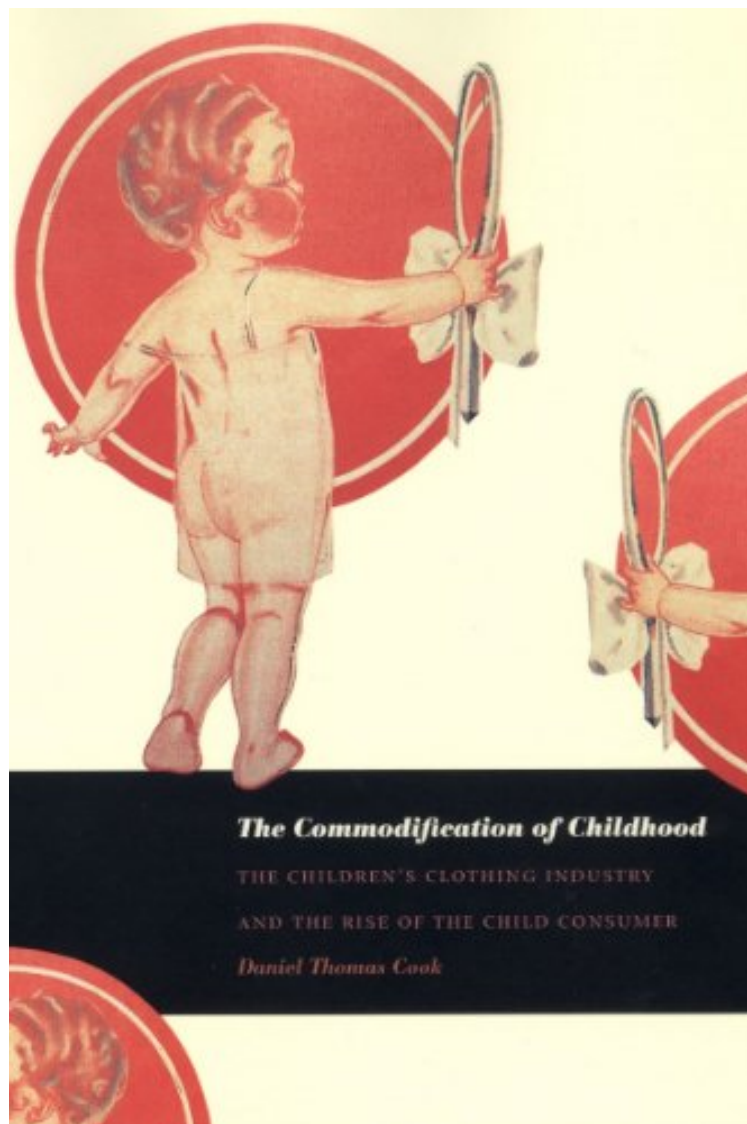


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The Commodification of Childhood: The Children's Clothing Industry and the Rise of the Child Consumer

Daniel Thomas Cook

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Daniel Thomas Cook : The Commodification of Childhood: The Children's Clothing Industry and the Rise of the Child Consumer before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Commodification of Childhood: The Children's Clothing Industry and the Rise of the Child Consumer:

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Cook's TourBy Ian GordonMarketing to children is tricky business.

Just what is a child? Are children naturally innocent? And is it appropriate to direct advertising to children as if they are capable of making consumption decisions? Daniel Thomas Cook's wonderful book guides us through many of these issues as they applied to America in the twentieth century. He discusses competing notions of childhood and motherhood and how advertisers and merchants appealed to an array of sentiments. But marketers increasingly pitched their goods to a child's viewpoint rather than a mother's. This shift, which Cook labels 'pediocularity', decentered the adult view and privileged the child's. In this process parents had to be educated to understand the importance of seeing from the child's point of view. And children still needed to be educated so as to discern quality and value, but the very meaning of quality and value became constricted and tied ipso facto to the market. Cook's sources are trade journals and he makes good use of these sources, but some case studies of particular companies might have strengthened his argument. But as the blurb on the book's back cover says it is 'a must read for all scholars of consumer society'.⁵ of 5 people found the following review helpful. worth the wade through the words

By John Dough-nut

In very academic prose, Cook manages to make the case for his provocative views. He finds in the history of the children's clothing industry in the US from 1917-1962, a growing ethos to see the world from the "child's point of view" (something he awkwardly calls "pediocularity"). In painstaking detail in some places, Cook shows how the growing clothing industry increasingly shaped the fixtures, floor plans and overall design of children's stores to be oriented to kids' viewpoints rather than the mothers'. One result, he claims, is that children have gained the status of persons in our culture because their "needs" and desires are catered to, not just by the clothing industry, but by all parts of our culture--often even over adults. Among the interesting cases are: how the "toddler" was invented by industry and the "preteen" girl in the 1950s as the forerunner of today's "tween." If you are into this sort of reading, it pays off well.

In this revealing social history, Daniel Thomas Cook explores the roots of children's consumer culture and the commodification of childhood itself by looking at the rise, growth, and segmentation of the children's clothing industry. Cook describes how in the early twentieth century merchants, manufacturers, and advertisers of children's clothing began to aim commercial messages at the child rather than the mother. Cook situates this fundamental shift in perspective within the broader transformation of the child into a legitimate, individualized, self-contained consumer. The Commodification of Childhood begins with the publication of the children's wear industry's first trade journal, *The Infants' Department*, in 1917 and extends into the early 1960s, by which time the changes Cook chronicles were largely complete. Analyzing trade journals and other documentary sources, Cook shows how the industry created a market by developing and promulgating new understandings of the child's nature, needs, and motivations of the child consumer. He discusses various ways that discursive constructions of the consuming child were made material: in the creation of separate children's clothing departments, in their segmentation and layout by age and gender gradations (such as infant, toddler, boys, girls, tweens, and teens), in merchants' treatment of children as individuals on the retail floor, and in displays designed to appeal directly to children. Ultimately, *The Commodification of Childhood* provides a compelling argument that any consideration of the child must necessarily take into account how childhood came to be understood through, and structured by, a market idiom.

Blending the sociologist's theoretical rigor with the historian's attention to detail and change, Daniel Thomas Cook offers us a striking and original explanation of how twentieth-century notions of childhood together with new marketing practices led to the modern autonomous child. — Gary Cross, author of *The Cute and the Cool: Wondrous Innocence and Modern American Children's Culture*