


***“EH GIRLS! LET’S PLAY, WE ARE IN A RESTAURANT! IMAGINE WE’RE GOING TO McDONALD’S™ ”***

**BRANDS AS SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES IN CHILDREN’S PEER CULTURE.**

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# THE CONTEXT

- **Nike, Barbie, and iPod, have appeared in New York State's Common Core standardized English tests.**
  - Children experience brands as an integral part of their lives (Sherry, 1998).
  - They build brand relationships beyond their shopping and consumption experiences (Nairn, Griffin, and Wick 2008; McAlister and Cornwell, 2010).
  - They used advertising as social and cultural resources to build their childhood culture (Bartholomew and O'Donohue 2003; Lawlor and Prothero 2008; Ritson and Elliott 1999).
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# THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- **Yet**, very few studies have focused on the way children use **brands as a resource to build their childhood culture.**
- This study aims at exploring **how children use and interpret brands to build their childhood culture, outside of a consumption context.**



# THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

- **A conceptual framework drawn on the New Sociology of Children.**
- ✓ Research on child-brand relationships traditionally based on the theories of developmental psychology (John, 1999).
- ✓ **Yet**, children become consumers in a socioeconomic and cultural environment (Ji, 2002; Hamilton and Catterall, 2006; Nairn et al., 2008; Diamond et al., 2009).

## **The Sociology of Childhood:**



an alternative approach to studying child-brand relationships (Cook, 2009; Johnson, 2001).



# THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

- **Children as active, innovative social actors.**
- ✓ Children are not passive recipients of socialization.
- ✓ They act in and on the social world, in interaction with their various social environments.
- ✓ They collectively perceive, interpret, and act on the world within their peer groups.

➔ **Peer culture:** "a stable set of activities or routines, artifacts, values, and concerns that children produce and share in interaction with peers" (Corsaro, 2011, 120).

(Adler and Adler, 1998; James, Jenks, and Prout 1998; James and Prout 1997).

# THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

- **“Interpretive Reproduction”** (Corsaro, 1992, 2001)

- ✓ Children are affected by the societies and cultures of which they are members.

- ✓ **But**, they create their own social rules, and modify words or objects belonging to adulthood.

- ➔ Children build their **peer culture** by creatively appropriating adults' culture.

- ➔ Children contribute to the **reproduction AND extension** of the adults' culture.



# METHODOLOGY

- **How do children use and interpret brands to build their childhood culture?**
- ✓ A child-oriented ethnographic study in the school setting.
- ✓ 6 fifth grade classes in 2 French schools (112 ten-eleven-year-old students).
- ✓ Immersion of one researcher over 6 months.
- ✓ Data collection based on multiple methods.
- ✓ Thematic content analysis based on an inductive categorization.

(Thompson et al., 1989; Spiggle, 1994)



## FINDINGS

- A brand language shared within the peer group
- ✓ A mostly oral language.

*Mère Cédès or Mircidis; Naïque, Niek or Nicke.*

*“ I do not know Quéloguesseu! Kellogg’s™ spelling is with a “x”, not like that!!” (F.)*

- ✓ **The social use of brand names** according to the product category.

*Dannon™ = a plain yogurt.*

*“Jeofrey has six Adidas™, and me two. At last I have two Adidas™ and two Reebok™” (M).*





# FINDINGS

- **Brands as resources in peer culture**

- ✓ **Brands included in school games and school work**

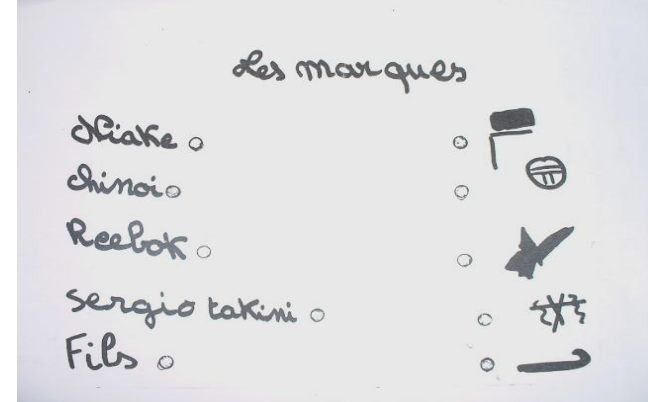
*““Eh girls, let’s play! We’re in a restaurant! (A.)*

*No we imagine we’re going to McDonald’s™” (S.)*

- ✓ **Brands distorted and included in peers’ vernacular**

*“Sometimes we use expressions, like ADIDAS which means “Attention Danger Ici Arabes Sauvages”. It is harsh but a lot of friends say it.*

*Korey wrote in a composition ADIDAS: everybody knew the meaning and he erased it when the teacher watched it” (N.).*



 **The children take ownership of the brands.**



# FINDINGS

- **The children distort the meaning of brand names and discourses**

- ✓ **To make friends laugh**

- ✓ **To transgress teacher's rules**

*“Kinder means children in German (the teacher)*

*Ah Kinder Surprise™!” (P.) All students are laughing.*

- ✓ **To make fun of the brand discourses**

*“L'Oréal, because you aren't worth it!” (J.)*

 **Brands used to consolidate complicity within peer group and differentiate it from adults' world.** 

# FINDINGS

- **Brands as support for appropriating and reproducing adults' brand culture in an innovative way**
- ✓ **Brands introduced in traditional childhood routines to create new collective play routines.**
- ✓ **Brand discourses distorted to assimilate consumer culture?**  
*“Reebolt shoes, at 61 945 euros, the cheapest price!” (S.)*



# CONCLUSION & DISCUSSION

## How do children use and interpret brands to build their childhood culture?

- Beyond the purchase and consumption of branded products, **brands provide sociocultural references to build peer culture.**
- **Consistently with Corsaro's interpretive reproduction theory**, children creatively appropriate brand discourse conveyed by adults to address their own peer concerns.



**Interpretive reproduction theory: an appropriate framework to explore child-brand relationships in a sociocultural perspective.**

## CONCLUSION & DISCUSSION

**A complex and paradoxical child-brand relationship.**

- By decoding and distorting brand discourses, **children seem to develop brand literacy.**
- Even if current children seem to be increasingly informed and savvy consumers, **their childhood culture and brands are inextricably intertwined.**

**Does the creative appropriation of brand culture by children mean that they are savvier consumers?**



**Thank you very much  
for your attention.**

