FROM PRINCESS TO PROVOCATEUR: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF PRETEEN FASHION IN TEEN MAGAZINE, 1960-2005

A Thesis

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ABSTRACT

The sexualization of preteen girls’ fashion is a concern in America. Girls are given the opportunity to wear clothing that accentuates and reveals their figures. They are encouraged to dress in styles shown by the media, most especially in popular fashion magazines. For this study, I looked at Teen magazine from 1960 to 2005 and performed a content analysis using advertisements and fashion spreads from the months of April and September. I measured provocative dress, as defined by Kennedy, identified specific characteristics that increased the image’s sexual nature, and ran descriptive statistics on the data pulled.

The history of the preteen dress, adolescent development, and the marketplace was explored. Research showed that an intense focus on appearance led to self-objectification and a lack of attention on other activities, including school and play. According to the APA Taskforce on the Sexualization of Girls, preteens became sexualized when their values came from their sex appeal. The increase in provocative preteen apparel could be indicative of more relaxed social attitudes.

The results of the study showed a subtle, but progressive increase in provocative fashion in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The majority of the provocative images reported were published after 1985. Fifteen characteristics were
analyzed, but only those with the highest numbers were discussed. The number of accentuating garments, exposed breasts, exposed legs, and low waistbands reported often reflected the era’s most popular fashion trends. Results also showed an increase in the number of characteristics reported over the time span of the study.
DEDICATION:

TO MY MOM,
WHOSE BEAUTY I SEE EVERY DAY
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This research would not be possible but for the grace of God. Although I fought Him every step of the way, I can never express how honored I am to have been chosen for this project.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Preteen apparel has evolved into its own distinctive category of dress over the past fifty years. The images publicized by the fashion industry in the twenty-first century depict young girls wearing clothing that was once only appropriate to be worn by adult women. This type of adolescent dress that stimulates sexual desire, calls attention to the body, and exposes the figure, invites the question, “how long did it take for this trend to become a common practice in American culture?” The purpose of this study was to explore the questions: when did this trend begin and what was the rate of change? A literature review brought together all previous research done on the effects of provocative preteen clothing. Images extracted from Teen magazine, from 1960 until 2005, were analyzed to determine if and when there was a shift in preteen apparel from playful princess to prurient provocateur.

In recent years, preteen apparel has shifted from the more conservative lines of the 1940s and 1950s (t-shirts with no logos or statements on them, buttoned blouses, skirts to the knee or below) to the more provocative clothing (mini-skirts, tight-fitting shirts with suggestive text, and child-size thongs) currently offered by American retailers such as Abercrombie and Fitch and Justice. The terms preteen, adolescent, and tween will be used interchangeably to identify an age group of nine to fourteen year olds.
traditionally Caucasian, heterosexual girls from middle-class neighborhoods.¹

This shift is relatively recent. It was not until the 1950s that adolescent females were given the option of wearing clothing made specifically for them. Prior to World War II, girls between eight and twelve dressed like a child or a young adult.² There was very little clothing especially made for the years and stages in between. Children were eventually segmented into categories with the rise of ready-to-wear clothing. Marketers and retailers transformed childhood into a commodity when they manufactured products tailored to fit the preteen body. This chapter will examine the emergence of the children’s wear industry, as it pertains to preteen apparel, in order to provide historical support for any evidence found over the course of this study.

The female child consumer, by and large, is still controlled by the industries that created her. Levin and Kilbourne related that “children are assaulted by commercial images” from the minute they wake up in the morning until they go to bed in an effort to make them “shoppers for life.”³ The images shown by the media have become increasingly graphic and sexualized to attract viewer attention. In recognition of the sociocultural forces that shape young girls, Division 35 (Society for the Psychology of Women) of the American Psychological Association created the Taskforce on the Sexualization of Girls in 2007. It asserts that “virtually every media form studied provides ample evidence of the sexualization of women, including television, music videos, music lyrics, movies, magazines, sports media, video games, the internet, and

This constant barrage of commercials exposes preteens to content oftentimes beyond their comprehension and maturity levels.5

Preteens often look to outside influences for stability and recognition because they are in a constant state of change. As they mature, their clothing needs shift from comfortable kiddy to pricey preteen wear. Adolescent girls use clothing to display an image that comes from magazines, advertisements, and celebrity fashion. Many preteens imitate models that are sanctioned by the media because they believe it will help them gain popularity and attract male attention.6

Clark related that preteen girls are in search of an identity that combines the latest fashion trends with peer-accepted styles.7 Girls conform to the images displayed by high school students, which can include short shorts, tight t-shirts with suggestive text, manicured nails, and thong underwear. Academics and extra-curricular activities sometimes take a back-seat because girls focus more attention on their looks and ways to improve them. Clark explained that adolescent females are at risk of self-objectification and creating a distorted view of sexuality if their appearance becomes their top priority.8

The American Psychological Association’s (APA) Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls defines sexualization as a condition where:

1. A person’s value comes from his or her sexual appeal or behavior, to the exclusion of other characteristics

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5 Levin and Kilbourne, 37.
8 Ibid, 9.
2. A person is held to a standard that equates physical attractiveness (narrowly defined) with being sexy

3. A person is sexually objectified – that is, made into a thing for another’s sexual use, rather than seen as a person with the capacity for independent action and decision making; and/or

4. Sexuality is inappropriately imposed on a person.²

A preteen girl’s cultural conditioning and stage of cognitive development could make her unable to understand the consequences of wearing provocative clothing. In this case, dressing sexy is an elusive means to gain maturity because it is done with an outside person’s interests in mind. This could contribute to an increase in childhood sexual harassment, molestation, and prostitution.³ Levin and Kilbourne identified that “as many as one in three girls and one in seven boys will be sexually abused at some point during their childhood,” often by a person who is known, loved, and/or trusted by the child.⁴

As children learn from their experiences and grow into adolescents, they develop techniques to negotiate what is and is not appropriate for them. Although fashion is an important factor in the development of a preteen girl’s identity and place in society, it can play a positive or negative role in her life. The choices made in early adolescence can affect one’s livelihood for years to come, which is why it is important to understand the problems young girls face with their clothing choices.

This change in what preteen girls wear could also be indicative of more relaxed societal attitudes or less parental influence. Levy suggested we live in a “raunch culture”

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² Clark, 9.
³ Leven and Kilbourne, 9.
⁴ Ibid.
that celebrates promiscuity and exhibitionism.\textsuperscript{12} She questioned why Paris Hilton gained notoriety after her sex tape was made public in 2004 or what could entice female Ph.D. students to make out with each other for the film, \textit{Girls Gone Wild}.\textsuperscript{13} Parents, the media, and the fashion industry are often blamed for this type of behavior. A 2002 survey by Public Agenda reported that 76 percent of parents believe it is a lot harder to raise children today than when they grew up, and 47 percent found their biggest challenge was protecting their child from premature exposure to graphic and violent messages.\textsuperscript{14}

The aim of this research was to determine whether American culture accepts provocative preteen girls’ apparel as normal, and if so, when and how it began. It includes an examination of the history of preteen dress, late childhood and early adolescent development, and market research that focused on this subgroup in order to support any evidence found in the study. A review of literature revealed what was known about the effects of provocative clothing on the preteen’s livelihood, academic performance, and gender development.

The study used a content analysis based on images pulled from \textit{Teen} magazine. The following research questions identified specific points to be collected from:

1. Do the images show an increase in provocative dress, as defined by Kennedy, over the time span of this study? This includes “all female appearance styles that deviate

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 11.
\textsuperscript{14} Levin and Kilbourne, 15.
from the acceptable norm of a specific social situation toward the direction of sexual
suggestions and/or body exposure."\textsuperscript{15}

2. If the images are rated as provocative, what characteristics are shown that make them
so?

\textsuperscript{15} Duncan Kennedy, \textit{Sexy Dressing Etc. Essays on the Power and Politics of Cultural Identity}
CHAPTER II

A HISTORY OF PRETEEN DRESS, PRETEEN DEVELOPMENT, AND PRETEENS AS CONSUMERS

The fashion industry, marketers, and the media have paid special attention to children’s wear in the last fifty years. Their influence has contributed to a change in the marketplace, in addition to children’s overall look. This chapter will explore the history of children’s fashion, preteens specifically, in order to fully understand how their look has evolved. The two stages of development, late childhood and early adolescence, will be analyzed due to their influence on the preteen’s habits, attitudes, and behaviors. One of the reasons preteens are more open to explore and experiment with different identities is because of their changing bodies. Consequently, they are also subjected to images and ideas that could be harmful. Miley Cyrus, Calvin Klein, and other public figures were studied in order to determine whether their influences contribute to the change in preteen clothing styles.

History of Preteen Dress

Adolescent fashion has experienced changes in style, function, and influence throughout American history. Susan Kaiser noted that up until 200 years ago, young girls did not have a distinctive “look;” rather they were the mirror images of fashionable
adults. The differences between young female fashion and adult fashion became more apparent throughout the twentieth century. Women’s appearance, both young and old, was influenced by the same cultural and social phenomena, such as world wars, the economy, and celebrities. It is important to understand the evolution of preteen dress in order to determine how this group’s look became what it is today. The preteen’s early years as a consumer marks a vital time in retail history. This information helps determine when preteens started to take a proactive role in the design and consumption of apparel. The history of preteen fashion must be addressed if the changes in its sexual nature are to be measured.

Children were not segmented into age categories until the twentieth century. Girls were either children or adults, and their clothing reflected this lack of separation. The teenager, a name that can be “traced back to 1941 as a term coined by Madison Avenue,” emerged. Marketers and advertisers encouraged this new demographic to buy innovative products that were designed specifically for them. The teenager evolved into a significant buying category as more coming-of-age adolescents earned money and became brand loyal. Seventy-five million children were born between 1946 and 1964, making the Baby Boomers one of the largest, and most influential, generations in American history.

Designers, manufacturers, and retailers took notice of this potential market group during

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the mid-1950s as the early Boomers were placed into separate junior high schools.⁴ Bohner girls used clothing as a way to establish their independence and set themselves apart from their former, child-like selves. The Boomers gravitated towards adult-like clothing although they did not truly understand the nature of its design and function. They wanted to create a look unique for their age group, apart from the traditional, adolescent garb. Designers noted their differences in physicality, such as short, tall, lanky, busty, and round, and created clothing lines that gave preteen girls a sense of sophistication while being true to their chronological and sociological ages.

By the 1950s, preteen dress included informal playwear that allowed them greater ease of movement while taking part in leisure activities. They had the choice of a full skirt and fitted top or a tailored dress with princess lines. Slim Jims, slacks cut slim and tapered around the ankles, were another option. Girls wore a rounded collar, gathered sleeves to cover their arms, and a slip beneath a skirt to ensure their body remained concealed at all times.⁵ Pedal-pushers with three quarter, dolman- sleeve tops and Jamaica shorts in bright colors reflected the vibrancy that categorized the suburban lifestyle in the 1950s.⁶

The family values of the 1950s were left behind as America embraced a new set of ideals brought on by the Civil Rights movement, sexual revolution, counter culture, and the birth control pill.⁷ Cook explained that, by the 1960s, children, which included preteen girls, were their own market group, completely separate from parents, and they

⁴ Hulan, 31.
⁶ Ibid.
⁷ Ibid., 216.
made purchases “for personal use and satisfaction.” As a result, fashion specifically developed for children was made available in new designs, fibers, and silhouettes. Sills explained that girls moved easier in new stretch fabrics, like Lycra and Orlon; “their new physical freedom reflected a freer attitude about girl’s behavior” (see Figure 2.1). The youth market revolted against the previously set standards of dress and adopted styles that were less constricting, like two-piece bathing suits, mini-skirts, and athletic wear. By 1967, preteens could choose between a tent dress that flared out, a fitted jumper, pant dress, or a pleated skirt with a dropped waist. Reports show, however, that certain schools forbade girls to wear mini-skirts and pant dresses because they showed too much skin. Traditionally masculine-style clothing, such as pants, Nehru and Safari suits, were also adopted by young girls throughout the 1970s and early 1980s (see Figure 2.2).

By the end of the 1980s, girl’s fashion was separated into two distinct categories: fashionable, sports-inspired wear and child-like designs. The idea that a young girl could assume different identities with the clothing available to her was a contemporary one. Department stores, independent shops, and mass merchandisers identified their target markets’ roles in society and offered goods that reflected these personas. Gender distinctions blurred; girls could look romantic or rugged with a shift in top and bottom.

Parents were assured by clothing manufacturers and distributors that girls’ dress would

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9 Rubenstein, 217.
10 Sills, 38.
11 Rubenstein, 222.
12 Ibid., 243.
remain age appropriate, but there was children’s clothing made throughout the 1990s and early 2000s that was similar in design to adult styles.¹ (see Figure 2.3).

Preteen Development

Children are easily influenced between the fourth grade and ninth grade because of changes in their environment, social standing, academic responsibilities, and physicality. Preteens entering elementary and junior high school are introduced to complex thinking, puberty, and identity discovery. They can have difficulty transitioning from pre-pubescent children to adults whose bodies are growing into young women. While these developments are natural, they are still precarious, complex, and have the potential to hamper a young girl’s maturation for years to come. A discussion of child development is necessary in order to understand why preteen girls are attracted to provocative clothing and how this style of dress affects them.

Piaget’s concrete operational stage extends from seven to eleven years of age.² A child’s thoughts are more logical, flexible, and organized compared to previous years. Although they can focus on several aspects of a problem at once, decentration, children can only do so with concrete information.³ This limits them from thinking in the abstract. Berk explained that working memory improves “as a natural byproduct of daily activities.”⁴ Children who fancy themselves experts in an area are highly motivated to increase their knowledge base.⁵ Between the ages of nine and fourteen, they do not

¹ Rubenstein., 248.
³ Ibid., 438.
⁴ Ibid., 446.
⁵ Ibid.
Figure 2. 3. “Let’s Play Dress-Up on Vogue.” *French Vogue*, December-January 2011. (accessed on July 14, 2011)

http://www.bing.com/images/search?q=provocative+child+images+vogue&view=detail&id=BED4E3293CB10C01048FF47ED1C56AD1BB6FB89B&first=0&FORM=IDFRIR
question their reading material because any abstract thought or comparison is beyond
their level of comprehension.⁶

Their emotional and social development expands during middle childhood to
include the ability to make social comparisons and to understand that traits are often
connected with certain desires. George Herbert Mead described the self “as a blend of
what important people in our lives think of us.”⁷ This depiction results in middle-school
children comparing their “real self” to an “ideal self” that was formed from other
people’s expectations, in particular, that of parents, peers, and teachers. A young girl’s
overall self-esteem is directly correlated with physical appearance, more so than with
academic, social, and athletic self-esteem.⁸ By the end of middle childhood, children will
begin to form peer groups to satisfy their desire for belonging and acceptance. They
gravitate towards children their own age, most often times classmates, to create an
informal peer culture. Both boys and girls experience gender typing. According to Berk,
teachers and parents more often praise boys for knowledge and accomplishment, while
girls are praised for obedience.⁹ Gender typing also implies that girls do better in music,
art, and reading whereas boys excel in math, science, athletics, and mechanical skills.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau believed the “biological upheaval of puberty triggered
heightened emotionality, conflict, and defiance of adults.”¹⁰ Berk further explained that
the emerging adolescent experiences a gradual hormonal change that began about the age
of eight or nine. According to Berk,

⁶ Berk, 450.
⁷ Ibid., 483.
⁸ Ibid., 485.
⁹ Ibid., 503.
¹⁰ Ibid., 530.
Estrogen released by the girl’s ovaries causes the breasts, uterus, and vagina to mature… [T]he body takes on feminine proportions, and fat accumulates… [Estrogen] also contributes to the regulation of the menstrual cycle… Adrenal androgen, released from the adrenal glands on top of each kidney, influence girl’s height spurt and stimulate growth of underarm and pubic hair.  

The average age for a female’s growth spurt in North America is ten, a full two years before the average age for boys. A girl’s arms, legs, and trunk will begin to grow by age eight, “a trend that accelerates between eleven and sixteen.”  

The average age for an American girl’s first menstruation, which occurs late in the sequence of puberty, is twelve and one half years.  

The onset of puberty has decreased five years since the beginning of the twentieth century.  

Girls who experience puberty earlier than their peers can have a lower self-image because they are often heavier. Their bodies have developed at a more accelerated pace than their emotions, which leads to image confusion. Physical attractiveness is important to adolescent girls who are influenced by the female images shown in magazines that traditionally favor the late developer’s body shape. Her mental, physical, and emotional health may be at risk should she believe that her image is not equal to a set standard of beauty.  

The importance of fitting in with one’s peers is especially evident at ten through fourteen, and as a result, early developers often seek out the company of older companions who share in their biological maturity.  

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11 Berk, 531.  
12 Ibid., 533.  
13 Ibid.  
14 Clark, 9.  
15 Berk, 542.  
16 Clark, 8.  
17 Ibid.  
18 Berk, 542.
proportionate to their older peers, but when encouraged to participate in activities beyond their mental and emotional maturity, the similarities are inconsequential.19

Early adolescents’ cognitive development leads them to engage in critical and complex thinking. This results in an *imaginary audience*, or the belief that they are at the center of everyone’s attention. The adolescent will develop an inflated opinion of themselves, or a *personal fable*, because of this perceived self-importance.20 Compared to middle childhood, adolescents can think in abstract terms when describing themselves or their peers.21 They place importance on exploring different sides of their personality, so long as those traits are socially acceptable.

Girls entering early adolescence continue to excel in typically feminine subjects, such as music, reading, and art.22 Many will spend their time talking to girlfriends, shopping at the mall, worrying about which boy likes them, and agonizing about the perfect dress to wear for homecoming. These typical female activities can become more important as the early adolescent ages. This period of *gender identification* is marked with an “increase in gender stereotyping of attitudes and behavior, and movement toward a more traditional gender identify.”23 Gender identification is stronger in girls than boys, although both sexes experience it. As a result of the biological transformation that preteens experience, they become increasingly concerned with their appearance and think of themselves in “gender-linked ways.”24 These pressures to perform specific gender-typed activities are often prompted by parents and peers. Puberty also increases

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19 Berk, 542.  
20 Ibid., 565.  
21 Ibid., 599.  
22 Ibid., 615.  
23 Ibid.  
24 Ibid.
adolescents’ concerns about how they are perceived by others. Preteens as Consumers

Preteen girls have received a good deal of media attention because of their consumer power and spending. Advertisements in magazines, television shows, commercials, radio spots, and internet websites try to establish loyal buying patterns with this target market. In order to understand the rise of sexualized preteen clothing, information that pertains to this subgroup, marketing techniques, important retailers, and celebrity inspirations will be explored.

Fifty years after their emergence, preteens continue to dress like teenagers, but they are now a market unto themselves. They can purchase brand-name clothing designed especially for them with money earned from part-time jobs or allowances. As of 2003, tweens spend an estimated 1.18 trillion dollars of their own money yearly and are shown to control 80 percent of all brand choices. By 2010, the number of teens in the United States will have increased an estimated 20 percent from 1995. These high projections account for the number of advertisements used to influence this powerful age cohort. Exceedingly brand conscious, preteens have “fragile self-images” and great desires to be a part of the “in” crowd. Consequently, shopping for and choosing a clothing brand has become the equivalent of self-reflection for preteens. Advertisers seek to placate their target market’s fears and insecurities in the hopes of inspiring brand loyalty and creating lifelong customers. According to Levin and Kilbourne:

25 Berk, 615.
26 Hulan, 32.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
The average child in the United States… views 20,000 to 40,000 commercials every year… Teen oriented brands are now designed to ‘register so strongly in kids’ minds that their appeal will remain for life.’ Toddlers are suited by Baby Gap and amused by Disney, while teenagers are outfitted by the Gap-owned Old Navy and entertained by Disney-owned horror films.  

Albert Bandura explained that “because we [humans] are provocative, we choose our own course in life . . . we are vulnerable to outside influences.” Bandura studied the role mass media plays in society and concluded the fashion industry heavily relies on “social prompting.” He related that “by drawing on ‘modeled patterns,’ people can transcend the bounds of their immediate environment” to achieve perfection. Models are chosen by the media because of their allure and ability to influence preteen fashion and behavior. Preteens are no longer children, but fall short of the mental, emotional, and biological maturity of teenagers. They can fall prey to this ploy because of their many social ties and desire for peer acceptance.

Retailer Abercrombie Kids appropriates this desire in its sexualized merchandise, store atmosphere, and internet website. When the Limited brand bought out Abercrombie & Fitch in 1988, they transformed the brand’s image and inventory to focus heavily on apparel. It captured the teen market’s attention with its sex-driven, pop-culture induced Abercrombie & Fitch Quarterly. Then in 1998, the store opened its first subsidiary, Abercrombie Kids, for preteens between the ages of seven and fourteen. Shortly thereafter, gritty product design, suggestive language, and sexually explicit photography

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29 Levin and Kilbourne, 35.
30 Bandura, 121.
31 Ibid., 138.
32 Ibid., 126.
of the retailer’s products outraged the public. In November 2005, a “girlcott of …
Abercrombie & Fitch’s attitude T-shirts” attracted national media attention when a
campaign was raised against the retailer’s “demeaning” apparel messages (see Figure 
2.4). Girls as Grantmakers chairwoman, Emma Blackman-Mathis, appeared on the Today 
show with Katie Couric to express her distaste for A & F’s offensive shirts that read, 
“When brains are needed you have these” and “Blondes are adored, brunettes are 
ignored.” Days after the protest, Abercrombie & Fitch agreed to pull the T-shirts off 
their shelves, citing that what was meant to be a humorous play on words was in fact 
troubling to some. Three years before, the retailer was criticized for selling thong 
underwear in children’s sizes with the words “wink wink” and “eye candy” printed on the 
front (see Figure 2.5). A & F’s intention, according to one CNN report, was to provide 
their younger clientele with underwear that was “lighthearted and cute.” Company 
spokesperson, Hampton Carney, explained that the thongs were meant to be worn by a 
girl as young as ten, but for any younger age was inappropriate.

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33 Bandura, 126.
34 Monica Haynes, “Bawdy T-Shirts Set Off ‘Girlcott’ By Teens,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 
35 Haynes.
36 Monica Haynes and Moustafa Ayad, “Abercrombie & Fitch to Pull Line of T-Shirts, *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, November 5, 2005, 
37 “Abercrombie’s Sexy Undies ‘Slip,’” *CNNMoney*, May 28, 2002,  
38 Ray Delgado, “Retailer Goes From ‘Wong’ Wrong to Wrong: 2nd Controversy in 2 Months,” 
Figure 2.4. Abercrombie & Fitch Controversial T-Shirts. (accessed on October 18, 2011) http://media.photobucket.com/image/abercrombie%20fitch%20blonde%20brunette/renarf/12800_01_L.jpg
Figure 2. 5. Abercrombie & Fitch Controversial Child-size Thong. (accessed on May 15, 2010)
The official website for Abercrombie Kids shows images of preteens in flirtatious positions with bawdy quotations, such as “Good secrets are never kept” and “When in doubt flirt.” Bill Johnson, president of the American Decency Association, vehemently disapproves of the retailer’s decision to expose children to such images. Johnson relates that “what Abercrombie is doing is sexualizing our youth and setting them up to view themselves as sexual objects and sexual toys.” The disturbing truth behind this controversy, however, is that while adults argue over propriety and unethical behavior, A & F’s young consumers line up to purchase the notorious unmentionables. Every online shopper can witness the calculated images that Abercrombie projects in conjunction with its apparel; those who wear this brand will have fun, be athletic, and be the subject of coed interest.

It is with this agenda that adolescents can begin to associate ideas of fun and girl power with provocative clothing. Childhood is filled with images of looking and acting like an adult, so it is only natural for children to wear clothing too mature for their age. In 1980, fifteen-year old Brooke Shields wore tight blue jeans and a button-down blouse when photographed for a series of Calvin Klein advertisements. She announced that “nothing comes between me and my Calvins” while posing with her legs akimbo (see Figure 2.6). An entire consumer market saw this image and criticized Klein’s use of a teenage girl’s innocent remark to turn a profit.

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40 Delgado.
Figure 2.6. Brooke Shields Calvin Klein Advertisement. (accessed on May 15, 2010)
http://www.bing.com/images/search?q=brooke+shields+calvin+klein+ad&view=detail&id=417DA95B4B953FD0E797C38B67AC877E99D0AFF9&first=0&FORM=IDFRIR
The Shields denim campaign was only one of a series of Calvin Klein advertisements that pushed the boundaries of children’s fashion. In 1999, Klein canceled a series of advertisements that depicted young children in their briefs and undershirts. A company spokesperson declared the photographs were meant to “capture the same warmth and spontaneity that you find in a family snapshot” (see Figures 2.7 and 2.8). The photographs outraged consumers because the “high definition, sexualized images” resembled child pornography. Many observed that children were becoming aware of, and therefore influenced by, the media’s attention to sex and beauty.

Hannah Montana is a beloved children’s character who was at the center of an image controversy. In the spring of 2008, fifteen-year-old actress/singer Miley Cyrus posed for *Vanity Fair* magazine with nothing but a satin bed sheet draped across the front of her body (see Figure 2.9). Lin Burress, creator of “Tell It Like It Is,” a blog devoted to marriage and parenting, was outraged at what she felt was a scandalous photograph. Burress declared that “parents should be concerned because young girls across the world look to Cyrus as a role model.” She went so far as to suggest that mothers across America burn their children’s Hannah Montana merchandise as an act of protest against the starlet. What is most startling about the controversy is that before the article was published, Cyrus had a spotless reputation. Her television show was one of the few series

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42 Calvin Klein.
43 Ibid.
44 Ibid.
46 Ibid.
Figure 2. 7. Controversial Calvin Klein Advertisement. (accessed on June 11, 2011)
Figure 2. 8. Controversial Calvin Klein Advertisement. (accessed June 11, 2011)
Figure 2. 9. Miley Cyrus on the cover of *Vanity Fair*. (accessed on May 15, 2010)
that was age appropriate for her young audience, ages six to fourteen. Disney announced in early 2010, however, that the end was near for Hannah Montana.

Cyrus, now seventeen, explained that without the pressure to conform to the network’s standards, she is free to mature and embrace solo stardom. Her album, “Can’t Be Tamed,” is a reflection of her attitude towards growing up independent. She is pointedly more sexy and daring, defending her provocative dress citing, “I’m not trying to be slutty… I’m not trying to be like, go to the club and get a bunch of guys… what I’m trying to do is make a point with my record and look consistent, in the way my record sounds and the way I dress.”

Parents are uncomfortable with the amount of skin she shows while on stage. Cyrus explains that she works hard for her body and does not see the impropriety with showing off her legs. “When you’re eleven, the word you would use to describe someone is definitely not sexy, and as you get older I think you grow into that.” Whether or not she is right in her opinions, the fact remains that her audience, who wishes to emulate her look and attitude, is still in elementary school. The media has once again fed preteen girls an image that tells them it is all right to dress and act well beyond their chronological age and maturity level.

Young girls are being influenced by means other than the electronic media. Day spas that are opened purposely for the zero-to-12 set allow youngsters to receive facials, manicures, and pedicures all in one sitting. It is no longer enough for a young girl to use a disposable razor from her local drug store, now she can have her leg hair professionally removed with a laser treatment. According to Newsweek and market-

48 Fox.
49 Barnes.
research firm, Experian, “43% of 6- to 9-year-olds are already using lipstick or lip gloss; 38% use hairstyling products; and 12% use other cosmetics.” This information suggests that girls, starting at an early age, place beauty very high on their priority list, many times above school. The NPD Research Group revealed that this high-maintenance generation “already spends more than $40 million a month on beauty products.”

Kids are exposed to content way beyond their maturity levels and comprehension. Throughout history, young girls wore constricting ensembles similar in design and function to their mothers’. Over the last one hundred years, however, their clothing incorporated the elements of comfort and ease, in addition to style. Preteens became an established consumer market because of the proactive behavior of the Baby Boomers in the 1950s and 1960s. From a developmental standpoint, this subgroup engages in critical thinking, physically grows into young adults, and responds to peer and celebrity influence. Marketers, the media, and industry executives use sex appeal to attract this leading market’s attention, despite parents’ and school boards’ negative reactions. The culmination of these factors affects preteens’ dress, how they perceive dress codes, and the ways their clothing reflects appropriated gender roles.

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50 Jessica Bennett, “Tales of a Modern Diva,” Newsweek, April 6, 2009, 42-43.
51 Ibid.
Premature sexualization is a growing concern because of its long-reaching, negative impact on women, young and old. Cognitive development is altered with the early introduction and proliferation of provocative messages. Concepts of sexuality can thus be influenced by said messages and cause girls to develop unhealthy attitudes about sex.¹

In her study on the harmful effects of female sexualization, Coy concluded that it limited girls’ “space for action” with regard to future opportunities and identities. Coy defined sexualization as the:

1. Use of bodies for profit as a means to power
2. Importance of individual choice
3. Make-overs as “reinventions of self”
4. Focus on biological differences between men and women
5. Designation of women as sexually available and objectified²

She found that girls are “adultified” through the proliferation of sexualized children’s toys, provocative clothing, and products explicitly connected to the sex industry. Bratz dolls and thong underwear are products targeted to young girls that lead to an influx of

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premature sexualization. The availability of these products is indicative of a cultural shift that gives children more say over where they spend their money and what they want to wear.

The preteen market’s buying power has grown significantly since its inception in the mid-twentieth century. This power is evident in the rise of specialty retailers that specifically target young adolescent females of varying demographics, personalities, and price points. Two of the tween market’s most important retailers, Abercrombie Kids and Justice, have experienced significant upheaval over the past five years, including an economic recession, internal restructuring, and net sales growth/loss. The National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) announced that the United States entered an economic recession in December of 2007. This statement was made in December 2008 after months of analysis by NBER into “real personal incomes, industrial production as well as wholesale and retail sales.” The longest running recession in American history, apart from the Great Depression of the 1930s, lasted between seventeen and eighteen months. The retail industry continues to recover from the economic downturn that lasted until June 2009, eighteen months after it began. Abercrombie Kids, a division of Abercrombie & Fitch, Co., experienced an 18 percent decrease in net sales when it fell from $420,518 in 2008 to $343,164 in 2009. According to their 2010 annual report,

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3 Coy.
Abercrombie & Fitch, Co. (ANF) moves to expand internationally and to bring its operating margins back up to historic levels. From August 2006 until July 2008, the company’s stock price fluctuated between 60 and 70. Their stock price fell below 60 for the first time in two years on June 30, 2008 and gradually decreased until November 17, 2008, when it bottomed out at 13.89. ANF stock has continued to rise since the winter of 2008, but its sales have not reached above December 13, 2010’s price of 57.34. Abercrombie’s recent net sales are a definite step back for the company, but compared to their competitors, they continue to hold significant influence over their target markets, especially preteen girls.7

Justice experienced great internal changes over the past few years. Justice was first launched in 2004 by Tween Brands, Inc. (TWB). TWB nearly doubled their 2004 sales of $598 million to $1.0 billion in 2007. Despite this increase, however, TWB did not match its competitor’s, Abercrombie & Fitch, sales of $3.75 billion in 2007. In November 2009, TWB became part of the Dress Barn (DBRN) family that included specialty retailers The Dress Barn and Maurices. The Dress Barn now operates under the Ascena Retail Group (ASNA) as of January 3, 2011. ASNA stock price continues to increase, but its gradual ascent in the market had not reached above 30.25 on April 19, 2010.8

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As of July 31, 2010, Justice operates 887 stores that deliver the “hottest fashion and shopping experience for ‘our girl’ and great value for mom.”\(^9\) From its November 2009 merger until the end of the 2010 fiscal year, Justice saw a 17 percent increase in comparable stores sales and net sales that totaled $711.9 million.\(^{10}\)

The Significance of Fashion in the Development of a Preteen’s Identity

Darian surveyed “Parent-Child Decision Making in Children’s Clothing Stores,” and found that today’s parents are more willing than those in previous generations to allow their children to choose between specific brands for purchasing.\(^{11}\) Darian concluded that while parents wanted to engage their child in the final purchase of clothing, they struggled to limit the number of items bought, styles shown, and their price points. Of the 342 in-store observations made, 78.7 percent of parents mentioned price when deciding on a purchase, compared to the 40.9 percent of children with the same concern.\(^{12}\) Figures suggested that purchase occurred 81.3 percent of the time when there was no disagreement between parents and children. The majority of parent-child disagreements were based on style rather than price, practicality, color, and quality.\(^{13}\) In particular with girls, parents “were often negative about style because they thought that the clothing was too body revealing.”\(^{14}\) This indicated that children, especially girls, were more concerned with the aesthetics of clothing than any monetary value.

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\(^9\) Yahoo Finance.


\(^{12}\) Ibid., 423.

\(^{13}\) Ibid., 425.

\(^{14}\) Ibid.
Lamb and Brown explored the conflict between preteen girls’ and their clothing choices. They argued that girls are conditioned from an early age to assess clothing by its aesthetic value instead of its functionality.\(^{15}\) Rather than wearing holes into the elbows and knees of old play clothes, girls spent their time color coordinating outfits to match their personality. Girls who preferred to wear blue, green, and black, colors typically reserved for boys, are associated with aggressive behavior, athleticism, and bold attitudes.\(^{16}\) Traditional “girl” colors, however, evoked images of sweetness, goodness, and light. The majority of apparel available for young, female sports fans is “balanced by some pink, some glitter, or some other indication of a girliness/fashion diva,” such as ‘sport princess’ or ‘sport cutie.’\(^{17}\) They further found that the battle between blue vs. pink or tomboy vs. girly girl has reached new heights with the “Pink Wars.” Lamb and Brown indicate that pastel pinks designate innocence while hotter, bolder pinks connote a sexier edge.\(^{18}\) With this ever-increasing stereotype, girls can show themselves to be “good girls or sexy divas” with just a simple color choice. The “Pink Wars” color palate is supplemented by appropriate text and graphics, which include an angel, princess, drama queen, spoiled brat, etc.\(^{19}\)

Russell and Tyler examined the role of shopping in relation to gender development and consumer culture.\(^{20}\) They explored the connection between identity and

\(^{16}\) Ibid., 19.
\(^{17}\) Ibid., 17.
\(^{18}\) Ibid., 20.
\(^{19}\) Lamb and Brown, 15.
\(^{20}\) Rachel Russell and Melissa Tyler, “Branding and Bricolage: Gender, Consumption, and Transition,” *Childhood* 112, no. 2 (2005) [http://chd.sagepub.com/content/12/2/221.abstract](http://chd.sagepub.com/content/12/2/221.abstract) (accessed August 27, 2010), 223.
consumer culture with reference to bricolage, a term used by Levi Strauss to explain how
one product can take on many uses.\textsuperscript{21} Bricolage permits people to reuse, refurbish, and
recreate products for their own purposes. Russell and Tyler also examined the transition
from child to teenage status and observed their subjects’ behavior in a preferred retail
setting. They stated that “preteen girls in the U.S. and the U.K. are twice as likely as any
other demographic to visit a shopping center on the weekend.”\textsuperscript{22}

The researchers first examined British retailer, Girl Heaven, as adult consumers
to collect information on its relationship with its target market. They next observed eight
girls, between ten and eleven years of age, at Girl Heaven to record their shopping
experience.\textsuperscript{23} Russell and Tyler went on to observe six out of the eight aforementioned
girls at Girl Heaven, now ages thirteen to fourteen. This phase in the longitudinal study
allowed the researchers to compare the girls’ reactions at two different ages and measure
their emotional and cultural growth in a familiar environment. The girls were “armed
with disposable cameras. . . [to] articulate certain images of femininity” that struck a
chord with them.\textsuperscript{24} Russell and Tyler asked the girls to discuss how their shopping
experience was shaped by personal growth and the passing of time, in addition to the
ways this transition changed perceptions on gender and consumer culture.

The results showed that preteen girls were caught between two different planes of
existence, childhood and early adolescence. They basked in the newness of their teenage
status, but still clung to small elements of their child life. For instance, Russell and
Tyler’s young participants took pictures of adult stilettos, mini-skirts, and department

\textsuperscript{21} Russell and Tyler, 222.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 226.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 229.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 230.
store make-up counters, in addition to “make-up as sweets,” cosmetics that smelled and tasted like candy or fruit. The transition from child to teenage status was also reflected in the different brand names that came up over the course of this research. The girls took pictures of and discussed various store names that were popular with their age group, including H & M, Disney, Free Spirit, and Warner Brothers.

The girls reported to Russell and Tyler they felt “targeted and branded” by the different media attention directed at them. Although shopping remained a communal social activity, they often felt inadequate and alone as a result of the sophisticated messages sent by marketers.25 One girl admitted in the group interview that “[i]t’s a nightmare you have to spend such a lot of time in queues at cash machines just to keep up with all the stuff you are supposed to buy.” Ineffective consumption, or the inability to purchase goods, was a taboo subject amongst the preteen participants and the only time any of them looked uncomfortable. Russell and Tyler suggested that this response was a type of gender ambivalence because it reflected both the “pleasures and pressures” of being a female.

Provocative Dress Defined

Kennedy explained that provocative dress included “all female appearance styles that deviate from the acceptable norm of a specific social situation toward the direction of sexual suggestions and/or body exposure.”26 The “degree of body exposure, fabrication, and drape of dress style” are used to measure the sexual nature of one’s dress.27

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25 Russell and Tyler, 232.
27 Ibid.
was also among the first to establish a relationship between the provocative nature of
dress and the environment in which it was worn.

Lynch studied the behavior of female undergraduates at the University of
Northern Iowa during four consecutive homecoming celebrations. Lynch expanded
Kennedy’s definition to include sexually revealing behavior, in particular flashing.\textsuperscript{28} Past
studies explored the concept of provocative dress, but “utilized carefully constructed
pictures depicting models in what researchers selected as sexually provocative
clothing.”\textsuperscript{29} She asked participants their opinions of flashing, whether they had ever
participated in the act, or coerced someone else to do it.\textsuperscript{30} Female flashers claimed that
while their decision to publicly bear their breasts was spontaneous, they later regretted it
and became apprehensive that images would show up on the Internet.\textsuperscript{31} When
interviewed, one male participant cited that in years prior, he enjoyed “the \textit{scenery}”
(referring to flashing) with his buddies. When he later took his girlfriend to
Homecoming, however, he was “a lot more aware of the situation . . . a little more
uptight” that she could be pressured to flash. Lynch concluded that girls who wore
“conventional bar attire,” such as skirts and tank-tops, might be perceived as dressing
provocatively if they flashed their breasts in public, as she saw in her observations.\textsuperscript{32}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 2.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 10-15.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 12.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 16.
\end{flushright}
Gurung and Chrouser studied objectification theory and suggested that women in Western cultures were “targets of the male gaze.”

They asked female participants from an American college to rate three photographs of female Olympic athletes as provocative or sports-appropriate. Gurung and Chrouser stated that “people overuse nonverbal cues when creating impressions” which suggests that an immediate opinion of someone’s character is formed based on how they are dressed.

Women who reveal too much skin or wear extremely tight clothing are seen as more promiscuous, flirtatious, and seductive. Their results showed that female athletes were first judged by their appearance rather than their physical capabilities if they wore provocative outfits.

A Reflection of the APA’s Task Force on the Sexualization of Preteen Girls

The American Psychological Association (APA) Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls explained that children do not begin to recognize the purpose of advertisements nor are they able to distinguish between commercials and television shows until the age of eight. This limited cognitive development diminishes their ability to comprehend and cope with the sexual messaging. The task force members’ concern was that although preteens were ignorant of the explicit connotations, they willingly perpetuated the design cycle by wearing clothes that accentuated the body, publicized physical developments, and celebrated underage sexuality. The ability to draw the line between appropriate and provocative is an acquired social skill that takes age and experience. It is out of ignorance


__34__ Ibid.

__35__ Ibid., 3.

__36__ Ibid., 6.

that young girls who dress provocatively are more at risk to be the victims of sexual assault, harassment, self-objectification, prostitution, and trafficking.\textsuperscript{38}

The APA task force found that young girls who project images of promiscuity have greater chances of being taken advantaged of than those who are dressed conservatively. According to “Hostile Hallways,” a report cited by the APA, 63 percent of girls experienced harassment “often” or “occasionally” by being touched, grabbed, brushed up in a sexual manner, or pinched.\textsuperscript{39} Girls who experienced puberty early were more likely to be sexually harassed at a younger age because their changing bodies were on public display. The premature development of breasts is linked to “earlier external expressions of sexuality,” whether or not it is the girl’s intention.\textsuperscript{40} The APA task force suggested that preteen girls whose identity is defined by their appearance and the amount of male attention received will eventually measure all accomplishments and value by those standards. This self-objectification leads to a distorted view of sexuality and contributes to unrealistic expectations in regards to their first sexual encounter and partner.\textsuperscript{41}

The APA task force also reported that premature exposure to sexually explicit material impacts girls’ cognitive development and function. Constant attention to appearance lowered the number of cognitive resources available for other mental and physical activities, like education. Girls “prioritize certain rewards [male attention] over other rewards [academic achievement],” which could limit future academic and

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{38} APA, 17.  \\
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.  \\
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid.  \\
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid.
\end{flushleft}
There was a significant difference in mental capacity between preteens and young women, but the idea that gender perceptions affect cognitive development remained the same. Therefore STEM fields (i.e., science, technology, engineering, and math) were not as attractive to females because they appeared less sexy and were outside of their (girls) estimated levels of intellectual ability. This measurement limits occupational choices to include only those positions that are typically feminine, such as modeling or fashion design.

The Effects of Sexualization on the Preteen’s Academic Standing

Simpkins, Davis-Kean, and Eccles argued that a girl’s science and math concepts were “less stable than boys” throughout the stages of adolescent development. Two hundred and twenty-seven Michigan students participated in a “longitudinal school based study” that charted their classroom participation, expectancies, and values in math and science classes. Data was collected from third through sixth grade, tenth through twelfth grade, and two years post high school. The results showed that although boys spent less time participating in math activities, they had more confidence in their math abilities than girls in sixth grade. Findings also suggested that girls were less likely than boys to engage in after-school math activities, such as questionnaires and puzzles. They focused instead on fantasy activities that reflected traditional female roles as housewife and mother. Simpkins, Davis-Kean, and Eccles posited that students’ self-concepts, or “beliefs about their ability in that domain,” are as influential as grades in their choosing to continue an

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42 APA, 22.
43 Ibid., 33.
education in math or science. As girls’ bodies matured, they began to use appearance to compensate for their perceived decline in academic ability and discontinued any interest in male-dominated subjects.

Barbara Fredrickson compared the results of one math exam and found that the female test group “performed remarkably better” on a math test when wearing sweaters instead of bathing suits. She tested seventy-two females in her first experiment to manipulate objectification theory. Self-objectification occurs when one views her body, body parts, or sexual functions as a separate identity or being. In the case of many females, self-objectification leads to sexual objectification when they allow other people’s opinions of their appearance shape their self-worth.

In parts one and two of Fredrickson’s experiment, participants filled out questionnaires and reported their moments of body shame and any physical attributes they wished to change. The subjects then were placed in a dressing area and asked to try on a sweater or swimsuit, whichever item they felt was their correct size. They described what they did or did not like about the garment in terms of fit, got dressed in their street clothes, and had a sweet at the craft services table. In part two, Fredrickson placed their reactions into emotional clusters, such as silly, humiliated, and angry. After eating, the girls were weighed and asked to evaluate their snack. Following this exercise, the participants were allotted fifteen minutes to complete a twenty question math exam. The results showed that the female participants who wore sweaters earned higher scores than

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45 Simpkins, Davis-Kean, and Eccles 82.
46 Ibid.
those in the swimsuits. This correlation suggested that girls who were comfortable with
their appearance performed better academically than those with lower levels of self-
esteem.48

The Proliferation and Influence of Raunch Culture

Ariel Levy examined the rise of raunch culture and explored ideas of female
sexuality in connection with the rise of a pornographically charged society where the
female chauvinist pig is one who makes “sex objects of other women” and themselves.49
She points out that historic feminists of the 1960s and 1970s celebrated ideas of liberation
and equality in the face of traditional rejection, whereas contemporary women defend
their right to be independently raunchy in a prude society. Over the course of thirty years,
some women turned to pornography and hooker-like clothing to represent their sexual
freedom; never before had the act of stripping been a source of female empowerment.
Levy expressed that “what was once regarded as a kind of sexual expression we now
view as sexuality.”50 For example, many women are not ashamed to pose for the
centerfold of Playboy.51 In fact, Playboy CFO and chairman, Christie Hefner, explained
that women of all ages subscribe to the men’s magazine that recently celebrated its
fiftieth anniversary. According to Hefner:

The post-sexual revolution, post-women’s movement generation that is now out
there in their late twenties and early thirties—and then it continues with the
generation behind them, too—has just a more grownup, comfortable, natural
attitude about sex and sexiness.52

48 Fredrickson et al, 269-284.
49 Ariel Levy, Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture (New York: Free
50 Levy, 5.
51 Ibid., 35.
52 Ibid., 39.
Hefner concluded that women can pose in a titillating ensemble for her camera as an act of sexual exploration and being in control of their own person.\textsuperscript{53} This illusion of limitless possibilities that raunchy behavior advertises actually minimizes a girl’s “space for action” in terms of development and action. The sexualization of young girls limits the range of opportunities available to them because personal fulfillment is only achieved through provocative measures.\textsuperscript{54}

Adolescents adopting this style of dress reveal a general acceptance of raunch culture. Levy pointed to girls who wear “tank tops with little Abercrombie skirts” that are so short they are sometimes referred to as belts.\textsuperscript{55} One high school junior explained to Levy that it was “very popular for the seventh- or eighth- or ninth-grade girls” to hook-up or have sex. “Parents kept calling the school, like why is this senior at my house when my daughter is a freshman? They dressed so provocatively, the guys couldn’t really tell how old the girls were. . . all they see is a hot girl.”\textsuperscript{56} Levy explained that young girls dress in an improper and stripper-like manner, but they often confuse being sexy with the act of sex. Many young girls want to look ‘hot’ and attract boys’ attention, but few actually want to have sex with them.

Merskin studied the emergence of “Lolita,” a term applied to young girls who dressed and acted in ways that appealed to older men’s desires. She found that young girls were targeted by the media because of their innocence and vulnerability. Advertisements communicated that girls are to “be sexually available, be dominated and

\textsuperscript{53} Levy, 43.
\textsuperscript{54} Coy, 40.
\textsuperscript{55} Levy, 142.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.
sexually aggressed against, and be gazed on as sexual objects.”\textsuperscript{57} Little girls who dressed “grown up” nurtured a pedophilic fantasy, a trend that became commonplace in the 1980s and 1990s as a result of the “pornographication of the American girl.”\textsuperscript{58} The author noted that Gregory Dark directed pornography before working on Britney Spears videos in the late-twentieth century. He professed the “lure of jailbait” will never cease, but become increasingly accepted by society.\textsuperscript{59}

Merskin applied accumulation theory, as defined by DeFleur and Dennis, to relate that audiences were affected by any message consistently shown to them. She found that sexually charged images “represent society’s passivity of issues” because they were readily available to the public and reflected pedophilic desires.\textsuperscript{60} In desensitizing the public, this exploitation sets new and lower standards for what was acceptable for adolescent sexuality. Accumulation theory predicted a rise in the number of teen pregnancies, eating disorders, STDs among teens, and abuse. The “myth that children want to be sexually used by adults” is the same as “women who ask to be raped,” contested Merskin.\textsuperscript{61}

Merskin applied Galician’s seven-step “dis-illusioning” model to four fashion advertisements in order to remove the veil of perceived innocence and to chart the rise in adolescent fetishization in relation to physical and emotional violence. Step one, detection, identified that three out of the four models shown in the advertisements dressed

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 121.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 122.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 123.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid.
older than their age.\footnote{Merskin, 123.} Step two described the photos’ sexualized messages.\footnote{Ibid., 124.} The images were then deconstructed in step three to reveal that a person must adjust to the new functions and changes that sexuality presents because it is a natural response of their body’s maturation. Merskin diagnosed in step four that the sexualized messages presented in the four advertisements were a “myth version of reality.” Through her analysis, Merskin designed methods and suggestions on how to de-sexualize the advertisements.\footnote{Ibid., 125.} She debriefed, or studied the model’s body language, in step six. The advertisements “encourage[d] sexual exploitation of girls, contribute[d] to fetishization of females in the media, and foster[ed] an overall climate that does not value girls’ voices or their contribution of society.”\footnote{Ibid.} Finally, Merskin disseminated, or spoke of groups that challenge the sexualized status quo, such as the activist website Aboutface.org.\footnote{Ibid., 126.}

Levin and Kilbourne discussed the harmful effects of a sexualized childhood in reference to a girl’s appearance and her extracurricular activities.\footnote{Diane Levin and Jean Kilbourne, \textit{So Sexy So Soon} (New York: Ballantine Books, 2008).} They tell the story of a mother who became concerned over her eight-year-old daughter’s behavior after overhearing that she wanted to wear a midriff-exposing top to school. Tessa thought it unfair that she was not allowed to wear such a top, especially after noting that the popular girl, who all the boys liked, wore one. The mother became more worried when she heard another eight year old declare that she was going to diet after seeing an ultra-cool, skinny

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{Merskin} Merskin, 123.
\bibitem{Ibid.} Ibid., 124.
\bibitem{Ibid.} Ibid., 125.
\bibitem{Ibid.} Ibid.
\bibitem{Ibid.} Ibid., 126.
\end{thebibliography}
model in her cousin’s *CosmoGIRL* magazine.\(^6^8\) Both of these examples show young girls relating a perceived image of “sexy” to popularity and acceptance.

**Modesty vs. Eroticism**

Rebecca Raby led eight focus groups with secondary school students in Ontario to study their behavior towards dress codes.\(^6^9\) She found that school dress codes and peer responses affected girls’ final decision on what they wore. Girls were more likely to ridicule their female classmates for dressing too provocatively than male students, argued Raby.\(^7^0\) Girls questioned the dress codes when they believed them to be archaic or useless, especially when the rules shift as fashions change. Raby related that girls would be called “sluts” if they revealed too much. Tanenbaum reported that girls who called others sluts, “reinforced sexual double standards to exercise power over other women;” indecent exposure is linked to a lack of self-respect and curtails female progress.\(^7^1\) She also suggested that such behavior goes back to women competing for men’s attention.

The line between modest and erotic dress was explored, in separate studies, by Raby, Shalet, Entwistle, and Rysst.\(^7^2\) Rysst’s ethnographic field study observed seventy-one Norwegian coeds to determine if ten-year-old girls actually want to dress sexy.\(^7^3\) She studied preteen girls’ attitudes and behaviors on shopping excursions to the mall, and

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\(^6^8\) Levin and Kilbourne, 24-25.

\(^6^9\) Rebecca Raby, “Tank Tops Are Ok but I Don’t Want to See Her Thong,” *Youth & Society* 41, no. 3 (2010), [http://vas.sagepub.com/content/early/2009/03/24/0044118X09333663.abstract](http://vas.sagepub.com/content/early/2009/03/24/0044118X09333663.abstract) (accessed August 27, 2010), 340.

\(^7^0\) Ibid.

\(^7^1\) Ibid.


\(^7^3\) Rysst.
concluded that girls are more concerned with looking “kul,” not sexy. Rysst established a connection between looking “kul,” attracting men’s attention, and love. Girls had set boundaries, “mechanisms and peer norms” that stopped them from acting or looking too mature. Nevertheless, young girls were not consciously aware that tight jeans and belly shirts signified anything but being fashionable. Rysst claimed that they did not understand the negative implications of their provocative dress. Conflict arose when the girls could not determine how to be “kul” and dress age-appropriately. Additionally, Enwistle explained that “sexy” is relative to time and place; bearing one’s breasts was considered indecent in America, but was a common practice in other societies. “Given the focus of fashion is the body,” Enwistle suggested, “it is no surprise to find fashion almost obsessed with sex and sexuality.”

The relationship between modesty and eroticism intensified as parents demanded that preteen fashion fall closer to the modesty pole; the more skin exposed, the closer the line is drawn towards eroticism. Rysst concluded that designers must create fashionable clothes that appeal to both parents and children.

McAllister suggested that the wildly successful and seductively-dressed Bratz doll influenced the way young girls act and dress because they want to mirror their favorite toy’s appearance, including its anorexic figure, hooker boots, ultra-miniskirts, and caked on make-up. MGA entertainment sold 150 million dolls in its first five years, reported McAllister. Isaac Larian, MGA founder, promoted Bratz as a lifestyle brand for “girls

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74 Entwistle quoted in Rysst, 80.
75 Rysst, 80.
76 Matthew McAllister, “Girls with a Passion for Fashion: The Bratz Brand as Integrated Spectacular Consumption,” *Journal of Children and Media* 1, no. 1 (2007) [http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/content~db=all~content=a782989761](http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/content~db=all~content=a782989761) (accessed August 27, 2010), 244.
with a passion for fashion.” 77 In a contemporary spin on a little girl’s toy, Bratz consumers not only owned the doll, but looked and acting like her too. McAllister stated that the doll’s clothing designers followed young celebrity fashion, attended fashion shows, and changed character clothes three to four times per year. In addition to the figurine, the Bratz brand sold make-up and accessories, real-life Bratz clothing, birthday paraphernalia, fast-food toys, video games, TV shows, and movies. 78 This intense focus on image caused young girls to limit their extra-curricular activities and interests into the narrow realm of shopping, looking pretty, and acting sexy, posited McAllister. 79

The Changing Look and Influence of the Media

The Bratz phenomenon reflected a change in the way children used multimedia for their entertainment, information, stimulation, relief from boredom, and emotional arousal. 80 Nancy Signorielli examined four types of media, focusing on six separate venues, including television, theatrical films, music videos, and teen magazines, to explore messages relating to body image, behavior, activities, motivation, and demographic make-up. 81 The September, October, November, and December 1996 issues of *Sassy*, *TEEN*, *YM*, and *Seventeen* made up her magazine sample. The general framework for coding the images and articles included demographics, appearances, activities, and topics of magazine articles. Signorielli reported that women in magazines

77 McAllister, 244.
78 Levin and Kilbourne, 31-32.
79 McAllister, 32.
had a greater representation than men, unlike in music videos, television, and commercials. Seventy percent of all pictures and 82 percent of advertisements showed women in some form. Sixty-one percent of the 622 advertisements tested showed that toiletries and make-up were the most prevalent products, shown by the media that young girls turned to. Results showed that of the 378 magazines articles analyzed, 37 percent involved appearance and looks, 35 percent dating, and 32 percent clothing/fashion. Signorielli concluded that although teen magazines reinforced positive messages of honesty and independence, they also contained stereotypical messages of dating, fashion, and appearance.

Clark examined preteen girls between the ages of eight and twelve to measure the effects of sexual content in the media. Sexual content, which was difficult for children to find fifty years ago, is now impossible to avoid. She found that the more controversial issues were also the most popular with the public, which included children. Young women’s magazines were more progressive in their approach towards sexuality, but their attitudes were self-mocking and ironic. She cited Simone de Beauvoir’s “childish coquetry” to explain that children sexualize themselves to get what they want. This behavior can be learned through consuming magazines at such a high rate. Seventy-seven percent of teenage girls read beauty and fashion magazines, reported Clark; three quarters of white, early age teens (12-14) read at least one teen magazine monthly.

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82 Signorielli, 26.
83 Ibid., 29.
84 Ibid., 34
86 Ibid., 23
87 Ibid.
88 Ibid., 24.
Preteen girls are more likely to consult magazines for advice than their parents or teachers.

Clark surveyed boys and girls to determine the factors that influenced children’s clothing decisions.\(^9^9\) She separated the children into seven different groups, one class for every grade level. Across all classes, parents were reported to be the most influential factor in kid’s clothing choices at 33 percent, followed by peers at 16 percent. Of the media categories, which total 18 percent, magazines are the most influential at 8 percent. The girls in Classes A and B agreed that parents, friends, and magazines carried the most influence on their clothing choices.\(^9^0\) Classes E and F reported that magazines held a greater influence than their parents.\(^9^1\) Clark explained that magazines were popular because they “can be read by the individual or in a group, at a time and place dictated by consumers of the magazine, their portability allow[s] for greater flexibility, and can be held in the hands of girls.”\(^9^2\) She concluded parental influences trend lower as children age and are replaced by the media.

In addition to reporting children’s clothing influence, Clark examined what type of magazine advertisement is most powerful for them and at what age. Younger girls saw an advertisement for “SO DESIRABLE” as inappropriate and too sexualized, while the “older” twelve year olds thought it was “cool.”\(^9^3\) Advertisements stand out because of color, background, make-up, clothing, and tan. Clark reported a “paradox” in the

\(^{89}\) Clark, 24. 
\(^{90}\) Ibid., 49. 
\(^{91}\) Ibid. 
\(^{92}\) Ibid. 
\(^{93}\) Ibid., 119.
surveyors’ responses; “covert and implicit sexualization of girls is normalized, but overt expressions of the sexualization of children is criticized.”

The earliest work related to teen magazines was done by a British women’s studies group in the late 1970s. McRobbie compared advertisements to the feminine ideal in her study Jackie: An Ideology of Adolescent Femininity. She explained that children spend more time with media than any activity, other than sleeping and school. The media is a “key site for defining sexual codes.” McRobbie found that the media’s standard of beauty is skinny with a well-developed bust, Caucasian, heterosexual, and sexually active.

Duke and Kreshel conducted ten in-depth interviews with female subjects, ages twelve and thirteen. The participants, who were regular readers of Teen, Seventeen, YM, and Sassy, were questioned about their standards of beauty, behavioral influences, and feminine ideals. Abby, a girl interviewed by Duke and Kreshel, explained that although model searches request “girls next door,” they almost never chose them. She wanted to see “more girls like me” in the centerfolds of magazines. The beauty industry was wrought with inconsistencies, such as teaching girls how to achieve a “natural look” with a shopping cart full of cosmetics and enhancements. Duke and Kreshel posited that fashion spreads were an important part of teen magazines, so long as the images shown conformed to current trends and what a girl’s peer group “narrowly defines as

94 Clark, 119.
97 McRobbie, 62.
acceptable.” The preteen participants acknowledged the “illusions” fashion magazines present, but they criticized themselves for falling short of this perceived standard of beauty. Fashion magazines were considered an authority figure to preteens who seek the “truth” on how to dress and where to shop.

Grant and Stephen conducted a series of four in-depth focus group interviews with six female participants between the ages of twelve and thirteen. They asked thirty-nine open-ended questions to identify what influences preteen girls in the purchase of clothing. They established that because preteens experienced increased awareness of brands and exposure to fashion, marketers and advertisers were more pressured to understand this subgroups’ buying behavior. Grant and Stephen noted that because “couples have fewer children later in life, with established careers and more discretionary income” their offspring are given more opportunities to shop and establish buying habits. They found that preteen girls are “highly fashion sensitive” and influenced by their parents, peers, and brand names.

Summary

Premature sexualization has a negative impact on a girl’s emotional, cognitive, and sexual development. She can be ignorant of her own vulnerability, which increases the chance for exploitation by the media, adults, or peers. The discussion of parent-child decision making has explored the relationship between authority figures and adolescent...
dressing. Research indicated that the more time girls spend focusing on their appearance, the less time they devote to academics or extra-curricular activities. Preteens negotiate what is and is not appropriate to wear in public and are influenced by their parents, peers, and the media. Studies suggest that magazines carry the most influence for preteens out of all media sources. The media’s standard for beauty, which is being thin, having a well-developed bust, and being sexually active, influences the ways preteens develop their sense of style, identity, and personal standards.

The following research questions were developed based on the review of literature.

1. Do the images show an increase in provocative dress, as defined by Kennedy, over the time span of this study? This includes “all female appearance styles that deviate from the acceptable norm of a specific social situation toward the direction of sexual suggestions and/or body exposure.”

2. If the images are rated as provocative, what characteristics are shown that make them so?

For the purpose of this study, I examined preteen girls’ dress from 1960 to 2005 in order to explore when and how this sexualized phenomena occurred.

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CHAPTER IV

METHODS

Purpose

Images pulled from *Teen* magazine were analyzed to determine whether or not preteen girls’ fashion experienced an increase in sexualization from 1960 to 2005. These images conveyed the model’s overall appearance, as well as specific elements of their clothing that related to body parts being exposed. The APA Taskforce on the Sexualization of Girls explained that sexualization occurs when:

1. A person’s value comes from his or her sexual appeal or behavior, to the exclusion of other characteristics

2. A person is held to a standard that equates physical attractiveness (narrowly defined) with being sexy

3. A person is sexually objectified – that is, made into a thing for another’s sexual use, rather than seen as a person with the capacity for independent action and decision making; and/or
4. Sexuality is inappropriately imposed on a person.¹

Out of these factors, the sexual objectification of adolescent girls is the most relevant to this study. Based on research previously gathered, the following research questions were generated in order to identify specific points from the data collected.

1. Do the images show an increase in provocative dress, as defined by Kennedy, over the time span of this study? This includes “all female appearance styles that deviate from the acceptable norm of a specific social situation toward the direction of sexual suggestions and/or body exposure.”²

2. If the images are rated as provocative, what characteristics are shown that make them so?

Method

This study used the model for content analysis as outlined in Jo. B. Paoletti’s, “Content Analysis: Its Application to the Study of the History of Costume.”³ This method uses documentary evidence, such as images from Teen magazine, when they are “especially numerous,” where background information can be learned, and can achieve objective results. Paoletti outlined the following operations:

1. Articulation of precisely-stated objectives or hypothesis

2. Creation of an instrument or questionnaire designed to measure relevant variables or sort them into predetermined categories

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3. Unbiased sampling of sources and communication units

4. Systematic recording or measuring of variables using the instrument

5. Analysis of the data using appropriate statistical procedures.⁴

Content analysis was used to identify the provocative elements of each model’s dress. Robert Hillstead defined dress by classifying each image as an article of clothing or adornment.⁵ Hillstead stated that clothing, “associated particularly with comfort and protection of body,” includes shirts, pants, dresses, gowns, skirts, bathing suits, coats, sweaters, and shorts. Adornment, “associated with embellishment,” refers to jewelry, cosmetics, grooming aids, purses/bags, and hats.⁶

In addition to the model’s wardrobe, her pose was factored into whether the image was considered to be provocative. How she tilts her head, angles her body, or places her limbs are individual elements that could be provocative when combined. For instance, two models wearing the same bikini could incite different reactions if one is demurely sitting down with her legs closed and her back straight and the other lies down with her arms above her head.

Sample

Teen magazine was chosen for this research because of its widespread popularity, image variety, mission statement, and years of circulation. Jane Fort, Editor-in-Chief of TeenPROM, explained that the magazine, which focused on girls, was a “wholesome balance between service and celebrity that delivers everything a girl needs to begin her

⁴ Paoletti, 14.
⁶ Ibid, 118.
life as a teen.” Although its first issue was published in 1954, *Teen* was not sold on a monthly cycle until 1957. The magazine was more celebrity generated in its early years, but *Teen* gradually evolved into a lifestyle publication. Seventy-two percent of its readers were between the ages of 12 and 14; 59 percent were Caucasian; and 38 percent lived in the North East region of the United States. Fort explained that “every issue is packed with fashion and beauty, interactive advice and quizzes, celebrity role models and entertainment news, as well as inspiring real-girl stories.” The reader demands to know what the latest fashion trends are, where to shop, how to develop a personal style, and how to accessorize.

*Teen* published twelve issues per year and had a paid circulation of two million until 2000 when sales began to drop. Hearst publications announced the end of the magazine in 2009 because its numbers only reached 200,000 copies. Preteens consume magazines intended for older teenagers, such as *Seventeen*, because it is one way for them to feel mature. *Teen* magazine’s demise is one in a growing trend of young adult publications coming to an end, including *Elle Girl* and *Teen People* in 2006, *Jane* in 2007, and *CosmoGirl* in 2008.

The sample ran every five years, from 1960 until 2005, in order to generate an accurate depiction of the testing periods’ trends without being overwhelmed by large numbers. Images were pulled from the April and September issues of *Teen* magazine. Fort stated that “traditionally the “[f]all,” “back-to-school” issue is the best newsstand

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8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
seller . . . [because] girls are interested in back-to-school shopping and buy magazines for inspiration.” The use of the April and September issues nullified any need to eliminate clothing categories for extreme weather because the majority of the clothing shown is for the fall and spring seasons. There are some bathing suits and winter coats found in the chosen issues, but they do not make up the majority of the images pulled. The researcher was unable to acquire every issue of Teen needed, which included the April and September issues from 1960. As a result, August 1962 and May 1963 were used as substitutes. As for the other issues that could not be procured, the researcher chose months and years that were close to the intended date.

There were benefits from using both advertisements and fashion spreads in this study. Advertisements are used to sell the products shown. The high premium paid to have advertisements shown in magazines indicates their importance in terms of viewership and influence. Fashion spreads are controlled by the magazine and reflect the editor’s vision of where trends are going for the season. The models’ dresses, postures, and attitudes inform their viewers about how they should look.

The first eight advertisements and eight fashion spreads that met the set criteria were pulled. The majority of images displayed one female model with at least three-quarters of her body shown. Any image that was blurry was excluded from testing. If the image showed more than one female model on a page, the model with the clearest details was chosen. If more than one model was clearly defined, the one closest to the page’s center or to the magazine centerfold was chosen. A few of the images pulled from August 1962 and May 1963 did not fit within the limits of this study, but were used anyway.

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12 Jane Fort, interviewed by author, email, January 25, 2011.
because there were no others that were available. It was normal for early underwear advertisements to show caricatures instead of real women because it was considered indecent to show flesh. Consequently, some of the lingerie advertisements pulled were renderings of women or real women in body suits beneath their bras and underwear. Another problem occurred in 2005, when both issues only contained five usable advertisements. The ones that were not used showed very little of the model or none at all. In this situation, only five advertisements were tested for each month that year.

Instrument

The instrument was composed of questions which analyzed the images’ material content and reflected the meaning of provocative dress (see Table 4.1). There was enough information on the subject of provocative dress to formulate a series of questions that best reflected it. Questions that identified specific parts of the body, such as, are the model’s legs or breasts exposed, were first asked because the answers were obvious. The model’s legs did or did not show; yes or no. There was no gray area or room for interpretation. There were images, however, that did not have an obvious reason as to why they were rated as provocative. The instrument needed questions that identified characteristics which increased the image’s provocative nature without exposing the model’s physical attributes. An image that shows two models embracing may not be altogether provocative, however, if the models are lying together in a position that is less-than-innocent, the image’s provocative nature will increase. Imagery, position, and context change the manner in which a viewer perceives an image. A fully-clothed young woman
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Questions:</th>
<th>Year/Image</th>
<th>Year/Image</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is this image sexually provocative?</td>
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<td>If yes, then:</td>
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<td>Does her clothing accentuate her form?</td>
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<td>Does her breast cleavage show?</td>
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<td>Does her butt cleavage show?</td>
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<td>Does ¾ or more of her legs show?</td>
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<td>Is her stomach exposed?</td>
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<td>Is her bare back exposed?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Are her legs spread open?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Are her lips open wide?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Is her tongue shown?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Are her hands placed over sexual parts of her body?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is her bra/underwear exposed?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Are her pants not completely closed?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is her top unzipped or unbuttoned at all?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Does the waistband of her bottoms fall below the waist?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Does the image show an embrace between models?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is the model lying down?</td>
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Table 4.1. Instrument.
standing akimbo could still be perceived as provocative if her hands are draped across her breasts or legs spread open.

For this study, only one person, the researcher, rated the images because she knew enough information on the subject of provocative dress to make decisions that would yield valid results. Each rating, which was based on an educated opinion that pulled from academic research and formal training, was measurable. The researcher first decided whether an image was provocative or not. If the answer was no, the researcher moved on to the next image. If the answer was yes, the image was tested against a running list of questions that identified specific provocative characteristics. The researcher identified parts of the body, including the breasts, buttocks, midriff, legs, and back, that were considered to be sexual. There were also questions on how the model was posed, where her hands were placed, and if there was any physical interaction with other models. The questions that yielded the most significant results are discussed in the next chapter.

Once the data was compiled, the researcher tabulated the frequency of yes answers for each question and added the totals across a single row at the bottom of the instrument. The yes answers for each question that were reported between 1960 and 1985 were added together in a separate row. These numbers were divided into the sum total of yes answers and converted into individual percentages. For example, the number of bare midriffs reported before 1985 was divided by the total number of bare midriffs that were reported for the entire study and converted into a percentage. The same formula was used for the yes answers reported between 1960 and 1995. The researcher broke down the total number of yes answers for each question by testing period. The categories that showed the highest number of images reported were inserted into a table for comparison.
CHAPTER V

RESULTS

Introduction

The sexualization of preteen fashion is a growing concern in American society. Young girls are given the opportunity to wear clothing that is more suitable for older women. In previous centuries, children wore clothing that was similar in style and design to adults, but their fashions were considered age appropriate. Their clothing was a reflection of their family’s status and the spirit of the times, not the child’s own desire to look sexually alluring. As consumers in the early twentieth century, children were given the opportunity to purchase clothing specifically designed for them. They became exposed to an onslaught of advertisements that vied for their attention by the mid-twentieth century. While the images may have started out innocently, by the twenty-first century, they became increasingly sexualized.

Many girls bought into the idea that provocative apparel was alluring and appropriate, when in fact it had the potential to damage their cognitive development, academic, and social standing. Their ability to negotiate the transition to adolescence was often hampered by the onslaught of provocative images and messages. Preteen girls
looked to the media, specifically television, the internet, and magazines, for direction. In their desire for acceptance, they dressed in fashions similar to those found in the glossy pages of their favorite magazines. These fashions were at times, risqué, flashy, and they called attention to the wearer’s body.

For this study, I examined images from *Teen* magazine to explore the adoption of preteen provocative dress in the late twentieth century. An instrument was created to address the following research questions:

1. Do the images show an increase in provocative dress, as defined by Kennedy, over the time span of this study? This includes “all female appearance styles that deviate from the acceptable norm of a specific social situation toward the direction of sexual suggestions and/or body exposure.”

2. If the images are rated provocative, what characteristics are shown that make them so?

The researcher examined images pulled from *Teen* magazine, an American publication that targeted girls in late childhood and early adolescence. This study covered the years 1960 to 2005, at five year intervals, because it was in that period that the magazine was continuously circulated. Three hundred and eleven images were pulled from the April and September issues. The first eight images that showed advertisements and eight fashion spreads chosen per year for analysis showed at least one female model with no less than three quarters of her body exposed. Five advertisements and eight fashion spreads were used in 2005 due to a limited number of usable images available for the months chosen. Based on Kennedy’s definition of provocative dress, each image was

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rated provocative or not. The images rated not-provocative were put aside. The provocative images underwent additional testing that identified specific characteristics the provocative images showed, including exposed cleavage, open legs, and clothing accentuation. The researcher also qualitatively recorded any images that were blatantly sexual. Once the survey was completed, the researcher looked at the results for any similarities, irregularities, or general trends. The answers were then tallied and converted into charts.

Overview of Results

Of the three hundred and eleven images that were analyzed, eighty-two were rated provocative, two hundred and twenty-nine were rated not-provocative (see Table 5.1). Of the images rated provocative, fifty-three images were advertisements and twenty-nine images were fashion spreads. Sixty-two percent of the images rated provocative were published in 1985 and after. Thirty-nine percent were published in 1995 and after. In terms of fashion history, the period between 1960 and 2005 was a time of experimentation and unconventional dress. As the mid to late twentieth century progressed, the number of provocative images increased.

Results for the 1960s

Only three provocative images were reported for 1960. (see Table 5.2) The model in one provocative advertisement was drawn in nothing more than a pair of briefs. Although the model was a caricature, it was rated provocative because her curves were generous and uncovered. Only one provocative image was reported to show its model in accentuating garments, one with ¾ or more of the model’s legs exposed, and one with the
NUMBER OF PROVOCATIVE IMAGES PER YEAR

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32 Images Per Year

*In 2005, only 26 images tested
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Table 5.2. Image Characteristics per Year. *Teen. 1960 – 2005.*

32 Images Per Year

*In 2005, only 26 images tested*
stomach exposed. Seven out of the sixteen fashion spreads from 1960 showed models in foundation garments, but their skin was covered by flesh-colored body suits. These images were not rated provocative because they did not appear in a sexual way. (see Figure 5.1).

By 1965, the number of provocative images increased to five. Two separate advertisements were rated as provocative because both showed young females in their underwear (see Figure 5.2). Three provocative images showed models in accentuating clothing. Three images showed models with exposed cleavage, two with exposed stomachs, and one with exposed legs. One provocative fashion spread showed a model with her legs spread akimbo and mouth open wide. Although she was dressed conservatively, her pose and expression were perceived as sexual.

Tortora and Eubank, authors of Survey of Historic Costume, reported that women’s fashion made the transition from “New Look-influenced styles to easy, unfitted lines” by 1964.² Skirts were gradually shortened and new silhouettes were “either straight or unfitted or princess style with a slight A-line.”³ The images analyzed from 1965 showed girls in dresses that matched this description. Fitted bodices expanded into A-line skirts that cut off slightly above the knees. The dresses that took on more contemporary lines were straight from shoulder to hem and accentuated nothing in between.⁴

Tortora and Eubank explained that women’s skirts shortened to two inches above the knee in the late 1960s. The mini-skirt and micro-mini skirt, a term that “applied to the

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³ Ibid.
⁴ Ibid.
Figure 5. 1. Fashion Spread. *Teen*, August 1962, 51.
shortest of the short skirts,” were staples in women’s fashion. The fashion industry responded to this “unfitted, short silhouette, with the introduction of the maxi, a full-length style dress, and the midi, a calf-length skirt.”

Results for the 1970s

The results of the study showed that the images pulled from Teen magazine became increasingly provocative in 1970. Eight provocative images were reported in 1970; six of them showed models in accentuating garments. Six images showed models with exposed cleavage, five with exposed legs, and three with open legs. Two images showed models with low waistbands. These models were the first in the study to wear bottoms that ended below the natural waistline.

One April advertisement was rated as provocative because the bikini model was shown on her knees in the sand (see Figure 5.3). Her one hand was holding her long hair above her head while the other was placed on her inner thigh. A September advertisement showed a model nearly covered from head to foot. The image was rated provocative because the majority of the model’s legs were exposed by short shorts. Another provocative advertisement showed a naked model whose arms and knees covered her private parts as she was bent over at the waist. These examples reflected a trend in advertising that exposed models’ bare skin, instead of covering it with flesh-colored body suits.

By 1975, dress took on more conservative lines. Only five images were rated provocative; three images less than the previous testing period. Four provocative images

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5 Tortora and Eubank, 469.
6 Ibid.
In a world of fusing, Dune Deck
makes the go-everywhere of cotton easy.
Skins $3 to $5. The bikini, about $4.5. The
cover-up, about $6.

Figure 5. 3. Advertisement. *Teen*, April 1970, 25.
showed models in accentuating garments, three with exposed cleavage, and two with exposed stomachs. Only one model was shown with her legs exposed and two with low waistbands. One September advertisement showed the expanse a model’s cleavage as she wore a crop top with plunging scoop neckline that was considered exceedingly provocative. Two provocative images showed an embrace between models. One April 1975 advertisement was rated provocative because of an “intimate embrace between a male and female model” (see Figure 5.4). While the female model was completely covered, she reclined beneath her companion, thus increasing the sexual nature of this image. This was the first image in the study that showed any sexual contact between a male and female.

The provocative ratings of the early 1970s reflected one of the era’s most popular fashion trends; the mini-skirt and the micro-mini skirt. The fashion emphasis on leg exposure influenced models’ postures and poses. Tortora and Eubank reported that the mini-skirt was more popular than the maxi or midi in the early 1970s. They also reported that trousers and blue jeans became more acceptable to wear for both leisure and special occasions. Once pants were adopted by women, the fashion industry introduced other types of pants to include gaucho pants, knickers, and hot pants. Tortora and Eubank described the prevalent fashion silhouette for the late 1970s as “fluid . . . an easier and more casual fit.” There was an emphasis on the well-toned body, but this translated into fashions such as cotton wrap dresses, pantsuits, and stretchy athletic suits. The clothing of the late 1970s enhanced women’s silhouettes, but did not expose them, particularly with

\[\text{Torotora & Eubank, 469.}\]
\[\text{Ibid., 481.}\]
Figure 5.4. Advertisement. *Teen*, April 1975, 27.
the adoption of the maxi and midi-skirts. Dresses that could easily fit over the head and tighten at the waist were also popular trends in women’s fashion.

Results for the 1980s

There was an increase in the number of provocative images reported in 1980. Ten provocative images were reported; eight of them showed models in accentuating clothing. Only two images showed models with exposed cleavages. The number of images that showed bare legs increased from one in 1975 to five in 1980. Two images showed models with exposed stomachs, three with open legs, and four with low waistbands. None of the provocative images showed an embrace between models.

A September advertisement was rated provocative because the model’s nightshirt was short and covered with suggestive text. The words “Cuddle Me, I’m Baby Soft” were written across the chest. This was the first image that showed suggestive or sexual text on clothing. An April fashion spread showed one model with her legs open as she stood on her head (see Figure 5.5). An advertisement from the same year was rated provocative because the model wore skin tight jeans and bit down on her thumb in a suggestive manner (see Figure 5.6). Another advertisement showed a model bent over with her hands on her knees. The photo was taken from behind and although the model was dressed moderately conservative, she was seen as sexually compelling because the researcher’s attention was immediately drawn to her backside. These images were rated provocative because of the model’s pose, in addition to her clothing.

Eight images were rated provocative in 1985; six of them showed models in accentuating clothing. Three images showed models with exposed cleavage, three with
Figure 5. 5. Fashion Spread. *Teen*, April 1980, 66.
Figure 5. 6. Advertisement. *Teen*, September 1980, 25.
exposed legs, and three with low waistbands. The number of exposed stomachs reported increased from two images in 1980 to six in 1985. The number of open legs reported also increased from three in 1980 to five in 1985. One image showed an embrace between two models; this was an increase of one from the previous testing period.

An April advertisement showed a model in a white lace crop top and leggings. In addition to her revealing wardrobe, the model lies across a bed with her leg bent over the other, thus calling attention to the open area between her legs (see Figure 5.7). Another fashion spread showed a model dancing around in her crop top and high-rise pants, which exposed her midriff, upper chest, and arms (see Figure 5.8). Another April advertisement was rated provocative because the female model’s stomach was not only revealed in her Tarzan inspired bikini, but it was the center of the image. Her legs were slightly akimbo and hands down at the side, but as her head and lower legs were not shown, the viewers’ eyes were immediately drawn to the bare skin. An advertisement from 1985 was rated provocative because it showed a model in an oversized shirt that exposed her midriff. Her waist-high jeans were opened at the top, her arms held were above her head, and her hips were thrust out to the side. The model’s unsnapped pants were found to be very suggestive, in addition to her pouty expression and bare midriff. Another advertisement was shown in a similar ensemble. These images reflected a trend in advertising that showed female models with their pants partially undone at the top and their midriffs exposed.

The conservative trends of the previous decade began to fade by the early 1980s. Tortora and Eubank explained that the emphasis on the body that began in the mid-1970s
Figure 5. 7. Advertisement. *Teen*, April 1985, 5.
Figure 5. 8. Fashion Spread. *Teen*, April 1985, 63.
evolved. Women showed off their toned bodies with shorter skirts, tight dresses made from “spandex stretch fiber blends,” and lace and other sheer fabrics. Emphasis on the female’s physical attributes continued well into the 1990s and early 2000s.

Results for the 1990s

There was an increase in the number of provocative images reported in 1990. Eleven provocative images were reported; ten of them showed models in accentuating clothing. There was an increase in the number of exposed legs shown from three in 1985 to five in 1990. Only two images showed exposed cleavages, two showed exposed stomachs, two showed open legs, and two showed low waistbands. These ratings were lower than those reported in 1985. There were no provocative images that showed an embrace between a male and female model.

An April 1990 advertisement was rated provocative because the model wore a snug, knee-length dress that exposed a portion of her back. The shot was taken from behind, and as the model walked away from the camera her dress pulled across her buttocks, immediately drawing attention to that area (see Figure 5.9). Two advertisements showed models in fitted stonewash denim; little skin was shown by either of them, but their pose and attitude increased the sexual nature of these images. One model, bent over at the waist, propped herself up against a wall. The other, whose backside was the main focus of the shot, had a seductive stare. Models who assumed a sexy, pouty look for the camera was an evolving trend that continued into the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

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9 Tortora and Eubank, 524.
10 Ibid.
Figure 5. 9. Advertisement. *Teen*, April 1990, 29.
Provocative trending continued to increase in 1995 as the highest number of provocative images was reported thus far. Fourteen images were rated provocative; ten of them showed models in accentuating garments. Eight provocative images showed models with exposed legs; an increase of three images from the previous testing period. Three images showed models with exposed cleavage, three with exposed stomachs, and three with open legs. The number of low waistbands reported decreased to one. There were three provocative images that showed an embrace between models. This was the highest number of embraces reported for any one testing period.

An April advertisement showed a female model who stood closely between two shirtless male models (see Figure 5.10). Although her jeans extended to the natural waistline, her top reached high enough to expose the bottom of her breast. Another fashion spread from that same year showed a model lying across the top of a tractor in a low cut halter top. Her top was completely buttoned, but its neckline was low enough to reveal her cleavage (see Figure 5.11). The majority of the model’s legs were exposed by her short shorts. Another model’s short, fitted sundress emphasized her entire figure, curves and all, in addition to exposing the majority of her legs. One model’s traditional school uniform was sexualized because her skirt was well above the knee and she stuck her buttocks out as she leaned over a lab desk.

Tortora and Eubank argued that although short skirts continued to appear in 1990, other lengths and silhouettes gained popularity. They explained that “long, straight skirts had long slits. Many dresses, skirts, and pants were fitted and tight until the early
Figure 5. 10. Advertisement. *Teen*, April 1995, 15.
Figure 5. 11. Fashion Spread. *Teen*, April 1995, 74.
By the mid-1990s, “pant legs . . . became wider, and short full skirts reappeared . . . jackets were long . . . and t-shirts ranged from the basic cotton tees to those made in handsome fabrics,” explained Tortora and Eubank.¹¹

Results of the 2000s

Nine images were rated provocative in 2000; eight of them showed models in accentuating garments. The number of images that showed models with low waistbands increased from one in the previous testing period to six. The number of exposed stomachs reported also increased from three in 1995 to five in 2000. Four provocative images showed models with exposed cleavage, two with exposed legs, and one with open legs. One image showed an embrace between a male and female model. One April advertisement showed a model in a tank top that was cut low in the front and exposed her midriff. She coupled it with a pair of moderately low-riding jeans; she hooked her thumbs through the loops and pulled them down slightly to expose more stomach (see Figure 5.12). One fashion spread was provocative because the model’s pants were tight, her stomach was exposed, and her partially zipped jacket drew viewers’ attention to her chest. A September 2000 fashion spread was rated provocative because the model wore a gold, metallic top stretched tightly across her chest, tight pants, and a pouty facial expression. Another September 2000 advertisement was rated provocative because the model transformed her school-girl uniform into a provocative ensemble. The model’s opened sweater revealed the straps and lace of a black camisole (see Figure 5.13).

¹¹ Tortora and Eubank, 525.
¹² Ibid., 525-530.
Figure 5. 12. Advertisement. *Teen*, April 2000, 26.
Figure 5. 13. Advertisement. *Teen*, September 2000, 27.
Despite a decrease in the number of images tested in 2005, the number of images rated provocative did not change. 2005 was the only period that tested ten advertisements instead of sixteen because of a lack of usable images from *Teen* magazine. Nine images were rated provocative; all nine showed models in accentuating clothing. Four images showed models with exposed cleavage, two with exposed legs, five with exposed stomachs, and six with low waistbands. The number of open legs reported increased from one in 2000 to five in 2005. Two images showed a male and female model in an embrace.

An April 2005 advertisement showed a model in a skimpy tank top that revealed the sides of her breasts. Another provocative advertisement showed a model’s buttocks sticking out because she was bent over the hood of a car. The same model was shown in a combination biker-chick/dominatrix ensemble in the advertisement’s background. One fashion spread was rated provocative because the model’s stomach was exposed as she hung from a tree (see Figure 5.14). This reflected a trend in images that showed models raising their arms high in order to expose more of their already-bare stomachs.

By the new millennium, styles had evolved from one particular silhouette or look to many. Trends were adopted by peer groups, argued Tortora and Eubank, to reflect their status or to make a statement. Fashion followers could adopt new styles every season, while others would hold onto the classics for years on end. A variety of necklines and fabrics added interest to the ever-changing designs. Tortora and Eubank explained that “the bare midriff styles that had started in the 1980s continued, and blouses were cut high and pants or skirts low, so that the navel was visible.”

13 Tortora and Eubank, 534.
to eight, leg exposure to two, and open legs one in 2000. Breast exposure increased to four images, bare midriffs to five, and the number of low waist bottoms to six.

The midriff-baring ensembles that were popular in the early 2000s continued into 2005. Women’s styles also became more varied. Tortora and Eubank explained that “skirts could be found in almost any length. Some were A-line; some were short, tight mini-skirts; others were long, slender skirts, called pencil skirts.” Different pant styles included bell-bottoms, tailored pants, and cargo pants. The variety of necklines, particularly in spring/summer wear, triggered the emergence of women’s tops with built in brassieres.

Summary

This research explored the proliferation of provocative preteen apparel in the late twentieth century. Research Question One asked if the images showed an increase in provocative dress over the time span of this study. Kennedy explained that provocative dress included “all female appearance styles that deviate from the acceptable norm of a specific social situation toward the direction of sexual suggestions and/or body exposure.” The results showed a subtle, but progressive increase in provocative fashion from 1960 until 2005. Eighty-two out of the 311 images pulled from Teen magazine between 1960 and 2005 were rated provocative. The majority of the provocative images reported were published after 1985. Ten percent of the provocative images reported were published in the 1960s, 16 percent in the 1970s, and twenty-two percent in the 1980s. Thirty percent of the provocative images were published in the 1990s. 22 percent were

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14 Tortora and Eubank, 534.
15 Ibid.
16 Kennedy, 163-164.
published in the 2000s, but the number of images tested was lower than in previous testing periods.

Research Question Two identified the different characteristics of each provocative image. Fifteen characteristics were analyzed, but only those with the highest numbers were discussed. Sixty-five out of the eighty-two provocative images showed models in accentuating clothing. Only 22 percent of the images that showed models in fitted clothing were published before 1980. The number of provocative images that showed exposed legs was thirty-three. There was a significant escalation of leg exposure reported in 1970 and 1995. Thirty provocative images showed models with exposed cleavage. The highest number of exposed cleavages reported was six in 1970, followed by a tie of four in the 2000s. Thirty provocative images showed models with bare midriffs; 71 percent of those images were published in 1985 and later. Twenty-six of the provocative images showed models with low waistbands. These numbers reported stayed consistently low, between zero and four, until the 2000s when they increased to six. Twenty-four images showed models standing with open legs. The highest number of images reported was a tie at five in 1985 and 2005. As proposed, there was an increase of provocative dress publicized by the media, in addition to an increase in the number of identifying provocative characteristics shown.
CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION

Provocative preteen apparel is today’s headline news, but its emergence in the mid-twentieth century is often overlooked. By looking at the images shown in *Teen* magazine from 1960 to 2005, a subtle shift in provocative trending was discovered. Girls’ fashions and behaviors became more sexualized as the years progressed. Identifying the roots of this issue will help concerned parents, school administrators, and concerned citizens offset it.

Comparison with Previous Research

A review of previous literature helped me to identify the ages studied and what measures were taken to generate results. There was little precedent on the subject as a whole which gave me a wide field for study. I drew on other scholars’ research, methods, and conclusions to create my own instrument for analyzing provocative preteen fashion.

Kennedy explained that provocative dress included “all female appearance styles that deviate from the acceptable norm of a specific social situation toward the direction of sexual suggestions and/or body exposure.”¹ Lynch studied coeds at the University of Northern Iowa and expanded Kennedy’s definition of provocative dress to include

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sexually revealing behavior. These definitions were applied to the current study of provocative dress. I first asked myself whether the Teen image showed a female model dressed in a revealing ensemble or sexually compromising position. The answer was oftentimes obvious, but there were examples that needed more attention. A model shown in her foundation garments might have been rated provocative had it not been for her flesh-colored body suit. Each image was approached with a thorough understanding of what provocative dress was for the era in order to rate it accurately.

Signorielli evaluated four types of media to identify the messages presented and to determine what outlets had the greatest representation of men and women. She found that women in magazines had a higher representation than men, and that teen magazines reinforced positive messages about independence. They did, however, contain gender stereotypes about dating, fashion, and appearance. This research helped me narrow down the type of media that I wanted to use in my study. Based on Signorielli’s conclusions, I used a popular teen publication because it contained many examples of fashion.

Clark examined the content of monthly teen publications and found that a majority of teenage girls were more likely to consult a magazine for advice than their parents or teachers. She also reported that younger children (below twelve) rated sexually explicit advertising as inappropriate, but older adolescents (twelve) thought

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them to be cool. McRobbie found that magazines were a “key site for defining sexual codes” for girls. The magazines’ female standard for beauty was skinny with a well-developed bust, Caucasian, heterosexual, and sexually active. These studies reinforced my decision to use a monthly teen magazine for my study. I opted for Teen magazine because it had not been studied before. Previous research used Seventeen and Jackie to examine teenage fashion, feminist theory, and gender roles, but not the sexualization of preteen fashion.

Adolescent females looked to fashion magazines for the latest trends in clothing and retail outlets. They were “highly fashion sensitive,” concluded Grant and Stephen, and had the means necessary to achieve their desired looks. In an effort to influence preteens’ buying habits, I argued, the media inundated them with messages on brand names and current trends. The preteen was persuaded to buy into an image or look that was being paid for by advertisers or the fashion industry. I used both editorial fashion spreads and advertisements in my study because they demonstrated what was on trend and what was being sold to the public. Each served its own purpose, but both types of images were put into magazines to influence its readers.

Russell and Tyler observed adolescent females in a British retail setting to determine the role of shopping in relation to gender development and consumer culture. They compared the girls’ reactions at two different ages and measured their emotional and cultural growth in a familiar environment. Although our studies were performed

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using two different methods and for two different purposes, I thought that we shared a common affinity for adolescent females. We were determined to contribute as much information as possible on the subject of preteen girls and how they relate to their environment.

In Merskin’s study on the emergence of “Lolita,” she found that girls were to be “sexually available, be dominated and sexually aggressed against, and be gazed on as sexual objects.” The media endorsed public figures who have worked in the porn industry, such as director Gregory Dark. The public could become desensitized to adolescent sexuality because of their continued viewing of provocative content. The results of my study showed an increase in provocative dress in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Increased reports of body exposure reflect previous research on premature sexualization. I agree with Merskin that girls are becoming a commodity for the media to sexualize and sell for profit.

Duke and Kreshel interviewed twelve and thirteen year old girls who read Teen, Seventeen, YM, and Sassy. The participants were questioned about their standards of beauty, behavioral influences, and feminine ideals. Duke and Kreshel explained that fashion spreads were an important part of teen magazines because they showed girls how to dress and where to shop. I believe that although young readers considered magazines an authority on fashion, they had difficulty negotiating what was on trend and what was socially acceptable. If the young preteen does not fall within the boundaries

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set, they are labeled as outcasts. Adolescence is a precarious stage, at best, and with the pressure that is placed on young girls to look and act in a certain manner, they are likely to believe they are abnormal and doomed to never fit in.

Rysst explored high school students’ attitudes towards school dress codes and found that many girls were more concerned with looking cool rather than sexy. Peer acceptance was a high priority for them, especially when their dress attracted male attention. Rysst concluded that girls had set boundaries that stopped them from acting or dressing in ways that were too mature for their age. These were reassuring conclusions, but I was limited with what I could apply to my own research because it focused on teenagers. Preteens lack the experience or wisdom that was necessary to develop these social mechanisms. Their desire for peer acceptance and attracting boys’ attentions may overrule any thought of conservative dress. Although their intention may be to only look cool, preteens who dress provocatively are sexualizing themselves.

Points of Interest

I came across several points of interest while conducting this research. Some were expected, others were not. Each point was, nevertheless, valid and valued for its contribution to the body of research. I examined the rates of provocative trending from 1960 until 2005, the number of provocative images identified in the study, the nature of the provocative images from the beginning of the study to the end, and the embraces between male and female models over the course of the study.

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10 Rysst.
One unexpected result showed itself in the overall findings. Question One asked whether there was an increase in provocative dress, shown in Teen images, over the course of this study. I expected this answer to be a clear yes. The data said something different. There was an overall increase in the number of provocative images reported from 1960 to 2005, but there were several years that experienced a decrease in numbers. For instance, the number of provocative images reported for 1975 was five; this was a decrease of three images from the previous testing period. These results showed a subtle, yet progressive shift in provocative dress. Instead of a solid line that indicated straight trending, it fluctuated every five years or so.

I would also not have predicted that the number of provocative images rated for this study would be so low. Only eighty-two out of the 311 images pulled from Teen magazine were rated provocative. When conducting my research and gathering my data, I would not have believed it possible that my sample would yield such low results. I was, at first, surprised and frustrated with my results, believing that a mistake was made at some point of the study. How could an instrument that was designed to objectively draw out images from a publication and systemically identify the images’ provocative characteristics mess up? Or was a mistake made on my part? After going over each step of the process again, I realized that no mistake was made. The data, although unexpected, was valid.

After acknowledging that my results were correct, I decided to look them from a different perspective. I asked why the number of provocative images pulled from Teen was so low. What was so different about this publication that it deviated from what I
believed to be the provocative norm? Had not the majority of publications become more provocative over the past fifty years? While my results did confirm an increase in provocative trending, I do not believe it completely reflected the cultural changes that took place since the 1940s. A combination of societal influences, which include the Civil Rights movement, sexual revolution, and an increase of the number of women in the workplace, led to an acceptance of provocative dress. If these factors resulted in a change of dress, why did the images pulled from Teen magazine not reflect this? Did this magazine maintain its wholesomeness amidst the ever-increasing sexual nature of other publications? Could it be the reason Teen magazine tanked after fifty years in circulation? Did it no longer appeal to its young audience? Were its editorials and advertisements not flashy enough to catch the eye of its curious consumer? Or could it be that the magazine’s subscription rates were not enough to sustain its cost? While there is not enough evidence to support or refute these claims, the fact is that Teen magazine only showed a subtle increase in provocative nature from 1960 until 2005.

Provocative Imaging: Then and Now

I wanted to compare the provocative images from the beginning of the study to those at the end. An advertisement from the early 1960s that was rated provocative showed a female caricature with their knees bent and hips thrust to the side. Although the model was covered from neck to knees in a loose jersey and skirt, the image was considered provocative. There was a significant difference between these provocative images and others pulled from 2005. One model stood with her leg bent forward and hip thrust to the side, almost identical to the earlier advertisement (see Figure 6.1). She was photographed from the side, however, and her hands pulled her hair well above her head.
Figure 6. 1. A comparison of provocative advertisements from 1960 (left) and 2005 (above). *Teen*, May 1963, 79, Spring 2005, 8.
Two other images were rated provocative because of the models’ attitudes, especially their postures and facial expressions. A fashion spread from the early 1960s showed a model standing with one leg crossed over the other and hands placed across her waist. She wore a formal dress with a fitted bodice and full skirt. Another model from the early 2000s stood with one leg bent and off to the side. She wore a button-down shirt beneath a V-neck sweater, knee-length shorts, and knee-high boots. While the model in the earlier image was rated provocative because of her heavy make-up, typical of the early 1960s, and pouty-expression, she was moderately tame. The later image, on the other hand, showed a model that radiated self-confidence and attitude (see Figure 6.2).

It was easier to use words than numbers to explain how one image was more provocative than the other. My instrument only measured whether or not an image was provocative, not the degree to which it was so. The images that were published in 1960 and were rated provocative appeared to be less sexual than those provocative images published in 2005. Nevertheless, each image showed characteristics that reflected the idea of provocative dress.

Embraces Between Male and Female Models
At the beginning of this research, I wanted to see how the images that showed embraces between male and female models progressed over the course of this study. I expected to see changes in their clothing, but I could never have predicted the varying levels of intimacy on display. The images showed a gradual increase of physical intimacy between male and female models from 1960 to 2005. At the same, the models’ ages seemingly decreased. The level of physical intimacy between the models was low in the early years
of the study. Images that projected ideas of enduring, romantic love showed adult couples standing together with little sexual attachment. By the mid-1980s, images showed young female models sitting on top of male models. There was an increase in the level of physical intimacy between the two models, but a decrease in their ages. By the beginning of the twenty-first century, preteen couples were shown leaning across each other with their limbs intertwined (see Figure 6.3).

Importance

The American Psychological Association Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls explained that young girls were exposed to images, products, and celebrity endorsements that glorified sex. Sexualization occurred when:

1. A person’s value comes from his or her sexual appeal or behavior, to the exclusion of other characteristics

2. A person is held to a standard that equates physical attractiveness (narrowly defined) with being sexy

3. A person is sexually objectified – that is, made into a thing for another’s sexual use, rather than seen as a person with the capacity for independent action and decision making; and/or

4. Sexuality is inappropriately imposed on a person.\(^\text{11}\)

The APA Task Force explained that young children lack the ability to distinguish between fiction and fact or play and reality.\(^\text{12}\) Although it was easy for them to


\(^{12}\) Ibid.
Figure 6.3. A comparison of provocative images that show couples embracing. *Teen*, May 1963, back of cover page, Spring 2005, 34.
misunderstand what was right in front of them, children’s perceptions were what made them so creative and demonstrative. Little girls were known to play dress-up with their mothers’ wardrobes, but society has taken away the fantasy and replaced it with clothing, make-up, high-heeled shoes, and cosmetics that were especially designed for them. Society took away her imagination and told her what was beautiful. By not allowing her to make her own judgments, we limited her space for action. In doing so, girls thought of themselves as imperfect and that they fell short of the idealized image that was presented by the media. They objectified themselves by allowing the media to determine what was beautiful and valuable.

An increased exposure to the media has caused preteens to imitate models chosen for their allure and ability to influence fashion. Young girls are shown images of models in barely-there ensembles, posing suggestively by themselves or with others. It has conditioned young girls to believe that it is appropriate to dress provocatively. They cannot begin to understand the consequences of their actions because they were taught at a young age that sex equals power and that the more skin exposed the better. If they are to assume the roles of future leaders, they must learn in the present how to dress less provocatively.

Implications for Future Research

Two research questions addressed the most relevant issues of this phenomenon. Research Question One asked if the images showed an increased in provocative dress over a given period of time. Three-hundred and eleven images between 1960 and 2005 were analyzed. A change in the testing sample could be another possible research study. Teen magazine was chosen because it had the right target audience, was in circulation
throughout the last half of the twentieth century, and was considered an important source of fashion information. If another preteen publication were used such as *Girl’s Life* or *Barbie Magazine*, the results could provide other angles otherwise unavailable. Other media outlets could be tested as well, including catalogs, to generate more data.

Research Question Two identified specific characteristics that made the images suggestive. A limited number of provocative characteristics were identified because of time and space. One future study could focus on a specific area of the female’s body, such as the legs or breasts, and measure the exposure rates over a given time. Focusing on one body part could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the fashion trends that exposed or enhanced it. Given that fashion trends shifted at such a rapid rate in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, one might pull images from every two years instead of five.

These suggestions could help identify when and how the young female body became a mannequin for provocative fashions. How can we possibly justify suggesting to young girls that it is appropriate to wear clothing that is sexually provocative? When did it become common practice to sell child-size thongs or advertise girls with their legs spread apart? Children grow up too fast as it is. Should we not, as adults, protect their innocence? Adults need to nurture them, not degrade them. By being in a position of authority, adults have the responsibility to ensure that they lead the most productive, moral, and well-rounded lives. If they continue to allow young girls to dress provocatively, they will become the very type of person adults should be protecting them from. Although the number of provocative images shown in the late-twentieth and early twenty-first centuries has increased, there is an opportunity to stop the wide-spread
adoption of these trends. Adults must hold themselves accountable for the roles they play
in facilitating this phenomenon and only then will change occur. This change must be
soon, however, or else society will have another generation that quickly matures from
pretty princesses to preteen provocateurs.
REFERENCES


