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## Threshold Lives: Exploring the Liminal Consumption of Tweens

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**Paper Title:** Threshold lives: exploring the liminal consumption of tweens

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## **Threshold lives: exploring the liminal consumption of tweens**

*'It is in this gap between ordered worlds that almost anything can happen'* (Turner, 1974: 13)

### **Introduction**

The intervening spaces of socio-cultural organisation have proved sources of fascination and powerful theory development in the fields of sociology, psychology and anthropology (e.g. Douglas, 1966; Van Gennep, 1961; Freud, 1950, Foucault, 1977). Consumer culture research has hitherto acknowledged the potency of studying transitional phenomena, spaces and places and the interactions of varied ontologies with the consumption experiences of the individuals or group in flux and evolution (e.g. Davies and Fitchett, 2004; Maldonado and Tansuhaj, 1999; Gentry, 1997; Schouten, 1991). But what of those whose reality is the threshold between two ordered and defined worlds, the centre of nowhere?

This research focuses on the premise that for those whose sense of self is vague or blurred by the experience of existing midway between two distinct social spheres, belonging to neither, but embedded in both, consumption practices take on a divergent focus. Centring specifically on the pre-adolescent or tween, who has come to embody conceptualisations of a categorical anomaly (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998; Cook, 2004), a socio-cultural miasma (Jenks, 2005), the lived experience of a tween is explored using personal diaries, in-depth interviews and accompanied shopping trips. Thus we set out to explore the dynamics of consumer culture most recently articulated as 'a social arrangement in which the relations between lived culture and social resources, and between meaningful ways of life and the symbolic and material resources on which they depend, are mediated through markets' (Arnould & Thompson, 2005: 869), specifically amongst those who exist on the threshold of sociocultural organisation. This paper presents one of the theoretical conclusions of this longitudinal research project – the theory of metaconsumption – which explores consumption within their

liminal shadow of activity and regeneration readying these social neophytes for the biggest performance of their lives.

### **Everything and Nothing – The Theoretical Framework of Liminality**

Defined by Turner & Turner (1978: p.249) as ‘the state and process of mid-transition in a rite of passage’, a ‘moment in and out of time’ (Turner, 1969: p.96), the liminal phase of a transition, represents an instance of incompleteness, when the liminars (the ritual subjects in this phase) ‘elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space’ (Turner, 1969: p.95). Understanding the attributes of liminal entities also serves to illustrate the core ideologies of the theory. One such attribute is structural and social invisibility, seclusion from the spheres of everyday life (Turner, 1967). In addition, ideologies of liminal theory espouse characteristics such as tabula rasa, symbolisation of concurrent degeneration and gestation or parturition (Turner, 1967), heteronomy, silence, equality and obscurity.

Turner’s (1967, 110) ‘invitation to investigators of culture to focus their attention on the phenomena and processes of mid-transition’ has resulted in contrasting disciplines welcoming liminality and its constituent dimensions into their midst to enrich an understanding and analysis of many phases of cultural change. Several bodies of literature forming a hybridism of theoretical perspectives with liminality unite around a core trope of illness and loss (e.g. Little et al, 1998; Gough, 2005, Jones et al, 2007). Anderson (2003), Campbell et al (2005), Landzelius (2001) and Waskul (2005) have engaged with contextual specificities such as implantable cardioverter defibrillators (ICDs), advertising, incubated pre-term babies and internet personas respectively in their integration of this anthropological theory of structural anomalies.

Contexts as disparate as place and space (Pritchard & Morgan, 2006; Matthews et al, 2000), performance (Dunne, 2002; Rill, 2006; Brown, 2007; Hooker, 2007), and Postmodernity (Bhabha, 2004; Zukin, 1991; Bettis, 1996) highlight the infusion and contribution of many areas of socio-cultural research with ideologies of the liminal, adding vividness and analytical depth to contemporary lived experiences of socio-cultural evolution and disruption.

### **Liminal Consumption**

But what of liminal consumption? Have the ideologies of interim states been used as a lens of analysis for consumption practices and behaviours? Schouten (1991) represents the inaugural integration of this anthropological perspective on mid-transition with individual consumption practices. Despite introducing a link between liminality and consumption, the overall emphasis of Schouten's (1991) research is divided between self-concept theories, role transitions, rites of passage and liminal ideologies. This multi-theoretical focus implies that less in-depth insights of specifically liminal consumption behaviours are garnished. Schouten (1991, 422) himself concludes that 'little is yet known about the consumption behaviours of liminal people'.

Despite focusing on a proposed relationship between liminal transitions, symbolic consumption and the extended self, the work of Noble & Walker (1997) gravitates around the notion of transitions as opposed to the state of liminality itself and additionally utilises a positivist framework and quantitative methodology to align with its dissemination in predominantly psychologically oriented fields of inquiry.

Several other studies have approached the phenomenon of consumption in a liminal state (Hogg et al, 2004; Landzelius, 2001; Pavia & Mason, 2004). Although generating fascinating insights in their own right, these studies commonly relegate the liminal to a constituent

dimension of a wider terrain of focus. It appeared that Schouten's (1991) cry to rally the troops towards explorations of this potential reservoir of symbolic meaning and consumer experiences had been relegated to the margins of interpretivist consumer research. Thus this research aimed to explore the interweaving of consumption and identity amongst those whose sense of self is as much about past as future; selves that are embedded in what was but gravitating towards what is to come.

## **Methods**

In order to explore the interaction of liminal lived experiences and tween consumption practices, there were several methodological considerations and implications. Firstly, cognisant of the inherent ideologies of liminality, an instance of time deemed fundamentally disruptive or ambiguous in the life of a pre-adolescent was selected so as to capture lived experience of 'betwixt and between' at its most lucid. Therefore, a longitudinal study of a year was undertaken spanning the participants' final months of primary school and early months of secondary education<sup>1</sup>. Three main sites of access were utilised; drama schools, personal contacts and primary schools.

Second, in line with Richardson's (1994) conceptualisation of multiple methods within the interpretivist domain as 'crystallisation', this year-long exploratory research project was interjected at various points by a constellation of data collection techniques. A focal point of Richardson's (1994) theorisation is the premise that 'what we see depends on the angle of our repose' (p.523). Five data collection methods were employed; namely in-depth interviews (which were conducted at two separate intervals), personal diaries, accompanied shopping trips, e-collages and researcher diaries. Each method was chosen so as to reflect a divergent

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<sup>1</sup> These stages of education correspond to junior and senior high school in the United States

angle of repose on the lived experience and consumption practices of a liminal. However, due to space constraints, only interview data will be integrated into this paper.

Analysis of such a myriad set of data collection techniques required a specific combination of rigour and creativity. In line with the work of Strauss and Corbin (1998), a grounded theory process of analysis was used which proved ‘mechanistic and indeterminate in roughly equal portions’ (McCracken, 1988: p.41). Following this process of analysis which inherently involves stages of memo writing, axial coding and selective coding, core categories were developed around which the other categories and constructs revolved and offered explanatory power (Spiggle, 1994). This process of data analysis culminated in a stage of data interpretation in the manner of ‘a hermeneutic circle’ (Arnold and Fischer, 1994: p.63).

### **Research Findings and Interpretation**

The following section details one of the central findings of the first phase of data collection – during the last months of primary school – the theory of metaconsumption. Although the main focus of this paper is the metaconsumption theorised as reflective of the consumption practices engaged with by the liminal tweens, it is necessary to briefly ground this theory in the context in which it emerged. This contextual grounding lays the foundation for the emergence of the metaconsumption theory.

### **The Liminal Tween**

As discussed throughout the literature review, the theoretical framework of liminality (Turner, 1967; 1969; 1974) was utilised as a prism for interpreting the cultural and social categorisation of these ambiguously located beings. Due to space constraints there will be a

brief delineation of one of the component concepts of the notion of the liminal tween. This and many other instances of liminality that emerged throughout the data add empirical credence to the social invisibility experienced by these 'betwixt and between' girls. This sense of being socially imperceptible would emerge as a focal point for the metaconsumption strategies engaged with by these interstitial consumers.

### ***Legal Vs Social Age***

One of the most overtly liminal components of the tween identity was the tension experienced between their legal and social age. Testament to the conceptualisation that these girls are no longer; but not yet, their social and legal categorisations were often at odds with one another, resulting in an acute sense of social invisibility for the girls. Elaine informs me that although she is given the responsibility of caring for her own brother and sister, many people outside of her family would consider her 12 years of age, too young to be held responsible for young children. However she is keen to point out that she does not hold the same view:

**E:** *'but I am far more mature than a lot of 13 year olds I know. I think it is more to do with the fact that people hear 12 years old and they think oh that's too young to babysit children..'*

**K:** *'and when do you think they would be okay with it....other people?'*

**E:** *'I think at about 14 or 15 it is more acceptable, by other people, to be babysitting for children'.*

Here Elaine finds herself grappling with her own sense of social development and the views of those who ascribe to the legal indications of age-aligned development. She exists uncomfortably at the threshold of what is deemed acceptable legally and how she considers herself socially. This incongruence between legal and social age is manifest also in the social invisibility that seems to pervade their existence. Angela points out that their ambiguous social categorisation, their alignment with the interstices of culture means that an outlet for them in the community is often lacking or intangible.

**K:** *'what is it like being 12...?'*

**A:** *'I don't know...it's not deadly anyway...coz you can't do much'*



**K:** *'what do you mean....what can't you do?'*

**A:** *'there's nothing to do in Kilkenny and there's nothing to do around here really'*

**K:** *'and what kind of stuff do you want to do that maybe you can't'*

**A:** *'well you can't really go to the cinema much at my age coz you're always too young to see them.....like something could look really good but it's probably like 15s or something'*

### **The Egocentric Tween**

The incorporation of a theoretical perspective from the field of psychology was an emergent development following initial data analysis. Elkind's (1967) notion of egocentrism is considered by those specialising in the field of adolescent psychology, to be an under-researched idea, with constructive potential for anyone attempting to theorise on the lived experiences of young adolescents (Elliot & Feldman, 1990). In essence, Elkind's theory centres on the advanced cognitive capabilities of those approaching adolescence status in particular their increased ability to incorporate the perspectives of others into their own way of thinking and understanding themselves and the world around them. What differentiates adolescents however, and perhaps most pertinent to this research, is the tendency of this group to overgeneralise and believe themselves to be the focus of most other people's attention all of the time akin to an 'imaginary audience' (Elkind, 1967).

Amanda's interview illustrates vividly her tendency to incorporate an imagined audience into her developing self-system. She explains that the impending move to secondary school has meant divesting herself of any stationary that would be considered young or child like, in the hope of avoiding what she imagines would be certain disdain and ridicule from her new class mates.

**K:** *'what else did you have to buy for secondary school?'*

**A:** *'yea like I used to have all these little parers and little fancy girly parers but then I was like I'd probably get into trouble....people would be like 'why do you have that'...so I went for a plain pencil parer'...*

**K:** *'what would people think if you have a plain pencil parer?'*

**A:** *'if you had a big girl sittin up on the table they might be like hmmmmm...baby....'*

Here Amanda is using the imagined reactions of her peers to alter her consumption repertoire and future buying habits. It is almost like how she envisages her class-mates reacting to her display of consumption objects, is harnessed and utilised as a gauge for what will be suitable to bring along to secondary school. At this point in time, Amanda has not yet experienced the social environs of secondary school at first hand. However her advancing cognitive abilities have allowed her to consider the perspective of those girls she has yet to meet, albeit to an exaggerated degree. Even something as seemingly unrelated to social judgements and ridicule as the theft of her MP3 player is reflective of the egocentric nature of Amanda's developing self.

**A:** *'I nearly made myself sick thinking about it....i dunno why I got so upset about it....'*

**K:** *'was it to do with losing your zen...or that it was robbed by someone....'*

**A:** *'I dunno...I guess it was a bit of both....i just dunno....i just cracked....i imagined everyone will think I can't look after stuff...'*

In this example it appears that what had unsettled Amanda so much following the theft of her MP3 player was less to do with the physical void of the item but more with what she imagined the incident conveyed to others about her ability to be responsible for her possessions. Egocentrically, she believes this mishap to be the sole focus of others' attentions.

### **Metaconsumption**

As outlined above, the liminars' lived experiences are characterised by social ambiguity, categorical invisibility and an overt preoccupation with how they appear in the eyes of those around them. It emerged throughout the data analysis that despite their conveyed annoyance at their status as social non-descriptors, their shadowed realities were a vital resource.

As evidenced in the data, various consumption strategies were being utilised by the tweens in order to paradoxically evade definite categorisation via consumption owing to their

egocentric tendencies and fear of social reprisal, prior to a more assured and competent entry into teenager-hood. But concurrently these strategies enable the tweens to tentatively participate in the consumer culture towards which they know their imperatives must be oriented if they are to be accepted by friends and envisaged onlookers.

A relatively recent consideration within the domain of cognitive analysis is that of second order thinking; or 'thinking about thinking' (Keating, 1990). Metacognition is frequently studied within the realm of psychology as 'the ability to monitor one's own cognitive abilities and activity for consistency, for gaps in information that need to be filled' (Keating, 1990: p75). This theory appeared to have potential for application within the domain of this instance of consumer research. When re-appropriated to analyse the emergent consumption practices of these liminal tweens, the theory of metaconsumption emerged as a viable theoretical process.

Fundamentally metaconsumption was envisaged as involving consumption about consumption. During this liminal existence, metaconsumption strategies served to realise the main preoccupation of a tween; remaining covertly active. It appears to be one of the primary preoccupations of the liminal experience, the main product of this ambiguous, obscure interval. Eluding definite categorisation as either child or teen, the tweens channel this cultural anonymity into preparing for one of the most socially pertinent roles of their lives thus far; becoming a teenager. These metaconsumption strategies, as will be delineated, allow the girls to paradoxically both evade definite categorisation via consumption prior to a more assured and competent entry into teenager-hood but also enables them to tentatively participate in the consumer culture towards which their imperatives must be oriented.

### ***Brand Apathy***

The nexus of the metaconsumption strategy is thus the maintenance of an unobtrusive, yet concurrently burgeoning site of consumption, which the liminal period appears to represent for these girls. Several strategies had at their core the notion that any activity, which wrenched the girls from the comfort of their categorical ambiguity and assign them to either a child or teen status before they feel prepared, is detrimental. One concept reflective of the tweens' striving towards consumption practices that facilitate preservation of their social anonymity, for fear of premature emergence before their imagined audience, is brand apathy. Pervasive throughout the first interview data is a definite reluctance by the girls to express an alignment with or affinity to branded products for fear of making an error conducive to social exclusion and ridicule. Contrary to the abundant secondary research in this area (e.g. Siegal et al, 2004; Lindstrom, 2003b; McNeal, 1992), the girls displayed a noticeable reticence when a discussion of brands and their importance to them arose.

In this example Nicola dismisses the notion that brands are important to her, but acknowledges that 'some people' like to revolve their consumption patterns around them.

**K:** *'so do you think brands matter to people your age?'*

**N:** *'well some people do...like they have to get all the brand....it doesn't matter to me'*

**K:** *'does it not...so what's important to you'*

**N:** *'just kind of if I like the top or not.'*

At this stage, she is still a novice when it comes to buying her way into the teen/consumption dialectic. By refusing to commit to an engagement with brand labels, she is not expected to know anything about them and thus cannot err in her discourse around brands and consumption. Her social status cannot be allocated and she can remain in the interstices of categorisation until such a time when she is equipped with enough social-kudos oriented information to emerge.

Another metaconsumption strategy seemingly utilized in order to convey a purposeful apathy about branded items is price preoccupation. There are numerous examples throughout the first interview data, which suggest that reverting to the reliable utilitarian justification of 'because non-branded things are cheaper', allays the possibility that their incompetence with consumer culture will be brought to notice.

Two excerpts from Rachel's interview add credence to the notion that apathy or resistance toward acknowledging the centrality of brands to their lived experiences is a strategic defence mechanism often couched in a fixation on value for money, designed to protect the shadow side of their being, their liminal regeneration.

**K:** *'and do you think brands matter to people in your class....well not just your class...but your friends....do ye talk about brands at all?'*

**R:** *'amm....not really....the main place that we go is penneys<sup>2</sup>....coz its so cheap and it actually does have some nice clothes and stuff...and they just have everything at a really cheap price... and say if you went into somewhere else...like where would you go...am...really expensive like Pauls or somewhere....and you'd see the same string top or the same jumper for like fifty euro and like the one you could get in penneys would be like fifteen or twenty...'*

In this first passage, Rachel's attitude is analogous to the other tweens, in that she justifies her supposed detachment from branded goods by referral to the value for money at non-branded stores. However just minutes later, Rachel recalls the experience of buying a new outfit for her confirmation a couple of months previously.

**K:** *'and what other shops would you go to....say if you went in with your mum?'*

**R:** *'well radical<sup>3</sup> I bought my confirmation outfit in.'*

**K:** *'what kind of outfit did you get?'*

**R:** *'well I got these grey bench combats....they're really nice and I got this tee-shirt and I love it I wear it all the time...and I got a bench hoody....and am its really cool you can put on the sleeve you can put your thumb through a little hole in it...its really cool...and I got my runners<sup>4</sup> there aswell....they're van.'*

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<sup>2</sup> Penney's is a discount clothing and accessories store in Ireland

<sup>3</sup> Radical is a store in Ireland which stocks branded clothing and footwear

<sup>4</sup> Runners is Irish slang for trainers/sneakers

It is clear therefore that Rachel's earlier expressed indifference to brands is not consistent with her behaviour. In this instance, when her mother's financial agency enters the equation, and Rachel has had a tangible experience with a brand, Rachel's priorities change and the non-branded shop doesn't get a mention. Rather she manages to list two big brands in her purchases. Surely if the non-branded store is such good value, her mother's financial resources would have gone a long way further? Clearly Rachel's interview, visible in part through this inconsistency, suggests that indifference is a defence mechanism. Expressing a detachment from the world of labels, logos and symbolism is less important a goal when resources not available to the neophyte materialise.

### *Parody*

Cognisant of the fact that the core of the metaconsumption strategy is its focus on existing without exhibiting, I was made aware of yet another component of this strategy during the accompanied shopping trips. This strategy centred on the agentive dimension of this liminal shadow in which the tweens exist; consumption strategies that evinced monitoring and acquiring of information and competencies needed when the time came to lead their liminal cocoon and embrace young teen identity.

During these shopping trips, the ambiguity and ensuing tension that the girls experienced in many of the shops seemed to stem from their recurring mislocation as a group or social category. At times the shops we visited were so beyond the realm of possibility for these girls on every level, while concurrently other stores evinced notions of a former childhood self that they were eager to forsake. In other words, it was palpable throughout these trips, that expressing interest in particular items was a risky, value-laden endeavour. Signalling interest in an item deemed 'inappropriate' in any dimension appeared to represent social suicide. I

soon realised that these weren't just shopping trips, but opportunities to manage, protect and accumulate the knowledge that was expected of them as young, female consumers.

The concept of parody emerged as a means through which the girls could openly experiment with possible signifiers and configurations of consumption, but maintain a distance from any personal reflections ensuing because of these experiments at the same time. It allowed them to exist without exhibiting. During the shopping trip with three tweens for example, I witnessed first hand the use of this strategy. On entering one particular store, the girls picked up random tops and skirts claiming 'this is so you' or 'this is my dream outfit'. I only realised after chatting to the girls later on, that this was a statement of sarcasm meant to denote that something was not to their taste and they weren't at all genuine in their sentiments. However although it was not genuine admiration they espoused, expressing opinions or preferences couched in parody or mockery, protects the girls' vulnerability at a time when their level of consumer experience is limited.

### ***The Fake Facilitators***

This concept refers to the conclusion that many of the girls chose to forsake a preoccupation with having the genuine brand and instead focused on manipulating and utilising the sign value even associated with counterfeit versions to assert a provisional foot into the world of teen consumption. Therefore although many of the 'brands' they possess are in fact fakes, these products nonetheless facilitate a participation in a version of consumer culture, however diluted. This strategy allows for an engagement with the imperatives that dominate teen consumption but concurrently does not demand the resources only attributed to those of a more defined societal categorisation such as finances, life experience or definite market place allocation. In this example, Katie is taking me through some of the possession in her room, including a fake Von-Dutch cap. Interestingly she herself points out that it is a fake.

**K:** *'What other brands do you use?'*

**KL:** *'von dutch...I got those in Majorca...they have lasted me two years now'*

**K:** *'wow...and do you have any other von dutch stuff....do you know much about the brand?'*

**Katie roots underneath her bed**

**K:** *'ooh a cap...do you wear that much'*

**KL:** *'yeah...its fake von dutch...but it's still von dutch'*

What Katie seems to mean here is that to others, it still appears to be Von Dutch, or at the very least she is appearing to others to be engaging with the brands that form the appropriate staple diet of any normative teen. The important thing for Katie then is appearances rather than authenticity. Appearances maintains the shadow side of their being so that they can incur as little anticipated social ridicule as possible while they experiment with the intricacies of the teen persona/consumption dialectic.

Rachel also displayed an affinity for the non-authentic version of some well-known brands.

**K:** *(reading diary)...Louis Vitton is one of my favourite designers. I love his bags....so which one is yours?'*

**R:** *'well I got the both of them off my next door neighbour (laughs), she got them...'*

**K:** *'what do you like about those bags'*

**R:** *'I think they look really cool...and I don't mind of they're fake...because no-one really knows'*

Rachel here articulates the key element of the fake facilitator concept, as a metaconsumption strategy. Counterfeit products allow the liminal tweens, despite their lack of agency as a socially ambiguous category, to engage with a desirable facet of consumer culture; the repository of symbolic meaning and social implications behind the Louis Vitton logo. Although the use of fake brands is not a consumption practice limited to this age group, the role that these brands play in the lived experience of a liminal tween is significant towards understanding how consumption is enacted during a time of social invisibility.



## **Discussion**

This paper has described some of the constituent parts of metaconsumption; the theorisation of the liminars' consumption practices. Being neither a child consumer nor a teen purchaser implies that there exists a gap between the self they were and the self they long to be and the liminal status that ensues. In addition, advancing cognitive capacities instil the tweens with a flagrant sense of trepidation regarding their neophyte-like social standing and potential public transgressions. Consequently they long to reside in the shadowed side of being, attempting to learn, monitor and accumulate socially oriented consumer knowledge, but all the while protect and maintain the anonymity that shields them from social scrutiny and insinuations. This intense period of 'consumption focused on consumption' aligning oneself with the nuances and mores of the social sphere which will help sculpt their entry into teenager-hood, provides examples of a myriad consumption strategies and practices which further a theorisation of liminal beings and their consumption practices.

Thus this desire to exist without exhibiting is the core characteristic of the liminal existence and subsequently the theory of metaconsumption has an integral role in its manifestation. For example, the visible propensity of the tweens to convey decided apathy and even resistance towards branded consumption with the variant but related strategy of price preoccupation, was reflective of an effort to preserve the unspecific nature of their social categorisation. Not committing to a brand meant not committing to an (unfinished) teen identity. This theoretical conclusion stands in stark contrast to the prevalent literature on branded consumption, whether conceptually, theoretically or managerially oriented (Lindstrom, 2003; McDougall & Chantrey, 2004; Elliot & Leonard, 2004) that convey brand-oriented consumption as a transparently positive and desired facet of tween consumer culture.

However it is equally as intrinsic to the liminal existence that this period of time is not entirely static. As theorised by Douglas (1966, p.137) in relation to interstitial existences ‘there is energy in the margins and unstructured areas’. A degree of agency must become part of the metaconsumptive practices of the tween if they are to progress towards the essence of their teen identity (Jenks, 2003). Thus the concepts of the fake facilitators and parody encapsulate the covert but fervent accumulation of consumer-oriented knowledge and experience that concurrently embodies the liminar’s ‘betwixt and between’ existence. For example, parody, akin to the foundational premise of the other metaconsumption strategies is both an enabling and a protective mechanism in that it facilitates the tweens’ engagement with the appearance of teen consumerism but yet safeguards the anonymity necessary to prevent premature alignment with a teen identity that are ill prepared for.

Cognisant of the tweens’ concurrent engagement with and detachment from consumption practices, the liminal period is proposed to represent a fruitful darkness (Turner, 1967, p110). Akin to understudies waiting in the wings anxiously ingesting as much information as possible in order to better prepare themselves for the biggest performative role of their lives to date – which as of yet is just out of sight – the fructile chaos of the fruitful darkness facilitates a private rehearsal for what will eventually be a very public performance. The metaphor of the fruitful darkness embodies the concurrent darkness and energy, the restorative obscurity that epitomises the liminars’ experiences with consumer culture within the interstices of socio-cultural categorisation. Although at times the tweens appear passive or nonchalant about many of the signifiers of teen culture, this passivity appears to belie a fervent task. Turner (1967, p.102) similarly theorised when he claimed that during the liminal period ‘his apparent passivity is revealed as an absorption of powers which will become active after his social status has been redefined...’

## **Conclusion**

Fundamentally the theory of metaconsumption engages with the work of those who revel in exploring the myriad ways in which socio-cultural contexts and identity interact with and are mediated by market forces. This theory reflecting on the tendency of those who exist in an ambiguously defined social category to engage with 'consumption about consumption' also resonates with the 'consumer as identity seeker' conceptualisation pursued by those within the field of interpretive research. As argued by Arnould & Thompson (2005), what is most integral to the strength of consumer culture theory is its ability to transcend context and generate theoretical insight. In the case of this research, although the tween is an integral component of this work, the theory of metaconsumption has the potential to surpass its genesis within the micro-level of the lived experience of young adolescents and become an effective theoretical lens at a meso-level for exploring consumption practices throughout many other liminal experiences.

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