Contents

List of Tables, Figures and Illustrations  vii
Acknowledgements  viii
Notes on Contributors  ix

Introduction  1
David Buckingham and Vebjørg Tingstad

Part I  History of Children’s Consumption
1  Valves of Adult Desire: The Regulation and Incitement of Children’s Consumption  17
   Gary Cross
2  Proper Toys for Proper Children: A Case Study of the Norwegian Company A/S Riktige Leker (Proper Toys)  31
   Tora Korsvold
3  The Books That Sing: The Marketing of Children’s Phonograph Records, 1890–1930  46
   Jacob Smith

Part II  Theory and Method in Research on Children’s Consumption
4  Commercial Enculturation: Moving Beyond Consumer Socialization  63
   Daniel Thomas Cook
5  Subjectivities of the Child Consumer: Beings and Becomings  80
   Barbro Johansson
6  Researching Things, Objects and Gendered Consumption in Childhood Studies  94
   Claudia Mitchell

Part III  Practices of Contemporary Marketers
7  Children’s Virtual Worlds: The Latest Commercialization of Children’s Culture  113
   Janet Wasko
8 Creating Long-lasting Brand Loyalty – or a Passing “Craze”?: Lessons from a “Child Classic” in Norway

Ingunn Hagen and Øivind Nakken

9 The Cute, the Spectacle and the Practical: Narratives of New Parents and Babies at The Baby Show

Lydia Martens

Part IV Social Contexts of Children’s Consumption

10 The Stuff at Mom’s House and the Stuff at Dad’s House: The Material Consumption of Divorce for Adolescents

Caitlyn Collins and Michelle Janning

11 The Dao of Consumer Socialization: Raising Children in the Chinese Consumer Revolution

Randi Wærdahl

12 “Those Who Have Less Want More. But Does It Make Them Feel Bad?”: Deprivation, Materialism and Self-Esteem in Childhood

Agnes Nairn, Paul Bottomley and Johanne Ormrod

Part V Childhood Identities and Consumption

13 Branded Selves: How Children Relate to Marketing on a Social Network Site

Håvard Skaar

14 “Hello – We’re Only in the Fifth Grade!!”: Children’s Rights, Inter-generationality and Constructions of Gender in Public Discourses About Childhood

Mari Rysst

15 “One Meets Through Clothing”: The Role of Fashion in the Identity Formation of Former Soviet Union Immigrant Youth in Israel

Dafna Lemish and Nelly Elias

Index
Introduction

David Buckingham and Vebjørg Tingstad

Commercial marketing to children is by no means a new phenomenon. Indeed, historical studies show that children have been a key focus of interest at least since the inception of modern mass marketing (e.g. Cook, 2004; Cross, 1997; Seiter, 1993). Nevertheless, in recent years children have become more and more important both as a market in their own right and as a means to reach adult markets. Marketers are seeking to target children more directly and at an ever-younger age; and they are using a much wider range of techniques that go well beyond conventional advertising. Marketers often claim that children are becoming ‘empowered’ in this new commercial environment: the market is seen to be responding to needs and desires on the part of children that have hitherto been largely ignored or marginalised, not least because of the social dominance of adults.

However, these developments have also led to growing public concern about the apparent ‘commercialisation’ of childhood. Popular publications, press reports and campaigns have addressed the damaging impact of commercial forces on children’s physical and mental health. These concerns are often part of a broader lament about the decline or corruption of childhood itself. Such arguments typically presume that children used to live in an essentially non-commercial world; and that their entry into the marketplace over the past several decades has had a wide range of negative consequences for their well-being, which range from concerns about obesity and eating disorders to issues such as ‘sexualisation’ and materialism. Far from being ‘empowered’, children are typically seen here as victims of a powerful, highly manipulative form of consumer culture that is almost impossible for them to escape or resist.

Before we introduce the studies contained in this book, it is important to sketch these debates in a little more detail, since they largely
frame the topic we are addressing. Like other debates about childhood, and particularly about children and media, debates about children’s consumption are often highly polarised. Children are either powerful agents or passive victims; either sophisticated and ‘media literate’ or innocent and naïve; either competent or incompetent. One of the aims of this book as a whole is to look beyond these opposing positions, and to develop a more nuanced and more complex account of how the commercial market operates, and how children relate to it.

Constructing the child consumer: critics and marketers

In the wake of Naomi Klein’s influential No Logo (2001), there has been a flurry of popular critical publications about children and consumer culture: prominent examples include Juliet Schor’s Born to Buy (2004), Susan Linn’s Consuming Children (2004) and Ed Mayo and Agnes Nairn’s Consumer Kids (2009). Other such books include discussions of children’s consumption alongside broader arguments about the apparent demise of traditional notions of childhood – as in the case of Sue Palmer’s Toxic Childhood (2006) or Richard Layard and Judy Dunn’s A Good Childhood (2009). The arguments in these publications are, by and large, far from new. One can look back to similar arguments being made in the 1970s, for example by groups like Action for Children’s Television in the US (Hendershot, 1998); or to announcements of the ‘death of childhood’ that have regularly recurred throughout the past two centuries (e.g. Postman, 1983). Even so, there now seems to be a renewed sense of urgency about these arguments.

Many of these books link the issue of consumerism with other well-known concerns about media and childhood: as well as turning children into premature consumers, the media are accused of promoting sex and violence, junk food, drugs and alcohol, gender stereotypes and false values, and taking children away from other activities that are deemed to be more worthwhile. Of course, this is a familiar litany, which tends to confuse very different kinds of effects and influences. It constructs the child as innocent, helpless, and unable to resist the power of the media. These texts describe children as being bombarded, assaulted, barraged, even subjected to ‘saturation bombing’ by the media: they are being seduced, manipulated, exploited, brainwashed, programmed and branded. And the predictable solution here is for parents to engage in counter-propaganda, to censor their children’s use of media, or simply keep them locked away from corrupting commercial influences. These books rarely include the voices of children, or try to take account of
their perspectives: this is essentially a discourse generated by parents on behalf of children.

Meanwhile, there has been a growth in marketing discourse specifically focused on children. Again, there is a long history of this kind of material. Dan Cook (2004) has shown how the children’s clothing industry has historically attempted to articulate the child’s perspective, to construct the child as a kind of authority, not least by means of market research. More recent examples of such marketing discourse would include Gene del Vecchio’s *Creating Ever Cool* (1997) and Anne Sutherland and Beth Thompson’s *Kidfluence* (2003). Perhaps the most influential account, however, is Martin Lindstrom and Patricia Seybold’s *Brandchild* (2003). *Brandchild* focuses on the relatively new category of the ‘tween’ – which is itself a good example of how the market purports to have identified a new category of consumer, whose needs it then claims to identify and meet (cf. Cook, 2004). According to Lindstrom and Seybold, tweens are a digital generation, ‘born with a mouse in their hands’; and they speak a new language, called Tweenspeak. Yet they also have anxieties – and the stress of growing up, the fear of global conflict and so on, mean that brands are all the more important for them, in helping them to enjoy life despite their difficulties. Indeed, tweens are seen to have a ‘spiritual hunger’ that brands and marketers alone can satisfy. The strategies these authors recommend to reach tweens are a long way from conventional advertising, and include peer-to-peer marketing, viral marketing and virtual brands. These are tactics that rely on the active participation of the peer group – and they are precisely those that alarm the critics mentioned above. For the marketers, however, these practices are all about empowerment – about children registering their needs, finding their voices, building their self-esteem, defining their own values, and developing independence and autonomy.

The most striking contrast between these accounts and those of the critics of consumer culture is the very different construction of the child consumer. The child is seen here as sophisticated, demanding and hard-to-please. Tweens, we are told, are not easily manipulated: they are an elusive, even fickle market, sceptical about the claims of advertisers, and discerning when it comes to getting value for money – and they need considerable effort to understand and to capture. This idea of the child as sovereign consumer often slips into the idea of the child as citizen, as autonomous social actor; and it is often accompanied by a kind of ‘anti-adultism’. This approach is very apparent, for example, in the marketing of the global children’s television channel Nickelodeon (Banet-Weiser, 2007; Hendershot, 2004). Significantly, children are defined
here primarily in terms of being not adults. Adults are boring; kids are fun. Adults are conservative; kids are fresh and innovative. Adults will never understand; kids intuitively know. In the new world of children’s consumer culture, kids rule.

Polarization and paradox

These two perspectives thus provide quite contrasting constructions of the child consumer. On the one hand, the campaigners present children as powerless victims of consumer culture. From this point of view, the pleasure of consumption is something to be suspected, a matter of inauthentic, short-term gratification – unlike the apparently authentic pleasures of human interaction, true culture, or spontaneous play. This argument stands in a long tradition of critical theory, from Adorno and Marcuse (and indeed more conservative critics like F.R. Leavis and Ortega y Gasset) through to contemporary authors such as Stephen Kline (1993). One of the most evident problems with this perspective is that it is always other people’s consumption that is regarded as problematic: the argument is informed by a kind of elitism, whereby largely white, male, middle-class critics have stigmatised the consumption practices of others – women, the working classes and now children (Seiter, 1993).

By contrast – and perhaps ironically – it is the marketers who emphasise the competence and autonomy of children, and who pay tribute to their sophistication. To be sure, there are definite limits to this: the power that is being celebrated here is ultimately no more than the power to consume. And of course, given the political pressure that currently surrounds the issue of marketing to children (most notably around so-called ‘junk food’), marketers are bound to argue that advertising has very little effect, and that children are ‘wise consumers’. Even so, this kind of argument aligns quite well with the emphasis on children’s autonomy and competence that characterises contemporary research in the sociology of childhood. For some researchers at least, there is an alarming coincidence in this respect between their own views and those of marketers. Indeed, there are some surprising political alliances – or potential alliances – here. On the one hand, child welfare campaigners seem to share a common cause with the moral majority; while on the other, some childhood researchers are making arguments that are very close to those of the marketers.

One of the recurring problems with this debate – as in other debates about media effects – is its tendency to displace attention away from
other possible causes of the phenomena that are at stake. For example, there is a growing tendency in many countries to blame marketers and advertisers for the rise in childhood obesity; and this is an issue that is also becoming an increasing preoccupation for researchers (see Buckingham, 2009a, b; Tingstad, 2010). Yet there may be many other complex reasons for this phenomenon. In fact, poor people are most at risk of obesity – and this clearly has something to do with the availability and price of fresh food, and the time that is available to people to shop and prepare their own meals. The rise of obesity might also be related to the rise of ‘car culture’, and the fact that children (at least in some countries) are now much less independently mobile. As with violence, blaming the media allows politicians to displace attention away from other potential causes, while also being seen to be ‘doing something’ about the problem. The key point here, however, is that it makes little sense to abstract the question of children’s relationship with advertising, or with consumer culture, from the broader social and historical context. The growth of consumer society is a complex, multi-faceted, long-term social development; and displacing broader and more complex problems onto the issue of advertising inevitably results in a neglect of the real difficulties at stake.

Ultimately, the limitations of this debate derive from the broader assumptions about childhood on which it is based. It seems to be assumed that there is a natural state of childhood that has been destroyed or corrupted by marketers – or alternatively that children’s ‘real’ innate needs are somehow being acknowledged and addressed, even for the first time. It is believed that there is something particular to the condition of childhood that makes children necessarily more vulnerable – or indeed spontaneously more wise and sophisticated, for example in their dealings with technology; and that adults are somehow exempted from these arguments.

Aside from the sentimentality of these assumptions, this kind of polarization fails to acknowledge some of the paradoxes here. For example, it is entirely possible that children (or indeed adults) might be active and sophisticated readers of media, but might nevertheless still be influenced – or indeed that an illusion of autonomy might be one of the pre-requisites of contemporary consumer culture. On the other hand, the campaigners often fail to acknowledge the difficulty that marketers have in reaching children – the fact that the market in children’s products rises and falls in unpredictable ways, and that the failure rate for new products is much higher in the children’s market than in the adult market (McNeal, 1999).
Theoretically, the question here is how we understand the relationship between structure and agency (Buckingham and Sefton-Green, 2003). On the one hand, the market clearly does attempt to construct and define the child consumer: it offers children powerful definitions of their own wants and needs, while purporting to satisfy them. Yet children also construct and define their own needs and identities – not least by how they appropriate and use consumer goods. The paradox of contemporary marketing is that it is bound to construct children as active, desiring and autonomous, and in some respects as resisting the imperatives of adults, while simultaneously seeking to make them behave in particular ways. Structure requires agency, but agency only works through structure.

Moving beyond these simple dichotomies also requires us to understand consumer culture – and indeed its historical evolution – in relation to other social factors. The children’s market works through and with the family, the peer group and – increasingly – the school. We need to address how consumption practices are carried out in these different settings, and how they are implicated in the management of power, time and space. Anthropological and sociological studies of childhood have begun to address these dynamics in other areas of children’s lives (see Qvortrup et al., 2009); and much of the work presented in this book seeks to extend this into the analysis of consumer culture.

Contents of the book

The ‘explosion of discourses’ about the child consumer in recent years has also been accompanied by a significant expansion in academic research. This work derives from a range of disciplines, including the sociology of childhood, history, social psychology, media and cultural studies, and marketing and business studies. This book emerges from the third in a series of international, multidisciplinary conferences on ‘Child and Teen Consumption’, which have been held every two years since 2004 (previous volumes drawn from earlier conferences may be found in de la Ville, 2005; and Ekstrom and Tufte, 2007). The conference, which we organised, was held at the Norwegian Centre for Child Research in Trondheim in April 2008. This volume brings together a carefully selected collection of the best papers from the conference, written both by well-known scholars in the field and by emerging researchers. Our selection reflects a certain Nordic emphasis, but it includes contributions from the UK, the United States, Canada, China and Israel, as well as Norway and Sweden.
The book contains five parts organised around broad themes, each with three chapters. Part I about *History*, begins with a contribution by Gary Cross, which offers a broad analysis of the changing relationships between adults and children in US consumer culture over the past century. Cross argues that the communicative relationship between the advertiser and the child is more problematic than recent marketing research models suggest. Based on his analysis of US print and television advertising and specific historical episodes of parental reactions to new youth-oriented products, Cross shows how adults have repeatedly projected onto children their own contradictions and desires. On the one hand, adults repeatedly seek to regulate advertising and children’s consumption; yet on the other, they spend money on children in their efforts to restore their lost wonder and their memory of childhood. This contradictory behaviour has produced tension between children and parents, as well as confusion between marketers and care-givers. It has also led to the modern extension of childhood and teenage tastes and products into adulthood. Cross suggests that the culture of teenage ‘cool’ (marked both by a rejection of parental restrictions and an embrace of parents’ indulgence) has become a lifestyle shared by adults and children instead of a life stage abandoned at maturity.

In Chapter 2, ‘Proper Toys for Proper Children’, Tora Korsvold offers a detailed historical case study of the Norwegian company *Riktige Leker* (Proper Toys). In contrast with previous historical studies of the US toy market, this analysis draws attention to the very different context of the post-war Norwegian welfare state. The toys marketed by this company appear to be very pedagogical and appeal to particular notions of ‘good parenting’: there are no war games or ‘sexualised’ toys here. However, the process of selecting toys has become more complicated over time, as contemporary toy manufacturers and marketers seek to define childhood as a time for children’s exploration of play and fun. The Proper Toys company builds on a tradition that defines play as progress, and on an old adult hegemony that claims to know children’s ‘own good’; but it has also had to accommodate to market forces, not least by presenting itself as a niche company, appealing to adult nostalgia. Korsvold’s analysis focuses on how the distinction between ‘proper’ and ‘improper’ toys is defined and sustained, and how it has changed over time; and interprets this in terms of broader shifts in social values and in the ideologies and practices that characterise contemporary parenting.

The final chapter in Part I, by Jacob Smith, provides another historical case study, of the marketing of children’s phonograph records in the early decades of the twentieth century. In 1924, the Victor Phonograph
Company proclaimed the possibilities of the ‘boundless and almost untouched children’s market’ in embarking on a marketing campaign for ‘Bubble Books’, a very early example of a hybrid ‘trans-media’ product combining print texts with recorded sound and music. Examining advertisements for these products in trade journals and in the popular press, Smith explores how the child audience was constructed and addressed, and how parents were implicated in this process. It considers how the products sought to combine appeals based on education and on entertainment, and to repackage an oral tradition of children’s nursery rhymes and songs. The direct marketing strategies adopted here in many ways presage those of Disney and other companies that followed; and in this respect, the analysis offers an important addition to previous accounts of the historical development of consumer culture and of contemporary constructions of childhood.

Part II moves on to address broader questions of theory and method in research on children’s consumption. In Chapter 4, Daniel Thomas Cook offers a theoretical critique of the widely-used concept of consumer socialisation. This concept, and the research that has followed from it, tends to posit the child as moving in a linear fashion from unknowing to knowing and from a simple to a complex being. It is a paradigm that carries the embedded assumption that there is some point where the human organism ‘enters’ consumer life from a place or time ‘outside’ of it; and that there is a known (or knowable) end-point to the development of the consumer — usually that of the ‘competent’ adult. By contrast, the concept of ‘commercial enculturation’ developed in this chapter places attention on the multiple, layered and overlapping webs of cultural meaning that precede any individual child. Children, in this view, are not so much socialised into becoming specific kinds of consumers as they are seen as entering into social relationships with and through goods and their associations. This is a variable process that is not necessarily linear or temporally determined, but which has the general shape of an ontological trajectory.

Chapter 5, ‘Subjectivities of the Child Consumer: Beings and Becomings’, discusses the forms of consumer subjectivity available to contemporary Nordic children, and relates these to notions of ‘being and becoming’ as they are used in childhood research. Barbro Johansson draws on interviews with children aged 8–12, but also seeks to develop a broader theoretical analysis of the role of consumption in the construction of a ‘generational order’, in which people in different life stages are organised in relation to each other, and power and responsibility are allocated between them. Drawing on recent debates within childhood
studies, on actor-network theory and the work of Deleuze, the chapter seeks to move beyond the polarisation between ‘being’ and ‘becoming’. It argues that these concepts carry different meanings, and are defined situationally; and as such, they need to be seen more as events than as properties of the individual. These ideas are explored through an analysis of six distinct consumer subjectivities – that is, six ways in which children perform or construct themselves as consumers. This approach shifts attention away from individuals and entities to the flows and connections between events, and to the role of non-human actors such as objects, techniques and structures.

The final chapter in Part II, by Claudia Mitchell, makes a case for studying the *material culture* of childhood as a means of empirically grounding the emerging body of sociological and cultural research on children’s consumption. Drawing on a range of perspectives from different disciplines and traditions, as well as on her own and her colleagues’ extensive empirical research, Mitchell shows how the analysis of material objects can help to theorise abstract concepts in a very grounded manner. The objects of childhood offer a particular significance for further study, both because of their connections to memory and autobiography and particularly because of how they illuminate the gendered nature of children’s consumption. Mitchell illustrates her argument with examples drawn from studies of toy packaging, dolls and doll-play, photographs and drawings, and displays in children’s bedrooms. This chapter seeks to position the study of children’s material culture within visual studies and cultural studies more broadly, effectively arguing for a ‘new materialism’ in childhood studies, while also providing promising hints and suggestions for further empirical research.

In Part III, the focus shifts to the practices of contemporary marketers. In Chapter 7, Janet Wasko explores the phenomenon of children’s online social worlds, drawing particularly on forms of critical analysis developed within the ‘political economy’ approach to media and communications. Wasko argues that this perspective is especially important in a context where there has been a proliferation of new products and media forms, and a range of new marketing and advertising strategies targeted at children. Her brief overview of these general developments is followed by detailed case studies of two leading children’s sites, Neopets and Webkinz. The analysis looks at the economic models on which the sites operate, and the ways in which they are connected with other forms of marketing and commercial activity targeting children. Wasko also focuses on the appeals of these sites to children – as is apparent in their form and content, and their mode of address – as well as the ways
in which they define and produce children as consumers, and the forms of ‘consumer ideology’ they promote.

In Chapter 8, Ingunn Hagen and Øivind Nakken explore the phenomenon of children’s consumer ‘crazes’ – situations where highly marketed media products and their spin-offs suddenly ‘catch on’ and become very popular with children. By contrast with well-known global examples such as Pokemon, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, and Harry Potter, this chapter focuses on a nationally specific example, in the form of the Norwegian character Captain Sabertooth. This pirate figure, who features in books, cartoons, toys, a theme park and an animated film, has been popular among Norwegian children for the last 18 years, and is principally targeted at 2–8-year-olds, especially boys. Hagen and Nakken focus on the strategies used by the producers to achieve long-lasting brand loyalty and thereby move beyond the ephemeral nature of the ‘craze’. These include strategies such as synergy, inclusion and brand control, which have all contributed to the lasting success of the brand, and its relative longevity as a ‘child classic’.

Chapter 9, by Lydia Martens, analyses the UK consumer exhibition The Baby Show, which is targeted at new and prospective parents. Martens focuses on two dimensions of the Show, which she refers to as the spectacular and the practical. On the one hand, the Show has been set up to entertain, displaying the aesthetics of ‘cuteness’ and radiating a sense of (dis-)organised fun. On the other hand, it speaks to a variety of more practical and utilitarian concerns that cohere with the specific life course experiences of its visitors. The chapter discusses these apparently opposing features in some detail, and then goes on to outline how they are related. In doing so, it explores how ‘what it means to become a parent’ in contemporary society is culturally constructed alongside and in relation to ‘what it means to be a baby’ – constructions that are essentially created by adults working discursively on the cultural distinction between adulthood and childhood. In this latter respect, the chapter makes useful connections with some of the main themes of debate in the literature on children’s consumer culture, such as child agency and oppositional marketing.

Part IV contains three chapters exploring the diverse Social Contexts of children’s consumption. In ‘The Stuff at Mom’s House and the Stuff at Dad’s House’, Caitlyn Collins and Michelle Janning consider the implications of parents’ divorce for children’s use of consumer goods. Drawing on in-depth interviews with adolescents and young adults in the Pacific Northwest of the United States, they analyse how the children of divorced parents use artefacts of material culture to construct
the meanings of domestic spaces and to form identity. The decoration and display of consumer goods in bedrooms, and the use of media technologies, are analysed in terms of how adolescents assert their tastes, opinions and beliefs, and establish their place within the family. Where there are disparities between two locations in terms of the availability, use or access to desirable objects (such as computers, video games and musical equipment), the young people are often very aware of their own agency. This chapter thus provides an engaging case study of the significance of children’s material culture, and the ways in which its meaning varies according to social settings and relationships.

In Chapter 11, Randi Wærdahl considers a very different cultural context, namely that of children and parents living in the midst of China’s so-called ‘consumer revolution’. In this context, children have become increasingly significant as consumers, and yet there have also been concerns about the dangers of them developing materialistic attitudes, and about their vulnerability to commercial persuasion. Chinese scholars point to diverging trends in parents’ attitudes towards their children’s consumption: on the one hand, parents are keen for their children to enjoy the things of which they themselves were deprived; and yet there is also concern that excessive spending on children is a result of parents’ lack of ‘quality time’ to spend with the family. This chapter draws on questionnaires completed by sixth-grade children and their parents in urban one-child families in Beijing; and on in-depth interviews and home visits. The analysis explores changing and contested ideas about the difference between ‘good’ (or appropriate) and ‘bad’ (or excessive) consumption, and relates these to broader philosophical traditions in Chinese thought.

Finally, in Chapter 12, Agnes Nairn, Paul Bottomley and Johanne Ormrod explore the complex relationships between deprivation, materialism and wellbeing among families in the UK. Drawing on two large-scale quantitative surveys, the authors analyse the associations between measures of economic deprivation and levels of materialism, and the popular assumption that things become more desirable precisely when they are less easy to obtain. The findings suggest that deprivation is indeed positively related to levels of materialism, as defined by standardised scales; and that materialism and wellbeing are inversely related. However, more deprived children did not have lower levels of self-esteem and depression than less deprived children. Further analysis suggested that the correlation between materialism and wellbeing was more sensitive for the less deprived children; whereas for the more deprived children, greater materialism did not result in lower self-esteem or wellbeing.
Taken together, the two studies suggest that the potentially negative influence of consumer culture may be greater for those who are more affluent – thus disturbing the commonsense assumption that ‘those who have less want more’.

Part V addresses the theme of Identities. In his chapter ‘Branded selves’, Håvard Skaar explores the use and significance of branding and marketing materials in children’s presentation of self on a popular social networking site. Drawing on a broader ethnographic study of a group of Norwegian classmates aged 11–12, Skaar analyses how the children made use of branded resources and tools in creating their individual profiles, and how this related to the existing social dynamics and hierarchies within the peer group. He distinguishes between those he calls ‘collectors’ and ‘elaborators’: the simple collection of branded resources appears to need less work and be more convincing and more unassailable than elaborating them into more complex and creative self-presentations. Social competition tends to reinforce a uniform use of brands and branded resources, thus proving an obstacle to the development of individual creativity. Skaar’s analysis offers a valuable challenge to more optimistic, and more superficial, accounts of children’s participation in such online environments.

In Chapter 14, Mari Rysst discusses the ambiguities and ethical dilemmas at stake in young girls’ views about the aesthetics and design of clothing. As she suggests, the fashion industry typically assumes that ‘tweenage’ girls want to dress ‘older than their age’; while media debates often express concern at the apparent ‘sexualisation’ of girls’ clothing. Rysst contrasts these accounts with data drawn from ethnographic fieldwork in two contrasting socio-economic settings in Oslo, Norway. The analysis suggests that girls operate norms and controlling mechanisms within the peer group that are predicated on not acting significantly ‘older than their age’. They have clear views about not exposing too much of their bodies, and such behaviour often meets with sanctions and ridicule. Yet they also have to strike a balance between not being interpreted as too childish, and not acting too old. In practice, it seems that sexuality is not the key issue in their selection of clothing: rather, their interest is in being seen as fashionable and ‘cool’. These findings are related to broader arguments about the construction of gender identity: the chapter argues that gender distinctions should not be ‘theorised away’, but that research should continue to take account of the material, bodily dimensions of identity formation.

In the final chapter, Dafna Lemish and Nelly Elias explore the role of fashion in the lives of immigrant children and adolescents from the
former Soviet Union living in Israel. Drawing on in-depth interviews, they focus particularly on the complex personal and social challenges resulting from immigration and the need to solidify a new identity, and the role of consumption in that process. Clothing and fashion appeared to have significant implications for constructing new hybrid identities as well as re-confirming old ones in the realms of gender, adolescence, Russianness and Israeliness. As the ‘social skin’ of both immigrants and local youth, clothing served variously as an identity card, a declaration of cultural war, or a means of exhibiting personal and social transformation. Here again, young people’s consumption is located within a specific social and cultural setting; and while young people are implicitly presumed to be making active choices in terms of what they buy and how they appear, they are also doing so in circumstances that are not of their own choosing, and which they cannot always control.

Conclusion

We began this introduction by identifying some of the binary oppositions that typically characterise the debate about children and consumer culture. On the one hand, we have the view of children as competent, sophisticated, empowered consumers, frequently espoused by the marketers; and on the other, the view of them as innocent, naive and vulnerable, adopted by many concerned campaigners. The contributions presented here take us beyond the comforting simplifications of this debate; and in doing so, they sketch out new issues for research. Taken together, they suggest that we need to analyse children’s activities as consumers in their broader social and historical context; that we need to understand the complex interactions between the power of the marketers (structure) and the power of consumers (agency); and that we need to see contemporary childhood as inevitably and inextricably embedded within the broader operations of our consumer culture.

References


Index

abandoned flat study 104–5
accoustemology 97
acclimatization 256
adolescents see also divorce research; teenagers
appropriaion of space 166
bedroom decoration 167–70
room culture 165–6
adult pleasure, through children 23–4
adult supervision 88
adults
fully socialized 68
implications of changing perceptions of childhood 27–9
advertising
aimed at parents 20
appeals to selfishness 29
changing perspectives on 17
for children 21
deregulation 21
and gender 224
immersive 118–19
targeting 113–14
voluntary restraint 20–1
advertising trade cards 50–1
African-American children 73
agency
of children 42–3
range of 90
and sexual innocence 235
and structure 6
and technology 172–3
anti-consumption rhetoric 20
archiving, digital 106
Ariès, Philippe 27
autonomy 4, 18, 88–9
babies' rooms 102
babies, safety 154–5
babyhood 151–2

Barbie 41
Baudrillard, Jean 90
becoming and being 9
changing meanings 89–90
as events 82–3
as intertwined 87–9
bedrooms 102, 167–70
becoming and becoming 9
changing meanings 89–90
as events 82–3
as intertwined 87–9
Berggren Torell, Viveka 237
birthday parties 75
Bjerrum Nielsen, Harriet 236
Boltanski, Christian 100–1
Bottomley, Paul 11–12
boundaries, adults and children 231
Bourdieu, Pierre 37
boys, cool 237
brand attachment 202
brand control 140–1, 143
brand equity 133–4
brand loyalty 132–4, 143
Brandchild 3
branding 12, 133
brands
and identities 212
Piczo study 218–23
Bratz 42, 233
broadcasting, Bubble Books 56–7
Bubble Books 8, 46, 47, 49 see also phonograph records
advertising 50
appeal to mothers 52–6
avoiding controversy 57–8
broadcasting 56–7
cultural impact 58–9
educational content 54
marketing strategies 50–1
parties 57
as quasi toys 52–3
Buchli, V. 104–5
Captain Sabertooth 10
appealing to girls 137
brand control 140–1, 143
brand loyalty 133–4, 143
characters 136–7
as cultural phenomenon 131–2
as cultural practice 134
inclusion 136–40, 143
indirect marketing 139–40
origins 130–1
settings 136
spin-offs 131
synergies 134–6, 143
targeting adults 138–9
car culture 5
catalogues 96
categorization, and limitation 90–1
cell phones 103–4
‘child-centredness’ 37
child consumers, constructing 2–4
child development 64–5, 178
child market, fragmentation 137–8
child mortality 25–6
child safety 154–5
childhood
ambivalent view of 18–19
assumptions about 5
changing perspectives on 32
commercial 132–3
construction of 38
ideological view of 43
materialism, self-esteem and socio-economic status 197–9
as not existing 90–1
permissive view of 24–5
plurality of 73–4
psychological perspectives on 65
public discourses 229–34
separate from adulthood 236
sexualization 229–31
understandings of 23, 228
childhood studies 63, 104–6
children
active and knowing 74
as actors 65, 81
as agents 42–3
centrality in marketplace 46
changing image of 25–6
discourses of 80
influence on parents 50
rationality 19–20
treatment as consumers 82–3
voices 242
white middle class as ‘ideal’ 73
children as consumers, types of
construct 2, 3–4, 9
children’s consumer studies,
perspectives on children 63–4
children’s rights 37–8, 230
Chin, Elizabeth 73–4
China
consumer revolution 11, 181
economic growth 178
growth in children’s consumption 178
parental attitudes to consumption 179
China research study
children’s need for guidance and protection 183–6
concerns for future 187–8
Dao of consumer socialization 190–2
effects of economic, social and cultural changes 186–8
methods 180–1
parental views on consumer influence 182–3
preparing for future 188–90
technology 187
choice, increased opportunities for 88
Church, attitudes to children 27
class stratification, and consumption 37
Clausen, Bente 236
clothing 12, 230–2
age appropriate 232–3
and construction of identities 245
fitting in 248–50
kul 233–4
and sexualization 230
and social categorization 247–8
cognitive development 65–6
Cognitive psychology, critiques of 65
Collins, Caitlin 10–11
colours, associated with babies 150–2
Index

Dao of consumer socialization 190–2
Daston, L. 94
debates, polarization 2
deep memory 106–7
deliberate remembering 98–9
depivation, materialism and
depression, materialism and
wellbeing 11–12
deregulation, advertising 21
desire
of adults 23–4
children as valves of 18–19, 23–9
desiring child 25–6
diet 187
digital archiving 106
digital media, debates about 211
Disney 57, 116, 140
diversity, Proper Toys 39
divorce 10–11
changing identities 165
children’s experiences 166–7
reframing of objects 165
divorce research see also adolescents;
teenagers
agency and technology 172–3
bedroom decoration 167–70
‘fun’ vs. ‘not fun’ 170–1
incentives/one upmanship 171
methods 167
relations of property 175–6
sense of displacement 175
technology and consumption 170
technology and time
allocation 173–5
views of parents and home 170–2;
see
virtual connectedness 171–2
Dohring, Doug 118
dolls 102
Dream Worlds 150
economic deprivation, and
materialism 11–12, 196
economic rationality 68–9
Edison, Thomas 47–8
Edwards, Elizabeth 95, 99
Ekström, Karin 69
Elias, Nelly 12–13
elitism 4
Ellis, Liz 150–1

commercial childhood 132–3
commercial enculturation 8, 64,
69–73, 76
commercialization 1
communities of parenthood 152–3
competence 4
concupiscence 20
conflicting values 205
Confucianism 191
Connerton, Paul 234
consumer acculturation 70
consumer culture 31–2, 147–8
consumer groups, creating 232
Consumer Involvement scale 202
consumer orientation 202
consumer revolution, China 11
consumer socialization 8, 64–7, 71–2
critiques of theory 68
Dao of 190–2
reasons for putting aside 75–6
use of term 69
consumer subjectivity 8
consumers, as unmanageable 89–90
consuming, learning 74–5
consumption
broad definition 72
and class stratification 37
controlling 19–23
foci of research 150
Norwegian state’s attitude 38
and technology 170
Cook, Daniel 3, 8, 31–2, 50, 52, 55, 235
cool 26–7, 29, 216–17, 238
cool boys 237
cool femininity 237
coolness 216–17, 237–8
crazes 10, 132–3
critical theory 4
Cross, Gary 7, 42
cross-promotion 136
cult of the child 20
cultural capital 37
culture of the cool 19
cultures
adolescent room culture 165–6
motherhood 147–8
curatorial play 102
cute girls 237
Index

eLogg 214, 216, 217
empowerment, and marketing to
tweens 3
enculturation, diverse forms 73–5
eroticism 230, 239–40
estrangement 256
exhibitions 150
families, negotiation and
diplomacy 232–3
family, as context of
consumption 188–90
family roles, and marketing 52
fashion
as bricolage of styles 256
codes of dress 246
experiences of migrants 246–55
functions 246–7
and identities 255
and immigrant identities 250
immigrants 12–13
and integration 255
as site of social resistance 250–3
and social acceptance 248–50
and social adjustment 253–5
sociology of 244–5
tweenage girls 12
Federal Drug Administration
(FDA) 22
Federal Trade Commission (FTC) 21
femininities
cool 237
traditional 234–7
traditional and modern 228
festivals, commercialization and
infantilization 24
films, rating 28
Formanek-Brunell, Miriam 57
Formoe, Terje 131, 133, 135, 136,
137, 140, 141
fragmentation, of child
market 137–8
frames 214
free agency 17
‘fun’ vs. ‘not fun’ 170–1
Ganz Toys 121–2 see also Webkinz
Garvey, Ellen Gruber 50–1
gaze, reciprocal 248
gender
adult roles in children’s
construction 231–2
and advertising 224
as negotiated construction 229
new ways of doing 237–9
and sport 237
stereotypes 236
traditional and modern
views 229–34
gender construction 228–9, 235, 242
generational order 8
Girard, Gilbert 48–9
girl-child 239
girls, cute 237
global self-esteem 198
Goffman, Erving 211–12, 213, 223,
224
good childhood (den gode
barndom) 229–30, 234–7
good consumers 67–9
Goode, J. 165
Growing up in Montreal 105
Hagen, Ingunn 10
Hart, J. 95, 99
hegemony, adult 40, 43
Hjemdahl, K. M. 131
Hodder, Ian 104
home consumption, defining 163
homes, material culture,
consumption, and
identity 164–5
Hooley, William F. 48
hopelessness 198
human becomings 80
human beings, concept of 81
identities 12–13
adolescents after divorce 163
bedroom decoration 167–70
and brands 212
changed by divorce 165
and clothing 245
and consumption 32
and fashion 255
and home consumption 163–4
hybrid 12–13
immigrants 250, 255
  as parents 146
  ready-made 71
  transformation as new parents 147–8, 154
ideology
  Neopets 119–20
  Proper Toys 36
  Webkinz 124
immersive advertising 118–19
immigrants
  estrangement, adaptation and resistance 256
  fashion 12–13
  identities 250, 255
immigration, trauma of 256
impression management 215–16
inclusion 136–40, 143
information, at Baby Show 153–6
Inglehart, Ronald 196
innocence 17–18
integrated marketing 135
integration, and fashion 255
intergenerationality 228–34
International Council for Children’s Play (ICCP) 34
internet
  data gathering 127
  as marketing tool 114–15
  self-presentation 213–14, 223–4
Israel
  immigration 244
  social stratification 247–8
Israel research study
  discussion and summary 255–7
  estrangement, adaptation and resistance 256
  findings 246–50
  methods 245–6
  social acceptance 248–50
  social adjustment 253–5
  social resistance 250–3

Jacobson, Lisa 46, 58
James, A. 74
Janning, Michelle 10–11
Johansson, Barbro 8–9
John, Deborah Roedder 65–7, 68, 73
juvenile records see phonograph records
Kaiser, Susan 235
Key, Ellen 31, 37
Kirkham, Pat 95
Korswald, Tora 7
kul 238–9, 240–2
Leach, William 57
learning, and video games 225
learning to consume 74–5
Lee, Nick 89
Lego 41–2
Lemish, Dafna 12–13
life phases, and subjectivity 80
life stories, ways of telling 163
Lindstrom, Martin 3
local fashion, adopting 253–5
lost wonder 23–4
love, and consumption 23
Lucas, G. 104–5
males, changing concept of maturity 28–9
mapping 101
market research, Neopets 120–1
marketing
  changing perspectives 32
  and family roles 52–6
  integrated 135
  targeting 113–14
marketing discourse, focused on children 3
marketing strategies
  Disney, Walt 57
  indirect marketing 139–40
  storybook strategy 55
  for tweens 3
  virtual worlds 126
Marshall Plan 38
Martens, Lydia 10
material culture 9
material dissatisfaction 202–3
Material Values Scale 195
materialism
  in adulthood 195–7
  and attitudes to parents 203–4
  and economic deprivation 196
materialism – continued
new 104–6
and self-esteem 195–6
self-esteem and socio-economic status 197–9
use of term 194
materiality 95, 100
maturity 27–8
Mayhew, Ralph 49
McVeigh, Susan 125
media 2, 28, 57–8, 229–30
media culture, studying 113–14
memory work 97–9
memory writing 98
metadata 106
Mickey Mouse Club 21
migration 19
Mitchell, Claudia 9
modern childhood 18
Montgomery, Kathryn 114–15
moral panics 26–7
morality 20, 157, 179
Mosco, Vincent 114
motherhood 147–8, 153
mothering, diversity of experience 147
mothers, marketing to 52–6
Nairn, Agnes 11–12
Nakken, Øivind 10
nature, nearness to 239
Neopets 9, 116–21
new materialism 104–6
Nordic countries, traditions of play 35
Norway cool 238
good childhood (den gode barndom) 229–30
women’s values 236
nostalgia, Proper Toys 36, 39–40
nursery rhymes 54
obesity 5
objects approaches to study 106–7
ephemerality 106
and gender construction 236
gendered 95–7
in study of material culture 94–5
and visual culture 99–104
online social worlds 9
ontology of flow 91
oral tradition, Bubble Books 54–6
organizational networking 136
Ormrod, Johanne 11–12
othering 80–1
otherness 248
Others, children as 80–1
outdoor activities 236–7, 239
outdoor play 237
Pacificer Heaven 139–40
pacifism, Proper Toys 36–7
packaging 95–7
parental authority 88
parental rights 19, 22
parenthood communities of 152–3
morality 157
pleasures of early 150–1
parents, influence of children 50
parents, new 146–7, 153–4
peer groups 26
Penaloza, Liza 70
persuasive intent 72–3
philanthropy, Webkinz 124–5
phonograph records 7–8 see also Bubble Books
children’s media entertainment 46–7
history and development 47
performers 48–9
photographs 99–100
Piczo study 211
branding 214–15
collectors and elaborators 217–18, 224–5
collector’s use of brands 218, 220
conclusions 225–6
coolness 216–17
creativity 222
discussion 223–5
elaborators’ use of brands 221–3
methods 214
production modes 219
use of brands 224–5
users and non-users 215–16
Pink, Sarah 95, 167, 168
Pirates of the Caribbean 144
play
outdoor 237
traditions of 35
political economy approach 9
political economy of media 114
political pressure 4
Postman, Neil 27
Pountain, Dick 238
poverty 203
power relationships, visibility and appearance 255
Pre-school Pedagogue 36
preparation and protection, children as consumers 179
productive remembering 97–9, 106
projection 7, 23–5
Proper Toys 7, 31
adult consumers 42
children’s rights 37–8
foundation of 33–5
overview of case study 32–3
pedagogical aims 35
political and economic context 35–6
properness 38–40
selection of toys 39, 40, 43–4
significance of name 34
vision, ideology and morality 35–7, 40–1, 43
properness 38–42
protection 19
of good childhood 230
from sexual exploitation 231
protection and preparation, children as consumers 179
Prout, A. 74
Pugh, Allison 26, 73–4
quality, Proper Toys 39
quantitative research 194–5
quasi toys 52–3
referencing 101
regulation, of childhood consumption 19–23
remembering, deliberate 98–9
research
autobiographical dimension 148–9
quantitative 194–9
resistance 256
responsibility, sharing 87
restraint, in advertising 20–1
Riggins, Stephen 101–2
rights, of children 37–8, 230
Riktige Leker (Proper Toys) see Proper Toys
Robins, David 238
Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) 198
Rousseau, Jean-Jacques 230
Rudberg, Monica 236
Rysst, Mari 12
safety 38, 154–5
Schor, Juliet B. 46, 53, 198, 199
Seiter, Ellen 52, 53–4, 130
self-control 19
self-determination 88
self-esteem 195–6, 197–9, 204 see also well-being
self-presentation, internet 213–14, 223–4
selfishness 29
Selstad, Leif 234–5
senses, appeal to 134–5
sensory ethnography 95
serial purchasers 50–1
sexual exploitation, protection from 231
sexuality, understanding of 240–2
sexualization 12, 229–31, 239–40
Seybold, Patricia 3
Skaar, Håvard 3
Smith, Jacob 7–8
smoking 22–3
social acceptance 248–50
social adjustment 253–5
social categorization, and clothing 247–8
social contexts, of children’s consumption 10–11
social democracy 37–8
social networking 12, 211 see also Piczo study
social resistance 250–3
social skin 257
socialization, as competent agents 17
socio-economic status 197–9, 204 see also well-being research
Sofaer, Joanna 106–7
Sofaer, Joshua 106–7
sounds, of toys 96–7, 103
space, appropriation by young people 166
Spencer, Len 48–9
spending, restricting 18
spoken word, limitations 104
sport 237, 238
staging 98
standard adult 89
stereotypes, gender 236
stigmatization 250
storybook strategy 55
structure, and agency 6
subjectivities
aspects of production 80
of consuming child 83–7
supervision, by adults 88
Sutton-Smith, B. 43
synergies 134–6, 142

Talking Machine World 50–1
technology 170, 172–5, 187
teenage cool 29
teenager-girl 239
teenagers see also adolescents; divorce research
implications of changing perceptions of childhood 27–9
television, marketing to children 46
The Baby Show 10, 148–50
as celebratory 156–7
as community of
parenthood 152–3
as fun and practical 157
as information conduit 153–6
orchestration 150–2
the cute 151–2, 157
Therborn, Göran 38
time, allocation after divorce, and technology 173–5
tobacco advertising 22–3
toy packaging 95–7
toys 34–5, 38–40, 42, 96–7, 103
“Toys That Teach” articles 53–4
traditions of play 35, 54–6, 234–5
trans-toying 53
tweenage girls, fashion 12
tweenagers 3, 232, 235

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 228, 242
US consumer culture, relations between children and adults 7
values 43, 205, 236
valves of desire 18–19, 23–9
Victor Phonograph Company 7–8, 46
video games 28, 225
violence in media, and maturity 28
virtual worlds see also Neopets; Webkinz
analysing 125–6
business models 115–16
critiquing 126–7
data gathering 127
defining 114–15
visual ethnography 101–2
visual, materiality of 100
voices, of children 242
vulgarity 28
Waerdahl, Randi 11
Ward, Scott 64
Warner, Marina 99
Wasko, Janet 9–10
Webkinz 9, 121–5 see also Ganz Toys
well-being 1, 194 see also self-esteem
well-being research
disappointment 204–5
discussion and conclusions 204–6
methods 199–200
research tools 198
results 200–4
Williams, Rosalind 150
wise consumers, children as 4
wondrous innocence 23, 27–8
Youth Materialism Scale (YMS) 197