Beneath the Backpack: Interrogating Gender Appropriation and (Re)Production in *Dora the Explorer*

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**Abstract**

In this feminist intervention, I interrogate *Dora the Explorer*, the popular pre-school TV program and the brand associated with it, in order to better understand the gender roles and subjectivities that Dora appropriates and (re)produces. Drawing on third wave feminist scholarship, this social semiotic analysis examines the ways in which *Dora the Explorer* presents a contradictory image of Dora as, on the one hand, an empowered, curious and active female subject and a traditional, feminine subject, on the other. I claim that the Dora brand ultimately and effectively resolves this contradiction by enabling the latter representation through its dainty, ultra-feminine products. This hegemonic (re)production of traditional gendered, feminine subjects, I argue, is both informed and propagated by the political economy of contemporary American society and culture.

**Keywords**

gender reproduction; child consumerism; *Dora the Explorer*; third wave feminism; children's television; gendered toys
Bibliography


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