

# **THE CHANGING SOCIAL CONCEPTION OF CHILDHOOD AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO THE MARKETPLACE**

**Catharine Curran**

Universidade de Massachusetts Dartmouth

## **RESUMO**

Esta pesquisa visa explorar os factores que levaram à importância das crianças como um segmento de mercado distinto no campo da economia, sendo vistas ao mesmo tempo como uma população que necessita ser protegida quer a nível governamental, quer social. Com base numa análise histórica, este artigo demonstra a existência de uma relação reflexiva entre a concepção social de infância e a evolução do mercado em relação aos meios de comunicação para crianças, assim como os produtos e serviços especificamente concebidos para captar a atenção das crianças.

## **PALAVRAS- CHAVE:**

crianças, marketing, infância, história.

## **ABSTRACT**

This research will explore the factors that led to the rise in prominence of children as a distinct market segment within the economy as well as concurrently being viewed as a vulnerable population in need of government and societal protections. Using historical analysis, this article demonstrates the ongoing reflexive relationship between the social conception of childhood and the changing market place for children's media as well as products and services designed specifically to appeal to children.

## **KEYWORDS:**

children, marketing, childhood, history.

## INTRODUCTION

The recognition of children as a distinct and economically vital market segment within the economy is now fully realized in the United States and is an increasing global reality. In 1997 children in the United States under 12 spent more than \$24 Billion of their own money and influenced \$188 billion more (McNeal, 1998). The phenomena is not limited to the United States, in other countries the importance of children's direct spending combined with their influence over family spending is becoming a vital part of economic well being. Even in developing nations, such as China, children are playing a vital role in economic development with spending on children rapidly increasing (Chan and McNeal, 2004).

In the United States children were initially recognized as a viable market sector at the turn of 20th century. There were a number of dramatic changes occurring in both the economic and social environments at that time that resulted in a reconstruction of the societal view of children's role in society. It was during this period that childhood became "an enchanted period of life" (Mintz, 2004) and children were now viewed as a vulnerable population, in need of societal and adult protection. This view stood in stark contrast to the previous view of children as contributors to the family economy. This new conception of the worth children and the importance of childhood led to drastic increases in spending by both society and families on children's needs. Thus, creating markets for products and services that existed solely for the benefit and protection of children. Children also became empowered to make their own purchase decisions and were included in a wider variety of family purchase decisions, leading to changes in both manufacturing decisions and retailing practices culminating in today's market prominence. Firms now try to create a familiarity with adult brands among children (mere exposure effects) to increase the probability of having a positive attitude toward the brand when the children will have grown.

This research will explore the factors that led to the rise in prominence of children as a distinct market segment and concurrently being viewed as a vulnerable population in need of government and societal protections. By exploring the social, economic and political conditions in the United States that led to these phenomenon it maybe possible to predict the rise of both children's prominence as a market segment, and as the focus of regulatory protection in other nations. By understanding this complex relationship between society's view of children and their role in the marketplace it maybe possible to forecast trends that will impact children's marketing. I will begin with a brief historical review of the role of children in United States society prior to 1900.

## EARLY CONCEPTIONS OF CHILDHOOD 1600 - 1800

Tracing the history of children is not an easy undertaking; there are few if any first hand historical accounts of the lives of children written by children. Primarily historians rely on adult accounts, literary references, artistic renderings and other historical records such as court documents to detail the lives of children at various points in history. With few direct accounts from children the study of childhood is open to interpretation. There are two competing schools of thought concerning how and why the status of children changed within the US (Cunningham, 1998). One school takes the more traditional socio-cultural route in examining the history of childhood the other is "an evolutionary, psychoanalytic theory of human history" (Davis 1976). Davis explains how the two theories differ; psychoanalytic theory posits that historical and cultural changes in society are wrought by changes in parent child relations that then become broader societal changes. More traditional theories "assume that social forces and institutions cause individuals to change rather than the converse. Thus, the individual does not create history but is a product of it" (Davis, 1974, p. 14).

Each school offers interesting and complex theories about the social construction of childhood, though they differ in their assessment of the underlying cause of change, they agree that dramatic changes in society occurred between 1880 and 1920 that radically changed the lives of children in the United States.

Children's lives in early American society stand in sharp contrast to the lives of children in modern America. In the seventeenth century, childhood was not widely viewed as a distinct period of life, in fact children were not viewed as vulnerable beings in need of special care and protection from adults (Davis 1974, Farrell 1999, deMause 1974). However, beginning in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century images of childhood began to appear in art and literature (Aries 1962) mostly these were images of the wealthy and their children. These images depicted children in idealized family settings and often as angels or cherubs. Yet in reality most children were kept at an emotional distance from their parents.

It was also during this period that the Puritans followed a practice of "putting out" where parents apprenticed their own children to non-relatives and took in other people's children (Farrell 1999). Children were put out at a very young age, some as early as four years old and if they returned home there were stiff penalties and punishments for the family. Further evidence of this emotional distance between parents and children during this period was the practice of routinely naming succeeding children the same name as children who had died. Mourning rituals were also not the same for children as they were for adults (Farrell 1999, Davis 1974), the period of mourning for a child was considerably shorter.

Though the reason for this emotional distance is the subject of debate among historians it is consistent with the Puritan belief in the innate depravity of children, and that children who did not adhere to a program of strict discipline would be damned. Thus, the emotional bonds between a parent and their own children may threaten the parent's ability to enforce strict disciplinary rules (Farrell, 1999). A quote from Cotton Mather illustrates this belief "better whipt, than dammed" this treatment of children was necessary to save the child. Among the upper class in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century feelings and attitudes toward children had begun to change, a change that started flowing down the social class ladder through the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. However the economic importance of children in 18<sup>th</sup> Century families may have had a compelling influence on the slowness of this change. In many parts of the US children were a necessary component of the family economy. The conception of a child as "fragile, innocent or vulnerable" (Farrell 1999, p. 22) was not extended beyond infancy since by historical accounts children were expected to perform as adults by age 7. Most boys were apprenticed to professions by age 7 or 8 and most girls were married by the age of 13. Childhoods in the 18<sup>th</sup> century were very brief.

However by the time of the American Revolution regional variations in family structures and beliefs about children were yielding to a more coherent American view of family. The family became more important in early American culture and one of the roles of the family unit was to protect children from outside influences. Families began to withdraw from the larger society and insulate themselves from perceived dangers that existed outside of the home (Aries 1962, Farrell 1999).

### **THE EMERGENCE OF CHILDHOOD**

The 19<sup>th</sup> century saw the emergence of the middle class in the United States. Members of the middle class, taking their cue from upper class families, began to redefine children as "innocents in need of full time keeping" (Farrell 1999, p. 22). According to Davis (1974) and deMause (1974), this era was characterized by parents asserting a need for moral control over their children. Francis Wayland, author of "The Elements of Moral Science" in 1831 stated the following in a letter to a periodical "The right of the parent is to

command; the duty of the child is to obey. Authority belongs to the one, submission to the other” (Davis 1974, p. 39).

During this period both physical and psychological control of children were viewed as important aspects of child development (Reinier, 1996). Through diaries and other literary works, the societal acceptance of the need for moral control of children and their impulses was repeatedly discussed. Often under the guise of religion and moral purity disobedient children were treated in what today would be considered an extremely harsh manner. It was also thought that infants needed to be tightly bound so they could learn to control their impulses. Diaries from this time tell of parents who starved their 15-month old son for 3 days to “break his will” and allow him to be properly educated (Farrell, 1999).

It is also during this period that family role prescriptions were more clearly defined. Fathers “were to have single-handed responsibility for economic support of their families but little direct participation in family life” (Macleod 1998, p.8), mothers were to be the “guardian of virtue and morality” (Farrell, 1999) and children were to “spend full-time in learning – cognitive lessons from professional teachers, psychological and moral lessons from the full-time attention of a mother” (Macleod 1998, p. 8). By the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century this conception of the family had become the idealized view of family with men and women operating in different realms, men outside the home and women within the home. Childhood became a distinct period of life during which children learned to be morally upright adults.

For the first time, children were viewed in need of adult and societal protection beyond infancy. Unfortunately for many in the United States, this was an ideal that could not be made reality due to economic or geographic necessity children still needed to play the role of “little adults” (Farrell, 1999). In order for this new ideal to become reality families had to undergo changes. First, this new ideal required reduced fertility. Second, the reduction in fertility had to be coupled with increasing financial resources. This led to strong class distinctions in the ability to adopt this new ideal (Macleod 1998). The poor, new immigrant families, farm families and many others were unable to adopt this new ideal.

There have always been class distinctions that impact how children live and what role children are given within the family. Yet historians point out that even among families that could ill afford to excuse the child’s labor from the family economy, children became more “sentimentalized and reinterpreted as innocent and vulnerable” (Farrell 1999). What allowed for the rapid growth of this re-conceptualization of children from income generators to innocents was increased access to resources, especially financial resources fueled by the rapid switch from an agrarian economy to an industrialized economy. Access to resources is repeatedly mentioned by historians and others as the primary contributor to the rise of childhood in the US and elsewhere (Farrell 1999, Macleod 1998, Cross 1997). Driven by changing economic conditions there is a confluence of disparate factors in a culture that allowed for the emergence of the modern conception of childhood. In the US this confluence occurred during the period between 1890 and 1920 and has been termed “The Age of the Child.”

Wealth creation in the United States was allowing for the rapid expansion of the middle class especially among white-collar professionals and skilled blue-collar workers. As income rose for these two groups fertility rates declined. In 1910 it was feared that this drop in fertility was only experienced by the “superior” groups and that “inferior” groups such as immigrants and minorities were out producing whites (Macleod 1998). In hindsight this declining fertility rate was a phenomenon across all groups in the United States. The reason for the decline in fertility rates in the early 1900’s is another subject of debate among historians with some attributing the decline to various birth control methods, others attributing the decline to the changing role

of women including a new class of women who were college-educated and remained childless. When the first birth control clinic in the United States opened in 1916 (Margaret Sanger opened the clinic in an Italian and Jewish neighborhood in Brooklyn, NY) the clinic had over 400 visitors on the first day (Farrell 1999). Many historians point to the fact that the sharp decline in fertility could only have resulted from active attempts by women to limit fertility.

The drop in fertility was also coupled with an increase in the life expectancy of adults. Although the life expectancy of adults was gradually increasing, infant mortality rates held constant until the 1930's (Farrell 1999). With increasing life expectancy of parents children benefited from having parents who would at least live through their youth. Whatever the root cause for declining fertility, the phenomena was real and resulted in smaller family sizes for all groups with the notable exception of southern African-American families where the birth rate remained comparatively higher than the rest of the country (Macleod 1998).

As fertility declined and incomes increased, along with adult life span parents were able to invest more of both time and money into each individual child. Urban parents were the most likely group to embrace this notion of the "economically worthless but emotionally priceless child" (Macleod 1998, p.13) since urban parents had less reliance on the child's income for the family economy. Urban children were also the focus of the Progressive Movement, which advocated and eventually won wide acceptance of the new idealized conception of childhood.

Perhaps the final step toward acceptance of this new conception of childhood was realized in the United States with the 1946 publication of "The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care" by Dr. Benjamin Spock. This paperback book became the best selling new publication in American history with six million copies being sold in the first six years and at least a million copies a year sold for the next eighteen years (West, 1996). Spock's position that parents needed to have flexibility and let the individual child develop at their own pace as well as encouraging parents to shower affection and openly demonstrate love for the child may not seem radical today but it was highly controversial in the 1940's. Prior to Spock the most influential book on child care was James B. Watson's "Psychological Care of Infant and Child" published in 1928. In stark contrast to Spock, Watson argued for strict rule and regiments. Children needed strict schedules and that "mother love" was a "dangerous instrument" that could lead to dysfunctional adults, especially males (West, 1996). Spock and other experts on child rearing, encouraged parents to allow their children more autonomy and that it was the job of the adults to provide an openly loving and accepting environment for their children.

The acceptance of this new definition of children as priceless because of emotional contributions to the family was evidenced by a host of products that came into existence around the 1900's and has continued unabated every since. For example, Farrell (1999) states that life insurance was sold to cover the high cost of elaborate children's funerals, a public demonstration of the value and importance of the child. The emergence of the child-centered family also opened up the market for toys, clothing, and a host of other consumer goods designed specifically to appeal to children.

### **THE CHILD CONSUMER**

Prior to the late 1800's and early 1900's toys were sold primarily to adults and only the children of the wealthy had store bought toys other children played with home made dolls or toys. Toys were designed for the entertainment of adults mostly for ritual or religious purposes. Children were allowed to play with these toys only after their usefulness to adults had ended (Cross, 1998). Beginning in the mid 1800's the revolutions in retailing and in manufacturing, coupled with the idealized family, led to rapid increases in the

number of toy manufacturers and toys retailers in the United States. The rise of department stores, chain stores and catalog retailers had opened new markets for toy manufacturers. By 1900 toys, once rare, had become commonplace and toys were becoming more and more the province of children.

In spite of World War I, the “wholesale value of American toys and games rose from \$8.29 million in 1899 to \$70.17 million in 1919” (Cross 1998, p.29). In 1908 “F.A.O. Schwartz turned his modest toy shop...into a mammoth store offering 16,000 items...” (Cross 1998, p.29). Toys also began to take up more pages in catalogs and more shelf space, especially in dime stores. Advances in production techniques allowed for toys to be mass produced cheaply, using a wide variety of materials, allowing families other than wealthy families to afford to buy toys for their children. Today the toy industry has sales of over \$21 Billion dollars, with 62% of the toys purchased being requested by the child, with many of the requested toys being heavily marketed (NPD Group, 2005, Klein, 1993).

Retailing also underwent dramatic transformations during the first half of the 1900's. Beginning in the 1930's many diverse groups began to target children directly, shifting away from focusing marketing efforts on the mothers who were assumed to be the primary purchasers. This was especially true for children's clothing manufacturers and merchants (Cook, 2004) Children's clothing began to consume more retail floor space in department stores, as well as store frontage as children's specialty shops became common (Cook, 2004). Manufacturers no longer focused on the utilitarian needs of parents but also the child's needs and wants. Store layouts began to include child size displays as well as a host of designs featuring popular children's characters.

Cook's (2004) investigation into the rise of the children's clothing market, with its special focus on girls and adolescent females, offers insight into the reflexive relationship between the individual and the market. Children were commanding and receiving toys and clothing that were designed around their specific desires; they were shaping the market. In many ways changes in retailing of both children's toy and clothing in the 1920's and 1930's foreshadowed the empowerment of children, with the “right to consume” leading the way for the institutionalizing of other rights for children.

Children's media also underwent dramatic changes as new medium's emerged in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century children began to be viewed as distinct media audience with programs designed specifically for them to entertain not educate. Television networks in the mid 1960's began allocating Saturday morning entirely to children's programming. Not the children's programming of the 1950's, Howdy Doody and the like, but cartoons, superheroes and children's variety shows such as the Bozo the Clown Show and Wonderrama. These programs were initially financed by toy manufacturers who almost by accident discovered the power of television to sell their products (Pecora, 1998). During the 1950's and 1960's media critics such as Vance Packard began proclaiming that advertisers were using sophisticated psychological techniques on consumers and that audiences, especially children, were unable to resist these techniques (Packard, 1957). Packard and other critics were successful in raising awareness that advertising was a powerful force and that there were both good and bad aspects of the growing media culture.

The dramatic rise in marketing, retailing and especially media attention to children as a viable market segment led to the rise of various advocacy groups. In the 1960's these groups, such as Action for Children's Television (ACT), Important topic but is it straight to the point regarding the title and the abstract ? began to question whether the inherent vulnerability of children was being exploited by marketers. Increasingly there were questions raised about whether advertising was causing children to be more materialistic, interfering with the parent/child relationship, contributing to malnutrition and a host of other concerns (Curran and Richards,

2000). Eventually under pressure from ACT and other advocacy groups, the Federal Trade Commission agreed in the 1970's to investigate children's television advertising.

In the late 1970's the result of that investigation was the call from the FTC to ban all advertising to children on the basis that advertising to children violated the Fairness Doctrine. At the time the FTC followed the same guidelines it had used to call for a ban of cigarette advertising in 1969. The regulatory tide in the early 1980's was turning and the result of the call for a ban was instead of a ban prohibitions were placed on the FTC by Congress. In lieu of a ban, broadcasters proposed their own self-regulatory guidelines for children's advertising and groups such as ACT turned their attention to improving the quality of children's programming. The 1960's marked the beginning of not only radical changes in media but also the beginning of a sea change in societies view of childhood.

### **WHOLLY REALIZED CONSUMERS**

The early 1960's marked the end of the largest increase in births in the country. The Baby Boom, 1946 - 1964 had produced almost 80 million babies. The baby boom generation was coming of age in an era of rapidly expanding technology. Many historians credit the automobile as being the most influential technology on the American lifestyle. The automobile allowed families to move away from the cities out into the rapidly emerging suburbs (West, 1996). Suburban areas were designed especially for young families with a system of neighborhood schools and parks. Initially the suburban lifestyle was feasible with one income, allowing one parent usually the mother to remain out of the workforce. During the 1970's economic realities had transformed and suburban families had to adjust to two-income earners. Mother's joined the workforce in increasing numbers.

In 1970 40% of women worked by 1990 that number had grown to 75% approximately 46% of the workforce is now women (BLS, 2006). The highest increases in female workforce participation are among women with children under the age of 2.

This transition of mothers into the workplace required a reorientation in societies views of gender role proscriptions. This included redesign of household functions to meet the needs of dual earner families and the rise of single parent families, another trend that began in the 1970's. During the period between 1970 and 1996 the percentage of children living with both biological parents decreased from 85 % to 68%. At the same time the percent of children who live with one parent grew from 12% to 28% (Saluter and Lugaila, 1998). Outsourcing of household tasks became the norm from child care to food preparation, new industries and services were designed to meet the needs of the changing suburban family.

Dramatic changes were taking place in all forms of retailing to accommodate this new mobile lifestyle and the new family structures need for convenience. Small markets gave way to large supermarkets, retailers clustered together in shopping malls, movie theaters became multi-screen complexes, etc.. All these changes fueled by the availability of the automobile which allowed the emergence of what West terms the "drive in culture" (1996). Perhaps no industry was more impacted by the drive in culture than the food industry with the birth of fast food in the 1960's.

Fast food restaurants initially followed the baby boom families out into the suburbs led by Ray Krok and his McDonald's chain. Krok realized that children were going to be key to the success of McDonald's and actively pursued attracting children who he realized were key decision makers within the family. Krok knew he also had to appeal to mothers he did so by providing clean restaurants and consistent service. By the 1970's Ronald McDonald "was second only to Santa Claus among figures most readily recognized by

American children” (West, 1996, p. 267). Thus fast food joined the rapidly growing list of product categories that focused its advertising and marketing efforts at children.

The automobile is just one of the many technological innovations that dramatically changed how children lived in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and into the early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. While the automobile allowed families mobility, advances in telecommunications technology allowed families to experience global events in real time. The invention of the microchip and computer technology once again had dramatic effects on the lives of children. These rapid advances in technology have been the reality of the children of the Baby Boomers, known as the Echo Boomers. Not quite the size of their parent’s cohort, the Echo Boomers, also known as Generation Y, are still a powerful force, with 60 million babies being born between 1979 and 1994 (Neubourne and Kerwin, 1999). This generation is also known as the “Digital Generation” new technologies were part of their everyday existence. They have grown up in homes with home computers, internet access, multiple television sets, digital music systems, mobile technology, etc.

In many cases the children possess a higher knowledge level about these technologies than their parents do (Ribak, 2001). This generation has been described as being heaviest consumers of media, they are also the most converged generation. They are simultaneous users of various technologies and are redefining the role many of these technologies play in day to day living (Weissman, 1998). Companies such as Nokia have even gone so far as to have product development teams consisting of pre-teens and teenagers in an attempt to meet the voracious desire of this segment for the latest technology products (O’Leary, 2003). With cell phones as with other new technologies children are leading their parents and often driving the purchase of these products.

This is just one example of the inversion of a more traditional parent/child relationship that is being evidenced in society today (Mintz, 2004). As we begin the 21<sup>st</sup> Century scholars are once again pointing to changes in the role of children in families and in society and concomitantly the marketplace.

### **THE ENMESHED CHILDHOOD**

Family life in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is still undergoing changes. The entry of mothers into the workforce has leveled off and for some classes of women has actually declined. The divorce rate, now stabilized at around 50%, and number of single parent homes has also stabilized. The trend for women to delay marriage and childbirth has also leveled off with women now marrying later and having children later than previous generations. What has changed is the nature of the parent child relationship, with sociologists now beginning to study the impacts on the changing nature of this relationship.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, as throughout the entire history of childhood, social class plays a crucial factor in differences in parent/child relations and the role children play within families and thus the role parents feel is appropriate for children to play in society. Laureau concluded that middle-class families practice “concerted cultivation.” (2003). Middle-class parents involve their children in organized activities, developing their reasoning skills and intervening on the child’s behalf with teachers, coaches, etc. These children are taught how to navigate the adult world and how to “demand action from social institutions” (Laurea, 2003) Laureau’s describes lower income families as practicing what she terms “natural accomplishment of growth.” In these families the focus of the parents is on providing for the basic needs of children while allowing children to develop talents naturally. Children of lower income families tend to stay closer to home, play more with siblings and have more clearly defined boundaries between adults and children. As Brooks observes these differences in parenting style render middle and upper middle class children with the social capital necessary



to be successful in today's hypercompetitive environment (Brooks, 2005). Middle class children have been trained to assert their needs and wants from adults, while lower income children tend to be quieter around adults and "accept what is" rather than believing they can change it.

Generation Y (we begin to see generation z in some texts) presents a paradox to marketers, they are high knowledge consumers and have been labeled the most brand conscious consumer segment (Neubourne and Kerwin, 1999) yet they are some of the most brand fickle consumers. This generation presents marketers with a challenge they are an extremely attractive market segment leading to a focus on this segment yet they are also very finicky they know what they want and will not settle for less. Generation Y is attractive because of "... higher disposable incomes resulting from more generous allowances and teens opting to work part-time during schooling, less reliance on parents to make purchases, and heightened media awareness" (Sharma, 2002).

Just as their parents had shaped the market for children's clothing, toys, etc. this Generation is shaping the market in not only traditional children's categories but also formerly adult categories such as men's grooming, high end cosmetics, home design and furnishing and other luxury goods are now launching product lines or redesigning traditional lines to appeal to the 15 – 25 year old market. For example, "today, 84 percent of teen boys and 93 percent of teen girls wear fragrances; this age segment remains a vital demographic of the fragrance industry" (NPD Group, 2004) Consumption become a way of life for them. With brands representing identities that can be easily changed as new identities are adopted. Thus requiring constant innovation and updating to brands targeted at children. The speed of brand diffusion has also changed as a result of the internet, new trends emerge and are quickly over thanks to the global nature of communications. As was previously discussed sociologists find that social class is a determinant in the parent child relationship. However, for all families research has shown that there are subtle shifts in the nature of this relationship, moving from a more hierarchical relationship of parents having authority over children and thus children having limited autonomy to a "culture of negotiation" in which both sides exert their rights as autonomous individuals (Heinz-Hermann, et al. 1994). In this new conception of the parent/child relationship, children have autonomy over the management of their life. According to Heinz-Hermann, et al. parents feel that they must justify specific directives to their children thus empowering children to make the majority of their own purchasing decisions.

Sociologists are still seeking to understand this phenomena yet social commentators such as David Brooks and others have observed that this equalizing of the parent child relationship has shifted how parents view their role in the lives of their children to a more partnering rather than parenting role. Retailers have identified the phenomena of "growing older younger" and have observed that children's purchasing behavior and preferences have changed impacting the market for all children's products and especially toys (NPD Group, 2004). Traditional children's toys and clothing are given up at earlier ages forcing the marketers of these products to market to ever younger groups of children. The preschool segment formerly comprised of 3 – 5 year olds is now focusing on 0 - 2 with, infants now commanding their own toy category led by the success of products such as the Baby Einstein line (Selling to Kids, 2000)

Traditional toys are having to adjust to meet the demands of this new reality. For example, the Barbie fashion doll was originally conceived as a toy for tween girls who had outgrown baby dolls. Today girls receive their first Barbie at the age of three rather than thirteen. In the beginning the Barbie doll did not have a defined history and story created for her because the creators wanted girls to imagine her story. In order to appeal to today's mediated children Barbie has become a multi-media star. Barbie now stars in music videos, workout

videos, full length movies, Saturday morning cartoons as well as numerous themed television specials. There is even a live stage show in which an actress playing Barbie stars as an actress playing the role of a fairy in a production. The actress playing Barbie onstage even signs autographs offstage as Barbie (Rudoren, 2006). Even though today's children are viewed as getting older younger and more empowered to make decisions concerning their daily living, there is a contrasting trend. When asked at what age people should be considered an adult the results of a national poll was 26 years. Data from family spending patterns also reveal that children are receiving support from their parents well into their 20's and even early 30's. This extended period of dependence has been termed *adulthood* (Tyre, 2002). No longer socially stigmatized college graduates are returning home in record numbers. According to the 2000 Census, 4 million people aged 24 – 35 lived with their parents. Researchers theorize that this movement back to their parents home by college graduates maybe indicative of the changing economic realities of the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Many college graduates with entry level salaries simply cannot afford to live on those salaries and the traditional social structures that allowed for the transition into adulthood have been either altered or eliminated (Settersten, et al. 2003). Thus the research on today's children claims that they are simultaneously older younger and younger older, presenting an interesting paradox for researchers.

#### **THE FUTURE OF CHILDHOOD**

As with any social phenomena it is difficult to predict how childhood will be redefined in the coming years. As other countries become more Westernized will these trends that have occurred in the US evidence themselves? As researchers in marketing begin to examine the reflexive relationship between the societal conception of childhood and the marketplace a better understanding of how the market is shaped by changes in the view of childhood and the role of children within society should emerge.

Researchers are now examining questions such as the role of marketing in the epidemic of childhood obesity. Once again attempting to understand the role of marketing in a very complex social phenomenon. At the core of this research is an understanding of and a discussion about the role of child in their own consumption. How do children learn about proper nutrition? How do children make food choices? What are the influences on those choices? What role should parents, teachers, and society play in those choices? Who is responsible for children's nutritional needs?

The answer to these questions in large measure is determined by the role children play within families and within society. To understand those roles marketers can look to the field of childhood research to enrich our own theories and research.

Catharine Curran is a Fulbright Schuman Scholar and an Associate Professor of Marketing in the Charlton College of Business at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth. Her areas of specialization include marketing to children, privacy, public policy and the application of a market orientation to traditionally non-market based professions. Her current research focuses on how becoming market driven has affected the traditional professions of law, medicine and education as well as understanding marketing's role in children's product choices. Dr. Curran-Kelly has published in journals such as *The Journal of Advertising*, *The Journal of Consumer Marketing*, *The Journal of Business Ethics*, and *Marketing Education Review*. She received her B.A. in Communication Studies from The Pennsylvania State University and her M.B.A. and Ph.D. in Business Administration from New Mexico State University.

## REFERÊNCIAS BIBLIOGRÁFICAS

- ANONYMOUS (2000), "Ahead of the Times: Marketing to Kids Growing Older Younger," *Selling to Kids*, Feb. 23, [http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m0FVE/is\\_3\\_5/ai\\_59597418](http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0FVE/is_3_5/ai_59597418)
- ARIES, Philippe, (1962), *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, translated by Robert Baldick, Knopf Publishers, New York, NY.
- Bureau of Labor Statistics, (2006), "Civilian Labor Force Participation by Sex, Age, Race and Hispanic Origin," <http://www.bls.gov/emp/emplab06.pdf>
- CHAN, Kara and James U. McNEAL, (2004), *Advertising to Children in China*, Chinese University Press, Hong Kong.
- COOK, Daniel Thomas, (2004), *The Commodification of Childhood*, Duke University Press, Durham, NC.
- CROSS, Gary (1997), *Kid's Stuff: Toys and the Changing World of American Childhood*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.
- CUNNINGHAM, Hugh (1998), "Histories of Childhood," *The American Historical Review*, 103(4), p. 1195 – 1208.
- CURRAN, Catharine M. and Jef I. RICHARDS, (2000), "The Regulation of Children's Advertising in the United States", *International Journal of Marketing and Advertising to Children*, 2(2), p. 139 – 154.
- DE MAUSE, Lloyd (1974), *The History of Childhood*, Psychohistory Press, New York, NY.
- DAVIS, Glenn (1976), *Childhood History in America*, Psychohistory Press, New York, NY.
- FARRELL, Betty G.(1999), *Family: the Making of an Idea, an Institution and a Controversy in American Culture*, Westview Publishing, Boulder, CO.
- HEINZ-HERMANN, Kruger, PETER BUCHNER and MAUELA DU BOIS-REYMOND (1994), "The Family Culture of Negotiation – A result of Changing Parent-Child Relationships," *Innovation: The European Journal of Social Sciences*, 7(1), p. 29 – 40.
- KLEIN, Stephen, (1993), *Out of the Garden: Toys and Children's Culture in the Age of TV Marketing*, Verso Press, London, UK.
- NEUBOURNE, Ellen and Kathleen KERWIN (1999), "Generation Y," *Business Week*, Feb. 15.
- MACLEOD, David I., (1998), *The Age of the Child: Children in America 1890 – 1920*, Twayne Press, New York, NY.
- McNEAL, James U. (1998), "Tapping the Three Kids Markets," *American Demographics*, April, p. 37 – 41.
- MINTZ, Stephen, (2004), *Huck's Raft: A History of American Childhood*, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.
- LEARY, Noreen, (2003), "Wot R They Up 2?" *Adweek*, 44(7), p. 26.
- The NPD Group, (2004), "Brand Disloyalists," [http://www.npdinsights.com/corp/enewsletter/html/archives/june2004/cover\\_story.html](http://www.npdinsights.com/corp/enewsletter/html/archives/june2004/cover_story.html)

- PACKARD, Vance (1957), *The Hidden Persuaders*, Penguin Press, New York, NY.
- PECORA, Norma Odom (1998), *The Business of Children's Entertainment*, Guilford Press, New York, NY.
- REINIER, Jacqueline, (1996), *From Virtue to Character: American Childhood 1775- 1850*," Twayne Publishers, New York, NY.
- RUDOREN, Jodi, (2006), "Actress Barbie Has a Dark Little Secret," *The New York Times*, April, 13, Section B, p. 1, 7.
- SALUTER, Arlene F. and Terry A. LUGAILA (1998), "Marital Status and Living Arrangements: March 1996," United States Census Bureau, Current Population Reports. <http://www.census.gov/prod/3/98pubs/p20-496.pdf>
- SETTERSTEN, Jr., Richard A., Frank F. FURSTENBERG, Jr., Ruben G. RUMBAUT, (2003), *On the Frontier of Adulthood: Theory, Research and Public Policy*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL.
- SHARMA, Ashima, (2002), "The Lure of Generation Y," *Euromonitor International* [http://www.euromonitor.com/articles.aspx?folder=The\\_lure\\_of\\_generation\\_Y&industryfolder=Articles](http://www.euromonitor.com/articles.aspx?folder=The_lure_of_generation_Y&industryfolder=Articles)
- TYRE, Peg (2002), "Bringing up Adulolescents," *Newsweek*, March 25,
- WEST, Elliott, (1996), *Growing Up in Twentieth Century America*, Greenwood Press, Westport, CT.
- WEISSMAN, Rachel (1998), "The Kids are Alright, They're Just a Little Converged," *American Demographics*, December.