

The Visual Commoditization of Childhood: A Case Study of a Children's Clothing Trade Journal, 1920s-1980s

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ABSTRACT Drawing upon Goffman's insights about ceremonial depiction, this paper explores the visual portrayals of children found in advertisements of a children's clothing trade journal over the period of the 1920s through the 1980s. At issue is how images of children and, by implication, versions of childhood have become constructed by and traded among industry members in the context of an emerging market for children's clothes and other consumer goods. In the process, I open up for investigation the area of a "commercial iconography of childhood" by analyzing six visual motifs culled from nearly 80 years of commercialized depictions of children. These motifs offer insight as to how market relations have congealed in American/Western childhood and specifically in the ways that exchange value has been inscribed on the bodies of children.

The power immanent in visual representation stands on the ability to present an image as uncontested depiction—that is, as one which reflects some true essence of the subject or subject matter. The world of commerce and advertising has unleashed this power of visual representation into the realm of childhood. Depictions of children have been brought to the service of commercial and advertising persuasion for over a century, from Kate Greenaway's illustrations in children's books (1880s-1890s) to the icon of Buster Brown (1911), from Morton's salt to Crisco's cooking oil and from, more recently, automobile tires to the entire realm of children's consumer goods.

My intent here is to open up for investigation the area of a "commercial iconography of childhood." This area is composed of two sectors, consumer and trade, both of which remain virtually unexamined by social scientists (but see Alexander, 1996). The consumer sector consists of publicly available images of children—like print advertisements, television commercials and prod-

uct labels—produced to sell goods on the open market. These goods may be intended either for child or adult consumption or use. The trade sector consists of advertising images of children, usually found in trade publications, which are produced to sell goods to other trade members for resale to the public. In this paper, I analyze several visual motifs identified in the advertisements of an American children's clothing trade journal, now known as *Earnshaw's Review*, covering the period of the 1920s to the 1980s.

Trade presses are semipublic forums, accessible to nonmembers in libraries and archives, which afford a circumscribed, "inside view" on the concerns and preoccupations of industry participants. Surely, nothing of "true" trade secrets are revealed on these pages as the readership consists of competitors. What is revealed on the pages of a trade journal is a perspective as much as technical information. A bald, forthright approach to commodities, markets and consumers characterize the "voice" of an industry press. In this case, trade advertisements strikingly foreground the commodity status of childhood in ways probably never found in consumer sources.

The visual analysis presented below brings to light ways in which childhood—its "nature" and boundaries—take on both economic (Marx, 1978) and symbolic (Baudrillard, 1981) exchange values, a process I refer to as the "commodification of childhood." Examining these advertisements provides partial access to how commodities circulate between cultural brokers in commercial space (cf. Appadurai, 1986; Kopytoff, 1986). Trade rhetoric and images thus give a "back stage" glimpse (Goffman, 1959) on the reciprocal commoditization of childhood and children's clothing.

It will become clear through the course of the discussion that I do not take advertisements simply as pure reflections of a pre-existing social reality. A child advertisement—i.e., when children are depicted visually—is an interpolation of a particular, interested version of childhood into a corporeal expression of exchange value. Clothing is best displayed by its intended user (market representative) who, in this case, is a child. Thus, when clothing is displayed on a child's body, it becomes a combined message, a dual articulation, which encompasses garment-plus-body and which thereby congeals both object and subject into a singular portrayal. That is, children serve to personify market relations in this trade context because they literally embody its commodity.

The focus on childhood, advertisements and markets cannot be approached with the same assumptions as one would in studying adults and advertising (cf. Goffman, 1979; Williamson, 1978). Viviana Zelizer (1985) identified a fundamental tension between children and markets in her historical study. For Zelizer, children were effectively expelled from the cash nexus of the American economy over the 1880-1930 period because the sentimental, sacred value of children came into conflict with that of commerce (eg. child labor, fixing a price on a child's life as in life insurance, etc.). Children, in essence, became "extra-mercium" (p. 11).

Her insightful analysis, however, does not account for how a children's consumer culture has arisen since the early 1900s. My response, briefly, is two-fold: a) the sacred aspects of childhood (i.e., protection, nurturance) became encoded in the *goods* put on the market (eg. "healthful clothing," "developmental" toys or, later, "educational" television; [see Cook 1995]); and/or b) children themselves began to be portrayed, thought of and treated increasingly as *persons* in the context of consumption. In the first case, consumption is enacted on the child's behalf by advocates and caretakers; in the second case, it is framed as a more or less willful act of a willful agent.

An examination of portrayals of children in the trade press, and I would claim in consumer sources also, reveal that consumption is a legitimate context for the expression of personhood.

It is where children can take on the role as persons and as spokespersons for goods. Historically speaking, children have been portrayed to envince "personhood" in advertisements and in market contexts decades before their "right" to self determination was explicated by such bodies as the United Nations in 1989 (see Cohen and Naimark, 1991).

This paper, and the larger study from which it is taken, is as much about an approach to investigating and "knowing" childhood as it is about method and content. One part of that knowing is a visual knowing. Before delving into the visual analysis, I offer some ideas about the relationship between children and visuality. It is a discussion which necessarily involves some explicit formulations about children, childhood and the locus of power.

Symbolic Childhood and the Ability to Represent Children Visually

To select, to frame and to fix some subject into an image is, in effect, an act of creation. It is no less than the invention of the subject through the invention of the context of the subject. Yet, the product of this creation, the image, can stand divorced from its creator, from its origins and from the environment of its construction, especially in the case of photography. The image can thus stand on its own as if its meaning were self-generating or, at least, self-evident—what Barthes (1981) calls the "sovereignty of the image."

This sovereign power of visual representation is extended and enhanced by the capacity of agents and structures to deploy images throughout varied public formats, often to the point of saturation. Advertising and commercial interests are far and away the most organized and prodigious sources for the production and distribution of imagery. They are therefore key brokers of the public appeariential order.

Images of children are particularly susceptible to the power of visual representation. Actual, biographical children lack the capability and access to the mechanisms to represent themselves as a class of social being to a public beyond their age-circumscribed social station. This point is best understood in the context of childhood history and historiography, through which various identities and meanings are produced, contested and take hold.

First, it is clear that children rarely create the materials from which childhood history is written. Young children only sporadically leave significant, recountable traces of their early life-worlds. They do not build things that last and do not keep records of their thoughts and lives, excepting perhaps through the oral traditions of games and pastimes (see Opie and Opie, 1959; Avedon and Sutton-Smith, 1971; Bettelheim, 1979). With few usable documents, pictures and artifacts created by children, the scholar of childhood history must rely heavily on those adults who have had the disposition and wherewithal to record and preserve their interpretations of children's lives (see Pollock, 1983, 1987; Aries, 1962).

Children's voices are virtually absent from the historical record because children, as a category of social actor, have had none literally with which to speak; what Qvortrup (1990) has called the "conceptual and numerical marginalization" of children. What sort of "voice" can an infant or even a singular five year old offer to history? And, importantly, who would be there to make and preserve that record? Parents and teachers come to mind—again, adults who often filter and adjudicate the activities of children.

Consequently, children do not and cannot write childhood history as other members of previously "voiceless" groups have done (eg. Cott, 1977; Anderson, 1988; hooks, 1989).¹ Childhood is a social status unlike any other in this regard because children must pass through it into "adulthood" in order to represent it with any authority to a public. Thus, while childhood might be thought of as that changing tradition which is passed between age grades of children (see Fine, 1987), childhood history is most productively conceived as a legacy which is traded among adults through time.

Second, the inability of children to effectively assert an authoritative voice in history derives directly from a fundamental, indeed universal, fact of childhood: a newborn child is utterly dependent. In its passing state of dependency, it offers virtually no initial resistance to definition by others thereby making both individual children and childhood ripe for multiple meanings and various interpretations.

Thus, an actual, corporeal child can and

does represent a range of meaning on a variety of levels. He or she can stand for political citizenship as well as for racial hope and ethnic continuity. A coming child can mean the imminence of a welfare check or the promise of a tax break; it can provide for family lineage and species expansion, for parental immortality and financial inheritance; it can be a blessing or a curse. "The child," at this level of discourse, is thus a conduit for meaning, a medium for significance—in short, a symbol.

It is in this way and at this level that "the child" can be approached and treated as a social object, particularly for the act of writing history. Aside from the fact that children tend to have little or no voice of their own, they also tend to be treated, discussed and acted upon as objects or symbols by persons and entities both within and outside the family proper. Thus merchants, advertisers and marketeers are not so interested in individual children as they are in the idea, the construct, of "the child," and further in what various versions of childhood may mean for their endeavors.

In this project I approach "the child" as a symbol, as a discursive object created by industry actors. I do so for reasons other than mere methodological convenience; the child is symbolic for the researcher because the child is symbolic for the historical subjects of the research. If children's voices emerge at all in the commercial context, they do so as "preferences" and "desires" for goods on the marketer's score sheet and not as oppositional or, some might say, authentic voices.

Commercial portrayals of children thus always implicate adult assumptions, wishes and interests regarding the "order of things"—be they concerns about age appropriateness, gender relations or the "proper" place of consumer goods in social life. When adults organize themselves formally (as in a corporation or industry) and use children's images as instruments of their interests, the meanings and associations thereby depicted contribute to defining selective versions of children and childhood. They also reinforce the adult prerogative to produce commercially interested portrayals of children and childhood in the first place.

A vast array of portrayals of children can be

found in public media, especially advertising. Print advertisements and television commercials are rife with children sporting multiple personae. As a person-in-progress, a young child especially can be made to portray (i.e., "dressed up" as) any number or kind of social persons, including those associated with occupations (teacher, nurse) and social roles (mother, father). These evince personhood in that they are adult occupations and roles.

The malleability of the child's image testifies to children's inability to resist association on a collective level. As a polysemous and multivocal symbol (Turner, 1967), the image of "the child" lends itself readily to commercial association in that children can be made to advertise most any product, provided that an "appropriate" association is made between child and product. The ability of "the child" to stand for most anything, however, is limited in a few ways.

One limitation is the extent to which gender and racial characteristics of the depicted child outweigh other, desired claims. For instance, Ellen Seiter (1993) found marked gender differences in both print and television toy advertising. Boys tended to take active, leading and independent roles and girls either observed boys at play or were visually associated with mothers, domesticity and cooperation (see pp. 51-95). She also found that, in television commercials, African-American children remained in a passive role, off-center visually, usually deferring to the play of white children (pp. 138-144).

Another limitation to the legitimate, publicly adjudicated portrayal of children entails those associations which profane children and childhood. Among these include sexuality and sexual innuendo, violence to and by children and death. Sexuality is often the most volatile of these profane associations precisely because it serves as an important emblem of adulthood/personhood. Sexual conduct is something expected of a person during the course of one's life and children's movement toward personhood tends also to move toward the status of sexual being. Further, clothing gestures toward (potential) sexuality in the display of the body and in the attention paid to it in the process of personal adornment (see Steele, 1985). In this way, clothing implicates an observer, the gaze of another, who may be attracted as a potential mate (see below).

Unlike sex and sexuality, death and violence never make their way into the commercial personae and personhood status of children. Death is a form of status passage that effectively negates not only "life" but the "future," a time to which children readily belong in their process of becoming (see Bluebond-Langer, 1978). Violence to children negates any stated or unstated claim that children are to be treated as "equals" or "persons." Violence by children, on the other hand, profanes sacred childhood in the way that it highlights the immoral rate of maturity of a child who behaves not only like a person, but like a "bad" person who no longer can claim innocence.²

The malleability of the child's image and the general inability of children to resist association make children, childhood and children's goods ready vehicles for advertising. The potential polluting effects of associating children with commerce are mitigated by another characteristic inherent to visual representation: pictures lack the ability to express the negative—to say "not"—in the course of the presentation of their subject. In the visual, non-lexical realm, the way to insinuate "not," paradoxically, is to assert that, which is to be negated and then somehow express opposite of that assertion. (See Freud, 1899 (1965): 352-372; Bateson, 1972: 177-193; Worth, 1981: 162-184.) Thus, for instance, the use of the red circle with a diagonal line through it is an attempt to express negation without words. However, in order for this icon of "not" or "no" to work, the undesired activity or element must be present; hence, the burning cigarette must be pictured in order to assert a ban on smoking.³

The inability to positively assert the negative allows for a rampant ambiguity of meaning in the visual sphere. Any visual claim is readily deniable. In the case of visual advertising—the nature of which is to posit associations between products, lifestyles, personae, etc.—the ambiguity of meaning can be particularly useful in avoiding charges of exploitation (of children, of women, etc.). Only rarely does public opinion impose an interpretation on an image to the point of shared acknowledgement and acceptance.⁴

Historically, commercial interests initially appropriated children's images as sales tools on a national scale by using them as decorative elements on many household goods like napkins

rings and platters beginning in the 1870s (Heininger, 1982). In the 1890s, children began to appear on product labels as icons for the producers of soups, soaps and cereals (Strasser, 1989: 165-170), in magazine advertisements as part of the "family circle" (Marchand, 1985: 248-254) and in advertising parables which instructed mothers in child guidance (Marchand, 1985: 228-232).

In 1917, George Earnshaw, a manufacturer of infants' garments, began publishing a small trade magazine, the *Infants' Department* (hereafter *Earnshaw's*). The stated purpose of the magazine was to provide a forum to help create separate infants' clothing departments in department stores. Prior to that time, infants' and children's clothing were stocked and displayed by item and not by age (see Cook, 1995). By 1921, the *Infants' Department* was taking a substantial number of paid advertisements as well as, in 1922, paid subscriptions. The publication grew tenfold, from an average of approximately 250 pages yearly during 1918 to 1922, to over 2,500 total pages in 1924, increasing this size throughout the decade.

In what follows, I present interpretations and analysis of six advertising motifs found on the pages of *Earnshaw's* (except for one) from the 1920s through the 1980s. I examined an estimated 6,000 advertising images in *Earnshaw's* from 1922 to 1990. Some of these motifs connect with each other in historical/chronological sequence while others do not.⁵

Childhood Advertisements: Personifying and Gendering Market Relations

In *Gender Advertisements* (1979), Goffman demonstrated a way to study visual advertising which would allow the researcher to acknowledge the constructedness of images and still connect them to some "outside reality" to which they refer. In this vein, he distinguished between gender and gender depiction, construing both as forms of ceremony. Ceremony affirms "basic social arrangements" while at the same time presents "ultimate doctrines about man and the world" (p. 1).

For Goffman, gender relations are a series of ceremonial performances or displays; hence, their rendering in advertising are visual performances of performances, or displays of displays.

That is, gender advertisements particularly (and visual advertisements generally) are "hyper-ritualized" depictions; they are not "a picture of the way things are but a passing exhortative guide to perception" (p. 3).

Advertisements are conservative, for Goffman, in their reaffirmation of ongoing social arrangements. They are conservative also in their ability to provide known and knowable visual idioms as shorthand, at-a-glance hedges against potential uncertainties of, gender identity. He offers visual themes such as "the ritualization of subordination," "licensed withdrawal," etc. in support of these points (pp. 24-83).

To take the position that gender is socially and performatively based, rather than biologically based, required that Goffman speculate about its social origins. He asserts that gender performance has drawn upon the "parent-child complex" for its interactive materials. This complex, especially in its ideal, middle-class version, is a "common fund of experience" (p. 5) and a "source of display imagery" (p. 9) for gender and thus for power. That is, the relations of super- and subordination which inhere between parents and children are transposed onto, respectively, male-female relations: man is to woman as parent is to child.

The implication here is that subordination is tantamount to infantilization regardless of sex. When a man is shown to be subordinate to a woman in an advertisement, Goffman argues that the visual, kinesic and proxemic conventions used to portray this power relation are identical to those used when women are depicted as subordinate. What remains constant is the power relation which draws its model form the parent-child relation.

It appears, from Goffman's perspective, that children occupy the lowest rung on the ladder of interpersonal political relations in the way that they are relegated as the very embodiment of subordination.⁶ This perspective is reasonable and expected given his focus on consumer, adult-oriented advertisements and adult gender relations. He was concerned primarily with gender advertisements and not with either product advertisements or the relationship between gender and product advertisements. In short, he did not entertain any notion of the commodity form

Fig. 1.1. Into the Mouths of Babes

**You may
sell 'em**



— BUT I WEAR 'EM

So I know! And if a customer came up to me and wanted an all-wool baby shirt, I wouldn't be scared one bit to say — "See here, madam, there just aren't any more all-wool shirts (because of the war, of course)."

I'd tell her that many doctors prefer an all-cotton layette anyway! And I'd say that leading baby specialists have endorsed Vantas for over a quarter of a century now!

Then I'd really go to town on how scientific design and all the seams bound on the outside make Vanta Baby Garments the most comfortable, soft, warm clothes ever!

And I just wish you could put yourself in my

place (in my Vanta pants and shirts) for just one day! Then you'd be as enthusiastic about selling them as I am about wearing them!

We want to help you keep customer good will (because they're our customers, too). And as always, that depends on your sales force.

Customers expect wartime shortages — so if you're out of the particular garment a customer wants, don't be afraid to offer her another . . . as long as the "other" is Vanta. She'll appreciate your help these days. And do train your salespeople to explain to customers, sincerely and honestly, that Vanta Baby Garments are still the best — and tell them why!

EARNshaw KNITTING COMPANY, NEWTON 28, MASS.
1555 Broadway, New York 18, New York

Children becomes "persons" by virtue of their imputed ability to judge their garments (and to argue with sales staff). *Earnshaw's*, Apr. 1994, p. 48.

When one turns to trade advertisements where children are at center stage to promote both the goods made for their use and the industry which produces, distributes and sells those goods, one finds a general pattern in which children are represented as volitional actors in relation to their world of goods. They do not stand for subordination *per se* in the trade context but stand, rather, often as equals or even super-ordinates.⁷

Motif I: Into the Mouths of Babes

Children, indeed infants, gain a "voice" about the quality and desirability of their garments. They become persons by virtue of their ability to judge their garments (and to argue with sales staff) as in this ad for George Earnshaw's own knitting company (Fig. 1.1).

Motif II: The Desiring Child

Trade hopes about a child's influence on parental purchases (as early as 1929 in this case) extend to depictions of children who exude an almost eerie ability to chose the "right" items (Fig. 2.1).

Motif III: Conjuality

The personhood status of children becomes manifest not only by infusing desire and autonomy into children's depictions, but also by picturing children as having or mimicking adult relations, in this case relations of conjuality. Eastern Isles (Fig. 3.1) explicates in 1936 what often is taken for granted in other advertisements using the conjuality motif: namely, that attracting a mate is a matter of looking one's very best. This belief implicates a collusion between mothers and the industry in training little ones to become cognizant of their gender displays, including their clothing. Note also the stereotypical gender performances. Goffman's ritualization of subordination is evident in the girl's slight body cant to accept the boy's kiss.

Similarly, Figure 3.2 illustrates the girl in a repose of licensed withdrawal. She is unoriented in and to the social situation and "dependent on the protectiveness and goodwill of others who are... present" (ibid: 57). The "shoulder hold" requires "that the held person accept direction and constraint" and may imply sexual proprietorship

(Goffman, 1979: 55); standing on one leg, the girl gives over to the boy any possibility of reacting quickly to a dangerous situation (Fig. 3.3).

Motif IV: The Male Gaze

Gender relations always involve power relations. An important form of this power is the ability to place females in the position of being the object of the male gaze, a practice which is at least as old as Western art itself (Berger, 1972). These ads use the presumption of male power and prerogative to view females (really, girls) as a visual idiom to promote not only their particular line, but also the notion that style and beauty are a girl's duty (see Banner, 1983). (Fig. 4.1.)

Motif V: Age Confusion

Many themes such as conjuality and the male gaze are constant over time, although the creators of the advertisements employed different visual practices at various time periods. From the late 1960s onward, ever larger segments of casual wear for adults and children have gradually converged in style and silhouette. Many observers took this trend as a transparent indication that either childhood was disappearing or that childhood and adulthood were merging (for instance, see Elkind, 1981; Postman, 1982; Meyrowitz, 1985). However, I have observed that in every decade of the twentieth century a certain portion of children's wear manufacturers have sought to create miniature versions of adult styles. "Miniature adulthood," as a recent, overarching culture trend is, *prima facie*, a red herring.

Yet, identity and status ambiguities have become manifest not only in many of the personae of children mentioned above, but also in manufacturer and distributor advertising appeals. Note the tensions between dress, posture and props (dolls, lollipops) in Figures 5.1 and 5.2. These are tensions between super- and subordination, between autonomy and dependence.

Motif VI: Girl Power

Goffman (1979) observed that the relative size of objects in visual representation offers a summary, at-a-glance indication of the relative social weight of those pictured (pp. 28-29). Social weight, for Goffman, encompassed a generalized

Fig. 2.1. The Desiring Child



Even
Blindfolded
Baby
Chooses
Bunny
Pants!

Rand Bunny Pants
Are Treated by
A Special Process That
"Makes Them LAST LONGER"

Rand Bunny Pants
Are Ventilated
Roomy and Comfortable
STILL

Rand Bunny Pants
COST NO MORE

RAND RUBBER COMPANY
BROOKLYN, NEW YORK, U. S. A.
EVERYTHING IN RUBBER GOODS FOR THE NURSERY
Made Since 1880

At times, children were portrayed as exuding an almost eerie ability to chose the "right" items. *Earnshaw's*, Jan

Fig. 3.1. Conjugalilty, I



"Boy MEETS Girl"

When little future Romeos meet their winsome Juliets they want to look their very best. That's why understanding mothers dress them in Eastern Isles' Bobby Suits and Toddlers.

More and more America's mothers are asking for this famous brand by name. That's why alert buyers everywhere are strongly featuring Hand Made Baby Wear by

Eastern Isles 1350 BROADWAY, N.Y.
(Additional Showrooms: 16 East 34th St.)

"CHOICE OF AMERICA'S MOTHERS"

*With a bow to the producers of that current Broadway success

Eastern Isles explicates in 1936 what often is taken for granted in other advertisements using the conjugal motif: namely, that attracting a mate is a matter of looking one's very best. *Earnshaw's*, Feb. 1936, Back Cover.

Fig. 3.2. Conjugality, II



Traditional male-female conjugality often is depicted with the female in the repose of "licensed withdrawal."
Earnshaw's, Mar. 1994, p.9.

Fig. 3.3. Conjuality, III



ABSORBA IS ON THE MOVE—AS OF OCTOBER 1st.

Ritualized subordination: the shoulder hold, according to Goffman, requires "that the held person accept direction and constraint" and may imply "sexual proprietaryship". *Earnshaw's*, Oct. 1979, Inside Front Cover.

Fig. 4.1. The Male Gaze



the *Kate Greenaway* look for summer

is the lure of the line

the catch of the season

the most coveted look of all

in sun dresses and playtogs.

L. WOHL & COMPANY, INC. • 1333 BROADWAY, NEW YORK 18, N. Y.

Even the (presumably male) dog has its eye on the "catch of the season" from Kate Greenaway. *Earnshaw's*, Feb. 1953, p. 51.

Fig. 5.1. Age Confusion, I

Good news for the difficult-to-fit, difficult-to-please set: We're introducing a striking new line of youth junior jeans. Jeans specifically designed to fit the fashion conscious 10 to 13-year-old who's "too old" to youth wear—and not quite ready for juniors. Come see them at our New York showroom, 130 W. 33rd St. 17th floor. Phone: 212-695-5571. Or at any of the regional markets. We've got the young junior figure figure.

Wilkins Young Junior Rumble Seats

Age confusion in the preteen range has always been an opportunity for sales. That an "older look" is preferable is the message of this girl who appears ready to discard the doll of subordinate childhood. *Earnshaw's*, Apr. 1981, p. 66.

Fig. 5.2. Age Confusion, II

JEANJER JEANS
presents
TOMORROW'S
STARS
featured in
"STUDS"




"A STAR IS BORN"
BRADLEY IMPORTS LTD.,
112 W. 34TH ST., SUITE 1903, N.Y.C. 10120 212 695-5180

This boy is a "stud", ready to drive away in his denims with keys in one hand and a lollipop in the other.
Earnshaw's, Sep. 1985, p. 186.

power exerted in "real world" situations, particularly in gender relations. In the circumscribed context of children's wear trade images, social weight can be analogous to "market weight" or sales potential which is likewise inscribed visually by relative size and also by posture.

Girls' ready-to-wear clothing has out-paced boys' in volume and percentage of an urban family's budget since 1920. It was not until the mid-'60s, however, that the market weight of girls' clothing was illustrated through the relative size and posture of models. Several factors can account for this timing. For one, by the late '60s a strong fashion element had thoroughly infiltrated most all sizes of girls' wear thereby giving impetus to quicker and larger turnovers of stock. For another, from the late '60s onward jeans and pants became standard for girls' wardrobes and thus added to its number.

The following images illustrate what I call "girl power" which portray the new "market weight" of girls' clothes in the size and posture of girls over boys. In these examples, girls tower over boys (not pictured) and take the lead in a dance (Fig. 6.1). Female aggressiveness is displayed in Petit Bateau's advertisement where the girl confidently plants a kiss on a demure, almost paralyzed, boy (Fig. 6.2). Figure 6.3 depicts a girl resting her arm on a boys' shoulder, apparently less for support than perhaps as a license to touch an equal or subordinate (see Henley, 1977: 94-123). Both children exude a forthright confidence and, as in the vast majority of these sorts of images over the last 70 or so years, they stand alone without the surveillance of an adult intruding on their world.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The visual representation of children stands at the intersection of childhood history and of children's clothing history. How children "appear," literally, is paramount to their placement in socio-historical space. Given both the malleability of the child's persona and the polysemy of "the child" as a symbol, specific renderings of children and childhood help reduce the uncertainty surrounding the question what sort of being the child is or should be.

In the sphere of commerce, if the above is

any indication, images of children represent more than themselves and more than childhood; they serve as vehicles for the creation and movement of economic and symbolic exchange value. In the trade context, and arguably in the consumer context, children are imbued with multiple personae and are graphically empowered to act upon the world of goods as persons. They are most often subjects. In the same instance, they serve as objects, as a bodily medium for the display of commodities. Ultimately, these images function to personify a market or market segment: the child-plus-garment is the market, or actually market segment, to the trade audience.

If Goffman's "parent-child complex" can be extended to a more general "adult-child complex," then one is in a position to investigate how characteristics of super- and subordination, of personhood and non-personhood, are transferred from depictions of relations between children to those between commodities. This transference is what Marx called commodity fetishism. In the realm of this trade imagery, it again is childhood—its nature and boundaries—which becomes commoditized and fetishized.

It is the images of children, and not children themselves, which are "traded" among the industry audience. These images, combined with the discursive construction of "the child," have effectively extended the commoditization internal to the trade world outward into childhood. An extensive investigation of the commercial iconography of childhood will help make visible the hand of the market in the creation and deployment of children as public symbols.

NOTES

1. Scholars have examined parallels between children and other subordinated groups or social categories like women (Oakley, 1993), social class (Oldman, 1994) and minority groups (Qvortrup, 1993).
2. Portrayals of "bad" children (as opposed to only "naughty") in film seem to be a post-World War II occurrence. Patty McCormack played a pre-pubescent killer in *The Bad Seed* (1956). In this vein, there are other films like *The Village of the Damned* and a number of stories featuring possessed children like *Rosemary's Baby*, *The Exorcist* and *The Shining*. See Mukerji 1997 for a discussion about associations between children and monsters.

Fig. 6.1. Girl Power, I

TANGIERS

KIDS



WINNER OF THE 1987 EARNIE AWARD FOR GIRLS' SPORTSWEAR 7-14

TWO NEW LINES OPENING ONE FALL IN LITTLE ROCK
AND SMITH & SON'S LOCATED IN NEW YORK CITY

The Tangiers Corporation is pleased to announce the opening of its new store in New York City. The new store is located at 100 West 42nd Street, New York, NY 10018. The new store is open from 10:00 AM to 6:00 PM, Monday through Saturday. The new store is a great place to shop for kids' clothing and accessories. The new store is a great place to shop for kids' clothing and accessories. The new store is a great place to shop for kids' clothing and accessories.

Jill Thompson, Vice President

Jill Thompson, Vice President

Jill Thompson, Vice President

Girl power is made evident in the height advantage the girl has over the boy and in the way that she takes the lead in the dance. *Earnshaw's*, Dec. 1987, p. 11. .

[illegible]

Female aggressiveness is displayed in this advertisement where the girl confidently plants a kiss on a demure, almost paralysed, boy. *Earnshaw's*, Jun. 1983, p. 10.

Fig. 6.3. Girl Power, III



LOLLYTOGS LTD, 112 West 34th Street, Suite 1206, New York, NY 10120
 (212) 594-4740 • FAX (212) 268-5160 • (800) 262-KIDS
 NEW YORK • CHICAGO • LOS ANGELES • MIAMI • DALLAS • BOSTON • SOUTH CAROLINA • PUERTO RICO

This girl rests her arm on a boy's shoulder, apparently less for support than perhaps as a license to touch an equal or subordinate. *Children's Business*, July 1990, Back Cover.

3. Of course, this mode of negation is limited to the extent that that which is not desired can be pictured. The difficulty is apparent when one tries to use the red circle and diagonal slash to express abstract ideas like, "No Postmodernism" or "No Racism," for those ideas cannot easily be pictured.
4. A recent example is Calvin Klein's underwear advertisement in 1995. Public outcry denounced the ads as sexually exploitative of children in the poses of the models. The company was investigated by the F.B.I. and had to prove that its models were 18 or older. See *Advertising Age*, Sept. 4, 1995 and Sept. 11, 1995, for an advertising trade view on the Klein incident.
5. The advertising-to-editorial ratio in the publication varied over the years, averaging about 50-50 in the '20s, dropping to 42-58 in the slumping '30s and rising strongly by the end of the '50s to 64-36. The ad-ed ratio has varied within a stable range since then, tending not to fall below 58-42 and not above about 70-30. Some of the variation between months is often due to special issues devoted to a particular issue or segment of the industry which can carry a large volume of copy or bring in an above average number of advertisements.
6. Anderson (1990) gives a similar assessment of children in the "hierarchy of trustworthiness" of social types which is used by residents of his neighborhood study to judge safety on the streets (see pp. 163-189). To this hierarchy of age and gender Anderson adds race as a central factor in residents' assessments of passersby.
7. Please note that due to space consideration, only a few of the images will be shown and discussed as examples.

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