The ABC Family cable network has become a leader in television for the millennial audience through a strategy of increased diversity on screen and an emphasis on complexity in family life. These goals have both been aided by representing Latina/o characters in the network’s flagship series: The Secret Life of the American Teenager, Pretty Little Liars, Switched at Birth, and The Fosters. In this thesis I engage in industrial, textual, and discourse analysis of these series, finding that Latina/o representation is increasing in both quantity and quality as network executives and producers attempt to appeal to the ethnically diverse millennial generation. These attempts, however, are not perfect. This project pinpoints a span of time in which ABC Family shifts towards more Latina/o inclusion both on-screen and behind the camera. At the same time, ABC Family programming dominates ratings in its key millennial demographic, indicating a correlation (of undetermined causation) between increased Latina/o representation and ratings.
Marketing to children is all about creating pester power, because advertisers know what a powerful force it can be. According to the marketing industry book Kidfluence, pestering or nagging can be divided into two categories—“persistence” and “importance.” According to Klein, the mid-1980s saw the birth of a new kind of corporation—Nike, Calvin Klein, Tommy Hilfiger, to name a few—which changed their primary corporate focus from producing products to creating an image for their brand name. According to the Center for a New American Dream, babies as young as six months of age can form mental images of corporate logos and mascots. Brand loyalties can be established as early as age two, and by the time children head off to school most can recognize hundreds of brand logos.