

# Understanding Girls

by Nancy Zwiers, CEO of Funosophy, Inc.

Entertainment properties like Hannah Montana and High School Musical aside, there have been very few new breakout girls' toy brands in the past few years. Perhaps the industry has been distracted by dazzling technologies or maybe not enough decision makers are women who have an intuitive first-hand understanding of girls. Regardless, we can all benefit from a deeper understanding of girls' basic emotional needs in order to create product lines that really resonate.

One of the most important insights into girls is that there is a marked difference between what appeals to younger girls (3-6) and older girls (7-plus). Younger girls, preoccupied with establishing their gender identity, are attracted to hyper-feminine characteristics in products. Pink and sparkly is the sweet spot. In addition, these young girls are still in the "magical thinking" stage of cognitive development (Piaget), and therefore gravitate to fantasy themes. It's not surprising, then, that Disney Princesses are so perennially popular. At age 7 or 8, girls respond to more reality-based looks and themes. For example, tween girls are so hooked on what is on-trend in popular culture, whereas younger girls seem somewhat immune to trends.

Although the execution will be different for younger girls and older girls, the emotional needs addressed by successful girls' product lines are almost the same:

**Beauty** – girls seek beauty every-

where, from their own personal appearance to their personal surroundings to the world around them. A successful girls' product must be aesthetically pleasing and often focuses on enabling girls to create beauty.

**Glamour** – girls aspire to live exciting, over-the-top fantasy lives. Think about ways your product could allow girls to play out glamorous, aspirational events like being the belle of the ball, a fashion diva, or a pop star. Hannah Montana, Cheetah Girls, and High School Musical are great examples of entertainment-based glamour targeting girls.

**Nurturing/Mothering** – girls have a deeply rooted need to give and receive love. They yearn to take care of someone or something, whether that is a younger sibling, a baby doll, or a pet. Whereas boys want to fight evil and overcome it, girls want to rescue things from danger but not necessarily fight the danger itself. Anything cute and vulnerable cries out to be nurtured. Soft and cuddly plush can comfort and nurture girls right back.

**Self-Expression** – even at a very young age, girls have an innate need to express their own individuality (like picking their own clothes or drawing and coloring). This need increases with age, which is why fashion brands become so important. Today's girls expect to be able to customize products to suit their individual styles—everything from their room décor and jewelry to the play lists on their iPods and their online avatars. This is why the arts and

crafts category is so universally appealing to girls.

**Social Connection** – girls grow and discover themselves in relation to others. Consequently, they place a huge emphasis on social connections and friendships. This is why products that facilitate social connections, like chat rooms and cell phones, appeal to girls so much.

**Mastery** – girls are competitive, too. Whether competing against themselves or against others as part of a team, they want to succeed. This need to succeed manifests both in traditional ways (mastering levels of video games) and in girl-specific ways (having the most buddies on Club Penguin).

**Silliness** – like boys, girls like to be silly, but they tend to express it in different ways. In contrast to the "gross" silliness boys crave, girls appreciate verbal quips and puns or the physical humor that flows from relationships. SpongeBob SquarePants appeals to both boys and girls.

Girls are complex creatures, but they come programmed with several key emotional needs. A product line that addresses these needs in a meaningful and different way is a key lever in captivating girls. ■

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*Nancy Zwiers is CEO of Funosophy, Inc., a kids' marketing and product design firm specializing in preschool and girls' products. For more information, call (562) 436-5251 or email nancy@funosophy.com.*