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Lydia Martens

Childhood and Markets

Infants, Parents and the Business
of Child Caring

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Preface

The materials discussed in this book have their embryonic beginnings in a series of convivial conversations with Sue Scott and Dale Southerton in cafés in Durham. Coming together with backgrounds in sexuality, risk, consumption and intimate everyday lives, we discussed the relative absence of children in the sociology of consumption, and the importance of bringing these varying sociologies together. It soon became clear that we were not the only ones asking questions like this, and in fact, some—including Viviana Zelizer, Ellen Seiter and David Buckingham—had already developed work on the location of children and families in economic and mediated life, the moral questions this was giving rise to, and the ubiquitous enmeshing of the private and the public. It is clear that the past 15 years have seen significant acceleration in debates on children, childhood and consumer culture. This is witnessed, for instance, in the global participation of a research community in the successful International and Pluridisciplinary Child and Teen Consumption conference, which, as the brain child of Valerie Inés de la Ville, commenced in 2004 and has since taken place bi-annually at different locations in Europe. This book engages with these evolving debates. In particular, it grapples with the question how, through

theoretical innovation, scholarship can prevent itself from becoming tied up with the strong moralities that dominate the topic of children's consumption and the location of children in consumer culture. My argument is that the scholar's task, in the first instance, is not to moralise, but to understand how common everyday moralities come about, and to explore what the consequences are. Empirically, this book is about the youngest of children—babies and toddlers, and even those yet to be born, their carers, and the business of child caring that has evolved to service the goods and services that allow child caring to be performed. This focus has been selected purposefully, as young children, the question of children's age, and the problematic of the generational relations that inform both the moral debates and the location of children in consumer culture are either absent, or have remained hidden from view. The theoretical approach adopted in this book brings these relationalities out and into the open. As you commence reading, be prepared to read about how the mundane world of early childhood and new families gives rise to an amazing array of cultural productions and achievements, with the capacity to shape the worlds of children, families and business.

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who not only taught us about the importance of consumption research, but also about the absolute necessity of collegiality. You remain in our memory.

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I offer a heartfelt thank you to the colleagues with whom I worked on the ESRC seminar series Motherhood, Markets and Consumption. Pauline Maclaran, Margaret Hogg, Stephanie O'Donohoe, Lorna Stevens, Linda Scott and Mary Jane Kehily, your unfailing enthusiasm, the engaging and thought-provoking seminars that you organised in your host institutions, and the excellent team-work you delivered in pulling publications together, taught me a lot about how collaborative work can be both efficient and thoroughly enjoyable. Special and warm thanks go to Pauline Maclaran, your friendly coaching and absolute generosity of spirit have made working with you a pleasure. In the Child and Teen Consumption network, I am grateful to David Buckingham, Valerie Inés de la Ville, Dan Cook, Vebjørg Tingstad, Tora Korsvold, Olivia Freeman, Helene Brembeck, Malene Gram and many others. Particular and heartfelt thanks go to Anna Sparrman, Minna Ruckenstein and Pascale Garnier, for joining me in a special symposium session to discuss the book at the 8th CTC conference in Angoulême, and for providing valuable feedback on the book.

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Love and intimacy are important themes in this book, and they are equally important on a personal level. My sisters, Jacqueline and Monique, have listened to endless stories about the many challenges of living life as an academic. They have also rejoiced with me when hard work has paid off. To Carina and Eva, for giving me first hand experience of the process of growing up, for making me a parent, and for finding good Japanese animated films to watch together. To Steven, for bringing music into my life and for always being there for me. I love you all! I dedicate this book to my parents, Jan and Jeanne Martens, for giving me all those years of care and love, and for walking and becoming alongside me.

Contents

1	Introduction	1
2	Researching Children, Childhood, and Consumer Culture	23
3	Child Caring and Market Interactions	57
4	The Business of Child Caring	83
5	Loving: Emotional Movements	113
6	Protecting: Assembling Infant Embodied Vulnerability	135
7	Purifying: Embodied Cleanliness and Natural Products	159
8	Marketised Pedagogy and the Moralities of Child Caring	187

xii	Contents	
9	Child Caring Moralities and Market Organisation	225
10	Conclusion	245
	Index	265

List of Figures

Fig. 2.1	Scholarly territories and their agendas in relation to the sacred and the profane	28
Fig. 4.1	Walking through The Baby Show at Birmingham's National Exhibition Centre	86
Fig. 4.2	Demonstrations at the Phillips Avent stand at Birmingham NEC Baby Show (2009)	104
Fig. 5.1	Baby bodysuits hanging, in washing line fashion, on the side of an open exhibition area at The Baby Show	121
Fig. 5.2	Smiling face, hands and feet as commonly visualised baby body parts in sales literature	126

List of Tables

Table 4.1	Product categories listed in The Baby Show product locator in the show guide, Birmingham NEC, 2006–2014	97
Table 4.2	Pathways in child caring, product categories and the teleoaffective qualities of child caring	98
Table 8.1	Information pages on the Cow & Gate website (2013), organised by themes	197
Table 8.2	Online discussion forum topics on the Cow & Gate website (2013)	199