

FROM CHILDHOOD TO TWEENHOOD

FROM CHILDHOOD TO TWEENHOOD: AN EXAMINATION OF THE IMPACT OF  
MARKETING FASHION TO TWEENS ON TWEEN SELF-IMAGE AND  
MOTHER-CHILD INTERACTIONS

By

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## **ABSTRACT**

Scholars and laypersons are increasingly concerned about the marketing of inappropriate adult fashions directly to *tweens*, children between the ages of eight and thirteen. Using a symbolic interactionist approach, I consider strategies used to market tween fashion images, and their influence on tween self-image and mother-child relationships.

Through content analysis of images in two magazines, *Today's Parent* and *Tiger Beat*, I establish that contradictions exist between traditional images of childhood as a time of innocence, and more recent adult or sexualized images of tweenhood; that both these types of representations are gendered; and that both reinforce gender roles in childhood and tweenhood alike.

Through qualitative interviews with mothers and tweens, I explore the meanings they associate with tween fashion and their influence on tween self-image. Both mothers and tweens are somewhat influenced by marketing strategies that use brands, logos and celebrity role models to market tween fashion. However, mothers use maternal "gatekeeping" strategies such as solo shopping, and control of financial resources, to mitigate the influence of fashion marketing on their tweens, and to avoid disagreements with their children over potentially inappropriate fashion styles.

Tweens themselves actively filter corporate messages based on their own internalized gendered meanings learned through socialization. The opinions of their mothers, primarily, and their peers, influence their assessments of clothing as appropriate or inappropriate, regardless of marketing strategies. Notably, tween girls use internalized gendered meanings to differentiate between fashions that convey a "good girl" image or a "trampy" image, reproducing patriarchal versions of women as madonnas or whores, even at this age. Despite moral panics, a symbolic interactionist approach inspired by the principles of the new sociology of childhood, privileges tweens' voices and reveals them to be embedded within social networks that temper the influence of tween fashion.

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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

In recent years, scholars have identified for study the role that fashion, geared to adults but marketed to adolescents, plays in identity formation and change. In particular, there is growing concern among scholars and laypersons alike that female children are being increasingly commodified, detached from their social networks, and turned into sexual objects (*sexualized*) by corporations.<sup>1</sup> Further, traditional notions of what constitutes childhood itself are being altered through the marketing of adult fashions to children.

*Tweens*, primarily considered children between the ages of eight and thirteen, have been identified as a new marketing niche for fashion styles marketed directly to them (cf. Albanese, 2009:222; Cook and Kaiser, 2004; Schor, 2004:56). Many of the concerns expressed about the commodification and sexualization of children are focused on this age group, seemingly a new developmental stage between childhood and the teenaged years. Tweens, for example, are now targeted by brand name companies, retailers and manufacturers through marketing and advertising tactics, especially in the world of fashion.<sup>2</sup> Schor (2004:13) has noted that this current generation of tweens is the most "brand-oriented, consumer-involved, and materialist generation in history."<sup>3</sup> Further, between April 2007 and 2008, it is estimated that American tweens spent close to \$34 billion on clothing (Teen Power, 2008).

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Bissonnette (2007), Cook and Kaiser (2004), George (2007), Kopkowski (2008), McRobbie, (1997), Mitchell and Reid-Walsh (2005), Pilcher (2010), Rawlins (2006), Russell and Tyler (2002), Schor (2004), Whyte (2007).

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Bissonnette (2007), Cook and Kaiser (2004), George (2007), Kopkowski (2008), Pilcher (2010), Rawlins (2006), Russell and Tyler (2002), Schor (2004), Whyte (2007).

<sup>3</sup> See also, Cook (1999), Comiteau (2003), Gunter & Furnham (1998), and Levine (2006).

A basic assumption about childhood in Western societies, embodied in law, is that children are inherently different from adults, that they are *innocents* in need of nurturing and protection (Handel *et al.*, 2007). Yet, a quick look at fashion trends targeted at tweens today reveals that these fashions embody dichotomous images of childhood. On the one hand, these trends emphasize childhood motifs, reflected in clothing from *The Disney Store* and *The Children's Place*. Capitalizing on fairytales like Cinderella, these fashions reproduce a gendered identity through the provision of stereotypical female and male children's clothing (cf. Moseley, 2002).

On the other hand, clothing styles for female tweens in particular, who because of their age might still be considered children, tend toward reproducing what can only be characterized as overtly sexual or, colloquially, *raunchy* images.<sup>4</sup> For example, slogans on tween girl clothing such as "Made You Look", or "Jailbait" reflect a radical departure from how children were once conceptualized (George, 2007; Kopkowski, 2008; Rawlins, 2006:366; Whyte, 2007:10).

Although it is argued that children are being commodified by these marketing tactics and childhood identity is being sexualized, I suggest that the only way to know the impact of these changes is to ask children directly about it, rather than assuming it as a truth or reality. Accordingly, I explore these issues by using an interpretive approach that engages tweens and focuses on how these processes influence tween self-identity, and interactions with others such as mothers and peers.

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Bissonnette (2007), Cook and Kaiser (2004), George (2007), Kopkowski (2008), Pilcher (2010), Rawlins (2006), Russell and Tyler (2002), Schor (2004), Whyte (2007).

This dissertation research draws on symbolic interactionism, an interpretive theoretical approach, to examine, as an empirical question, the roles that popular culture, and more specifically fashion, play in the formation and construction of childhood identity within a *Canadian* context. I focus on the tween phenomenon, wherein girls in particular, and less so boys, are exposed to and adopt adult clothing styles at odds with traditional notions of childhood identity.

On a theoretical level, I am particularly interested in using interactionism to understand the generic social processes informing the meanings associated with understandings of childhood, tweenhood, appropriate fashions, and the presentation of a tween self-image. Accordingly, I first explore the images of tween-aged fashion presented in two popular culture magazines, *Today's Parent* and *Tiger Beat* magazine. Second, to understand this meaning-making process on a micro and/or interactional level, I explore how mothers, and, importantly, tween-aged children as social actors, make decisions about fashion purchases and self-image projection based on the meanings associated with clothing, and ultimately, the image the clothing projects.

Through processes of commodification, it has also been argued that children are being separated out and/or detached from the influence of family through direct marketing by corporations (c.f. Boden *et al.*, 2004; Boden, 2006; Cook and Kaiser, 2004; Schor, 2004). Addressing this as an empirical question, I analyze the dynamics of the mother-tween relationship, and address the ways in which this relationship is impacted by these competing conceptualizations of tweenhood, as evidenced by current fashion trends today. I also explore how both mothers and tweens negotiate these meanings through

interaction, and the consequences of this interaction for the evaluation and consumption of tween fashion. Through the use of an interpretive lens which focuses on meanings and micro-level interactions, I also contribute to the broader sociological literature on the role of popular culture in identity formation and change.

### **The Sociological Context**

Sociologists have extensively explored the social worlds of children, their experiences, and processes of meaning-making about childhood as a concept. Elkin and Handel (1972; 2007), for example, conducted extensive research on the significance of play to children's development. Denzin's (1977:17) research focused on understandings of childhood as socially constructed and a product of meaning-making; and Best's (1990) research focused on the rhetoric used by claims-makers to construct children as "threatened". In her classic work, *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children*, Zelizer (1985) traced the evolution of the social meanings of children from valueless and, therefore, consigned to baby farmers, to valued, sentimentalized black-market babies in the adoption market.

Within the symbolic interactionist tradition, the study of children has also yielded foundational work on the subject.<sup>5</sup> In an extensive review of this literature, Cahill (2003: 860) identified Mandell's (1984; 1988) study of children in day care centers, and Corsaro's (1985) study of preschool role playing activities, as significant in illustrating the complex dynamics that inform children's interaction processes within peer groups. Adler

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<sup>5</sup> For a complete discussion of the contributions of symbolic interactionist research to the study of children, see Cahill (2003:857-874). See also, Fine (1988), Cahill (1989), Thorne (1993).

and Adler's (1987) study of children and the peer group, was also identified as important by Cahill (2003:866) for its study of processes of power and/or "status dynamics" within these groupings.<sup>6</sup>

Fashion, within sociology, has also been extensively studied, and understood as symbolic of social class; as an extension of self-image presentation; and, as part of the process of reinforcing patriarchal ideologies of masculinity and femininity (Barber and Lobel, 1952; Davis, 1992; Entwistle, 2000; Kaiser, 1990; 1991; Mead, 1934; Simmel, 1904; Stone, 1970; Veblen, 1899). Further, a well-established sociological literature on identity formation and development exists, as well as a body of research studying the role of the body in identity work or "projects" (Atkinson, 2004; Dunn, 1997; Gubrium and Holstein, 2000; Mead, 1934; Shilling, 2003; Stryker and Burke, 2000).

The role of fashion in identity has also been extensively investigated in adulthood and late adolescence (Krafft, 1991; Gutman and Mills, 1982; Thompson and Haytko, 1997). However, less research has been carried out on female and male tweens, and what has been done, although insightful, has not made use of an interpretive theoretical approach in any systematic way.<sup>7</sup> Yet, children too are social actors with much to teach

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<sup>6</sup> See also, Fine (1988), Mintz (2007), March (2000).

<sup>7</sup> Although some studies have examined the decision-making processes accompanying fashion purchases by tweens and their parents, much of this research on fashion and tween identity formation and change has been situated within cultural studies, critical theory, consumer and/or marketing research studies, or human geography studies. Further, much of this research has been conducted using British, Australian or American tweens and their parents (cf. Boden, 2006a, 2006b; Boden *et al.*, 2004; Brookes and Kelly, 2009; Cook, 1995; 2008; Cook and Kaiser, 2004; Crewe and Collins, 2006; Pilcher, 2010; Rawlins, 2006; Schor, 2004). Importantly, while Pilcher's (2010:468) study analyzed the meanings children attach to particular fashions, the study itself was not an interactionist study. Instead, it adopted a more "structural" approach, suggesting that "'what to wear' (where and when) remains structured and is bounded...." Further, in her recent 2011 article, Pilcher stated she was using Goffman's "presentation of self", but did not utilize these principles in any concrete way that was attentive to meanings in an interactionist sense. Indeed, even studies of Canadian youth have not utilized an interactionist-based perspective. While Currie (1999), Currie

us about basic processes of identity formation, in particular, in terms of the influences of a changing popular culture versus parental socialization on how they view themselves (Côté et al., 2002; 2006; Blackman, 2005). My research, therefore, makes the following contributions. Situating this research within a Canadian context, I make use of an interactionist approach that privileges the voice of children and is attentive to the meanings and social processes influencing mothers' and tween-aged children's decisions regarding fashion, identity and self-presentation.

### **Research Questions**

Little sociological work using an interpretive theory approach has been done in Canada on the influence of adult fashions marketed to tweens on their identity formation, or the decision-making processes accompanying fashion purchases by tweens and their parents. Accordingly, I have structured this dissertation research to accomplish the following tasks: Using a symbolic interactionist approach, (a) I examine how popular culture, embodied in fashion, appears to conceptualize tween identity today. (b) I explore in detail how contradictions exist in two popular culture magazines between traditional constructions of childhood and more recent images of tweens. (c) I consider fashion industry marketing strategies themselves, in particular as these are used to market tween fashions to this age group; for example the use of brands, logos and celebrity role models. (d) I then explore the perceptions of mothers about the meanings they attach to tween

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*et al.*, (2006; 2007), Kelly *et al.*, (2006), Pomerantz *et al.*, (2004) have provided very insightful accounts of Canadian youths' identity experiences, these studies are situated within the feminist literature and examine the "discursive position" of self, the "oppressive prescriptions of femininity" and the resistance to "emphasized femininity."



fashion and their role in influencing tween self-image. Most importantly, (e) I explore how tweens themselves make sense of the processes involved in developing and projecting a particular self-image through fashion, and the influences of primary and secondary groups on these processes. Finally, (f) I consider the extent to which mothers and their tweens feel that these corporate marketing strategies influence how they view tween fashion, whether they purchase it, and how this impacts their mother-tween interactions.

To address these research questions, I make use of a qualitative research design inspired by the new sociology of childhood (see James, Jenks and Prout, 1999) that includes (a) a descriptive content analysis of two popular culture magazines – *Today's Parent*, which targets parents, and *Tiger Beat*, which targets tweens, focusing on issues related to identity and fashion in childhood/tweenhood; and (b) in-depth interviews with thirty-three respondents - seventeen mothers and sixteen tweens, of whom twelve were girls and four were boys. The focus of my research was exploratory, and my primary research goal was to generate insights for further research on these issues utilizing a larger sample.

### **Organization of the Dissertation Chapters**

In the next three chapters, I discuss in detail the historical and theoretical literatures informing this research. In Chapter Two, I provide an overview of the literature on historical understandings of children and childhood. I document, not only the malleable nature of these conceptualizations, but also the contradictions inherent in them. For example, childhood has been traditionally conceptualized as a time of

innocence, and children as *cherubs* in need of protection. However, children have also been viewed as *chattel* to be worked for economic gain.

I also demonstrate that historically, fashion and clothing have played a role in how children are identified; for example, certain types of clothing were worn by individuals to identify themselves as members of a particular social class. This in turn translated into how they dressed their children (Cunningham, 1995). According to Albanese (2009:222) the first appearance of "tweens" in the literature, as a separate stage in childhood development, was in a "marketing journal article" (cf. Hall, 1987; Cook and Kaiser, 2004).

As I discuss in some detail in this chapter, tweens are neither regarded as young children nor as teenagers; nor are they considered cherubs or chattel. Rather, as I outline, marketers have identified tweens as a new consumer group, and have begun to market to them - through fashion apparel items, electronics, and other consumer items - new and often conflicting identities associated with being a tween (Albanese, 2009; Brookes and Kelly, 2009; Bissonnette, 2007; Cook and Kaiser, 2004; Pilcher, 2010; 2011; Rawlins, 2006; Schor, 2004).

In Chapter Three, I review sociological approaches to the study of fashion, including functionalism, feminism, and late postmodernism, and the research literature generated by these approaches. I conclude with an examination of the literature focused on fashion and its relationship to how young adults identify themselves. Based on this examination, I situate within the literature, the research questions informing this research.

In Chapter Four, I discuss in detail how the theoretical assumptions and concepts of symbolic interactionism, as reflected in the Chicago School approach, are used to address the theoretical and substantive questions informing this research. As symbolic interactionism conceptualizes actors as self-reflexive and possessing agency, they are viewed as able to create and recreate themselves and their environment. I argue that this contextual framework is essential for understanding the processes of adopting, modifying and/or rejecting the meanings and definitions surrounding childhood, the emergence of tweens as a new identity construct, and the assessments of appropriate or inappropriate fashion choices for tweens. I also argue that tween fashion and its acceptance or rejection become meaningful for identity through interaction with, and the reaction of social actors (see Musolf, 2003: 103; see also Blumer, 1969a2; Mead, 1934).

In Chapter Five, I discuss the qualitative methodological approach of the Chicago School of symbolic interactionism and the principals of the new sociology of childhood as a methodological tool; the methodological issues arising from the study of children and tweens, including children and tweens as a distinct research group; ethical concerns about doing research with tween-aged children; and child and tween-friendly techniques and strategies.

In this regard, I outline a new methodological approach using magazines and a digital camera/recorder as a child and/or tween-friendly research technique to enable me to discuss fashion and identity development in an age-appropriate manner suitable for tween-aged participants.

I also discuss in detail the design of the interview schedule, the questions used to address the issues under review, and the data analysis techniques used for the qualitative interviews. Finally, I briefly describe the frame analysis used to carry out content analysis on the two popular culture magazines chosen for their focus on parents or tweens.

In Chapter Six, I present the results arising from the content analysis of the two magazines chosen for study: *Today's Parent* and *Tiger Beat*. Using a descriptive content analysis rooted in frame analysis (Entman, 1993), I document in detail the different approaches taken to the selection and placement of images of childhood and/or tweenhood, the fashions worn, and the use or non-use of celebrities as fashion icons and role-models for magazine readers. I provide evidence to support the contention that fashion marketed to parents and tweens is highly gendered and reinforces gender roles regardless of age. I also consider what information is not selected for inclusion in these two magazines, in terms of the selection and salience of images of children and tweens, and offer explanations for its exclusion.

At the end of the chapter, I re-examine the frames identified in *Today's Parent* and *Tiger Beat* using the theoretical concepts of *promotionalism* and *the cult of celebrity* (Knight and Greenberg, 2002; Lawrence, 2009). I consider how these frames are created as marketing tactics that may or may not act to influence consumer behaviour.

In Chapter Seven, I discuss the results arising from in-depth interviews with mothers of tween-aged children. First, I consider whether mothers perceive that childhood has changed over the years and in what ways. Second, I discuss the extent to

which these mothers feel that their tween-aged children are influenced by tween fashions in creating and projecting a particular self-image. Third, I explore with mothers whether they feel their tween-aged children are influenced by primary and secondary group interactions in creating and projecting a particular self-image. I also discuss mothers' perceptions of the increasing "sexualization" of fashions marketed to tweens, their age-appropriateness, and the perceived consequences for mother-child relations.

In Chapter Eight, I discuss the results arising from my in-depth interviews with tween-aged children. I consider to what extent tweens perceive that they are influenced by others, and/or marketing strategies such as fashion brands and celebrity role models in creating and projecting a particular self-image. I also detail tweens' own perceptions of and their reactions to the increasing "sexualization" of fashions marketed to them and note the gender differences that emerge. Finally, I consider whether tweens feel that inappropriate clothing items are a potential source of disagreements between them and their mothers and if so, why.

In Chapter Nine, I provide a general summary of the research, and discuss the theoretical, methodological, and substantive contributions of the thesis. I also consider the limitations of the thesis and offer suggestions for future research in this area.

To conclude, this timely research has the potential to make theoretical and substantive contributions to several areas of sociological inquiry including the social construction of identity; the sociology of childhood and the family; social problems, and the sociology of popular culture. The research also contributes to both the scholarly and public debates currently underway about the increasing commodification and

"sexualization" of children through popular culture; and the role of tween fashion for tween self-image and/or identity formation. In the next chapter, I begin with a discussion of the historical conceptions of children and childhood.

## **CHAPTER TWO: HISTORICAL CONCEPTIONS OF CHILDREN AND CHILDHOOD**

What are children and what is childhood? The meanings of children and childhood are matters of definition which are constantly changing over time. Indeed, what does this relatively new term tween mean? Statistics Canada (2007) has defined a child as "blood, step- or adopted sons and daughters (regardless of age or marital status) who are living in the same dwelling as their parent(s), as well as grandchildren in the households where there are no parents present...."<sup>8</sup> The Oxford Dictionary of Sociology, on the other hand, has defined a child: "...to mean either an offspring or someone who has not reached full economic and jural status as an adult in a society. Individuals in the latter state are passing through an age-related period known as childhood" (Marshall, 1998c:69).

Along with these changes, therefore, new categories and finer distinctions like adolescence, and more recently, tweens, have developed. According to Schor (2004:56), tweens are eight to thirteen year olds<sup>9</sup> who are "in-between teens and children" and represent an "ambiguous, gendered, and age-delineated marketing and merchandising category" (Albanese, 2009:222; see also, Cook and Kaiser, 2004:203).<sup>10</sup> Cook and Kaiser (2004:203) have further argued that these marketing tactics "produce and reproduce a 'female consuming subject' who has generally been presumed to be white, middle or upper middle class and heterosexual." Various scholars have argued that tweens interpret their sense of self and identity in terms of varying conceptualizations of youth present in

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<sup>8</sup> As the guide was published online, I cannot provide pagination for this direct quote. The reader is referred to the webpage containing the dictionary at:  
[www12.statcan.ca/english/census06/reference/dictionary/fam007.cfm](http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census06/reference/dictionary/fam007.cfm).

<sup>9</sup> Schor (2004:56) has suggested that "tweens" can be as young as six years old.

<sup>10</sup> Carol Hall (1987) first used the term 'tween' in a "marketing journal article" (Albanese, 2009:222; see also, Cook and Kaiser, 2004).

society at any given time. Indeed, these childhood selves and identities, it is argued, emerge through processes of negotiation and interaction (Blumer 1969a; 1969b; Handel *et al.*, 2007; Mead, 1934).<sup>11</sup> In this chapter, I review the literature on historical conceptions of children and childhood and consider their impact on identity formation and change over time.<sup>12</sup>

### **The Evolution of Concepts of Children and Childhood**

"Cherubs, chattel and changelings" are terms often used to classify children (Lancy, 2008:2-3).<sup>13</sup> Indeed, throughout history, these contradictory conceptualizations of children have been documented by scholars as co-existing and/or alternating over time and from culture to culture. Western nations, in particular, have conceptualized children as cherubs (Lancy, 2008:2-3). This notion implies that children as a group are happy, playful and without cares or concerns, and that a major characteristic of these cherubs is their innocence (Lancy, 2003:2-3; see also, Handel *et al.*, 2007; James, Jenks and Prout, 1998:62; Wyness, 2006).<sup>14</sup> Chattel, on the other hand, is a term used to describe notions of children as one's property or when "children are/were treated as the property of the head of the household" (Lancy, 2008:3). Finally, Lancy (2008:3) has defined changelings

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<sup>11</sup> Boocock and Spencer (2005:7) have suggested the three "C's" of analysis: context, comparisons and change. These are pertinent in understanding children and childhood, as selves and identities are dynamic (see also, Albanese, 2009; Blumer 1969a; 1969b; Boocock and Scott, 2005; Handel *et al.*, 2007; Maines, 2001; Manis and Meltzer, 1978; Mead, 1934; James, Jenks and Prout, 1998; Lancy 2008; Wyness, 2006).

<sup>12</sup> This chapter is indebted to Albanese (2009), Lancy (2009), and Schor (2004) in particular, for their expertise in the area.

<sup>13</sup> Lancy (2003:2) referred to a cherub as "a plump, angelic, child-like creature that personifies innocence."

<sup>14</sup> There are inherent issues with viewing children as cherubs which I discuss below momentarily (cf. Lancy, 2008:2).



as "unwanted children" – for example female children where male children are culturally preferred.<sup>15</sup>

These classificatory terms are useful in understanding the creation of childhood as an 'identity' construct. As Stone (1970:399) has argued, self-identity is "what and where an individual is", arising through the process of interaction and socialization with others (see also, Blumer, 1969a; Goffman, 1959; 1963; 1972; Manis and Meltzer, 1978; Mead, 1934; Stone, 1970). Utilizing Lancy's (2008) schema, I examine the evolution of children and childhood as identity constructs over time.

### **Existence of Childhood as an Identity Construct**

Philippe Aries (1962) was the first important scholar to theorize about children and childhood.<sup>16</sup> According to Aries (1962:28,33), the young (i.e. children) and old (i.e. adults) were once part of the same social group. Thus, children, as a social group, were not unique to adults in terms of social or personal identities.<sup>17</sup> Aries (1962:28-38) argued that the general "indifference" towards the young symbolized an absence of the concept of childhood *per se* (cf. Albanese, 2009:6-8; Cunningham, 1995). For Aries (1962), childhood as a distinct stage and identity construct first appeared with the emergence of the "married family" (i.e. mother and father married with one or more children) (Wyness, 2006:13). The understanding of childhood as a distinct phase of life was evident in a 17th century paintings which showed a "parental gaze" towards children that strongly contrasted with earlier medieval images where children were depicted as miniature adults

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<sup>15</sup> The concept of changeling will not be discussed in this review of children and childhood. Please refer to Lancy (2008:3) for a discussion of this concept.

<sup>16</sup> I discuss the adolescent identity stage further in this chapter.

<sup>17</sup> Aries (1962:28-38) has argued children were similar to adults, just "smaller" in size.

(cf. Albanese, 2009:7; Aries, 1962:47; Wyness, 2006:13). Further, Aries (1962:47) has argued that the upper classes in 17th century European society first acknowledged the stage of childhood which was characterized by a

growing recognition of children's special need for attention, nurture, and guidance accompanied by an increase attention to schooling...a more formal distinction was made between childhood and adulthood, especially among the upper classes who could afford to protect children longer (Albanese, 2009:7).

However, not all scholars agree with Aries' (1962) view of how childhood was understood in the past. First, some scholars have argued that Aries (1962) did not account for any differentiation between children and adults until well into the late 16<sup>th</sup> century (Wyness, 2006:13; see also, Orme, 2002:5). Yet, Orme (2002:5) has noted that "adults [in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries] regarded childhood as a distinct phase or phases of life"<sup>18</sup> as evidenced by cultural practices in Medieval times. Second, Aries (1962) claimed that children were considered nuisances in society. However, examples from antiquity undermine Aries' (1962) claims (cf. Cunningham, 1995). Ancient Greek and Roman cultures, for example, honoured children and expended time and energy on their upbringing. In ancient Greece, families mourned a child's passing with the creation of a special burial ground. Museums in Greece showcase burial graves of children laden with toys, food, and jewellery to bring into the afterlife. Moreover, special toys that catered to children's play needs were evident during this time period, revealing the concept of childhood as a stage of play. Cunningham (1995) has argued that childhood was indeed

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<sup>18</sup> See also, Wyness (2006:13).

considered a life-stage and existed as a distinct identity long before Aries (1962) acknowledged these in his theory.<sup>19</sup>

Sommerville (1982) too has presented evidence from Egyptian culture suggesting the existence of childhood as a distinct stage at an earlier date (cf. Lancy, 2008:4). Sommerville (1982) has also argued that the Spartan's "Skinnerian system of childrearing", prohibition of infanticide in 318CE, creation of religiously organized "foundling homes in 8th century CE", condemnation of "corporeal punishment from the 13th century onwards" and the move towards universal schooling all indicate an understanding of children as different from adults very early in history (Lancy, 2008:4). Further, Lancy (2008:4) has argued that a cherub conceptualization of childhood was predominant during much of this period of time, although it is unlikely the Spartans shared this view.

From ancient times to the medieval era, therefore, children have been active and recognized participants in family and social life. However, despite the recognition of children as a social group and childhood as a distinct identity, these conceptualizations have been neither uniformly positive nor universal. During the 17<sup>th</sup> century, for example, moralists and Christian reformers restricted children's access to adult social groupings (Wyness, 2006). Reformers believed children lacked the proper etiquette and social behaviours to successfully integrate into adult society (Wyness, 2006). Notably, etiquette

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<sup>19</sup> See also, Handel *et al.* (2007), Lancy (2008), Orme (2002), Sommerville (1982), and Wyness (2006).

schools emerged to teach children manners and other types of socially acceptable behaviours (cf. Wyness, 2006).<sup>20</sup>

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Shorter (1977) noted that the affluent middle and upper classes embraced a new definition of children in relation to motherhood. Fewer mothers employed wet nurses,<sup>21</sup> not only because they were no longer considered necessary, but also out of a desire to spend more time with their children (cf. Shorter, 1977; Wyness, 2006). Shorter (1977) observed that the main factor in this shift in mothering behaviour among the affluent was the emergence of the so-called *Romantic era* and the concomitant emphasis placed on children in the family unit (cf. Wyness, 2006:13). What is most pertinent, however, was the greater *centrality* of children in both family and social life and a prevailing sentiment that children were loveable, endearing, innocent cherubs.

To conclude this section, the notion of innocence as a characteristic of children during childhood was predominant in many historical periods (cf. Handel *et al.*, 2007; Lancy, 2008; Shorter, 1977; Sommerville, 1982; Wyness, 2006). However, despite this conceptualization of children as innocent, most, in reality, lived in poverty and as a consequence, had challenging childhoods (Kamp and Wittaker, 2002:38-39; Lancy, 2008:2-3).

### **Chattel: A New Identity for Children and the Stage of Childhood**

Indeed, views began to shift regarding the place of children in society. As noted at the beginning of this chapter, throughout history, contradictory conceptualizations of

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<sup>20</sup> See also, Aries (1962), Goffman (1963), Mead (1934).

<sup>21</sup>Wet nurses have existed since antiquity. Most used a wet nurse out of the inability to breast-feed (i.e. illness) or preference not to (i.e. indicator of higher classes; that is, no need to do it yourself when you can hire someone else to) (cf. Shorter, 1977; Wyness, 2006).

children have been documented by scholars as co-existing and/or alternating over time and from culture to culture. Thus, while some children were considered innocent cherubs at various points in time, at the same or at other times, other children were viewed as chattel. As Lancy (2008:2-4) has observed, "working class children" throughout history were often viewed as chattel or the "property" of their parents or businesses. Children were considered objects that were owned and their self-worth and/or usefulness was linked to their ability to fulfill the needs of their owner (Handel *et al.*, 2007; Lancy, 2008:2-4; Wyness, 2006).

The chattel period reflected the real need for children to economically aid the family.<sup>22</sup> Notably, children of the late 18<sup>th</sup> to early-to-mid 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in the United Kingdom and in North America had considerable economic assets (Wyness, 2006; see also, Forastieri, 2002; Handel *et al.*, 2007).<sup>23</sup> Indeed, some working class children were conceptualized as household property among the working classes and sent out to labour in order to support the family (cf. Forastieri, 2002; Handel *et al.*, 2007; Lancy, 2008; Wyness, 2006).

Groups concerned about this economic exploitation of children pressed for legislation governing children's labour. As early as 1832 in New England, individuals tried to reform the definition of children as workers and institute child labour laws (Child Labour Public Education Project, 2010).<sup>24</sup> Children had a legal obligation to attend

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<sup>22</sup> Not all families viewed and/or defined their child (or childhood) in such utilitarian terms.

<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, children of middle to upper class backgrounds were not engaged in such work-related activities (cf. Forastieri, 2002; Handel *et al.*, 2007; Lancy, 2008; Wyness, 2006).

<sup>24</sup> As this is an online resource, I cannot provide pagination for this information. The reader is referred to the webpage containing the information at:  
[http://www.continuetolearn.uiowa.edu/laborctr/child\\_labor/about/us\\_history.html](http://www.continuetolearn.uiowa.edu/laborctr/child_labor/about/us_history.html).

school (Handel *et al.*, 2007). Therefore, any employed school-age child was a *child labourer* (Child Labour Public Education Project, 2010, Handel *et al.*, 2007). In fact, mandatory schooling became a way to deal with the child labour problems: educating children instead of having them out in the workforce (Handel *et al.*, 2007).<sup>25</sup> However, it was not until 1938 in the United States that minimum wages and "regulations on hours of work passed through legislation" (Child Labour Public Education Project, 2010).<sup>26</sup>

Through the enactment of child labour laws and mandatory schooling, Western nations rejected the notion of children as chattel and reestablished the ideal of the innocent child (cf. Handel *et al.*, 2007; Lancy, 2008). Today, Western law defines the amount and type of labour children can engage in based on 'age appropriateness' (Handel *et al.*, 2007; Levine, 2003; Wyness, 2006). Further, many Western nations began to view childhood as a "period of development that involves interaction with family and establishment of interpersonal networks that enhance children's understanding of their social surroundings and how to act within them" (Singer, 2005:123-124).

However, these laws are not universally accepted. While chattel were primary working class individuals in the United Kingdom and North American, today there is greater variability in that definition. On a global level, there continue to be cultural and national variations in laws governing the economic role of children. According to the International Labour Organization, over "120 million youths between five and fourteen years of age work full-time" (Forastieri, 2002:9). Child labour is alive and well in many

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<sup>25</sup> See also, Child Labour Public Education Project (2010), Levine (2003), Wyness (2006).

<sup>26</sup> As this is an online resource, I cannot provide pagination for this direct quote. The reader is referred to the webpage containing the information at:  
[http://www.continuetolearn.uiowa.edu/laborctr/child\\_labor/about/us\\_history.html](http://www.continuetolearn.uiowa.edu/laborctr/child_labor/about/us_history.html).

countries, especially third world and developing countries. Child labour is essential for family survival in some of these countries. In others, it is forced upon children without their consent (Bass, 2004; Forastieri, 2002). Indeed, the laws in many developing countries continue to define children as workers, and therefore, chattel. As a result, socialization into adult roles occurs much earlier.<sup>27</sup> This conceptualization of the role of children contrasts sharply with the values of Western societies that claim to protect children from the work force and adult-based responsibilities. A Canadian child's sense of self-identity and personal responsibility may be very different, therefore, from that of a child the same age in a small African village. However, this depends on class and other socioeconomic divisions.

### **Cherub Reversion: Childhood Identity as a Happy and Playful Period**

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Westernized ideals of childhood were realized in definitions of childhood as "a period in the life course characterized by social dependency, asexuality, and the obligation to be happy, with children having the right to protection and training but not to social or personal autonomy" (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998:62).

Indeed, in the twentieth century, childhood has been redefined along the cherub framework outlined earlier. While childhood has always existed, Western conceptions have recently emphasized the "free, happy, playful and innocent nature of children"; thus, there is little expectation of labour or work (James, Jenks, and Prout, 1998:62; see also, Handel *et al.*, 2007). The emphasis on work out of economic necessity, on the other hand, characterizes the stage of adulthood. In this economic sense, in North America

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<sup>27</sup> However, it is very likely that there are large class differences within developing countries.

childhood and adulthood are conceptualized as opposite ends of the spectrum. Childhood equates to a sense of play, freedom and innocence, whereas adulthood is a time of work, constraint and responsibility (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998:62; see also, Forastieri, 2002; Wyness, 2006).<sup>28</sup>

For the most part, today, Western nations view childhood as a responsibility-free and innocent stage in the life cycle; this is particular true of those from a middle to upper class background as lower class children often have to work, during their childhood years (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998:62). Importantly, *how* children and childhood are defined has consequences for how they are treated, interpreted, and the identities/selves they form. Thus, while childhood in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century has been considered a time of innocence, this innocence translates into "moral and social fragility" (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998:62). Parents feel, therefore, an instinctive need to protect children from harm and danger, based on their definition of "the kinds of strain ..." that children should avoid (Stryker, 1980:32). Indeed, some scholars have suggested that these definitions have contributed to an infantilization of children by prolonging schooling, raising the age of majority and further removing responsibility and agency from children's lives; very different than the recognition of childhood in early historical periods (Handel *et al.*, 2007; Wyness, 2006).

A basic assumption about childhood in 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century Westernized cultures then, is that children are fundamentally different from adults. Although assessments of

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<sup>28</sup> While childhood in the time of the Ancients also recognized the play stage through toys and games, children were still expected to work. Western twentieth century views of childhood, however, focuses on it as a 'work-free' stage of life (cf. Handel *et al.*, 2007; James, Jenks and Prout, 1998).



children can include the ability to care for themselves, maintain a level of responsibility and be independent, these are considered *developmental* issues associated with a process of maturing. However, given the meanings of childhood held by parents that de-emphasize responsibility, emphasize the importance of play, and focus on the need to protect, parents and/or caregivers do not treat children in the same manner as adults. For example, parents censor their speech when in the presence of children, avoiding profanities and "sex talk" (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998:62; see also, Mills, 1940). Discussing topics of an adult nature in front of children, it is felt, would undermine childhood as "innocent and asexual" (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998:62; Mills, 1940). Essentially, parents and/or caregivers protect children and reinforce their childhood identities through socialization. Parents and/or caregivers, for example, limit children's activities and the levels of responsibility they are given based on age appropriateness.

However, since World War II, there has been a further change in of the meanings of children and childhood and beliefs regarding child versus adult responsibilities (Alston, 2007; Ambert, 1992; Boocock and Scott, 2005; Handel *et al.*, 2007; Wyness, 2006). For example, as work and home responsibilities have become fluid and multiple, children are now often *not* exempt from adult-type responsibilities.<sup>29</sup> The emergence of the phenomenon of "latch key kids" illustrates this shift in meanings (Alston, 2007; American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 2004).<sup>30</sup> Latch key children are those who

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<sup>29</sup> As I will discuss further in this chapter, the creation of the life stage of "adolescence" further complicated these beliefs and conceptualizations. Adolescents are not adults, but not children: they are "sexually mature", but "not socially mature" (cf. Marshall, 1998d:7). As a result, adolescence began to separate children from adults, giving children increased responsibilities.

<sup>30</sup> As the guide was published online, I cannot provide pagination for this direct quote. The reader is referred to the webpage: [http://www.aboutourkids.org/articles/latch\\_key\\_children](http://www.aboutourkids.org/articles/latch_key_children).

return home after school to an "empty house" because their parents and/or caregivers are at work (Alston, 2007; American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 2004).<sup>31</sup>

It is estimated that close to seven million, white, middle-class children in the United States between five and thirteen years of age are "latch key kids" (Alston, 2007; American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 2004).<sup>32</sup>

The emergence of latch key kids has brought with it a different view of responsibility as it relates to children. Parents and/or caregivers come to define their children as capable of caring for themselves due to lack of other options, despite more general assumptions and laws about their need for supervision (Alston, 2007).<sup>33</sup> In essence, latch key kids are *no longer* conceptualized as innocents unable to care for themselves. Further, this phenomenon signals a larger trend in the shifts and/or transition of meanings linking innocence to childhood.

### **Not a Cherub, Not Yet an Adult: The Loss of Childhood Identity and Emergence of 'Tweens'?**

It could be argued that the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries have been a period of flux in terms of how to understand what childhood is and who is a child. For example, concerns have come to the fore that Western children, in particular, are being forced to grow up too quickly, that they are being given increased responsibilities too early, and have greater exposure to knowledge about adult spheres of life (Bissonnette, 2007; Cunningham,

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<sup>31</sup> As the guide was published online, I cannot provide pagination for this direct quote. The reader is referred to the webpage: [http://www.aboutourkids.org/articles/latch\\_key\\_children](http://www.aboutourkids.org/articles/latch_key_children).

<sup>32</sup> As the guide was published online, I cannot provide pagination for this direct quote. The reader is referred to the webpage: [http://www.aboutourkids.org/articles/latch\\_key\\_children](http://www.aboutourkids.org/articles/latch_key_children). Further, according to Alston (2007, [http://www.aboutourkids.org/articles/latch\\_key\\_children](http://www.aboutourkids.org/articles/latch_key_children)), latch-key kids also tend to live in safer neighborhoods than lower and working class children.

<sup>33</sup> See also, Ambert (1992), American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (2004).

1995; Postman, 1982; Schor, 2004).<sup>34</sup> This "loss/disappearance of childhood" hypothesis has come under fire as a "technological determinist[ic] [view]" which is grounded in a hatred for "the corrupting forces of electronic media" (Buckingham, 1998:55).<sup>35</sup> That is, some have argued that those who blame the loss of childhood on the media and social forces are mistaken.

Further, Giroux (1998) has argued that perhaps "the golden age" of innocence never even existed, and therefore, it is difficult for it to have "disappeared" (Albanese, 2009:220; see also, Buckingham, 1998; Vanobbergen, 2004). According to Giroux (1998), the notion of innocence has "allow[ed] adults to ignore the fact that children suffer from adult greed, power and recklessness, so often found in adult policies and practice" and that innocence is "aimed at promoting 'family values' and the views and goals of a dominant, Western, capitalist ideology" (Albanese, 2009:221). According to Schor (2004:23), for example, American children "directly influenced \$330 billion of adult purchasing in 2004 and 'evoked' another \$340 billion....that influence spending is growing at 20 percent per year. Global estimates for tween influence topped \$1 trillion in 2002." However, Boocock and Scott (2005) have suggested that these results skew the harsh reality: that a great proportion of Americans and others in Western developed nations are living in poverty.

There is some merit to this argument, as the discussions earlier have illustrated the fluidity and lack of world-wide consensus on definitions of children and childhood. In

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<sup>34</sup> According to Marshall (1998d:7), even Western adolescents are dependent on parents for support, given their perceived immaturity levels.

<sup>35</sup> See also, Albanese (2009:221), Giroux (1998), Postman (1982).

global terms, tens of thousands of children die annually worldwide of hunger and hunger related diseases (Boocock and Scott, 2005; Buckingham, 2000).<sup>36</sup> Moreover, in approximately forty countries, children between the ages of fourteen and eighteen are actively and "forcibly" recruited as child soldiers and are considered to represent a large amount of all individuals killed in battles for the past twenty years (Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2010; War Child Canada, 2010).<sup>37</sup> Yet, Westernized nations tend to hold onto the ideal of childhood innocence where these scenarios and statistic do (or wish they do) not exist. Notably, there is a great deal of social confusion when these notions and beliefs erode as I discuss below (cf. Albanese, 2009; Giroux, 1998).

### **Fashion, Tweens and Changing Identities**

Historically, fashion and clothing have played a role in the identification of children; for example, clothing worn by certain social class members or clothing which capitalized on the innocent image (cf. Cunningham, 1995). The more recent activities of the fashion industry and the changing consumer patterns of children/tweens and their parents suggest an erosion of the once traditional notions of childhood that stressed innocence and dependency. However, there is a degree of ambivalence emerging in Western nations regarding how children should, in fact, be dressed (cf. Bissonnette, 2007; Schor, 2004). Indeed, while children of all ages are facing this new phenomenon, it is tweens who encounter the greatest variations in identities linked to dress.

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<sup>36</sup> Of course, these are only the reported figures on poverty.

<sup>37</sup> As these two documents were published online, I cannot provide pagination for this information. The reader is referred to the following webpages: <http://www.child-soldiers.org/childsoldiers/child-soldiers> and <http://www.warchild.ca/>.

Tweens represent the new generation of "Millennials" or "Generation Yers" (KidFormation Series, July 2008:2). As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Schor (2004:56) has defined tweens as eight to thirteen year olds<sup>38</sup> who are "in-between teens and children" and represent an "ambiguous, gendered, and age-delineated marketing and merchandising category" (Albanese, 2009:222; see also, Cook and Kaiser, 2004:203). The first appearance of tweens in the literature was by Carol Hall in 1987 in a "marketing journal article" (Albanese, 2009:222; Cook and Kaiser, 2004). Tweens are not young children, but are not yet teenagers/young adults or adults. Further, tweens are not cherubs nor are they chattel (cf. Lancy, 2008:4). Rather, they represent a new age-based group that marketers have targeted. Specifically, marketers have begun to present new and often conflicting definitions of tween and childhood identities to tweens using fashion apparel items, electronics, and other consumer items (Boden, 2006a; 2006b; Boden *et al.*, 2004; Cook and Kaiser, 2004; Schor, 2004).

Evidently, tweens are believed to possess both adult and child characteristics, similar to adolescence. However, there are important distinctions between tweenhood and adolescence. Marshall (1998d:7) has referred to adolescence as "the phase in the life-cycle before the physical changes associated with puberty are socially recognized; or the transition from childhood to adulthood"; traditionally, adolescence is believed to begin around age thirteen and last until approximately eighteen or nineteen years of age (cf. Marshall, 1998d:7). Tweenhood occurs before on than adolescence; that is, tweens represent the intermediary stage between childhood and adolescence. However, similar to

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<sup>38</sup> Schor (2004:56) has suggested that "tweens" can be as young as six years old and Boden (2006a:291; 2006b) has noted that some authors consider tweens to be between the ages of seven and eleven.

the adolescent-stage, therefore, society often interprets "young people [as] sexually mature well before society acknowledges them as adults in other respects; and, because of education and training, they remain dependent on parents and guardians" (Marshall, 1998d:7). These children are just beginning to sexually mature, however, they are still socially immature and need the guidance of parents and other significant others. However, unlike adolescents of past generations, these tweens face greater and greater ambivalence in their identities, perceived characteristics and options available for dress.

Through the process of "tweening" or "kid-fluence", marketers and advertisers have conceptualized an ideal image of child or tween which contradicts previous definitions of childhood innocence once prevalent in Western industrialized nations (Schor, 2004:23).<sup>39</sup> This marketing, it is argued, has been characterized as part of the process of the "commodification" or "commercialization" of children and childhood (cf. Cook, 1999; Cook and Kaiser, 2004; Crewe and Collins, 2006; Russell and Tyler, 2002:619; Schor, 2004:13; Vanobbergen, 2004). In advertisements directed at this age group, for example, styles of dress inspired by the adult fashion world are more common. Further, pop icons like Miley Cyrus, Demi Lovato, Selena Gomez, Taylor Swift, the Jonas Brothers, Zac Efron, Robert Pattison, and Taylor Lautner who appeal to tweens, embody the cool look. Moreover, some have suggested that these tween fashions tend towards the sexualized, raunchier edge of adult fashions, especially for girls.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> See also, Albanese (2009), Cook and Kaiser (2004), and Hall (1987).

<sup>40</sup> See, for example, Albanese (2009), Bissonnette (2007), Boden (2006a; 2006b), Boden *et al.* (2004) Brookes and Kelly (2009), Cook and Kaiser (2004), Kopkowski (2008), Rawlins (2006), Schor (2004), Whyte (2007).

Indeed, this ambivalence is therefore reflected in how they are treated (as individuals), as well as through the production and marketing of goods. As a result of these dichotomous contradictions, children are often dressed in fashions/styles that reflect more adult-like characteristics. Indeed, concerns have also been expressed about the increasing sexualization or tweening of children, especially females, and the apparent reconstruction of childhood identity through particular clothing that favours sexualized adult fashions.<sup>41</sup> Children's worlds, it is argued, are becoming less differentiated from adults and this process is only intensified through dressing youth in more *adult* fashions. Albanese (2009:236), however, is quick to point out that tweens are not extremely different from "pre-teens" of past generations. She notes that advice columns in magazines of the 1940s "reveal that some girls wanted to wear adult-like clothing and makeup by the age of 12, while mothers preferred that they wait until ages 14-16. What differs, perhaps, is that the tween has become a marketable identity in itself" (cf. Cook and Kaiser, 2004:207).

Although there is debate about the increasing sexualization of children and challenges to childhood identity through fashion marking to tweens, they remain empirical questions for study. Indeed, these debates provides context for my study, in particular, (a) I begin by examining whether contradictions exist between traditional constructions of childhood and more recent images of children in popular culture; and (b) I explore how popular culture, embodied in part in fashion, appears to conceptualize

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<sup>41</sup> See, for example, Albanese (2009), Bissonnette (2007), Boden (2006a; 2006b), Boden *et al.* (2004) Brookes and Kelly (2009), Cook and Kaiser (2004), Kopkowski (2008), Rawlins (2006), Schor (2004), Whyte (2007).

tween identity today. I also examine the role these corporate and retail marketing strategies may play in influencing the perceptions of tweens and their parents around identity and fashion.

In this research, therefore, I address these concerns, using the theoretical perspective of the Chicago School of symbolic interaction to examine the connection between fashion, fashion marketing, and childhood identity. In the next chapter, I review the relevant sociological literature on youth, fashion and identity, in particular functionalist, feminist and late/postmodern perspectives on these issues. I conclude with a discussion of more specific research conducted on youth, children, fashion and identity.



### **CHAPTER THREE: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ON FASHION, IDENTITY AND YOUTH: THE EMERGENCE OF TWEENS AS A DEVELOPMENTAL STAGE AND A MARKETING NICHE**

#### **Introduction**

Within sociology, fashion has been understood as symbolic of social class; as an extension of self-image presentation; and, as part of the process of reinforcing patriarchal ideologies of masculinity and femininity (Barber and Lobel, 1952; Davis, 1992; Entwistle, 2000; Kaiser, 1990; 1991; Mead, 1934; Simmel, 1904; Stone, 1970; Veblen, 1899). Further, a well-established sociological literature on identity formation and development exists, as well as a body of research studying the role of the body in identity work or "projects" (Atkinson, 2004; Dunn, 1997; Gubrium and Holstein, 2000; Mead, 1934; Shilling, 2003; Stryker and Burke, 2000). However, while the role of fashion in identity has been investigated in adulthood and late adolescence, little research exists on children, and in particular, tweens (except see Bissonnette, 2007; Boden, 2006a; 2006b; Boden *et al.*, 2004; Cook, 1999; 2008; Cook and Kaiser, 2004; Kopkowski, 2008; Pilcher, 2010; 2011; Rawlins, 2006; Schor, 2004).

In this section, I examine the sociological literature on fashion, youth and identity formation by discussing the (a) functionalist conceptualizations of fashion; (b) feminist views on fashion as a perpetuation of patriarchy and reinforcement of dominant gender norms; and (c) late/postmodern arguments about fashion and the body in relation to self-image projection. I also examine the research conducted on youth and children and fashion and identity.

### **Early Beginnings: Studies of Fashion Within Sociology**

Scholars have suggested that, concomitant with the emergence of mercantilism and the rise of consumerism, individuals began to use fashion as part of the process of identity formation.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, it was not long before dress was recognized to denote one's position within the socio-economic hierarchy (cf. Bourdieu, 1990; 1993; Veblen, 1899).

Veblen (1899), and later, Barber and Lobel (1952) conceptualized fashion as serving a functional role - supporting social stratification, particularly the class/status system within society (cf. Sanborn, 1927). Fashion, Veblen (1899:127) argued, is "prima facie evidence of both pecuniary success and of social worth." However, Negrin (1999:99) has argued that Veblen believed fashion was impractical and it did not obey "the principle of practical utility."<sup>43</sup> In fact, Veblen criticized the impractical dress of women as an "unnecessary and wasteful indulgence, symptomatic of the economic dependence of women on men" (Negrin, 1999:99). Yet, Veblen (1899) clearly recognized that clothing symbolized much more than practicality; that is, individuals could use fashion to transform and reconfigure their identities.

Simmel (1904) also recognized fashion's role in terms of both social class and identity. Fashion and other cultural goods, he argued, trickle-down from the upper to the middle and lower classes (Simmel, 1904:133-142).<sup>44</sup> Western industrialized nations such as Canada and the United States, for example, export articles produced by their fashion cultures to less developed societies around the world (Simmel, 1904). Indeed, Simmel

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<sup>42</sup> See, for example, Bourdieu (1990; 1993), Craik (1994), Crane (2000), Veblen (1899), Weber (1969).

<sup>43</sup> Veblen (1899) noted that fashion, not clothing per se, was impractical (Negrin, 1999:99).

<sup>44</sup> Similarly, Seidman (2004:148) has argued that Bourdieu (1984; 1990; 1996; 19998) located individuals in a "multi-dimensional space defined by their class position." For a more complete discussion, please see Bourdieu (1984; 1990; 1996; 1998), Seidman (2004).

(1904) acknowledged that fashion is a meaningful and significant symbol in and of itself, as this trickle-down effect is largely a "product of class distinction" (Simmel, 1904:133).<sup>45</sup> Fashion is also a mechanism by which social actors can take on a particular persona or identity through imitation or role-playing (cf. Goffman, 1959; Mead, 1934; Stone, 1970). It is through this reflexive relationship with others and the concomitant symbolic use of fashion that Simmel (1904) explains the self's emergence (Mead, 1934). Indeed, functionalists believe that fashion is a social symbol which is intrinsically linked to identity and one's social and economic position within society. Feminists, on the other hand, argue that fashion reinforces male and female gender roles, which I now discuss below.

### **Feminist Views on Fashion**

The feminist literature has conceptualized fashion in terms of its role in shoring up existing patriarchal ideologies with respect to feminine beauty and subservience (hooks, 2000; Shilling, 2003; Wolf, 1991). Scholars have argued that, traditionally, women's clothing was tailored towards participation in the private sphere. This was a powerful symbolic testament to women's subordinate role in public life (Lauer *et al.*, 1981; Turner, 1984; Veblen, 1899; Wolf, 1991). Further, feminist scholars have contended that garments were and remain manifestations of existing social, cultural and political relations where gender stratification and the control of women feature prominently.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> See also, Blumer (1969a; 1969b), Mead (1934), Shalin (1993).

<sup>46</sup> See, for example, Craik (1994), hooks (2000), Howson (2004), Lakoff *et al* (1984).

Twenty-first century feminist scholars have produced a diverse range of empirical studies on fashion. Analyzing London's fashion and labour market, McRobbie (2002:59) has identified what she calls "prada-ization" and the "Chardonnay pound."<sup>47</sup> McRobbie (2002:59) has suggested that middle class females deferring marriage and children to later points in the life cycle have more disposable income [the "Chardonnay pound"] and more purchasing power (i.e. "prada-ization") to buy exclusive, limited edition fashion items. As a result, companies compete to produce these limited edition items for this target market (McRobbie, 2002:59).

Further, Moseley (2002:37) has examined the effect of what she has termed the "Audrey Hepburn image" on iconic fashion and women's identity. Moseley (2002:37) has contended that Hepburn's image [extreme "thinness" linked to fashion sensibilities] reflects patriarchal ideologies concerning attractiveness and beauty; that is, Hepburn represents a "flexible image which...enabl[ed]...young women through dress in relation to exigencies of gender, class and national identity" and thereby a physically identifiable sense of self. Interestingly, Moseley (2002:39) also concluded that the "Cinderella motif" existed for the women in her study as it represents: "a staple of feminist culture, from the childhood fairytale, to the before and after, rags to riches fashion and beauty makeover of girl[s] and women..." While experimenting with one's identity may produce a "renewed sense of self", it often also results in a "gendered attractionist aesthetic", the creation of a "male gaze" and a "to-be-looked-at-ness" (Moseley, 2002:39-40).

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<sup>47</sup> McRobbie (2002:59) has suggested "prada-ization" occurs when competitive brands such as Karen Millen and the French Connection move into prominent fashion districts and sell their brands exclusively.

Waggoner and O'Brien Hallstein (2001:27-28) have asserted that in their study of professional women in academia that women often face the "hegemonic constraints of fashion." While women express agency in making fashion choices, such choices are often "stereotypically feminine" (Waggoner and O'Brien Hallstein, 2001:30). Despite its often liberating aspects, Waggoner and O'Brien Hallstein (2001) have concluded that the patriarchal system constrains women's agency by limiting choice to gendered clothing.<sup>48</sup>

Thus, feminist critiques focus on the political processes of fashion which, feminists have argued, inherently perpetuate patriarchal domination.<sup>49</sup> However, some scholars of the late and postmodern literature challenge feminist assumptions as they address the many opportunities to use fashion in identity expression. I now discuss the role of fashion and identity in the late/postmodern context.

### **Fashion in a Late Modern Context**

Before the Industrial Revolution, options for using fashion in identity formation/expression were limited (cf. Blumer, 1969a; 1969b; Negrin, 1999). Of course, times have changed. Our consumerist world and access to credit cards, disposable incomes and mass production means unprecedented access to different styles of dress. Moreover, attitudes toward fashion and the body permeate all levels of society; as well, available fashion options are now more stylistic than practical and/or traditional (Bauman, 1992; 1997; 2000; Brookes and Kelly, 2009; McRobbie, 1994; Wilson, 1990). This

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<sup>48</sup> Indeed, scholars have suggested that fashion is a creation of patriarchy which encourages ideological notions of femininity and the view that women are objects (cf. Craik, 1994; hooks, 2000; Lakoff *et al.*, 1984; Waggoner and O'Brien Hallstein, 2001; Wolf, 1991).

<sup>49</sup> See, for example, Craik (1994), hooks (2000), Howson (2004), Lakoff *et al* (1984), Waggoner and O'Brien Hallstein (2001), Wolf (1991).

expansion of both product and fashion sensibilities is, to a large extent, a function of both flexible modes of production and advances in communication and information technologies in late modernity.<sup>50</sup>

These scholars argue that these technologies have transformed how individuals consume fashion and fashion-images. For example, online clothing stores allow consumers to purchase authentic designs (or knock offs) only moments after they make their debut on national television. Likewise, tweens who adore *Hannah Montana* can now purchase similar styles of clothing with a credit card and a click of a mouse.<sup>51</sup> As late modern scholars have argued, fashion's global reach has greatly expanded the number of opportunities for identity formation, expression, and presentation.<sup>52</sup> That being said, the fluidity and ever changing nature of contemporary fashion means stable narratives of identity expressed *through* fashion tend to be elusive (cf. Featherstone, 2003; Giddens, 1991:81; Sweetman, 2003).

Further, Giddens (1991:81) has argued that late/postmodernity has given contemporary social actors "no choice but to choose" from different fashion items with which to construct an identity (cf. Gergen, 2001; Sweetman, 2003). In fact, Sweetman (2003:528) has observed that individual identity is no longer associated with key sociological variables such as age, gender, ethnicity or occupation. Instead, individuals negotiate and express their self-identity through *consumption* and consumer items like fashion (Featherstone, 1991:92). Contemporary consumer culture and the societal

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<sup>50</sup> See, for example, Bauman (1992; 1997), Baudrillard (1990; 1993), Giddens (1991; 1995), Harvey (1990), Lyon (1999).

<sup>51</sup> See, for example, Bauman (1992; 1997), McRobbie (1994), Wilson (1990).

<sup>52</sup> See, for example, Bauman (1992; 1997; 2000), Giddens (1991; 1995), Harvey (1990), McRobbie (1994), Zukin (2005).

importance of body presentation and self-transformation, according to Sweetman (2003:539), have encouraged individuals to be *self-reflexive* with their identity (cf. Featherstone, 1991:92; Shilling, 2003). Therefore, scholars have argued that the late modern/postmodern scholarship largely subverts the patriarchal focus of feminist arguments and the practical considerations of functionalist thought. I now review the research literature on youth and children and fashion and identity that has been emerging within other disciplines.

### **Fashion and Identity**

#### ***Mods, Rockers and Teddy Boys and the Evolution to Branded Youth***

Despite the relevance of the theoretical developments discussed above, empirical sociological research on the role of fashion in the development of childhood identity is sparse. The literature on the subcultural fashion styles of the Mods, Rockers, Teddy Boys, college students and postmodern individuals in their late teens is far more copious than what exists in the literature on relationships between childhood identity and fashion (Cohen, 1972; Hall and Jefferson, 1976; Hebdige, 1979; Muggleton, 2000). In this section, I review previous research carried out on youth and adolescents that are relevant to my research on tweens and fashion. For the most part, this research is situated within cultural studies, consumer studies, marketing research, behavioural studies and geography.

Inspired by an Edwardian-style of dress, the Teddy Boys emerged as a distinct youth subculture of resistance during the 1950s consumerist boom in the United Kingdom

(Hall and Jefferson, 1976).<sup>53</sup> Following closely, and inciting moral panic as *folk devils*, the Mods and the Rockers also constructed their identities and sense of group belonging through the clothing they wore (Cohen, 1972; Hall and Jefferson, 1976; Hebdige, 1979; Muggleton, 2000). These two examples are important for the following reasons: foremost, the Teddy Boys and the Mods and Rockers were the first groups directly identified by marketers as a target market (Cohen, 1972; Hall and Jefferson, 1976). Second, the emergence of the Teddy Boys and the Mods and Rockers epitomized how youth constructed and displayed their identities through the use of fashion. These research studies are dated, however, and apply to an older age demographic than the tweens I studied in this dissertation research.<sup>54</sup>

In recent years, however, scholars have begun to further analyze the connection between consumerism and youth identities. This is not surprising as, according to Schor (2004:13), the current generation is the most "brand-oriented, consumer-involved, and materialist generation in history."<sup>55</sup> In fact, Teen Power (2008) has stated that in 2007, U.S. children reportedly spent \$27 billion dollars on fashion apparel items (cf. Schor, 2004:13). Indeed, children exert great purchasing power in the marketplace.<sup>56</sup>

Scholars have also argued that children are informed consumers, becoming "brand aware by age three" with the capacity to remember close to 400 brand names (Schor,

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<sup>53</sup> See also, Cohen (1972), Hebdige (1979), Muggleton (2000).

<sup>54</sup> More recently, Thompson and Haytko (1997) have also conducted an extensive qualitative study with college students regarding their resistance to and contestation of fashion ideals in a modernist context (see also, Gutman and Mills, 1982; Krafft, 1991).

<sup>55</sup> See also, Cook (2004), Comiteau (2003), Gunter & Furnham (1998), Levine (2006), Teen Power (2008).

<sup>56</sup> See also, Cook (2004), Comiteau (2003), Gunter & Furnham (1998), Levine (2006), Teen Power (2008).



2004:25; Penn, Schoen and Berland, 2001; see also, Comiteau, 2003).<sup>57</sup> Considering these statistics, it is not surprising that many studies focus on branding in relation to childhood identities. According to Elliot and Leonard (2004), poor British youth reveal brand affinity when purchasing cross trainers (i.e. running shoes). Moreover, there is an inherent connection between the likeability of an individual and the branded items s/he possess:

if the trainers are obviously branded and expensive the children believe the owner to be rich and young, if the trainer is unbranded and inexpensive looking the children believe the owner to be poor and old...These opinions are so strongly held that the children would prefer to talk to someone wearing branded trainers than unbranded trainers (Elliott and Leonard, 2004:347).

Furthermore, Brookes and Kelly (2009:600) have revealed that Australian children (and their identities) are "artefacts of consumption." Schor (2004:13) has argued in *Born to Buy*, however, that:

American kids display more brand affinity than their counterparts anywhere else in the world: indeed, experts describe them as increasingly 'bonded to brands'...more children [in the United States] than anywhere else believe that their clothes and brands describe who they are...<sup>58</sup>

However, this phenomenon is not exclusively a North American one as revealed by the research studies of Elliott and Leonard (2004) and Brookes and Kelly (2009).

Indeed, scholars have argued that the emphasis on branding and consumerism have led to the "loss of childhood" and the (over)commodification and

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<sup>57</sup> While Canadian parents and lobbyists have attempted to ban advertising to youth (Goar, 2010), it is increasingly difficult. Goar (2010) has noted corporate resistance to such policies and the failure of some companies to follow the rules; for example, Saputo and General Mills were taken to court in Quebec for violating the ban. As this was published online, I cannot provide pagination for this information. The reader is referred to the webpage: <http://www.thestar.com/opinion/article/771687--goar-shielding-youth-from-pressure-to-buy>.

<sup>58</sup> See also, Cook and Kaiser (2004), Comiteau (2003), Davis (1992), Schor (2004), Teen Power (2008).

"commercialization" of children by mass industries (Schor, 2004:13; see also, Cook, 1999; Crewe and Collins, 2006; Russell and Tyler, 2002:619; Siegel *et al.*, 2004; Vanobbergen, 2004). In sociological terms, the "commercialization of childhood" refers to the process whereby corporations seeking profits, offer various versions of childhood identity through fashion and clothing items to consumers (Schor, 2004:13; see also, Siegel *et al.*, 2004). Evidently, the mass availability of consumer products, including fashion, has enabled individuals to "consume in ways which articulate to themselves and others a sense of identity which may be autonomous from their membership in traditional status groups" (Bocock, 1992:145). Furthermore, the middle class has become the prime target of the fashion industry given their greater disposable incomes, and increased access to credit and cheap goods. The child consumer can, in theory, purchase a wide variety of different fashion items from multiple companies as part of the process of identity formation, as long as the disposable income or credit line of a parent (or a child's reloadable credit card) can accommodate it.

### **Influences on Identity and the Sexualization of Tweens**

According to Harper *et al.* (2003:196), parents are still seen as the dominant decision makers in financial purchases with children "exert[ing] a strong influence." However, these decisions are influenced by their children's opinions, the dynamics of marketing and branding, as well as the peer groups (both adult and child). Crewe and Collins (2006:11) have suggested that fashion and identity are intrinsically linked through "children's agency (which is itself striated by gender and age variables), their peer group and social network effects, and the ways in which children can and do play a significant

role in their parent's reflexive narration of self-identity." Interestingly, one of the most commonly expressed concerns today focuses on the uneasiness felt about the increasing role of the fashion industry and popular culture in defining children's identities.

Indeed, there is a particular concern expressed in the popular literature about the sexualization of youth, especially tween girls. MacLean's magazine provocatively asked "Why do we dress our daughters like skanks?" (Whyte, 2007:10; see also, George, 2007). As Whyte (2007:10) has explained, skank wear refers to clothing that is "sequined", "belly-bearing", "sparkly", and made of "fishnet materials" which reveal children's bodies in a more "adult" fashion (cf. Bissonnette, 2007; George, 2007; Kopkowski, 2008). Kopkowski (2008:36) has argued that once these types of skank fashions appeared in stores, "it became apparent that there is less sand in the hourglass for girlhood than there used to be" (Albanese, 2009:221). Similarly, Bissonnette (2007) has argued in *Sexy Inc.*, that youth had a difficult time differentiating pictures and advertisements as either adult or adolescent magazine-friendly. Notably, many were shocked that such sexual images, more suited to *Penthouse* or *Playboy*, appeared in adolescent-aged magazines (Bissonnette, 2007).

On the other hand, Cook and Kaiser (2004) have suggested that while sexualization is indeed occurring within tween fashions, "it also allows girls to exhibit agency in their appropriation of style, and this inevitably evokes uncertainty and fear in some adults" (Albanese, 2009:222; see also, Crewe and Collins, 2006). Rawlins (2006:366), however, has noted that "discussions with the mothers about inappropriate fashions revealed parallels with popular concerns around the wearing of clothes that are

miniature versions of adult fashions. These outfits were deemed too revealing and grown up and could lead to unwanted attention" (cf. Bissonnette, 2007; Schor, 2004). However, Pilcher (2010:461-470) has stated that the British youth she studied considered their mothers' opinions about these risqué fashion styles when making decisions about "what not to wear" (see also, Rawlins, 2006).

This parallels the work of Boden (2006a; 2006b), as well as Boden *et al.* (2004) done in the United Kingdom on fashion and gendered identity development.<sup>59</sup> Boden *et al.* (2004:9-16,23) have concluded that girls are subject to sexualization whereas young boys are not.<sup>60</sup> Instead, boy's fashions tend to emphasize physical activity, power and the "seduction of labels", compared to an emphasis on girls' inactivity and often, inappropriate clothing choices (Boden *et al.*, 2006:9-16,23; see also, Bissonnette, 2007; Boden, 2006a; 2006b; Cook and Kaiser, 2004; Kopkowski, 2008; Pilcher, 2010; Rawlins, 2006; Schor, 2004). These conceptualizations of identity are influenced by popular culture and celebrities; available clothing options in the marketplace; and the role of parents and children in the decision-making and/or purchasing of fashion items (Boden *et al.*, 2004:2,8-16,23; Pilcher, 2010: 467; 2011; Rawlins, 2006).

In a follow-up article, Boden (2006a:291; 2006b) investigated the relationship between fashion and "tweenager" identity by further assessing the role and influence of popular culture and celebrities. Similar to the concept of "branding", Boden (2006a:291; 2006b) has argued that children often identify with a particular celebrity or sport star; that

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<sup>59</sup> Boden *et al.*'s (2004) is based on interviews with 8 families, including children between 6 and 11 years of age and their parents.

<sup>60</sup> See also, Bissonnette (2007), Cook and Kaiser (2004), Kopkowski (2008), Pilcher (2010), Rawlins (2006), Schor (2004).

is, children emulate their "identity" through clothing (see also, Pilcher, 2011). Children are able to purchase clothing from the labels and branded clothing lines of these celebrities which further intensifies this process (i.e. such as "Stuff by Duff") (Boden, 2006:292; 2006b; see also, Pilcher, 2010; 2011; Pole, 2007).

Yet, the skank images do not only appear in risqué clothing lines or as images in magazines (Kopkowski, 2008; Rawlins, 2006; Schor, 2004). According to Schor (2004:57), "...even the family-friendly *Disney Channel* is full of sexually suggestive outfits and dancing". Furthermore, scholars have suggested that the tweening of *Nickelodeon's Dora the Explorer* and the sexual images of the *Bratz* dolls reveal this phenomenon is not confined to a small subsection of tween society (Moody, 2009; Schor, 2004:215).<sup>61</sup>

However, not everyone is defining childhood, especially girl's childhood, as a sexual phase. *Just So you Know* recently published the results of an online tween and teen celebrity poll (cf. Waddell, 2009).<sup>62</sup> According to Waddell (2009), tweens and teens voted Miley Cyrus as "the worst celebrity influence of 2009"<sup>63</sup> due, in part, to her recent sexualized activities (i.e. the sexualized Annie Leibowitz photo shoot and the pictures leaked online of the actress nearly nude in the shower) (cf. Waddell 2009).<sup>64</sup> Additionally, Putman (2008) has noted that some designers and retailers have marketed "layering" to

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<sup>61</sup> See also, Boden (2006a; 2006b), Boden *et al.* (2004), Kopkowski (2008).

<sup>62</sup> As this article was published online, I cannot provide pagination for this information. The reader is referred to the webpage containing the discussion: <http://new.music.yahoo.com/miley-cyrus/news/miley-cyrus-voted-worst-celebrity-influence-of-2009--61720659>.

<sup>63</sup> As this article was published online, I cannot provide pagination for this direct quote. The reader is referred to the webpage containing the discussion: <http://new.music.yahoo.com/miley-cyrus/news/miley-cyrus-voted-worst-celebrity-influence-of-2009--61720659>.

<sup>64</sup> As this article was published online, I cannot provide pagination for this information. The reader is referred to the webpage containing the discussion: <http://new.music.yahoo.com/miley-cyrus/news/miley-cyrus-voted-worst-celebrity-influence-of-2009--61720659>.

placate concerned parents, so that "too-revealing camisoles and tank tops [are] now paired with a covering hoodie or graphic t-shirt..."<sup>65</sup> While the sexual fashions of low-slung necklines and revealing tops are still available in the marketplace, marketers and retailers appear to be attempting to pacify parental fears through the creation a sweater or jacket to "disguise" the look (Putman, 2008).<sup>66</sup> Similarly, in response to parental outrage over "Dora the Streetwalker...Dora the Explorer [turned] into a Tramp", Mattel and Nickelodeon toned down some of the early versions of the "grown-up" Dora doll (i.e. 10 years old) (cf. Moody, 2009).<sup>67</sup>

Yet, there is stronger evidence supporting the sexualizing and growing up of youth despite these modest attempts to protect their innocence. There is a reason for parents to show concern over children's fashion and identity when companies like Primark market, advertise and sell a "padded bikini top...garment [that] over-sexualiz[es] children and pander[s] to pedophiles" (*Agence France Presse*, 2010b).<sup>68</sup> This, in combination with social activities such as bikini waxes for children and the need for underwear that do not show "panty lines" (Zlomislic, 2008)<sup>69</sup>, illustrates that the sexualization of tween girls is occurring in a variety of different ways and is thus deserving of empirical *sociological* attention (cf. George, 2007; Whyte, 2007).

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<sup>65</sup> As this article was published online, I cannot provide pagination for this direct quote. The reader is referred to the webpage containing the discussion: <http://www.laudit.com/article.php?nId=2208>.

<sup>66</sup> As this article was published online, I cannot provide pagination for this direct quote. The reader is referred to the webpage containing the discussion: <http://www.laudit.com/article.php?nId=2208>.

<sup>67</sup> As this article was published online, I cannot provide pagination for this direct quote. The reader is referred to the webpage containing the discussion: [http://ca.news.yahoo.com/ad/capress-090316-entertainment-tv\\_dora\\_for\\_tweens/](http://ca.news.yahoo.com/ad/capress-090316-entertainment-tv_dora_for_tweens/).

<sup>68</sup> As this article was published online, I cannot provide pagination for this direct quote. The reader is referred to the webpage containing the discussion: [http://ca.news.yahoo.com/s/afp/100414/world/britain\\_retail\\_paedophilia\\_clothing\\_1](http://ca.news.yahoo.com/s/afp/100414/world/britain_retail_paedophilia_clothing_1).

<sup>69</sup> As this article was published online, I cannot provide pagination for this direct quote. The reader is referred to the webpage containing the discussion: <http://parentcentral.ca/parent/articlePrint/486409>

## **Conclusion**

As the previous discussion reveals, there are gaps in the current research on fashion and childhood identity, and in particular, tween identity: First, much of the research on fashion and identity formation and change, while extremely insightful and interesting, is situated within cultural studies, conflict theory, consumer and/or marketing research studies, or human geography studies. Second, with a few notable exceptions, most literature in this area has not focused on the experiences or opinions of children and tweens as social actors in their own right. Third, sociological research, and in particular, symbolic interactionist research on these issues, has tended to be more theoretical than empirical. Fourth, to my knowledge, no studies using a symbolic interactionist either in Canada or elsewhere have empirically examined the relationship between fashion and the emergence of a new tween identity. As noted earlier, while Currie (1999), Currie *et al.*, (2006; 2007), Kelly *et al.*, (2006), Pomerantz *et al.*, (2004) have provided very insightful accounts of Canadian youths' identity experiences, these studies are situated within the feminist literature and examine the "discursive position" of self, the "oppressive prescriptions of femininity" and the resistance to "emphasized femininity."

Given the concerns expressed about the increasing sexualization and "commodification of childhood" through fashion and the development of the "female consuming subject" (Schor, 2004:13; Cook and Kaiser, 2004:203; see also, Cook, 1999; Crewe and Collins, 2006; Russell and Tyler, 2002:619; Vanobbergen, 2004), research that addresses the gaps in the literature outlined above will not only contribute

theoretically and substantively to this area of study, but will also provide valuable insights to inform the public debates currently under way.

To summarize, this dissertation focuses on the identity formation of tweens as a new stage between childhood and adulthood, and the role that fashion specifically marketed to them plays in this process. In the next chapter, I discuss the theoretical assumptions of the symbolic interactionist perspective, and I outline the concepts guiding this dissertation research. Specifically, I address how the concepts of self-reflexiveness and agency; socialization, shared meanings and the definition of the situation; roles, rewards and sanctions and the looking-glass self can be used to assess the impact of the relationship between fashion and tween identity development.



## **CHAPTER FOUR: THEORETICAL OVERVIEW OF SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM**

### **Introduction**

In the sociological literature on the individual and society, numerous theoretical perspectives advance differing conceptualizations of self and identity. Critical theorists, for example, have argued that selves and identities are embedded in structure - "individuals are always structurally located in a multidimensional social space defined broadly in terms of social class position" (Seidman, 2004:148).<sup>70</sup> Whereas the structuralist view of the self has posited a constructive, rational and calculative individual, the so-called anti-humanist (post)structuralists and postmodernists have envisioned a "discursively created self" (Dunn, 1997:689).<sup>71</sup> Theoretically, it is argued that the poststructural/ postmodern self experiences restrictions in agency or freedom of action which cannot be overcome, ultimately leading to its demise as an "authentic self" (Erickson, 1995:121).<sup>72</sup>

While these perspectives on the self contribute to our sociological understanding of individuals and their relation to society, none focus on the role of individuals as "self-reflexive actors" able to act without constraints (Faberman, 1991:479). Symbolic interactionism, however, conceptualizes actors as self-reflexive, stresses the processual and emergent nature of selves and society, and advances the notion of interaction as consensual and based on shared meanings, common understandings and expectations (Blumer, 1969a; 1969b; Mead, 1934). Although arising within social structures, actors

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<sup>70</sup> See also, Bourdieu (1984; 1994; 1996; 1998), Giddens (1991; 1995).

<sup>71</sup> See also, Derrida (1976), Erickson (1995), Lester (1984), Seidman (2004).

<sup>72</sup> See also, Kotarba (1984), Kotarba and Fontana (1984), Lester (1984).

with selves within the symbolic interactionist tradition have agency and can, through their actions and interactions, recreate and change the societies within which they arise (Blumer, 1969a; 1969b; Mead, 1934).

In this dissertation, I make use of symbolic interactionism to study the creation of childhood identity through fashion. In this section, (1) I begin with a discussion of the basic tenets of symbolic interactionist theory, and in particular, the Chicago school; (2) I review the interactionist literature on fashion and identity; (3) I consider the relevance of these theoretical assumptions for the study of fashion and childhood identity; and (4) I conclude with some remarks on the empirical focus of this dissertation.

### **Symbolic Interactionism and the Chicago School**

Symbolic interactionism, as a perspective, is replete with variants that range from the dramaturgical school of Erving Goffman to the structural social psychology of Kuhn and Stryker (Kuhn, 1954).<sup>73</sup> In this dissertation, I draw on the theoretical and methodological approach of the so-called Chicago School of symbolic interactionist thought, inspired by Cooley, Thomas and Mead among others, and advanced by the pre-eminent post-war Chicago interactionist, Herbert Blumer (cf. Musolf, 2003:102).

Symbolic interactionism, as a theoretical approach, emerged as part of a larger paradigm shift in the 19<sup>th</sup> century from the study of consciousness to linguistically

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<sup>73</sup> While the Iowa School began with Kuhn, Sheldon Stryker is now the leading scholar in this area. According to Stryker (2001:227), the self is organized with multiple parts "reflecting the multiple structures of various kinds that exist within society, as well as the multiple ways these structures relate to one another: overlapping, isolated, cooperative, conflicting" (see also, Stetts and Burke, 2003; Stryker, 2007). The self is comprised of different "roles" based on "salience, centrality and levels of commitment" (Stryker, 2001:227; 2007; Stryker and Serpe, 1994). For a complete discussion, please see Stryker (2001; 2007), Stetts and Burke (2003), Stryker and Serpe (1994) and McCall (1987).

oriented theories; and in response to an Hegelian critique that rejected metaphysical and hard scientific thought in favour of a more interpretative analysis (cf. Dunn, 1997:689; Huber, 1973a; 1973b). This Hegelian dialectical view of society is reflected in the tenets of symbolic interactionism which emphasize the processual and emergent properties of self, action, and society itself. Further, symbolic interactionism is a pragmatist theory which recognizes the role of language, shared meanings and the interdependent and reflexive relationship that exists between individuals and the society in which they live (Prus, 1996).<sup>74</sup>

Early symbolic interactionist thought is associated with the work of Charles Horton Cooley, William I. Thomas, and George Herbert Mead among others (Musolf, 2003:96). Cooley's (1922:87) provocative statement, "imagination which people have of one another are the solid facts of society" was reflected in his development of what he termed the Looking-glass self, one of the first theoretical insights into the rise of the self through interaction. Cooley argued that this Looking-glass self developed through a process of socialization in primary and secondary groups. Cooley concluded that an individual "obtains an identity only with the realization that his or her picture, idea or image of himself or herself reflects other people's picture of him or her" (Herman *et al.*, 1994:34; see also, Manis and Meltzer, 1978; Meltzer *et al.*, 1975).

In order to capture these lived experiences, Cooley (1922) argued that the researcher should make use of what he termed *sympathetic introspection*. Cooley (1922) suggested that researchers analyze the meanings behind individual actions, which are

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<sup>74</sup> See also, Manis and Meltzer (1978), Meltzer (1994), Reynolds (1994).

rooted in individual's *definition of the situation* (cf. also Thomas and Swaine Thomas, 1928; Thomas, 1937). This methodological tool allows researchers to *take on the role of the other*, thereby minimizing researcher bias; that is, researchers analyze meanings and/or definitions of a situation in terms of how those individuals involved in the action/interaction understand them.<sup>75</sup>

W. I. Thomas followed in Cooley's footsteps, describing the interdependency between self and society, and focusing on instincts and adult socialization; that is, the *adult self redefined*.<sup>76</sup> However, it is widely accepted that the W. I. Thomas dictum - the definition of the situation - is "the one direct link between W. I. Thomas and the large, growing tradition of symbolic interactionism" (Reynolds, 1994:35). According to Thomas (1937:572), "if men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences." Thomas (1937:572) argued, further, that *adjustive responses* are "social" in nature. As Reynolds (2003:65) has explained, "adjustive responses occur in social settings, and standing between these settings and the adjustive responses to them are individuals' definitions of the situation." Indeed, Thomas (1937:572) believed that adjustive responses were in fact an individual's interpretation and/or response to his/her definition of the situation (cf. Reynolds, 2003:65; see also, Thomas and Swaine Thomas, 1928).

However, the various contributions of George Herbert Mead to symbolic interactionism are considered foundational (Manis and Meltzer, 1978; Meltzer *et al.*,

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<sup>75</sup> The implications for methodology of sympathetic introspection and a symbolic interactionist approach to empirical research in general, are discussed in detail in Chapter Five.

<sup>76</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the adult self redefined, please see Thomas (1937), Thomas and Swaine Thomas (1928) and Cooley (1928).

1975).<sup>77</sup> Mead conceptualized the mind and the self as arising within a social context through the mechanism of language and he viewed both of them as social in origin and function (Manis and Meltzer, 1978). According to Mead (1934), individuals born into a society learn pre-existing social roles through socialization. Individuals are able to enact these roles successfully because rewards and sanctions for their role behaviour are provided through interaction with others (Mead, 1934).

According to Manis and Meltzer (1978), in developing a sense of self, individuals pass through a *preparatory* stage characterized by mindless imitation of roles.<sup>78</sup> [Note, however, that this stage was not part of Mead's original conceptualization.] Then, according to Mead, individuals enter a *play* stage where certain roles such as child or parent are known but there is no "centralized standpoint" from which to view oneself (cf. Manis and Meltzer, 1994:43-44; 1978; Mead, 1934). The final stage in developing a self-reflexive self is the *game* stage, where individuals, from a "unitary standpoint", can take the role of all others and also see themselves as an object or as others see them (cf. Manis and Meltzer, 1994:43-44; 1978; Mead, 1934). As Stryker (2001:216) has observed, the self develops through this social process of *role-taking* and "exists in viewing oneself reflexively by adopting the standpoint of others to attach meanings to the self."

Perhaps most contentious, but foundational to notions of an agentic actor, Mead has conceptualized the self-reflexive self as made up of two components: the "I" and the "me" (Mead, 1962:176). The "I", according to Mead (1962:176), is the "impulsive"

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<sup>77</sup> For a detailed discussion of these, see Musolf (2003).

<sup>78</sup> This contrasts Iowa theorists such as Hickman and Kuhn (1956:45) who have argued that an individual's "attitudes toward himself as an object [is] the best index to these plans of action, and hence to the action itself, in that they are the anchoring points from which self-evaluations and other evaluations are made."

tendency of the individual and represents "the undirected tendencies of social actors" (Manis and Meltzer, 1994:43; Stetts and Burke, 2003). As Mead (1934:174-76) observed, "it is because of the 'I' that we say we are never fully aware of what we are, that we surprise ourselves by our own action . . . for this response of the 'I' is something that is more or less uncertain."

The "me" on the other hand, represents the internalization of the "organized set of attitudes and definitions prevailing within the group" (Manis and Meltzer, 1994:43-44; Mead, 1962:176). According to Mead (1962:176),

The 'I,' then, in this relation of the 'I' and the 'me,' is something that is, so to speak, responding to a social situation which is within the experience of the individual. It is the answer which the individual makes to the attitude which others take toward him when he assumes an attitude toward them. Now, the attitudes he is taking toward them are present in his own experience, but his response to them will contain a novel element. The 'I' gives the sense of freedom, of initiative. The situation is there for us to act in a self-conscious fashion. We are aware of ourselves, and of what the situation is, but exactly how we will act never gets into experience until after the action takes place.

The "I" and the "me" are constituent parts of the self and interact or work together in responding to any social situation (cf. Manis and Meltzer, 1994:43-44; Mead, 1962:176). The "I" gives propulsion or momentum to the act while the "me" gives direction or guidance based on the definitions, shared meanings or expectations of others (cf. Manis and Meltzer, 1994:43-44; Mead, 1962:176). The resulting action or response is the result of this interplay between these two components of the self. Mead (1962:176) also conceptualized the "I" and the "me" as collaborating within the self, and not continually struggling for control as Freud's *id* and *super-ego* are considered to do (see also, Manis and Meltzer, 1994:43-44; 1978). It should also be noted that, according to

Blumer (1969a:62), "Mead saw the self as a process and not as a structure." In essence, human behaviour is an ongoing process built up in the course of this interaction between the "I" and the "me" into acts, or lines of action; all human behaviour, therefore, apart from habitual or reflex action, is built up in the course of its execution (cf. Mead, 1934; 1962:176; Manis and Meltzer, 1994:43-44; 1978; Stetts and Burke, 2003).

Theoretically, it is argued that when the self is fully developed, it is a "miniature version of society" allowing individuals to direct action toward themselves in the same way that they would with other social actors through "minded behaviour" (Manis and Meltzer, 1978:20; Meltzer, 1964:19). According to Meltzer (1964:19), "minded behaviour" occurs through the collaboration of the "I" and the "me". Importantly, there is "hesitancy" between a stimulus and the reaction of an individual where a mind is present (Meltzer, 1964:19; see also, Reynolds, 2003:77). Meltzer (1964:19) has argued, therefore, that there are moments of "inhibition" when the mind is present (cf. Reynolds 2003:77). As a result, the possession of a self-reflexive self enables individuals to moderate, organize, and/or create behaviour, thereby providing individuals with agency not present in other conceptualizations of the self (Faberman, 1991:479; Manis and Meltzer, 1978). In sum, symbolic interactionism, as promoted by theorists of the Chicago School, envisions the development of the self as "deliberate", reflexive and contingent on social interaction and communication with others (cf. Manis and Meltzer, 1978:20; Meltzer, 1964; 1994).

Identity, on the other hand, refers to an individual's existence as a social entity (Manis and Meltzer, 1978; Stone, 1970:399). As Stone (1970:399) has stated, identity is

"what and where an individual is." Identities arise through "interactional encounters" and are "subject to confirmation" by other social actors (Stone, 1970:399).<sup>79</sup> Other social actors "validate or invalidate" one's self-identity through interaction, communication and response to other's appearance and gestures (Manis and Meltzer, 1978:20). This is a reflexive process as the reactions and/or responses of others, that is, generalized other(s), influence one's identity. Thus, like the self, identities are part of a larger reflexive and socially interpretative process.

Finally, Herbert Blumer (1969a, 1969b), one of the most important interactionist theorists of the post-war Chicago School era, argued that no previous scholar had developed a clear statement on the theoretical propositions of symbolic interactionism. Blumer (1969a), therefore, devised three foundational premises of symbolic interactionism, which include the following:

1. Human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that things have for them.
2. The meaning of things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows.
3. Meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters. (Mussolf, 2003:103; see also, Blumer, 1969a:2).

It is Blumer's (1969a) last statement emphasizing the role of interpretation in action that differentiates interactionism from other perspectives on individual and society. By acknowledging the role of interpretation, one can understand non-problematic interaction as consensual and based on shared meanings, common understandings and expectations (Blumer, 1969a; Mead, 1934; 1962). Blumer (1969a) also advocated for a

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<sup>79</sup> See also, Blumer (1969a), Goffman (1963), Manis and Meltzer (1978), Mead (1934), Meltzer (1964; 1994).



methodology that could be used to analyze the importance of meanings, social interaction and interpretation among individuals and the society in which they live. Indeed, Blumer sought a methodology that would "inspect the rich variety of social experience, as it was lived; would build up *sensitizing concepts* from experience; that would produce theories directly grounded in empirical data; and would determine the relevance of such theories by a continual return to the evidence" (Marshall, 1998b:42-43). In this regard, Blumer's (1969a; 1969b) theoretical premises and methodological approach and Cooley's concept of the role of sympathetic introspection can be viewed as foundational in stressing the importance of and the use of a qualitative methodology to study social action, a research approach I discuss in detail in Chapter Five.

As Reynolds and Herman-Kinney (2003:112) have argued, the Chicago School theoretical approach aligns with "...a corresponding method aimed at exploring the subjective and intersubjective worlds of those whom we would understand." As a result, it makes sense to combine symbolic interactionism with the approach of the new sociology of childhood (see, for example, Albanese, 2009; Christensen and Prout, 2002; Christensen, 2004; Corsaro, 1997; James, Jenks and Prout, 1998; Leonard, 2007; Mandell, 1984; 1988). Both symbolic interactionism and the new sociology of childhood recognize social actors as having agency, being reflexive, privileging the voices of social actors in research endeavours, and importantly, each approach stresses the bi-directionality of socialization as a process rooted in, and influenced by, interaction with others (c.f. Albanese, 2009; Blumer, 1969a; 1969b; Cooley, 1922; Christensen and Prout, 2002; Christensen, 2004; Corsaro, 1997; James, Jenks and Prout, 1998; Leonard, 2007;

Mandell, 1984; 1988; Mead, 1934; Stone, 1970; Thomas and Swaine Thomas, 1928). In this dissertation therefore, I make use of this theoretical approach, influenced also by the principles of the new sociology of childhood, with its focus on self-reflexivity, shared meaning arising through interaction, and the role of consensus in interaction and communication to explore the role of fashion in shaping identity among tweens (Blumer, 1969a; Cooley, 1922; 1928; Mead, 1934; Thomas and Swaine Thomas, 1928). I now discuss interactionist contributions to the study of fashion and identity.

### **Identity Formation: Interactionist Contributions**

Interactionist scholarship argues that the self is said to emerge from within the dynamic and reflexive processes of symbolic communication (Mead, 1934; Blumer, 1969a; 1969b; Shalin, 1993). Within that process, fashion operates as a variable form and method of symbolic exchange. Thus, while clothing exists firmly in the obdurate world, its symbolic meaning – its relevance *as* fashion – is a social construct that is defined and redefined across both time and space (cf. Mead, 1934; Stone, 1970).<sup>80</sup> Further, the use of fashion is one of the many ways we develop and communicate our sense of self to others (Kilbourne, 1999; Lofland, 1973).

Blumer (1969b:275-291) has argued that fashion is not abnormal or irrational; instead, fashion is and has been a pertinent component of identity politics. In his theory

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<sup>80</sup> While not used as a theoretical framework in this research, the constructionist perspective addresses the varying constructions/explanations of childhood over time, as defined by different *claimsmakers* and *claimsmaking activities* (Loseke, 2003). According to Wyness (2006:2), social constructionism recognizes the "...meaning and the socially malleable nature of childhood [which] moves us beyond an earlier orthodoxy that foregrounded biological and chronological certainty" (see also, Berger and Luckmann, 1966). For a more detailed discussion of constructionism, please see Spector and Kitsuse (1977; 2001), O'Neal (1997), Ibarra and Kitsuse (1993), Mauss (1989), Woolgar and Pawluch (1985).

of class differentiation and collective selection for example, Blumer (1969b:275-291) acknowledged how fashion permeates the micro and macro levels of life. Through the attainment of an "apperception mass," he argued that individuals select fashion items to present a particular meaning and identity to other social actors (Blumer, 1969b:275). However, a tension arises within Blumer's work between the dynamic nature of the fashion process and his rather tentative argument that fashion provides a mechanism for order (Blumer, 1969b:275-291). In essence, fashion provides a momentary sense of belonging to the "in-group" (Blumer, 1969b:275-291). Yet, at the same time, the dynamic nature of the fashion process is already undermining that stability in order to present another option for belonging; that is, another style to follow (Blumer, 1969b:275-291).

Goffman (1959; 1963; 1972) also recognized the role of fashion in identity expression. He observed that fashion is important to the presentation of self as a form of *body idiom* (Goffman, 1963; see also, Davis, 1992; Shilling, 2003). For Goffman (1963:33), body idiom includes a social actor's "dress, bearing, movements and position..." representing an *internalized generalized other* (cf. Shilling, 2003). Thus, Goffman (1963:33) has asserted that body idiom enables social actors to control and monitor their presentation of self to facilitate social interaction with others.

Reflecting Goffman's notion of body idiom, Davis (1992) has suggested that our clothing choices reflect larger social and cultural ideologies.<sup>81</sup> As Cahill (1989:289) has explained, children "fashion themselves into gendered persons" through fashion (see also,

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<sup>81</sup> See also, Craik (1994), Entwistle (2000), Kaiser (1990; 1991).

Boden *et al.*, 2004; Boden, 2006a; 2006b). Since physical appearance is inseparable from the construction and presentation of self, it encourages individuals to experiment with different presentations of self through clothing (Featherstone, 1991:92; Sweetman, 2003:528).<sup>82</sup> Therefore, fashion *and* the body and/or identity are in a truly dynamic and symbiotic relationship. It is from this scholarship and points of departure that one can gain theoretical insights into how youth utilize fashion to develop a sense of self and identity.

I argue that the contributions of interactionist scholarship on identity and fashion remain, for the most part, theoretical in nature. Additionally, these studies do not focus on children *per se*, but rather the experiences of social actors more generally.<sup>83</sup> It is my intention to address these deficits in the literature through this research. Methodologically, I make use of a qualitative research design made up of intensive interviews and content analysis, methodologies I discuss in great detail in Chapter Five. In the next section, I consider the relevance of the theoretical concepts discussed above for the empirical research undertaken for this dissertation.

### **Theoretical Assumptions and their Relevance to the Research**

As noted earlier, this research focuses on the identity formation of tweens as a new stage between childhood and adulthood, and the role that fashion specifically marketed to them plays in this process. In this section, I discuss the relevance of symbolic interactionist assumptions about (a) self-reflexiveness and agency; (b)

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<sup>82</sup> See also, Cahill (1989), Goffman (1963), Shilling (2003), Turner (1984).

<sup>83</sup> For an exception, see Adler and Adler (1989), Cahill (1989).

socialization, shared meanings and the definition of the situation; and (c) socialization, roles, and the looking-glass self, as they relate to the substantive areas under review.<sup>84</sup>

### *Self-reflexiveness and Agency*

Symbolic interactionism conceptualizes actors as self-reflexive and possessing agency that allows them to create and recreate themselves and their environment. In this dissertation, I argue that this contextual framework is essential for understanding the processes of adopting, modifying and/or rejecting the meanings and definitions surrounding childhood, the emergence of tweens as a new identity construct, and the assessments of appropriate or inappropriate fashion choices for tweens.

### *Socialization, Shared Meaning and the Definition of the Situation*

Blumer has argued that meaning arises through interaction with others, and that humans interact with one another on the basis of shared meanings learned through socialization and role-taking (Blumer, 1969a:2; Musolf, 2003:103). Significant symbols, therefore, become meaningful through interaction and the reaction of social actors (Musolf, 2003:103; see also, Blumer, 1969a:2; Mead, 1934). However, meanings and definitions, such as those surrounding childhood identity, are part of an interpretative process and are, therefore, not static (Blumer, 1969a:2; Musolf, 2003:103). For example, individuals within a society learn definitions of what it means to be a child and how to conceptualize childhood identity through interactions based on shared meanings. As noted earlier in the dissertation, these conceptualizations have varied over time and place.

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<sup>84</sup> I should note at the outset that there is overlap among these assumptions and the discussion which follows is an attempt to clarify where and how these assumptions are used in the empirical research.

Similarly, fashion is inherently a social creation and the meanings or definitions attached to it can vary. In this regard, I make use of the concept, definition of the situation, as it relates to how children, tweens, adults and the general public (i.e. fashion industry, media, etc) assess the appropriateness of fashion trends for tweens and the marketing strategies targeting them.

In this research, therefore, I begin by exploring images presented in magazines aimed at tweens and their mothers, such as *Tiger Beat* and *Today's Parent*. I document the presence of tween role models and fashion icons that may impact tweens' fashion sensibilities and construction of self-identity through appearance. I investigate how both tweens and their mothers evaluate these images; whether they support the notion of a tween identity; and how both tweens and their mothers make decisions about fashion choices, based on notions of what are or are not appropriate styles to wear to project this tween identity.

I also examine the meanings that my participants, both mothers and tween-aged children, associate with (1) the nature of childhood: What does it mean to be a child in our society? (2) the nature of tween as a new identity construct: Do the mother and tween participants in this study agree that tween is a separate stage from childhood? (3) What is the role, if any, of the new corporate strategies marketing fashion to tweens and/or the influence of significant others in the formation or non-formation of tween identity? (4) How do the mothers and tweens in this study assess the new fashions marketed to tweens – for example, are they appropriate or inappropriate and what makes them so? I also explore, as empirical questions, the extent to which these meanings and definitions

impact, not only decision-making about fashion purchases, and mother-tween interaction, but also the identity formation processes of children and tweens themselves.

*Socialization, Roles, and the Looking-glass self*

Roles are learned through socialization and this learning extends over the life-span of individuals in any given society. Role-taking is an essential step in the identity formation process, accomplished through interaction with real or imagined others. Indeed, many children role-play and take part in hero-worship as a way to find and express their sense of self (Cooley, 1928). Further, the role-taking process is not static, as it involves constant interaction with and reaction from others. Role-taking can also involve the manipulation of appearance, a major focus of this research (cf. Stone, 1970).

Individuals often switch between roles based on the responses of others, and in relation to rewards and sanctions associated with the particular role behaviour (Manis and Meltzer, 1978). Through role-taking, for example, a child may dress similarly to Hannah Montana, but then receive negative feedback (sanctions) from the peer group regarding that particular presentation of self. After internalizing the negative feedback, the child may attempt to (re)validate his/her sense of self through taking on the role and dress of another, more socially acceptable figure. For example, in an attempt to seek validation, the child may take on the role of a cool peer or a more in celebrity such as Taylor Swift, and thereby dress and act accordingly. However, these remain empirical questions for research.

As noted earlier, there is a degree of overlap among the concepts being discussed in this section of the chapter. Specifically, Cooley (1922; 1928) has also argued that

selves derive from the perceptions and opinions of other individuals. In that regard, the looking-glass self is conceptualized as having three components: "the imagination of our appearance to the other person; the imagination of their judgment of that appearance; and self feelings, such as pride" (Marshall, 1998e:374; see also, Cooley, 1922; 1928). Like role-taking, the Looking-glass self as a process is also influenced by rewards and sanctions received from others in interaction, and this extends to reactions to one's appearance. If an individual, for example, receives negative feedback about a fashion choice and/or presented self, he or she may engage in a form of exchange where alternative options are considered. Individuals internalizing these opinions and considering alternatives may opt for other forms of appearance with a concomitant change in what constitutes their Looking-glass self.

I use these concepts to examine the degree of influence significant others from primary and secondary groups exert in the identity formation process. In particular, I explore the role of images in tween fashion magazines, how these and the reactions of others affect or do not affect decision-making about fashion purchases conceptualized as part of the process of communicating a particular identity.

I begin by exploring the following questions with both the mother and tween participants: (1) To what extent do tweens view fashion as a vehicle for expressing themselves or presenting a certain kind of self-image and/or identity? (2) To what extent do tweens value the opinions of others, such as family, peers, or the media, in formulating their own sense of self and/or identity? (3) Who are these significant others and what role, if any, do they play in the formation of new identities based on appearance?



Drawing on my analysis of tween magazine content as a source of information about images of tweens and their fashions, I also ask study participants their opinions on (1) Who are the dominant tween celebrities/role models showcased in the magazines (i.e. role models/significant others)? (2) What role, if any, does fashion play in shaping celebrity/role model identity? (3) What tween celebrities and/or styles are most celebrated as 'in-style'? Assuming these are relevant, I also ask whose opinions and reactions are most important in children's construction of their sense of self through appearance; that is their parents, their peers, popular cultural fashion images and/or popular culture celebrities?

In the next chapter, I examine first, the qualitative methodological approach of the Chicago School of symbolic interactionism; and second, the methodological issues arising from the study of children and tweens, including children and tweens as a distinct research group; ethical concerns about doing research with tween-aged children; and child and tween-friendly techniques and strategies. Third, I detail the design of the interview schedule and questions used to address the issues presented above, and fourth, I discuss how I analyzed the data from the in-depth interviews and two popular culture magazines using a descriptive content analysis.

## **CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **Introduction to Qualitative Methods**

Blumer (1969a:2) has argued that the Chicago School requires a methodological approach which explores lived experience, is self-reflexive, has theoretical propositions grounded within empirical data, recognizes shared meaning arising through interaction, and the role of consensus in interaction and communication (cf. Marshall, 1998b:43; Musolf, 2003:103). That said, Blumer (1969a:2) has argued that sympathetic introspection is "the only true method for understanding human behaviour from the viewpoint of the actor" (Petras and Meltzer, 1994:55). Further, Cooley (1922) has suggested that researchers take on the role of the other to analyze the meanings behind individual actions, which are rooted in individual's definition of the situation (cf. Thomas and Swaine Thomas, 1928; Thomas, 1937). Blumer's (1969a:2; 1969b) theoretical and methodological approach, as well as Cooley's concept of the role of sympathetic introspection can be viewed as foundational in stressing the importance of and the use of a qualitative methodology to study social action.<sup>85</sup>

Indeed, qualitative field research and ethnographic methods approach the study of social phenomena in a humanistic, subjective and non-absolutist manner (cf. Adler and Adler, 1987:12). Adler and Adler (1987:12) have described ethnographic field methods as an effort to "know and understand the broad range of social meanings by which members of a social scene organize their attitudes, behaviour, and, ultimately, their social world as

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<sup>85</sup> Indeed, Blumer sought a methodology that would "inspect the rich variety of social experience, as it was lived; would build up sensitizing concepts from experience; that would produce theories directly grounded in empirical data; and would determine the relevance of such theories by a continual return to the evidence" (Marshall, 1998b:43; see also, Blumer, 1969a).

*verstehen*, a process of interpretive understanding." Data collection techniques such as in-depth interviews, participant observation and content analysis go hand in hand with the Chicago School's interpretive approach to understanding human experiences (Blumer, 1969; Becker, 1963; 1964; Filstead, 1970; Shaffir *et al.*, 1991). In this research, I made use of in-depth qualitative interviews and a descriptive content analysis to explore the meanings, understandings and/or conceptualizations of fashion and tween identity, focusing primarily on these issues from the perspective of my participants.

Since the Chicago School advocates an in-depth understanding of social actors and their lived experience, field and ethnographic methods are often "intimate" and personal due to the nature of study (cf. Adler and Adler, 2009:110).<sup>86</sup> However, understanding the lived-experience of individuals is a cumbersome task in terms of time considerations. Moreover, it often takes researchers years to learn about the social worlds they are studying "...the problems they encounter, the ways they resolve them, the significant individuals and groups in their lives, and their role among these" (Adler and Adler, 2009:110).<sup>87</sup>

Connectedly, "moral dilemmas" are often present in field work (Fine, 1993:267). While deception was not used in this project, it is important to understand its relevance as Goode (1996) has suggested that all field work contains some degree of deception based on the dynamic nature of social life (cf. Fine, 1993:268). As a result, research ethics boards (REB) *sometimes* act as "gatekeepers" (cf. Fine, 1993:268; van den Hoonaard,

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<sup>86</sup> See also, Adler *et al.* (1994), Gans (1962; 1968), Petras and Meltzer (1994), Whyte (1955).

<sup>87</sup> See also, Becker (1963; 1964; 1967), Gans (1962; 1968), Prus (1996; 1999), Reynolds and Herman-Kinney (2003).

2002). I agree with Fine (1993:268) and van den Hoonaard (2002) that researchers are often forced to engage in "front and back stage activities", revealing that the social sphere of research is a "...world [that] is secured on secrets." Our research endeavours involve "altered presentations or lies" as they "better capture the assertion that we should be aware of the reality that we are shading in our assumptions about the world-and being provocative in sometimes a virtue" (Fine, 1993:268). In essence, researchers learn to "walk the tightrope" within the research process (van den Hoonaard, 2002:1).<sup>88</sup>

Qualitative field methods allow researchers to understand the social experiences of actors from their perspectives - this is similar to the approach proposed by James, Jenks and Prout (1998), among others, in the "new sociology of childhood" who have argued that researchers need to study children from their perspectives and experiences. However, many methodological issues and challenges are present in research endeavors. Further, research with children involves ethical and methodological challenges unique to them. In this chapter, I discuss the methodological issues arising from the study of children including children as a distinct research group; ethical concerns about doing research with children; child friendly methodological techniques and strategies. Next, I outline the design of the interview schedule and the questions used to explore the empirical questions of interest in this research. To conclude, I describe how I analyzed the data from my qualitative interviews with mothers and tweens, and the data I obtained

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<sup>88</sup> This research, for example, was challenged by REB because participants were going to be asked socio-demographic questions to elicit information relevant to the research such as age, sex, marital status and religious affiliations. Not only are these questions foundational to sociology as a discipline, they were considered relevant to discussions of self and identity, assessments of the appropriateness of fashion and so on. After negotiations, these questionable interview questions were allowed. I truly learned to "walk the tightrope" (van den Hoonaard, 2002:1) and negotiate the "front and back-stage activities" of the research process in seeking REB clearance (cf. Fine, 1993:267-294).

through content analysis of two magazines targeting parents and tweens: *Today's Parent* and *Tiger Beat*.<sup>89</sup>

### **Little People, Big Voices: Methodological Issues When Conducting Research with Children and Tweens**

Boocock and Scott (2005:7) have suggested that the three "C's" of sociological analysis: context, comparisons and change, are essential when studying children and childhood. Moreover, scholars have suggested studying children as separate from the study of other social actors, such as parents.<sup>90</sup> Historically, however, children have not often been studied, due to their marginalization and the often unique challenges that researchers encounter when trying to study children.<sup>91</sup> As a result, we have adult interpretations of what childhood experience must be like.

Furthermore, Albanese (2009:41) and Morrow and Richards (2006) have suggested that "adults have appointed themselves the understanders, interpreters and translators of children", which often leads to the lack of children's "voice" in research studies. Children's lack of agency also relates to their perceived naïveté.<sup>92</sup> If children are innocent and immature, "adult study participants are treated as 'experts' and as the people most knowledgeable about children's lives" (Albanese, 2009:41). Indeed, the general exclusion of children from research further perpetuates their lack of power, agency and voice.

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<sup>89</sup> Both magazines address issues relating to fashions for either children or tweens.

<sup>90</sup> See, for example, Best (2007), Boocock and Scott (2005), Christensen and James (2000), Christensen and Prout (2002), Corsaro (1997), Handel *et al.* (2009), James and Prout (1990).

<sup>91</sup> See, for example, Best (2007), Boocock and Scott (2005), Christensen and James (2000), Christensen and Prout (2002), Corsaro (1997), Handel *et al.* (2009), James and Prout (1990).

<sup>92</sup> A conceptualization of children discussed in some detail in Chapter Two.

Yet, some scholars have followed Corsaro's (1997:103) rule which states that "children are the best sources for understanding childhood." Hill (2006), for example, asked children their opinions on the research process, their role and involvement in it and "...how research should unfold, how long data collection should take, how involved children themselves should be, and how their privacy can and should be protected via-a-vis other children, teachers, etc." (Albanese, 2009:42). Eliminating the "adultcentric" bias gives children agency (Albanese, 2009:42; see also, Best, 2007; Christensen and James, 2000; Christensen and Prout, 2002; Crewe and Collins, 2006). It is crucial to study children as a separate research group, with their own opinions, values and perspectives on their experiences with and about the social world in which they live. However, research with children involves certain ethical and methodological concerns which I now discuss.

### **Ethical Methodological Concerns: Access, Consent and Assent**

Corsaro (1997:103) has stated that research *must* involve "collecting data from the children being studied" and must give equal consideration to both adult and children's opinions (cf. Christensen, 2004:165). However, children are a sensitive social group to study. Oftentimes, gatekeepers restrict access to research with children (i.e. parents, caregivers, research ethics boards, etc) (Christensen, 2004; Mandell, 1984; 1988; Pole, 2007). According to Pole (2007:7), for example, researchers in the United Kingdom must first receive clearance from the Criminal Records Bureau before conducting research with children. Thus, as minors and "protected persons", it is often difficult to gain access and entry to children and their social world (Pole, 2007:7).

According to the Tri-Council Statement, children are "vulnerable persons" who experience "harm differently than adults" with "longer-term" effects on their self-development (Albanese, 2009:48-49).<sup>93</sup> For these reasons, many scholars often forgo interviewing and/or observing children.<sup>94</sup> Christensen and Prout (2002:490) have suggested, therefore, that researchers be aware of the ethical implications of research with children including, but not limited to: "benefits of the research to children, if any; social and psychological risks; issues of privacy and confidentiality; exclusion of particular groups of children; consent; disclosure; and finally, impacts on larger groups of children."<sup>95</sup>

Yet, proponents of the new sociology of childhood have argued that children are competent social actors with a wealth of information to share about their social lives and experiences (cf. Christensen, 2004; Crew and Collins, 2006). In any research endeavour, however, the researcher must assure competency and a level of understanding, often accomplished through the preliminary stages of consent/assent (Christensen and Prout, 2002:490). According to Albanese (2009:51), the process of consent/assent<sup>96</sup> involves

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<sup>93</sup> Albanese (2009:49) has also argued that "futuristic language" does not look at the immediate needs and potential harms to children, but "that children are valued as future citizens and adults-in-the-making."

<sup>94</sup> Additionally, research and on with children often brings up issues such as pedophilia, abuse and mistreatment of children (cf. Pole, 2007).

<sup>95</sup> One ethical concern, for example, deals with observations. Researchers cannot easily observe in child-dominated environments due to concerns about child welfare and safety (i.e. pedophilia, abductions, etc.,) (cf. Pole, 2007:7).

<sup>96</sup> Consent "when executed properly provides sufficient information about study procedures so that a potential participant can make a reasonable decision about participation, based on an understanding of the potential risks and anticipated benefits (if any) of the study. Informed consent is not a waiver of rights. Individuals who do not have the authority to consent to participate in research must still provide their assent" (California State University, 2010, <http://www.ogc.fullerton.edu/irb/consentassent.htm>). Assent refers to "...an active affirmation of a desire to participate and differs from consent which is recognized as being granted from an individual with the legal authority to do so. Even very young children or those with limited cognitive ability can assent and they can certainly indicate a desire not to participate, which must be honoured. Assent should be administered in a manner that is easily understood by the potential participant

"giving clear information", and the option to participate in research that "respect[s] children's' interest and willingness to participate in research, after parents or guardians have provided consent" (cf. Mischna *et al.*, 2004).

In this research project, I began recruiting participants (see Appendices A through F) upon receiving ethics approval from the McMaster University Research Ethics Board (MREB). First, I recruited participants through convenience sampling in immediate social networks. I recruited mothers of tweens first and sought informed consent to interview their child or children. Tween participants included those between eight and thirteen years of age.<sup>97</sup> Initially, I sampled and recruited participants in immediate social networks, where no existing personal or intimate relationships that involved any dimension of power or supervision existed. Individuals so identified were first contacted by letter or email, informing them of the study and its focus. If participants notified me about their interest to participate, I then contacted them by telephone or in person to arrange an interview. Second, I also recruited participants through advertisements. Specifically, I posted a call for participants on McMaster Daily News "Worth Mentioning Section" (see Appendix G). Over time, participants provided me with additional contacts and interested persons (i.e. snowball sampling).

Specifically, in this research study, mothers were first sent a letter of information informing them of the study (see Appendix B). If interest in participating was expressed, a letter of consent was forwarded (see Appendix C). In addition to the standard

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(either written or verbal) and should be limited to a one-page format. Illustrations might be helpful and larger type makes it easier for some individuals to read" (California State University, 2010, <http://www.ogc.fullerton.edu/irb/consentassent.htm>).

<sup>97</sup> Although a few eager participants slightly under the age of eight were included in this study.



information provided on the consent form, mothers were asked if they [as mothers] were willing to participate in the study. If so, mothers were also asked (1) for permission to approach their tween-aged child/ren about an interview; (2) if the tween-aged child/ren agreed to participate, I requested mothers' permission to interview their child/ren; and finally, (3) permission to tape record the interview, as long as the child/ren agreed on their assent form (see Appendix C).

Once I secured parental consent, I gave tween-aged children an assent form, written in child-friendly language (see Appendix D). The assent form covered topics such as: "who I am", "why am I meeting you"; "what I am doing in this study"; "what will happen to you if you are in this study"; "are there good and bad things about the study"; "Will you have to answer all questions and do everything you are asked to do?"; "Who will know that you are in the study?"; "Do you have to be in the study?"; and finally, "Do you have any questions?" (see Appendix D).

The assent form also outlined the use of a special word, "pass", for the tween-aged child to use if s/he did not want to complete the interview (see Appendix D). By providing tween-aged children with these options, tweens were able to exercise some measure of control over the process. Attention to ethical issues of assent and consent is, therefore, very important. Equally important, however, are methodological techniques which engage children in the research process, provide them with agency and a voice and are fun and relevant to their skills, knowledge and interest levels (Christensen and Prout, 2002:321; Corsaro, 1997). I now examine the child-friendly methodological techniques used in this dissertation.

### **Child and Tween Friendly Methodological Techniques and Strategies**

Many scholars, especially those adopting the approach of the new sociology of childhood, have recommended using child and/or tween-friendly data collection techniques when conducting research with and on children and tween-aged children.<sup>98</sup> Child and/or tween-friendly data collection methods include tasks, questions and activities geared towards the skills, knowledge and interest levels of child participants (Christensen and Prout, 2002:321). Essentially, it is extremely important to acknowledge that "research with children isn't the same as research with adults, mainly because of adult perceptions of children and children's marginalized position in adult society" (Christensen and Prout, 2002:321). Research with children and tweens is *no less* important than adults. Thus, it is essential to treat tween-aged children's opinions as equally valid and important as older participants (i.e. adult) (Mandell, 1984; 1988).

Leonard (2007:137) has suggested that "children are ultimately the gatekeepers in their own worlds" (cf. Mandell, 1984; 1988). While researchers may gain all of the necessary approval and access, children ultimately control who has access to their own social worlds (Leonard, 2007; Mandell, 1984; 1988). That said, without child and/or tween-friendly research techniques, children may deny researchers access to their terrain. I now describe the child and/or tween-friendly research strategies used in this research, including (1) self as researcher and the "least-adult role" (cf. Mandell, 1984; 1988); (2) bonding with participants; and finally, (3) tween photographers.

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<sup>98</sup> See, for example, Boocock and Scott (2005), Christensen and Prout (2002), Corsaro (1997).

*Self as Researcher and the "Least-Adult Role"*<sup>99</sup>

Appearance plays a dominant role in interactions with other social actors.<sup>100</sup> In this research, it was especially important for me to take on the "least-adult role" (Mandell, 1988:433; 1984; see also, Leonard, 2007:141). According to Buchbinder *et al.* (2005), Nancy Mandell's (1988:433) "least-adult role" "...requires the suspension of adult-child differences (except physical size), and requires adults to occupy the role of a child when participating in children's social worlds."<sup>101</sup> A "least-adult role" minimizes the boundaries and "physical differences between adults and children in children's minds" (Buchbinder *et al.*, 2005; Mandell, 1988:433).<sup>102</sup> I was able to take on the "least-adult role" through my youthful appearance (Mandell, 1988:433).<sup>103</sup> My physical appearance as someone young and closer in age to the tween-aged children helped to create a sense of comfort, ease and relatively easy conversation - that is, my appearance made me someone I felt tweens could relate to.

Notably, I was able to pass not as..."teacher, parent, or adult but at the same time not quite being a pupil or child either" (Leonard, 2007:141).<sup>104</sup> Similar to Leonard's (2007:140) experience with school board officials and pupils, I dressed more "informally"

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<sup>99</sup> cf. Mandell (1988:433).

<sup>100</sup> See, for example, Davis (1992), Goffman (1963), Leonard (2007).

<sup>101</sup> As the Buchbinder *et al.* (2005) article was published online, I cannot provide pagination for this direct quote. The reader is referred to the webpage containing this article – <http://www.hannaperkins.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/hpc.Article.Ethnography-and-Childcare-Practice.pdf>.

<sup>102</sup> As the Buchbinder *et al.* (2005) article was published online, I cannot provide pagination for this direct quote. The reader is referred to the webpage containing this article – <http://www.hannaperkins.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/hpc.Article.Ethnography-and-Childcare-Practice.pdf>.

<sup>103</sup> As the Buchbinder *et al.* (2005) article was published online, I cannot provide pagination for this direct quote. The reader is referred to the webpage containing this article – <http://www.hannaperkins.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/hpc.Article.Ethnography-and-Childcare-Practice.pdf>.

<sup>104</sup> See also, Ball (1985), Buchbinder *et al.* (2005), Davis (1985), Mandell (1984; 1988).

when meeting with the tween-aged children. Appearing at an interview in a suit or more formal business type attire would symbolically communicate a level of authority over the tween-aged children - something which I did not want to do (cf. Leonard, 2007:140). Yet, wearing a Hannah Montana shirt would have communicated a researcher/interviewer bias.<sup>105</sup> Moreover, the tween-aged children too might have seen it as inappropriate; it might have made them suspicious of my intentions.<sup>106</sup>

Additionally, I was very conscious about the type and brand of clothing I wore in interviews. I consciously avoided wearing any visible labels in order to avoid interviewer/researcher bias. I was able to maintain my role as a researcher, yet I felt I projected an accessible image to my participants. Essentially, my appearance and "least-adult role" allowed me to gain approval from the tween-aged child "gatekeepers" (Mandell, 1988:433; see also, Leonard, 2007:137, 141).<sup>107</sup> I was also able to take on a "least-adult role" through different bonding strategies (Mandell, 1988:433). In the next section, I discuss the bonding process with research participants as a child and/or tween-friendly methodological technique.

### ***"Tell me about yourself": Establishing Rapport and Bonds with Research Participants***

Wax (1971) has argued that there is no perfect method to bond with participants while in the field. I established bonds with research participants in a few different ways. First, I always asked the mothers and tween children their preferred location for the

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<sup>105</sup> Interviewer bias refers to "the distortion of response to a personal or telephone interview which results from differential reactions to the social style and personality of interviewers or to their presentation of particular questions." (Marshall, 1998a: 329).

<sup>106</sup> See, for example, Pole (2007) for a discussion of a researcher's presentation of self in interviews.

<sup>107</sup> See also, Buchbinder *et al.* (2005), de Laine (2000), Measor (1985).

interview. I did this to ensure the tween (and mother) were as comfortable as possible. In some cases, we met in a local coffee shop, while other interviews took place at local libraries, office buildings, private residences, or by telephone. Tweens decided whether to be interviewed alone or with a family member. Indeed, the decision was entirely up to the child; therefore, I interviewed some<sup>108</sup> tween-aged children on their own, while others in the presence of their sibling or mother.

Secondly, I tried to make participants as comfortable as possible and create an initial bond at the start of every interview. I began by asking them to tell me a little about themselves such as the school they attended, their age, and favourite activities. I also told them about myself and let the participants ask me any questions. Sometimes tweens self-initiated the bonding process. In one case, the child brought her photo album from a past vacation for us to look at together. In another case, the individual told me about the public speaking contest s/he was in. Thus, the methodological bonding techniques created a comfortable and welcoming environment.

Thirdly, I was able to bond with the tween-aged children based on my knowledge of activities, television shows, games and celebrities that are/were of interest to them (i.e. again taking on the "least-adult role" through my knowledge of these activities and interests) (cf. Mandell, 1988:433). Being able to talk about the *High School Musical* series, Sidney Crosby, Zac Efron, Miley Cyrus, Taylor Swift, and *Glee* was an important bonding tool. In one particular interview, a tween participant was a little shy; once I

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<sup>108</sup> I followed Coombs (1978:12) semantic rules for describing the number of participants who expressed certain opinions: "To avoid weighing down the text with myriad numbers, I have generalized by using the conventional words, *few*, *some*, *many*, and *most*. They may be interpreted as follows: Few - not more than 10 percent of the respondents; Some - more than 10 percent but less than 25 percent; Many - more than 25 percent but less than 50 percent; Most - more than 50; a majority."

began asking about the tween show, *The Suite Life of Zack and Cody*, the participant smiled and began talking. After that ice-breaking technique, the interview lasted close to three hours. Like Wax (1971) has suggested, researchers need to be creative and flexible to identify bonding strategies that encourage the participant to feel comfortable and actively participate in the research; once found, an interview can surprise both the participant and researcher.

I also established bonds with tween participants through the use of pseudonyms, and in this regard, I presented the tween-aged children with the option of creating their own fake names (c.f. Currie *et al.*, 2006). I felt that this simple gesture would help the tweens feel in control of the interview process and allow them to make their mark in the research. I was amazed, however, at the energy and thought that went into the creation of their pseudonyms. One participant, for example, exclaimed "that is so funny you ask because my friends and I were just talking the other day about what other names we'd like to be called" (Jasmine). Tween participants took this task seriously and did not want to rush into a poor or bad name choice as it was their visible contribution to the project. In some instances, tweens asked if they could contact me a day or two after the interview as they wanted to pick out the best name possible. Others joyfully proclaimed their fake name almost immediately.

I included this method of bonding as it was attentive to the agency, opinions, thoughts and concerns of the tween-aged children; that is, the ability to choose pseudonyms created a sense of inclusiveness and value for tween-aged children in their role as participants (cf. Leonard, 2007; Mandell, 1984; 1988). These bonding techniques

enabled me to take on a "least-adult role" and bond with participants in ways which evoked agency and benefited the research through tweens' engagement and interest in the research project (cf. Leonard, 2007:140; Mandell, 1988:433). I now discuss my final child and/or tween-friendly methodological technique involving the use of photography and fashion images presented in magazines.

### ***Tween Photographers***

As part of the interview process, I also used magazines and a digital camera/recorder as a tween-friendly research technique.<sup>109</sup> Specifically, at the end of all the interviews, the tween participants and I looked at the celebrities and the different fashions and clothing styles presented in the magazines.<sup>110</sup> Respondents were able to take digital images of the particular pictures in the magazines that generated the most discussion. This tactic enabled me to discuss fashion and identity development in an age-appropriate manner suitable for tween-aged participants. The tweens considered this methodological approach fun.

This technique also created a sense of inclusiveness and value for tweens in their role as participants, and served as another "bonding tactic" in interviews (cf. Leonard, 2007:143). Leonard (2007:143) mentioned how she bonded with the children participants in her study. Similarly, my digital camera methodology enabled me to "trans[gress] the boundaries between adult and child by adopting the least adult role" (Leonard, 2007:143)

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<sup>109</sup> Boden *et al.* (2004) has mentioned looking through catalogues with her participants, but not the extent to which they were used in the research project (see also, Boden, 2006a; 2006b; Galilee, 2002; Pilcher, 2010; 2011; Pole, 2007).

<sup>110</sup> The magazines available for viewing; that is, a current issue of *Tiger Beat* was the same ones used in the systematic content analysis which is discussed later in the chapter.

Instead of being "Sarah the researcher", I was "Sarah who lets you use her camera to take pictures." In fact, I garnered a few interviews simply based on the word-of-mouth excitement of past participants. The fact that tweens selected their own pseudonyms compounded with the fun task of taking pictures, was a valuable way to relate to their competency levels and skills (Boocock and Scott, 2005; Christensen and Prout, 2002; Corsaro, 1997; Leonard, 2007; Mandell, 1984; 1988).<sup>111</sup>

To conclude, Christensen and Prout's (2002:321) observation that "research with children isn't the same as research with adults, mainly because of adult perceptions of children and children's marginalized position in adult society" informed the development of a methodology suitable for use in this research with tweens. Accordingly, I was able to successfully engage tween-aged children in the research process through attentiveness to the methodological issues unique to children and the employment of child and/or tween-friendly research techniques. I now discuss the steps in the research process, including (a) the development of the interview schedule; (b) questions developed for mothers and tweens; (c) the nature of the in-depth interviews; and (d) approaches used in the analysis of the qualitative interview data and descriptive content analysis.

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<sup>111</sup> Boden (2006a; 2006b) used a similar methodology in that her child participants hand-drew pictures of themselves in different outfits and looks (see also Rawlins, 2006). She also provided children or their mothers with a disposable camera with which to take pictures of themselves in their favourite outfits. For a more detailed discussion of her technique, please see Boden (2006a; 2006b), Boden *et al.* (2004), Cook and Hess (2007), Dockett and Perry (2005), Pilcher (2010), Pole (2007).



## **The Research Process**

I undertook this research to address substantive deficits in the research literature. At the same time, earlier studies were influential in informing my overall focus.<sup>112</sup> I used two forms of data collection in this dissertation: (a) I conducted thirty-three semi-structured qualitative interviews in Southwestern Ontario, using purposive and snow-ball sampling.<sup>113</sup> Of the thirty-three respondents recruited, seventeen were mothers and sixteen were tween-aged children including twelve girls and four boys<sup>114</sup> An interview schedule combining fixed and open-ended questions was developed for both mothers and for tweens given the different issues confronting these two groups of respondents.<sup>115</sup> (b) I also conducted a descriptive content analysis of two popular magazines targeting either parents (*Today's Parent*), or tweens (*Tiger Beat*). My intention was to attempt to delineate the fashion industry's role in establishing fashion styles linked to childhood identity for these two groups of respondents. As the interview schedule was foundational to my research, I begin with a discussion of its development for mothers and then for their tweens.

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<sup>112</sup> See, for example, Boden *et al.* (2004), Boden (2006a; 2006b), Brookes and Kelly (2009), Elliot and Leonard (2004), Pilcher (2010), Pole (2007), Rawlins (2006), Schor (2004). See Chapter Three for a complete discussion of these studies.

<sup>113</sup> In the case of three families (three mothers and four children in total), mothers requested that a paper version of the interview questions be sent to them to be completed at their convenience. While I respected participants' wishes, their written answers were followed up by a phone interview or an in-person interview, or both.

<sup>114</sup> Despite numerous attempts to recruit a larger sample through advertising, in the end I was compelled to resort to snowball sampling through social networks. Given the small sample size, results of this research should be interpreted with caution.

<sup>115</sup> Mothers participating in this study were aware of the focus of the research on their so-called tween-aged children, despite ages that might identify them as children in other circumstances. Accordingly, questions used in the interview schedule with mothers and their children employed this nomenclature tween.

### ***Interview Schedule for Mothers***

In order to elicit the fundamental meanings underling discussion of the issues of interest in this research, I developed the following questions. First, mothers were asked how they viewed childhood as a stage of development and what characteristics they associated with it; whether they felt childhood was now viewed differently, and did tweens represent a new stage in childhood. Mothers were also asked how they assessed this new stage; and whether they were aware of the emergence of fashions targeted to tweens.

I also developed questions intended to elicit a preliminary understanding of mothers' perceptions of their tweens' fashion likes and dislikes; the nature of clothing styles available for tweens; and mothers' overall familiarity with and assessment of tween fashion trends. I was also interested in establishing how mothers viewed the role of fashion in the media in shaping how their tweens viewed themselves. Accordingly, mothers were asked about their tweens' exposure to magazines aimed at them; television shows their tween watched regularly; and to what extent mothers felt their tweens were interested in fashion or considered it important.

Mothers were also asked to respond to open-ended questions that addressed how they viewed the relevance of fashion to tween self-image and the ways in which their tween did or did not use it as part of interaction with others. Mothers were also asked to assess the role of their tweens' peer group in influencing how their tween used fashion and what purpose, if any, did this fashion serve for interaction with the peer group.

To identify the extent to which mothers felt fashion provided through retail stores and media outlets might also influence their tweens' fashion or clothing choices, mothers were asked to assess the importance their tweens placed on brands and fashion logos and whether celebrity icons in tween magazines and on television had an influence on their tween's fashion preferences.

The next set of questions addressed more directly how mothers assessed the clothing styles available for their tweens; what made them acceptable or unacceptable for purchase; what images they associated with the tween fashions available; and how these assessments of appropriateness or inappropriateness or other factors influenced their interactions with their tweens around shopping for, and purchasing tween fashion styles.<sup>116</sup> Specifically, I explored with the mothers, the causes, if any, of mother-tween-aged child disagreements over fashion purchases. Finally, I asked mothers what influence their tween-aged children had over purchasing decisions when disagreements over fashion choices occurred.<sup>117</sup>

### *Interview Schedule for Tweens*

In order to ease my tween respondents into the interview process, I began by asking them to tell me about their favourite tween stars and tween celebrities, and favourite television shows. In this way, I hoped to obtain information about their familiarity with tween culture; which tween icons might serve as role models; and to what

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<sup>116</sup> For a complete listing of the actual questions used in the interview schedule developed for mothers, please see Appendix E.

<sup>117</sup> A number of demographic questions were also asked and these can be found in Appendix H.

extent the tweens in my sample expressed preferences that matched those identified by their mothers.

I also attempted to learn more about their interest in clothing and fashion by asking them to name their five favourite outfits, a strategy also used by Boden *et al.* (2004).<sup>118</sup> In addition, I asked them what made these particular outfits their favourites; what types of clothing they wore most often and why; and what influences different settings such as school or outings with friends might have on the clothing choices they made.

To expand the discussion, I moved to more general questions that explored why tween-aged children liked particular clothes and what they felt made them want to have or to purchase certain styles over others. In this regard, I probed for the influence brands and logos might have on their fashion likes and dislikes. I also asked more directly about the magazines they read, the television shows they watched and whether they discussed their clothing choices with their friends and why.

Finally, I asked the tweens themselves about their shopping behaviour: who they shopped with; what stores they were most likely to shop in; and what causes, if any, led to disagreements with their parents about what types of clothing or fashions to buy.<sup>119</sup>

As discussed earlier in the chapter, as part of the interview process, I made use of magazines and a digital camera/recorder as a tween-friendly research technique.

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<sup>118</sup> This resembles the tactic used by Boden *et al.* (2004) in conducting "wardrobe audits: simply talking through the contents of a person's wardrobe or chest of drawers" (Pole, 2007:73). However, in their research, this was done in the context of shopping trips with the family or in the bedroom of the child (cf. Boden, 2006a; 2006b; Pilcher, 2010; 2011).

<sup>119</sup> For a complete listing of the actual questions used in the interview schedule developed for tweens, please see Appendix F.

Specifically, at the end of all the interviews, the tweens and I looked at the celebrities and the different fashions and clothing styles presented in the tween magazine *Tiger Beat*. Respondents were able to take digital images of the particular pictures in the magazines that generated a positive or negative response. This tactic enabled me to discuss the reasons underlying their fashion likes and dislikes, the influence of celebrities as role models; and other influences on tween self-image, at an age-appropriate level.

### *Sample Characteristics*<sup>120</sup>

As mentioned earlier, I interviewed thirty-three individuals, seventeen of whom were mothers, while the remaining sixteen individuals were tweens - four boys and twelve girls between the ages of eight and thirteen.<sup>121</sup> Most mothers were in their early to mid-40s in age, and married with more than one child. All had attended or completed some form of post-secondary education. Moreover, these mothers came from diverse working backgrounds, ranging from stay-at-home moms, to managers and employees in the retail and sales industry, to vice-presidents and executives, and were predominately middle to upper-middle class individuals, based on their household income.<sup>122</sup> All mothers self-identified as white/Caucasian, and predominately Christian, although only a few self-identified themselves as active members of their faith.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> See Appendix H for further information on the sample composition. Given the small sample, these demographics are provided for information purposes only.

<sup>121</sup> One participant was 1 week shy of her eighth birthday but did not want to wait until she was officially a 'tween' to participate. She also wanted to do the interview the same day as her sister.

<sup>122</sup> This information reflects those expressing an opinion.

<sup>123</sup> Not all of the sample disclosed their religious affiliations. Additionally, some participants were non-denominational in their beliefs (spiritual instead of firmly attached to a religious group), while others were raised in one religion (i.e. Jewish) and later converted. As already noted, the findings from this sample should be interpreted with caution given the small sample size and homogeneous nature of the participants.

Most tweens were in grades four through seven, and the majority of respondents attended public schools, lived with both parents and had one or more siblings. A minority of the tween participants were only children or were living full-time with divorced or separated mothers (see Appendix H).

### *Duration of Interviews*

Interviews ranged in length from twenty minutes to three hours. In some cases, the interviews were tape-recorded. In others, I took vigorous notes during and after the interview. The decision to tape-record was influenced by the participant's decision to allow it or not, and the noise-level at the location where the interview was held. Coffee shops, for example, often had a great deal of background noise that made tape recording the interview problematic. On occasion, I also made the decision to stop recording if I considered it an impediment to the comfort level of participants. For example, despite agreeing to be recorded, one participant stared fixedly at the red light on the digital recorder. Upon noticing this, I asked her if she would feel more comfortable if I turned it off. Although she said she did not care and that it was "whatever I wanted", I made the decision to turn it off. From that point on, the girl was more relaxed and forthcoming in her answers.

### *Data Analysis of Interviews*

As Taylor and Bogdan (1984:129) have observed, "all researchers develop their own ways of analyzing qualitative data." In this research study, I was guided by the directive to develop an in-depth understanding of my respondents - the mothers and

tweens - as they made sense of the meanings guiding their actions and interactions with each other, and the larger social world. I began by organizing the data generated by the interviews with mothers into categories and then sub-categories of responses, as outlined below. I coded the data using the main categories of analysis first. Data were coded with qualifiers such as "innocence" or "corporate image". In a secondary stage of analysis, I sub-coded further these larger themes of analysis. For example, the main code and/or theme dealing with "concerns over age-appropriateness for tweens" was furthered sub-coded into categories such as (a) support for a traditional image of tween-agers as children, (b) tween fashion as problematic, (c) the increasing sexualization of tween fashion styles for girls but not for boys, and, (d) the gender differences this entailed. These codes and sub codes are outlined in detail below for both mothers and tweens.

As I engaged in this process, I became aware of themes or patterns emerging, as Taylor and Bogdan (1984:131) put it, in "conversation topics, vocabulary, recurring activities, meanings, feelings" expressed by my respondents. These categories, sub-categories and themes from the interview data with the mothers in my sample are provided below.

**Mothers**– (1) Notions of innocence versus corporate generation of alternate images. (2) Fear of exposure to tween magazines and television shows and the importance of fashion to their tweens – emergence of gender differences in importance of fashion. (3) Tween fashion as a form of image display – which included data on tween fashion as a unique form of self-image display, as a way to emulate significant others, as tied to situational contexts, and influenced by brand awareness and fashion logos. (4) The

role of peer influences and tween celebrity influences – the role of fashion in facilitating the generation of a successful self-image and integration within the peer group. (5) The concern over age-appropriateness for tweens – which included support for a traditional image of tween-agers as children, tween fashion as problematic, the increasing sexualisation of tween fashion styles for girls but not for boys, and the gender differences this entailed. (6) Shopping and purchasing decisions: Processes of gatekeeping tween fashions - appropriateness of clothing in terms of cost and practicality/functionality.

This section in particular provided insights about the increasing pressures mothers feel to protect their tween-aged girls in particular from commercial/corporate influences and how this impacts the mothers' interactions with her children – gatekeeping (a) against inappropriate tween fashions especially for their girls, and (b) as a strategy to avoid conflict through solo versus co-shopping. Another general theme emerged that mothers held very different and gendered meanings about the appropriateness of clothing for their tweens. I take up both these observations in detail in Chapter Seven.

**Tweens** – (1) Exposure to tween magazines and television shows reflected mothers' perceptions – Lists of magazines, television shows and tween celebrities very similar for these two groups. (2) The importance of fashion to tweens – gendered differences emerged. (3) Perceptions of tween fashion as a form of image display. (3) Perceptions of fashion as part of the interaction ritual. (4) Perceptions of the importance of branding and logos in projecting a preferred self-image. (5) The role of influential others on fashion choices which included data on peer influences and tween celebrity influences – emergence of gender differences in role-models emulated. (6) The role of



fashion in facilitating the generation of a successful self-image and integration within the peer group. (7) Concerns over age-appropriateness for tweens – tween girls assessing some fashions as problematic because of the image they conveyed - clothing as too mature for girls or too degrading (skanky); lack of concern by boys about the inappropriateness of their clothing choices. (8) Shopping and purchasing decisions: Gatekeeping tween fashions?

The last two sections above provided the insight that the increasing pressure that mothers reported they felt to protect their tween-aged children from commercial/corporate influences was not entirely warranted. What emerged from their responses was a picture of active tweens engaged in rejecting pressures themselves using the meanings about childhood provided by their mothers, and the wider peer group, a point I take up again in detail in Chapter Eight. Finally, in both the interview data with mothers and tweens, the gendered meanings associated with girls and boys were pervasive in their responses.

### ***Content Analysis- Data Analysis***

In addition to in-depth interviews, I also carried out a preliminary descriptive content analysis on several monthly media sources aimed at tween and parental markets. From January to April 2008, *BOP*, *Tiger Beat*, *Popstar!*, *Six*, *7*, *8<sup>th</sup>*, *teenVOGUE*, *CosmoGIRL!* and *Disneyshopping.com* were examined. Chosen systematically, each media source was from the same time period and represented the magazines or websites providing information about tween and teen fashion, bodily appearance, and how these related to the image their readers might want to project. Notably, the magazines also represented long-standing brand name magazines that have been on the market for years;

for example, *Tiger Beat and BOP*, and more recent publications such as *Popstar!*, *Six*, *7*, *8<sup>th</sup>*, *teenVOGUE* and *CosmoGIRL!*.

Because the magazines were so similar, I felt that selecting one, *Tiger Beat*, and comparing it to *Today's Parent*, targeting mothers, would be most effective in terms of illustrating the different images available in the marketplace. This strategy allowed me to systematically analyze the print media on a regular monthly basis for consistent themes and trends in the fashion presented in these sources; the topics and stories covered; the way(s) children were presented and in what contexts; and how both magazines made use of suggestions and/ recommendations for generating particular types of self-image for children and tweens based on the clothing worn. I had an annual subscription to both *Tiger Beat* and *Today's Parent* until November – December, 2009 and it was this year of the magazine was used in my analysis. *Today's Parent* was chosen as it is "... Canada's national parenting magazine, is committed to helping parents build happy, healthy, families. Speaking to moms and dads of children from birth to 14, articles tackle the complete range of parenting issues, including health, education, and behaviour" (December 2008:14) . Further, the magazine publishes 12 issues annually, "with a circulation of approximately 215,000 copies, the magazine is read by 1.8 million Canadians each month" (*Today'sparent.com*, 2010). It is a well-known and recognized publication among Canadian mothers.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Monthly editions of these magazines were also used as props in the interviews with tweens. For example, if I interviewed a tween in November, 2009, a copy of the November or December issue of *Tiger Beat* was used to generate discussion of the fashion images.

While not every participant might receive these two magazines on a regular basis, I did not feel that this was problematic for my research on tween fashion. Based on my preliminary examination of magazines on the market and a more general review of television shows aimed at tweens, *Tiger Beat* seemed to present an abridged package of current tween fashion trends (see also, Brookes and Kelly, 2009; Currie, 1999). This clothing reflected what was also worn by tween celebrities on television, and what was available at retail stores, a point I take up in some detail in the chapters that follow. However, it is useful to note that the tweens in this sample listed *Tiger Beat* as a magazine that they read often, and their mothers were also aware of this magazine.

To supplement the analysis of the magazines, I regularly checked news media and academic avenues for articles pertaining to the construction of children through the use of fashion. In this regard, I also collected articles, although not systematically from *The Hamilton Spectator*, *The Toronto Star*, *Associated Press* (online), *The Orlando Sentinel*, *The Daily Express UK*, *Disney.com*, *Macleans*, *The View*, *The Today Show*, and other media sources.

Using a descriptive content analysis rooted in frame analysis (Entman, 1993), I examined 12 issues of *Today's Parent* and 11 issues of *Tiger Beat* - the equivalent of one year of publication for each magazine.<sup>125</sup> Notably, there were quite different approaches taken in these magazines to the selection and placement of images of childhood and/or

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<sup>125</sup> In this research, 12 issues of *Today's Parent* and 11 issues of *Tiger Beat* magazine were included as part of the analysis. In each issue, an average of 200 or more images were considered. Although all of these images were considered, only examples of the various themes emerging are provided in Appendices I and J. It is important to note, also, that only images with a complete view of the clothing worn were included in the analysis of these magazines. Further, since advertisements were a part of the "package" and "corporate writing" strategies of the magazines (Knight and Greenberg, 2002:545), images in advertisements were analyzed alongside the images that accompanied stories in the magazine articles.

tweenhood, the fashions worn, and the use or non-use of celebrities as fashion icons and role-models. However, the homogeneous nature of the generic images found in each magazine directed me to concentrate on establishing the themes informing these images within each magazine, and in contrast to one another, rather than to provide a quantitative analysis which would not prove very useful in any case given my focus on meanings.

A number of research questions informed my analysis of the two magazines. My overarching focus was to consider whether contradictions exist between traditional constructions of childhood and more recent images of children in popular culture. To address this issue, I considered the following: Within these two magazines, how was childhood conceptualized? More specifically, I considered in detail the nature and content of the images presented in *Today's Parent* and in *Tiger Beat*, with a view to establishing whether age-based differences rooted in understandings of childhood could be clearly delineated within these two magazines and if so, what form they took. The results of this analysis are provided in Chapter Six which follows.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I have reviewed the issues informing the use of qualitative methodologies, and the ethical and methodological problems that can arise when conducting research with children. I have described the development of the interview schedules for the mothers and tweens in this sample and, in particular, my introduction of a new technique for engaging children in research. I have also described the sample, the interview process itself and the data analysis strategies I used in organizing the data and extracting themes. I concluded with a brief overview of the content analysis undertaken

with two magazines aimed at mothers and tweens. In Chapter Six, I present the results of the content analysis; in Chapter Seven, the results of my interview with mothers; and in Chapter Eight, the results of my interviews with tweens.

## **CHAPTER 6: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF *TODAY'S PARENT* AND *TIGER BEAT* USING FRAME ANALYSIS**

Although concerns have been expressed by scholars and the public alike about the increasing commodification and sexualization through fashion of children known as tweens, I felt it was important, as part of my research, to provide empirical referents to inform the discussion of these issues.<sup>126</sup> As indicated in the last chapter, it was not my intention to conduct a complete overview of fashion magazines aimed at tweens and their mothers. Rather, I hoped, through an analysis of images contained in these magazines, to generate "sensitizing concepts" that would guide my research (cf. Blumer, 1969a:2; Marshall, 1998b:43). After an extensive review of the available literature, two magazines were chosen to serve as ideal types.

In this chapter, I discuss the results arising from the content analysis of these two magazines chosen for study: *Today's Parent* and *Tiger Beat*. A number of research questions informed my analysis of the two magazines. My overarching focus was to consider whether contradictions exist between traditional constructions of childhood and more recent images of children in popular culture. To address this issue, I considered the following: Within these two magazines, how was childhood conceptualized? For example, did *Today's Parent* consider that childhood as a stage included the so-called tween age group – ages 8 to 13 - or did their focus reflect shifting notions of the stages of childhood development? According to Schor (2004:56), tweens – formerly considered children ranging in age between eight and thirteen – now represent an "ambiguous,

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<sup>126</sup> While different in scope to my own research project, it is important to note that Brookes and Kelly's (2009:600) content analysis of the Australian magazine, *Dolly*, as well as Cook's (1999) analysis of children in trade journals are insightful in addressing how children are influenced and targeted by consumerist and marketing tactics present in these types of publications.

gendered, and age-delineated marketing and merchandising category" (Albanese, 2009:222; see also, Brookes and Kelly, 2009; Cook and Kaiser, 2004:203; Kopkowski, 2008; Rawlins, 2006; Schor, 2004). How then did *Tiger Beat*, a magazine aimed at this new age group of tweens, conceptualize them as a distinct marketing and merchandising category?

Using a descriptive content analysis rooted in frame analysis (Entman, 1993), I examined 12 issues of *Today's Parent* and 11 issues of *Tiger Beat* - the equivalent of one year of publication for each magazine. Notably, there were quite different approaches taken to the selection and placement of images of childhood and/or tweenhood, the fashions worn, and the use or non-use of celebrities as fashion icons and role-models for magazine readers.

More specifically, I considered in detail the nature and content of the images presented in *Today's Parent* and in the images aimed at tweens in *Tiger Beat*, with a view to establishing whether age-based differences rooted in understandings of childhood can be clearly delineated within these two magazines.

### **Frame Analysis**

To accomplish the objectives outlined above, I made use of frame analysis, as conceptualized by Entman (1993). Erving Goffman (1974) first developed frame analysis, and other theorists have made use of this approach.<sup>127</sup> However, Entman (1993:51) has argued that no theorist has developed a comprehensive and accessible

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<sup>127</sup> See, for example, Edelman (1993), Entman and Rojecki (1993), Fiske and Taylor (1991), Gamson (1992), Graber (1988), Iyengar (1991), Kahneman and Tversky (1984), Pan & Kosicki (1993), Riker (1986), Snow and Benford (1988), Tuchman (1978), White (1987), Zaller (1992).

statement of frame theory itself. In fact, Entman (1993:51-52) has stated that "nowhere is there a general statement of framing theory that shows exactly how frames become embedded within and make themselves manifest in a text, or how framing influences thinking." Entman (1993:52) has also suggested that previous attempts at defining and analyzing *frames* and *framing* are "often defined causally, with much left to an assumed tacit understanding of the researcher and reader." Further, he has stated that common concepts such as frame, framing and *framework* appear far too frequently "outside of formal scholarly discourse" (Entman, 1993:52). As a result, Entman (1993:52) has developed a theory, rooted in Goffman's (1974) work, which addresses these deficits in the frame analysis literature by offering a "more precise and universal understanding" of the concepts used for the analysis and the examination of communication texts. I chose to use Entman's (1993) theory of frame analysis in this research as it is proved to be a practical and methodical way to examine communication texts such as my magazine data.

According to Entman (1993:52), two principles inform the examination of communication texts – first, there is a focus on the *selection* and second, the *salience* of the information presented. Analytically, the researcher is enjoined to attend to the "selection" of information made in a communication text as it is used to "promote a particular problem, definition, casual interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described" (Entman, 1993:52). The researcher then considers the effect of this selection on the "salience" of the information (Entman, 1993:52). According to Entman (1993:53), by highlighting "bits of information about an item", the information becomes "salient"; that is, "more noticeable, meaningful, or



memorable to an audience. An increase in salience enhances the probabilities that receivers will perceive the information, discern meaning and thus process it, and store it in memory." Entman (1993:53) has argued that salience is also achieved through the placement or repetition of information or the association of the information with "culturally familiar symbols".

Indeed, Entman (1993:57) has observed that framing is essential for content analysis as it identifies the "dominant meanings" contained within a communication text. However, content analysis without the use of frame analysis "may yield data that misrepresent the media messages that most audience members are actually picking up" (Entman, 1993:57). Although in this research the impact on readers of selected and salient images in *Today's Parent* and *Tiger Beat* was an empirical question, Entman (1993:57) has suggested that "to identify a meaning as dominant or preferred is to suggest a particular frame of the situation that is most heavily supported by the text and is congruent with the most common audience schemata."

The use of framing is an important theoretical tool for analyzing the content of communication texts and seemed ideal for analyzing the data obtained through the descriptive content analysis of *Today's Parent* and *Tiger Beat*. As I was also interested in what information was NOT selected for inclusion in these two magazines, I made note of what was missing in terms of the selection and salience of images of children and tweens in *Today's Parent* and *Tiger Beat*. At the end of the chapter, I examine the frames identified in *Today's Parent* and *Tiger Beat* using the theoretical concepts of promotionalism and the cult of celebrity to consider how these frames may act to

influence or not to influence magazine readers (cf. Knight and Greenberg, 2002; Lawrence, 2009).

In the next section, I begin with a discussion of the target audience and mission statement of *Today's Parent*. Then I delineate the main frames of analysis identified in this magazine: the use of fashion images to project the innocence of children and to reinforce traditional gender roles; and concomitantly, the asexual, non-erotic depiction of "anonymous" – that is non-celebrity - children in the images selected for inclusion in this magazine.<sup>128</sup>

### **Today's Parent**

#### ***Target Audience and Mission Statement***

As is easily discerned from its title, *Today's Parent* has parents as its target audience. The magazine was established in October 1984 and is published by Roger's Publishing Limited, a division of Rogers Media Inc. located in Toronto, Ontario, Canada (*Today's Parent*, December 2008-November 2009; *Todaysparent.com*). According to their homepage, *Today's Parent* (2010) purports to offer information and help to its readers such as: "Raising kids in the real world"; "Solving problems for Canadian moms and dads for over 25 years"; and providing "a library of information on all the ages and stages of your kids, parenting and how to keep your kids healthy" (*Todaysparent.com*, 2010).<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> A complete listing of the descriptive coded images by magazine issue on which this discussion is based can be found in Appendix I. Unfortunately, prohibitive costs linked to copyright laws made it impossible to reproduce images in the dissertation proper.

<sup>129</sup> As this is the online version of the website, I cannot provide pagination for this direct quote. The reader is referred to the webpage: [www.Todaysparent.com](http://www.Todaysparent.com).

*Today's Parent* (December 2008:14) also adheres to the following mandate and/or mission statement:

*Today's Parent*, Canada's national parenting magazine, is committed to helping parents build happy, healthy, families. Speaking to moms and dads of children from birth to 14, articles tackle the complete range of parenting issues, including health, education, and behaviour. *Today's Parent*:

- Helps parents view situations through a child's eyes and truly understand child development.
- Helps readers feel that they are not alone, providing them with a community that shares similar joys and frustrations.
- Does not underestimate readers' intelligence and is not afraid to tackle taboo topics.
- Offers unconventional wisdom, but not "perfect" solutions; provides options, not lectures.
- Laughs about life with kids, but never at the expense of kids.
- Advocates for a better world for our children.

The magazine publishes 12 issues annually, "with a circulation of approximately 215,000 copies, the magazine is read by 1.8 million Canadians each month" (*Today'sparent.com*, 2010).<sup>130</sup> *Today's Parent* magazine is approximately 8 inches by 10.5 inches in size, printed in color on glossy paper, and is a sister magazine of *Today's Parent Toronto*, *CanadianParents.com*, *Today's Parent Pregnancy*, *Today's Parent Baby and Toddler*, *Today's Parent Kidsummer*, and *Enfants Quebec* (*Today's Parent*, December 2008-November 2009; *Today'sparent.com*, 2010-2011).<sup>131 132</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> As this is the online version of the website, I cannot provide pagination for this direct quote. The reader is referred to the webpage: [www.Todaysparent.com](http://www.Todaysparent.com).

<sup>131</sup> As this is the online version of the website, I cannot provide pagination for this information. The reader is referred to the webpage: [www.Todaysparent.com](http://www.Todaysparent.com).

<sup>132</sup> *Today'sparent.com* is the online version of the magazine with interactive features such as blogs, forums, contests, mobile applications and newsletters, as well as other resources on such topics as "Pregnancy", "Baby", "Toddler", "Preschool", "School-Age", "Tween and Teen", "Parent Time", "Health", "Food", and "Crafts and Fun" (*Today'sparent.com*, 2010). Given limits of time and space, the online version of *Today's Parent* was not consulted nor referenced in this research project.

As part of my research, I analyzed twelve issues of *Today's Parent* from December 2008 to November 2009. The monthly issues varied greatly in page length.<sup>133</sup> However, each issue contained countless pages of advertising ranging from baby and child items (i.e. strollers, diapers, toys) to services (i.e. *Canada Post*) and stores (i.e. *Canadian Tire*, etc); a stark contrast to the wall posters of tween celebrities found each month in *Tiger Beat*. While the content of the topics varied, every issue of *Today's Parent* included the following "Departments": "From the Editors", "Mailbag", "Family Room", "Uncommon Sense", "Mom Time", "Health", "Education", "Behaviour", "Family Food", "Steps and Stages", "Expert Q & A", "Your Turn", and finally, "Milestones". These categories were not part of the analysis. My primary focus was on the display of images of children and tweens in the magazine, as well as on the particular fashions featured.

### **Today's Parent – Results**

Using frame analysis, I made note of the images selected for inclusion in the magazine on a monthly basis, the content of the images in terms of the apparent age of the model, the nature of the clothing worn, the context within which the image was situated, the activities engaged in, and whether apparent age or gender differences emerged in the information presented. I also attended to the "salience" of the information as defined by Entman (1993:52). Specifically, I examined the highlighting given to information

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<sup>133</sup> The average number of pages per monthly issue was 152.6, with the October 2009 "25th Anniversary celebration" edition the largest at 208 pages.

through placement, repetition, or association with "culturally familiar symbols" (Entman, 1993:53).

### ***Framing Childhood Through Fashion as a Stage of Innocence***

As discussed in an earlier chapter, childhood is framed for some a time of innocence; while for others, childhood is bisected by age with a new stage identified as the tween stage. *Today's Parent*, with its "parent and child-centred" focus, made little apparent attempt to include older [tween-aged] models in a way that would suggest that they represented a different stage in the life cycle in any significant way (cf. *Todaysparent.com*, 2010-2011).<sup>134</sup> In terms of selection and presentation of information, for example, all the covers of the magazine contained images of what were apparently intended to be considered children and this extended to images within the magazine as well (cf. Appendix I). Notably, none of the models on the cover from December, 2008 to November, 2009 appeared any older than eight or nine years of age – an assessment based on the style of the clothing they were wearing, clothing that might be considered more suitable for children based my descriptive analysis of tween images in tween oriented magazines. This observation is also interesting given the magazine's mandate to provide information to parents of children from birth to 14 years of age (cf. *Todaysparent.com*, 2010-2011).

Regardless of placement, and whether boys or girls, these models were attractive and projected what might be construed as a wholesome image. There appeared to be little

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<sup>134</sup> As this is the online version of the website, I cannot provide pagination for this direct quote. The reader is referred to the webpage: [www.Todaysparent.com](http://www.Todaysparent.com).

or no recognition of a new stage following childhood based on age that intersected with the teenage years and generated a different style of clothing. Further, although there were limited discussions of tweens in the text, the fashion images accompanying any presentation of children in that age-range conveyed more innocent understandings of this life-stage than a reading of other tween oriented magazines might suggest. For example, in an article geared to 9 to 11 year olds entitled, "When Friends are Mean," a group of girls are shown "hanging out" together at a sleepover (*Today's Parent*, August 2009:96). Although they are identified as tweens, the girls wear modest attire – legging style pants, long shirts that cover their midribs and lower abdomens – and all sport braided hair. This is similar to the image presented in "Out and About" where two tween-aged girls are shown getting ready to go out for coffee (*Today's Parent*, June 2009:154). These girls are modestly dressed in blue jeans, sneakers, tops and jackets which cover their stomachs and mid-sections.

In another edition of *Today's Parent* (November, 2009:170), an image is presented of a mother and daughter assessing whether fashions are "age inappropriate" (i.e. a dress). The girl, clearly within the tween age group, is also dressed in modest, conventional clothing. The article, "Growing up Too Fast?", accompanying this image, reflected on a mother's experience of shopping with her pre-teen:

I remember one shopping expedition with my then 10-year-old daughter when I was taken aback by what was on offer in her size. The teeny-tiny belly tops and tight, low-cut jeans, in fashion at the time, just seemed too provocative for a girl her age. 'But mom', Annie said, 'everyone's wearing them!' (170).

In Entman's (1993:52) terms, the image of the mother and daughter, as well as the caption could be considered to be salient; that is, selected to reinforce *Today's Parent's*

perspective that considering eight to thirteen year olds to still be children is preferable, as tweenhood is a stage characterized by inappropriate fashion choices which can give rise to stress for both parents and children. Given the homogeneity of the images presented and the repeated depiction of children in the tween range in modest, conventional clothing, it became apparent that *Today's Parent* magazine stresses a particular frame of childhood as a life stage that does not include tweenhood, despite the age of the models. My analysis of these images also identified several "dominant meanings" that shaped conceptualizations of how this childhood stage was to be understood that emphasized not only the traditional conceptualizations of the innocence of childhood but also its gendered nature (cf. Entman, 1993:57).

Through placement, repetition, or association with "culturally familiar symbols", images of girls and boys appeared selected to project this sense of innocence and, more notably, through clothing, context and the activity depicted, to reinforce traditional gender roles (cf. Entman, 1993:57). In Entman's (1993:57) terms, these selected images of childhood were salient – designed to identify a meaning as dominant or preferred.

### ***Framing Childhood Through Fashion to Reinforce Traditional Gender Roles***

Intrinsically tied to the conceptualization of children as innocent were the meanings and definitions about appropriate dress. Not only were tween-aged children dressed in modest conventional clothing, these models also wore stereotypically gendered apparel (cf. Appendix I for a listing of these images by issue).

It was not unusual, for example, to see female models of all ages in dresses or skirts, often with frills and in pink hue colours. Models dressed in this stereotypically

female attire were usually depicted engaged in domestic or stereotypically gendered activities. For example, on page 5 of the December 2008 edition of *Today's Parent*, the image is presented of a girl completely dressed in pink with her hair in pigtails. Further, on pages 58-60 and 62-63 of this same issue, images of girls as little mothers, dressed in feminine clothing while decorating the house, doing crafts, and baking are presented. Similarly, while engaged in washing dishes, a girl is depicted wearing pink rubber gloves with polka dots (*Today's Parent*, April 2009:66). In another example, a girl is shown tossing a salad for dinner (*Today's Parent*, August 2009:69). As Entman (1993:52-53,57) would conclude, through repetition and association with cultural images and activities, these images become salient and reinforce dominant meanings about what it means to be a girl.

In terms of non-selection of images and information, there were very few images showing girls as active and athletic; indeed, most images showed girls in stationary or static positions that were quite posed.<sup>135</sup> For example, a girl is featured in an article on "Five Ways to Get Active", but is holding a volleyball while posing in a stationary position (*Today's Parent*, June 2009:27). In this regard, while girls occasionally appeared in soccer attire, it was usually only images of boys in action shots (i.e. actually playing soccer) that were depicted in the magazine (*Today's Parent*, June 2009:27,66-69). In one exception to this rule, a girl is portrayed as active (i.e. playing soccer), but she is still dressed in feminine clothing and canvas looking slip-on shoes not conducive to strenuous exercise like running (*Today's Parent*, June 2009:27,66-69). A further example of

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<sup>135</sup> For an exception, please see *Today's Parent* (July 2009:76) which presented a small group of girls and boys playing a game of bean bag toss, bowling, and playing with water guns.



feminine athletic and active wear is seen in the July 2009 issue. A picture depicts girls at a summer daycare and/or camp. However, while all these girls are dressed in active wear, some are wearing baby pink shorts and are in a very posed "running shot" (*Today's Parent*, July 2009:100).

Using frame analysis, repetitive images and/or information that present girls in stereotypically gendered ways could be said to be salient, tied as they are to wider cultural messages reinforcing traditional ideologies regarding appropriate female dress, duties, and social activities. However, in terms of the selection and salience of information and images depicting boys, *Today's Parent* also appeared to reinforce traditional stereotypes of boys in terms of their clothing and activities.

For example, repetitive images of boys as little men were presented, with these models wearing polo shirts, sweater vests, slacks (i.e. khakis and/or jeans), and collared shirts (*Today's Parent*, all editions; Appendix I). These outfits worn by boys were often identical to the images selected to represent fathers who were wearing polo shirts and khakis and/or jeans (cf. *Today's Parent*, June 2009:5,81-82,88).

Images depicting boys as physically active on the basis of the clothing they were wearing were also common. For example, an article on "Healthy Kids" features a mother, father and two boys riding their mountain bikes (*Today's Parent*, May 2009:62). Further, while a girl poses sitting atop a soccer ball, her male counterparts are seen playing in a variety of different shots: first, a boy is shown running with the ball, while in another shot, he is balancing and running on top of the soccer ball. Another boy is depicted running down the field ready to kick a goal, with a latter set of images showing him and

his teammates running and embracing one another after scoring a goal. Finally, a team of boys are depicted stretching and exercising before starting their soccer game (*Today's Parent*, June 2009:66-70).

In addition to images in the magazine on a monthly basis, numerous advertisements for *Wonderbread*, *Safe Kids Canada*, and an advertisement aimed at attracting people to move to Manitoba, also showcased boys dressed in athletic gear or sports attire; for example in hockey gear or in athletic wear or while holding a football (cf. *Today's Parent*, September 2009:25; *Today's Parent*, February 2009:14-15; *Today's Parent*, January 2009:59; Appendix I). Although posed, unlike most images of girls in athletic gear, the boys wore clothing actually conducive to physical activity. All clothing images selected and concurrently rendered salient through placement, repetition or connection with wider cultural symbols epitomized gendered conceptualizations of boys as little men and/or boys who engaged in traditional male activities like sport (cf. Entman, 1993:52-53,57).

These meanings and definitions were further emphasized by including models playing with age and gender appropriate toys in the advertisements. For example, in an article on successful sleepovers, two boys are shown playing with a car and train set (*Today's Parent*, May 2009:96). Similarly, the cover of the November 2009 issue shows a blond girl, dressed in traditional attire, riding a very pink *Disney Princess* themed activity ride-on.<sup>136</sup> The same girl is later shown playing with very feminine, pink and flowery

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<sup>136</sup> An activity ride-on is similar to a buggy. According to the *Disneystore.com* (2011, <http://www.disneystore.com>), the description of the *Disney Princess* ride-on is: "Her royal carriage awaits. Your young princess can drive herself to the ball on this Disney Princess Activity Ride-On. With lots of

"*Superstructs Pinklets: The Fairy Garden*", which according to the description are "...pink and it's all about fairies – two reasons our 'girlie girl' testers were drawn to this construction toy..." (*Today's Parent*, November 2009:5,53). This selection of images of boys and girls wearing stereotypical male and female clothing and playing with gender appropriate toys in *Today's Parent* rendered these gendered stereotypes salient, tied as they were to a larger cultural context wherein dominant meanings are reproduced (cf. Entman, 1993:57).

Further, depictions of parent-child interactions also reinforced these gender stereotypes as salient, as they were inherently connected to cultural and social understandings of parenting and the reproduction of gender appropriate roles and activities (cf. Entman, 1993:52-57). For example, images of mothers predominated in the issues included in this descriptive content analysis. There was also a stark contrast between the presentation of males; that is, fathers or father-figures, and females; that is, mothers or mother figures. Notably, mother figures were depicted in stereotypically feminine ways through their (a) visible motherly roles and emotions seemingly being expressed and (b) through participation in traditionally feminine activities, such as housework. It is also important to note that mothers were not limited to same-sex parent-child interactions; rather, depictions of mothers with both male and female children were common. However, interaction and/or participation in household activities such as cooking were almost always done with the same-sex; that is, female child.

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great features like the sound effect of a horse whinnying, this princess buggy will steer her towards playtime fun!"

Mothers were always presented in images as nurturing, compassionate, and comforting individuals. In an article on surviving early childhood development, a mother (who is also a doctor) is depicted comforting her two-year-old son in her arms (*Today's Parent*, August 2009:42). The emphasis on her role as a nurturing and caring mother appears to take precedence over her role as a doctor. In another example, a mother is again depicted in the role of nurturer, as she embraces her toddler girl (*Today's Parent*, July 2009:45-46; see also, June 2009:38; Appendix I).

Further, the placement and repetitive depictions of mothers participating in domestic tasks and activities with their children were common. For example, in the February 2009 (3; 23) issue, an image is presented of a very gendered parent-child interaction: a mother and her two girls cooking in the kitchen. A similar image is seen in the same issue, as a mother and daughter are shown making sushi (98) (cf. *Today's Parent*, November 2009:186; Appendix I). It could be argued that images of mothers as actively engaged and nurturing both their male and female children are made salient, as they are tied to cultural ideals surrounding female and mother-related duties, roles and appropriate forms of interactions with children (cf. Entman, 1993:52-53,57).

However, as noted earlier, similar depictions of fathers are rare in *Today's Parent*. Despite their mission statement, *Today's Parent* tends, in my opinion, to market to and cater to a female audience. As a result, most of the depictions of parental-child interactions were of a mother and child. Where images of fathers and/or male father figures were included, these men were either (a) seen posing with children or (b) most often interacting with same-sex children (i.e. boys) in stereotypical activities.

Out of all of the issues examined for research, images of father-child interactions were greatest in the June 2009 issue (i.e. Father's Day issue; *Today's Parent*, June 2009:80-88,91-93). In an article on "Dads we love", fathers are depicted with their children in happy, posed shots; each individual is wearing denim jeans and a white shirt (infant girls are featured in denim dresses). With the exception of father Joshua Miller interacting with his son in his makeshift cardboard house while giving him a kiss, all other fathers are merely posing with their children - there is no interaction (cf. *Today's Parent*, June 2009:1,5,8; November 2009:127). Moreover, another article in the same issue, "The New Dad" (*Today's Parent*, June 2009:91-93) only shows one visible, albeit obstructed, image of a father and his newborn baby. Despite the focus of the article, very few images of fathers and babies are included (cf. *Today's Parent*, December 2008:28).

Further, in an article entitled, "Food, Love and Fatherhood", chef David Rocco is pictured in the kitchen with two children, a boy and a girl (*Today's Parent*, June 2009:61-62). Although he is shown holding a knife with garlic in front of him, it is only the girl (adorned in pigtails) who is actually "getting her hands dirty" in the kitchen, with tomatoes all over her hands while she prepares a tomato sauce (cf. *Today's Parent*, June 2009:61-62). The boy appears to be holding something in his hand but is also not actively participating in the cooking – rather, like Rocco (depicted as a father figure), he is *observing* while the girl participates in the traditionally gendered task of cooking. Other images included in this article continue to depict the girl as the active participant in the kitchen. On page 62, for example, Rocco poses with the children while the girl grates cheese as the boy holds the grater, taking a passive role in the kitchen. Notably, both

male figures are posing in this article, rather than interacting and/or participating in what is considered a female task.

Further evidence of these stereotypically gendered activities is seen through parent-child interactions. More often than not, therefore, father figures are depicted as active participants in same-sex traditional activities. First, a African American father is shown teaching his three-to-five-year old how to ride his first bike (*Today's Parent*, June 2009:132). Similarly, another African American father figure is shown as a soccer coach, exercising and getting his all-male team ready for the soccer game (*Today's Parent*, June 2009:70).<sup>137</sup> Certainly, it could be argued that all images of parental-child interactions selected and concurrently rendered salient through placement, repetition or connection with wider cultural symbols epitomized gendered notions of traditional and/or appropriate male and female roles and activities (cf. Entman, 1993:52-53, 57).

Notably, my descriptive content analysis of *Today's Parent* yielded no evidence that gender boundaries were crossed in any presentation and/or framing of images of children. One would be hard-pressed to find a boy wearing anything that resembled a feminine look, or a girl in anything but gender appropriate attire (cf. *Today's Parent*, December 2008 - November 2009; Appendix I). Indeed, in terms of images that were selected for inclusion in *Today's Parent*, what it means to be a child did not appear to involve any gender ambiguities. Children were stereotypically depicted as either boys or girls and dressed "appropriately."

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<sup>137</sup> One exception is found in the May 2009(61) issue which does include an image of a father running and exercising with his wife, son and daughter.

I suggest that these stereotypical renderings of female and male children may be part of a larger frame within *Today's Parent* which seeks to make salient the image of the idyllic family who communicate information about themselves such as their status, adherence to middle-class family values, and overall social well-being through what they wear. An advertisement for *The Co-operators*, for example, presents the image of the idyllic family – depictions of attractive, heterosexual couples with equally attractive children, depictions very similar to the images of fathers with their children in the special June 2009 "Father's Day Edition" (*Today's Parent*, May 2009:33; *Today's Parent*, June 2009:1,5,8,61-62; 91-93; see also, *Today's Parent*, May 2009:61; Appendix I). Entman (1993:53,57) would argue that this salient image is further projected by use of "culturally familiar symbols", such as a tranquil white sandy beach and the white angelic clothing in which most of the family is adorned. It may be that this linkage to images of the traditional, happy, nuclear family may encourage mothers in particular and parents in general to view and to dress their children in a more traditional way. Future research is needed to explore these possibilities.

***Framing Childhood Through Fashion to Reinforce the Asexual Nature of Childhood***

Although there is some overlap in these images in terms of their potential to represent salient images of childhood as a stage of innocence, I felt it was important to illustrate the *absence* of any imagery linked to the increased sexualization of children in the tween age range. Clearly, in the 12 issues I examined, *Today's Parent* contained no images of children and/or fashion that could, in any way be interpreted as erotic,

sexualized or age-inappropriate. As previously mentioned, the November 2009 (170) article on "Growing Up Too Fast?" revealed that "teeny-tiny belly tops and tight, low-cut jeans" are "too provocative for a girl" in her tween years. Rather, more age-appropriate images were frequently provided of smiling children wearing white, a colour commonly associated in North American culture with innocence, against the backdrop of a clear blue sky (*Today's Parent*, September, 2009:37). Indeed, child models selected for inclusion in this regard could only be described as cherub-like.<sup>138</sup>

As noted earlier, images of apparently older tween-aged children were characterized by the selection of fashions for them in traditional colours, cuts and styles (*Today's Parent*, November, 2009:170; Appendix I). Indeed, in the March (2009:91-94) issue, an article entitled "Teenage Dread", discusses the changes that children go through as they age in terms of the fashions they choose. Specific reference is made to fashion choices accompanying these changes that might be considered inappropriate, and the article is illustrated with an image of a child model sporting the grunge look. Specifically, the female model is depicted in black pants with boxer shorts popping out of the top of her bottoms, with a black shirt covering the palm and top of her hand. Her outfit is accessorized with metal studded wrist bracelets, as well as one pink chain and two metal chains connected to her belt loop and back pocket. She also sports a French manicure which is quite visible as the white nail polish gleams and contrasts her black attire. Her outfit is complimented with rings on the three middle fingers of each hand.

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<sup>138</sup> A notable exception to this imagery occurred in articles about "bad behaviour", "being frightened", "mental health issues" or "tantrums" where advice was provided to parents on how to react. These articles were accompanied by images of young, angry or sad child models - for example *Today's Parent* (December, 2008:131), February (2009:16), June (2009:55,73), and August (2009:79).



Such an image strongly contrasts with the 'ideal' and more consistently presented image of children in *Today's Parent*. Indeed, this traditional image of childhood is salient for those who accept or have internalized larger cultural understandings of traditional childhood.

Although not a primary focus of this research, it is interesting to note that through my analysis, I also identified frames in the types of advertisements included in *Today's Parent* that reinforced the images in the magazine proper. Specifically, in addition to depicting child models in stereotypical clothing and activities, an observation made earlier when discussing boys, the images of the children in these advertisements could invariably be described as representing childhood as a time of innocence.<sup>139</sup>

### ***Framing Childhood Fashion Through the Use of Anonymous Models***

Given the propensity for tween magazines to focus on celebrity models and their fashion choices, an observation I discuss in detail in the next section on *Tiger Beat* magazine, I felt it was important to examine the types of models used in *Today's Parent* to illustrate fashion. *Today's Parent* magazine did not regularly use child or tween celebrity models such as Miley Cyrus, Taylor Swift or any of their contemporaries (cf. Appendices I and J). Rather, the publication favoured the use of anonymous child models who, by the clothing they wore, epitomized the idealized image of childhood as a stage. Further, although the magazine did provide images of children from diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds on its cover and within the text, the types of clothing worn reflected

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<sup>139</sup> See for example, advertisements in *Today's Parent* for the *Children's Place* (December 2008:12-13); *Johnson and Johnson* (February, 2009:17); *Sony* cameras and camcorders (June, 2009:13); and *Airmiles* (May, 2009:56-57).

the frames discussed earlier in the chapter. This use of anonymous models is not surprising given that *Today's Parent* is a magazine with parents, especially mothers, as the target audience. The focus in the magazine articles, for example, was on providing parental advice and discussing topics related to growth and development.

*Tiger Beat*, on the other hand, is a magazine with tweens as the target audience, and as my descriptive content analysis revealed, the frames used to depict children in this age range through fashion were very different. I will now turn to a discussion of these frames.

### **Tiger Beat**

#### ***Target Audience and Mission Statement***

*Tiger Beat* was founded in 1965 by Charles Laufer (Wikipedia, 2010).<sup>140</sup> The magazine is a subsidy of Laufer Media, Inc, headquartered in Glendale, California (*Tiger Beat*, December 2008-November 2009). The magazine publishes 11 issues annually, with a combined January/February issue. The magazines are approximately 8 inches by 10.5 inches in size, printed in color on glossy paper. *Tiger Beat* self-identifies as a tween magazine, with "86% [of all readers] between 10 and 16 years of age" (*bopandtigerbeat.com*, 2011).<sup>141</sup> Further, *Tiger Beat* recognizes that 97% of all readers are female (*bopandtigerbeat.com*, 2011).<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> As the article was published online, I cannot provide pagination for this information. The reader is referred to the webpage containing the article: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tiger\\_Beat](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tiger_Beat).

<sup>141</sup> As the article was published online, I cannot provide pagination for this direct quote. The reader is referred to the webpage containing the article: *bopandtigerbeat.com/advertising/*.

<sup>142</sup> As the article was published online, I cannot provide pagination for this information. The reader is referred to the webpage containing the article: *bopandtigerbeat.com/advertising/*.

As part of their mission statement, *Tiger Beat* seeks to create an environment which is "the best place to reach tween and teen girls" as "no where will you find a more media-savvy, fun-loving audience of tween and teen girls and their families" who also comprise "an audience of trend-setters...focused on celebrities, TV & film, music, and fashion!" (*bopandtigerbeat.com*, 2011).<sup>143</sup> *Tiger Beat* acknowledges that this age group, tweens, is their prime demographic and target market.<sup>144</sup>

As noted earlier, I analyzed eleven issues of *Tiger Beat* from December 2008 to November 2009.<sup>145</sup> Every month the magazine contained 6 different fold-out wall posters of current celebrities considered popular with tween readers. The images in these posters differed from month to month with some celebrities featured every month and others only occasionally. In addition, other coloured posters, slightly smaller than 8 inches by 10.5 inches, were also inserted each month.<sup>146</sup>

### **Tiger Beat - Results**

Following the same frame analysis approach used with *Today's Parent*, I made note of the images selected for inclusion in *Tiger Beat* on a monthly basis, the content of the images in terms of the apparent age of the models, the nature of the clothing worn, the context within which the image was situated, the activities engaged in, and where

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<sup>143</sup> As this was published online, I cannot provide pagination for this direct quote. The reader is referred to the webpage containing the article: *bopandtigerbeat.com/advertising/*.

<sup>144</sup> Interestingly, Brookes and Kelly (2009:604-605) have noted that *Dolly*, an Australian tween magazine, has similar objectives and makes similar claims about their target market.

<sup>145</sup> *Tiger Beat* also has a website, shared with its sister magazine *Bop*, which includes an annotated version of its magazine, in addition to other resources such as "News and Gossip", "Polls", "Fun Stuff", "Make Stuff", "YOU", "BopTV", "Subscribe" and "Shop" (*bopandtigerbeat.com*, 2010).

<sup>146</sup> All monthly issues contained 108 pages, including the front and back covers. Surprisingly, there were very few advertisements in *Tiger Beat* compared to *Today's Parent*. Usually, only less than a handful of advertisers appeared in *Tiger Beat*. For example, there was an advertisement for a *Disney* product and one from *Tiger Beat* itself to promote magazine subscriptions.

apparent age or gender differences emerged in the information presented. Again, I attended to what Entman (1993:53,57) defines as the salience of the information through an examination of the prominence given to information through repetition, placement and/or association with "culturally familiar symbols."

*Tiger Beat* cannot be characterized as a risqué magazine, nor does it directly endorse age inappropriate clothing for tweens. However, it does showcase particular popular culture celebrities who it considers to be of interest to its tween readers. Through the magazine's use of these recognizable tween popular culture icons to promote certain styles of dress, I argue that tweens are exposed to increasingly sexualized fashion. In the next section, I outline the main frames of analysis identified in *Tiger Beat*.<sup>147</sup>

### ***Framing Tweenhood as a Distinct Life Stage Through the Use of Celebrities***

As Schor (2004) and others have noted, tween is regarded as a relatively new life stage. Indeed, my analysis of *Today's Parent* revealed that corporate images of childhood persist, that do not include this stage in any meaningful way. However, *Tiger Beat* clearly made use of information and images to establish that this tween stage is significantly different from childhood (cf. *bopandtigerbeat.com*, 2011). This was accomplished in a number of ways: through a focus on tween girls as a unique developmental stage, to the use of texts that characterized these targeted individuals as "trend-setters...focused on celebrities, TV & film, music, and fashion"

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<sup>147</sup> A complete listing of the descriptive coded images by magazine issue on which this discussion is based can be found in Appendix J. Unfortunately, prohibitive costs linked to copyright laws made it impossible to reproduce images in the dissertation proper.

(*bopandtigerbeat.com*, 2011).<sup>148</sup> Most importantly, the use of celebrity fashion images was a radical departure from the more traditional children's fashions of *Today's Parent*.

Unlike the generic models in *Today's Parent*, *Tiger Beat* made exclusive use of celebrities considered popular with tweens and teens to market its fashions. This use extended to providing information to accompany celebrity fashion images that included discussions of their lifestyles and likes and dislikes in fashion. Readers were also sometimes encouraged to judge celebrity fashion choices. In contrast to *Today's Parent*, there appeared to be no recognition of the stage of childhood, and in fact, there were no discussions of children in any edition of *Tiger Beat* reviewed (cf. *Tiger Beat*, December 2008-November 2009). This is not surprising given *Tiger Beat's* target audience, and the magazine's focus on providing advice and information about celebrities, fashions, and other forms of "trendsetting behaviour" to tweens and teens (*bopandtigerbeat.com*, 2011; see also, Currie, 1999).<sup>149</sup>

It is clear, however, that through the placement and repetition of images or through their connection with wider cultural symbols, celebrities were presented as fashion icons to be emulated (cf. Entman, 1993:52-53,57). In their study of *Dolly*, an Australian tween magazine, Brookes and Kelly (2009:605) also identified the use of celebrities to target children. As is the case with *Tiger Beat*, Brookes and Kelly (2009:605) have noted that these types of "appearance magazines" recognize "at one level that tweenies are heavily influenced by the brands and products that they associate with

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<sup>148</sup> As the article was published online, I cannot provide pagination for this direct quote. The reader is referred to the webpage containing the article: *bopandtigerbeat.com/advertising/*.

<sup>149</sup> As the article was published online, I cannot provide pagination for this direct quote. The reader is referred to the webpage containing the article: *bopandtigerbeat.com/advertising/*.

their favourite singers, actors and pop culture idols, these celebrities are included in [these magazines] as role models" (see also, Currie, 1999).<sup>150</sup>

In this regard, in every issue, *Tiger Beat* capitalized on the newest tween it celebrities by displaying them prominently on the cover of the magazine (cf. *Tiger Beat*, December 2008-November 2009; Appendix J).<sup>151</sup> For example, the Jonas Brothers, Demi Lovato, Selena Gomez, Miley Cyrus, Taylor Swift and Zac Efron were regularly featured on the cover. However, over the course of the year, new celebrities Kristen Stewart, Robert Pattinson and Taylor Lautner of the Twilight saga franchise began to appear more frequently on the cover and in the magazine as the series became more popular. In all of the issues, images of celebrities wearing fashions apparently intended to be considered appropriate for *Tiger Beat's* readers were provided. However, as I discuss in the next section, these fashions were often more adult-looking in style than might be considered appropriate for *Tiger Beat's* tween readers.

All of the celebrities included in *Tiger Beat*, regardless of placement, were conventionally attractive, and were engaged in various activities that provided tweens with ideas about a cool way to behave. For example, *Tiger Beat* depicted tween celebrities in fun and/or funky clothing engaged in various fun activities. Selena Gomez, a Disney star, is depicted wearing a hippie-inspired flowered headband (*Tiger Beat*, June

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<sup>150</sup> While Currie's (1999:1) study focuses on "intertextuality" of the magazines rooted in "materialist feminism", she too recognizes that these magazines present particular images of, and, to youth.

<sup>151</sup> Given that celebrity is fleeting, I do not provide detailed descriptions of why these individuals were considered celebrities in the first place. For example, Chris Brown was dropped from *Tiger Beat* following a conviction for assaulting his girlfriend. Justin Bieber, a current sensation among young tweens, did not only appear in the very last issue I reviewed for this dissertation, and had minimal coverage. Accordingly, I provide the names of individuals perceived to be celebrities at the time, only to illustrate the use of these individuals to sell fashion to tweens and teens.

2009:1); the Jonas Brothers are shown being slimed at the Kid's Choice Awards (*Tiger Beat*, June 2009:5); images are shown of Jennette McCurdy and Nathan Kress having a rock climbing adventure (*Tiger Beat*, July 2009:7); David Henrie is shown on vacation in Italy (*Tiger Beat*, April 2009:24-25); and, Chelsea Staub is depicted having a "life-changing vacation" in Argentina (*Tiger Beat*, April 2009:26). These activities are far removed from the domestic chores and soccer playing activities in *Today's Parent* that apparently characterize childhood as a stage.

Images of female celebrities in glamorous and revealing fashion styles were also common. Teenagers Taylor Swift, Demi Lovato and Miley Cyrus were often shown in form-fitting and revealing ballgowns, despite their celebrity among tween readers. Male celebrities such as the Jonas Brothers and Taylor Lautner were dressed in leather jackets and suits, a far cry from the little-man look of *Today's Parent* (see, for example, *Tiger Beat*, June 2009:1-3,6-7; see also, *Tiger Beat*, July 2009:20-21,24-25,32; Appendix J). Further, through the selection and placement of images of these individuals on red carpets and in attendance at other celebrity events, the links between what they were wearing and success as individuals is clearly drawn, or as Entman (1993:52-53) might say, made salient. It is important to note that Brookes and Kelly (2009:600), in their study of *Dolly*, an Australian magazine, also identified how magazines present images of females to encourage readers to obtain a similarly "desirable self."

Through my analysis, it became quite apparent that *Tiger Beat* magazine stresses tweenhood as a life stage with its own lifestyle and fashions. Indeed, the meanings or definitions regarding appropriate and suitable clothing styles were fundamentally tied to a

conceptualization of tweens as older and more mature than children. As suggested by Entman (1993:53), through association with "culturally familiar symbols" and the placement and repetition of images of popular culture celebrities, tweens were provided with a glimpse of a more modern, trendy lifestyle than is usually considered appropriate for children. At the same time, through clothing, context, and the use of these celebrity images, the magazine editors seemed to suggest that tweens might dress in a more adult and sexualized manner. Whether these images have any impact on the fashion choices of tweens remains an empirical question, which I address later in the dissertation. In the next section, I discuss in more detail the observations about tweenhood and celebrity outlined above.

### ***Framing Tween Fashions Through the Use of Celebrity Models***

As noted above, the images of tween celebrities such as the Jonas Brothers and Miley Cyrus graced every cover of *Tiger Beat* from December 2008 to November 2009. However, within the magazine, there were regular sections that showcased celebrity fashions and styles. For example, articles regularly appeared with the headings: "I Can't Believe I Wore That!" (*Tiger Beat*, January/February 2009:36-37); "Bundle Up!" (*Tiger Beat*, March 2009:16-17); "Selena's Superlong Scarves!" (*Tiger Beat*, May 2009:26); "The Style Award Goes To:" (*Tiger Beat*, June 2009:6-7); "Demi's Crazy for Colors" (*Tiger Beat*, July 2009:3); "Taylor's Trends" (*Tiger Beat*, July 2009:32); "Headband Heaven" (*Tiger Beat*, August 2009:15); "Totally Obsessed. These stars can't live without their faves [fashion items]" (*Tiger Beat*, August 2009:22-23); "Look What's in Your Closet!" (*Tiger Beat*, September 2009:90-91); and "Stars Gone Wild! [animal prints]"



(*Tiger Beat*, November 2009:24). These articles were clearly intended to influence tween buying behaviour to achieve that star look. For example, one section, "Week in Fashion" regularly showcased a particular celebrity's week of clothing choices; and monthly features such as "Fashion to Go! Find out how to get star style for less!" (*Tiger Beat*, June-November 2009) literally showed readers how to dress exactly like their favourite celebrities. Entman (1993:52-53,57) would suggest that through this constant repetition and placement of images month to month in the "Star Style Tricks" and "Week in Fashion", particular images of fashion that emphasized a more adult look became salient for tween readers of the magazine.

Although the display of popular culture celebrities in *Tiger Beat* was not explicitly sexual, the clothing worn by many of these celebrities reflected the fact that they were, despite their popularity with tweens, somewhat older than their readership. For example, at the time of my analysis, many tween celebrities were not, in fact, tweens themselves. The entire *High School Musical* cast were in their twenties, some of the Jonas Brothers were no longer teenagers, and certainly not tweenagers, and the *Twilight* franchise stars frequently included in *Tiger Beat* were in their late twenties and early thirties. For these reasons, the fashions worn by these celebrities were often more mature, given the fact that they were dressing for *their* age, not the age of *Tiger Beat* readers.

It is also not surprising that the majority of the celebrities included in the magazine were female, given that 97% of all *Tiger Beat* readers are also female

(*bopandtigerbeat.com*, 2011).<sup>152</sup> More importantly, as noted earlier, female celebrities who were older than their tween fan base, but still teenagers, were often dressed in more adult looking fashions such as one-shoulder or strapless ball gowns and frocks with stilettos heels (Taylor Swift: *Tiger Beat*, December 2008:39; Vanessa Hudgens: *Tiger Beat*, March 2009:67; celebrities at "Jennifer's Glamorous Sweet 16!": *Tiger Beat*, May 2009:2-3; and celebrities at Kid's Choice Awards, *Tiger Beat*, June 2009:2-3,6-7). For example, Rihanna was shown wearing a short black dress, leather jacket and high-heel lace-up calf-length boots (*Tiger Beat*, December 2008:104). Further, Selena Gomez was shown wearing a tight denim dress with predominant bra and/or bust cups and a zipper down the bust line to mid-chest (*Tiger Beat*, January/February 2009:71; Appendix J).<sup>153</sup> It could be argued that this style of dress was intended to project an image of these tweenaged girls as sexually mature and available.

In more general terms, this apparent push to sexualize girls was challenged when, at the age of fifteen, Miley Cyrus was photographed by Annie Leibovitz with a bare back, tousled hair and only a sheet covering her chest, in what some deemed a sexual depiction of the under-aged girl.<sup>154</sup> Despite offering an apology for this apparent lapse in judgment, Ms. Cyrus has continued to dress in what some consider age-inappropriate fashions as she transitions from tween star to adult celebrity. These fashions have included sequined dresses with short hems, animal-inspired prints, ripped and torn stockings, and more

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<sup>152</sup> As this was published online, I cannot provide pagination for this information. The reader is referred to the webpage containing the article: *bopandtigerbeat.com/advertising/*.

<sup>153</sup> Taylor Swift, Selena Gomez, Chelsea Staub, Demi Lovato, Brenda Song, Ashley Tisdale and other teenagers have also been photographed in age-inappropriate fashions (cf. *Tiger Beat*, January/February 2009:37,71,86; *Tiger Beat*, May 2009:10,21; *Tiger Beat*, June 2009:2-3,6-7,34-35; Appendix J).

<sup>154</sup> To see a picture of this cover, please see Marikar (2008):  
<http://abcnews.go.com/Entertainment/SummerConcert/story?id=4736358&page=1>

revealing formal gowns (cf. *Tiger Beat*, December 2008:42; *Tiger Beat*, January/February 2009:37; *Tiger Beat*, April 2009:43; *Tiger Beat*, June 2009:25; Appendix J).

In Entman's (1993:57) words, images conveyed through the use of these popular culture celebrities become salient for tweens – they convey a dominant and/or preferred meaning that, like their celebrities, tweens can wear more adult-looking fashions which occasionally border on the provocative and sexually mature.<sup>155</sup> In terms of the non-selection of images and information, there were few images showing celebrities as innocent or childlike. This was the case even though the younger celebrities, such as Selena Gomez, Miley Cyrus and Demi Lovato, were, at the time of this analysis, a little closer in age to their tween fan base.<sup>156</sup>

Although male celebrities were featured in the magazine to a lesser degree as heartthrobs, and depicted wearing more adult fashions, such images did not contain sexual imagery or suggest that these celebrities were sexually available. For example, male celebrities such as the Jonas Brothers were seen in pin stripe suits and fedora hats (*Tiger Beat*, September 2009:73,77,88). Similarly, images of stars like Zac Efron and Robert Pattinson showcased them in aviator sunglasses and suit jackets. While these images are meant to "attract" or seem attractive to female tween readers, these images

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<sup>155</sup> Of course, since individuals create and give their own meaning to situations and people, the opinions on this and other matters may vary depending on their definition of the situation, a matter I take up in the next two chapters.

<sup>156</sup> This may reflect their connection to a Hollywood culture that may encourage them to dress and act older than they are.

could not be considered risqué or sexually inappropriate (*Tiger Beat*, August 2009:22-23; cf. Appendix J).<sup>157</sup>

Based on these observations, I suggest that these renderings of female and male celebrities may be part of a larger frame within *Tiger Beat* which seeks to make salient what are considered stereotypical gender roles and patriarchal ideologies surrounding sexuality. While all images of both males and females seek to define tweenhood as encompassing an older, more adult life stage through the fashion worn and activities participated in, it could be argued that there are even stronger overt messages regarding female sexuality. Specifically, females were regularly presented as sexual beings through revealing fashions whereas images of men in trendy suits and fedora hats predominated (*Tiger Beat*, October 2009:7; *Tiger Beat*, September 2009:73,77,88; Appendix J). This contrasting selection of images of female and male celebrities wearing particular fashion styles appeared to reproduce dominant cultural and societal meanings about women, but not men, as sex objects (cf. Entman, 1993:52-53,57). Future research is needed to explore these possibilities.

While Entman's (1993) frames were well-suited as an analytical tool for this descriptive content analysis of *Today's Parent* and *Tiger Beat*, in the next section I briefly draw on Knight and Greenberg's (2002) theory of promotionalism and Lawrence's (2009) work on the cult of celebrity to offer some further observations on the frames identified, and to suggest some directions for future research in this area.

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<sup>157</sup> It should also be noted that, while male celebrities were included in the magazine's large fold-out posters, the images could not be considered in any way reminiscent of centerfolds of women in popular men's magazines.

### **Promotionalism and the Cult of Celebrity**

According to Knight and Greenberg (2002:545), promotionalism as a concept, when used to refer to a corporation, involves integrating different types of communication such as advertising, public relations, mission statements and other forms of "corporate writing" so that the differences among these forms of communication become blurred (cf. Boje, 2000). Using *Nike* as their referent to illustrate this practice, Knight and Greenberg (2002:545) observe that "when Tiger Woods advertises *Nike*, *Nike* also advertises Tiger Woods", and there is no clear or fixed distinction between the two.<sup>158</sup>

Intrinsically connected to promotionalism is the cult of celebrity. According to popular culture expert Copper Lawrence (2009), celebrities are idolized in much the same way that deities are idolized within certain religious traditions. Drawing on John Maltby's (2002) study of the connection between religion and celebrity worship, Lawrence (2009:4) notes that many so-called religious people "worship not in the house of the Lord, but at the altar of *In Touch Weekly*. For many of us, celebrity is, in fact, our Church." Further, according to Lawrence (2009:XIII), in a study published in *Developmental Psychology*, "75% of adolescents had a strong attraction to a celebrity and 59% were heavily influenced by their favourite star."

As discussed in some detail earlier in this chapter, the mission statement of *Today's Parent* states that as "Canada's national parenting magazine, [it] is committed to helping parents build happy, healthy, families" (*Todaysparent.com*, 2010).<sup>159</sup> As my

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<sup>158</sup> For a complete discussion of promotionalism as it relates to *Nike*, see Knight and Greenberg (2002).

<sup>159</sup> As this is the online version of the website, I cannot provide pagination for this direct quote. The reader is referred to the webpage: [www.Todaysparent.com](http://www.Todaysparent.com).

analysis of the frames earlier revealed, *Today's Parent* defines "happy, healthy kids" in a traditional manner as innocent and asexual, but gendered.<sup>160</sup> All of the images, advertisements, and articles seek to promote this ideal understanding of the meaning of childhood as a time of innocence, purity, and asexuality. Indeed, it could be argued that through "corporate writing" and other promotionalism tactics, the editors and managers at *Today's Parent* have created a symbiotic relationship between their mission statement and the images and advertising material in their magazine to reinforce their particular conceptualization of children and childhood (cf. Boje, 2000; Knight and Greenberg, 2002:545).

Further, I suggest that the lack of recognition of or use of a cult of celebrity in *Today's Parent* may actually serve to promote its conceptualization of childhood as a traditional stage of innocence and vulnerability, where parents, not children make decisions about what they will wear, and how they will behave (cf. Lawrence, 2009). This, however, remains an empirical question for future research.

On the other hand, *Tiger Beat* defines eight to thirteen year olds not as children, but as tweens who have the power to consume, the ability to create a self-image through the use of social and cultural artefacts, and who are influenced by the power of celebrity and brands, as was apparent in their mission statement and in other "corporate writing" (cf. Knight and Greenberg, 2002:545)<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> As this is the online version of the website, I cannot provide pagination for this direct quote. The reader is referred to the webpage: [www.Todaysparent.com](http://www.Todaysparent.com).

<sup>161</sup> As stated earlier, *Tiger Beat* seeks to create an environment which is "the best place to reach tween and teen girls" as "no where will you find a more media-savvy, fun-loving audience of tween and teen girls and their families" who also comprise "an audience of trend-setters...focused on celebrities, TV & film, music, and fashion!" ([bopandtigerbeat.com](http://bopandtigerbeat.com), 2011, [bopandtigerbeat.com/advertising/](http://bopandtigerbeat.com/advertising/)).

For example, through recurring articles on "Dress like" a particular tween icon, and features on how to emulate and/or copy a certain celebrity's fashion style, the images of popular culture icons as role models and fashion icons were packaged and/or presented to tween readers in the magazine. Notably, *Tiger Beat* markets its publication purely through the use of celebrities. In the same way that *Nike* has marketed Tiger Woods, *Tiger Beat* promotes celebrities, movies, brands, products and lifestyles (cf. Knight and Greenberg, 2002).

All covers from December 2008 to November 2009, for example, included at least three to four *Disney*-endorsed celebrities. The most frequent *Disney* stars marketed included Selena Gomez, Demi Lovato, Miley Cyrus, the Jonas Brothers and members of *High School Musical* fame. Indeed, the use of these celebrities and logos, I argue, was inherently connected to creating brand loyalties. Being bonded to brands is part and parcel of the "art" of promotionalism such that "....identity and promotionalism play an especially critical role for brand name companies in buyer-driven commodity chains such as the apparel and athletic footwear industries..." (Knight and Greenberg, 2002:546; see also, Brookes and Kelly, 2009). On the other hand, the *Disney* brand prides itself on its wholesome family image. However, I suggest that, although projecting multiple images of these stars on the cover and inside the magazine may be intended to promote these ideals, and of course, to sell *Disney* products and apparel, it may not be having the desired effect. As I noted earlier in this chapter, these stars often dressed in more provocative

and/or adult fashions when not in character.<sup>162</sup> Or it may be that *Disney* is attempting to extend its influence to older tweens and teenagers through these more adult images of its celebrities, again, an empirical question requiring further research.

*Tiger Beat* has framed tweenhood as a time of self-exploration, appreciation and/or idolization of celebrity lifestyle(s) through conscious or unconscious use of a cult of celebrity. Some tweens may follow these trends, as Lawrence (2009:4) suggests, in a way that is similar to religious followers. For example, tweens may religiously purchase or have a monthly subscription to these tween magazines in order to stay current on "tween content": celebrity gossip, fashions and trends (cf. *bopandtigerbeat.com*, 2011).<sup>163</sup> However, this again is an empirical question requiring further research.

### **Concluding Remarks**

It is reasonable to conclude, based on my analysis, that both *Today's Parent* and *Tiger Beat* have selected images of childhood and/or tweenhood and rendered them salient to their readers through promotionalism tactics and an understanding of the cult of celebrity. It could also be argued that the creation and use or non-use of these particular frames are tactics intended to influence readers to view children, tweens, and fashion in particular ways and choose accordingly. In fact, these two publications symbolize the contradictory conceptualizations of children, tweens, fashion and identity that are currently in play. For *Today's Parent*, childhood is a stage of innocence, purity, and

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<sup>162</sup> Miley Cyrus' character *Hannah Montana* dressed quite provocatively; further, celebrities such as Miley and Vanessa Hudgens have tarnished the wholesome *Disney* reputation with their almost nude and nude photos that were leaked online.

<sup>163</sup> As this is the online version of the website, I cannot provide pagination for this information. The reader is referred to the webpage: [www.bopandtigerbeat.com/advertising](http://www.bopandtigerbeat.com/advertising)



asexuality, where tweenhood is almost absent. For *Tiger Beat*, tweenhood is a stage rooted in celebrity idolization and emulation characterized by the use of fashion as a form of self-expression that is becoming increasingly sexualized.

However, whether these frames and tactics have had their desired effect on the mothers and tweens in my research sample is an empirical question. In the next chapter, I discuss the data arising from my interviews with mothers, and whether the themes identified in this chapter resonate with them, when considering their tween-aged children's fashion choices.

## **CHAPTER 7: MOTHERS' ASSESSMENTS OF FASHIONS MARKETING TO TWEENS; INFLUENCES ON TWEEN SELF-IMAGE, AND IMPLICATIONS FOR MOTHER-TWEEN INTERACTIONS**

### **Introduction**

As indicated in the previous chapter, there are markedly different images of children presented in magazines geared to parents and tweens. In this regard, both academics and the general public have expressed concern about the increasing marketing of fashion directly to tweens and, in particular the increasing sexualization of tween fashions aimed at girls. In this chapter, I present the empirical results of my research which addressed these issues, drawing on my in-depth interviews with mothers of tween-aged children.

Two lines of questioning informed my research. First, I was interested in whether these mothers felt that the meanings associated with childhood had changed in recent years with the emergence of a new tweenage stage. Second, I wanted to explore to what extent these mothers agreed or did not agree that fashions were increasingly being marketed to their tween-aged children. Third, what influence if any did these mothers feel these tween fashions might have on their children, in particular in assisting them to create and project a particular image of themselves? Fourth, to what extent did these mothers feel that the peer group influenced their tweens' fashion choices? Finally, what role if any, did they think celebrity role models, brands and logos played in influencing these choices?

My second line of questioning focused more directly on the mothers themselves. I elicited their opinions on the age-appropriateness of tween fashion, and whether they felt

there was an increasing sexualization of these fashions. I also explored the decision-making process these mothers engaged in when actually purchasing clothing for their children; and the implications of tween fashion marketed to tweens for mother-child interactions.

As discussed in Chapter 4, this dissertation research was situated within the symbolic interactionist theoretical perspective. Within this tradition, Blumer (1969a:3-5) has observed that human beings are considered to act towards objects on the basis of the meanings these objects hold for them. These meanings arise out of processes of socialization wherein significant symbols become meaningful through interactions with other social actors, and become internalized as part of the development of the self. But social actors possessing a self, as Mead conceptualizes it, are considered to be self-reflexive and capable of creating their own new meanings (cf. Blumer, 1969:2; Mead, 1934; 1962; Musolf, 1994:103).<sup>164</sup> This theoretical framework was essential for understanding the processes whereby mothers in this sample might adopt, modify and/or reject the meanings associated with childhood, and tweenhood as a new life stage; and the processes whereby mothers might make assessments of appropriate or inappropriate fashion choices for their tweens based on these meanings.

Meanings such as those informing childhood identity, self-image and fashion arise as part of an interpretative process and are, therefore, not static (cf. Blumer, 1969:2; Musolf, 1994:103). Although individuals within a society may learn through socialization what it means to be a child and how to conceptualize childhood identity,

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<sup>164</sup> For a complete discussion of these theoretical assumptions, see Chapter Four. See also, Blumer (1969a) and Musolf (1994).

these conceptualizations will vary over time and place. Similarly, what constitutes fashion or what makes it acceptable or unacceptable are also inherently social creations. Thus these meanings will also vary over time and place.

To conclude, in this chapter I present data from my current research on mothers' perceptions of the meanings associated with tween fashions as they relate to their perceptions of tween self-image; and the appropriateness and/or acceptability of fashion styles marketed to tweens. I also consider how these meanings influence mother-child interactions and the decision-making and purchasing behaviour of mothers themselves.

### **Mothers' Perceptions of Children, Tweens and the Emergence of Tween Fashion**

While conducting interviews with mothers, the same sentiments were repeatedly expressed. When asked about the notion of childhood itself, almost all of the mothers observed that childhood was very different than when they were children. As one mother put it: "Children are so different than when *I* was a kid." This perceived difference was tied in part to the availability of child-exclusive stores, considered rare in their own childhood years. As Chloe, one of the participants stated, "I don't remember any stores like that." In this regard, one need only spend time at an urban shopping mall where franchises such as *Baby Gap*, *Gymboree*, *Please Mum*, *The Children's Place*, *Siblings*, *Hot Topic*, *Stitches*, *Victoria Secret PINK*, *Artizia*, *Bonnie Togs*, and *La Senza Girl* are engaged in marketing clothing for infants, toddlers, children, tweens and teenagers. In addition, there is greater availability of child and tween/teen focused merchandise in major department stores such as *Sears* and *The Bay* (or *Macy's*, *Dillard's*, and *JCPenny* in the United States).

Thus, the mothers in my sample felt that children today are regarded differently than in the past in terms of (a) the meanings we associate with childhood and the rising importance of children as consumers; and (b) the creation of products and services targeting this age group. All mothers in my sample agreed with the observation, for example, that tweens, as a new category between childhood and the teenage years, have become a target for marketing fashions unique to them.

According to one mother for example, clothes in her youth were "...generic, not stereotypically fashion things." Mothers also felt that there had been a significant change in children's clothing fashions over time from styles that emphasized childhood as a unique stage of innocence requiring a certain kind of dress, to more adult and even sexualized styles aimed at tweens, and especially girls. As Susan observed, "the preppy casual look of *Abercrombie*, *Hollister*, *Birkenstocks*, etc is very popular. Long tops over leggings (usually black leggings), and gladiator sandals for summer" are common fashion trends for tweens, yet marketed initially to adults.<sup>165</sup> Mothers also noted that casual clothing like cotton pants, "girly tops", jeans, shirts, shorts, sweatpants and loungewear were now branded or contained labels and logos associated with popular tween stores.

Indeed, when asked if clothing styles for tween-aged children had changed over time, Joanne strongly agreed and observed that in her youth, "....*Jorache Jeans* were the big thing and how tight you could get them yeah we ah just like I said, now I even see it in the young sizes for little girls and it blows my mind....Kids don't have to dress that way." Samantha agreed observing, "Yes, I think children's clothing is very grown-up

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<sup>165</sup> Please refer to McRobbie (1997) and Mitchell and Reid-Walsh (2005) for a discussion of fashions marketed to tweens but created for a more adult audience.

looking and quite revealing, for example, too sexy." Deanna suggested that while there was greater availability of clothing styles for tweens, she felt that some fashions were "causing young girls to look much older than they need to." In describing the clothing she wore as a girl, Stella observed:

I see what they want to dress like and the things that they are looking at I think that some of the stuff for girls...it's just really ah...inappropriate at best! I think when I was at that age, I was wearing cotton shirts and cotton pants. You know, I wasn't wearing little halter tops and you know trying to be dressed up at the mall. ...some of the stuff is just really little for the amount that it's going to cover on a kid's body. And you look at some of this stuff and it's just crazy.

Growing up in the same decade, Deanna shared a similar perspective on the changing nature of clothing styles: "It was a different time - we weren't trying to be *sexy*, we wanted nice clothes but not *revealing*."

To conclude, all of the mothers in my sample felt that meanings associated with childhood as a time of innocence have changed over time, and that children occupying a new stage of tweenhood have become prime targets for retailers marketing fashions of an adult or more mature nature directly to them.

### **Mothers' Perceptions of Tween Media Use**

#### ***Tween Exposure to Tween Magazines and Television Shows***

As discussed in Chapter 6, tween magazines and television shows are prime mediums for marketing fashions directly to tween-aged consumers. I felt it was important therefore to ask mothers about their knowledge of their tweens' exposure to magazines and television shows. For example, which magazines targeted to tweens did they think that their tween-aged children were reading either in their own homes or while at school

or at friends' houses.<sup>166</sup> Most mothers reported that their tweens did read magazines like *Tiger Beat*, *Bop*, *Seventeen*, *teenVogue*, *CosmoGirl!*, *J-14*, *M*, *Chickadee*, and *Twist*, as well as *Young Riders*, *Sports Illustrated Kids*, *New Type USA*, and *Otaku US.*, although could not specify the frequency of use with any certainty. In terms of their *own* reading habits, most mothers did not report independently reading these publications, although on occasion they read with their children if they felt it provided an opportunity for bonding with or spending time with their child. Susan was one exception who noted that she did "look at [Tara's] magazines if she has some at home."

Although not a major focus of this research, I also asked mothers about their tweens' television viewing habits in order to establish which tween celebrities and fashion styles their children were being exposed to.<sup>167</sup> All the mothers in this sample reported that their tweens' most commonly watched shows included *Hannah Montana*, *Sonny with a Chance*, *I-Carly*, *Wizards of Waverly Place*, the *Jonas Brothers*, *Suite Life of Zack and Cody*. Additional shows mentioned by some mothers were *Glee*, *Phineas and Ferb*, *Family Guy*, *American Dad*, *Rick Mercer*, and *American Idol*.

To obtain more information about their *own* knowledge of the tween world, I asked mothers if *they* watched tween television shows either by themselves or with others. Interestingly, while no mother specifically sat down to watch a show like *Hannah Montana* on her own, many mothers reported watching a tween show if it meant "quality time" with their children.

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<sup>166</sup> Given the sample size, I did not attempt to establish tween exposure to these media in any definitive way.

<sup>167</sup> As these data reflect mothers' perceptions of their children's media use, I cannot state with certainty that their assessments are accurate or that these magazines, celebrities, and fashion styles were actually influencing their children's clothing choices. These are empirical questions I take up in the next chapter.

### **Mothers' Perceptions of The Importance of Fashion to Their Tweens**

In order to establish mothers' perceptions of the importance of fashion to their tweens, I asked how often they thought their children discussed fashion with their peers. My analysis of the interview data revealed that mothers perceived a gender difference between tween boys and girls. Mothers of tween boys, for example, unanimously agreed that their boys did not discuss fashion with their peers or others. For example, when asked if her son talked about fashion with his cousins, Stella noted, "No. No and I don't think I've ever heard them talk about clothes." Clare, along with Stacey and Sally, also noted that, based on their experiences, fashion and clothing were not priority topics of conversation for their sons.

The mothers of tweens girls, however, felt that the discussion of fashion took up a great deal of time within their daughters' peer groups. Although Susan noted that her tween daughter "...talked about fashion with her girlfriends", Samantha observed that her daughter's discussions revolved around "...Miley Cyrus's music videos and how much she has changed" and how her daughter and her friends are "...not happy about [Miley's] new image." As a former employee of the retail fashion industry, Mary also witnessed many discussions about fashion, styles and trends among younger tweens when they were shopping in her store.

However, some mothers felt that tweens' discussions about fashion did not only occur within the immediate peer group. Chloe's tween daughter, for example, exhibited a love for fashion from a very early age:



She does like fashion. It's like a personality like for her. She's always been like that. When she was little she wanted to go shoe shopping. It's kind of funny, like a kindergarten kid and she would like want to go shopping for like shoes and stuff.

Kelly noted a very similar trend with her daughter Danielle. She would talk about fashion with whoever would engage in a conversation about it with her – and has done so since a very young age.<sup>168</sup>

When asked about their *own* discussions of tween fashions with others, most mothers noted that they often discussed the negative aspects of tween culture, self-image, identity and fashion. Indeed, Samantha stated that "...other mothers and I may discuss popular trends such as short shorts; I have also asked some of Crystal's friends what they think of some of the styles they see on T.V." Additionally, mothers such as Joanne, Stacey, Brenda, Deanna, and Kelly noted particular stores such as *Hot Topic*, *Stitches*, and *La Senza Girl* were the root of their discussions about inappropriate fashions with other mothers. As Brenda noted, *Stitches* does not carry clothes that she felt were suitable for any individual, let alone appropriate dress for eight to thirteen year olds.

All the mothers revealed that their own considerations of tween fashions revolved around the challenges they faced when purchasing items for their tween-aged children. Although these challenges included factors such as cost and practicality, the main concerns expressed in their conversations with me were related to the meanings they associated with childhood and tweenhood, and the appropriateness of the images

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<sup>168</sup> A few years earlier, Danielle [Kelly's daughter] was separated from her mother in the grocery store. After finding her a few aisles down, Kelly could not help but laugh at what she witnessed. Danielle had wandered off because she was so intrigued by another woman's outfit and shoes. Apparently, at the ripe age of four or five, Danielle told the woman "I just love your outfit!" According to Kelly, Danielle's need to share her opinions on other's fashion has continued. I too experienced Danielle's 'passion for fashion' in my interview with her as she could not take her eyes off my pink purse. When I asked her if she wanted to see it, she eagerly took it from my hands and began modeling it.

projected by tween fashions available for purchase. Notably, mothers' opinions about what specifically constituted appropriate fashions were tied directly to their perceptions about whether tween fashion projected an appropriate or inappropriate image of their tweens.

### **Mothers' Perceptions of Tween Fashion as a Form of Image Display**

My analysis of the data revealed that mothers felt that fashion serves a unique purpose in allowing their tweens to present an image of themselves to others; but also provided tweens with an opportunity to imitate others who they felt projected a certain desirable image or identity of their own.

#### ***Tween Fashion as a Unique Form of Self-Image Display***

Many of the mothers in my sample acknowledged the importance of fashion in their tweens' lives, specifically as it was used to project a certain self-image. According to my respondents, fashion also allowed a greater freedom of expression among tweens, unlike a school uniform that precluded any originality in appearance within the student body. While jokingly referring to her daughter's dislike of "the polyester pants" that were a part of her uniform at the Catholic school she previously attended, Chloe suggested that the uniforms "were boring for her...and she could live without the uniform, that's for sure." Both Stacey and Kelly noted that their tween-aged children were not pleased about wearing a uniform and looked forward to dressing in "street clothes" after school and on the weekends. Indeed, as Samantha stated, her daughter's fashion choices allowed her to show that she "has her own sense of style." Clearly, according to the mothers in this

sample, fashion allowed tweens a greater degree of flexibility in presenting an image of themselves, unlike, for example, a school uniform which might repress an individual's unique sense of style.

Even mothers of tween boys noted that despite their sons' adamant dismissal of its importance, fashion served as a mechanism that allowed them to "express who they were" or "who they did not want to be." Joanne's son's dislike of "plaid and buttons" and Brenda's son's love for "comfy, non-tight pants", for example, led their mothers to conclude that their sons did not want to wear clothes that they feared might characterize them as nerds or "preps." Indeed, according to their mothers, avoiding these clothes allowed these boys to express their unique sense of self-image through the particular fashions they did wear.

In sociological terms, I suggest that these tweens, through their clothing choices, were demonstrating a form of agency in fashion consumption linked to how they viewed themselves and wanted others to see them (cf. Boden, 2006b:291; 2006a). As Samantha suggested about her daughter, "I think a part of her choices have come from her wanting to stand-alone or separate in some ways from her friends/classmates. If someone else has it, she will not want it."

Adler and Adler (1998:74:97) have argued, however, that personal uniqueness is often disguised and is part of the larger process of "fitting in" with the peer group. Interactionists would suggest that presenting a unique self-image is often influenced by and/or is a reflection of interaction with others based on shared meanings, rewards and

sanctions, and the nature of the relationships one has with these others (cf. Cooley, 1922; 1928; Goffman, 1959; 1963; 1972).

*Tween Fashion as a Way to Emulate Significant Others*

Some mothers acknowledged that, while their tween children made choices among fashion options to reflect who they "wanted to be", these choices also often reflected what interactionists would term others' ideologies of self, projected by tweens through the fashions they wore. Specifically, many mothers felt that sometimes a tween's fashion choices were actually linked to emulation or imitation of a respected other. For example, Stella noted how her son's love for baseball translated into the clothing he 'treasured' the most: "But the Blue Jays...he loves the Blue Jays." Even though Stella stated her son was "not picky" when it came to clothing styles, her son treasured his *Blue Jays* jerseys, which she felt may have reflected his desire to imitate his respected favourite sports hero: Reed Johnson.

It is a truism within sociological research that significant others are often a dominant influence in determining what children and adolescents think about themselves and their appearance (cf. Cooley, 1922; 1928; Mead, 1934; 1962; Stone, 1970). According to Cooley (1922; 1928), the most dominant significant others are situated in primary groups and can include parents, relatives and close friends. However, real or fictional others such as popular culture celebrities found in secondary groups can also be influential either as real individuals, or through the characters or roles they portray in the entertainment industry. As Deanna noted, for example, her daughter paid "attention to

what the T.V. star is wearing throughout an episode." I discuss these influences in more detail later in the chapter.

According to the mothers in this sample, social and cultural artefacts like fashion often enabled their tweens' interaction with others and facilitated entrance into and social acceptance by the peer group. As Brookes and Kelly (2009:600) have explored in Australia, these social and cultural "artefacts" enabled tweens to obtain "a self that is fit to belong." Indeed, Clare and Deanna, mothers in my sample believed too, for example, that their tween sons often used certain fashions to "fit" in and "be who they wanted to be." Clare observed that her son gravitated towards certain fashions, such as beanie hats because "all of his friends are wearing them" and felt that this helped him identify himself as a member of his peer group.

In sociological terms, it could be argued that the hat solidified his sense of self-image by connecting him to the larger peer group, but it also illustrated the importance of shared meanings about cultural artefacts such as fashion in expressing identity, self-image, and belonging. Indeed, symbolic interactionists would argue that fashion items imbued with shared meanings are used not only to project a reflection of others to fit in, but are also a way for tweens to embody or emulate a respected other (cf. Adler and Adler, 1998:74-97; Mead, 1934; Blumer, 1969a; Goffman, 1963).

Generally speaking, wearing a particular clothing item did enhance the experience of interacting with friends. Indeed, it could be argued that fashion is meaningful because it is in fact part of the "interaction ritual" (cf. Collins, 2004; Goffman, 1974). However,

Joanne also perceived a strong connection between fashion and identity for her tween children:

Fashion is important because you also don't want to stand out for the wrong reasons; mismatched clothes, out of style etc because you are picked on. He doesn't care what people say, but as a parent, I can't help but think it does...so I try to steer it another direction, gradually. I do worry about it.

Based on her own perceptions and meanings, Joanne socialized her son to her vision of "correct" and "appropriate" clothing. This in turn, she felt, enabled him to avoid being ridiculed and/or sanctioned by his friends and the larger peer group. By presenting an "acceptable self-image", he was aided in the process of successfully interacting and integrating with others tweens.

To conclude, the mothers in my sample perceived that most tweens, to varying degrees, used fashion either as a form of what I termed unique image display or to imitate a respected other. While these are important ways that mothers understood their tweens' relationship to fashion, the mothers in my sample were quick to note that the importance of fashion in terms of tween self-image was situational.

### ***The Role of the Situational Context in Tween Self-Image Display***

Based on the interview data, it appeared that context was an important factor influencing tweens' presentation of self-image through their fashion choices. According to some mothers in the sample, for example, fashion played a minor role in a tween's sense of self-image in certain contexts, such as lounging around the house. These mothers believed that their tween children defined the home environment as a "fashion-free" or "lounging" zone. Indeed, Chloe and Samantha expressed the sentiments of other mothers:

"...when they are just 'hanging' together at the house, kids often do not pay much attention to dress." Rawlins' (2006:364) study of the geographical and intergenerational impacts influencing children's fashion decisions identified a similar result:

...the home space, and the girls' bedrooms in particular, is a private space, and is idealistically portrayed as a refuge from the world (McRobbie, 1978, 1991; Lincoln, 2004). Here the girls can wear whatever they like, they do not have to be so fashionable when the only people to see them are their family....

However, at social events like school dances and outings to the mall, most of the mothers I interviewed felt that their tweens wanted to use fashion as a way to present a self-image that would be accepted among their peers. Indeed, as Samantha noted, "...they place a great deal more emphasis on what they are wearing, hair style, make-up, etc when they are going out to the mall or a birthday get together." One mother argued that her daughter wanted to fit in with the "right crowd" which was often achieved by having "...the right clothes."

To conclude, the importance of fashion to tween self-image display, as these mothers understood it, depended on the situational context within which the tween was embedded or interacting. For many, home was experienced as a neutral zone or what Goffman (1959) might term "back stage" (see also Rawlins, 2006). However, social encounters with peer groups required the use of fashion to present a desirable self-image, what Goffman would term "front stage." In other words, through their appearance and clothing, mothers felt tweens communicated their status to others in a way designed to elicit approval and acceptance (cf. Adler and Adler, 1998:74-97; Cooley, 1922; Stone, 1970).

***The Role of Brand Awareness and Fashion Logos in Tween Self-Image Display***

As recent studies have shown, children are socialized from a young age to play with, wear, and otherwise consume logoed and trademarked products.<sup>169</sup> Retail stores and their corporate sponsors, according to mother and clothing store manager Annabelle, "...want to sell an image of young, fun youth...but also create an interest in the brand to eventually grow up the brand into the adult one." Getting children hooked at an early age to particular items/brands creates a strong bond that can make the products essential to the child.<sup>170</sup> My analysis of the interviews with mothers revealed that my sample was no different. Brand name items were an important element in self-presentation and image projection for both mothers and their tweens.

As discussed earlier, all the mothers interviewed agreed with the observation that tween is a new marketing and advertising category. As Chloe stated, "they are getting marketed to already!" Sociologically speaking, it could be argued that this process reflects the "commodification of childhood" whereby tween children are exposed to a range of fashion apparel items, electronics, and other consumer items that are intended to be used as part of the process of defining who they are (Schor, 2004:13; see also, Cook, 1999; Crewe and Collins, 2006; Russell and Tyler, 2002:619; Vanobbergen, 2004).<sup>171</sup> The use of branding and logos, it can be argued, is just one of the steps in this overall process. Deanna's son, for example, was bonded to brands and clothing with the *Star*

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<sup>169</sup> Please refer to Boden *et al.* (2004), Boden (2006a; 2006b), Brookes and Kelly (2009), Elliot and Leonard (2004), Kopkowski (2008), Pilcher (2011), Rawlins (2006), Schor (2004) for a detailed discussion of the effect of brand bonding on youth.

<sup>170</sup> Annabelle noted that her store's loyalty program encouraged repeat shoppers. Moreover, some stores kept the allegiance of their shoppers by catering to pre-teens through to adulthood.

<sup>171</sup> See also, Boden *et al.* (2004), Boden (2006a; 2006b), Brookes and Kelly (2009), Cook (1999), Elliot and Leonard (2004), Kopkowski (2008), Pilcher (2011), Rawlins (2006), Siegel *et al.*, (2004).



*Wars* logo because he liked it and it made him "feel good" - as did Stella's son's fondness for *Blue Jays* apparel mentioned earlier.

Similarly, Yasmine noted that Lizzie's bond to brands began around grade two or three with *La Senza Girl* and got "worse" when she began fitting into the clothes at *Aeropsotale*, a store marketing to 14-to-17-year-olds. The need for tweens to shop at stores like *Aeropostale*, *Hollister*, and *Abercombie and Fitch*, among others was frequently reported by the mothers in my sample. Indeed, mothers such as Deanna, Yasmine and Stella commented that these types of fashions enabled their tween children to become part of their peer group by appearing to share similar values and beliefs about what were "cool", "appropriate" and "in-style" fashions. It could be argued, therefore, that brand name fashion items helped tweens define themselves in a socially acceptable way, ensured a successful presentation of tween self-image, and facilitated integration with other tween-aged children.<sup>172</sup>

Yet, not all tween-aged children were able to show off their brand affinity on a regular basis. Samantha's tweens attended a school in which "...brand names and logos are not permitted to be worn at school", while Kelly, Stacey and Chloe's tween-aged children attended a Catholic school where uniforms were the norm. Furthermore, Joanne noted that her tween-aged children "...are not label people and neither am I. They have no idea what labels are...they basically know *Wal-Mart* labels. They are not into labels; they could care less."

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<sup>172</sup> See, for example, Adler and Adler (1998; 2009), Brookes and Kelly (2009), Cooley (1922; 1928), Goffman (1958; 1963; 1968), Rawlins (2006), Schor (2004).

However, I would argue that *Wal-Mart* labels are still in fact labels, regardless of whether or not they are high end brands. Brands such as *George*, *Fruit of the Loom*, *Disney* and *Hanes*, for example, are sold at *Wal-Mart*. As Entman's (1993:52-53, 57) work suggests, the constant reinforcement provided through shopping at *Wal-Mart* made the store's brands salient for both Joanne and her children; that is, her tweens were not exposed to the labels in other stores and therefore the *Wal-Mart* brands become meaningful labels to be sought out, at least for her tween children.

It is important to note that my data suggest that few tween-aged children are brand-less, given the availability of these types of items in the marketplace (cf. Schor, 2004). With outlet malls and factory stores carrying these products, it is even easier for less affluent shoppers to purchase brand name items, assuming their bank account or credit card can support such a purchase (cf. Kraftt, 1991). An interesting example of being "bonded to brands" (Schor, 2004:25), however, unfolded during one of my interviews with Yasmine and Lizzie, her tween.

Yasmine, an executive at a major department store, received a substantial discount at her place of employment. While she occasionally purchased sale items at stores such as *Hollister* and *Abercombie and Fitch* to appease her daughter's demands, she did the majority of her shopping at her own store. In the course of the interview, a discussion of the recent school picture day came up. On picture day, Lizzie wore one of these newly purchased items from her mother's store, or so her mother thought. As her mother was describing the "nice dress", Lizzie cut her off and described how she *did not* in fact wear this item and instead changed into another "cooler" item.

The data suggest that brands and their appeal were so important to Lizzie that she did a bait-and-switch with her clothing to wear something in the school picture that, I suggest, better personified her "vision" of herself. Notably, although brands were not important to Joanne and her tween-aged children, she understood that "...especially in the city...kids are being made fun of because of not having a name brand."<sup>173</sup>

All the mothers in this sample considered brands to be an element of the fashion choices tweens made to project a self-image or to aid in identity development, although to varying degrees. While some mothers admitted their tweens were "bonded to brands" (Schor, 2004:25), other mothers actively sought out brand name fashions with which to outfit their tween-aged children.<sup>174</sup> Kate, a mother of an eight-year-old girl, argued, for example:

If I'm going to spend money on clothes, I want my daughter to look good. She is going to wear the identifiable brands like *Roots*, *the Gap* and *Tommy Hilfiger* because that's what we like and it looks good. Plus, she looks presentable and people know that the clothes she is wearing are good.

It is interesting to note that many mothers felt that brands and logos were so important for presenting a desirable self image that they themselves literally bought into the advertising pitched to their tweens. Rather than filtering these commercial assaults on their children, they reinforced the corporate message. For example, for Kate, and ultimately for her child, wearing clothing possessing a brand identification facilitated

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<sup>173</sup> See also, Brookes and Kelly (2009).

<sup>174</sup> It is interesting to note that one of my respondents, Sally, named her child after a very popular sporting brand which revealed the significance of brands not only to her tween, but to Sally herself.

interaction with others because of the visible symbolic message the clothing projected about them.<sup>175</sup>

### **Mothers' Perceptions of the Role of Influential Others on their Tweens' Fashion Choices**

In this section, I examine the extent to which mothers perceived that influential others helped shape their tween's fashion choices. As discussed earlier in this dissertation, children role-play and engage in hero-worship as part of the process of developing and presenting their self-image (Cooley, 1922; 1928). Further, the role-taking process is not static, as it involves constant interaction with and reaction from others. Role-taking can also involve the manipulation of appearance as part of this presentation of self, often in response to rewards and sanctions from others (cf. Stone, 1970). According to the mothers in my sample, there were two primary influences on tween fashion choices: their peers and media celebrities.

#### ***Peer Influences on Tween Fashion Choices***

As might be expected, based on the sociological research on childhood and adolescence, the majority of mothers in this sample agreed that peers played an important role in influencing tweens' interests and fashion decisions. As Chloe argued, "Oh her friends definitely have an influence." However, she felt that having the right clothes allowed her tween child to better "adjust", or, as I would put it, successfully interact with her peer group. Having branded items, sociologically speaking, enabled tweens to receive rewards from their peers or what Cooley (1922) would call the primary group, to

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<sup>175</sup> See, for example, Adler and Adler (1998), Schor (2004).

avoid sanctions for unacceptable fashion choices, and to fit in with their peers. Tweens, according to their mothers, desperately wanted to fit in with the peer group and sometimes the easiest way to do so, was through common bonds like clothing. Chloe, for example, poignantly made the following observation:

If you aren't going to wear that stuff, you make yourself a target for picking on. If you don't dress in the newest things, now you are the loser whereas before, most people didn't have the stuff.

Joanne made a similar observation about her tween-aged child's best friend:

She's got a best friend and I find that they feed off each other and also with clothes. And she might be more influenced now by her peers, now more than ever...they pretty much have the same style. Her friend is very um although I have seen clothes on her that I would let her wear.

Furthermore, Deanna believed her daughter chose particular styles because "...friends at school wear similar clothes" but also because of the influence of the fashion styles of tween celebrities seen in magazines and on television, and also marketed through retail outlets. My data revealed that a complete understanding of tweens' fashion choices necessitated an examination of the influence of significant others from what Cooley (1922, 1928) would term the secondary group, influence provided through the types of media tweens use. According to the mothers in my sample, tween celebrities like Taylor Swift and Miley Cyrus and the latter's fictional alter ego *Hannah Montana* often educated tweens about what fashions were popular and what styles of dress were considered "cool" and "in-style".

### ***Celebrity Influences on Tween Fashion Choices***

Intrinsically connected to branded fashions are celebrities and other role models who embody particular fashion styles and are used as part of a corporate marketing strategy to advertise and sell clothing to tweens. As noted above, the mothers in my sample suggested that celebrities exerted a great deal of influence, both directly and indirectly, on their tweens' fashion choices.

In my interviews, I first asked mothers to name who they perceived to be the most popular tween celebrities for their tweens, and within tween peer culture, more generally. In response, mothers ranked the following tween celebrities as *most* important to tween culture: Miley Cyrus (although now to a lesser degree than in the past), Demi Lovato, Selena Gomez, Taylor Swift, Sidney Crosby, Zac Efron and the rest of the *High School Musical* cast (i.e. Vanessa Hudgens, Ashley Tisdale, Corbin Blue, etc.), Carly from *I-Carly*, Robert Pattison, Kristen Stewart, Taylor Lautner, Zack and Cody from *The Suite Life of Zack and Cody*, and Nick, Kevin and Joe Jonas of the *Jonas Brothers*. As discussed in Chapter 6, popular tween celebrities often acted as fashion icons or role models. Indeed, mothers noted that the prominence of celebrities in tween-related or targeted media content often influenced tweens' decisions regarding fashion and clothing styles.

As Chloe observed, her daughter would never dress up like *I-Carly*, but she noted that "I think you can't help, by seeing things on a regular basis, to get influenced by it...even just by familiarity even then things start to look good, right?" Indeed, as I discussed in Chapter 6 in relation to promotionalism and the cult of celebrity, celebrities

are 'brands' in their own right. They represent an ideal type and convey a certain image in terms of appearance and fashion style. Furthermore, I argue that the *Disney* branded celebrities often also promote others' products or have become associated with their own brand name products, such as Miley Cyrus, *The High School Musical Cast*, Selena Gomez, etc. While I acknowledge that not all celebrities will be fashion role models for each individual child, Chloe noted that they "...do give you an idea of what's out there and in style." Indeed, Deanna stated that "clothing in relation to a T.V. personality or movie...a lot is based on the teen icon at the time." As Sally also noted about her tweens, she "tries to dress them to look respectable, like their father and those I see on TV." Many mothers also felt that tweens who were going to *Wal-Mart* to buy, for example, the *Hannah Montana* brand or the *D-signed* labels in *Target* were doing so, not only to emulate these fictional characters, but also to project a popular self-image of themselves (cf. Ford, 2010).

According to Samantha, however, having a tween idolizing and emulating popular culture celebrities was not necessarily a good thing. She had "...noticed children in the mall who are dressing similar to popular culture icons and at school events...", yet she was "...not pleased with the styles of clothing that reflect the latest music videos or popular shows." Susan also observed that:

I believe some of the pop stars influence current trends for the tween age group, I don't see my daughter and her friends following those styles religiously. They wear more casual, comfortable but fashionable clothing...I think sports figures and male singers like Kanye West, Sean Kingston, influence the boys' fashion of this age group.

It is clear from Susan's remarks and remarks of other mothers in this sample that fashion role models are not necessarily the most popular among tweens. Rather, I suggest that celebrities are role models in so far as their clothing styles can facilitate successful tween integration with peers and assist tweens in "feeling comfortable in their own skin." In sociological terms, the data from my respondents suggest that through meaning-making processes and interactions with others, tweens seek out styles for purchase for their symbolic meaning - that is, the image or the presentation of self-image they project when they choose to wear a specific fashion. However, not all displays of tween self-image through fashion were as easy for mothers to understand and accept. Mothers observed that both they and their tween-aged children had to negotiate the contradictory options available for dress; that is, what was and was not appropriate and/or acceptable for their tween-aged child to wear.

### **Mothers' Perceptions of Age-Appropriate Clothing for Tweens**

The discussions above alluded to some of the difficulties mothers faced when attempting to find age appropriate fashions when shopping for their tween children, especially girls. That said, the notion of age appropriate had multiple meanings. As suggested throughout this dissertation, individuals within a society learn definitions of what it means to be a child or tween through interactions based on shared meanings (Blumer, 1969a; Musolf, 1994). Furthermore, as discussed in Chapter 6, there are inherent contradictions between traditional views of childhood compared to the more recent modern images of tweenhood present in popular culture. As *Today's Parent* and *Tiger Beat* have illustrated, these meanings and definitions surrounding what it means to



be a child and/or tween often influence options for dress. Moreover, these contradictory styles of dress often encourage individuals to view youth through either traditional or modern understandings of what it means to be an eight to thirteen year old in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Indeed, I suggest that these meanings and definitions are crucial to the decision-making process surrounding tween fashion style choices. That is, the meanings that mothers hold influence not only their interactions with their children, but also definitions of appropriateness when it comes to purchasing clothing.

It is important to note that all the mothers interviewed revealed that age appropriateness was, in sociological terms, a greatly *gendered* concept. The meanings informing the age appropriateness of clothing styles were starkly different if the tween was a girl versus a boy. All mothers in this study revealed that their perceptions of age appropriate fashion for tween girls were linked to issues of innocent versus more adult and/or sexualized images of self presented through fashion choices.<sup>176</sup> On the other hand, mothers' perceptions of age appropriate fashions for tween boys were linked to their suitability and/or appropriateness depending on the situation the boys were in.

### ***Mothers' Support for the Traditional Image of Tween-aged Children***

An analysis of the data from my interviews revealed that the mothers in this sample more closely aligned themselves with an innocent and/or traditional conceptualization of children and tweens. Indeed, all the mothers in my sample

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<sup>176</sup> It is interesting to note that religious values did not factor into assessments of age-appropriateness. This sample of mothers did not identify themselves as devout practitioners of any religious tradition. Rather, mothers spoke of moral, social and/or personal values that influenced their judgments about clothing. See Appendix H for a breakdown of religious affiliation and practice for this sample.

disapproved of their tween-aged children, especially their girls, dressing up in the latest celebrity tween styles as exemplified by Lady Gaga and her contemporaries.

Chloe, for example, noted that Kayla, her ten-year old, still liked to play dress up: "she still likes pretty things, like feminine things....she likes tops that are pretty." Chloe also noted that Kayla enjoyed using fashion to "dress up" and "be other people" whether that meant wearing *Disney* princess costumes or old *Little House on the Prairie* inspired-clothes from her mother's youth. As both a mother and a professional in the marketing and fashion industry, Susan noted, however, that after a certain age, it is "not cool to wear Disney related products anymore" and play dress-up. These types of images are "too little-kid like." Therefore, Susan and some other mothers felt that while kids might still like *Hannah Montana* or *Cinderella*, tweens did not want all of their products branded with those particular images. Instead, Susan observed they wanted to *look like* the star playing the role: wearing the leggings, the skinny jeans and the "flashy tops."

In this regard, mothers listed the following as the common trends in tween fashion: "...see-through tops worn with tube tops, cardigans, short-shorts, one piece dresses with fashion belts, sandals, necklaces, long shirts worn with tights...", as well as casual pants like khakis, jeans, sweatpants/loungewear, and t-shirts. However, my data suggest that these styles did not always align with the meanings and definitions that mothers held regarding the innocence, purity, and youthfulness of their tween-aged children.

*Mothers' Perceptions of Tween Fashion as Problematic*

Carol, one of the mothers in this sample, stated "I want them to dress like ladies, not tramps." Her comment illustrates the contentious situation that some mothers in this research dealt with on a daily basis. How did they purchase clothing and help their tweens dress themselves in a way that did not compromise their status as children? Mothers dealing with these challenges did not get much help from the marketplace, as the past few years have been witness to the production of increasingly sexualized and adult-looking fashions for tweens (cf. Bissonnette, 2007; Boden *et al.*, 2004; Boden, 2006a; 2006b; Kopkowski, 2008; Pilcher, 2010; Rawlins, 2006; Schor, 2004).

Notably, the mothers in my sample were *most* concerned that age-inappropriate fashions for tweens were available at all in the marketplace. These fashions, they felt, might create an unwelcome interest among their tween girls in items they themselves considered inappropriate such as short-shorts or more revealing tops. These mothers were also concerned about the possibility that their tween might seek out these products in the future.<sup>177</sup> Susan, for example, was currently content with her daughter's clothing as she felt that her tween "...dresses for her age and casual style."

However, Susan also made it a point to avoid *La Senza Girl* because of its more adult-looking styles. As their children grew older, all the mothers of tween-aged girls in my sample noted that it was more and more difficult to find a congruency between the right fit/size and style of clothing. If a tween outgrew the sizes available in traditional children's stores, some mothers had no other option but to shop at stores for older

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<sup>177</sup> I discuss this concern in greater detail at the end of the chapter.

adolescents and/or adults. Not surprisingly, these stores often carried clothing that these mothers characterized as adult or even trappy. As Susan observed:

...she is now wearing XS ladies. We sometimes have difficulty finding correct sizes because at this age because she is too big for kids clothing, plus the styles are too junior for her but many of the ladies sizes are still too large since she is petite.

When their tween girls were in those "in-between" sizes, such as Susan's daughter, mothers claimed that they had difficulty finding age-appropriate fashions in stores that catered to an older age demographic. As the aunt of two girls, Stella expressed the following thoughts about the "in-between" sizes available to tweens:

...So, you start doing that when they're nine, what do you do when they're 16, right? And you have to really think about that. There's a consequence to everything...I think it would be better if they didn't make high heels and short tops for girls and boys didn't have to wear the stuff that the 17-year-olds are wearing. You know, I worked in a clothing store before and it was very difficult for mothers whose kid's were in that in between stage. And you know, they couldn't fit into the adult clothing and they couldn't fit into the kid's clothing, so they had to go into ladies' stores and get the smallest sizes...But I just think it draws attention to...you know, there are so many sexual predators out there that drawing attention to something purely sexual...I think that makes it an issue.

Stores like the combination *La Senza/La Senza Girl* or *Victoria Secret/Victoria Secret Pink* contain sexualized and adult-looking fashions even though these stores cater to pre-teen, tween, teen and adult consumers. Annabelle, a mother and an employee in the retail fashion industry, noted that it was not uncommon for children to seek out styles from the adult (i.e. *La Senza*) side of the store. Sometimes it was considered innocent, such as when she witnessed a 5-year-old playing in the lingerie section who put "something a little more risqué", such as a lace or see-through bra on her head and was

dancing around. At other times however, it was more overt or intentional. As Annabelle observed:

One day some young girls came in and one girl went to the bra section and pointed out four of the five bra colors and styles she had to her friends...kids come in when they were five, shop in *LSG* and then over time, I have helped them into bras and lingerie in *LS*.

As Chloe argued, "some of them are marketing things that they shouldn't be marketing", a comment that epitomized many mothers' thoughts on the diverse range of children's and tween's fashions now available for purchase. Yet, Carol noted that while some of these fashions should not be available, "it is up to mothers to teach children to respect themselves." When tweens grew beyond the sizes carried in children's stores, as Susan noted earlier, there were often no other places to shop but in older, more teenage and adult clothing stores. This became a troublesome task, as Joanne revealed for both her as a mother and for her daughter:

And I have to be very careful too. While she's fitting into that clothing, she's still *only* twelve...to find appropriate clothing has been like um a real struggle. It's like well you are not wearing that or you can wear that if you wear a jacket over it, that's sort of it. That's where we're at right now but she's still only twelve.

Others mothers revealed that they were concerned that their worries could become reality as their tween-aged children grew older and they might be unable to find age-suitable fashions. Joanne recognized that "I have to be a little flexible because times have changed" but that "there are going to be more battles, that's for sure. The fun is just beginning." This was especially true, according to Deanna, when there were styles out there that "...are worn by younger and older kids that are sometimes not age appropriate...they can make younger children look too *grown-up*."

Thus, I found that mothers in my sample were often "forced" to shop in stores that had sizes that fit their tween daughters but not necessarily clothing that aligned to the meanings and values informing their judgments about appropriate dress. Notably, mothers ranked the more modest fashions as their favorite choices for their tween-aged children, fashions more in line with the clothing trends for tween-aged children in *Today's Parent* (cf. Appendix I). Deanna proclaimed that "overall she is pretty level-headed--she chooses comfy clothes, t-shirts, jeans, etc," but realized that this might change with time. Moreover, while Samantha was as a rule happy with her daughter Crystal's choices, she noted that "there are even times when she totally surprised me with her choice, such as wearing a kimono to graduation, something I fully supported but would never have suggested."

To conclude, according to the mothers in my sample, fashion trends available for tweens today often mimic more mature adult fashions and inadvertently or not, may create images of tween girls as sex objects (Bissonnette, 2007; Cook and Kaiser, 2004; Schor, 2004). As Stella pointed out, "this is a progression! Don't kids and their mothers realize that if they dress this way, it can lead to people thinking certain things about them or further problems?" Notably, Stella's comment resonated with many mothers in this study. As I discuss in the next section, these mothers understood that there was a trend towards the "hypersexualization" of fashions for tween girls (Bissonnette, 2007).

### ***Mothers' Perceptions of the Sexualization of Tween Fashion for Girls***

As Carlson (2010) has observed, the early sexualization of tween-aged girls is not necessarily a new phenomenon (cf. Bissonnette, 2007; Cook and Kaiser, 2004;

Kopkowski, 2008; Pilcher, 2010; Rawlins, 2006; Schor, 2004). The infamous *Calvin Klein* advertisements of the 1980s featuring a very young Brooke Shields raised similar concerns. As Carlson (2010) has observed, "The ads launched Shields to a new level of fame....-- projected a youthful innocence in contrast with her sexy poses and tagline, transforming her into a Lolita figure and fantasy object for millions of male fans."<sup>178</sup>

The Lolita figure is precisely the image that the mothers in my study did not want their tween girls to project through the clothing they wore (cf. Carlson, 2010; Kopkowski, 2008). Indeed, referring to a specific retail outlet, Annabelle revealed that "...my husband said I would never be allowed to shop in here if we had a daughter" because of the often provocative styles of dress offered in the store. For Deanna, these images revealed that "children don't remain children for very long." Moreover, she felt that tween-aged girls were learning that "the sexier and more revealing you look, the prettier you are."

Despite the early Lolita-look of Brooke Shields, there were fewer sexualized adolescent fashions and advertisements available at that time than there are now. Not surprisingly, mothers of tween-aged girls today are very concerned about the provocative messages these new styles of clothing are sending not only to their children but to the wider community.

Some advertisements portray children and tweens in a sexual manner both in the clothing styles chosen and in the suggestive poses used. As the content analysis of *Tiger Beat* revealed, images of girls in short skirts, fancy adult-looking dresses, and revealing

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<sup>178</sup> As the article was published online, I cannot provide pagination for this direct quote. The reader is referred to the webpage containing the article:  
[http://ca.lifestyle.yahoo.com/fashionbeauty/articles/archive/yahoolifestyle/yahoolifestyle-still\\_nothing\\_between\\_brooke\\_shields\\_and\\_her\\_calvins](http://ca.lifestyle.yahoo.com/fashionbeauty/articles/archive/yahoolifestyle/yahoolifestyle-still_nothing_between_brooke_shields_and_her_calvins).

tops and bottoms were common (cf. Chapter 6; Appendix J). These are also common fashion styles and clothing items marketed to and available for purchase by tween-aged shoppers and their mothers.

Indeed, skirts that might be considered too short or tops that were considered too revealing were more likely in the past to be marketed as part of an adult fashion line. As Mary, a former employee of the fashion industry, has noted however:

... I have watched in disgust as the industry cultivated and celebrated children as their target market...I dealt primarily with independent retailers of higher end ladies clothing and accessories, and I watched over the years as retailers who at one time might have targeted women had begun to rely on and cater to the 8-13 year old market...What they were doing is creating the demand among their adult customers who would buy this stuff for their kids. It started always in the high-end independent market, in wealthy neighbourhoods and then trickled down. Spring became 'panic' season with my customers because they now had to cater to ...wait for it...Grade 8 prom season. This involved two changes of clothing, jewellery, limo rentals, photographers, women's shoes, all with the blessing of the mothers and the cooperation of business.

Despite the availability of these fashion styles, Samantha refused to "...buy clothing that is overly revealing such as short shorts or skimpy tops." Further, as Joanne argued,

Even the little girl's clothing now, they make it look so old!..I want her to look like she's 12. And she's starting to develop and I worry you know about her being taken the wrong way so you have to realize that you're like 12 and people look at you differently, you know, depending on what you are wearing and that sort of thing.

Annabelle concluded that the mothers in this study are not alone. One of her customers did "not like the idea of matching bras and panties", believing, that as no one would see them; there was no *need* for matching undergarments. The retail store's philosophy, according to Annabelle, was that "older girls sometimes like to match, so that



is why they have them." Notably, Annabelle argued that stores "cannot have sizes that cater just to one market, so if something exists, it is available in XS to XL."

As previously noted, while religion did not have an influence on clothing options or fashion sensibilities in this sample, Carol, Chloe, Stacey and Kelly acknowledged that a school uniform took away some of the potential disagreements that might arise over tween clothing options that they felt were too provocative. Moreover, the uniform was felt to lessen the influence of and need for different fashion styles. My data also revealed that mothers believed there was no likelihood of their tween girls looking "sexy" at school when everyone was wearing the same type of asexual clothing.<sup>179</sup> That said, tween image was intrinsically linked to mothers' perceptions of the meanings of age appropriate fashion, and among the mothers in this sample, these meanings took on the stature of rules governing what could and could not be worn.

### *Mothers' Perceptions of Appropriate Tween Fashion Styles for Girls*

For some mothers with tween-aged children, such as Yasmine, "there isn't much concern for appropriateness right now because she doesn't have much there to show right now." Yasmine also observed that,

It's not so much 'appropriateness', but if others are wearing it. I saw a pair of shorts at *Abercombie and Fitch* that were really short and was hesitant to buy them. I thought if others kids were wearing it, it would be okay. But if the other kids weren't, I didn't want her to wear them.

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<sup>179</sup> Having attended a Catholic school however, I am aware of the sexual connotations that are prevalent among students regarding the kilt and 'Catholic school girl look'. Despite the claim that uniforms make individuals asexual, many girls "roll up" their kilts to make the uniform more revealing and sexy. Furthermore, the kilt pin is a significant symbol embedded with meaning: indeed, at my school, movement and placement of the kilt pin in certain directions and angles visually communicated dating status (i.e. single, dating), as well as sexual status (i.e. virgin, pregnant, or "easy") and so on. However, Kelly's daughters and the other girls who wore a uniform did not wear kilts but pants and shorts.

Additionally, Joanne revealed that, "I don't want her on display. I pick her clothes carefully. Luckily, we agree on things right now. I have taught them to respect themselves and that is why they do not wear clothes that are provocative." Natasha felt the same way: "my daughter is turning 10 soon and I know I'll have to watch out." If she was not in charge of the purchases, Natasha believed her daughter would select *some* items she deemed unacceptable or age inappropriate. For the time being, Natasha was able to pick out and control her daughter's purchases, but with time, she felt that might change.

These comments revealed that some mothers considered certain fashions as objectionable because of the image they felt they conveyed about an individual, that is, as provocative. The comments from the mothers in my study resonate with Pilcher's (2010:464) and Rawlins' (2006) respective studies. As Rawlins (2006:367) has noted, "The way in which these clothes are perceived by others means that what may be seen as a sexually alluring outfit on a sexually mature women becomes something rather different and even inappropriate on a ten-year old girl."

However, my study revealed that there was a sliding scale of acceptability in terms of the age of the child or if "the other kids are doing it." Moreover, certain fashions had situational relevance - accepted for wear at home but not at school.<sup>180</sup> For example, mothers of daughter taking dance lessons sought out "... a more risqué style for their kids, like thongs and nude under garments" for their daughter's dance costumes, but these were

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<sup>180</sup> As I mentioned earlier, both Pilcher (2010) and Rawlins (2006) have discussed the situational appropriateness of certain fashion styles in their respective studies on British youth and the geographical and intergenerational influences on tween' fashion decision-making.

situationally appropriate. While suitable for dance, Annabelle acknowledged that "...if the store ever brought that in, people would be up in arms and think it was inappropriate."

It has been argued, therefore, that children's worlds are becoming less distinct from the adult world, given these fashion images which may present tweens as adults and even sexual beings. As Stella argued, girls need:

Stuff that fits! The pants that are supposed to be on the waist are on the waist. Um, shirts that are long enough to cover their waists. And if that's tucked in, that's great! Clothes that are going to be washed and dried and not shrink up so kids aren't wearing clothes that aren't fitting them properly... You know, you see some of these young girls and they bend over and you can see their whole butt!! And they're ten! It's just not appropriate! Yeah! If they wear jeans that are coming below their butts every time they move, well they're going to stop moving. And it's not appropriate that people who don't know these kids are seeing those parts of their body. It's just not appropriate!

Kate and Brenda concurred that their girls "will never look like that." Trying to ignore the trend of "younger girls trying to look older and sexy as well as too revealing" was difficult, according to Deanna, as these images seemed to dominate both the clothing stores and images on the television and radio. Mothers in this sample attempted to avoid these styles, as Deanna noted, to "protect the innocence and allow them to be children."

The mothers of girls in this sample faced a situation with no immediate solution: the competing meanings about children and childhood, as well as debates about the appropriateness of fashion choices. However, mothers in this sample also noted that the available fashion trends did not make them feel as if they needed to "protect the innocence" of their tween boys - that is, the fashion trends for tween boys were not considered to be as sexualized or erotic as the fashions of tween girls.

*Mothers' Perceptions of Tween Fashions for Boys*

According to Joanne, since "girls mature faster than boys, female sexuality is portrayed everywhere. You don't see it like that with boys." Instead, the concern over boy's clothes tended to center around situational appropriateness - that is, could boys play and be active in the clothing they were wearing and was it appropriate for the social settings they were in. Indeed, there was a general lack of concern among mothers in this sample regarding boys wearing age inappropriate or sexually provocative clothing. Sally noted that with two boys, her biggest concern was that her oldest son did not dress "...like a bum."<sup>181</sup> The only stylistic issues she anticipated were that her son would "...have trouble finding clothes that represented his sense of style." However, she noted that if she had girls, it would have been "...an entirely different ballgame..." as she was "happy to have a boy because it is easier and less worrisome" than having a girl given that their fashion styles were often "inappropriate."

Both Joanne and Clare expressed frustration with the skull and the skeleton-inspired clothing that their sons liked to wear. As Joanne observed,

Everything has as a skull on it and it drives me crazy! I don't mind the occasional thing but *everything!* Like I don't get. I went into *Wal-Mart* the other day and every *single thing* had a skull on it! What is that trying to portray. But I'm not crazy and like 'you can't wear anything if it has a skull on it' but that really seems to be a trend there for the boys. But he's not a trendy kid.

While the "skull or skeleton look" was not ideal for Joanne or Clare, there was and is nothing sexual about the image either one conveyed.

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<sup>181</sup> Sally observed that her youngest son is much more "fashionable" and "put together" than her older child.

As I noted in the content analysis of both *Today's Parent* and *Tiger Beat* magazines, the fashions being marketed for boys clearly reflected stereotypical images of active, tough, and playful young men. According to Joanne, as noted earlier, her son Fred's only concern was "no plaid or buttons!" In fact, Sally recognized that track pants were not appropriate for "everyday wear", but were necessary to fit her boys' active lifestyle. Indeed, as noted in Chapter Six, clothing options and the images such clothing projected were gendered - that is, based on stereotypical ideas of what it means to be a boy in society today. However, whether shopping for tween girls or boys, mothers' perceptions of the image that particular clothing and fashion styles conveyed was a prime factor influencing their purchasing decisions. I now consider this process in more detail.

### **Mothers' Shopping and Purchasing Decisions: Gatekeeping Tween Fashions**

In the sections above, I discussed the meanings mothers held about tween fashions currently being marketed to their children. In this section, I provide information on the actual shopping and purchasing behaviour of mothers and the factors they indicated influenced that behaviour.

First I asked mothers where they tended to shop for their tweens and the following retail stores were identified: *Aeropostale*, *Old Navy*, *Winners*, *Campus Crewe*, *Bluenotes*, *Sears*, *La Senza Girl*, *The Children's Place*, *The Gap*, *the Bay*, and *Wal-Mart*. Some mothers were actively boycotting retailers such as *Hot Topic*, *La Senza Girl* and *Stitches*, who mothers reported were all known for carrying more revealing or "skimpy" fashions for tweens. As Susan stated forthrightly, "I don't love *La Senza Girl*", while Brenda noted that "some of their clothing is the size of a handkerchief", a sentiment shared by other

mothers in this sample. Mothers also tried to limit purchases in stores like *Boat House*, *West 49*, *Hollister*, *Artizia*, and *Abercombie and Fitch* as the clothing in these stores was very expensive. In this regard, there were a variety of factors that affected mothers' actual purchasing of tween fashions.

### ***Gatekeeping Against Inappropriate Tween Fashions***

As might be expected, one of the most contentious factors impacting the purchasing behaviour of the mothers in my sample was the perceived appropriateness of the tween clothing available. Indeed, both Pilcher's (2010) study of British tweens and Rawlins' (2006) study of the intergenerational interpretations of fashion acceptability have discussed mothers' concerns regarding what fashions are acceptable for their tweens to wear. Mothers in this sample defined appropriateness in a number of different ways, but as discussed earlier in this chapter, gender played a dominant role in the meanings of appropriateness that were generated. For Joanne, it was "appropriateness for both of them [son and daughter] actually, just different angles." Her key concerns in purchasing clothes for her tween daughter were her age and the age appropriateness or non-sexual nature of the clothing. However, when purchasing clothing for her son, her primary concerns were focused on its durability and practicality.<sup>182</sup>

Martens *et al.* (2004:12), writing in the *Journal of Consumer Culture*, have argued that parents are the most significant influence on children's consumption patterns. As the authors have observed, parents "not only act as gatekeepers regarding what can be

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<sup>182</sup> As already discussed, tween fashions produced for and marketed to boys did not appear to have a sexual connotation attached to them according to the mothers in this sample.

consumed, but also actively engage in cultivating ways of consuming" (Martens *et al.* 2004:12; see also, Prout, 2000). According to Allen and Hawkins (1999:199), *maternal gatekeeping* has been defined as including a mother's reluctance to relinquish responsibility over family matters by setting rigid standards.<sup>183</sup> Although their research focused on the gender dynamics inherent in maintaining roles within the family, in this analysis maternal gatekeeping is used as a sensitizing concept. It could be argued, for example, that mothers of tween girls embraced this gatekeeping role and acted as gatekeepers through judging the appropriateness of fashion styles in terms of the message they felt the clothing projected about their daughters and their image. Clothing was deemed to be age *inappropriate* in general if it was considered to embody a more adult look and, in particular, if it did not adhere to a mother's notion of who her tween was or how her tween should look (cf. Allen and Hawkins, 1999).

For most mothers, therefore, acting as gatekeepers, and purchasing only age appropriate clothing for their tweens were most important when making buying decisions. However, as discussed earlier, in searching for these appropriate clothing items, mothers more often than not encountered adult-looking fashions targeted for tweens that verged on or were overtly sexual. Brenda, for example, pointedly observed that what she termed the "hoochie fashions" available in some stores such as *Stitches*, were so inappropriate that a girl could not bend over because both her rear end and breast area would be exposed. These, she concluded, were just not acceptable styles of dress for anyone, let alone girls as young as eight to thirteen years of age.

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<sup>183</sup> For a complete discussion of maternal gatekeeping within families, see Allen and Hawkins (1999).

It is important to note, however, that these mothers felt that it was only "a matter of time" before their tweens would start disagreeing more frequently with their mothers' fashion choices. As Rawlins (2006:373) has noted in her study on the influence of spatiality on tween fashion decision-making,

the mother–daughter relationship is constantly being reconfigured as a result of conflicts and occurrences in certain key spaces such as the home, the school and the street (Holloway and Valentine, 2000) resulting in an ever changing identity for all involved.

Indeed, a prime concern for mothers of tween girls in this sample was their realization that they and their daughters might begin to disagree about the kinds of images being projected through the tween fashion available. What mothers might consider sexually provocative clothing might be considered one of the latest styles or "in" things for tweens, based on the clothing and tween images being marketed.

Some mothers were already personally feeling the push from their daughters to allow them to wear what their mothers considered unsuitable clothes. As Chloe revealed, her husband was already telling their daughter, "Well you're not ever leaving the house wearing something like that!" However, Chloe also noted that these occasions were rare as, "basically, we let her pick things out based on the understanding that we have to approve them as well...she knows that anything she pulls out, we have to give it the okay." Deanna also revealed that on rare occasions, she and her daughter would have a disagreement about fashion based on the notion that the clothing was too tight, but noted that, "Ariel understands that when we shop if I don't find something appropriate, I am the one who has the final say because I am making the purchase. We usually find something else anyway that she is happy with." Further, Joanne acknowledged that:



She's pretty good. If I say no, she doesn't bug. We've had that conversation, you know, you're twelve and you are judged by the way you look and there is lots of time to grow up!.. Like I said, I'm buying them. The bottom line is that I'm buying them and whether or not she picks a fight doesn't matter. What's appropriate and not appropriate for a twelve year-old, that's my decision.

However, most mothers in the sample did express the concern that as their tween children matured, conflicts over clothing would become inevitable. This concern was linked to the different meanings mothers felt would inform what their tweens considered "appropriate" fashions, particularly in terms of the image the clothing projected.<sup>184</sup> Mothers also felt that the actual availability for purchase of the particular styles in dispute exacerbated the potential for these disagreements.

Despite these expressed concerns about future problems, mothers in this sample were quick to report that if disagreements ensued over the purchase of particular types of clothing, it was ultimately the mothers, acting as gatekeepers, who made the final decision according to their rules. At least for the time being, these mothers felt they had a degree of control over the image their tween-aged children projected through the clothing actually purchased for them to wear.

### *Gatekeeping as a Strategy to Avoid Conflict: Solo Versus Co-Shopping*

As already discussed, the data have suggested that mothers in this sample were very much aware of tween fashions, had made judgments about their appropriateness, and understood their importance to their tweens as part of a process of fitting in with the peer group and being cool. However, the majority of mothers nevertheless revealed that when

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<sup>184</sup> In the next chapter, I present the data from my interviews with the tweens in my sample and discuss these observations from their point of view.

shopping for clothing for their tweens, they were usually *solo shoppers*. By shopping without their tweens, these mothers felt they had greater flexibility to impose their *own* criteria for purchases, even though the influence of their child's expressed opinions, as well as economic and practical factors, weighed heavily on their purchasing decisions. This finding differs from that of Harper *et al.* (2003:197) who also studied parent and child shopping relationships and concluded that "most mothers often take their tweens shopping with them", a process the authors termed "co-shopping" (see also, Crewe and Collins, 2006).

My interview data suggest that most of the mothers in my sample limiting "co-shopping" with their tweens used it as a strategy to avoid conflict they knew or believed was coming. These mothers understood that tween fashions had the potential to create problems and/or disagreements between themselves and their children. As a result, mothers used a strategy of "shopping solo" as much as possible to avoid these potential conflicts.

In this regard, it could be argued that these mothers were again acting as "gatekeepers" who moderated and/or protected their tween children from media influences by limiting their opportunities to lobby for and/or to purchase clothing that the mothers considered unacceptable (cf. Allen and Hawkins, 1999; Martens *et al.*, 2004). Indeed, only a few mothers in my study admitted that they co-shopped with their tweens on a regular basis and many of these limited this co-shopping to seasonal buying, such as for back-to-school clothes.

However, one exception was Susan who noted that she "...only buys clothing for Tara when she is with me" because "what Tara likes" was her main consideration when shopping. Chloe also took her daughter shopping with her on a regular basis:

She is usually with us. She has her own tastes. If she is not there, there is always the risk that she won't like it. And if she doesn't like it, it's not going to go on her. And that's fine. Like we grew up in a family where 'that's your clothing, you're wearing it and that's it', right? So I ah don't want to do that to her...so I only make her wear what she feels comfortable wearing.

As noted above, Chloe felt that she had been raised in a more traditional closed household where her opinions about her clothing did not weigh heavily on household decision-making. It would appear, as a result of this early experience, that Chloe and her husband adopted a more co-operative parenting style where they valued and took their daughter's opinions into account when making purchasing decisions.

Deanna suggested, however, that some mothers were taking their tweens' opinion(s) too much into consideration by "trying to make their children happy - too busy to spend time with their children so they will spend money and buy these clothes to make up for it." For mothers such as Deanna, gatekeeping and having the final decision over fashion choices not only avoided potential conflicts, but also taught tweens a valuable lesson that money does not buy happiness.

I suggest that while some mothers might agree with Deanna's statements, others might argue that other factors were at play. As the mothers in this study taught me, sometimes it was easier to lose a few battles if you wanted to win the war. As Joanne argued, mothers should learn to "pick your battles", and the choice of clothing styles for their children might not be one of the important ones.

In this study, Chloe and Susan were exceptions to the rule as most mothers were solo shoppers - a gatekeeping technique that allowed mothers to shop for the fashion styles that were cost, image and age appropriate without any negative feedback from their tweens. Brenda, for example, only shopped infrequently with her daughter as she found it easier to shop without her, picking up what she wanted without experiencing any negative feedback. By limiting co-shopping, Brenda avoided conflict over potentially "hot button" fashion choices that her tween daughter might seek out.

On the other hand, mothers of boys, such as Joanne, Sally and Clare found it easier to shop solo, as co-shopping with their tween-aged children often resulted in the boys becoming bored, and as Stacy observed, "wanting to go home as soon as we got there."<sup>185</sup>

It is interesting to note that the opinions of spouses and/or significant others also appeared to have an impact not only on a mother's clothing purchases for her tweens, but also in terms of her role as a gatekeeper against the purchase of certain fashion styles. Samantha, for example, revealed that her husband's opinion was one of the main influences on her purchases for her tween if she and her husband were together: "...if we feel the clothing is sending a message, rather than being about what a person feels good wearing then we will avoid purchasing those items." However, there was not sufficient data to explore this influence further so it remains a suggestion for future research.

To conclude this section, mothers' decisions about clothing purchases were often a direct result of whether they co-shopped or not and/or acted as gatekeepers to avoid

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<sup>185</sup> For a complete discussion of co-shopping, see Harper *et al.* (2003:197).

potential conflicts with their tweens over the purchase of particular inappropriate fashions. As Martens *et al.* (2004:16) have observed,

The parent–child relationship clearly has implications for the way adults consume and the degree of autonomy that they have in making consumption 'choices'. Whether children are autonomous in their consumption is another debate. On the one hand, children are not autonomous because adults, who also act as gatekeepers and guardians to many consumption practices, control most 'purchases' of goods and services.<sup>186</sup>

However, future disagreements between mothers and tweens seemed inevitable as conflicts over shared meanings regarding what was and was not appropriate for tweens to wear would become more frequent as the tweens got older. This potential conflict could reasonably be expected to be greatly enhanced by the corporate sector (a) marketing styles to their tweens that challenged these mothers' meanings regarding what was appropriate, and (b) making available these clothing styles in retail outlets geared to tweens. Further, solo shopping as a gatekeeping tactic aimed at lessening other influences on tween fashion choices would only have limited effectiveness. As Schor (2004) has observed, as tweens, and girls in particular, grow older, they want to shop more, both with their mothers and their friends. As a result, mothers would inevitably lose a degree of control despite their gatekeeping tactics, or lose control all together when their tweens begin to shop without them present. However, this is an area that will require further research.

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<sup>186</sup> See also, Boden (2006a; 2006b), Cook, (1995), Crewe and Collins (2006).

***Mothers' Perceptions of Appropriateness of Clothing in Terms of Cost and Functionality***

Mothers in this study also indicated that their purchasing behaviour was influenced by factors such as cost and functionality. In sociological terms, these factors were gender-neutral; that is, the mothers in this sample rationalized their purchases for their girls and boys in the same way, and the gender of their tween did not influence the process. While some mothers would not buy any items that were beyond their means and/or a pre-determined price point, others had a sliding scale. Notably, Carol revealed that cost was the most significant factor *only* when there was no disposable income: "if I have a lot of money in the bank, we can spend \$200 in one store. If not, then we don't buy anything." Yet, if there were extra funds available for consumption in the household, cost became an irrelevant factor for Carol. Likewise, Brenda, a self-professed shop-a-holic shared that:

I love to shop and will purchase clothes for the kids from whatever store has great deals. Most of the time, the clothing will still be the same in style, like athletic or dress-up clothes, but I'll shop whenever I can find something and it can, and most often is, from a number of different stores.

Moreover, cost in relation to the practical/functional nature of the clothing also impacted decisions surrounding fashion purchases. Although Rawlins (2006:366) has taken a different approach, her research supports my findings that mothers strongly consider the practical and/or functional aspects of clothing when shopping for their children. Stella noted that she would not purchase high cost items if the main function of the clothing was to play and "get dirty in". Furthermore, Clare did not see a need to purchase "skeleton-look" clothing as it was not "nice" nor worth the "price tag." On

occasion, however, she "gave in" to her son's requests. Samantha concurred and noted that, "...clothing cost was sometimes more than I thought it was worth", given the ultimate purpose of the item. Susan concluded that while there was greater availability, "some of the name brands are pricey" and ultimately not worth the cost.

Carol believed that cost became a dominant factor *only* when monthly disposable income was a problem. As a result, occasional disagreements ensued when her daughter wanted an item in a month where "...we don't buy anything", although this was rare. According to Samantha, "price seems to be the only area where we may negotiate on." (sic) In these instances where she was participating in the shopping experience, her daughter offered to "...pay for half of it with birthday money or as a Christmas gift." Indeed, when co-shopping, the decision to purchase an item was a combination of the physical cost of an item, the mother's perception of the actual value of the item, the tween's influence over the purchase, and the ability to negotiate through the disagreement with an acceptable resolution for both the mother and tween.

The appropriateness of clothing for purchase was also tied to its functionality. While most boys would not ask for one, purchasing a suit for their son to wear to school was not considered functional if he was going to run and play in the dirt with his friends. Similarly, purchasing a high cost item for a tween who would outgrow it in a few months was not considered appropriate because it was not practical or cost-efficient. Sometimes, however, mothers wanted to purchase items that were suitable for specific occasions. Neither Joanne nor Clare, for example, felt that the skulls, skeletons and beanie hats their sons loved were appropriate for special events. This meant that purchasing decisions

made by mothers were influenced not only by cost and functionality but by suitability; that is, having clothes that were suitable for the school year, or dressy clothes suitable for special occasions, as well as lounging or play clothes.

### **Concluding Remarks**

In this research sample, it was clear that mothers continued to define the nature of childhood and tweenhood using more traditional normative meanings that emphasized innocence, and the need to protect their children from inappropriate influences external to the family. In this regard, however, mothers acknowledged the influence of factors such as brands, logos and tween celebrities on the way their tweens viewed themselves and what tween styles they felt they should wear. Mothers also made clear their concerns about the marketing of inappropriate tween fashions directly to their children, the overly sexual nature of some of these tween fashions, particularly for girls, and the availability of these fashions for purchase in stores geared to tweens.

On the other hand, mothers also indicated that they understood how important tween fashions were to their children as a mechanism for projecting a successful self-image and fitting in with the peer group. Thus, mothers faced a dilemma as they struggled to remain true to their own meanings of what was unacceptable or not, in the face of challenges from the corporate world (a) to the meanings these mothers held and (b) their control over their tween children. In order to resist these external influences on their tweens, mothers used a strategy of gatekeeping in two ways. First, they exerted control over what tween fashion was bought based on their own assessments of its appropriateness and what image they felt it projected about their tween. Second, they



engaged in a strategy of solo shopping which minimized the potential for conflict with their tweens based on differing meanings associated with tween fashion.

One of the main problems with research on the issues addressed in this chapter is the lack of attention paid to the thoughts and opinions of the children and tweens themselves. However, in this research I actively sought to understand how tween-aged children felt about the diverse and often conflicting meanings that impact their social understanding of themselves.<sup>187</sup> In the following chapter, I discuss tweens' perceptions of the relationship between fashion specifically marketed to them and the role it plays for them as they negotiate a new sense of self and seek approval from their peers.

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<sup>187</sup> See also, Pilcher (2010).

## **CHAPTER 8: TWEENS' PERCEPTIONS OF TWEENHOOD, FASHION AND THE FACTORS INFLUENCING THEIR EXPRESSION OF SELF-IMAGE THROUGH FASHION**

In this chapter, I discuss the results arising from my in-depth interviews with tween-aged children. A number of research questions informed my interest in tweens' perceptions of the relationship between fashion, the influences on fashion, such as brands, logos and celebrities, and the projection of their self-image. My overarching focus was to consider how it felt to be a tween and if fashion acted as a form of image projection for the tweens interviewed in this study. I also considered the impact that significant others might have on tweens' projection of their self-image through the use of fashion items.

To address these issues, I considered the following: To what extent do tweens perceive that they are influenced by others in creating and projecting a particular self-image? I also considered tweens' perceptions of and their reactions to the increasing sexualization of fashions marketed to them, especially to girls. Finally, I considered tweens' perceptions of clothing items that were a potential source of disagreements between them and their mothers due to the clothing's inappropriate style and/or image it projected.

### **A Brief Theoretical Overview Informing the Analysis**

As discussed in some detail in Chapters 4 and 7, this dissertation research was situated within the symbolic interactionist tradition. I conducted my analysis of the interview data with tweens by attending to the meanings informing their assessments of tweenhood, tween fashion, the appropriateness or inappropriateness of fashion styles, and the social factors influencing their purchase of clothing, such as branding, celebrities,

family and/or friends. Further, I conceptualized tweens as self-reflexive and possessing an agency which allowed them to create and recreate themselves and their environment. As was the case in Chapter 7, this contextual framework was essential for understanding the processes whereby tweens may or may not have adopted, modified and/or rejected (a) the meanings and definitions of *tweens* as a new identity construct and/or life stage after childhood. Further, I focused on (b) the meanings tweens associate with significant others in relation to their influence on tweens' fashion decisions and choices for self-image projection; and (c) the processes whereby tweens made assessments of appropriate or inappropriate fashion choices for themselves based on these meanings.

Theoretically, the importance of shared meaning is linked to processes of socialization and role-taking (Blumer, 1969:2; Musolf, 2003:103). Roles are learned through socialization and this learning extends over the life-span of individuals in any given society. Role-taking is an essential step in the formation of identity and the process of self-expression and may affect the particular self-image a child projects. Indeed, many children role-play and take part in hero-worship as a way to find and express their sense of self and self-image (Cooley, 1922). Further, the role-taking process is not static, as it involves constant interaction with and reaction from others. Role-taking can also involve the manipulation of appearance, a major focus of this research (cf. Stone, 1970).

Children often switch between roles based on the responses of others, and in relation to rewards and sanctions associated with the particular role behaviour (Manis and Meltzer, 1978). Through role-taking, for example, a child may dress similarly to *Hannah Montana*, but then receive negative feedback in the form of sanctions from the peer group

regarding that particular presentation of self and/or self-image. After internalizing the negative feedback, the child may attempt to revalidate his/her sense of self-image through taking on the role and dress of another, more socially acceptable figure. For example, in an attempt to seek validation, the child may take on the role of a cool peer or a more in celebrity such as Taylor Swift, and thereby dress and act accordingly.

Cooley (1922) has also argued that selves and the projection of self-image derive from the perceptions and opinions of other individuals. In that regard, the Looking-glass self is conceptualized as having three components: "the imagination of our appearance to the other person; the imagination of their judgment of that appearance; and self-feelings, such as pride" (Marshall, 1998e:374; see also, Cooley, 1922). Like role-taking, the Looking-glass self as a process is also influenced by rewards and sanctions received from others in interaction and this extends to reactions to one's appearance. If a child, for example, receives negative feedback about a fashion choice and/or presented self-image, he or she may engage in a form of exchange where alternative options are considered. Children therefore internalize these opinions and consider alternatives and may opt for other forms of appearance with a concomitant change in what constitutes their Looking-glass self.

I use these concepts to examine tweens' assessments or the perceptions of the degree of influence significant others from primary and secondary groups exert in the self-expression process. In particular, I explore how the reactions of others affect or do not affect tweens' decision-making about fashion purchases conceptualized as part of the process of communicating a particular self-image. In addressing these issues, I made use

of tween magazines as an important and methodological technique to generate discussion with tweens in interviews about the celebrities and fashion styles often marketed to them.<sup>188</sup> For example, near the end of my interviews with tweens, the tween participants and I looked through the current monthly issue of a tween magazine such as *Tiger Beat* to assess the clothing worn by the models and/or celebrities - in particular, we often discussed what celebrities and/or fashion styles the tween liked or disliked, and the reasons for these assessments.<sup>189</sup>

Building on the use of photography in ethnographic research ventures, I originated a new methodological approach to data collection, allowing the tween respondents to take digital images of the particular pictures in the magazines that captured their interest and generated the most discussion.<sup>190</sup> This tactic enabled me to discuss fashion and identity development in what Mandell (1984; 1988:438) terms as "an age-appropriate manner", which was both suitable for and considered to be fun by the tween boys and girls. Through using magazines and digital photography, I was able to engage tweens and capture their comments on the important trends in tween fashion in a new and innovative way.

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<sup>188</sup> Boden *et al.* (2004) has mentioned looking through catalogues with her participants, but not the extent to which they were used in the research project (cf. Boden, 2006a; 2006b; Galilee, 2002; Pilcher, 2010; 2011; Pole, 2007).

<sup>189</sup> Most interviews involved looking at editions of *Tiger Beat* magazine from December 2008-November 2009. However, interviews conducted at an earlier stage in the research process involved looking at other issues of magazines, such as *BOP*, *Six*, *7th*, *8th*, and an earlier edition of *Tiger Beat*. However, all of these magazines were current - that is, the same publication month in which the interviews were conducted.

<sup>190</sup> Boden (2006a; 2006b) used a similar methodology where her child participants hand-drew pictures of themselves in different outfits and looks. She also provided children with a disposable camera for them (or their parents) to take pictures of themselves in their favourite outfits. For a more detailed discussion of her technique, please see Boden (2006a; 2006b), Boden *et al.* (2004), Pole (2007) and Pilcher (2010; 2011). Please also see Cook and Hess (2007) for their description of using a camera in research with children in England and Denmark in three different projects, as well as Dockett and Perry (2005).

In this chapter, then, I present data on tweens' perceptions of the meanings accompanying fashion as they relate to their perceptions of self-image and/or identity, and the appropriateness and/or acceptability of fashion styles marketed to tweens. I also consider how tweens negotiate these meanings through processes of interaction with significant others; and how fashion facilitates interaction and integration with peer groups and the wider social environment. Finally, I examine how these meanings and interactions influence tweens' decision-making about how to project a self-image through fashion, and how these decisions affect what is in fact purchased.

### **Tweens' Perceptions of Fashion Awareness**

#### ***Tweens' Exposure to Magazines and Television Shows Targeted to Them***

As discussed in Chapter 6, tween-gearred magazines present packaged information to "an audience of trend-setters...focused on celebrities, TV & film, music, and fashion!" (*bopandtigerbeat.com*, 2011).<sup>191</sup> *Tiger Beat* and other similar magazines acknowledge that tweens are their prime demographic and target market - marketing images of cool tweenhood through the use of celebrities and fashions is one tactic to target this group of consumers. Indeed, Brookes and Kelly (2009:600) have revealed that these types of magazines are important marketing tools to target and present particular images of youth to tween-aged consumers (see also, Currie, 1999). These magazines provide advice and information about celebrities, fashions, and other forms of "trendsetting behaviour" to

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<sup>191</sup> As this was published online, I cannot provide pagination for this direct quote. The reader is referred to the webpage containing the article: *bopandtigerbeat.com/advertising/*.

tweens and teens (*bopandtigerbeat.com*, 2011).<sup>192</sup> It is clear, however, that through the placement and repetition of images or through their connection with wider cultural symbols, celebrities were presented as fashion icons to be emulated (Entman, 1993:52-53,57). As a result, I thought it was important to establish what magazines tweens in my sample were in fact aware of or exposed to given the possibility that these images might be identified as influences on how they expressed their self-image through fashion.

When I asked tweens which magazines they read on a regular basis, tween girls reported that they most often read *Tiger Beat*, *Bop*, *Seventeen*, *teenVogue*, *CosmoGirl!*, *J-14*, *M*, *Twist*, *QuizFest*, *Pop Star*, and *GI*. either on their own or with friends. One participant in my sample mentioned that she read *Young Riders*, *New Type USA*, and *Otaku US* on a very regular basis. The tween boys in the study noted their favourite magazines included *Chickadee* and *Sports Illustrated Kids*, which they read "often" again either alone or with friends.

I also asked tweens about their television viewing habits in order to be aware of the particular tween celebrities and fashion styles that might be influencing their own fashion choices as an expression of self-image. Like the reports from mothers in Chapter 7, tweens identified the following shows, in no particular order, as "most watched": *Hannah Montana*, watched "very often" by most of the girls and "watched sometimes" by one boy; *Sonny with a Chance*, watched "very often" by most of the girls and none of the boys; *I-Carly*, watched "very often" by most of the girls and none of the boys; *Wizards of Waverly Place*, watched "very often" by most of the girls and none of the boys; the *Jonas*

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<sup>192</sup> As this resource was published online, I cannot provide pagination for this direct quote. The reader is referred to the webpage containing the article: [bopandtigerbeat.com/advertising/](http://bopandtigerbeat.com/advertising/).

*Brothers*, watched "very often" by most of the girls and "watched sometimes" by one boy; *Life with Derek*, watched "very often" by most of the girls and none of the boys; and finally, *Suite Life of Zack and Cody*, watched "very often" by most of the girls and one boy.<sup>193</sup>

The *Disney* brand of television shows appeared to be "most watched" among the tween viewers in my sample. According to Rachel, the *Disney Channel* shows did not have any "racy content", so she perceived they were "appropriate" for someone her age to watch. In general, the viewing habits of my tween respondents reflected their interest in the celebrities profiled in *Tiger Beat*.

### ***Tweens' Perceptions of the Most Popular Tween Celebrities***

My tween participants also identified the following tween celebrities, in no particular order, as *most* popular: Miley Cyrus (although now to a lesser degree than in the past), Demi Lovato, Selena Gomez, Taylor Swift, Sidney Crosby, Zac Efron and the rest of the *High School Musical* cast (i.e. Vanessa Hudgens, Ashley Tisdale, Corbin Blue, etc.), Miranda Cosgrove (Carly from *I-Carly*), Robert Pattison, Kristen Stewart, Taylor Lautner, Zack and Cody from *The Suite Life of Zack and Cody*, and Nick, Kevin and Joe Jonas of the *Jonas Brothers*. This choices reflected the most popular tween celebrities found in *Tiger Beat*, as discussed in some detail in Chapter 6.<sup>194</sup> One of my tween respondents, Danielle, noted that these stars were "the best" because they were cool, fun,

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<sup>193</sup> Although additional television shows were mentioned, I have limited this discussion to those shows watched most often by the tweens in this sample, given the sample's small size.

<sup>194</sup> Despite not being a tween-aged celebrity, Lady Gaga also made the list. Rachel's comment about Lady Gaga resonated with the other tweens in my sample: "only her music, not for her clothes."



and had "really nice clothes." One exception to the rule was Crystal who stated "It's not intentional, but frequently I like whatever people don't like. I do not like Justin Bieber." Despite those claims, Crystal still liked some of the contemporary tween stars listed above, noting that "I also like to listen to the *Disney* stars' music such as Demi Lovato."

Although I cannot claim conclusively that it is the case, the data suggest that the constant repetition of these images of celebrities in magazines and on television shows, with few alternative options, were made salient for tweens. Both mothers and tweens in this research provided identical lists of the most popular celebrities, lending support to this observation (cf. Entman, 1993:52-57). As I discuss later, the prominence of these celebrities in tween-related media content may influence tweens' decisions regarding fashion and clothing styles. Notably, in addition to having a list of favourite tween stars, the individuals in my sample also had a strong preference for favourite items of clothing.

### ***Tweens' Interest in Fashion - Their Five Favourite Fashions***

The tween respondents in this sample clearly had an interest in fashion. With one exception, none of my tween respondents had difficulty listing their five favourite fashions when asked to do so. Tweens' favourite fashions reflected the types of clothing they believed were most "in-style", based in part on their own assessments of what celebrities were wearing, and in part on what others in their school and/or peer group were wearing. One of Kayla's favourites was a "track suit that is like bluish gray and it's really pretty" as well as her "black checked leggings that are comfortable." But as she noted, "sparkles nowadays are kind of babyish" so those items were not part of her top-

five. When asked what she liked most about her clothes, Crystal responded that they were "cool."

The exception to the rule, Danielle, could *not* decide on what clothing fit into her "top five." As she observed, "Oh that's hard, I think I have about 27 choices that I really like!" She was somewhat indecisive about what to include in her "final list." Instead of choosing five favourite outfits, Danielle chose a favourite summer and winter look. She first described her summer look:

Like let's say today is like the hottest day of the whole year and I would wear short leggings with a skirt, although I don't have any skirts out right now I kind of like a tank top yeah a tank top and a sweater that has short sleeves,

while her winter outfit would be:

like leggings with it's like purple and black and I have like nice leggings at home. I have like it's kind of like puffy shirt but it like holds your wrist like this and it's like black and white oh I mean black and purple with like fancy stuff on it. It's really nice.

Danielle's love for fashion became clear when she added "clothes I don't have but would be my favourite if I had them" into her list of favourite outfits. Interestingly, Danielle took it upon herself to complete one of the quizzes in the June 2009 edition of *Tiger Beat* during our interview (34-35). The quiz asks readers, "What Trend Style Are You?", providing images of celebrities in particular styles of clothing. Danielle choose the following fashion items over the other available options: plaid over ripped jeans, hats over headbands, sequins over lace, skinny belts over thick belts, high heels over flats, and colourful frocks over black dresses. Based on these answers, the quiz determined that this tween's "trend obsession" was high heels (*Tiger Beat*, June 2009:34-35).

Eager to share her own top fashion outfits, Danielle's older sister Megan included her favourite winter outfit of "grey skinny jeans and this gray top." Megan's favourite summer outfit included a tank top with a sweater and "jean capris that come up to about here", pointing to her mid-calf. To add to her self-described "funky style", Rachel included her *Victoria Secret Pink* sweatpants, plaid pink shirt a "flashy sweater" and her yellow "banana pants", as her favourite fashions. Rachel noted how she played around with clothes and styles to create a "uniquely her look."

Providing a list of favourite clothing options was just as easy for the tween boys who participated in this study. Bob, for example, included his striped blue/gray sweater, his blue jeans, his skeleton zipper sweater, and his short sleeve white shirt with his jacket as part of his "favourite five." Chad's "*Aeropostale* or *Roots* blue and green coloured shirts" were his favourite to wear, along with any other clothes that "are comfy."

It is important to note that it was not just clothing that was important to tweens. Kayla observed that clothing was just one part, as the rest came with accessories "that make the outfit. If you are going to have an outfit, you need to have something to go with it. You've got to have accessories. That's what accessories are for!" Rachel agreed that "bright accessories add a lot to it." Jasmine stated however that she "likes accessories but they are not like my favourite part." Not only did my tween respondents demonstrate an interest in fashion, the data suggest that tweens' preference for particular fashion styles and "looks" reflected their perceptions about the relevance of fashion as a form image display.

### **Tweens' Perceptions of Fashion as a Form of Image Display**

My analysis of the data suggested that tweens perceived that fashion allowed them to present a self-image reflective of who they were as individuals, although to varying degrees. For example, both Megan and Danielle attended a school where uniforms were mandatory. Megan reported that the dress code "represses my sense of individuality." Kayla pointed out that fashion in public school enabled kids to "...actually know who you are going to be friends with" just based on what the kids were wearing.

Similarly, Rachel thought it was difficult to "express herself" at her previous uniform based school. For her, fashion was just one of the ways she could be "expressive." Both she and her mother Carol noted how *Glee*, a popular television show, helped Rachel accept her self-image and the role that fashion played in the process. As her mother noted, "art school allows them to be more expressive than she was at her former Catholic school." Seeing the unique fashions suited to each artistic character on *Glee* and translating them into her own wardrobe, was especially important for Rachel in allowing her to be "more casual and less put together" than in a school uniform. These new fashions, she felt, were more unique and representative of her own personality, just as they were for the cast of *Glee*.

Notably, the Season 1 DVD Set of *Glee* (2009-2010) includes a bonus feature instructing individuals how to dress like their favourite *Glee* star. In this featurette, the costume designer and wardrobe stylists are depicted shopping for each individual character. The stylists inform the viewer how to "copy their look" and what exact clothes and styles to purchase if individuals want to look like the characters on the show (*Glee*,

2009-2010). Given this information, along with Rachel's admiration of the unique wardrobe and fashions of the characters on the show, it is reasonable to conclude that she felt she was successful in creating a self-image inspired by *Glee* through the clothing she wore.

For Crystal, certain fashions made her feel confident; that is, Crystal suggested that "it's not really vanity reasons that I wear these clothes. However, I do still like my appearance." Tara too shared a similar perspective on the importance of fashion to her self-expression and appearance, noting however, that "I love to shop" and "I really like to talk about fashion with my friends." Ariel also stated that "I love fashion and I'm crazy about shoes." On the other hand, Tara was certain about the styles and/or self-image she did not want to embody when she noted that, "I don't like Goth, girly girl stuff, or tomboy look" and preferred other clothing styles "because they are in style and they suit me."

My analysis of the data suggests that these participants believed clothing was key to expressing their self-image and personality traits. Jasmine, for example, stated that fashion reveals "Like your attitude, it sometimes shows the music you like, the things you like to do and stuff...like if you are like girly or a tomboy." The data indicated that tweens enjoyed the ways clothing made them look and feel; that is, the clothing helped these tweens to project or embody a preferred self-image (see also, Brookes and Kelly, 2009:600).

However, not all tweens were cognizant of or willing to admit the importance of fashion to their own self-image. Crystal, for example, stated "fashion just isn't my thing" yet later revealed how wearing comfortable clothes made a statement about "who I am."

Further, both Jonathan (ten-years-old) and Fred (twelve-years-old) were in similar positions regarding their "disinterest" in fashion. Jonathan revealed that he did not like "the preppy look" or the "tight jeans cause they just really look weird!" because they did not align with his sense of style. Further, Bob found himself in a similarly contradictory position. Although he said that fashion did not mean "anything" to him, he "needed" and "wanted" particular fashion items because "all of my friends have them." Ironically then, certain fashion styles did say who Jonathan and Bob were as individuals and importantly, facilitated their interaction and integration with the peer group based on their wearing similar fashion items and having similar tastes.

The data suggest, therefore, that fashion played a role in tweens' social lives and that particular styles of dress provided an important link to their presentation of a preferred self-image. In theoretical terms, choosing fashions to project a preferred self-image is part of the "interaction ritual" and/or the creation of a looking-glass self reflective of the larger socializing group (Collins, 1994; Goffman, 1959; 1974; see also, Adler and Adler, 1998; Cooley, 1922).

### **Tweens' Perceptions of Fashion as Part of the Interaction Ritual**

My analysis of the data indicated that fashion facilitated interaction and integration with the peer group. According to my respondents, the peer group played an important role in tweens' fashion choices by providing what sociologists refer to as rewards and sanctions for their fashion choices and image projection. Adler and Adler (1998:74-97) have noted how peer culture exerts pressure on its members to have the right looks, attitudes, and clothing - no child wants to be at the bottom of the peer culture

pyramid as sanctions and ridicule run too high. The tweens in my sample expressed a similar sentiment as they sought to project a particular self-image which allowed them to align with groups of similar others. Rachel's eclectic *Artizia's* clothing, for example, allowed her to express her artistic personality, as well as to fit into the peer group at her art school. Further, Kayla noted that public school "allowed her to change" her fashion choices and self-image in order to meet her friend's ideals and values - that is, Kayla's fashion choices facilitated her successful interaction and integration with her peer group as well. Kayla tied the importance of fashion to her best friend's opinions: "If she told me it didn't look good, I would believe her because she's my friend!"

Lizzie too mentioned that she kept up with fashion to "avoid being teased" and to keep the peace within her peer group. Indeed, Lizzie was not afraid to admit that if her friends said they liked a style, she would "try it and make it my own or do it just because my friends like it." Jasmine also noted how her peer group influenced her choices: "for me, I always like listen to my friends and they tell me what *they like* and I don't....I always just say who I am." Rachel too stated how she often sought to have a style that was "similar to my friends."

Similarly, Fred and Bob reported that their interest in skulls and skeletons was based on the observations that their friends had comparable clothes. Bob pointed that out "I get compliments on my hat. I like it when people say they like it." Having the same clothing items made tweens feel part of the group; indeed, the peer group often exerted pressure for members to possess certain and similar items in order to be considered an "official member" (cf. Adler and Adler, 1998:74-97; Collins, 1994). As mentioned earlier,

these items allow children to create "a self that is fit to belong" (Brookes and Kelly, 2009:600; see also, Elliott and Leonard, 2004). Jasmine, for example, noted that "Um yeah I have a really really close friend and um we like wear the same kind of clothes and stuff." Jasmine also added that "But I do like listen to my friends like my close friends and stuff." According to the tweens in my sample, the rewards and sanctions provided by the peer group were an important part of tween fashion choices aimed at projecting a certain kind of self-image (Adler and Adler, 1998; Brookes and Kelly, 2009; Elliott and Leonard, 2004). I now turn attention to the impact of branding and logos on tween fashion choices.

#### **Tweens' Perceptions of the Importance of Branding and Logos in Projecting a Preferred Self-Image**

By selecting branded fashion items as part of the symbolic expression of their self-image, I argue that tweens incorporate and project corporate values. This process is twofold: Interactionists would suggest that first, tweens' association with brand identification leads to acceptance and sociality because of the visible and symbolic message the clothing projects; and second, branding facilitates identification or emulation with particular significant others such as peers or celebrities which may be rewarded. My analysis of the data suggested that the purchase and wearing of brand name items facilitated tween interaction and integration with the peer group and with society more generally (cf. Adler and Adler, 1998:74-97; Brookes and Kelly, 2009; Elliot and Leonard, 2004; Pilcher, 2011).



My data revealed that tweens in my sample considered corporate branding very important in projecting their self-image. This observation was first strongly supported when tweens were asked to list their favourite stores, all of which carried recognizable brands. The list of favourite stores to shop in included: *American Eagle Outfitters*, *Aeropostale*, *Hollister*, *Nike Outlet*, *Adidas Outlet*, *La Senza Girl*, *Old Navy*, *North by Northwest*, *Artizia*, *Bluenotes*, *Giant Tiger*, *Wal-Mart*, *The Bay*, *Sears*, *Abercombie* and *Fitch*, *Roots*, *Arlies*, *West 49*, *Victoria Secret Pink*, *Ardene*, *Winner's*, *Zellers*, and *Claire's*. Further, reference to brand names was constant in all of the interviews with these tweens.<sup>195</sup> Even Crystal who stated, "I like comfy clothes, dark colour and no specific brand" contradicted herself by mentioning that her favourite fashions included *Calvin Klein* and *Ryka* outfits, both very popular and recognizable brand names. Quinn also revealed her affinity to brands with a particular interest in *Nike*:

Yeah. Like the brands in like...I like *Adidas* and *Nike*, *Reebok* and stuff like that...like this came from there or *Reebok* yeah *Reebok*. I like the *Nike* outlet because that's where I tend to get lots of clothes because I like to play basketball and stuff. The shoes that I brought here are *Nike*. I've got basketball shoes that are *Nike* and bright shock shoes that are *Nike*!<sup>196</sup>

Jonathan revealed a similar brand affinity. When asked what stores he liked to visit on a trip to the local mall, Jonathan stated, "Hum, I like *the Gap*, *Old Navy* there's one like *Northwest*." Furthermore, when asked what clothing brand he preferred, Jonathan revealed a fondness for *Nike*: "I would probably buy like *Nike*." Bob's

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<sup>195</sup> For more information on branding, see Boden *et al.* (2004), Boden (2006a; 2006b), Comiteau (2003), Cook and Kaiser (2004), Elliott and Leonard (2004), Penn, Schoen and Berland (2001), Pilcher (2011), Schor (2004).

<sup>196</sup> See also, Consumer's Union (1998).

preferences were not much different. He really liked the *Adidas* brand and told his mom "...that my running shoes have to be *Adidas*, Mom."

Similarly, Tara identified three different *branded* items within her top-five favourite fashions:

One: my favorite capri pants I wear them mostly anywhere because they are casual. They are dark grey with a yellow and greenish flower on the bottom corner of one leg.

Two: my jean short shorts I wear them anywhere - they are light coloured denim and flipped up at the bottom.

Three: my *Hollister* t-shirt I wear it mostly to school but it works anywhere. It is navy blue with the word *Hollister* across the top in white capital letters.

Four: My *Aeropostale* t-shirt it isn't too casual but it's not that fancy. Red ribbed buttoned up with the word *Aero* down the side

Five: my knee length jeans which are dark denim from *Old Navy*. I wear them with my *Aeropostale* shirt.

While these comments were indicative of tween-aged individuals being "brand aware" (Schor, 2004:25), nothing was more convincing than the first two minutes of my interview with 12-year-old Lizzie. Before I even got the opportunity to introduce myself, Lizzie flopped herself on a couch and proclaimed:

Just to let you know, I won't wear anything unless it has labels. I always look for a label. It *needs* to have a label for me to wear it. Without it, I won't wear it. It has to have labels like *Hollister*, *Abercombie and Fitch*, *lulu lemon* and those otherwise it's no good. Things without labels suck.

Elliot and Leonard's (2004:347) study of poor British youth provides context for Lizzie's comments: clothing projects one's role and status in society. In a similar fashion to the tweens studied by Elliott and Leonard (2004:347), I suggest that Lizzie thought that brand names symbolized her affluence and "coolness", and as a result, believed that "children would prefer to talk to someone wearing branded [items] than unbranded

[items].<sup>197</sup> However, tweens in my sample did not become brand aware without first being introduced and/or influenced to such labels by others, such as family, friends and the media.

Based on my research with these tweens, two groups tended to influence fashion decisions and options for self-image projection. The first influence was significant others from the primary group such as parents, siblings and friends. As I noted in Chapter 7, mothers were often influential in presenting and socializing children to value certain brands and labels. Joanne's children, Fred and Jasmine, for example, were accustomed to the *Wal-Mart* brand, while Deanna reinforced her son Chad's love of *Star Wars* when she purchased items carrying this logo.

Second, tween exposure to brand identification was provided through the socialization inherent in popular media representations. For example, captions in the magazines, both online and in print format, often first identified the favourite tween celebrity and then the producer and/or manufacturers of the item worn (cf. *Tiger Beat*, December 2008-November 2009).

I argue that magazines such as *Tiger Beat* market fashion, lifestyles and ideal images to tweens in the *hopes* that their readers will identify particular celebrities with brand names; celebrities who they may later emulate by purchasing similar fashion styles (see also, Brookes and Kelly, 2009). It is important to note, therefore, that tweens in my study did indicate that interaction with and exposure to definitions and meanings about tween fashion, branding and other indicators of "cool" clothing from primary and

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<sup>197</sup> Please note that the brackets refer to my edit of Elliott and Leonard's original text. I replaced "trainers" to "items" to reflect Lizzie's experience.

secondary groups, often led to role imitation or emulation, an observation I discuss in more detail in the next sections.

### **Tweens' Perceptions of Traditional Role Models for Fashion Emulation**

My data revealed that tweens felt that celebrities and others who they emulated became an important way they interacted with others and went about developing their own self-image. Emulating a significant other such as a friend or celebrity enabled tweens to be accepted by the peer group. But where and when does this emulation and importance of significant others begin? Not surprisingly, Cooley (1922:312) argued that emulation is an essential process in the development on one's self, and that children initially emulate or hero-worship significant others from the primary group such as siblings, parents or other relatives. For example, through taking the role of the other, children internalize the values and behaviours of individuals important to them and integrate these into their own sense of self.

Situating this process within this research study, a child may mimic the mannerisms of *Disney* princes and princesses (Cooley, 1922:312). Cindy, the youngest tween in this study revealed, when recounting her vacation to *Walt Disney World*, how she was enjoyed dressing up like a Cinderella "...because I love her, I really love her. She is my favorite and she's so pretty."

Fashion or costume play a role in these early developmental stages (cf. Stone, 1970). Indeed, little girls dressing up in their mother's high heels and dresses, and little

boys wearing fireman or policeman outfits are common images in childhood.<sup>198</sup> Imitating characters from *Disney* fairytales represents a form of hero worship in so far as girls and boys emulate these admired characters "in a spirit not of rivalry or opposition, but of loyal enthusiasm" (Cooley, 1922:312). As children grow into their tween-aged years, my data show that this emulation shifts to friends and older tween celebrities.

***Tweens' Perceptions of the Influence of Real Tween Celebrities on their Fashion Choices***

As noted above, as tweens grow older, many seek to personify real modern-day popular cultural 'prince/s and princess/es' such as Taylor Swift, Kristen Stewart, Zac Efron, Miley Cyrus and Robert Pattison through the fashion choices they make (cf. Appendix J).<sup>199</sup> Tweens in my sample revealed that certain popular culture celebrities became important to them, not only as influences on their selection of fashion items for purchase, but also as influences on the self-image they were attempting to project.

As I outlined earlier in the chapter, favourite tween celebrities identified by tweens and their mothers included: Demi Lovato, Selena Gomez, Taylor Swift, Robert Pattison, Kristen Stewart, Taylor Lautner, Sidney Crosby, Zac Efron and the rest of the *High School Musical* cast (i.e. Vanessa Hudgens, Ashley Tisdale, Corbin Blue, etc.), Carly from *I-Carly*, Zack and Cody from *The Suite Life of Zack and Cody*, Nick, Kevin and Joe Jonas of the *Jonas Brothers* and Miley Cyrus. As Jasmine revealed, "Yeah I

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<sup>198</sup> I acknowledge these are gendered references but they are very common occurrences among young children and tweens.

<sup>199</sup> While some of these individuals play characters on film or on television, I am discussing their influence as individuals in real life, with the exception of Miley Cyrus' dual influence as herself and TV persona, *Hannah Montana*.

really like Taylor Swift. I think she's a really good influence ah role model" and "I really like her sense of style."

As discussed in Chapter 6, some of these celebrities have their own brand and clothing lines, based either on their own sense of style, or on their characters from feature films and television shows, which are marketed to tweens to purchase and wear. Further, the iconic image of *Twilight* lovers Bella and Edward, played by Kristen Stewart and Robert Pattison, is readily available on t-shirts and other apparel items in stores across the globe. Additionally, the characters from *Hannah Montana* and other *Disney* television shows are now part of the marketing of entire clothing brands aimed at tweens. According to the *Orlando Sentinel* (July 23, 2010), however, *Disney* has also launched a more direct way for viewers to fashion their styles after their favourite *Disney Channel* stars as the real people they are, rather than the fictional characters they play (cf. Ford, July 23, 2010).<sup>200</sup> Launching *D-Signed*, *Disney* stated that this clothing:

is a departure from more general entertainment-inspired tween based clothing as these items do not portray the characters' likeness. Instead, they're inspired by their look and personality on the hit series--these items you would find in their closet (Ford, July 23, 2010).<sup>201</sup>

One of the frequently emulated *Disney* stars is Miley Cyrus who I will now consider as a case study in celebrity marketing to girls.

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<sup>200</sup> As the article was published online, I cannot provide pagination for this reference. The reader is referred to the webpage containing the article: <http://blogs.orlandosentinel.com/disney-a-mom-and-the-mouse/tag/disney-inspired-clothing/>.

<sup>201</sup> As the article was published online, I cannot provide pagination for this direct quote. The reader is referred to the webpage containing the article: <http://blogs.orlandosentinel.com/disney-a-mom-and-the-mouse/tag/disney-inspired-clothing/>.

***Miley Cyrus as Hannah Montana - A Case Study of Celebrity Marketing to Tween Girls***

As previously mentioned, Miley Cyrus is a tween star from the *Disney* series *Hannah Montana*. While no longer a tween herself, her television show, clothing line, and personal and fictional *Hannah Montana* brand names are marketed to tween girls. Cyrus' clothing line embodies the spirit of her TV persona: a rock star with a funky attitude. After taking a digital image of a picture of Cyrus dressed as *Hannah Montana* and wearing a sparkly grey sequined coloured tank top, Quinn explained: "As Hannah Montana, she wears more catchy clothes so people can see further back because there's always like thousands of people at those concerts...because they sit so far back and stuff."<sup>202</sup>

The "catchy clothes" in the *Hannah Montana* clothing line present her as a modern day *Disney* princess with an attitude. Indeed, Cyrus' *Hannah Montana* clothing line includes material with shimmer, shine and embroidery to capture the rocker line, enhancing the "to-be-looked-at-ness" of the "Cinderella motif" (Moseley, 2002:39-40). Moreover, accessories such as fashionable blond wigs are part of the *Hannah Montana* line sold in *Disney* Stores across North America, as well as in *Wal-Mart* and *Target*. As Julia noted, "I can be *Hannah Montana*!" All that was required was the purchase of the clothing line and the wig.

The integration of the wig with the actual fashion line provides symbolic and communicable ways for girls to visually emulate their favourite stars and receive rewards from the peer group for doing so. In some cases, sanctions might be forthcoming if it was

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<sup>202</sup> For the image, please see *Six*, 7th, 8th, January/February 2008:22.

no longer cool to dress that way (cf. Adler and Adler, 1998:74-97; Collins, 1994; Goffman, 1959; 1974).<sup>203</sup> According to Cooley (1922; 1928), these acts of imitation, when rewarded by others, provide individuals with a secure sense of self. In other words, dressing in a particular way and being rewarded for it, enabled tweens in my study to develop a looking-glass self that was satisfactory to themselves and others.

### *Tween Girls' Emulation of Other Tween Celebrities*

However, Miley Cyrus was not the only celebrity whom the tween girls in my sample used as a model for their own expression of self-image. Ariel, for example, modelled her fashion choices and presentation of self-image after tween celebrities "because I want to be like them" because the characters on tween television shows "...wear really cool clothes." Accordingly, Ariel actively tried to include similar styles of dress in her own wardrobe. Similarly, as noted earlier, Rachel often modeled her own fashion styles after the characters on *Glee* (2009-2010). She also liked the clothing worn by *Disney* star Selena Gomez, and often sought out similar styles of dress.

However, overt role emulation is age-dependent. As Jasmine noted:

Well if they like actually have Miley Cyrus on it, I don't like those clothes. But she has her own fashion line and so does Avril Lavigne. Avril Lavigne most of the time I do like that because she has really cool hoodies...it's okay, it's different; she has her own style...having star's faces on the clothes is like more little kids, they think it's *Hannah Montana* and don't even really know the difference yet. But I don't know, I'm a little old for that.

However, tweens' perceptions of influences on their fashion choices and projection of self-image were governed by competing positions on how they wished to

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<sup>203</sup> It is probably that this is a predominately a white middle-class phenomena, given the meanings associated with the blond wig in North American culture.



view themselves - as independent, yet also influenced by others. As ten-year-old Tara noted, "No, I don't dress like them because I like my style better." Similarly, Crystal believed that "...a lot of the stars dress to impress and I'm more one of the people that just wears what they're comfortable in." Yet, Crystal also noted that one of her key influences was an Asian pop star who was also an actress. As Crystal noted, "...her movie is one of my favourites." Interestingly, Crystal wore a kimono as her graduation outfit, undoubtedly inspired by her fascination with her celebrity role model.

Perceptions of the influence of celebrities on tween fashion decisions and image presentation were at times confused. Tweens like Tara and Crystal, to name a few, suggested that tween celebrities did not inspire them in anyway. Yet, their comments revealed otherwise. An analysis of the comments from others tweens in my sample revealed that two factors mediated this lack of conscious acknowledgment of celebrity influence. First, the data suggested that tweens often sought to present themselves as autonomous, or possessing a degree of freedom and independence. To say that someone else influenced their style might have been perceived by these tweens as a challenge to their sense of agency or independence in making decisions about dress and how they expressed themselves. Tweens like Tara and Crystal could, therefore, say they were independent and that all decisions surrounding fashion adornment were their own, giving them a greater sense of agency and control over their environment and self (cf. Boden, 2006a; 2006b). Yet, friends and favourite celebrities clearly influenced their decisions. Second, the data suggested that tweens often modeled their own fashions styles and/or

were inspired by the fashion trends of celebrities.<sup>204</sup> However, my analysis of the interview data also revealed that a gender difference existed between tween boys and girls in terms of how they perceived the degree of influence of celebrities on their fashion choices.

### *Tween Boys' Emulation of Popular Culture Celebrities*

As a great deal of the marketing of clothing is directed at tween girl consumers, there are fewer celebrity role models available for boys to emulate. For example, *The Jonas Brothers* are not, for the most part, marketed to tween boys (cf. Appendix J) but rather, as romantic figures - they are marketed to tween girls, the prime demographic. As a result, boys often exhibited a lower interest in fashion and emulated individuals such as sports heroes or musicians such as rappers (cf. Boden, 2006a; 2006b). As Susan commented earlier in Chapter 7, "Kanye West, Sean Kingston influence the boys' fashion of this age group."<sup>205</sup>

While some tween boys mimicked stars from *Disney's Suite Life with Zack and Cody* for their "trendy, cool and fashionable style", Jonathan had a different take on the situation. After taking a picture of the two *Disney Channel* stars, Jonathan noted that:

Well Zack, he's kind of dumb. He's kind of like skate-boarder kind of. And I like him. And then there's Cody and he's kind of like a nerd. And then yeah...I really don't like his clothes he ah he wears all these like sweater vests and stuff, you know?<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> See also, Boden *et al.*, (2004), Boden (2006a; 2006b), Brookes and Kelly (2009), Pilcher (2010), Rawlins (2006), Schor (2004).

<sup>205</sup> Boden (2006a:291; 2006b) found that boys often emulate sports heroes and rappers, giving further credence to Susan's comment, although the boys in Boden's study were also more willing to express a strong interest in fashion.

<sup>206</sup> For this image, see *Tiger Beat*, March 2008:70.

While Cody may not be cool to Jonathan because of his *preppy* clothes, many tween boys emulate this look. However, for Jonathan, both Zack and Cody represented "what not to wear" when he made his own selections of fashion items (see also, Pilcher, 2010:461-470; 2011).

It could be argued that emulating *Disney* or *Twilight* stars was not much different from dressing as a favourite sports star. The boys in this study reported a higher inclination to dress like a favourite sports celebrity; for example, by wearing a similar sports jersey. These boys also noted that dressing in similar styles to their favourite sports star brought a sense of happiness and fulfillment, not unlike that reported by the girls in this study. From a symbolic interactionist point of view, it could be argued that there was a congruency between societal definitions of boyhood and their own understandings resulting in an alignment that further informed their own sense of self. Jonathan, for example, noted, "I have two Sidney Crosby jerseys: one home and one away and one of them is signed. Well if I like go to games and stuff, it feels better to wear a jersey than just sit in like a shirt."

On the other hand, Chad really liked *Star Wars* merchandise in much the same way as girls reported their attachment to *Hannah Montana*. My analysis of the interview data with boys suggested that fashion was indeed important to boys' sense of self and self-image, whether that meant wearing the jersey of a favourite sports celebrity, the skeleton or skull-inspired look, or a *Star Wars* branded clothing item, although to a lesser degree than was reported by the tween girls in this study.

As already noted, the nature and availability of fashion items marketed to tween boys was greatly different from that marketed to tween girls. Some tween clothing produced for tween girls was more adult and even sexual in nature. The styles worn by celebrities and some peers made the relationship between fashion choices and tween self-expression quite problematic for some girls, a matter I take up in the next section.

### **Tweens' Perceptions of Age-Appropriate Clothing**

The progression towards more adult fashion in tween girl clothing lines has been occurring slowly over the past five to ten years. One of the main reasons, as noted in Chapter 7, is that companies are now diversifying the brands and products they create. Parent companies like *La Senza* target the adult woman, while *La Senza Girl* serves the tween or preteen crowd. Yet, sizes that are available for tweens in *La Senza Girl* are limited, so some tweens begin shopping at a very early age in the adult store version of *La Senza*. For example, Megan noted that she "likes *La Senza Girl* but some of the things they are making smaller so not everything fits me there anymore." That said, when tween-gear stores no longer carry sizes for older tweens, they have limited options as to where to shop. This makes shopping an increasingly difficult task for some tween girls, given that clothing that fits them size wise is now carried in more adult-looking clothing stores geared to an older age demographic.<sup>207</sup> My analysis of the interview data suggested that tween girls in this sample carefully analyzed their clothing options and carefully considered and were influenced by the opinions of what sociologists refer to as

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<sup>207</sup> It is important to note that this does not mean that all clothes have to be "sexy" clothes.

significant others when making choices about fashion as an expression of their self-image.

### *Tween Girls' Analysis of Clothing Styles as Appropriate*

The tween girls in my sample were very analytical about the clothing styles available for purchase. For example, in the last six months or so of interviews, there was a drastic shift in the perception of Miley Cyrus and her television persona, *Hannah Montana*. In the interviews conducted with tweens in 2008 through early 2009, Miley Cyrus was the *tween queen*. However, I noticed that as her more risqué behaviour was publicized, such as her semi-nude photos, and her fashion style became increasingly adult, tweens did not find her as appealing to emulate. In fact, many of the girls, such as Kayla, informed me that Ms. Cyrus "is not cool anymore" and even inappropriate in certain circumstances because of her fashion styles. Further, Rachel noted that "*Hannah Montana* is out now. Her style is too different, so is her music and look." When I asked what she meant by "too different", Rachel stated that Miley Cyrus was too old to be *Hannah Montana* anymore, and her styles were "too odd" and "too old" for the viewers of the show.

When looking at the October 2009 (25) edition of *Tiger Beat* together during the interview, Jasmine took a picture of Miley Cyrus in "rip hole" tights - a look she deemed not suitable for someone her age to wear.<sup>208</sup> A large number of the tween girls in this study did not want to emulate or dress in a fashion similar to Miley Cyrus as she was now perceived to promote an "uncool", and even, unacceptable image.

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<sup>208</sup> For this image, see *Tiger Beat*, October, 2009:25.

The girls in this research all shared a similar viewpoint about what clothing was appropriate. As Megan stated, "I don't like when people wear clothes that show off everything. I don't think it's right." While taking a picture of an image of Miley Cyrus in a white, strapless gown, Megan noted that the dress was "pretty", but that she could not wear it without a sweater because it exposed the shoulders, and was also a little revealing "in the top."<sup>209</sup> Further, despite stating earlier that she liked to dress like celebrities, Ariel only mimicked fashions that "someone my age could wear." That is, Ariel only emulated the fashion styles of celebrities who were appropriate for someone her age to wear, such as Taylor Swift's outfit of a layered t-shirt, skinny jeans, and knee-high boots - an image that she pointed out during our interview.<sup>210</sup>

In addition, after observing and taking a picture of an image of Demi Lovato in a short black dress, Rachel stated that the outfit "was not appropriate" because it was "too short."<sup>211</sup> However, Danielle and Megan took a digital image of Demi Lovato in a rocker-inspired outfit with dark denim jeans, a black t-shirt with the slogan "love" and a button down striped vest, an outfit that they deemed was "age-appropriate" as it was not too tight or revealing and therefore, these tweens could wear it.<sup>212</sup>

Despite concerns expressed by scholars and the public alike, the tweens in this sample appeared to have a highly developed sense of modesty, and surprisingly, a sense that some of the fashions available in the marketplace for tweens were inappropriate for them. It is tempting to use the term "sexual" but these tweens limited their comments to

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<sup>209</sup> For this image, see *Tiger Beat*, June 2009:3.

<sup>210</sup> For this image, see *Tiger Beat*, June 2009:27.

<sup>211</sup> For this image, see *Tiger Beat*, November 2009:27.

<sup>212</sup> For this image, see *Tiger Beat*, May 2009:37.

such evaluative terms as "too short" or "too revealing" or "too tight". This in itself may reflect the age of the girls who may have felt uncomfortable using the word. However, this remains a question for future research. As Jasmine informed me, "It's all about respect. I want people to respect me and make it look like I actually respect myself. That's why I do it. I don't want people to look at me differently."

These tween girls were not responding to celebrity marketing strategies as might be expected, based on some of the research of others, who have suggested that tweens internalize these media messages and engage in consumer behaviour accordingly, to the distress of their parents (Boden, 2006a; 2006b; Brookes and Kelly, 2009). Rather, situated within a social network that included parents and peers among others, these tweens were self-reflexively invoking other internalized meanings that allowed them to choose or reject both fashion styles and celebrities who did not fit with their own *ideal* self-image. In a similar finding to my own, Pilcher (2010:464-465) has noted that the British tween girls in her study were "constrained by their mothers' ideas of what was acceptable for them to wear" (see also, Rawlins, 2006). As symbolic interactionists would observe, the alternate meanings and values of these tweens, reflecting the meanings and values of their mothers, were internalized at a young age through a process of socialization. At this point, these meanings continued to be salient for these tweens as they assessed the age appropriateness of the fashions to which they were exposed.

### ***Tween Girls' Reactions to Age-Inappropriate Fashions***

The tween girls in this study overwhelmingly demonstrated an active aversion to what could be termed *sexualized* fashion trends. This is different than prior studies in the

field, such as Pilcher (2010:468) who stated that while the British tween girls in her study evaluated clothing on "moral terms", they were not able to "articulate" their cognizant and active aversion to these types of fashions. The girls in my study did not have trouble articulating and acting upon these feelings. For Jasmine, avoidance of this look was about "self-respect", while for Crystal it was about wearing clothes that were comfortable and "not girly, or short and revealing." Tweens also avoided stores like *Hot Topic*. As Jasmine noted, all of the clothes in there were "like skimpy or strapless", and this was one way that tweens like Jasmine attempted to avoid and/or reject these trends.

When discussing how her friend, Melanie had questioned her choice of athletic clothing, Quinn revealed:

Like I always wear like basketball shorts and stuff. And she's always like 'why are you wearing that' and I say 'well I like it'. And then she always wears...she always just wears like wearing like she always wearing like short not long, opposite from me, short fabric and she sorts of like to show that off in a way and show off what's she got.<sup>213</sup>

Quinn faced sanctions from her friend Melanie because of her choice of athletic clothing. By responding to Melanie's questions with "well I like it", Quinn attempted to defer further questioning and avoid possible threats to her self-image. However, my data also revealed that Quinn was equally ready to sanction Melanie's choice of clothing and her tendency for "showing off what she's got." This is similar to Pilcher's (2010:466) finding that British tweens "...reported their dislike...of 'showing' one's body via clothing."

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<sup>213</sup> Melanie's questioning of Quinn's clothing is illustrative of how peers pressure their cohort to conform (cf. Adler and Adler, 1998:74-97).



As discussed in an earlier chapter, Schor (2004), Whyte (2007) and George (2007:10) have all argued that some tween girls are increasingly wearing what is termed, "skank wear." This includes clothing, for example, that reveals the midriff and other portions of the body (cf. Albanese, 2009; Whyte, 2007:10). Notably, Melanie was dressing in a way that Quinn conceptualized as age-inappropriate based on her understanding of acceptable dress for someone their age.

As a result, the tween girls in my sample expressed concern about types of clothing and the images such styles visually and symbolically portrayed to others. Lizzie reported that her clothing would not include "skinny jeans or skirts" as these items were "way too short and too revealing." Further, Rachel noted that she avoided clothing "with excessive cleavage" and did not wear "skinny jeans because they do not look good. I don't like it looking trashy." Ariel also avoided t-shirts with sayings such as "Act like an angel, think like a devil."

Jasmine mentioned a shirt that she and her mother saw on one occasion with the slogan, "I like to suck." While the t-shirt was actually referencing the vampire series *Twilight*, Jasmine noted that such a shirt was not "appropriate" to wear *anywhere*. However, her *Twilight*-inspired shirt with the slogan, "I like sparkly vampires" was acceptable because there was no sexual connotation associated with wearing it. My analysis of the interview data clearly indicated that tweens in this study did not deem these types of clothing to be age-appropriate.

On the contrary, Rachel was quite pleased when we came upon an article in *Tiger Beat* during our interview which depicted Chelsea Staub on a shopping trip (*Tiger Beat*,

November 2009:76). Ms. Staub is shown shopping for a variety of different clothes, including graphic t-shirts and hoodie sweatshirts. Rachel took a picture of her favourite shirt, a slightly fitted pink t-shirt with the slogan "gangster wrap", an image of a pita wrap sandwich in the center of the shirt, followed by "with a side of sour cream."<sup>214</sup> Rachel noted that a top such as Chelsea's "shows a bit of personality." However, Rachel believed this shirt was age-appropriate, because she did not consider it to be too adult – instead she regarded it as "silly" because of the play on words.

Quinn also felt the need to avoid certain fashion styles and trends. Upon seeing an image in a magazine of a belly-baring top, Quinn described what went into her decision-making about what was suitable to wear, "like some shirts like they go too low and if you were to put your hand up, for instance, like this one it still covers me and I don't like to wear anything that shows your tummy if you put your hand up for instance" (*BOP*, February 2008:25; see also, Kristen Stewart in *Tiger Beat*, October 2009:25). When asked about her favourite clothing, Quinn noted:

I basically like anything as long as it's not too tight. See, like Jonathan, if he wears all like boy's stuff and stuff, it's easier for him to find clothes because everything in the boy's section is like loose, like he doesn't have to worry if it's too tight or whatever. Where in like the girl's stuff, it's tighter these days or whatever. So like for instance, Jonathan's got all of these pants that are like red, pant or whatever and I wear them sometimes like.

Indeed, Quinn realized that there was, as Pilcher (2010:464) has argued in her study of British tweens, a "moral danger arising from the ways in which they revealed the[ir] bare skin..."

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<sup>214</sup> For this image, see *Tiger Beat*, November 2009:76.

Further, one of my tween respondents, Jasmine, for example, did not understand why girls dressed in a "certain way" at school. She noted that "I think like all of the girls are trying to make themselves pretty and stuff but all of the teachers and principals want them to look appropriate for school which sometimes they don't think about that" (see Kopkowski, 2008:36-37). From an symbolic interactionist point of view, I would argue that tweens received sanctions from certain individuals, such as school administrators, for clothing choices that did not conform to the dress code regulations. I argue that tweens therefore, recognized that certain styles sent a symbolic message about their sense of self-worth and self-image. Tweens understood the statement made by Carol, a mother I interviewed, about – "being a lady or a tramp."

Indeed, parental values appeared to be more influential on tween's decision-making, than were the opinions of their peers or influences from tween popular culture.<sup>215</sup> For example, even though she listened to her friend's opinions, Jasmine stated that "Now that I'm getting older and my mom's around me now, it's mostly my mom that I listen to." Further, Rachel noted her own sense of style is different from that of her friends who often dress as Goths, because most of all, she valued her mother's opinions.

As one of the older tweens interviewed in this study, some of Rachel's fashion styles were slightly more adult than those of the participants. However, even though Rachel took pictures during the interviews of celebrities such as Jennette McCurdy in a purple strapless dress or Miley Cyrus in blue leopard leggings, she stated that she would

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<sup>215</sup> Notably, religious values did not seem to influence any of these sentiments regarding fashion. As a whole, the sample of mothers and tweens could not be characterized as devout. Tweens were asked about their religious affiliation and whether they regularly attended religious services. Please refer to Appendix H for further details on the religiosity of this sample.

not wear any clothing that was not deemed appropriate by her mother, because these items did "not look good."<sup>216</sup>

### ***Tween Boys' Perceptions of Age Appropriate Clothing***

As discussed in Chapter Six, gender ideologies were reproduced in tween boys' and girls' clothing depicted in both *Today's Parent* and *Tiger Beat*. Boys' clothing was characterized as active wear and non-sexual in comparison to the often adult, raunchy, or what has been termed, sexualized, clothing produced and marketed to tween girls (cf. Boden, 2006a; 2006b; Schor, 2004). In this interview sample, tween boys themselves did not connect these meanings to the fashion choices available to them in stores.

It has been argued that as a society, we socialize girls to be prim, proper and pretty individuals. Cooley (1922:202), for example, has noted that "girls have, as a rule, a more impressible social sensibility. They care more about appearances for the social image, study it, and reflect upon it more than boys." Boys, it is argued, are socialized to be strong, aggressive and active (cf. *Today's Parent*, December 2008-November 2009; Appendix I). For example, when I asked Jonathan why he believed his sister read "girly" magazines, he replied: "Well just ideas to know what to wear. And she likes looking at all of the stars and all that." Further, when asked why boys do not read these magazines, Jonathan responded, "Well it's a little bit more girly."

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<sup>216</sup> See, for example, *Tiger Beat*, November 2009:79. It should also be noted that the tweens in this study were all from relatively middle to high socioeconomic backgrounds, allowing them greater flexibility and ability to be *selective* among clothing styles. Not all tweens have the ability to choose any clothing they like; indeed, some tweens are constrained by such issues as cost (Boden, 2006a; 2006b).

**Gendered Conceptualizations of Tweens: The Role of Clothing and Celebrity Appearance**

In this study, it is reasonable to conclude that gendered conceptualizations of tweens are inherent in the clothing manufactured and marketed to them. This extends to the representations of celebrities provided to tweens through the media. As discussed in detail in Chapter Six, in magazines targeted to tweens, male celebrities were not presented in the same overtly sexual way in terms of their dress as female celebrities were.

Whereas tween girls were directed to more mature, sexualized fashions, boys were directed to clothing that was suitable for an active lifestyle and possibly more comfortable than clothing styles offered to tween girls (cf. *Today's Parent*, December 2008-November 2009; Appendix I). Indeed, Chad's response to a question about his favourite clothes and why he liked to wear certain things was because "I'm comfy." Chad, Fred, Bob and Jonathan would not wear anything that did not fit into their definition of "comfortable" clothing because that was their primary concern at this age. Even in situational contexts such as a family night out, boys dressed in active clothing that was comfortable. As Jonathan noted, "I'd just wear like good track pants and a nice shirt."

Notably, the more adult looking fashions of celebrities such as Zac Efron did not appear to compare in any way to the sexualized image girls encountered with *some* of their fashion options (cf. *Tiger Beat*, December 2008 - November 2009; Appendix J). After looking through the magazines and taking a picture of Zac Efron, Jonathan explained that he liked Efron's look: "I like it. Yeah, I'd wear it in some situations. I don't

like his shoes."<sup>217</sup> This comment is similar to one made by Bob who, during our interview, took a picture of *Twilight* star Robert Pattison wearing a plaid shirt because he *disliked* the fashion statement.<sup>218</sup>

What is important to note is the basis for Jonathan and Bob's assessments. They did not like the styles the celebrities were wearing – the idea that the shoes or plaid might be age inappropriate did not form any part of their assessment.<sup>219</sup>

As discussed in Chapter Five, using magazines as a methodological technique provided the tweens in this research study with an opportunity to first see an image in the magazine, and then to comment on how it was or was not congruent with fashion choices they might make as part of expressing their own self-image. The responses of Jonathan and Bob were in stark contrast to the comments the tween girls made in this sample about why some clothing was inappropriate as a look for them – it was "skank wear", "showing off what she's got", or "inappropriate" (cf. Pilcher, 2010:466; Whyte, 2007:10).

### **"Intimate Strangers": Tween Bloggers' Assessments of the Age Appropriateness of Celebrity Fashion Styles**

Despite their small numbers, the twelve tween girls in my sample provided a wealth of information about their experiences with self-expression, especially in terms of the influence of celebrity fashions, and the appropriateness or non-appropriateness of the clothing available to them. Yet, these girls were not the only ones who were seemingly

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<sup>217</sup> For this image, see *BOP*, February 2008:4

<sup>218</sup> For this image, see *Tiger Beat*, November 2009:77.

<sup>219</sup> It is prudent to remember that in this sample, only four boys were interviewed. This insight requires that further study with a larger sample must be carried out before it can be considered reliable.

aware of the increasingly inappropriate (sexualized) fashion trends being marketed to them.

There is a larger community of tweens who also appear to share their thoughts about and assessments of the current fashion trends in evidence today, such as the online bloggers and readers of *Tiger Beat* magazine.<sup>220</sup> Although not a focus of this research, I want to briefly review this blog data, drawing on theoretical conceptualizations of "intimate strangers" and the "illusion of intimacy" to illustrate the apparent congruency between the perceptions of the tween-aged children in my sample and tweens in general (Schnikel, 1985:4).<sup>221</sup>

According to Schnikel, (1985:4), social actors have a "sense of otherness" with normal strangers which serves as a form of a safety net "against intrusion", but the same does not extend to our relationships with celebrities. He has argued that "thanks to television and the rest of the media we *know* them, or think we do. To a greater or lesser degree, we have internalized them, unconsciously made them a part of our consciousness, just as if they were, in fact, friends."

As an example of "intimacy at a distance", *Tiger Beat* readers had an opportunity to comment on the fashions of tween celebrities at the 2009 *Teen Choice Awards* during and after the ceremony at *Tiger Beat's* online blog (Schnikel, 1985:4-5). According to Schnikel (1985:4-5), this form of critical commentary from tween readers is a crucial

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<sup>220</sup> The comments included are only a few of the entries from readers. These were chosen for analysis because they were representative of the thoughts of the bloggers in general. More comments can be found at: <http://www.tigerbeatmag.com/celebs/celebs/2009-kca-fashion-showdown/#comment-26075>.

<sup>221</sup> These observations are intended to generate hypotheses for further research as I cannot conclusively link the sentiments of these bloggers to my small sample of tweens.

element of the "illusion of intimacy."<sup>222</sup> These tween bloggers feel intimate enough with these celebrities to call them by their first names and to engage in a discussion with or about them in reference to their lifestyles, fashion choices, and behaviours (Schnikel, 1985:4-5).

As the data illustrate, both the tweens in my sample and these bloggers shared similar perspectives on certain types of fashion styles worn by celebrities. Through their perceived "intimate" relationship with these celebrities, bloggers felt comfortable expressing them on-line (Schnikel, 1985:4-5).<sup>223</sup>

Despite some of their harsh comments, *amber and natasha* tended to focus on fashions that were not appropriate for these younger stars to be wearing to a kid-based awards show. For example, these girls noted that Vanessa Hudgens' "shorts way too short what message are you trying to send to theses little girls??" The girls expressed the opinion that the fashion styles of Miley Cyrus were "older" in nature, such as when they stated: "16 going on 60 wow a sequel to 13 going on 30!! im going to watch that!!! its starring miley!! comming out august 13!!"

Unlike these comments, *iluvtwilight13♥* believed that tween star Miranda Cosgrove was dressed "PERFECT!!!! Totes appropriate for her age! (unlike some clebs \*\*cough coughMiley cough\*\*)". This blogger did not agree with Miley's age

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<sup>222</sup> See also, Kelly *et al.*, (2006:3) for their study of chat rooms and "interactive, online learning" among youth.

<sup>223</sup> The target market and general readership of the magazine are tweens. However, since this is an online forum, there is the potential for bloggers to be older than tweenagers. Yet, given the scope and market of the magazine, it is reasonable to conclude that these comments are from tweens (see Chapter 6). It is important to note that the quotes from the bloggers have been kept in their original state - that includes spelling errors, slang, and long prose. I believe this best represents the comments of the bloggers. Please refer to Appendix K to review the blog entries in depth.



"inappropriate" fashion choices: "THIS WAS THE KCAs NOT THE OSCARS!!!! U DONT NEED 2 WEAR AN EVENING GOWN!!!" *anggie*, on the other hand, congratulated all of the celebrities for "looking great."

However, *conversebabe* was more systematic in her analysis of the celebrities' fashions, devising a best and worst dressed list with applicable rankings. Importantly, *conversebabe* stated that "...Girl(s) Keke (Too tight \*how can she breath?\*) Emma (nawt<sup>224</sup> age worthy) and Miley (It made her look older! and made her fique<sup>225</sup> carrot like)", noting that while she liked some fashions, others were not appropriate whether it be because of size, style or the celebrity's age.

Despite being complimentary to many stars, *Briana* stated: "I think that Vanessa's shorts were way too short for a KIDS choice awards. It isa innapropiette to be wairing thoso when there are children younger than 8yrs. old!..." *Briana* also noted that "Ashley & Brenda: 8/10 They were ok. The dresses were a little short. It wasn't totally amazing, but a pretty good choice." and, " Emma Roberts: 5/10 Emma, Emma, Emma.....I dont know what to say. The dress was too short. The color was weird. The shoes.....were scary. And sorry, but I really don't like it." Indeed, *Briana* was very conscious about dress length, as she noted " Jennette McCurdy: 10/10 WOWZA!!! Jennette looked AMAZING as well!!!! The dress was the perfect length, and the color looked great!!!! AWESOME job Jennette!!!" Clearly, for *Briana*, length of dresses (i.e. not too short) defined what was appropriate or not.

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<sup>224</sup> This is slang for "not".

<sup>225</sup> Spelling error on the part of the blogger: should read "figure".

These quotes from *Tiger Beat* bloggers, as well as the comments from the tweens in my sample, illustrate the differing opinions about the fashion items and celebrity images created in the media marketplace and dispensed to tween-aged children.

Thus, while celebrities had an influence on tween fashion trends and self-image projection, my analysis of the interview data suggested that both my participants and the tween bloggers possessed a critical eye. While tweens may choose to emulate particular stars, they do not appear to be mindless drones who follow trends without some degree of interpretation, self-reflection and analysis. Moreover, my data revealed that some tweens would not dress in fashions they considered inappropriate, despite the fact that celebrities wear such styles. As the quotes revealed, tweens *do*, to some degree, interpret the meanings and definitions of appropriate fashions, tween fashions, celebrity influence, and styles of dress presented by society. Indeed, the tween girls in my sample, specifically, would not sacrifice their self-respect or value system by wearing an item they deemed as "inappropriate".

### **Tweens' Perceptions of Decisions Informing Fashion Purchases**

In this final section of the chapter, I discuss the relevance of external sources of influence on tweens' fashion purchases. Specifically, I examine tweens' shopping experiences and attend to those items or fashion styles that tweens considered a source of contention between them and their mothers.

### *Tweens' Perceptions of the Shopping Experience*

The previous discussions have made reference to specific fashion styles and brands, but how do tweens obtain these fashion items and accessories? Evidently, tweens purchased these items from stores most often with their "moms." However, as noted in the previous chapter on mothers, only some tween-aged children participated in "co-shopping" with their mothers, and this was usually done on a seasonal basis (cf. Harper *et al.*, 2003).<sup>226</sup> While tween girls were most likely to shop with their mothers on these seasonal trips, the tween boys in this sample did not. Fred did note that he had recently asked his mother for the first time to go shopping for back-to-school clothing. Similarly, Bob noted that "I shop every six months" for clothing.

As discussed in Chapter Seven, the mothers interviewed for this research reported that they most often shopped "solo", with the exception of a few seasonal "co-shopping" trips with their tweens.<sup>227</sup> When in fact tweens did accompany their mothers, they noted that their mothers always had the final say when it came to making fashion purchases. Tweens did reiterate, however, that their mothers took their preferences into consideration when shopping for them. Indeed, the tweens in my sample shared a similar experience to the individuals in Cook's (2008:219,235) study: mothers were cognizant of their children's wants and needs when shopping for them.

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<sup>226</sup> Rachel was one exception to the rule, noting that she and her mom shopped together "95% of the time". See also, Allens and Hawkins (1999), Martens *et al.*, (2004).

<sup>227</sup> It is important to note that not all mothers and tweens in this sample were from the same family, although the majority were. Some mothers were interviewed, while their tweens were not, either at the mother's and/or tween's discretion. As Chapter 7 revealed, solo shopping was used by mothers as a strategy to avoid conflict over potentially problematic clothing options, which might occur if their tween-aged child was present when shopping - especially on a regular basis.

Notably, the tweens in this sample reported that shopping with friends was rare. Rachel, for example, was not allowed to shop at the mall with friends as her mother believed they would be "out smoking cigarettes" and possibly getting into trouble. Jasmine was the only tween to mention shopping with her friends, while all others believed they were "too young" to go alone. I think this finding was indicative of the nature of my particular sample and not how tweens behave in general, however. A trip to the local shopping mall often reveals large numbers of tweens shopping with friends.

Although they did not report shopping with their friends, tweens had already reported that their peers did influence decisions regarding fashion and style. Perhaps the tweens in this study only experienced rewards and sanctions from their friends after fashions were already purchased, or used their friends' comments to avoid certain styles in the future. Not surprisingly, this finding probably reflects the age of these tweens, and the limited opportunities they had to escape the family circle. As freedom of movement and accessibility to the financial resources to purchase their own clothing increased, it is likely that the peer group's influence would become more direct. Boden (2006a; 2006b) for example, noted in her British sample, that two issues affecting tween consumer behaviour were their increasing autonomy and the cost of the clothing they wanted to buy (see also, Elliott and Leonard, 2004).

### ***Tweens' Perceptions of Fashion as a Source of Disagreement***

With all of these contradictory images available in tween fashions, especially for girls, I asked participants if any disagreements arose with their mothers in terms of fashion items and/or styles available for purchase. Although disagreements were rare,

when they did arise, according to the tweens interviewed, it was because an item was deemed "inappropriate" by the mothers. Again, the tweens reported that their mothers' judgments about inappropriateness were tied to *gendered* understandings of the clothing.

According to the tween boys, their mothers' judgments of inappropriateness were linked to the practicality of the clothes, and their suitability for certain occasions. As mentioned earlier, for example, the skulls and skeletons logos that Fred and Bob wanted to wear were deemed inappropriate by their mothers on certain occasions, such as a formal family gathering. Bob also noted that, while his mother did "give in" and purchase some items of this nature, it was a battle, given her assessment of the "inappropriateness" of the image. This suggests that if the image that a fashion conveyed was an issue for boys, it was related to other imagery than sexuality per se, an observation that should be explored with a larger sample.

Among tween girls in the sample, disagreements with mothers centred on judgements of the appropriateness of the style of clothing based on the image it projected, such as it being too adult or too provocative for the age of tween child. It is important to note that in Pilcher's (2010:464-465) study of tween fashions in Britain, she also identified that tweens relied on their mothers to censor their clothing for what was and was not appropriate for them to wear (see also, Rawlins, 2006). As Ariel, a participant in my research observed, disagreements only arose when fashions were "not appropriate or they are for older girls" with the same end result: "we don't buy them." Rachel noted that disagreements were limited with her mother because she understood and respected her mother's rules regarding fashion: "she wants me to dress like a lady and be sophisticated."

This revealing comment by Rachel illustrates her mother's attempts to socialize her to the appropriate gender role established for girls – to act like a "lady", an image at odds with the corporate images provided in tween magazines for Rachel to consume.

Even at this age, Rachel recognized these competing meanings about the clothing available for purchase, and was aware that if she actively sought out these clothing items for purchase, a disagreement would arise with her mother. Although recognizing the competing meanings, Rachel sided with her mother, a loyalty that might not hold as she grew older and more autonomous (see also, Pilcher, 2010). In other words, as a self-reflexive social actor, Rachel was able to decide which meanings she would accept as she negotiated the purchase of clothing, a process clearly understood through the lens of symbolic interactionism.

Tween girls also linked their mothers' judgments of clothing as inappropriate to the concerns their mothers had about what behaviour it might lead to. For example, in discussing her mother's concerns that she might act inappropriately if she wore certain styles, Crystal revealed "they have nothing to object to currently neither have they ever." Tara took a similar position noting "that's never happened." Quinn stated that since her mother works in the public school system:

..she is used to see the girls act a certain way for the boys, she just knows all that stuff, she's just used to it. So anyways, I just like I just like wearing...like she's never had this problem with me because I don't wear stuff like that. I just wear, like she just knows, if she, anyways, I've never had that problem because she just knows that I like longer shirts, short sleeve. Well the clothes that I wear are short sleeve and long enough.

Quinn was clearly aware of the meanings her mother attached to behaving inappropriately with the boys, a clear indicator of her mother's attempts to socialize her to a *chaste* and respectable gender role.

In this sample of Canadian tweens, mothers controlled the finances, and reported that they purchased most clothing without their tweens present. Therefore, the tweens in this study had little or no monetary power to go against their mother's wishes. For example, Lizzie adamantly disagreed with her mother about a "dress." This dress was a source of tension for the two, as Lizzie believed that "the dress was ugly, long and had too many flowers." However, she was powerless as her mother controlled the financial purchases of clothing.

Jasmine, however, often compromised with her mother in these situations. If or when her mother refused to buy an item because of the price, Jasmine knew she could use her babysitting money to split the cost. In Boden's (2006a; 2006b) study of British children, both boys and girls reported that major disagreements with parents centred on the cost of clothing items themselves. As in this study, she linked tween consumer behaviour to the increasing autonomy of her children and the availability of financial resources to purchase. In general, then, a lack of financial resources, combined with an evident respect for their mothers' beliefs and values about appropriate gender roles that the tweens in this sample still expressed, meant there were no large scale attempts at rebelling - at least not yet. As Crystal observed revealingly, "they have nothing to object to currently."

Although to this point, my discussion has centred on the appropriateness of clothing styles and logos, Jasmine noted that presenting an age appropriate image also involved avoiding makeup, which her mother refused to allow her to wear. As Jasmine explained: "Like all my friends at school wear like some pink eye shadow, but my mother just thinks it makes me look old." Rachel also noted that her mother did not "allow me to wear too much makeup."

As I complete this dissertation, *Wal-Mart* has introduced a makeup line geared to tweens, specifically, eight-to-twelve-year-old girls (*Daily Mail UK*, January 26, 2011).<sup>228</sup> This has been met with criticism from parents and the general public alike. However, the *Geo Girl* brand also includes a line of "anti-aging" products for tweens (*Daily Mail UK*, January 26, 2011).<sup>229</sup> As the *Daily Mail UK* has noted, "What next for kids? In store Botox?" (*Daily Mail UK*, January 26, 2011).<sup>230</sup>

The marketing of adult products to tweens, with its continuing challenges to traditional meanings about the nature of childhood and how long it lasts, continues unabated. Further research will be required to chart the impact of these new marketing tactics on the self-image and buying behaviour of vulnerable tween consumers.

To conclude this section, my interview data revealed that tweens felt that their mothers had a great deal of influence over their fashion decisions. This was linked to

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<sup>228</sup> As the article was published online, I cannot provide pagination for this article. The reader is referred to the webpage containing the article: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1350857/Walmart-Geo-Girl-anti-aging-make-targets-EIGHT-year-olds.html>.

<sup>229</sup> As the article was published online, I cannot provide pagination for this direct quote. The reader is referred to the webpage containing the article: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1350857/Walmart-Geo-Girl-anti-aging-make-targets-EIGHT-year-olds.html>.

<sup>230</sup> As the article was published online, I cannot provide pagination for this direct quote. The reader is referred to the webpage containing the article: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1350857/Walmart-Geo-Girl-anti-aging-make-targets-EIGHT-year-olds.html>.



what I would characterize as the internalization of appropriate gender roles as provided by their mothers, and the control of finances and access to shopping that these mothers exerted over their children. However, as discussed above, problems or objections might not exist now, but as tweens began to move out of the family circle and gain access to their own money, the disagreements their mothers feared were coming, might become inevitable (cf. Boden, 2006a, 2006b; Elliott and Leonard, 2004; Pilcher, 2010; Rawlins, 2006).

### **Concluding Remarks**

Clearly, the tweens in this study, despite their age, possessed the ability to interpret and understand their social worlds as active social actors. They were extremely cognizant of the ways in which their mothers, their friends, and tween celebrities provided competing meanings about what fashions were appropriate or inappropriate for them to wear. At the same time, they were able to create, modify and reject these meanings, provided to inform their social lives and experiences. Indeed, these tweens were active in both adopting, modifying and rejecting meanings and definitions about fashions that impacted their self-images, and the identities they projected to the larger social world. Notably then, tweens were not "mindless drones" or passive social actors marginalized, as Albanese (2009) has put, at the edges of society and powerless to direct their own lives according to their own meanings.

Thus, while they acknowledged that celebrity fashions did play a role in shaping what they liked, the tweens in my sample, and the *Tiger Beat* bloggers, did not appear to be overwhelmed by media messages about what to wear. These sources were influential

in directing tweens' attention to certain styles as fashionable, but the opinions of their parents, their friends, and their own personal beliefs and values were more influential when it came to determining if these fashions were appropriate for them or not. Even when mothers were not present during the interviews, tweens appeared to be influenced by the values, beliefs, and rules instilled by their parents. For example, at the time of these interviews, no tweens in my sample were willing to sacrifice their own value systems and personal beliefs to dress like the hottest or coolest celebrity.

However, this commitment to parental values is also structurally and temporally situated – with increasing autonomy and financial power, these internalized meanings about appropriateness might very well shift – that in itself would be a testimony to the agency of these social actors (cf. Boden, 2006a 2006b; Crewe and Collins, 2006; Pilcher, 2010; 2011; Rawlins, 2006).

I now turn attention to the final chapter of this dissertation in which I summarize the research findings, and outline the theoretical and substantive contributions of the thesis. In this regard, I situate my findings in larger theoretical debates informing the sociological literature. Finally, I discuss some possible implications for social policy, the limitations of this research, and future areas for research.

## **CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSION**

### **Summary of the Research Process**

This dissertation has discussed the concern among scholars and laypersons in society today regarding the marketing of inappropriate adult fashions directly to *tweens*, children between eight and thirteen. There is also concern that traditional notions of what constitutes childhood are being altered through marketing of these adult fashions to children.<sup>231</sup> Yet little sociological work has been done in Canada on the relationship of these fashions to tween identity formation, or the decision-making processes accompanying fashion purchases by tweens and their parents within a symbolic interactionist framework. Further, studies of these issues in other countries, while insightful, have tended to be approached using cultural studies or critical sociology, have focused on issues in consumerism, or were published as commentaries on these issues (see, for example, Boden *et al.*, 2004; Boden, 2006a; 2006b; Brookes and Kelly, 2009; Cook, 1999; Cook and Kaiser, 2004; Elliott and Leonard, 2004; Kopkowski, 2008; Pilcher, 2010; 2011; Rawlins, 2006; Schor, 2004).

This dissertation research used symbolic interactionist theoretical assumptions, as well as the concepts of the new sociology of childhood to examine, as an empirical question, the role that popular culture, and more specifically fashion, plays in the formation and construction of childhood identity in Canada. As symbolic interactionist studies of children in general have revealed them to be social actors embedded in social

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<sup>231</sup> See, for example, Bissonnette (2007), Boden *et al.* (2004), Boden (2006a; 2006b), Brookes and Kelly (2009), Cook (1999), Cook and Kaiser (2004), George (2007), Kopkowski (2008), Pilcher, (2010), Rawlins (2006), Schor (2004), Whyte (2007).

networks of influence, I was also interested in the role that primary and secondary groups played in supporting, modifying or refuting these new fashion influences on tweens (cf. Cahill, 2003; Mandell, 1984; 1988). Finally, influenced by the work of Boden in the United Kingdom (2006a, 2006b) among others<sup>232</sup>, I was interested in exploring how new fashions marketed to tweens impacted relationships between parents, in this case mothers, and their children, particularly around issues associated with buying these new fashions.

Paying close attention to the changing meanings informing an understanding of childhood in recent years, I began by investigating the contradictory ways in which children and tweens, considered a new stage in life, were depicted in two popular culture magazines - *Today's Parent*, geared to parents, and *Tiger Beat*, geared to tweens. I used this analysis as a mechanism for generating "sensitizing concepts" to inform my research with mothers and tweens (cf. Marshall, 1998b:42-43). As part of this analysis, I documented the marketing and advertising tactics used to target mothers and tweens, with a view to influencing their buying behaviour.

I then explored the perceptions of mothers and tweens about the relationship they felt existed between tween fashion and tween self-image. In this regard, I examined how mothers interpreted the meanings informing this process, and most importantly, how tweens themselves made sense of the processes involved in developing and projecting a particular self-image through fashion.

I also examined the various ways in which mothers and tweens felt that this expression of tween self-image was affected by various social influences including (a) the

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<sup>232</sup> See, for example, Brookes and Kelly (2009), Cook (1999), Cook and Kaiser (2004), Elliott and Leonard (2004), Kopkowski (2008), Pilcher, (2010), Rawlins (2006).

peer group; (b) corporate marketing strategies that emphasized brand names and logos; and (c) corporate marketing strategies that created tween celebrities as fashion role models. I also documented the meanings underlying the labelling of tween fashions as appropriate or inappropriate with both mothers and tweens in this sample, and considered how this impacted buying practices or as Boden (2006b:291; 2006a) has conceptualized it, fashion consumption.

Specifically, I recruited a snowball sample of thirty-three participants – seventeen mothers and sixteen tweens, of whom twelve were girls and four were boys. The focus of my research was exploratory; that is, my primary research goal was to generate insights for future research with a larger sample on these issues. Accordingly, I made use of a qualitative methodology that included (a) a descriptive content analysis of the two popular magazines chosen for study – *Today's Parent* and *Tiger Beat* - focusing on issues related to identity and fashion in childhood/tweenhood; and (b) I conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with both mothers and tweens. In the next section, I review the organization of the thesis and then the results of this research.

### **Preliminary Organization of the Thesis**

In the first three chapters of the thesis, following the introduction to the dissertation in Chapter One, I discussed in detail the historical, theoretical and methodological literatures informing this research.<sup>233</sup> In Chapter Two, I provided an overview of the literature on historical understandings of children and childhood and documented, not only the malleable nature of these conceptualizations, but also the

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<sup>233</sup> For a complete discussion of these literatures and my arguments, please see the original chapters.

contradictions inherent in them. For example, childhood has been traditionally conceptualized as a time of innocence, and children as cherubs in need of protection. However, children have also been viewed as chattel to be worked for economic gain.

I also demonstrated that historically, fashion and clothing have played a role in how children are identified; for example, certain types of clothing were worn by individuals to identify themselves as members of a particular social class. This in turn translated into how they dressed their children (Cunningham, 1995). According to Albanese (2009:222) the first appearance of tweens in the literature, as a separate stage in childhood development, was in a "marketing journal article" in 1987 (cf. Hall, 1987; Cook and Kaiser, 2004).

As I discussed in some detail in this chapter, tweens are neither regarded as young children nor as teenagers; nor are they considered cherubs or chattel (cf. Lancy, 2008). Rather, as I outlined, marketers have identified tweens as a new consumer group, and have begun to market to them - through fashion apparel items, electronics, and other consumer items - new and often conflicting identities associated with being a tween.<sup>234</sup>

In Chapter Three, I reviewed sociological approaches to the study of fashion, including functionalism, feminism, and late postmodernism, and the research literature generated by these approaches. I concluded with an examination of the literature focused on fashion and its relationship to how young adults identify themselves. Based on this

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<sup>234</sup> See, for example, Albanese (2009), Boden *et al.* (2004), Boden (2006a; 2006b), Brookes and Kelly (2009), Bissonnette (2007), Cook (1995; 1999; 2008), Cook and Kaiser (2004), Elliott and Leonard (2004), Kopkowski (2008), Pilcher (2010), Rawlins (2006), Russell and Tyler (2002), Schor (2004).

examination, I identified gaps in the literature that I hoped to address in my dissertation research.

First, much of the research on fashion and identity formation and change, while insightful, had been situated within cultural studies, critical studies, consumer and marketing research studies, and human geography studies. Second, with a few notable exceptions, most literature in this area has not focused on the experiences or opinions of children and tweens as social actors in their own right. Third, sociological research, and in particular, symbolic interactionist research on these issues, had tended to be more theoretical than empirical. Fourth, to the author's knowledge, no studies in Canada have used a symbolic interactionist approach to examine the relationship between fashion and the emergence of a new tween identity. Canadian scholars who have examined these issues have tended to use a feminist framework rooted in discourse analysis (see, for example, Currie, 1999; Currie *et al.*, 2006; 2007; Kelly *et al.*, 2006; and Pomerantz *et al.*, 2004).

In Chapter Four, I discussed in detail how the theoretical assumptions and concepts of symbolic interactionism, as reflected in the Chicago School approach, as well as the tenets of the new sociology of childhood, would be used to address the theoretical and substantive questions informing this research.<sup>235</sup> As symbolic interactionism conceptualizes actors as self-reflexive and possessing agency, they could be viewed as able to create and recreate themselves and their environment. I argued that this contextual framework was essential for understanding the processes of adopting,

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<sup>235</sup> For a complete discussion of the use of these concepts in the research, please see Chapter Four.

modifying and/or rejecting the meanings and definitions surrounding childhood, the emergence of tweens as a new identity construct, and the assessments of appropriate or inappropriate fashion choices for tweens.

Another assumption of symbolic interaction is that meaning arises through interaction and that humans interact with one another on the basis of shared meanings learned through socialization (Blumer, 1969a:2; Musolf, 2003:103). Tween fashion, therefore, and its acceptance or rejection would become meaningful for identity through interaction with and the reaction of social actors (cf. Musolf, 2003:103; see also, Blumer, 1969a:2; Mead, 1934).

Roles are also learned through socialization, and role-taking is an essential step in the identity formation process, accomplished through interaction with real or imagined others. Role-taking could also involve the manipulation of appearance to imitate or emulate a significant other, a major focus of this research. The use of role-taking as a concept allowed me to theorize that process of using appearance as an expression of self-identity, subject to the rewards and sanctions of others.

Cooley's (1922) Looking-glass self also provided a theoretical explanation that overlapped with role-taking in that like role-taking, the Looking-glass self is conceptualized as a process that is also influenced by rewards and sanctions received from others in interaction, and this extends to reactions to one's appearance. For example, a tween might dress in a certain way to reflect what she felt was an acceptable tween image, but then receive negative feedback from her friends. This response might lead the



tween to choose a different look to express her sense of herself and regain the approval of her friends.

In Chapter Five, I discussed the qualitative methodological approach of the Chicago School of symbolic interactionism and the new sociology of childhood; the methodological issues arising from the study of children and tweens, including children and tweens as a distinct research group; ethical concerns about doing research with tween-aged children; and child and tween-friendly techniques and strategies. In this regard, I outlined a new methodological approach using magazines and a digital camera/recorder as a child and/or tween-friendly research technique that enabled me to discuss fashion and identity development in an age-appropriate manner suitable for tween-aged participants. This methodological technique was also used to create a sense of inclusiveness and value for children in their role as participants and to serve as a bonding tactic in interviews.

I also outlined in detail the design of the interview schedule, the questions used to address the issues under review, and the data analysis techniques used for the qualitative interviews and the two magazines chosen for content analysis.

## **Results**

In Chapter Six, I presented the results of my descriptive content analysis, rooted in frame analysis, of *Today's Parent* and *Tiger Beat*. A number of themes emerged from this data about how magazines market images of children and tweens to mothers, and to tweens themselves. To avoid repetition, I provide these results in summary form:

(1) Within *Today's Parent*, children were depicted in clothing that reinforced gender norms, and traditional conceptions of children as innocents. For example, girls dressed primarily in pink, frilly clothing were shown either in *inactive* poses or, if engaged in activity, were depicted doing housework or baking. Boys were depicted in outfits suited to physical activity and depicted in active sports play. I concluded that these images were reinforcing gender roles through images of the clothing worn and the activities engaged in.

(2) Through these stereotypically gendered renderings of children, *Today's Parent* did not fully acknowledge a tween life stage – even children who were described as being in the 8-to-13-year old tween age bracket were dressed in more traditional, gendered children's fashions.

(3) *Today's Parent* used anonymous adult and child models in their fashion displays – a marketing tactic I argue was done deliberately to project to parents that childhood was a stage free of the influences of the media, and therefore, innocent and unsullied. Further though purchasing the clothing being marketed in *Today's Parent*, the innocence of their children could be assured.

*Tiger Beat* magazine was a study in contrasts.

(1) Tweenhood were clearly identified as a life stage, and depicted as different from childhood, with a different lifestyle and a different fashion look, marketed by celebrity role models.

(2) As celebrity role models tended to be older than tweens and dressed accordingly, more adult trends were promoted to tweens, the general readership of *Tiger*

*Beat* magazine. However, these styles were not necessarily always revealing or overtly erotic.

(3) Gender played a dominant role in the celebrity marketing of fashion. Female celebrities were often depicted as sex objects through the clothing they wore or the poses they assumed. Male celebrities, on the other hand, were not depicted in either sexually suggestive poses or clothing. I argue that these marketing tactics lend support to the feminist argument that patriarchy perpetuates dominant gender ideologies in society through social institutions such as the media.<sup>236</sup>

Finally, I also discussed how both *Today's Parent* and *Tiger Beat* magazine successfully made use of the tactics of promotionalism and the cult of celebrity, albeit in very different ways, to successfully target and market fashions to their consumers – mothers and tweens, respectively.

In Chapter Seven, I presented the themes arising from my qualitative interviews with the mothers in this sample.

(1) Mothers firmly believed that childhood had changed in recent years. Indeed, many mothers were uncomfortable that their children were being targeted as consumers, and that fashion was being marketed to them already.

(2) Mothers perceived that brands, logos, and celebrities did have an impact on their tween-aged children's projection of self-image and fashion choices, although to varying degrees.

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<sup>236</sup> See, for example, Craik (1994), hooks (2000), Howson (2004), Lakoff *et al.* (1984), McRobbie (2002), Mosley (2002), Waggoner and O'Brien Hallstein (2001) and Wolf (1991).

(3) Further, mothers perceived that some of the styles promoted by celebrities and brand-name stores were not age-appropriate, and commented on their uneasiness about the availability of these fashions for purchase in stores geared to tweens – some styles were considered too adult or sexually mature, although cost and practicality also informed assessments of fashion styles.

(4) However, mothers also recognized that fashion was an important way that their tweens developed a self-image, and that tween fashion was used to facilitate their interaction and integration within the peer group.

(5) Mothers used their own meanings to decide what fashions were unacceptable for their tween-aged children, and these meanings varied by gender.

(6) Clothing for tween girls was considered unacceptable if it projected an image that mothers considered too mature. This could include assessments that the style was too tight, too revealing or too overtly sexual.

(7) Clothing for tween boys was considered unacceptable if it was impractical or too expensive. Mothers did not express concerns about the overtly sexual nature of any of the clothing available for their tween boys.

(8) I argued that mothers used *gatekeeping* as a strategy to avoid purchasing fashion they considered problematic, and limited shopping opportunities for their tweens through solo shopping.

(9) This gatekeeping allowed mothers to avoid problems they anticipated would arise with their tween-aged girls, and eliminated the possibility that the fashion tween girls chose would project an unacceptable self-image.

By exerting their control over fashion purchases and often shopping solo, I also argued that mothers were able to control the external influence of the media on their tweens, and limit the potential for conflict with their tweens, based on differing meanings associated with tween fashion.

In Chapter Eight, I presented the themes arising from my qualitative interviews with the tweens in this sample. I also included excerpts from a Tiger Beat website where tween bloggers expressed their opinions about celebrity fashions styles being provided on-line, although this was not a major focus of my research.

In my interviews, I examined tween perceptions of various influences on their fashion choices such as the peer group, brands, logos, and celebrities marketing fashion to them, and the use of fashion to develop and project a self-image. I also explored their understanding of, and reaction to, clothing marketed to them and why it might be considered inappropriate.

(1) Tweens were clearly active and informed social actors who were aware of the competing meanings that family, friends, and influential others in the media were offering to them about tweenhood, the appropriateness of clothing styles, and the images they projected.

(2) However, unlike other studies in the field that have argued that tween-aged children instantaneously absorb the messages of the media without any self-reflection<sup>237</sup>, I found that the tweens in my sample were active in both adopting, modifying and rejecting

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<sup>237</sup> See, for example, Boden (2006a; 2006b), George (2007), Schor (2004), and Whyte (2007).

meanings and definitions about fashions that impacted their self-images, and the identities they projected to the larger social world.

(3) Consequently, I found that tweens were influenced more in their decision-making regarding fashions by their parents, especially their mothers, and the peer group, than by media marketed celebrity fashions, brand names or logoed items. As I argued in Chapter Eight, while celebrity fashions acted as a guide in shaping fashion preferences, both the tweens in my sample, and *Tiger Beat* bloggers, did not appear to be overwhelmed by media messages about what to wear.

(4) Tween girls in particular, dealing with sexualized fashions being marketed directly to them, were aware of their parents' value systems regarding appropriateness, and accepted these values as their own.<sup>238</sup> The tweens in my sample, and *Tiger Beat* bloggers, were aware that certain styles of clothing projected negative female images characterized as slutty or trappy, and rejected these styles accordingly. Tween boys, on the other hand, limited their evaluations to whether the clothing was comfortable and/or cool.

(5) Although the mothers in my sample feared conflict would arise with their tweens over clothing choices, the tweens in my sample used their mothers' meanings to assess and to avoid fashion styles deemed inappropriate.<sup>239</sup> Disagreements that did arise with their mothers focused primarily on issues of cost and/or the impracticality of the fashion they wanted to purchase.

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<sup>238</sup> See also, Pilcher (2010).

<sup>239</sup> See also, Pilcher (2010).

However, the tweens in the sample did note that as they grew older, they expected to have disagreements with their parents over suitable fashion choices.

In the next section, I provide a brief summary of the implications of these empirical results for the sociological literature in this area. Then I discuss my contributions to the methodologies used when conducting research with children. Most importantly, I discuss the implications arising from my results that extend beyond the specific empirical findings of this dissertation, and I provide direction for future research in this area.

### *Contributions to the Sociological Literature on Tweens and Fashion*

As noted earlier in the chapter, much of the research on fashion and identity formation and change has been situated within cultural studies, critical studies, consumer and marketing research studies, and human geography studies. A first major contribution of this research to the sociological literature, therefore, was my use of a symbolic interactionist perspective to conduct empirical research on the issues under review; that is the role of marketing fashion to tweens as an influence on tween self-identity. To my knowledge, no research using this theoretical perspective has, at this point in time, examined *empirically* the relationship between fashion and tween identity either in Canada or elsewhere. As such, this research, despite its small sample size, has provided a much needed empirical grounding and addresses another gap in the literature in this area.

Further, no studies to date have examined these issues within a Canadian context through a symbolic interactionist lens, another gap in the literature that this research undertaking has addressed. Indeed, while Currie (1999), Currie *et al.*, (2006; 2007), Kelly

*et al.*, (2006), Pomerantz *et al.*, (2004) have provided very insightful accounts of Canadian youths' identity experiences, these studies are situated within the feminist literature and examine the "discursive position" of self, the "oppressive prescriptions of femininity" and the resistance to "emphasized femininity."

Another important contribution of this research is that I included the *voices* and *opinions* of children themselves. While other insightful studies such as Boden (2006a; 2006b), Crewe and Collins (2006), Pilcher (2010; 2011) and Rawlins (2006), for example, have incorporated the voices of children, few Canadian studies have been done and none have used a symbolic interactionist perspective. As noted earlier, children have not often been studied, due, it is argued, to their marginalization, and the often unique challenges that researchers encounter when trying to study children. Scholars like Mandell (1984; 1988) have provided foundational insights into the world of children and how to access them without denying children their own perspective. However, Albanese (2009:41) has also noted that adults continue to appoint themselves "the understanders, interpreters and translators of children." Unfortunately this often leads to the exclusion of children's voices in research studies (cf. Morrow and Richards, 2006).

The general exclusion of children from research further perpetuates their lack of power, agency and voice. In this study, however, I did not believe I could speak about the meanings informing tween self-image and their social worlds without understanding *their* perspectives and opinions on the issues. Given the theoretical and methodological commonalities between symbolic interactionism and the new sociology of childhood, as I outlined earlier, I was able to make the voices of my participants heard by combining the



principles of these two related approaches. Thus, I contributed to the literature that privileges children as distinct social actors (c.f. Albanese, 2009; Blumer, 1969a; 1969b; Cooley, 1922; Christensen and Prout, 2002; Christensen, 2004; Corsaro, 1997; James, Jenks and Prout, 1998; Leonard, 2007; Mandell, 1984; 1988; Mead, 1934; Stone, 1970; Thomas and Swaine Thomas, 1928).

As noted earlier, most studies of fashion and tween self-image have made use of perspectives other than symbolic interactionism. However, my results parallel the work of Boden (2006a; 2006b), Boden *et al.* (2004), and Pilcher (2010; 2011) done in the United Kingdom, among others, thus lending support to my findings on Canadian tweens.<sup>240 241</sup>

In previous research, Boden *et al.* (2004:9-16,23) concluded that girls are subject to sexualization through fashion imagery whereas boys are not.<sup>242</sup> Instead, boy's fashions tended to emphasize physical activity, power and the "seduction of labels", compared to an emphasis on girls' inactivity and often, inappropriate clothing choices (Boden *et al.*, 2004:9-16,23).<sup>243</sup> In this regard, my results with Canadian children are supported by these earlier findings, and reinforce these observations as valid in a Canadian context. In her more recent research, (Boden, 2006b) has been interested in examining "the penetration of the domestic sphere by consumer culture, especially in terms of the

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<sup>240</sup> Boden *et al.*'s (2004) study was based on interviews with 8 families, including children between 6 and 11 years of age and their parents (cf. Boden, 2006a; 2006b).

<sup>241</sup> See also, Cook (1995; 1998; 2008), Cook and Kaiser (2004), Elliott and Leonard (2004), Kopkowski (2008), Rawlins (2006), Schor (2004).

<sup>242</sup> See also, Bissonnette (2007), Boden (2006a; 2006b), Cook and Kaiser (2004), Kopkowski (2008), Rawlins (2006), Pilcher (2010), Schor (2004).

<sup>243</sup> See, Bissonnette (2007), Boden (2006a; 2006b), Cook and Kaiser (2004), Kopkowski (2008), Rawlins (2006), Pilcher (2010; 2011), Russell and Tyler (2002), Schor (2004).

intergenerational dynamics of consumption."<sup>244</sup> Boden has also argued, as do I, that teens are influenced by popular culture, celebrities, and available clothing options in the marketplace (see also, Brookes and Kelly, 2009; Pilcher, 2010; 2011).<sup>245</sup>

However, our findings appear to differ in important ways. Boden (2006b) has concluded that her children, ages six to eleven, demonstrated a growing autonomy from their parents, and assumed an authority to modernize their parents' tastes in clothing. This may reflect her focus on the impact of the *consumption* of clothing on parent-child relations.

However, rather than assuming a unidirectional model wherein fashion images impacted children/tweens who bought into them, and then pressured their parents to buy them, my research revealed a more nuanced relationship. Tweens were indeed influenced by popular culture images, but my exploration of the meanings informing their assessments of fashion clearly indicated that they did not necessarily embrace these fashions, nor pressure their parents to buy them.

Rather, I was able to demonstrate that media influences are not experienced by children as directly as Boden's (2006a; 2006b) work seems to suggest. Rather, they are filtered through the social networks within which tweens find themselves, and in this research, tweens were still inclined to measure the acceptability of clothing styles based on their mothers' values about modesty, and the kind of image the clothing projected. Pilcher's (2010:464-465) study of British tweenagers, on the other hand, lends supports to

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<sup>244</sup>As Boden's (2006b) article was published in an on-line journal, I cannot provide pagination for this direct quote. The reader is referred to the webpage containing this article – [www.socresonline.org.uk/11/2/boden.html](http://www.socresonline.org.uk/11/2/boden.html).

<sup>245</sup> See also, Bissonnette (2007), Cook (1995; 1999; 2008), Cook and Kaiser (2004), Elliott and Leonard (2004), Kopkowski (2008), Rawlins (2006), Russell and Tyler (2002), Schor (2004).

my findings of *Canadian* tweens in terms of the role of mothers in filtering messages surrounding appropriateness and acceptability. In this regard, the contributions of a symbolic interactionist approach that focuses on documenting actors' meanings rather than assuming them, are clearly demonstrated.<sup>246</sup>

***Contributions to Methodology: A New Technique for Research with Children***

This research has also contributed to the methodological literature in important ways and build on the principles of the new sociology of childhood. First, influenced by previous research on children,<sup>247</sup> I used tween-friendly research techniques that enabled me to collect data from tweens in a way that maximized results. These included adopting the "least-adult role"<sup>248</sup>, making use of a variety of bonding tactics, and the use of photography in the interviews. In this regard, I built on the methodological techniques developed to create a sense of inclusiveness for children as participants (cf. Mandell, 1984; 1988).

Specifically, I developed a variation on these techniques which proved highly successful - the incorporation of digital photography with magazine content - a tactic that enabled me to discuss fashion and the display of self-image in an age-appropriate manner suitable, and in fact, fun for children. This technique was also innovative in that it bridged two forms of data collection - archival and interview data - to reveal the

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<sup>246</sup> Given the small sample size, these observations should be interpreted with caution. Exploring these findings with a larger sample is a proper subject for further research.

<sup>247</sup> See, for example, Albanese (2009), Best (2007), Boden *et al.* (2004), Boden (2006a; 2006b), Boocock and Scott (2005), Christensen and James (2000), Christensen and Prout (2002), Corsaro (1997), Handel *et al.* (2009), James and Prout (1990), Leonard (2007), Mandell (1984; 1988), Morrow and Richards (2006).

<sup>248</sup> cf. Mandell (1984; 1988).

meanings tweens brought to the fashion images in the magazines with which they were presented.

Having discussed the contributions of this research to the sociological and methodological literature, I will now consider the more important themes emerging from my research: The gendered construction of tween fashion; the differential impact of tween fashion on mothers and tweens, and the role of group mediating effects. I will also discuss the implications of this research for more general understandings of how society socializes girls to be asexual or sexual, virgins or whores, whatever the clothing they choose. Finally, as part of this discussion, I will advance suggestions for future research in these areas.

### ***Gendered Constructions of Tween Fashion***

Feminist scholars have contributed extensively to the literature on the reproduction of gendered norms in families and in the wider society (cf. Fox and Murray, 2000). More recently, attention has focused on the role of fashion in that process. Among others, Mosley (2002), McRobbie (2002) and Waggoner and O'Brien Hallstein (2001) have examined the gendered nature of fashion produced for young women and working professionals. Cook and Kaiser (2004:203) have explored how these marketing tactics "produce and reproduce a 'female consuming subject'..." However, the meanings attached to these gendered fashions, how they are experienced and/or assessed by the individuals who buy and wear them, and individual understandings of the symbolic messages that their clothing might convey to others, are less well explored.

In this research, I have argued that gendered norms and their impact on behaviour can be better understood through the use of a symbolic interactionist framework that examines the meanings associated with conceptualizations of femininity, masculinity and fashion.

Although the category of tween is considered a stage beyond childhood, it is still situated within a broader social understanding (*gendered ideology*) that gender differences exist between girls and boys. In my research, these gendered beliefs were evident (a) in the fashions presented for children and tweens; and (b) in the images of children and tweens produced in *Today's Parent* and *Tiger Beat*, whether these magazines were geared to parents or tweens.

Gender roles and understandings of the meanings attached to them played a significant role in how mothers assessed the appropriateness of fashion, in particular for their tween-aged daughters. Socialized to these gendered meanings by their mothers and the wider society, tween girls themselves also assessed the fashions that were available to them, and their appropriateness, based on the meanings that linked particular types of fashions to inappropriate or negatively sanctioned images of women and girls.

Feminists have argued that fashion is a reproduction and perpetuation of patriarchal norms and values regarding femininity and masculinity.<sup>249</sup> Accordingly, girls and boys are always dressed as they "should be" - in clothing that is identifiably feminine or masculine – to the dismay of feminists who seek to expand concepts of gender and

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<sup>249</sup> See, for example, Craik (1994), hooks (2000), Howson (2004), Lakoff *et al.* (1984), McRobbie (2002), Mosley (2002), Waggoner and O'Brien Hallstein (2001) and Wolf (1991).

gender appropriate clothing.<sup>250</sup> However, these patriarchal meanings and values are learned in early childhood, through socialization from parents, the peer group, social institutions and the media. Indeed, patriarchal gender roles and the norms, values, categories of acceptable behaviours, forms of dress, and suitable displays of self-image are continually reinforced.<sup>251</sup>

These same processes informed mothers' and tweens' assessments of fashion styles - judgments about inappropriateness were tied to the internalized *gendered* meanings associated with clothing; that is, clothing styles that aligned with their meanings about gender were deemed appropriate. For tween boys, appropriate clothing meant that it was comfortable and suitable for an active, playful lifestyle. Clothing for girls, on the other hand, was considered appropriate if it was ladylike, pretty and feminine, and did not create an impression that the tween girls wearing it were *slutty* or *skanky*.

Although tween girls in this sample rejected clothing on the grounds that it might make them look like *sluts* or *tramps*, they did so by drawing on internalized gendered beliefs that women and even girls can be identified as either *madonnas* or *whores*.<sup>252</sup> Clearly these tweens had been socialized to these two versions of how a tween girl would be perceived depending on how she dressed. Feminist scholars would argue that these

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<sup>250</sup> See, for example, Craik (1994), hooks (2000), Howson (2004), Lakoff *et al.* (1984), McRobbie (2002), Mosley (2002), Waggoner and O'Brien Hallstein (2001) and Wolf (1991).

<sup>251</sup> See, for example, Blumer (1969a; 1969b); Cahill (2003); Cooley (1922; 1928), Mandell (1984; 1988), Mead (1934); Stone (1970).

<sup>252</sup> See also, Rutherford (2007).

two roles are equally gendered patriarchal social constructs that suppress women (Bissonnette, 2007; Wolf, 1991).<sup>253</sup>

Regardless of whether fashion images are geared toward projecting an innocent image or a tramp image, girls and women are still subject, to varying degrees, to influences from the media, their parents, their peers, or other social institutions, that there are appropriate gendered ways for girls and women to behave that speak to their *moral* selves. As evidenced above, the media push both childhood as a stage of innocence, and fashions that suggest early sexualization of tween girls. Parents, on the other hand, push innocence and who you are if you are not innocent - a slut or a tramp. Peers too also reproduce these meanings they themselves have internalized in interactions, as discussed earlier - all forms of social influence which encourage women and girls to behave, and dress, in a certain way.

As already noted, these meanings and messages are continually internalized through processes of socialization, and the reproduction of these ideologies through the media and other institutional forms of influence. Indeed, both Cooley (1922) and Mosley (2002) have argued that matters of appearance and beauty are conceptualized as feminine concerns.

Whereas feminist critiques tend to focus on more macro explanations of the role of patriarchy and the reproduction of gendered norms, the use of a symbolic interactionist micro lens in this research illuminated the *content* of the meanings associated with femininity from the perspectives of the mothers and tweens themselves. These meanings

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<sup>253</sup> See also, Craik (1994), hooks (2000), Howson (2004), Lakoff *et al.* (1984), McRobbie (2002), Mosley (2002), Waggoner and O'Brien Hallstein (2001) and Wolf (1991).

affected tween girls' and their mothers' decisions about the potential impact of their fashion choices, and shaped their buying behaviour accordingly.

It should also be noted that, in both Boden's (2006a; 2006b) work and my own, the images provided for tween boys focused on active wear, and the boys themselves identified comfort as a primary consideration in choosing clothing. However, I was struck by the images for boys that were apparently *not* present in popular culture fashion, at least not in the sources I reviewed.

It is interesting to speculate, for example, whether mothers and tween boys would assess tween boys' clothing as inappropriate or sexualized, if images were provided that they felt projected an image of the boy as a "sissy" or "gay". Future research that focuses more directly on boys and the impact of tween fashion on their sexualization is needed to explore this observation. Indeed, it could be argued that by focusing more directly on the sexualization of girls in these kinds of studies, researchers reproduce the gendered concepts of femininity and masculinity present in the wider society.

### ***The Differential Impact of Tween Fashions Marketed Though the Media on Mothers and Tweens***

In the literature on tween identity and fashion, it has been argued that tweens and their parents are unequivocally influenced by the persuasive powers of the media. Indeed, two theoretical arguments have been advanced that support this assertion. According to Mills (1956), the media were a major cause of the transformation of America into a mass society, where urban social relationships were detached and impersonal. Individuals were vulnerable to manipulation by the media in ways



previously not experienced. The mass society thesis viewed the effects of mass communications as both direct and immediate.

This argument has been reformulated in post-modernist writings that view the *self* as *saturated* by media messages (Gergen, 2001; Karp, 1996). As Karp (1996:186) has observed, individuals are challenged in "constructing and maintaining an integrated self because the social structures necessary to anchor the self have themselves become unstable" (cf. Gergen, 2001). Gubrium and Holstein (2000:103), have further argued that symbolic interactionists must begin to shift their analysis to the *institutional* production of selves and away from the *situational* construction of selves.

In this research, through the use of a symbolic interactionist lens, I established that mothers seemed more concerned about the influence of the media on their tweens than appeared warranted, based on the tweens' own views on the subject. Specifically, mothers expressed concern that the increasingly adult and even sexualized fashions being marketed to their tween girls through magazines, television, and retailers would influence their tween fashion choices, and result in conflicts over buying inappropriate fashions. To avoid this conflict, as they perceived it, mothers engaged in *gatekeeping*, both in terms of what clothing styles were considered appropriate to buy, and how shopping was in fact carried out – solo versus co-shopping - to avoid conflicts with their children (cf. Allen and Hawkins, 1999; Boden, 2006a; 2006b; Crewe and Collins, 2006; Harper *et al.*, 2003; Martens *et al.*, 2004). This research result reflected the conclusions reached by previous

studies examining the impact of tween fashion marketed to tweens on parents' relationships to their children, and buying behaviour.<sup>254</sup>

However, in this study I also examined how tweens assessed the impact of influential others, including the media and tween celebrities, on their decision-making processes; and how socially-prescribed meanings impacted their own thought-processes about what was considered appropriate for someone in the tween years to wear.

Notably, tweens in this sample were very conventional and, as I noted in Chapter Eight, still more influenced by their mothers' views than peers or the media. This is an important contribution as some prior studies strongly suggest that the media's persuasive effects give individuals little choice but to accept their messages (Brookes and Kelly, 2009; Boden, 2006a; 2006b; Boden *et al.*, 2004; Schor, 2004). However, my research data and the blog data from *Tiger Beat* readers specifically illustrated the ability of tweens to resist messages targeted to them. Indeed, while mothers used co-shopping as a gatekeeping strategy to avoid conflict, their tweens appeared to filter assessments of fashion styles primarily through the lens of their mothers' or parents' values, although the peer group and the media continued to have an influence, at least to some degree (see also, Pilcher, 2010).

Whereas other studies in the literature have advanced arguments supporting the direct impact of the media on tweens' understandings of fashion and self-image, my research with an admittedly small sample, highlights the importance of attending to the

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<sup>254</sup> See, for example, Albanese (2009), Bissonnette (2007), Boden (2006a; 2006b), Boden *et al.* (2004), Brookes and Kelly (2009), Cook (1995; 1999; 2008), Cook and Kaiser (2004), Elliott and Leonard (2004), Kopkowski (2008), Pilcher (2010; 2011), Rawlins (2006), Schor (2004).

meanings of the tweens themselves, who actively resisted fashion messages at odds with their family's values. However, symbolic interactionism also emphasizes the dynamic nature of meanings and interactions. It is reasonable to suggest that tweens will report greater influence from media fashion sources as they grow older. Further research is needed to explore when and how these transitions take place.

### *Tween Agency and Group Mediating Effects*

It could be argued that a "moral panic" has been created centred on concerns about the increasing sexualization of children through the direct marketing of mature fashions to them. Cohen (1972:9) has observed that moral panics involve

a condition, episode, person, or groups of persons [that] emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by mass media; the moral barricades are managed by editors, bishops, politicians, and other right-thinking people...

Further, Becker (1963:135-147) has argued that moral entrepreneurs often *incite* moral panics about a particular issue. For example, moral panics have arisen over "Halloween sadism crime stories in which innocent children fall victim to seemingly innocuous adults who are really perverts" (Glassner, 1999:31; see also, Becker, 1963; 1964; 1967; Cohen, 1972; Jenkins, 1998).

In the case of tween sexualization and fashion, those reporting on the issue may not be attending to the children's meanings in the way that they should. In fact, these moral panics are often overstated.<sup>255</sup> Those who suggest that tweens absorb media messages without any degree of reflection or analysis are basing their argument on

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<sup>255</sup> See, for example, George (2007); Schor (2004), and Whyte (2007).

Gergen's (2001) postmodern conceptualization of the *saturated self*, and/or the mass society thesis.<sup>256</sup>

In fact, the tweens in my study assessed media messages through interactions with their parents and peer groups and made use of their own internalized meanings, linked to gender socialization, to make fashion decisions.<sup>257</sup> Tweens in this research resisted certain fashion trends that they felt were unsuitable for them and they did so, based on their need for acceptance by their mothers and their peers. As discussed in Chapter Seven, social encounters with peer groups were often characterized by the use of fashion to present a desirable self-image, what Goffman (1959) would term "front stage."

In other words, through their appearance and clothing, the tweens communicated their status to others in a way designed to elicit approval and acceptance (cf. Cooley, 1922; Stone, 1970). Importantly, tweens relied heavily on the opinions of others before seeking out products, images and lifestyles targeted to them through the media.<sup>258</sup> It should be noted that Cahill (2003:860), Mandell (1984; 1988), Corsaro (1985) and Adler and Adler (1987) have also concluded that children actively filter information through their social groupings, including parents and peers.

However, other scholars have conducted their own research on these issues, assuming that tweens internalize media messages and engage in consumer behaviour accordingly, to the distress of their parents (Boden, 2006a; 2006b; Schor, 2004). As

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<sup>256</sup> See, for example, George (2007); Schor (2004), and Whyte (2007).

<sup>257</sup> See also, Pilcher (2010) for a discussion of the importance of mothers' opinions to tweens' fashion decision-making.

<sup>258</sup> In an early unpublished MA study on adolescent fashion decision making, Miall (1972) reported that when combined, primary and secondary influence greatly outweighed the effectiveness of mass media influence on adolescent fashion decisions.

already noted, the tweens in my sample utilized their own decision-making skills as a form of agency to filter the most egregious marketing techniques. They did so by drawing on internalized meanings regarding sexualization, tween fashion and self-image display, and taking into account the reactions of their family and friends.

To conclude this section, I argue that symbolic interactionism as a theoretical tool not only elicits the meanings associated with behaviour as a way to explain human conduct. The perspective also encourages researchers to respect the actors they study which, from a humanistic perspective, is important to do. This is even more the case when the study subjects are children.

As discussed in Chapter Five, children are often excluded from research endeavours because of their age and the belief that they do not have the capacity to participate in research.<sup>259</sup> This research also contributes, therefore, to the literature carried out by scholars who encourage researchers not to marginalize children and thereby deny them agency (Albanese, 2009; Christensen and James, 2000; Christensen and Prout, 2002; Corsaro, 1997; Crewe and Collins, 2006; Mandell, 1984; 1988). Indeed, based on my results, I argue that any future research on these issues *must* include the perspectives of the children, tweens and teens concerned.

### ***A Postscript: Sexualization and Eroticization of Youth and Children***

As repeatedly stressed in this thesis, a basic assumption about childhood in Western societies, embodied in law, is that children are inherently different from adults,

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<sup>259</sup> See, for example, Albanese (2009), Best (2007), Christensen and James (2000), Christensen and Prout (2002), Christensen (2004), Corsaro (1997), Mandell (1984; 1988).

that they are innocents in need of nurturing and protection (Handel *et al.*, 2007). Yet, it appears as if we are now living in a "world made sexy" (Rutherford, 2007:1), especially in terms of the ways in which youth and even children are increasingly being displayed in the media, and/or exposed to popular culture content containing sexualized imagery. Evidence of the eroticization and sexualization of children and youth is present in all forms of culture, including literature, television, movies, and magazines, and, as this and other research have demonstrated, in fashion.<sup>260</sup> For example, a Chinese book publisher recently published an erotic version of some of the famous Grimm Brothers fairytales (Agence France-Presse, 2010a).<sup>261</sup> While this particular publication was claimed to be the result of an error, these stories and portrayals of children are still available for public consumption.

This perception of increasing attempts to portray youth and even children in a sexualised manner is not new, but it has generated a widespread backlash against cultural products. For this reason, literary works are often censored for their adult and/or inappropriate content.<sup>262</sup> For example, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, by Harper Lee, and published in 1960, has frequently been deemed unsuitable for a young audience, given its "mature content."<sup>263</sup> Further, in 1992, Maurice Sendak's (1970) *In the Night Kitchen* was:

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<sup>260</sup> Erotic and sexual portrayals of youth are often available in mainstream venues such as in the *Twilight* series or traditional fairytales. Indeed, a simple *Google* search for "erotic children's literature", "censored children's movies", "censorship for adult content", etc., will yield many results, such as the ones cited in the dissertation proper (cf. Albanese, 2009; Bissonnette, 2007; Schor, 2004).

<sup>261</sup> As the article was published online, I cannot provide pagination for this information. The reader is referred to the webpage containing the article: <http://beta.ca.news.yahoo.com/china-publishers-mistakenly-translate-erotic-grimm-tales.html>.

<sup>262</sup> For more on censorship in the United States (with references to Canada), please see Wikipedia (2011a).

<sup>263</sup> cf. Wikipedia (2011b, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category\\_talk:Lists\\_of\\_controversial\\_books](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category_talk:Lists_of_controversial_books)).

...objectionable because of the nudity of the main character, a young boy, promoting allegations that this nudity might encourage child molestation. In Springfield, Missouri, the book was expurgated by drawing shorts on the nude boy.<sup>264</sup>

According to the American Library Association, *In the Night Kitchen* is twenty-first on its list of "100 Most Frequently Challenged Books of 1990-1999" (cf. University of Virginia, 2000).<sup>265</sup> In a similar vein, despite being adored for decades by children and teen readers, Judy Blume's *Forever* (1975) has been subject to much controversy.<sup>266</sup> Interviewing Blume thirty-years after *Forever*'s first publication, *Guardian* reporter Sarah Crown (2005) recounted how her own copy of the book "lived under the mattress; my sister kept hers in a locked desk drawer; my best friend's was buried under a pile of too-small clothes at the back of her wardrobe."<sup>267</sup> The reasons for hiding the book were related to the fact that the book was considered to contain adult and erotic sexual themes

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<sup>264</sup> As the article was published online, I cannot provide pagination for this direct quote. The reader is referred to the webpage containing the article:  
[http://childrensbooks.about.com/gi/o.htm?zi=1/XJ&zTi=1&sdn=childrensbooks&cdn=parenting&tm=52&f=00&su=p284.9.336.ip\\_p504.1.336.ip\\_&tt=2&bt=0&bts=1&z=http%3A/www.lib.virginia.edu/speccol/exhibits/censored/child.html](http://childrensbooks.about.com/gi/o.htm?zi=1/XJ&zTi=1&sdn=childrensbooks&cdn=parenting&tm=52&f=00&su=p284.9.336.ip_p504.1.336.ip_&tt=2&bt=0&bts=1&z=http%3A/www.lib.virginia.edu/speccol/exhibits/censored/child.html).

<sup>265</sup> As the article was published online, I cannot provide pagination for this direct quote. The reader is referred to the webpage containing the article:  
[http://childrensbooks.about.com/gi/o.htm?zi=1/XJ&zTi=1&sdn=childrensbooks&cdn=parenting&tm=52&f=00&su=p284.9.336.ip\\_p504.1.336.ip\\_&tt=2&bt=0&bts=1&z=http%3A/www.lib.virginia.edu/speccol/exhibits/censored/child.html](http://childrensbooks.about.com/gi/o.htm?zi=1/XJ&zTi=1&sdn=childrensbooks&cdn=parenting&tm=52&f=00&su=p284.9.336.ip_p504.1.336.ip_&tt=2&bt=0&bts=1&z=http%3A/www.lib.virginia.edu/speccol/exhibits/censored/child.html).

<sup>266</sup> See also Judy Blume's *Tiger Eyes*. These books contrast the popular *Sweet Valley* series (1983-2005; reprinted in April 2008), including their cover art. According to Bengal (2008: [http://www.printmag.com/Article/Cover\\_Girls](http://www.printmag.com/Article/Cover_Girls)), where the new edition of Blume's *Forever* includes two teens lying on a bed together, the revamped *Sweet Valley* series "...kept everything really simple and clean...In a convention familiar from chick lit, many YA covers feature sections of girls' bodies rather than their faces, but Senders was adamant about showing the twins as individuals, not midriffs: 'People really reacted to the blondes, to these sisters, and we wanted to keep them, but do a modern version with photographs.'"

<sup>267</sup> As the article was published online, I cannot provide pagination for this direct quote. The reader is referred to the webpage containing the article:  
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2005/jun/08/booksforchildrenandteenagers.sarahcrown>.

unsuitable for its target audience of children and teens.<sup>268</sup> According to Crown (2005), the book contained "forthright descriptions of sex that lead teenage girls the world over to squirrel their copies away."<sup>269</sup> This is similar to the controversy that arose over young audiences reading *The Lives of Girls and Women* (1971), with its very detailed descriptions of the young character, Del Jordan and her sexual experiences with men.

More recently, the very popular *Twilight* series, written by Stephanie Myers, has been dubbed as erotic, considering that the primary readers are children, tweens, and young adults. According to Mahoney (2011), "The debate about the sexual nature of the characters continues between opponents and proponents of the *Twilight* saga. While Edward is against sex before marriage, Bella is willing to hand over her virginity."<sup>270</sup> Whether this makes Bella a slut or a tramp is an empirical question requiring further research. To conclude, these are just a few examples of the ways in which children and youth are either presented as sexual beings in popular culture literature and children's books, or exposed to this imagery in books targeted to them.<sup>271</sup>

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<sup>268</sup> As the article was published online, I cannot provide pagination for this information. The reader is referred to the webpage containing the article:  
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2005/jun/08/booksforchildrenandteenagers.sarahcrown>.

<sup>269</sup> As the article was published online, I cannot provide pagination for this direct quote. The reader is referred to the webpage containing the article:  
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2005/jun/08/booksforchildrenandteenagers.sarahcrown>.

<sup>270</sup> As the article was published online, I cannot provide pagination for this direct quote. The reader is referred to the webpage containing the article:  
[http://christianteens.about.com/od/christianentertainment/a/TwilightDebate\\_2.htm](http://christianteens.about.com/od/christianentertainment/a/TwilightDebate_2.htm)

<sup>271</sup> For a list of the most controversial and censorship children's book, please refer to Wikipedia (2011b): [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category\\_talk:Lists\\_of\\_controversial\\_books](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category_talk:Lists_of_controversial_books). However, many scholars have argued that these written accounts and images are not much different from some more traditionally erotic adult literature (cf. Bissonnette, 2007; Schor, 2007).



As Bissonnette (2007) has argued, sexual images are immediately available to technologically savvy youth, and I would argue, children.<sup>272</sup> For example, the media, in terms of television, movies and magazines, often present a sexualized image of youth and children.<sup>273</sup> The iconic Calvin Klein ads of the 1980s and 1990s showcased very young children and young adults, such as Brooke Shields, in nude or almost nude poses (cf. Carlson, 2010).

Further, movies often present female children and girls as sex objects. Perhaps the first to do so was the film, *Lolita*, filmed in 1962 by Stanley Kubrick, and based on the novel of the same name by Vladimir Nabokov (1955). Sue Lyon, the young actress who played Lolita, was fourteen years old at the time of filming and served as the object of desire of a middle aged man, Humbert Humbert. Notably, the character Lolita was actually depicted as twelve in the book and movie. Sometimes the sexual images are more overt, such as Jodie Foster, at the age of fourteen, playing a young prostitute in *Taxi Driver*. Shields too played a prostitute when she was only twelve years old in the 1978 film, *Pretty Baby* (*Channel4.com*, 2009).<sup>274</sup> In 1989, at the age of 14, Fairuza Balk played the object of Annette Benning's twisted revenge plot in *Valmont* (1989). According to Roger Ebert (1989), a media critic at the time, a "heartless woman...assigns her former lover [Colin Firth] to seduce an innocent girl [Fairuza Balk], simply to deprive

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<sup>272</sup> While conducting a Google search for "pussy", one of the researchers in Bissonnette's (2007) study noted the thousands of websites and images that were available for viewing by anyone with a little knowledge of the Internet and the desire to search for such items - including children. Searches for relevant and related 'topics' yield the same results.

<sup>273</sup> For more on movie censorship, please see

<http://www.montgomerycollege.edu/Departments/hpolscrv/cdeibel.html>

<sup>274</sup> As the article was published online, I cannot provide pagination for this information. The reader is referred to the webpage containing the article: <http://www.channel4.com/programmes/the-100-greatest-sex-symbols/articles/the-results>.

her present lover of the privilege of marrying a virgin."<sup>275</sup> The movie includes a semi-nude and sexually explicit scene of Balk and Firth (cf. Ebert, 1989).<sup>276</sup>

Roger Ebert interviewed the director, Milos Foreman, who, when asked about Balk's age said,

"She was 14 years old, when we were shooting. She was for me the perfect example, half-child, half-woman, and of course sometimes the childish side appears where she should be a woman, and sometimes it's the other way around, and that I think is good for comedy" (Ebert, 1989).<sup>277 278</sup>

Not surprisingly, these sexual and adult depictions in the media, have usually focused on the sexualized female. Through language and imagery, women, girls and children have been depicted as sexual beings and sex objects on a constant basis, both in mainstream and non-mainstream cultures.<sup>279</sup> At the root of these depictions have been the ways in which individuals are described, presented, and clothed. Given these sexualized

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<sup>275</sup> As the article was published online, I cannot provide pagination for this direct quote. The reader is referred to the webpage containing the article:

<http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/19891112/REVIEWS/911120301/1023>.

<sup>276</sup> As the article was published online, I cannot provide pagination for this information. The reader is referred to the webpage containing the article:

<http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/19891112/REVIEWS/911120301/1023>.

<sup>277</sup> As the article was published online, I cannot provide pagination for this direct quote. The reader is referred to the webpage containing the article:

<http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/19891112/REVIEWS/911120301/1023>.

<sup>278</sup> Other times, however, these depictions of children are more "innocent" in coming of age stories like *The Blue Lagoon* featuring a nude Brooke Shields. Other times they are not so innocent, such as the underage actors on MTV's new show, *Skins*, depicted drinking, engaged in sexual acts, and shown as nude and semi-nude in some scenes (Serjeant, 2011, <http://ca.news.yahoo.com/tv-watchdog-calls-child-porn-probe-skins-20110120-150231-974.html>).

<sup>279</sup> Further, in October 2010, a very controversial photo spread of some of the *Glee* cast members appeared in *GQ* magazine (CBSNews.com, 2010, <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2010/10/22/earlyshow/living/parenting/main6981731.shtml>). The cover and article featured stars Lea Michele, Diana Argon and Corey Monteith in a variety of sexually suggestive poses. That same month, "bad girl" Taylor Momsen of *Gossip Girl* appeared on the cover of *Revolver* magazine in "hyper-sexual" lingerie, while (Lopez, October 14, 2010, <http://www.tnz.com/2010/10/14/taylor-momsen-parents-television-council-revolver-gossip-girl/>).

images in literature and the media, it is hardly surprising, that the same can be observed in the popular culture world of fashion.<sup>280</sup>

### **Limitations of the Thesis**

No research undertaking is without limitations, and no thesis is complete without a discussion of those limitations.

#### ***Sample Size***

First, the ethics approval accorded this research stipulated that I should advertise my research project, provide people with contact information, and if they wished to participate in my research, wait for them to contact me. Accordingly, I made several attempts to recruit a sample. I widely posted information on my study at McMaster University, in the Part-Time studies program, where I expected to find more mature students with children, and in the university online newspaper, *The Daily News*. I also provided over 200 letters of introduction providing information on my research to a local children's summer camp. Despite my extensive efforts, the response rate was very low.

After many attempts, I decided, in consultation with my supervisor, to turn to a snow-ball sampling technique which was more successful. Notably, a comparison of my Canadian results with studies done in other countries indicated that there was support for many of my conclusions. This lent confidence, not only to the findings that replicated

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<sup>280</sup> It is interesting to note that an organization has been formed that seeks to challenge the current symbolic messages and meaning associated with fashion by emphasizing the notion of asexuality in dress. According to the Asexuality, Visibility and Education Network website, the organization "was founded in 2001 with two distinct goals: creating public acceptance and discussion of asexuality and facilitating the growth of an asexual community." For a complete discussion of this approach, see Asexuality, Visibility and Education Network (2008).

previous research, but also to my interpretation of those findings that differed. However, as the sample numbers for mothers and tweens are small, any conclusions arrived at in the thesis should be interpreted with caution.

### ***Lack of Participation by Fathers***

A second limitation of the study was the omission of fathers from the interviews. Despite being actively recruited, no fathers agreed to participate in this research. Apart from the obvious finding that women are more likely to participate in research related to family matters than men, I suggest that their lack of participation was also a direct result of family shopping dynamics. Specifically, participants overwhelmingly revealed that "mom" was the primary shopper in the family. When approached for an interview, fathers may have considered their lack of experience in shopping, or fashion for that matter, as a reason for not participating in the study.

However, this study, as well as future studies in this area of research, would benefit from the participation of fathers. As Marsiglio *et al.* (2000) have documented, the meanings of fatherhood have substantially changed over the past twenty years, and the expectations associated with parenting in that role have changed even more dramatically. As these authors note, "although research agendas have been and will continue to be defined in large part by pressing social policy concerns, researchers should continue to study fathers' involvement with and influence on their children" (Marsiglio *et al.*, 2000: 1186). Any future study of parent-child interaction around the issues identified in this research will require the participation of fathers.

### ***Reproduction of Magazine Images***

I was unable to include any of the magazine images in my thesis given the prohibitive costs associated with copyright law. Nor was I able to reproduce the images photographed by the tweens in this sample with the digital camera provided to them. This limitation was keenly felt by me and challenged my ability to present my content analysis results without direct visual reference to the images being discussed. Obviously, I would have had it otherwise. However, I have provided detailed referencing to the images discussed in all cases where these are mentioned in the text. These images are listed in the Appendices as well. A larger research budget would solve these limitations in the research in future studies.

### ***Interviews with Corporate and Retail Store Managers***

Although not a limitation of the thesis *per se*, future research in this area should include the perspectives of corporate and retail store managers who produce and sell tween fashion products respectively. Although I was able to identify corporate marketing tactics through the use of various theoretical perspectives, such as *frame analysis* and *promotionalism*, both used in media studies, empirical research with the actual marketers and retailers would further ground these observations empirically.<sup>281</sup>

### **Concluding Thoughts**

In conclusion, this research has demonstrated how fashion and the development of a tween self-image are intricately connected. Thus, our understanding of what meanings

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<sup>281</sup> See, for example, Pilcher (2010) and Crewe and Collins (2006) who have some insightful information on British retailers and marketers in children's clothing wear.

we bring to childhood, children and tweens, *and what clothing symbolizes* matter greatly. Notably, in 1969, Blumer invited all "...sociologists to take seriously the topic of fashion" (1969b:288-289). Yet, I do not think he imagined all of the ways in which fashion would become a core part of individual and social processes of identity development and social change.

Indeed, Blumer's (1969b:288-289) invitation is even *more* relevant today than forty years ago. The world is in a constant state of flux, and we, as researchers and as citizens, would do well to keep that in mind. Today, clothing has become a symbol of the "clash of cultures" in the world, as nations such as France legislate what Muslim women can wear. Canadian legislatures debate the right of Muslim women to access government services, or even to vote, if these women are veiled; that is, wearing what they consider religiously ordained clothing but others consider inappropriate. Sikhs in Canada also face continuing challenges to their right to wear a turban and, at the same time, engage in other roles freely available to citizens who do not.

The marketing of adult products to tweens with its continuing challenges to the nature of childhood will continue unabated, and more research needs to be done. However, further research should also consider the changing role that clothing, its meanings, and its acceptance or non-acceptance play in issues of human rights, and a nation's obligations to its citizens.

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**APPENDIX A: MCMASTER RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD APPROVAL FORM**

<b>McMaster University Research Ethics Board (MREB)</b> <small>c/o Office of Research Services, MREB Secretariat, GH-305/H, e-mail: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca</small> <b>CERTIFICATE OF ETHICS CLEARANCE TO INVOLVE HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH</b>			
<b>Application Status:</b> New <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Addendum <input type="checkbox"/> Renewal <input type="checkbox"/> Project Number 2008 022			
<b>TITLE OF RESEARCH PROJECT:</b> End of Innocence? The Social Construction of Childhood Identity Through Fashion			
<b>Faculty Investigator (s)/ Supervisor(s)</b>	<b>Dept./Address</b>	<b>Phone</b>	<b>E-Mail</b>
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<b>Student Investigator(s)</b>	<b>Dept./Address</b>	<b>Phone</b>	<b>E-Mail</b>
S. Clancy	Sociology	21342	clancysj@mcmaster.ca
The application in support of the above research project has been reviewed by the MREB to ensure compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement and the McMaster University Policies and Guidelines for Research Involving Human Participants. The following ethics certification is provided by the MREB: <input type="checkbox"/> The application protocol is approved as presented without questions or requests for modification. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> The application protocol is approved as revised without questions or requests for modification. <input type="checkbox"/> The application protocol is approved subject to clarification and/or modification as appended or identified below:			
<b>COMMENTS AND CONDITIONS: Ongoing approval is contingent on completing the annual completed/status report. A "Change Request" or amendment must be made and approved before any alterations are made to the research.</b>			
<b>Reporting Frequency:</b>		<b>Annual:</b>	<b>Other:</b>
<b>Date:</b> April 20, 2008		<b>Dr. D. Maurer, Chair/ Dr. D. Pawluch, Vice-chair:</b> <i>Dr. D. Maurer</i>	

## **APPENDIX B- LETTER OF INFORMATION**



**Sarah Jane Clancy**, PhD Student  
Dept. of Sociology, McMaster University  
Email: [clancysj@mcmaster.ca](mailto:clancysj@mcmaster.ca)

PhD Supervisor: **Dr. Charlene Miall**  
Dept. of Sociology, McMaster University  
Email: [miallce@mcmaster.ca](mailto:miallce@mcmaster.ca)

I'm conducting research on children's self-image and how clothing is used in this process. This research project is for my PhD dissertation at McMaster University. One of the purposes of the study is to understand more about the fashion and clothing interests of children between 8 and 13 years of age. I will conduct interviews with both parents and children to understand why particular fashions and styles of clothing are or are not chosen. Additionally, I am interested in groups that may influence these fashion choices: the media and celebrities, family and friends. Also, we will look at current children's fashion magazines together to see the different clothing and fashion styles. At the end of the interview, I will ask you questions regarding your age, gender, ethnicity, religious affiliation and total household income. These questions will help me understand more about the people I am interviewing. However, you are not required to answer any of these questions. I am not interested in finding any particular result, only in finding out what you understand about these issues. There are no right or wrong answers. It is not likely that there will be any harms or discomforts to you or your child/ren by taking part in this study. The research will not benefit you or your child/ren directly but you might find it interesting to talk about these questions. I will conduct the interview at a location of your choice.

The McMaster Research Ethics Board has reviewed and approved this research. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is conducted, you may contact: McMaster Research Ethics Board Secretariat Telephone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 23132 C/o Office of Research Services. Email: [ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca](mailto:ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca) You should know that if you agree (and allow your child) to participate in this interview, you are not required to answer the questions if you do not want to, and you can end the interview at any time. If you decide to withdraw from the study and/or decide to withdraw your child from the study at the end of the interview or at a later date, your responses will be destroyed unless you tell me otherwise. I will assign a study ID number to this interview rather than your name and all your answers will be held in strict confidence. This consent form will be kept separate from the information you give me during the interview and will be destroyed at the end of the study. In papers that may arise from this research, you will not be identified in any way in any results that are released. These same rules and conditions apply to interviews with your child/ren. The interview will take about an hour to complete.

If you are interested in this study, please contact me (see address below). Thank you for your consideration of participation in this study. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact myself or Dr. Charlene Miall. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

**Sarah Jane Clancy**, PhD Student  
Dept. of Sociology, McMaster University  
Email: [clancysj@mcmaster.ca](mailto:clancysj@mcmaster.ca)



## **APPENDIX C- CONSENT FORM**



**Sarah Jane Clancy**, PhD Student  
Dept. of Sociology, McMaster University  
Email: [clancysj@mcmaster.ca](mailto:clancysj@mcmaster.ca)

PhD Supervisor: **Dr. Charlene Miall**  
Dept. of Sociology, McMaster University  
Email: [miallce@mcmaster.ca](mailto:miallce@mcmaster.ca)

### **Parents**

I'm conducting research on children's self-image and how clothing is used in this process. This research project is for my PhD dissertation at McMaster University. One of the purposes of the study is to understand more about the fashion and clothing interests of children between 8 and 13 years of age. I will conduct interviews with parents to understand why particular fashions and styles of clothing are or are not chosen. Additionally, I am interested in groups that may influence these fashion choices: the media and celebrities, family and friends. Also, we will look at current children's fashion magazines together to see the different clothing and fashion styles. At the end of the interview, I will ask you questions regarding your age, gender, ethnicity, religious affiliation and total household income. These questions will help me understand more about the people I am interviewing. However, you are not required to answer any of these questions. I am not interested in finding any particular result, only in finding out what you understand about these issues. There are no right or wrong answers. It is not likely that there will be any harms or discomforts to you by taking part in this study. The research will not benefit you directly but you might find it interesting to talk about these questions. I will conduct the interview at a location of your choice.

### **Children**

I am also interested in speaking with your child/children. I will ask children the same questions that I ask you. I am interested the clothing your child likes (or dislikes) to wear and why. Also, I am interested in groups that may influence your child's fashion choices: the media and celebrities, family and friends. Your child and I will also look at current kid's fashion magazines together to see the different clothing and fashion styles. I am not interested in finding any particular result, only in finding out what your child understands about these issues. There are no right or wrong answers. If you give me permission, I will approach your child for an interview. I will discuss the study with your child by talking about the what will happens to them if they participate, their rights, what happens to the results and ask them if they have any questions. I will also stress that no one will be mad if they decide not to participate or decide not to answer a question. I will then ask your child/ren if they want to participate. If they do, I will retain their assent by

having them print their name on a form. I will give you a copy of this form for your records.

The McMaster Research Ethics Board has reviewed and approved this research. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is conducted, you may contact: McMaster Research Ethics Board Secretariat Telephone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 23132 C/o Office of Research Services. Email: [ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca](mailto:ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca) You should know that if you agree (and allow your child) to participate in this interview, you are not required to answer the questions if you do not want to, and you can end the interview at any time. If you decide to withdraw from the study and/or decide to withdraw your child from the study at the end of the interview or at a later date, your responses will be destroyed unless you tell me otherwise. I will assign a study ID number to this interview rather than your name and all your answers will be held in strict confidence. This consent form will be kept separate from the information you give me during the interview and will be destroyed at the end of the study. In papers that may arise from this research, you will not be identified in any way in any results that are released. These same rules and conditions apply to interviews with your child/ren. The interview will take about an hour to complete. If you would like to receive a brief summary of my preliminary findings I will be happy to send them by mail or email if you provide your contact information below.

Please read the following statements. Please check one answer (yes or no) from the following statements:

	<b>NO</b>	<b>YES</b>
I agree to take part in this study	[ ]	[ ]
I agree to have the interview tape recorded	[ ]	[ ]
I agree to let Sarah Clancy approach my child about an interview	[ ]	[ ]
If my child agrees to be interviewed, I agree to let Sarah Clancy interview my child	[ ]	[ ]
I agree to have my child's interview tape recorded (as long as my child also agrees in the assent form)	[ ]	[ ]

[ ] No [ ] Yes I would like to receive a brief summary of the study findings by having them sent to me at

By email: \_\_\_\_\_

or mail to \_\_\_\_\_

**I HAVE READ THIS CONSENT FORM AND AGREE TO THE CONDITIONS ABOVE. I HAVE BEEN GIVEN A COPY OF THIS FORM.**

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

## **APPENDIX D**

### **Assent for Minor to Participate in a Study**

Your parents have allowed me to talk to you about a project that I am working on. The project is on your interest in particular types of clothing. I am going to spend a few minutes telling you about my project, and then I am going to ask you if you are interested in taking part in the project.

#### **Who am I?**

My name is Sarah Jane Clancy and I am PhD Student at McMaster University. I work in the Department of Sociology.

#### **Why am I meeting with you?**

I want to tell you about a study that involves children like yourself. I want to see if you would like to be in this study too.

#### **Why am I doing this study?**

I want to find out why kids like you like certain types of clothes over others and why. I also want to find out if you like or don't like clothes that your friends, family or famous people wear. I want to understand how you choose the clothes you wear. I also want to know how certain clothes make you feel, like happy or sad.

#### **What will happen to you if you are in the study?**

If you decide to take part in this study there are some different things I will ask you to do. First, I will ask you about some of your favourite TV shows, movies and famous people. Second, I will ask you some questions about your family. I'll ask you who you live with and if you have any brothers and sisters. Third, I will ask you to tell me about some of your favourite clothes and why you like them. Fourth, I will ask you to tell me about shopping: do you like going shopping, who takes you and what are some of your favourite places and things to look at when you go out. Last, we will look at some magazines together to see pictures of the different kinds of clothing. You can tell me what you think the clothes in the magazines and why you like or don't like them. While doing these things, all you have to do is try your best. It will take you about 30 minutes to 1 hour to do these things.

#### **Are there good things and bad things about the study?**

What I find in this study will be used to write an assignment at university. As far as I know, being in this study will not hurt you and it will not make you feel bad.

**Will you have to answer all questions and do everything you are asked to do?**

If I ask you questions that you do not want to answer then tell me you do not want to answer those questions. If you don't want to answer a question, you can tell me you want to 'pass'. Saying 'pass' will be our special term. You can say 'pass' anytime you like before, during or after we finish talking with one another. Also, if I ask you to do things you do not want to do, then tell me that you do not want to do them. If you have tried your best and do not know what to say or do next, you say 'I do not know'.

**Who will know that you are in the study?**

The things you say and any information I write about you will not have your name with it, so no one will know they are your answers or the things that you chose.

I will not let anyone other than me or my supervisor see your answers or any other information about you. Your teachers, principal, and parents will never see the answers you gave or the information I wrote about you.

**Do you have to be in the study?**

You do not have to be in the study. No one will get angry or upset with you if you don't want to do this. Just tell me if you don't want to be in the study. And remember, if you decide to be in the study but later you change your mind, then you can tell me you do not want to be in the study anymore.

**Do you have any questions?**

You can ask questions at any time. You can ask now or you can ask later. You can talk to me at any time during the study. Here is the telephone number to reach me.

Sarah Jane Clancy

Sociology

905-525-9140 x21342

IF YOU WANT TO BE IN THE STUDY, SIGN YOUR NAME ON THE LINE BELOW:

Child's name, printed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of the Professor/Student: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE WITH MOTHERS**

### **Purpose of the Study**

One of the purposes of the study is to document views on the fashion and clothing interests of tween children (i.e. those between 8 and 13 years of age) from both parents of tweens and the tweens themselves. I am also interested in your (and your child/ren) views on why these particular fashions and styles of clothing are chosen. Also, if no fashion or clothing styles are chosen, I am interested in your (and your child/ren) opinion(s) as to why not. Last, I am interested in the influences and decision-making process that goes into both you and your child/ren choosing particular fashion and clothing styles. I am not interested in finding any particular result, only in finding out how tweens and you, their parent(s), understand these issues. There is no right or wrong answers.

You (and your child/ren) have the right to withdrawal from the interview at any time. Additionally, you (and your child/ren) have the right to refuse to answer any question.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

### **Questions to Establish Number of Children, Gender and Parenting Relationship**

**I'd like to ask a few questions related to the number of children you have and your relationship to them. These questions give me a sense of the children in your household and your relationship to them.**

(1) How many children are you or have you parented? \_\_\_\_\_

### **FOR EACH CHILD**

- (2) What is the age of your first child?
- (3) What is the sex of each child?
- (4) What is your relationship to each child? (Biological, step-parent, adoptive, foster, etc)

### **Questions to Establish Nature of Clothing Styles**

**The next set of questions relates to the clothing styles your tween children wear. These questions allow me to understand what styles of clothing tweens wear in different settings.**

- (5) What types of clothes does your tween child or children typically wear?

**Follow-up:** What clothes do they wear to school?

**Follow-up:** What clothes do they wear at home?

**Follow-up:** What clothes do they wear going out as a family?

**Follow-up:** What clothes do they wear going out with friends?

**Follow-up:** What clothes do they wear going out to religious functions?

(6) Can you describe these clothes for me?

**Prompt:** Some respondents have noted that two distinct types of clothing style exist for tweens: first, styles based on popular cultural icons like musicians, TV stars and sports hero. For example, respondents have noted girl fashion trends follow the styles of young pop cultural icons such as Hilary Duff, the Olsen Twins and Hannah Montana. For boys, some have said that clothing is related to male pop cultural icons like Zac Efron from HSM, the Jonas Brothers and sport hero icons. On the other hand, other respondents have suggested that another style which is not so branded and instead embraces the age, necessity, and functionality and other factors of tween children's lives.

### **Questions to Establish Mothers' Decision Making About Clothes Purchases**

**These questions relate to factors you take into consideration when purchasing clothing for your children.**

(7) How often do you usually purchase clothing for your tween? (for each individual tween)

**Prompt:** Is it something you do on your own, with you children or with someone else?

**Prompt:** Why?

**Follow-up:** What are the reasons for this decision? Does it change depending on the situation?

(8) **If relevant**, when shopping on your own, what decisions come into play when you pick out clothing for your tween children?

**Prompt:** Does it depend on what situation you are buying clothing for, such as school, recreation, dressy, etc)?

**Follow-up:** Does it depend on your knowledge of what your children is looking for or not?

- (9) **If relevant**, when shopping with your tween child, what decisions come into play when you pick out clothing for your tween children?

**Prompt:** Does it depend on what situation you are buying clothing for, such as school, recreation, dressy, etc)?

**Follow-up:** Does it depend on your knowledge of what your children is looking for or not?

- (10) When purchasing clothing on your own, what are the stores you prefer to shop in for your tween child [or not?]
- (11) Depending on the situation, could you identify who or what influence you decisions about clothing choices for your children? For example, other parents, what other children are wearing, what is available, what is required for school, what is on the media, etc.
- (12) Depending on the situation could you identify the most important influence on your decisions?

**Note: If respondent replies that it usually depends on what my children wants—FOLLOW UP:**

Are there instances when you don't agree with what your child wants?

On what grounds do you disagree?

What happened on those occasions? Can you tell me about it?

**Questions to Establish Mothers' Familiarity with and Assessment of Tween Fashion Trends, Specifically**

**These questions relate to your knowledge on tween fashions. These questions allow me to understand how familiar you are with tween fashions. Additionally, these questions ask about your assessment of particular trends in clothing styles for tween-aged children.**

- (13) Do you watch tween fashion and clothing related content on TV?

**Prompt:** Adult and children geared shows



(14) Do you read about current fashion trends in tween magazines?

(15) Do you talk about tween fashion with others?

**Prompt:** with friends, colleagues, family (siblings, parents, relatives), at school, peer groups, etc

(16) What do you think are the current trends or styles in children's fashions in general?

**Prompt:** What are the available retail options? Does it vary?

(17) Do you think these trends or styles in children's clothing have changed over time?

**Prompt:** In what ways? Good or bad? Greater availability, more choice, etc?

(18) **If relevant**, What do you think are the current trends or styles for a child of your daughter's age? (**May be same as above**)

(19) **If relevant**, What do you think are the current trends or styles for a child of your son's age? (**May be same as above**)

(20) If your opinion, are these styles intended for children in your son's/daughter's age range? [For example, can they be worn by younger/older children?]

(21) How do you feel about the fashion options available for your child/ren that you have identified?

**Prompt:** Do you think, for example, that these fashion options are age appropriate? Are too limited?

### **Questions to Establish a Child's Decision Making about Clothes Purchases**

**These questions relate to the decisions your child makes in relation to the clothes they what to purchase. This allows me to understand what factors your tween child/ren take into account when wanting and purchasing new clothing.**

(22) Does your child watch tween fashion and clothing related content on TV?

(23) Does your child read about current fashion trends in tween magazines?

(24) Does your child talk about fashion with others?

**Prompt:** with friends, family (siblings, parents, relatives), at school, peer groups, etc

- (25) When your purchasing clothing with your child/ren, are there types of clothing styles that your child prefers [or not?]
- (26) When purchasing clothing with your child/ren, what are the stores your child prefers to shop in [or not?]
- (27) **If relevant:** In your opinion, why do you think your child chooses these particular styles?

**Prompt:** Do you think it is a matter of personal preferences [tomboy], trends, to fit in, parental influences, other influences like peers, magazines etc.

- (28) Do you think your child [ask for each child if relevant] chooses a particular style of fashion to present herself/himself in a certain way? For example, some children want to imitate styles worn by their friends, etc.

**Prompt:** Who are your child's favorite pop stars, TV/movie stars or sports stars?

- (29) Do you think your child uses clothing to say "This is who I am" or for some other reason?
- (30) Depending on the situation, how do you feel about your child's fashion preferences?

**IF NOT ANSWERED BEFORE:**

- (31) What happens if you and your child disagree on a clothing choice?
- (32) What might prompt you both to disagree?

**Prompt:** Is the type of clothing not suitable, age inappropriate etc.? How is this resolved?

**Basic Demographic Questions**

**These last few question relate to information about yourself, including age, education, ethnicity, religious background and income bracket. These are demographic categories which help me understand more about the people in my sample. You are not obliged to answer any of the questions in this section. However, please know that these answers are assigned a code. The only reference the codes will have with your interview is to the pseudonym you have been assigned.**

**Sex of Respondent**

(33)

1 Male \_\_\_\_\_  
2 Female \_\_\_\_\_

(34)

In what year were you born? \_\_\_\_\_

(35)

What ethnicity do you most identify with? \_\_\_\_\_

- 01 Aboriginal (Inuit, Métis, North American Indian)
- 02 Arab/West Asian (e.g., Armenian, Egyptian, Iranian, Lebanese, Moroccan)
- 03 Black (e.g., African, Haitian, Jamaican, Somali)
- 04 Chinese
- 05 Filipino
- 06 Japanese
- 07 Korean
- 08 Latin American
- 09 South Asian
- 10 South East Asian
- 11 White (Caucasian)
- 12 Other \_\_\_\_\_ ( specify)
- 77 Don't know
- 88 No response/refusal

(36)

What is the highest level of education you have completed? \_\_\_\_\_

- 01 No formal education
- 02 Some elementary or public school
- 03 Completed elementary of public school
- 04 Some high school
- 05 Completed high school
- 06 Vocational or technical college
- 07 Special diplomas –i.e. teaching
- 08 Some university
- 09 Completed university
- 10 Some post-graduate study
- 11 Post graduate degree \_\_\_\_\_ ( specify)
- 12 Other
- 77 Don't know

88 No response/refusal

(37)

As a child, were you raised within a particular religious tradition? (If yes, specify). If no religious affiliation, probe for belief in God, agnostic or atheist beliefs)

01	Anglican	_____
02	Baptist	
03	Jewish	
04	Lutheran	
05	Methodist	
06	Pentecostal	
07	Presbyterian	
08	Roman Catholic	
09	United Church	
10	Other Christian	
11	Other religion	
12	Nor formal religion by belief in God	
13	Agnostic	
14	Atheist	
77	Don't know	
88	No response/refusal	

(38)

**What, if any, if your current religions affiliation?**

01	Anglican	_____
02	Baptist	
03	Jewish	
04	Lutheran	
05	Methodist	
06	Pentecostal	
07	Presbyterian	
08	Roman Catholic	
09	United Church	
10	Other Christian	
11	Other religion	
12	Nor formal religion by belief in God	
13	Agnostic	
14	Atheist	
77	Don't know (Skip to Next Question)	
88	No response/refusal (Skip to Next Question)	

(39)

**IF APPLICABLE:** Do you consider yourself a practicing (religion)?

- |    |                      |
|----|----------------------|
| 01 | Yes                  |
| 02 | No                   |
| 03 | Sometimes/it depends |
| 04 | NA                   |
| 07 | Don't known          |
| 08 | No response/refusal  |

(40)

**ASK EVERYONE:** How often do you attend a regular religious service (not for special reasons like marriage, funerals, etc).

- |    |                            |
|----|----------------------------|
| 01 | More than once a week      |
| 02 | Once a week                |
| 03 | Two or three times a month |
| 04 | Once a month               |
| 05 | Several times a year       |
| 06 | About once or twice a year |
| 07 | Less than once a year      |
| 08 | Never                      |
| 09 | NA                         |
| 77 | Don't know                 |
| 88 | No response/refusal        |

(41)

How important are religious beliefs in your life (where you are a member of a religious group or not)?

- |    |                            |
|----|----------------------------|
| 01 | Very important             |
| 02 | Important                  |
| 03 | Not too important          |
| 04 | Not important              |
| 05 | Other                      |
| 06 | About once or twice a year |
| 77 | Don't know                 |
| 88 | No response/refusal        |

(42)

Are you currently employed?

- |    |            |
|----|------------|
| 01 | Yes        |
| 02 | No         |
| 77 | Don't know |

88 No response/refusal

(43)

**IF YES**, is this full or part-time work? \_\_\_\_\_

01 Full-time

02 Part-time

77 Don't know

88 No response/refusal

(44)

What is your main occupation or job title? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Probing Question if job title is unclear:** What business or industry is this? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Probing Question if occupation is unclear:** What product is produce or service rendered? \_\_\_\_\_

77 Don't known

88 No response/refusal

(45)

**IF EMPLOYED, SKIP TO NEXT QUESTION. IF NOT**, Do you consider yourself to be:

01 Retired

02 Unemployed

03 Laid off temporarily

04 A full-time homemaker

05 Student

06 Unemployed because of sickness

07 On Strike

08 Other

77 Don't know

88 No response/refusal

(46)

Marital Status: What best describes your current living arrangement?

01	Single	**
02	Married	
03	Widowed	
04	Separated	
05	Divorced	
06	Common Law **	
77	Don't know **	
88	No response/refusal **	

**\*\*Have you ever been married?**

01	Yes
02	No
77	Don't know
88	No response/refusal

(47)

**(HAND RESPONDENT CARD WITH INCOME BRACKETS)**

What is the number of the category that corresponds to your own total annual household income?

01	No Income
02	Less than \$5,000
03	\$5,000 to \$9,999
04	\$10,000 to \$19,999
05	\$20,000 to \$29,999
06	\$30,000 to \$39,999
07	\$40,000 to \$49,999
08	\$50,000 to \$59,999
09	\$60,000 to \$69,999
10	\$70,000 or over
77	Don't know
88	No response/refusal

## **APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE WITH TWEENS**

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### **Purpose of the Study**

I'm a student at McMaster University. I'm interested in talking to kids, like you, who are between 8 and 13 years old. I'm also interested in talking to your parents. I'm trying to find out what types of clothes you like to wear and why. Last, I am interested in what influences or helps you choose the clothes you wear. I am interested in all your answers on this topic.

You can stop the interview at any time. You do not have to answer any question you do not want to.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

### **Questions to Ease Children into the Interview and Gain Preliminary Understanding of their Likes and Dislikes**

**I want to start by talking about the things that you like and dislike, including your favorite TV shows and stars.**

- (1) Who are your favourite stars/singers/etc?
- (2) What do you like most about them? Why?

**Prompt:** talent, clothes, personality, etc

- (3) Do you like to dress like these individuals? [or not]?
- (4) Do your friends like the same stars?
- (5) Do you and your friends like a lot of the same things?

**Follow-up:** What do you both like and explain [or not like]?

### **Questions to Establish Number of Children, Gender and Parenting Relationship**

**I'd like to ask you about the people that you live with. It helps me understand who takes care of you and how often you spent time with people.**

- (6) How old are you?
-



(7) Do you have any brothers or sisters?

**FOR EACH SIBLING**

(8) What is the age of your brother/sister?

(9) What is the sex of your brother/sister?

(10) Who do you live with?

**Prompt:** mom, dad, grandparents, siblings, aunts/uncles, etc

**Questions to Establish Nature of Clothing Styles**

**The next set of questions relates to the clothing styles you wear to different places like school, out with your family, or out with your friends. The questions help me understand all of the clothes you wear in the different settings.**

(11) If you could pick 5 of your favourite clothes from your closet, what would they be?

**Follow-up:** Why?

**Follow-up:** Can you describe/or show them to me?

**Follow-up:** What do you like most about these clothes?

**Prompt:** colour, who gave it to you, style, who else likes/wears it, etc

(12) What types of clothes do you wear most often?

**Prompt:** Casual, dressy, play clothes, etc

**Follow-up:** What clothes do you wear to school?

**Prompt:** Uniform, regular everyday clothes, dressy, etc

**Follow-up:** What clothes do you wear where you are at home?

**Prompt:** clothes you can run & play in; dress-up clothes (girls: dresses, high heels, etc); whatever I can find; etc

**Follow-up:** What clothes do you wear going out as a family?

**Follow-up:** What clothes do you wear going/playing with friends?

**Prompt:** what your friends are wearing, whatever my parent picks out, whatever I want, etc

**Follow-up:** If you are going to church/synagogue/temple, what kinds of clothes do you wear?

(13) **If not answered above:** Can you describe these clothes for me?

**(May use early in lieu or in addition to prompts/follow-ups)**

**Prompt:** Some kids your age have told me that 2 different kinds of clothes are available. **(for girls)** One type of clothes is like the styles/dress of Hilary Duff, the Olsen Twins and Hannah Montana. **For boys**, some have said they like to dress like Zac Efron from HSM, the Jonas Brothers and sport hero icons. Other kids have told me that they really don't care about those kinds of styles. Instead, they wear whatever is comfortable or lets them run around and play, etc.

**Follow-up:** What do you think?

**Follow-up:** How would you describe your clothes?

### **Questions to Establish a Child's Decision Making about Clothes Purchases**

**These questions tell me about why you like the clothes you do and what makes you want to buy them.**

(14) What shows do you watch on TV?

**Prompt:** Do you like to see the clothes the people on the show wear?

**Prompt: If relevant,** what do these clothes look like?

**Follow-up:** Do you like the clothes? Why or why not?

**Follow-up:** Can you describe the clothes for me?

(15) Do you read about fashion and clothing in magazines?

(16) Do you child talk about clothes and the things you like/want to wear with others?

**Prompt:** with friends, family (siblings, parents, relatives), at school, peer groups, etc

(17) What are your favorite type (i.e. style, colour, brand, etc) of clothes to wear?

**Follow-up:** What styles do you prefer not to wear?

**Follow-up:** Why or why not?

- (18) Do you like to go shopping?
- (19) Do you go out shopping a lot?
- (20) Who takes you shopping most of the time?
- (21) When you go out shopping, what are the stores you really like to go to [or not?]
- (22) **If relevant:** Why do you think you like these particular clothes/styles?

**Prompt:** Do you think it is a matter of personal preferences [tomboy], trends, to fit in, parental influences, other influences like peers, magazines etc.

- (23) Do you like the way your clothes make you feel?

**Follow-up:** Do you like the way your clothes make you look?

**Prompt:** What do you like most about the way your clothes may you look? [Or not] (I.e. fit in with friends, comfort, fun, etc)

- (24) **If relevant,** do you like these clothes for any other reason?

**Prompt:** friends, parents picked it out, given as a gift, want to be different, want to fit in, etc

**IF NOT ANSWERED BEFORE:**

- (25) What happens if you and your mom/dad don't agree on the clothes you like?

**Prompt:** do you fight? Do you tell them that you really want it?, etc.

- (26) What do you think you and your mom/dad don't agree on the clothes?

**Prompt:** Too expensive, you have enough clothes, not well suited for your age, etc.

**I have four popular tween magazines. I'd like to look through them together and look at the clothing images. When you find a picture of clothes that you really like, I'm going to take a picture of it. But the picture will only be of the image in the magazine, not of you or anyone/anything else.**

**Let responses emerge based on the data. \*Use questions only if needed.\***

(27) How do you feel about the pictures/clothing in the magazines?

**Prompt:** like/dislike; nice/not nice looking

(28) Do you have any clothes that look like the pictures in the magazine? [or not?]

(29) What do you think of when looking at some of these pictures?

**Prompt:** Do you like the way the girls/boys are dressed?

**Follow-up:** Why? What do you like the most?

**Follow-up:** What don't you like?

(30) Do you think your mom/dad would let you wear these clothes? Why or why not?

(31) Do you have anything else you want to tell me?

**Follow-up:** Do you have anything you want to ask me?

### **Basic Demographic Questions**

**These last few questions tell me a little bit more about you. It lets me understand a little more about all of the people I've talked to.**

#### **Sex of Respondent**

(32)

1 Male \_\_\_\_\_

2 Female \_\_\_\_\_

(33)

How old are you/what year were you born? \_\_\_\_\_

(34)

What ethnicity do you most identify with? \_\_\_\_\_

- 01                                      Aboriginal (Inuit, Métis, North American Indian)  
 02                      Arab/West Asian (e.g., Armenian, Egyptian, Iranian, Lebanese, Moroccan)  
 03                                      Black (e.g., African, Haitian, Jamaican, Somali)  
 04    Chinese  
 05    Filipino  
 06    Japanese  
 07    Korean  
 08    Latin American  
 09    South Asian  
 10    South East Asian  
 11    White (Caucasian)  
 12                                      Other \_\_\_\_\_ ( specify)  
 77    Don't know  
 88    No response/refusal

(35)

What grade are you in? \_\_\_\_\_

- 01    grade 1  
 02    grade 2  
 03    grade 3  
 04    grade 4  
 05    grade 5  
 06    grade 6  
 07    grade 7  
 08    grade 8  
 09    grade 9  
 10    Other  
 77    Don't know  
 88    No response/refusal

(36)

Do you go to church/temple/synagogue? If so, what is your religion? \_\_\_\_\_

- 01                      Anglican  
 02    Baptist  
 03    Jewish  
 04    Lutheran  
 05    Methodist  
 06    Pentecostal  
 07    Presbyterian  
 08    Roman Catholic  
 09    United Church  
 10    Other Christian

11	Other religion
12	Nor formal religion by belief in God
13	Agnostic
14	Atheist
77	Don't know
88	No response/refusal

(37)

**ASK EVERYONE:** How often do you attend a regular religious service (not for special reasons like marriage, funerals, etc).

01	More than once a week
02	Once a week
03	Two or three times a month
04	Once a month
05	Several times a year
06	About once or twice a year
07	Less than once a year
08	Never
09	NA
77	Don't know
88	No response/refusal

**APPENDIX G: ADVERTISEMENT**



Childhood identity study needs participants

Parents with children between 8 and 13 years of age are being sought to take part in a research study currently underway in the Department of Sociology at McMaster University. The research is being conducted as part of a Ph.D. dissertation and focuses on the fashion and clothing interests of "tweens." Parents and their "tween" children will be asked to answer questions about particular fashion likes and dislikes, trends in the media, and influences on fashion choices, such as friends, family and popular culture. The interview also involves looking at current kid's fashion magazines together to observe different clothing and fashion styles. Participation takes approximately 1 hour. The McMaster Research Ethics Committee has approved this study. If you and/or your children fulfill the criteria outlined above and are interested in either participating in this study or learning more about it, please contact Sarah Jane Clancy at [clancysj@mcmaster.ca](mailto:clancysj@mcmaster.ca).

## **APPENDIX H: SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS**

<b>Sample Characteristics</b>	
<b>Mothers</b>	<b>Tweens</b>
<b>Sex</b>	<b>Sex</b>
Female: 17	Male: 4 Female: 12
Total: 17	Total: 16
<b>Age</b>	<b>Age</b>
30s: 1 40s: 14 50s: 1 Undeclared: 1	Younger than "tween": 1 7 (almost 8): 1 8: 2 9: 1 10: 4 11: 2 12: 4 13: 1
Total: 17	Total: 16
<b>Number of children (biological, adopted or foster)</b>	<b>Number of siblings</b>
1: 6 2: 8 3: 1 4: 1 Undisclosed: 1	Only child: 4 1: 10 2: 1 3: 1
Total: 17	Total: 16
<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>
Caucasian: 17	Caucasian: 16
Total: 17	Total: 16
<b>Religious Affiliation</b>	<b>Religious Affiliation</b>
Christian: 1 Catholic: 6	Christian: 1 Jewish: 1



United: 1 Jewish: 1 <sup>282</sup> Undisclosed: 8  Total: 17	Catholic: 7 United: 1 Undisclosed: 6  Total: 16
<b>Marital Status</b>  Single: 2 Married: 10 Divorced: 3 Undisclosed: 2  Total: 17	<b>Living Arrangements<sup>283</sup></b>  Both Parents: 10 Mother: 6  Total: 16
<b>Occupation</b>  Stay-at-home-mom: 3 Student: 3 Entrepreneur: 1 Receptionist: 1 Sales/Retail: 2 Vice-President/Director: 2 Educational/Learning/Teacher: 4 Accountant: 1 Medical/Dental Assistant: 1 Undisclosed: 1  Total: 19 <sup>284</sup>	<b>Grade</b>  Grade Younger than "Tween": 1 Grade 2: 1 Grade 3: 1 Grade 4: 2 Grade 5: 1 Grade 6: 6 Grade 7: 3 Grade 8: 1  Total: 16
<b>Educational Background</b>  Some university or college: 7 College Diploma: 2 University degree: 5 Vocational, Technical or trade: 2 Undisclosed: 1  Total: 17	
<b>Annual Household Income</b>	

<sup>282</sup> This participant was raised Jewish but now is non-denominational.

<sup>283</sup> If the parents are divorced/separated, who the child lives with the most (not including visitation times with the other parent).

<sup>284</sup> Two participants self-identified as both students and stay-at-home moms.

\$40,000 to \$49,999: 1 \$60,000 to \$69,999: 1 \$70,000 or over: 5 Undisclosed: 10  Total: 17	
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**APPENDIX I: DATA ANALYSIS AND DESCRIPTIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS  
OF TODAY'S PARENT DATA**

<i>Today's Parent</i> <sup>285</sup> <b>December 2008 Volume 25, Number 12</b>		
<b>Female Gender Reinforcement</b>	<b>Male Gender Reinforcement</b>	<b>Innocent and Traditional Looking childhood</b>
Front cover; 5; 12-13; 18; 21-22; 27; 31; 58-60; 62-63; 67; 89; 93; 97; 103; 121; 123; 131; 139; 164; 170; 172	21-22; 33; 45; 65; 67; 69; 89; 93; 95; 113; 123; 125; 162; 165-166; 168-170; 172; 174; 186	Front cover; 5; 12-13; 18; 21-22; 27; 31; 33; 45; 58-60; 62-63; 65; 67; 69; 89; 93; 95; 97; 103; 113; 121; 123; 125; 131; 139; 162; 164-166; 168-170; 172; 174; 186
<i>Today's Parent</i> <b>January 2009 Volume 26, Number 1</b>		
4; 14; 17; 21; 27; 30-31; 33; 46; 68; 70; 80; 90; 94	Front cover; 14; 17; 21; 30; 33; 59; 86-87; 92	Front cover; 4; 14; 17; 21; 27; 30-31; 33; 46; 59; 68; 70; 80; 86-87; 90; 92; 94
<i>Today's Parent</i> <b>February 2009 Volume 26, Number 2</b>		
Front cover; 3-4; 6; 17; 23; 27; 37; 50; 55; 67; 75-77; 88; 98; 100; 102-103; 111-112; 114	14-15; 27; 30; 59; 61; 76-77; 88; 94; 103; 106; 111-112;	Front cover; 3-4; 6; 14-15; 17; 23; 27; 30; 37; 50; 55; 59; 61; 67; 75-77; 88; 94; 98; 100; 102-103; 111-112; 114
<i>Today's Parent</i> <b>March 2009 Volume 26, Number 3</b> <sup>286</sup>		
Front cover; 5-7; 20; 23; 47; 54; 60; 95; 108; 144; 151; 154	4; 7; 18-20; 33; 37; 47; 49; 56-59; 68; 77; 81; 127; 151	Front cover; 4; 5-7; 18-20; 23; 33; 37; 47; 49; 54; 56-59; 60; 68; 77; 81; 95; 108; 127; 144; 151; 154

<sup>285</sup> Considering that *Today's Parent* focuses on "childhood" and not tweens, all images of children from all ages were considered and counted for the purposes of these tables. However, only images where a sufficient view of their clothing was included.

<sup>286</sup> In this March issue (pages 91-92), the writer talked about dreading the teen years and included a picture of the grunge look with chains and black; therefore, not "appropriate".

<b><i>Today's Parent</i></b> <b>April 2009 Volume 26, Number 4</b>		
Front cover; 6-7; 12-14; 29-30; 33; 47; 56; 66; 100-103; 104; 142; 151; 157; 159; 162	8-9; 14; 21; 29; 33; 56; 69; 90; 93; 106; 114; 157; 159	Front cover; 6-7; 8-9; 12-14; 21; 29-30; 33; 47; 56; 66; 69; 90; 93; 100-103; 104; 106; 114; 142; 151; 157; 159; 162
<b><i>Today's Parent</i></b> <b>May 2009 Volume 26, Number 5</b>		
Front cover; 10; 22; 29; 33; 38; 56-57; 59; 62; 99; 101; 103-104; 114; 150	16; 22; 28; 33; 56; 61-62; 70; 94-97; 99; 150; 157; 160; 162	Front cover; 10; 16; 22; 28-29; 33; 38; 56-57; 59; 61-62; 70; 94-97; 99; 101; 103-104; 114; 150; 157; 160; 162
<b><i>Today's Parent</i></b> <b>June 2009 Volume 26, Number 6</b>		
Front cover; 8; 13; 27 <sup>287</sup> ; 50-51; 59; 61-62; 64; 66-69 <sup>288</sup> ; 86; 88; 140; 154-155 <sup>289</sup>	5-6; 8; 18; 26; 31; 34; 50-51; 61-62; 64; 66-71; 81-82; 88; 111; 121; 132; 152	Front cover; 5-6; 8; 13; 18; 26-27; 31; 34; 50-51; 59; 61-62; 64; 66-71; 69; 81-82; 86; 88; 111; 121; 132; 140; 152; 154-155
<b><i>Today's Parent</i></b> <b>July 2009 Volume 26, Number 7</b>		
3; 5; 7; 9; 21; 24; 45-46; 69; 72-74; 76; 78; 100; 112; 114	Front cover; 3; 42-43; 45; 50; 69; 72; 76; 78	Front cover; 3; 5; 7; 9; 21; 24; 42-43; 45-46; 50; 69; 72-74; 76; 78; 100; 112; 114
<b><i>Today's Parent</i></b> <b>August 2009 Volume 26, Number 8</b>		
Front cover; 5; 7; 11; 27; 38; 52; 56-57; 63; 67; 69; 96; 110	7; 21; 23; 38; 42; 52; 56-57; 91; 94	Front cover; 5; 7; 11; 21; 23; 27; 38; 42; 52; 56-57; 63; 67; 69; 91; 94; 96; 110
<b><i>Today's Parent</i></b> <b>September 2009 Volume 26, Number 9</b>		
4-5; 7; 22; 27; 37; 55-57 <sup>290</sup> ; 60; 111; 130; 136; 140; 143-144; 146	Front cover; 22; 25; 56; 60; 86-88; 133-134; 136; 138; 143; 146; 154	Front cover; 4-5; 7; 22; 25; 27; 37; 55-57; 60; 86-88; 111; 130; 133-134; 136;

<sup>287</sup> Even though this girl is active (playing soccer), she is still dressed in 'feminine' clothing and canvas looking slip-on shoes not conducive to exercise.

<sup>288</sup> While girls are in soccer attire, it is only the boys who are in "action" shots (i.e. actually playing soccer).

<sup>289</sup> One of the only references to "tweens"; however, the girls are still dressed more youthful for 12 and 13 than other depictions of children this age in other magazines.

<sup>290</sup> This advertisement for Microsoft Office Home and Student borders on the verge of 'untraditional' and/or age-inappropriate fashions; the girls are still wearing stereotypically feminine clothes, but these are more

		138; 140; 143-144; 146; 154
<b><i>Today's Parent</i></b> <b>October 2009 Volume 26, Number 10</b>		
Front cover; 8; 20; 22; 32; 38; 54; 59-60; 64; 68; 72; 97; 104; 106; 112-114; 126; 129; 137; 139-140; 143- 148; 160; 186; 194; 203; 208	Front cover; 5; 20; 22-23; 32; 38; 47; 54; 58; 60; 62; 64; 66; 68-69; 72; 83; 102- 104; 112-113; 126; 131; 143-146; 151; 165; 188; 203; 206	Front cover; 5; 8; 20; 22- 23; 32; 38; 47; 54; 58-60; 62; 64; 66; 68-69; 72; 83; 97; 102-104; 106; 112-114; 126; 129; 131; 137; 139- 140; 143-148; 151; 160; 165; 186; 188; 194; 203; 206; 208
<b><i>Today's Parent</i></b> <b>November 2009 Volume 26, Number 11</b>		
Front cover; 5; 10; 25; 28- 29; 31; 44-45; 50; 60; 62; 67; 71; 75; 77; 80; 82; 91; 93-95; 102; 104; 106; 109; 112; 119; 125; 128-129; 132; 134; 138; 162-163; 165; 170 <sup>291</sup>	31; 44; 49; 57; 67; 71; 75; 91; 93-95; 97; 102; 104; 106; 119; 127-129; 132- 133; 165; 167-169; 186	Front cover; 5; 10; 25; 28- 29; 31; 44-45; 49-50; 57; 60; 62; 67; 71; 75; 77; 80; 82; 91; 93-95; 97; 102; 104; 106; 109; 112; 119; 125; 127-129; 132-134; 138; 162-163; 165; 167-169; 170; 186

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"modern' versions of tweenhood - that is, fashions that *Today's Parent* does not typically show youth in (as it tends to subscribe to a view of children, not tweens).

<sup>291</sup> This is a picture of a mother and daughter assessing whether fashions are "age inappropriate" (i.e. a dress); however, the "tween" (i.e. child for *Today's Parent*) is wearing "age-appropriate" clothing,

**APPENDIX J: DATA ANALYSIS AND DESCRIPTIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS  
OF *TIGER BEAT* DATA**

<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Tiger Beat</i> December 2008 Volume 6, Number 11</p>		
Most Popular Tween Celebrities <sup>292</sup>	Celebrities as Fashion Role Models <sup>293</sup>	Celebrity Age-Inappropriate Clothing <sup>294</sup>
Jonas Brothers <sup>295</sup> : front cover; 2 (poster); 3; 7-8; 12-16; 18-19; 22-24; 33; 74-76; 79; 82; 84; 86; 92; 95; 98; 102; 107 (poster); 108; plus giant posters of Nick Jonas, Kevin Jonas and Joe Jonas, as well as one of the Jonas Brothers	Selena Gomez (page 4): "win this cute shirt signed by Selena"	Ashley Tisdale (page 38): wearing a more adult looking tank top
Selena Gomez: front cover; 4-5; 7; 24; 28; 29 (poster); 30; 36; 75; 91; 93; 99; 103; 108; plus giant poster	Selena Gomez: "wearing a T-shirt with Michael Musso's [another tween celebrity] picture on it" (page 5)	Taylor Swift (page 39): wearing an adult evening gown
Miley Cyrus: front cover; 6; 19; 25; 30; 37; 42 (centerfold); 71; 72 (poster); 73; 85-86; 94; 96; 101	Jennette McCurdy: "win Jennette's purse!" (page 32)	<i>High School Musical</i> Cast dressed in character (pages 40-41): glamorous ball gowns, short skirts and knee high boots
Zac Efron: front cover; 24; 34 (poster); 35; 40-41 (poster as part of the <i>High School Musical Cast</i> ); 81; 84; 87; 98; 103	Selena Gomez, Miranda Cosgrove, Jennifer Stone, Alyson Stoner, Demi Lovato, Victoria Justice, Emily Osment, Vanessa	Miley Cyrus (page 42; centerfold): form-fitting yellow animal print top, corset-looking double belt; and above the knee-

<sup>292</sup> Given that celebrity is fleeting, I do not provide detailed descriptions of why these individuals were considered celebrities in the first place. For example, Chris Brown was dropped from *Tiger Beat* following a conviction for assaulting his girlfriend. Justin Bieber, a current sensation among young tweens, did not only appear in the very last issue I reviewed for this dissertation, and had minimal coverage. Accordingly, I provide the names of individuals perceived to be celebrities at the time, only to illustrate the use of these individuals to sell fashion to tweens and teens based on their image being dominant in each monthly edition.

<sup>293</sup> It is important to note that only images where a sufficient view of their clothing was included.

<sup>294</sup> It is important to note that only images where a sufficient view of their clothing was included.

<sup>295</sup> In coding this data, I counted both individual images of any of the three Jonas Brothers, as well as their appearance together as a group under the category "Jonas Brothers".

	Hudgens, Aly Michalka, and Miley Cyrus (pages 36-37) as "Trend Setters: It's all about fun, laid-back fashions this fall"	length star-print white skirt
Demi Lovato: front cover; 19; 28; 31; 37; 74; 77; 90 (poster); 91; 93; 108; plus giant poster	Miley Cyrus (page 73) in "Miley's Signature Sign": "2006: Miley was a fresh face on the scene who wore a denim skirt and cowboy boots; 2007: Miley started to pick up on Hollywood trends and strutted her stuff in skinny jeans and cute heels.; 2008: Debuting her darker 'do after her breakup with Nick Jonas, she was still flashing her smile and looking like a doll.; 2008: These days Miley looks relaxed and back to her old self in casual jeans, flip-flops, and a cute hat."	Dylan and Cole Sprouse (page 68): fedora
Taylor Swift: front cover; 7; 19; 39 (poster); 85	Jemma McKenzie-Brown (page 78): "Shop with Jemma!"	Emily Osment (page 70): flashback to the 60s and 70s pink dress with almost knee-high level cowboys boots
	Blake Lively, Miley Cyrus, and Taylor Swift (page 85): "What's your winter coat colour"	Miley Cyrus: (page 73) short jean shirt
	Demi Lovato (page 91): wearing hot pink leggings, a white t-shirt with a hot-pink heart print, and a blazer	Jemma McKenzie-Brown (page 78): wearing a very short, slightly longer than a t-shirt, style floral-print dress with a navy blue chunky belt
	Meaghan Jette Martin, Emma Watson and Rihanna (page 104): "What's your holiday party style?"	Miley Cyrus (page 94): wearing a very short yellow and black kilt with knee-high soccer socks and a t-shirt

		"What's your holiday party style? (page 104): all the girls, especially Rihanna (in short black dress and leather jacket and high-heel calf boots) are dressed age-inappropriate for the tween reader
<b><i>Tiger Beat</i></b> <b>January/February 2009 Volume 7, Number 1</b>		
<b>Most Popular Tween Celebrities</b>	<b>Celebrities as Fashion Role Models</b>	<b>Celebrity Age-Inappropriate Clothing</b>
Jonas Brothers: front cover; 2-5; 12-15; 18; 21-22; 24-25; 27-28; 31-32; 78; 82-83; 87; 89; 92; 95; 99; 101-102; 104-108; plus giant posters (Joe, Nick, Kevin and the Jonas Brothers)	Demi Lovato (page 34-35): spread which discusses her sense of style; displays fashion outfits	Demi Lovato (page 34-35): older-looking outfits (i.e. fedora, crop jacket, tight leather pants)
Selena Gomez: front cover; 5-6; 10; 15-16; 17 (poster); 19; 21; 24; 29; 33; 70-71; 76; 79; 84; 87; 89; 94; 99; 103; 107-108; plus giant poster	Kiley Williams, Rihanna, Brenda Song, Meaghan Martin, Ashley Tisdale, Miley Cyrus and Jennette McCurdy (pages 36-37): "I Can't Believe I Wore That!" (i.e. 'what not to wear')	Miley Cyrus (page 37): dress with a revealing bust line (and visible bra cup)
Miley Cyrus: front cover; 4-5; 10-11; 18; 21; 30; 37; 87; 89; 103; 107	Selena Gomez (page 84): "What's Your New Look?"	Selena Gomez (page 71): tight denim dress with predominant bra cups and a zipper down the bust line to mid-chest
Zac Efron: front cover; 7; 18; 21; 28; 83; 89; 108	Demi Lovato (page 98): "Design Demi's Outfit"	Ashley Tisdale (page 86): wearing a t-shirt dress (transparent) with a tank top underneath and black knee-high boots
Demi Lovato: front cover; 5-6; 19-20; 25; 29; 34-35; 70-71; 77; 79; 85; 87; 89; 93; 98-99; 107-108; plus giant poster		
Taylor Swift: front cover; 11; 18; 21; 26; 70; 80-81; 89		



<b><i>Tiger Beat</i></b> <b>March 2009 Volume 7, Number 2</b>		
<b>Most Popular Tween Celebrities</b>	<b>Celebrities as Fashion Role Models</b>	<b>Celebrity Age-Inappropriate Clothing</b>
Jonas Brothers: front cover; 2-5; 12-14; 15 (poster); 18; 20; 22; 26; 30; 33; 75-76; 83-85; 88-89; 97-99; 101-102; 107-108; plus giant posters (Jonas Brothers, Nick Jonas, Kevin Jonas and Joe Jonas)	Selena Gomez, Demi Lovato, Miranda Cosgrove, Emily Osment, Jennifer Stone, Miley Cyrus, Ashley Tisdale, and Victoria Justice (page 16-17): "Bundle Up!", featuring winter layering looks	Demi Lovato (page 28-29): wearing a high-waisted tweed-looking skirt with a hot pink t-shirt, chunky pink bow belt, pink iridescent tights, and black 3/4 length sleeve black sweater; older looking than <i>Tiger Beat's</i> tween readers
Selena Gomez: front cover; 5-6; 9; 16; 19-20; 24; 31; 72 (poster); 73; 85; 89; 97; 103; 106; plus giant poster	Ashley Tisdale (page 98): "Design Ashley's Outfit"	Vanessa Hudgens (page 67): purple halter knee-length dress with ankle boots
Miley Cyrus: front cover; 6; 17; 21; 23; 31; 38 (poster); 76; 77 (poster); 84; 89; 97; 102; 104	Miley Cyrus, Demi Lovato and Rihanna (page 104): "What's your Valentine's Color", featuring their best looks in bright coloured clothes	Miley Cyrus, Demi Lovato and Rihanna (page 104): "What's your Valentine's Color"; wearing adult looking fashions not oriented for a tween reader to wear
Zac Efron: front cover; 19; 74; 89; 99; 107-108		
Demi Lovato: front cover; 5-6; 16; 19-20; 22; 27-28; 29 (poster); 36-37; 80; 85; 88; 97; 104		
Taylor Swift: 21; 73; 78 (poster); 79		
Robert Pattison: front cover; 18; 88; 93; 99; 102; 107-108		
<b><i>Tiger Beat</i></b> <b>April 2009 Volume 7, Number 3</b>		
<b>Most Popular Tween Celebrities</b>	<b>Celebrities as Fashion Role Models</b>	<b>Celebrity Age-Inappropriate Clothing</b>
Jonas Brothers: front cover; 2-9; 16; 23; 33; 69; 75; 85; 97; 99; 104; 106-107 (3-D poster); 108; plus giant 3-D posters (2 of the Jonas	Demi Lovato (pages 18-19): "Demi's Style Secrets"	Demi Lovato (pages 18-19): fashions not tween-appropriate; high heels, etc.

Brothers, one of Nick Jonas)		
Selena Gomez: front cover; 3; 11; 78; pages 1-20 of "Selena's mini-mag" magazine inside <i>Tiger Beat</i> ; pages 78-85); 97; 99; 102; 108; plus giant 3-D poster	Selena Gomez (pages 1-20 of "Selena's mini-mag" magazine inside <i>Tiger Beat</i> ; pages 78-85): presenting different fashion looks	Miley Cyrus (page 43) in <i>Hannah Montana</i> character outfit: short hot pink animal print skirt with hot pink sequined fashion belt, sequined glitter sweater, and hot pink sequined calf-high boots
Miley Cyrus: front cover; 15; 34-35; 42-43 (3-D poster); page 17 of "Selena's mini-mag" (magazine inside <i>Tiger Beat</i> ; pages 78-85); 97; 108	Victoria Justice (page 73): "Win Victoria's Hoodie"	Selena Gomez (1-20 of "Selena's mini-mag" magazine inside <i>Tiger Beat</i> ; pages 78-85): none of the styles are 'risqué' but some, such as the white ball gown, are not "age appropriate" for tweens
Zac Efron: front cover; 14; 17; 68 (poster); 99; 102; 104; 108	Miranda Cosgrove (page 98): "Design Miranda's Outfit"	
Demi Lovato: front cover; 3; 18-19; 27; 69; pages 14-15 of "Selena's mini-mag" (magazine inside <i>Tiger Beat</i> ); 88; 97; 99; 108; plus giant 3-D poster		
Taylor Swift: front cover; 3; 5; 14; 17; 22-23; page 18 of "Selena's mini-mag" (magazine inside <i>Tiger Beat</i> ); 91; 98-99; 108; plus giant 3-D poster		
Robert Pattison: front cover; 15; 17; 23; 86; 99; 108		
Miranda Cosgrove: front cover; 28-29; 97-98; 108		
<i>Tiger Beat</i> May 2009 Volume 7, Number 4		
Most Popular Tween Celebrities	Celebrities as Fashion Role Models	Celebrity Age-Inappropriate Clothing
Jonas Brothers: front cover; 5-6; 12-16; 18; 21; 27; 32-33; 72-73; 76; 84; 89; 97-99; 108; plus giant posters (Jonas Brothers, Nick Jonas and Joe Jonas)	Selena Gomez, Demi Lovato, Miley Cyrus, Vanessa Hudgens and Victoria Justice (page 26): "Selena's Superlong Scarves"	Celebrities in attendance for "Jennifer's Glamorous Sweet 16!" (pages 2-3): again, not sexual, but not age-appropriate for tweens readers who may

	Rihanna, Jennette McCurdy and Victoria Justice (page 93): "What's Your Signature Accessory?" - Rihanna is "known for statement-making jewellery", Jennette is "a belt babe", while Victoria is known for "hats."	be as young as eight years of age
Selena Gomez: front cover; 2-3; 5; 17-19; 21; 22 (poster); 23; 26; 81; 85; 94; 97; 99; 108; plus giant poster	Vanessa Hudgens (page 93): "Vanessa's fave accessory"	Taylor Swift (page 10): strapless "silver mini-dress"
Miley Cyrus: front cover; 9; 17; 20; 26; 74; 75 (poster); 80; 97; 98-99; 102; 104	Emily Osment (page 98): "Design Emily's Outfit"	Camilla Belle (page 21): from the hairstyle to outfit and accessories, Camilla appears to be in her late 20s or early 30s
Zac Efron: front cover; 16; 38 (poster); 71-72; 78; 84; 89; 102	Jennifer Stone (stars and hearts), Rihanna (stripes) and Miley Cyrus (plaid) (page 104): "What's your Pattern Personality"	Miranda Cosgrove (page 90): punk rocker look contradicts visions of "age appropriate" (recall <i>Today's Parent</i> )
Demi Lovato: front cover; 2-3; 5; 7; 19-20; 26; 30; 36 (poster); 37; 83; 85; 92; 97; 99; 108; plus giant poster		
Taylor Swift: front cover; 10; 18; 28; 29 (poster); 94; 97; 108; plus giant poster		
Robert Pattison: front cover; 6; 8; 20; 24-25; 72; 77; 89		
Miranda Cosgrove: front cover; 4; 19; 34-35; 85; 89-90; 97		
Taylor Lautner: front cover; 5; 8; 19; 79; 107 (poster)		
<i><b>Tiger Beat</b></i> <b>June 2009 Volume 7, Number 5</b>		
<b>Most Popular Tween Celebrities</b>	<b>Celebrities as Fashion Role Models</b>	<b>Celebrity Age-Inappropriate Clothing</b>
Jonas Brothers: front cover; 3; 5; 8; 12; 14-16; 18; 21-22; 26; 31; 37; 38 (Joe Jonas poster); 69 (Kevin Jonas	Celebrities at the Kid's Choice Awards (i.e. Jonas Brothers, Miley Cyrus, Demi Lovato) (pages 2-3)	Demi Lovato (page 2): wearing a strapless, sweetheart neckline, form-fitting gold shimmer

poster); 70; 72; 83; 97; 106 (Nick Jonas poster); 108; plus giant poster (Jonas Brothers and Nick Jonas)		dress; "I'm growing up, so you will definitely see a more mature side of me."
Selena Gomez: front cover; 4-5; 12; 18; 20 (poster); 21-22; 35; 37; 42 (poster); 70; 72-73; 88; 94; 97; 99; 104; 108; plus giant poster	Selena Gomez and Jennette McCurdy (page 4): "Win Selena's Dress and Jennette's Shoes!"	Miley Cyrus (page 3): wearing a strapless, long white formal gown
Miley Cyrus: front cover; 3; 6; 18-19; 22; 25; 29; 33-34; 70; 78; 82 (poster); 83; 85; 92; 95; 97; 101; 104; 108; plus giant poster	Demi Lovato, Miley Cyrus, Ashley Tisdale, Keke Palmer, Miranda Cosgrove and Jennette McCurdy (pages 6-7): "The Style Award Goes To"	Selena Gomez (page 4): strapless, floor-length orange-coloured dress; some may say looks "too-adult" (i.e. <i>Today's Parent</i> )
Zac Efron: front cover; 19; 30; 40 (poster); 72; 102	Miley Cyrus (page 25): "Miley's Week in Fashion"	Demi Lovato, Miley Cyrus, Ashley Tisdale, Keke Palmer, Miranda Cosgrove and Jennette McCurdy (pages 6-7): all resemble Adult "Hollywood Red Carpet" Fashions, not tween-inspired styles of dress
Demi Lovato: front cover; 2; 6; 13; 16; 18; 22-23; 34; 36-37; 70; 71 (poster); 72; 75; 89; 97-99; 108; plus giant poster	Chelsea Staub (page 26): "Star D.I.Y"	Miley Cyrus (page 25): wearing short shorts in one image, and a short lacy trim dress with knee-high boots in another
Taylor Swift: front cover; 16; 27; 32 (poster); 33; 35; 70; 88; 108; plus giant poster	Jonas Brothers (page 26): "Celeb Fashion Tip" for wearing their favourite shoes with all of their different outfits	Taylor Swift (page 27): more adult-looking outfits - one-strap blue, knee-length dress with shimmery silver peep-toe shoes, as well as another image of her in a short pleated skirt, knee high boots and a blazer jacket
Robert Pattison: front cover; 9; 19; 22; 30; 80; 101; 107 (poster)	Taylor Swift (page 27): "Fashion to Go! Find out how to get star style for less!"	Taylor Swift: (page 33): more adult-looking (and negligee-like) white dress with visible bust cups
Miranda Cosgrove: front cover; 5; 7; 16; 22; 78; 79	Miley Cyrus, Victoria Justice, Meaghan Martin,	Demi Lovato (page 34): off the shoulder sequined

(poster); 81; 90; 96-97; 101	Jenifer Stone, Demi Lovato, Ashley Tisdale, Selena Gomez, Jennette McCurdy, Taylor Swift, Brenda Song, Chelsea Staub and AJ Michalka (pages 34-35): "What's Your Trend Obsession"	grey dress
Taylor Lautner: front cover; 2; 24; 41 (poster); 72	Miley Cyrus (page 83): "Miley In Red"	Brenda Song: (page 35): blue leather 2 to 3 inch high heels
Kristen Stewart: front cover; 80	Debby Ryan (page 98): "Design Debby's Outfit"	Chelsea Staub: (page 35): off the shoulder/one strap, above the knee blue dress
		AJ Michalka: (page 35): black v-neck form-fitting above the knee dress
		Vanessa Hudgens and Ashley Tisdale (page 72): strapless, low-cut above the knee formal dresses with high heels
		Taylor Swift (page 88): white around the neck sparkly dress which accentuates the bust line
		Alyson Stoner: (page 90): wearing a one-piece denim romper which falls just below her rear-end
<b><i>Tiger Beat</i> July 2009 Volume 7, Number 6</b>		
<b>Most Popular Tween Celebrities</b>	<b>Celebrities as Fashion Role Models</b>	<b>Celebrity Age-Inappropriate Clothing</b>
Jonas Brothers: front cover; 2; 5; 14; 18-19; 23; 28; 40 (Joe Jonas poster); 67 (Kevin Jonas poster); 75; 84; 89; 97-98; 102-104; 107 (Nick Jonas poster); 108; plus giant poster (Jonas Brothers)	Demi Lovato (page 3): "Demi's Crazy for Colors!"	Demi Lovato (page 3): short skirts and form fitting, low-cut tops with high heels
Selena Gomez: front cover; 4-5; 9; 14-16; 26-27; 32; 70 (poster); 71; 73; 78 (Demi	Selena Gomez (page 4): modeling sunglasses	<i>Twilight</i> Cast (page 20-21): formal adult red carpet attire, such as suits

and Selena poster); 83; 85; 88; 91; 97; 108; plus giant poster		with ties, and one shoulder strap long ball gowns
Miley Cyrus: front cover; 5; 16; 22 (poster); 23; 25-26; 30; 32; 76; 82-83; 86; 97; 104; 108; plus giant poster	Selena Gomez, Emma Roberts, Emily Osment and Brenda Song (page 15): "What's Your Summer Beauty Style?"	Ashley Tisdale (page 24): wearing a strapless, sweetheart neckline above the knee, form-fitting black dress
Zac Efron: front cover; 14; 16; 28; 68 (poster); 77; 91	Ashley Tisdale (page 24): "Ashley's Week in Fashion"	Miley Cyrus (page 25): wearing an above the knee blue fringe dress with knee-high boots
Demi Lovato: front cover; 3; 17; 23; 26-27; 32; 74 (poster); 75-76; 78 (Demi and Selena poster); 82; 87-88; 91; 94; 97; 99; 102	Miley Cyrus (page 25): "Fashion to GO! Find out how to get star style for less!"	Taylor Swift: "Taylor's Trends" (page 32): strapless, above the knee "sparkly" dress with high heels, and other more adult looking red carpet gowns
Taylor Swift: front cover; 17; 32; 33 (poster); 72; 79; 84; 89; 91; 102; 108; plus giant poster	Victoria Justice (page 26): "Star D.I.Y"	Selena Gomez (page 107): wearing a t-shirt-style dress that resembles a negligee
Robert Pattison: front cover; 5-6; 16; 20-21; 38 (poster); 39; 76; 87; 104; 108; plus giant poster	Selena Gomez, Demi Lovato and Miley Cyrus (page 26): "Celeb Fashion Tips" for sunglasses	
Miranda Cosgrove: 27; 29; 41 (poster); 85; 97	Taylor Swift (page 32): "Taylor's Trends"	
	Chelsea Staub (page 36): "Win Chelsea's signed shirt!"	
Taylor Lautner: front cover; 6; 9; 17; 20-21; 76; 97; 106 (poster)	Selena Gomez (pages 70-71): "Selena's Summer Dos and Don'ts!"	
Kristen Stewart: 20-21; 87	Tiffany Thornton (page 98): "Design Tiffany's Outfit"	

<p align="center"><b><i>Tiger Beat</i></b>  <b>August 2009 Volume 7, Number 7</b></p>		
<b>Most Popular Tween Celebrities</b>	<b>Celebrities as Fashion Role Models</b>	<b>Celebrity Age-Inappropriate Clothing</b>
Jonas Brothers: front cover; 4; 11; 14; 16-17; 19; 22; 32-35; 38; 75; 77; 84; 87; 91; 97; 99; 103 (Kevin Jonas poster); 104; 106 (Joe Jonas poster) 107 (Nick Jonas poster); 108; plus giant poster of Nick Jonas	Miley Cyrus (page 8): modeling a bikini as a "...normal girl"	Demi Lovato (page 15): more adult-looking blouse and pants with tie-up 3inch (approximately) heels
Selena Gomez: front cover; 2-3; 5; 11; 18 (poster); 19; 26-27; 31; 71-73; 85; 87; 96-97; 100-101; 108; plus giant poster	Taylor Swift, Demi Lovato, Miley Cyrus, Ashley Tisdale and Jennifer Stone (page 16): "Headband Heaven!"	Ashley Tisdale (page 15): very "short-short" denim jean shorts
Miley Cyrus: front cover; 8; 10; 15; 23; 27; 38; 72; 78 (poster); 79; 83-84; 97; 104; 108; plus giant poster	Nick Jonas, Zac Efron, Robert Pattinson, Miley Cyrus, Demi Lovato, Brenda Song, Emily Osment and Miranda Cosgrove (pages 22-23): "Totally Obsessed!"	Demi Lovato (page 23): more adult fashions with high heels (shoes and boots) and leather jackets
Zac Efron: 17; 20; 22	Demi Lovato (page 24): "Demi's Week in Fashion"	Demi Lovato (page 24): outfits ranging from a white dress with a zipper down the entire front of the dress, to platform heels and a shiny silver above the knee dress
Demi Lovato: front cover; 5; 9-11; 15-16; 19; 23-24; 26; 30 (poster); 31; 39; 72; 86; 97; 100; 108; plus giant poster	Miranda Cosgrove (page 25): "Fashion to GO! Find out how to get star style for less!"	Miranda Cosgrove (page 25): skin tight blue skinny jeans
Taylor Swift: front cover; 6; 15-16; 70-72; 86; 97-98; 108; plus giant poster	Jennette McCurdy (page 26): "Star D.I.Y"	Vanessa Hudgens, Selena Gomez, and Miley Cyrus (page 27): short, form-fitting dresses
Robert Pattinson: front cover; 14; 20; 23; 29; 38; 108; plus giant poster	Selena Gomez, Demi Lovato and Debby Ryan (page 26): "Celeb Fashion Tip" for hats	Demi Lovato (page 31): off the shoulder, short sparkly grey dress
Miranda Cosgrove: 11; 23; 25; 74 (poster); 75; 84; 94;	Vanessa Hudgens, Selena Gomez, and Miley Cyrus	Chelsea Staub (page 89): older (adult) looking

97; 101; 105	(page 27): "What your picture perfect pose?"	dresses with shorter hemlines; skin tight skinny denim pants with leather boots
Taylor Lautner: front cover; 2-3; 5; 14; 19-20; 28; 40 (poster); 105	Demi Lovato (page 31): "Demi's Fashion Evolution"	
Kristen Stewart: 28-29	Debby Ryan, Ashley Tisdale, Vanessa Hudgens, Demi Lovato, Taylor Swift, Emily Osment and Miley Cyrus (page 72): "Who do you dress for?"	
	Chelsea Staub (page 89): "Fun and Flirty Sundresses"	
	Jennette McCurdy (page 98): "Design Jennette's Outfit"	
	Brenda Song, Ashley Tisdale and Emily Osment (page 102): for their shoe style	
<i><b>Tiger Beat</b></i> <b>September 2009 Volume 7, Number 8</b>		
<b>Most Popular Tween Celebrities</b>	<b>Celebrities as Fashion Role Models</b>	<b>Celebrity Age-Inappropriate Clothing</b>
Jonas Brothers: front cover; 5; 27; 72-73; 76-77; 80-81; 84-85; 87; 98; 101; 104; 107 (Jonas Brothers posters); 108; plus giant posters (Nick Jonas and Joe Jonas)	Kristen Stewart (page 8): "Kristen's starting her own trend by tying her shirts in knots"	Kristen Stewart (page 8): belly-baring top
Selena Gomez: front cover; 5; 14; 17-19; 24; 27; 35; 38-39; 40 (poster); 78; 85; 98; 103; 105; 108; plus giant poster	Selena Gomez (pages 18-19): "I'm Growing Up", showing her fashion style changes from 2007 to 2009	Selena Gomez (pages 18-19): fancy Hollywood style, adult looking dresses such as off the shoulder
Miley Cyrus: front cover; 5-6; 14; 16; 27; 28 (poster); 29; 37; 39; 85; 89; 91	Selena Gomez (page 24): "Selena's Week in Fashion"	Selena Gomez (page 24): fancy adult-looking dresses and high heels
Zac Efron: front cover; 14; 17; 35; 68 (poster)	Ashley Tisdale (page 25): "Fashion to GO! Find out how to get star style for less!"	Ashley Tisdale (page 25): white skinny jeans with tears throughout the legs, high heels and other skinny leg type pants
Demi Lovato: front cover; 14; 16; 26-27; 32; 36	Miranda Cosgrove (page 26): "Star D.I.Y"	Nick Jonas (page 73): "Jonas Dolls Nick"; a cut



(poster); 37; 39; 75; 78; 85; 87; 96; 101; 105		and paste 'doll dressing': suits, walking stick, scarf, canvas 'deck' shoes, top hat
Taylor Swift: front cover; 14; 22-23; 38-39; 89-90; 108; plus giant poster	Demi Lovato, Lucas Till and Vanessa Hudgens (page 26): "Celeb Fashion Tips" for hats	Joe Jonas (page 77): "Jonas Dolls Joe"; a cut and paste 'doll dressing': skinny jeans, purple high tops, pink collared shirt with silver tie, with a wet suit, fedora
Robert Pattinson: front cover; 4-5; 8; 14; 16; 20 (poster); 21; 35; 87; 108; plus giant poster	Nick Jonas (page 73): "Jonas Dolls Nick"; a cut and paste 'doll dressing': suits, walking stick, scarf, canvas 'deck' shoes, top hat	Kevin Jonas (page 88): "Jonas Dolls Kevin"; a cut and paste 'doll dressing': fitted pants, purple pin-striped collared shirt with a green polka-dot tie and black vest, with a wet suit
Miranda Cosgrove: 14; 26-27; 34 (poster); 35; 79; 85; 87-88; 90	Joe Jonas (page 77): "Jonas Dolls Joe"; a cut and paste 'doll dressing': skinny jeans, purple high tops, pink collared shirt with silver tie, with a wet suit, fedora	Miley Cyrus (page 91): short silver sparkly dress with low-waisted belt and knee high boots Jennette McCurdy (page 91): purple skinny jeans with tears throughout the legs and peep-toe high heels
Taylor Lautner: front cover; 14; 30 (poster); 31; 84; 105; 108; plus giant poster	Kevin Jonas (page 88): "Jonas Dolls Kevin"; a cut and paste 'doll dressing': fitted pants, purple pin-striped collared shirt with a green polka-dot tie and black vest, with a wet suit	Chelsea Staub (page 102): wearing a low v-neck, short hot pink dress
Kristen Stewart: front cover; 8; 17; 21; 35; 106 (poster)	Robert Pattinson, Nathan Kress, Chelsea Staub, Miranda Cosgrove and Nicole Anderson (page 87): for their sunglass style Taylor Swift, Miley Cyrus, Miranda Cosgrove, and Jennette McCurdy (page 90-	

	91): "Look What's in Your Closet!", giving out fashion and style tips	
	Brenda Song (page 98): "Design Brenda's Outfit"	
	Jennifer Stone, Chelsea Staub and Debby Ryan (page 102): "What's Your Summer Shade" for their choice of summer clothing colours	
<b><i>Tiger Beat</i></b> <b>October 2009 Volume 7, Number 9</b>		
<b>Most Popular Tween Celebrities</b>	<b>Celebrities as Fashion Role Models</b>	<b>Celebrity Age-Inappropriate Clothing</b>
Jonas Brothers: front cover; 2; 5-6; 16; 19-21; 30; 32-33; 42 (poster of Kevin); 77; 79; 85; 87; 90; 97; 99; 101; 106 (poster of Joe Jonas); 107 (poster of Nick Jonas); plus giant poster (all Jonas Brothers)	Jennifer Stone (page 4): "Win! A Piece of Wizards history!"	Selena Gomez and Demi Lovato (page 7): adult-looking gowns; Selena is wearing a one-shoulder white, above the knee length frock, while Demi is wearing a two-toned above the knee length dress with an accentuated bust
Selena Gomez: front cover; 3; 7; 14; 15 (poster); 16; 24-25; 35; 72; 78; 84; 97; 103-104; plus giant poster (Selena and Demi Lovato)	Miranda Cosgrove, Keke Palmer, Jennette McCurdy, Victoria Justice and Ashley Argota (pages 10-11): "Show us your funny star pose!" for their star-shaped sunglasses	Miranda Cosgrove (page 10): wearing a belly-bearing top
Miley Cyrus: front cover; 6; 9; 24-25; 30; 34 (poster); 35; 79; 84; 87; 91; 97; plus giant poster	Taylor Lautner, Zac Efron, Jonas Brothers and Lucas Till (pages 18-19): "Double-Duty Cuties" for their makeovers from 'casual' wear to suits	Keke Palmer, Jennette McCurdy and Ashley Argota (page 11): all wearing very tight skinny jeans
Zac Efron: 8; 19; 75; 83; 86	Robert Pattison (page 22): for his "undercover", "dressed up" and "casual" looks	Selena Gomez and Taylor Swift (page 14): adult-looking gowns
Demi Lovato: front cover; 7; 16; 20; 29; 31; 35; 70; 71 (poster); 84; 86-87; 91-92;	Debby Ryan, Jennette McCurdy, Miley Cyrus, Victoria Justice, Vanessa	Miley Cyrus (pages 24-25): short "short-short" denim shorts and a t-shirt

97; plus giant poster (Demi and Selena)	Hudgen and Selena Gomez (page 24): "Braids are all the rage!" for their braided hair styles	dress with tights with "rip holes in them"
Taylor Swift: front cover; 5; 9; 14; 17; 25; 74 (poster); 75; 78; 91; plus giant poster	Kristen Stewart, Miley Cyrus, Taylor Swift, Selena Gomez, Meaghan Martin, Brenda Song and Ashley Tisdale (page 25): "Star Style Tricks"	Meaghan Martin, Brenda Song and Ashley Tisdale (page 25): for their strapless, one shoulder or strapless, high leg style rompers
Robert Pattinson: front cover; 8; 21-22; 23 (poster); 37; 75; 78; 86; 104; plus giant poster	Emma Roberts (page 26): "Emma's Week in Fashion"	Kristen Stewart (page 25): for a belly-bearing top
Miranda Cosgrove: 5; 10; 17; 79; 85; 88 (poster); 89; 97; 100	Aly Michalka (page 27): "Fashion to GO! Find out how to get star style for less!"	Aly Michalka (page 27): short skirt and bust-revealing shirt
Taylor Lautner: front cover; 17-19; 21; 37; 98; 105; plus giant poster	Meghan Martin (page 28): "Star D.I.Y"	Brenda Song (page 29): short denim "short-shorts"
Kristen Stewart: front cover; 5; 8; 25; 37-38; 39 (poster); 84; 104	Chelsea Staub, Keke Palmer, and Brenda Song (page 28): "Celeb Fashion Tip" on fancy earrings	Taylor Swift (page 78): spaghetti strapped, short (mid-thigh) length silver sparkly dress
	Jennifer Stone, Brenda Song, Demi Lovato and Ashley Tisdale (page 29): "What's your back-to-school denim trends?"	Selena Gomez (page 84): mid-thigh length black dress
	Jonas Brothers (pages 32-33): for their shoe and scarf fashion styles	Miley Cyrus (page 84): mid-thigh stripped t-shirt dress with purple fringed mid-calve length suede boots
	Selena Gomez, Demi Lovato, Jennette McCurdy, Kristen Stewart, Miley Cyrus, Debby Ryan, Miranda Cosgrove, Stirling Knight and Nick Jonas (pages 84-85): for their back to school looks	Miranda Cosgrove (page 89): tutu style dress that sits just below the rear-end with black tights; tight, pink sparkly hot pants
	Chelsea Staub (page 98) "Design Chelsea's Outfit"	Miley Cyrus (page 91): silver sparkly t-shirt

		length dress with a black and silver fashion belt and knee high black leather boots
<b><i>Tiger Beat</i></b> <b>November 2009 Volume 7, Number 10</b>		
<b>Most Popular Tween Celebrities</b>	<b>Celebrities as Fashion Role Models</b>	<b>Celebrity Age-Inappropriate Clothing</b>
Jonas Brothers: front cover; 5-6; 16; 20; 29-30; 32-33; 70; 75; 80-81; 86; 94; 97; 101; 104; 107 (Joe Jonas); 108; plus giant poster (Nick Jonas)	Miley Cyrus (page 4): "Win Miley's Outfit!"	Selena Gomez (page 2): wearing skin-tight black sequined pants with 3 to 4 inch purple suede mid-calf boots Miley Cyrus (page 4): blue leopard-print hot pants/leggings
Selena Gomez: front cover; 2; 5-6; 14 (poster); 15; 17; 25; 29; 37; 71; 73; 87; 90; 97; 100; 103; 105; 108; plus giant poster	Meaghan Martin, Miranda Cosgrove, Ashley Tisdale, Keke Palmer, Brenda Song, Demi Lovato, Miley Cyrus and Selena Gomez (pages 24-25): "Star's Gone Wild!", for their animal-print fashions	Taylor Swift (page 8): in character while shooting <i>Valentine's Day</i> ; wearing "short short" athletic shorts that barely cover her rear end
Miley Cyrus: front cover; 4; 16-17; 25; 28-29; 37; 38 (poster); 39; 70; 85; 90-91; 97; 108; plus giant poster	Emma Watson (page 26): "Emma's Week in Fashion"	Selena Gomez and Demi Lovato (page 15): adult-looking gowns; Selena is wearing a one-shoulder white, above the knee length frock, while Demi is wearing a two-toned above the knee length dress with an accentuated bust
Zac Efron: 23; 75; 86; 101	Demi Lovato (page 27): "Fashion to GO! Find out how to get star style for less!"	Selena Gomez (page 15): white and black one-shoulder tank with decorative design sitting at, and accentuating, the bust line
Demi Lovato: front cover; 15; 17; 20; 25; 27-29; 31; 36-	Nicole Anderson (page 28): "Star D.I.Y"	Meaghan Martin (page 24): strapless zebra print

37; 39; 72 (poster); 73; 84; 90; 97;		dress with red fashion belt accentuating her bust line, accessorized with red high heels
Taylor Swift: front cover; 8; 16; 21; 22 (poster); 23; 28-29; 37; 71; 87; 108; plus giant poster	Miley Cyrus, Demi Lovato, and Taylor Swift (page 28): "Celeb Fashion Tip" for their bracelets	Emma Watson (page 26): short skirts, strapless necklines and very high heels
Robert Pattinson: front cover; 3; 6; 18-19; 29; 36; 71; 75; 77; 84; 102; 106	Chelsea Staub (page 76): " <i>Tiger Beat</i> takes Chelsea shopping!"	Demi Lovato (page 27): short black skirt (mid-thigh length) with strapless top (jacket to cover bare shoulders) and heels
Miranda Cosgrove: 24; 37; 73; 86; 97; 99	Jennette McCurdy (page 79): "girly glam" modeling different gown/dress looks	Jennette McCurdy (page 79): "girly glam" modeling different gown/dress looks which are more 'adult' in nature given the cut of the bodice, high heel shoe accessories, and strapless and/or sweetheart necklines
Taylor Lautner: front cover; 5; 8; 34; 35 (poster); 70; 75; 77; 85; 108; plus giant poster	David Henrie (pages 88-89): his "...secret to looking hot!"	Miranda Cosgrove (page 99): tight pink sparkly hot pants
Kristen Stewart: front cover; 3; 67 (poster); 77; 85; 106 (poster);	Jennifer Stone (page 98): "Design Jennifer's Outfit"	Miley Cyrus (page 108): wearing a fedora, a tight tank top with the UK flag embossed on it, accentuated by a waisted black chunky belt and skin-tight black hot pants with yellow 3 to 4 inch high heels
Justin Bieber; front cover; 12; 108; plus giant poster		Taylor Swift (page 108): strapless red above the knee dress, accessorized with an odd looking grey sequined flower headband

**APPENDIX K: COMMENTS FROM *TIGER BEAT* READERS AFTER THE 2009 KID'S CHOICE AWARDS<sup>296</sup>**

"OMGGGG Cole and Dylan looked effing amazingggg they were def the best dressed ones there

10/10!!!

and miley looks effortlessly pretty in that white dress 9/10 girl!

zac looks hot and vanessa looks like a hot mess lol

brenda looks gorgeous as always<33"

- *kacie* on April 11 2009

"#1 demi: your dress is ugly!! your tan is bad your skin matches the carpet and your head looks huge

#2 jonas brothers: kevin we love you but the pants r not working for you. nick your my fave(amber) but you look short & stubby and loose the jeans. joe your my fave(natasha) but your standing like a bobo (retard) and thats it. you guys are still HOT SEXY ECT.

#3 miranda: are you dumb? that retarded flower isnt working and its the same color as your hair thats black on black crime!

#4 jennette: heard your song its good but those stalkings and shoes doent work kk

#5 the twins: \*puke\*

#6 vanessa omg!! shorts way too short what message are you trying to send to theses little girls??

#7 keke palmer: omg we seen the dresses you've picked on E! omg y didnt you pick any of them??

#8 last and the least miley cyrus: 16 going on 60 wow a sequel to 13 going on 30!! im going to watch that!!! its starring miley!! comming out august 13!!

and for the rest of you guys on the list

well you get our point cant dress!"

- *amber&natasha* on April 10 2009:

"Jonas bros- Joe look good. Nick & Kev DIDNT!

Zac & V- BLAHHHH!!!!!! too casual!

Taylor Launter- GORGEOUS!!! (as always!!)

Demi- SO CUTE!!

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<sup>296</sup> The comments can be found at: <http://www.tigerbeatmag.com/celebs/celebs/2009-kca-fashion-showdown/#comment-26075>. Also, for a visual image of some of these fashions, please see *Tiger Beat* June 2009 (Volume 7, issue 5):6-7.

Victoria Justice- BLAAHHHH!!! the dress is ok, but the jacket & accsesories KILL IT!!

Also, bad shoes!

Keke Palmer- ok

Ashley & Brenda- Ahs's is ok, bad shoes. Brenda is PERFECT!!!

Archie- ok

Sprouses- EWWWW...

Miranda- PERFECT!!!! Totes appropriate for her age! (unlike some clebs \*\*cough coughMiley cough\*\*)

Josh Hutcherson- Good.

Jenette- like the dress, not the shoes

Miley- THIS WAS THE KCAs NOT THE OSCARS!!!! U DONT NEED 2 WEAR AN EVENING GOWN!!!

Emma- cute dress, ditch the shoes!!!"

- *iluvtwilight13*♥ on April 9 2009

"Demi looks great, im giving her 1/10 ! ashley, cutie as always..... vanessa,so stylish.. victoria,you realy know how to make an entrance... miley, your dress is soo sweet... miranda,keep up the pose...sprouse twins,so cuute!!!...jonas brothers,looking hot as always...david,cute vest... the point is... LOOKING GREAT EVERYONE!!!! 😊"

- *anggie* on April 9 2009

"Best Dressed:

Boy(s): Jonas Brothers (love their unique style!)

Girl:Miranda (tottaly 4 her age)

Worst:

Boy(s) Sprouse Twins ( TOO casual)

Girl(s) Keke ( Too tight \*how can she breath?\*)Emma (nawt age worthy)and Miley (It made her look older! and made her fique carrot like)

Orange Carpet Sights

I just LOVE Demi but she looks better with the make-up. Jennette's shoes did anwt go w/ her dress. Victora's accessories r 2 die 4!"

- *conversebabe* on April 8 2009

"I think that Vanessa's shorts were way too short for a KIDS choice awards. It isa innapropiette to be wairing thoso when there are children younger than 8yrs. old! Miley, I have to addment, looked feabulous!!!! Amaising!!!! I do have a questioned though, why did Demie and Ashly get spry tans? It ruined their outfits because theis skin was so

distracting to look at! Miranda is just annoying to me. She is posing like such a goody-good girl but in real life, she is probily really mean! But her dress did look cute 😊

I'm going to rate them from 1-10

Jonas Brothers: 10,000/10!!!! They looked amazingly AWESOME!!!!!!

Zac and Vanessa: 7/10 They looked pretty good, I don't know why Vanessa was wearing shorts though, but overall good.

Taylor Lautner: 6/10 He wore a lot of black, except for the jacket. He should've had more color to his outfit.

Demi Lovato: 10/10 I think she looked absolutley GORGEOUS!!! I LOVE her new hair and the dress!!!!!!

Victoria Justice: 6/10 It looked like TOO MUCH!!! I would lose the jacket. And I would pick better shoes!!!!

Keke Palmer: 10/10 She looked great!!!! I love the dress, purple looks good on her! And the soes are cute & classic!!

Ashley & Brenda: 8/10 They were ok. The dresses were a little short. It wasn't totally amazing, but a pretty good choice.

David Archuleta: 10/10 I LOVE it!!!!!! He looks cute as always!

Dylan & Cole Sprouse: 9/10 I'm not real big fans of them, but I thought they looked good. Very clean and classic.

Miranda Cosgrove: 10/10 OMG! I love the dress!!!! It's sooo cute! I mean who wouldn't buy this dress?! (Good pose, by the way!)

Josh Hutcherson: 8/10 Cool. But he needs to lose the sneakers, and he looks older.

Jennette McCurdy: 10/10 WOWZA!!! Jennette looked AMAZING as well!!!! The dress was the perfect length, and the color looked great!!!! AWESOME job Jennette!!!

Miley: 3/10 UGH! I HATE Miley Cyrus!!!!!! And she's going strapless AGAIN!!!!!! The dress was too ruffly and was EW!!

Emma Roberts: 5/10 Emma, Emma, Emma.....I dont know what to say. The dress was too short. The color was weird. The shoes.....were scary. And sorry, but I really don't like it.

Please, except my opinion. Everyone thinks differently, so don't be mean. Please."

- Briana on April 4 2009