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CHAPTER ONE

Care and Belonging in the Market

It is a few days before Halloween at the Sojourner Truth after-school center in Oakland, California, and I am sitting with some children at a table where they are supposed to be doing their homework. Instead, the children, all of them from low-income families and who attend this center for free or almost no cost, are talking about the upcoming holiday. Aleta, an African-American third grader, is holding forth about her costume.¹

"I'm going to be a vampire," she announces, gleefully, almost cackling. Already she has the outfit: the teeth, the cape, the shoes. Her mom bought it at Target, she says offhandedly, tossing her head and making the beads in her hair rattle. Simon and Marco, two recent immigrant children about seven years old, are listening closely without smiling, eyeing her like dancers memorizing an audition routine, and occasionally filling in their homework sheets. Thinking to include them in Aleta's fantastic reverie, I ask them what they will be for Halloween, but they find the question difficult.

"I'm not going to be anything," Simon, a recent African immigrant, says flatly, his eyebrows arched high in a disdain he appears to be trying on for size. "I only care about the candy."

Marco, who arrived from Mexico last year, agrees, but then he pauses. "I'm just going to go as me," he says, with a studied casualness.

"The humans were the scariest part of [the horror movie] *Dawn of the Dead*."

Neither Simon's nor Marco's parents had been in the country more than two years; later, Simon's proud mother tells me Halloween is as meaningless to them as the Tooth Fairy. To Simon's parents, refugees who have been working three jobs to save for a home, a Halloween costume is the height of frivolity, a potent symbol of the children's peer culture to which they, with the bemused confidence born of certainty, turn a deaf ear.

But later on that same day at Sojourner Truth, when another classmate comes up to the table and asks the same question, Simon is prepared, ready to manage the commercial demands of the peer culture in which he has found himself. "I am going as me," I overhear him saying, his high, clear voice piercing the din of children's voices as they get ready for snack. "The humans were the scary ones in *Dawn of the Dead*."

A few days later, on a quiet, leafy street whose elegant homes seem farther away than the short, seven-minute drive from Sojourner Truth, Judy Berger put her elbows on her teak dining table and sighed when I asked her whether she had ever regretted buying anything for her eight-year-old son Max. A quiet and reflective woman, Judy was nonetheless clearly pained when she described how the popular electronic handheld Game Boy had affected her family's life. They finally bought Max the gaming system for his birthday, after two years of his intense lobbying, in which he pointed out that all of his friends had them, and that "that is what they do for fun, [and] that is what they talk about over lunch and stuff like that," Judy said. The fight had gone on so long he had given up hope that they would buy him one, contenting himself with a magazine featuring Game Boy lore, which he pored over again and again, acquiring a certain Game Boy fluency if not possession. Judy laughed wryly about his absorption, saying, "At least he had something to do on the plane to Australia." When he actually unwrapped the Game Boy on his birthday, Judy recalled, "I have to say I don't think that I have ever seen him so happy before or after that."

But the good feeling didn't last. "It really strained our relationship," she said. "Max was doing it [playing games] every day, every single morning before school we were really fighting about turning it off, and how important—you know, what is more important, finishing this level or going to school on time?" She grimaced at the memory. "So now one of the rules we have is that when it is time to go to school or time to go to violin lesson or camp, when we really have to leave, he just has to turn it off no matter what." After too many arguments about whether or not he could stop in the middle of a game, Judy even called the manufacturer to see if her son was right, was there no way to save his progress, did he have to keep playing until he was past a certain level, could he not just put it down when she wanted him to? When Judy talked about the Game Boy, it was as if she was talking about a teenager's alarming girlfriend, one who distracted her son from making wise choices, one who was outside her control, but also one who, because of her son's intense attachment, could not simply be turned away.

She instituted other rules to control Max's playing. He could play it in the morning only when he had his backpack on, his breakfast eaten, his teeth brushed. He could play for only a half hour a day, and they set a kitchen timer to keep track. He could not play it in the car, even though she knew other families found that convenient. "I am not buying this as a babysitter, you know," she said. "I am buying it for—because I gave in."

Thus when I asked Judy if she regretted a particular purchase, it would not have been surprising if she had named the Game Boy. But she demurred. It is not that she rued buying the Game Boy for Max, she insisted. "I guess I felt almost like it wasn't really, like I couldn't have not bought it, because now we are there in our life," she said, her normally smooth syntax turning convoluted to express her certain ambivalence, the contradictions she was straddling between her distaste for what she considered the Game Boy's addictive, violent, and sedentary properties, and her desire to make Max happy. Most important, the gaming system had so saturated the social lives of eight-year-old boys they knew that she did not think she could relegate Max to that kind of invisibility, that kind

of social pathos. "It is kind of sad that it feels like it is a given that you will have one," she conceded. "It is too bad that that is where we are." Judy did not regret buying the Game Boy, she regretted *having* to buy it.

THE HIDDEN CRISES OF CHILDHOOD CONSUMPTION

Commodity consumption for children has exploded, with fully \$670 billion annually spent on or by children in the United States by 2004. Many moments of childhood now involve the act of buying, from daily experiences to symbolic rituals, from transportation to lunches to birthdays. As market researcher James McNeal has crowed, "precisely all those activities that we call consumer behavior are performed by millions of . . . children . . . every day in virtually every aspect of life." The U.S. government calculated that the cost of raising a child to age seventeen, adjusted for inflation, climbed by 12.8 percent from 1960 to 2000, but many experts believe even these measures are far too low: a recalculation in an article in the *Wall Street Journal* entitled "The Million-Dollar Kid" *tripled* the most recent government estimates for the richest families. The "commodity frontier" is advancing in child rearing, the sociologist Arlie Hochschild warns, as "companies . . . expand the number of market niches for goods and services covering activities that, in yesteryear, formed part of unpaid 'family life.'"²

Many social commentators blame consumer culture for a burgeoning crisis of childhood. Television advertising and overindulgent parents have led to epidemics of children's materialism, depression, hyperactivity, obesity, and other problems, these analysts contend. Books and editorials with titles such as "Parenting, Inc.," *Consuming Kids: The Hostile Takeover of Childhood*, and "Reclaiming Childhood" lament the commodification of children's lives, arguing that childhood in the United States and other advanced economies is in danger of being overrun by the market, with children's lives tethered to the corporate bottom line.³

These stories reflect real concerns about children's lives, and how parents and children are responding to new pressures and tensions embed-

ded in the task of growing up. They usefully draw our attention to the billion-dollar industry bent on using whatever works to capture children's attention and allegiance. Yet underlying their critique of corporate capitalism is an acute discomfort with children's desire generally. Is it that children should not be consuming at all (surely next to impossible in this world), or is it rather that children want the wrong things (too adult, too tacky, or just too much), or they want them in the wrong way (too intensely)? Perhaps widespread uneasiness with the often unobtrusive, uninhibited nature of children's consumer desire is distracting us from other, more fundamental, concerns: the hidden crises of consumption.⁴

I argue the question we should be asking is this: How is the commercialization of childhood shaping what it means to care, and what it means to belong? An analogy to divorce helps clarify the issue: some family scholars have argued that high divorce rates affect not just the families that break apart, but even those that stay together, through the spread of a "divorce culture" and its weakened assumptions about mutual trust and obligation. In the same way, perhaps rising consumption, by its sheer domination of childhood today, establishes a new cultural environment, with new expectations about what parents should provide, what children should have, and what having, or not having, signifies. The market suffuses childhood today, but it does not do so in the aggregate, like so much liquid poison pouring into one individual child after another, as some critics would have it. Instead, it permeates the relationships in which children are embedded. What role does the market play in these relationships? What meanings do children and parents impart to particular commodities? How does commercial culture thread its way through children's emotional connections, with peers and with parents?⁵

I investigated these questions through an ethnography of childhood consumer culture, involving observations of children at school and with their families, and interviews with parents and other caregivers. I spent three years with the children of Sojourner Truth, and six months with children in more affluent settings, a private school I call Arrowhead, and an elite public school I call Oceanview. I sat at "circle time" with the

children, read to them, tied their shoes, knitted with them, threw footballs, jumped rope, and went to birthday parties and on field trips. I listened to their jokes and stories, eavesdropped on their conversations, taped their songs and games, took them shopping, to the car wash, to the library. I also listened to parents from fifty-four families, in interviews generally lasting two to four hours, sometimes over several visits. I talked to teachers and other school staff and attended neighborhood meetings, award ceremonies, fundraisers, and festivals. (Chapter 2 offers more details about the methods of this research.) Through these efforts, I immersed myself in the childhoods and parenthoods of people grappling every day with the exigencies of consuming for children, its practices and meanings. I found that the hidden crises of consumption for children lurk in the convergence of inequality, care, and the market, which enables consumer culture to saturate children's emotional connections to others.

THE ECONOMY OF DIGNITY

I argue that the key to children's consumer culture, to the explosion of parent buying and the question of what things mean to children, lies in social experiences much like the incidents described at the beginning of this chapter, the exchange about costumes and movies among Simon, Marco, and Aleta at the Sojourner Truth center, and Max's lunch-table discussions about Game Boys as recounted by his mother, Judy. I observed similar conversations among affluent and poor children alike, in private schools and public, on playgrounds, at birthday parties—wherever children gathered. Everywhere children claim, contest, and exchange among themselves the terms of their social belonging, or just what it would take to be able to participate among their peers. I came to call this system of social meanings the “economy of dignity.”

The “economy of dignity” echoes a phrase coined by Arlie Hochschild, who dubbed the exchange of recognition between spouses—for gifts of time, work, or feeling—the “economy of gratitude.” Couples

negotiating who would do the laundry or make dinner owed or banked gratitude, depending on how their behavior measured up against their sometimes unstable bargain about who should be responsible for what. Similarly, I argue, children collect or confer dignity among themselves, according to their (shifting) consensus about what sort of objects or experiences are supposed to count for it.⁶

The dictionary defines *dignity* as “the quality or state of being worthy,” but we might reasonably ask, worthy of what? I suggest that for children a vital answer is “worthy of belonging.” I use “dignity” to mean the most basic sense of children’s participation in their social world, what the Nobel Prize-winning economist Amartya Sen called an “absolute capability . . . to take part in the life of the community.” With dignity, children are visible to their peers, and granted the aural space, the very right to speak in their own community’s conversation.⁷

By focusing on dignity, I am not talking about a particularly common view of why people buy: competitive status-seeking behavior. Buyers buy, according to this tradition, in order to establish themselves as better than those to whom they compare themselves, to “gain the esteem and envy of one’s fellow-men,” as Veblen put it more than a hundred years ago. While inducing jealousy is certainly part of the emotional landscape of consumption, my use of “dignity” refers less to “envy” than to the “esteem” of others, the goal of joining the circle rather than one of bettering it. Through claiming that their own bodies were part of the costume, Simon and Marco were not so much seeking honor, demanding respect, or even striving for status, I argue, but rather they sought, with a measure of bravado masking their momentary desperation, to join in.⁸

Children together shape their own economies of dignity, which in turn transform particular goods and experiences into a form of scrip, tokens of value suddenly fraught with meaning. Children’s lives can traverse several different economies of dignity—at school, at their after-school program, and in the neighborhood, for example—where different tokens can become salient in the peer culture resident there. And when children—even affluent ones—find themselves without what they need

to join the conversation, they perform what I termed “facework” to make up for the omission.⁹

Simon and Marco, for example, knew that Halloween was the official children’s holiday in American culture (and as a safely secular holiday it was one that was fully celebrated by their public school, which—not unusually—arranged for costume display, candy distribution, and parades during school time). These boys’ facework was to interpret their total nonparticipation—at their young age still problematic—not as their families’ choice to opt out but as a different sort of costume, an innovation on the cultural imperative of being scary that had even greater cachet by referring to a popular movie. With this discursive move, they demonstrated their cultural bilingualism, translating their own lives into what would make sense—even more, make dignity—in the social world of the after-school program.¹⁰

The reach of the economy of dignity does not stop at the school-house door, however. Like Max Berger and his fight for the Game Boy, children bring their consumer emergencies home to their parents, who largely control what their children have and how much it matches what they need. What makes some parents more or less attuned to their children’s social milieu and the role particular objects or experiences play in it? How do parents handle their children’s consumer desire?

I found that when children came home with their desires turned into needs by the alchemy of dignity, most of the time parents heard them and responded, while only very occasionally parents ignored, resisted, or denied their children’s desires. Like Judy Berger, who, as we saw, bought Max his Game Boy despite her extreme reluctance, responsive parents prioritize their children’s social belonging. This practice has a long history in American culture, as exemplified by Sinclair Lewis’s 1920s antihero George Babbitt. In one telling episode in Lewis’s classic novel, Babbitt’s wife cautions him against disciplining their son’s teenage friends at a party, because “we wouldn’t want Ted left out of things, would we?” In reply, however, although “Babbitt announced he would be enchanted to have Ted left out of things,” he then “hurried in

to be polite, lest Ted be left out of things." Babbitt, and Judy Berger, are not alone. In one national survey, about half of parents with children under age thirteen confessed: "While it's often against my better judgment, I sometimes buy my children clothing and things they want because I don't want them to feel different from other kids."¹¹

The prospect of feeling "different from other kids" animated many parents' buying practices, but I found parents and children watched for three specific forms of difference, each with varying impact: interactional, personal, and social. Interactional difference includes the momentary variations that arise in conversations, such as whether or not someone has gone skiing, can do a handstand, or owns a set of Heelys, the popular sneakers with wheels built into the sole. Personal difference refers to enduring characteristics adhering to the person, such as facts about his or her family, or individual traits, such as being shy or gifted in music. Social difference stems from social categories such as race, gender, class, sexuality, nationality, and the like. The child's unique configuration of difference, coupled with family resources, shaped how much parents bought, in order to shield, cure, or cultivate. In addition, parents were motivated not just by the prospect of the child's difference from others, but also by their own emotional memories—often their anxious recall—of their experiences of being different as a child. These motivations combined to create parents' relative sensitivity to their child's belonging, leading to which desires parents could ignore and which they could not.¹²

Both affluent and low-income parents were responsive to children's wants, but this did not mean these groups bought in the same way. I found that parents aimed their buying to accomplish different symbolic goals depending on where the parents were on the income ladder. Affluent parents practiced a form of "symbolic deprivation," pointing to particularly meaningful goods or experiences that their child did *not* have as evidence of their own moral restraint and worthiness as parents. Affluent parents often disparaged aloud the need to belong as a form of conformity, and children's desires often contradicted the stated goals of adults, some of whom explicitly sought not just to "keep up with the

Joneses" but to be "different from the Joneses." Symbolic deprivation was how affluent parents resolved the contradiction between their normative beliefs and their practices, between their ideals and their material plenty.¹³

On the other end of the class spectrum, most low-income parents implemented a form of "symbolic indulgence," making sure (sometimes at considerable sacrifice) to buy particular goods or experiences for their children, those items or events sure to have the most significant symbolic value for the children's social world. For many low-income parents, symbolic indulgence was the best they could do within their resource constraints, even though their personal experience of the pain of difference often led them to prioritize children's belonging above almost all else. These consumer practices thus comprised the way low-income parents demonstrated their own moral worth and value as parents.¹⁴

PERSONAL VICE OR SOCIAL ILL? WHAT WE TALK ABOUT WHEN WE TALK ABOUT BUYING

Many of the more popular current explanations of the children's spending boom focus on corporate marketers or personal vices and thus feel less like understanding than judgment. While they portray part of the consumption story, they omit the conceptual tools we need to comprehend Judy Berger's regret that "it is a given you will have a Game Boy," or Simon and Marco's discursive facework to invent a new Halloween costume.

Some commentators explain the consumption boom by looking first to the children, whose consumer desires seem to arouse considerable adult anxiety. Children are often portrayed as "agents of materialism," to use Robert Wuthnow's term, conduits for the commercial culture that Americans regard with mixed feelings. Bloggers by the thousands decry children's seeming addiction to video games, collectibles like Yu-Gi-Oh! cards, or Air Jordans, while in works with titles like *Born to Buy* scholars issue warnings depicting the psychological costs of consumerism. Wagish terms such as "the nag factor" or "pester power" capture the notion

of parents subjected to children who know no appropriate limits. Media portrayals feature children as either unwitting dupes to corporate marketing, or avaricious and amoral; in one editorial pledging a series on "how much of parenting has been reduced to fending off requests from children for commercial products," a national newspaper opined that childhood "has been transformed into consumerhood."¹⁵

Yet, as media critic David Buckingham wrote, there is "at least a degree of irony in adults accusing children of 'consumerism' when their power to consume at all is almost entirely in the hands of adults themselves." Some writers point out that commercialized children surely learn from their materialistic parents, those who enact their own status concerns through their children's toys and wardrobes. On a more fundamental level, a number of scholars have recently argued we should hardly be surprised by the spread of children's consumption, because children's culture mirrors that of adults generally. Widespread concerns about the intensity and extent of children's marketized desires, these analysts contend, reflect more about our misguided need to consider childhood as it never was—a time and place apart from the cares, woes, and temptations of adult life. As childhood expert Daniel Cook has argued, consumption is not separate from childhood, as the profane is distinct from the sacred; children are "always, already embedded in market relations," and the market is "indispensable and unavoidable" in constructing childhoods. Perhaps childhood has turned into consumerhood, then, because adulthood has, too.¹⁶

Stories about greed, whether in children or adults, certainly have their magnetic appeal—witness the annual journalistic exercise in charting spending excess during the holiday season, leading to articles with headlines like "18 Shopping Bags and 3 Empty Wallets, One Family's Ritual: Daylong Orgy of Buying Christmas Gifts." Yet charges of materialism, with its underlying image of uncontrolled vice and unrestrained desire—as in the hedonism captured by the headline's term "orgy"—seem less to offer answers than to raise questions. Who are those people who just cannot seem to get their spending under control? Why are

they driven by desire for the latest doll fad or video game to stand outside stores before dawn, name their children after favorite brands, or go to extreme measures to buy?¹⁷

WHOSE NEEDS? WHOSE LUXURIES? SPENDING AND INEQUALITY

The morality tales of spending are part of a cultural contest of who can buy and how much. Whether consumers are depicted as the poor and minority "combat consumers," as Elizabeth Chin argued, willing to rob to buy Timberland boots, or the luxury-obsessed wealthy, intent upon owning the largest yacht or the most diverting East Hampton castle, popular representations of materialism or greed are most often portrayals of the vice of Others, mostly for the benefit of an assumed white, middle-class audience.¹⁸

In families' daily lives, however, inequality and consumption are deeply, mutually implicated, albeit in complex, sometimes counterintuitive ways. Poor families are *not*, as one analyst recently asserted against much evidence, somehow "relatively insulated by their poverty from the consequences if not the temptations of consumer marketing." Indeed, until recently, most research has shown that low-income families spend disproportionately *more* on their children than do wealthier families, suggesting that in times of budget constraints, in many homes children's needs are more fixed, more compelling than those of adults. Marketers have dubbed the children's market "bulletproof," meaning that it is practically impervious to economic dislocations, because parents report being unable to take pride in cutting back on children's expenses.¹⁹

Talk of spending immediately raises questions of need versus luxury. But even the economist Adam Smith understood that needs are fungible, relative, based on cultural standards. Lauded by free-market celebrants, Smith is less well known for his passages recognizing the primacy of dignity. "By necessities," he wrote, "I understand not only the commodities which are indispensably necessary for the support of

life, but whatever the customs of the country renders it indecent for creditable people, even of the lowest order to do without."²⁰

Thus we might say that a family's relative means to spend (inequality), and what a family spends to mean (consumption), are intricately, intimately connected, although not in a simple, linear way. As one shifts and changes, so does the other—and not merely with the stiff formality of figures and numbers, but in the warp and bend of human feeling. Inexorably, inevitably perhaps, the standards of childhood change, with "needs" chased by children and adults from marbles and bicycles to Nintendo Wii and iPods. These shifting standards are met by shifting emotions, the despair of the parent working two jobs to cover what used to be the basics, the dread of the middle-class parent trying to stave off the addictive appeal of the latest fad, the triumph of the taxi driver's daughter when she uses her own money to buy her own PlayStation. While greed or materialism might fuel some of their actions, their intense emotions hint at a deeper mystery, of the meaning of things, of care, and of belonging.

NOT-SO-HIDDEN PERSUADERS

Some researchers have argued that the meaning of things, and hence the urge to buy, stem from the powerful reach of particularly effective corporate marketing. Corporate marketing is so insidious and potent that it can make children desire, and parents desire for their children. There is certainly plenty of solid research into the impact of advertising, demonstrating that corporate marketing is increasingly sophisticated and unfettered, and that children are particularly vulnerable to marketing tactics, as children are believed to be unaware of the advertisers' persuasive intent until about the age of seven. Much of this research is conducted by psychologists, who fabricate "strange situations" involving individual children exposed to ads and then asked about products, and there is a plethora of studies showing children do indeed respond to corporate efforts to convince. A number of scholars have also documented

the expansion of campaigns to plumb the psyches of children, the weakening of advertising regulation, and the development of new and even more powerful market tactics to lure buyers, such as the thinly disguised market research among "tweens" involving staged and sponsored "sleep-overs" where girls talk about products. Corporate marketing, this research demonstrates, is targeting children with a gimlet eye.²¹

Given the soaring and pervasive rates of children's media exposure, the attention these scholars pay to corporate actors is undoubtedly warranted: American youth spend more time with media per week (6.4 hours) than they do with their parents (2.3 hours), with friends (2.3 hours), or in school (on an annual basis). We may not yet have reached the moment predicted more than a half century ago by E. B. White in a science-fiction story, when "children early formed the habit of gaining all their images at second hand, by looking at a screen, [and] only what had been touched by electronics was valid and real." At the very least, however, children's lives are increasingly beginning to approach the atomistic existence modeled by the psychology experiments, as more and more they watch TV alone in their rooms.²²

Yet these arguments rely on a rather weak notion of human behavior, in which people have all the substance of tissue paper, blown this way and that by nothing more than the airwaves, or by their individual vices. Either the corporations are too powerful to resist or parents are too weak to set limits or delay gratification; the answer to exploding consumption is thus either more corporate regulation or more parental responsibility. While these perspectives are commonly argued against one another, they share a common perception: parents *buy* merely because they (or their children) have been successfully *sold*.²³

CONSUMPTION AS CARE

Other scholars argue that consumption is a social practice, one in which people are communicating meaning to each other through goods, although these experts disagree about just what kind of meaning con-

sumption conveys. Some researchers contend buying for children is driven by parents' efforts to establish their children's socioeconomic status—or, more subtly, to shape their children's class-specific tastes—through their purchases; by parents enacting their class status in the practices they employ to make purchases; or by parents' recognition of the role that consumption plays in signaling the full citizenship available only to those with means. More recently, scholars have explored the intersections of the market and intimacy, arguing that consumption forges “connected lives,” in the words of Viviana Zelizer. These researchers expand our notion of why buyers buy beyond the obsession with status, arguing that consumption acts as a symbolic language through which buyers make connections to others. As the British anthropologist Daniel Miller contended, shopping for others can be considered a devotional rite, and commodities “the material culture of love.” In this vein, parents buy for children to strengthen emotional bonds that are fraying due to increasing work hours, cultural prescriptions encouraging children's defiance, the high incidence of divorce, or the strains of poverty, among other factors. These scholars contribute a critical observation: the importance of feeling in motivating action, in shaping cultural meaning, in spurring consumption. As the sociologist Sharon Zukin observed, “the things we need to buy are framed by our love for the significant others we buy for.”²⁴

Yet in focusing on the bridging of consumption, analysts sometimes seem to gloss over how consumption can separate as well, and downplay the very real inequalities embedded in the sheer capacity to spend. In addition, even though people may use commodities as a tool to express their connections, the very system of commodification exerts its own influence on the relationships it mediates, much as a set of tires will drive a car forward or back but not up, say, or sideways. We need not “presume that the realm of commodities debases the realm of sentiment,” sociologist Eva Illouz cautioned, but “the vocabulary of emotions is now more exclusively dictated by the market.”²⁵

Families adjust to new circumstances, and evidence suggests they are indeed adjusting to the commodification of childhood. Arlie Hochschild

has analyzed some of the strategies parents use to handle the pressures of overwork and what she calls the "commercialization of intimate life." She points to people using goods to represent their ideal selves ("we'll go camping someday"), to engage in "caring consumption" to avoid family conflict, to revisit the question of just what aspects of family life—birthday parties? photo albums?—are and are not appropriate to pay someone else to do. As Hochschild reports, however, these adaptations have their own impact, just as someone favoring a bad knee can start to feel a twinge in the good one, too. Relationships—between men and women, between parents and children—suffer from the sacrifice of our time, energy, and focus on the twin altars of cultural capitalism: work and shopping. Hochschild warns that such practices serve "to push men and women further into the worlds of workplace and the mall," to decenter family life as the focus of collective rituals, and finally, to "materialize love."²⁶

BEYOND THE FAMILY: THINKING ABOUT CHILDREN'S CULTURE

Consumption has thus evolved into a kind of care, of how adults form connections with children, albeit in service to the market. Yet market culture does not just connect lives vertically, as between adults and children, but also horizontally, among children themselves. Zelizer urges us to view consumption as a set of economic processes laden with "continuously negotiated meaning-drenched social relations"—in other words, with culture. In answer to this call, this book sets out to consider the specific meanings, and the social relations, behind children's consumption. How does consumption figure in childhood culture?²⁷

Sociologists have an important contribution to make here. Culture scholars have demonstrated that people create and experience meaning in groups via particular rituals, interactions, and institutions, which serve to shape and communicate norms and expectations. The personal, local interpretations of commodities and events that comprise contemporary childhoods are not simply idiosyncratic, but rather grounded in social

locations and fraught with social implications. "Tastes," observed Oxford's Douglas Holt, "are never innocent of social consequences." In an influential work on how tastes develop, Pierre Bourdieu argued that parents socialize children into having "good" taste, through at times unconscious cultural practices of investing certain goods—or a certain approach to goods, such as a knowing connoisseurship—with the power to establish group boundaries. Yet much of this research considers children as if they lived only in families, and not in communities of their own, with cultures of their own. As media researcher Ellen Seiter has noted, children's desires can infuriate parents who consider them "kitschy" or "distasteful," because children are often oblivious to the class dimensions of taste as opposed to those expressing age or gender. Thus while analysts like Bourdieu have argued goods and experiences have variable meanings *across* households, it is important to note that the meanings of goods and experiences can conflict *within* households as well. The process of parents socializing children to the "right" cultural capital, then, is perhaps not quite as seamless as some researchers might suggest, because of the dynamic influence of children's own cultural imperatives.²⁸

As Patricia and Peter Adler wrote in their work on preadolescents, children do not "perceive, interpret, form opinions about, or act on the world as unconnected individuals. Rather, they do all these things in concert with their peers, as they collectively experience the world." Yet unlike advertising, the influence of peers or peer communities on children's consumer desires has not been extensively studied. Clearly, as one psychologist declared, "more research on peer influence, especially with younger children, would be welcome." A British study echoed this observation, pointing out that "much work on children's consumption . . . focuses on the relationship between the market and children, to the neglect of other pertinent social relationships," and arguing that "any investigation [must evaluate] the influence of other . . . child actors within the networks that make up their daily life."²⁹

Studies of the impact of peers on children's consumer preferences have mostly focused on adolescents and have largely demonstrated that

consumer goods provide for a certain status. Only a few projects have gone further, observing that items such as clothes or food not only confer status but evoke a crucial sense of belonging, painful in its absence. "The experience of being present in a chosen group but being unable to exhibit membership rites was a particularly agonizing one," observed a team of British researchers. Their study of teenagers and advertising reported many incidences in which teenagers "described the experience of being 'left out,' 'talked around,' or 'blanked' when they were unable to participate in a particular exchange because they had not experienced the ad in question." In another study, on Chinese children's food consumption, a student reported: "I have to try new things. Otherwise when classmates are chatting, if everyone has tried something and you have not tried it, then you have nothing to say."³⁰

Having "nothing to say" is akin to not belonging, to a sort of unwelcome invisibility. This study takes as its central focus the social interactions that put children in the position of "having something to say" or not, that thereby give particular meaning to the products, services, or commodified experiences children may have heard about elsewhere. My purpose here is not to ascertain exactly where the influence of advertising stops and where that of peers begins, but rather to explore how children's social lives shape what children consider important, and how that affects parent spending. Children's concerns about fitting in are only part of the story, however. Why would these anxieties matter so much now that they act as an engine moving the commercialization of childhood forward? To obtain an answer to this question, we must step back from the microlevel study of children's social worlds to examine the broader picture of the revolution of childhood that has taken place in the last thirty years.

CHILDHOOD IN PRIVATE AND IN PUBLIC

At the beginning and end of every episode of *Teletubbies*, the toddlers' television series on PBS, a large baby's head appears as the sun, smiling down on the brilliant colors and curious shapes that mark Teletubby

land. We hear the baby's voice, cooing and squealing, as the narrator greets and bids farewell to the bright, pear-shaped Teletubby characters who stand and wave. The baby's head is giant, luminous, drawing the viewer's attention to the heat and joy of childhood pleasure, dwarfing the miniature Teletubby world.

In the manner of cultural images everywhere, the giant-baby-as-sun captures some truths and reworks others. In some ways, like the television baby, children are ever larger in their worlds, their joys and pleasures reverberating, their needs and predilections even at times dominating their environments. In many families—not just middle-class ones—this image holds true inside the domestic sphere, with important implications for childhood, parenting, and consumption. To be sure, some children are still neglected, abused, or oppressed, the perpetrators protected by the privacy of the home. Yet in many other families, children's symbolic presence has swelled to new dimensions. Like the enormous baby smiling down on the scene below, children's desires are magnified within the home; as in the television program, children's desires are then met through the market, if not with endearingly dumpy little characters, then by Pottery Barn Kids or Toys“R”Us.

Yet the sun is the apotheosis of the free and the public, and children are giant-sized only in the private sphere. In public, children's role has shrunk to the size of tiny glass figurines, brittle, silent, and unable to command significant public support, attention, or presence. As the historian Steven Mintz observed, “kids have more space than ever inside their homes, but less space outside to call their own.” It is this twin paradox—of children as private giant and as public figurine—that has fueled the development of what the sociologist Barrie Thorne called “the privatization of childhood.”³¹

In the private sphere, demographic and cultural patterns involving children have expanded their importance in American families. First, children's footsteps echo in the lonely halls of their homes. When men left the family farm in the nineteenth century to join the paid workforce, people felt considerable concern and confusion about just what a family

was without Father there all day. In response, scholars have argued, they made holy the image of Mother as "homemaker" and invented rituals—birthdays, Thanksgiving—that persist today, resonant in their ability to recall what historian John Gillis termed "the family we live by." More than a hundred years later, similar anxiety coalesces around women's increasing turn to full-time work, and about family instability due to divorce. As mothers' work lives look more and more like fathers', who but the child is left to sacralize as the vessel of all that is dear about domesticity? As the percentage of single parent households maintains itself at historically high levels, who but the child is left to symbolize family devotion? As community bonds wither, who but the child is left to embody parents' emotional connections?³²

This confluence of trends suggests children loom larger in families than they ever have, and their desires may thus loom larger as well, as soaring advertising budgets targeting children attest. On a practical level, children's increasing participation in family and personal shopping affords them greater opportunity to enact their own priorities and goals in the market. Yet children's symbolic impact could be even greater; parents may have been better able to ignore or defer children's desires when they didn't form the acknowledged center of the family's emotional life. When children are all that is left of family, the urge to cherish them as the last vestige of intimacy is strong indeed. As the essayist Adam Gopnik observed, "the romance of your child's childhood may be the last romance you can give up."³³

Changing notions of childhood and motherhood accompany these demographic trends. Sociologist Annette Lareau found that middle-class parents pursued a strategy of concerted cultivation, in which their children's individual talents were coaxed and channeled through organized activities, and through which their children acquired "a robust sense of entitlement." These practices relied upon new ideas of children, who went from being economic contributors to the household to priceless individuals defined as not-yet-adults, whose primary task was their own development. In tandem evolved what Sharon Hays has

dubbed "the ideology of intensive motherhood," a brand of parenting she identified as focused, dedicated, child-centered, self-sacrificing, and, not coincidentally, expensive. While these trends centered in the middle class, they established standards that found their way into the homes of working-class families, at the very least through institutional practices and assumptions they faced. For parents, what was at one time a whim or pleasure to buy for their children had turned into a mandate.³⁴

For all their increased private power, however, children comprise an ever smaller share of the public. Falling birthrates mean children now form a smaller proportion of the population in the United States than they have for the past several hundred years. Yet although such demographic trends might lead us to expect for them decreased competition for resources, say, and thus improved well-being, instead children's poverty has risen dramatically in the last thirty years, in comparison with that of the ever-increasing ranks of the elderly. While the "feminization of poverty" has been widely recognized, the less visible trend has been a "juvenilization of poverty." "Why have children lost ground vis-à-vis the elderly?" asks demographer Suzanne Bianchi. "Sources of public transfers differ greatly for the two groups, with those going to children less generous and declining over time and those going to the elderly more generous and much less susceptible, at least politically, to erosion over the past two decades."³⁵

Most government spending for children is delivered by states aided by federal block-grant money and is subject to political and economic fluctuations, researchers have found. "States—the main source of social welfare spending for children—have faced sizeable budget deficits and have attempted to shore up their bottom lines by reducing spending," one study reported. On the federal level, while per capita social-welfare spending on children grew overall from 1980 to 2000, these gains were largely in Medicare and food-stamp allocations. Other areas of federal social-welfare spending on children declined in real dollars.³⁶

The geographer Cindi Katz links this disinvestment to the abandonment of poor and working-class children, by both global capital, which

finds them no longer economically useful, and the middle class, who increasingly turn to private markets for solutions to child-rearing problems and thus withdraw from lobbying for quality public services for all children. Property tax revolts that swept the nation in the late 1970s, such as Proposition 13 in California, were fundamentally a protest against social spending for children, most often poor and minority, who attended the schools these taxes underwrote. Writing about youth in Harlem witnessing the government's shrinking of the "social wage," including the lopsided provision of education, Katz observed: "Large fractions of those coming of age were butting up against the limitations produced by these broad-scale political economic shifts and their local fallout. For growing numbers . . . all bets for the future were off."³⁷

As the public provisioning has receded, the distance between families in the United States becomes even more meaningful—in freezing the structure of opportunities, to be sure, but also in raising the stakes of "making it," and communicating to others that you have. The gap between rich and poor yawns wider than ever; by 1998, the wealthiest one-fifth of families had an average net worth of \$1.1 million, while the bottom two-fifths were worth \$1,000. Over the past three decades, such earnings inequality and a host of other factors—including changing family structures, the shifting nature of work, increased racial and ethnic diversity across American families, and new antipoverty policies—made resources less equitably distributed across American families. Children have not escaped this trend; in fact, they are at its leading edge, as children are twice as likely to be poor as adults. While one in five children lived in poverty in 1994, more than half of all children lived in homes of relative prosperity. Over the last decades of the twentieth century, the difference between the two groups grew ever wider, as family income from 1969 to 1989 declined among the poorest children while increasing (by nearly 20 percent) among the richest children.³⁸

These developments—the emptying out of the home and the sacralization of the domestic child, the withdrawal of the state and the expansion of the market, and the rise in inequality—form the backdrop to the

explosion of spending on children. New interpretations of children's needs (and new attention paid to them), new standards of meeting them through the marketplace, new stakes of failing to do so—all combine to make child-rearing consumption urgent, prevalent, and fraught with emotional meaning.

MAKING MEANING: CULTURE AS PROCESS

The realm of emotional meaning, wherein neutral objects and events are transformed into things and experiences that matter to people, is the realm of culture. Culture is often defined as a system of meanings, in the words of Sharon Hays “a social, durable, layered pattern of cognitive and normative systems.” Yet perhaps this description makes culture sound a little more ossified, more finished, than people experience. We do not invent culture out of whole cloth, of course, but we do work with what we receive, albeit often unconsciously. We mix and blend meanings across social realms and experiences, bringing one to another in a daily project of individual and collective creativity that nonetheless often serves to reproduce understandings and relationships. As my research focuses on how children and parents make meaning out of things, I emphasize here the movement, the dynamism of culture, by proposing that we think of it as a process.³⁹

What is the process of making meaning? Meaning comes from a sort of emotional thinking, so that the way we feel about commodities and experiences colors the way we perceive them. We might conceive of culture, then, as a patterned, collective process by which people attach personal, emotional significance to their world, indeed, as a sort of dynamic, two-way bridge between the social and the psychological. Much of that process is captured in interactions that serve as occasions to reconfirm, and occasionally to reshape, the powerful social asymmetries that order our experience.⁴⁰

In this work, I argue that certain shared cultural notions—powerful ideas about what parents owe their children, about the challenge posed by

difference, about the primacy of belonging—make it near-impossible for most American-born parents of varied class and race backgrounds to ignore children's yearnings. To be sure, our trajectories and choices are profoundly shaped by the "organization of human existence," the social institutions, categories, and resources that frame and produce social life. But what makes children yearn, and parents buy, is also in part a cultural story of what we value and what we fear, ideas that are continually made concrete in interactions, rituals, and daily experiences. Taking into account the institutional backdrop, this book tells that cultural story, exploring how consumption expresses care and belonging for children and parents, how social inequality and intolerance can make care and belonging feel scarce or plentiful, and how such feelings shape contemporary childhood.⁴¹

The organization of this book reflects one of its central themes: the similarities and differences across families of widely varying backgrounds in their experience of children's consumer culture. In chapter 2, I describe in greater detail the disparate communities of this study, and how their sharp contrasts shaped the kind of ethnographic work I did there, while making the similarities across sites even more intriguing. Chapter 3 immerses the reader in the worlds of children, both rich and poor, where I explore the economy of dignity, its tokens of value, and children's facework strategies for navigating it. Then, chapters 4–6 consider what happens when children bring their consumer desires home: chapters 4 and 5 exploring the circumstances in which affluent and low-income parents respond to children's entreaties while deploying symbolic means to frame those responses as honorable, and chapter 6 weighing the circumstances in which parents say no. Chapter 7 evaluates the implications of the privatization of childhood for another kind of consumption, that which shapes children's future—the "pathway consumption" of children's contexts, like the neighborhoods, schools, and other spaces where childhood takes place. In chapter 8, I conclude by considering the ties between children's consumer culture and that of adults, weighing the implications of this new math—the equation of

belonging with possession and care with provisioning—and offering ways in which interested adults can mediate the drive to belong, neutralize the power of difference, and make dignity more available to all. Parents looking for advice on how to shop and what to buy for their children will not find those answers here, then, but they *will* gain a deeper appreciation of the consequences of their choices.

CONCLUSION

At the center of the word *belonging* is a synonym for *desire*, as one contemporary novelist recently observed, and these twin ideas explain the particular magic of children's consumer yearnings. In service to these yearnings, I argue, spending on children has exploded, and this trend has been costly for American families. Compared to families of decades ago with or without children, today's families with children work more hours, accumulate more debt, and declare bankruptcy more often. Affluent families lament the sheer quantity of children's stuff but can also mourn the degree to which parent-child relations are mediated through consumer goods. The cost is no less significant for low-income families; research documents the great lengths to which low-income families go to equip their children. Low-income parents take on extra jobs over Christmas, plan birthday gifts and seasonal clothing purchases long in advance, juggle creditors to be able to float expenses, and otherwise strive to meet children's designated needs, protecting their place in the family budget.⁴²

There are also other costs to this spending race, beyond the impact on individual children and their families, that we all bear. On a society-wide level, the trend promotes a culture of spending that redefines care and belonging as mediated through the market. Those who want to opt out find it difficult to do so. The cost of raising a child increases, and the impact of income inequality on the distribution of opportunity is intensified. Furthermore, poor children—attending high-poverty schools with an economy of dignity that can contrast sharply with that of some of the more affluent schools—are perhaps enduring what we might call an

unequal distribution of sentiment, one in which differences are subject to intense peer discipline of scorn or invisibility. Not only, then, are the opportunities afforded by different contexts for children highly unequal, but so too might be their emotional allowances, suggesting perhaps another cost of commodified childhood: the stratification of feeling. We might consider collectively these expenses of modern spending practices as an invisible tax, a tax that no one collects but one that we all pay, adding to the \$300 price tag for the Nintendo Wii, the \$90 American Girl doll, or the \$165 pair of Air Jordans.⁴³

But perhaps most important, the commodification of childhood turns the child into a pipeline of commercial culture, the cause of the ratcheting up of standards, the target of cultural animosity about the costs of rising inequality even as he or she is its primary victim. Who bears the emotional fallout for these trends? Furthermore, who takes on the burden when parents do the "right" thing, eschew consumer culture, ignore their children's entreaties? A hint, perhaps, lies in the identity of who often shoulders the blame for what are really the residual effects of materialism, greed, and the effectiveness of advertising: children. Calling children the conduit of commercial culture is a bit like faulting fish for the water in which they swim.⁴⁴

Children's emotional experience records the impact of consumer capitalism on all of us—the expansion of work time, the expression of love through things, the pressure of increasing inequality, and the diminution of public provisioning, which has withered like a raisin. Could adults' anxiety swirling around children reflect instead worries about our own materialistic culture, our own inability to stem desire, our own failure to connect with others? We could be relegating to children what we fear for ourselves, while all along they just want to belong.

NOTES

NOTES TO THE PREFACE

1. For worries about consumer debt and adequacy of income, see Massachusetts Mutual Life Insurance Company, *Family Life Survey* (Springfield, Mass., 1994), Polling the Nations, www.poll.ors.pub.com (accessed February 20, 2006); also see Consumer Federation of America, as cited in Elizabeth Warren, "The Growing Threat to Middle-Class Families" (lecture, National Association of Consumer Bankruptcy Attorneys, 2003), http://www.nacba.org/files/new_in_debate/GrowingThreatMiddleClassFamilies.pdf (accessed November 4, 2007). For concern about values, see Robert Wuthnow, "Pious Materialism: How Americans View Faith and Money," *The Christian Century*, March 3, 1992, 239-42.

2. The survey reporting lamentations about "over-commercialized children" was conducted by the Center for a New American Dream; see Center for a New American Dream, *The New American Dream Poll* (Takoma Park, Md., 2005), <http://www.newdream.org/about/poll.php> (accessed March 30, 2006).

NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

1. All names of people and institutions, including some of their identifying details, have been changed to preserve their confidentiality.

2. McNeal, a marketing expert and publisher of many books on children and consumption, is the most common source of estimates of spending related to

children. The 2004 estimate is from his research, reported in Juliet Schor, *Born to Buy: The Commercialized Child and the New Consumer Culture* (New York: Scribner, 2004), 23. McNeal's triumphant assessment is found in his 2007 book, *On Becoming a Consumer: Development of Consumer Behavior Patterns in Childhood* (Burlington, Mass.: Butterworth-Heinemann), 5. U.S. government estimates of child-rearing costs are annually furnished by Mark Lino of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, based on extrapolations from 1990 Consumer Expenditure Survey data; this estimate was reported in Mark Lino, "USDA's Expenditures on Children by Families Project: Uses and Changes over Time," *Family Economics and Nutrition Review* 13, no. 1 (Winter 2001): 81-86. The *Wall Street Journal*, while focused on elite spending, was able to update the USDA numbers with data on more contemporary purchases for children, such as cell phones, iTunes, and \$900 strollers, none of which existed in 1990; see Eileen Daspin and Ellen Gamerman, "The Million-Dollar Kid," *Wall Street Journal*, March 3, 2007, <http://online.wsj.com/public/article-print/SB117288281789725533.html> (accessed June 14, 2007). For the "commodity frontier," see Arlie Hochschild, *The Commercialization of Intimate Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 35-36.

3. I define consumer culture, following Slater, as a "social arrangement . . . by which meaningful ways of life and the resources upon which they depend" take place in and through the market; see Don Slater, *Consumer Culture and Modernity* (Cambridge and Malden, Mass.: Polity Press, 1997), 8. Throughout this work I use the terms *consumer culture* and *commercial culture* interchangeably to mean this system of meanings and exchange; I also use the terms *commodification*, *commercialization*, and *marketization* to mean the same transformative process by which consumer culture is increasingly implicated in experiences such as childhood. The psychological and physical problems of commercialized children are reported in Schor, *Born to Buy*. See also Susan Linn, *Consuming Kids: The Hostile Takeover of Childhood* (New York and London: The New Press, 2004); *San Francisco Chronicle*, "Reclaiming Childhood," editorial, March 30, 2003; Pamela Paul, *Parenting, Inc.* (New York: Times Books, 2008).

4. Ellen Seiter argued that middle-class discomfort with children's taste was behind parents' anticommercial sentiment; see Ellen Seiter, *Sold Separately: Children and Parents in Consumer Culture* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1993). See also David Buckingham, *After the Death of Childhood* (Cambridge and Malden, Mass.: Polity Press, 2000); Dan Cook, *The Commodification of Childhood: The Children's Clothing Industry and the Rise of the Child Consumer* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2004); and Gary Cross, *Kids'*

Stuff: *Toys and the Changing World of American Childhood* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997).

5. For "divorce culture," see Karla Hackstaff, *Marriage in a Divorce Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999).

6. For the "economy of gratitude," see Arlie Hochschild, with Anne Machung, *The Second Shift* (New York: Avon Books, 1989).

7. The idea that people are motivated by the urge to belong is grounded in the Durkheimian notion of the sacredness of communal feeling. Yet "interest theory," with its emphasis on competitive individualism, has been far more influential for contemporary scholars looking for a "rational actor" model. While I sketch the outlines of belonging as motivation here, elsewhere I expound upon the model as a possible compromise between a psychologizing that feels presumptive to many contemporary social scientists, and a view of the person as a rather sterile collection of interests, which is "clearly far too narrow," in Sherry Ortner's phrase, in its exclusion of a whole range of emotional terms. In addition, there is a developing consensus among psychologists that the need to belong is a universal human need, and a trove of educational research on how students' sense of belonging leads to a host of positive outcomes. In her extensive review of the literature, Karen Osterman concluded: "Findings are strong and consistent: Students who experience acceptance are more highly motivated and engaged in learning and more committed to school." See Allison Pugh, "The Economy of Dignity: Children's Culture and Consumer Desires" (under review). Sherry Ortner's critique of interest theory is found in her seminal article: "Theory in Anthropology since the Sixties," *Society for Contemporary Study of Society and History* 26 (1984): 126-66. See also Karen Osterman, "Students' Need for Belonging in the School Community," *Review of Educational Research*, 70, no. 3 (2000): 359. For the definition "the quality or state of being worthy," see *The Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*, s.v. "dignity," <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/dignity> (accessed June 7, 2007). Amartya Sen, "The Possibility of Social Choice," *The American Economic Review* 89, no. 3 (1999): 361-62.

8. Words other than "dignity," I think, simply do not work as well to capture this fundamental humanity. "Honor," for example, evokes a more rarefied pleasure, one involving earned elevation above the rest. "Respect," in Richard Sennett's sense of "taking the needs of others seriously," is nearer the mark, but it falls short by attending more to the social interaction of providing and getting a respect than to a particular state of worthiness that children seek (and such a state is oddly shrunken by the term "respectable"). And while "status" as it is

conventionally understood conveys the competitive ranking children (and other consumers) surely do sometimes seek, it ignores what I found prevalent: children's longing simply to engage each other, to be a full member, to belong in their social world. Randall Collins turns to "status" to convey the experience of belonging or not belonging but takes care to emphasize that his more restrictive definition differs from the "general term for hierarchical differences of all kinds." In *Interaction Ritual Chains*, Collins usefully explores the capacity of interaction rituals to forge group membership. Murray Milner applied a theory of status relations to teenagers and consumer culture, arguing that teenagers are intensely preoccupied with status because "they are excluded from meaningful forms of economic and political power." While this powerlessness is true as well of the children I studied, we might not expect elementary students to have much in the way of real economic or political efficacy. Yet perhaps because they, too, lacked other means of evaluating each other, they were also preoccupied by the ephemera of consumer culture and its capacity to determine who belonged. See Richard Sennett, *Respect in a World of Inequality* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2003), 52; Randall Collins, *Interaction Ritual Chains* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004), 115; and Murray Milner, Jr., *Freaks, Geeks, and Cool Kids: American Teenagers, Schools, and the Culture of Consumption* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 184. For "gain the esteem and envy," see Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899; repr., New York: Dover Publications, 1994), 21. For an excellent essay about honor, see Hans Speier, "Honor and Social Structure," *Social Research* 2 (1935): 74-97.

9. Erving Goffman coined the term "facework" to mean particular conversational rituals—such as apologies, as well as displays of deference and poise—that people employ to patch over the mutual embarrassment from an interactional stumble. Always intrigued by the seemingly orderly flow of everyday affairs, Goffman sought to document the backstage action, to reveal the active but thoughtless way in which people managed normalcy. He was less interested in the people inhabiting these interactions. My use of "facework" borrows from Goffman but shifts our focus to the selves doing the feeling. As I develop further in chapter 2, facework, then, is the effort people make not to preserve the conversational flow, but rather to achieve and preserve their own standing in entering that flow in the first place. See Erving Goffman, *Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face-to-Face Behavior* (New York: Anchor Books, 1967).

10. Knowing what counts as a token of value is half of the battle. As the British writer Don Slater observed, "by knowing and using the codes of consumption of my own culture, I reproduce and demonstrate my membership of a

particular social order." Slater, *Consumer Culture and Modernity*, 132. Facework demands that children do more than just *identify* the symbolic scrip, however; as we see in chapter 3, to achieve dignity they must be able to enact that knowledge at the very least through strategies such as Simon's and Marco's.

11. Still relevant nearly ninety years later, Sinclair Lewis's *Babbitt* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1922) is a study of conformity and the social anxiety it simultaneously arouses and soothes; see p. 186 for Babbitt's concern for his son Ted. The national survey of 1,000 parents found a smaller proportion than I did of what I call responsive parents, who nonetheless included the majority of caregivers in the sample (the proportion increased to 58 percent of parents with children thirteen-seventeen years old). My small, qualitative sample is not designed to measure the breadth of a particular trend, but rather to excavate the meanings and processes at work. Nonetheless, I would argue that requiring responsive parents to tell a stranger they agreed with a statement beginning "Against my better judgment" in all likelihood yields results that underrepresent their numbers among the rest of the population. See Massachusetts Mutual Life Insurance Company, *Family Life Survey* (Springfield, Mass., 1995), Polling the Nations, www.poll.ors.pub.com (accessed November 7, 2007).

12. Goffman is once again relevant here—his intense and creative focus on interaction is compelling, although he paid only scattered attention to issues of consumption. See Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963). Goffman outlined three kinds of stigma—body stigma, character stigma, and tribal stigma; my three kinds of difference are related to, but not the same as, his typology. First, I prefer to remain in the realm of "difference" rather than stigma, because while some differences do carry a polluting charge, inspiring parents to shield their children from them or to treat them so that they might be cured, other differences have a positive valence, although one that still leads parents to spend. Second, I conflate the notion of embodied stigma and character stigma in "personal" differences because these animate consumption in the same way, as enduring individual problems or gifts that generate their own consumer responses, particularly among the affluent. Third, my notion of interactional differences seeks to capture the fleeting, momentary character of difference and commonality established in children's everyday conversations, conversations that are themselves shaped, but not wholly determined, by longer-lasting personal and social differences. Affluent children, for example, sometimes felt the surprise of not having the item that other children were discussing; their affluence did not always protect them from the shock of difference. Goffman was deeply interested in interaction, of course; his study of

stigma attended to how personal and social differences are handled in everyday discourse. A principal focus of this study, however, are those momentary differences of possession and experience that interaction throws into relief.

13. Michel Maffesoli analyzed how consumers want not to conform but actually to be "different from the Joneses." See Michel Maffesoli, *The Time of the Tribes: The Decline of Individualism in Mass Society* (London: Sage, 1995). While his argument may certainly apply to adults, particularly upper-income ones, my research provides evidence that some children, even upper-income ones, want first to belong. Randall Collins's work *Interaction Ritual Chains* suggests some reasons, beyond developmental psychology, why this might be the case (see chapter 3, note 7).

14. For a thorough accounting of low-income caregivers' attempts to provide, see Kathryn Edin and Laura Lein, *Making Ends Meet: How Single Mothers Survive Welfare and Low-Wage Work* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1997). Several scholars have documented the powerful, painful draw of the panoply of American consumer goods for low-income children and their families; see especially Elizabeth Chin, *Purchasing Power: Black Kids and American Consumer Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001); and Carl Nightingale, *On The Edge: A History of Poor Black Children and Their American Dreams* (New York: Basic Books, 1993).

15. For "agents of materialism," see Robert Wuthnow, "Pious Materialism: How Americans View Faith and Money," *The Christian Century*, March 3, 1992, 239-42. Regarding bloggers, Google blog searches on June 12, 2007, found 8,955 blogs for the search "children video games addicted," 1,633 for "children materialism consumer," and 19,167 for "kids consumerism." Writers on the psychological costs of materialism include Schor, *Born to Buy*; Linn, *Consuming Kids*; and Tim Kasser, "Frugality, Generosity, and Materialism in Children and Adolescents," in *What Do Children Need to Flourish? Conceptualizing and Measuring Indicators of Positive Development*, ed. K. A. Moore and L. H. Lippman, 357-74 (New York: Springer Science, 2005). For the transformation of childhood into "consumerhood," see *San Francisco Chronicle*, "Reclaiming Childhood."

16. Buckingham, *After the Death of Childhood*, 165. One study depicting materialistic parents who buy too much for their children is Joanna Higginson, "Competitive Parenting: The Culture of Teen Mothers," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 60, no. 1 (1998): 135-49. Scholars who argue that consumerist childhoods reflect consumerist adulthoods include Christine Williams, *Inside Toyland: Working, Shopping, and Social Inequality* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Cook, *Commodification of Childhood*; and Lizabeth Cohen, *A*

Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America (New York: Knopf, 2003). See Cook, *Commodification of Childhood*, 6.

17. See Cate Doty and Rachel Thorner, "18 Shopping Bags and 3 Empty Wallets," *New York Times*, November 27, 2004. For the emerging trend of giving babies brand names, see BBC World News, "U.S. Babies Get Global Brand Names," 2003, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/3268161.stm> (accessed November 9, 2007).

18. Elizabeth Chin coined the term "combat consumers" in her ethnography *Purchasing Power*. Stories of the largest yacht are from Robert Frank, *Luxury Fever: Why Money Fails to Satisfy in an Era of Excess* (New York, Free Press, 1999). Frank also quotes a profile of two brothers building a fantasy castle in East Hampton; see "Alan Wilzig," *New York Times Magazine*, August 17, 1997.

19. Benjamin Barber suggested poverty insulated poor families in his book *Consumed: How Markets Corrupt Children, Infantilize Adults, and Swallow Citizens Whole* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007), 9. An important 1988 study by Lazear and Michael reported that children's proportion of household spending actually declined as household income increased, and a team of London researchers recently concurred. Researcher Thierry Kochuyt confirmed this insight with a Belgian sample, arguing that low-income parents created "artificial affluence" for their children, restricting, delaying, or minimizing some parental needs so as to satisfy the desires of their children. "What people consume is not the family income divided by the number of relatives," Kochuyt wrote, arguing that child-rearing consumption should be thought of as a gift that cements family ties. He also cites Dutch research demonstrating that "the giving of goods and money to the children is relatively more important among lower income categories. They give almost 84% of what the higher incomes give, which comes down to a much higher portion of their revenues." See Thierry Kochuyt, "Giving Away One's Poverty: On the Consumption of Scarce Resources within the Family," *The Sociological Review* 52, no. 2 (2004): 139-61; see pp. 145 and 149 for the quotes. Also see Edward P. Lazear and Robert T. Michael, *Allocation of Income within the Household* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); Robin Douthitt, "An Evaluation of the Relationship between the Percentage-of-Income Standard and Family Expenditures for Children," (discussion paper, Institute for Research on Poverty, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1990), 921-90, as cited in Ingrid Rothe, Judith Cassetty, and Elizabeth Boennen, "Estimates of Family Expenditures for Children: A Review Of The Literature," *Institute for Research on Poverty*, April 2001, <http://www.irlp.wisc.edu/research/childsup/cspolicy/csprpubs.htm> (accessed November 9, 2007); and M. Brewer, A. Goodman, and

A. Leicester, "Household Spending in Britain: What Can It Teach Us about Poverty?" *Institute for Fiscal Studies Report*, http://www.ifs.org.uk/publications.php?publication_id=3620 (accessed November 9, 2007). Recently, however, Plassmann and Norton found that while low- and middle-income families spent about the same proportion of income on children, upper-income families spend about 15 percent more. They found wide variations by ethnicity, so that for some families on the edge of poverty that are Hispanic or white, the children are poor and the adults are not, while for some that are African- or Asian-American, the adults are poor, but the children are not. Further research is needed to parse out these racial/ethnic differences. See Vandana Plassmann and Marjorie Norton, "Child-Adult Expenditure Allocation by Ethnicity," *Family and Consumer Sciences Research Journal* 33, no. 1 (2004): 475-97. For the "bulletproof" market, see Michael McDermott, "Kid's Market Is a Small World with Franchise Opportunities," *The Franchise Handbook*, Summer 2006, http://www.franchise.com/articles/Kid's_Market_Is_a_Small_World_with_Franchise_Opportunities_149.asp (accessed June 23, 2008).

20. Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (1776; repr., New York: Bantam Dell, 2003), 1103.

21. The term "strange situation" refers to studies of mother-child attachment, in which psychologists would watch what would happen when babies were left and rejoined by their mothers. I use it here to point out how similarly staged are many experimental research designs, which often exclude any measure of the social world in their assessment of children's susceptibility to ads. Other scholars depict children as active, resistant, and creative in their reinterpretations of corporate messages. Children are not passive consumers of advertising, these scholars argue, but healthy cynics, regarding corporate efforts to persuade them askance, mocking or modifying claims for their own purposes. While this research offers a fuller view of the child, it remains focused, like an interrogation spotlight, on the individual child and his or her stance toward advertising. The discovery of the child as "wise consumer" is but the flip side of the discovery of the child as particularly malleable; both are animated by the central question of how TV advertising affects children, and mostly reliant on the same expose-then-ask sort of methodology. See Buckingham, *After the Death of Childhood*, 150-55, for a cogent discussion of the debate about pure children versus wise consumers. For an excellent review of research on children and advertising, see Deborah Roedder John, "Consumer Socialization of Children: A Retrospective Look at Twenty-five Years of Research," *Journal of Consumer Research* 26, no. 3 (1999): 183-213. See also Schor, *Born to Buy*; Chin,

Purchasing Power; Cross, *Kids' Stuff*; Michael Schudson, *Advertising: The Uneasy Persuasion* (New York: Basic Books, 1984); Sharon Zukin, *Point of Purchase: How Shopping Changed American Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Laurel Graham, "Beyond Manipulation: Lillian Gilbreth's Industrial Psychology and the Governmentality of Women Consumers," *The Sociological Quarterly* 38, no. 4 (1997): 539-65; Linn, *Consuming Kids*; Barber, *Consumed*; Stephen Kline, *Out of the Garden: Toys, TV, and Children's Culture in the Age of Marketing* (New York: Verso, 1993); and Cook, *Commodification of Childhood*.

22. Children's time spent with media was examined in a national study by the Kaiser Family Foundation. See Victoria Rideout, Donald Roberts, and Ulla Foehr, "Generation M: Media in the Lives of 8-18 Year-Olds," <http://www.kff.org/entmedia/entmedia030905pkg.cfm> (accessed November 9, 2007). See also E. A. Vandewater, D. S. Bickham, and J. H. Lee, "Time Well Spent? Relating Television Use to Children's Free Time Activities," *Pediatrics* 117 (2006): 181-90. E. B. White's observation is found in his 1950 science-fiction story "The Morning of the Day They Did It," reprinted in *The Second Tree from the Corner* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), 69.

23. This view echoes the premise behind *Babbit*, in which Sinclair Lewis wrote: "So did the large national advertisers fix the surface of his life, fix what he believed to be his individuality. These standard advertised wares—toothpastes, socks, tires, cameras, instantaneous hot-water heaters—were his symbols and proofs of excellence; at first the signs, then the substitutes, for joy and passion and wisdom." *Babbit*, 80-81. Advertisers know, of course, that it is not so easy. As Milner noted in his study of teenage cultures of consumption, "most people were not influenced by impersonal messages, but by the opinions of people they knew and interacted with." See Milner, *Freaks, Geeks, and Cool Kids*, 167. Similarly, Martens urges us to look beyond the market for how children learn about consumption; she suggests parents' influence has been underestimated, but also recommends that we consider "the broader networks of social relationships that envelop a child who grows up in a consumer world." See Lydia Martens, "Learning to Consume—Consuming to Learn: Children at the Interface between Consumption and Education," *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 26, no. 3 (2005): 343-57; see p. 350 for the quote.

24. For thousands of years, ever since sumptuary laws attempted to regulate consumption so as to weed out those pretenders to the elite, we have understood consumption as a sort of stratifying practice, a means of distinguishing ourselves from others, most often from others below. Pierre Bourdieu argued that early consumption shapes tastes, which are ranked hierarchically as a form of "symbolic

violence." See Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984). Bourdieu's ideas updated the important work of Veblen and Mauss, who demonstrated the display work consumption performed for spenders in advanced countries as well as more primitive societies; see Veblen, *Theory of the Leisure Class*; Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. Ian Cunnison (New York: Norton, 1967). Zelizer's "connected lives" argument is presented in Viviana Zelizer, *The Purchase of Intimacy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004). For "the material culture of love," see Daniel Miller, *A Theory of Shopping* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998). For Zukin's observation about "the things we need to buy," see Zukin, *Point of Purchase*, 30. For parent buying due to increasing work hours, see Arlie Hochschild, *The Time Bind* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1997); and Craig Thompson, "Caring Consumers: Gendered Consumption Meanings and the Juggling Lifestyle," *Journal of Consumer Research* 22, no. 4 (1996): 388-407; due to children's defiance, see Theodore Caplow, "Christmas Gifts and Kin Networks," *American Sociological Review* 47, no. 3 (June 1982): 383-92; due to divorce, see Allison Pugh, "From Compensation to Childhood Wonder: Why Parents Buy" (Working Paper No. 39, Center for Working Families, University of California, Berkeley, 2002); due to the strains of poverty, see Edin and Lein, *Making Ends Meet*; and Elaine Power, "Freedom and Belonging through Consumption: The Disciplining of Desire in Single Mothers on Welfare" (paper presented to the British Sociological Association Annual Conference, University of York, 2003).

25. Other research into the ways in which consumption can be sharply divisive due to income includes Juliet Schor, *The Overspent American: Upscaling, Downshifting, and the New Consumer* (New York: Basic Books, 1998); Williams, *Inside Toyland*; Zygmunt Bauman, *Work, Consumerism, and the New Poor* (Buckingham and Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1998); Gary Cross, *An All-Consuming Century: Why Commercialism Won in Modern America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); and Cohen, *Consumer's Republic*. For research on how consumption connects and separates, see Zelizer, *Purchase of Intimacy*; Thompson, "Caring Consumers"; David Cheal, *The Gift Economy* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998); and Allison Pugh, "Selling Compromise: Toys, Motherhood, and the Cultural Deal," *Gender & Society* 19, no. 6 (2005): 729-49. See Eva Illouz, *Cold Intimacies: The Making of Emotional Capitalism* (Malden, Mass.: Polity Press, 2007), 91.

26. Three books by Hochschild examine these themes: for the impact of women's twin responsibilities of working and caring on family life, see

Hochschild, *Second Shift*; for outsourcing as an outgrowth of overwork, see Hochschild, *Time Bind*; and for the intersections of economic and family life, see essays in Hochschild, *Commercialization of Intimate Life*. Quotes in this paragraph are from the latter book: p. 143 of the essay "From the Frying Pan into the Fire"; p. 209 of the essay "Emotional Geography and Capitalism."

27. Viviana Zelizer, "Culture and Consumption," in *The Handbook of Economic Sociology*, ed. Neil Smelser and Richard Swedberg, 349 (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press; New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2005).

28. Nina Eliasoph and Paul Lichterman's work on culture-in-interaction is a compelling rendition of culture as group norms and expectations, made concrete through daily interaction; see Nina Eliasoph and Paul Lichterman, "Culture in Interaction," *American Journal of Sociology* 108, no. 4 (2003): 735-94. For "tastes," see Douglas B. Holt, "Does Cultural Capital Structure American Consumption?" *Journal of Consumer Research* 25 (June 1998): 1-25; see p. 19 for the quote. See Bourdieu, *Distinction*; and Seiter, *Sold Separately*. Annette Lareau's work explored the implications of class differences in child rearing; see Annette Lareau, *Unequal Childhoods* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

29. Patricia Adler and Peter Adler, *Peer Power* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1998), 206; John, "Consumer Socialization of Children," 206; Lydia Martens, Dale Southerton, and Sue Scott, "Bringing Children (and Parents) into the Sociology of Consumption: Towards a Theoretical and Empirical Agenda," *Journal of Consumer Culture* 4 (2004): 155-82; see pp. 158 and 175 for the quotes.

30. For examples of research on adolescents, see Randi Waerdahl, "Learning by Consuming: Consumer Culture as a Condition for Socialization and Everyday Life at the Age of 12" (diss., Department of Sociology and Human Geography, University of Oslo, 2003); Milner, *Freaks, Geeks, and Cool Kids*; Rosaleen Croghan, Christine Griffin, Janeen Hunter, and Ann Phoenix, "Style Failure: Consumption, Identity, and Social Exclusion," *Journal of Youth Studies* 9, no. 4 (2006): 463-78. For work uncovering the crucial sense of belonging, see Bernadine Chee, "Eating Snacks, Biting Pressure: Only Children in Beijing," in *Feeding China's Little Emperors: Food, Children, and Social Change*, ed. Jun Jing (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2000); David J. Jamison, "Idols of the Tribe: Brand Veneration and Group Identity among Pre-Adolescent Consumers" (working paper, Department of Marketing, University of Florida, Gainesville, 1996), as cited in John, "Consumer Socialization of Children," 194; and Sue Middleton, Karl Ashworth, and Robert Walker, *Family Fortunes: Presures on Parents and Children in the 1990s* (London: Child Poverty Action Group,

1994). The British study is reported in Mark Ritson and Richard Elliott, "The Social Uses of Advertising: An Ethnographic Study of Adolescent Advertising Audiences," *Journal of Consumer Research* 26 (December 1999): 260-77; see pp. 265-66 for the quote. For "I have to try new things," see Chee, "Eating Snacks, Biting Pressure," 34.

31. Steven Mintz, *Huck's Raft: A History of American Childhood* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, Belknap Press, 2004), 381; Barrie Thorne, "The Crisis of Care," in *Work-Family Challenges for Low-Income Parents and Their Children*, ed. Nan Crouter and Alan Booth, 165-78 (Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Publishers, 2004).

32. John Gillis, *A World of Their Own Making: Myth, Ritual, and the Quest for Family Values* (New York: Basic Books, 1996). A fulsome study of the withering of community bonds can be found in Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001). A veritable industry of social science catalogs the rates of single parenthood and the movement of women into the paid workforce; for the effects of these trends on children, see Sara McLanahan, "Diverging Destinies: How Children Fare under the Second Demographic Transition," *Demography* 41, no. 4 (2004): 607-27.

33. Children's increasing shopping participation is documented by McNeal, *On Becoming a Consumer*; and Barrie Gunter and Adrian Furnham, *Children as Consumers* (New York and London: Routledge, 1998). For "the romance of your child's childhood," see Adam Gopnik, *Paris to the Moon* (New York: Random House, 2001), 167.

34. Lareau's work *Unequal Childhoods* contributed to and inspired my own research, particularly in its compelling demonstration of how something as abstract, even theoretical, as social structure can exert powerful force in children's daily lives. Her research design molded her findings in important ways, however. For example, because she studied individual families chosen for their particular demographic features rather than a group of families within a community, she finds that class trumps race, rather than investigating its overlapping features, and she downplays the social nature of childhood and parenthood, the comparing, networking, and research tasks families conduct within their communities. Her student Patricia Berhau analyzed the consumption behavior of the same set of families, with the intriguing finding that *how* families bought things differed by class even when *what* they were buying did not; her work similarly steers clear of the social world, children's peer culture, and how parents come to decide what to buy, however. See Lareau, *Unequal Childhoods*; Sharon Hays, *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Uni-

versity Press, 1996); and Patricia Berhau, "Class and the Experience of Consumers: A Study of Practices of Acquisition" (diss., Temple University, 2000). For the wider impact of middle-class parenting trends, see, in addition to Lareau's work, Sara Ruddick, "Care as Labor and Relationship," in *Norms and Values: Essays in Honor of Virginia Held*, ed. Joram G. Haber and Mark S. Halfon, 3-25 (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998). Viviana Zelizer documented children's historical transition from economically useful to emotionally priceless in *Pricing the Priceless Child* (New York: Basic Books, 1985).

35. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, "Trends in the Well-Being of Children and Youth," 2003, <http://aspe.hhs.gov/HSP/03trends/> (accessed February 23, 2008); Suzanne Bianchi, "Feminization and Juvenilization of Poverty: Trends, Relative Risks, Causes and Consequences," *Annual Review of Sociology* 25 (1999): 324.

36. For state spending, see Paul W. Newacheck and A. E. Benjamin, "Intergenerational Equity and Public Spending," *Health Affairs* 23, no. 5 (2004): 142-47; see p. 2 for the quote. For federal spending, see Susmita Pati, Ron Keren, Evaline A. Alessandrini, and Donald F. Schwartz, "Generational Differences in U.S. Public Spending, 1980-2000," *Health Affairs* S23, no. 5 (2004): 131-42.

37. Tellingly, urban theorists call this public provisioning a form of "collective consumption." For Katz's observation, see Cindi Katz, "Vagabond Capitalism and the Necessity of Social Reproduction," *Antipode* 33, no. 4 (2001): 725.

38. On inequality in net worth, earnings, and resources, see Michael Hout, "Money and Morale: What Growing Inequality Is Doing to Americans' View of Themselves and Others," (working paper, Survey Research Center, University of California, Berkeley, 2003), http://ucdata.berkeley.edu/rsfcensus/papers/Morale_Working_Paper.pdf; Claude Fischer and Michael Hout, "Differences among Americans in Living Standards across the Twentieth Century" (working paper, Survey Research Center, University of California, Berkeley, 2002), <http://ucdata.berkeley.edu/rsfcensus/papers/livingstandards.pdf> (cited with permission); Daniel Lichter, "Poverty and Inequality among Children," *Annual Review of Sociology* 23 (1997): 121-45; Susan Mayer, "How Did the Increase in Economic Inequality Affect Educational Attainment?" *American Journal of Sociology* 107, no. 1 (2001): 1-32; and Robert Haveman, Gary Sandefur, Barbara Wolfe, and Andrea Voyer, "Inequality of Family and Community Characteristics in Relation to Children's Attainments" (working paper, Russell Sage Foundation, 2001), http://www.russellsage.org/programs/proj_reviews/si/revhavemanor.pdf. For the disparity in children's economic resources, see Gregory Acs and

Megan Gallagher, "Income Inequality among America's Children," Urban Institute, Washington, D.C., 2000, <http://www.urban.org/url.cfm?ID=309307>; and Daniel Lichter and D.J. Eggebeen, "Rich Kids, Poor Kids: Changing Income Inequality among American Children," *Social Forces* 71 (1993): 761–80.

39. Sharon Hays, "Structure, Agency, and the Sticky Problem of Culture," *Sociological Theory* 12 (1994): 57–72; see p. 65 for the quote. Scholars who emphasize the process behind making meaning—at once creating anew and reproducing modes of acting—include Sherry Ortner, William Sewell, and Ann Swidler. See Sherry Ortner, *High Religion: A Cultural and Political History of Sherpa Buddhism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989); William Sewell, "A Theory of Structure—Duality, Agency, and Transformation," *American Journal Of Sociology* 98, no. 1 (July 1992): 1–29; and Ann Swidler, "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies," *American Sociological Review* 51 (April 1986): 273–86.

40. A tradition of psychoanalytic social science investigates that bridge between the personal and the social; see Nancy Chodorow, *The Power of Feelings: Personal Meaning in Psychoanalysis, Gender, and Culture* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1999); and Jean L. Briggs, *Inuit Morality Play: The Emotional Education of a Three-Year-Old* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1998). Sociologists often juxtapose "culture" and "structure," with the former representing the softer world of beliefs, values, and rituals, while the latter comprises the institutions (such as education, religion, family, the state) and social categories (such as race, class, gender, sexuality) that shape the choices and trajectories of individuals. As Sharon Hays has argued compellingly, however, collective ideas of social meaning can shape our sense of what is possible and desirable just as forcefully as the rules and regulations of schools or the political system. See Hays, "Structure, Agency, and the Sticky Problem of Culture." See also Collins, *Interaction Ritual Chains*.

41. For the phrase "organization of human existence," see Sherry Ortner, *Making Gender: The Politics and Erotics of Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996).

12. The notion that people of widely varying socioeconomic status share cultural values but diverge in the structured pathways available to them echoes a theme explored in Robert Merton's famous 1949 essay "Social Structure and Anomie," in *Social Theory and Social Structure*, 185–214 (1949; repr., New York: Free Press, 1968). Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for the reference.

42. For the increasing work hours of families with children, see Michael Hout and Caroline Hanley, "Working Hours and Inequality, 1968–2001: A Family Perspective on Recent Controversies." (working paper, Survey Research Center, University of California, Berkeley, 2003), <http://www.russellsage.org/>

publications/workingpapers/workinghrsineq/document(accessed November 4, 2007). For the debt load of married families with children, see Elizabeth Warren and Amelia Warren Tyagi, *The Two-Income Trap* (New York: Basic Books, 2003). See Kochuyt, "Giving Away One's Poverty"; Edin and Lein, *Making Ends Meet*; and Power, "Freedom and Belonging through Consumption."

43. See Marianne Cooper, "Made-to-Order Lives: Upper-Income Families in the New Economy" (Presentation at American Sociological Association, Montreal, 2006).

44. Similarly, in her study of how working couples sort out the second shift, Hochschild argues that the "saddest cost" for women is that they had to implement the speed-up of their own families, and thus bear the emotional fallout—"Mom is always rushing us"—from a system in which they were also the primary victims. See Hochschild, *Second Shift*.

NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

1. For income inequality in Oakland, see Edward P. Lazear and Angie Rodgers, "Income Inequality in the District of Columbia Is Wider Than in Any Major U.S. City," DC Fiscal Policy Institute, July 23, 2004; and Neena Murgai, "Oakland Health Profile 2004," Alameda County Public Health Department, Oakland, 2005, <http://www.acphd.org>. For wages data, see Howard Greenwhich and Christopher Niedt, "Decade of Divide: Working, Wages, and Inequality in the East Bay," East Bay Alliance for a Sustainable Economy, Oakland, 2001, <http://www.workingeastbay.org/pdf/decade.pdf>.

2. Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003), 21.

3. For Oakland poverty rates for children, see Murgai, "Oakland Health Profile 2004." For school data on Oakland's children, see Ed-Data, "Education Data Partnership: California Public School Enrollment in 2004-2005," <http://www.ed-data.k12.ca.us> (accessed February 20, 2006). The Annie E. Casey Foundation ranks the nation's fifty largest cities on several different indicators of children's problems, including child poverty, teen dropouts, children without a vehicle in the home, and so on. While Oakland ranked in the bottom half for all of these, other cities ranked far worse for such measures as rates of single parenthood, whether or not the child had a telephone in the home, and percentage of teenagers not working or attending school. For these measures as well as data on adult employment in children's homes, see Annie E. Casey Foundation, *City and Rural Kids Count*