Disney's High School Musical and the construction of the tween audience

Tween is a concept and an age category encompassing those who are seen to reside in the space between childhood and adolescence approximately aged 8–12 (Sørenssen, 2012). Disney Channel has a prominent position in western children's lives and especially targets this age group (Sørenssen, 2015; 2016). This article is part of a larger study on Norwegian tweens and their relationship with Disney's *High School Musical,* and as Buckingham notes; "While we do need to acknowledge what readers bring to texts, we also need to account for what they find there" (Buckingham, 1993:59). As tweens are the target audience for Disney's *High School Musical* this article explores the scripts the Disney Company offers their tween audience, especially looking at the content through what is being said and done in light of age and identity.

It is important to look at how, as an audience member, one is positioned in relation to the characters, and where one's identification, desires, and hopes for the movies story is scripted (Bordwell and Thompson, 1997: 123). By focusing on whose point-of-view the movie favours, what motivations and goals the protagonists have, and the obstacles that lie in the way of achieving the goals, we can read how the audience is configured. This serves as a guideline for how to interpret the text and what sympathies one should have as an audience. As Morley (1992) expresses:

> In analyzing programs, it cannot be enough simply to look at the content of what is said. We have also to look at the assumptions that lie behind that content. There will be assumptions about us as an audience, and these assumptions need to be made visible if we are to understand the implicit 'messages' which a program may transmit over and above what is explicitly said in it (Morley, 1992: 84).

Analyzing media content in the age of individualization

The analytical framework is based on scripts (Akrich, 1992), and configuring the user (Woolgar, 1997). This framework is combined with media and film scholars, as "formal systems both cue and constrain the viewer's construction of a story" (Bordwell, 2004: 245). This notion resembles Woolgar (1997) and his concept of "configuring the user". With configuring Woolgar suggests that technologies define, enable, and constrain the user (Woolgar, 1997: 74). In addition to guiding the viewer in how to construct the stories told, the media texts also configure their audience by providing scripts for how to be a tween. Hendershot suggests: "Like children's literature, children's TV is designed by adults to fulfil

their conceptions of what childhood should be" (Hendershot, 2004: 183), This implies that through media texts producers inscribe their ideal version of what childhood should be or as Vogler puts it:

> I came looking for the design principles of storytelling, but on the road I found something more; a set of principles for living. I came to believe that the Hero's Journey is nothing less than a handbook for life, a complete instruction manual in the art of being human (Vogler, 1999: ix).

As such, media texts are thought to cue and constrain the audience's construction of what is happening on screen and relate this to what is happening off-screen. As Gottschall (2011) argues, movies depicting youth can be understood as pedagogic, as "the ideas of youth envisaged in the films stem from, and enter into, the popular imaginary, making and remaking concepts of childhood and youth-hood" (Gottschall, 2011: 333). Hence what is being broadcasted in tween content can be said to provide scripts for the tween audience on how to be tweens.

Learning about life through art is an age-old idea. Even though I am focusing on television content, the idea is the same: stories are being told, and there is a belief that one learns through stories, that one makes sense of one's own life and that of others through those stories. "Storytelling is vital to every society as a way of searching for and sharing truth, but the role of storyteller in culture has changed, affecting what is told. Today, popular film has become a central storyteller for contemporary culture" (Ward, 2002: 1). The idea that people, through reading, seeing, and hearing other people's stories, make sense of their own life, consciously or unconsciously, has been considered essential (McKee, 1997). The same formulaic story, or narrative, being told over, and over again, can be seen as contributing to a narrative structure that becomes experienced as a 'natural' for individuals. Even though children in the tween category tend to watch content over and over again (Lury, 2002; Tally, 2005), this does not mean that they will in fact internalize the scripts provided. Nevertheless, by analyzing the content we can see what scripts Disney provides for how to be a tween. The *High School Musical* trilogy can therefore be viewed as potential tools for the audiences' identity making process.

There is said to have been a shift in social identity, where in pre-modern times one was ascribed a social identity, while in late-modern times one has to manage one's social identity, meaning: "reflexively and strategically fitting one's self into a community of 'strangers' by meeting their approval through the creation of the right impressions" (Côté, 1996: 421). This notion is closely tied to the thesis of the individualization of society, and this article is partly inspired by the

writings of Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) and Bauman (2000) on this matter. Since I find individualization a value inscribed in the Disney media texts, I will briefly explore this concept before leaping into the analysis of the media texts.

The individualization thesis focuses on social structures becoming increasingly individualized. In Côtè's words, what happened in late modernity is that: "market-oriented policies and consumption-based lifestyles are replacing community-oriented policies and production-based lifestyles" (Côté, 2002: 117). As a result, issues that in earlier times were addressed through the public domain with collective solutions are becoming increasingly individualized, meaning that it becomes the responsibility of the individual to resolve issues on their own (Bauman, 2000; Beck, 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Côté, 2002). Beck and Beck-Gernsheim explain the concept of individualization as having two meanings, which overlap and intersect. On the one hand individualization means the disintegration of previous social forms such as social status and gender roles. On the second hand the concept is that in modern society new demands, controls, and constraints are being imposed on individuals (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002:2). In other words, in a social world where one is no longer born into a preformed static identity, one is now required to take on the task of becoming the primary architect of one's own identity (Giddens, 1991:38). In this individualized society Disney can be said to offer scripts through their media texts, as tools in the audiences' identity making processes. The question thus becomes; what are the identity making tools and resources the Disney trilogy offers its tween audience, and how is the notion of identity constructed?

As shall be argued, Disney's trilogy promotes a notion of a stable "core-self" which the individual needs to first discover, and then assert. This notion of identity as unique, fixed, and coherent, is rather rare in the works of social theorists where identity is usually considered as performative, flexible, and a process (Butler, 1990; Goffman, 1959; Hall, 2000; Giddens, 1991). I agree with this notion, and what I find interesting is that the Disney media texts are communicating the notion "true self" inherent to the individual which can be multi-faceted. However, simultaneously they are communicating, a singular identity as defined by Coulter (2012) in her article on how Disney is colonizing childhood. The notion of singular identity implies here that even though there is room for identity being multi-faceted, they "omit anything too edgy or close to the realities of teen life, offering instead a nice, bubblegum version of adolescence" (Coulter, 2012: 154). The *High School Musical* trilogy as shall be explored, is ambiguous in how it configures its audience, the tweens.

High School Musical

High School Musical is a trilogy where we follow the protagonist Troy and his love interest Gabriella, who are from two different social cliques in the high school realm. Troy is the captain of the basketball team and Gabriella is a "brainiac". Gabriella and Troy challenge the clique mentality through finding a common passion for singing in the school's musical. In all three movies Troy and Gabriella must overcome difficulties in order to truly "be themselves" and be able to engage in different activities.

The trilogy can be said to belong to the high school movie genre, and the subgenre of suburban high school movies with the setting being in middle class suburbia (Bulman, 2005). Bulman found that in suburban films there is a focus on expressive individualism, which can be described as a type of individualism that focuses not on material achievements but rather; "the discovery of one's unique identity and the freedom of individual self-expression" (Bulman, 2005:20). In other words, a type of self-realization based within the individual. The stories being told in the typical suburban films thus mirror the notion that in late-modern society individuals are encouraged to continually discover their identities through consumption and pleasing others (Côté, 1996; Gergen, 1991). As shall be elaborated in this article, discovering, and subsequently asserting one's unique identity, and expressive individualism are important themes in the *High School Musical* trilogy.

Who am I? Providing scripts for the independent individual

In the *High School Musical* trilogy, we follow Troy, the protagonist's, point of view, and so as audience members, we are positioned in relation to Troy. Thus, the media text extends an invitation where our identification, desires, and hopes for the movie's story should lie (Bordwell & Thompson, 1997:123). It is Troy's journey we as an audience become invested in. From the beginning of the movie Troy is depicted as a sympathetic and well-rounded person, helping others and being liked by the student body. The obstacles in the trilogy are ones that Troy needs to overcome in order to achieve his goal of being able to do both basketball and the school musical, and being able to cross the lines of social groups, socializing across the social borders. As such, he becomes a poster child for the fluid fragmented identity of the late modern society.

In the trilogy there is evidence of Troy struggling with both parents and peers in relation to the choices he makes. The individual's goal in the typical suburban high school movies is to "find their identity and to express their true selves apart from the expectations of their school, their parents, and their peers" (Bulman, 2005:20). Troy's discovery of his own identity and his assertion of this is depicted as a road he, if he is to be true to himself, has to go down. By doing so, the media texts configures tweens identity-making project as a process of individuation, meaning the becoming of an autonomous individual (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). One of Troy's struggles becomes the paradox of individuation and autonomy on one side, and obligations to others on the other (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002:12). Troy in the trilogy constantly struggles with this paradox. However, as I will argue below, for Troy, the outcome configures the need for individuation in becoming human.

In all three movies Troy goes through different 'crises' forcing him to reflect on who he is. This is especially clear through the song lyrics. In the first movie, both parents and peers oppose the idea that Troy can be both captain of the basketball team and have a part in the school musical. Troy's identity is threatened as his peers and father try to convince him that he can only be the 'basketball boy,' a term frequently used in the first movie by Troy, as exemplified below when talking in private to Gabriella:

> Troy: My parents' friends are always saying, "Your son's the basketball guy. You must be so proud."
> Sometimes I don't wanna be the "basketball guy." I just wanna be a guy. You know?
> Gabriella: I saw the way you treated Kelsi at the audition yesterday. Do your friends know that guy?
> Troy: To them, I'm the playmaker dude.
> Gabriella: Then they don't know enough about you, Troy. At my other schools I was the freaky math girl.
> It's cool coming here and being anyone I wanna be. When I was singing with you I just felt like... a girl.

Troy struggles in all three movies with his identity. He is categorized as "the basketball guy" or the "playmaker dude" by his friends and teammates, and by his father, who also happens to be the basketball coach. It is this fixed and constraining category of "basketball guy" that Troy attempts to escape and widen, enabling him to take part in both basketball and musicals. Troy is through the whole first movie defined by people around him, something that he rejects after a while, as Jenkins claims: "Labelling may also, of course, evoke resistance" (Jenkins, 2004: 21). From what Gabriella says here there lies a longing for being free from being defined by others, being just a girl, and as Troy says, "I just wanna be a guy." The Disney text thus offers a script of an ambiguous and fluid identity as something that is a goal for Troy. A goal of being free from labels, not being placed in a static identity category but rather discovering, asserting, and managing that identity (Côté, 1996).

Repeatedly Troy is told by his father why he cannot move beyond the fixed category where he belongs. For example, after having missed his first basketball practice in three years his father/coach scolds him:

> Coach Bolton (father): You're not just a guy Troy, you're the team leader. What you do affects not only the team but the entire school. You're a playmaker not a singer.

In this quote Troy's father explicitly tells him what Troy is, and what he is not, thus restraining and defining his identity and possible actions. Here we see that not only does Troy struggle with this constraint on his identity when talking to Gabriella as we saw in the previous excerpt, but he is also put in his place by his father/coach. Being in opposition to one's parents and other adult figures as a typical theme in suburban high school movies as the students must: "form their identities in opposition to adult figures" (Bulman, 2005:94). Troy has a difficult relationship with his father, as he is the coach of the basketball team, and as the rest of the school, Troy's father does not support Troy doing both basketball and the musical. At the end of the first movie however, Troy's father understands more of his son's multifaceted identity as Troy is able to free himself from the expectations from his father and grow as an individual, making his own choices. Not only does Troy need to free himself from his father's constraints, but also from his peers, and especially his best friend and teammate Chad, who questions Troy's identity and loyalty:

> Chad: Look... do you see what's happening here, man? Our team is coming apart because of your singing thing. Even the drama geeks and the brainiacs suddenly think that they can... talk to us. Suddenly people think that they can do other stuff. Stuff that is not their stuff. They've got you thinking about show tunes, when we've got a playoff game next week.

Both Chad and Troy's father explicitly inform Troy that by him wanting to sing he is affecting the whole student body in a negative way. The school's social structure in *High School Musical* is based on social cliques, which define, enable, and constrain the individual's identity. According to Bulman (2005) this structure is typical for high school movies. In this quote Chad opposes the idea of dismantling the clique-structure of East High, which is the outcome of Troy refusing to be contained within his category. Troy is confronted with his choices and the fear others (Chad and Troy's father) have that Troy, when stepping out of his assigned category, will ruin things for those around him. The fears that his father and Chad communicate present the paradox of the autonomous individual versus the community (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). In addition, Chad and Troy's father also represent a traditional view of identity, the static, what Cotè discusses as "inner-directed" personality (Côté, 1996). According to Cotè: "inner-directed persons exercise choice and initiative, but the general heading and pattern of acceptable behavior is set" (Côté, 1996:419). This fits with both Chad's and Troy's father

attempting to keep Troy in his assigned category. Troy, on the other hand, through his journey of first discovering, then asserting his new fluid multi-faceted identity, comes to represent the late modern individualization.

After having been confronted by both Chad and his father, Troy is still determined to be "himself" and is now sure of who he is and will pursue and stay true to himself. Troy then convinces Gabriella that individuality, being 'true to one's self,' is more important than doing what is expected of you:

> Gabriella: Troy, the whole singing thing is making the school whack. You said so yourself. Everyone's treating you differently because of it.
> Troy: Maybe it's because I don't wanna only be the basketball guy. They can't handle it. That's not my problem; it's theirs.
> Gabriella: How about your dad?
> Troy: And it's not about my dad. This is about how I feel, and I'm not letting the team down. They let me down, so I'm gonna sing. What about you?

The moral of most suburban high school movies according to Bulman is that "you should follow your heart, regardless of what your friends, your parents, or your teachers advise" (Bulman, 2005:18). This is an example of how Disney, through this text, is subjecting the characters as individuals, encouraging them to be themselves and not let others dictate, and hence conveying the message of individuality. In addition, Disney through this communicates the notion of bearing the responsibility for being the primary architect of one's own identity (Côté, 2002; Giddens, 1991) to its audience. The importance of listening to one's own heart and not to others is evident in Troy's actions. White and Preston (2005) claim in their analysis of Disney Channel programs; "All social relations are subordinate to Disney in the process of self-actualization as an individual" (White and Preston, 2005: 252).

As mentioned earlier, there is a paradox between becoming a unique individual and one's obligations to others (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). As the first film ends it becomes clear that Troy benefits from finding and asserting himself. Through Troy's individual agenda, he consequently takes part in 'freeing' the school; the community benefits too from his quest for independence. Thus, the paradox is resolved. Troy is rewarded socially as the act of freeing himself from the constraints of expectations enables him to free the whole school. Subsequently, the individuals at the school become more at one with each other. One could say that the individualization of late- modernity and its fluid, multifaceted identity, through this story, trumps the notion of the unitary identity project belonging to the early modern society.

In American cultural history there is claimed to be a conflict and contrast between community and individual, constructed by the dominant discourses. On one hand there is a strong emphasis

on individualism, simultaneously as there is a yearning for belonging and a longing for sameness (Grant, 1986; McKinley, 1997; Pugh, 2009). This can also be found in the trilogy, as Disney is implying that when becoming an independent individual, one needs to take part in community, and it is only when one is truly an independent individual that the community will prosper. Bellah et al. (2007) describe the typical American belief that: "To serve society, one must be able to stand alone, not needing others, not depending on their judgment, and not submitting to their wishes. Yet this individualism is not selfishness. Indeed, it is a kind of heroic selflessness" (Bellah et al., 2007: 146). Several scholars have suggested that Disney scripts the notion of individualization in their media texts (Fruzińska, 2014; Wasko et al., 2001; Steinhoff, 2017; Giroux and Pollock, 2010). This serves true in the trilogy as generally the trilogy suggests that the individual, by staying true to himself or herself, can change the structure. Troy and Gabriella do not change their own identities, and as a result, the student body learns to accept multiple social identities. Troy refuses to compromise his identity for the sake of the rest of the school and in his quest to assert his expressive individualism, the whole school changes and also benefits. Change is made possible on a structural level (the school opens up for a more diverse student body within predefined groups) and on a personal level (when one is able to discover the true self, accepting the multiple identities one has).

In the trilogy I observed a tension between the modern and the late modern in relation to identity and individuality in Troy's conflicts with his father and Chad. Troy can be seen as representing a the late-modern individualized society as he refuses to be labeled as solely the "basketball guy" and insists on a multi-faceted identity that does not have to be confined within rigid norms. Chad and Troy's father on the other hand first represents a more unitary modern notion of identity insisting that Troy needs to focus on basketball and forget singing. However, through the trilogy they come to accept the late-modern idea of individualization.

Configuring tweens as soon-to-be-teenagers: Tensions of growing older

While the *High School Musical* trilogy is about teenagers attending high school, it is the younger age group, tweens, who are the main target audience (Sørenssen, 2014; 2012). Implicitly, this tells us that the Disney text configures its audience as aspiring teenagers. Thus, these movies can be seen as Disney providing scripts for the tween's anticipatory socialization. Through the media texts we can observe that tweens are configured as being in a liminal stage or a place of limbo between adolescence and childhood, between family and peers. As a

potential source for anticipatory socialization Disney, through this trilogy, scripts difficult parent-child relationships and peer-relationships as normal for teenagers. Hence, the narrative can be seen as an invitation to imitate or prepare for things to come. Thus, raising the question how age—past, present, and future—is portrayed in the movies.

How is age presented in the media texts? Like other texts the trilogy is about what it is to be human—as Vogler claims all media texts are (1999). The first movie is mainly about Troy finding, and asserting himself in the here and now of the high school realm, as discussed earlier. In the second and third movie, Troy still fights for his individuality and independence. However, as this issue has partly been resolved in the first movie, the focus moves from present to both the future and the past. The past and the future are fused together in a mutually dependent dilemma. Generally when examining the three movies, one can find several references to becoming older as something uncertain and scary, which then results in a nostalgic longing for younger childhood when life supposedly was easier. These two types of stories combined create a script of being in limbo. Hence being in between is the focus. As a prolongation of this, Disney offers tweens a script preparing them for a supposed liminal stage, which other scholars have suggested is the state tweens reside in (Cody and Lawlor, 2011; Johansson, 2010).

How is this done? In the first movie Troy and Gabriella experience that going out of the potential actions of one's predefined social group and status is not well received by the student body. They reminisce about how life was easier in kindergarten, a time where they presumably did not need to perform identity:

> Gabriella: Do you remember in kindergarten how you'd meet a kid and know nothing about them, then 10 seconds later you're playing like you're best friends because you didn't have to be anything but yourself?

In this quote, being in kindergarten is defined as being free from having to adhere to an identity-type, belong to a predefined category, or the necessity to assert one's self. This is uttered as a reaction to the other students not accepting Troy and Gabriella wanting to be in the school musical. Keeping in mind the constraining categories that Troy and Gabriella both were subjected to, Gabriella as the "freaky math girl" in her previous school, and Troy as the "basketball guy" at East High, Disney is implicitly providing a script of constraint for the soon-to-be teenagers. Becoming older is scripted as being in a place of limited scope and as such conveys the constraints, trials, and tribulations of becoming older. However, the scripts also entail enablement of resisting the constraints as the story shows that Troy, through asserting

his individuality, is able to define himself. As such the script can be read as a warning of things to come, and also suggesting a window of opportunity for overcoming these tribulations, enabling the individual's agency. The romantic notion of childhood as being a "free space" in relation to identity performance might be a common idea, but it has been rejected by, amongst others, James (1993). In her study on childhood identities, James found that children from a very early age, perform identity and engage in identity 'work' in the social arena to situate themselves where they wish to be (James, 1993). Still, the notion of the trouble free childhood exists and is conveyed in the trilogy, as Chad and Troy sing in the third movie in the song, "The boys are back"

> Take it back to the place where you know that it all began./ We can be anything we wanna be!

In the quote from Gabriella above, the idea is that one is free to be "one's self", whatever that might entail. Thus, there is a notion of a singular identity that is you and that you are free to be and not cover in early childhood. In the song however, the scope is unlimited, you can be whoever you want to be. Thus, the first example focuses on the perceived constraint-free existence of small children in kindergarten. The song on the other hand, emphasizes all the possibilities one has at a younger age, and which supposedly become more restricted when one grows older. The prelude to this song is a conversation between Chad and Troy:

> Troy: Don't you ever feel like your future is laid out in front of you?
> Chad: What is your point?
> Troy: I don't know. I just want my future to be … my future.
> Chad: Do you see what happens when you do a show? You're, like, five people.
> Troy: Yeah, but what's so bad about that, Man? We used to come here as kids, we'd be 10 people. We'd be spies, superheroes, rock stars. We were whatever we wanted to be, whenever we wanted to be it. It was us, man!
> Chad: Yeah, we were, like, eight years old.

Troy and Chad here have two quite different stances. Troy opens up for still being able to be different people, longing for childhood when he was not defined by others and could do what he wanted to do. Chad's talks about being eight years old, which is the age that the tween age is perceived as starting. After eight, according to the script provided by Chad, you can no longer play the same way, thus preparing the tween audience for things to come. Through taking part in the drama club and in the musical, however, one can seemingly prolong the existence of this childhood wonder where you are not defined and have unlimited scope. One could argue that Chad is firmly positioned within a modern version of identity as a unitary feature, while Troy argues for a multiple and flexible identity rooted in late-modernism. Within this segment lies a struggle between these two notions of identity, where the Disney text can be said to favor the

late-modern notion of individualization as it is Troy who is the one who the audience is invited to be invested in.

Regressing to a state of younger childhood in the movies is a theme in the trilogy. Hence, Disney communicates that a troublesome future lays ahead, one of trials of adolescence and adulthood. This regression/progression dilemma is also evident in several songs and dialogues in the movies, and is one of the main themes in the last movie.

There is a scene built on clichés in the third movie where the boys do not want to dress up for the prom, but it is the night that the girls have "dreamt of all their lives". The prom itself is not shown as this happens when Troy and Gabriella are driving back from Stanford, and it might be that depicting a prom would be too 'grown up' for tween content. Proms are usually portrayed as the night for sexual activity in teen movies like American Pie (Bulman, 2005). As Talley suggests: "while they (tweens) aspire to being teenagers, this does not necessarily mean that they are comfortable watching films that feature more sophisticated teen themes involving sex, drugs or alcohol" (Tally, 2005: 316). By making the prom a song number from the musical that we see them rehearse, it is just that, rehearsing, playing with teen culture (Mitchell and Reid-Walsh, 2005). It becomes a stylized song and dance number, not attempting to mirror real life, thus creating a safe distance to be watched and enjoyed. Disney is able to simultaneously touch upon issues, which can be seen to belong to the teenage world, while still keeping it at a safe distance. The trilogy ends with a graduation scene, which culminates into a song number, where the whole cast takes part. In this song, the potential dilemma of past versus future is resolved in the suggestion that you can do both:

> High School Musical/
> Who says we have to let it go?/
> It's the best part we've ever known/
> Step into the future but hold on to/
>
> High School Musical/
> Let's celebrate where we come from/
> All together/
> Makes it better/
> Memories that last forever

In these lyrics one can read the ambiguity that is scripted in becoming older. Again, whatever paradoxes Disney serves its audience, they also serve a neatly packaged solution. In these lyrics the moral is that being together as individuals make us stronger. Like Bauman suggests, individually together (Bauman, 2002). In addition, these lyrics also enable flexibility, holding on to the past while simultaneously stepping in to the future. How age is scripted in this trilogy

is closely related to freedom of choice and the necessity to assert one's autonomy in teen years as a resistance towards being merely labelled. This becomes a key issue both when examining how age is being portrayed as well as how individual identity is conveyed as in the previous segment. Doing age becomes part of the emancipation process.

The ambiguous Disney configuration

This article has explored how age and individual identity are inscribed in the media text *High School Musical*. The trilogy concerns itself with the larger issues of identity-making in life and provides resources for making life altering choices and explicitly focuses on the big questions in life; who am I and how will assert myself? Age is inscribed as ambiguous, moving forward, becoming teenagers and even adults. Simultaneously the trilogy leaves room for regressing (not in action but in thought) to the perceived easier life grounded in childhood. There are clear inscriptions of a society being individualized. Thus, the script Disney provides its tween audience in relation to individual and community is highly focused on the individuation of the individual. The notion of expressive individualism can be summed up as; "those who would argue that in a society where each vigorously pursued his own interest, the social good would automatically emerge" (Bellah et al., 2007: 33). By showing that Troy comes out on the other end stronger and happier, and that his immediate community of East High is also a happier place, due to his adamant pursuit of what he believes is right for him, Disney favors and promotes the celebration of the independent individual within an individualized society. As Rönneberg (2001) claims, Disney's themes in general are, to 'be self-reliant,' 'finding oneself,' 'be accepted for who you are,' 'become someone,' 'to grow,' but above all it is the identity struggles that is central (2001:11). The questions the audience is invited to reflect on in the trilogy are the major questions in life. Disney Channel caters to the tween audience in the media texts of *High School Musical*, hence the media texts can be read as how Disney imagines its target audience, but it can also be read as how Disney attempts to reach this audience.

By including issues that Disney imagines are relevant for the tween audience, they anticipate to attract viewers. From the script of *High School Musical* Disney imagines tweens as being children on their way to becoming teenagers, drawing on both childlike and teen interests. Issues that can be deemed as teen issues, such as emancipation, individuation, and romance, are presented from a safe distance, enabling Disney to attract younger viewers. The media texts concern themselves with teenage issues, however they do so in a playful way. By omitting typical teenage issues such as sex, drugs, and alcohol, Disney specifically targets the age group below adolescence. Disney provides at times ambiguous, but never mutually exclusive, scripts

of what it is like to be residing in the tween ages and how to become an autonomous individual. As these media texts are about people inhabiting the age category situated over (in age) the audience target group there is also a safe distance, Disney is inscribing the future, preparing tweens for things to come and giving them resources for identity making.

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