

BORN TO BUY: THE COMMERCIALIZED CHILD AND THE NEW CONSUMER CULTURE BY JULIET B. SCHOR

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A groundbreaking exposé of a marketing culture that makes children "believe they are what they own." —USA Today



Juliet B. Schor

Bestselling Author of *The Overspent American* and *The Overworked American*

"This extraordinarily well-researched book provides abundant evidence for commercialization of childhood in our society and offers the first hard research data on the negative effects of turning children into consumers." —*The Boston Globe*

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Amazon.com Review

Parents will be tempted to read Born to Buy as a kind of contemporary horror story, with ever more sophisticated marketing wunderkinds as Dr. Frankensteins and their children as the relentless monsters they create. Indeed, it's difficult to avoid feeling overwhelmed by the avariciousness, omnipotence, and ingenuity of the advertising industry Juliet B. Schor portrays when it comes to transforming preschool kids into voracious, 'tude-infused consumers. Intermixing research data with anecdotal illustrations, Schor chronicles the rapid development of a once-shackled industry that now markets R-rated movies to 9-year-olds. The mind boggles at the notion that Seventeen magazine's target readership is now pre-teens. While Schor unearths a surplus of information on the effectiveness of advertising, she's not nearly as adept at proposing effective responses. Reacting to the power and creativity of the consumer culture with politically unfeasible regulation and parental diligence is a little like attacking Frankenstein's creature with torches. Still, Born to Buy is an eye-opening account of an industry that is commercializing childhood with remarkable effectiveness and insouciance. --Steven Stolder

From Publishers Weekly

According to consumerism and economics expert Schor (The Overspent American), the average 10-year-old has memorized about 400 brands, the average kindergartner can identify some 300 logos and from as early as age two kids are "bonded to brands." Some may call it brainwashing, others say it's genius; regardless of how you see it, the approach is the same: target young kids directly and consistently, appeal to them and not the adults in their lives and get your product name in their heads from as early an age as possible. From TV shows and toys to video games, snacks and clothing, kids today, according to Schor, know too much yet understand too little, sopping up subliminal and not-so-subliminal messages of "buy, buy, buy." Drawing on a significant body of research, including interviews with everyone from advertising executives to the kids themselves, Schor exposes what she believes to be a huge cesspool of materialism, consumerism and commercialization that could be, and perhaps already is, leading to a generation of kids with no concept of what is important and truly necessary in life. By offering up her own ideas of what can be done by parents, educators, advertisers and others to lessen these problems, Schor goes beyond uncovering the problem and

into the realm of concrete solutions.

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Review

"Born to Buy is so grounded in appalling data about both kids and advertising companies, it has the effect of making even the most TV-and-advertising-wary parents among us realize that we haven't been half vigilant enough."

-- Amy Bloom, O, The Oprah Magazine

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-- BusinessWeek

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-- Los Angeles Times

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Marketing targeted at kids is virtually everywhere -- in classrooms and textbooks, on the Internet, even at Girl Scout meetings, slumber parties, and the playground. Product placement and other innovations have introduced more subtle advertising to movies and television. Drawing on her own survey research and unprecedented access to the advertising industry, Juliet B. Schor, New York Times bestselling author of *The Overworked American*, examines how marketing efforts of vast size, scope, and effectiveness have created "commercialized children." Ads and their messages about sex, drugs, and food affect not just what children want to buy, but who they think they are. In this groundbreaking and crucial book, Schor looks at the consequences of the commercialization of childhood and provides guidelines for parents and teachers. What is at stake is the emotional and social well-being of our children.

Like Barbara Ehrenreich's *Nickel and Dimed*, Mary Pipher's *Reviving Ophelia*, and Malcolm Gladwell's *The Tipping Point*, *Born to Buy* is a major contribution to our understanding of a contemporary trend and its effects on the culture.

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Amazon.com Review

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"A wake-up call."

-- Los Angeles Times

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84 of 85 people found the following review helpful.

Scathing Analysis of Marketing Practices

By Amazon Customer

This book is an extended report on current marketing practices aimed at children and their results. The author begins by noting how marketing practices have changed over the last ten to fifteen years. In the 1970s and 1980s, when many of today's new parents were growing up, laws and industry practices provided some level of protection and privacy for children from the focus of marketing campaigns. Now, however, the gloves are off, and marketing firms shamelessly push everything from junk food to beer, cigarettes, cosmetics, and cars to `tweens, children between the ages of 6 and 12. Schor worked closely with marketing professionals while gathering information for this book so that she could obtain insider views. At the end of the book, Schor notes that these marketers generally feel horrible about what they do and the lengths they go to, but feel they have to continue in order to feed their own families.

The kinds of marketing practices that Schor describes in this book are shocking and outrageous. Many parents have heard of Channel One, an organization that puts TVs in schools for free, but parents may not be aware that in exchange for use of the equipment, administrators agree to force students to watch Channel One program complete with commercials while sitting in their seats and with the volume turned on. But force-feeding commercials to a captive audience of school kids is nothing compared to other current practices, such as having children conduct and even surreptitiously videotape focus-group data from friends at slumber parties that marketers pay them to organize. And then there are the "viral-marketing" campaigns, where kid leaders are sought out because other kids think they're cool, and then paid to convince other kids to buy merchandise, or when college kids are paid to sit in bars and pretend to be ordinary patrons while extolling the virtues of a company's alcoholic beverages.

Schor notes that there are now many ways in which marketing messages are delivered to kids. Kids are exposed to ads through viral-marketing, magazines, and radio. But television advertising seem to be especially hard for youngsters to understand and withstand. Marketers know that if they tell young kids that a product is fun or cool, the kids will pester their parents to get it, and they more the kids see the ads, the more persistent they will be with the pestering. Internet advertising is also a great problem for children, since young children have great difficulty recognizing which parts of the screen are filled with advertising and which parts with content. Marketers even embed Internet games with logos and ads, so that the ads are inseparable from the content.

One result of all this exposure to advertising is that kids these days are more heavily into consumerism than ever before. Schor cites a 1997 time use survey in which it was found that American children now spend, on average, two and a half hours each week shopping, which is twice as much time as they spend reading or going to church, and five times as much as they spend playing outdoors. They are extremely brand conscious with their clothing choices, even well before their teenage years. Schor attempted to find how down-shifting families dealt with all these commercial influences on their children, but found that it was extremely difficult to locate down-shifters with children- -apparently, having children in the house who are so exposed to marketing campaigns makes it difficult to avoid over-consumption.

To see how modern hyper-consumerism is affecting children, Schor conducted a research survey among kids in downtown and suburban Boston. She found that the marketing pitches are causing serious harm to children's well being. Advertisements for junk food, sweets, and soft drinks are feeding the obesity epidemic among our children, and the kids who watch the most TV are the ones getting the fattest. Heavy TV watchers also tend to have the greatest number of behavior problems, they have problems getting along with their parents, and they cannot seem to find satisfaction with life, no matter how much they buy. In contrast, in another study conducted by Thomas Robinson in San Jose, California, it was found that children whose TV watching was reduced also reduced their requests for products advertised on TV.

This book is clearly written and very well researched. Sources are cited through endnotes found at the back of the book (but not numbered explicitly in the main text). There is also an extensive bibliography and index. At times, the text can be rather heavy and overbearing, as Schor buries the reader in fact after depressing fact, so it's not exactly a fun book to read. Nevertheless, the material is extremely important for all of us, parents or not.

45 of 50 people found the following review helpful.

I'm convinced.

By Christopher Carstens

I'm a practicing child psychologist, and I have followed the media and their impact on children for a number of years. I found Dr. Schor's argument accurate and convincing. I think the book is a must read for parents seriously concerned about the way big advertising is socializing their kids.

By the way, I recommended the book to my book club -- all men, mostly with children. Me, a child psychiatrist, a lawyer and a bunch of engineer types. Not a group for "chick books." We thought it was one of the best we've read in a couple of years.

21 of 23 people found the following review helpful.

Highly Captivating; A Must-Read for Parents!

By Kirsten Crase

It is no secret that children today wield more consumer power than ever, and that marketers have discovered them as one of the most profitable niches. But what is the real impact of all of this consumer attention on children?

In her latest book, renowned economist, consumer/family studies expert, and founding New American Dream Board Member Juliet B. Schor argues that this impact is detrimental, and something we ought to be paying much more attention to.

Says Schor, "We have become a nation that places a lower priority on teaching its children how to thrive socially, intellectually, even spiritually, than it does on training them to consume."

Indeed, her documentation of commercialization within schools is truly disturbing. And the results of a survey which Schor administered to a sampling of "tween"-aged children strongly indicate that heavy involvement in consumer culture jeopardizes children's well-being.

Ultimately, Schor argues that we need to take steps to decommercialize childhood, and she lays out several intriguing ideas for how to do so. Highly captivating and packed with vivid examples, this book should be required reading not only for parents but for anyone who cares about the future of our society.

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