

Tween Intimacy and the Problem of Public Life in Children's Media: "Having It All" on the Disney Channel's *Hannah Montana*

Tyler Bickford

Contradictions of public participation pervade the everyday lives of contemporary children and those around them. In the past two decades, the children's media and consumer industries have expanded and dramatically transformed, especially through the development and consolidation of "tweens"—people ages nine to thirteen, not yet "teenagers" but no longer quite "children"—as a key consumer demographic (Cook and Kaiser 2004). Commentators increasingly bemoan the destabilization of age identities, pointing to children's purportedly more "mature" taste in music, clothes, and media as evidence of a process of "kids getting older younger" (Schor 2004), and to adults' consumer practices as evidence of their infantilization (Barber 2007). Tween discourses focus especially on girls, for whom the boundary between childhood innocence and adolescent or adult independence is fraught with moral panic around sexuality, which only heightens anxieties about changing age identities. Girls' consumption and media participation increasingly involve performances in the relatively public spaces of social media, mobile media, and the Internet (Banet-Weiser 2011; Bickford, in press; Kearney 2007), so the public sphere of consumption is full of exuberant participation in mass-mediated publics. Beyond literal performances online and on social media, even everyday unmediated consumption—of toys, clothes, food, and entertainment—is fraught with contradictory meanings invoking children's public image as symbols of domesticity, innocence, and the family and anxiety about children's intense affiliation with peer communities outside the family (Pugh 2009). Participation in the sphere of

consumption entails a form of publicness that is in stark contrast to a traditional construction of childhood as private, innocent, and islanded in domestic spaces.

In this context, the Disney Channel sitcom *Hannah Montana* is a seminal text. *Hannah Montana* aired from 2006 to 2011 and ushered in a new era of children's media. Along with the television movie *High School Musical* and the rock act the Jonas Brothers, *Hannah Montana* returned Disney to a level of commercial dominance with young audiences that it had lost since its heyday of animated musical films in the 1990s, when musical features such as *The Lion King* and *The Little Mermaid* topped movie and music sales charts and transformed the home video market (Graser 2009). In 2007 the *Hannah Montana* soundtrack album debuted at number one and spent seventy-eight weeks on the Billboard 200 chart (Billboard 2014). A national concert tour sold out in minutes (Kaufman 2007), and a concert film sold out theaters nationally (Bowles 2008), earning sixty-five million dollars and setting box office records for normally slow winter releases (Box Office Mojo 2014). The show transformed Disney's music business and accelerated a decade-long shift toward pop music genres and multimedia tie-ins across the children's music industry (Chmielewski 2007; Bickford 2012). *Hannah Montana* built on earlier Disney Channel successes like *That's So Raven* and *Lizzie McGuire*, as well as 1990s teen pop, heavily marketed to children, such as Britney Spears and NSYNC. But it combined and transformed these predecessors, establishing a model of hugely successful multimedia celebrity acts, bridging film, television, and popular music and focused entirely on preadolescent child audiences. In the changing fields of tween media and children's consumer culture, then, *Hannah Montana* is a genre-defining text.

Hannah Montana intervenes directly in discourses about childhood, publicness, and consumerism. Its premise is that fourteen-year-old pop sensation Hannah Montana lives a normal life as middle school student Miley Stewart.¹ The show's narrative conflict builds around tensions between Miley's public and private life, exploring in detail how Miley's public life disrupts her "normal" childhood and threatens her intimate friendships. This conflict seems to broadly allegorize children's changing relationship to media and public culture, but rather than reinventing the wheel in applying such questions to children, *Hannah Montana* adapts its approach from another sphere with a long tradition of dramatizing cultural anxiety around changing social boundaries: the postfeminist prob-

lem of “having it all” and women’s changing relationship to domestic and waged work.

Having it all is a long-standing topic in debates about feminism and gender equality, as in a recent essay in the *Atlantic Monthly* by U.S. State Department official and Princeton University professor Anne-Marie Slaughter titled “Why Women Still Can’t Have It All” (2012), about her struggles to reconcile professional success with motherhood. “Having it all” discourses often identify a conflict between “feminism” and “femininity” (Brunsdon 1991) that applies specifically to women in contemporary capitalism, in which an apparent incompatibility between public, professional roles as wage earners and heads of households and private, domestic roles as wife and mother places impossible, contradictory demands on women. While media scholar Morgan Blue (2013) has argued persuasively that *Hannah Montana* applies postfeminism to girlhood in ways that confine girls to femininity and consumerism, in its adaptation of the specific postfeminist trope of “having it all” the show struggles with children’s changing relationship to media and domesticity and highlights publicness and intimacy as problems with particular implications for childhood. Marshaling conventionally postfeminist “having it all” discourses to envision a public life for children—a much fuzzier and open-ended concept for children than for women—may require a much more creative and future-oriented imagination of possibility for children in the world.

If “having it all” is the shorthand for an ongoing cultural conversation about public-private conflict for women, “tween” might be seen as shorthand for a parallel discourse about children. Like “teenager” before it, this item of marketing jargon has expanded to everyday usage. The category emerged as part of an effort by sellers of consumer goods to address a relatively difficult segment of the market: children, especially girls, who are “between” childhood and adolescence. The in-betweenness of tweens points to an incompatibility between the presumptive domesticity, dependence, and innocence of childhood and the (relative) publicness, independence, and worldliness of adolescence and its associated mass-mediated public youth culture. The oppositional terms here, while not identical with the tension between motherhood and work to which “having it all” might simplistically reduce, highlight similar themes. The relative independence of adolescence from the family is substantially linked to economic freedoms of consumption (Chinn 2008), in parallel to the apparent problem that independent professional success is said to cause for women’s family

success. The terms that contrast with economic independence—childhood and motherhood—both emphasize embedded familial relations, intimacy, and dependence. Very schematically, then, the tension implicit in the term “tween” poses the familial domesticity of childhood against the economic independence of adolescence, exposing an ideological binary of private versus public that may operate in similar ways for preadolescent children as for working adult women.

While this essay explores how problematics of gender may be adapted to the particularities of childhood, I do not propose that it is possible to fully tease age apart from gender. Tweens are presumptively (perhaps categorically) girls, so the problem of tween consumption is already a problem of femininity. Tween femininity is normatively constructed as white, affluent, suburban, and consumerist, while childhood more generally is also normatively constructed as feminine, white, affluent, suburban, and consumerist. I start from the understanding that childhood and femininity are deeply co-constructed and intersecting categories: women are infantilized and children are feminized (Oakley 1993), female youth and sexual innocence are prized while childhood innocence is eroticized (Kincaid 2004), and women are historically treated as legal and social minors subject to paternal power (Field 2014). Furthermore, the historical project of enforcing children's withdrawal from wage earning and confinement within consumerist domesticity has been intensified and more fully realized in the past generation. The sacralization of childhood plays a key role in the retrenchment of patriarchal values and reaction against women's increasing role as wage earners (Pugh 2009, 20). Furthermore, childhood innocence is central to ideologies of racial and class superiority, especially as rhetorical appeals to childhood allow for the coded reinforcement of patriarchal, bourgeois, and white supremacist projects (Bernstein 2011; Zelizer 1985). My goal then is to locate childhood among the intersections of gender, race, and class in consumer media and to point out how frameworks like postfeminism can travel, slip, shift, or adapt across intersecting categories of identity.

“Having It All” in Women's Media

Hannah Montana adapts a framework that has been worked through in women's media over two decades, responding to the concern that women's participation in wage labor threatens intimate domestic relations. The

classic examples in media scholarship are the television shows *Ally McBeal* and *Sex and the City* and the book and film series *Bridget Jones's Diary* (see, e.g., Moseley and Read 2002; McRobbie 2009; Genz 2010). Moseley and Read contrast *Ally McBeal* with earlier shows like *Murphy Brown*, in which “the main conflict for female characters is between career and personal happiness . . . [which] are mutually exclusive, as are feminist and feminine identities” (2002, 231). *Ally McBeal*, by contrast:

does not centre on a conflict between career and personal life, but instead on the struggle to hold them together. . . . The distinction and conflict between public and private and feminist and feminine identities is irrevocably deconstructed and integrated. . . . Ally has a successful career, but her personal life, unlike Murphy Brown's, is filled with warmth and friendship as well as loneliness and struggle. (232)

Genz collects *Ally McBeal*, *Bridget Jones*, and *Carrie Bradshaw* of *Sex and the City* under the figure of the “postfeminist singleton,” defined as:

the young, unattached, and mostly city-dwelling woman who is caught between the enjoyment of her independent urban life and her desperate yearning to find “Mr. Right” with whom to settle down. The singleton's predicament centers on her recognition that “having it all” implies walking a tightrope between professional success and personal failure, between feminist and feminine empowerment. (2010, 99)

Characters like *Murphy Brown* or *Angela Bower* from *Who's the Boss?* either forego marriage and motherhood or delegate domestic work to a live-in employee, choosing professional success over conventionally feminine motherhood. By contrast, the postfeminist singleton is determined “not to choose between feminism and femininity, job and relationship” (113–14). But since the underlying conflict is a structural one that has not been resolved historically, materially, or culturally, the idea that women can refuse to choose may simply be a fantasy. One reading is that these media simply assume away the conflict and instead portray “the effortless realization of a postfeminist nirvana where women can ‘have it all’” (103–4). Genz argues instead for a more optimistic and nuanced reading in which “the postfeminist singleton expresses the pains and pleasures of her problematical quest for balance in a world where personal and professional, feminist and feminine positions are mutually pervasive” (104).

Whether highlighting struggle or resolution, these shows share a narrative technique for exploring women's refusal to choose between feminism and femininity: they collapse their protagonists' public and private contexts, treating their characters' professional lives as sites of intimacy. For example, Carrie Bradshaw, whose job is to write newspaper columns about her sex life, makes her personal life the basis of her work, while Ally McBeal's workplace is the site of a caring and intimate group of friends. This move sidesteps the problem of the family to which "having it all" originally referred and displaces intimacy onto nonfamilial friendships. These shows envision friendship as a relationship that accommodates care, dependence, emotional and financial support, and stability outside of marriage, such that Gerhard (2005) argues for a queer reading of *Sex and the City's* emphasis on friendship as an alternative or addition to marriage.

Still, despite the protagonists' rich personal and professional lives, their narratives revolve around a deeply felt lack of, and desire for, children and husbands. The feminism that makes personal and professional success possible in the first place seems in the same stroke to foreclose the sort of "essential" or "authentic" femininity embodied in roles like mother or wife that are still profoundly desired (McRobbie 2009, 21). On the one hand, these postfeminist media present a superheroic or superficial reconciliation of public and private. On the other hand, they lament a field of naturalized gender identity that is left behind. While we might describe these as questions about individual gender identity, what is specifically at stake are relationships: relationships like wife and mother that are seen to be stable, given, and natural but also strangely unattainable, versus unstable, chosen, and intensely felt relationships that characters desire, but never quite succeed, to convert into given naturalness.

What is fascinating in *Hannah Montana* is that it is built around an almost identical problematic, except the desired but unattainable relationship is not marriage or motherhood but friendship itself. Friendship in *Hannah Montana* is a site of both given, natural supportiveness and unstable and occasionally desperate desire. Friendship is not just the relationship that combines and thus reconciles public and private, as in the classically postfeminist texts; here it is also the intimate relationship that is most threatened by publicness. Rather than marriage or motherhood, friendship is the role most characteristic of "essential" or "authentic" childhood. In the project of envisioning a public life for children, in parallel to or by analogy with the gendered problem of having it all, the role

of precarious but profoundly desired intimacy is filled by friendship as the site of vulnerability, anxiety, and desire.

Intimate Friendship in *Hannah Montana*

Hannah Montana supports two contrasting interpretations: In the first, deep contradictions between public and private are effortlessly reconciled by consumption and “love conquering all.” In the second, problematics of postfeminism are repurposed as problematics of childhood. From the latter perspective, *Hannah Montana* does not so much narrate a simplistic morality play of gender-identity retrenchment as it poses and struggles with the question of what it would mean for children to be professionals or heads of households and to have meaningful public lives without sacrificing the things that define them as “authentically” children: their embedding in familial relationships, their same-age friendships, their school lives, their consumer culture. If postfeminism negotiates a conflict between feminist empowerment and feminine authenticity, we can see something similar in *Hannah Montana*, where professional, economic, and cultural (if not political) autonomy is posed against “authentic” childhood. If feminism is portrayed as having “robbed women of their most treasured pleasures, i.e. romance, gossip and obsessive concerns about how to catch a husband” (McRobbie 2009, 21), in *Hannah Montana* the possibility of a public, professional, economically independent life instead threatens the “most treasured pleasures” of childhood.

The first reading is suggested by the show’s theme song, which poses two worlds and asserts that you can have the best of both of them:

You get the limo out front
 Hottest styles, every shoe, every color
 Yeah when you’re famous it can be kind of fun
 It’s really you but no one ever discovers
 In some ways you’re just like all your friends
 But on stage you’re a star
 You get the best of both worlds
 ...
 Living two lives is a little weird
 But school’s cool ’cause nobody knows

Yeah you get to be a small town girl
 But big time when you play your guitar
 ...
 Pictures and autographs
 You get your face in all the magazines
 The best part's that
 You get to be whoever you want to be
 ...
 Who would have thought that a girl like me
 Would double as a superstar?
 (Gerrard and Nevil 2006)

Certain lyrics celebrate authenticity: “small town girl,” “girl like me,” “like all your friends,” “it’s really you.” Others highlight the joys of celebrity. There is a hint of tension that “living two lives is a little weird,” but maintaining the secret (“school’s cool ’cause nobody knows”) resolves that tension entirely. There is a more indirect tension in the idea of an authentic self: phrases like “it’s really you” imply an authentic identity that reads against “you get to be whoever you want to be.” Looking more closely, the earlier line is also “you *get to be* a small town girl”—so that “authentic” identity might itself be a choice. Combined with “hottest styles, every shoe, every color,” we can see the core postfeminist trope of choice and empowerment through consumption (Gill 2007): choosing between two contradictory identities is as simple as choosing a pair of shoes, and Miley is privileged here specifically because she has a bigger closet full of shoes and identities. Realistically, being a small-town girl like all your friends should be incompatible with being a celebrity pop star with your picture in all the magazines. But the song simply assumes the contradiction away (do both!) and establishes the “situation” of the show as a classically post-feminist effortless reconciliation of public and private worlds.

If “The Best of Both Worlds” appears to assert the ease of having it all, the tension in “it all” is between celebrity and school and friends, not work and family. While celebrity is a form of wage-earning employment, school and friendship are very different from family, which the song never mentions. In particular, friendship and school are not obviously private or domestic but instead have important components of publicness. Still, school is like the family home in being a site of paternal care and childhood dependence, and friendship is itself a site of intimacy that, like family,

may highlight mutuality in contrast to neoliberal individualism. As Valerie Hey writes, “friendship demands a ‘self’ and the ‘other.’ Subjects cannot simply evade the regulation that flows from interconnectedness, mutuality and interdependence. . . . Taken together, young people’s investments in the practice of compulsory sociability is so strong that no amount of neoliberalism is ever likely to overwrite it” (2002, 239). Such intense investment in sociability heightens the narrative stakes of friendship and situates it as a key site of both desire and anxiety, very much like the role of heterosexual romance in postfeminist women’s shows.

In contrast to the theme song, the show itself tends toward the second reading, especially as it spends a lot of effort fretting about tensions rather than assuming them away. The plot of the first episode opens with Miley’s best friend, Lilly, who does not know that Miley is the famous performer, announcing a pair of tickets to see Hannah Montana in concert. Miley refuses to attend the concert to avoid revealing her secret identity, and Lilly is upset that her best friend will not join her to see their favorite act. Miley worries aloud to her dad that if others found out then “no one would treat me the same” and “I’d never be ‘just Miley’ again” (“Lilly, Do You Want to Know a Secret?” 2008).² The rest of the episode plays out around Miley’s increasingly dramatic and ultimately unsuccessful efforts to conceal her identity from Lilly. When Miley reveals her secret, Lilly is upset that Miley did not trust her from the start. Miley explains, “I thought maybe once you knew you wouldn’t want to be my friend anymore, and you’d like Hannah Montana more than you’d like me.” Lilly is sympathetic but affirms, “That could never happen, Miley, don’t you know that?” Miley agrees, and the friendship seems secured. But when Miley later shows Lilly her closet full of expensive clothes, Lilly fantasizes about telling their school friends. They argue passionately until Lilly calls Miley “Hannah,” confirming Miley’s worst fear of no longer being “just Miley.” Finally they reconcile, when Lilly again affirms that Miley is her best friend, so she will not act on her admitted desire to use Hannah’s celebrity for her own benefit.

There is no consumer delight here in choosing from an abundance of available identities, only anxiety at the risk posed by that abundance. Unlike the theme song where it is a simple matter of “school’s cool cause nobody knows,” here the possibility of her secret being discovered is not just “a little weird.” Instead it threatens Miley’s intensely valued core identity as “just Miley,” which is defined relationally, as Miley’s identity *for*

Lilly: the full line is “if *she* knew the truth, I’d never be just Miley again.” Miley’s core identity, then, is tied up in her relationship with her best friend and, more generally, in the types of relationships and social roles that are available in childhood settings like school and home.

Interestingly, her actual family is never an existential problem. Like Ally McBeal’s or Carrie Bradshaw’s friends, Miley’s father and brother are a source of comic relief and sometimes frustration, but they are a stable and undramatic presence in her life. Conflict with her brother does not lead to anxiety about the loss of that relationship. Miley’s friendship, on the other hand, looks more like the romances in those postfeminist dramas: it is a deeply felt, emotionally fraught, and intensely valued relationship whose stability and continuity is desired but, despite all Lilly’s protests to the contrary, clearly *not* assured. Instead, it is vulnerable and demands continual reaffirmation. Just as the postfeminist singleton’s difficulty attaining a satisfying intimate life is thematized by the precariousness of romance, here a parallel desire for satisfying intimacy in childhood is staged around the precariousness of best friendship.

Rather than consumption being the magic tool to resolve all contradictions, Hannah’s material excess elicits an overabundance of desire in Lilly that threatens to destabilize the friendship. To continue the comparison with heterosexual romance narratives: tween girls like Lilly are often culturally stereotyped as overwhelmed by consumer desire. To the extent that such desire is *for* celebrity bodies like Hannah’s, we can liken the construction of tween consumer desire to constructions of masculine sexual desire. Gill (2007) argues that postfeminism requires girls and women to internalize the male gaze and self-objectify, resolving the problem of objectification not critically but passively, by accepting objectivity as an authentic form of subjectivity. This is done primarily through consumer practices of clothing and decorating the body. Lilly’s desire for Hannah presents a strikingly similar situation, even with consumer apparel at its center. Were Miley to follow the scripts of Gill’s postfeminist sensibility, she might internalize her objectification under Lilly’s consumer gaze and treat Hannah as a full-time authentic self. Instead, she strongly rejects that option. While that may reflect a critical sensibility toward postfeminism, more significantly here is that friendship is charged with these problematic of desire and objectification.

Morgan Blue notes that Lilly is a tomboy who never lives up to the standards of “feminine propriety” set by Hannah/Miley (2013, 671). Once

privity to Miley's secret, Lilly takes on a secret identity as well, the camp/drag Lola. Lilly/Lola's femininity is awkward and visibly performative:

As Lilly attempts to comply with Miley's sense of feminine propriety, she performs an exaggeration of youthful femininity in a collection of wigs, but tends toward the boyish—tomboyish—in relation to Hannah's masquerade of girliness. In this way, Lilly's Lola disguise can work as a foil to Miley's Hannah, never threatening to displace Hannah's idealized girlhood. (671)

Lilly's tomboyishness takes on additional meaning in light of *Hannah Montana's* format as a classic network era live-audience family sitcom (Newman 2009). With her boyish puerility, her awkward physicality and slapstick humor, her repeated threats to publicly embarrass Miley/Hannah, her inability to meet class-based standards of feminine propriety set by her partner, and her personal failure to control her impulses and desires, Lilly conforms to the classic *male* sitcom archetype of the “working-class buffoon” who always embarrasses and disappoints his more refined wife (Butsch 2011). The plot of this first episode, in which intimate trust is unintentionally and incompetently betrayed but ultimately reaffirmed (while reserving the possibility that future episodes will return to the buffoonish character's bumbling failures), rehearses a family sitcom cliché. Comparing Lilly to buffoonish husbands is not to suggest that her gender performance is radically nonconforming. As Blue argues, her tomboyishness supports rather than undermines the show's hegemonic femininity (2013). Rather, I want to highlight the adaptation of explicitly domestic televisual roles—buffoonish husband, properly feminine wife—into this very different context of childhood friendship.

Noting the homology between friendship and romance here, we can read the episode's resolution as a conventional statement of “true love conquering all”: Over the course of the episode, Lilly affirms once that she would never prefer Hannah to Miley. She then reveals through her actions that this is not actually true. But then, despite failing to act on her initial promise, she is able to permanently heal the relationship by simply restating her commitment to Miley (“you're my best friend”). This is not very satisfying for a conclusion that attempts to secure Miley and Lilly's friendship as the basis for the ongoing show. But it is a standard formula of romantic narratives in which love is valued as the pure expression of interior feeling and is demonstrated by passionate affirmations

rather than actions. In friendship or romance, love may be sentimentally valuable precisely because it is not pragmatically or instrumentally valuable.

That age and not just gender is at stake is confirmed by the larger narrative arc of the series. While Miley “comes out” to select friends, she continues to closely guard her secret, which is a source of conflict and threat for her “normal” childhood of school and friendship. Miley Stewart can never come out to the whole world, because if she did so *she would stop being a child*. Unlike in the case of adult celebrities who publicly reveal details about their intimate romances and private lives to build sympathetic identification with audiences, it is not possible to be both an international pop star *and* a small-town girl who is just like your friends with a normal school life. But the latter is what it means to be a child, just like motherhood and marriage are constitutive of culturally constructed femininity. In the series’s last season, Miley does finally reveal her secret to the world, but only at the point when she and her friends will leave for college, which is to say, when they officially terminate their status as children. She does this because her secret creates problems for her friends—delaying Lilly’s entry into college and getting her boyfriend into trouble for “cheating” on Hannah with Miley. But she also does it because the cost no longer exceeds the benefit: there is no more “authentic” childhood to be threatened by publicness. Thus when Hannah reveals that she is actually Miley on *The Jay Leno Show*, we might note a shift into a much more conventional post-feminism: the public Hannah is integrated with the private Miley in the classic postfeminist move of resolving public-private conflict by collapsing them onto one another. Miley incorporates her professional identity into her private life; Hannah publicly reveals her private identity in her professional life. Perhaps upon entering adulthood Miley can effectively become Carrie Bradshaw, a woman whose private and public lives are fully integrated through wholly publicizing the private.

Public Childhood and/as Contradiction

To summarize, *Hannah Montana* poses an idea very similar to “having it all” in its theme song and motivating situation. It then focuses on the implications of that idea for the “best friend” relationship between Miley and Lilly, which is narrated through recognizable, if out-of-context, tropes of romance, desire, objectification, domesticity, love, and even marriage.

Miley's anxiety is not centered on finding and keeping a romantic partner or whether her profession will allow her to bear children and be a good mother. Instead she is anxious that her public professional life will create deep problems for the most strongly felt intimate relationship in her life, her best friendship with Lilly. This fear is shown to be valid, overcome only by the superheroic intensity of the friends' feelings for each other. To be sure, romantic friendship between girls is not a new theme (Faderman 1981), and it may be commonplace for girls' peer culture to focus on the vulnerability of emotionally heightened friendships (Thorne and Luria 1986). What I think is interestingly new is the focus on mass-mediated public life as the specific threat to the intimacy of Miley and Lilly's friendship.

In conventional postfeminist media, "having it all" discourses allow three possible responses: accepting the incompatibility of work and family and choosing just one of them; superheroically or superficially collapsing the two and refusing the choice altogether; or highlighting the struggle, contradiction, and anxiety that the pursuit of "it all" creates in individuals' lives. The last two are most visible in *Hannah Montana*. Genz (2010) argues for understanding the postfeminist singleton as embodying the third, emphasizing the struggle rather than resolution of contradictions at the forefront of postfeminist narratives. On the other hand, Blue's analysis emphasizes the second, when she writes that "Hannah may trouble an otherwise stereotypical character, but she does so only to the extent that Miley Stewart makes an effort to convey that she prefers the 'normal' life over the particularly feminine excesses of her celebrity life. . . . There is minimal disconnect between Miley's 'two worlds'" (2013, 667). But Miley does not merely *prefer* a "normal" life, as Blue puts it. Instead the stakes of that desire are clearly profound and even existential—raising questions about the very conditions of possibility of her life—as evidenced by the depth of feeling expressed by Miley and Lilly for one another, the intensity of Miley's anxiety and fear for her relationship, and the richly detailed imagination of everything that could go wrong by connecting Miley's two worlds.

Thematizing childhood in this way as anxious and contradictory may itself be a formulaic part of the cultivation of children as an audience. The continued expansion of children's media is not a foregone conclusion, and children are asked increasingly to identify as an independent market demographic (Bickford 2012). The narration of the self as contradictory

and problematic is an unexceptional, even conventional, characteristic of public claims of group affiliation. Lauren Berlant (2008) points out, for example, that negative affects are central to the production of an intimate public femininity, which claims its publicness precisely through appeals to domestic authenticity. Michael Warner argues that “self-alienation is common to all of the contexts of publicity,” such that “at the very moment of recognizing ourselves as the mass subject . . . we also recognize ourselves as minority subjects. As participants in the mass subject, we are the ‘we’ that can describe our particular affiliations of class, gender, sexual orientation, race, or subculture [or age] only as ‘they’” (2002, 171). Such experience of self-alienation through the recognition of oneself as affiliated with a publicly mediated group is perhaps *necessary* to the establishment of a coherent and self-ordering market demographic. The children’s media market needs children to think of their childhoods as a source of authenticity—naturally based in the reproductive family and characterized by same-age friendships—but also as a problem, vulnerable and full of contradiction. Carol Dole writes, “The tortuous, even tortured, endings of all these chick flicks make clear that we do not currently have complete cultural consensus on whether women can have it all” (2007, 75). *Hannah Montana*’s equally tortuous vision of the impact of publicness on its protagonist’s intimate childhood seems to hail children as an audience who might also think of their public selves as lacking consensus, in question, a problem. If encouraging the growth of children’s media means encouraging children’s identification as subjects whose public and private lives are in contradictory tension, postfeminist women’s media provides proven scripts for that goal.

Tyler Bickford is an assistant professor of English at the University of Pittsburgh, where he teaches in the Children’s Literature Program and is affiliated faculty in gender, sexuality, and women’s studies.

Notes

1. Despite its protagonist’s chronological age, the show is very much for children and about childhood. Unlike recent shows for and about teenage or young adult women like the WB’s *Gossip Girl* or HBO’s *Girls*, *Hannah Montana* emphasizes domestic harmony over adolescent disruption, and its stylistic emphasis on clownish situations, gross-out humor, and slapstick

physical comedy locate it in a distinctive tradition of children's media (Seiter 1993).

2. This episode originally aired March 24, 2006, on the Disney Channel.

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