, Legality of Sale of Toy Air Guns, Department of Justice Fonds, RG13 A-2 Vol 266 File # 1922-597, LAC
140 E.J. Newcombe to Clarence E. Casey, [letter], 30 Mar 1922, Legality of Sale of Toy Air Guns, Department of Justice Fonds, RG13 A-2 Vol 266 File # 1922-597, LAC
142 Bottomley, 105-106.
144 Blake Brown, Arming and Disarming, 161
The connection between toy guns and crime meant that by the end of the Second World War, many members of the public, including police, public officials and women’s peace groups, were calling for a ban. An editorial by J.V. McAree called for a ban on toy guns because of their confusing realism and misuse by criminals.\textsuperscript{145} When Gerald Armstrong of Warren, ON assaulted a Hull, PQ taxi driver and attempted to rob a convenience store, Deputy Magistrate Joachim Sauvé made the connection between violent offences and toy guns: “This is the sort of thing I intend to stamp out in this city. I would prohibit the sale of toy guns which look too much like the real thing, and adequate punishment will be handed out by me for crimes of this sort.”\textsuperscript{146}

The concerns of the police and public officials were buttressed by the long-standing objections of pacifist and women’s groups. In 1948 the Vancouver chapter of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) began pressing for a ban on toy guns. WILPF claimed that twenty-two crimes were committed with toy pistols in Vancouver in 1948.\textsuperscript{147} The Vancouver police department proved to be a staunch ally for WILPF. The executive sent a letter on behalf of the membership commending police chief W. Mulligan on his declaration in favour of a nation-wide ban on toy guns and their efforts to pressure Ottawa into enacting appropriate legislation.\textsuperscript{148} Similarly, the National Council of Women forwarded a resolution to Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent in 1957 asking for a ban on toy guns, describing them as “dangerous weapons…which serve no

\textsuperscript{147} S. Young to George Archer, 6 Jan 1955, WILPF Fonds, Vol. 4 File 23, University of British Columbia Special Collections,
\textsuperscript{148} WILPF ARC 1626 Vol. 4 File 23, University of British Columbia Special Collections; WILPF to W. Mulligan, 10 Mar 1955, [letter], Vol. 4 File 23, University of British Columbia Special Collections & C.J. Archer to WILPF, 11 Jan 1956, [letter], Vol. 4 File 23, University of British Columbia Special Collections.
useful purpose whatsoever.”

The objections of the feminist movement and pacifists to toy guns coincided with regulatory and legal problems for the Canadian state around the regulation of firearms more generally. Toy guns exploited and exacerbated existing holes in firearms legislation prompting a convergence among the interests of pacifists, feminists and public officials. By declaring the toys “weapons” women’s groups and pacifists were recasting the toy as an adult commodity beyond the competence of the developing child. However, their intelligent use of tactics obscures the very different logic at work between feminists and pacifists, on the one hand, and the public officials and experts on the other.

The efforts of women’s groups and pacifists to ban toy guns were part of a broader push to ban war toys. The ambivalent stance of professional psychologists’ ensured that the war toy issue was less well received. In the interwar period, psychologists and advice writers tended to support a ban on war toys, reflecting a shared understanding of the developing child. Dr. Teyyl Hsieh criticized war toys, claiming that they encouraged violence and delinquency. Similarly, journalist Augustus Bridle asserted that many psychologists believed that toys, films and comic books that depicted

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150 In his dissertation on the origins of the present day gun control debate in Canada, Samuel Bottomley argues that much of the firearms legislation before the mid-1960s aimed at restricting the type of person that could have a gun, not gun control. Yet what the history of toy pistols during the interwar and early postwar years demonstrates is that the genesis of these later efforts at regulating the weapon itself drew on the same logic first connected with activism around toy guns by public officials, police officers, feminists and pacifists. Largely because the toy gun posed a legal problem, when activists raised wider social concerns connected with the discourse of the conditioned child, state representatives were far more receptive to assertions about the need to regulate and curtail their production and use than had been the case with war toys, understood more broadly.
war were “powerful emotional educators” that “promoted mass murder.”

In Mrs. M.G. Thoday’s discussion of the duties of motherhood, the gender dynamics that underpinned concerns about war toys were clearly elaborated. According to Thoday “Women are the mothers of men…their first responsibility [is] the prevention of war [and] the instruction of their children who should be taught the spirit of service rather than destruction…war toys should be abolished.”

In Thoday’s formulation mothers were called upon to regulate the behaviour of their male children. In a letter to “The Homemaker” column, a mother asked fellow readers to “refus[e] to buy certain types of toys, designed to excite the imagination of the owners to inflict pain on some other creatures…Put into the hands of a boy a plaything which signifies cruelty and you have sown in the mind of the man the seeds of callousness and crime.”

In response to the growing prominence of war toys after 1930, the Federated Women’s Institute of Canada and the National Council of Jewish Women passed a resolution, “condemning the manufacture of toys, which are replicas of war machines,” because of their effect on the imagination and behaviour of boys. In another letter to the Globe’s homemaker column, an unidentified mother stressed the need to monitor consumption instead of play, drawing on anxieties about the developmental effects of war toys:

If parents were more careful to choose constructive and beautiful toys for their children instead of destructive playthings, would we have as much crime as we have among our young men today?…Every parent knows that a child’s play is real

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life to him, and whether we are advocates of peace or believers in the inevitability of war, surely the child in our midst should be protected from ideas of death and destruction until his reason matures…Ideals are largely formed when we are children.’’

Quotations like this demonstrate the influence of the discourse of the developing child and its ability to link behaviours in adulthood to the lasting influence of war toys. Feminists and pacifists used the discourse of the developing child to demanded action on the consumption of war toys. This helped anti-war toy activists shift the focus towards the market and away from the supervision of children in the home. Mothers were still held responsible, but were simultaneously asserting boundaries for professional scrutiny of their activities.

Attempts to discourage the production and consumption of war toys ultimately fell short thanks to the changing position of professional psychology on the issue. The distance between psychology and feminist and pacifist activists following the war was indicative of the presence of two distinct conceptualizations of the developing child. While feminists and pacifists tended to incorporate the social emphasis of the conditioned child in their version of the discourse, professional psychology tended to frame development as an internal process. Important public figures in the discipline of child psychology like William Blatz began insisting that war toys posed no specific threat to children. Dr. William Ellasberg, following the catharsis argument, similarly claimed that war toys were a “healthy outlet” for children. Ellasberg declared that those inside and outside his profession who claimed such toys raised aggression were “crackpots”.

158 “War Toys good for Children, Noted Psychiatrist Holds,” Globe and Mail, 28 Nov
Similarly, Dr. Grace Langdon, child development advisor to the American Toy Institute, claimed that “You don’t take children’s minds off war by depriving them of war toys…the desire is still there.”\textsuperscript{159} By stressing the inborn drive to destroy, Langdon and Ellasberg were taking issue with pacifist and feminist claims about the developmental implications of toys. They cast development as primarily an internal process, in contrast to the more socially focused conceptualization of feminists and pacifists.

For psychologists in the early postwar period, toys were understood as stimuli – effective in the moment in which they were applied. As such, the idea that they could have a lasting impact on innate drives or child development was difficult to imagine. Indeed, the developing child was still itself under development. As a discourse it had a number of variations, not all of which sat comfortably alongside one another as the case of war toys aptly demonstrates.\textsuperscript{160}

As the issues of abnormal play and violent playthings indicate, mothers found themselves under increasing material and social pressure when it came to ensuring the normal growth of the developing child. Attempts to speak back to psychologists and male public officials, paradoxically relied on the support of those same authorities and their discourses in order to be taken seriously. Toys were represented as simultaneously a corrective and a source of abnormal and undesirable childhood behaviour. Toys and play were gradually becoming diagnostically relevant and therapeutically corrective. Toys were fraught with tensions and possibilities that placed unattainable expectation upon

\textsuperscript{159} “Let Children Have War Toys,” \textit{Saskatoon Star-Phoenix}, 19 Oct 1950, 11.
mothers and children to resolve and navigate these opportunities and pitfalls. When it came to normalizing the ideal around toys and play, psychology bestowed tremendous agency upon toys as they simultaneously refashion the commercial meaning of childhood.

*Marketing, Psychology and the Educational Toy*

Aside from its major impact on the role of mothers and children in efforts to expand the availability of toys, psychology also provided those in retailing and advertising with yet another script for selling playthings. Advertisers were highly selective about which parts of psychological advice they appropriated. They emphasized year round toy purchases, outdoor play, the agency of children and the value of play in general for achieving developmental goals. They also effectively deployed age grading and typological categories to ensure continuous sales. The relationship between psychology and the toy business should be understood as one of convergence and appropriation rather than direct conflict. The toy industry attempted to reconcile the heavy material demands of the developing child with their already emerging belief in children’s competent consumer agency. Their use of psychological rhetoric generated mixed responses from advice writers and the psychological profession.

Curiously, the use of psychological terminology and arguments in advertising actually predated the first catalogue appearance of educational toys in the 1920s.\(^{161}\) It coincides with the increased popularity of the mental hygiene movement in Canada during the 1910s. This suggests that advertisers and the toy industry were responsive to

expert opinions on children from very early on. Henry Morgan & Co. was an early adopter of psychological terminology in their advertising copy beginning in 1912. In an advertisement for the store, the role of toys in shaping the development of children was elaborately spelled out for consumers: “The child’s world is a world of TOYS for toys are the child’s implements of growth – and play may be intelligently directed…play is the greatest builder of life of mind and body…play dominates in these great formative years…toys lie at the door of this training…” The advertisement specifically invests these claims with the authority of scientific knowledge: “Psychologists tell us that the influence of childhood days have a direct bearing upon a child’s future life…a little intelligent thought and the wise selection of a child’s playthings are the surest means of fitting a child for the work of grown-up days.”

Advertising appeals based on psychology were partly interrupted by the First World War and the toy famine. In the 1920s they were redeployed by Henry Morgan & Co:

Toys are the Child’s greatest implements of growth…upon you devolves the responsibility of choosing wisely. For there are educational toys and toys that permit full play and development of youthful thought and imagination. We have studied just these requirements and our toys fulfill just such a mission. We ask you to see them. We can help you to choose wisely.

The advertisement also highlighted the different age grades of certain toys found in the store. A 1924 advertisement again emphasized the theme of educational toys and simplicity, stating, “here are educational toys, toys that encourage thought and

162 This is perhaps unsurprising given that the Montreal was also the headquarters of the Canadian National Committee on Mental Hygiene.
164 Ibid.
166 Ibid.
imagination, whilst permitting play, and toys - just simple, pure toys - to amuse.”\textsuperscript{167} By the 1930s and extending into the postwar period, a whole host of Canadian retailers were using similar scripts about the connection between their toy stock and psychology.\textsuperscript{168} In 1932 Eaton’s began deploying female “toy advisors” in all its stores to help parents find educational playthings: “She’s up on child psychology.”\textsuperscript{169}

In all instances, the ads and comments stressed different playthings for boys and girls, many of which were similar to the toys on offer right before the First World War. However, the meaning attached to gender difference was shifting. Gendered toys were characterized as important pieces in the puzzle of children’s growth and development that warranted more careful and focused consideration on the part of mothers. The toy retailers identified themselves in advertising copy as experts who were familiar with the wide assortment of toys available and the latest psychological knowledge, making them the perfect candidates to advise and guide parents.

Even some toy manufacturers began selectively using psychological rhetoric to describe and promote their industry. At a banquet held by the Toy Makers’ Association of America in Quebec City in 1924 the president, George A. Fox, stressed the psychological appropriateness of manufactured toys for his Canadian audience: “It is the general opinion…that toy makers are devoted solely to the amusement of the young. This is far from being the case; nearly every toy that is manufactured has some educational value

that is not always apparent to the casual observer, but one that is always there.”

Arnold F. Arnold of New York stated at the opening of his exhibit of toys at the Museum of Modern Art that the secret to a successful educational toy was to appeal to children’s fantastic sensibilities. “A child likes things as unrealistic as possible…he likes to imagine things.”

By the 1950s, the toy industry had adapted efforts to expand the season for toy consumption to the claims of “educationalists.” According to Foreign Trade, toy manufacturers had become “consumer-age conscious” and were heavily involved in analyzing and investigating age grading. At the 1954 toy show in Montreal, manufacturers had already begun to produce more arts and crafts-oriented play materials in keeping with the latest ideas in psychology.

Retailers and manufacturers borrowed liberally from child development experts in their advertising scripts during the 1950s. Advice writers like Gladys Bevans declared that “the educators and the child psychologists have been called in and really fine playthings are to be had…toyland is a better country than it used to be.”

Ronald Boxall, on the other hand, offered a more critical assessment of the connection between the toy industry and psychology: “you won’t find one professional psychologist on the staff of the biggest toy making firms…[only] businessmen and technicians.”

175 Ronald Boxall, "The Toy Business Pays in Millions," Quebec Chronicle-Telegraph,
Gary Cross draws a clear distinction between educational toys and their commercialized, racist and often inappropriate antithesis: the “fantasy toy.” Cross argues that there were major differences in the way these toys were marketed, understood and used by American families and children. Educational toys were generally considered good for children. Fantasy toys, in contrast, were thought to have a deleterious effects on parent-child relations, children’s development and played a significant role in the “commercialization of the family.” Cross acknowledges the tendency of toy advertisers to use child psychology to their own ends. His focus on commercial actors and sources leads him to understate the degree to which psychology had already made a strong case for a greatly expanded toy box.

My research suggests that advertisers drew on many of the same strategies and discourses to promote fantasy and educational toys, collapsing these neat categories and distinctions. The educational toy selectively blended developmentalist ideas with a didactic interest in toys as training instruments or as keys to unlock the world of fantasy and imagination through nostalgia or progress. This was a far cry from the objectives of psychology and the discourse of the developing child, but constituted a creative attempt to pair the discourses of the agentive child with that of the developing child. The Simpson’s and Eaton’s catalogues and other marketing copy suggests that the term educational toy, though rarely specific, was laden with many of the same assumptions and aspirations evident in professional psychological discourse. Cross’ categories oversimplify the deployment of the developing child and consequently understate its socio-economic impact.

22 Dec 1956, 16.
176 Cross, *Kid’s Stuff*, 82-120 & 129-146, Cross, *The Cute and the Cool*, 121-190.
If educational toy messaging told consumers very little about the toy in question, it said a great deal more about the child consumer. Daniel Thomas Cook’s discussion of models of the child consumer points to another important insight. According to Cook, models of consuming children, (what he would later refer to as commercial personae), find their main purpose in mediating the tension between “the kind of value embodied in the singular, sentimental ‘nature’ of children and that which is encountered in the rational, equalizing character of the market.”\(^{177}\) Cook’s focus is on market research predominantly derived from trade publications. He concedes that it “…stands at one end of a continuum of several kinds of market relevant knowledge.”\(^{178}\) Psychological science, even when not directed at understanding the consuming child, constituted another important form of market relevant knowledge that was easily and effectively mobilized by the toy industry and its critics. According to the toy men, the child consumer was defined by their biological age and their status as constantly growing, changing and becoming, ultimately leading to a developing appetite for commodities. This required careful attention on the part of parents and their ultimate submission to the guidance of experts and those trained in the new knowledge of child psychology, including toy store staff.

By the mid-1930s, psychologists and some advice writers were already striking back against the toy business and what they saw as its opportunistic and dubious claims about the general educational value of the toys they produced and marketed. As the debate intensified, psychologists and their allies took an increasingly critical stance

\(^{178}\) *Ibid.*, 489.
towards the consumption of manufactured toys, ultimately contesting the use of the
discourse of the developing child in representations of the child consumer. In 1930, for
instance, William Blatz and Hellen Bott had begun to single out certain categories of
manufactured toys as unsuitable in their follow-up book The Management of Young
Children. “Mechanical toys,” according to Blatz and Bott, “bored the child
because…they are too easy.” Blatz, Millichamp and Fletcher’s Nursery Education:
Theory and Practice warned nursery school programs that mechanical toys “have little
value from a developmental point of view, except when they are used as accessories to an
imaginative or constructive game,” suggesting that “play materials are better than toys
with only one use …[including] sand, blocks, Plasticine, clay, paper, and other
materials…”.

The term “play materials” was more than an attempt to provide a broader
definition of what could be used in play than the term “toy” implied. Play materials
increasingly held anti-consumerist undertones, quickly becoming the preferred
terminology of psychological science during the period. Less than ten years later, for
instance, Karl S. Burnhardt was extolling the virtues of “play materials” in contrast to
“passive pursuits” which included consuming media and other pop-culture products like
toys.

Nowhere is the evolved, anti-consumerist implications of the term “play
materials” more evident than in Blatz’s personal and frank correspondence between he

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180 Blatz, Millichamp, & Fletcher, Nursery Education, Theory and Practice, 183-185
181 Karl S. Burnhardt, "Leisure Time Activities for the School Age Child." Karl S.
Burnhardt, Bulletin of the Institute of Child Study, June 1951, CPA Fonds, LAC, MG28 I
and his wife during the Second World War.

As far as toys are concerned, we are now in the midst of a revolution which I hope will be bloodless. That revolution is in our more efficient understanding of child development. We have to teach children to be busy, not to “play.” Heretofore it was thought that what you bought for the entertainment of children were toys. The value of toys was judged by the number of new forms the toy could automatically take…Modern child study holds the view that, first, toys which entertain the child prevent him from learning how to interest himself, and second, that the majority of toys are created by adults to please adults. In modern child education the word “toy” is not used. Material is substituted for this term…Clay, wood, paper and scissors, glue and coloured paper and paste, hammer and saws, are now the materials and the tools which the modern child should have at his disposal, not “toys.”

If we unpack this lengthy quotation what emerges is the essence of a liberal backlash against the role of the capitalist marketplace in providing the material surroundings for the normal growth of the developing child. Toys were no longer in accord with “modern child study.” By declaring that most toys were made for adults to satisfy adult desire, Blatz was characterizing the toy industry as adult-centred and overly preoccupied with appealing to impulses like nostalgia and progress.

Psychologists increasingly considered the market incapable of appropriately fulfilling the play needs of children. For Blatz and others, education and entertainment were portrayed as polar opposites, rather than mutually supportive concepts. Indeed, the “modern” parent of any “normal” child was advised unequivocally to be leery of the answers provided by manufacturers, retailers and advertisers. Blatz and his colleague S.R. Laycock reiterated this point throughout the postwar period in popular and professional publications.

182 Blatz, Hostages to Peace, 160.
In contrast, advice writers who offered criticism of mass-produced toys tended to take a more ambiguous or conciliatory stance towards the effect of toys on children. Their preoccupation with promoting thrift was central to their position. Since the 1920s, advice writers were advocating thrift in toy purchasing. The inability of children to care for their toys was often interpreted as evidence of their status as “wasters.” 184 According to the Toronto Star, “there is enormous waste to be seen in the creation and use of toys. Fragile playthings are bad for a child. They make him destructive, because they are so easily destroyed…make him use his originality and initiative to get toys.”185 The article suggested crayons, paper and glue are the most important playthings for children at an early age.

In the 1930s when faced with the challenging economic climate of the Great Depression advice writers began advocating thrift less as a virtue to be taught and rather as a necessity in mothers’ day-to-day lives. This fused with the shift underway in psychology. Myrtle Eldred for instance advised parents to seek out “the raw materials from which playthings are made” in the house.186 A few years later Eldred was suggesting that household junk, typically simply thrown away, could provide an assortment of play activities and play materials for children.187 With the arrival of rationing during the Second World War and early postwar years thrift continued to be an important factor. For Dr. Gary Cleveland, shortages meant that there were limited playthings for children, many of which were of poor quality. This led him to suggest

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Clark, 1956), 75-77.
paint sets, jigsaw puzzles, paper and scissors as good options for children’s amusement. The *Canadian Home Journal* and the Ottawa Committee on Children offered advice on making simple toys at home to cope with wartime shortages. In its postwar thrift campaign the National Council of Women advocated the production of homemade toys from leftovers to satisfy their children’s needs. In 1954 the Toronto Nursery Education Association held a demonstration of six hundred such toys for parents. According to Jocelyn Motyer, “although babies need lots of toys, it isn’t necessary to dip deeply into the family budget to keep baby busy and interested.” Parents could fashion excellent playthings from household materials, leaving the purchase of “novelties” up to relatives. In these contexts, thrift was directly linked to the nationalist objectives of winning the war and rebuilding Canadian society.

Eventually this persistent tension produced a popular synthesis of the positions of psychologists and toy manufacturers that reaffirmed the suitability and value of mass-produced toys for normal children. Toy testing began in North America at Columbia University in 1938 with the establishment of the Toy Guidance Council. The council examined over four hundred toys each year offering evaluations of their potential for social, physical, mental and vocational development, amusement, value and safety. For

193 “Making and Buying Toys Becomes Serious Art," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 1 Sep 1959, 6.
the *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, this meant better quality toys of a higher value for children:

“So when you go to buy a toy for junior, please realize it’s no laughing matter…just think of all the tests this little toy has had to pass to get to market, and have the proper respect.”

Two groups – the Canadian Association of Consumers (CAC) and The Ottawa Citizens Committee on Children (OCCC) – jointly started a Toy Testing Committee in late 1952. The committee, headed by Mrs. S.A. McKay-Smith, was comprised of a myriad of what we might now call stakeholders in the toy industry, including parents, psychologists, nursery school teachers, parent educators, social workers, toy buyers, retailers, representatives from the National Industrial Design Council, trade experts, craftsmen and pediatricians. As the list clearly demonstrates, child experts from various fields and retailers dominated the membership. According to their annual report, the first year of operation for the Toy Testing Committee was focused on exploring the best method for testing toys. Their investigation involved gathering information on American organizations that evaluated toys, including Consumer Research, Consumer Union, the Toy Guidance Council, and the Toy Testing Laboratory. McKay-Smith’s investigations concluded that these organizations “either do not actually test toys, or they test them on a fee basis.”

Thus, American toy testing was deemed lacking in empiricism, objectivity or both. The report clearly states that the committee would have preferred “scientific”

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195 Special Bulletin of the Citizens Committee on Children, Governor General Fonds, LAC, RG7-G26 Vol. 82 File 140c.
testing. However, this would have required the distribution of fifty sets of each toy to various testers in various play scenarios.\textsuperscript{198} They opted instead for a dual system that involved home testing by families on a limited basis coupled with the “knowledge and experience” of committee members.\textsuperscript{199} Put less flatteringly, it meant a very awkward synthesis of psychological rhetoric and anecdotal testing methods. When they spoke about what toys should be like and what they should do, the Toy Testing Committee deployed the discourse of the developing child. When they were reporting results from evaluations, they leaned more heavily towards the discourse of the agentive child.

Initially, this awkward compromise caused problems for the committee. By the end of the first year there was a strong sense that expert opinion did not easily reflect empirical evaluations. Toys deemed by experts to have low play value, as fragile or as uneducational, were used in many unexpected ways when put in the hands of children, raising the very real possibility of “snap judgments or unfounded statements.”\textsuperscript{200} However, the slow pace and problematic outcomes of these early testing efforts did not deter toy testers. The Toy Testing Committee offered up numerous opinions in the form of public discussions to customers at Eaton’s in Toronto, to the Hamilton Junior League and to several organizations around Ottawa. Pivotaly, they also received some support from the business community. They attended the Montreal annual toy fair, were invited to put on and advise on exhibitions of “good” toys around Ottawa including that of the National Industrial Design Council and were invited by \textit{Sports and Playthings Magazine}...

\textsuperscript{198} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{199} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{200} \textit{Ibid.}
to contribute an article on toy retailing. They had somewhat presumptuously begun compiling a list of toys from toy catalogues commenting on their play value, durability and age appropriateness. Even manufacturers and distributors were offering “100% cooperation.” This is not surprising given the way they had already selectively adopted much of the language of psychology in marketing efforts. This was all done in spite of having only tested one set of children’s plastic dishes and admitting to significant problems with their own testing methods. Given this paradox, it is clear that much of the committee’s authority rested on their ability to mobilize psychological knowledge about toys, moderated by popular interest in thrift and amusement. This placed the Toy Testing Committee in a far more moderate position than many of those in the academy and made their services appealing to the toy industry.

The growing authority the Toy Testing Committee, rooted in their idiosyncratic blend of psychology and toy promotion, meant that only a year later the chair did a complete about-face. McKay-Smith concluded that their testing methodology was in fact “quite satisfactory”. Impressively they had expanded their testing activities to include 54 different items. According to the committee report, manufacturers were supportive and receptive. Mamba Toys and Arnold Arnold Toys corrected problems identified by the committee. Similarly, the Toy Testing Committee began to publish results in the form of reports for consumers and manufacturers and established a sub-committee for consumer complaints. As the 1955 annual report paradoxically concluded, toy testing had to move slowly due to its time constraints, yet consumer education “must move fast” in order to

further establish the Toy Testing Committee’s authority to evaluate and pontificate on the value of toys.\textsuperscript{204}

In 1956 and 1957 the Toy Testing Committee published pamphlets for consumers; tested over 120 toys in total; produced standardized scoring, ratings, consumer and manufacturer reports; and established specific sub-committees for various cross-sections of toys.\textsuperscript{205} These efforts in standardization further added to their ability to produce knowledge and offer conclusions that seemed scientific and authoritative. Indeed, their growing influence was apparent to the executive: “Almost every Canadian will buy almost one toy this year…the toy testing committee is helping to shape this industry in an increasingly potent way.”\textsuperscript{206} The committee saw their rising authority as central to furthering the cause of children’s consumer autonomy and agency: “Through it [the Toy Testing Committee] the child can now register complaints about design, colour, function, scarcity, etc.”\textsuperscript{207} This all culminated in the 1958 publication of the first annual Toy Buying Guide distributed to schools, hospitals, universities (including the Institute of Child Study), government departments, libraries, businesses, publications and national charitable organizations.\textsuperscript{208} The elation of the committee executive was palpable: “From an unknown, experimental body it has changed into a dynamic, sure-footed research group whose advice is sought by government bodies, manufacturers, retailers, importers,

\textsuperscript{204} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{207} \textit{Ibid.}
parents and educators.”

The meteoric rise in stature and authority was precipitated by the Toy Testing Committee’s ability to occupy a moderate position. It encouraged the participation of manufacturers by allowing them to externalize some of the costs of product testing while at the same time adapting the authority of child experts to serve plainly pro-capitalist objectives. The committee placed the child front and centre as the major actor and beneficiary of their efforts: “We are not only trying to create better toy buyers, but happier, healthier children.”

Their choice to focus equally on “children’s likes and dislikes” as a means to empirically support existing ideas about age appropriateness, thrift and pleasure offered manufacturers and retailers a market-based solutions to the increased toy requirements of the “normal” child. It offered mothers a reasonable resource for fulfilling the developing child’s growing need for toys. Yet, it also meant that listening to expert advice and then acting upon it in the market as an “informed consumer” increasingly defined good motherhood.

By 1960, advice writers and psychologists were raising many concerns about the role of mass-produced and mass-marketeted toys in children’s lives. The innovative fusion of some of the objectives of the toy industry with the more moderate pronouncements of psychological science kept in place the facade of a harmonious toy culture that was vastly improved from previous generations. This helped to obscure an important and growing

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209 Ibid.
211 “Might Spoil Fun for Father,” Saskatoon Star-Phoenix, 7 Dec 1955, 10.
schism between the business community and more radical psychological ideas among professional psychologists and social activists.

It is clear that psychology’s efforts since the 1920s raised the status of playthings and greatly expanded the material requirements associated with normal children. By the Second World War, many psychologists and advice writers increasingly viewed mass-produced and mass-marketed toys as something akin to Frankenstein’s monster. Their attempts to promote the anti-consumerist idea of play materials as a replacement to toys was an attempt to slay this seemingly debased and horrific beast. The discursive innovation of the developing child and its popularization stoked the flames of discord that have come to dominate the social life of toys. As we shall see in the next section, Blatz’s “revolution” was indeed “bloodless,” but it was in no way free from violence.
CHAPTER SIX


Toys were changing. No one understood this better than Sara Zippin. As she boldly declared to a journalist from *Maclean’s*: “I don’t like dolls, I just like Smurfs.” Sara had been collecting the blue-skinned figures since the age of 3½. She had amassed over 103 Smurf figurines, stamps and countless mushroom houses.

Sara’s specific love for Smurfs, rather than a broader love of dolls, illustrates the growing focus on niche brands on the part of toy consumers and producers. After 1960, children increasingly played with Smurfs, Cabbage Patch Kids, Barbies, G.I. Joes and Transformers. Toy companies relied on branded products and children like Sara to stay in the black. Doug Pike, sales manager for Canadian distributor Ganz Brothers Toys, conceded that the Smurfs were “ugly as hell,” but that their sales were remarkable and welcome.

This shift did not happen immediately, nor without exacerbating long-standing concerns about the relationship of children to the consumer market. Sara’s mother’s comment that her five-year old daughter might become a Smurf and the image of Sara grasping at numerous dolls that accompanied the article highlighted the disruptive effect of toy promotions on children’s consumer desire.

Since the 1950s, television advertising’s connection to the toy industry has formed the basis for robust and expanding toy sales. However, it has also been a major source of anxiety for those critical of toy manufacturers growing ability to reach into

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living rooms around the world and speak directly to children.

But the story of the Smurfs’ commercial success is more complicated than the triumph of small screen advertising and unbridled consumer desire. Begun as a French-language Belgian comic in 1958 called *Les Schtroumpf*, the Smurf franchise had spread throughout Europe and into Quebec by 1979. With the release of an English-language weekly cartoon series in 1981, the Smurf franchise became a North American TV phenomenon. The Smurfs’ popularity led to the development of licensed toy lines, movies and video games. Pivotal, the initial status of the Smurfs as a literary work meant that any product representing the characters would be protected by copyright regardless of form, giving the creator and licensees robust control over the creation. Television advertising directed at children and toy mega hits were indicative of a massive shift in the toy industry centred on the growing commercial promise of intellectual property in the later half of the twentieth century.

Most historiography on children’s popular culture and toys sees this period as one of profound unease and discord. Television advertising directed at children is often accused of disrupting the established patterns of toy consumption, production and distribution. According to Gary Cross, “upstart novelty toy companies prevailed over the old family companies with the skillful manipulation of novelty, TV advertising and financial power.” Most recently described by Cross as part of the victory of “the cool” over “the cute,” other scholars have also identified this period as pivotal in the transformation of the toy industry and children’s culture. In Cambre and Hawke’s study of technology in the classroom toys are divided into three technologically determined

3 Cross, *Kid’s Stuff*, 196
4 Cross, *The Cute and the Cool*, 150-151
categories: before television, after television and after computers. In the growing power of the toy industry, Howard Chudacoff sees the near destruction of authentic children’s play. Scholars working from the perspective of media studies have stressed the closer association between television and children’s commodities as the salient feature of this period with television, video games and the internet looming large in their accounts.

In the instances outlined above, the rising profits and power of the global toy industry are understood as products of technological change and reduced government regulation. In Canada, it is much more difficult to make this case. Government regulation of toy advertising, as Kline himself acknowledges, actually increased or remained static over the period. These studies tend to see toy companies and the industry as a whole as a static ideological block whose interest in making profits compelled them to explore new avenues under the competitive conditions of free-market capitalism.

Concerns about the role of corporations, the media and cultural producers in commercializing childhood are in need of greater nuance. Corporations didn’t invade the family or hijack childhood, and neither did the arrival of television. The commercialization of the affective bonds of family and children’s leisure time was already well underway before the postwar period. Instead, television advertising and other commercial developments were partially constitutive, and indicative of more radical

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transformations underway in the toy industry and its understanding of its products and the consuming child.

Television advertising, and later programming, offered a solution to a long-standing problem: that of creator control over the rights to their toy creations. To focus on television ads, the closer connection between television programming and children’s commodities, or as Gary Cross obtusely calls it, the “logic of the staple fad” is to mistake the effect for the cause. To put the shift I am describing in the clearest terms, the toy industry transitioned from a consumer industry, focused on producing consumer goods, to a cultural industry, producing, acquiring and disseminating toy creations as intellectual property. The rise of postindustrial systems of production in the toy industry resulted from a series of pull and push factors. The arrival of television as an important medium, the shift to box store retailing and changes to intellectual property legislation all pulled the toy industry towards this new business model. Increased labour activism and the Canadian government’s embrace of free trade helped push the toy industry towards subcontracting in the global south, facilitating the transition to a postindustrial business model. Together these changes launched a revolution in the children’s industries with which we are still coming to terms.

When the term intellectual property is used, we often think of the so-called knowledge economy filled with new medicines, patents, software or other high-tech inventions. Yet, economists and policy experts define “I.P.” in a far more complex fashion. Surendra Gera and Kurt Mang claim “the ability to create wealth is increasingly dependent on…the organizational capability to create, acquire, accumulate, disseminate

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10 Cross, *Kid’s Stuff*, 196.
and exploit information and knowledge."^{11} What ultimately gives intellectual property its value and drives corporate wealth creation in the knowledge economy is the scarcity of certain knowledges or creations supported by legally sanctioned proprietary monopolies over their circulation. Rather than a purely competitive market, as its promoters contend, the knowledge economy is a perfect example of monopolistic competition. Knowledge may wish to be free, as Internet visionaries claimed in the 1990s, but everywhere it is in chains.

In his epic *Piracy: The Intellectual Property Wars from Gutenberg to Gates*, historian Adrian Johns gives a global account of the slow and conflict-riddled development of the concepts of piracy and intellectual property. Johns’ principle thesis is that intellectual property developed over the last five hundred years because of efforts to establish certain practices as piratical, not as an originary principle that piracy violated.^{12} What we today consider intellectual property – copyright, patents, trademarks and industrial design – developed unevenly at different times and only became partially integrated as a comprehensive system following the Second World War. The development of new mediums like television and new technologies that fostered wider dissemination like the VHS cassette or high speed internet ultimately facilitated closer integration between the four branches.^{13}

Yet, the trouble with studies like Johns’ and Christopher May and Susan K. Sell’s *Intellectual Property Rights: A Critical History*, is that they tend to focus on “high

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^{13} Ibid., 431-496.
knowledge” forms of intellectual property – patents and copyright – leaving low forms of intellectual property on the margins of their histories.\(^\text{14}\) This means that the history of trademarks and industrial designs have generally been left up to business historians and art historians, respectively. The topics tend to appear in studies focused on branding or the genius of design without connecting these activities to the broader category of intellectual property.\(^\text{15}\) However as Paul Duguid and Mira Wilkin’s work highlights, brands were impossible without the rise of trademark law throughout the Atlantic world in the nineteenth century.\(^\text{16}\)

Yet the legal infrastructure to enforce trademark and industrial design registries was much more robust – nationally and internationally – in the postwar period. This was pivotal for the rise of transnational capital. It allowed companies to thwart imitators in distant national markets that they would otherwise have to compete with through legal means.\(^\text{17}\) Today, toy companies and a host of other industries produce most of their goods through subcontractors in the global south, while a small elite of designers, marketers, testers and lawyers create, promote and maintain the brand from head-offices and


courtrooms in the United States, Japan and Europe.

Our tendency to conflate technology with the rent seeking activities inherent in a knowledge economy often obscures its humbler origins in so-called low and medium knowledge industries in the late-postwar period or even earlier among consumer manufacturers and retailers.\textsuperscript{18} The toy industry was one of the industries at the forefront of this change.\textsuperscript{19} Television was part of this equation insofar as it allowed companies to establish associations between certain products and the company or a brand much more quickly and across vast distances. As Paul Rutherford declares in his history of television’s early years: “If Culture had faltered on television by the early 1960s, Commerce had thrived.”\textsuperscript{20} The commercial success of television meant that consumers were often confronted with similar products at similar prices. Manufacturers had to sell the brand, the aura or the aspirational qualities of the product.\textsuperscript{21} The medium was undoubtedly important in facilitating the toy industry’s embrace of postindustrial models of production.

However, for the toy industry and many other consumer industries, the transition to postindustrial capitalism meant charting new ground, new practices and new ideologies of business. It meant a revolution in business thought that we are still grappling with today.\textsuperscript{22} In order to grasp the extent of this shift it is necessary to begin by exploring the

\textsuperscript{18} Gera & Mang, “The Knowledge Based Economy,” 150.
\textsuperscript{20} Paul Rutherford, When Television was Young: Prime Time Canada, 1952-1967, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 309.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 312
\textsuperscript{22} There are at present few studies of business thought in Canada, despite its importance for understanding economic motives and actions. As Michael Bliss’ A Living Profit aptly demonstrates, business has always had its own moral economy and social life that exists
transformation of the toy industry’s own understanding of itself, shifts in labour-capital relations as well as the growth in advertising and the conflicts it engendered.

From Consumer Industry to Culture Industry

Changes to the toy industry’s strategy did not happen overnight. Many toy producers continued to profit on early-postwar era practices even as changes were slow-boiling under the surface. These continuities helped toy producers to continue to profit even as the toy industry began to change. Plastics remained important for the toy industry. The growing use of molds boosted efficiency and lowered production costs for toy makers, helping them to better absorb changes in production costs.\(^{23}\)

As well, the Canadian government continued to provide robust support for the toy industry. Throughout the 1960s they subsidized travel and free local advertising so Canadian toy companies could show their wares at large international fairs like the Nuremberg Toy Fair, the British Toy Fair and the International Toy Fair, held in Asia or Oceania. Larger firms, like Reliable toys, engaged in more general trade fairs throughout

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the world. Many of these ventures met with success. However, a number of issues suggested all was not well.

Only eight firms from Canada chose to participate in the 1967 Nuremberg toy fair. Of those that did attend, the quality and efficacy of their participation varied widely. Aurora Plastics of Canada, the local subsidiary of an American firm, was praised for its professionalism in the official report. However, much of the business accruing to the Canadian branch plant came through the American stand for the company. Even more troubling, Playcraft Toys “would have been better left at home” as their wares consisted of American-made Remco toys sold out of Remco boxes available more cheaply from Remco proper in the United States.

The large number of branch plants in the Canadian industry was a clear reason for both the low participation and the position of the toy industry more generally. Products made at Canadian toy factories were largely derivative, or simply one line under a wider American owned corporate banner. The opening up of the toy industry during the early-postwar period had led to an overall reduction in the number of toy firms as smaller producers either merged with other Canadian firms or were swallowed up by large American competitors. Consequently, attracting business for novel products was a challenge for the small number of independent Canadian firms.

In spite of these difficulties, Foreign Trade reported that the 1960s witnessed

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26Ibid.
27Ibid.
modest increases in export opportunities for what remained of the Canadian toy industry, primarily to Britain, Western Europe, Australia and South Africa. At the same time, efforts to remain competitive in the Caribbean and Latin America continued to falter as those areas imported toys from the United States on an ever-larger scale. However, depreciation of the Canadian dollar during the 1960s, and sustained high birth rates helped the industry at home and abroad. The Canadian toy industry chugged along.

In the 1960s Canadian toy firms lived and died by domestic sales. In the opening year of the decade, Canadian firms sold $110,000,000 in toys, or $114.61 per child, while exporting only $750,000 in product. By 1966 domestic sales had risen to $180 million and by 1979 they reached $532,000,000 annually. However, this presents its own conundrum. When adjusted for inflation in constant year 2000 dollars, domestic toy consumption grew from just under $985,000,000 in 1966 to $1,545,000,000 in 1979. This growth was in contrast to the steep decline in fertility rates after 1965 resulting in around one million fewer children under the age of fourteen by the end of the 1970s than there

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32 "Big Boom Predicted for Canada's Toy Industry," Saskatoon Star-Phoenix, 10 Mar 1967, 12; CP, “Toy Outlook Surprises Some as Sales Point to Good Year,” Calgary Herald, 2 Feb 1979, B10
had been at the start of the 1960s. Most of this reduction in the number of children was among those under the age of ten. The obvious implication is that Canadians were spending more on toys per child by the late 1970s. Clearly this is not an instance of business as usual. Something was changing in the culture of consumption.

The relationship between advertising, consumer goods and intellectual property law lies at the root of this shift. The emergence of television led to a reform of Canadian copyright law in 1952, an expert review of Canadian trade mark law and the striking of a Royal Commission on Patents, Copyright, Trademarks and Industrial Design, informally referred to as the Isley Commission. The three reports issued by the Isley Commission provide a clear picture of the issues and emergent trends in Canadian intellectual property law. Collectively they demonstrate the persistence of a qualitative hierarchy between different forms of intellectual property. Novel processes, inventions and publications belonging to high knowledge industries or high culture received the most robust protection in the form of patents and copyrights. The protection of mundane and purely “aesthetic” commercial creations through trademark and copyright laws was less generous and more challenging to enforce.33

This is the point at which the question of intellectual property became most troubling for Isley and his fellow commissioners, especially in the case of the relationship between high and low culture. For instance, the committee began its investigation into industrial design by considering the abolition of the category altogether and the repeal of

the Industrial Design and Union Label Act of 1952. The Commission Report stated that it was unclear what benefit industrial design was “to the progress of the mechanical arts.”  

Ultimately, the decisions to endorse “some form of protection” emerged from three interrelated factors: Firstly, many of Canada’s major trading partners offered some form of protection and Canada had signed treaties recognizing industrial design. Secondly, in their survey of industry, the commission found that an overwhelming majority of manufacturers either licensed equipment, or products protected by industrial designs or themselves owned protected industrial designs. Finally, many purveyors of popular culture appearing before the Isley Commission challenged the distinction between copyright, industrial design, patent and trademark. By extension, they also questioned the hierarchy between high and low culture and the value attached to each.

In their testimony to the Isley Commission, the Canadian Manufacturing Association and cultural enterprises like the Walt Disney Co. tried to secure greater protection for industrial products and brands. Disney and the CMA, as well as several others, hired Dr. Harold G. Fox, Q.C. a legal expert on intellectual property in Canada and former chairperson of the Trademark Law Revision Committee, to represent them. Fox made a compelling case for more robust protection of low knowledge and culture. He began by arguing that the existing industrial design protections were “flimsy and incomplete.” Pivotal, Fox claimed that changes in manufacturing techniques meant that “shape” and not “ornamentation” was now the most distinguishing feature of any

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35 Ibid., 10-12.
design. Fox proceeded to claim that the object itself, rather than the particular configuration of adornments, colour or enameling, should form the basis of registration.\footnote{Ibid., 1904-1907.} In practice this would amount to enhanced protection. The need for greater protection, Fox contended, was discernible in the instance of the toy industry. Fox singled out Renwal Manufacturing v. Reliable Toy Co. (1949) as indicative of the challenges faced by the producers of popular culture.\footnote{Ibid., 1902.} In that case, Renwal Manufacturing sued Reliable Toy when they began manufacturing a series of plastic toys based on models registered as industrial designs to Renwal. The Exechequer Court of Canada ruled against Renwal, despite clear evidence that the Reliable’s doll furniture was based on the models. The ruling stated that the objects were not original and so were not eligible for registration. In the attached annotation, the presiding judge opined about the uselessness and unenforceability of existing design legislation and demanded its reform.\footnote{Renwal v. Reliable Toy Co. CarswellNat 6, 8 Fox Pat. C. 163, [1949] Ex. C.R. 188, 9 C.P.R. 67; This case was in contrast Reliable Toy Ltd. and Reliable Plastics Ltd. v. Collins (1950), an employee of Vinyoil Paint Co. where the judge upheld Reliable’s rights to maintain its plastic making processes as a trade secret due to patent rights and awarded $2,500 in damages. See Reliable Toy Co. Ltd. and Reliable Plastics Ltd. v. Collins (Vinyoil Paint Co.) 3 Apr 1950, 1950 CarswellOnt 96, 13 C.P.R. 53, 11 Fox Pat. C. 5, [1950] O.R. 360, [1950] 4 D.L.R. 499.}

Older issues from the T. Eaton Co. fonds reveal that outside the courtrooms, retailers and licensees understood the very different protection afforded patents and copyrights than what was provided for industrial designs and trademarks. For example, Eaton’s raised concerns about the status of knock-off “steelrector” sets from Castle Manufacturing Company. The retailer was worried that A.C. Gilbert Co., which held a U.S. patent on erector products, might attempt to sue for infringement. A.C. Gilbert did
sue, Castle Manufacturing folded and Eaton’s was left holding an insurance bond against a possible costly legal settlement.⁴⁰

A similar issue arose around the Kewpie doll when the Robertson Brothers Ltd., a Toronto confectionary company, licensed the Kewpie trademark in 1914 for use in candy products. After Robertson Brothers discovered that Genesee Pure Food Co. were manufacturing Jell-O packages featuring the Kewpie doll, Eaton’s found themselves in the middle of another legal struggle. Following an unrelated $500 legal settlement for the sale of imitation Kewpie dolls, Eaton’s decided it wasn’t worth the trouble and issued a moratorium on the purchase of any Kewpie products unless a manufacturer could produce a licensing agreement.⁴¹

The hierarchy between high and low culture encoded in intellectual property designations meant that consumer industries like the toy industry often found their character creations without much in the way of legal protection from appropriation by competitors. For retailers this problem could act as a disincentive for carrying wildly popular products, as their high sales might become a liability should imitations make their way into the store. The form and meaning of intellectual property within the toy industry before 1960 constituted a major problem. What a toy company created fit awkwardly within established categories, easily drifting between patents, industrial designs or trademarks. This ambiguity had major repercussions as the categorization of a particular product had a significant impact on the ability of manufacturers to protect their creations and the ability of others to get away with imitating them.

Disney, one of the first companies to make the full transition into an integrated

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⁴⁰ Castle Manufacturing Co. T. Eaton’s Fonds, AO, F229-34 File 201.
⁴¹ Kewpie Trademark, T. Eaton’s Fonds, AO, F229-34 File 1002.
cultural producer, directly addressed this issue when they appeared before the commission. Speaking on behalf of Disney, Fox was more explicit about the need for equal status between design and trademarks on the one hand and patents and copyright on the other. Fox described the space Disney’s creations occupied as “the penumbral area of protection between copyright and industrial design.”

No Canadian courts had ruled on this issue. Fox’s resourcefulness, however, led him to a precedent in the House of Lords from 1941. The case in question centred on an alleged copyright infringement when a competitor produced imitation Popeye dolls from a model they had seen. Popeye’s creator won their case against the piratical imitator. Based on this precedent, Fox reasoned that “the author of an artistic work is entitled to copyright whether or not at the time of its creation the author intends to use it as an industrial design or to apply it thereto, and irrespective of whether the work is so used or applied.” In short, Fox was claiming that the creation of a model as a one of a kind invention constituted an original work, not an industrial object. As such, Fox and Disney held that such a model was entitled to copyright protection irrespective of its registration as an industrial design.

Fox proceeded by attacking the distinction between high and low culture: “It is felt to be an unjustifiable distinction that the popularity of a work of artistic craftsmanship should diminish the form of protection accorded to it.” Whether there was only one, or if they were being manufactured at “25 or 30 a minute” from plastic molds, Fox and Disney claimed that “the element of craftsmanship is in the original

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43 Ibid., 7821.
44 Ibid., 7823.
creation” and resides in subsequent copies. Accordingly, Fox reasoned on Disney’s behalf that their popular character toys of Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck retained copyright protection regardless of the medium of their presentation. Taken as a whole, Fox and his corporate clients were arguing for an integrated system of intellectual property that would protect ideas regardless of form.

The public debate between parliamentarians and Canada’s leading trademark expert helped to shape jurisprudence on the matter. In a series of subsequent rulings television advertising emerged as a key factor in establishing and protecting brands. The concept of distinguishing guise elaborated in the 1953 revisions to the Trade Mark Act made it possible to register an industrial design or unregistered objects as a trademark, once it was associated with a brand. Registration was valid so long as the object was in use.

The case of Eldon Industries v Reliable Toy Co. (1964) is indicative of the emerging connection between advertising, trademarks, branding and industrial design. On the surface, the case was a losing attempt to safeguard a creation. The courts were unwilling to extend much protection to generic looking toys, allowing Reliable to effectively duplicate Eldon Industries’ fire truck because, in the words of the judge, there was no “secondary meaning identifying it as something produced by a particular manufacturer.” In Eldon’s appeal of the decision, the judge was even more explicit about the nature and means of establishing this “secondary meaning”:

A claim founded on the alleged marking or appearance of wares…is doomed to failure unless the claimant establishes that the marking or appearance has become recognized by the public as having a particular origin. In order to succeed the plaintiffs must establish that the design of the Eldon truck had acquired in Ontario

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45 Ibid., 7894.
a secondary meaning signifying its source and identifying it as the plaintiffs' product. Even if the design of the truck had acquired a secondary meaning, the plaintiffs would still fail unless they could prove that trucks made and distributed by the defendants had been confused with the plaintiffs' trucks, or that such confusion was likely. 46

The accuser still faced a substantial burden of proof. However, the use of media and marketing to establish secondary associations between the product and a particular brand or company became the basis for effectively protecting generic looking wares. By modifying their physical appearance slightly, producers could also register their products as distinguishing guises. Television, with its wide dissemination and accessibility was a perfect medium through which toy companies could establish the secondary branding criteria in order to transition an industrial design into a distinguishing guise or associate it with a trade mark. As the court records on trade mark infringements for 1960-1990 attest, toy companies were highly active in registering and defending trade marks that resided within a line of diverse toy products. The noticeable uptick in the aggressiveness with which toy companies pursued new trademarks and other forms of intellectual property is remarkable but understandable in light of the long-standing trouble they had guarding their wares from duplication. 47

The toy industry developed a number of strategies for establishing and elaborating the “secondary meaning” of their toy creations to safeguard their products and ease the minds of retailers. The toy industry began promoting their products to retailers and

47 Regal Toy Limited v. Reliable Toy Co. Limited 8 Feb 1962 CarswellNat 10, 38 C.P.R. 269, 22 Fox Pat. C. 122; Regal Toy Ltd. v. Reliable Toy Co. Ltd., 5 Feb 1971 CarswellNat 411, 1 C.P.R. (2d) 133. Similarly when trademark infringement was alleged regarding Wrinkles and Pound Puppy Gazn Bros. and Irwin Toys took there dispute to the courts. See Ganz Bros. Toys Ltd. v. Irwin Toy Ltd. 2 Oct 1986, 1986 CarswellOnt 2142, 12 C.P.R. (3d) 434.
protecting their wares by advertising the extent to which they advertised, especially on television. In 1963, *Toys and Playthings* reported that throughout the industry record expenditures were being made in television, print, radio and billboards advertising to “create a new and accelerated interest in their wares.”48 “The public,” reasoned the magazine “is bound to be very much aware of toys that have been backed by extensive television and newspaper advertising.”49 “Saturation campaigns” like Eldon Industries nationwide efforts in 1964 were increasingly the norm.50 A year later, *Toys and Playthings* was informing retailers and wholesalers that all the toy companies were doing on TV. The magazine argued that manufacturers needed to explain their advertising strategy and expenditures to show prospective buyers that they were effective advertisers willing to spend heavily to build their brands.51 An advertisement for A.C. Gilbert in the May/June 1965 issue of *Toys and Plaything* emphasized the over $1,000,000 in television advertising for U.S. border TV stations and specific “saturation spots” for Canada.52 According to Marx Toys, “TV will sell [the] Big Bruiser [tow truck] for you!!” because of the more than 19 million television sales messages Louis Marx & Co. had taken out to promote it.53 Fisher-Price, purveyor of “developmental” and “educational” toys, promised to turn the work of merchandisers and retailers “into child’s play” by doubling their advertising on all Canadian television stations and launching an aggressive advertising

48 “Is Television Still the Key To Success?” *Toys and Playthings*, May/June 1963, 16.
campaign in *Chatelaine* targeted at Canadian mothers.\textsuperscript{54}

By the beginning of the 1970s, the trade press was celebrating the effectiveness of television advertising for reducing overall sales costs for retailers.\textsuperscript{55} Consequently, by 1971 around ninety percent of all advertising dollars spent by Canada’s toy industry was being spent on television – an even higher proportion than in the United States.\textsuperscript{56} Irwin Toys used television almost exclusively to promote their products.\textsuperscript{57} This was likely the result of the realities of accessing a sparsely distributed and highly regionalized population. Mass media, rather than local daily newspapers, were just more effective.

In 1979 *Toys and Games* began publishing an annual TV advertising breakdown for major toy manufacturers showing the regional coverage, networks used and overall length of the advertising campaign for television. The analysis included a listing of the advertisements to appear in print to help retailers and wholesalers pick their stock.\textsuperscript{58} From 1960-1990 the story was one record-setting advertising campaign after another, as the major toy players sought to increase their visibility. According to the sexist musings of T.M. Abrams, editorial director of *Toys and Playthings*, “not being on television is like a secretary with an ankle length mini-skirt.”\textsuperscript{59}

Relying on television advertising also heralded its own challenges, raising the stakes for those who failed to protect their intellectual property. When the Hugabug plush toy became wildly popular in Japan in the late 1950s, Reliable Toy decided to blatantly

\textsuperscript{58} “National Toy Advertising Campaigns 1979,” *Toys and Games*, Sep/Oct 1979, 27-31
\textsuperscript{59} [Editorial], *Toys and Playthings*, August 1968, 3.
copy the doll and beat Japanese imports to market. In contrast, when Vancouver’s Horizon Agencies copied a flying disk made to appear like a space station they found themselves in court in Canada and the United States facing lawsuits from its inventor, Columbia Plastics Ltd. Imitations, aside from permitting easy and quick profits, also risked damaging the brand. When flammable imitation Cabbage Patch Kids from Taiwan made their way into stores, they led to questions about how consumers could distinguish them from the real article. It became increasingly important to safeguard creations for the viability of the brand as well as to protect profits after large investments in advertising. Rather than making companies innovative, post-industrial capitalism made them conservative and protectionist, interested in freeing themselves from the free-market as soon as the popularity of their brand would permit it.

In 1966 a full-page advertisement by Hasbro for G.I. Joe demonstrated the fusion of the carrot and stick approach to guarding intellectual property against infringement. In the first panel, Hasbro declared, “G.I. Joe continues to be the leader in the toy industry. Supported by complete coverage on nationwide television. G.I. Joe represents your greatest profit opportunity.” On the second panel Hasbro issued the following “Warning” for would-be imitators:

Canadian patent No. 730377 covering G.I. Joe has been granted...our solicitors advise us that this recently issued patent along with our previously issued Industrial Design Registration covering the appearance of G.I. Joe affords us complete legal coverage. We also wish it to be known that it is our intention to diligently assert our legal rights...against all infringements, whether on the manufacturing, wholesale, or retail level...In buying a moveable figure other than

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60 “Reliable in First with Hugabug,” Financial Post, 24 Sep 1960 3
G.I. Joe you may also be buying a legal headache!"\textsuperscript{63}

The interplay between advertising and intellectual property allowed G.I. Joe figures to amass no less than three different forms of protection including patents, a trademark and an industrial design. In 1974 a copyright was also issued.\textsuperscript{64}

Similarly, the latest iterations of the Hoola-Hoop and Yo-Yo reflected the increased need to legally protect toys.\textsuperscript{65} Initially popular in the 1950s, the Hoola-Hoop died down and was written off as a fad, in part because of the proliferation of Hoola-Hoop copycats. The product’s inventors, Wham-O, claimed it took them until 1965 to “straighten out its patent.” With the Hoola-Hoop Mark II, released in 1967, Wham-O made sure to protect its creation by launching a massive advertising campaign, licensing Li’l Beaver Toys and Trucks of Toronto to make and distribute the new toy and through litigation against no less than three other Canadian toy firms charged with infringement.\textsuperscript{66}

Advertising was not just effective for making sales, it was essential for maintaining and enforcing proprietary rights over products that were ill-served by simple registration as industrial designs. Television had made piracy visible and punishable. As the high number of imitation products that continued to find their way into stores over the period attests, these shifts did not stop copying by declaring it piratical. It did, however, raise the danger and cost for retailers.

Toy companies also sought to build brands in the minds of the public by turning toys into television programs, or by licensing copyrighted properties for the production of

\textsuperscript{63} “There is Only One G.I. Joe,” advertisement, \textit{Toys and Playthings}, Mar/Apr 1966, 30-31

\textsuperscript{64} “Warning,” advertisement, \textit{Toys and Games}, Jun 1974, 11.


\textsuperscript{66} “The Hullabaloo Behind the Hula Hoop Mark II,” \textit{Maclean’s}, Oct 1967 3
toys. They extended copyright protection over the toy, providing enhanced protection against imitation. To go into detail on all of the licensed products during the period would require a separate thesis. James Bond, the Six-Million Dollar Man, the Bionic Woman, Star Wars, Batman, the Smurfs, the Care Bears, Rambo, Thunder Cats and the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles were all licensed as toys from film, television shows, or comics. In the early 1960s James Bond and Batman led sales. When Batman became “hot” again as a result of his live-action debut in a 1988 film, Charon toys spent substantial sums to license the rights to the character in an effort to save their crumbling business.\footnote{“Toy Manufacturer Charan Hopes to Ride Batman’s Cape to Turn Company Around,” \textit{Montreal Gazette}, 14 Aug 1989, B7} Irwin’s explosive profits in the late 1970s and early 1980s were in large part the result of two licensing agreements: one for Star Wars action figures, the other for Atari game cartridges and systems. The former property accounted for 20 percent of Irwin’s sales and 40 percent of volume gain in 1979.\footnote{“Boom Lights Up toy Industry,” \textit{Winnipeg Free Press}, 5 Feb 1979, 26} According to executives, the desire of the agentive child consumer ensured that licensed toys would sell well because “children know who the characters are and fantasize about them.”\footnote{“Toy Maker Turn to TV Winners for New Trend,” \textit{Financial Post}, 23 Aug 1975, 1&4.}

Toys could also be copyrighted if they were transformed into characters on television or in film. Again the list of toys in this category is long, ranging from Strawberry Shortcake, The Master’s of the Universe, Sheera, Sectaurs, Transformers, G.I. Joe, My Little Pony, Go Bots and so on. Deals would often be made between toy companies and production studios to create half hour or hour-long cartoon series or even movies to promote and protect the toy line.\footnote{“Playthings Spawn TV Series,” \textit{Ottawa Citizen}, 13 Feb 1985, F11; Ruth Franklin.} Copyright was the most generous form of
protection. It required no prior registration or application and because its protection endured beyond death, efforts like these enhanced the protection afforded toy creations.\footnote{Resistance to so-called program length commercials (PLCs) by consumer activists followed much the same trajectory as opposition to advertising more generally. The main distinction was activists increased reliance on the hierarchy between high culture and low culture. See for instance: \textit{“Toy Makers Saturate Television with Own Productions,”} \\Globe and Mail, 22 Dec 1984, M1 & M4; \textit{“Toy Selling Shows for Kid’s Under Fire,”} \\\textit{Calgary Herald}, 24 Dec 1984, D1.}

However, these were fundamentally rent-seeking activities designed to extract profit by manipulating the social and cultural context in which toys were sold through proprietary monopolies over the meaning of a commodity. Production came second to the creative work of designing and marketing a new toy or property. This is reflected in the changing distribution of employment between factory and back office labour at Canadian toy firms. In 1960 back office labour accounted for only about 16 sixteen of the employees at toy firms. By 1983 it had more than doubled to over thirty-five percent.\footnote{Statistics Canada, \textit{“Sporting Goods and Toy Industries,”} (Ottawa: Queen’s Printer, 1960) \& Statistics Canada, \textit{“Sporting Goods and Toy Industries,”} (Ottawa: Queen’s Printer, 1983).}

As the \textit{Winnipeg Free Press} reported in 1972, \textit{“Santa’s Elf’s”} were being replaced by \textit{“chemists, psychologists, marketers and engineers.”} Toy manufacturing did not cease in Canada, but the importance of making consumer goods was gradually becoming secondary to the creation, acquisition and circulation of intellectual property in a variety of forms.

The transformation of the toy industry into a cultural industry also affected retailing in important ways. The growth of large discount department stores like K-Mart

\footnote{“Good news for toy buyers: The popular items are back in stock,” \textit{Saskatoon Star-Phoenix}, 7 Dec 1986, TAB 20.}
as well as the continued relevance of higher-end retail department stores meant that toys
would frequently be used as a loss leader to draw children and families into the store. It
also insulated the industry against hard times by establishing certain brands that would
sell even in economic downturns, like Mr. Potato Head, Barbie and G.I. Joe. The
continuation of year-round toy sales also led to the development of toy specialty shops.
They struggled to compete on price point. However, they remained profitable by locating
in malls and specializing in niche markets. These changes, along with the growing
developmental and social significance attached to toys, meant that playthings began to
look partially recession-proof. Even in the most trying of economic circumstances,
parents were expected to forgo other purchases to ensure children had a “proper
Christmas” and developmentally appropriate toys year round.

This led to the growth of chains focused exclusively on toys like Tops in Toys – a
western Canadian retail chain. In the early 1980s the Canadian discount catalogue retailer
Consumers Distributing created a toy-focused subsidiary called Toy City. Tops in Toys
and Toy City, like its American cousin, Toys R’ Us, blended a focused retail and
merchandising system similar to specialty toy shops with the discounting and warehouse

74 “It’s Christmas Everyday,” Winnipeg Free Press, 12 Oct 1985, 95
Lorenzon Benet. “Toy Classics are Perennial Yule-Time Favourites, Edmonton Journal,
76 “Leisure World: Co-Op Cuts Costs and Increases Profits,” Toys and Games, Oct/Nov,
1976, 18-19; “Calgary’s Toy House,” Toys and Games, Jun/Jul 1975, 28-29; “Children
Play and Parents Buy at Calgary’s Tops in Toys,” Toys and Games, Feb/Mar, 1977, 30-
31.
77 “Toys: The Tube is Still Tops for the Big Christmas Push,” Marketing, 19-26 Dec
1977, 12 & Interview Arnold Irwin, Toronto, Sep 20 1977, Interviewer Cynthia
Thompson, RG 47-27-3-1, AO, Tape 2 Side 1.
style promotions of large discount department stores. 78 For Canadian Business, competition between Toy City and Toys R’ Us was making the toy business bigger than it had ever been. 79 These two retailers, and other so-called box stores, dominated the toy-retailing scene throughout the 1980s and into the next decade, as the department store lost its preeminent place in Canadian retailing.

Business-friendly publications fixated on the significance of branding and box retailing whether celebrating explosive growth or lamenting the short-lived downturns in the toy industry during the period. In 1962 the Financial Post explained in an excited tone that the toy industry was planning for an even busier year than in 1961, which itself witnessed a ten percent sales gain. 80 Similar stories abounded in the 1970s. 81 In 1981 La Presse reported on the demographic promise of the baby-boomer’s offspring for toy sales. 82 When toy sales dipped briefly in 1986 business journalist Kenneth Kidd of the Toronto Star, declared Christmas a “Ho-hum” affair, sharing toy retailer’s concern that unlike 1985 “it’s not a barn-burner.” 83 Much of this coverage demonstrated the volatility of toy retailing highlighting the presence or absence of “hot sellers.”

Media coverage also stressed the innovative and creative process central to successful toy creations, In 1968 the Financial Post celebrated mathematics teacher Fred Francis for his successful toy creation. Francis built a versatile wooden model kit for his

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78 “Hypermarche,” Toys and Games, Jun 1974, 17-19
“Toy Markers See Big Sales Boost,” Financial Post, 11 Nov 1961 11
son which he was attempting to market to Canadian parents and children.\textsuperscript{84} The \textit{Halifax Chronicle-Herald} lauded the entrepreneurial efforts of the husband and wife owners of Brocklin Toys, which established a small factory for wooden toys.\textsuperscript{85} When 1989 looked like a potentially dismal year, \textit{Marketing} connected the low sales to a lack of innovation, declaring that the toy industry had stalled.\textsuperscript{86}

All of these stories, of which there are many more, helped to generate interest in the toy industry’s latest creations. Whether it was tracking great or dismal sales, celebrating new companies or the creations themselves, intellectual property was showcased front and centre in these consumer fables. “Innovation” was the fount from which profit allegedly sprang. Its absence was understood as a harbinger of economic doom.

\textit{Labour and the Decline of Toy Production}

The changing realities of advertising and intellectual property shifted the gaze of toy industry executives away from their long-standing focus on producing consumer goods. However, it was labour strife on the factory floor and the arrival of free trade, which encouraged them to focus their gaze squarely on postindustrial models of capitalism. The growing effectiveness of intellectual property protections reduced the toy industry’s long-standing reliance on tariff barriers for profitability. At the same time, rising labour-capital conflicts encouraged them to move their production to the global south into either proprietary or sub-contracted factories, leaving the head office to focus

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{84} Harry Gregson, “Model Kit for Son May Build Road to Riches for Teacher,” \textit{Financial Post}, 16 Nov 1968 38
\item \textsuperscript{85} “Toymakers Earn an Enviable Reputation,” \textit{Halifax Chronicle-Herald}, 12 Oct 1979, 52
\item \textsuperscript{86} “Toys Aren’t Changing,” \textit{Marketing}, 3 Apr 1989, 9
\end{itemize}
on marketing, product design and development and public relations.

During the 1950s and 1960s toy workers in Canada began to unionize far more frequently. According to Michael R. Smith, these changes were reflective of what the Woods Report on Canadian Industrial Relations identified as the shifting aspirations of Canadian workers for better wages and working conditions.\(^87\) The growing demands of workers were given voice through the rising influence of Labour-Management Production Committees, which attempted to boost productivity through labour-capital cooperation. By the late 1970s, “cooperation had reached the point where the executives of the Canadian Labour Congress routinely consulted with the C.D. Howe Institute and sat across the conference table with the Business Council on National Issues…” in the face of objection from rank-and-file members.\(^88\) It was in this more accepting context that the labour movement found renewed success in the toy industry after the 1960s.

This shift must be understood in the context of the purchase of many of the sole proprietorship and partnerships that had dominated the Canadian industry by large American, British and European firms. Arnold Irwin could claim by 1977 that Irwin Toys was the largest Canadian toy company with a twenty-five percent share of the domestic market.\(^89\) However, this was as much a result of other major producers being bought out and transformed into branch-plants, as it was of Irwin’s success. Personal enterprises like Irwin and Reliable traditionally relied on paternalistic and patriarchal systems of


\(^{89}\) Interview Arnold Irwin, Toronto, Sep 20 1977, Interviewer Cynthia Thompson, RG 47-27-3-1, AO, Tape 2, Side 1.
management for a predominantly female staff.

The removal of these personalized systems of power through the sale of enterprises, coupled with a significant expansion of unionization in Canada during the 1960s and 1970s, changed the work environment in Canadian toy factories in significant ways. Corporate consolidation meant that between 1965 and 1977 the number of Canadian factories producing toys dropped from a high of eighty-one to forty-eight, a low not seen since 1943. The smaller number of factories didn’t mean fewer employees. Toy factories doubled in size from a per-factory average of thirty-six employees in 1965 to a high of sixty-one in 1976. Overall employment ranged between 2700 and 3200 throughout the 1960s and 1970s only becoming more volatile during the early 1980s. The period of consolidation up to the mid 70s replaced smaller factories under paternalistic systems of management with large branch-plant factories relying on technocratic approaches to managing workers. Even those proprietary enterprises like Irwin that survived became more conservative and less independent as they increasingly relied on licensed American or European products already “proven” in other markets.

Rather than slowing this transition, unionization actually sped up the process of absorption, as big business had more resources with which to negotiate and confront big labour. Companies founded during the Second World War like Dee Cee Toys and Ganz Brothers were purchased by Mattel and Regal Toys, respectively, within a decade of their first negotiated contract. Those that found no buyer, like Earle Pullan Co. Ltd., Allied Toy and Enterprises Ltd., and Star Doll Co., went bankrupt a few years after

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91 Ibid.
92 Interview Arnold Irwin, Toronto, Sep 20 1977, Interviewer Cynthia Thompson, AO, RG 47-27-3-1 Tape 1, Side 1.
unionization. Toys and Playthings complained in 1968 that the rising cost of raw materials, labour and television advertising left toy makers facing a “cost-squeeze” which would require them to either up the prices of their goods, or find some way to cut costs. In the end, they would opt to do both.

The most visible short to medium term effect of unionization was a precipitous rise in average hourly wages across the industry. Real wages rose from $9.39/hour in 1960 to $13.84/hour by 1976, stagnating thereafter.

Figure 6.1 – Average Hourly Wages in the Toy Industry, 1960-1984

Wages did go up across the board and grievance procedures and working conditions were improved, but not all unions were equally effective at protecting their workers. The Canadian Labour Congress found a number of irregularities and problems with the conduct of the International Union of Doll & Toy Workers (IUDTW). Originally founded in the United States, the union began operating in Canada in 1961 by unionizing

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93 Earle Pullen Co Ltd. 1966-67, Department of Labour Fonds, RG7-33 B106910; Allied Toy and Enterprises Ltd, Department of Labour Fonds, RG7-33, B133239; Stardoll Manf. Co. Ltd, Department of Labour Fonds, RG7-33 B106911, AO
94 “The Great Cost Squeeze,” Toys and Playthings, Jan/Feb 1968, 52-54
30 employees at Nicky Toys in Toronto.95

Beginning in 1965, a series of irregularities started surfacing. Firstly, the union began stepping outside its stated industrial focus and moving into areas typically reserved for other unions. Worse still, the CLC and others alleged that IUDTW was making sweetheart deals with management. When the United Steelworkers tried to organize the Rotor Electric Co. of Toronto, management claimed to already have recognized the Doll and Toy Workers Union. Oddly, the employees were unaware of their unionized status. When the Steelworkers challenged the claim it was company lawyers that defended the Doll and Toy Union.96 The agreement signed between IUDTW and Ganz Brothers Toys in 1969 was never put into force, no shop steward was appointed and no union meetings were held. Furthermore, the modest $0.07 an hour wage increase promised in the agreement was not implemented.97 By 1969 the Doll and Toy Workers Canadian union boss was openly threatening bodily harm against other union presidents.98

In contrast to CLC files on the union, the records of the Ontario Labour Relations Board show a somewhat different story. The cases brought before the board demonstrate efforts on the part of some IUDTW locals to engage employers on issues of unionization, certification and worker rights, especially at the ill-fated Star Doll and Earle Pullan

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factories. This suggests that the union’s performance was highly uneven and dependent on local circumstances.99 After a change in leadership in 1969, IUDTW often fought aggressively for worker rights.100

Problems with union efficacy came and went. However, the gender dynamics that shaped toy production and consequently unionization were a persistent problem. As Joan Sangster has demonstrated, women employees in later postwar Canada continued to face discrimination in the workplace based on their marital status, family status and age.101 Immigrant women of continental European origins working in the toy industry and elsewhere were no longer racialized to the same extent as before the war. However, women of colour were still viewed in negative and racialized terms.102 Combatting the labour movement’s residual patriarchy in the long 1960s was a protracted engagement between the labour movement and emerging left-wing feminist critiques which sought to

102 Ibid., 53-54
redress imbalances in wages and treatment between male and female employees.\(^{103}\)

Wage rates between male and female workers were frequently unequal, with women paid at lower rates for overtime shifts and regular wages even in unionized environments. As Figure 6.2 clearly demonstrates, the result was a strong preference for women employees in the toy industry because of the lower wages they could command even in unionized factories. The divide was particularly acute in Ontario where women made up between 60-66 percent of the labour force in the years for which statistics are available. When compared with the overall averages for Canada, its clear that Ontario was something of an aberration in this respect. In Quebec for instance, where around 25 percent of Canadian toy production was located, the gendered division of labour was closer to 50 percent.

\begin{table}[h]
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\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
\textbf{Ontario} & \textbf{Men} & \textbf{Women} & \textbf{Total} & \textbf{\% Male} & \textbf{\% Female} & \textbf{Canada} & \textbf{Year} & \textbf{Men} & \textbf{Women} & \textbf{Total} & \textbf{\% Male} & \textbf{\% Female} \\
\hline
1963 & 1074 & 1698 & 2772 & 38.7446 & 61.2554 & 1963 & 1403 & 1925 & 3328 & 42.1575 & 57.84255 \\
1964 & 1159 & 1725 & 2884 & 40.1872 & 59.8128 & 1964 & 1488 & 1953 & 3441 & 43.2432 & 56.75676 \\
1968 & 1195 & 2247 & 3442 & 34.7182 & 65.2818 & 1968 & 1614 & 2573 & 4187 & 38.5479 & 61.45211 \\
1972 & 1286 & 1899 & 3185 & 40.3768 & 59.6232 & 1972 & 1758 & 2212 & 3970 & 44.2821 & 55.71788 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Gender Distribution in Canadian Toy Factories, 1962-1974}
\end{table}


Canadian companies that survived into the 1980s, like Irwin Toys, found that their paternalistic system of management faced continued threats from increased union activism. Irwin went through a particularly long and bitter strike with the workers at its

Etobicoke plant in 1981-1982, represented by the United Steelworkers of America (USWA). The employees walked out to secure their first collective agreement on 17 June 1981. USWA bussed in workers to bolster the picket line. At various times over the long strike violence broke out. Indeed, the supposedly docile female immigrant labour force Arnold Irwin paternalistically referred to as “his girls” were striking for better wages and job security.\textsuperscript{104} In October of 1981 three hundred local women in Etobicoke marched to the Irwin plant in solidarity with the striking workers urging a boycott of Irwin toys until they settled their labour dispute.\textsuperscript{105} According to union spokespeople, the support of women, because of their status as major toy consumers, was essential to ending the strike in the workers favour.\textsuperscript{106} It was also indicative of feminist solidarity across the picket line. When the six-month strike finally ended in January only twenty-six of the 114 workers who walked out remained eligible to vote on the new contract, the rest having either worked as scabs at the factory or taken jobs elsewhere.\textsuperscript{107} The bitter and hard-fought victory was painfully short-lived. After concluding their agreement with the Etobicoke workers, Irwin offered an even better pay and benefits package to their non-unionized workers in their Toronto plant. Their paternalistic gesture had the desired effect. Employees at the Etobicoke plant voted to terminate their affiliation with the Union in 1983 in exchange for this new employment package.\textsuperscript{108}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{105} “300 women March on Plant Call for an Boycott of Irwin Toy,” \textit{Globe and Mail}, 9 Oct 1981, 5
\textsuperscript{106} \textit{Ibid}.
\textsuperscript{107} Matt Maychak, “Irwin’s Strike Over but the Anger Lingers,” \textit{Toronto Star}, 1 Jan 1982, A3
\end{flushright}
The strike at Irwin and its outcome were indicative of the breakdown in the postwar social contract between labour, capital and the Canadian state during the 1980s. Successive governments throughout the anglo-American world embraced neo-liberal economic restructuring during the decade. General deindustrialization would come later for many industries. However, the toy industry had already begun to wind down production in Canada in the late 1970s. The number of manufacturing employees in Canadian firms declined after 1977 as Canadian toy companies struggled against global competitors. Production increasingly moved elsewhere, following repeated tariff reductions.

Figure 6.3 – Average Number of Manufacturing Employees per Firm, 1960-1984

![Average Number of Manufacturing Employees per Firm](image)


Holdouts like Irwin Toys continued to rely on the old and racially charged

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110 “Big Boom Predicted for Canada's Toy Industry,” *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix* 10 Mar 1967, 12; Interview Arnold Irwin, Toronto, Sep 20 1977, Interviewer Cynthia Thompson, AO, RG 47-27-3-1, Tape 2, Side 2.
rhetoric of “high quality” Canadian toys versus “cheap imports,” and the dwindling tariff protection that reflected this distinction. However, the days of the Canadian toy industry were clearly numbered.\footnote{Interview Arnold Irwin, Toronto, Sep 20 1977, Interviewer Cynthia Thompson, AO, RG 47-27-3-1, Tape 2, Side 2.} The final nail in the coffin came in the form the FTA and NAFTA, which removed the remaining trade barriers in North America including those for toys. The CTMA lobbied against the treaties.\footnote{“CTMA,” Toys & Games, Jan 1988, 38.} However, tariff protection was no longer the main method of escaping the competitive market for major toy producers. Instead, intellectual property allowed them to limit competition without having to rely on the fickle allegiances of state legislators.

The global success of the toy industry’s new model of business has often masked the acute volatility of the period between 1960-1989 on the shop floor. Organized labour occupied an ambiguous place in an increasingly globalized industry with declining incentive to demand protective tariffs. Unions did not put the toy industry out of business, nor did they create the conditions under which outsourcing began. There is no empirical evidence to support such a bold assertion. Labour conflict only acted as a push factor under the toy industry’s emerging status as a cultural industry where profits became less directly dependent on manufacturing and tariffs became less essential for escaping the competitive market. In the paternalistic worldview of toy men, employees had bitten the hands that fed them and so were undeserving of any loyalty on the part of employers. It was unions’ lack of understanding of the broader shifts in the industry and economy when pursuing local bargaining that allowed organized labour to unwittingly play into the toy industries growing embrace of postindustrial capitalism and the subsequent
transformation of the toy industry into a rent-seeking culture industry focused on curating the cultural value and meaning of their creations.

*From Fads to Crazes*

The transition from a consumer industry into culture industry generated criticism from a number of consumer groups and individuals. Concerns were often directed at the most visible aspects of this transition: the increased prevalence of television advertising and the consumer behaviour of children and adults. The Consumer Association of Canada (CAC) was a particularly vocal critic on this front. At their annual meeting in 1966 CAC acknowledged that one of the most frequent sources of consumer complaints were toy advertisements.\(^{113}\) Indeed, early in January of 1967 CAC was so inundated with complaint letters concerning toys that they decided to carry out their own detailed investigations.\(^ {114}\) In 1968 CAC and its former Toy Committee, now independent and operating under the designation of the Canadian Toy Testing Council, issued a joint statement expressing their concern about “over-powering TV advertisements.”\(^ {115}\)

The CAC, other organizations and the media frequently reported on and reiterated concerns about the tempting or dangerous affect of toy advertising on children. These complaints either blamed overindulgent parenting or the toy companies’ rapacious appetite for profit. A spokesperson from the American-based organization Action for Children’s Television (ACT) told the *Ottawa Citizen* that “[Children] do not have the

\(^{113}\) “Minutes Annual General Meeting,” Canadian Association of Consumers Fonds, LAC, MG28 I200 Vol. 5 File #60A.


\(^{115}\) “Association Offers Toy Buying Hints,” *Calgary Herald*, 27 Nov 1968, 76
maturity or experience to analyze and discount the normal ‘puffery’ of commercials.”

_Vancouver Sun_ journalist Nicole Parton criticized the whole of children’s popular culture as over-commercialized, boldly declaring that “your child is being manipulated…[by] a siren song so sweet and seductive.” Le _Devoir_ called “television toys…[the] hideous face of capitalism” and accused toy companies of creating “endless additional expenditures.” According to a letter to the editor of the _Toronto Star_, written by H.F. Harwood-Jones the religious spirit of Christmas had been taken over by the “Yuletide hucksters” who were orchestrating a “cash register polka” through advertising. These anxieties were underpinned by an understanding of the child consumer that drew on the discourses of the developing and conditioned child to varying degrees. Children were in danger because of their inability to comprehend and navigate the complexity of television advertising either as a result of their stage of development or because of poor socialization.

By the early 1970s CAC and other groups like Quebec’s Mouvement pour l’Abolition de la Publicité Destinée Aux Enfants were busy lobbying the government and picketing the CRTC for increased regulation of advertising directed at children. In their 1973 submission to the Committee on Broadcasting, Films and Assistance to the Arts, CAC argued that advertising to preschool children should be banned: “the purpose of a commercial is to sell, there can be no justification for advertising to a child

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…children do not buy products.” Children were characterized as particularly vulnerable because they were allegedly unable to distinguish between programming and commercials. CAC specifically referenced accounts about the effects of advertising on children derived from social learning theory with its attendant emphasis on modeling and the observation of authority figures as the basis for childhood cognitive and social development. Indeed, concerns with advertising and other issues as they manifested after 1960 discussed in the next chapter are almost impossible to imagine without reference to Canadian-born psychologist Albert Bandura, who provided a pivotal link between behaviourism and social psychology. It situated the roots of abnormal development in the great expanse of “the social.” By effectively moving the corrective efforts centred on the developing child out of the laboratory and the research preschool and into the lived social world Bandurian social learning theory merged anxieties about the socialization of the conditioned child with the focus on normal development. Normality and abnormality were no longer inside or outside the child. It was in both places at once.

CAC’s argument centred on the large number of misleading commercials identified through voluntary monitoring in 1972 and 1973. However, the advertisement

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121 See Albert Bandura, Social Learning and Personality Development, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963); Albert Bandura, Adolescent Aggression: A Study of the Influence of Child Training Practices and Family Interrelationships, (New York: Ronald Press, Co., 1959); Albert Bandura, Joan E. Grusec & Francis L. Menlove, “Observational Learning as a Function of Symbolization and Incentive Set,” Child Development 37, No. 3 (1966): 499-506; In his discussion of effects research, David Buckingham contends that “effect studies” remained the dominant perspective of psychological studies and argues that such efforts are highly problematic both for the way they construct child consumers as helpless and because they often conflate correlation with causation, ham-fistedly applying artificial laboratory results to more complex social experiences through a prescriptive use of statistical modeling. See David Buckingham, The Material Child, 49-52.
monitoring sheet given out to volunteers reveals a problematic research design. Determining if commercials were misleading was accomplished by requiring volunteers to relate the commercial to the actual product – necessitating an intimate familiarity with its design, use and availability in their local community. Those without this direct knowledge were encouraged to jump to question fifteen which asked them “do you consider that this commercial makes unwarranted claims” – essentially an invitation to speculate. The reported results for 1974-1976 reveal the assumed and expansive nature of many of the problems identified. Phrases like “cars seem to go very fast,” “does doll really speak?” and “implies that father will automatically play with child” shows that what informants considered misleading was rooted as much in their own lack of familiarity with the products being advertised as it was in their own insecurities about their role as parents in their children’s lives. Consequently, it is quite likely that CAC’s numbers were inflated and inaccurate. Even if we are to take these statistics at face value, the results clearly show the number of misleading advertisement reported dropping from twenty-three to seventeen after the introduction of voluntary regulations for advertising to children. Even with the very mixed evidence and problematic methodology, CAC insisted that the government should err on the side of caution and ban advertising directed at children outright.122

The federal government opted, instead, to chart a middle course. Caught between the lobbying of concerned citizens and the countervailing efforts of the toy industry for

voluntary regulation, the government attempted to avoid angering either side. James McGrath, Conservative MP for St. John’s East, introduced a private members bill in 1973 to ban all advertising to children. Upon reviewing the legislation, the Broadcasting Committee opted to water down the bill, calling instead for a reduction in advertising time and asking the CRTC to adopt regulations that ads may not be “exclusively” targeted at children. The committee also called for more research on the issue.123 McGrath continued to lobby for a ban on advertising to children throughout the decade, almost achieving his objective under the short-lived 1979-1980 Conservative government of Joe Clark. However, his efforts and those of others typically resulted in piecemeal reforms that supported the principle of voluntary regulation.124

“Voluntary”, adherence to the Broadcast Code for Advertising to Children was mandatory to receive a broadcast license from the CRTC. The code also required pre-clearance of all commercials. Some stations even went beyond these requirements. In 1976, the public broadcaster CBC decided to ban all television commercials featuring cartoon characters from the station.125 Consequently, “voluntary” should not be confused with optional, which it was clearly not for advertisers and broadcasters.126

In this conflict the toy industry was adamant about their preference for voluntary regulation. On the one hand, they emphasized the connection between advertising and low toy prices, which in the context of growing inflation and economic stagnation proved

123 "Committee Waters Down Bill to Prohibit Kids TV Ads," *Vancouver Sun*, 17 Jul 1973
125 “No More Cartoon Ads to Kids,” *Marketing*, 6 Dec 1976, 1
an appealing argument. They also claimed that television advertising directed at children was psychologically beneficial. It allegedly helped children become more discerning and critical consumers.127 Finally, they claimed that their enthusiasm for voluntary regulation was evidence of their responsible corporate citizenship and removed the need for mandatory regulations.

The seriousness of these concerns was evident in the toy industry’s cleverly orchestrated public relations efforts. Indeed, in 1977 Marketing warned the toy industry not to dismiss advertising critics as “vocal minorities.” The magazine saw marketing concerns as an “emotional issue” – a clear use of coded gendered language to undermine the large number of women critics. However, Marketing warned that the agitators were “well-educated, well-financed, well-motivated, [members of the] middle-class” – a very important market for toy makers. In suggesting how to tackle this public relations problem it was clear that characterizing attempts to regulate advertising as “communism, socialism, censorship and propaganda [was] a non-sequitur.” 128

When increases in Canadian content were being debated in 1974 the Canadian toy industry argued against “restrictive legislation” as it would allegedly lead to a reduction in toy advertising, children’s programming and a dramatic increase in the cost of toys. They made the case for an alternative policy of subsidies and incentives to reach the Canadian content objectives.129 When faced with the possibility of an advertising ban, Mac Irwin claimed it would harm parents more than the toy industry by driving up

127“White Heads International Toymen, CTMA gets Mandate to Set Ad Policy,” Volume Retail Merchandiser, May 1982, 7
129 “Toy Firms Warn of Cutbacks,” Marketing, 19 Aug 1974, 1&17
margins on toys. Irwin went on to attack the characterization of child consumers inherent in calls for a ban on advertising emanating from Joe Clark’s Conservative government:

the framers of this legislation look on children under 13 years of age as one cohesive and uniform block that could be isolated from the community that sustains them…They are a vital and participating part of society…surely politicians must realize that the coddling attitude they practice is only producing a spineless society that is an open invitation to the worst abuses of TV.\footnote{130}

As the quote aptly illustrates, toy makers considered the status of children as effective rights bearing members of Canadian society an outgrowth of their status as agentive consumers. Rhetorically, it made for an appealing line of argument.

Mac Irwin, however, did not speak for every manufacturer. Reliable Toys opted to take an entirely different stance, by turning concerns about television advertising into a commercial advantage. Beginning in 1970 Reliable began an anti-television advertising promotional campaign for their toys. Reliable’s efforts centred on portraying the company and its products as old-fashioned, timeless, kid-friendly and antimodern. The fashion doll Colleen was marketed as “the 24-inch walking doll that’s walking off with more and more sales every minute you don’t see her in expensive TV commercials.”\footnote{131}

Another advertisement claimed that advertising made the colour of a rocking horse “dollar green,” suggesting that Reliable toys were uncompromised by high cost advertising.\footnote{132} The backlash from fellow toy companies was almost instantaneous, as several suggested Reliable’s president Mannie Grossman be “gagged” for claiming that the “fragmented” Canadian toy market was ill-served by television. They also took issue with Grossman’s claim that foregoing costly advertising would actually lower the price of

\footnote{130} “$100 Million: The Extra Cost of toys with No Advertising,” \textit{Marketing}, 24-31 Dec 1979, 2
\footnote{131} “Colleen,” advertisement, \textit{Toys and Playthings}, May/Jun 1970, 17
toys. In 1971 *Toys and Playthings* published an editorial slamming Reliable’s anti-TV advertising campaign as “sanctimonious,” filled with “half-truths” and ultimately injurious to the toy business.

Despite the trade press’ censure, Grossman and Reliable became media darlings. Barry Conn Hugh declared Grossman, “The Nicest Toymaker...[next to] Santa Claus.” Grossman went to great lengths to portray Reliable’s anti-TV stance as protective of children: “I felt kids were just being oversold. They’ve been exposed to too much on television and it’s not good if a child gets over-sophisticated in his wants...a child in a low income family doesn’t really see the price on TV, he sees a $20 toy that he’s encouraged to want...how can that be a happy situation?” Reliable continued to advertise prodigiously in print and on radio. As one of the largest manufacturers in Canada, its bold stance was significant, though ultimately they abandoned it by the mid-1970s in the face of declining prospects.

The success of Canadian toy manufacturers in navigating concerns over advertising and winning the right to voluntary regulation ultimately garnered them admirers in the international toy industry as well. When CTMA chair Frank White was chosen to head the International Committee of Toy Industries (ICTI) in 1982, the CTMA was charged with chairing a sub-committee to create an international set of voluntary standards for advertising to children. In laying out the principles of their voluntary regulations, the CTMA drew on the same arguments they used with toy critics in Canada,

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declaring “voluntary industry control…the most acceptable form of regulation.”

By the 1980s the CRTC and federal government had in place an extensive and fairly effective voluntary code for regulating advertising just as the United States was repealing their federal regulations. However, unlike the repeated failures at the national level to institute large-scale bans on advertising to children, the Quebec government was highly receptive to an outright ban. Quebec became a hotbed for the debate over toy advertising, ultimately adopting and enforcing stringent regulations. In post-quiet revolution Quebec toy advertisements constituted a problem on a number of fronts, which made their regulation politically appealing for federalists and separatists.

With the creation of the sovereigntist Parti Québécois it became clear to Robert Bourassa’s governing Liberals that the English dominated mass media and mass market would constitute an important front in the persistent debate over Quebec nationalism. Unlike in English Canada, language politics were central to popular reactions to child-focused advertising in Quebec. In her 1970 article for *Le Devoir*, Hélène Pelletier-Baillergeon argued that toy advertising was inserting Anglicisms into the Québécois language. All the exposure to English media was leading to cultural deracination among young francophones: “If your child’s English vocabulary is still poor after being showered with 32 [English] commercials in 120 minutes keep listening as very soon you will hear them talking about Slinky, Astrolite, Dial Art, Trace n’ Light…etc. etc. etc.”

When Lévesque’s PQ government came to power in 1976 they moved quickly to pass legislation requiring games and toys to include French instructions to ensure francophone

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children would not become “victims of a type of [Anglophone] colonialism.” Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau's Liberal government supported bilingual labeling on the basis of its 1968 passage of the Official Languages Act, intended to ensure protection of the French language and culture. Toy executives like Arnold Irwin complained about “stupid decisions,” government “indecisiveness” and the cost of implementing the changes on licensed and repackaged toy products. Irwin and others seemed to have missed the more subtle linguistic politics at work.

In 1978 the Quebec government proposed an all-out ban on toy advertising in an amendment to its Consumer Protection Act. It marked the beginning of a long and protracted legal battle over toy advertising to children. At the committee hearing examining the proposed legislation, the toy industry was clearly panicked and deployed the same rhetorical tactics and argument it had used with the federal government throughout the 1960s and 1970s. It failed to realize the very different stakes of the debate in Quebec.

Not surprisingly, Lise Payette, the minister for Consumer Affairs and Cooperative Financial Institutions, dismissed their claims of impending economic collapse: “you will have to excuse me, but I evidently don’t have a large enough imagination to follow your convoluted claims of an impending catastrophe [in the toy industry].” With the government unconvinced, Canadian advertisers, including the toy industry, launched a

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140 Arnold Irwin, (Interview), Tape 2 Side 2.
141 “L’Industrie de Jouet Apprehendre Un Desastre,” Le Devoir, 16 Nov 1978, 7
series of legal challenges in order to undermine the act. In 1980, Irwin Toys and its advertising firm F.H. Hayhurst were charged by the Quebec government with forty counts of advertising to children, exposing Irwin to fines of between $40,000 and two $2,000,000. Irwin opted to challenge the charges. Under section 92 of the Constitution Act, Irwin and Hayhurst claimed that the regulation of advertising constituted a broadcast regulation and was outside the jurisdiction of the provinces.\footnote{Irwin and Hayhurst charged in Quebec, “Marketing, 15 Dec 1980, 2} By the time Irwin’s case reached the courts, Attorney General of Quebec v. Kellogg’s Co. of Canada had already been established as a precedent. The decision declared Quebec fully within its rights to legislate on advertising directed at children. Unsurprisingly, Irwin lost in the Quebec Superior Court. The trade and business press jumped to Irwin’s defense calling Quebec’s legislation “confusing” and describing it as “economic bullying.”\footnote{“A Case of Pure Economic Bullying,” Marketing, 8 Mar 1982, 9-10}

With the Canada Act about to receive royal assent and Irwin now facing upwards of two million charges under the Quebec Consumer Protection Act, they decided to appeal the decision to the Quebec Appeal Court as a constitutional challenge under the freedom of speech clause 2(b) of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.\footnote{Irwin Toy Ltd. c. Quebec (Procureur General) 18 Sep 1986, 218, 3 Q.A.C. 285, [1986] R.J.Q. 2441, 14 C.P.R. (3d) 60, 26 C.R.R. 193, 32 D.L.R. (4th) 641, J.E. 86-940} In 1987 the constitutional challenge made it before the Supreme Court of Canada. The landmark ruling on Canadian freedom of speech was issued on 27 April 1989. In their majority decision, the Supreme Court upheld the right of the Quebec government to regulate advertising under the Consumer Protection Act. The ban on advertising to children was considered a justified limitation by the court under section 1.\footnote{Irwin Toy Ltd. v. Quebec (Attorney General) 27 April 19891 S.C.R. 927, 58 D.L.R.
political victory that sovereigntists and federalists could claim. For sovereigntists it was a sign of Quebec’s uniqueness and ability to survive in the Anglophone sea threatening to wash over its borders.\textsuperscript{146} For federalists it demonstrated that even though the Charter was passed without Quebec’s consent, the Canada Act did not undermine Quebec’s provincial autonomy to set their own legislative agenda in the name of protecting its distinct language and culture.

The transformation of the toy business into a cultural industry also generated more populist anxieties about the effects of a postindustrial culture consumption on social and family order. The proliferation of what the media often hyperbolically defined as “crazes” became central to criticisms (and celebrations) of the toy industry. Bordering on and sometimes crossing the line into the realm of moral panic, crazes were sensationalized and exaggerated accounts of disorderly consumer conduct. News coverage of crazes went a step beyond the monitoring of “trends” or the dismissal of “fads” that characterized the period from 1920-1959. They emphasized the irrational exuberance of consumers rather than their popular preferences. These reports offered implicit and explicit criticisms of the culture of consumption for and by children. Parents, children and youth were presented in these stories in an unflattering light as they struggled to find the most sought-after toys. The tropes of the over-indulgent ‘boomer parent, the commercially enslaved child or the delinquent youth featured prominently in these media narratives. Crazes were typically attributed to a failure on the part of parents

to control themselves and properly socialize their child, compromising authentic childhood and parental authority.

A number of licensed and unlicensed products were described as crazes when they were first introduced. What marked something as a craze was its trendiness and perceived effect on adults and children. Also, the frequently erroneous assumption of ephemerality, long attached to popular culture in general, loomed large. In describing the impending Winnie the Pooh “craze” expected to follow the release of Disney’s movie in 1966, the Toronto Star recounted the CTMA’s opinion that Pooh merchandise and toys would be “the hottest thing since the Barbie doll.” This led the journalist to conclude that the “massive promotional deal” being spearheaded by the Walt Disney Co. would lead to children demanding “to go to the Pooh-tique to get my Pooh-jamas.” Their exuberance was framed using the language of epidemiology and contagion as the journalist worried about “outbreaks of the Pooh bears and his side kicks Roo, Tigger and Kanga.”

In the midst of the Star Wars craze in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the media and toy manufacturers swapped epidemic language for that of religious fanaticism and mental illness. According to George Irwin, “there were 8 year old boys and girls out there who live and breathe this movie…it’s developed into almost a cult.” The “Star Wars cult” was allegedly the result of incessant advertising aimed at children: “Already the

147 “Yule Toys Exciting but Costly,” Globe and Mail, 1 Oct 1958, 19; Cecil Reid, "Little Demand Seen This Year ffo Toys with Theme of Space Age,” Saskatoon Star-Phoenix, 21 Dec 1960 12.
149 Ibid.
150 Ibid.
kids are wandering in after school, waving pudgy little hands in frustration, trying to describe this thing they want, this thing they must have for Christmas this year because they saw it on television last night…” 152 For Le Soleil, the excitement for Star Wars might lead some to remark how “crazy” Canadians were. 153 Clearly, toy industry executives and others emphasized the irrational exuberance of children as a form of pleasure and fun and a danger to proper adult child relations.

When the media described a toy craze, it tended to emphasize the scarcity of the product in question, the unexpected demand for it and its unique origins. The surprise success of Irwin’s Wrinkles in 1985 was typical. After seemingly coming out of nowhere, the surprisingly robust demand for the puppet resulted in shortages. Local consumers were reportedly hunting through local stores, spending anywhere from $15-$70 to acquire the playthings. This was contrasted with Wrinkle’s less corporate beginnings. The toy was supposedly invented by a young struggling artist, Catherine Senitt. Senitt and others soon formed a co-op to meet growing demand. Jack Ganz of Ganz Bros. Toys “discovered” the dog, licensed the toy and began manufacturing puppets in its Woodbridge plant, but predominantly from factories in South Korea. 154

Some of these aspects were emphasized more than others for a variety of products. The biggest and most surprising toy craze of the period mobilized all of these parts of the narrative. The Cabbage Patch “epidemic,” as Le Devoir dubbed it, lasted from 1983-1985. 155 Over those three years it made Coleco and the doll’s creator a veritable

152 Ibid.
154 “Wrinkles Steals the Season,” Maclean’s, 9 Dec 1985, 40-41.
fortune, excited children and toymaker and supposedly drove parents to strange
behaviour in pursuit of the dolls. The “homely looking” kids each had slightly unique
facial features or skin colours and came with a set of “adoption” papers. But in every
other respect they were a regular doll. They were not licensed from a television show, or
movie and yet they became a sensation the year of their launch.

The Cabbage Patch story started out like that of other toys during the period.
Coleco introduced the Cabbage Patch Kids on the toy fair circuit in early 1983. Coleco
declared it “the girls product of the decade.”156 According to its projections, Coleco
would need around 175,000 dolls to meet demand. Even at this early stage Coleco,
perhaps intentionally, speculated that “we could very well run short.”157

The narrative Coleco used to market the dolls was part of the attraction for
consumers. They were not dolls and they were not sold to children. They were “kids” that
were “adopted” by “little mothers”.158 The concept was licensed from an American
designer and art student, Xavier Roberts. Coleco turned this into a plan to offer dolls, a
host of accessories, a Saturday morning cartoon, sales floor displays and a sales script
that emphasized the adoption process of the dolls by having children actually sign
adoption papers at the store.159 The dolls raised genuine concerns among birth parents,
adoptees and advocacy groups who found the marketing gimmick offensive and
demeaning.160 However, the gimmick of adopting the dolls, rather than buying or
consuming them, encouraged fantasies about the intimacy of the commodity and its

156 “Coleco Says New Kids Will Go Far,” Marketing, 7 Feb 1983, 2
157 Ibid.
158 Ibid.
159 Ibid.
160 E. Wayne Carp, Jean Paton and the Reform of American Adoption, [Forthcoming],
distance from the polluting influence of the market. This was in spite of the large, but certain not record-setting, $750,000 advertising campaign that accompanied the launch of the Cabbage Patch Kids.161

Targeted at girls or “little mothers,” the Cabbage Patch Kids also became favoured playthings for boys, “grandmothers and young single women.”162 By early November 1983 Toronto was completely sold out.163 The demand exceeded Coleco’s expectations and left them rushing to fill backorders. By the end of November Coleco was so inundated with calls that they chartered special flights from their factory in Hong Kong to bring the dolls to the packaging plant in Montreal.164 By the end of the year, Coleco had shipped over 2,500,000 dolls worldwide and 300,000 in Canada, or roughly double their expected unit sales.165 A special report on Xavier Roberts that December recounted his growing wealth evident in the designer’s acquisition of a thirty-bedroom mansion and twelve cars.166

In the face of robust demand and unremitting supply shortages, Canadian parents were described as being in a state of temporary insanity. “They weren’t acting like adults, they were acting like crazed maniacs,” claimed one toy store employee.167 In Saint John, NB shoppers alleged that a man had punched a women in the face and ripped a doll from

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162 “Ridiculous Doll Craze Blammed on Media,” *Winnipeg Free Press* 15 Dec 1983, 1
165 “Cabbage Patch Kids Sensation is Even a Surprise to Coleco,” *Marketing*, 5 Dec 1983, 2
the hands of a nine-year-old boy at the downtown Woolworths. Two police units were called into control five hundred people lined up outside a store for forty-eight dolls in Cambridge, ON. In Windsor, ON one man threatened to throw a child through a window in a one-thousand-person line-up. When police restricted access to the store, some shoppers rushed the line to snatch dolls from the display. As one disappointed mother informed the press “I can’t believe people are behaving like this…they’re like animals.”

Successful parents reportedly exited stores clutching the dolls like trophies above their heads. The following year the Cabbage Patch Kids were still selling aggressively with merchandisers just dropping the dolls and walking away as shoppers eagerly picked them over. Whether describing shoppers as “animals” or “maniacs,” the media was drawing on the discourse of the irrational consumer described by Donica Belisle. However, unlike the instances recounted from the first half of the twentieth century, the concern was not targeted at women but instead at male and female parents, stressing aggression and impulsiveness rather than confusion or desire.

The spectacle of consumer disorder around the Cabbage Patch Kids recorded, sensationalized and disseminated by the Canadian media sparked some stern criticisms from experts on children. The “adoption” of the dolls with its exchange of money was likened to slavery and characterized as an attack on adoptees and adoptive parents.

Barry Schneider, a University of Ottawa psychologist, pontificated on the lessons parents

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170 Ibid.
171 Ibid.
and children might take from their efforts to procure a cabbage patch doll: “failure may be good for their children’s psyche…It’s not healthy for children to get everything they want and perhaps parents should keep this in mind…”  

Julie Creighton, director of the Canadian Toy Testing Council, shared Schneider’s sentiments, albeit with more blame for parents: “Parents are giving in too much to their children’s wishes…with a little more imagination parents can come up with an equally good product as a Christmas gift.” Creighton went on to point her finger at Coleco suggesting that the unprecedented demand was nothing more than the result of “slick advertising” claiming that the shortage was “pure speculation.”  

Profound shifts in the production and marketing of toys were part of wider changes in the Canadian economy. These issues were embraced and contested in the media and the market in the form of the toy craze. The impact of the Cabbage Patch “epidemic” on Canadian toy companies and their critics was profound and reinforced a number of changes occurring in the industry. Coleco’s stock climbed from $3.50 a share to $23.38 on the Dow Jones in November 1983. Visible in the numbers was a vindication of postindustrial capitalism. The Cabbage Patch Kids demonstrated in extreme form the potential for profit under the new organization of production and consumption. The goal of business became the identification or creation of the next big craze, the next product to duplicate the “Cabbage Patch panic.” At various times video games, Ninja Turtles, Transformers, Pokémon, Irwin’s Oopsy Daisy and Tickle-Me Elmo all

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174 Doug Kelly, "A Lesson in the Cabbage Patch - You just can't have everything." Ottawa Citizen, 25 Nov 1983, 21
175 Ibid.
176 “Sought After Dolls Raise Coleco's Stock," Ottawa Citizen, 30 Nov 1983, 53
177 Ibid.
approached this level of popularity. Critics viewed toys that became identified with particular crazes as evidence of improper socialization. Children under the spell of such commodities were deemed in need of saving, disciplining or both from adults more responsible than their indulgent parents.

At the federal and provincial level, Canadian concerns about advertising resulted in an overall increase in restrictions on advertising to children. Whether voluntary or mandatory, there is little evidence to suggest that advertising codes were optional. This is in contrast to events in the United States during the same period. Under the Reagan administration, the regulation of advertising to children all but disappeared after less than a decade in existence. Thus, it is difficult to contend that television alone was responsible for transforming the toy industry, especially when television advertising is considered in light of changing labour relations and intellectual property regimes. Television played an important role in the changing model of toy production and consumption, including the growth of anxieties about marketing directed at children. However, it did not decisively transform the toy industry or the toy on its own. Nor was advertising the only issue that raised the alarm for activists and parents. We will now turn our attention to these other concerns.
CHAPTER SEVEN

Objects of Scorn: Play Value, Safety and the Social Life of Toys

“Did you know that you can make your baby more intelligent?” Toy designer and advice writer Arnold Arnold was certain that parents could, by “kindl[ing] his sensory awareness…[with toys of] different textures.” Arnold’s article and the accompanying list of toys highlighted the persistence of toy advice to parents in the period from 1960-1989. However, the advice after 1960 was changing in important ways. Prior to 1960, advice writers may have promised that toys could help or hinder normal development, but not that they could transform the cognitive capacity of children for good or for ill. Arnold was telling his readers something new and revolutionary about the toy.

Arnold’s claims were indicative of significant developments in psychological science in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The popularization of Albert Bandura’s social learning theory was particularly important for social and political activism focused on toys. Social learning held that subjects adopted behaviours and concepts modeled by peers and authority figures in specific social settings. Much of Bandura’s work on this concept, including the famous Bobo Doll experiment, focused specifically on aggression in children. Social learning theory fused the discourse of the developing child with that of the conditioned child much as feminist and peace activists had attempted in the interwar and early postwar period. It suggested that exposure to improper stimuli didn’t

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1 “How to Help your Child’s IQ,” *Toronto Star*, 2 Dec 1968, 53
just generate undesirable behaviour through conditioning, but actually affected children’s cognition and development. These were no longer the malleable children of behaviourism or the internally motivated children of child study. They were akin to the psychologically fragile creatures familiar to us today, prone to irreversible damage. Popular iterations of this formula claimed that exposure to improper messages, images and ideas – even those carried within toys – could irreversibly damage children or drastically improve them. Consequently, determining the value or danger associated with particular toys and combatting undesirable playthings took on a greater intensity and importance.

Among those who claimed authority to advise parents on proper and improper toys were organizations and individuals involved in the emerging field of toy testing. Unlike child experts, these toy experts and their testing methods isolated toys from other developmental issues and connected them to broader social contexts. As chapter five highlighted, testing for durability and quality emerged in Canada in the 1950s out of the tension between the child study movement and the toy industry. Toy testing began as an innovation on advice for parents. After 1960, it took on a new authority among parents and toy consumers, leading them to view toys in a new and more troubling light.

Adding to the status of toy testing were popular understandings of toys’ potential vectors for disease and harm. Prior to 1960 toys had become reflective of what Linda Singer has described as the epidemic logic of contamination characteristic of an emerging risk society. The resulting concerns about the safety of children’s playthings also led to

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the rise of focused testing for safety by the federal and several provincial governments. Not surprisingly, concerns about children’s bodily integrity and health and their psychosocial development played off one another in popular discourse as they had in previous decades. By putting toys to the test, critics were also testing assumptions about the boundaries and meaning of childhood, citizenship, gender and race in Canada. Long standing unease about war toys and dolls were rekindled. The interest in these two particular categories of playthings resulted from efforts to re-imagine Canadian gender relations as part of the women’s liberation movement as well as the changing realities of Cold War politics in Canada.

Together, these developments provided the basis for critics to assert with scientific authority that toys were not merely reflective of social realities but helped to constitute the developmental possibilities for children and Canadian society. The result was sustained and high-profile action against undesirable toys, which stigmatize certain consumer choices and certain types of play among boys and girls in the name of world peace and equality.

Gary Cross has described the period from 1960 to the present as one “spinning out of control.” 6 If correct, then this chapter suggests it was as much the result of changing conceptions of children and toys among critics, as the increased advertising and promotion associated with toy consumption highlighted in the previous chapter. Many in Canada pushed back against the rising power and influence of toy makers, often placing their children in the middle of protracted struggles over Canadian popular culture. The history of toys from 1960-1989 is one of heightened adult scrutiny of children’s toy

6 Cross, Kid’s Stuff, 188
selection and play, not of powerless resignation in the face of expanded corporate power.

*Testing for Play Value*

The Canadian Toy Testing Council’s (CTTC) toy testing efforts ranked among the most moderate and commercially friendly attempts undertaken at the time. The CTTC was born out of the Toy Testing Committee thanks to modest funding from the Ministry of Trade and Commerce, the National Design Council and the Canadian Toy Manufacturers Association. Initially the split with the Canadian Association of Consumers (CAC) led the former organization to refuse to participate with the CTTC, though that stance was quickly reversed. The CTTC opted to focus their attention primarily on what they referred to as the “play value” of toys. This mirrored the attempts by toy manufacturers to begin promoting “play value” as opposed to “educational toys” as the evaluative benchmark for good playthings beginning in the 1960s. Play value provided an altogether more comfortable and malleable term with which to hock their goods. An invention of child experts, the term made its way into the lexicon of the Canadian toy industry as a way for manufacturers to argue that any toy that stimulated the child had a pedagogical and developmental value. By switching to play value, the toy industry was attempting to wrap themselves yet again in the cloak of psychology.

Play value also carried with it another connotation. It implied that the extent to which a toy did, or did not have play value could be measured, tested and evaluated. Toys were no longer simply good or bad; appropriate or inappropriate, but could be ranked in hierarchy against one another. According to Mrs. A.L. Kassimer, head of the CTTC the

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7 Executive Meeting Minutes May 16 & 17, Canadian Association of Consumers Fonds, LAC, MG28 I200 Vol.3 File 33a.
switch to play value was necessary because “every toy is, or should be, an educational
toy.” Play value implied that toys could have very different potentials that would allow
testers to objectively determine their quality.\(^8\) Twenty-five years later the CTTC was still
talking in terms of play value, avoiding concerns about its imprecision by mystifying the
concept and situating it beyond adult competency. It was characterized as a product of all
children’s engagement with toys: “Play value to an adult may be very difficult to define,
but to children it is a measurement of their pleasure in playing with certain toys.”\(^9\)

Its malleability and widespread use by the toy industry and psychology was part
of the reason the CTTC opted to use play value to justify their testing method. The
CTTCs established pattern of using families as toy testers and reinforcing their anecdotal
findings with the copious use of psychological discourse began to slowly eclipse other
sources of advice on toys. Described by the Financial Post as the “conscience of the toy
industry,” the CTTCs testing method had evolved to support the interests of toy
manufacturers far more than consumer activists. Many toy makers were using the CTTC
as a testing service. It was generally happy to oblige in the hopes of building close
relationships with manufacturers.\(^10\)

Almost all of the CTTC’s papers from the period between 1960 and 1990 were
destroyed. However, periodicals have preserved a number of details about its efforts,
including its testing methods. The CTTC began the process by attending the toy fair in
order to select toys to test. If the manufacturer was willing, they requested six toys,
keeping one for reference and sending the other five to families, nursery schools and

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kindergartens for evaluation. After a six-week testing period, the manufacturers were sent confidential reports with suggestions for improving the toys. All the toys that received acceptable ratings were published in the CAC Bulletin and later, in the annual toy report launched in 1965.\(^\text{11}\)

The authority of the CTTC’s testing method rested on their insistence that they were taking the child’s view, a claim maintained from their earlier work as a committee of CAC. Children’s authentic responses to toys were transformed into relevant knowledge once they were interpreted by parents and CTTC volunteers. The resulting toy rankings were provided the air of scientific authority through the use psychological rhetoric. According to Ann Farrell of the *Toronto Star*, the rankings, “are the result of [the] controlled testing of toys against strict standards…conducted in private homes, nursery schools and daycare centres.”\(^\text{12}\)

These rhetorical constructions established the family home as a place of focused and scientific research on par with laboratories. Parents assumed the role of technicians, charged with observing and recording their children’s play. Language like “controlled testing” and “strict standards” established the scientific and professional authority of the testing method. The value of this methodology was not lost on “educational” toy makers like Fisher-Price who established a similar testing system in their research and development department in Aurora, Ontario.\(^\text{13}\)

The CTTCs celebration of children’s active role in their toy testing activities clashed with growing suspicions surrounding their desire for playthings. Children’s

\(^{11}\) *Ibid.*

\(^{12}\) “Parents’ Guide to the Pitfalls of Toyland,” *Toronto Star*, 1 Dec 1973, H1

\(^{13}\) “Children Operate Test Laboratory,” *Toys and Games*, Apr-May 1976, 23.
trustworthiness as informants was situational: “How many parents have bought Christmas toys to place under the tree, only to realize shortly after the excitement died down that at least one of them, probably several, did not appeal to the child after the first wind-up rundown or push-buttoning was over.” The reliance on parents to communicate their children’s wants integrated them into the process of generating knowledge about toy consumption. This contrasted with earlier advice that characterized parents as recipients rather than partners in the production of advice on toys. CTTC testing was framed as a cooperative activity between adults, experts, children and manufacturers that attempted to subsume the cleavages inhering to toy consumption under a hierarchical and interdependent system of knowledge production.

The harmonious vision of toy testing promoted by the CTTC contrasted with the attitude of more radical consumer groups. Lois Lawrence, chairperson of the CTTC and wife of A.B.R. Lawrence, Ontario Minister of Finance, expressed shock after attending a consumer conference in Vienna in 1970 sponsored by the International Organization of Consumers Unions. Lawrence found that her arguments for moderation predominantly fell on deaf ears. “I found a generally hostile attitude to manufacturers at the conference…to regard manufacturer as villains is not the way to improve the situation…in order to get anywhere we must have their goodwill.” Indeed, “goodwill” between the CTTC and manufacturers became increasingly necessary for the organizations financial survival. After parting with CAC, a sizable proportion of the CTTC’s budget was comprised of a grant and toy donations from the Canadian Toy

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14 “Choosing the Right Toy is Seldom Child’s Play,” Montreal Gazette, 12 Dec 1978, 27
However in 1972 the Canadian Toy Manufacturers Association withdrew all support from the CTTC, citing the institution of mandatory safety standards by the government as the main reason. The CTTC did not test for safety, suggesting that the CTMA had been using the organization for political cover on the issue of toy safety. Evidence also suggests that the CTMA was upset by the tendency of CTTC endorsements to lead to more retail space and higher sales for approved toys.

The pro-business approach of the CTTC persisted despite the Canadian toy industry’s efforts to distance itself from the organization. Vice-chairperson Leslie Burch explained on the occasion of the CTTC’s thirty-fifth anniversary that “we don’t want to say ‘this is a bad toy.’ We would rather promote good toys than criticize the manufacturers.” The toy business was well aware of the friendly disposition of the organization, using the rankings from the toy reports on several occasions to actually promote and sell toys, much to the embarrassment of the council.

Despite all the rhetoric about the rigorous and authoritative testing targeted at toys by the CTTC, the toy guides are remarkable for their tame and pedestrian commentary before 1980. The early toy guides only published approved toys. They were often described in matter of fact fashion. In 1976, the CTTC’s feature in the *Canadian Consumer* listed the toy, the manufacturer, the age range and the approximate price of the toy, all provided by the manufacturer. Instead of focusing on the strengths and weaknesses of toys, the guide merely described the product: “A soft vinyl squeeze toy which is easy to grasp”; or “Plush bear with soft sounding squeaker – can be machine

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16 Ibid.
17 “Toy-makers told ignore Test Groups,” *Ottawa Citizen*, 18 Feb 1972, 43
19 “Use of Test Ratings Angers Council,” *Calgary Herald*, 24 Nov 1987, B8
washed and dried.”20 There was little in the toy guides that could not be read from the back of a toy package or a wash label. As late as 1979 the CTTC was still omitting the names of toys it found problematic, including “toys found to be unsafe, to have little play value, to lack durability or those that violate product safety standards.”21

The CTTC’s efforts contrasted with those of another group working on the other side of the Ottawa River. In Quebec, the Association des Consommateurs Canadien du Québec (ACC-Q, later shortened to ACQ) developed a more critical approach to the toy business beginning in the 1970s. ACQ was the first Canadian consumer group to publish a list of unsuitable toys.22 It was common during the 1970s for between one-third and one-half of the small number of toys tested by ACQ to garner the dreaded “not recommended” designation.23 This stemmed from very different testing priorities. ACQ focused on testing for safety rather than play value. They only tested extremely popular toys, or toys for which they received direct complaints. The reactive nature of their testing made it more likely that problem toys would be identified. It is probable that this very different approach had a direct impact on the CTTC’s priorities and messaging at the beginning of the 1980s.

Under the leadership of Julie Creighton and others, the 1980s marked a turning point where the moderate stance of the CTTC took on a more critical edge.24 This shift is

evident in the decision to begin publishing a list of toys that were not recommended and the problems associated with them. Language like “limited play value” and “poor durability” began appearing in the Toy Report in 1979.\textsuperscript{25} In 1985 Creighton and the CTTC sought additional federal funding to study the affect of television advertising on children’s toy choices.\textsuperscript{26} Pivotal, CTTC’s new editorial policy highlighted the role of children in rejecting unsuitable toys, in an effort to maintain their rapport with business.\textsuperscript{27} Over the decade, the council increasingly referred to children as the principal testers in order to situate their moderately critical stance towards business in the authentic reactions of children rather than in the political calculations of adults: “Children have a lot of advice to give the amateurs – adults…”\textsuperscript{28} In one article, Creighton gives numerous examples where toys considered “good” by adults actually missed the mark with children. Ultimately, Creighton argued, it was the children’s reactions to toys which determined their rating out of three stars, not Creighton’s decisions as editor of the report.\textsuperscript{29} 

It is important not to overstate the degree to which the council was critical of business. For instance, though Creighton regarded the frenzy around the Cabbage Patch Kids with disdain, she nevertheless praised the dolls for their exceptional play value, likely adding to the demand for the dolls.\textsuperscript{30} In 1985, the same year the CTTC was lobbying for funding to study the effect of advertising, Creighton wrote an op-ed in Toys and Games, asking manufacturers to consider funding the CTTC again to cover their

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\textsuperscript{26} Pat Bell, "Toy Testing Council Announces Year's End Best Bets," Ottawa Citizen, 20 Nov 1985, A18 \\
\textsuperscript{27} Marilyn Anderson, “146 Toys Rejected in Kid’s Test,” Toronto Star, 4 Nov 1980, A1 \\
\textsuperscript{28} “Ask a Kid Toy Council Suggests,” Winnipeg Free Press, 30 Oct 1986, 40 \\
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{30} “Adoption of Dolls Likened to Slavery,” Winnipeg Free Press, 29 Nov 1983, 11
\end{flushright}
rising operating costs.\footnote{Julie Creighton, “Serving the Canadian Toy Industry,” \textit{Toys and Games}, May/Jun 1985, 38}

By focusing on play value, the CTTC and others charted an extremely moderate course in their evaluation of toys, often primarily concerned with avoiding offense to manufacturers and placing parental authority at the centre of their research methodology. Its parent and business-friendly nature ensured that testing like this received persistent and positive media coverage. Every year the CTTC or ACQ released a toy report, it was picked up by the Canadian Press and disseminated in Canadian dailies and in broadcast news reports. Its lack of scientific rigour allowed CTTC testing to mobilize numerous stakeholders at once, blunting criticism and temporarily shunting aside differences. Testing for play value could occasionally use critical language, but primarily provided comfort to parents and consumers by stressing the responsibility and receptiveness of the majority of manufacturers, the value of children’s play with toys and the special role of parents in translating their children’s experiences into meaningful knowledge.

Play value, however, had other disciples. Some of them offered a more direct, if equally problematic, criticism of popular toys. For groups with a more anti-consumerist stance, play value helped to reinforce the boundaries between middle and high culture and popular or low culture. Popular culture, and the toys that reference it, were thought to have limited play value. This was in accordance with postwar psychology’s insistence on “open-ended” toys. Concerns about the play value of mass-produced and mass-marketed toys dovetailed nicely with anxieties centred on advertising directed at children. This led some middle-class activists to create an alternative production and distribution system separate from the toy industry in the name of protecting working and middle-class
children from the growing influence of consumer society.

Toy libraries were originally developed in the 1930s as a response to the economic hardships of the Depression and a perceived rise in juvenile delinquency. They witnessed a resurgence in the late 1960s in response to rising toy prices. Worried that inflation would place toys out of reach for some, or put undue strain on family budgets, a number of librarians and early childhood educators committed themselves to bringing playthings to the masses.

Modeled on traditional libraries, and sometime even located within them, toy libraries tried to facilitate access to toys by allowing families to borrow playthings. Ultimately, this gave second-hand toys a new role. Whereas once they had been a major means to bring marginal children and families into Canadian consumer society, they were now called upon to protect them from its worst manifestations. Indeed, Le Soleil thought the availability of second-hand toys at toy libraries was an excellent solution to the rising cost of living in Canada, especially for those in the working-class.

Proponents claimed that the toy library focused on toys with high play value, in contrast to the low quality toys available from the toy industry. The Calgary Herald made this connection explicit in its article on Calgary’s new toy library: “there is fact behind the psychologist’s fancy that educational toys can develop a meaningful direction for a child’s life style and a toy library is being established in town to cater to this need.” However, without the deep pockets of the toy industry to assist them, toy lending centres

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34 Deborah Vernon. "Tokens of Love can be Borrowed," Calgary Herald, 31 Jul 1972, 14
usually relied on funding from federal, provincial or municipal governments to cover their operating costs. The Stephenson-Britannia School in Winnipeg, for example, started a toy lending service with funding from the Manitoba Ministry of Education.\footnote{35}{“Toy and Book Lending Library Service – PR-SD2-448 GR4052 E 0083 & “Toy Lending Libraries Association,” Department of Education Fonds, Manitoba Archives, P1.3.151 GR 3569 E 0083.}

Toy libraries and other lending centres were also imbued with an antimodern nostalgia for an imagined pre-commercialized childhood. The Sheridan College Summer Course in toy making and toy lending was indicative of this latter impulse. Children were lent toys and parents were taught how to make them for their child in order that each child could have a toy “which is unique and individual in itself because it is a product of the parent’s and/or child’s imagination.”\footnote{36}{“Sheridan College Summer Course,” Toy Lending Centres Newsletter, May 1974, 4.}

It implied that toys found in stores or otherwise purchased were homogenous, impersonal and unsuited to a child’s creativity.

The Vancouver City Toy Library was representative of all of these trends. Its advisors consisted of artists, woodworkers, educational experts, and early childhood educators.\footnote{37}{“The Toy Library [1973],” City Publication Collection, Vancouver City Archives, PD 1266.} In their 1973 proposal for funding to the City of Vancouver, the toy library explained their plans for growth and expansion. The problem with contemporary toy consumption, as the Vancouver Toy Library understood it, was two-fold: “The lack of public accessibility to safe, high quality toys geared to child growth and development; [and] the lack of information readily available to the public on the role toys and play take in the development of the child.”\footnote{38}{“The Toy Library [1973], City Publication Collection, Vancouver City Archives, PD 1267.} The toy library stressed their role in solving these problems by highlighting the importance of toys for developing self-esteem and cognition.
in children.\textsuperscript{39}

In their 1974 proposal, the Vancouver Toy Library was more direct about the negative effect of mass-production and mass-marketing on children: “Only the most fortunate child today has enough quality toys to play with. Our society’s emphasis on consumerism has led to shoddy production methods that often result in unsafe toys…the effect of the product on the child all too often takes a back seat to the toy manufacturers’ pursuit of the dollar.”\textsuperscript{40} The toy library purportedly allowed supporters to combat economic inequality in the toy box by avoiding the global toy industry altogether.

Along with establishing a toy recycling or repair centre they also intended to expand their craft production of wooden and cloth toys, drawing on earlier methods for providing toys to those in need.\textsuperscript{41} All these simple toys, according to the library, were “educational…alternatives to Barbie dolls and plastic submachine guns,” a clear reference to persistent concerns about fashion dolls and war toys. Ultimately the city approved the grant for the toy library to supply city library branches with 90 toys each for their lending services.

Similarly, the \textit{Canadian Toy Library Association Newsletter} reveals a tendency to deploy psychological discourse in discussions about child development, in concert with information on craft production. Advice on finding appropriate toys with excellent play value was fused with tips on woodworking and varnishing.\textsuperscript{42} Some toy libraries made

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{40} “Toy Library [Request for Funding],” United Way of the Lower Mainland Fonds, Vancouver City Archives, 618-A-7 File 6.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
their own toys. Others tended to turn to the market to acquire playthings. Some toy libraries, such as the Vancouver Toy Library, were radically anti-consumerist and antimodern. Others adopted a moderate stance towards the mass market as the movement grew. An examination of the surviving copies of the Canadian Toy Library Association Newsletter reveals the degree of expansion during the 1970s and 1980s. By the mid-1980s, there were more than 211 toy libraries spread across the country. However, cuts to programs begun by the government of Conservative Prime Minister Brian Mulroney starting in 1984, were taking their toll. Without reliable public funding many toy libraries turned to private industry, compromising their ability to offer an alternative to the mass-produced and mass-marketed toy. When explaining themselves to the toy industry, it was clear that the CTLA, unlike the Vancouver Toy Library the decade before, was committed to a moderate stance, similar in many respects to that taken by the CTTC. In an op-ed published in Toys and Games designed to solicit donations for Canadian toy libraries from business, CTLA argued that “toy libraries have never appeared as a threat to the toy industry…they act as a showcase and an education for the perceptive, prospective consumer.”

In the end, the CTTC and CTLA demonstrate the widespread appeal and limited possibilities for change afforded by the concept of play value. While it raised questions about the suitability of toys, it did so in a way that often avoided larger questions about the economics of toy consumption, production and distribution. When it did directly address these issues it was often from a nostalgic perspective committed to returning to a time before the commodification of childhood. Unfortunately, it had been more than a

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44 “Toy Libraries! Toy What?” Toys and Games, Sep/Oct 1985, 34
century or more since such a reality existed on the shores of North America. Their difficult position was only made worse by the decline of public funding in the 1980s. Ultimately, it drove them back into the arms of the toy industry, ensuring that any criticisms they did offer would be tentative and muted.

Testing for Safety

Similarly, health concerns about certain toys had been rising since the interwar period. However, as chapter five indicated, the problem was increasingly situated within the toy rather than the context of its use. Mothers were no longer the only focus of blame as they had been in the past. By 1960 the efforts of feminists and peace activists to stigmatize certain toys for perceived physical and psychological dangers and the growing role of the Canadian state in providing health and welfare services led to numerous calls for state and corporate action against dangerous or harmful playthings.

A pamphlet issued by the government of Saskatchewan in 1960 was indicative of this growing trend. “Take it from the British: Toy Accidents are a Problem” claimed that new research from the Portsmouth, U.K. chamber of commerce demonstrated for the first time the frequency and prevalence of toy accidents. A whopping forty-one percent of children were allegedly victims of some form of toy accident. What followed were several detailed descriptions of accidents ranging from wounds and cuts, to electrocutions, burns, mouth injuries and even death. The statistical table revealed that almost two-thirds of the injuries documented fell into the wounds and cuts category. In contrast, detailed anecdotal accounts raised concerns among readers about the potential for more serious
injuries. Parents were reminded to remain vigilant. However, the frequency of incidents implied that the government needed to play an increased role in the fight against dangerous toys.

Newspapers were similarly raising the alarm among their readers about the dangers posed by toys. The *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix* ran a story in 1966 about the hunt for Raggedy Anne Dolls made in Poland, described by the Saskatoon fire chief as “practically dynamite”. According to the *Calgary Herald*, toy ducks imported from Japan were coated with a preservative containing high levels of lead. The tendency for these stories to focus on imported toys formed part of the long-standing claim that Canadian, Western European, and American-manufactured toys were better made, safer and better suited to Canadian children than those manufactured in other countries. Furthermore, the invisibility of many of these threats meant that simple vigilance and observation on the part of mothers was no longer sufficient to safeguard their children’s health.

The growing public profile of issues like these led to the creation of the Federal Ministry of Consumer and Corporate Affairs in 1967, under the leadership of John Turner. The creation of the new government department precipitated a number of complaints about foreign and domestic toys alike. Problem toys included the “Rocket Firing Batmobile” and its ability to launch projectiles, as well as cheaply made rattles containing tiny rocks as noisemakers. This latter item was considered a failed attempt on the part of an “emerging African nation getting into the manufacture of small articles for

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46 "Search for Dolls Pressed," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 29 Dec 1966 1
Reliable Toy Co. dolls were derided for their poor manufacture, which included the use of pins to stick clothing and features onto the doll. One girl allegedly removed the features with ease and began playing with the pins. At the end of 1968, the British Columbia Provincial Women’s Institute forwarded a resolution to the new minister, Ronald Basford, demanding that the federal government take action to protect children from dangerous toys. In his response, Basford acknowledged the problem and claimed that he was already planning to introduce amendments to the Hazardous Products Act specifically related to toys in the upcoming parliamentary session. According to cabinet documents, the Trudeau government was preparing a full review of all hazardous products legislation beginning in 1969. Events would prove that this decision came not a moment too soon.

In November of 1969 the story of one toy accident in particular reached the floor of the House of Commons. A toy car spilled acid onto a young girl playing with it, causing serious and life threatening chemical burns to her face. The toy car was approved by the CTTC as a “good toy” and was allegedly examined in the presence of ministry officials. The following week, more allegations arose that a documentary on product safety that raised concerns about the car in question had been pulled from the CBC and

48 “Rocket Firing Batmobile,” Consumer and Corporate Affairs Fonds, RG103 Vol.28 file 401-26-7, LAC; “St. Denis Rattle,” Consumer and Corporate Affairs Fonds, RG103 Vol. 25 file 401-26-8, LAC.
49 “Reliable Dolls,” Consumer and Corporate Affairs, RG103, Vol 24 File 401-26-8, LAC.
50 R. Basford to F.W. Golata, 25 Nov 1968, RG103 vol.25 File 401-28-7, LAC
51 “An act to prohibit the advertising, sale and importation of hazardous products” 20 Dec 1968. RG2, Privy Council Office, Series A-5-a, Volume 6338, 3, LAC.
its producer subsequently fired.\textsuperscript{53} The Poweride Car, manufactured by Canadian toy maker Eldon Industries, was nicknamed the “Killer Car” by the federal Opposition, in a bid to highlight the inadequacy of current product safety testing. Grace MacInnis, Progressive Conservative MP for Vancouver-Kingsway declared that “parents around the country are living in a fool’s paradise. They believe themselves to be properly protected from buying dangerous toys. Actually, they have no such protection at all.”\textsuperscript{54} The reactive nature of product testing helped to foster this impression. Investigations and testing were only undertaken based on complaints, not in advance to approve toys.

The optics of the incident allowed the opposition to raise questions about the government’s culpability, putting the minister, Basford, on the defensive. On 1 December 1969, in an effort to control the damage, Basford admitted that the Ministry had been working on safety standards for toys for the last six months. Not satisfied, the opposition pressed the general issue in the early part of 1970, demanding answers on the “Killer Car” and raising concerns about toys contaminated with DDT and the sale of toy firearms.\textsuperscript{55}

Compounding the issue, the CTTC took the ill-advised tactic of calling concerns about toy safety overblown in the fall 1970 issue of \textit{Canadian Consumer}, suggesting that more than ample legislation for toy safety existed.\textsuperscript{56} However mishandled this issue was, the Canadian government was not alone in confronting this problem. The British

government had been working on safety standards since the early 1960s with little success.\textsuperscript{57} Meanwhile, in November of 1969 US President Richard Nixon signed legislation establishing safety standards for toys and giving the US federal government the right to ban dangerous toys.\textsuperscript{58} The following year the Federal Drug Administration (FDA) banned 39 toys deemed too dangerous.\textsuperscript{59} The CTTC’s claims notwithstanding, it was clear that toy safety was a rising global issue.

The Canadian Toy Manufacturers’ Association was not oblivious to the direction in which events were unfolding in Canada and abroad. Facing pressure on advertising to children, the CTMA now faced a battle over safety standards. Their response to both issues followed a similar logic. They advocated industry participation in the establishment of voluntary standards. To this end, Reliable Toys sent a memorandum to the CTMA suggesting the establishment of a toy safety committee comprised of suppliers, retailers, safety experts, members of the public and government officials for the purpose of setting standards, including clear guidelines and penalties for manufacturers that violated them. This voluntary system, according to Reliable Toys and the CTMA, was superior to reactive legislative efforts aimed at banning unsafe toys without providing preventative guidelines. Reliable Toys also carefully defended Canadian industry along nativist lines, claiming that “almost invariably dangerous toys sold in Canada have been made outside of Canada.”\textsuperscript{60}

The Eldon Poweride Car incident and the subsequent political pressure placed on the Liberal government led to legislative action during the Christmas sales rush of 1970.

\textsuperscript{57} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{58} “Shoppers Get Warning on Dangerous Toys,” \textit{Globe and Mail}, 11 Dec 1969, W8
\textsuperscript{59} "39 'Dangerous' Toys are Banned," \textit{Ottawa Citizen}, 22 Dec 1970, 41
The Trudeau government introduced and passed legislation creating safety standards for toys, a system for testing them and a procedure for banning toys found to be unsafe. In some ways, these regulations were already included in provincial legislation, but the addition of standards to federal statutes made them easier to enforce across Canada.

The legislation was accompanied by targeted public relations efforts on the part of the government to demonstrate to Canadians that it was taking a tough stance on dangerous toys. Basford announced the establishment of the new regulations with a pile of “unsafe” toys in front of him. They partnered with the CTTC in producing a government-sponsored guide titled “Toys: A Guide for Consumers,” which mixed the CTTC toy ratings for play value with safety evaluations, in the hopes of offering advice on “psychological effects as well as…physical safety.”

In late November 1970, Basford attempted to give the appearance that toy safety testing was a preventative process by sending out inspectors in his home province of British Columbia to visit toy stores in search of dangerous toys. Many of the dangerous toys they were looking for had already been singled out for concern by U.S. product safety groups. In the end, the inspectors pulled three toys and sent them to Ottawa for testing. The ministry also continued to update their toy standards throughout the decade. In 1976, for instance, the government instituted a ban on asbestos in toys. With their new status as co-publishers of the CTTCs annual report on toys, the ministry eventually

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63 “Basford Plays it Safe in Toyland,” Vancouver Sun, 6 Nov 1970, 73.
pushed the CTTC to rename it the Toy Report in 1980 and to begin publishing toys that were not approved.  

Rather than solving the toy safety issue, the efforts of Consumer and Corporate Affairs turned it into a favoured topic for news coverage. Articles with titles like “Beware the Frog’s Friendly Smile” characterized toy safety as a hidden danger, describing how fun and seemingly innocuous toys could harm children if dropped or smashed.  

*Le Soleil* highlighted concerns about a doll designed to simulate urination and bowel movements that generated a caustic liquid when the two substances mixed.  

Organizations like the Canadian Safety Council continued to issue warnings every Christmas to parents about how to identify dangerous toys.  

The continued controversy around toy safety was indicative of the problem with the legislation. New regulations and public relations stunts were one thing, but testing remained reactive. The Department of Consumer Affairs continued to rely on complaints in order to begin investigating a product. Complaints about the safety of Irwin Toys “Traffic Jam,” led to an investigation, but testing found that the toy met the established standards.  

When crib and playpen fatalities seemed too high for comfort, the ministry launched an investigation, finding that ninety percent of deaths resulted from mechanical malfunctions or broken products. This ultimately led to a few recalls, but the government continued to place the emphasis on parental education and the establishment of more

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69 “Beware the Frog’s Friendly Smile,” *Vancouver Sun*, 22 Oct 1975, 74  
70 “La Pire Poupée Vendue Cette Anne,” *Le Soleil*, 13 Dec 1978, F1  
rigorous and specific standards for manufacturers.\textsuperscript{73}

The infrequent and usually benign force of the Product Safety Branch resulted in a similar pattern of regulation as that demanded by the CTMA. Despite some initial reservations, the CTMA’s safety committee was pleased by the invitation to appoint a delegation to represent the toy industry on the advisory committee established in 1971.\textsuperscript{74} They also actively defended their record on safety in the press highlighting their cooperation with federal standards on advertising and safety.\textsuperscript{75} In 1975 the chairman of the CTMA’s toy safety committee wrote a letter to \textit{Toys & Games} declaring that “as a result of legislation, the Canadian toy industry is now making better and safer toys. I believe the government has actually helped us produce a better product.”\textsuperscript{76}

Yet, not all of the government efforts to improve toy safety were met with fanfare. John’s Scientific, a manufacturer of pacifiers and other infant toys and equipment complained to Minister of Consumer Affairs Herb Gray in 1973 when tightened regulations threatened the process used to manufacture some of their products.\textsuperscript{77} Bill C-180, which was designed to change packaging requirements to improve safety, was viewed by the toy industry as a step too far that would lead to price increases and little benefit for consumers.\textsuperscript{78}

\textsuperscript{73} “Cribs and Playpens,” Ministry of Consumer and Corporate Affairs Fonds, LAC, RG103 Box 2 ACC-1987-88, File Q 5020-6.
\textsuperscript{74} “Department of Consumer Affairs to Form Safety Advisory Committee,” \textit{Toys and Playthings}, Dec 1971, 4.
\textsuperscript{76} “Toy safety…” \textit{Toys and Games}, Feb 1975, 80
\textsuperscript{77} “Pacifiers,” Ministry of Consumer and Corporate Affairs Fonds, LAC, RG103 Vol.20 file 16393.
\textsuperscript{78} “Interview with Government Spokesman on Bill C-180,” \textit{Toys and Games}, Dec 1974, 11.
The ongoing inability of product safety testing to prevent dangerous toys from entering, or being manufactured in Canada, left the media with numerous sensational stories on toy safety to pursue throughout the 1980s. The press and organizations like ACQ continued to highlight the toy safety issue even as some reports suggested that problems were on the decline.\(^79\) In 1988 Toys and Games ran a story explaining the significant gains in toy safety as manufacturers busied themselves “cracking down” on unsafe toys and providing a toy safety guide for readers. Reactive toy testing ensured that even if the overall number of toy accidents were reduced, it would nevertheless persist as a problem without a clear solution.\(^80\)

On the one hand toy accidents clearly occurred and issues around the material and chemical composition of playthings persisted throughout the period – and into today – under a primarily reactive system of safety testing. The lack of preventative testing meant that there were clear limits to how safe toys could really become. This provided ample fodder to create the impression, in part correct, that dangerous toys were everywhere and could only be combatted by heightened parental vigilance.

However, concerns about toy safety also formed the basis for expanding the responsibilities of the Canadian welfare state to manage and safeguard the health and wellbeing of their populations, especially children. Like population statistics or universal health care, testing for toy safety was part of the history of the governmentalization of the state and its increased focus on biopolitics as a major field of action. As Dominique

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Marshall has shown, protecting children as the biological, social and political future of the state and nation formed the basis of the expansion of federal and provincial welfare states after the Second World War. Consequently, children’s bodies were central to efforts to govern, helping to transform dangerous toys from a social or private issue into a matter of public and finally state concern.

_Guns, Dolls and Political Children_

Testing efforts that mobilized the bodies and minds of developing children also intersected with a series of political concerns centred primarily on gender. Concerns about the effect of war toys and dolls on children’s growth and development were ubiquitous between 1960 and 1989. Consequently, boys and girls, respectively, formed the major focus of efforts to change or ban the offending playthings. The efforts of critics to turn the decision to purchase or not purchase a toy into a political act became ever more common during the period. Critics hoped to secure cultural victories in order to attract widespread public support to their lobbying effort for issues like gender equality, cold war disarmament, racial equality and world peace. Toys were used as a “way in” to mobilize Canadians in support of numerous political causes by linking them directly to their child’s well-being and their everyday acts as consumers.

As we have seen, concerns about war toys have a long history. Beginning in the nineteenth century several groups, including women’s organizations and pacifist groups, became actively involved in opposing war toys. Their use was thought to promote warfare and juvenile delinquency among boys. The Voice of Women (VOW) anti-war

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81 Marshall, _The Social Origins of the Welfare State_.

333
toy campaign, in operation since 1964, raised the stakes for children, consumers and manufacturers for the production and consumption of war toys.

VOW began operation in 1960 as a response to Lotta Dempsey’s call for women to work for international peace in the face of rising fears about nuclear war. VOW expanded rapidly, turning into one of the largest peace organizations in Canada. Effective grassroots organizing and modest membership fees helped to swell the ranks of the organization. As a moderate left wing peace group, VOW attracted a heterogeneous membership of committed feminist and peace activists as well as less overtly political homemakers and professional women from across the country. Among its founding members were Opposition Leader Lester B. Pearson’s wife Maryon Pearson, Thérèse Casgrain, a prominent feminist activist in Quebec and active politician for the Liberal Party and CCF. They were joined by individuals like Kay Macpherson, Peggy Hope-Simpson and Muriel Duckworth – peace and women’s rights activists whose professional activities had centred on civil-society organizing.

Following other organizations like the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, VOW worked to build lasting peace through the mobilization of women across Canada and the world. In 1960 VOW chartered a peace train to Ottawa to protest the militarization of the Canadian north and to lobby the Canadian government to declare Canada a nuclear-free nation. VOW organized and hosted an international peace conference and flew to Europe and Moscow to promote nuclear disarmament.

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instances, VOW leveraged the status of women and children as the present and future victims of war and nuclear proliferation to press their cause with politicians in a similar fashion to other women’s peace organizations across North America.\(^85\) For instance, they used an analysis of Strontium-90 levels in baby teeth to push for a ban on nuclear testing.\(^86\) When the Tonkin Gulf resolution was passed beginning the Vietnam War, VOW began knitting baby clothes in dark colours to raise awareness about American bombings of civilians and to help Vietnamese children remain unseen.\(^87\) These simple activities were highly effective at drawing media attention and solidifying widespread public support and participation for the cause of world peace and nuclear disarmament.

VOW’s early history was not without its challenges. Lester B. Pearson’s acceptance of the Bomarc missile necessitated Maryon Pearson’s resignation from VOW. According to Macpherson, Casgrain and the more moderate wing of the organization came into conflict with more “radical” elements led by Macpherson and Duckworth. In the end, the “radicals” took over the organization’s executive in 1964. The reality of VOWs internal politics shaped their response to the Cold War peace movement. VOW opted for forms of activism that could effectively mobilize members and the wider public through everyday activities that required only limited ideological conformity among the membership. Similar to their efforts around the Vietnam War and baby teeth, politicizing the consumption of war toys was considered an effective way to raise awareness and engage Canadians in efforts to promote an end to conventional and nuclear war.

\(^86\) Voice of Women Fonds, LAC, MG28 I218, Vol. 5 File 2.
\(^87\) Voice of Women Fonds, LAC, MG28 I218, Vol. 6 File 7
Begun in 1964, the anti-war toy campaign asked members to boycott the purchase of war toys for children, especially boys. VOW claimed that war toys would lead to a future dominated by war, violence and destruction. The anti-war toy campaign was designed to parallel lobbying efforts for disarmament and provide the organization’s grass roots with an opportunity to participate directly in efforts to promote world peace.

In the press release announcing the launch of the campaign in time for Christmas 1964, VOW justified their opposition on the grounds that war toys were more realistic than in the past and that the offending toys made “war seem inevitable and acceptable.”\(^{88}\) Along with boycotting the purchase of toys, VOW encouraged women to tear out the pages of catalogues featuring war toys and mail them back to retailers.\(^{89}\) In an opinion piece written by War Toy Committee Chair Marjorie Lawrence, the advertising scripts, images and physical construction of G.I. Joe were identified as a sources of militaristic values. According to Lawrence, G.I. Joe was Barbie’s counterpart, evoking the exciting fantasies of warfare in place of those of consumption and marriage. Toys like “exploding mine road” and guerrilla weapons and uniforms were deemed to bring children too close to the adult realities of the Cold War:

“When the arms race and the toy race become synonymous, what does this mean for countries that protest to the world that they stand for peace? Are we paying lip service to one principle, while we carefully and psychologically prepare our children for the inevitability and acceptability of nuclear war?”\(^{90}\)

The provocative stance garnered widespread media interest. Some stations even contacted Dr. Benjamin Spock for commentary. He initially dismissed concerns about war toys,

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\(^{88}\) “Press Release from War Toy Committee,” Voice of Women Fonds, LAC, MG28 I218 vol.7 file 7-2.

\(^{89}\) Ibid.

\(^{90}\) “Let’s Repudiate War Toys This Christmas,” Voice of women Fonds, LAC, MG28 I218 Vol.7 file 7-2.
only later to reverse his opinion.\footnote{“Dr. Benjamin Spock,” Voice of Wome Fonds, LAC, MG28 I218 Vol.7 file 7-2.}

Posters like the one below distributed in schools, charitable organizations and city libraries highlighted the simple but effective messaging of the campaign:

Figure 7.1 – Anti-War Toy Campaign Poster

Source: Voice of Women Fonds, LAC, MG28 I218 vol.7 file 7-2.

Masculinity, boyhood and their relationship to universal childhood formed the main points of discursive tension during the campaign. The emphasis on being constructive highlighted psychological concepts of the developing child and the need for positive environments. However, the binaries of construction and destruction also implied a tension within traditional definitions of masculinity and boyhood. VOW celebrated the physical and productive labour associated with traditional liberal masculinity, while
simultaneously deploring the equally traditional martial virtues indicative of earlier forms of boyhood.\textsuperscript{92}

As provocative and newsworthy as these efforts were, some evidence suggests that VOW was fighting a consumer battle that they were already close to winning. In 1961, for instance, the \textit{Toronto Star} reported that space toys and military toys were nowhere to be found. According to a spokesperson from the CTMA, the U2 Spy Plane incident and the Cuban Missile crisis meant that “people don’t want toy A-bombs, soldiers and guided missiles under the Christmas Tree.”\textsuperscript{93} In 1965 the \textit{Vancouver Sun} declared that war toys had “been put out to pasture,” and replaced by “farm animals and other toys.”

However, the war toy campaign was not just about banning toys. It was designed to mobilize their large and diverse membership base and draw public and political attention to Cold War peace initiatives. This is not to question the sincerity of their concerns, but rather to point out that its attachment to broader political issues sustained the anti-war toy campaign regardless of changes in toy consumption patterns. The fight against war toys was about publicity and policy. Armed with evidence from psychologists and others that toys could improve or damage children’s development, the war toy campaign was something of an insurance policy for future peace. It kept alive the possibility that women from across the country would continue to push for peace and disarmament through their consumption, and perhaps their votes, even as Lester Perason and Pierre Trudeau disregarded their demands to exclude Bomarc and Cruise missiles

\textsuperscript{92} Mark Moss, \textit{Manliness and Militarism: Educating Young Boys in Ontario for War}, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 110-121

\textsuperscript{93} “Rootie Kazootie Routs War Toys – Maker,” \textit{Toronto Star}, 13 Nov 1961, 35
from Canadian soil. By targeting future citizens, especially boys, they hoped to ensure that women’s rights and world peace would be respected, even if the struggle in the present seemed daunting. Thus, the futurism of the campaign sustained the overall peace efforts by creating the sense that eliminating war toys was achievable even in the face of present setbacks.

VOW continued to press their case with the media over the course of the decade and into the early 1970s. They prepared speaking points on war toys, copied newspaper articles by psychologists condemning war toys and other material to support their stance.94 Along with raising awareness and advancing the peace agenda, VOW’s efforts also inspired other groups to enter the debate on war toys. An article appearing in the Anglican Church of Canada’s magazine Canadian Churchman by Rev. A Gordon Baker declared war toys “symbols of hell” for their tendency of “ingraining in children the fantasy-glory of war.”95 San Francisco Women for Peace took inspiration from VOW launching their own anti-war toy campaign in 1965.96

Like concerns about advertising, the negative association with war toys led manufacturers and marketers to respond in a myriad of ways. American toy firm Lionel began an anti-war toy advertising campaign, similar to Reliable’s anti-television advertising campaign. The most famous of these, a microscope advertisement, reminded the reader that “No one ever held up a store with one of these. Or learned to make war with a Lionel train. Or played like a dagger-bearing monster with a Lionel-Porter science

set. Lionel makes nice toys only. They are good for thrills and fantasies, but the healthy kind.”

Other companies took a more defensive and antagonistic response towards VOW’s position. Toronto Star journalist Sidney Katz reported that one toy company executive in Toronto claimed that war toy critics wanted “a race of namby-pambys” and concluded that war toys were essential for boys: “[if you] give your boy a machine gun for Christmas…he won’t turn into a homosexual.” “Guns,” according to the toy company executive, helped to “promote leadership and strength.” The politics of heterosexual masculinity were not lost on toy manufacturers. Rather than seeking to change the frame of the debate, they accepted the basic premise of critics like VOW that this was a conflict about boyhood. Clearly some manufacturers were disdainful of the liberal masculinity promoted by VOW and other groups, preferring instead a more martial definition of boyhood.

It is hard to determine the extent to which VOW’s efforts actually affected the sale of war toys. In 1966 for instance, retailers were reporting robust sales of war toys yet again in contrast to the situation in 1965, despite VOW store pickets. Yet by the end of the decade it was clear that public opinion was shifting against the now infamous playthings. Sears-Simpson’s ceased carrying war toys in 1968, purportedly in response to the Robert Kennedy assassination. Letters like that from Dorothy Morrison of the

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98 “Do War Toys Teach Young Children that War is Inevitable,” Toronto Star, 27 Oct 1966, 3.
99 Ibid.
CTTC expressed disgust at the continued availability of war toys, which were “conducive to unwholesome fantasies.” In Scarborough, ON two towers with replica machine guns were declared a health hazard in 1977 and removed, partially out of racially charged psychological worries that the guns would “turn children into hijackers.” Also in 1977, G.I. Joe, now going by the less militaristic moniker Super Joe, was retired by Hasbro after exchanging military fatigues for scuba suits for most of the 1970s. While determining the overall success of the anti-war toy campaign is difficult, it seems clear that at the very least it placed toy manufacturers on the defensive. By articulating an alternative view of masculinity and using psychology to reinforce their claims about the affects of war toys, groups like VOW were able to mobilize children effectively as tools to shape consumer culture and public opinion.

War toys generated a lot of press, but they were not the only toys critics were focused on in the 1960s and 1970s. Dolls mobilized ideals of femininity and girlhood and raised concerns about the feminization of boys. During the early 1960s, concerns about doll use implicated boys and girls, partially informing the reaction to war toys. Letters like that from “Interested” to the Dear Abby column highlighted the concern quite clearly: “I have a nephew who is ten years old and plays with dolls. He dresses up in his mother’s high heels, clothes and hats and “plays house” with his six-year old sister. I’ve never seen him play a boy’s game and he prefers playing with little girls…Everyone in the family is disturbed…” Advice columnist Myrtle Eldred similarly found herself fielding questions about the use of dolls by a two-year-old boy. His parents celebrated his

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104 Abby [Van Buren], "For the Birds," *Ottawa Citizen*, 27 Dec 1960, 27.
interest in dolls as evidence that the boy was adopting a modern attitude towards
fatherhood. Eldred opted for a more cautious indifference: “The small boy is merely
interested in a plaything. At this age the doll cannot possibly contaminate his
manliness.” However, the threat of future contamination apparently remained.

In 1967, the introduction of the anatomically correct Little Brother doll raised
corns about the impact of visible male sex organs on the development of premature
sexuality in girls and of an undesirable fascination with genitalia among boys. Similarly, a letter to Dear Abby in 1976 by “Disgusted” expressed outrage at Barbie’s
little sister, Growing Up Skipper, who sprouted breasts when children twisted her arm. “I
think toys of this kind should be outlawed,” declared a concerned parent. Though Abby
found the complaint overblown, it is clear that gendered distinctions around doll play ran
parallel with attempts to enforce and promote heteronormativity among youth and sexual
ignorance among small children.

By the late 1960s advice about the use of dolls by boys was increasingly moving
in a more accepting direction. Manufacturer and self-proclaimed toy expert Arnold
Arnold wrote a column claiming that the prohibition against the use of dolls by boys was
“an absurd prejudice” invoking recent psychological writing to support his case. Yet
Arnold tied this positive endorsement of boys’ doll play with a condemnation of the
present selection of dolls for boys as “almost exclusively military…[or] ‘character dolls’
that represent the folk heroes of comic book, movie and TV land, accessorized with all

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106 Robert Reguly, “True to Life Boy Doll May be On Sale Here,” Toronto Star, 1 Nov
1967, 73.
107 Abby [Van Buren], “Dear Abby: Dolls too Realistic for Reader,” Ottawa Citizen, 16
Jan 1976, 48.
108 See Mary Louise Adams, The Trouble with Normal.
the hostile hardware of destruction.” Arnold merged his endorsement of doll play with a condemnation of war toys and boys’ popular culture.\(^{109}\)

Concerns about boys and dolls was, like concerns about war toys, indicative of a conflict over the meaning of masculinity. As Christopher Dummitt has argued, masculinity and modernity could be used almost interchangeably between the end of the Second World War and the late 1960s in Canada.\(^{110}\) The “updated patriarchy” that thrived in Canada during this period also touched on boys. Yet there was no clear consensus, as the ascendant “manly modern” described by Dummitt conflicted with older definitions of patriarchy and masculinity reliant on an idealization of separate spheres and martial virtues. When it came to toys and children, this conflict persisted into the later postwar period. Boys’ play with dolls was constructed as either evidence of a rising modern masculinity, or as the degeneration of traditional masculine virtues, with clear homophobic overtones.

However, this conflict over competing definitions of patriarchy also raised questions about femininity and girls’ relationship to their playthings. Feminist responses to doll play tended to highlight conflicts over the relationship between men and women and women’s place in social and political life. Specifically, girls’ play with certain dolls was constructed as evidence of the persistence of older forms of patriarchal power based on separate spheres that marginalized women. The solution to this problem generally adopted the liberal approach of treating boys and girls the same and eliminating gendered play in toys altogether. Those promoting women’s liberation argued that war toys might


make boys too aggressive to achieve equality between the sexes and dolls would render girls too passive to challenge patriarchy. By giving boys and girls the same toys, feminists hoped that they would become equals as men and women.

In 1971 representatives from the women’s movement in Canada requested a meeting with toy manufacturers to ask that war toys, toys that depicted violence against women and all fashion and homemaking toys be taken off the market. They wanted these undesirable toys replaced with “more space, science, and adventure toys for girls and more dolls for boys.” The activists admitted that their promotion of doll play for boys would unsettle traditional gender binaries, leading some to raise concerns about homosexuality.111

In 1973, Dr. Blair Shaw identified the changing shape of patriarchy and gender roles and its effect on child rearing. According to Shaw, in the past it was easy for parents to raise boys and girls because “they knew what each of these two roles was like.” However, Shaw felt that changes in the later-postwar period left some parents “not so sure,” about how to raise their son or daughter.112 Shaw went on to invoke the conditioned child, claiming that the way children were raised ultimately limited their horizons as boys and girls: “We try to justify the differences which we try to train into girls and boys, but is there really any good reason for most of it.” Female incompetence and subjugation was not innate to women, but was first learned in the playpen and elsewhere. As such, Shaw endorsed the promotion of “wide development” among girls and boys in order to help them understand their own individuality in relation to social

112 Dr. Blair W. Shaw, “Toys we Select for Children can Help them to be Liberated,” *Toronto Star*, 20 Feb 1973, 75.
expectations. In short, by conditioning the child differently with toys, Shaw contended we could unlock their authentic and unique self.\textsuperscript{113} However, this authentic self was not the naughty boy or the nice girl, nor an innocent in the secret garden of childhood, but a unique liberal individual ready to define themselves existentially through play, consumption and labour.

Similarly, a women’s studies doctoral student, Janine Frot, wrote an open letter, published in \textit{Le Devoir}, condemning the sexism in retail catalogues at Christmas. According to Frot, the catalogue showed a clear bias towards satisfying the needs of boy consumers, since boys were given twice as many pages for their toys as were girls. Furthermore, those pages devoted to girls’ toys celebrated conspicuous consumption or motherhood, offering girls few avenues for growth and development. While boys toy boxes offered freedom and liberation, girls’ toys were confining.\textsuperscript{114}

In a 1975 column by anti-war toy activist Lotta Dempsey the concern about girls dolls and war toys were neatly tied together. According to Dempsey, Barbie was problematic for her interests – mainly accessorizing – and her heavy commercialization. However, Dempsey applauded Mattel for its “Big Jim” doll targeted at boys, including its interchangeability with Barbie accessories. Dempsey noted that Barbie and Big Jim could use each other’s accessories, opening up play possibilities for boys and girls beyond traditional gender dichotomies.\textsuperscript{115} Dempsey implied that playing house with Big Jim or sending Barbie on a secret mission could form the basis for women’s liberation and a

\textsuperscript{113} \textit{Ibid.}
reconfiguration of gender relations.

In “Today’s Dolls Have Come a Long Way, Baby,” Helen Worthington reinforced the claim that toy choice was central to the objectives of gender equality. Quoting University of Toronto psychologist Esther Greenglass, the article makes the case that “Our choice of dolls is so tied up with our own needs that we…reflect our own ideas and impose them on children.” Accordingly, toy choice was indicative of the possibilities for women in the future, as well as the degree of subjugation faced by women in the present: “Women will continue to buy baby dolls and sexy dolls [like Barbie] as long as they get their identity only from their husband and children.” Similarly, Norma Bowen, a psychologist from the University of Guelph claimed that “…from baby [doll] to Barbie…the result is that little girls learn to be exploited in their female role.” In short, avoiding dolls was central to liberating children and homemakers from patriarchal domination.

However, Barbie also upset conservative psychologists because she disrupted traditional female gender roles. Defenders of older forms of patriarchy like psychiatrist Saul Levine, were troubled by what they saw as Barbie’s denigration of traditional women’s roles in childcare, and longed for more traditional toys like the baby-doll. The toy industry, upon reflecting on Barbie’s first decade, admired her commercial success, but lamented how she temporarily forced “traditional” baby-dolls off the shelf. *Toys and Playthings* celebrated her declining but consistent sales as it made it possible for baby-

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dolls to stage a comeback. When the Toronto Star asked children about their toy preferences, the result helped to reinforce assumptions of significant gender differences in play. The boys preferred heavily advertised toys like Spiderman and Super Joe Commander, while the two girls preferred baby dolls. In short, many were making clear attempts to link the choice of toys with the destruction of patriarchy and women’s liberation. Yet, Barbie and other dolls also offered the opportunity to mobilize reactionary discourses that sought to reinforce established patriarchal systems of domination.

The 1960s and 1970s also witnessed a rising interest in the racial politics of doll play. This was in part the result of liberation movements among racially and ethnically marginalized populations throughout the world, as well as changing government policy towards racial and ethnic minorities in Canada. These shifts were encapsulated in the 1971 adoption of the policy of multiculturalism and bilingualism by Pierre Trudeau’s Liberal government. The new policy stressed integration rather than assimilation. It promoted the superficial, festive and private aspects of non-white Canadian culture, while expecting conformity to white norms in most professional and public contexts. In practice, this shift had an effect on white and non-white Canadians alike.

The matter of citizenship and the role of “ethnic dolls” was discussed at length in correspondence between Michael Warren, provincial deputy minister for Citizenship and Helen Wood, public relations director at toy manufacturer Overload Co. Ltd. Overload used census data from 1961 in order to develop dolls that would appeal to Canada’s

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119 “Here’s How Children Rate the New Dolls,” Toronto Star, 10 Dec 1977, G1.
twelve largest ethnic groups. Overload provided detailed descriptions to the Ontario government in an attempt to sell their dolls as settlement aids for new Canadians. The descriptions are remarkable for their essentialist caricatures of white and non-white Canadians.

The British Isles, Dutch, French and German dolls were described as industrious and central to the work of building the Canadian nation. However, they were also slotted into particular kinds of activities. Germans, for example, were celebrated for their woodworking, while the Dutch Lady was described as an expert artist and florist. Dolls like the “Huron Indian” and “West Indian Fruit-Seller” blended anti-colonial discourse with essentialist stereotyping. For instance, veiled language derided the efforts by colonial administrations to “educate the native.” However, the description also celebrated Aboriginal “endurance and arts and crafts.” It characterized aboriginal Canadians in antimodern terms by suggesting that they were still trying to grapple with the changes wrought by technology on everyday life.\textsuperscript{121}

The manufacturer considered West Indian members of Canada’s new mosaic “the most interesting” segment of the Canadian population. Canada was characterized as a land of freedom and opportunity for a group of immigrants described as “always eager for higher education” and “to fill the gap in many service categories such as domestic and hospitality work.” The positive spin on the economic subjugation of West-Indian immigrants to Canada reassured white consumers and discouraged efforts to address the

\textsuperscript{121} [Correspondence between Overload Co. Ltd. and Michael Warren], Correspondence of the Provincial Secretary – Citizenship – Solls – Ethnic Dolls – Overload Co. Ltd. [1966-1972], AO, RG 8-5 B229098.
historical causes of this subjugation in Canada’s racist immigration policies.\textsuperscript{122} Efforts like those of Overload exoticized racial others and commodified their difference in complex and sometimes contradictory ways. Simultaneously, its depiction of white toys further reinforced the hegemony of white identity in the Canadian mosaic.

A similar tendency is evident in museum exhibits from the period. In 1979 the McCord Museum and the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) held doll exhibits. The ROM exhibit, titled “Dolls of Many Cultures,” had the express goal of “eliminate[ing] the competition between nationalities and reveal[ing] the human elements which bind humankind together.”\textsuperscript{123} The exhibit tried to connect Barbie as a “role model doll” to ancient Persian and Indian dolls purported to perform the same function. The message was clear. Difference was merely superficial window dressing, underneath which lay an authentic, universal and post-racial childhood.

The consumption of black dolls in Canada was an altogether more complex phenomenon. Much as interracial adoption came to symbolize white Canadian’s embrace of a post-racial Canada, the purchase of black dolls by white consumers may have had a similar meaning for some. For others, they may have been indicative of child preference, or used as parenting aids in mixed race families.\textsuperscript{124}

Shindana Toys, a manufacturer of Afro-centric playthings including dolls, reported to the \textit{Calgary Herald} that the sale of black dolls to white consumers was on the rise in the United States and Canada. The dolls were designed to help children of African

\textsuperscript{122} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{123} “All Dolled Up,” \textit{Maclean’s}, 19 Mar 1979, 40d-40f.

349
descent develop a positive self-image, partly in reaction to the Kenneth and Mamie Clark study showing the preference of African-American girls for white dolls. White customers, however, were allegedly purchasing them as proof of their anti-racism in an effort to raise racially tolerant children and avoid the wider discussion of imperialism and colonialism in the present: “They’ll tell you point blank: ‘I don’t want my kid to grow up with some of the hang-ups I grew up with.’”

This is not to deny the meaning ascribed to dolls among minority populations. The production and sale of black dolls was intended as an earnest extension of the politics of liberation. In Montreal, Errol Johnson, an African-Canadian started his own doll company “Natam Enrg.” which subcontracted its manufacturing of black dolls to a plant in New York. According to Johnson, “If a black child plays with white dolls, sooner or later she looks in the mirror and wonders why she isn’t white…[black dolls] are a way of not losing your identity.”

War toys and dolls continued to cause problems in the 1980s and beyond. On the one hand, critics faced an anti-feminist backlash articulated by reactionary conservative male politicians and groups like R.E.A.L. Women, who considered attempts to reform gender roles dismissive of women’s “natural” status as mothers. On the other, rising tensions marked by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the failure of the U.S. to ratify SALT II and increased military activity in Latin America and elsewhere reignited Cold

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War fears. By 1980 the debate over war toys and dolls was back in full swing.

According to Robert Kagan, an employee of the State Department at the time, the Cold War of the 1980s was different. It was not simply a conflict in the developing world or a matter of stockpiling and deploying new weapons. It was a “domestic battle for the American soul.” The toy industry was one partner among many that participated in this domestic battleground in the United States and among other potential western allies, including Canada.

The revamped G.I. Joe of 1982 designed as a counter-offensive against feminists and war toy critics. Robert Parkinson, CEO of Hasbro Toys, described the toy’s return as a much needed corrective to the “excesses” of the 60s and 70s:

"We can take pride in America – that’s what this toy says: that we’re Americans and we’re going to protect ourselves. G.I. Joe is what he says he is - a real American hero. This G.I. Joe is a rapid deployment team, and he’s going to need a lot better helicopters than the ones we used in Iran."

Hasbro’s relaunch included a record-setting $4,000,000 advertising campaign. In 1982, G.I. Joe was made bilingual in order to appeal to French and English Canadians. Rather than adopt a one-size-fits-all approach to selling American Cold War ambitions, Hasbro’s new G.I. Joe was tailored to specific national tastes. G.I. Joe was launched in Europe as the nationally ambiguous “Action Force.” The Canadian variant was still called G.I. Joe, though the “Real American Hero” tag line was dropped. All the American Joes were born and bred in the U.S.A. However, the Canadian editions had mixed national

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130 Ibid.
origins. According to their file cards, Grunt, Backstop, Scarlett and Snow Job, were all white and all born in various parts of Canada. Furthermore, the G.I. Joe vehicles and accessories, emblazoned with the American flag south of the border, were decorated with Canadian flags for their trip north.

The Canadian release of G.I. Joe invited Canadians to imagine themselves as racially homogenous allies in the American Cold War fight. The comics and the action figures sold exceedingly well with total North American sales of the toys exceeding $40,000,000 in 1982. Hasbro’s “paramilitary world policeman” was designed quite consciously by its manufacturer to use the latest advertising and marketing techniques while simultaneously acting as the new face of American world power. Sales of G.I. Joe soared in 1983. Tops in Toys manager Ruth Kirby remarked to the *Calgary Herald* that the blistering sales meant “we’re forever ordering to fill up.”

G.I. Joe was only the first of many war toys that would become available to Canadian children during the decade. “Nukies” also displayed the strategic convergence of CEO patriotism and Ronald Reagan foreign policy imperatives. The product of a Florida company, “Nukies” were described by the *Montreal Gazette* as “soft [and] cuddly” nuclear devices. These WMDs-in-miniature came with their very own ownership that declared the purchaser a certified nuclear power with “spheres of

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131 “Scarlette” & “Snow Job” [Toy Package], Andrew Bene Collection (Private), Ottawa, ON; “Backstop” & “Grunt” [Toy Package], Andrew Bene Collection (Private), Ottawa, ON.
132 See Andrew Bene Collection (Private), Ottawa, ON.
133 Wood. “Littlest Arms Race,”
134 Ibid.
influence, the right to set up puppet dictatorships and all the rights and powers of a thermonuclear power."\textsuperscript{138} They consciously articulated a justification for recent U.S. incursions in Latin America and elsewhere in the world and displayed the Reagan administrations by-then familiar revival of American global hegemony through the stockpiling of weapons and weapon systems.

These are but two striking examples. Similar qualities are discernible in the violent and pro-American Rambo toy line manufactured by Coleco. These toys clearly demonstrated a strong link between the politics of the “adult world” and the production of playthings for children. Canadian and American children and their parents were invited by American-based toy companies to participate in empire second-hand by consuming toys that were clearly imbued with the values of American Cold War imperialism.\textsuperscript{139}

By Christmas of 1983, signs of a resurgent and increasingly diffuse debate were everywhere. Ms. Sosonowsky, a college instructor and member of the newly formed Kids and Guns, a Canadian anti-war toy organization, expressed her dissatisfaction in a letter to Hasbro, co-signed by twelve separate anti-nuclear proliferation groups: “Today when the very existence of life on this planet is threatened by an escalating arms race your Christmas offerings of death and destruction are particularly offensive.”\textsuperscript{140}

Similar complaints were made about Rambo. The president of the Montreal Business Professionals’ Women’s Association was quick to denounce the entire line of

\textsuperscript{138} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{139} Historians of the nineteenth century, like Joanna de Groot and Kristin Hoganson have described the domestication of empire through consumption in the British and American empires respectively. See Joanna de Groot. “Metropolitain Desires and Colonial Connections: Reflections on Consumption and Empire” Catherine Hall & Sonya O. Rose (ed.) \textit{At Home with the Empire: Metropolitain Culture and the Imperial World}. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006) & Hoganson, \textit{Consumers Imperium}.
\textsuperscript{140} Elizabeth Godley, “War on War Toys,” \textit{Vancouver Sun}, 2 Dec 1983, B1
dolls as well as their manufacturer, Coleco, for “exacerbating… the values of racism, violence and war… It is very sad that your company, which brought to children the delightful Cabbage Patch Kids should now turn around and sell a doll which teaches children to kill and mutilate.” The Canadian Arab Federation was equally troubled by the line of dolls, in particular “Nomad,” one of Rambo’s foes. The arabic doll was described as a “treacherous desert warrior” whose followers “are without honour” and often “carry out terrorist assaults on innocent villages.”

Operation Dismantle, an anti-proliferation peace group, took a hard line on the arrival of Nukies in Canada, threatening, “to spray paint the things on the store shelves.” Letters were written to Prime Minister Brian Mulroney and Consumer Affairs Minister Michel Côté demanding the toys be banned from Canada. As Jim Stark, president of the association stated: “If we can ban toys that could harm children physically, I dare say we can ban toys that would harm them psychologically. Any parent who would tuck their child into bed with a toy nuclear bomb should be reported to the Children’s Aid [Society].” Large toy retailers in Canada decided to bend to the demands of critics like Stark and forgo ordering the controversial toys.

Taken together, the popularity of war toys inspired forty editorial cartoonists from the United States and Canada to launch an anti-war toy cartoon campaign from 10-24

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141 Michael Farber, “Rambo-toy foes are up in arms,” Montreal Gazette, 2 Oct 1985, A3
142 A similar concern was expressed by the Canadian Mental Health Association over Zartan, a COBRA operative who was described on his file card as a paranoid schizophrenic. The wording of the file card was eventually changed. See John Barber “Warfare in Toyland” Maclean’s 15 Dec 1986, 38-40
December 1985. The cartoons depicted children being turned into soldiers by the cornucopia of violent playthings now available for their use.\textsuperscript{146} In spite of the controversy, \textit{Toys and Games} reassured toy retailers that action figures remained a “growth category” in Canada.\textsuperscript{147}

Male children’s desire for and use of war toys was identified as a potential source of psycho-social danger. Critics contended that children were incapable of comprehending the distinction between play and reality to support their campaign against war toys. Boys were considered susceptible to a monkey-see, monkey-do relationship with their toys. Early childhood educator Sarah Meritt felt that the very design of war toys invited violence: “The weaponry and physiques of these toys strongly suggest that praise goes to the person who uses the most violence and has the most strength.”\textsuperscript{148} Similarly, Dorothy Keith of Mount Royal College Daycare justified her daycare’s ban on war toys, stating that “they [children] are in a social situation where one of our goals is to help them develop pro-social behaviour. We don’t introduce toys which would encourage problem-solving by the strong person winning.” Joanna Santa Barbara, child psychiatrist and member of Canadian Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear similarly argued that: [Toys teach that]…War is a game, an exciting adventure…Killing is acceptable, even fun…Violence or the threat of violence is the only way to resolve conflicts…The world is divided into “goodies” and “baddies…The bad guys are devoid of human qualities and their destruction is desirable.\textsuperscript{149}

\textsuperscript{146}“Newspaper Cartoonists Declare War on War Toys,” \textit{Montreal Gazette}, 4 Dec 1986, G16
\textsuperscript{147}“Strength in Action Figures,” \textit{Toys and Games}, Apr 1984, 34.
\textsuperscript{148}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{149}Dr. Joanna Santa Barbara “What to do about War Toys at Home and Beyond,” \textit{The
employee, joined the refrain arguing that war toys ensured that “kids get more aggressive.”  

Peace activists also argued that violent toys begat violence in children. As Rose Dyson claimed:

…it is easy to conclude that a significant portion of the modern economy is based on ideological child abuse…It is no accident that we have rising levels of violence, suicides, mean world outlooks, crime, racism, and intolerance to civil liberties with role models for our children such as Rambo, the [Ninja] Turtles and Arnold Schwarzenegger.  

At the Calgary War Toy protest of 1986, Susan Webster, the protest’s spokesperson, declared that when children played with war toys they "...become passive about violence and things like missiles that can blow up entire cities." In a similar political action undertaken by the New Westminster Peace Council in British Columbia, spokesperson Beverley Mill claimed that war toys had a hidden agenda: “Really what it’s doing is conditioning children into losing their fear of real guns and real violence. The good guys get the bad guys but the message is annihilate your enemy, not negotiate or find another way.”  

Meanwhile dolls remained a problem for critics and manufacturers alike. In the 1980s, toy companies attempted to blend the commercial success of the fashion doll and its robust line of accessories with the older image of the baby-doll. This was a complex balancing act. The result was products like Irwin’s Strawberry Shortcake line of dolls that

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Ploughshares Monitor, Sep 1991, 8-9

John Barber “Warfare in Toyland”

Rose Dyson, “Toyland as Terror Zone,” Peace Magazine, May/June 1992, 6-7

"Shops under attack by demonstrators for selling war toys," Globe & Mail, 1 Dec 1986, A21

came in multiple sizes, consisted of numerous iterations, including of course racially non-white dolls and multiple accessories to collect.\textsuperscript{154} Mattel and others also introduced dolls that reinforced traditional gender roles for women. The Mrs. Heart doll was married, had a family, became pregnant and gave birth to a newborn. Like Barbie before her, she came with numerous accessories for her family. However, Mattel insisted that Mrs. Heart was in no way connected to Barbie “[Barbie] has always been single and always will be and will never have a baby.” Mrs. Heart encapsulated the convergence between renewed demand for more traditional toys and conservative accounts of women’s sexuality that stigmatized unwed mothers and pre-marital sex.\textsuperscript{155}

In 1980 Barbie herself went through an overhaul as a result of the feminist critiques targeted at her throughout the 1960s and 1970s. For instance, hispanic and black Barbies made their debut. Mattel had experimented with making Francie, Barbie’s cousin, black in 1967. This change sparked “confusion” as well as outrage at the implication that Barbie’s cousin may have been the product of an interracial relationship.\textsuperscript{156} Consequently, Francie was made white again and in the 1980s black Barbie was merely Barbie’s “friend.”

Still, critics complained about the limited range of prospects for Barbie that typically centred on her physical appearance and consumer activities. Mattel contended that they were powerless to address these issues because of the vast divide that separated the interests of grown women and little girls: “For two years we gave her a doctor’s uniform and it didn’t sell. I pleaded with the manufacturing department to keep it in line

\textsuperscript{155} “No Baby for Barbie,” \textit{Toronto Star}, 29 Aug 1986, B3
so I could say to representatives of women’s lib that Barbie was branching out. But little girls would have none of it…[they] don’t fantasize about their careers.”

Three Canadian women, described by the media as role models, offered criticisms of Barbie’s representation of femininity. For Olympian Carolyn Waldo, Barbie’s shortcomings and “girliness” was easily overcome by pretending that “she was a jock. She would even get into fights with other fancy-dancy-prissy Barbies.” Sylvia Sweeny, an African-Canadian former Basketball star, declared her preference for simpler toys to the Barbie doll, which was “very sexist.” Canadian super-model Monika Schnarrer confessed that “Barbie’s body image is unrealistic for girls.” Others, like Nicole Beaulieu went even farther, asking if Barbie didn’t constitute as severe a threat to girls as Rambo did for boys. Mattel was reluctant to change Barbie’s body, but she was sent to work in 1985 and made into an astronaut in 1986 in response to persistent criticisms.

Attempts to update Barbie were mirrored by other Mattel and Hasbro dolls designed to more closely resemble the feminist recommendations for girls’ play, while simultaneously providing them with some much needed cover on the issue of war toys. Hasbro introduced female characters like Lady Jay and Scarlett into their G.I. Joe line. Mattel on the other hand was aggressively marketing He-Man’s sister, She-Ra. In 1989 it looked like She-Ra Princess of Power might unseat Barbie from her throne as the “Queen of Dolls.” The Master’s of the Universe and G.I. Joe came under fire when

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159 Nicole Beaulieu, “Barbie Serait-elle aussi perniceuse que Rambo?” *Le Soleil*, 6 Dec 1986, B4
targeted at boys, yet when the same toy lines appealed to girls with female characters they were celebrated for promoting active and aggressive play that still conformed to feminine ideals of beauty. As a *Montreal Gazette* article put it: “young girls at play today get to be aggressive and pretty in the loveliest of environs.”

Thus, the problem posed by dolls and war toys by the 1980s had become highly dependent on who was implicated as the user of the toys in question. Boys’ use of dolls was celebrated for producing more sympathetic and enlightened men. Girls’ dalliance with war toys would make them more independent and self-assured. War toys and dolls were understood to simultaneously underpin and undermine patriarchal violence. This was only possible by assuming that the developing child’s gender carried with it certain immutable social and psychological characteristics that needed to be overcome in order to produce the autonomous post-gendered, post-racial liberal individual in adulthood. In this respect, war toy and doll critics shared a similar logic with conservatives who saw in concerns about war toys and dolls the destruction of traditional feminine and masculine ideals.

As the 1980s came to a close, the Cold War was nearing its end and girls’ selection of toys was purportedly expanding. Shifts in the discourse around war toys and dolls began placing less emphasis on the connection between their prohibition and the promotion of peace and women’s socio-economic liberation. Critics began to stress new connections between war toys, dolls and violence against women. The case of the Montreal Peace Monument and Pacijoue is revealing in this respect.

Pacijoue was a Quebec based collective founded in 1986. Their stated objective was

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to promote peace education among children. Pacijoue’s activities included the publication of teaching aids and the promotion of education campaigns. “Cessez le Feu,” published in 1987, was indicative of the association of war toys with generalized social violence. It drew heavily on claims about the psycho-social risk posed by war toys: “If, through television, film and toys, we provide a child with stories of doctors and nurses, we can expect that they will learn healing. If we provide him with stories of carpenters and tools, we can expect that he will build things. And if we glorify violence, we can expect that will carry over to the home, the classroom and the neighbourhood.” 163

The collection of donated war toys (defined in the broadest sense) from elementary school children for the construction of a peace monument became the cornerstone of their outreach efforts. In October of 1988 Pacijoue marked the UN-sponsored Disarmament Week with a drive to collect war toys and a march for peace, including the display of war toys in the procession. After a number of subsequent collections, Pacijoue found themselves in possession of tens of thousands of war toys, yet the search for funding for the monument and the flagging interest of city council meant that promises to have it erected by fall 1989 or spring 1990 ultimately seemed bleak. However, the anti-feminist shooting rampage of Marc Lepine at Montreal’s L’Ecole Polytechnique on 6 December 1989 invested the peace monument project with a new urgency and a new rationale: the prevention of violence against women.

The monument was finally unveiled 6 December 1991 to mark the second anniversary of the Montreal Massacre and the first National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women. The tens of thousands of war toys formed the

163 Pacijoue, “Cessez Le Feu,” (s.i.: s.n., 1987), 3.
structure of the monument and were also embedded in its base. Children who had donated war toys each had their names written on a plaque. Lépine, one journalist was careful to point out, “…was in many ways a typical boy: He played at war while his sister played at dolls.”\textsuperscript{164} Using a leap of cultural logic, Lépine’s violent, heinous, and sexist acts were immediately linked with another set of concerns: the promotion, consumption and use of war toys and dolls by boys and girls. Diane Savard, president of Pacijoue made this explicit to her interviewer: “We can’t just bury our heads in the sand. We have to look at society’s role in creating Marc Lépine’s – and change society…Our message at Christmas is: Don’t give violence as a gift.”\textsuperscript{165}

The increased prominence of toy testing supported by the rise of social learning theory and increased state involvement in consumer life created a space for political activists to mobilize children’s toys in their struggles against patriarchy, sexism, racism and Cold War imperialism. What had looked like a clever and successful strategy in the 1960s and early 1970s for raising the profile of important issues had become self-sustaining by the 1980s as the concerns about dolls and war toys were grafted on to each successive crisis in women’s rights, masculine identity or world peace. Increasingly, children’s play was placed under heavier and more diffuse adult scrutiny. Children and toys found themselves at the symbolic centre of a number of social conflicts. Ironically, the seriousness with which adults and children were expected to treat toys had reached new heights, just as the modern definition of the toy was coming entirely unravelling.

\textsuperscript{165} \textit{Ibid.}
CONCLUSION

After Toys

At 43 Hanna Street, just off King Street West in the “up and coming” neighbourhood of Liberty Village, you can find what remains of Irwin’s Toronto toy factory. The promotional text for what the building now known as the Toy Factory Lofts asks potential buyers to think back to their own childhood: “remember when you were 10 and the thought of living in a toy factory was the ultimate dream?” Liberty Village Condos promises to make that “dream” a reality for those with the income to indulge their inner child. The fake brick effect, large factory-style windows, once used for ventilation and added light, and the exposed ductwork all harken back to the industrial origins of this post-industrial consumer paradise. Yet now, rather than a place of production, it is a place of consumer desire, where exchange happens as much around ideas and dreams as it does around commodities. The teaser video for these wonders of post-modern consumer culture raises a question: what should we make of it all?

In “New Consensus for Old” Thomas Frank highlights the growing use of objectifying, commodified approaches to the self in North American society.\(^1\) Whether it’s “personal branding” or subsuming social relations under the marketized heading of “networking,” Frank sees a profound crisis at the heart of modern subjectivity and social relations. Like Walter Benjamin’s flâneur, we are everywhere confronted with things to see, including ourselves.\(^2\) We observe. We consume. Experience has been replaced by a

\(^1\) See Thomas Frank, New Consensus for Old: Cultural Studies from Left to Right, (Prickly Paradigm Press, 2002).
series of discreet and largely meaningless events.\(^3\) Being there, is supposed to be enough for us.

If post-modernity, or late-modernity, is defined in part by a breakdown of linear meaning and the rise of a fragmentary self, then the material things we purchase to adorn our life and the aesthetic expressions we work-up around us are no less subject to this rule.\(^4\) Canadian poet Karen Solie captures the complex, anxious and nostalgic tone of this fragmented social existence beautifully:

…To nights at the Alec Arms
or Coal Banks Inn, our multiplying glasses making of the table
a fractured lens we looked through to our better selves...
even as it threatened to expose the vacant hours we poured
our lives into, that stood in for youth. I can't say we
were not happy in those days, though I didn't fully understand
what qualifies, and still don't…I resolved,
henceforth, wherever I was, to be ready to leave without warning.\(^5\)

Just like the fractured post-modern self comprised of shards blending production and consumption; the aesthetic and the industrial; fantasy and material life; childhood and adulthood – the toy and the child have also become increasingly unstable categories, threatening to melt before our eyes and disintegrate into a series of fragmentary, contested and uncertain moments in space and time. The roots of this shift are varied, but two developments stand out as particularly important: the growing importance of video games and the expansion of adult toy consumption.

The wild commercial and cultural success of the video game has been particularly disruptive for the modern meaning of the toy and childhood. Today, it is often the most

expensive toy in any home, increasingly used to amuse parent and child alike. However, its beginnings were decidedly less auspicious and disruptive.

The history of video games has drawn attention, much like many other toys, from enthusiasts and critics alike, typically working in media studies departments. Yet given the very early involvement of toy companies in the home video game portion of the industry as well as its frequent connection to the toy industry in popular writing, declaring video games a medium is somewhat over-determined and anachronistic.

Video games should be considered in light of the toy industry’s changing relationship with intellectual property and subsequent transformation into a cultural industry. At the time of their emergence as commodities, video games defied easy characterization. They were like toys in that they could be played with and were connected to leisure as much as entertainment. However, their composition of resistors, transistors and microchips held within a “black box” whose function varied based on the insertion of seemingly materially identical cartridges, concealed their meaning beneath their material surface. The Winnipeg Free Press article “The Video Brain Game” explored in-depth this seemingly strange phenomenon, where as if by magic, swapping out one silicon chip for another similar looking one could transform Space Invaders into Paper Boy – two very different video games. Today, video game systems’ ability to allow users to watch television, play games, interact with friends, surf the internet and perform a host of other tasks only complicate their meaning and place within the world of

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commodities. If the conversion of toys into fully integrated intellectual properties blurred
the boundaries between culture and commodity, between media and product, then the
video game threatened to obliterate this distinction altogether.

None of this was readily apparent at first. The invention of the video game has its
precursors in playful lab experiments on oscilloscopes and punch card computers in the
1950s and 1960s. It wasn’t until the 1970s that the first computerized arcade games
would find their way into bars and pool halls – decidedly adult places of entertainment.
Nolan Bushnell and Atari initially led the way in North America launching games like
Pong. The arrival of Space Invaders in 1978 sparked a sensation. Not surprisingly, the
success of these games led to numerous imitations.

The initial space in which arcade games were used marked them as an adult
product indicative of the transition to post-modern forms of entertainment and
consumption with their emphasis on uniqueness and novelty.\(^8\) The development of arcade
games and home video game systems was not intended to attract children, but instead was
targeted at young adults in their 20s and 30s. As Sarah Murdoch confessed in her feature
in *Toronto Life Magazine* “I can pretty well trace my transformation from work-weary
office drudge into galactic saviour to one evening about ten months ago, the night I
waged my first outstanding military engagement against the malignat Zylons…Life is
better now…in a world dismally devoid of amusements that fully engage, home video
games hold the lure of a profound obsession.”\(^9\) Murdoch’s “Confessions of a Space
Junkie” drew on the language of addiction and the genre of the confessional to position

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\(^8\) Carly A. Kocurek, “Coin Drop Capitalism: Economic Lessons from the Video Arcade,”
in Mark J.P. Wolf (ed.), *Before the Crash: Early Video Game History*, (Wayne State

video games as the “drug” that led the addict to live a double life; one savoury and productive, the other hedonistic and destructive, effectively allowing the gamer to straddle the economic worlds of modernity and post-modernity.

Similarly, several home entertainment games were specifically designed with highly adult themes, some of which were deemed to be in poor taste or even obscene. Custer’s Revenge, an “adult” video game featured a scene where General Custer, sporting an erect pixelated penis, raped a computer-generated version of Pocahontas. The rehash of nineteenth century colonial violence sparked widespread outrage, leading the Canadian government to invoke its power to ban the game as obscene material, deemed degrading to women and Aboriginal peoples.10

Despite the socially unacceptable nature of some video games and gaming experiences, many children and youth still frequented the arcades, blurring the line between child and adult, the toy and adult leisure. As a medium, games were accessible, reportedly enjoyable and were at least partially intergenerational. Many games with less overt violent and sexual content, like the torture themed Chiller, were enjoyed by a wide variety of players.11

The concern about the use of video games by male youth and children, especially in public places, eventually led to a full-blown moral panic in the early 1980s. Some psychologists staked careers, then as now, on proving that video game addiction was a psychological disorder.12 Video games were characterized as a disease of the will – an

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11 “Video Veteran Chokes on Chiller,” Vancouver Sun, 25 Jul 1986, B1
“addiction.” It constituted an internal failing that instead of raising uncharacteristic behaviours, were driven by a compulsive relationship with the game itself, raising questions about socialization and self-control.¹³

Municipal governments and the police began to target video games with bylaws and surveillance, describing them as the cause of a host of social ills. Bob Stewart, Vancouver chief of police reported to the Community Services Committee that he supported a public ban on the games from any space, which might be occupied by minors, including convenience stores and shopping centres. According to Stewart, “demands for service from the police were consistently high in areas where video machines were located…[including] youths annoying, fights, disturbances and thefts.”¹⁴ Similarly, school principals were reporting that children were skipping classes and stealing in order to “finance their need to play.”¹⁵

By enforcing a broadly-worded gambling bylaw from an earlier century, the police were able to regulate and limit the spread of video games, despite opposition from a number of small businesses. In “Video Lure Replaces Old-Time Pool Rooms,” the Vancouver Sun complained that local youth were being drawn into a seedy and dangerous world through video games located in convenience stores and other public places. The objections of Vancouver youths like Cliff Starr to being “treated like a delinquent” for playing games largely went unheeded.¹⁶

When the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association met in 1982 they passed a

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¹⁵ Ibid.
resolution demanding that the province ban arcade games for those under fifteen citing concerns about skipped classes, pilfered quarters and the “ruin of a generation.”\textsuperscript{17} This was in spite of the fact that when Calgary set up a committee to hear complaints on video games, only one person showed up. In contrast to the dearth of evidence, Alderman Stanley Nelson was certain that a large majority of Calgarians were upset by the machines.\textsuperscript{18} In Montreal, bylaws were passed forcing arcade operators to pay a special “amusement tax” and to implement age restrictions on access to video games.\textsuperscript{19} With arcade games costing a quarter or fifty cents a turn to play and home video game systems priced in the hundreds of dollars, its clear that class formed a major basis for the concern around arcades.

Home systems emerged only shortly after arcade games in the 1970s. However, their popularity followed a decidedly different trajectory. Home systems were expensive, limited or both. Buying a video game system was a major purchase for Canadian families. Along with North American pioneer Atari and home electronic firms like Magnavox, toy companies were relatively quick to jump on board the home video game market. Irwin sought out licensing rights for Atari games and systems. Coleco, Mattel and others developed their own systems with exclusive games and content.

The sale of home systems initially mirrored the blistering sales of arcade games with Mattel, Coleco and Irwin raking in huge profits. \textit{Marketing} magazine declared video games the next big boom.\textsuperscript{20} However, the growing number of hostile newspaper articles

\textsuperscript{17} “Battling the Scourge of Youth,” \textit{Alberta Report}, 11 Oct 1982, 12.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{19} “Arcade Owner’s Contest City’s Amusement Tax,” \textit{Montreal Gazette}, 13 Feb 1985, A5.
\textsuperscript{20} “TV Games: They’re only the Beginning,” \textit{Marketing}, 6 Mar 1978, 10-11.
associated with arcade games and market saturation forced sales of home systems into a free-fall. Irwin posted their worst year in decades in 1984. Mattel and Coleco exited the video game business altogether. Even Mike Richards, vice-president of marketing for Coleco Canada was sure video games were through: “It’s a fad, really, and fads change.”

Growing concerns about stolen coinage, missed school and delinquency heralded a transition in the physical location of video gaming, not its ultimate demise. By moving video games off the street and into the home, the medium became safer for children and youth – at least in the minds of some. This is perhaps unsurprising given the long-standing concern with children’s place in public, particularly working-class children, for whom correctives were frequently imagined in terms of the core material and moral fixtures of middle-class domesticity.

In 1986 the timing was right for the Japanese playing card firm Nintendo to revolutionize the video game industry with their Famicom system, renamed the Nintendo Entertainment System for its launch in North America. Though relatively expensive by contemporary standards, Nintendo, Sega and others used a new sales tactic whereby the hardware was sold at near cost while licensed software became the basis for profits. This reduced the entry cost for consumers and provided a steadier stream of revenue. Nintendo became one of the top 10 best selling “toys” for the closing years of the decade. Video games were back.

As we approach the launch of eighth generation of consoles in the fall of 2013, it

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seems clear that video games are here to stay. Today video games are once again marketed as an intergenerational medium with the console intended to occupy the centre of living room entertainment. However, concerns linger about a medium whose interactivity, reliance on visual media, and “black-boxed” status undermines the stable meaning of the terms toy, media, commodity and child.

The intergenerational use of video games also points to a broader disturbance that threatens to destroy the modern definition and meaning of the toy and the child: adult toy consumption. This trend was evident as early as the interwar period when retailers began to carry adult-oriented goods as part of their toy stock. Henry Morgan & Co. stocked Mha-jong sets and other “adult” games and toys in the early 1920s to offer parents a personal reason to visit toylands. Along with finding goods that would appeal to them, adults were also expected to relive the joy of being a child while shopping for their offspring. Henry Morgan & Co. offered parents the opportunity to “wander at will and enjoy the full wonders” because “it is fun to give to children [a]nd great fun to choose toys here.” Eaton’s too appealed to “young and old” in their 1939 advertisement which featured a fictional dialogue from a father who had finally escaped from his daughter in order to spend more time examining the toy trains on display. Indeed, the toy train was unique in its ability to simultaneously draw on discourses of technological futurism and the nostalgia of fathers for their own childhood. According to the Globe and Mail in 1938, toy train manufacturers were building more complex toy railroads because fathers

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were “monopolizing” them. As the *Toronto Star* put it, “It’s smart to be childish’ is the prevailing model for home entertainment…Yuletide toylands all have special departments catering to these grown-up whimsies.”

As children were provided with more autonomy in toy stores, adults were invited to relive their own childhood by buying toys for themselves.

Toys for adults took on a new seriousness after the Second World War. Eric Richter, a journalist with the *Financial Post*, detected a rise in toys targeted at adults as a result of the efforts of toy companies to expand their market. At the same time, newspapers began running stories on toy collectors who had saved rare or interesting toys from their childhood. Collecting toys was clearly a “serious hobby” by the early 1970s. By the late 1970s and early 1980s, doll-collecting societies had arisen in Canada and the trade in rare or antique toys had become a profitable source of additional income for some. A *Globe and Mail* article from 1987 celebrated the new “serious” uses adults had found for children’s toys. In some instances, toys were being described as “works of art” or “cultural artifacts.” For the toy industry, this new adult culture of toy

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27 "Toys for Adults are Popular in N.Y.,” *Toronto Star*, 1 Dec 1932, 36.
30 “His Wonderful World of Toys,” *Vancouver Sun*, 14 Dec 1972, 78.
consumption offered a chance to enhance sales and expand their commodity into new markets. By tapping into adult nostalgia and the rising consumption of leisure, toys could become a commodity once again open to all. The nostalgic use of toys by adults for a variety of purposes has only persisted and intensified up to today. Late-night television shows like *Robot Chicken* offer adult sketch comedy performed through the stop motion use of children’s toys from the 1980s and 1990s in order to satirize popular culture. It offers its nostalgic viewers the chance to simultaneously relive and laugh at their childhood.

Recent updates of Neil Postman’s now classic thesis about the disappearance of childhood (and adulthood) have tried to explore these trends. Books like Christopher Noxon’s celebratory *Rejuvenile* or Marcel Danesi highly critical *Forever Young* identify adults’ changing relationship to toys and children’s popular culture as a major indicator of a shift in our present day understandings of adulthood, and by extension, childhood. In particular, the tendency of many adults to use toys as markers for a variety of self-referential meanings has brought to the fore the complexity of talking about a “children’s commodity” or providing a clear definition of the “child consumer”.

My former roommate and I are portents and products of these changes. He has a personal collection of toys, some dating from his childhood, while others are new acquisitions designed to reaffirm those early connection to G.I. Joe and Star Wars. I can remember the first time we moved in together, lugging a seemingly endless number of

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Rubbermaid totes up to our third floor office area at the house we rented in Ottawa’s Sandy Hill neighbourhood.

“What is in here?” I finally asked.

“Toys. Comic books,” my roommate sheepishly replied, averting his gaze slightly.

Indeed, the recent G.I. Joe films, or the perpetual reissuing of the original Star Wars Trilogy and Disney “classics,” are calculated to draw on adult nostalgia for their own childhood and attract a new generation of children. Walk down the action figure toy aisle in any store and you are as likely to find grown men and women shopping for themselves as you are children.

I personally have little interest in action figures. However, I still own a video game system and numerous games for it. I play it often – more often than is considered socially acceptable for a man my age. When the final Mass Effect game, a beloved franchise of the most recent console generation, was slated for a midnight launch, I attended, sporting one of my five Mass Effect t-shirts purchased online. I remember asking myself what I was doing at twenty-nine going to a midnight video game launch in socially questionable attire. When I finally arrived, my shame quickly turned to surprise. Most of those in line with me ranged between the ages of 20 and 40, and were similarly attired. Most of the attendees expressed enthusiasm and excitement at the prospect of spending another 30-40 hours with “their” Commander Shepard. This was no event for children or teenagers. It was for adults, like me.

Unlike much of the scholarship on toys and popular culture, I have opted in the pages here to offer a more nuanced, but no less critical, account of childhood’s most
treasured commodity. At the very least, this thesis can help us to put past and present changes in one aspect of children’s popular culture in context and perhaps address them without reducing their complexity to that of a corporate sponsored shell game. Certainly there are important shifts underway. The status of toys and childhood is much more unstable than at any time during the twentieth century. However, this is more a matter of degree rather than absolute divergence.

Whether it was hardened criminals robbing stores with toy pistols, or adults buying Meccano sets to transform their children into future engineers, its clear that toys have always captured adults’ imaginations as much as children’s. The toy has always been prone to destabilization. This in turn has raised fundamental questions about the relationship between children and adults, the proper role of institutions and experts in child rearing, and the meaning of children’s participation in the capitalist market as consumers and labourers.

Toys have mobilized Canadians in a series of social and political struggles, often in the name of children and childhood. Typically, they act as a means to make these complex issues seem simple and manageable for wide swaths of the public and to integrate a wide array of individuals into these conflicts. Interventions along these lines take the form of consumer activism. I have argued that rather than distractions, these efforts had a profound affect on the politics of issues ranging from juvenile delinquency and Cold War disarmament to women’s liberation. Consumer activism, in its efforts to raise awareness about a number of issues, frequently oversimplified the toys and children in question. Their accounts of what a child was were as one-dimensional as those offered by business. Thus, consumer activism almost always stigmatized certain children and
certain consumer choices. In a world where political, social and economic activism is increasingly dominated by boycotts, one-click digital petitions, the fair trade movement and earth hour, we should be mindful of the real limits of these efforts, the symbolic violence they enact and their potential to smooth the way for meaningful, if moderate, change.

This thesis has also expanded our understanding of the history of consumption, childhood and business in Canada. It has provided important insights into existing international historiography on toys. As a whole it suggests that children’s relationship with the market is complex and defies easy characterization, contrary to popular and academic accounts that see it as the unhindered triumph of corporate power.

This dissertation has also pointed out that boys and girls have had decidedly different experiences as toy consumers. The former has received much of the attention – positive and negative – while the latter has often played second fiddle in matters of consumption. If toys are about the freedom to play, than it is no wonder that women’s subjugation left them with few options in the toy box. Similarly, white, middle-class Canadian children were the principal focus for concerns about toy consumption. For working-class and racially marginalized Canadians the concern for most of the twentieth century was how to provide them with more of the correct toys to be enjoyed in the correct environment. Like most issues pertaining to children and consumer life, toys fell under the purview of mothers. As a result, they became the most forceful activists, vocal critics and frequent scapegoats in concerns about improper or undesirable playthings.

How we understand and negotiate children’s consumption in contemporary Canada continues to be dominated by modern discourses of childhood and the
commercial persona of the child consumer elaborated by Patrick Ryan and Daniel Thomas Cook, respectively. If we are more concerned about toys and the child consumer today than in the past, it is because these resources are increasingly ineffective at capturing the complexity of the consumer lives of the young or in helping us to understand postindustrial capitalism and subjectivities. The toy industry, after all, no longer really sells to children. They sell childhood to a variety of consumer cohorts in all its real and imagined forms. To quote Patricia Crane, “Childhood has itself become an object of consumer desire.”

On the most basic level, this 150-year history of the modern toy in Canada has helped to enhance our understanding of our present circumstances. Our current relationship to the toy commodity was a long time in the making with important developments beginning as far back as the nineteenth century. This was, however, not an uncontested trajectory. Along the way many offered correctives or alternatives to the industrial and postindustrial development of the toy industry, sometimes in direct conflict with capitalist objectives. In the end, the moderate and reformist approaches of these efforts ultimately meant that they were incapable of forcing their will onto the toy industry. Nor was the toy industry able to effectively silence or satisfy the growing and heterogeneous concerns of critics.

Stories, fictional or otherwise, are ultimately about choices. What stays and what goes is often the hardest, but most pressing, decision of any writer, scholarly or otherwise. Despite the broad sweep of this thesis, or perhaps because of it, there remain a number of avenues requiring greater attention to further flesh out the history of toys and

36 Patricia Crane, “Childhood as Spectacle,” American Literary History 11, no. 3 (1999): 545-553.
children’s consumption. We need more works on children’s industries and children’s consumption in order to better understand in what ways the toy industry is similar to and different from their cousins. We need a history of video games and gaming that examines them from the perspective of the gamer, not just as an industry or as a medium. We also need more studies of capitalism in general that stitch together the worlds of capital, labour, regulation, production and consumption in order to tell the story of how our material world and cultural horizons shape and reshape one another in very direct ways.

At an ethical level, we need to realize that by using children as proxies in our socio-economic conflicts we run the risk of unduly focusing on correcting present problems by targeting the bodies and minds of the young. When we search for answers to complex and fraught issues in “truth from the mouth of babes,” or when we demonize and scapegoat a group of citizens based solely on their age, we usually miss the core of the issue.

The effects of the frequent and continuous mobilization of young people as a site for correcting social ills is presently evident throughout Canadian society. The young face a gerontocratic economy and political system that has no place for them as workers, or as citizens. At the same time, those across the political spectrum dismiss activism on the part of the young for better working conditions, lower tuition, political reform or job training as “entitled whining”. They want in, and more pressingly, they want the same opportunities as their parents. Increasingly, however, it seems that those in positions of power and authority, while professing undying love for their children, would prefer to share only when the young approach on bended knee, rather than when they look them in the eye.
In some ways the young have always been a problem for their elders, but this is no excuse to continue the practice of indifference and hostility towards them. Neil Postman lamented the disappearance of childhood and adulthood in the 1980s, but from the vantage point of the second decade of the twenty-first century I would welcome its demise. Rethinking these unequal identities and the assumptions they encode would constitute an opportunity to rebuild the foundation of adult-child relations on the basis of mutual respect, rather than mutual antagonism. This is a grandiose objective. But if there is anything this thesis has demonstrated, it is that sometimes, important issues and ideas have the most surprisingly humble beginnings.
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