The invention of the tweens: youth, culture and media

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Abstract

During the first decade of this century, various discourses within the Brazilian context, celebrated the image of savvy children consuming "like adults" and providing adults with technological know-how. This is the starting point to investigate the recent creation of *tweens*, boys and girls between childhood and adolescence, by undermining this supposed phase of life and having a genesis of this subject pre-teen, stemming from the possible conditions of its emergence, all within a youth culture. Based on Foucault's understanding of subjectivity, the article underlines arguments linking the changes in the conception of the modern individual to the emergence of new technologies of subjectivity in contemporary societies, articulating them to media discourses constituting tweens. Such communication processes give voice to children, contributing thus to the social construction of their autonomy.

Keywords: Tweens. Pre-Adolescents. Autonomy. Modernity.

The present work stems from research that seeks to understand which cultural resources are available so that we can each be somebody, in other words, how is it possible to be or belong within that culture. This inquiry was addressed by taking as object of study the phenomenon of the so called tweens, or those children who begin to adhere to social and cultural practices that allow them to try new ways of being and staying young in the

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world. This query stems from various discourses, which characterize tweens (or preteens) in order to analyze the very creation of this age category as a symptom of socio-cultural changes of the last decades. But the task at hand is not merely to deconstruct this stage of life. Based on Foucault's understanding of subjectivity, the article underlines arguments that link the changes in the conception of the individual with the emergence of modern technologies of subjectivity in contemporary societies, articulating them to media discourse constituting tweens. This paper proposes the discussion among those authors who have attempted to explain these acute changes in Modernity, where the urgency of an autonomous subject manifests itself. This theoretical discussion is followed by an analysis of the article "Eles têm força" or "They have power," which appeared on *Veja Magazine*, in February 2003. The choice was made after a survey conducted in the first decade of this century in the Brazilian press[1]. The excerpts chosen from the material that resulted from this survey will be important on two levels. First, to signal the media visibility of tweens, and secondly, to show how the media presents itself as a stage where boys and girls are constituted as individuals. Through this methodological option it was possible to understand that tweens are, after all, a product of their time, which is made possible by a particular social setting, at a specific moment in time.

Tweens: a new way of being young in the world

In 1904 G. Stanley Hall published in the United States, *Adolescence: its psychology and its relation to physiology, anthropology, sociology, sex, crime, religion and education* consisting of two volumes and approximately 1500 pages. The book not only defended the existence of a longer passage from childhood to adulthood, but additionally, it stated that this group required special treatment. Soon this life period began to occupy a privileged space, natural-

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[1]Understood as the magazines and newspapers (and their respective online contente) with national circulation and also recognized as Market leaders such as *Veja*, *Época*, *Isto É*, *Folha de São Paulo*, *O Estado de São Paulo* and *O Globo*.

ized – even though it was a socially constructed view anchored on conceptual refinement (GRINDER, STRICKLAND, 1968; FREIRE FILHO, 2006). In the second half of the twentieth century, the concept of adolescence was consolidated as an age group that started to demand their own specific ways of acting, living, dressing and interacting. The value of this life period garnered spokespeople in various areas. *Youth* (and all its controversial definitions, classifications, boundaries, appropriations and various uses of the term) began to take center stage in academia[2]. It became an object of study in the fields of Sociology, Medicine, Pedagogy, Biology, Psychology, as well as the target of interest of the Arts, Government Institutions, public policies, and the press. Its aesthetics, especially through the arts and advertising, allowed individuals of different ages to access youthful modes of existence. The "juvenilization" underwent by modern societies (MORIN, 2005) disconnected the youth of his temporal materiality based on age, and promoted it as an ideal way of living, experiencing and being. This serves as reference not only to the old who persistently strive not to lose their youthfulness, but also to the young, who are committed to take actions that will allow them to access the youth as soon as possible.

On the forefront of multiple cultural and social events, the youth does not stop recreating itself through various ways of being young. The transition from childhood to adulthood, schematized throughout the twentieth century, is anchored with increasing intensity in the mediated social practices at the expense of traditional relationships. It is within this context that the concept of tweens, or preteens appears: Boys and girls summoned to deny the practices of childhood and to adhere to youthful modes of being

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[2] According to Edgar Morin, the terms youth and adolescence refer to the same idea. He states that the rise of adolescence is linked to the weakening of rites of passage, found mainly in archaic societies, "old age is undervalued. Adulthood is rejuvenated. Youth, meanwhile, is not in a matter of speaking, youth: it is adolescence "(Morin, 2005, p 153.). Therefore, in this paper, the two terms are treated interchangeably (MORIN, 2005, p. 153). Thus, in the current paper the two terms will be treated indistinctively.

and existing in the world. Therefore the expansion of adolescence operates in both extremes - toward the older age groups and also the younger. Tweens and pre-teens are constantly invited to join this experience of what it means to be young through a behavioral conduct prescribed to them by means of consumption of material and symbolic goods.

The term *tween* comes from the English preposition between, which indicates a position between two extremes, and is also reminiscent of the word teen (teenager to teenager in English). It first appeared in 1987 in an article in the magazine *Marketing and Media Decisions* to designate a market formed by a young middle tier between the ages of 9 and 15, possessing "its own distinct characteristics and capabilities" (HALL, 1987, p.56, *apud* COOK, KAISER, 2003). From then on several other research projects, articles, and essays proposed different age groups without straying far from the 8 to 14 years of age (COOK, KAISER, 2003). Although terms such as preteens, preadolescence, preteenager, subteen, and subteenager had already appeared then, its role was to specifically designate a *generation* with a specific market behavior within this age group.

The *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary* defines "tween-agers" as the / a "young person between the ages of 8 or 10 and 12 or 14 years old" (my emphasis). And the Pan American Health Organization / World Health Organization - PEO / WHO considers adolescence as a stage divided into pre-adolescence (10-14 years) and adolescence itself (15-19) (ABRAMOVAY, 2004).

In Brazil the term preadolescent had already appeared in academia in 1980 (ALMEIDA, 1980), limiting itself to solely designate a range of ages without any ties to consumerism. The *Houaiss* dictionary defines pre-adolescence as the "period of human development just prior to adolescence; puberty ". During the first decade of this century, both terms - tweens and pre-adolescents started being used in Brazilian media, in most cases, interchangeably[3]. Although tweens were shaped and strengthened in North

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[3] "The tween village is not homogeneous. This is because pre-teens are going through a major milestone – puberty - when bodily and behavioral changes are countless" (KOSTMAN, 2003, p. 89); "Stemming from the term between (in English), the tween concept is applied in Brazil to boys and girls from eight to 12 years, a period popularly known as pre-adolescence "(Castellón, 2007).

America around the 1980s, it is only in the early 2000s that we notice the construction of this category in Brazil. A thorough observation of Brazilian media, whether printed, electronic or online, whether they come from a journalistic standpoint or advertising, can show the extent to which the term has been absorbed and is being used. Not only that - but the notion that this is a young segment endowed with their own personality and relevance to the marketplace also becomes apparent. By resorting to such a category, these boys and girls can be supplied with social practices from which new subjectivities are promoted and new identities are offered.

The denaturalization of the tween phenomenon is not, however, the only aim of this paper. Nor is the notion of the creation of a new age category as just another marketing strategy of domination – although it should be clear that the hat the categorization of tweens allows the development of a number of specific social practices related to material age allowing the legitimacy of behaviors and, thus placing limits on conduct (BOURDIEU, 1983). In this respect, Michel Foucault thought the naturalization of concepts and practices not as a strategy to maintain the power of the bourgeoisie, but as a social construct, as a result of a specific social context (FOUCAULT, 2006).

Thus, situating the emergence of tweens in a secular discussion about youth is an exercise that exceeds the task of denaturalization. Thus we approach the present in a Foucauldian way, which understands the present, again, as the place of the difference between who we were and who we are, not in the search for cause and effect but of a diagnosis of the present that allows us to reflect that elements of our time allowed for the realization that features of our time allowed the constitution of pre-adolescence, a term not uttered in decades. According to this view, tweens are a sign of the times, a construct that would not take place at another epoch or society, born of a discourse that reveals power relations. The conditions of visibility of their practices are historical and not inherent. It is not, however, something that was hidden and revealed, but of a possibility which has resulted from a social setting, at a specific time.

Tweens: a symptom of contemporary culture

Unlike pre-modern societies where social roles were delegated to its members by the community, Modernity allowed individuals to try new ways of being in the world and therefore new ways of relating and interacting. From here on, identity would no longer be just a common heritage; it became a venue to different instances of modern societies, whose apparatuses and institutions demanded certain placements of individuals. Family as well as work relations are no longer confined to the group that shared the same space for almost a lifetime. Sharing different environments at different moments and being able to accomplish an accurate interaction through fluid and disposable identities became an unpostponable item on their agenda. In contemporary societies, the practice of administering adequate identities is part of the daily life of an individual responsible for choosing, defining, constructing and disposing of their own identities. The question then is not about who one is, but who one can become and how to become someone.

Harvey (1992) argues that Modernity has not achieved its main goals comprised in a project based on Enlightenment's intellectual effort to create a society free of "subjectivisms" based on faith and tradition but comprised by objective science and nature, through the discovery of universal premises that could be applied to any and all. Additionally, according to the author, such move would have bumped into the contradictions present within Modernity itself, one of which was predicted by Weber pertaining to the fact that the rationalization of all spheres of society in the search for a universal harmony that imprisons individuals instead of liberates them.

According to Eagleton (1998), the advancement of modern processes reached its limit in such a way that other social arrangements were triggered in order to cope with the demands of society. According to this view, proclaiming to be "'postmodernist' not only means that you have abandoned Modernism once and for all, but that it has run its course until it has reached a stage which has been deeply marked by it" (EAGLETON, 1998, p.8).

Giddens (1991; 2002) makes use of the term late Modernity to characterize this moment. According to him, the stage we live in today is the consequence of Modernity on a global scale. Bauman (2001) uses the term liquid modernity, alluding to the fluid nature of liquids, which allows successive and continuous changes in its shape. He claims he was part of the modern design intended to rid the individual of an inherited identity, freeing each to acquire the identity he or she desired as a life plan (BAUMAN, 1998). Personal choices on how to live take the place of traditional ways living, giving to individuals the chance to play new roles, to assume new identities, formulated and transmitted by modern institutions.

Other social institutions, such as the mass media began to offer symbolic material for identity construction, which is an individual reflective task. The individual starts choosing who he wants to be and how he wants to be recognized in the world. With the advancement of Modernity and media culture, these possibilities multiply. Everyone can take ownership of images, attitudes and appearances readily available. While observing this complex dynamic in advertising, Kellner realized that the ads are much more worried about presenting a "lifestyle" than the characteristics of the product at hand. Identification with particular ideals presented in the advertisement (beauty, fame, health, happiness, youth, success, wealth and so forth) gives pleasure and satisfaction to individuals. Since this is an endless movement, the construction of identity in contemporary societies becomes limitless. "The overwhelming range of possible existing identities in this thriving culture image undoubtedly creates extremely unstable identities while it keeps offering new openings for the restructure of the personal identity" (KELLNER, 2001, p.330). Therefore it is an ever fleeting, incomplete identity. The new quickly turns into old.

Giddens refers to these identities as identities of the self (self-identities), conceived by him as biographical narratives of the self (GIDDENS, 2002) and constructed through reflective processes of internal reflexivity, by means of successive choices. This proposition has a number of consequences, among which two are note-

worthy for this research. The first one of them relates to *lifestyles*, which act as a tactic to ease the anguish and anxieties linked to the ongoing task of choosing. Social practices that constitute such styles embraced by individuals "fulfill utilitarian needs" and, moreover, "give material form to a particular narrative of self-identity" (GIDDENS, 2002, p.79).Another consequence pointed out by the author refers to what he calls the segregation experience. Modernity has allowed a marked departure from prior experiences that circulated in daily life. Without traditional references, individuals invest heavily in projects of the inner self. Absent from experiences, they rely on the *experts* offered by increasingly specialized systems. Thus, experts teach how to live and choose in a world where freedom and autonomy go from privilege to responsibility.

This idea of acting on by yourself is due to the construction of an inner self that allows the individual to objectify him/herself and thus evaluate oneself, planning personal strategies or eliminating elements that are not consistent with a given life project. According to this perspective "the search for identity can be seen as a search for what I am essentially" (TAYLOR, 2005, p.239). Therefore the possibility (or necessity) of individuals to articulate, narrate their existence, participate, and belong to a community arises, since society no longer has authority to determine its members as such. Understanding this *inner man*, this *self*, is in line with the practices of that construct subjectivity in contemporary societies. It is upon this internalized soul that individuals intervene, making and remaking their own self.

Taking into account that subjectivity is not their own - but pass through them - it can be argued that subjects are discursive constructions stemming from knowledge, power and practices of the self (FOUCAULT, 2006). The fact that the subjects were not pre-existing, but the result of subjectivity, does not mean that its performance is null (FOUCAULT, 2006). Rather, the techniques themselves allow individuals to operate on themselves (on their body, their emotions) in order to perform appropriate transformations - some of them totally absorbed by moral laws while others may be completely independent from them. In Foucault's view,

this happens in a particular way in modern society - when the exercise of power over individuals went from punitive and explicit to new modes of adjustment, now organized by discipline; a process analyzed in *Discipline and Punish* (1979), where he argues that this kind of power causes a pain in the soul rather than the body. In order to escape this it is necessary to hear the authorized voices to give the direction towards the path of healing or the various ways in which to avoid pain. Within this scenario where the self was being objectified, truths were produced towards the individuals, which legitimate various prescribed forms of character and origin.

Tweens: offspring of their time

Foucault (1988) referred to governmentality or government of the self and others to explain the union between the techniques of domination over others and over themselves. Thus self-identities are part of this broad program of self in contemporary societies in which individuals, while undergoing social arrangements, double up on themselves (DELEUZE, 1988), forging new ways of subjectification. By suggesting a history of governmentality, Foucault (1979) proposes an investigation in the sixteenth century, a period that he characterizes as the beginning of a *governmentalisation of the state.* With the emergence of the populace was the emergence of the population that allowed the transfer of statecraft, to manage people and resources of the family space to urban communities. The state government would no longer be one marked by territoriality, but the management of collectives. It was the emergence of the population that allowed the transfer of the art of governing, in order to manage people and resources, from private to collective urban communities. The State government would no longer be marked by territoriality, but by the management of collectivities. The isolation of populations (by gender, age, illness, social class, crime and so forth) allowed for calculations and statistical analysis that generated a reality, i.e., truths about such groups. They were used in a kind of moral topography, associating material data to political, economic, cultural, biological, and psychological ones.

Just as the isolation of populations allowed predictions about them, which were used to foment the practices and technologies of subjectivity, the categorization of boys and girls between childhood and adolescence is making it possible to formulate a series of knowledge about them. Once they are grouped by a range of ages, *tweens* have been increasingly exposed to research and studies that measure their tastes, their desires, fears, dreams, and priorities. Market research, disseminated and propagated by the media, analyze the *tweens*. Based on interviews with pre-adolescents themselves and their parents, these surveys are obviously in the service of developing better sales strategies.

> Recent research by the French group Ipsos with young people aged 11 to 12 years, in 13 countries (Argentina, Britain, Brazil, among others), captured this well. Girls are concerned with clothes and beauty products, while boys want the most is to chase a ball or play video games (APETITE, 2005).

But they are not limited to drawing marketing profiles, additionally; they propose a kind of essential tween. By stating, for instance, that families with children who are pre-teens have more debt, one of the articles deduces that the increase in spending is due to the fact that at this age, "kids have their own tastes".

> Having pre-adolescents children (six to 12 years) also disturbs the household finances. "In this age group spending on clothing weigh more because the kids have their own tastes, seek follow trends and grow out of clothes and shoes quickly, since they are in the growth phase," observes Perrella (FAMÍLIAS... 2007)

More than merely mapping out consumption, studies show the soul of pre-teens, building an emotional topography, as observed in the study that shows that

> Brazilian girls starting at 8 years old are already concerned with matters such as fidelity in dating. Sooner than ever they begin to have adult concerns: they want commitment, while boys do not want to give up their freedom. For them, dating can take away from their time with friends. In their eyes these are not premature attitudes for their age group. This is a general trend observed in a survey of a thousand tweens and Brazilian adolescents, ages 8 and 14, from all regions of Brazil, taken by Boomerang TV channel (Mariano, 2009).

The search for what constitutes the anxieties attributed to this period of life exhibit a wide range of emotions, from fear to the frustrations as pointed out by the children and adolescents surveyed:

> Research by UFMG (Federal University of Minas Gerais) showed that it is not only teenagers who say they are dissatisfied with their bodies [...] According to Ana Elisa Fernandes Ribeiro, responsible for medical research, children between six and nine years old and pre-adolescents between ten and 13 years old also showed concern about their body image. 1,183 students between six and 18 enrolled in primary and secondary education in 20 schools of Belo Horizonte were analyzed. Although 80% of them are of normal weight, 62.6% were dissatisfied with their body. About 34% wanted to be thinner and 29% would like to gain some weight (CHILDREN, 2007).

Such data feed into the techniques of developing the self fields of *psi*, as assured Rose: "to make calculable subjectivity, they [" psychological sciences "] become subjected to people who do things to them - and subjected to do things to themselves - on behalf of their subjective capacities" (ROSE, 1998, p 39.).This is where prescriptions for conduct for tweens are born, especially addressed to those who care for them. Most of the literature addressing the topic is specifically in the English language[4]. In Brazil, one of the most well known names in this area is the psychiatrist Içami Tiba. He urges parents to not their tween's consumption desires rule them, as the "tween brain is biologically still child-like and emotionally, he/she is also infantile, therefore with no biological, psychological and social conditions to cope with the responsibilities of what may happen to them" (TIBA, 2005, p.174). Additionally, the author suggests that "if parents negotiate well their children's wishes within their real means, these children will have good administrative and financial education that will help the whole family" (ibid., p.39).

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[4] *The everything tween book: a parent's guide to surviving the turbulent preteen years*, by Linda Sonna (Everything Books, 2003); *Talking to tweens: getting it right before it gets rocky with your 8- to 12-year-old*, by Elizabeth Hartley-Brewer (Da Capo Press, 2005); *Engaging tweens and teens: a brain-compatible approach to reaching middle and high school students*, by Raleigh Philp (Corwin Press, 2007); *Congratulations, you've got tweens!: preparing your child for adolescence*, by Paul Pettit (Kregel Publications, 2007).

Within the field of education tweens are also beginning to have space and attention. Ferminiano (2010), for example, believes that they are vulnerable to successive marketing appeals and therefore there is a need to redesign the school's curriculum, pedagogy and the training of teachers in order to develop new types of literacy, especially in economics and consumerism in order to prepare pre-teens to deal with a globalized culture.

> "Tweens" are these fascinating creatures that often push adult to the edge as far as their patience, but they are our children, and, under no circumstance, you can leave them at the whim of other influences, such as marketing. To them is delegated a position of power, because they can win their parents over through fatigue and additionally because they understand the world and perceive, feel, that adults do not have sufficient knowledge to deal with them and identify their emotional, affective, moral and physical needs, and desires. Powerful, but immature to hold such power they are also the target of Education. A universal need for stable and organized ties in the family as well as in the school are essential for them in order to feel safe and able to make their choices, even if consumerist ones, that are permeated by values and responsibility (FERMINIANO 2010, p.426).

Noteworthy is the fact that such statements assume that children in general and particularly tweens are not able to fend off the attacks of marketing, leading parents and educators not to prevent them from this but to monitor and even equip children with increasingly information and knowledge so they can make defend themselves: parents should talk to their children about household finances, integrate them into the family budget discussions, teach them to manage their own pocket money, explain the utility of certain products and so forth. On the same token, teachers should provide notions of economy, consumption, and entrepreneurship, teaching students to use money in a productive manner. In addition to this line of work, we have readily at our disposal an extensive production of other technical knowledge that legitimate family interference, education, politics, government, medical and legal aspects of the lives of these boys and girls[5].

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[5] "The Brazilian Association of Food Industries (ABIA - A Associação Brasileira das Indústrias da Alimentação), the Brazilian Advertisers Association (ABA - Associação Brasileira de Anunciantes) and 24 food companies pledged to end, start-

But there is also a ready supply of proposed behavior geared towards children and adolescents so that they can draw relevant ways of inhabiting societies present in the music lyrics, the plots of movies and TV shows, the strategies of online gaming, and the representations that accompany products consumed by them. In addition to the prescribed codes of conduct given to adults there is an emergence of "how to" manuals directed towards tweens themselves. The examples drawn show products that insert within the imaginary of boys and girls issues and problems of the young world as well as the adult world. The collection of books entitled *Altas-ajudas* by Rocco Publisher, edits titles such as *How to Survive Family* (2006), "child-friendly, with tips on how they can take simple ideas and attitudes for living better within the family and educate their parents ". The book is the first in a series written by Bernadette Prades and other authors[6]. By the same publisher we also have *De menina a mulher* (2001 – *From Girl to Woman*) by Rikki Pinotti, which proposes steps to teach girls, "in a non-didactical manner," how to operationalize their own passage to the adult world in a light manner[7].

ing in January, advertising towards children and pre-adolescents under 12 years old" (IWASSO; MAIA JUNIOR, 2009). ""The loss of IQ points caused by sleep apnea in children is irreversible in most cases, if left untreated, experts warned at a conference on sleep disorders (...) between the ages of seven and eight years old the ideal sleep is ten hours, and at least nine hours for tweens"(APNÉIA..., 2002). "When practicing at least one [sports] modality, twice a week, tweens improve coordination, strength, flexibility, aerobic endurance and strengthen the joint structure" (ELES..., 2004). "'It is essential to monitor the auditory system in children and adolescents, paying attention to the signs and performing audiometric testing at least once a year, 'says the doctor, who warned of the rise of hearing disorders among pre-teens (USO..., 2007).

[6] *Como sobreviver sendo um menino* (2007 – *How to survive being a boy*), *Como sobreviver sendo uma menina* (2007 – *How to survive being a girl*) e *Como sobreviver na escola* (2008 – *How to survive being in school*). All from Rocco Publishing.

[7] *De menina a mulher: tudo o que você precisa saber para sobreviver à adolescência e virar uma mulher de sucesso* (2001 – From girl to woman: everything you need to know to survive adolescence and become a successful woman), *De menina a mulher 2: tudo o que você precisa saber para trilhar os caminhos da moda e arrasar sempre* (2002, From girl to woman 2: everything you need to know to conquer the fashion world and always be trendy), *De menina a mulher 3: tudo que você precisa saber para ser popular, fazer amigos e manter relacionamentos* (2003 – From

Along these lines, Record publisher, through Seal *Galera*, launched in Brazil *Brincar de ser feliz* (2010) – *Playing Happy* (2010) which is noteworthy because it is a self-help book written by Libby Rees, when she was 9. In 72 pages, she tells how she overcame her parents' divorce and advises young readers how to tackle problems. What one can observe from these titles and their propositions is the construction of a child being molded to change and reform him/herself, able to intervene on their own self. The interiority of a child, which was previously limited to the managing of their caregivers, is now presented as something accessible to these infantile subjects.

Rose believes that, as the disciplines of the psychic field (psi) penetrate in different aspects of society, psychologizing social behaviors and practices, they are also affected by "cultural technologies", such as marketing and advertising, which contribute to develop the "psych apparatuses to understand and act on the relationships between people and products in terms of images of self, your inner world and your life-style" (ROSE, 2001, p.194). Thus, analyzing the forms of governmentality is a way of investigating the available paths of subject formation, therefore the means of subjectification. The construction of the self as a personal project goes through practices of thinking, judging and acting for themselves and others. Therefore, empowering the subject is a central action in contemporary governmentality because only autonomous individuals are free to choose what is offered to them - and what they need to become.

> The prospect of governing draws our attention to all those numerous programs, proposals, and policies that attempted to form the behavior of individuals - not only to control, subjugate, discipline, normalize, or reform them, but also make them more intelligent, wiser, happier, more virtuous, wholesome, productive, docile, entrepreneurs, empowered with self-esteem (ROSE, 1996, p.12).

girl to woman 3: everything you need to know to be popular, make friends and maintain relationships), *De menina a mulher 4: Tudo que você precisa saber sobre vestibular, profissões e dinheiro para ter uma vida de sucesso* (2004, From girl to woman 4: everything you need to know about the SATs, jobs and money and to have a successful life) and *De menina a mulher 5: Tudo que você precisa saber para sobreviver no mundo dos adultos!* (2010 – From girl to woman 5: everything you need to know to survive the adult world. All titles from Rocco publisher.

Rose states that the development of the history of government goes hand in hand with the history of the psi disciplines. Institutions in charge of conducting behavior manipulated the production of knowledge about individuals and their subsequent disclosure. To become a subject autonomous of their choices, it takes practice to learn about themselves, taught by experts (key figures in the contemporary subjectification process), which act in the preparation of the subjects. Thus, "through these transformations we invented ourselves with all the ambiguous costs and benefits that this invention entails" (ROSE, 1996, p.17). The influence of the experts thus meets the demands for knowledge especially used in decision-making.

Tweens: towards autonomy

The modernity project weakened the authority figures and the value given to community experience and tradition due to the strengthening of an increasingly internalized individual, who is self-constituted from a psychological center at the expense of external references to it. In this sense, autonomy is configured as one of the most pressing contemporary values.Rose describes autonomy as "the ability to carry out the wishes in secular life, develop the full potential through one's own efforts, determine the course of its own existence through acts of choice" (ROSE, 1999, p.84). Thus, according to the author's view, in contemporary times, the ways in which the individual is governed and self-governing are linked to the so-called therapeutic technologies and consumer technologies.

The therapeutic technologies are related to the psychological knowledge of human beings. Their importance for the analysis of modes of governance in Modernity lies in the fact that they have developed knowledge about individuals, which could be used in the development of technologies of subjectivity. In the mid-twentieth century, the rise of mass consumer technologies is configured in rationalities established by "salesmen, marketing researchers, designers, and advertisers who increasingly base their

calculations on psychological concepts of humans and their desires" (ibid., 1999, p.85). Through these psychological techniques, it was possible to divide the population by segment, tastes, desires, weaknesses and thus to promote a link between the product and the needs of individuals, allowing a link to be made between making a specific purchase, and the individuals desires, making it possible to adhere to a specific life style through purchasing and communicating it in the form of a narrative of life consistent with the choices made.

> This governmental rationality rests on mechanisms to govern at a distance by means of self-disciplined social subjects, encouraged to feel responsible for their own well-being. In the very moment it seems there are exerting their most personal choices, the person who actively pursues self development acts as a vehicle for a spectrum of practices and government policies and regulations. We observe here a change of external imposition of discipline for an internal motivation (SON Freire, 2007, p.14).

It is within these contemporary contours that the *tween* subject arises, drawing on the ideals of a free, autonomous individual, capable of making choices in their personal turf, which somehow, are in line with neoliberal requisitions of the self-responsible subject. To illustrate the formation of this new youth category and their direct alignment with contemporary ideals of autonomy, the following is an analysis of an article published in February 2003 by *Veja* magazine, in the section relating to behavior. Entitled "They have the strength" (*Eles têm a força*) the weekly magazine features in the form of an 8 page spread a report based on a round table discussion with 20 pre-adolescents between the ages of 10 and 12, commissioned to the McCann-Erickson firm, which widely known for their public polls and market research.

The subheading helps to understand the meaning assigned to the terms "they" and "strength": "Not child, sir - preteen. The 8 to 12 years old crowd lives and consumes like adults. And furthermore teach their parents how to deal with the computer" (KOSTMAN, 2003, p.85). Although the text does not bother to give exact definitions of what would actually be a pre-teen, it's safe to assume, based on the responses of the interviewees,

what they are not: children. Later on in the article the reporter explains: "They hate magicians, clowns and anything that relates to children's universe; their parties have, instead, a dance floor and happen late at night" (ibid., p.86). The denial of childhood is the initial condition for the gradual access to the experiencing youth. It is no wonder that these boys and girls, identified in the story as the "ultra-young gang", are known for wearing clothes, shoes, cosmetics, makeup and more electronic gadgets that are more reminiscent of adults than children, in other words, they are living like "big people". These are practices that are changing their age-identity from children to youth. Secondly, the title of an article states that they, those who are no longer children, have the power, clearly based on the fact they consume "big people" and due to the fact that they teach adults. This will be explicitly shown as the most celebrated characteristic in this specific article, but also throughout various others analysis during the present research. Therefore this strength resides in the power to consume and in their technological skills also developed through the power of consumption. Thus to speak of tweens is to speak of middle class boys and girls in large urban centers: "Ever more self-determined and independent, middle class tweens consequently have acquired a high purchasing power. Never before have 10 year old boys and girls had so much money in their hands and such autonomy to decide what to do with it" (KOSTMAN, 2003, p.86).

The article proceeds to highlight the elements that differentiate them from the children's understanding of childhood built over the last three centuries. The historical and socio-cultural changes in which societies have passed, however, allowed these boys and girls to have more space to talk and be heard: "Until very recently they belonged to the vast, undifferentiated world of children. Now this ultra-young gang have a voice at home, know very well what they want, date, hang out with friends and consume as big people "(ibid., p.86). The fact that the magazine had conducted a round-table discussion with 20 pre-adolescents is strong evidence of the growing legitimization of their "active voice". This initiative also signals to another significant point: the media are configured as a

space of discursive formation from which these boys and girls are constituted as subjects. The statements from experts and parents within the article are constructed as responses and as a dialogue in response to what was said by the children. Thus, the media an ideal place to examine noticeable changes relating to childhood in the extent that they give legitimacy to such voices.

Consumption practices were, in this sense, a catalyst for such changes. By identifying in children a potential marketplace and to invest not only in toys, clothes and shoes - but in a range of material and symbolic products and services that enable the formation of different lifestyles in the first years of life - the consumer society allowed a wide view of children, empowering them with possibilities of consumption, choice and therefore subjectification (CASTRO, 1998). Even without jobs, totally dependent on their responsible parties income, in addition to purchasing products for their own consumption, pre-adolescent directly interfere in the consumption habits of parents. According to Coulter (2009), this phenomenon began in North America in the 1980s, when women consolidated themselves as professionals and the myth of the "super-mom" begins to give way to the figure of a woman needs and wants to work. It is the offspring of these women who are called to take a more active participation in their own upbringing, becoming independent sooner, accessing more information, choosing more, deciding more, having more of an active voice in the family and therefore in the public sphere.

In addition to consuming, pre-teens are portrayed in the magazine article according to their access to information and their uses of it as insurmountable.

> Beatriz, a housewife, and the mother of Marcelo says that her child has an autonomy unimaginable by her when she was that same age [...] While she is a bit frightened with his precociousness, Beatriz believes that his son's life is better than hers ever was. "He is more cultured, can speak on any topic and is tech savvy. He can even shop online" she states proudly (KOSTMAN, 2003, p.89).

Margareth Mead (2002) considers such circumstances as signs of what she calls a culture of pre-figurative, in which youth culture

prefigures culture of what is to come, different from traditional cultures, where youth learned from elders. In this new moment, it is the younger generations who are hailing knowledge and are much more tech savvy, than adults. The way pre-teens supply their parents with information, particularly technology related, confers pride on one hand and concern on another.

> The marketing director of the toy manufacturer *Estrela* Aires José Leal, who by virtue of position follows step by step the evolution of the phenomenon, believes that tweens are causing a breach in the family hierarchy. "Pre-teens have become small monarchs. They define everything they will consume and still influence parents to buy things for the household" (MEAD, 2002, p.87-88).

Throughout the article, such behavior is exemplified to justify the use of terms such as "little tyrants" or "little emperors", alluding to the way the tens of millions of China's only children are referred as. The magazine confirms: "Those who have one of these at home already know: they demand and boss around like big people" (ibid, p 86.). What, in a way, is celebrated and justified in a culture that increasingly requires those more independent and more knowledgeable, in another is confronted by a consolidated imaginary of childhood, a period in which Schindler (1996) conceptualizes as "social metaphor of dependency". In trying to resolve such impasse, the article concludes its analysis with a piece of advice:"To the parents is entitled the mission of stimulating the good aspect of the tween revolution, which is to form more determined and knowledgeable children, while at the same time trying to contain their deleterious counterpoint: creating an army of spoiled brats" (KOSTMAN, 2003, p.91). The conflict can also be understood in the light of two discourses that coexist about the contemporary child: one that shows enthusiasm with such changes, by believing that the new generations have a more pragmatic view and therefore productive of existence (TAPSCOT, 1999); and the other that sees it as a clear threat to the childhood experience, understood as a period of innocence (POSTMAN, 1999). In this sense, although the magazine considers the marketing role of tweens fundamental for existing in contemporary societies, one

cannot deny, based on what has been said, that such practices are aligned with the kind of free and autonomous subject that narrates itself through such choices, while at the same time is held accountable for them.

If childhood is, etymologically speaking, the condition of having not having a voice, the previous utterances analyzed, in a way, are releasing these boys and girls of this stage of life, to the extent that it grants them a voice. The *Veja* article, therefore, is taken as an exemplary case in understanding that the tween phenomenon, in addition to being formed at a particular time, historically and socially situated, is constituted through communication processes through which new subjectivities are organized.

Final considerations

This article stemmed from the idea that the aesthetics of youth gained ample dimensions in modern societies, making the modes of being young and being in the world more accessible to different age groups, including very young children. In this sense, to think of the genesis of an age category that did not exist 40 years ago and to seek the means by which it has been taking shape and strength is an exercise that helps to understand how societies naturalize not only a period of life, but also the behaviors linked to it. However, as important as denaturalizing preadolescence it is imperative to point out that its construction is directly inserted into a specific historical and socio-cultural setting.

The analysis offered in this article also allowed for the understanding that tweens are more than a strategic marketing technique intended to control boys and girls gathered around an age range. Rather, they are foremost social constructions to a social arrangement, possible within a socio-historical moment within this society. They respond to a distinct and distinctive way to self-subjectification, based on the formation of a self, an interior "I" that is made and remade in their endless choices and identity positions. Thus, the tweens are children of their time in that they constitute and are constituted stemming from actions taken upon

interiority, a psychological core that supports the formation of an autonomous subject.

What was noticed in the examination of the extensive media articles referring to tweens, particularly in the article in *Veja* magazine which purports to define them and regulate their conduct, was the legitimation of a new category of transition, which leads individuals inserted in it from a childhood experience to a youthful one. The Consumption practices and cognitive abilities, especially in the use of new technologies, are celebrated and presented as signs of a childhood marked by increasingly less dependence and increasingly marked by means of empowerment, leaving it up to the parents the responsibility to ensure balance in the advancement of the visibility of children in ever more adult-centric societies. Thus, the analyzed discourses are in alignment with the formation of contemporary thought by recognizing in these boys and girls a non-infantile condition and therefore a place of speech and voice, in this sense, pointing towards new forms of subjectivity.

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