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"Aren't They Keen?" Early Children's Food Advertising and the Emergence of the Brand-loyal Child Consumer

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Media Studies

"AREN'T THEY KEEN?" EARLY CHILDREN'S FOOD ADVERTISING AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE BRAND-LOYAL CHILD CONSUMER

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Abstract

This dissertation examines how American food advertisers approached children in the early twentieth century and how this conceptualization changed during a critical juncture that lasted from approximately 1928 until 1945. Prior to the late 1920s, national advertisers acknowledged children as "consumers" (that is to say, eaters) of food and celebrated their idyllic innocence; however, advertisers rarely addressed children as active participants in the consumer marketplace. This perspective changed due to new commercial media platforms, such as radio and comic strips, as well as changing attitudes within the business community. By the 1930s, food advertisers began to communicate with children as a direct audience in a significant, strategic, and consistent manner, effectively positioning children as brand-loyal consuming subjects for the first time. Although parents and consumer activists pushed back against marketers, these groups were largely unable to contain food advertising to children.

This business, cultural, and political-economic history considers the following three research questions: (i) Why, and in what broader contexts, did national food advertisers begin targeting children in earnest? (ii) Using what strategies did these advertisers attempt to draw children into the marketplace as brand-loyal and demanding consuming subjects? (iii) How did food advertisers, their agencies, commercial media, and market researchers grapple with, valorize, and construct children as a valuable audience segment? My analysis incorporates extensive

primary research from a variety of archival sources. I examine advertisements and papers from the advertising agencies that represented key food brands, including Cream of Wheat and Post. I also review the advertising trade press and numerous marketing practitioner textbooks. These latter sources provide a "back-stage" view of the industry and allow me to understand how early advertising practitioners approached, valorized, and socially constructed young people as a market segment.

Keywords: children; food; advertising; branding; consumer culture; advertising history; media history; political economy of media; market segmentation; consumer activism.

Dedication

This work is dedicated to my grandmother, Audrey Nixon. Many admire her wisdom and strength. She also ate her fair share of Cream of Wheat in the 1930s.

Acknowledgments

On an afternoon in August 2010, a University of Western Ontario librarian left his post at the circulation desk to help me search for a lost treasure: *40,000,000 Guinea Pig Children*, a remarkable 1937 critique of children's food marketing. Crawling through dust on his hands and knees, the librarian eventually located the book, which had fallen behind a shelf. The text became the centerpiece of chapter six. This anecdote is a reminder that a dissertation is, first and foremost, a product of people--especially the people willing to crawl in the dust.

A number of individuals have crawled through real and figurative dust for me. I wish to extend my sincerest gratitude to Dr. Daniel Robinson for his efforts as my dissertation supervisor and academic mentor. I first sat down with Daniel in August 2007, two weeks before my first semester as a Ph.D. student. Since that day he has generously devoted time and energy to help me navigate through life as a scholar. A heartfelt "thank-you" also needs to go out to the many other Media Studies faculty, program administrators, and staff who offered support. I am particularly indebted to Dr. Alison Hearn, Dr. Edward Comor, Dr. Nick Dyer-Witheford, Cindy Morrison, and Wendy Daubs. Beyond my program, I must also thank Dr. Matthew P. McAllister for being such an encouraging external examiner.

Scholarships and bursaries from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), the Hagley Museum and Library, the Business History Conference, and the University of Western Ontario made this research possible.

However, funding alone did not guarantee success. My success locating primary sources can be attributed to the archivists and staff with whom I worked during the winter, spring, and summer of 2010. I would like to thank Lynn Eaton and Joshua Larkin Rowley at Duke University's Hartman Center, and Carol Lockman, Marge McNinch, and Linda Gross at the Hagley Museum and Library in Wilmington, Delaware. Locally, I must also acknowledge the many University of Western Ontario librarians who enthusiastically helped with my unusual requests, which also included pulling several hundred dusty volumes of the advertising trade press from off-site storage.

Completing a doctorate was, of course, a challenge. Throughout the process three groups of people helped me maintain enthusiasm and motivation. First, I consider myself lucky to have been surrounded by so many great colleagues and friends in the University of Western Ontario's graduate program in Media Studies. A select few Ph.D. students must be named here: Andrea Benoit, Chris Richardson, Gemma Richardson, Jennifer Martin, Michael Daubs, Tiara Sukhan, and Trent Cruz. These friends provided me with advice, reassurance, and laughs. Second, I would like to thank the undergraduate students I have taught in the Media, Information, and Technoculture (MIT) program. The enthusiasm of both my colleagues and students consistently reminded me that universities remain wonderful places to spend a few years--or perhaps decades. Finally, my family fully supported my academic journey, offering understanding, encouragement, and more "tangible" services like proofreading.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

In November 2010, the city of San Francisco made headlines for a controversial public health ordinance: San Francisco's Board of Supervisors effectively outlawed the McDonald's Happy Meal toy. Supervisor Eric Mar introduced the policy, which set nutritional standards that must be met before any restaurant in the city could offer a toy to children as a purchase incentive.[1] McDonald's Happy Meals were not able to meet the city's minimum standards for fruit, vegetable, calorie, fat, and sugar content. In response to what the Board of Supervisors characterized as a childhood obesity epidemic, San Francisco sought to crack down on the promotional strategies used to attract children to mass marketed, branded fast foods.

Critics of children's advertising as well as public health researchers concerned over childhood obesity lauded the decision. Others attacked the city for being heavy handed and for not trusting parents to effectively manage the desires of their own children. A McDonald's spokesperson indicated the decision went against the wishes of the chain's customers. Radio pundits and political bloggers debated the decision at length. This was one city ordinance, but it seemed to strike at the very heart of contemporary controversies over children's consumer culture. Much of McDonald's success can be attributed to the company's successful consumer socialization of young people. McDonald's entices children to develop a brand preference through

[1] Sharon Bernstein, "San Francisco Bans Happy Meals," *Los Angeles Times*, November 2, 2010, http://articles.latimes.com/2010/nov/02/business/la-fi-happy-meals-20101103. A New York City councilor has proposed a similar ban on offering toys as a purchase incentive for unhealthy foods. At the time of writing, this remains just a proposal.

"free" Happy Meal toys, cartoon-like mascots, play areas in restaurants, extensive television advertisements, online games, contests, and even the sponsorship of school events.

A few months later, McDonald's faced another regulatory hurdle. In April 2011, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) introduced restrictions on the amount of sodium and sugar in foods that are advertised to children.[2] The FTC's non-binding directive asks food producers and restaurants to either make products healthier or cease advertising them to children. Recognizing that the Happy Meal is often *the* target for critics and regulators, in July 2011, McDonald's responded by announcing changes to the content of Happy Meals. New Happy Meals, offering smaller portions of french fries, a fruit serving, and a reduced calorie count, will be introduced across the United States between September 2011 and April 2012.[3] Demonstrating that the company would rather re-invent the product than cease advertising it, the new Happy Meal will still be advertised to children and will still come with a toy.

Concerns over how food is marketed to children go beyond McDonald's and also go beyond fast food. The FTC estimates that food producers spent a record $2.3 billion on advertising to children in 2006.[4] A critical mass of psychology, public health, and policy research has recently been undertaken to understand the role of food advertising. Much of this research focuses on specific marketing vehicles, such

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[2] William Neuman, "U.S. Seeks New Limits on Food Ads for Children," *New York Times*, April 28, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/29/business/29label.html.

[3] Stephanie Storm, "McDonald's Trims its Happy Meal," *New York Times*, July 26, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/27/business/mcdonalds-happy-meal-to-get-healthier.html.

[4] Neuman, "U.S. Seeks New Limits."

as television advertising, Internet advertising, or product packaging.[5] Complementing this body of research, other recent books examine how the powerful food industry creates a "toxic" culture of convenience, cheap-but-unhealthy options, and over-sized portions.[6] Critics of children's food advertising often demand outright bans and some policymakers appear willing to back calls for tighter restrictions.

These controversies drive my dissertation. However, I do not intervene in public health debates directly; rather, I provide a historical *context* for these discussions. Recent reports and publications seldom acknowledge the lengthy history of advertising food to children. Rarely do public health officials and policymakers consider the origins of these practices, how food brands became so dominant in children's commercial media culture, or how children became such valuable targets

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[5] See Lisa Alvy, and Sandra L. Calvert, "Food Marketing on Popular Children's Web Sites: A Content Analysis," *Journal of the American Dietetic Association* 108 (2008): 710-13; American Psychological Association, *Report of the APA Task Force on Advertising and Children* (Washington: APA, 2004); Federal Trade Commission, *Marketing Food To Children and Adolescents: A Review of Industry Expenditures, Activities, and Self-regulation*. Report to Congress (Washington: Federal Trade Commission, 2008); Jennifer L. Harris, Marlene B. Schwartz, and Kelly D. Brownell, "Marketing Foods to Children and Adolescents: Licensed Characters and Other Promotions on Packaged Foods in the Supermarket," *Public Health Nutrition* 13 (2009): 409-17; Institute of Medicine, *Food Marketing to Children and Youth: Threat or Opportunity?* (Washington: National Academies Press, 2005); Kaiser Family Foundation, *It's Child's Play: Advergaming and the Online Marketing of Food to Children* (Menlo Park, CA: Kaiser Family Foundation: 2006); Kaiser Family Foundation, *The Role of the Media in Childhood Obesity* (Menlo Park, CA: Kaiser Family Foundation: 2004); Susan Linn and Courtney Novosat, "Calories for Sale: Food Marketing to Children in the Twenty-first Century," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 615 (2008): 133-55; Juliet Schor and Margaret Ford, "From Tastes Great to Cool: Children's Food Marketing and the Rise of the Symbolic," *Journal of Law, Medicine & Ethics* 35 (2007): 10-21; and Frederick J. Zimmerman and Janice F. Bell, "Associations of Television Content Type and Obesity in Children," *American Journal of Public Health* 100 (2010): 334-40.

[6] See Kelly Brownell and Katherine B. Horgen, *Food Fight: The Inside Story of the Food Industry, America's Obesity Crisis and What We Can Do About It* (New York: Contemporary Books, 2004); David Kessler, *The End of Overeating: Taking Control of the Insatiable North American Appetite* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2009); Stephen Kline, *Globesity: Food Marketing and Family Lifestyles* (New York: Palgrave, 2011); and Marion Nestle, *Food Politics: How the Food Industry Influences Nutrition and Health* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

for food advertisers in the first place. The problem of advertising food to children, ostensibly, goes deeper than recent television advertisements, online advergames, or Happy Meal toys. If the problem is an ahistorical public health and policy debate, the answer lies in historical investigation to help unravel the complexities of children's food advertising and the role children play as participants in the marketplace. As William Leiss, Stephen Kline, Sut Jhally, and Jacqueline Botterill suggest, "to understand the present we must first, so to speak, disassemble it."[7] In doing so, we can also counter what Harold Innis characterizes as society's "obsession with present-mindedness" and the way in which this obsession "precludes speculation in terms of duration and time."[8]

The Critical Juncture, 1928-1945

In "disassembling" the history of advertising branded foods to children, I arrived at a critical juncture, the period from 1928 until 1945. During these years national food brands began advertising directly to children in a significant, strategic, and consistent manner. However, more than food products were sold during this era. Food advertisers provided lessons on how to live in a brand-laden market society; food advertisers welcomed children as brand-loyal consuming subjects.

New advertising platforms were an important pre-condition for the sudden boom in children's food advertising during the 1930s. Robert McChesney defines a critical juncture as a "relatively rare and brief" period in which "dramatic changes"

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[7] William Leiss, Stephen Kline, Sut Jhally and Jacqueline Botterill, *Social Communication in Advertising: Consumption in the Mediated Marketplace*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2005), 17.

[8] Harold Innis, *The Bias of Communication* (1951; repr., Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 87.

unfold; new communication technologies are one common component of a critical juncture.[9] Commercial network radio was available for advertisers by the late 1920s. I use 1928 to mark the start of this critical juncture because this year marks the earliest experiments in children's radio sponsorship and the origins of ad-supported children's broadcast media. Comic strips, appearing in newspaper supplements, rivaled the popularity of radio with children during this period. Food advertisers, two decades before television, enjoyed strong partnerships with children's commercial media platforms. Food sponsors wove their brands and special offers into the content of radio shows and comics; moreover, they produced the radio shows and comic strips. Because toy companies did not heavily advertise to children until the 1950s, I argue that food advertising played a dominant role in the origins of children's commercial media.

However, new commercial media options were not the sole determinant of the sudden rise of children's food advertising. Advertiser-supported youth periodicals reached young people as early as the 1850s.[10] Hence, I also consider why food producers and advertising industry decision makers suddenly took an interest in children during the late 1920s, but not earlier. I argue that it took until the late 1920s and early 1930s to recognize the value of children as a marketing and audience segment, and certain cultural and business attitudes provoked this awakening. A substantial amount of market knowledge was created *by* and *for* food

[9] Robert W. McChesney, *Communication Revolution: Critical Junctures and the Future of Media* (New York: The New Press, 2007), 9.

[10] See Diane Gruber, "Much of Their Tuition: The Historical Matrix of Youth, Consumerism, and Mass Culture as Illustrated in the Pages of the *Youth's Companion*, 1827-1929" (PhD diss., Purdue University, 2002).

advertisers in the 1930s; articles appeared in the advertising trade press on the topic of children as consumers, books were published on marketing to children, and agencies brought in experts to better understand young audiences. During meetings at agencies or in trade press articles, adworkers debated the value of, and strategies for, targeting a child audience. By the end of World War II, as business leaders turned their attention to post-war consumer markets, food advertisers had proven the value of children as a brand-conscious advertising audience.

McChesney argues that during a critical juncture "the range of options for society is much greater than it is otherwise."[11] This was also true for the period in which children's food advertising proliferated. Despite new business attitudes and commercial media platforms, this period saw numerous roadblocks that could have potentially reined in, or even eliminated, advertising to children before these practices fully made it off the ground. First, advertising food to children flourished during the Depression. Food manufacturers turned to children at a time when both consumer spending and advertising investments were low. Second, the 1930s was an important decade for consumer activism. A strong consumer movement gained momentum and Federal regulators debated new policies to control advertising. Parents and critics spoke out against both the quality of children's media and the practices of advertisers inculcating brand loyalty in children. These opponents, however, were not able to contain children's food advertising. Interwar children would become the parents of children during the post-war consumer expansion.

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[11] McChesney, *Communications Revolution*, 9.

Generations of brand-loyal child consumers have followed since. Marketing strategies, including premium offers, contests, character associations, and athlete endorsements, continue today.

By examining the early history of these practices, I offer several insights into the contemporary controversy. First, the consumer and "brand" socialization of young people by food advertisers was neither natural nor inevitable. These practices emerged in a particular time and place and were the result of business decisions as well as cultural, media, and political-economic contexts. Second, by studying this history I can also appreciate the deep roots of certain practices. Limiting children's food advertising in the twenty-first century remains a challenge precisely because food advertisers have played an integral role in the socialization of young people for many generations. Food advertising is deeply implicated in children's mass media, consumer culture, and the very notion of the brand-loyal and demanding child consumer.

Extant Literature

There is a sizable body of academic research on the history of advertising, marketing, branding, and consumer culture. These accounts situate the emergence of advertising within various historical contexts and demonstrate that advertising has been embedded in our socio-cultural fabric for well over a century.[12] While

[12] Among the most widely-cited works on advertising history are: Stuart Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976); Stephen Fox, *The Mirror Makers: A History of American Advertising and Its Creators* (New York: Marrow, 1984); Richard Wightman Fox and T. J. Jackson Lears, ed. *The Culture of Consumption: Critical Essays in American History, 1880–1980* (New York: Pantheon Book, 1983); Russell Johnston, *Selling Themselves: The Emergence of Canadian Advertising*

historians differ on the exact origins of advertising, the topic must be approached as a complex historical process involving both economic structure and human agency. Further, this body of research charts not only the emergence of modern advertising, but also the rise of a larger consumption ethic that forms the backdrop of present-day advertising controversies.

Stuart Ewen's *Captains of Consciousness* places the emergence of advertising within the needs of capitalism. Advertisers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries sold more than goods; advertisements offered meta-narratives on an emerging consumer culture. According to Ewen, early advertisers also had to eclipse values like thrift and delayed gratification to keep consumers wanting more. Advertising then became necessary for the capitalist elite. Demand had to be manufactured to keep up with production and a looming over-production crisis by the early twentieth century. Others disagree with Ewen's framing of advertising's monolithic historical power. In *Advertising, the Uneasy Persuasion*, Michael Schudson suggests that Ewen wrongly assumes that advertisements have the instrumental power to create consumers. Schudson, examining a larger business and cultural context, offers a less polemical social and historical analysis that questions the extent to which advertisements influence human behaviour. However, Schudson

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(Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001); Pamela Walker Laird, *Advertising Progress: American Business and the Rise of Consumer Marketing* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998); T.J. Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundances: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1994); Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity 1920-1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); James D. Norris, *Advertising and the Transformation of American Society, 1865-1920* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990); Daniel Pope, *The Making of Modern Advertising* (New York: Basic Books, 1983); Michael Schudson, *Advertising, the Uneasy Persuasion* (New York: Basic Books, 1984); Susan Strasser, *Satisfaction Guaranteed*: *The Making of the American Mass Market* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989); and Richard Tedlow, *New and Improved: The Story of Mass Marketing in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1990).

does acknowledge advertising's significant cumulative effect, particularly the way advertising articulates cultural desires and creates "capitalist realism."[13]

Other historians occupy positions somewhere between Ewen and Schudson, placing advertising within rich--and at times contradictory--business, social, and cultural contexts while still maintaining a critical view of advertising's ideological impact on a changing society. Susan Strasser's *Satisfaction Guaranteed* posits that marketing, and branded goods more generally, originated from a struggle between producers and wholesalers in the second half of the nineteenth century. For much of the nineteenth century, customers were loyal to grocers, but not brands. Retailers bought goods in bulk from wholesalers who had the upper hand over producers. Using cases such as Heinz and Quaker Oats, Strasser demonstrates how the promotion of modern manufacturing techniques and new products swayed consumers to build trust in specific producers and demand specific brands from retailers, thereby reducing the influence of wholesalers. Food brands, in following, played an important role in turning "customers" into brand-loyal "consumers."

Pamela Walker Laird's *Advertising Progress* documents a similar history where manufacturers attempted to foster consumer "pull" instead of wholesaler "push" to distribute goods and grow profits. Laird places early adworkers in a hegemonic position, promoting the ideology of "progress." Laird sees advertisers as producing cultural change, not simply taking advantage of changes already unfolding. Similarly, James Norris' *Advertising and the Transformation of American Society* pays close

[13] Schudson, *Advertising, The Uneasy Persuasion*, 214.

attention to shifting consumption habits in parallel with the rise of national advertising. Like Laird, Norris shows how advertisers created new lifestyles alongside new products.

Many advertising histories are also excellent cultural histories. Advertising has consistently played a unique role in mediating modern culture. Roland Marchand's *Advertising the American Dream* presents the "therapeutics of advertising," how early adworkers sold goods and simultaneously provided general advice on taste, style, social correctness, and the art of living in an urban culture. According to Marchand, adworkers championed a new fast-paced modern life, but also provided solutions for the stresses and anxieties of this life. T.J. Jackson Lears' *Fables of Abundance* traces advertising through a diverse cultural backdrop of Victorian culture, visual arts, literature, and even religion. Lears highlights the way in which advertisements fostered a kind of "magical thinking." Simultaneously Lears argues that adworkers had to overcome the field's carnivalesque roots with a professional and scientific tone. The rich cultural contexts that Lears and Marchand draw upon make these works superior to historical accounts like Stephen Fox's *Mirror Makers*, which simplistically argues that advertisers responded to, and directly reflected, American culture in the early twentieth century.

Several advertising histories trace the rise of our modern consumer culture through distinct phases. Leiss, Kline, Jhally, and Botterill locate five "cultural frames." The frames show how advertising has shifted from an emphasis on product utility,

to its current status as a core component of late-modern promotional culture.[14] Richard Tedlow's *New and Improved* business history postulates three periods in marketing history: market fragmentation, the mass market, and market segmentation. This body of literature also emphasizes that old practices never entirely disappear. Advertising practices or "consumerist" attitudes commonly cited as emerging in the second half of the twentieth century, including branding, the promotion of "convenience," and planned obsolescence, actually reach back to the nineteenth century. My work, likewise, points to continuities in the history of advertising food to children. Furthermore, the criticisms of advertising are also not unique to the current era. Daniel Pope's *Making of Modern Advertising,* a business history of the development of agencies, examines early consumer activism and interrogates the longstanding issue of "truth" in advertising.

Although children are absent from these histories, there are historical accounts of children's advertising and consumer culture.[15] The history of children's advertising complicates reductionist claims about how capitalism has "colonized," "corrupted," or "invaded" an otherwise-innocent childhood. The process by which

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[14] Leiss, Kline, Jhally, and Botterill, *Social Communication in Advertising,* 205-24.

[15] A shortlist of children's (and youth) advertising and consumer culture histories: Amanda Lynn Bruce, "Creating Consumers and Protecting Children: Radio, Early Television and the American Child, 1930-1960" (PhD Diss., Stony Brook University, 2008); Daniel T. Cook, *The Commodification of Childhood: The Children's Clothing Industry and the Rise of the Child Consumer* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); Gary Cross, *Kids' Stuff: Toys and the Changing World of American Childhood* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997); J. Spencer Downing, "What TV Taught: Children's Television and Consumer Culture from *Howdy-Doody* to *Sesame Street*" (PhD Diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2003); Gruber, "Much of Their Tuition"; Lisa Jacobson, *Raising Consumers: Children and the American Mass Market in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004); Stephen Kline, *Out of the Garden: Toys, TV and Children's Culture in the Age of Marketing* (New York: Verso, 1993); Kelly Schrum, *Some Wore Bobby Sox: The Emergence of Teenage Girls' Culture, 1920-1945* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004) and Ellen Seiter, *Sold Separately: Children and Parents in Consumer Culture* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1993).

the market socially constructs young people is a key theme across historical literature on children's advertising and consumption.

Kline's *Out of the Garden* and Gary Cross' *Kids' Stuff* offer excellent histories of the toy industry and how toy manufacturers have drawn children into the marketplace. Kline and Cross each argue that although childhood is a shifting and relational term, the (Western) ideal of a "pure" and "innocent" middle class childhood was cemented in the late nineteenth century, around the same time advertising and new consumption practices emerged. Child labour laws and compulsory schooling helped to create childhood as an innocent realm separate from the harsh realities of adult life. Throughout the late nineteenth century the home became a leisure place among the middle and upper classes. Without farm chores, children had additional time and energy for play. New child-rearing tactics, such as giving gifts to reward proper behaviour, also benefited toy manufacturers. Children's toys and the subsequent playrooms helped to construct idyllic, innocent, middle class childhood. The Western ideal of innocent childhood, then, rather than being invaded by market forces, is better seen as historically co-constituted by commercialism--particularly the efforts of toy manufacturers. By the middle of the twentieth century, with the arrival of television and the burgeoning spending power of the middle class, toy companies began advertising directly to children; a practice that reached new heights by the 1980s.

Kline and Cross differ, however, in their approaches to history. Cross, a historian, writes a detailed narrative and casts a wide net, incorporating a history of American

family life into his work. Kline, a scholar of mass communication, writes a historical account but also "uses" history to illuminate the contemporary political economy of children's media. Kline's work is normative and prescriptive, looking to history to understand how North American children's television became inundated with toy advertising, the "program-length commercials" for toy lines, and what can be done to solve this issue. I borrow from both of their research frameworks. Cross offers a model of placing children's marketing history in business, social, and cultural contexts; nevertheless I align with Kline's unapologetic interest in the political economy of communication.

Daniel Cook's the *Commodification of Childhood* provides a history of the children's clothing industry. Cook's research, similar to the above works on toys, engages with the history of childhood as a sociological construct, through such writers as Philippe Ariès, Lloyd deMause, John Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Although Cook examines business practices beyond advertising--for example, how retail spaces were designed to make children and mothers feel comfortable--his analysis provides a suitable framework for my dissertation. Cook also demarcates the period from the 1920s until 1945 as important, when retailers and manufacturers had a perspectival shift and began considering their spaces and products through the eyes of children. By doing this, the clothing industry effectively introduced the "child consumer" as an idealized commercial identity, or in Cook's terms, a "commercial persona." He also concludes that marketing practices in the 1920s and 1930s created the commercial persona of the "toddler." We might think

of "the toddler" as an age-salient category backstopped by development psychology; however, it was department stores, targeting the conspicuous consumption of parents of means in the 1930s, which put the word toddler into mainstream discourse. My dissertation considers the idealized "commercial persona" that food advertisers, alongside commercial media, constructed. Finally, Cook's work is useful for highlighting the complex and mediating role of parents in children's consumer culture. Cook and other recent scholars have taken up the dynamics of children as co-consumers alongside the purchasing parent.[16]

This dissertation draws heavily on Lisa Jacobson's *Raising Consumers*. I focus on a similar era and examine some of the same archival materials. Jacobson's work offers a comprehensive account of the historic relationship between childhood and the marketplace. She undertook her project to dispel the myth that the child consumer was a product of television and post-war economic expansion. Jacobson situates the history of children's consumer culture in the late nineteenth century social construction of childhood: the end of child labour, the introduction of compulsory schooling, and the development of peer-based organizations, such as the Boy Scouts. As Jacobson outlines, "even as child labor laws imposed new taboos on the commercial exploitation of children, child consumers were increasingly

[16] For various debates over contemporary advertising to children, including the mediating role of parents, see: David Buckingham, "Selling Childhood? Children and Consumer Culture," *Journal of Children and Media* 1 (2007): 15-24; Daniel T. Cook, "Semantic Provisioning of Children's Food: Commerce, Care and Maternal Practice," *Childhood* 16 (2009): 317-34; Daniel T. Cook, "The Missing Child in Consumption Theory," *Journal of Consumer Culture* 8 (2008): 219-43; Daniel T. Cook, "The Dichotomous Child in and of Consumer Culture," *Childhood* 12 (2005): 155-59; and Allison J. Pugh, *Longing and Belonging: Parents, Children, and Consumer Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

exposed to the selling pressures of the marketplace."[17] Matching many of my conclusions, Jacobson argues that the premiums, games, and contests of 1930s advertisers "trained" children to appreciate ads and to desire advertised products.

My dissertation also departs from Jacobson in several important ways. Jacobson offers a nuanced history of the role of children within the "consuming" American family, such as how parents (as well as businesses) considered children in relation to a rising consumer culture, how children could influence family purchases, and the perceived differences between the "consuming son" versus the "consuming daughter." However, in discussing the multiple roles of children within the consuming family, Jacobson takes a number of things for granted, such as the precise point where advertisers began communicating directly with children, the role of media, and organized resistance. Focusing exclusively on the history of advertising food to children, my work clarifies these points. For example, chapter three outlines two different business paradigms: viewing children as symbols of innocence to entice mothers, and viewing children as subjects in the branded marketplace. Jacobson conflates these two approaches as evidence of the emerging "child consumer." Second, food advertisers played a critical role in the development of children's mass media--particularly with the case of radio--and helped to define and solidify the value of children as an advertising audience. Jacobson treats commercial media as a "given." My work concerns reciprocal relationships between advertisers, media, and children as an advertising audience. Finally, Jacobson offers

[17] Jacobson, *Raising Consumers*, 2.

only brief mentions of the policymakers, parents, and activists who pushed back against advertisers in the 1930s. I devote a chapter to these issues, illustrating the rough waters advertisers navigated.

My analysis borrows from and extends these key histories of advertising and consumer culture, including children's advertising and consumer culture. Food offers a poignant case study with respect to the critical study of advertising. In justifying the emerging field of food studies, Warren Belasco notes, "food is the first of the essentials of life, our biggest industry, our greatest export, and our most frequently indulged pleasure."[18] Selling food is fundamental to capitalist consumption because consuming food is fundamental to human life. Consequently, the history of food advertising reveals much larger debates over our brand-laden consumer culture, media economics, childhood, and social-political regulation.

Research Objectives, Questions, and Key Definitions

This dissertation examines, largely with archival sources, the early history of advertising branded foods to children in a larger business, cultural, media, and political-economic context. Examining food advertising to children prior to television follows directly from my research problem: that current debates are ahistorical. As Kline argues, television is the most visible tip of the children's marketing iceberg; but children's advertising runs much deeper.[19] In order to limit

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[18] Warren Belasco, "Food Matters: Perspectives on an Emerging Field," in *Food Nations: Selling Taste in Consumer Societies*, eds. Warren Belasco and Phillip Scranton (New York: Routledge, 2002), 2.

[19] Stephen Kline, "A Becoming Subject: Consumer Socialization in the Mediated Marketplace," in *The Making of the Consumer: Knowledge, Power and Identity in the Modern World*, ed. by Frank Trentmann (New York: Berg, 2006), 210.

this project to a historical analysis, rather than a historical and comparative analysis, I consider the case of the United States only. While many food advertisers, products, and advertising practices were common to both the United States and Canada, other contextual factors differed. The available archival materials also restrict this research to the study of American advertising.

The following three research questions guide this work:

1. Why, and in what broader contexts, did national food advertisers begin targeting children in earnest?
2. Using what strategies did these advertisers attempt to draw children into the marketplace as brand-loyal and demanding consuming *subjects*?
3. How did food advertisers, their agencies, commercial media, and market researchers grapple with, valorize, and construct children as a valuable audience segment?

These research questions contain several loaded terms that need to be defined. First, the word **consumer** is used frequently throughout this dissertation. The "consumer" is a complex subject because "consuming" could refer to the act of acquiring goods, the act of using goods after purchase, or even the act of viewing media content.[20] A child "consuming" food is certainly different from a child being a brand-conscious food consumer. "To consume" once meant to waste, to destroy, or

[20] Tim Edwards, *Contradictions of Consumption: Concepts, Practices and Politics in Consumer Society* (Buckingham, UK: Open University Press, 2000), 12-13.

to exhaust.[21] As such, consumers were viewed in a negative light. According to Raymond Williams, a neutral articulation of "consumer" emerged by the eighteenth century when the consumer came to signify the purchaser, or customer. But the term consumer is more abstract and means more than simply "customer." Customers exist in smaller, personalized marketplaces; for example, a shopper in a local and independent grocer. On the other hand, consumers exist in large, abstracted marketplaces where producers manufacture goods in large quantities and stimulate demand for these goods, especially goods that go beyond basic sustenance, with advertising. Consumers make purchases because there is pleasure and satisfaction in the very act of buying. Goods, to consumers, become mysterious (are fetishized) because of the increased distance between the production and consumption contexts.

Second, and closely related, is the term **consumer culture**.[22] This dissertation describes how food advertisers attempted to draw children into a modern, branded, consumer culture *as subjects*. Consumer culture is, in the words of Don Slater, "a

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[21] Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976): 78.

[22] I prefer to term "consumer culture" over "consumer society." Tim Edwards, in *Contradictions of Consumption*, promotes the term "consumer society" because he feels those who write about "consumer culture" emphasize the postmodern aesthetics (symbolic systems) of consumption over the political-economic foundations. However, my approach to "culture" is more in line with the work of Williams. "Culture" is the whole way of life, which is directly related to a society's forces and relations of production. As such, I use the term "consumer culture" without downplaying the historical, materialist, and political-economic context of advertising. Furthermore, I associate the term "consumer society" with Zygmunt Bauman's *Consuming Life* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2007) and Jean Baudrillard's *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures* (London: Sage, 1998). For both Bauman and Baudrillard, "consumer society" is a social organization distinct from a "producer society" and unique to the late-modern (or liquid-modern, for Bauman) era in second half of the twentieth century. For the purposes of studying children, the dialectic of a "producer" versus "consumer" society is awkward. I agree with Bauman that the "consumer" is a role to be played and a way of looking at the world; however, when it comes to children, the "role" of the consumer cannot necessarily be defined in opposition to the role of a "producer."

story of the struggles for the soul of everyday life."[23] Consumer culture manifests itself in the quotidian, such as a child demanding to have one brand of breakfast cereal over another. As Lee describes, it is the very "ordinariness" of our consumer culture that makes it an "extra-ordinary and quite remarkable form of social organization."[24] Consumer culture is also the story of *modern* life; a consumer society is deeply connected to the values of Western modernity, for example, individual choice and impersonal market relations.

Following Slater, I define consumer culture as the culture where the defining feature is making purchases in a universal, abstracted, and impersonal marketplace dominated by large corporate brands. In a consumer culture, "core social practices and cultural values, ideas, aspirations and identities are defined and oriented in relation to consumption."[25] Edward Comor argues that, in capitalism, consumption is a sociological institution, a historically constructed and habitual way of thinking and acting.[26] My work draws attention to how food advertisers encouraged children to develop these habits. Advertising is but one promotional tactic that contributes to a consumer culture; nevertheless, advertising plays a dominant role in the way consumers see themselves in relation to a world of branded goods. As Leiss, Kline, Jhally, and Botterill assert, advertising is a "privileged discourse" and the primary

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[23] Don Slater, *Consumer Culture and Modernity* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 1997), 3.

[24] Martyn J. Lee, "Introduction," in *The Consumer Society Reader*, ed. Martyn J. Lee (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000), 1.

[25] Slater, *Consumer Culture and Modernity*, 24.

[26] See Edward Comor, *Consumption and the Globalization Project: International Hegemony and the Annihilation of Time* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

institution that provides "patterned systems of meaning for consumption activity."[27] Consumer culture is a system of material meaning and practices, but arguably these meanings and practices would not become habitual without pervasive advertising.[28]

Third, this work discusses at length how food advertisers **socialized** children as consumers. Food advertisers provided children with lessons on recognizing, differentiating, and staying loyal to branded products. In 1974, Scott Ward defined "consumer socialization" as the processes by which "children acquire skills, knowledge, and attitudes relevant to their function as consumers in the marketplace."[29] Contemporary critics of children's advertising still work with Ward's original definition.[30] However, these skills are not critical ones. The term consumer socialization is not used in the sense of developing "critical" consumer skills. Consumer socialization concerns the development of the "competencies" required to *uncritically* participate in consumer culture. Consumer socialization is a process by which individuals assume their *expected* subject positions as brand-conscious and demanding participants in modern capitalism. Hence, consumer socialization also relates to the notion of children becoming brand-loyal subjects.

Fourth, food advertisers socialized children to a world of **brands**. Following Liz Moor, I define a brand as a "conceptual abstraction"; a brand is a container that

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[27] Leiss, Kline, Jhally, and Botterill, *Social Communication in Advertising*, 244.

[28] Robert Dunn, *Identifying Consumption: Subjects and Objects in Consumer Society* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008), 8.

[29] Scott Ward, "Consumer Socialization." *Journal of Consumer Research* 1, no. 2 (1974): 1-14.

[30] See Kline, "A Becoming Subject."

holds ideas, values, experiences, and expectations.[31] During the early twentieth century, corporations branded products to grow sales through consumer identification, product differentiation, and consumer loyalty. As chapter 3 describes, brands helped to foster consumer "pull" in contrast to manufacturer and wholesaler "push." Brands were particularly important in early twentieth century food markets, where large, oligopolistic manufacturers sold nearly identical products. And, as the remainder of this dissertation argues, food was an ideal product category to draw children, for the first time, into a marketplace of brands.

Finally, I understand **childhood** to be a shifting sociological construct. What defines a child today may be different from what defined a child during the interwar era. For the purposes of this dissertation I do not apply a "fixed" definition of childhood. Rather, I recognize that childhood is shaped by the social, cultural, and political-economic concerns of a society at a given time. Instead of applying a strict definition of childhood, I consider representations of childhood through the eyes of the food producers, advertising professionals, and commercial media during the first half of the twentieth century. The social construction of the "child consumer" by the business community in the 1920s, 1930s, and early 1940s will be delineated throughout this work.

[31] See Liz Moor, *The Rise of Brands* (New York: Berg, 2007), 5. In the late twentieth century, brands--and the discourse of "branding"--have expanded in scope from these earlier goals of identification, differentiation, and loyalty. Brands in the contemporary era, as overarching corporate philosophies, function for consumers, employees, and investors alike.

Chapter Outline

My research questions will be addressed over the next six chapters. Chapter two situates this dissertation within an interdisciplinary theoretical and methodological framework.

Chapter three provides an overview of the history of branded foods, discusses some early twentieth century attempts at appealing to children, and then locates a point of transition: the 1928 Cream of Wheat H.C.B. Club. Prior to this marketing initiative, Cream of Wheat and most other packaged food producers aimed advertisements squarely at mothers, who were charged with the "duty" of selecting food for their children. The Cream of Wheat H.C.B. Club put children in front of the purchasing mother for the first time as the key person to influence; the goal of the H.C.B. Club was to get children to become loyal to the brand.

Chapter four outlines food advertising on children's commercial radio during the 1930s and early 1940s. Radio provided food advertisers with an unprecedented national platform to communicate with children. Food advertisers were the most common sponsors of children's programming during the first decade of network radio. This chapter examines how food producers used radio programs--the likes of *Little Orphan Annie*, *Singing Lady, Skippy, Bobby Benson*, *Tom Mix*, and *Buck Rogers*--and accompanying club, contest, and premium offers to draw children into the branded marketplace as consuming subjects. This chapter also addresses how radio produced children as an audience commodity for food advertisers to purchase.

Chapter five examines food advertising in children's newspaper comic strips during the 1930s and early 1940s. Comic strips borrowed the strategies of clubs and premium offers from radio. This chapter analyzes advertising texts alongside industry discourse, such as the trade press, to reveal how at the same time food advertisers socialized children to the branded marketplace, stakeholders in advertising socialized each other to the value of targeting children. Children were segmented by age and gender, measured, and considered a valuable audience because they were co-readers of comic strips alongside their purchasing parents.

Chapter six discusses the citizens who organized and pushed back against food advertisers during the 1930s. Food advertisers attempted to draw children into the branded marketplace through radio and comic strips during a period of intense consumer resistance. The practices of food advertisers did not escape scrutiny. However, despite the efforts of activists and policymakers, food advertisers could not be contained. Without significant intervention during the critical juncture of 1928-1945, advertising food to children rose to even new heights in the 1950s.

Chapter seven summarizes my arguments and contributions, and returns readers to the contemporary controversy of advertising branded foods to children.

Chapter 2 - Theoretical and Methodological Underpinnings

This chapter reviews my analytic approach, which draws from the theories and methods of media studies, sociology, and history. This framework is premised on understanding the emergence--or rather, social construction--of the brand-loyal child consumer through food advertising. First, I outline the challenges of theorizing children as consumers. Second, I turn to more specific theoretical "tools" that help frame how food advertisers conceptualized and represented children. Louis Althusser's concept of interpellation is used to theorize how advertisers attempted to position children as subjects to a branded consumer marketplace. I also discuss theories of audience commodification, which both frame how advertisers and commercial media constructed children as a valuable segment and spotlight the relationships between audiences, media, and advertisers. Finally, this chapter delineates key components of my method, such as selection of sources, interpretation of sources, organization of material, and historiographical footings.

Theorizing Children's Consumption

Challenges arise when the historical researcher is entirely immersed in data; the amount of archival material available can be overwhelming. This is why a theoretical frame is integral for a successful analysis. Theory can both filter sources and help with the interpretation of them; hence, for this project, theory is an "organizing principle."[1] William Neuman contends that it is "impossible to begin

[1] Arthur A. Berger, *Media and Communication Research Methods* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2000), 140.

serious research without a framework of assumptions, concepts, and theory."[2] Neuman further suggests that, "the interaction of data and theory means that a researcher goes beyond a surface examination of the evidence to develop new concepts by critically evaluating the evidence based on theory."[3] Historical analysis becomes problematically fact-centred and descriptive, a mere chronology, if the researcher does not have a theoretical framework. Discussing the role of theory in media history, Paul Rutherford recommends that researchers find the tools that meet their need for a "frame" and not worry about applying theory as "gospel."[4] Instead of debating about whether a theorist is "right" in all contexts, the media historian should look to theory as offering insights into how "people, their relations, and their artifacts operate in the world at large."[5]

However, a lack of theoretical engagement is a problem within the recent scholarship on advertising to children. Cook argues that "scholars of children and consumer culture," for the most part, "have not attempted to put their work in conversation with extant notions and theories of consumption generally."[6] For example, much of the recent publishing on children neglects the insights of well-established advertising and consumer culture theoretical works, derived from the likes of Karl Marx, Jean Baudrillard, Thorstein Veblen, or Pierre Bourdieu. Cook suggests, "children pose analytic, ontological and epistemological problems to the

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[2] William L. Neuman, *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1997), 412.

[3] Ibid, 414.

[4] Paul Rutherford, "Encounters with Theory," in *Communicating in Canada's Past: Essays in Media History*, eds. Gene Allen and Daniel J. Robinson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 279.

[5] Ibid, 272.

[6] Cook, "The Missing Child," 229.

theorizing of social action--most any kind of social action, economic or otherwise--precisely because their agency, being-in-the-world and ways of knowing are at issue."[7] Children are unique social actors.

Furthermore, children often "co-consume" alongside their caregivers, while many critical theories of advertising and consumption presuppose individual social actors. Cook's history of children's clothing notes how appeals were first made to mothers.[8] Similarly, Cross outlines how the toy industry in the twentieth century leveraged the ways parents were becoming much more self-conscious about childrearing. A distinct "child-improvement" ethos emerged in the early 1900s; psychologists, magazines, and even government whitepapers wrote on the importance of having a playroom in the house.[9] Just as some clothing and toy advertisers sold parents on children's goods, other advertisers appealed to children as a way to influence the spending habits of parents. Jacobson uncovers this early form of "pester power," citing examples of magazines instructing kids how to best pitch to their parents. Magazines often couched these tactics in discourses about promoting "companionate family relations" and "father-son bonding."[10]

As Cross argues, we must consider the "triad of the child, parent, and advertising."[11] Several scholars have successfully investigated children's

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[7] Ibid.

[8] Cook, *Commodification of Childhood*, 42.

[9] Cross, *Kids' Stuff*, 128. In this sense, children do not necessarily "become" consumers; instead, they are already expected as consumers prior to birth.

[10] Jacobson, *Raising Consumers*, 52.

[11] Gary Cross, "Valves of Desire: A Historian's Perspective on Parents, Children, and Marketing," *Journal of Consumer Research* 29 (2002): 445.

consumption while juggling these three parties. Ellen Seiter contends that parenthood is always-already embedded in children's consumer culture.[12] Allison Pugh's interview research examines what children's consumption means for parents. For example, Pugh observes that upper-class parents assert their social status by shielding their children from the excesses of "mass" consumer culture.[13] On the other hand, lower class parents indulge their children in advertised toys and fast food as a way to demonstrate their financial situation is not dire. The triad of the child, parent, and advertiser is certainly relevant for the history of food advertising. Advertisers, parents, and children were always in the equation. As chapter three traces, during the late 1920s and early 1930s food advertisers re-arranged the relationship between parents and children. Instead of parents "pushing" branded foods on their children, advertisers trained children to "pull" for those brands.

Works on children and consumer culture too often fall at the extremes of a polarized debate, generalizing all children as either "empowered" or "exploited."[14] The works of Benjamin Barber, Kline, Susan Linn, Neil Postman, Alissa Quart, and Juliet Schor, among others, emphasize the power of the mediated marketplace and approach children as a vulnerable audience preyed upon by advertisers.[15]

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[12] Seiter, *Sold Separately*, 3.

[13] See Pugh, *Longing and Belonging*, 119.

[14] Buckingham, "Selling Childhood," 15-24. See also Cook, "Dichotomous Child" for an overview of this debate.

[15] Benjamin Barber, *Con$umed: How Markets Corrupt Children, Infantilize Adults, and Swallow Citizens Whole* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2007); Kline, *Out of the Garden*; Susan Linn, *Consuming Kids: The Hostile Takeover of Childhood* (New York: New Press, 2004); Neil Postman, *The Disappearance of Childhood* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1982); Alissa Quart, *Branded: The Buying and Selling of Teenagers* (Cambridge, MA: Perseus, 2003); Juliet Schor, *Born to Buy: The Commercialized Child and the New Consumer Culture* (New York: Scribner, 2004); and Shirley R. Steinberg and Joe L. Kincheloe, ed., *Kinderculture: The Corporate Construction of Childhood* (Boulder, CO: WestviewPress, 1997).

Conversely, other scholars criticize laments about the "death of childhood" and instead focus on how young audiences actively resist, adopt, and use branded messages. David Buckingham condemns the way in which some researchers on the "exploitation" side define children by what they cannot do.[16] In a similar vein, Sarah Banet-Weiser argues Nickelodeon's "kid power" branding fosters a valuable form of active consumer-citizenship that complicates notions of commercialized childhood.[17] There are problems with both extremes of this debate. Consistent with decades-old debates in cultural studies, while critiques of exploitation may presuppose an overly simplistic view of advertising power, theorizing an audience as empowered is equally problematic because it aligns, perhaps uncomfortably, with media industry discourses.

Hence, interesting--though admittedly challenging--research lies in theorizing the political-economic power of advertising while not neglecting contexts or points of resistance. Dealing with both structure and agency is important, as historical research "attempts to systematically recapture the complex nuances, the people, meanings, events, and even ideas of the past."[18] As this chapter concedes, my approach is biased towards the advertising industry's attempt to foster young, brand-loyal consuming subjects. Nonetheless, throughout this dissertation I write about the political-economic power of early twentieth century food advertisers without falling into arguments that they were monolithic propagandists who

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[16] David Buckingham, *After the Death of Childhood: Growing up in the Age of Electronic Media* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2000), 13.

[17] See Sarah Banet-Weiser, *Kids Rule! Nickelodeon and Consumer Citizenship* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

[18] Bruce L. Berg, *Qualitative Research Methods* (Boston: Pearson, 2005), 265.

exploited an otherwise-innocent childhood. I do not assume that any individual advertisement had a direct effect on desires or purchases. Instead, I draw attention to the cumulative social construction of the child consumer. I also provide evidence, for example, of early marketing experts cautioning advertisers to scale back their efforts. Finally, I suggest that advertising food to children proliferated in a particular time and place; a variety of mediating institutions and socio-cultural contexts were also responsible for the rise of advertising (food) to children.

Theoretical Tools: Representing the Child Consumer

Central to my interest in early children's advertising is the process by which food advertisers not only started pitching products directly to young people, but also advanced the very notion of children as desiring and demanding consumers. The previous chapter described how contemporary public health debates surrounding advertising food to children are "ahistorical." I consider them ahistorical in the sense that they focus on specific advertising *practices* and do not see the deeper historical significance of food advertising: food advertising was actually responsible for birth of a certain articulation of the "child consumer." My work foregrounds how food producers, while pursuing their individual business goals during the first half of the twentieth century, socially constructed, represented, and naturalized the "demanding" and "brand-loyal child consumer."

A social constructionist perspective, such as the one proposed by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, offers an appropriate position with which to approach this

phenomenon.[19] The social constructionist epistemology steers between extreme objectivism (positivism) and subjectivism (relativism). According to Berger and Luckmann, we make sense of our complex world through institutionalized ways of thinking and socially constructed language, typifications, habitualizations, and roles. This perspective recognizes that we socially construct the reality of everyday life, but this socially constructed reality acts back on us in ways that are very much real and material. Hence, the brand-loyal child consumer is an entirely socially constructed subject position, a shared "reality" that exists in the minds of the business community, but this does not push me down the slippery slope of relativism, because the financial burdens parents carry and the consequences for food production or the economic structure of mass media are certainly very "real." Two conceptual tools help with specific aspects of the social construction process: the theory of interpellation and theories concerning the audience-as-commodity.[20] Both of these frames deal with how abstract ways of thinking about children are expressed, naturalized, and reified, through advertising.

Althusser's theory of "interpellation" offers a point of departure to understand how early advertisers first recognized and positioned the child as a certain kind of *subject*; a cornerstone in the social construction of the brand-loyal child consumer. Althusser's theory of ideology concerns "ideological state apparatuses," which are supported by a number of non-state institutions, such as religion, education, families,

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[19] Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966).

[20] These two theories correspond with the latter two of my three research questions, as presented in chapter one.

trade unions, media, and culture.[21] These ideological state apparatuses lack central control and function (relatively) autonomously compared to a repressive state; yet, they too play a key role in ensuring the effective reproduction of the dominant relations over time.[22] For Althusser, ideology does not just exist in minds; instead, semi-autonomous material institutions, including advertising, support it. Additionally, ideology is realized in habits, rituals, and behaviours that appear to be free and voluntary--such as a child demanding to have one brand of cereal. This submission happens through a process of "hailing" specific kinds of subjects, or "interpellation." Althusser famously posited, "all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects, by the functioning of the category of the subject."[23]

Judith Williamson's *Decoding Advertisements* is a foundational study of advertising semiotics that draws heavily on the concept of interpellation. Williamson discusses how advertisements "create an 'alreadyness' of 'facts' about ourselves as individuals."[24] For Williamson, interpellation requires an exchange between the reader as an individual and the "imaginary subject addressed by the ad."[25] What is interesting about this exchange is how advertising addresses different people as a singular, unified, imaginary subject. In this research, I pay close attention to how advertisements addressed children as the unified subject of the

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[21] Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001), 96.

[22] Ibid, 100-104.

[23] Ibid, 117.

[24] Judith Williamson, *Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising* (London: Marion Boyars, 1978), 42. Williams uses the term "appellation" instead of interpellation.

[25] Ibid, 50.

brand-loyal and demanding consumer; this was precisely the "subject position" that food advertisers envisioned starting at the end of the 1920s.

Although Williamson studies print advertisements, the interpellation of subjects is constituted in and through discourse. Althusser's work remains relevant for the critical analysis of all media texts, including sponsored radio programs, because they can also be read as speech acts that attempt to position their audiences as unified subjects. Addressing children as unified consuming subjects lays an important foundation for consumer socialization, a term defined in the previous chapter. Before children could be "socialized" to the more specific practices of branded consumption, advertisers had to both recognize and discursively address their young audience members in such a way that children recognized their "role" as a certain kind of subject. Advertising food to children soared when these advertisers recognized children as consuming subjects, and then spoke to them as such.

Kylie Valentine sees Althusser's work as an important--though certainly less optimistic--way to theorize the "agency" of children. Rather than describing children acting autonomously, Valentine sees agency as "inflected with power" and "constituted by the social."[26] On this note, Althusser's theory of interpellation can be criticized for creating a kind of "top-down" functionalism. Advertising audiences, as subjects to the ideology of consumer culture, are not afforded any power to resist. Narrowly read, the theory of interpellation assumes a kind of one-way ideological indoctrination. But this is not how I use Althusser. I do not assume all children were

[26] Kylie Valentine, "Accounting for Agency," *Children & Society* 25 (2009): 7.

indoctrinated, as subjects, by food advertisers during the first half of the twentieth century. In fact, children may have ignored the "hail" of food advertisers altogether. In this dissertation, Althusser's focus on the category of the subject says more about advertising as an institution--as an agent of socialization that seeks to produce certain habits, rituals, and behaviours--than it does about advertising's actual "effect" on children or their families.[27] I use Althusser's theory of interpellation (or "hailing") as a specific conceptual tool to locate the subject of the brand-loyal and demanding child consumer *as a business ideal.* There is precedent in the literature for this specific use of Althusser. Cook, whose work also concerns how businesses conceptualized childhood, cites Althusser to show how the clothing industry, particularly at the retail level, (re)produced children as consuming subjects.[28]

In this work, the concept of interpellation offers an organizing principle to identify, group, and theorize the importance of advertising efforts that attempted to position children as *subjects*. In this sense, interpellation helps to highlight an important transition in food advertising. I cannot argue that food advertisers "discovered" the profitability of children, for food companies advertised to parents with pitches concerning the "health of children" since the late nineteenth century. Rather, what is noteworthy about the period of this study is how advertisers directly addressed children as consuming subjects. A significant shift occurred when food producers attempted to hail children as desiring, demanding subjects. Second,

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[27] Despite this disclaimer, successful sales numbers and "audience metrics" (for example, returned box tops for special offers) demonstrate that food advertisers were, in many cases, successful in reaching children as demanding, consuming subjects.

[28] Cook, *Commodification of Childhood*, 12.

interpellation is useful to highlight how food advertisers sought a unique subject: the *brand-loyal* child consumer. Other manufacturers, though limited compared to food, advertised to children in the first half of the twentieth century. Sporting goods and toy marketers may have also addressed children as consumers, but food advertisers were unique in discursively positioning audiences as brand-conscious and brand-loyal subjects.

However, children were not only *subjects* hailed *by* the market; they were also *objects* placed *on* the market. This brings me to a second set of conceptual tools that help elucidate the social construction of the child consumer: "audience commodity" theories. During my period of study, commercial media and food advertisers extensively researched, valorized, and exchanged (in an abstract form) child audiences for the first time. Several media and communication scholars have discussed how media audiences are imagined groups and a kind of commodity that is produced, packaged, and sold for profit.

In the late 1970s Dallas Smythe introduced the idea of the audience commodity, suggesting that the "true" product produced by commercial media is not programming, but rather, an audience to sell off to advertisers.[29] Smythe argued that

[29] Dallas Smythe, "Communications: Blindspot of Western Marxism," *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory* 1 (1977): 1-27. Admittedly, Althusser's theory of interpellating subjects is rarely combined with Smythe's theory of the audience commodity. Smythe launched this debate in direct response to Marxists being too concerned about media's ideological impact. In other words, he contributed the audience commodity framework t*o move away from* Althusserian-like analyses of discourse, semiotics, and ideology. However, what links both Althusser and Smythe in my research is that they both offer theoretical tools to understand issues of representation--how businesses constructed the child consumer. To reiterate, this dissertation concerns the social construction of the brand-loyal child consumer by food advertisers. These advertisers had an interest in children *as subjects,* but through this, measured, discussed, and exchanged children as audience commodities.

Marxists were too often fixated on the ideological content of media and neglected the material conditions in which surpluses are derived from selling audiences to advertisers. Readers, listeners, and viewers can be "commodities," and specifically, commodities that labour. Audiences are valuable to advertisers, Smythe argues, because they perform a kind of abstract labour: they "work" to create a demand for branded goods in monopoly capitalism. In this sense, Smythe's work is also consistent with the notion of consumer socialization. Advertisers purchase audience commodities; their investments pay off in the long run as these audiences consume, and learn to consume more.

Jhally--who also distances himself from concepts such as "false symbolism" and advertising's direct causal effects--expands on Smythe's framework, describing how the viewing potential of audiences is valorized similar the work of labourers under capitalist relations of production.[30] For Jhally, audiences labour for broadcasters and not the advertisers. If commercial media wish to increase profits, they can either make audiences watch additional advertisements (absolute surplus) or target audiences with greater efficiency, targeting groups for which advertisers will pay more (relative surplus). Jhally's work is important for understanding the economic significance of audience *segments*. Certain audience segments--perhaps children--are more valuable than others to advertisers.[31] Like Smythe, Jhally argues that advertising is a consciousness industry; however, it is not only ideological in the

[30] See Sut Jhally, *The Codes of Advertising: Fetishism and the Political Economy of Meaning in the Consumer Society* (London: F. Pinter, 1987).

[31] Jhally specifically notes children as a valuable audience segment; however, he locates the emergence of this segment decades later than my work does, in the 1960s-1980s "Saturday morning cartoon ghettos."

sense of what media inculcate in viewers (messages), but rather what media take away (the value of an audience segment or demographic).[32]

These theories, important contributions to the study of mass communication during the late 1970s and 1980s, inspired extended debates among scholars.[33] There remains some dispute about whether "watching activity" is truly similar to capitalist labour. Ted Magder also questions how Smythe could write off media content as merely the "free lunch" to attract viewers.[34] Eileen Meehan entered the debate, proposing that because audience members are not actually exchanged, ratings are the ultimate commodity produced by commercial media.[35] Others have followed Meehan, putting ratings and audience metrics at the centre of the audience commodification process.[36] More recently, researchers have applied theories of audience commodification--and audience labour--to social media, mobile technology, and Internet advertising metrics.[37]

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[32] Ibid, 121.

[33] Other notable scholars in this debate included Graham Murdock, Michael Lebowitz, and Bill Livant. For an overview of this extended dialogue, see Vincent Mosco, *The Political Economy of Communication* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1996), 148-50 and Fernando Bermejo, "Audience Manufacture in Historical Perspective: From Broadcasting to Google," *New Media & Society* 11 (2009): 135-38.

[34] Ted Magder, "Taking Culture Seriously: A Political Economy of Communications," in *The New Canadian Political Economy*, eds. Wallace Celement and Glen Williams (Kingston, ON: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989), 278-96. I counter that Smythe did not entirely write-off the ideological importance of program content in his other works.

[35] Eileen Meehan, "Ratings and the Institutional Approach: A Third Answer to the Commodity Question," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 1 (1984): 216-25.

[36] See also Bermejo, "Audience Manufacture" and Philip M. Napoli, *Audience Economics: Media Institutions and the Audience Marketplace* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

[37] For example, Vincent Manzerolle, "Mobilizing the Audience Commodity: Digital Labour in a Wireless World," *Ephemera: Theory and Politics in Organization* 10 (2010): 455-69 and Hyunjin Kang and Matthew P. McAllister, "Selling You and Your Clicks: Examining the Audience Commodification of Google," *tripleC* 9 (2011): 141-53.

Reviewing the debate over Smythe's original proposal, Vincent Mosco concludes:

> Neglected in the debate about whether the audience labors, or whether it is the sole media commodity, is arguably the central contribution that Smythe made to our understanding of the media commodification process. For him, the process brought together a triad that linked media, audiences, and advertisers in a set of binding reciprocal relationships.[38]

The works of Smythe and Jhally are about the relationship(s) between advertising, commercial media, and audiences. Audience commodification theories are useful for this project because they point to other "players" in the history of children's food advertising: commercial media, measurement services, and market researchers. Instead of taking the theories and applying them "as gospel," I find the works of Smythe and Jhally useful for considering how the child audience segment was first constructed for (and by) food advertisers in abstracted, typified ways. Achieving a consensus on the value of targeting children partially explains why advertising proliferated during the 1930s, but not earlier. I am more concerned with how advertisers and mass media grappled with the value of children than if ratings were the ultimate media commodity, whether media content was merely a free lunch, or whether child audiences "laboured."

There is precedent in the historical literature for using the audience commodity concept. Kathy Newman's history of radio advertising takes up Smythe's ideas. She argues that "while advertisers discovered the 'audience commodity' prior to the 1930s, it was under the regime of commercial radio that a new class of intellectuals emerged whose primary job it was to study, rate, and value that audience

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[38] Mosco, *Political Economy of Communication*, 148.

commodity."[39] In fact, Newman suggests that media historians need to look at how audiences were constructed and how value was attached to them. Advertisers "construct" their ideal audience more so than other cultural creators, like authors or filmmakers.[40] Assumptions advertisers made about their audience played a critical role in the industry's historical development. Newman's more liberal application of the theory provides interesting insights into the historical study of advertiser-supported media, such as radio. As chapter four discusses, although some audience ratings services were available in the 1930s, advertisers also measured and valorized their investments in more subjective and ad-hoc ways.

Much of Cook's research concerns how the business community envisioned an idealized child as a commercial persona.[41] As Cook and other historians illustrate, marketers and mass media helped formulate the commercial personas of the "toddler" and the "teenager."[42] Kelly Schrum's cultural history of the "teenager" concludes that the development of the concept "teenager" was "inextricably linked to girls and to the marketplace."[43] Early "teen" media, such as *Seventeen*, helped to construct this link. Today's "tween" identity follows this pattern.[44] These identities--

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[39] Kathy Newman, *Radio Active: Advertising and Consumer Activism, 1935-1947* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 4. For Newman, the audience commodity heuristic also illuminates the dialectic of power and resistance. Newman's work spotlights the resistance against radio advertising during the 1930s.

[40] Susan Smulyan, *Selling Radio: The Commercialization of American Broadcasting, 1920-1934* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press), 6.

[41] See Daniel T. Cook, "The Other 'Child Study': Figuring Children as Consumers in Market Research, 1910s-1990s," *Sociological Quarterly* 41 (2000): 487-507 and Cook, *Commodification of Childhood*.

[42] See Cook, *Commodification of Childhood* and Schrum, *Some Wore Bobby Sox*, respectively.

[43] Schrum, *Some Wore Bobby Sox*, 170.

[44] See Natalie Coulter, "Tweening the Girl: The Crystallization of the Tween Market, 1980-1996" (PhD Diss., Simon Fraser University, 2009).

which can also be considered subject positions in an Althusserian sense--are idealized and abstracted audiences defined only by their economic potential as market segments. These identities, as signifiers of an entire demographic, exist because advertisers and media attach value to them. A commercial persona, as a marker for a larger group of consumers, must have an agreed upon "market value" among commercial media and advertisers; idealized and abstracted audiences are "negotiable currency."[45]

Cook argues that making children "knowable" was necessary to make the child consumer a viable target market and to justify why advertisers should pay to reach this audience segment.[46] Food advertisers both created and required this knowledge. Knowledge of the child advertising audience was based on market research and conjectured common sense assumptions, but consistent with Smythe's original argument, was always concerned with deriving profits from this audience. To the business leaders socializing each other on the value and nature of the brand-loyal child consumer, the child was treated as a "natural" thing.[47] However, the creators of market research were constructing an ideal of the child audience, even when using seemingly "objective" social science methods, for example, polling and ratings. As

[45] Cook, *Commodification of Childhood*, 19.
[46] Cook, "The Other 'Child Study,'" 487.
[47] Berger and Luckmann would argue that this is an example of "reification": when an institutional order or typification becomes "real," detached from its human-created origins.

Strasser describes, "the instruments for investigating markets [and audiences] are also the tools for creating them."[48]

To summarize, from the late 1920s until 1945, food advertisers advanced the brand-loyal child consumer as both a subject to brand-laden consumer culture (expressed in advertising texts) and an idealized segment to be valorized, measured, and exchanged (expressed in "back-stage" industry discourse). Stated another way, advertisers sought children as cooperative subjects in the branded marketplace, but simultaneously, advertisers and other industry players had to agree upon children as a valuable audience--or market--segment.

Method: Approach, Sources, Interpretation, and Case Studies

Leiss, Kline, Jhally, and Botterill argue that the critical study of advertising should be concerned with the "links between texts, social relationships and power."[49] This statement nicely summarizes my research approach. I deal with: (i) texts, including advertisements and other internal industry documents that construct and represent the child consumer; (ii) social relationships, including relationships between advertisers and children, children and parents, and advertisers and commercial media; and (iii) power, the political-economic power of commercial media and food advertisers to engender a new generation of consumers, but also the power of citizens to resist.

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[48] Susan Strasser, "Making Consumption Conspicuous: Transgressive Topics Go Mainstream," *Technology and Culture* 43 (2002): 769.

[49] Leiss, Kline, Jhally, and Botterill, *Social Communication in Advertising,* 274.

Following the lead of other advertising historians, I study advertisements alongside business records from early food advertisers (primarily through their ad agencies), practitioner textbooks, and trade journals. As noted by both Cook and Marchand, these latter kinds of sources represent what Erving Goffman referred to as "back-stage social encounters."[50] Examining how the actors of early children's food advertising discussed selling to children back-stage is necessary to see how the advertising industry opportunistically approached children. Comparing multiple kinds of sources from multiple (archival) locations is also important to validate my findings. Assessing validity in qualitative research presents difficulties. John Cresswell suggests several ways of validating findings in qualitative research, the first of which is triangulation, finding consistent themes across many different sources from disparate research sites.[51]

Consequently, I turned to a variety of primary sources. Three archives were particularly important for this project: the John W. Hartman Center at Duke University, the Hagley Museum and Library in Wilmington, Delaware, and the D'Arcy Collection from the Communications Library at the University of Illinois. These archives hold a variety of materials, ranging from advertisements, to advertising agency meeting minutes, to market research reports and rare practitioner textbooks. I also reviewed every issue of *Printer's Ink* from 1916 to 1950 and every issue of *Advertising and Selling* from 1931 to 1950. These titles were the premier advertising trade journals in the first half of the twentieth century.

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[50] Cook, *Commodification of Childhood*, 18 and Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*, 48.

[51] John W. Cresswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2003), 196.

Additionally, I examined many youth periodicals, such as *American Boy*, *American Girl*, *St. Nicholas*, and the *Youth's Companion*. Further primary sources were daily newspapers, including the *New York Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, and *Washington Post*, alongside periodicals and numerous published by consumer groups. These were used to contextualize the rise of advertising food to children during a decade of consumer resistance. Though less reliable in determining authenticity and exact dates, I also surveyed online sources to supplement other materials. Starting in the late, 1920s food advertisers appealed to children through club, premium, and contest offers. Club manuals, certificates, and a vast array of premiums are still bought and sold on eBay and other collector forums. Finally, "old time radio" hobbyists have created numerous online archives with radio scripts and digitized recordings. When interpreting all of these primary sources, I simultaneously considered business, cultural, media, and political-economic contexts. Secondary sources from various fields of history contributed to an understanding of this wider context.

Radio and comic strips were the two primary media platforms that food advertisers utilized to reach a national audience of children during my period of study. I treat each as a case study. Following directly from the two theoretical tools discussed in the previous section, within each of these case studies I examine advertisements to see how they attempted to position children as subjects, as well as key industry texts to see how food brands, adworkers, and commercial media understood and valorized child audiences--both through audience measurement

and conjecture. These case studies are bookended with two chapters that provide further contextualization: a chapter outlining historical contexts that gave rise to advertising branded food directly to children by the end of the 1920s, and a chapter that discusses those who opposed advertising in the 1930s.

These chapters contain a series of organizational case studies. Case studies of individual advertisers--or individual sponsored radio programs or comic strips--are useful because they demonstrate consistent patterns and practices without overgeneralizing "food brands," "advertisers," or "the marketplace" as singular, anonymous entities. As Strasser recommends, historians should write "not about abstractions but about individual and corporate producers and consumers."[52] I explore the advertisers, agencies, experts, and media responsible for advancing an interest in the child consumer, as well as the specific parties that resisted advertising.

Historiography and Limitations

In sum, this work is a business, cultural, and political-economic history of advertising food to children. My dissertation touches on business history, a field that frequently concerns the way in which marketing leaders constructed and represented consumers just as often as they sold goods. Business historians also consider the larger historical contexts of key periods of corporate change. This work is a cultural history in the sense that I deal with semiotic and discursive

[52] Strasser, "Making Consumption Conspicuous," 763. Likewise, to avoid dealing with corporate power as some kind of abstract force, other business historians have highlighted the agency of mid-level salaried employees. See, for example, Oliver Zunz, *Making America Corporate, 1870-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

representations of childhood. Yet, these cultural articulations of childhood and the family, including articulations from the business community, must also be located in a political-economic context. Modern constructions of Western childhood and parenthood are inseparable from the marketplace.[53] After all, food advertisers constructed childhood with profits in mind.

Although this research engages with both cultural representation and political economy, I do not see the economic goals of advertisers and commercial media mechanistically "determining" (or, conversely, "reflecting") representations of cultural constructions of childhood. Instead, these multiple and mutually constitutive forces dialectically interact in my narrative. For Mosco, a political economic approach to communication should deal with the social totality and see society as "multiply determined."[54] The question of economic "determinism," as Williams argues, is ultimately unanswerable because "we can never observe economic change in neutral conditions."[55] For Williams, culture is a totality of the entire way of life; nevertheless, this entire way of life is also bound by capitalism. Hence, and following Williams once again, I recognize "the diversity and complexity" of culture while taking "economic structure and the consequent social relations" as a dominant force, "the guiding string on which culture is woven."[56]

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[53] See Cross, "Valves of Desire" and Cook, "The Dichotomous Child."

[54] Mosco, *Political Economy of Communication*, 5. Althusser describes this multiple-determination as "overdetermination."

[55] Raymond Williams, *Culture & Society: 1780-1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), 280.

[56] Ibid, 269.

Advertising, consumer culture, and media historians such as Lawrence Glickman, Inger Stole, Ewen, McChesney, and Strasser have all grounded their research in political-economic themes.[57] However, Strasser observes that "as consumption history topics have come into fashion, the political stances that generated them has declined, and many younger historians decline to make political critiques, construct apolitical arguments, or suggest that capitalism is benign."[58] I am not one of these younger historians. My research is political and cannot be separated from my own critical views of advertising and commercial media; I cannot look at advertising history detached from a critique of capitalist institutions.[59] Strasser, arguing against apolitical historical research, surmises "inequality is propagated through consumption." Historians who "shy away" from political themes risk becoming "victims of fashion and comfort."[60]

There are potential pitfalls in approaching history with a political-economic emphasis. Scholars rooted in political economy, Strasser also notes, tend to be concerned with "buying" and not with "what happens to purchases once they are brought home."[61] I theorize how food advertising strategies attempted to draw children into the marketplace, but I do not know what happened to food products or

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[57] See Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness*; Lawrence B. Glickman, *Buying Power: A History of Consumer Activism in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Robert W. McChesney, *Telecommunications, Mass Media, and Democracy: The Battle for the Control over U.S. Broadcasting, 1928-1935* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Inger L. Stole, *Advertising on Trial: Consumer Activism and Corporate Public Relations in the 1930s* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006); and Strasser, *Satisfaction Guaranteed*.

[58] Strasser, "Making Consumption Conspicuous," 766.

[59] Mosco suggests that a political economic perspective should have some element of "moral philosophy." See Mosco, *Political Economy of Communication*, 34-5.

[60] Strasser, "Making Consumption Conspicuous," 767.

[61] Ibid, 762.

premiums once they entered the household. I likewise do not know whether children actually ate the foods they requested, or whether they enjoyed the prize that came with a purchase. Locating resistance presents a similar challenge. Chapter six deals with organized resistance--launched through major publications and organized consumer groups. Unfortunately, I know far less about how individual parents resisted the attempts of food advertisers in their everyday lives.[62] A challenge for the historian lies in maintaining a strong theoretical and political stance, while also "holding to standards of evidence and methods of interpretation that are central to the historian's craft."[63]

Consequently, this research fundamentally concerns how a specific business community socially constructed and represented the role of the "child consumer." Indeed, this study cannot be an anthropological or materialist study of the historical ways in which children (alongside their siblings, peers, and parents) used, understood, and/or resisted food advertising and commercial media. This dissertation in no way attempts to be a "bottom-up" narrative of children's cultures during the first half of the twentieth century. Finding the voice of children is particularly difficult in historical research, which is biased towards examining the official documents of organizations. Most primary sources realistically accessible are from corporations, advertising agencies, market researchers, and commercial media. Unlike adworkers, children living in the early twentieth century were

[62] As chapter four notes, some industry experts spoke about not angering parents with special offers and programming. This suggests parents did resist, but such resistance can only be inferred.

[63] Strasser, "Making Consumption Conspicuous," 770.

unlikely to have left behind many archived documents.[64] Doing interview research with individuals who may have grown up in the 1920s or 1930s would be possible for this topic; however, the limited time, funding, and scope of this project ruled out the possibility of oral histories. By nature of my research questions, as well as theoretical and methodological constraints, this dissertation is limited to the perspectives and goals of advertisers--and not the lived experiences or voices of children or families "on the ground."

[64] For a discussion of the challenges doing historical research on children, see Kathleen McDowell, "Toward a History of Children as Readers, 1890-1930," *Book History* 12 (2009): 240-65.

Chapter 3 - Experimenting with the "Child Appeal," 1880s-1928

> From the very beginning of our work on Cream of Wheat, the child appeal naturally played a very important part in our campaigns. Headlines of the type, "the greatest need of the growing child - energy," and "who is busier than a baby," illustrate the angle which was adopted in this advertising.[1]
>
> We've got to sell Little Gormley--and make him like it. The whole selling edifice is built on interpreting his cereal in terms of things that pique his imagination, that thrill him, that move him.[2]

From the earliest instances of national food marketing, advertisers and their agencies acknowledged children in sales plans. However, as the above quotes illustrate, at the start of the twentieth century food advertisers considered children in contrasting ways. For most of this period, the "child appeal" was an appeal to mothers. Children were considered consumers of food (that is to say, eaters), but not a direct advertising audience.[3] With limited exceptions, advertisers appealed to adults, predominantly mothers, though children may have been indirectly engaged. With this strategy, a food advertiser appealed to parents, who then had the responsibility of convincing their child to eat the product. Cream of Wheat also experimented with an alternative "child appeal": if a child, such as the above "Little Gormley," wanted the brand, the purchasing parent no longer needed to be "sold." In

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[1] Cream of Wheat Account History, 1926, box 5, J. Walter Thompson Account Files Collection, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, NC. (hereafter: "Duke").

[2] Harold Wengler, "Transmuting and Delivering a Bowl of Cereal (Hot)," The J. Walter Thompson News Bulletin, August 1929, box MN5, J. Walter Thompson Newsletter Collection, Duke.

[3] My interpretation here differs from Jacobson, who does not differentiate between children as "consumers of food" and children as an advertising audience. Jacobson sees almost any advertisement featuring children, even ones targeting at parents, as evidence children were being welcomed into consumer culture. See Jacobson, *Raising Consumers*, 21-5.

this model, Cream of Wheat positioned children as desiring consuming subjects who could then "sell" their parents on the brand.

This chapter begins by outlining a history of national advertising, highlighting the series of interconnected developments across several areas of business that created a branded consumer culture between roughly 1880 and 1920. Consumer culture, as a market-based, universal, and abstracted set of social relations, helped to "modernize" society by the 1920s. Food brands played a starring role in this history. With this context in place, I discuss how food advertisers considered children between the 1880s and 1920s. Early advertising attempts were mostly devoid of a strategy to interpellate children and paled in comparison to the amount of advertising aimed at mothers. In the second half of this chapter I turn to Cream of Wheat as a case study to consider the evolution of the iconic cereal advertiser's "child appeals." Cream of Wheat ads formerly "educated" mothers about raising healthy children with the "right" branded foods. In 1928, Cream of Wheat successfully developed a strategy to engage children directly. Cream of Wheat's H.C.B. Club represented a perspectival shift and was a pre-cursor to a children's food advertising "boom" that unfolded during the 1930s. Due to this perspectival shift--which in itself can be connected to a specific cultural context--the food industry saw children less as signifiers of innocence and more as brand-conscious, demanding purchase influencers.

Advertising Branded Foods

The eighteenth and nineteenth century patent medicine trade planted the seeds for "modern" branded goods. Patent medicines were various nostrums and narcotic concoctions promoted to cure real and invented ailments. These products were termed as such, not because their contents were patented, but because of trademarking and extensive advertising.[4] A patent medicine like Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound differentiated itself from competing products via packaging and labeling. With an emphasis on labeling, patent medicines proved early pioneers at branding mass-produced consumer products.[5] This was significant, because nationally advertised and branded consumer products caused a complete overhaul of the way in which people produced and exchanged goods.[6]

The rise of national advertising in the second half of the nineteenth century grew out of a struggle between merchants, wholesalers, and manufacturers, or, as several historians argue, a move away from wholesaler "push" to consumer "pull."[7] Wholesalers held tremendous power in a "push" marketplace, which lasted for most

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[4] Some of these companies even advertised nationally. On patent medicine advertising, see: Laird, *Advertising Progress* and Lears, *Fables of Abundance*. For a more general account of patent medicine history, see Ann Anderson, *Snake Oil, Hustlers and Hambones: The American Medical Show* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2000) and James Harvey Young, *The Toadstool Millionaires: A Social History of Patent Medicines in America Before Federal Regulation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961).

[5] Moor notes that "branding" in the form of monograms, ceramic marks, and furniture marks, predate the industrial era. Because I am considering branding in connection with national advertising, I see the patent medicine trade as the starting point. See Moor, *Rise of Brands*, 16.

[6] A number of advertising histories make this argument, including: Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness*; Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*; Norris, *Advertising and the Transformation*; and Strasser, *Satisfaction Guaranteed.*

[7] Laird, *Advertising Progress*, 4. There is another possible explanation: producers needed advertising to avoid a crisis of over-production. Advertising, in this historical explanation, was necessary to match consumption with capitalism's increased productive capacities. See, for example, Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness*, 51. With this case of food, both of these explanations are valid. Food advertisers needed to both gain control over wholesalers (by fostering consumer "pull") and to ensure mass-consumption kept up with mass-production.

of the nineteenth century.[8] Manufacturers sold commodities in bulk to wholesalers, who then sold the goods to local merchants. Commodities were "unbranded," so at a local grocer, a customer asked for flour; a particular brand, for example Gold Medal or Pillsbury, did not matter. To move goods, producers secured relationships with wholesalers. For wholesalers, who held considerable power in this "push" commodity chain, only grade and price mattered. Producers could only compete based on prices, limiting their power to grow profits.[9]

During the last two decades of the nineteenth century manufacturers attempted to gain control of the supply chain in order to "regulate" and better predict profit margins.[10] Around this time manufacturers were making large capital investments in machinery and labour; these companies would fold without a predictable, unimpeded, national distribution. Consequently, many food producers shifted to selling goods in individual, branded packages. The goal was to develop a marketplace where individual shoppers recognized and developed a loyalty towards specific brands. Customers would then enter a grocer demanding Quaker Oats or Gold Medal flour and not generic categories of these staples. "Customers" had to become brand-conscious and demanding "consumers."[11] Merchants, then, had to stock their stores with specific brands or risk losing patrons. Grocers could no longer order only the cheapest oats or flour from their wholesaler. Advertising also had to promote these brands; branded, individual packages alone were not enough

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[8] Strasser, *Satisfaction Guaranteed*, 19.

[9] James R. Beniger, *The Control Revolution: Technological and Economic Origins of the Information Society* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), 346-49.

[10] Moor, *Rise of Brands*, 18.

[11] Strasser, *Satisfaction Guaranteed*, 15.

to stimulate sufficient consumer pull. Wholesalers and manufacturer sales teams put products on the shelves, but advertising was considered superior to sales forces because it created the demand to pull products *off the shelves*.

Food and beverage makers placed an increasing emphasis on advertising with print ads and trade cards throughout the 1880s and 1890s.[12] Nineteenth century advertiser trade cards displayed a brand name with full-colour illustrations on the front. The reverse side included retailer information or an invitation to write the company for additional information. The Washburn Crosby Company of Minneapolis--which after other acquisitions became General Mills in 1928--began advertising Gold Medal flour nationally in the 1890s with print ads and trade cards. These ads communicated both the benefits of the brand, as well as reasons to trust only branded products. A Gold Medal flour trade card, circa 1900, displayed an innocent boy "riding" a barrel of Gold Medal-labeled flour. The reverse side of this card contained a stern warning to consumers to "beware of counterfeits." The text cautioned: "Washburn, Crosby Co. are the original and only manufacturers of genuine 'Gold Medal' flour." The card warned that "the brand is being imitated," promoting vigilance and reinforcing the popularity of Gold Medal. In order for consumers to not "allow this fraud to be practiced" on them and walk away with "inferior grade" flour, they had to "see that Washburn, Crosby Co.'s brand is on each

[12] On advertising trade cards, see: Thomas Beckman "Japanese Influences on American Advertising Card Imagery," *Journal of American Culture* 19 (1996): 7-21; Jennifer M. Black, "Corporate Calling Cards: Advertising Trade Cards and Logos in the United States, 1876-1890," *Journal of American Culture* 32 (2009): 291-306; Margaret E. Hale, "The Nineteenth-Century American Trade Card," *The Business History Review* 74 (2000): 683-89; Laird, *Advertising Progress,* 69-94; and Strasser, *Satisfaction Guaranteed*, 166.

barrel and sack."[13] The refrain of avoiding inferior imitations of products was prevalent in advertising texts around the turn of the twentieth century as manufacturers sought to encourage consumer "pull" for brands.

A number of other factors contributed to the rise of mass-marketed branded foods. Around the turn of the century, packaged, branded goods "came to represent and embody the new networks and systems of production and distribution," defined by Strasser as "the social systems that brought people the things they used."[14] The spread of the telegraph, telephone, and railroad networks allowed food corporations to do business in a truly national marketplace.[15] Food producers mastered continuous-line canning in the 1880s and 1890s, alongside other packaging innovations, including cardboard boxes and glass containers. The National Biscuit Company's president, Adolphus Green, suggested in 1905 that packaged goods "raise food standards."[16] In addition to helping keep products fresh during transportation and storage, packaging became an effective sales tool. Packaging allowed producers to attach their brand to products, as it was easier to print on cardboard than wood crates or barrels. This further reduced the control of individual shopkeepers, because grocers no longer had the responsibility of

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[13] Gold Medal Flour Trade Card, circa 1900, box 17, Advertising Ephemera Collection, Duke.

[14] Strasser, *Satisfaction Guaranteed*, 15.

[15] Beniger, *Control Revolution*, 248-78. See also James W. Carey, *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 201-30, for a seminal discussion of the telegraph's spatial and temporal significance in changing markets.

[16] William Cahn, *Out of the Cracker Barrel: The Nabisco Story, From Animal Crackers to Zuzus* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1969), 120.

measuring, weighing, packaging, and even pricing.[17] Self-service grocery shopping, where packaged products were displayed on shelves (with standardized prices) for consumers to handle themselves, also afforded consumers considerable "pull" power.[18] Grocers did less selling when consumers entered a store with a branded product in mind, often advertised for an exact price.

Business organization also changed around the turn of the century.[19] In the nineteenth century the railroad industry was among the first to develop tiered management and multiple layers of administrators to coordinate an enterprise with employees dispersed across the nation.[20] Food producers, along with other corporations, followed this model with complex management structures.[21] Waves of mergers simultaneously created vertically integrated holding companies. Advertising messages changed accordingly. Advertising trade cards of the nineteenth century often included industrial images of factories and, in many cases, information on the owner-managers. Such imagery, Laird theorizes, was the result of an owner making all advertising decisions and hence a desire for the owner to promote their capital assets--a kind of "conspicuous production."[22] By the start of the twentieth century, advertising messages began to portray a corporate brand image separate from both production facilities and the identity of owners. Quaker

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[17] Diana Twede, "Cereal Cartons, Tin Cans and Pop Bottles: Package-Converting Technologies that Revolutionized Food and Beverage Marketing, 1879-1902," *Conference on Historical Analysis & Research in Marketing* (2009): 273.

[18] Laird, *Advertising Progress*, 198-9.

[19] See Alfred D. Chandler Jr., *The Visible Hand: Managerial Revolution in American Business* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1977) and Alfred D. Chandler Jr., *Scale and Scope: The Dynamics of Industrial Capitalism* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1990).

[20] Chandler, *Scale and Scope*, 94-109.

[21] See Zunz, *Making America Corporate*.

[22] Laird, *Advertising Progress*, 107.

Oats, with the fictional Quaker trademark character, epitomized this change. Through conscious branding choices Quaker developed a "corporate soul" separate from any individual businessperson.[23]

Advertising agencies played an important role in this change. The earliest advertising agents represented publications, often newspapers. These individuals functioned as "space jobbers" who sought to drum up advertising sales for the publications for which they brokered. Until roughly the 1890s, individual corporations designed their own advertising creative materials. As large companies began carving out brand identities, demand for advertising professionals followed. Full-service advertising agencies took control of advertising plans and branding strategies from the powerful owner-managers.[24] Full-service advertising agencies, such as N.W. Ayer & Son in Philadelphia, offered additional services, including advertising design and copywriting, by 1892. These agencies largely replaced the space jobbers during the first two decades of the twentieth century. During this same period, various advertising leaders sought to "professionalize" the industry in order to distance the public perception of adverting from its patent medicine and P.T. Barnum carnivalesque roots.[25] Regional advertising clubs were founded alongside local "vigilance committees" that monitored the practices of peers and

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[23] Roland Marchand's *Creating the Corporate Soul: The Rise of Public Relations and Corporate Imagery in American Big Business* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988) describes the internal and external attempts made by corporations around the turn of the century to shift images away from "masculine" and "production-oriented" images.

[24] Laird, *Advertising Progress*, 160-77.

[25] Lears, *Fables of Abundance*, 46-53.

assured the public of advertising's new, supposedly responsible, ways.[26] Between 1900 and 1910 agencies (and periodicals) also dropped alcohol and patent medicine accounts to foster consumer trust in advertising.[27]

Food brands relied on national advertising and the services of this newly "professionalized" ad industry during the early twentieth century. Food producers, for example, Crisco and Quaker, were some of the first national advertisers.[28] Food companies were able to produce immense quantities of goods with continuous-line production by the end of the Second Industrial Revolution, at the turn of the twentieth century. James Beniger describes how advertising and branding were utilized to "control" consumption in order to avoid over-production.[29] In an effort to make consumption keep up with production, selling branded food became *big business*. From 1900 to 1920, food was advertised more than any other product; by 1919, food represented 38.2 percent of American family budgets, higher than clothing and shelter combined.[30] Families of all classes needed to consume some kind of food. The challenge for advertisers was to convince families to purchase as many branded, packaged foods as possible. For example, Aunt Jemima, which hired J. Walter Thompson (hereafter, "JWT") as its agency 1909, had the challenge of convincing customers to buy pancake mix instead of making their own pancakes

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[26] Stole, *Advertising on Trial*, 58-65.

[27] Pamela Walker Laird, "From Success to Progress: The Professionalization and Legitimization of Advertising Practitioners, 1820-1920," *Business & Economic History* 21 (1992): 307-16.

[28] For a history of both Crisco and Quaker as innovating food brands, see Terri Lonier, "Alchemy in Eden: Entrepreneurialism, Branding, and Food Marketing in the United States, 1880-1920" (PhD diss., New York University, 2009).

[29] Beniger, *Control Revolution*, 271.

[30] Daniel Starch. *Principles of Advertising* (New York: A.W. Shaw Company, 1923), 134.

from scratch. JWT had to sell potential consumers on not only the brand, but also the very practice of making pancakes from a mix.

Advertisers ushered in new urban lifestyles and new product categories in the early twentieth century. Immigration and urbanization brought millions to cities and towns. In 1900, over a third of Americans lived in towns or cities of eight thousand or more; New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia had over one million residents.[31] In 1920, for the first time, the United States Census Bureau reported that more Americans lived in towns and cities than in rural areas. To sell nationally branded products, advertisers invented and promoted new "urban" habits. Colgate educated consumers on the benefits of brushing teeth, while Gillette introduced the disposable razor, a substitute for what used to be a professional service.[32] Laird and Marchand argue that advertisers advanced the ideologies of "progress" and "modernity" through the promotion of consumption. Marchand characterizes advertising professionals of the 1920s as "apostles of modernity" because of their "parables" on modern living.[33]

The emergence of children as participants in the marketplace must be contextualized within this broader history of advertising national brands. Food advertising strategies required continuous fine-tuning. Agencies experimented with, and frequently boasted about, new techniques to promote the sales of branded foods. The demanding child consumer emerged, as the remainder of this chapter

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[31] *Twelfth Census of the United States, Taken in the Year 1900* (Washington, DC: United States Census Office, 1901), lviii–lix.

[32] Strasser, *Satisfaction Guaranteed*, 97.

[33] Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*, 13.

delineates, in an effort to develop stronger consumer "pull" and further entrench brands within the household. By the end of the 1920s, several food advertisers pinpointed the ability of children to create a "pull" dynamic *within* the middle class consuming family.

Breakfast Cereals and Children

Breakfast cereals, invented in the late nineteenth century, were an important part of this "new" consumer culture, the rise of branded foods, and one of the most significant product categories linking children to the marketplace. This begs the question: what was it about breakfast cereal that made it an ideal product to initiate children to a branded consumer culture, and introduce national advertisers and commercial media to the value of children? A brief history of breakfast cereal--and the meal of breakfast--provides some insights.

Breakfast cereal, as a mass-manufactured category of food, emerged in the 1890s amidst a strange convergence of business, health, moral, and religious concerns. For most of the nineteenth century "breakfast" consisted of red meat and pork that was left over from the previous evening's meal. Consuming these kinds of foods caused gas and bloating. Such consequences captured the attention of some religious leaders, who understood and preached about the relationship between "good food and good health."[34] Vegetarianism was promoted in several religious organizations, including the Seventh-Day Adventist Church.

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[34] Scott Bruce and Bill Crawford, *Cerealizing America: The Unsweetened Story of American Breakfast Cereal* (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1995), 4.

Dr. J.H. Kellogg was a Seventh-Day Adventist who operated the church-owned Battle Creek Michigan Sanitarium. Opened in 1866 in a farmhouse, the Sanitarium expanded over the following decades to a large complex where visitors with various ailments experienced a vegetarian diet, calisthenics, gymnastics classes, steam baths, cold showers, and even a high-powered enema machine. J.H. Kellogg obsessed over the human digestive tract and claimed the bowels must move at least twice per day. He believed that red meat at breakfast coupled with constipation caused a build up of sexual energy in the genitals, leading to masturbation. He famously claimed that "self-gratification" was worse for humanity than wars, the plague, or small pox. To advance public health and eliminate such "animal propensities," Kellogg experimented with bland grain-based products as an ideal breakfast food, which eventually resulted in Kellogg's Corn Flakes in 1895.[35] J.H. Kellogg's brother, William Keith (W.K.), handled most of the company's business affairs.[36] Battle Creek was the epicenter of breakfast cereal because of J.H.'s food experiments at the sanitarium and W.K.'s business savvy. W.K. Kellogg believed steadfastly in advertising. Within a decade, dozens of cereal brands were being produced in Battle Creek by a variety of opportunistic copycats. As a response to the flurry of nearly identical products, Kellogg began emphasizing the Kellogg brand; Corn Flakes packages all included the signature of W.K. Kellogg.

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[35] Thomas Green, "Tricksters and the Marketing of Breakfast Cereals," *Journal of Popular Culture* 40 (2007): 52.

[36] See Horace B. Powell, *The Original has this Signature: W. K. Kellogg* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1956) for a biography of W.K. Kellogg's as a businessman.

Post was the most successful copycat. In 1895, Charles William (C.W.) Post founded the Postum Company and soon after became one of Kellogg's greatest competitors.[37] Several years earlier, C.W. Post had sought treatment at the Battle Creek Sanitarium where he witnessed J.H. Kellogg's early cereal experiments between 1891 and 1895. He first sold Postum late in 1895 (a caffeine free coffee substitute) and two years later, his own breakfast cereal called Grape-Nuts. Postum and Grape-Nuts were produced "to meet a well-defined need of humanity."[38] Post was an astute entrepreneur who invested significantly in advertising and saw the business potential in health. He claimed that "good health can be turned into money-making."[39] Out of an "unprecedented mix of cultural and dietary forces" cereal was born, leading over time to a recasting of breakfast, especially for children and youth.[40] But business forces equally affected the emergence of the breakfast cereal industry. Cereal, because it was less prone to spoil compared to various fresh foods, was also a product that was easy to package and transport to retailers; cereal was an ideal early packaged food item for manufacturers, distributors, and retailers alike.

The history of breakfast cereal demonstrates that breakfast was, relatively speaking, a "newly invented" meal. It was not until the turn of the twentieth century that distinct foods were made available for this meal. As a recent cultural invention, even through the 1920s and 1930s, children may have been able to exert greater

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[37] See Peyton Paxson, "Charles William Post: The Mass Marketing of Health and Welfare" (PhD Diss., Boston University, 1993).

[38] Postum Cereal Company, *There's A Reason* (Battle Creek, MI: Postum Cereal Company, 1914), 25.

[39] Ibid, 17.

[40] Green, "Tricksters," 50.

influence over purchases. Eating breakfast cereal was a new enough practice that children did not have to compete against cultural traditions passed through generations about what was a "proper" meal.[41] Lacking this cultural "baggage," the psychologist-turned-market researcher Ernest Dichter claimed that breakfast was a meal for which children's individual preferences could be "respected without too much trouble."[42] "Giving in" to a child's request for a particular breakfast cereal did not cause parents undue stress because, as long as breakfast consisted of cereal, the meal did not need to be planned and prepared in advance. Dichter's research also claimed children themselves enjoyed the freedom associated with pouring their own bowl of cold cereal. The ease of cereal preparation, even for hot cereals, became important as the use of domestic servants decreased between 1890 and 1920, and dropped even further during the Depression.[43]

Cereals were also ideal packaged foods to socialize children to consumer culture because they were relatively cheap to buy and intended to be eaten regularly. Even in the context of the Depression, purchasing a box of breakfast cereal did not necessarily constitute an "excessive" indulgence.[44] Compared to confectionary products, toys, or clothing, children were more likely to exert influence over the purchase of breakfast cereal. Additionally, cereal was one of few foods intended to

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[41] This supports Comor's suggestion that cultural habits and traditions are obstacles to the expansion of consumer culture. See Comor, *Consumption and the Globalization Project*, 10.

[42] The Psychology of Breakfast Cereals," 18, n.d. box 1, report #9, Ernest Dichter Papers, Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, DE. (hereafter: "Hagley")

[43] Steven Mintz and Susan Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions: A Social History of American Family Life* (New York: Free Press, 1988), 124.

[44] During the 1930s, most boxes of brand-name cereal sold for 15 to 25 cents. Some advertisements announced boxes on sale for 10 cents.

be consumed daily. Breakfast was--and remains today--the only meal where Americans will eat the same thing almost every day. Breakfast has always been a meal of routine; this means routine purchases. As such, brand loyalty was considerably important. Toys may have been purchased only on occasion, or, depending on a family's financial circumstance, not at all. Cereal, however, offered a daily reminder for children that they lived in a branded society and they could exert their preferences as consuming subjects. The branded box may have even been visible at the table as children ate. In 1957, Eugene Gilbert wrote that most food companies were "newcomers to the bandwagon of merchandising to children," but noted the exception of breakfast cereal makers who had mastered these strategies decades prior.[45]

The success of one brand of cereal over another in the early twentieth century can almost entirely be attributed to advertising. Pre-sweetened cold cereal (cereal baked in a sugar coating) debuted with Sugar Crisp and several other competing products at the very end of the 1940s. Until this time there was nothing "child-friendly" about the actual product. Cereal did not contain fun shapes, a variety of colours, or sweet marshmallows. There was nothing child friendly about the actual, shape, texture or taste of Post Huskies or 40% Bran Flakes.[46] Cereals were nearly identical, produced by a few large companies, and sold for similar prices in an

[45] Eugene Gilbert, *Advertising and Marketing to Young People* (Pleasantville, NY: Printers' Ink Publishing Company, 1957), 64.

[46] Perhaps the most "child friendly" cereal to appear at grocers during the 1930s was Kellogg's Rice Krispies. Rice Krispies debuted at a time when a number of puffed cereals competed for attention. The cartoon characters Snap, Crackle, and Pop first appeared in 1933. These characters emphasized the "fun" sounds the cereal made.

oligopolistic marketplace. Advertising and branding sold cereal, supporting Stole's argument that oligopolistic markets are the "gasoline that fuels the flames of modern advertising."[47]

Trade Cards, Contests, Premiums, and Periodicals

From the 1880s until the 1920s, several food advertisers, including cereal makers, experimented with advertising efforts that appealed, even if indirectly, to children. I consider these "experiments" because advertisers lacked well-developed strategies to capture the interests of children as an audience. Although these efforts were limited and isolated, they are worth noting as precursors to the direct advertising practices that will be described in later chapters.

One of the earliest ways food advertisers made a connection with children was through advertiser trade cards. Jacobson documents how children enjoyed collecting, trading, and scrapbooking the whimsical trade cards produced in the 1880s and 1890s.[48] For example, in the 1890s Wing's Eclipse Baking Powder produced a series of four trade cards that told a story of a frog attempting to steal an egg from a duck. All four cards were needed to understand the story. Other trade cards from the 1890s included fantasy images of animals playing musical instruments. Although several historians have noted how children collected these

[47] Stole, *Advertising on Trial*, 4.
[48] Jacobson, *Raising Consumers*, 20.

trade cards, there is little evidence to suggest that food companies produced the cards with the goal of appealing to children.[49]

On the other hand, Egg-O-See, a flaked wheat cereal, ran a drawing contest for children in the spring of 1905. The contest asked children to illustrate famous rhymes, such as "There was an Old Woman who Lived in a Shoe" or "Simple Simon" (Figure 3-1). A series of newspaper ads in Washington, Philadelphia, and New York promoted the contest. Each ad included a winning child's drawing, with a caption noting the age and city of the contributor.[50] A prize of five dollars was given to entrants if Egg-O-See published the drawing with hundreds of cash prizes awarded. A *Washington Post* article covering the promotion referred to it as "the most unique that has ever come to our attention" because Egg-O-See sought the help of children to create ads.[51] The ads informed readers that full contest instructions could be found on Egg-O-See packages. With copy in each ad instructing readers, "if your grocer does not keep [Egg-O-See], send us his name and 10 cents and we will send you a package, prepaid," this promotion was an attempt to foster consumer "pull."[52] Egg-O-See claimed to have received up to three thousand drawings from children in a single day. The company asked children to interact with the brand, and even rewarded children with prizes. This initiative was also noteworthy for balancing a

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[49] For discussions on how children traded and scrapbooked trade cards, see: Jennifer M. Black, "Corporate Calling Cards"; Ellen Gruber Garvey, *The Adman in the Parlor: Magazines and the Gendering of Consumer Culture, 1880s-1910s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 16-50; Laird, *Advertising Progress*, 36; and Strasser, *Satisfaction Guaranteed*, 166.

[50] The entrant who submitted the "Simple Simon" drawing was 15 years old, which showed how food advertisers considered a wide range of ages to be "children."

[51] "Wins the First Prize," *Washington Post*, April 2, 1905, 8. This article was clearly biased and represented a very early example of a breakdown between editorial content and advertising.

[52] Egg-O-See advertisement in *Washington Post*, March 7, 1905, 9.

sense of individualism (creating custom ads) with the "new" consumer culture of mass-produced branded products, and mass advertising. However, this one-off promotion fell short of being a children's advertising effort because the ads that publicized the contest were all directed at parents in the *Washington Post* and *New York Times*. Egg-O-See engaged children, but advertised *to* parents to initially reach these children.

Figure 3-1. Egg-O-See "Simple Simon" contest advertisement in *Washington Post,* May 21, 1905, E3.

Other food companies appealed to children by offering premiums, "free" gifts, with a product purchase.[53] Once again, these offers were communicated to the parents, but children may have benefited from the premium itself after the purchase was made. In 1915, the H.J. Heinz Company of Pittsburgh offered a notable children's picture book, *The Story of Peanutville: A Tale for Little Children*, with peanut butter purchases (Figure 3-2). This promotion appealed to a younger audience than that for Egg-O-See's contest. The inside cover of the book read: "The story is simply told in the hope that even the littlest ones may understand the care that is exercised in making this delightful, wholesome and highly nutritive food."[54] The story told the tale of "Peanutville," a town where happy peanuts dwelled with city streets paved out of "shell." Once per month a "Pure Food Man" came to town to select the finest peanuts for Heinz. Peanuts competed in various activities, including pole vaults and races, to attract the Pure Food Man's attention. The peanut selection process was told in the following rhyme:

> The little peanuts all line up
> and gaily hand in hand
> they step out to the music of
> the Peanutville Brass Band
> the Pure Food Man then acts as judge
> 'tis he who reviews the lines
> and picks the finest peanuts out
> to go with him to Heinz.

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[53] On premiums, see: Laird, *Advertising Progress*, 55; Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*, 75; Strasser, *Satisfaction Guaranteed*, 164. Premiums were also offered to retailers. For a discussion of these premiums, see Daniel J. Robinson, "Marketing Gum, Making Meanings: Wrigley in North American, 1890-1930," *Enterprise & Society* 5 (2004): 4-44.

[54] H.J. Heinz Co., *The Story of Peanutville: A Tale For Little Children* (Pittsburgh, PA: H.J. Heinz Co., 1915), 2. Duke.

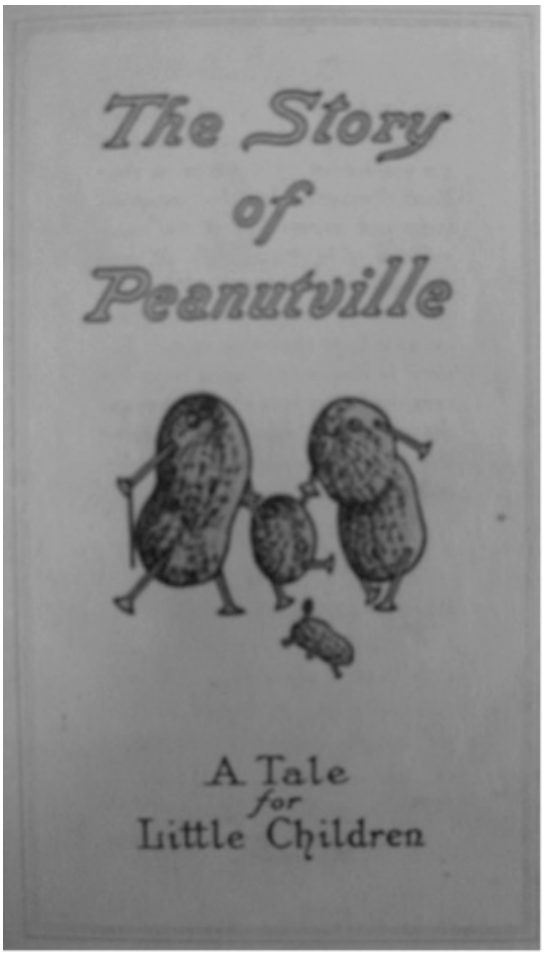

Figure 3-2. Heinz produced *Peanutville* storybook, 1915, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, NC.

The Heinz Peanutville story was less of an advertisement directed at children and more of a value-added offer to foster goodwill in the eyes of parents. The premium helped to convince a *parent* to buy Heinz peanut butter over a competing brand. Parents themselves could even be "educated" on Heinz quality standards by reading the book to their children. A similar case can be made for other children's premium offers from this period. Around 1910, Kellogg packaged "Funny Jungleand" books with Corn Flakes cereal. Kellogg advertised these premiums, which were

available for over a decade, to *mothers* as a free prize that would be "entertainment for weeks."[55] These premiums may have been of interest to children, but served mainly as an incentive for a mother to select one brand over another; the focus remained on convincing the mother to develop brand loyalty. Premiums influenced decisions at the grocer by making purchasing parents consider their children. Premiums may have also assisted mothers at the dining table by giving children a reason to be excited over their food. These early efforts did not reach children as an advertising audience; the child-friendly aspects of these offers were revealed to children *after* a purchase.

From 1880 until 1920, advertisers had greater difficulty reaching children compared to parents, although children's periodicals were available.[56] Children's periodicals date to the eighteenth century, with the *Lilliputian Magazine* founded in London in 1751. Although not initially ad-supported, children's periodicals became popular in the Victorian era. Titles, including the *Youth's Companion*, *St. Nicholas*, *American Boy*, *American Girl*, *Boy's World*, *Boy's Life*, and *Girl's Companion*, were all circulating by the end of the nineteenth century. These periodicals focused on stories of fantasy and adventure and had a didactic role in fostering the "right" moral values in children, especially boys. For much of the nineteenth century, the

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[55] Kellogg's Corn Flakes advertisements, 1921, microfilm reel 30,The D'Arcy Collection of the Communications Library of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, IL. (hereafter: "D'Arcy Collection, Illinois").

[56] On advertising in youth periodicals around the turn of the twentieth century, see: David Reed, "Growing Up: The Evolution of Advertising in *Youth's Companion* During the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of Advertising History* 10 (1987): 20-33; Diane Gruber, "Much of Their Tuition" and Richard Ohmann, *Selling Culture: Magazines, Markets and Class at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Verso, 1996).

Youth's Companion helped contribute to a vision of "muscular Christianity," along with new institutions, such as the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA).[57] Children's and youth periodicals stood alongside children's novels in the so-called "Golden Age" of children's literature, from 1860-1930.[58]

By the early twentieth century, many youth periodicals began pitching their audiences to potential advertisers in an effort to grow revenue. Publishers tried to reach prospective advertisers by placing notices in the trade press, namely, *Printer's Ink*. A 1916 ad for the *Youth's Companion* proclaimed the publication had 57 advertising clients that had been with the periodical for over a decade.[59] The *Youth's Companion* specifically targeted food advertisers with a trade ad reminding them that children come "to the table hungry three times a day."[60] Another *Youth's Companion* ad carried the headline "food is a BIG ITEM in the homes of the *Youth's Companion*."[61] *St. Nicholas* claimed the periodical allowed advertisers to get "not only several hundred thousand enthusiastic, impressionable, responsible youngsters rooting for you" but also get "on real speaking terms with the whole family."[62] A series of trade ads from *American Boy* in 1918 featured a fictional boy named "Billy Byer." One Billy Byer page depicted the boy telling his parents what cereal he wanted, because he "read a lot of advertisements about them and how

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[57] For a discussion of muscular Christianity, see: Clifford Putney, *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003) and Thomas J. Schlereth, *Victorian America: Transformations in Everyday Life* (New York: Longman, 1997), 219-20.

[58] See McDowell, "Toward a History of Children as Readers" and Mark West, "Theodore Roosevelt and the Golden Age of Children's Literature," *Journal of American Culture* 33 (2010): 121-5

[59] *Youth's Companion* advertisement in *Printer's Ink*, August 16, 1916, 103.

[60] *Youth's Companion* advertisement in *Printer's Ink*, January 9, 1919, 131.

[61] *Youth's Companion* advertisement in *Printer's Ink*, October 5, 1922, 11.

[62] *St. Nicholas* advertisement in *Printer's Ink*, November 30, 1916, 13.

they make folks cheerful and husky."[63] Another Billy Byer page featured the boy telling his mother about pancake mix. In 1917 and 1918, *American Boy* sought to help advertising clients by running a series of columns that counseled boys about why they should read ads, how advertising helped to make the magazine cheaper, and why advertised goods were typically of a higher quality than non-advertised ones.

Yet, the response from food advertisers was lukewarm at best. Based on the sheer quantity of trade ads, one might expect the pages of youth periodicals in the 1910s and 1920s to be filled with advertising for breakfast cereals and other foods, but food advertising was relatively uncommon.[64] Furthermore, little effort was put into developing ad creative that considered the editorial environment and young readership; in many cases, food advertisers ran one of their existing "adult"-oriented ads in *St. Nicholas* or the *Youth's Companion*. Campbell's Soup ads featured cartoon children, the Campbell's "kids," during the first two decades of the twentieth century; these ads ran in adult periodicals, such as the *Ladies Home Journal*, but also in youth periodicals. Hence, Campbell's approached selling to children as they would to mothers. This is consistent with Diane Gruber's conclusion that ads in the *Youth's*

[63] *American Boy* advertisement in *Printer's Ink*, March 7, 1918, 13.

[64] I examined nearly one hundred issues of *Youth's Companion* and *St. Nicholas* between 1910 and 1925. Some issues contained no food advertisements whatsoever. The most common advertising categories were bicycles, watches, typewriters, musical instruments, and basic household goods, often soap and toothpaste.

Companion's "revealed more about the advertisers (and the parents who oversaw their children's reading) than their audiences."[65]

Despite having an audience of young people at their disposal, these print advertisers addressed adults already familiar with the conventions of food advertising. In 1920, many food advertisers still placed "adult" or generic ads in youth periodicals, suggesting that food advertisers thought these publications were just another media option for existing creative material. A 1920 Kellogg's Shredded Krumbles ad in the *Youth's Companion* stated, "wise fathers and mothers know that Kellogg's Krumbles is the wonder-food for their boys and girls." The ad also discussed Kellogg's innovations in "waxtite" packaging for freshness.[66] One Quaker ad described the "joys these puffed grains bring to millions" by outlining Quaker's cereal production processes. Another full-page Quaker ad detailed how to serve Puffed Wheat and Puffed Rice cereals (Figure 3-3). This pitch, aimed at mothers, went on to describe to readers how "you wanted night dishes easy to digest" and how "the best foods known for children are the foods they love the best."

[65] Gruber, "Much of their Tuition," 130.
[66] Kellogg's Shredded Krumbles advertisement in the *Youth's Companion*, July 15, 1920.

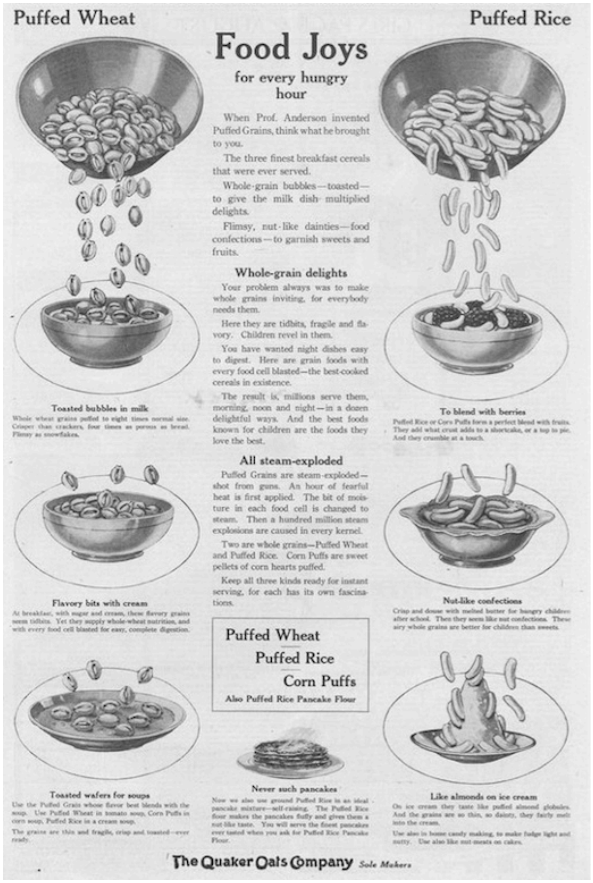

Figure 3-3. Quaker advertisement in the *Youth's Companion*, August 12, 1920, 477.

Some advertisements placed in the *Youth's Companion* spoke directly to children, but even these were inconsistent. In 1920, Cracker Jack ran several "child-friendly" ads with large text and simple messaging. One ad showed a cartoon girl begging a boy holding a box of Cracker Jacks. The copy read: "Aw Sis! I did give you some. The more you eat the more you want." The ad also promised "a toy or novelty in every package."[67] A variation of this ad, with the same "the more you eat, the more you want" tagline, appeared in other children's periodicals with the boy's dog begging for Cracker Jacks. Still, Cracker Jack also ran decidedly non-child-friendly ads in

[67] Cracker Jack advertisement in the *Youth's Companion*, July 8, 1920, 413.

issues that same year, boasting about product packaging features, such as wax-sealed boxes. An October 1920 ad in the *Youth's Companion* featured the headline "how do you suppose we keep Cracker Jack so fresh?" The copy stated, "it may have traveled hundreds of miles--yet every kernel of popcorn, turned golden with good old-fashioned molasses candy, is dainty and crisp" (Figure 3-4).

Figure 3-4. Cracker Jack advertisement in the *Youth's Companion*, October 14, 1920, 607.

Gruber acknowledges that children "found themselves directly addressed only occasionally" in the *Youth's Companion's* advertisements, but this does not mean they could not "overhear" the "discourse of advertising that was taking shape before

them."[68] Adults and children were co-readers of these magazines and the advertisements.[69] Cracker Jack and similar advertisers may have been seeking parents who read the *Youth's Companion* or *St. Nicholas* alongside their children, or even on their own. "While the magazine was most often spoken of as a children's publication," Gruber emphasizes, "it was indeed read by adult family members as well."[70] Several ads appealing to parents discussed production processes, food purity, or packaging, but also included statements instructing children to show the page to a parent. Postum ads in *Youth's Companion* stated "call this to Mother's attention!" It is possible that food advertisers turned to youth periodicals as *another* way to reach adults and children were left to, as Gruber surmises, overhear these advertising "conversations." Not unlike the earlier Egg-O-See contest or premium offers, children were reached indirectly *through* parents.

However, leaving children to "overhear" adult-oriented advertisements contrasts with the claims made by the publishers' trade ads. Through trade press advertisements, youth periodicals sold children as an audience commodity--and sold children as consuming subjects. Based on the consumer ads that ran, food companies bought a familiar adult audience. While publications, especially the *Youth's Companion*, promoted the value of speaking directly with children to influence household purchases, food advertisers rarely followed these instructions.

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[68] Gruber, "Much of Their Tuition," 131.

[69] During the early twentieth century the line between children's and adult literature (both books and periodicals) was difficult to discern. This argument is made throughout Beverly Lyon Clark's *Kiddie Lit: The Cultural Construction of Children's Literature in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003).

[70] Gruber, "Much of Their Tuition," 4.

Framed with the language of the "audience commodity," there was a disconnect between the "buyer" and "seller."[71] Commercial media were actually ahead of advertisers in recognizing the value of directly engaging children. Yet, food advertisements placed in youth periodicals at the start of the twentieth century were, at best, inconsistent. In fact, the *Youth's Companion* ran into financial difficulties during the 1920s, around the same time the publication increased its reliance on advertising revenue. Despite having over one-quarter of pages devoted to advertisements (most aimed at mothers) in 1915, the magazine suffered financial losses throughout the 1920s and was acquired by *American Boy* in 1929.[72]

Advertisers and their agencies did not recognize the value of hailing children as brand-loyal consuming subjects during the first two decades of the twentieth century. With only a handful of exceptions, the trade press did not discuss how national brands could involve children in household purchasing decisions. One of the few articles on advertising to children in *Printer's Ink* in the 1920s cautioned, "a child is not necessarily interested in a picture of a child," and common advertising tropes, such as "a well-groomed boy standing beside his mother," fail "mightily in arousing one spark of interest or of curiosity in the child."[73] The article noted the problem, but no advertiser jumped in with an immediate solution. Market research

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[71] My assessment of advertising in youth periodicals differs from Jacobson's. Jacobson also observes the rising number of trade advertisements placed by the likes of *St. Nicholas*, the *Youth's Companion*, or *American Boy*. However, Jacobson argues that these promotional efforts paid off "handsomely" without considering the inconsistent appeals of these advertisements. See Jacobson, *Raising Consumers*, 27.

[72] See Gruber, "Much of Their Tuition." *American Boy* folded in 1941.

[73] Margaret A. Bartlett, "Mother Tells of Advertising That Appeals to Her Children," *Printer's Ink*, November 17, 1921, 121.

on children was also non-existent until the 1930s.[74] Despite experiments with contests, premiums, and print advertising, from the 1880s through the 1920s food corporations invested substantially in adults, and specifically, women. Food ads dominated women's periodicals, for example, *Ladies Home Journal* and *McCall's*.[75]

There was a solid justification for investing in advertising to women. By the early 1920s, women were reported to have bought 79 percent of packaged food.[76] Advertisers recognized it was wasteful to advertise to everyone when women did the majority of the shopping. Changes in grocer layouts, sales approaches, and services were also credited to the profitability of women shoppers.[77] "Self-service" grocery stores expanded in the 1920s, with new ideas and new technologies to assist both the grocers and consumers. The shopping cart appeared in the 1930s, starting as a rolling cart on which shoppers could place their baskets.[78] With the introduction of shopping carts, the weight of goods no longer limited the amount of purchases. The shopping cart may have also made shopping convenient for mothers who brought their children.

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[74] Cook, "The Other 'Child Study,'" 489. However, market research was flourishing in general by the 1920s. Stanley Resor framed JWT as a "university of advertising" based on its scientific research and the hiring of John B. Watson. For more on market research history, see Daniel J. Robinson, *The Measure of Democracy: Polling, Market Research, and Public Life 1930-1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 10-38.

[75] On magazine advertising history, and the role of women's magazines, see: Daniel Delis Hills, *Advertising to the American Woman, 1900-1999* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2002); Garvey, *The Adman in the Parlor*; and Ohmann, *Selling Culture*.

[76] Starch, *Principles of Advertising,* 339.

[77] William L. Butler, *Modern Food Merchandising: A Book of Practical Suggestions for Profitable Operation of the Complete Food Market* (Trenton, NJ: C.V. Hill, 1935), 12.

[78] See Catherine Grandclement, "Wheeling One's Groceries Around the Store," in *Food Chains: From Farmyard to Shopping Cart*, eds. Warren Belasco and Roger Horowitz (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 233-51.

"Small Lectures on Child Feeding"

The Cream of Wheat company began as a North Dakota flourmill in the 1890s. Several men at the mill developed a bland porridge from milled wheat. The product was packaged by hand at first and branded with the image of a black chef with a saucepan, later nicknamed "Rastus."[79] One of the millers found a plate with this image at a local printer. Cream of Wheat began advertising in 1899 with JWT as their agency. Cream of Wheat, not unlike other food advertisers and retailers, found success in speaking to potential buyers not just as women, but also as *mothers*.

Food advertisers throughout the twentieth century spoke to women as mothers who expressed their love for, and devotion to, their families through food preparation.[80] Even when food was not "made from scratch" advertisers often used the phrase "home made" to connote preparing food with love. According to Jessamyn Neuhas' research on cookbooks during the era, a women's "real job … consisted of getting married and raising a family--and cooking for her husband and children."[81] Dry goods manufacturers and department stores also recognized the power of speaking to women as mothers in the early twentieth century. Clothing makers concluded, "a mother instinctively puts her child's needs above all else."[82] In

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[79] For a discussion of Rastus and other problematic black advertising characters, see Marilyn Kern-Foxworth, *Aunt Jemima, Uncle Ben, and Rastus: Blacks in Advertising, Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994). Foxworth notes that despite being foundational to the brand, neither the waiter who originally posed for the Rastus image, nor any relatives, have ever been compensated--let alone located.

[80] Katherine J. Parkin, *Food is Love: Food Advertising and Gender Roles in Modern America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 193-4.

[81] Jessamyn Neuhas, *Manly Meals and Mom's Home Cooking: Cookbooks and Gender in Modern America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 60. Cookbooks framed meal preparation as an enjoyable activity, rather than a chore, as the use of household servants declined.

[82] Cook, *Commodification of Childhood*, 42.

the minds of marketers, *women* may have made sacrifices in purchasing for the household, but *mothers* never accepted anything less than the "best" for her family.

Appeals to mothers must also be contextualized in the Victorian construction of "innocent" childhood. By the 1880s, with the decline of child labour, lower infant mortality, and increased interest in schooling, children became "innocent," "priceless," and worthy of societal protection. With the transformation of many American homes from a workplace (i.e. farms) to a leisure place (private homes, where a father worked off site), playtime took over from chores. Children were to be "coddled" and were also considered blank slates on which families and religion could impose proper moral values. New childrearing tactics meant children were to be rewarded, not punished. Marketers leveraged these changing attitudes towards children.[83] For food advertisers, innocent childhood meant mothers could be *scared* into buying branded foods to protect the health of their children. Infant formula producers between 1890 and 1910 created demand for an entirely new product. Formula makers advertised to mothers using infant mortality rates and instructions on how to keep a baby in good health by purchasing the right branded product.[84] Other early ads for baby food relied less on scare tactics and instead rested on the

[83] Cross describes how these changing attitudes benefited toy makers. See Cross, *Kids' Stuff*, 35-7.

[84] Rima D. Apple, "'Advertised By Our Loving Friends': The Infant Formula Industry and the Creation of New Pharmaceutical Markets, 1887-1910," *Journal of the History of Medicine and Applied Sciences* 41 (1986): 3-23.

argument that mothers would have additional time to coddle their babies if they spent less time preparing food.[85]

With food advertisers placing the responsibility of children's health and happiness on the shoulders of mothers, ads aimed at mothers often took the tone of advice columns. An entire "advice" industry with the ostensible goal of helping mothers emerged. However, as Seiter argues, the line between "advice" and "advertising" was often blurry.[86] Food advertisers provided advice on how to ensure children got proper vitamins, gained weight, and built strength. Of course, branded food was the solution to all three of these concerns. Market research concluded that women were "not only vitally interested in everything that concerns their children's well-being," but that "authoritative" presentation of this information was necessary; as such, copywriters working on the Cream of Wheat account turned food advertising text into "small lectures on child-feeding."[87] Copy--especially in food ads--stressed both rational and emotional appeals. These kinds of ads educated consumers, in a casual promotional discourse, about the benefits of a particular brand, and even how new products could be incorporated into everyday life. Food producers, epitomized by Cream of Wheat, often emphasized purity, health, and medical selling points. According to JWT writers, "the child appeal" was apparent in Cream of Wheat's advertising efforts from the earliest days of the company.

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[85] Amy Bentley, "Inventing Baby Food: Gerber and the Discourse of Infancy in the United States," in *Food Nations: Selling Taste in Consumer Societies*, eds. Warren Belasco and Phillip Scranton (New York: Routledge, 2002), 107.

[86] Seiter, *Sold Separately*, 24.

[87] Cream of Wheat Account History, 1926, box 5, J. Walter Thompson Account Files Collection, Duke.

Cream of Wheat developed iconic imagery to accompany its "small lectures on child feeding." Between 1900 and 1920, Cream of Wheat contracted illustrators to paint advertisements that used the image of Rastus, the fictional black man with his saucepan.[88] The paintings showed Rastus interacting with young children and reflected "the prevalent attitudes and social climate of America's large, emerging middle class."[89] Specifically, these paintings showcased romanticized images of "family life and childhood pleasures," including cheerful black servants.[90] Children and servants played a symbolic role in the "parables of advertising" that Marchand observes. Showing servants, advertisers "exaggerated and embellished" social stratification.[91] Advertisements directed at the middle class frequently depicted the aristocratic rich enjoying everyday branded products. These images played on the aspirational class ambitions of the middle class. Children could likewise symbolize higher classes. The children portrayed in advertisements were consistently well groomed, signifying distance from labour. Upper class families, not needing children for chores or farm labour, generally had fewer children. As such, advertisers also

[88] Using illustrations was preferred by most advertisers and agencies. Although photography was an option, art directors generally avoided it because photographs conveyed too much detail. Art directors preferred the abstraction and "fantasy" of paintings. For more on this argument, see Elspeth H. Brown, "Rationalizing Consumption: Lejaren A. Hiller and the Origins of American Advertising Photography, 1913-1924," *Enterprise & Society* 1 (2000): 715-39.

[89] David Stilvers, *The Nabisco brands Collection of Cream of Wheat Advertising Art* (San Diego, CA: Collector's Showcase, 1986), 5.

[90] Ibid.

[91] Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*, 198. Marchand suggests that advertisers did not generally use caricatures of blacks for humour, as many popular culture venues did during the early twentieth century.

showed children one or two at a time. Families of four, five, or six children were absent.[92]

The Cream of Wheat advertisements were iconic because of imagery drawn from an upper class Victorian ideal of childhood, but also because these advertisements relied on powerful visuals. The goal of these advertisements was to also visually convince mothers of "the value of a hot, nourishing cereal in starting off the days for the growing child."[93] One of the earliest Cream of Wheat ads showed a young girl sitting over a steaming bowl of Cream of Wheat, with a smiling Rastus looking on from another room (Figure 3-5). The page told mothers "strong bodies are the best equipment you can give your children for the battle of life." Consistent with most Cream of Wheat ads during the early 1900s, the limited copy lectured on "strong bodies" and "active brains." As the ads evolved, copy was further limited and consisted merely of rhymes, well known to both adults and children. A 1909 ad showed Rastus looking over a window ledge with a hot bowl of Cream of Wheat ready for a young boy pretending to be a "giant killer," playing with his dog on the street (Figure 3-6). The only text stated, "Fee! Fi! Fo! Fum! I smell Cream of Wheat, Yum-Yum! Yum-Yum!" Just as Egg-O-See did with their 1905 contest, Cream of Wheat included (altered) nursery rhymes and fairy tales. Daniel Robinson argues nursery rhymes in advertising construct an aura of "infantile nostalgia."[94] He further

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[92] Ibid, 192.

[93] Cream of Wheat Account History, 1926, box 5, J. Walter Thompson Account Files Collection, Duke.

[94] Robinson, "Marketing Gum," 9. Wrigley Gum incorporated Mother Goose rhymes in a number of advertisements and produced a 16-page book of rhymes as a premium in 1916. Other cereal

suggests the rhymes "evoked universal notions of past-ness, more biographical than historical, connoting the nostalgia, wholesomeness, and whimsy of childhood."[95] In an effort to sell food to mothers, Cream of Wheat constructed a timeless-yet-aspirational vision of upper class childhood innocence. Children, fairy tales, nursery rhymes, and in many examples, animals, all contributed to this idyllic vision.

Figure 3-5. Cream of Wheat advertisement, 1902. Roy Lightner Collection of Antique Advertisements, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, NC.

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advertisers used Mother Goose themes and premiums. Mother Goose dolls were packaged with Washington Crisps cereal.

[95] Ibid, 35.

Figure 3-6. Cream of Wheat advertisement. Roy Lightner Collection of Antique Advertisements, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, NC.

The use of children in these kinds of advertisements may have also softened the image of the corporations producing these products. Images of innocent children were used in advertisements in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century for numerous brands, ranging from Pears Soap to Uneeda Biscuit. Brands incorporating the referents of innocent childhood engendered values that were far removed from factories and labourers where production took place. From the abolition of child labour, a properly "loved" child was by definition separate from

the "cash nexus" of capitalism.[96] In Marxist terms, children purified, and further fetishized, the commodity exchange. Advertising professionals saw childhood, like femininity, as a kind of "buffer" against the harsh aspects of the modern capitalist marketplace.[97] The dominant version of childhood constructed by food advertisers during the first quarter of the twentieth century was a childhood antithetical to capitalism; children consumed food, but had no involvement in the marketplace. Invoking children helped advertisers to soften their corporate images; become innocent, pure, and feminine.

Cream of Wheat was not alone in advertising to mothers this way. A 1915 Kellogg's Toasted Corn Flakes ad showcased a smiling, well-dressed boy enjoying a large bowl of cereal (Figure 3-7). A 1919 Ralston porridge ad included copy that described children as "healthy and happy" because "the gluten and phosphates in their daily Ralston porridge make their bones and muscles strong."[98] The ad went on to describe how mothers would be "glad to know of a food so good for children" and was accompanied by images of smiling children looking into a giant cartoon cereal bowl. Images of innocent and healthy--if not portly--children appeared in most Borden's milk ads. Excited children were depicted eating and watching mother prepare meals and snacks for them in the kitchen. Quaker ads focused on the health

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[96] Viviana A. Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 72.

[97] Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*, 169. Marchand's *Creating the Corporate Soul* also outlines how children helped to "humanize," and even "feminize" large corporates in the early twentieth century. Companies even used the phrase "corporate motherhood." For example, Metropolitan Life, as part of its public service activities, offered health and nutrition publications such as *The Child* and *Your Baby.*

[98] Ralston advertisement, 1919, box 8, Roy Lightner Collection of Antique Advertisements, Duke.

of children, but also on how eating the right hot breakfast cereal would help children pay attention better and do well in school. These were all authoritative lectures on child feeding.

Figure 3-7. Kellogg advertisement, 1915. Roy Lightner Collection of Antique Advertisements, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, NC.

The phrase "child appeal" was even utilized in the trade press before advertisers began appealing *directly* to children in earnest.[99] Advertisers did not "discover" the

[99] Helen A. Ballard, "The Child Appeal as a Factor in Merchandising a Product," *Printer's Ink*, June 19, 1919, 93-96.

value of child consumers in selling branded food products at any one point in the twentieth century; when it came to food children were always-already "consumers" (eaters of food) and hence factored into the advertising strategies of food producers such as Cream of Wheat. However, until the late 1920s, children were rarely considered as an advertising audience. Instead of being subjects, children were signifiers, "things" to appear in ads aimed at middle class mothers.

The Cream of Wheat H.C.B. Club

JWT's William Resor described the 1928 Cream of Wheat H.C.B. Club as "one of the most interesting" advertising initiatives in the history of the company.[100] Although advertised to parents in the first instance, the H.C.B Club also allowed Cream of Wheat to directly communicate with children through mailings. Children "applied" to the H.C.B. Club by submitting a coupon with their name and address. In return, they received a chart and collection of gold stars to track eating habits. The materials instructed children to put a gold star on their chart whenever they ate a hot cereal and children were prompted to eat a hot cereal three times per week. Interestingly, the instructions did not tell children they had to eat Cream of Wheat, only a "hot cereal." Yet, at a JWT executive meeting, Resor observed, "the psychology of it is ... that the child actually believes he does not earn a star unless he eats Cream of Wheat."[101]

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[100] Minutes of Representatives Meeting, p. 4, May 1, 1929, box 2, J. Walter Thompson Staff Meeting Minutes, Duke.

[101] Ibid, 5.

This strategy was significant because it fostered Cream of Wheat brand loyalty among children. After a four-week regimen of eating a hot cereal breakfast at least three times per week, children returned their chart to Cream of Wheat. The company then welcomed children with an H.C.B. Club badge (Figure 3-8) that declared them to be "chevaliers" and official members. This package also told members the "secret meaning" of the H.C.B. initials. The initials did not stand for "Hot Cereal Breakfast," as parents perhaps assumed, but instead **H**ealth helps **C**hevaliers win **B**attles. At this point members received a second chart. After successfully completing the second chart, they received a certificate declaring them to be an "officer" of the H.C.B. Club. After another four-week cycle, Cream of Wheat promoted members to "grand officer." A JWT newsletter claimed, "higher degrees, each bearing a title romantic enough to delight a childish imagination, are available to those who continue their hot cereal breakfasts for three succeeding four week periods."[102] Cream of Wheat also sent members premiums at the completion of charts, including "surprise" cereal bowls. The interior bottom of each bowl had images of either the Spirit of St. Louis, or the Twentieth Century ship. Children had to finish their cereal in order to see the image--the "surprise." Exceeding agency expectations, 375,000 children joined the club in the first 16 months. Of these members, over 80,000 completed the regimen twice to receive the rank of officer.[103]

[102] Newsletter #187, September 1, 1927, box MN8, J. Walter Thompson Newsletter Collection, Duke.

[103] Minutes of Representatives Meeting, page 4, May 1, 1929, box 2, J. Walter Thompson Staff Meeting Minutes, Duke.

Figure 3-8. Cream of Wheat H.C.B. Club badge. eBay listing, August 2010.

The club's tracking, ranking, and premium systems represented several innovations. The "secret meaning" of the H.C.B. Club name created an aura of exclusivity and made the club an explicitly branded yet children's-only space. The club played on children wanting to belong to something exclusive, but also played on children wanting the recognition of rising through a hierarchy. Consuming a branded product conveyed both feelings of belonging and accomplishment--a powerful consumer socialization lesson. If children wanted to continue climbing the ranks to receive greater recognition and other premiums, they had to keep requesting a hot cereal, which given the Cream of Wheat branding on club materials, was likely to be Cream of Wheat.

An August 1929 JWT newsletter described the H.C.B. Club's "daring" innovations to other agency staff by telling the story of Gormley Jones, a fictional 10-year-old

boy from "Middletown USA" who refused to eat hot cereal.[104] The article outlined how his mother, doctor, and teacher all agreed a hot cereal would do "Little Gormley lots of good." Gormley was the only one who did not agree. The story explained that adults could eat a hot cereal "until the cows come home" but this did not "move Little Gormley." Parents enjoying a hot cereal did not convince Gormley to eat, but "vice versa" was another story: if Gormley wanted to eat the cereal, his parents would have no choice but to make the purchase. The H.C.B. Club was able to get Gormley excited about eating Cream of Wheat, because he saw his mother "put a gold star on his H.C.B. chart every time he gets clear to the bottom of his bowl." Gormley belonged to a club, proudly wore his badge, and climbed in rank by eating hot cereal breakfasts. The fictional Gormley "found the whole business" a "fascinating game" for him to play. The article concluded that every member of the agency should think about "Little Gormley as a market." However, in order to accomplish this, agency staff had to "understand the workings of a youngster's mind"--or in Cook's terms, possess "pediocularity." Cook defines "pediocularity" as the favouring a child's "viewpoint about goods, spaces, and social relations of consumption."[105]

Cream of Wheat deemed the H.C.B. Club a success and the program ran until 1934. The H.C.B. Club meant big sales, but also provided excellent demographic information for Cream of Wheat. Each H.C.B. Club member had to submit, at minimum, a name and address. With this information, Cream of Wheat could better

[104] Harold Wengler, "Transmuting and Delivering a Bowl of Cereal (Hot)," *The J. Walter Thompson News Bulletin*, page 19, August 1929, box MN5, J. Walter Thompson Newsletter Collection, Duke.
[105] Cook, *Commodification of Childhood*, 67.

focus distribution and sales efforts on certain areas. Nevertheless, the significance of this promotion goes beyond the impressive membership numbers or wealth of marketing data: Cream of Wheat developed a strategy to directly manufacture a kind of brand loyalty among children. Being a member of the H.C.B. Club could be equated to being loyal to Cream of Wheat. Children were effectively "branded" subjects, tied to Cream of Wheat.

JWT and Cream of Wheat understood that clubs and games meant more to children than rational, or even emotional, ad copy. As Cook's historical research argues, "children's autonomy is rich with the potential for exchange value."[106] With the H.C.B. Club, once children were initially engaged, Cream of Wheat established a direct line of communication and spoke to members as brand-loyal and demanding consumers. Cream of Wheat even asked children to send in the names and addresses of friends who had yet to join the club. As chapters four and five argue, by the end of the 1920s and through the 1930s, many food companies took a greater interest in speaking directly with children, and fostered brand loyalty with explicitly commercial clubs.

Changes in family life, real and perceived, may explain why it took until 1928 to see a food promotion as successful as the Cream of Wheat H.C.B. Club. The "democratic" and "companionate" family was a middle class cultural ideal by the late 1920s. While Cream of Wheat's earlier advertisements represented a Victorian ideal for children, the H.C.B Club showed how the idealized "innocent child" was giving

[106] Ibid, 77.

way to a child who participated in family decisions. Theories of the "companionate family," as promoted by psychologists, social workers, and experts in *Parents' Magazine* (launched in 1926), suggested that parents and children could be "pals."[107] Advertising food during the late 1920s both reflected and advanced the cultural ideal of the democratic child-centred middle class family.[108] Advertisers, for example, framed women who *forced* their children to eat as "bad mothers."[109] The H.C.B. Club also incorporated expert advice that fun and games reinforced behaviour better than strict rules, regulations, scolding, or threats. This was not a case where an advertiser leveraged pre-existing social changes, nor was this a case where a desire for profit masterfully created changes in family life. Instead, Cream of Wheat contributed to the image of democratic and companionate family *alongside* a new wave of child psychology.[110]

The H.C.B. Club was first advertised to mothers in 1928, but only to introduce the program to their children. Cream of Wheat ads aimed at mothers in 1928 argued that because "bad habits at breakfast are so widespread among children" authorities, such as the American Medical Association, "have made the right sort of breakfast the subject of a nation-wide movement." The H.C.B. Club was explained to mothers as a completely "free" plan "that arouses your children's interest in a hot cereal breakfast and makes them want to eat it regularly." This same ad included a testimonial from

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[107] Mintz and Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions*, 113.
[108] Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*, 230.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Whether this kind of family was actually prevalent, of course, is doubtful. The democratic and companionate family was a typification, especially for businesses, and not necessarily a historical reality.

a mother in New Jersey who claimed the "posters and stars are a wonderful help in getting my boy to eat hot cereal."[111] Another Cream of Wheat ad told mothers how "all children love the H.C.B. Club with a secret meaning" and how the club makes breakfast "a thrill game."[112] An ad placed in *Ladies Home Journal* discussed how children work for the prizes themselves and stressed that all material would be sent free of charge from Cream of Wheat's Minneapolis headquarters.[113]

The period from 1928, the start of Cream of Wheat's H.C.B. Club, through the mid-1930s, when food advertising came to dominate children's radio shows and comic strips, represents a perspectival shift. An early 1928 *Printer's Ink* ad from the Educational Advertising Company encapsulates the industry's awakening to the value of children in the new democratic and companionate family. This page contained a testimonial from Ralph Starr Butler, the advertising manager for Postum. Butler wrote, "as parents, we may have a variety of views about the independence of the rising generation." However, as "business men," Butler continued, advertisers must be aware that the "child's position in the home has changed," that children have "ideas of their own," and that "home purchases largely reflect" the opinions of children. The ad concluded that to successfully develop national markets, children must be addressed, in addition to adults.[114] More

[111] Cream of Wheat advertisement, 1928, box 3, Roy Lightner Collection of Antique Advertisements, Duke.
[112] Cream of Wheat advertisement, 1933, box 3, Roy Lightner Collection of Antique Advertisements, Duke.
[113] Cream of Wheat advertisement, 1929, microfilm reel 30, D'Arcy Collection, Illinois.
[114] Educational Advertising Company advertisement in *Printer's Ink*, January 5, 1928, 149.

attention was given to children as brand-loyal and demanding consuming subjects in the trade press during the first half of the 1930s.[115]

Cream of Wheat's twentieth century advertising efforts, from the romantic paintings with Rastus, to the 1928 H.C.B. Club, were representative of a larger shift in the advertising community. Earlier ads drew upon nursery rhymes and the mythology of an "innocent" Victorian childhood. These ads were pleasant and child-friendly, but were aimed squarely at mothers interested in buying the best food for the health and protection of their young children.[116] Cream of Wheat's later H.C.B. Club inverted this strategy; the marketing effort was parent-friendly, but the intent was to engage children through gold stars, premiums, and feelings of exclusivity. Making branded food appealing to parents did not automatically mean children would enjoy it. On the other hand, making children desire the product was thought to make parents fall in line without resistance. Therefore, advertisers, parents, and children were always in the equation. Cream of Wheat simply re-arranged the relationship between parents and children by enticing children directly once they joined the H.C.B. Club.

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[115] See, for example, Frederic Read, "A Club for Boys Idea Sold a Million Packages of Cracker Jack," *Printer's Ink*, July 24, 1930, 27; "What Kinds of Advertising Material Will Schools Use?" *Printer's Ink*, January 8, 1931, 131; Charles G. Muller, "Don't Overlook the Sons and Daughters of Mr. and Mrs. Consumer," *Printer's Ink*, May 21, 1931, 37; "Youth Not So Good a Term to Use in Advertising," *Printer's Ink*, April 28, 1932, 59; "Post Toasties Puts Cutout Toys on Its Package," *Printer's Ink*, May 11, 1933, 68; "Kellogg Children's Package," *Printer's Ink*, March 8, 1934, 36; and E. Evalyn Grumbine, "This Juvenile Market," *Printer's Ink*, July 19, 1934, 20.

[116] Food advertisers were not always specific about "what" or rather "when" is a child. Cream of Wheat's earlier paintings depicted very young children, while the H.C.B. Club was aimed at slightly older children, as evidenced by the fictional 10-year-old Gormley.

At the end of the 1920s Cream of Wheat took a sudden interest in children as a target market, and by doing this, re-constructed the "child consumer" as an active participant in--or rather, a subject to--the marketplace.[117] Although the binary of "children as consumers of food" to "children as consuming subjects" is useful to describe the perspectival shift that took place in the late 1920s, the history remains complex. Strasser warns historians of consumption to avoid dualistic thinking.[118] Binaries, such as producer/consumer, public/private, or work/leisure, can oversimplify the history of consumer culture. Cream of Wheat's advertising in the early twentieth century showed how childhood shifted from being a symbol of distance from the marketplace (in an effort to target mothers) to an efficient conduit linking the American family to the marketplace. Yet, despite this general tendency, the history of advertising food to children was indeed more complicated. I must nevertheless recognize the earlier efforts of Egg-O-See and the countless other food producers that experimented with premiums and print advertising to appeal to children.

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[117] Food advertisers were not alone in noticing this new role for children. Cook's *Commodification of Childhood* also cites the late 1920s and early 1930s as a key period when the clothing business honed in on children, and saw the world through the eyes of the children for the purposes of marketing dry goods. Food producers went beyond the clothing industry because they wanted children to recognize and request a specific brand. Once again, this is the unique "subject position" food advertisers sought.

[118] Strasser, "Making Consumption Conspicuous," 761.

Chapter 4 - "The Fine Art of Sitting Still and Listening to Something": Radio, 1928-1945

> Children are real enthusiasts ready to accept any challenge that demands action and gives them something to do. They are natural joiners and like nothing better than to belong to a club and have a secret password and badge or button to wear.[1]
>
> So ask your mother to get you a can of Ovaltine at her drug or grocery store because, even if you have some at home now, you'll be needing another can pretty soon anyway! And then Annie will send you your genuine gold-plated birthday ring! So get busy right now and, don't forget, be here right on time Monday at 5:45 to hear the exciting things that will be happening to Annie next.[2]

The popularity of radio in the 1930s was remarkable.[3] From a single Pittsburgh broadcaster in 1920, the industry grew to over six hundred licenced stations across the United States by 1935.[4] Approximately 40 percent of American homes had a radio in 1930, but by 1935 this percentage grew to nearly 70.[5] Radio provided

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[1] E. Evalyn Grumbine, *Reaching Juvenile Markets: How to Advertise, Sell, and Merchandise Through Boys and Girls* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1938), 21.

[2] Announcer pitch on *Little Orphan Annie*, October 21, 1935 episode.

[3] On radio history, including broadcast advertising history, see: Jim Cox, *Sold on Radio: Advertisers in the Golden Age of Broadcasting* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008); Jim Cox, *Frank and Anne Hummert's Radio Factory: The Programs and Personalities of Broadcasting's Most Prolific Producers* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2003); Susan J. Douglas, *Listening In: Radio and the American Imagination* (New York: Times Books, 1999); John Dunning, *On the Air: The Encyclopedia of Old-time Radio* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Michele Hilmes, *Radio Voices: American Broadcasting, 1922-1952* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997); Marilyn Lavin, "Creating Consumers in the 1930s: Irna Phillips and the Radio Soap Opera," *Journal of Consumer Research* 22 (1995): 75-89; Anne MacLennan, "Women, Radio Broadcasting and the Depression: A 'Captive' Audience from Household Hints to Story Time and Serials," *Women's Studies: An Inter-disciplinary Journal* 37 (2008): 616-33; Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*, 88-110; McChesney*, Telecommunications*; Newman, *Radio Active*; Smulyan, *Selling Radio;* Christopher H. Sterling and John M. Kittross, *Stay Tuned: A History of American Broadcasting*, 3rd ed. (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2002); and Michael S. Socolow, "Psyche and Society: Radio Advertising and Social Psychology in America, 1923-1936," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 24 (2004): 517-34.

[4] Azriel L. Eisenberg, *Children and Radio Programs* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936), 1. This was the first book-length research project published on children and broadcasting.

[5] Cox, *Sold on Radio*, 26.

Americans with a national and unifying social experience throughout the Depression and World War II. It was during this time of radio's radical growth, all the more remarkable given the dire economic situation, that children became so important to food advertisers and broadcasters.[6] In 1936, market research declared "one of the most efficacious ways of reaching the American home is through radio programs listened to by children."[7] By reaching children through radio, food producers discovered a sound sales strategy, and in the process, helped with the creation of a new advertising audience segment. This chapter examines how sponsored radio programs attempted to draw children into the marketplace as brand-loyal subjects and contextualizes these case studies within "back-stage" industry discourses that worked to construct the child audience.

Children's radio grew rapidly during the late 1920s and early 1930s. In 1928, children in the New York City area could tune in to only 34 total hours annual of children's programming; in 1933, over a thousand hours of yearly programming were available and food advertisers were behind many of these programs.[8] Children's radio did not proliferate just because children enjoyed listening to these shows; rather, programs were successful because young listeners also served a material purpose for both the networks and the sponsors footing production costs.

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[6] Radio bucked the Depression economy. Advertising budgets shrank in the first few years of the 1930s, but radio expenditures increased. In fact, some advertisers refused to share their success stories, for fear of giving a competitor their secrets to radio advertising success. Agencies used radio productions to protect their own margins by offering new services, including program evaluation, script writing, and audience research.

[7] Eisenberg, *Children and Radio*, 197.

[8] Grumbine, *Reaching Juvenile Markets*, 197.

As both Smythe and Jhally theorize, commercial mass media are in the business of producing audiences to sell to advertisers. Smythe's theory of audience "labour" and Jhally's contention that surplus value is derived from an audience's listening/ viewing activity are typically discussed with broadcast media where networks fund shows and sell advertising as "spots." Notwithstanding, the audience-as-commodity concept can still be applied to 1930s radio where sponsors funded and produced their own shows.[9] A combination of sponsoring food advertisers, agencies, market researchers, *and* network radio produced the child radio audience. Radio assembled the audience for advertisers, but, as Cook notes, in order for children to have value as an audience commodity they had to be made "knowable."[10] Knowledge came from "hard numbers," audience measurement mechanisms, but also from subjective discussions about the nature of child audiences. In order to be considered valuable targets for food advertisers, the child audience had to be not only measured, but also better understood. The child audience was an abstraction. Radio was the vehicle but the industry had to work collectively to draw a road map through this process.

Radio Advertising History

During the 1920s, radio left the domain of the hobbyists, those who tuned the dial to "listen in" to other amateurs, and became a commercially supported national medium.[11] The Radio Corporation of America (RCA) formed in 1919, shortly after the United States government lifted wartime radio communication restrictions. In November 1920, Westinghouse began operating a licenced station in Pittsburgh,

[9] Newman, *Radio Active*, 4.
[10] Cook, "The Other 'Child Study,'" 487.
[11] For a discussion of hobbyists, and the practice of "DXing," see Douglas, *Listening In*, 55-82.

KDKA, which had a local listening audience of a few hundred. Although KDKA offered a regular schedule, amateurs produced the programs without commercial incentive. By 1920, there were nearly one million radio homes in the United States; this number doubled by 1923. During these years, radio manufacturers, large corporations (such as newspapers or department stores), or non-profit organizations (such as churches and schools), owned stations. Each of these organizations used radio to promote their own interests, for example, to boost radio set sales. However, as the first permanent radio networks emerged in the mid-1920s, the business model of radio shifted to selling program time slots to sponsors. Supported by RCA, Westinghouse, and General Electric, the National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) formed in 1926. NBC's Red Network was set up months later, followed by NBC's Blue Network and the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) in 1927.[12] By the end of the 1920s, radio had become a truly national mass communication platform.

Both broadcasters and advertising professionals were distrustful of advertising at the dawn of the network radio era. As Marchand argues, some historians portray the commercialization of radio as a story where business interests violently exploited radio's philanthropic or public sphere potential.[13] This was not necessarily the case. Broadcasters were initially interested in having audiences pay for the

[12] The NBC Blue Network became the American Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) after reorganization in 1934. The Mutual Broadcasting System (MBS), another important network, formed in 1934 by a coalition of stations in the Midwest.

[13] Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*, 89.

service in the form of a subscription model.[14] While politicians and the listening public may have been resistant to radio advertising, and newspapers fearing competition from broadcasting also sought to contain radio advertising, the advertising industry itself was also frequently averse to using radio for hard pitches. Radio was the subject of many articles in the trade press throughout the 1920s and nearly all of them warned sponsors to exercise restraint. Advertisers expressed concern that promotional messages were intrusive when broadcast into private homes and could make audiences resentful of the advertised products that disrupted the "entertainment narrative."[15] Some advertising executives held the opinion that direct advertising would quickly "'kill" the nascent broadcasting industry.[16]

Slowly advertisers began to push the limits of this point of view by developing longer sponsorship announcements. Rather than direct "pitches" from announcers, radio advertising first took the form of general "goodwill" sponsorships; brands simply named shows or singing groups. During this same period, networks promoted advertising to the American public as making programming "free," a contrast to the British state-supported public radio model. Industry leaders framed radio advertising in the late 1920s as a patriotic practice.[17] Advertising, described by McChesney as a "marginal phenomenon" in 1927, accounted for $100 million of

[14] McChesney, *Telecommunications*, 115.
[15] Newman, *Radio Active*, 27.
[16] Radio alphabetical files, box 13, J. Walter Thompson Colin Dawkins Papers 1776-1986, Duke.
[17] Smulyan, *Selling Radio*, 77.

revenue for broadcasters by 1930.[18] Most major advertising agencies developed in-house radio departments by the end of the 1920s. In 1929, with a radio department newly in place, JWT considered radio sponsorship for nearly every account.[19] The next year the agency had 56 programs on the air. Once agencies began to develop their own radio programs for clients, they turned to a new team of experts: researchers, especially psychologists, were brought in to determine what kinds of programming or musical genres best matched specific sponsors.[20] Despite large-scale investments by 1930, the American advertising industry still displayed some respect for the fact that the "air" belonged to the public and good taste should always be considered. Specific stations prohibited sponsors from naming price points. CBS banned certain product categories, including laxatives, and NBC created a list of 80 words that sponsors could not use, such as "blood" or "stomach."[21] When developing programs, agencies paid particular attention to making the sponsorship announcements seamless, so as not to seem like an interruption.

Food advertisers pioneered several practices, from the radio jingle (Wheaties in 1926), to sponsored concerts (a Maxwell House concert series in 1927). Food corporations surpassed radio manufacturers in broadcast advertising expenditures in the early 1930s. In 1930, they collectively spent more than any other product category and up two-and-a-half times the amount spent in 1929.[22] In 1931, and with

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[18] McChesney, *Telecommunications*, 30.

[19] Minutes of Representatives Meeting, April 3, 1929, box 1, J. Walter Thompson Staff Meeting Minutes, Duke.

[20] Newman, *Radio Active*, 17.

[21] Cox, *Sold on Radio*, 22.

[22] "Food Companies Spent Most For Radio Broadcasts," *Food Industries*, April 1931, 173.

the Depression taking hold, 61 of the largest food manufacturers increased their radio expenditures.[23] Radio, believed only a few years earlier to be a kind of "bonus" for food advertisers, became a core component of advertising plans. Witness Aunt Jemima, a radio advertising pioneer that saw sales increase by over one hundred percent each year between 1927 and 1930.[24]

The radio advertiser melded entertainment with sales. In the late 1920s, advertisers generally believed "the sole value to be derived from broadcast advertising was the listener goodwill," which could manifest itself in "increased purchases of the sponsor's product."[25] In contrast, during the first few years of the 1930s advertisers wove explicit product pitches into the plotlines of serial shows. The listener, as Marchand observes, "became the host's unwitting accomplice in a trick that subtly shifted the scene from entertainment to a commercial vignette."[26] Radio was a powerful advertising vehicle because it blended entertainment with selling, but also because of the intimacy it kindled. As evidenced simply by the number of listeners who wrote personal letters to radio hosts and characters (even fictional ones), audiences felt a personal relationship with the voices they heard, which could also mean a close relationship with sponsoring brands.[27]

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[23] "Large Food Manufacturers Increase Advertising," *Food Industries*, September 1931, 406.

[24] Minutes of Representatives Meeting, April 16, 1930, box 2, J. Walter Thompson Staff Meeting Minutes, Duke.

[25] Ruetta Day Blinks, and Willetta Moore, *Food Purchasing for the Home*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: J.P. Lippincott, 1932), 261.

[26] Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*, 106.

[27] Ibid, 353. Marchand describes the example of Betty Crocker, who was given a "voice" via radio. Thousands of letters were addressed to Betty as if she was a real women.

Because radio advertisers needed reassurance that their investments were reaching audiences, broadcast audience measurement (or "ratings") systems soon emerged. Media "commodification," Mosco suggests, "demands the use of measurement procedures."[28] As discussed in chapter two, ratings systems contribute to the manufacture of the abstract "audience commodities" that advertisers purchase.[29] Ratings provide feedback that furthers, or perhaps accelerates, the commodification of media content *and* audiences. But ratings systems are neither objective nor stable. Fernando Bermejo argues that audience measurement "methodological issues" become a source of instability that makes visible the "process of audience manufacture."[30]

The first attempts to measure network audiences came in the form of surveys.[31] In 1928, NBC hired Harvard professor Daniel Starch to oversee a survey of five thousand radio households.[32] Given how rapidly radio grew and changed during the late 1920s, Starch's survey results became quickly outdated. Archibald Crossley, a former political pollster, took audience measurement further by forming the Cooperative Analysis of Broadcasting (CAB) within a year of Starch's research.[33]

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[28] Mosco, *Political Economy of Communication*,150.

[29] This argument was first posited by Meehan. Meehan, "Ratings and the Institutional Approach." For an overview of audience measurement, both historical and contemporary, see Philip M. Napoli, *Audience Economics: Media Institutions and the Audience Marketplace* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

[30] Bermejo, "Audience Manufacture,"138.

[31] Market research surveys predate the radio era. For a history of market research surveys, see Jean M. Converse, *Survey Research in the United States: Roots and Emergence, 1890-1960* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

[32] Steve Craig, "Daniel Starch's 1928 Survey: A First Glimpse of the U.S. Radio Audience," *Journal of Radio & Audio Media* 17 (2010): 182-94.

[33] For a discussion of the intersection between market research and political polling, see Robinson, *Measure of Democracy*.

Crossley worked for both advertisers and radio networks and used next-day telephone surveys that asked respondents to recall programs. Two other ratings services competed with Crossley's CAB: Clark-Hooper Inc. and AC Nielson, launching in 1934 and 1942, respectively.[34] Nielson introduced the "audimeter" in the 1940s, a device attached to radio sets that recorded when the radio was on and to which station(s) it was tuned. With the introduction of ratings systems, advertisers were buying access to the network's listening audience--or rather, a segment of this audience.

However, methods from Crossley's CAB, Clark-Hooper, or AC Nielson were not designed to reliably measure child audiences. Crossley's telephone surveys, the dominant ratings system for much of the 1930s, were unlikely to reach children. Most children's programs aired during the time mothers were preparing dinner.[35] Parents may not have been able to answer phone surveys on behalf of their children because they may not have known precisely the listening habits of their children. Nielson's later "audimeter" accurately tracked tuning, but could not record who was in the room listening or any demographic information about the listeners.[36] Club, premium, and contest offers--the dominant marketing strategies used by food advertisers during the first two decades of network radio--filled in these measurement gaps because they required young listeners to write in to a company and provide basic information, including location, age, and gender. Clubs could be

[34] Karen Buzzard, "Radio Ratings Pioneers: The Development of a Standardized Ratings Vocabulary," *Journal of Radio & Audio Media* 6 (1999): 287-306.

[35] MacLennan, "Women, Radio Broadcasting," 621.

[36] Buzzard, "Radio Ratings Pioneers," 299.

used to gauge audience interest in a show. Such responses revealed to advertisers a glimpse of who heard the offer when it was announced on the air. This "objective" data complemented market research and more subjective discussions about the child consumer that were unfolding in the advertising trade press, at agency meetings, and in large market research endeavours.

The H.C.B. Club Goes on the Air

The early forays into radio advertising coincided with increased attention from food advertisers on the child consumer. In early 1928, Cream of Wheat began directly engaging children through the H.C.B. Club. However, as noted in chapter three, the company still needed parents to introduce their children to the club. Radio resolved this issue and permitted Cream of Wheat, and the dozens of other food advertisers who followed, to communicate directly with children presumably as young as ages three or four. Cream of Wheat could now advertise the H.C.B. Club "to the actual primary customers" instead of selling "indirectly, through the mothers to the children."[37] Radio connected an audience of children--wide ranging in age, geographical location, class, and significantly, literacy levels--that no other communication channel was previously able to reach.

Cream of Wheat was one of the first advertisers to sponsor (and thus produce) a children's program. Cream of Wheat sought advice from the director of WMAQ, a station owned by *The Chicago Daily News*. WMAQ had created the "Topsy Turvy Club"

[37] Minutes of Representatives Meeting, April 16, 1930, box 2, J. Walter Thompson Staff Meeting Minutes, Duke.

in 1926 to support its non-sponsored daily children's programming. The club permitted the station to develop a relationship with its young listeners and Cream of Wheat saw the parallel between it and the H.C.B. Club. Cream of Wheat went on the air in December 1928 with the *Cream of Wheat Menagerie*, a musical entertainment show that allowed the company to talk to children, tell fairy tales, and even explain that "the reason the giant grew so big was that he ate Cream of Wheat."[38] Cream of Wheat's show opened with a series of wild animal noises. Rastus, the fictional Cream of Wheat chef, provided narration. The use of Rastus in the show made the company's racist branding more explicit. He spoke with an exaggerated "minstrel dialect," just as Aunt Jemima did on her 1929 radio show, also produced by JWT.[39] Rastus introduced the Cream of Wheat "Musical Menagerie," which consisted of various animals with names like "Toby, the xylophone-playing monkey." Between musical numbers Rastus talked to the animals, told stories, and recited poems. According to staff at JWT, children had an emotional connection to the animals, which as a result, allowed the company to deliver "some good, hard merchandising." Rastus concluded the episodes by asking children to join the H.C.B. Club and "to send for the free chart and gold stars that each child must have to qualify as a member."[40]

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[38] Ibid.

[39] Michele Hilmes argues that these black brand figures provoked "nostalgia for a bygone way of life in which 'others' labored to provide those things that modern 'white' consumers could now purchase in a box." These exaggerated minstrel voices offered a link between an older American society and the consumer society of the radio era. See Hilmes, *Radio Voices,* 31, 80.

[40] Frances Maule, "Cream of Wheat Radio Program Pulls Inquiries at Average Rate of 100 Per Day," *J. Walter Thompson Newsletter*, April 15, 1929, box MN8, J. Walter Thompson Newsletter Collection, Duke.

The Cream of Wheat show was a 15-minute program that aired in Chicago every weekday morning at 8:00 a.m. This timing represented the "exact moment when *most* mothers are going through the daily grind of trying to brow-beat their offspring into getting dressed and eating their breakfasts." Citing positive feedback from mothers, Cream of Wheat believed the program helped motivate children to get out of bed and get to where they could hear a radio at "the moment they *could* be eating Cream of Wheat."[41] By October 1929, the company claimed the show brought in several hundred daily inquiries, a number that included both letters from mothers and applications to join the H.C.B. Club.[42] One mother wrote to Cream of Wheat in April 1930: "I am very grateful to you and your programs, as it has been hard to get her [the daughter] to eat any hot cereal, and since she joined your club she eats it daily and is gaining in weight and health."[43] Another mother wrote that her daughter "refused to eat any other cereal because she said that Rastus would be offended if he came in and found her eating anything but Cream of Wheat."[44] Within a year, Cream of Wheat produced a second radio program, the *Jolly Bill and Jane* show, broadcast nationally on weekdays at 7:45 p.m.--before bedtime. Jolly Bill, an entertainer, and Jane, his child sidekick, sang songs and continued to promote the H.C.B. Club. Cream of Wheat saw profits rise 10 percent in the first quarter of 1930 from those in 1929, and much of this success was attributed to reaching children

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[41] Ibid.

[42] Minutes of Representatives Meeting, October 29, 1929, box 2, J. Walter Thompson Staff Meeting Minutes, Duke.

[43] Minutes of Representatives Meeting, April 16, 1930, box 2, J. Walter Thompson Staff Meeting Minutes, Duke.

[44] Frances Maule, "Cream of Wheat Radio Program Pulls Inquiries at Average Rate of 100 Per Day," *J. Walter Thompson Newsletter*, April 15, 1929, box MN8, J. Walter Thompson Newsletter Collection, Duke.

over radio.[45] Cream of Wheat's radio promotions demonstrated to broadcasters and competing food advertisers that radio could be used to communicate directly with children.

The number of children's radio programs grew every year during the early 1930s.[46] Between 1928 and 1934, New York City stations launched over 100 children's programs. Of these, 75 programs were considered "commercial," with over half sponsored by food advertisers. A General Mills company historian described early children's radio as being able to "not so much capture as enrapture inescapably quite a new group of customers."[47] The serial format of many programs ensured children tuned in daily, important to sponsors who produced foods, especially cereal, intended to be consumed daily. Based on fan mail responses, children aged 9 to 12 were the most common listeners of sponsored programming.[48] Children of immigrant parents were more likely to own radios than other children in the early 1930s. Radio allowed these children to learn about American culture. However, as the cases described in this chapter illustrate, radio accustomed children to a branded American consumer culture.[49]

In 1936, Azriel Eisenberg published *Children and Radio Programs*, a comprehensive look at the "typical" child radio audience member. Eisenberg

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[45] Minutes of Representatives Meeting, April 16, 1930, box 2, J. Walter Thompson Staff Meeting Minutes, Duke.

[46] Herman S. Hettinger, "How Much Has Radio Changed in 1934?" *Advertising & Selling*, May 10, 1934, 25.

[47] James Gray, *Business Without Boundary: The Story of General Mills* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1954), 167.

[48] Warren B. Dygert, *Radio as an Advertising Medium* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1939), 79.

[49] Hilmes, *Radio Voices*, 29.

surveyed 3,345 children, all from grade five, six, and seven classrooms and found that 91 percent of the children had radios in their houses. Taking advantage of schoolyard and neighbourhood word of mouth, he also reported that 42 percent of children suggested radio programs to their classmates and friends. Emphasizing the ability of children to recall radio programs and sponsors, Eisenberg's research noted that 84 percent of children remembered what time a particular program aired and 80 percent of children successfully named a program's sponsor.[50] Eisenberg also considered gender, age, and class variables. His results showed boys listened to an average of 6 hours and 12 minutes of radio per week, with girls slightly higher at 6 hours and 20 minutes.[51] He found that young girls were more likely to listen to radio in the company of others than boys, and that children from wealthier (and better connected) parents sometimes toured radio studios. Eisenberg even devoted a chapter to correlating the intelligence of children, based on data from classroom teachers, to radio listening patterns.

However, the categories of "children's radio program" or a "child audience" were somewhat ambiguous during the 1930s.[52] A children's radio program was simply any program that "children," which in itself is not a stable category, enjoyed. Children also listened to many programs produced for "adult" audiences. When researchers asked children under 12 about their radio preferences, shows such as *Amos 'n' Andy*, *Eddie Cantor*, or *Al Jolsen* ranked highly. Children, Eisenberg

[50] Eisenberg, *Children and Radio*, 63-5.
[51] Ibid, 51.
[52] Although I prefer the less-pejorative term "children's radio," most broadcasting industry texts referred to this genre as "juvenile radio."

underscored, "did not make distinction between children's programs and so-called adult programs."[53] If parents prevented children from listening to adult-oriented programs, children may still have listened at a friend's house. The hour of a show's broadcast did more to determine the age of the audience than the program content or the sponsor's intentions. Nonetheless, the focus here is on the ways in which business community constructed and approached the child advertising audience and this discussion deals with shows intended and defined *by the industry* for a child audience.

Children's radio programs had several common characteristics. The vast majority aired during the afterschool or pre-dinner hours of the day, most often between 5:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m.[54] Other programs, including the first Cream of Wheat show, aired in the before-school hours. Sponsored children's radio shows were likely to air during weekdays throughout school year, so as to catch children when they were at home. Nearly all shows were 15-minutes in length. Programs were book-ended by announcers pitching the benefits of consuming, or asking parents to purchase, branded products. The announcer messages often accounted for up to one-third of an episode's time. Announcers were almost always male. On the advice of audience research, this was because children found male voices authoritative, as opposed to female voices that reminded children of their nagging

[53] Eisenberg, *Children and Radio*, Appendix.
[54] Marilyn Lawrence Boemer, *The Children's Hour: Radio Programs for Children, 1929-1956* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1989), 2.

mothers or teachers.[55] Many advertisers ensured the announcer pitches--whether they were for a brand, related club, contest, or premium--incorporated the narrative of the show.[56]

"Just for Annie's Radio Friends"

Created by radio pioneer Frank Hummert, *Little Orphan Annie* was one of the most famous radio programs of the 1930s.[57] Boys and girls ranked it as the most popular radio serial of the 1930s.[58] *Little Orphan Annie* was also the first child-directed network radio serial program; children's programs existed on local and network radio in the late 1920s, but none were presented in a serial format where plots developed over several months.[59] The concept for the radio show was taken from a 1920s Harold Gray comic strip that followed Annie, Daddy Warbucks, and her dog Sandy on adventures around the world. *Little Orphan Annie* started on Chicago's WGN in 1930; in April 1931, it began airing nationally on NBC's Blue Network.[60] The 15-minute show aired Monday to Saturday at 5:45 p.m. and was sponsored exclusively by Ovaltine from its 1931 network debut until 1940, when the show moved to the Mutual Broadcasting System. Although the radio show ended

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[55] Eisenberg, *Children and Radio*, 104. This suggestion shows how patriarchal values of male authority were embedded in the business culture of 1930s advertising.

[56] For example, Wheatna, a hot cereal, sponsored the *Popeye* radio show starting in 1935. At the top of several episodes the announcer informed listeners that "Wheatna's his diet" (replacing spinach) and that "all the boys who want to be football players are eating Popeye's favourite cereal because it makes muscles." In other episodes the announcer warned children that several cereal companies having similar sounding names, and warned children not to forget the "those last three letters, E-N-A."

[57] On Frank Hummert and children's programs, see Cox, *Frank and Anne Hummert's Radio Factory*, 81-94.

[58] Eisenberg, *Children and Radio*, 28.

[59] See Lavin, "Creating Consumers," for a discussion of the significance of the radio serial.

[60] Because the network was still not fully linked during the first two years of national broadcast, two separate casts and crew, one in Chicago and one in San Francisco, performed identical scripts for each episode.

in 1942, *Little Orphan Annie* lives on as cultural icon with successful film and stage adaptations.[61]

Little Orphan Annie was an ideal venue in which to advertise Ovaltine to children. Originated in Switzerland in 1904, Ovaltine, described as a "food-drink," was a milk flavouring powder; its chocolate taste supposedly encouraged children to drink more milk. The show often opened with the announcement "here it is, 5:45, the time you hear *Little Orphan Annie* before drinking your Ovaltine every night [at dinner]."[62] The announcer occasionally reminded children that these adventures could be broadcast because boys and girls drank their Ovaltine. From the perspective of Ovaltine, the show's most important feature was its listener club, the *Little Orphan Annie* "Secret Society." Similar to the Cream of Wheat H.C.B. Club, Ovaltine designed the club to make children feel like they were a part of something special, and most importantly, something exclusive. The club fostered a loyal bond to the story, and by extension, to the brand.[63] The Secret Society's welcome package and manual, mailed after children sent in the required Ovaltine seals, warned members to "take good care of this book" as it contained "secrets that only a member of Radio Orphan Annie's Secret Society may know." The manual instructed

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[61] On Annie and popular culture, see: Arthur Asa Berger, *The Comic-Stripped American* (New York: Walker and Company, 1973); Jim Harmon, *The Great Radio Heroes* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2001), 103-12; Stella Ress, "Bridging the Generation Gap: Little Orphan Annie in the Great Depression," *Journal of Popular Culture* 43 (2010): 782-800; and Ellen Rhoads, "Little Orphan Annie and Lévi-Strauss: The Myth and the Method," *Journal of American Folklore* 86 (1973): 345-57. Much of this research deals with the conservative political undertones of *Little Orphan Annie*.

[62] *Little Orphan Annie*, October 23, 1935. Direct quotes from episodes were drawn from recordings available at the "Old Time Radio" Internet Archive, http://www.archive.org/details/oldtimeradio, and in some cases, scripts available at the "OTR Script Library," http://genericradio.com/library.php (both accessed August, 2010).

[63] E. Evalyn Grumbine, "Children's Radio Programs: 'How To' Experiences of Successful Users," *Printer's Ink*, July 15, 1938, 61.

anyone who found it to return it to the owner's address "without reading it." Although the secrets were "strictly private," the club manual did concede that parents, as "honorary members," could view it.

A popular element of the Secret Society was the decoder ring (Figure 4-1). Included with club membership, decoders allowed children to receive "encrypted" messages. At the end of many episodes, the announcer read a numeric code. Listeners wrote down the numbers and used their rings to match each number to a corresponding letter. This element of children's radio made it more interactive and personal for the listeners. On the other hand, decoders also served the sponsor's needs by encouraging sales. Evalyn Grumbine wrote in *Printer's Ink* that children had a "natural" urge to join clubs and that decoders should be given away to make club members feel like they were a part of something exclusive and secret.[64] Ovaltine constructed a kind of planned obsolescence to maintain the interest of children over several years by introducing ever-evolving clubs and *new* decoder rings. For example, the announcer reminded listeners that only members of the Secret Society in 1936 could decrypt the codes given in episodes aired in 1936. Children had to re-join the club each year to keep up, which meant submitting Ovaltine seals annually. The yearly manual was also updated and advertised to be "bigger n' better than ever" (Figure 4-2).

[64] E. Evalyn Grumbine, "This Juvenile Market," *Printer's Ink*, July 19, 1934, 20.

Figure 4-1. ***Little Orphan Annie*** **1935 decoder ring. eBay listing, August 2010.**

Figure 4-2. ***Little Orphan Annie*** **1940 club manual cover. eBay listing, August 2010.**

During the 1930s, over half of all network radio programs involved some kind of premium offer.[65] Secret Society members who promised to drink Ovaltine three times per day, for example, received a special coin engraved with the words "good luck" and "make a wish." Listeners could also receive other rings with unique membership numbers, ID tags, books, mugs, badges, and pins. Many of these offers were for club members only and most required submitting additional Ovaltine seals. In an October 1935 episode, the announcer noted that the premium offer was "made just for Annie's radio friends who are drinking Ovaltine everyday." Given the Depression-era context, premiums allowed children to receive toys and trinkets without parents putting out much of their own money. Introductory premium offers--a badge for joining a club--were easily accessible, costing only a proof of purchase. Costlier, in terms of cash or quantity of proofs-of-purchase submitted, premiums could then be used to sustain interest over a longer term.[66] Premiums also allowed radio advertisers to better "know" their audience. Returned Ovaltine seals were used to measure the size of, and gather demographic data on, the listening audience.

Contests functioned in a similar manner. Contests permitted advertisers to gather data (such as age, gender, geographic location) about their listeners, encourage immediate consumption of a product by requiring that a box top or label be submitted with the entry, and generate listener excitement via prizes. Contest prizes associated with *Little Orphan Annie* included simple toys and puppets. A more

[65] Cox, *Sold on Radio*, 288.
[66] Grumbine, *Reaching Juvenile Markets*, 182.

elaborate contest offered 50 trained "pedigree dogs" as prizes. To enter the contest, members sent in their suggested name for a dog with one Ovaltine seal. All entrants received *Radio Orphan Annie's Book about Dogs*.

By joining the Secret Society, children were drawn into *consumer society* more generally. Hailed by the program as desiring, consuming subjects, the show presented the values of an entire consumer culture to listeners. The Secret Society, for example, tried to foster in children that consuming a branded product led to enjoying material things; further, they would be left out if they did not maintain their membership and keep up with the club's manuals, secret codes, decoder rings, and other premiums. A kind of competitive consumption tied to forms of social acceptance was promulgated as the announcer suggested that a listener should be the first in his or her neighbourhood to receive the latest-and-greatest premium.[67] The Secret Society welcomed children into a peer culture, a unique children's-only sphere, but then put members in competition with each other; a logic of competition more in line with growing industrial capitalism undermined the aura of belonging.

A premium offer broadcast on October 18, 1935, best demonstrates this competitive spirit. In this episode, Annie received an international package from Daddy Warbucks on her birthday. Inside the package was a birthstone ring and listeners could receive their own ring (with a custom birthstone) for 10 cents and an Ovaltine seal. At the start of the episode the announcer sternly declared, "tonight's the night when you're going to hear all about the big surprise," presented as the

[67] Thorstein Veblen critiques the excesses and waste of this kind of competitive consumption in *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899; repr., New York: Penguin, 1994), 29.

"most beautiful and thrilling surprise Annie has ever had for her radio friends," and "something absolutely new and different." The lengthy pitch for the premium took over half of the 15-minute episode. The announcer placed a special emphasis on the ring being "absolutely different from any other ring offered on the radio before," because "it's finished in genuine 24 karat gold plate" and a full-sized ring, "just like the ones your mother and father wear." Connecting the offer to the show's plot, the announcer also noted that the custom birthstone was "imported from Europe," similar to "the stone that Daddy Warbucks sent to Annie." Emphasizing a kind of competitive, conspicuous consumption, the pitch told children that, "everybody can see it sparkling and shining when you wear it." In a 1934 *Printer's Ink* article, Grumbine warned advertisers not to "make the mistake of making the product the center of interest."[68] Although this was difficult for some myopic advertisers to accept, this episode showed that Ovaltine successfully wrote scripts around the premium, not their product.

After asking listeners if they dreamed of "having a big shiny gold-plated birthday ring," the announcer stressed a sense of urgency noting, "boys and girls everywhere will be sending in for their rings this very night," and reminded children to be "the very first of all your friends to wear one." Subsequent episodes repeated the ring premium instructions, with the announcer asking listeners, "wasn't that a great surprise last week?" A week later the announcer hinted that the peers of listeners could already be receiving their rings, once again instigating a form of competitive

[68] E. Evalyn Grumbine, "This Juvenile Market," *Printer's Ink*, July 19, 1934, 20.

consumption. The instructions ended with the announcer telling listeners to ask their mothers for a can of Ovaltine. If families already had a can in the house, children were instructed to still ask, because they will inevitably need "another can pretty soon anyway!"

Not all Ovaltine pitches on *Little Orphan Annie* concerned clubs, premium offers, or contests. The announcer emphasized the "health benefits" of Ovaltine. Listeners were told that Ovaltine could help get them through the morning to "keep up" with others in class. Even if they were not hungry at breakfast, the show instructed children they could drink a large glass of Ovaltine to help with concentration and avoid feeling "fidgety and fussy in school." The show's announcer commonly questioned, "don't you wish you could be as popular as Little Orphan Annie?" The positive answer to such queries involved getting "pep" by drinking Ovaltine, so "everyone will want you in the game and soon you'll be as popular as Orphan Annie herself." To have "real Orphan Annie pep" the announcer suggested listeners drink Ovaltine "everyday" both "at meals and between meals."

No matter whether the pitch was related to a club, premium, contest, or simply "pep," Ovaltine appealed to children as a junior sales force that could act on parents, especially mothers. The phrases, "tell your mother" or "ask your mother right now" were heard in the majority of episodes. Health-oriented sales talks supported the interests of parents, allowing children to tell their mothers about the benefits of Ovaltine. During one 1936 episode, the announcer read a letter from a mother explaining how a doctor advised her to give her daughter Ovaltine. This "treatment"

worked: the daughter gained eight pounds and the mother pledged to be loyal to Ovaltine, as it brought her daughter back to health. *Little Orphan Annie* demonstrated that children were an ideal radio advertising audience, but parents ultimately needed to approve of the product for a purchase to be made.

Segmenting with Kellogg's Singing Lady and Wheaties' Skippy

The Kellogg's *Singing Lady* radio program changed the company's approach to children. In the 1920s, Kellogg experimented with several marketing efforts aimed at children, such as giving away folders of animal cartoons, or including cutouts of Jules Verne's Nautilus on cereal boxes. While these efforts allowed the company to build a positive relationship with parents and young consumers, the promotions were not advertised directly to children. Starring Ireene Wicker, the *Singing Lady* demonstrated the appeal of radio to a younger audience.[69] The *Singing Lady* debuted on January 11, 1932 on NBC's Blue Network, airing on weekdays from 5:30 p.m. to 5:45 p.m. The show consisted of nursery stories--sometimes adapted from rhymes associated with Mother Goose or the work of the Brothers Grimm--and simple songs aimed at pre-literate children.

Kellogg successfully turned the show's popularity with children into cereal purchases with a variety of special offers. Families could acquire their own copy of the *Singing Lady*'s songbook by submitting Kellogg's cereal box tops. Kellogg also produced "Singing Lady Party Kits" that included everything a parent would need to throw a birthday party for eight children: invitations, place cards, party favours,

[69] Wicker would be accused of being a communist sympathizer by the 1950s.

masks, cake decorations, and recipes. The kits could be obtained in exchange for mailing a Corn Flakes box top and 10 cents.[70] With the *Singing Lady* party kits and songbooks, Kellogg also showed how radio programming could be used alongside premiums to increase sales. As with *Little Orphan Annie*, food advertisers recognized that product-oriented announcer pitches were not always enough to ensure a child requested a specific brand from parents, but a pitch that told a child they could have a program-related book, toy, or trinket by sending in a box top was frequently successful.[71]

As the *Singing Lady* program demonstrated, advertisers did not simply try to reach the maximum number of children. Instead, many companies considered different age groups, and even genders. Grumbine, an author, editor, and regular contributor to *Printer's Ink*, divided children into five sub-segments: (i) those up to age three, who could be appealed to with basic stimulation of the senses; (ii) those age four to six who appreciated fairytales, songs, animals, and other fantasy stories; (iii) those age seven to nine, who had a particular interest in premiums and prizes, (iv) those age ten to twelve, who had the strongest interest in joining clubs, and (v) those thirteen and older who started considering sports, health, and even occupations as adults.[72] The trade press warned that boys did not enjoy playing with girls and older children did not want to listen to shows for younger children; these

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[70] Kellogg's advertisement, 1936, microfilm reel 30, D'Arcy Collection, Illinois.

[71] This trend continued throughout the decade. The Jell-O sponsored *Wizard of Oz* program, airing in 1936, offered listeners "Little Wizard" storybooks in exchange for Jell-O boxes. Similarly, the Quaker Puffed Rice-sponsored *Dick Tracy* 1938 program offered children patrol pledges and official badges.

[72] Grumbine, *Reaching Juvenile Markets*, 46.

were all described as "psychological factors" advertisers should consider.[73] Eisenberg told potential radio advertisers that boys listened to "stories of strenuous adventure" while girls took an interest in tales of "emotion and sentiment" as well as in musical numbers. Likewise, boys were more likely to join radio clubs while girls were said to be more likely to write a letter to their favourite radio star.[74] These suggestions reflect more about how the industry perceived children than their actual behaviour. In their effort to "know" child audiences, advertising professionals constructed their audience into smaller packages and created potentially arbitrary market segments that would prevail for decades.[75]

The Wheaties sponsored *Skippy* show debuted on CBS on January 11, 1932 and provided an alternative for boys "too old" to take an interest in the *Singing Lady*.[76] *Skippy*, created by Hummert, was an attempt to replicate *Little Orphan Annie*'s instant success. *Skippy* aired on weekdays from 5:00 p.m. to 5:15 p.m. and was also based on an existing comic strip. Skippy was a Tom Sawyer-like rascal who tested the patience of adults; he was an anti-authority character who many adolescents could admire. Before commercial radio, General Mills marketed Wheaties exclusively to adults. However, by 1930 General Mills' president James Ford Bell concluded "the child himself" was the ultimate consumer of cold cereal and must be "won." Radio, according to Bell, "penetrated into the nursery where so often the

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[73] Walter A. Burke, "Age Brackets of Kids Programs," *Advertising & Selling*, June 1940, 17.
[74] Eisenberg, *Children and Radio*, 145.
[75] This is problematic with gender demarcations in children's advertising. The "program-length" commercials, television programs that supported toy lines, were infamous for creating masculine/feminine binary.
[76] The show debuted on the same day as *The Singing Lady*.

tastes of the family are actually shaped by the most powerful of dictators, the housewife's adored children." The *Skippy* radio program allowed the company to reach these supposedly powerful "dictators."[77]

General Mills created a *Skippy* club for listeners, titled the "Skippy Secret Service Society" (SSSS) to complement the show. The club shared many characteristics with Ovaltine's Secret Society. The SSSS allowed children to be more than simply radio listeners. For the application "fee" of two Wheaties box tops, the club allowed children to develop a strong attachment to the program and its characters. Members of the SSSS received a badge, as well as an eating chart to track their breakfasts. Like Cream of Wheat, Wheaties sought to make eating a branded cereal a part of daily routines. As "insiders," club members learned about secret handshakes and codewords that would be broadcast on the show.

At around the time *Little Orphan Annie*, *Singing Lady*, and *Skippy* debuted, articles discussing children as a direct audience began to appear regularly in the trade press. For example, a May 21, 1931 *Printer's Ink* piece titled, "Don't Overlook the Sons and Daughters of Mr. and Mrs. Consumer," argued that "the appeal to the child itself is all important in making the difference between small sales and large." Note, the wording here: the child was an "it," an object from which the industry could derive sales. The article also described a reversal of attitudes noted in chapter three; advertisers communicated with children "and indirectly to parents," instead of "the old idea of appealing to parents to buy for the child." Between 1934 and 1938,

[77] Gray, *Business Without Boundary*, 163-5.

Grumbine contributed a series of articles to *Printer's Ink* on the subject of advertising to children.[78]

Grumbine soon after presented her expertise in the form of a book--the first book on the topic of marketing to children. Her 1938 *Reaching Juvenile Markets: How to Advertise, Sell, and Merchandise through Boys and Girls* summarized her many other articles and offered advertisers the first book-length manual on how to appeal to children. Grumbine filled her text with case studies from many food advertisers. In the book's preface, she counseled against advertisers exploiting children; instead, she suggested that children "can benefit materially from their experiences in taking part in the various activities promoted by the national advertiser." Furthermore, she proposed a kind of active audience, arguing that children are generally more intelligent and savvy than most adults believe them to be. Grumbine endorsed a variety of strategies to capture the enthusiasm of children including clubs, premiums, and contests, such as those championed by Ovaltine and Wheaties.[79]

Market "knowledge" contributed to the rise of radio advertising to children, because it showed that children were a valuable advertising audience segment. The advertising industry of the 1930s defined market research as a "planned, orderly,

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[78] See E. Evalyn Grumbine, "This Juvenile Market," July 19, 1934, 20; "This Juvenile Market," July 26, 1934, 45; "This Juvenile Market," August 2, 1934, 67; "Advertising To Children," June 17, 1937, 49; "How to Build Effective Radio Programs for the Child Market," July 1, 1938, 23; "Children's Radio Programs: 'How To' Experiences of Successful Users," July 15, 1938, 61.

[79] In addition to larger strategies, Grumbine offered more mundane advice, such as warning advertisers not to use popular radio or comic characters without permission due to copyright law. Here, we can see "character marketing" was still a very new practice for advertisers.

thorough and analytical consideration."[80] Yet, the trade press, practitioner books, and experts--the primary sources of market knowledge--did not so much describe children as construct them as an idealized audience. The research and experts of this period constructed not only the characteristics of children, but also the reasons why these characteristics made them valuable. First, children were frequently considered to be "modern." In other words, children brought new ideas, attitudes, and products into the home because they were free from the shackles of tradition. The industry considered children more amendable, more pliant than adults; they were easier subjects to interpellate. As Grumbine argued, "even parents who consider themselves completely modern are often considered old-fashioned by boys and girls today."[81] Young people were said to be carriers of news into the household and to be the first to try new products. Second, according to industry discourses, children had a "natural" curiosity and enthusiasm that advertisers could harness. JWT staff claimed a child's "unhampered imagination makes him enthusiastic about things that cost very little provided they are dressed up in adventure and romance."[82] Third, children were valuable to food producers, especially during the Depression, because parents often put the needs of their children before their own. Advertisers constructed children as recession-proof consumers. Charles Muller

[80] American Marketing Association, *The Technique of Marketing Research* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1937), 3.

[81] Grumbine, *Reaching Juvenile Markets*, 28.

[82] Minutes of JWT Forum, May 12, 1936, box 6, J. Walter Thompson Staff Meeting Minutes, Duke.

wrote in *Printer's Ink* in 1931 that "parents often deny themselves many things in order that son and daughter may be well fed."[83]

Branded Cowboy Adventures

Following the success of *Singing Lady* and *Skippy,* many other cereal producers began sponsoring radio programs. Hecker H-O and Ralston, two other cereal producers, launched cowboy/western themed radio serials within a year of each other. Each program involved clubs, premiums, and contests. The "pitch" from these shows emphasized brands; they approached children as brand-loyal subjects. Brand identification and loyalty were challenges in the crowded breakfast cereal market during the 1930s.

Sponsored by Hecker H-O Oats hot cereal, the *Bobby Benson* show debuted on CBS on October 17, 1932, airing weekday evenings from 6:15 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. until 1936.[84] Hecker H-O was one of several cereal producers based in Buffalo during the interwar years and the *Bobby Benson* show represented the largest advertising expenditure in the company's history.[85] The show's setting was the H-Bar-O ranch in the Big Bend region of Texas. Though ranches were often named in the format of *initial*-bar-*initial* to correspond with cattle branding, the H-Bar-O setting reinforced the H-O Oats product name. Bobby Benson was a 10-year-old boy who, by a stroke of luck, had inherited the ranch. The show told the adventures of Bobby and Polly,

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[83] Charles G. Muller, "Don't Overlook the Sons and Daughters of Mr. and Mrs. Consumer," *Printer's Ink*, May 21, 1931, 37.

[84] A spin-off of the show was launched over a decade later in 1949.

[85] Buffalo was a strategic location between the Midwestern grain growing regions and the large eastern seaboard urban consumer markets.

his female counterpart. Rounding out the cast were Aunt Lil, racial caricatures used for comic relief like a Chinese cook, and the villain, a leader of a band of desperados trying to steal gold from the property. Hecker H-O thought young audiences, especially boys, could relate to Bobby's youthful character. To handle big responsibilities at such a young age, Bobby ate H-O Oats to be "strong." The show's announcer told children they could be a doctor, lawyer, or architect, but their health was "their greatest aid."[86] Children were told to "eat H-O Oats every morning," the breakfast that was "good for both boys and girls who want to succeed."

During this time, joining clubs ranked highest in "non-listening" radio-related activities for children.[87] *Bobby Benson* listeners could join the "H-O Rangers Club." Membership dues consisted of an H-O Oats box top and over 90,000 children joined in the first three months.[88] The introductory membership package consisted of a certificate, a ranger's button, and a picture of Bobby with his horse. The package also included a catalogue of other premiums that could be acquired for additional box tops, including cowboy hats, chaps, and lassos. H-O made available *Bobby Benson* adventure books, displaying some of the radio adventure tales in full colour, as premiums in exchange for two box tops. The announcer described at length how "if these books were bought in the regular bookstore, they would be best sellers." The announcer instructed the audience to "listen in at the close of the program and see how easy it is to get one of the books if you are a regular upstanding healthy

[86] This pitch played into the American cultural bias that an individual can be anything if they are healthy and "work hard."

[87] Eisenberg, *Children and Radio*, 138.

[88] Grumbine, *Reaching Juvenile Markets*, 37.

eater of Bobby's favorite hot breakfast."[89] Cumulatively, these promotional activities were intended to maintain interest in the program and reinforce the H-O Oats brand.

In September 1933, 11 months after *Bobby Benson* debuted, Ralston launched the *Tom Mix Straight Shooters* children's radio serial on the Mutual network. Ralston's Hot Wheat cereal competed directly with Hecker H-O Oats. Based on a real-life character, Tom Mix enjoyed a film career with embellished stories of cowboy bravery.[90] While other cowboy stars in the Hollywood system smoked, drank, and shot to kill, Tom Mix stressed "dress-up showmanship" side of frontier life.[91] He was an ideal film personality to move to children's radio. In early 1933, after watching the success of *Bobby Benson*, staff at Ralston-Purina secured Tom Mix's permission to create a fictional show about him. Airing from 5:30 p.m. to 5:45 p.m., the show was set on a western ranch where Tom's courage defeated villains.[92] Episodes typically ended by leaving children in suspense. To avoid causing undue stress on young audiences, Tom promised listeners he would come out of precarious situations safely. Advertisements for the show boasted that Tom Mix was "the world's champion cowboy" and invited children to "hear Tom Mix match wits with a desperate outlaw as danger and mystery ride the range."[93] While the Bobby Benson character was popular because audiences around the same age were able to relate

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[89] Quoted in Peter Morrell, *Poisons, Potions and Profits: The Antidote to Radio Advertising* (New York: Knight Publishers, 1937), 120. Morrell's text is described in detail in chapter six.

[90] For additional writing on Tom Mix, see Harmon, *Great Radio Heroes,* 87-102.

[91] Loy R. Philip, *Westerns and American Culture, 1930-1955* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2001), 12.

[92] The show was not entirely about action, however. Tom also sang campfire songs. These musical interludes may have been included to attract female listeners who, according to market research, were more drawn to music on radio.

[93] Ralston Wheat Cereal advertisement, 1940, microfilm reel 30, D'Arcy Collection, Illinois.

to him, Tom Mix took advantage of, in the words of one critic, "the natural tendency of children to be hero-worshippers."[94] Although the real Tom Mix died in a car accident in 1940, the show continued in various iterations--changing networks, time slots, at one point expanding to 30 minutes--until 1951.

Ralston launched the "Straight Shooters" club alongside the program in 1933 (see Figure 4-3 for club manual).[95] Box tops began rolling into Ralston-Purina's headquarters immediately. Premiums offered to members, in exchange for additional box tops, included blow dart guns, rings, model airplanes, books, comics, coins, whistles, bandanas, badges, stationery, cowboy vests, belt buckles, periscopes, branding irons, and even a mini-telegraph set. Members of the Ralston Straight Shooters could also receive decoder badges. The announcer told listeners to "get the jump on your friends" by being "the first to decode secret messages and secret clues broadcast in the radio program." A writer for the show claimed, "first you had to get a kid's attention, then you get his loyalty."[96]

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[94] Rachel Lyn Palmer and Isidore M. Alpher, *40,000,000 Guinea Pig Children* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1937), 10.

[95] Unlike the case of *Annie*'s Secret Society, the sponsor's name was included in the club title.

[96] Quoted in Bruce and Crawford, *Cerealizing America*, 80.

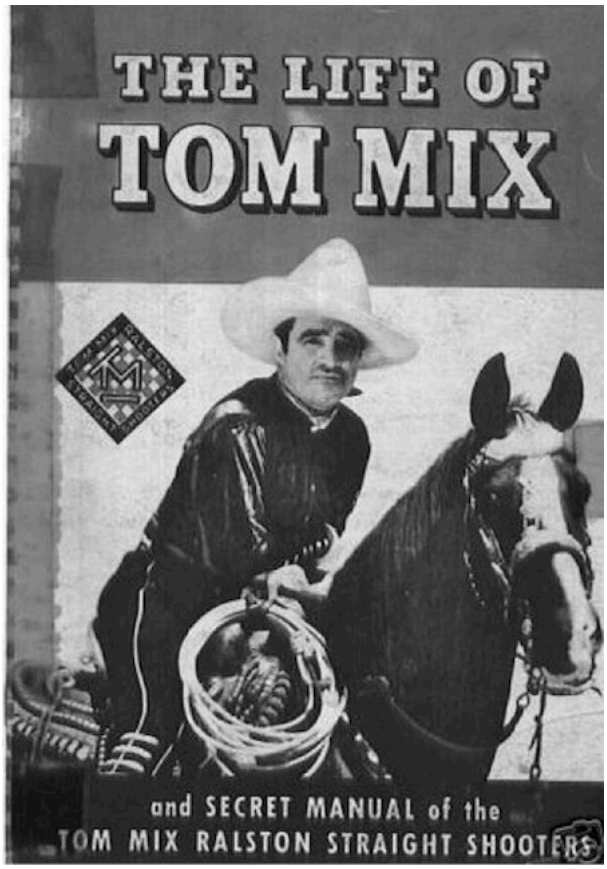

Figure 4-3. *Tom Mix* club manual. eBay listing, August 2010.

Premium offers for Ralston Straight Shooters were often incorporated into the show's narrative. A 1939 episode featured Tom using a flashlight to make a daring escape. The announcer told listeners that they too could have a flashlight by sending in two Ralston box tops, but he warned listeners to only submit *Ralston* box tops. At the end of this episode, Tom addressed his audience of Straight Shooters explaining, "I have found that when I'm working around the ranch or when I'm hiking or camping, I just can't get along without a flashlight." He went on to describe how he designed his own flashlight for this offer, one that cannot be purchased elsewhere, "no sir." During a 1941 episode, the comical "Old Wrangler" character delivered a

pitch for *Tom Mix Straight Shooters* comic books that could be had in exchange for two Ralston box tops. Not unlike *Little Orphan Annie*, the show's narrative typically occupied no more than 10-minutes and was book-ended by lengthy jingles and special offer pitches.

Both of these cereal-sponsored shows, debuting shortly after *Little Orphan Annie*, demonstrated marketing innovations. *Bobby Benson* and *Tom Mix Straight Shooters* were promoted by extensive--and truly remarkable--cross-promotions. For the 1932 launch of *Bobby Benson*, hundreds of cowboys, complete with stagecoaches and chuckwagons, appeared at schools and playgrounds to recruit H-Bar-O "Rangers." Local newspapers advertised these appearances and the radio show. Display cards were available at retailers proudly showcasing images of Bobby and the dictum "eat H-O Oats and be strong." *Tom Mix Straight Shooters* received a promotional boost from special edition comics, display cards, and newspaper advertisements. Today, children's commercial media characters are often tied to multi-platform integrated marketing campaigns.[97] But these practices are longstanding. In 1932 and 1933, children's advertising and commercial media already represented an integrated and multi-pronged cross-promotional effort.

However, it was the constant emphasis on brand names that made *Bobby Benson* and *Tom Mix Straight Shooters* successful advertising vehicles. While the idea of branded food was not new in 1932, bringing children into the realm of brand

[97] Nickelodeon characters SpongeBob and Dora the Explorer, for example, star in shows, motion pictures, video games, amusement park attractions, online games, and also appear as fast food toys and on the packages of branded foods. Families can purchase Dora-shaped canned spaghetti, or SpongeBob boxed macaroni and cheese.

preference and brand loyalty still required development. *Bobby Benson's* H-Bar-O ranch and Rangers Club helped to reinforce the "H-O" oats brand name. All contests and other promotional materials emphasized the "H-O" name. Club members who wrote "I like H-O Oats" in the neatest handwriting could win bicycles. As one writer in *Printer's Ink* noted, "loyalty among members," which could "often last into adulthood," was a benefit of sponsored children's clubs that outdistanced immediate sales.[98]

Members of the Straight Shooters club signed a pledge to "shoot straight with their parents, friends, and Tom Mix by regularly eating Ralston, Official Straight Shooters Cereal." Cowboy characters from the show instructed children to "ask your maw to get that red and white checkered package of Ralston for you tomorrow" because it was "the top hand cereal to keep you in top condition." During a December 1941 episode, the Old Wrangler character described in detail how hot cereal was good on cold winter days. He told listeners to "knock Mr. Frost as flat as a pancake" with Ralston cereal, but made sure to remind them, "it comes in the red and white checkered package." The refrain of "red and white checkered package" was common. Additionally, many of the premium offers reinforced the Ralston branding. Ralston incorporated the red and white checkerboard into badges, belt buckles, hats, and the mini telegraph set (Figure 4-4). So, Ralston not only taught young listeners the brand name--for example, naming the company excessively in the radio jingle that began each episode--but also how to recognize the brand

[98] "Children's Clubs are Potent Sales Makers," *Printer's Ink*, October 18, 1946.

through the company's distinct red and white checkerboard emblem and packaging design. This was more specific than consumer socialization; it was brand socialization.

Figure 4-4. *Tom Mix* telegraph set premium offer. eBay listing, August 2010.

Sales pitches from *Tom Mix Straight Shooters* and *Bobby Benson* also emphasized health benefits. However, diverging from *Little Orphan Annie,* which promised a gender-neutral "pep" to help children in school, the latter shows pitched a masculine ideal of health and brute strength. Both *Bobby Benson* and *Tom Mix Straight Shooters* were remarkably similar in terms of plot lines, settings, and also masculine overtones. The shows focused on male protagonists fighting nature and outlaws in dangerous environments. Westerns, both films and radio programs, had a didactic role to play in reinforcing American values, such as knowing the difference between right and wrong, being strong, and masculine hard work.[99] Sponsors promised

[99] Philip, *Westerns and American Culture*, 5.

listeners that they could be "strong," "tough," and build muscles with "cowboy vitamins." Hecker H-O and Ralston were not alone in utilizing western-themed programming to leverage muscle-building brand messages. During the 1940s, other popular western radio serials included the *Lone Ranger,* sponsored by Cheerios, *Wilderness Road*, *Cimarron Tavern,* and *Roy Rogers*. Audience research by psychologist Dichter in 1945 concluded that children were still receptive to western "cowboys and Indians" radio programs.[100]

The emphasis on tough masculinity coincided with the militaristic nationalism of America's entry into World War II. Loy Philip's history of western films and radio programs emphasizes how this genre "reinforced [a] sense of national identity."[101] While western films socialized children to values of frontier masculinity, justice, and sometimes democracy, the sponsored western radio programs were more likely to equate national identity with consumer identity. The show conflated being healthy and eating the right branded products with the independence and freedom of the nation during the war. A December 15, 1941 episode of *Tom Mix Straight Shooters* told listeners "Uncle Sam wants you to help build a stronger America by staying in shape." Around this same time, the Ralston Straight Shooters club pledge declared: "I know Ralston is just the kind of cereal that will help build a strong America."[102]

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[100] CBS Research Department Program Analysis Division, "Report on Listener Reactions Based on the Lazarsfeld-Stanton Program Analyzer: *Wilderness Road* and *Cimarron Tavern*," May 1945, box 1, report #19, Ernest Dichter Papers, Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, DE. This research showed that young girls also listened to the programs, despite their more masculine appeals. This supports the longstanding media and marketing assumption that girls will enjoy programs that boys like, but not vice versa.

[101] Philip, *Westerns and American Culture*, 80.

[102] "Children's Clubs are Potent Sales Makers," *Printer's Ink*, October 18, 1946.

During the war, organizations such as the Boy Scouts encouraged children to sell war savings stamps, or collect scrap rubber and metal to aid the allied effort.[103] *Tom Mix's* patriotic themes complemented these efforts, however commercially inflected.

The *Bobby Benson* and *Tom Mix Straight Shooters* programs instructed their child listeners to ask their mothers for the brands. The advertisers framed their appeals to children in such a way that parents would also be satisfied. Newspaper advertisements promoting *Tom Mix Straight Shooters*, and by extension, Ralston, included a small bar at the bottom of the page under the heading "Mother!" that detailed vitamin content. Characters remarked, "I'll be a pink-eyed prairie dog if you won't go plumb loco about this Ralston Wheat Cereal." The announcer then followed up, prompting "Straight Shooters" to "ask your mother in the morning." The show's jingle sang, "Mom says it's swell to eat." Writers at a JWT meeting in 1936 concluded, "there are still millions of children who must be induced to eat," even though parents knew "coercion makes the child ill," suggesting that parents appreciated advertisers offering something clever, "particularly if it is associated with adventure or hero worship."[104] It is also revealing that Grumbine's 1938 text was sub-titled *How to Advertise, Sell, and Merchandise through Boys and Girls* and not "*to* Boys and Girls."

The central role of parents led many radio experts to caution advertisers not to anger them. Parents represented a perceived point of resistance. Eisenberg, warning

[103] Robert Kirk, "Getting in the Scrap: The Mobilization of American Children in World War II," *Journal of Popular Culture 29* (1995): 223-33.

[104] Minutes of JWT Forum, May 12, 1936, box 6, J. Walter Thompson Staff Meeting Minutes, Duke.

against the excessive use of premiums, predicted that, "sooner or later the intelligent parent will revolt at the type of habit training brought about by 'inducements.'"[105] Nonetheless, he argued that parents in general supported their children listening to radio. He said parents especially liked shows that helped in general education, teaching about music, culture, history, or geography. Eisenberg even suggested that parents approved of radio's ability to teach children "the fine art of sitting still and listening to something."[106] Advertising professionals also wrote about finding the right kinds of radio programs to sponsor. Audience research suggested children were attracted to exciting, dramatic serials with "red-blooded characters."[107] Experts told sponsors programs must offer suspense and sustained action to maintain interest over many months. Other articles in the trade press warned advertisers to avoid frightening programs--so as not to upset children or parents.[108] Along similar lines, radio programs were supposed to emphasize good taste, avoid bawdy humour, slang or bad grammar, and provide accurate geographical or historical content.

"Even Better than Christmas"

As the cases of Ovaltine, Wheaties, H-O Oats, and Ralston demonstrate, positioning children as brand-loyal and demanding purchase influencers was a dominant strategy in the 1930s. During a 1933 JWT creative meeting, an executive

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[105] Eisenberg, *Children and Radio*, 142.
[106] Ibid, 151.
[107] Dygert, *Radio as an Advertising Medium*, 29.
[108] See "Child Radio Tastes," *Printer's Ink*, April 30, 1936, 92; "Poisons and Guinea Pigs," *Printer's Ink*, October 7, 1937, 88 and "How to Build Effective Radio Programs for the Child Market," *Printer's Ink*, July 1, 1938, 23.

bluntly stated: "I won't stop to take any testimony here regarding the energy and persistence with which a child can nag their parents. Suffice to say that this great energy has been harnessed by the premium advertiser and been put to work."[109]

For other product categories, including chewing gum, and other small "treat" items, food advertisers used radio to reach children as actual purchasers.[110] Chewing gum producers marketed nationally and were involved in children's radio.[111] Wrigley's *Lone Wolf Tribe* program, debuting in 1933, sought to engage children with club (the "Lone Wolf Tribe Club"), premium, and contest offers. When Wrigley launched the radio serial, the company even sent a number of "chiefs" to public schools to speak about "Indian lore." These individuals did not promote Wrigley or the show directly, though Wrigley did hire them to generate an interest in the subject matter.

Most notably, the Popsicle company ventured into children's radio by the late 1930s. In April 1939, it assumed the sponsorship of *Buck Rogers in the Twenty-fifth Century* and leveraged the already-popular show to promote spring and summer purchases of its various frozen foods. *Buck Rogers in the Twenty-fifth Century* made its original radio debut in November 1932, the same fall *Bobby Benson* appeared. For the next five years, *Buck Rogers* was a hit for CBS and was sponsored at different

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[109] Minutes of Creative Organization Staff Meeting, March 1, 1933, box 5, J. Walter Thompson Staff Meeting Minutes, Duke.

[110] Shops selling "penny candy" were prevalent by the 1920s and children frequented such shops in great numbers. The candy, however, was often purchased in bulk or made at the store. Consequently, confectionary companies did not play a major role in 1930s radio because they relied less on advertising or branding and more on sales techniques at the retail level.

[111] On the history of gum marketing, see also: Joseph Gustaitis, "The Sticky History of Chewing Gum," *American History* 33 (1998): 30-34; Michael Redclift, *Chewing Gum: The Fortunes of Taste* (New York: Routledge, 2004); and Robinson, "Marketing Gum."

times by three major food advertisers: Cocomalt, Cream of Wheat, and Kellogg. Popsicle revived the program in 1939 and moved the show to the Mutual Network, with three episodes airing per week. Popsicle's sponsorship only lasted one season; General Mills went on to sponsor the show until *Buck Rogers* ended its run in 1947. However, Popsicle's limited-term sponsorship of the show was still significant because of the ways the show's messaging diverged from other food sponsors of 1930s and 1940s radio.

Buck Rogers in the Twenty-fifth Century was based on a 1928 story about a fictional American hero who fought in World War I and then awoke in a vastly different future world after being in a state of suspended animation for centuries. A war between Americans and the "Mongol race" had broken out. According to the narrative, the Mongol race took over most of the globe and drove the "white race" back into the "hinterland." Rogers relied on a plethora of futuristic devices, comprising of rocket guns, disintegrator rays, space ships, and anti-gravity belts, to fight the war. Episodes described Rogers retrieving stolen inventions from evil scientists who supported the Mongols. Perhaps more than any other in the 1930s, the show provided vivid fantasy and action elements. Audience research, such as that conducted by John De Boer at Chicago Normal College in 1936, concluded that action and adventure were the most enticing aspects of children's radio; his survey of 558 school children cited *Buck Rogers* as one of the most popular shows on the air.[112] His research also noted that children, captivated by fantasy and adventure, do

[112] "What Children Want on Radio, it Seems, is Action," *Chicago Tribune*, April 17, 1936, 24.

not want to hear "anything that resembles teaching" on the radio. Nevertheless, *Buck Rogers* was able to teach children about planets and the solar system.[113]

Premiums were still needed as an inducement, however, even if the sales strategy did not involve children pestering their parents. In the 1930s, advertising professionals reveled in the idea that children had "no sense of values."[114] A premium could be cheap but still highly desirable to children. Additionally, these premiums could be "shown around the block" creating "desire in other children."[115] Popsicle saw a one hundred percent increase in sales in the summer of 1939, credited to their premium offers advertised on *Buck Rogers*.[116] The Popsicle incentive program allowed young buyers to collect product packages (bags) and exchange them for prizes: watches, dolls, and even a table tennis set. This was an existing promotion that the *Buck Rogers* show advertised. As such, the prizes did not necessarily involve themes or characters from the show. Because Popsicle only sponsored the show for a single summer, it was too difficult to develop elaborate plot lines around the brand or promotional offers.

The announcer frequently turned the microphone over to "Popsicle Pete" at the top of each show to discuss Popsicle premiums, and on one occasion, to sing a song about Popsicle products. Popsicle Pete was promoted as the "typical American boy" --a young, innocent sounding boy discussing Popsicle products. Literally, Popsicle

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[113] During Cocomalt's initial sponsorship of the show, children could submit labels in exchange for planetary maps.

[114] Minutes of Creative Organization Staff Meeting, March 1, 1933, box 5, J. Walter Thompson Staff Meeting Minutes, Duke.

[115] Ibid.

[116] Juvenile Market Group advertisement in *Printer's Ink*, June 13, 1941, 83.

Pete was a constructed commercial persona: the ideal child consumer in the eyes of the advertising industry. Popsicle Pete was the typical American boy because he was the typical brand-loyal consumer, a branded role model for listeners to emulate. On the first Popsicle-sponsored Buck Rogers episode in 1939, Pete introduced himself:

> Hello everybody. I sure am glad to meet'cha. And boy am I glad I was picked to be the typical American boy. Because now I'm Popsicle Pete. I always wanted to be on the radio, and now I have a chance to tell you about some wonderful presents you can get--free! Gee, you oughta see them--hundreds of 'em! You get them just for saving bags from nifty Popsicles, Fudgicles, and Creamsicles. Some gifts! Even better than Christmas! You can get a wristwatch, a movie camera, table tennis, a wallet, a doll--gee, lots of gifts! Just save the bags from Popsicles, Fudgicles, and Creamsicles on a hand stick. Boy, do they taste good!

The announcer followed up by describing how the Popsicle products were "wholesome," "nourishing," "made fresh everyday with the finest ingredients," and "the biggest five cents worth anywhere." In subsequent episodes Pete described how Popsicle products were easy to digest and made only from pure milk.

The near-constant message of the five-cent price was also noteworthy. While price claims did not come up in the other cereal-sponsored programs, Popsicle regularly noted how cheap its products were because unlike cereals, children bought these products themselves. Though this seems a subtle distinction, it demonstrates that Popsicle appealed to a child as a different kind of consuming subject--one who had access to his or her own money. The emphasis on brand identification and distinction was still relevant, however. Both the announcer and Popsicle Pete regularly suggested that Popsicle purchasers make sure their products

were "genuine." On April 16, 1939, Popsicle Pete declared genuine Popsicle bags were as "good as money."

What Radio Accomplished

In 1938, one decade after Cream of Wheat's first radio program, Grumbine wrote that the strategy of advertising directly to children through radio was "fundamentally sound."[117] The case of food advertising on children's radio in the 1930s and early 1940s represents one of the earliest examples of a large-scale joint effort between children's commercial media and children's advertisers. Food sponsors wove their products and brands into the content of shows and offered an elaborate array of promotional clubs, premium offers, and contests. Critics of twenty-first century children's advertising often take issue with the way commercial media team up with advertisers to create promotional efforts that seamlessly tie content or characters with products. However, similar practices date back to the very earliest efforts to market food to children, when sponsors wrote show scripts around contest or premium offers.

Current children's marketing practices, including the billions of dollars food advertisers spend on multi-platform integrated promotional efforts, cannot be blamed on "kids these days," "parents these days," or even "corporations these days." Many critics of children's advertising look to the 1980s as a key decade of change; the neoliberal Reagan era shepherded the rollback of various business regulations, which fostered the growth of synergistic and vertically integrated media-marketing

[117] Grumbine, *Reaching Juvenile Markets*, 87.

corporations. While I agree children's advertising intensified in this era, this period cannot be entirely blamed for creating a hypercommercial children's media culture. Schor, for example, hones in on children's advertising post-1980s and writes off marketing during earlier decades as being relatively modest.[118] Significant promotions, market research, and advertiser-media relationships can be traced back to the very origins of children's broadcast media. Hence, the way in which radio developed as a commercial media platform is as much to blame for today's children's advertising practices as the neoliberal 1980s.[119] But this history reaches even further, to the very origins of a branded consumer culture, changes in the concept of childhood, changes in nineteenth century production and consumption, and, as Slater poignantly argues, modern liberal economic thought. To borrow from Slater, our consumer culture is bound up with "the whole of modernity" and is by no means exclusive to the current, so-called postmodern or post-Fordist era.[120] Therefore, to address present concerns we must ask big questions about the fundamental ways our society is organized.[121]

Food advertising on early children's radio was significant because the industry ideal of the "brand-loyal child consumer" emerged through these practices. What was remarkable about the strategies of children's radio advertisers was the way in which they attempted to interpellate their listeners as consuming subjects in a branded marketplace. Programs also positioned listeners as desiring consumers

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[118] Schor, *Born to Buy,* 15-16.

[119] McChesney's *Telecommunications* provides an excellent account of the policy debates that resulted in radio forging ahead as an advertising-funded platform.

[120] Slater, *Consumer Culture and Modernity*, 32.

[121] The concluding chapter addresses this point more directly.

who should demand specific brands from parents and always be the first to receive the latest-and-greatest premium. As Cream of Wheat discovered in 1928, brand loyalty could be fostered through clubs. Although children may not have considered themselves Ralston consumers per se, many would have considered themselves Straight Shooters.[122] Research showed that by 1947 over three-quarters of children had a brand preference for cereals.[123]

Marketing strategies involving clubs, premium offers, and contests, had a double role to play in the emergence of the brand-loyal child consumer. These efforts taught children lessons in consumption, and in turn, taught advertisers and broadcasters about a young "audience commodity." This was important, because the only ratings services available during this time failed to reliably count children. If ratings systems, as Meehan contends, are central to the manufacture of audience commodities, early children's radio advertisers had to rely on their own supplementary audience measurement methods.[124] Based on a reading of the trade press, market research, and agency meeting minutes, food advertisers measured their child audiences by the number of box tops returned or club membership counts; box tops were a kind of currency. Returned box tops, for example those submitted for Ralston Straight Shooters flashlight offer--which was only mentioned in that one episode--provided important information about geographic reach,

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[122] Dichter, noted for his "depth" approach, authored reports in the 1940s along the lines of "The Psychology of Breakfast Cereals." The report concluded children have deep-seated emotional attachments to brands. See Ernest Dichter Papers, Hagley.

[123] Edward F. Howard, "Do Girls and Boys Have Brand Preferences," *Advertising & Selling*, February 1948, 46.

[124] See Meehan, "Ratings and the Institutional Approach."

audience size, and often some basic demographic data. These numbers, alongside more ad hoc advice from trade press articles and experts, helped to justify investments in children's programming, and ultimately, the purchase of an audience of children. This idealized child audience member was enthusiastic, open minded, eager to join clubs, enter contests, or enlist friends and family.

However, radio was not the only mass communication platform available for food advertisers in the 1930s and early 1940s. Eisenberg's audience research revealed that children preferred radio to such activities as listening to phonographs, reading a book, playing an instrument, or playing ball with children on the street. Reading the "funnies," though, proved more popular than radio listening.[125] Comics were an alternative way for advertisers to communicate with children during the 1930s and 1940s. In fact, several innovative radio serials--*Little Orphan Annie, Buck Rogers,* and *Skippy*--were based on already popular comic strips. Just as food advertisers were innovators in children's radio advertising, they were also leaders in producing sponsored comic strips.

[125] Eisenberg, *Children and Radio*, 81.

Chapter 5 - "All in a Day's Work": Comic Strips, 1932-1945

> Comics have a great influence on growing boys and girls. They offer a tremendous opportunity to advertisers wishing to reach the juvenile market.[1]
>
> Just so Inspector Post will know you are helping to keep your body strong and your mind alert (you know a detective must be strong and quick) he asks that you send with the coupon two tops from Post Toasties boxes. Post Toasties, you know, are full of quick energy--just what a detective needs.[2]

Newspaper comic strips were a widely used advertising platform during the 1930s.[3] Food advertisers took an interest in comic strip advertising and borrowed many strategies from radio, such as clubs and premium offers. This chapter describes how child-targeted comic strips (further) positioned children as consuming subjects and encouraged them to incorporate brands into their daily lives. Comic strips also complicated the way in which marketers and media conceptualized the child audience segment during the 1930s and early 1940s. Perhaps more so than radio, comic strips made explicit the advertising industry's gender biases, as well as the value of children as co-readers, and ultimately, co-consumers.

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[1] Grumbine, *Reaching Juvenile Markets*, 275.

[2] Inspector Post comic-strip proof, June 2, 1932, box 77, D'Arcy Masius Benton & Bowles Archives, Duke.

[3] On the history of comic strip advertising, see: Ian Gordon, *Comic Strips and Consumer Culture, 1890-1945* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1998) and Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*, 110-16. On comic strip history more generally, see: Berger, *The Comic-Stripped American*; Arthur T. Broes, "Dick Tracy: The Early Years," *Journal of Popular Culture* 25 (1992): 97-122; Jarret Lovell, "Nostalgia, Comic Books, and the 'War Against Crime': An Inquiry into the Resurgence of Popular Justice," *Journal of Popular Culture* 36 (2002): 335-51; Ress, "Bridging the Generation Gap" and Garyn G. Roberts, "Understanding the Sequential Art of Comic Strips and Comic Books and Their Descendants in the Early Years of the New Millennium," *Journal of American Culture* 27 (2004): 210-17.

From the Yellow Press to the Depression

Although the comic visual form can be traced back to political satires in eighteenth century European periodicals, it took until the 1890s for comics to appear as regular features in newspapers, such as Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World* and William Randolph Hearst's *New York Journal*. Comic strips were a defining characteristic of the "yellow journalism" era of American newspapers, a period driven by competition between Pulitzer and Hearst.[4] Centred in New York City at the end of the Gilded Age, the so-called "yellow press" placed a higher emphasis on crime stories, included more illustrations, and relied upon large and sensational headlines.[5] David Spencer argues that Hearst's publications were "sources of pure entertainment" that had little to do with "fact-driven news reporting."[6] To produce sensational news, Hearst even created a "murder squad"; the team tried to uncover sordid details of affairs and actually helped to solve the crimes as they "reported" on them. It was during the era of yellow journalism that papers began to promote *themselves* in earnest. The *Journal,* for example, published ads for itself throughout the paper, with the tagline "if you don't get the *Journal*, you don't get the news."[7]

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[4] On yellow journalism and American newspapers at the end of the Gilded Age, see: Gerald J. Baldasty, *The Commercialization of News in the Nineteenth Century* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992); Ted C. Smythe, *The Gilded Age Press, 1965-1900* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), 173-93; David R. Spencer, *The Yellow Journalism: The Press and America's Emergence as a World Power* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007).

[5] Smythe, *The Gilded Age Press*, 182.

[6] Spencer, *The Yellow Journalism*, 93.

[7] Ibid, 82.

Indeed, from the end of the Gilded Age until the Depression, comic strips sold newspapers and not consumer goods.[8] For Pulitzer, Hearst, and other owners, comic strips themselves were national commodities and contributed to the commodification of newspapers. Popular comics helped increase circulation, which was considered "a badge of pride" for American newspapers by the 1890s, when most newspapers could not survive without advertising.[9] Between 1893 and 1899, several popular comic strips debuted, including the Yellow Kid and the Katzenjammer Kids.[10] By 1899, Pulitzer's *World* published a page titled "the *World's* Funny Side" every Sunday.[11] For the next century, comic strips would be associated with the Sunday editions of newspapers. Hearst competitively outbid other dailies--and Pulitzer, specifically--to secure comic artists in the late 1890s.[12] Hearst was also an innovator in "syndicating" content.[13] By 1903, comic strips that originated in the *Journal* appeared in over a dozen other publications across the nation. Hence, commercial goals were implicit in the development of comic strips and Sunday newspaper comic supplements.

Advertisers, however, initially avoided comic strips because they felt a duty to offer a kind of cultural uplift through both their products and their sales techniques. Advertising professionals envisioned themselves as teachers, as apostles of the

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[8] The label of "comics" can be misleading to characterize these comic strips during the first three decades of the twentieth century. Many titles dealt with social problems of crime or poverty, and offered social commentary, not humour, for mainly adult audiences. Some publishers preferred the term "continuities" over "comics."

[9] Baldasty, *The Commercialization of News*, 62.

[10] The term yellow journalism came from the Yellow Kid comic strip character, first sketched by R.F. Outcault in 1895.

[11] Gordon, *Comic Strips*, 24.

[12] Spencer, *The Yellow Journalism*, 214-15.

[13] Gordon, *Comic Strips*, 38.

wonders of modern capitalism.[14] Many advertising professionals judged comics as too lowbrow. As Lawrence Levine traces, by the twentieth century American popular culture was divided into a hierarchy of "highbrow" and "lowbrow."[15] This hierarchy was laid on class and racial lines. Adworkers saw themselves as part of the white, male, and educated cultural elite that understood their role within highbrow culture.

Attitudes shifted when market research demonstrated the enormous popularity of comic strips. In 1929, George Gallup moved to Des Moines, Iowa to teach journalism at Drake University and produce research for the local daily *Register*.[16] His audience research, which he claimed penetrated to the "hidden recesses of human consciousness," showed that newspaper readers cared little about the "hard" news.[17] It shocked many in the advertising industry to learn that even adults preferred the Sunday comic strips to other news sections. This research caught the attention of Hearst, who considered using the weekly comic strip section as an advertising venue. Hearst conducted his own audience research to corroborate Gallup's findings. In a now well-documented story, Hearst ran an experiment with one thousand subscribers. On one Sunday, the main news section was omitted, on another Sunday, the magazine section was omitted, and the comic section was

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[14] Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*, 27.

[15] See Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988). According to Levine audiences were to enjoy culture with "proper" respect and seriousness.

[16] Gallup's research demonstrates the importance of market surveys in steering advertising industry trends. See Robinson, *Measure of Democracy* for a discussion of Gallup and the intersection of political polling and market research. See Susan Ohmer, *George Gallup in Hollywood* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006) for a discussion of Gallup, the advertising industry, and the Hollywood system.

[17] Ohmer, *George Gallup in Hollywood*, 26.

intentionally missing on a third Sunday. Of the 1,000 subscribers with which the paper experimented, only 45 readers complained when the news section was missing, 240 subscribers complained when the magazine section did not arrive, and an amazing 880 subscribers complained when the comic section was omitted.[18]

Convinced he could make his weekly humour section pay for itself with advertiser-produced comics, in the spring of 1931 Hearst began taking out ads in marketing industry periodicals, *Printer's Ink* and *Advertising & Selling*, touting the reach, value, and effectiveness of advertising via comic strips. Here, Hearst shifted from selling papers to selling audiences via comics. A prominent food advertiser accepted the invitation. In May 1931, General Foods produced the first advertising comic strip series, Suburban Joe. Syndicated in several Hearst papers, Suburban Joe reversed slipping sales for General Foods' Grape-Nuts cereal and started a "tidal wave" of advertiser-produced comic strips.[19] Young and Rubicam (Y&R), a major New York agency, worked with Hearst to develop the Suburban Joe series. Y&R thought that getting audiences to laugh was an important first step in getting them to pay attention.[20] Within months, Grape-Nuts sales hit an eight-year high. Given their regular weekly appearances and wide national audiences, comic strips provided an ideal advertising environment to promote staple products, often breakfast cereals. General Foods, through its comic strip, could "embellish" an otherwise mundane commodity with "personality."[21] Other advertisers attempted

[18] Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*, 111.
[19] Gordon, *Comic Strips*, 90.
[20] Ohmer, *George Gallup in Hollywood*, 27-8.
[21] Gordon, *Comic Strips*, 7.

comic strip advertisements by the end of 1931, including Tide detergent and Du Pont matches.

Paralleling the story of radio's commercialization, the business community retreated on goals of cultural and intellectual uplift as the economy worsened. Advertisers were drawn to comic strip advertising, among other reasons, because these formats were useful in "troubled times" when Americans sought "relaxation and escape from the painful realities around them."[22] Comic strips, studies showed, could be read by up to 68 percent of men, 72 percent of women, and 99 percent of "youngsters."[23] Agencies increased billings for both their creative and media buying services related to comics. With comic strips producing financial returns in a deepening Depression, advertising professionals became less concerned about pitching to a "dignified" or "redeemable" audience; the popularity of comics, instead, confirmed what Marchand characterizes as the yellow press inspired "tabloid audience."[24]

By the end of 1931, with the weekly comic section now being directly funded by advertisers, Hearst created *Puck! the Comic Weekly*, a Sunday comic strip "insert" for 17 Hearst papers.[25] Hearst's *Comic Weekly*, which declared itself the "greatest common denominator" for advertisers, charged $17,500 per back page and $16,000 per inside page in 1933--thousands more than a full page in magazines, such as the

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[22] J.D. Tarcher, "The Serious Side of the Comic-Strip," *Printer's Ink*, April 28, 1932, 3.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*, 110.
[25] The comic strip section was formerly called the *American Humorist* in the *New York Journal*. By 1937, Hearst's *Comic Weekly* reached over six million homes.

Ladies Home Journal.[26] Between 1931 and 1936, advertising expenditures on comic strips went from $160,000 to $14 million.[27] Hearst's *Comic Weekly* competed with the *Metropolitan Comic Weekly*, a supplement inserted into 18 Sunday papers across the country. These two supplements battled for comic franchises, circulation numbers, and in turn, advertising buyers. Comic strip advertising was not limited to the weekly "funnies" section of newspapers. Other media options for advertisers wishing to produce their own comic strips included the Saturday editions of Chicago's *Evening American* and New York's *Evening Journal*, plus dozens of other adult *and* youth-directed periodicals. Furthermore, advertisers utilized the comic style--a story told over multiple illustrated frames with a combination of narration and character speech balloons--in other print venues.

Comic strips intersected with other popular culture forms in the 1930s. Comic strips shared stories and characters with radio; both the *Skippy* and *Little Orphan Annie* radio programs were adapted from comic strips.[28] Comic strips also crossed over with film. Movies engaged adults and children alike during the interwar years. As with comic strips, many adults expressed concern over the "lowbrow" nature of movies, as well as the dark and sometimes-seedy spaces in which films were shown.[29] The 1930s witnessed the theatrical release of several Walt Disney animated shorts and features. Disney characters, including Mickey Mouse, Donald

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[26] Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*, 112.

[27] Grumbine, *Reaching Juvenile Markets*, 274.

[28] See Broes, "Dick Tracy" and Ress, "Bridging the Generation Gap" for discussions of how Dick Tracy and Annie respectively appeared in comics and on radio. The earliest episodes of radio's *Annie* borrowed plots directly from the comic strips. Over the years, however, the narratives diverged.

[29] Joseph M. Hawes, *Children between the Wars: American Childhood, 1920-1940* (London: Prentice Hall, 1997), 24.

Duck, and Pluto, appeared in their own comic strips, as well as some advertiser-produced ones.[30] Feature-length films like *Snow White* (1937) were promoted with comic strip ads that continued the movie's narrative. Finally, the comic strip phenomenon was significant because it provided fertile ground for comic books to develop. The comic book industry expanded and consolidated during the post-war years; however, the industry owed its roots to the comic strips of the interwar years.

Crime Fighting, Aviation, and Post Cereal

In June 1932, only one year after Suburban Joe's debut, General Foods' Post division introduced Inspector Post, the first comic strip advertising series aimed at children.[31] Post inserted the full-page comic strip into Sunday supplements, such as the Hearst company's *Comic Weekly*, and also repurposed it for a variety of periodicals. The comic strip featured a fictional detective, Inspector Post, and two children, Tom and Nancy, who together solved crimes. In the first instalment Tom and Nancy offered to "stake out" the house of a bank robbery suspect by playing in the street. After apprehending the robber, Inspector Post told the children: "You've shown me what good detectives children can be and I'm going to start a Junior Detective Corps. You are the first members--do you think other boys and girls would like to join too?"

The Inspector Post comic strips integrated branded products into an adventure narrative, a strategy that in twenty-first century advertising terminology could be

[30] Post benefitted from a licensing agreement with Disney. In 1934 Post Cereals offered Mickey Mouse spoon premiums with boxes of Toasties and Bran Flakes. This premium offer was advertised with a comic strip ad. Mickey Mouse also appeared on the boxes of a number of Post Cereals.

[31] Grumbine, *Reaching Juvenile Markets*, 269.

described as "branded content."[32] A July 1932 Inspector Post comic strip illustrated another bank robbery investigation, where the Inspector, Tom, and Nancy waited for hours to catch the suspect. In one frame, Tom stated: "Gee, I'm glad we brought Post Toasties along. This waiting is making me hungry." Another July 1932 instalment showed the two children leaving a trail of Post Toasties so Inspector Post would know their route as they followed "Phony Phil," a counterfeiter (Figure 5-1). The final frame of this edition depicted Tom and Nancy sitting at a kitchen table with a box of Post Toasties. In this frame Tom proclaimed to Nancy: "Gee that was a swell job! I'm glad we belong to Inspector Post's Junior Detective Corps." Nancy replied to Tom: "You bet! And these Post Toasties help to make us quick and strong --mmm, aren't they keen!" An August 1932 comic strip featured Post Toasties in three frames: on the kitchen table in the first frame when Inspector Post received a call reporting a stolen diamond, on an outdoor billboard in another frame, and at the dining table where the children ate at the conclusion. In this final frame Tom declared: "Inspector Post says there's nothing like Post Toasties to help a junior detective keep strong and quick."

[32] On product placement, branded content, and changing media buying practices, see: Leiss, Kline, Jhally, and Botterill, *Social Communication in Advertising*, 403-05 and Moor, *Rise of Brands*, 40-54. On branded content in children's contemporary children's media, see: Linn, *Consuming Kids*, 26-7; Quart, *Branded*, 89-91, 97-109; and Schor, *Born to Buy*, 78-81.

Figure 5-1. Inspector Post comic strip from August 1932. D'Arcy Masius Benton & Bowles Archives 1929-1995, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, NC.

The "Inspector Post Junior Detective Corps" reinforced the regular consumption of a branded product. This club offered children the opportunity to "learn all about clues and secret writing and other things that make detective work so interesting

and exciting." To join the club, children mailed a coupon that was attached to all of the Inspector Post pages. The instructions stated: "Just so Inspector Post will know you are helping to keep your body strong and your mind alert he asks that you send with the coupon two tops of Post Toasties boxes."[33] Junior Detective Corps members received a detective's badge and an instruction book that covered how to look for clues and decode secret writing. Over 500,000 children joined in the first four months.[34] By 1933, some three million box tops had been returned.[35] The Inspector Post page often included a separate column beside the actual comic strip for "club news." An October 1932 "news" item described how a Junior Detective Corps "squad" in Berkley California made up a yell: "Post Toasties, Post Toasties, the best thing on the Coast!" Similar to the decoder devices of radio's *Little Orphan Annie*, this column also included secret codes for members to decipher. Demanding a branded cereal permitted children to feel like they belonged to something special and exclusive.

The Junior Detective Corps organized members into "ranks." Although two box tops were required to join the club, four box tops allowed members to become "sergeants." After four more box tops, sergeants became "lieutenants." The ads told children to "ask your mother to buy Post Toasties regularly, so that you may be promoted quickly." This hierarchy capitalized on children wanting to obtain the highest "club" status possible. Similar to the consumer socialization lessons taught

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[33] Inspector Post comic-strip proof, June 2, 1932, box 77, D'Arcy Masius Benton & Bowles Archives, Duke.

[34] E. Evalyn Grumbine, "This Juvenile Market," *Printer's Ink*, August 2, 1934, 67.

[35] Minutes of Creative Organization Staff Meeting, March 1, 1933, box 5, J. Walter Thompson Staff Meeting Minutes, Duke.

by many sponsored radio clubs, competitive consumption was promoted and higher "status" could be obtained through the purchase of a branded cereal.

In early 1936, General Foods replaced the Inspector Post series with one titled Melvin Purvis America's No. 1 G-Man (Figure 5-2). The Melvin Purvis strip offered heroic tales of crime fighting and stories of how young children assisted a top detective. A club and various associated premium offers were also advertised. These pages included sidebars and other promotional elements accompanying the comic storyline. An April 1936 page featured a testimonial from a boy in New Jersey, announcing: "Post Toasties can't be beat. They're good all the time. In between meals Post Toasties hits the spot." A May 1936 page featured a small insert with "vacation tips from Melvin Purvis." One tip suggested trying "Post Toasties with cold milk or cream for a mid-afternoon snack." The Melvin Purvis comic strips served not only to sell Post cereals, but also offered advice on how to incorporate branded cereals into daily life, even beyond the meal of breakfast.[36] Post aimed higher than simply trying to sell children on a product; rather, Post wanted to promote the notion that a branded, packaged product was the *only* food choice.

[36] This suggests some desperation on the part of Post to move products during the late 1930s.

Figure 5-2. Melvin Purvis America's No. 1 G-Man comic strip from March 1936. D'Arcy Masius Benton & Bowles Archives 1929-1995, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, NC.

Unlike Inspector Post, Purvis was an actual detective. Comic strips regularly developed personalities and even celebrities out of "real life" figures. Purvis was an "ace" G-Man for the Department of Justice, most famous for killing John Dillinger in 1934.[37] The comics were an opportunity for Purvis to reveal "the methods used in

[37] It is not clear how Post compensated the real Purvis.

capturing desperate criminals" and Post promoted them as being "inside stories" that proved "crime does not pay."[38] Plots consisted of Paul and Joan, the requisite two children, asking Purvis to recount tales of how he captured dangerous public enemies, with the next frames showing his use of clever tricks. A June 1936 comic strip opened with Purvis and the children walking away from a grocer. Joan asked Purvis if he could tell a story "while we're taking our Post Toasties home." The final frame, returning back to the kitchen table, often featured a direct product pitch. In a January 1936 strip, Purvis said: "You know, Paul and Joan, a G-Man needs a hearty, satisfying breakfast." Post cereals were declared to be "just what a G-Man needs."

Children were invited to become "Junior G-Men" in a club similar to the Junior Detective Corps. Purvis, at the end of most comic strips, promised a "regulation sized Junior G-Man badge" when children joined his "secret roll." To enroll, children filled out a coupon attached to the strip and submitted two Post box tops. In an April 1936 comic strip, Purvis announced that he wanted every member of the Junior G-Man Corps "to have a big bowl of Post Toasties for breakfast." Purvis sent club members a book with information about clues, secret codes, invisible writing, self-defence, and playing up club exclusivity, other "inside information that only G-Men know."

Although boys and girls appeared in both the Inspector Post and Melvin Purvis comic strips, there was evidence that young girls were "secondary" compared to young boys. Boys who enrolled in the Junior G-Man corps received a badge with the

[38] Melvin Purvis America's No. 1 G-Man comic-strip proof, January 17, 1936, box 77, D'Arcy Masius Benton & Bowles Archives, Duke.

text "Melvin Purvis Junior G-Man Corps." Girls who enrolled received a much smaller badge stating "Melvin Purvis Junior G-Man Corps Girls Division." Young girls were relegated to a separate, and arguably secondary, "division" of the club. Children's consumer culture, both historical and contemporary, provides children "with a shared repository of images, characters, plots, and themes."[39] However, for much of the 1930s, this repository appeared to favour young boys.[40]

The Junior G-Man club re-launched after only a year; exercising a kind of planned obsolescence, the Melvin Purvis "Law-and-Order Patrol" took over in early 1937. The plot of each strip emphasized how adept Purvis was at noticing and connecting minute clues at crime scenes. Purvis invited readers to be secret operators in his new Law-and-Order Patrol, which offered new badges, along with wallets and toy guns as others premiums. Members received Purvis' "new secret operator's shield" and an "operator's book containing special instructions." The club membership "fee" continued to be two Post box tops. With the re-launch, the comic strip's visual style changed slightly, looking less "cartoonish" and more photo-realistic. Post may have been attempting to "keep up" with their audience as they grew older. The criminals became more menacing and carried realistic looking weapons.

Both versions of the Melvin Purvis comic strips reflected a cultural obsession with crime, gangsters, police, and the triumph of justice over evil. Stories of detectives and "public enemies" dominated 1930s comic strips (including ones

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[39] Seiter, *Sold Separately*, 7.

[40] A chapter is devoted to this topic in Jacobson's *Raising Consumers*, 93-126. The gendering of the child consumer will also be discussed later in this chapter.

created by advertisers) and served an ideological purpose for the state. Dick Tracy comics, debuting in 1931, were credited with "cleaning up" the public image of the police at a time when they were under attack for laxity and corruption.[41] Comic strips were so important in the shaping of public opinion about law enforcement that J. Edgar Hoover, founder of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), authorized a comic titled War on Crime. It debuted in 1936 with the goal of conveying the "legitimacy and efficacy of American justice" to children.[42] Although it is doubtful that the state took an active role in developing the Post comic strips, as Jarret Lovell summarizes, "with issues such as law and justice among the most politicized of social topics, the portrayal of crime and its enforcement [in comic strips] was often subjected to governmental influence if not direct political oversight."[43]

Post also sponsored Captain Frank Hawks comic strips in 1936. This series replicated many aspects of the Purvis strips. Hawks was a pilot who served in World War I and in the years after set many aviation records. He was another masculine role model for children, fighting an overseas war rather than domestic crime. Like Purvis, the real-life hero became a spokesperson for cereal, while Post adapted his personal accomplishments into comic strip narratives. The premise of the strip involved Hawks taking an around-the-world flight with two children in tow, Jerry and Janet. Hawks foiled racialized villains and escaped capture on many occasions

[41] Broes, "Dick Tracy," 101.

[42] Lovell, "Nostalgia, Comic Books," 338. Although the comic strip lasted only a year, is interesting that both the FBI saw children as an important public group to influence.

[43] Ibid, 335.

with his daring aviation tricks. In one instalment, the group landed in the water to explore an abandoned ship. While on board, caricatured Japanese "smugglers" took them hostage. On a page titled "The Lost Valley of Tibet," the three were swept off course into the Himalayan Mountains (Figure 5-3). A male prisoner warned them that evil monks had held him for 20 years. Hawks, Jerry, and Janet made a daring escape in Hawks' plane, rescued the prisoner, and promised to return him to "civilization." Back at a kitchen table scene for the final frame, Janet expressed her satisfaction to be "out of that awful valley" and "eating these swell Post's Bran Flakes again."[44] Eating Post cereal was always the reward for an escape or victory, and, in this particular scene, a signifier of a "civilized" culture.

[44] Captain Frank Hawks comic-strip proof, April 20, 1936, box 77, D'Arcy Masius Benton & Bowles Archives, Duke.

Figure 5-3. Captain Frank Hawks comic strip from May 1936. D'Arcy Masius Benton & Bowles Archives 1929-1995, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, NC.

Following the formula of other Post strips, no matter where the adventure took place, the final frame showed Hawks and the two children at a table eating Post cereal. Reflecting on whatever adventure, escape, or rescue the trio survived, Hawks frequently connected his nerves of steel to staying fit and eating the "right" cereal. Hawks modestly claimed that his heroics were "all in a day's work," before

instructing Jerry, as in a January 1936 instalment, to "dig into those Post Bran Flakes," because they were "just the thing" to keep him in "tip-top shape." These kitchen table vignettes also promoted the comic strip's accompanying club, the "Air Hawks." Children could join the club for the cost of one Post 40% Bran Flakes box top. In return, members received a "gleaming" silver wing-badge and the opportunity to participate in other premium and contest offers. Several ads referenced Jerry and Janet as being charter members of the club. Hawks often told the two children "all Air Hawks must eat plenty of Post 40% Bran Flakes."

Air Hawks premiums included watches, jackets, telescopes, bracelets, binoculars, first aid kits, and knives. Similar to successful food-sponsored radio programs, Post frequently wove premium offers into the entertainment narratives. In a July 1936 strip, Jerry and Janet were taken prisoner. In a daring escape, Hawks used Jerry's Air Hawks toy pistol to fool a prison guard into thinking he had a real weapon. This pistol was one of many premiums that children could receive in exchange for box tops. Likewise, a "Secret Scarab" ring was given to Hawks in a May 1937 strip set in ancient Egypt. This ring brought Hawks good luck and permitted his escape. This integration of a premium offer into the storyline echoed the Ovaltine birthday ring offer on radio's *Little Orphan Annie* in 1935.

For the product category of cereal, where dozens of similar brands competed for the loyalty of children, advertisers had to constantly revamp their offers to maintain interest. Grumbine warned that when premiums were cheap and likely to be destroyed, new offers had to be introduced so that "boys and girls will not forget the

product and turn to a competitive brand."[45] The goal of brand loyalty was made explicit by Grumbine, cautioning, "while the ultimate object is to have the product purchased by or through the influence of the children in the family, their loyalty must be secured and held through strategies that will last."[46] The Air Hawks club was re-launched in 1937 as the "Sky Patrol" club to maintain lasting interest. Post even ran a Captain Frank Hawks comic strip ad that did not deliver a story of adventure, but instead told children how and why to join the "new" Sky Patrol club. Titled "How Eddie Joined Capt. Hawks' New Sky Patrol," the comic strip showed one child throwing a paper airplane while another commented that the plane did a "whip stall." The second boy then bragged that he learned the aviation term from the Sky Patrol's manual. Hawks invited children to "hurry" and join so they could receive a Sky Patrol pin, pilot's manual, and catalogue of some 30 prizes.

The prominent club elements of these comic strip advertising efforts capitalized on a generation of children who were growing up in a "peer culture." During the first three decades of the twentieth century, schools and other institutions increasingly segregated children and adults.[47] Peer groups, Joseph Hawes argues, defined interwar childhood.[48] Young people "developed their own communities" as American society urbanized.[49] Adults created and led many of these peer communities, including schools, church groups, and the Boy Scouts (founded in 1910). Organizations, especially the Boy Scouts, showed that "adults understood the

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[45] Grumbine, *Reaching Juvenile Markets*, 91.
[46] Ibid, 266.
[47] McDowell, "Toward a History of Children as Readers," 241.
[48] Hawes, *Children between the Wars*, 1-4.
[49] Ibid, 2.

appeal of peer groups while also indicating the wish of young people to control their own lives."[50] Food advertisers also set up clubs as children's-only spheres. Unlike some of the other organizations that focused on morality and socializing children with the "right values," advertisers created clubs with explicitly commercial motives.[51] Joining a sponsored club brought children a sense of belonging and community, but read on another level, what children really belonged to was a peer group of consumers. These clubs embodied several aspects of consumer culture: attaching status to increased consumption, and even planned obsolescence. As Ian Gordon summarizes, "comic strips tied their audiences together as national communities of readers." In addition to giving this community a shared visual culture, comic strips "depicted appropriate ways of incorporating a growing number of commodities into their lives."[52]

Sports Comic Strips and the Gendering of the Child Audience

Sports-oriented comic strips continued the tendency of food advertisers to favour young males.[53] These advertisements combined the visual styles of comics, the power of testimonials, clubs, contests, and premiums, with endorsements from athletes. Numerous athletes starred in their own serial comic strips in the same way that Purvis and Hawks did. The use of athlete endorsements began in the 1930s, principally with comic strips, and would continue to be a strategy taken up by many

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[50] Ibid, 4.
[51] The Boy Scouts in particular focused on morality.
[52] Gordon, *Comic Strips*, 106.
[53] With gangster and war themes, the Inspector Post, Melvin Purvis, and Captain Frank Hawks comic strips all had a stereotypically masculine appeal.

cereal advertisers for decades to come.[54] Babe Ruth appeared in comic strip ads for Quaker Puffed Rice in 1937. Comic strips showed Ruth playing baseball, and even climbing mountains, while promising children they could receive baseballs and caps in exchange for box tops.[55] General Mills' Wheaties secured endorsements from numerous major league baseball players. All but five players who participated in the 1939 All-star game had contracts with Wheaties.[56] The Wheaties and Quaker ads marked a turn away from the fantasy and adventure found in other comic strips; they focused on the daily "problems" of young boys, offering advice on how to fit in with peers by becoming, for example, a better baseball player.

Huskies cereal, also made by General Foods' Post division, competed with Wheaties and both brands fought for athlete endorsements. It was considered a major accomplishment when Huskies secured an agreement with the New York Yankees' star first-baseman, Lou Gehrig. A comic strip titled "Lou Gehrig Comes through in a Pinch" appeared in a July 1938 edition of the *Comic Weekly*. The strip showed Gehrig reminiscing about legendary games. Gehrig explained step-by-step how to bunt, with the final frame depicting three boys at a table commenting on how "these Huskies Lou Gehrig told us about sure are swell." Likewise, in an August 1936 strip, Frankie Frisch, a St. Louis Cardinal player, came across a group of young boys playing baseball. Several boys ridiculed "Bobby" because "he couldn't hit a balloon" and repeatedly struck out. Frisch, after reminiscing for a few frames about a win

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[54] Athlete endorsements played on cereal's vitamin, energy, and strength-building qualities. Sports themes allowed cereal to be associated with good physical health and not over-indulgence.

[55] Quaker Puffed Rice advertisement, 1937, microfilm reel 30, D'Arcy Collection, Illinois.

[56] Bruce and Crawford, *Cerealizing America*, 89.

against the Giants, gave Bobby batting tips. Frisch also recommended eating a "big bowl of crisp Huskies every morning." In the final frame, Bobby connected with the ball while the other boys declared, "we're all eating Huskies now." Huskies used this template for other athletes: Johnny Vander Meer, a Cincinnati pitcher who told children how to pitch a no-hit game; Monte Pearson, a New York Yankees pitcher who let a boy "in" on the secret of the "drop curve"; and Elmer Layden, the football coach of the Notre Dame Fighting Irish who explained the series of play calls needed to come from behind for a win. These comic strips appeared in Sunday newspapers and other periodicals.

Huskies also incorporated club and premium offers into comic strips. The "Huskies club" required a coupon from the ads and a box top to enroll. Lou Gehrig was cast as "president" of the club, which unlike similar advertiser clubs of the 1930s lacked "exclusivity" in the form of secret codes or club manuals. The club offered a free pin to members along with the opportunity to send in additional box tops for other prizes, ranging from sports equipment to a lucky rabbit's foot. In a remarkable attempt to "educate" boys consumer, comic strips also illustrated how and why to join the club. A March 1937 comic was titled "Lou Gehrig Shows the Bunch on Maple Street How to Join the Huskies Club" (Figure 5-4). The strip opened with Gehrig approaching boys playing baseball and asking them: "How would you like to get a new ball and uniforms, and mitts, free... and really play some big league baseball?" The next frames showed Gehrig unfolding a Huskies brochure to show the boys the assortment of premiums. A series of frames then depicted the boys

asking for Huskies. A boy instructed his mother, “and don’t forget Mom, two boxes of Huskies!” to which she replied, “I won’t forget son, I know how good Huskies are for you.” Another boy requested, “say Auntie will you get Huskies and save the box tops for me?” These frames were tips on how to ask mothers and other women for branded goods. This scene embodied the food industry’s “ideal” for children by the 1930s: boys as brand-loyal and demanding, able to influence the women who did the shopping. In the final frame, under the title “3 weeks later,” the children held their prizes including a mitt, pair of roller skates, and an axe.

Figure 5-4. “How to Join the Huskies Club” from March 1937. D'Arcy Masius Benton & Bowles Archives 1929-1995, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, NC.

The Gehrig "How to Join the Huskies Club" comic strip exemplified how girls were, at best, an afterthought to food advertisers in the 1930s. On this particular page, all the characters pictured were boys. In a frame at the bottom of the page was a small, seemingly token, effort to appeal to girls. Helene Madison, an Olympic swimmer, was pictured with a speech balloon defending: "Girls! We've got lots of prizes for you too!" Female athletes were never the primary focus of sports comic strips. The Melvin Purvis series similarly marginalized girls, with smaller pins for the "Girls Division." Even western-themed radio serials--for example, H-O Oats' *Bobby Benson* and Ralston's *Tom Mix Straight Shooters*--emphasized boyish adventure and product pitches through the benefits of "cowboy vitamins."[57] The food industry in the 1930s seemed more interested in hailing boys as consuming subjects than girls. This tendency supports Jhally's argument that gender is the "social resource used most by advertisers."[58] These appeals to boy consumers revealed both the biases and strategies of food advertisers. The food industry's focus on young boys during the 1930s may be a result of the biases of a male-dominated industry. Women were poorly represented in the field; mostly brought in for the sake of a "woman's voice" and paid less.[59] How advertisers portrayed women could be the result of the industry's patriarchal views.

But strategically, food advertisers believed boys had greater influence over mothers, and thus had a better ability to "sell" to mothers. Jacobson argues that the

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[57] *Little Orphan Annie* arguably was a rare radio serial that appealed equally to boys and girls.

[58] Jhally, *Codes of Advertising*, 135. Jhally's work describes the "gender codes" to which advertisers appeal. He also argues that advertising messages "are part of the process by which we learn about gender."

[59] Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*, 33-5.

"boy" was considered the ideal modern consumer during the interwar period: demanding, influential, and precocious. Boys were thought to balance the "hedonism" of consumer culture with "control" and rationality.[60] This vision of the rational, savvy boy was in contrast to the "the fickle irrationalities of the archetypal woman consumer."[61] Evidence of this attitude appeared in the "How to Join the Huskies Club" comic: the boys demanded Huskies from various women, who were easily influenced.

The positioning of the boy consumer as an effective junior salesman can be traced back to the early 1920s, before most food advertisers appealed to children directly. In 1922, *American Boy* placed a full-page ad in *Printer's Ink*. In an attempt to drum up business from food producers, this ad described how "the autocrat of the breakfast, lunch, and dinner table is his majesty the boy." He had considerable power over his mother, "asserting the right to demand what he wants." The ad explained, "between trying to please him, keep him filled up and properly nourish him, mother has her hands full."[62] This positioning of the boy consumer in trade ads continued during the 1930s as food advertising directed at children increased. In a 1931 trade ad from *Boy's Life* magazine, prospective advertisers were told, "if your product sells to the family you *can't* sidestep the boy."[63] A 1933 ad for *American Boy*

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[60] Jacobson, *Raising Consumers*, 96.

[61] Ibid, 109. See also Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*, 66-9.

[62] *American Boy* advertisement in *Printer's Ink*, September 28, 1922, 7. Of course, *American Boys*' audience was young males, so the publication would logically promote the value of this audience. However, this general trend is still significant because youth periodicals for girls did not share this framing in their early trade ads. Periodicals, including *American Girl,* never made equivalent claims that portrayed girls as "the autocrat of the breakfast table."

[63] *Boy's Life* advertisement in *Printer's Ink*, September 3, 1931, 70.

described how the readers of this periodical were the perfect age, because they were "men enough to be convinced" but "boys enough to back up that conviction with sales-sowing enthusiasm."[64]

Young boys (generally those under 13) reigned supreme for food advertisers seeking to appeal to children as *purchase influencers*, but when the food industry started considering young people as *future branded consumers* in the early 1940s, adolescent girls entered the spotlight.[65] In the eyes of advertisers, agencies, and commercial media, this audience segment represented the future wives, mothers, and primary household shoppers. This trend was manifested in the growing number of trade ads attempting to sell food producers on the value of young women as future household purchasers. During World War II, *Printer's Ink* and *Advertising & Selling* carried dozens of ads from periodicals, often *American Girl* and *Seventeen*, trumpeting the value of young women and the "teenager," a term entering business discourse.[66]

Food advertisers were told to "sell to women while they're young," because girls would be "your woman's market in the post-war world."[67] A May 1943 *American Girl* ad counseled advertisers that, "in a war speed world," girls were quickly "growing into markets."[68] Another ad announced that young women were

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[64] *American Boy* advertisement in *Advertising & Selling*, January 19, 1933, 51.

[65] This point is discussed at length in Jacobson's *Raising Consumers*, 127-59.

[66] For an excellent history of how the "teenager" as a commercial persona was constructed by media and marketing industries during the 1930s and 1940s, see Schrum, *Some Wore Bobby Sox* and Cook, *Commodification of Childhood*, 122-43.

[67] *American Girl* advertisement in *Advertising & Selling*, July 1943, 88.

[68] *American Girl* advertisement in *Advertising & Selling*, May 1943, 96.

"progressive and unafraid" and "free from prejudices," which meant they did not have to be "unsold" on ideas, products, or brands.[69] A similar ad in 1944 portrayed the young woman as an enchanted fairy and declared, "the market she becomes at this magical moment is the woman's market you'll want for the next half century."[70] The Youth Group publishing conglomerate produced trade ads in 1944 that attempted to "scare" prospective advertisers into marketing to youth in order to secure post-war markets. These ads explained: "Unless you start talking to these annual crops of new consumers *now*--when their minds are pliable, and easily impressed--you will find yourself faced with a costly competitive scramble for adult consumers whose preferences and habits and brand-allegiances are set and hard to change."[71] Another ad, under the title "2 glimpses into the postwar future of American business," presented contrasting images (Figure 5-5). In one picture, the grocer offered a box to a woman who protested, "we don't believe in labels." In the contrasting image, the grocer presented a box to a woman who said, "known it since I was a kid!" Here, the goal of long-term brand loyalty was visually illustrated. Finally, with a patriotic tone, the copy told advertisers they can do their part in "safeguarding the future of your own business and the American way of life" by advertising to young women during the war.[72]

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[69] *American Girl* advertisement in *Printer's Ink*, May 28, 1943, 47.
[70] *American Girl* advertisement in *Advertising & Selling*, May 1944, 98.
[71] Youth Group advertisement in *Advertising & Selling,* July 1944, 73.
[72] Youth Group advertisement in *Advertising & Selling,* May 1944, 99.

2 GLIMPSES INTO THE POSTWAR FUTURE OF AMERICAN BUSINESS:

WE DON'T BELIEVE IN "LABELS"

KNOWN IT SINCE I WAS A KID!

With "Isms" at Work, With America at the Crossroads, We Say: "Tell Youth Your Story NOW." Study These Facts:

IN ALL "postwar planning", it's up to business to plan not only for sales—but for *survival*.

And whether you sell—whether you survive—will be up to tomorrow's customers . . . the youth of today.

To wait until youth has formed its own ideas of its postwar responsibility is to risk some hard sledding. You will find postwar selling an easier problem if you start selling Youth *right now*.

During the years when America's 'teen-age youngsters pass through the 11-17 age bracket, 277 billion dollars of consumer purchasing power is spent *by*, *for*, or *on* them. Later, when they start spending America's entire national income, it is natural for them to turn a cold shoulder on brand names and trademarks they never heard of when they were young.

By reaching youth now—in the Youth Group of youth's own magazines—you reach 1,550,000 'teen-age consumers, the leaders of postwar America. The page rate is $5680 per month, for which you get three positive values. *First*, you can sell the enormous youth market of today. *Second*, you can trim down your sales expense in the consumer market of tomorrow. *Third*, and very important, you can do your part in safeguarding the future of your own business and the American way of life.

A new sales presentation, just prepared, can in 10 minutes give you some startling facts about youth. Write or telephone one of the offices listed below:

SOLD AS A GROUP: *American Girl, Boys' Life, Open Road for Boys, Young America, Young Catholic Messenger. Guaranteed combined A.B.C. circulation 1,550,000. One order, one rate, one piece of copy. New York 17: 1 East 42nd St. Chicago 2: 9 West Washington St. Boston 16: 729 Boylston St.*

MAY, 1944

99

Figure 5-5. Youth Group ad in *Advertising & Selling*, May 1944, 99.

Advertisers and print media constructed ideal "boy" and (adolescent) "girl" audiences for different strategic reasons and at different times. Boy consumers served a distinct purpose, influencing mothers, and were targeted at a slightly earlier period. As evidenced by comic strip ads, girls were secondary to boys for

most of the first decade of advertising food to children.[73] However, as the business community began to contemplate post-war markets during the War years, adolescent girls appeared on their radar because this audience represented the household purchasers of the next generation.

Selling the Child Audience with the Co-Reading/Co-Consuming Family

Hearst's the *Comic Weekly* placed dozens of ads in the trade press between 1931 and 1933 to entice various industries to consider comic strip advertising. Many of these pages, which can be read as an attempt by Hearst put its audience on the market, sought to legitimize comic strips by arguing how all segments of the population enjoyed them. The *Comic Weekly's* tagline in 1933 was "everybody reads the *Comic Weekly*." Several of these trade ads noted the specific benefits of the child audience segment. A June 1933 ad in *Advertising & Selling* boasted how Ralston received 151,355 box tops from one page in the supplement.[74] This was another example of box tops being used as a kind of audience measurement method, as a metric for advertising effectiveness. Newspaper circulation numbers could not capture children, and were sometimes padded by unscrupulous papers. Box tops, on the other hand, were returned directly to the advertisers. According to the same trade ad, the *Comic Weekly* "gave Ralston the opportunity of economically reaching not only the parents but also the children who are the real cereal eaters." This

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[73] There is another possible explanation for the emphasis on boys. Commercial media have long believed that girls are willing to watch "boy" programs, or even play with "boy" toys, but not vice versa. In December 1970, the trade periodical *Marketing/Communications* printed an article titled "Youth Market: Are They Mini-adults or Maxi-mysteries?" that argued, "a good rule of thumb is that when in doubt, leave the girls out."

[74] *Comic Weekly* advertisement in *Advertising & Selling*, June 22, 1933, 43.

statement was an example of commercial media "educating" cereal makers on the importance of speaking directly with children.[75]

By the 1930s children were, generally speaking, neither uneducated nor illiterate. Due to a combination of child labour laws[76] and the poor job market, over 80 percent of Americans between the ages of 5 and 17 were in school during the 1930s; more than 50 percent of children born between 1920 and 1929 graduated from high school.[77] Nevertheless, publishers portrayed comics as being the most "accessible" kind of print advertising for young people. A *Comic Weekly* ad appeared on the inside cover of the July 20, 1933 issue of *Advertising & Selling*, claiming: "The *Comic Weekly* brings results because it's life... sold in pictures all can understand." Advertising industry experts seemed to agree. Grumbine wrote:

> It is generally agreed that children find the comics so appealing because (i) pictures and dialogue tell a story quickly; (ii) there is motion in the pictures presented as they are in panel-form sequence; (iii) they are packed with action and adventure; (iv) when balloons are not too full of type and the type is large enough, they are easy to read.[78]

[75] A complementary education unfolded in practitioner texts. Grumbine's 1938 book, described at length in other chapters, devoted a chapter to advertising to children through comic strips. Several case studies were discussed, including an anecdote of how Quaker Oats received 219,000 box tops in eight days for a half-page comic strip placed in 1934. See Grumbine, *Reaching Juvenile Markets*, 270.

[76] For an overview of the history of child labour laws in America, see Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child*, 64-72.

[77] Hawes, *Children between the Wars*, 34.

[78] Grumbine, *Reaching Juvenile Markets*, 266.

In the eyes of the advertising industry--which often held a contemptuous view of the intelligence of audiences[79]--comics were easy to digest and appealed to children and adults in a way that no previous kind of print advertising could match.

While valorizing young audiences, commercial media still considered parents to be important. When Hearst's *Comic Weekly* placed ads in the trade press, children were treated as a secondary audience compared to the value of their parents. In one 1933 ad, children were described explicitly as an "added bonus." The copy stated: "In addition to this adult audience, the *Comic Weekly* offers the great and growing market of youngsters coming of age--a present and future market you can't ignore."[80] Promotional material from the *Comic Weekly* discussed the number of adult readers available for each advertising dollar spent. Children did not enter these calculations but were instead discussed as a "plus value."[81] Similar thoughts appeared in trade press articles. A 1938 *Advertising & Selling* article described the comic section as the "sure route to the man and woman of the house, with a vast children's audience tossed in as a mere bonus."[82] Children were still valuable for their immediate influence and future brand loyalty. Yet, neither of these attributes seemed quite as important as appealing to adults through comic strips.

It is not that children were seen as less valuable than parents, as was the case before the late 1920s. Instead, the value of children as an audience segment was

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[79] Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*, 67. Many advertisers estimated the average consumer had the intelligence of a 12 year old.

[80] *Comic Weekly* advertisement in *Advertising & Selling*, July 20, 1933, inside cover.

[81] *Comic Weekly* advertisement in *Advertising & Selling*, October 1946, 127.

[82] "Comics," *Advertising & Selling*, April 1938, 21.

derived from children being co-readers of comic strip ads and co-consumers of branded food products alongside the purchasing parent. While children's radio was a unique advertising platform because it bypassed parents, comics reached families together. Several General Foods trade ads visually documented the value of children as co-readers and co-consumers. General Foods placed trade ads in *Restaurant Management* and *American Restaurant* in 1937, at the same time the company was publishing hundreds of Melvin Purvis, Captain Frank Hawks, and sports comic strips. These ads tried to convince restaurant owners to include Post cereals on their menus. The layout incorporated comic frames, illustrating a family reading the newspaper as a single group (Figure 5-6). These frames visually represented the food industry's vision of family co-reading, as well as the ideal of the "companionate" family developed by child experts (but taken advantage of by marketers) in the 1920s.[83] In the first frame, a young boy sat on the arm of a chair, looking over his father's shoulder and pointing with delight at the newspaper. In the second frame, a mother and father sat in the background reading the paper together while their two children read a separate section--presumably the comics--on the floor at their feet. In the final frame, the family appeared at a restaurant eating boxes of Post cereals--an odd scene.

[83] The ideal of the "companionate family" was discussed in chapter three. See also Mintz and Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions,* 113-4.

Figure 5-6. A section of a General Foods trade advertisement depicting children as co-consumers. D'Arcy Masius Benton & Bowles Archives 1929-1995, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, NC.

Comic strips were intended for family co-reading. Post placed Inspector Post, Melvin Purvis, Captain Frank Hawks, and various Huskies sports comic strips in weekly Sunday newspaper inserts, as well as youth periodicals. Notably, Post also repurposed many of the pages for full-page print ads in a number of adult periodicals, for example, *Country & Home*, *Farmer's Wife*, *Holland's*, *Household*, and *Progressive Farmer*. Because parents may have read the comics in these latter media, certain aspects of the comic strip ads were designed for them. A September 1936 Melvin Purvis comic included a section at the bottom of the page with the heading "Mothers." This section offered instructions for using Post-O cereal, with the statement: "It's so easy, so convenient to give those growing youngsters of yours the

nourishment and food-energy they need at breakfast." A section titled "Melvin Purvis Answers a Breakfast Table Cross-examination" appeared below a July 1936 comic strip; Purvis answered questions such as "why do Post Toasties taste so good?" "can Post Toasties be served other ways besides with milk or cream?" and "are Post Toasties economical to serve?" An April 1937 Captain Frank Hawks comic strip included a separate four-frame comic titled "Real Life Movies for Grown-Ups" on the far right side (Figure 5-7). This comic-within-a-comic strip depicted a wife recommending Post Bran Flakes to her chronically weary husband.[84]

Figure 5-7. Captain Frank Hawks comic strip from April 1937. D'Arcy Masius Benton & Bowles Archives 1929-1995, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, NC.

[84] The "adult" comic about a husband's health was juxtaposed with a Hawks fantasy adventure. In this instalment, Hawks traveled back in time and fought a dinosaur with his bare hands.

Situating parents and children as co-readers of comic strip ads raises the issue of parents and children as co-consumers. Seiter argues that children's consumer culture is too often discussed in the "narrow terms of the relationship between the child as an individual and the advertiser." Parents, when considered through these narrow terms, appear "only as shadowy figures of neglect."[85] The brand-loyal child consumer emerged in the 1930s as a distinct audience for food advertisers, but still had a very strong and important relationship to adult consumers. Children and parents *combined* had considerable power in moving products off shelves. Both parties were necessary for advertising success. During the Depression, families turned inwards, spending additional time together in the home. For comic advertisers, a close relationship with parents made the child audience valuable; in the minds of advertisers, the family that read comic strips together consumed together. Comic strip advertising also blurred the categories of "mass" and "segment" marketing. Comic strips appealed to specific groups, frequently young boys, but also to entire families.[86]

What Comic Strips Accomplished

Food manufacturers, employing comic strip advertising, drew children (further) into a branded consumer culture. Comic strip ads reciprocally borrowed from radio strategies to hail children as brand-loyal and demanding consumers. General Foods' Post division relied on comic strips to reach children as consuming subjects, and utilized clubs, premium offers, and contests to further engage readers. Similar to

[85] Seiter, *Sold Separately*, 12.
[86] Grumbine, *Reaching Juvenile Markets*, 268.

many radio serials, these offers taught children that consuming more of a product was desirable, as increased consumption and the ownership of exclusive material goods led to greater status amongst peers. The use of celebrity endorsements from "real life" heroes, such as Purvis, Hawks, or athletes, also reinforced certain brands. Children may not have been loyal to Post Huskies over General Mills' Wheaties, but they may have been devotees of Lou Gehrig over Babe Ruth. Comic strip advertisements were an exercise in brand socialization, selling both products and long-term consuming habits.

A Raisin Bran comic-style ad, appearing in newspapers in 1947, illustrates how advertisers saw children as fully involved in a marketplace of brands (Figure 5-8). This comic, promoting Raisin Bran and a contest, "tested" how much children understood about brands of cereal and their advertising claims. The first few frames depicted a group of boys telling Susie that she could not play follow-the-leader or do a headstand. In the final frame, Susie was shown doing a headstand behind a Raisin Bran billboard, much to the frustration of the group of boys who earlier teased her. The contest required children to complete the middle of the story, both colouring and providing text for a speech balloon coming from Susie. Children were presumably expected to write text along the lines of "if I eat Raisin Bran I can do anything the boys can" in order to demonstrate they understood not only the benefits of Raisin Bran, but also the clichés of food advertising.

Figure 5-8. Post Raisin Bran advertisement from 1947. D'Arcy Masius Benton & Bowles Archives 1929-1995, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, NC.

In the late nineteenth century, comic strips contributed to the commodification of news. With advertisers producing them by 1931, comic strips then assisted with the commodification of goods more generally, especially cereals. But there was a third kind of media commodification process at play with comic strips: the

commodification of audiences.[87] Print media put considerable effort into convincing food marketers to buy their audience commodity. During the 1930s and 1940s, the advertising trade press was filled with ads from newspaper owners and comic syndicates touting the benefits of advertising in comic strips. These ads constructed children as an audience commodity and complemented other market research and "expert advice" on children as an advertising audience.[88] An *Open Road For Boys* ad in 1935 discussed how the magazine's "unparalleled" power over youth could be put behind food products.[89] Children were again described as valuable because they were eager, curious, and a way to bring new ideas into the household. Children were avenues for cultural and economic change.

Through comic strip advertising texts and these other discussions over the nature and value of children, a more complex articulation of the child audience emerged. Comic strip food advertising made the gendered child consumer visible. Advertisers preferred young boys for their precocious ability to be, not just consumers of branded food, but also junior salesmen who could effectively sell to their mothers. But during World War II commercial media began to emphasize the role of adolescent girls (teenagers) in a post-war, peacetime market. While boys were considered to be ideal purchase influencers, girls gained perceived value

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[87] See Mosco, *Political Economy of Communication*, 140-61, for an overview of the different ways in which media contribute to commodification.

[88] Robinson cites Canadian research conducted in the late 1930s through Sunday Schools and Boy Scout meetings that demonstrated 75 percent of children could describe the plot of comics from the previous day's paper, but only 39 percent remembered the front-page headline. Daniel J. Robinson, "Polling Consumers: The Rise of Market Research Surveys in Canada, 1929-1941," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 8 (1997): 199-200.

[89] *Open Road for Boys* advertisement in *Advertising & Selling*, July 19, 1934, 67.

because they would eventually become primary purchasers for their own households. Furthermore, comic strip advertising focused considerable attention on the parents. Given that many child-directed comic strips were placed in media environments like newspapers and "adult" oriented periodicals, children were portrayed as co-readers, and co-consumers of food, alongside the purchasing parent.

By the end of the Second World War, the child consumer as both a *subject to* and a *segment in* consumer culture appeared to have emerged. Food manufacturers--and in particular, cereal makers--alongside advertising agencies, market researchers, and commercial media collectively created new strategies and a new audience segment. Food advertisers had proven the value of children as an advertising audience by the end of World War II. However, throughout this same period, a number of parties were pushing back. Comic strips caught the attention of critics, who argued, "children do not think of breakfast foods in terms of food value, but in terms of box tops which bring them free premiums."[90] Consumer activists sought to place significant limits on advertising.

[90] Palmer and Alpher, *40,000,000 Guinea Pig Children*, 90.

Chapter 6 - Resisting Advertising and Protecting "40,000,000 Guinea Pig Children"

> So long as our nation permits the lives of hundreds of thousands of children to be blighted from the start, we can hardly be called a civilized people.[1]
>
> A child trained via the radio to look to Ovaltine for "Orphan Annie pep and energy" will grow into an adult who will try first one patented product after another to banish constipation, get rid of that tired feeling, and cure all his other ills, fancied or real.[2]

The preceding three chapters described how food producers developed and advanced a view of children as brand-conscious consumers. This chapter spotlights points of resistance.[3] McChesney considers the 1930s to be one of three twentieth century "critical junctures" for resistance to capitalist power relations.[4] As Glickman's history of consumer activism traces, new forms of consumer resistance

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[1] Palmer and Alpher, *40,000,000 Guinea Pig Children*, 4.

[2] Ibid, 70.

[3] The "resistance" cited here concerns the efforts of organized consumer groups, women's groups, parents, and policymakers. As noted in chapter two, this dissertation does not deal with the lived experiences of actual children "on the ground" in the 1930s. Individual children no doubt rejected the offers and cheap premiums of food advertisers. However, given this dissertation's emphasis on how the business community constructed the brand-loyal consumer, compounded by the lack of historical evidence from children, this chapter only deals with the more "organized" patterns of resistance that food advertisers had to directly combat. Stated another way, this chapter is about resistance in and through the public sphere, not resistance in the average American family home.

[4] McChesney*, Communication Revolution*, 10. The other two critical junctures were the Progressive Era, from approximately 1900-1917, and the wave of consumer and political resistance that surfaced during the 1960s. For an overview of consumer politics and policymaking during the Depression, see also: Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003), 17-61; Fox, *Mirror Makers*, 120-26; Glickman, *Buying Power*; Robert N. Mayer, *The Consumer Movement: Guardians of the Marketplace* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1989); McChesney, *Telecommunications*; Margaret McFadden, "'WARNING - Do Not Risk Federal Arrest by Looking Glum!' *Ballyhoo* Magazine and the Cultural Politics of Early 1930s Humor," *Journal of American Culture* 26 (2003): 124-33; Newman, *Radio Active*; Daniel Pope, "Advertising as a Consumer Issue: A Historical View," *Journal of Social Issues* 47 (1991): 41-56; Leslie F. Smith, "Quelling Radio's Quacks: The FCC's First Public-Interest Programming Campaign," *Journalism Quarterly* 17 (1994): 596-608; Smulyan*, Selling Radio*; Stole, *Advertising on Trial*; and Inger L. Stole, and Rebecca Livesay, "Consumer Activism, Commercialism, and Curriculum Choices: Advertising in Schools in the 1930s," *The Journal of American Culture* 30 (2007): 68-80.

follow, almost immediately, the new practices of corporations.[5] Food advertisers attempted to draw children into the marketplace as brand-loyal and desiring subjects during a unique period of intense consumer activism. The 1930s saw the birth of new consumer groups, a general cultural discontent with commercialism, and the introduction of several laws to regulate advertising and broadcast media. While the advertising and branding strategies were national, the resistance was often local in nature. Anti-advertising action was manifested in several practices: product testing to challenge advertising "puffery," organized boycotts, letter writing campaigns, and lobbying for tighter business regulations.[6] Complaints about children's mass media and marketing can be found in newspaper editorials, books, letter writing campaigns of mothers, or printed material produced by parent-teacher organizations.

The following pages sketch the larger consumer resistance context of the Depression, spotlight the efforts of individuals and groups who challenged children's food advertisers, and critically discuss how significant critiques of advertising were overshadowed by a "moral panic" about children's media use. Without restraint, these advertising practices continued to grow. I end with a brief coda on advertising food to children during the 1950s and early 1960s.

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[5] Glickman, *Buying Power*, 12.

[6] The concepts of "consumer politics" and "consumer citizenship," however, include much broader practices and politics. See Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic*. For an interesting analysis of consumer citizenship and children, see Banet-Weiser, *Kids Rule!*

The Consumer Movement

Waves of consumer resistance surfaced during two periods in the first half of the twentieth century. Activists from these different periods faced different corporate opponents but similar ideologies drove their campaigns; namely, the consumer was not apolitical and could push to reform the institutions of capitalism to create a better society. During the Progressive Era, muckraking journalists, labour leaders, community groups, and other concerned citizens challenged newly consolidated corporations.[7] Reform-minded journalists, such as Upton Sinclair, revealed to wide audiences how industries exploited labour and endangered human lives in the name of profit. These journalists held a "tenuous" position within corporate news; nevertheless, their investigative reporting was enough to make corporate leaders afraid that middle class voters would support stricter business regulations.[8] Support from the middle class made this reform movement powerful and women's groups were particularly visible.[9]

Patent medicine advertising was challenged during the Progressive Era and, by some accounts, the successfully reformed.[10] The 1906 Pure Food and Drug Act was a turning point; it legislated that all ingredients be clearly labeled on packages. This severely hampered the ability of some "snake oil" sellers to make sensational claims. The fight to end the outrageous claims of patent medicine makers can be traced

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[7] On consumer activism during the Progressive Era, see: Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic*, 20-22; Stuart Ewen, *PR! A Social History of Spin* (New York: Basic Books, 1996), 48-59; Glickman, *Buying Power*, 155-88; and Stole, *Advertising on Trial*, 7-15.

[8] Stole, *Advertising on Trial*, 10. Stole, like Ewen, places the birth of "modern" public relations in this context.

[9] Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic*, 21-22.

[10] See Young, *Toadstool Millionaires*.

back to the efforts of Dr. Harvey W. Wiley in 1892. His cause, however, gained strength between 1904 and 1906 with the support of middle class magazines. As Ewen summarizes, "the enormous growth of reform-minded journalism and its readership revealed the unprecedented power of the mass media as a tool for assembling the public nationally around a variety of social concerns."[11] In 1904, the *Ladies Home Journal* refused to accept advertising from patent medicine makers and published a call to boycott these products. Articles reported on extensive research from chemists and revealed that patent medicines consisted merely of water and alcohol or other narcotics. *Collier's* published similar research in 1905.

Second, during the Great Depression, individuals, academics, women's groups, and organized consumer groups confronted corporate power, creating what Glickman terms a "consumer consciousness" and what Lizabeth Cohen characterizes as the emergence of the "consumer citizen."[12] Diverging from the Progressive Era, during the Depression activists were less concerned with product labeling and labour conditions. Instead, they questioned an American society dominated by large corporations that were producing nearly identical products and competing through advertising and branding. Stole argues that advertising practices evolved significantly since the first decade of the twentieth century; as such, advertising was the top concern of the consumer movement during the Depression.[13]

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[11] Ewen, *PR! A Social History of Spin*, 59.
[12] Glickman, *Buying Power*, 192 and Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic*, 18-9.
[13] Stole, *Advertising on Trial*, xi. My research certainly supports this conclusion.

Several books laid foundation for the consumer movement of the 1930s. In 1927, Stuart Chase, a liberal economist, and Frederick Schlink, who at the time worked for the Bureau of Standards, published *Your Money's Worth*.[14] This text inspired many anti-advertising activists during the 1930s. Chase and Schlink argued that manufacturers failed to provide consumers with sufficient and accurate information; consumers, in turn, wasted money on useless products that they would have otherwise not purchased if fully informed. Consumers were not manipulated or duped; rather, manufacturers simply provided skewed information. Following the theme of consumers getting "their money's worth," the authors also pointed out that, on the whole, production costs were falling while prices remained high. This was because large corporations (the ones behind national brands, especially in the food industry) consolidated to create and control oligopolistic markets. Chase and Schlink called for the government to step in and regulate the sales of certain products, including medicines.

As a follow-up, in 1933 Schlink and Arthur Kallet published *100,000,000 Guinea Pigs*, an exposé on the dangers of mass marketed foods and drugs.[15] Schlink and Kallet highlighted both the fraudulent claims of food and drug advertisers and the lack of sufficient regulation or product testing in the United States. This book was more hard-hitting than *Your Money's Worth* because its central thesis argued that

[14] Stuart Chase and Frederick J. Schlink, *Your Money's Worth: A Study in the Waste of the Consumer's Dollar* (New York: Macmillan, 1927).

[15] Arthur Kallet and Frederick J. Schlink, *100,000,000 Guinea Pigs: Dangers in Everyday Foods, Drugs, and Cosmetics* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1933).

many products were dangerous--not simply worthless and ineffective.[16] For example, the authors revealed chemicals in daily consumer products, such as mouthwash, toothpaste, and dyes. Existing food and drug labeling laws, they argued, were unable to keep harmful chemicals out of products. Worse still, the authors accused manufacturers of adulterating goods, dangerously combining, substituting, or changing ingredients without informing consumers. Americans were all "guinea pigs" at the hands of manipulative, profit-seeking food and drug makers. M.C. Phillips' made a similar argument in *Skin Deep*, a 1934 book that attacked cosmetic manufacturers and their advertising claims.[17] The hardships of the Depression made many citizens aware of both the greed of corporations and the structural biases of capitalism, such as price fixing, a lack of competition, waste, and the inefficient allocation of resources. These books spoke to these larger cultural attitudes and many libraries held multiple copies of each.[18]

Ballyhoo magazine, launched in 1931, likewise condemned advertising. However, the magazine presented these criticisms in a manner quite different from the "serious" best-selling consumer books. *Ballyhoo,* a satire magazine, featured parodies of advertisements, for example, fake advertisements for "Blisterine Rub," the cure for "fannitosis."[19] Marchand describes *Ballyhoo* magazine's near-instant financial success as "vivid evidence of a latent public skepticism of all advertising"

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[16] Fox, *Mirror Makers*, 123.

[17] M.C. Phillips, *Skin Deep: The Truth About Beauty Aids: Safe and Har*mful (New York: Vanguard Press, 1934).

[18] Stole, *Advertising on Trial*, 174.

[19] McFadden, "*Ballyhoo* Magazine," 126. *Ballyhoo*, in a sense, was the 1930s *Adbusters.*

and an "unlikely depression phenomenon."[20] The messages of *Ballyhoo* magazine were decidedly less political, and certainly not radical. The magazine blasted advertising claims--taking particular offence to the ways in which many national brands spoke to consumers in a patronizing tone--but did not address the political economy of monopolistic competition and ineffective regulatory regimes.

Consumer organizations were also important to 1930s consumer resistance; these groups linked institutional criticisms of advertising to issues as broad as corporate greed and corrupt regulators. After the success of *Your Money's Worth*, Chase and Schlink founded Consumers' Research Inc. in 1929. Consumers' Research was both an independent product testing lab and a consumer advocacy group. The organization tested goods to see if they measured up to advertised claims and published their results in a monthly bulletin. This emphasis on product testing was intended to combat advertising's ability to "deemphasize price and product comparisons" by "building brand loyalties."[21] Product testing represented a way to push back against the fetishes of an increasingly branded marketplace. A strike at Consumers' Research in 1935 created a divide within the organization. Some employees and members moved on to start the Consumers Union, a competing organization.[22] The Consumers Union combated advertising puffery with product testing, while also linking up with broader labour movements in pursuit of progressive reforms.

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[20] Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*, 312.

[21] Stole, *Advertising on Trial*, 48.

[22] See Lawrence B. Glickman, "The Strike in the Temple of Consumption: Consumer Activism and Twentieth-Century American Political Culture," *Journal of American History* 88 (2001): 99-128.

As with the Progressive Era, middle class women were important to the consumer movement of the 1930s through their participation in the American Home Economists Association, the American League of Women, and similar organizations. By the middle of the 1930s, these women's groups lobbied for stronger food and drug laws and linked with both the Consumers Union and Consumers' Research. A 1937 *Advertising & Selling* article warned that these women's groups were "young but strongly influential."[23]

Although "public distaste for advertising" is a longstanding issue unlikely to ever disappear, McChesney suggests complaints were actually "life-threatening" for broadcasting in the early 1930s.[24] According to McChesney, the period from the late 1920s until World War II marked one of the few moments in American history when institutional and, in a few instances, "radical," criticisms of the role of advertising and branding in capitalist consumer culture were permissible in mainstream political discourse. The commercial nature of radio was a contentious issue for many Americans throughout the 1930s. Newman observes that from the earliest days of network radio, "virtually any advertisement broadcast over the airwaves was considered by some listeners to be 'excessive.'"[25]

Radio, as a flashpoint for the excesses of advertising, was *the* medium to which many advertising criticisms were leveled. Radio connected the nation during the 1930s. But, as Susan Smulyan notes, it connected a nation suffering through the

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[23] R. I. Elliott, "The Consumer Movement Today," *Advertising & Selling*, November 18, 1937, 29, 49-50.

[24] McChesney, *Telecommunications*, 115.

[25] Newman, *Radio Active*, 2.

Depression and a nation suspicious of the grand claims or new inventions from large corporations.[26] Stole underscores that radio "fanned the flames of public discontent with advertising."[27] *Ballyhoo* satirized the popularity of radio and the "insipidness of much of what was broadcast."[28] Radio "reformers" shared many of the consumer movement's concerns about the fraudulent claims of advertisers, as well as worries about the industry's influence over media content and priorities. Although ultimately unsuccessful in creating a non-commercial radio system that served public interests over corporate interests, the policy debate that unfolded, in the opinion of McChesney, was "arguably the sole instance in which the structure and control of a major mass medium were subject to anything close to legitimate political debate in U.S. history."[29]

While the broadcast reformers fought for radio that served public (not corporate) interests, the other consumer groups set their sights on stringent and publicly accountable advertising regulation. Consumers' Research wanted to update decades-old legislation, such as the Food and Drug Act of 1906. This Act made the misbranding of foods illegal and required certain labeling practices, but it contained no provisions about advertising. In 1933, Senator Royal S. Copeland of New York introduced the "Tugwell Bill," co-written and promoted by Rexford G. Tugwell, the Assistant Secretary of Agriculture. The Bill gave the Food and Drug Administration the power to prohibit false advertising and banned ads promoting remedies for a

[26] Smulyan, *Selling Radio*, 126.
[27] Stole, *Advertising on Trial*, 30.
[28] McFadden, "*Ballyhoo* Magazine," 128.
[29] McChesney, *Telecommunication*, 3.

long list of medical claims.[30] Debates over the bill put the advertising industry into a direct confrontation with proponents of the consumer movement.[31]

Multiple industries responded to the Tugwell Bill with lobbying and public relations campaigning.[32] The advertising industry was especially concerned about the Bill's vague definition of false advertising and objected to the government's role in "identifying" such advertising.[33] In addition to lobbying Congress, the advertising industry created groups such as the "Consumer Division," backed by the publishing industry, or the "Consumer's Advertising Council," a front-group created by the American Association of Advertising Agencies. On the surface, these organizations resembled the Consumers Union or Consumers' Research, but in fact functioned as industry front-groups to *defend* advertisers at a grassroots level. The Consumer Division produced pamphlets for women's groups that claimed "educational advertisements" gave society better food and healthier skin.[34] This particular group also attacked Consumers' Research, suggesting that the organization existed only to sell books authored by Chase, Schlink, and their allies.

Broadcasters also had a financial incentive to avoid more stringent advertising regulation. The radio networks offered academics research grants to produce industry friendly research. Herman Hettinger from the Wharton School of Finance had much of his research paid for by the National Association of Broadcasters

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[30] See Stole, *Advertising on Trial*, 50-7.
[31] Ibid, 78.
[32] Stuart Ewen, *PR! A Social History of Spin*, 293.
[33] Stole, *Advertising on Trial*, 57.
[34] Ibid, 108.

(NAB).[35] Hettinger's book-length research on radio advertising ignored consumer and listener concerns about radio commercialization.[36] In fact, Hettinger made the classic liberal economic argument that advertising helped bring adults and children innovative programming.

Several pro-business revisions to the Tugwell Bill were proposed between 1933 and 1935. As a result of advertising and broadcasting lobbying efforts, business interests dominated the debate over advertising by 1935. The Wheeler-Lea Amendment, which handed the regulation of food and drug advertising over to the FTC, became law in 1938, ending several years of debate. From its creation in 1914, the FTC was charged with policing "unfair trade practices." The Wheeler-Lea Amendment extended this mandate to include false advertising as an unfair trade practice. Despite both Tugwell's original proposal and the Wheeler-Lea Amendment ostensibly being about protecting consumers against fraudulent advertising, Stole concludes "the two measures were drastically different."[37] Specifically, consumer groups expressed concern that the Wheeler-Lea Amendment lacked the "teeth" to punish advertisers.

The Battle over Schools

Schools were an important site where the consumer movement clashed with advertisers, and one of the first places where activists pushed back against the consumer and brand socialization of young people. During the 1930s, both

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[35] McChesney, *Telecommunications*, 87.

[36] See Herman S. Hettinger, *A Decade of Radio Advertising* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1933).

[37] Stole, *Advertising on Trial*, 157.

advertisers and the consumer movement saw public schools as a site to pursue their own interests. Corporations wanted to use schools to sell products but also to "undercut" a growing consumer movement.[38] This ancillary goal was to make a modern world of branded goods seem natural. Consumer activists, on the other hand, called on schools to teach "critical" consumer skills, a very different kind of consumer socialization.

Numerous food advertisers, including Heinz, General Foods, Hershey, Kellogg, and the United Fruit Company, provided schools with "sponsored educational materials" during the Depression. These educational kits, many in the form of recipe books, were most often aimed at high school home economics teachers, but some materials were also given to elementary schools.[39] Food advertisers sent maps of factory locations to teach geography, food related experiments to teach science, and company histories to teach history to elementary school students.[40] Cream of Wheat offered nutrition lessons. In 1929, JWT boasted that the Cream of Wheat H.C.B. Club "School Plan" was an important piece of "collateral work" to complement the larger H.C.B. Club campaign.[41] Cream of Wheat supplied teachers with "health habits" lesson plans, charts, and sample boxes of Cream of Wheat. The company prepared some 95,000 of these packages. On a provided chart, the classroom teacher kept track of the number of students who ate a hot breakfast cereal. If two-thirds of the

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[38] Stole and Livesay, "Consumer Activism," 69.

[39] On advertising to high school students during this period, see Joel Spring, *Educating the Consumer-Citizen: A History of the Marriage of Schools, Advertising, and Media* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2003).

[40] Grumbine, *Reaching Juvenile* Markets, 250.

[41] Minutes of Representatives Meeting, May 1, 1929, box 2, J. Walter Thompson Staff Meeting Minutes, Duke.

class ate a hot breakfast cereal three times per week, Cream of Wheat sent that class colourful posters to decorate the room. JWT staff discussed how "the psychology of this plan is that the child comes running home with a sample and exclaims 'teacher says we must eat Cream of Wheat!'"[42] Cream of Wheat sought to get the implicit backing of school authorities without the schools becoming "conscious of this questionable partiality."[43] Advertisers perceived in-school marketing as valuable because of the added authority of educators and the fact that school children were a "captive" audience.

Grumbine's *Reaching Juvenile Markets* spoke enthusiastically about the advantages of advertising in schools, noting that "many schools welcome the supplementary material furnished by manufacturers."[44] She also pointed out that if teachers sent home the sponsored assignments, children would have the opportunity to discuss the advertiser with their parents. Grumbine advised marketers to call superintendents, advertise in publications aimed at educators, or mail material directly to teachers.[45] However, this meant campaigns could not be deployed nationally in a consistent manner. Compared to both radio and comic strips, school advertising was local and ad hoc.[46] Individual teachers, school administrators, and school boards all needed persuading. Grumbine warned advertisers to avoid metropolitan schools because they had strong parent-teacher councils who frequently prohibited advertising. In larger cities, schools were often

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[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Grumbine, *Reaching Juvenile Markets*, 63.
[45] Grumbine, "This Juvenile Market," *Printer's Ink*, August 2, 1934, 67.
[46] "What Kinds of Advertising Material Will Schools Use?" *Printer's Ink*, January 8, 1931, 131.

better funded through taxes and did not require the advertiser kits. On the other hand, many schools across America experienced major budget problems during the Depression. Schools often welcomed new materials. An article in *Advertising & Selling* suggested "progressive advertisers have an unusual opportunity" to take advantage of a situation that requires some schools to "depend upon good supplementary material."[47] Advertisers in the Depression--similar to advertisers in today's neoliberal climate--took advantage of economic hardships and the unequal funding of schools. There is a long history of advertisers targeting poorer children via schools.[48]

Organizations such as Consumers' Research were also sending materials to public schools to foster a critical kind of consumer subjectivity. In 1932, the group sent anti-advertising teaching kits, experiments that compared name-brand products to cheaper generic products. Consumers' Research also created a lab project that demonstrated how brand-name creams could be produced with basic household ingredients for mere pennies.[49] These first-hand experiments demonstrated, once again, that branding was a central feature of children's advertising during the 1930s. Advertisers were training children to be brand-loyal subjects while activists were attempting the opposite. The goal of activists was to

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[47] Edward J. Storey, "Effective Advertising to School Markets," *Advertising and Selling*, November 1939, 30. In-school advertising remains a problem in the twenty-first century. Advertisers across North America continue to benefit from school budget shortfalls. On contemporary advertising schools, see: Linn, *Consuming Kids*, 75-94; Nestle, *Food Politics*, 188-95; and Schor, *Born to Buy*, 85-98.

[48] Naomi Klein's *No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2000) offers a chapter on the rising quantity and intensity of advertising in schools during the 1990s. She devotes considerable attention to the Channel One television service, which provides poorer schools with audio-visual equipment in exchange for showing advertisements to students daily.

[49] Stole and Livesay, "Consumer Activism," 71.

foster skepticism over advertising claims and the knowledge necessary to make rational purchasing decisions.

Schools have always been ideological battlegrounds. In the 1930s, consumer groups took it upon themselves to ensure teachers, particularly those in districts with limited funding, had an option besides advertiser-produced "hands on" supplementary materials.[50] Consumer activists believed that parents "might prefer that the schools, instead of teaching their children to ask for a specific brand, use a lesson in common buying sense."[51] Advertising critics argued that parents should not be concerned by indoctrination from "socialists" or "communists" because "big business interests" were doing far more pernicious ideological work in schools.[52]

Poisons and Guinea Pig Children: Key Texts

Criticisms of advertising directed at children appeared in several books associated with the Depression era consumer movement. Peter Morrell devoted an entire chapter to food advertising on children's radio in his 1937 polemic, *Poisons, Potions and Profits*. Morrell compared sales pitches on radio to the "medicine tent-wagon that was so common on the American scene before the days of radio."[53] He condemned radio advertisers for "bullying" parents into purchasing "worthless and sometimes dangerous" foods because of pressure from children.[54] Recognizing "it takes a thrilling juvenile adventure story to get the average juvenile interested in

[50] Stole, *Advertising on Trial*, 133.
[51] Palmer and Alpher, *40,000,000 Guinea Pig Children*, 18.
[52] Ibid, 21.
[53] Morrell, *Poisons, Potions and Profits*, 9.
[54] Ibid, 105.

anything as unadventurous as cereal," Morrell affirmed that food advertisers and radio broadcasters were manipulating children through program narratives.[55] He described how:

> Stories for children are presented full of action, exciting situations and sound. The announcer waits until the child audience has become profoundly absorbed, then he lays down a barrage of unsupported claims. They are promised that their hopes and dreams will come true if they'll only eat or drink this or that particular product.[56]

Morrell also criticized the club and premium offers that resulted in children developing a habitual distrust for non-branded, non-advertised foods.

The most direct, substantial, and well-researched attack on children's food advertising occurred with Rachel Palmer and Isidore Alpher's *40,000,000 Guinea Pig Children*, published in 1937. The title played on Schlink and Kallet's *100,000,000 Guinea Pigs*, and like that text, Palmer and Alpher focused on food, beverage, and drug advertising.[57] Vanguard Press, which some Federal politicians accused of being a "communist enterprise" by the 1940s, published these books and others. Setting the tone of children's food advertising as an issue for parents, the book's opening declared, "health rightly comes first among the things parents desire for their children."[58] Yet, America "permits the lives of hundreds of thousands of children to be blighted from the start" by poor diets. Palmer and Alpher argued that poor diets were the "greatest hazard to children" because advertisers offered an abundance of

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[55] Ibid, 116.
[56] Ibid, 107.
[57] Although the majority of Palmer and Alpher's book attacks food advertising, the authors devoted one chapter to the safety of toys.
[58] Palmer and Alpher, *40,000,000 Guinea Pig Children*, 3.

biased "free" nutritional information, while unbiased advice was much harder to locate.[59] Sponsored radio programs meant children were "subjected to the influence of advertising" during most of their leisure hours at home.[60] These arguments are remarkably similar to ones launched at children's food advertisers in the twenty-first century.[61]

Moreover, Palmer and Alpher recognized how food advertisers sought to build long-term brand loyalty by offering clubs and a constant array of new premiums. They criticized radio shows such as *Little Orphan Annie* that threatened, implicitly or explicitly, to go off the air if children did not get their parents to purchase the product. The authors also condemned clubs, noting how food advertisers utilized "on a national scale the very traits youngsters exhibit when at play in their own backyards and neighborhood lots."[62] Ovaltine was sold to children based on a promise that consuming the product was a way of demonstrating friendship to Annie. Purchasing additional tins of Ovaltine allowed children to penetrate the inner circle of Annie's special friends.[63] Food advertisers were further lambasted for exploiting children's love of mystery, adventure, and interests in sleuthing, aviation, sports, and cowboys. Attacking advertiser comic strips, the authors wrote that if a

[59] Ibid, 4.
[60] Ibid, 16.
[61] For similar arguments, see: Harris, Schwartz, and Brownell, "Marketing Foods to Children" and Linn and Novosat, "Calories for Sale."
[62] Palmer and Alpher, *40,000,000 Guinea Pig Children*, 11.
[63] Ibid, 69.

child was "all wrapped up in the detection of crime," he or she had to consume "enormous quantities of cereal just to acquire the necessary equipment."[64]

The overarching thrust of *40,000,000 Guinea Pig Children* was how food advertising negatively influenced the finances of parents and the health of children. Like the earlier works from Chase, Schlink, and Kallet, this was an institutional critique of advertising, its biases, and its long-term impact. Because commercial media only promoted branded, packaged foods, selling to children also meant that parents paid more than necessary to feed their families. Parents were advised that the costs of premiums were hidden in the higher price of a branded product. Advertising also placed too much emphasis on certain categories of food, especially breakfast cereals and candy. The rising consumption of sugar represented one of the most important changes in the American diet and the authors listed both tooth decay and diabetes as consequences of this dietary change.[65] "Buck Rogers may successfully dazzle youngsters into eating Cream of Wheat" but Palmer and Alpher poignantly noted there was "no hero who roams the stellar regions to convince children than an egg is as important as cereal at breakfast time."[66]

This bias toward processed, branded foods also had long-term consequences. "A child trained via radio to look to Ovaltine for 'Orphan Annie pep and energy,'" the authors forewarned, "will grow into an adult who will try first one patented product

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[64] Ibid, 94.

[65] A number of recent research projects on food marketing note rising rates of type 2 diabetes among children. See, for example, APA, *Report of the APA Task Force*, Kline, *Globesity*; Linn and Novosat, "Calories for Sale"; and Zimmerman and Bell, "Associations of Television Content Type and Obesity."

[66] Palmer and Alpher, *40,000,000 Guinea Pig Children*, 22.

after another to banish constipation, get rid of that tired feeling, and cure all his other ills, fancied or real."[67] Palmer and Alpher were cognizant of what was arguably the most significant consequence of advertising to children: the long-term socialization of children to habitually turn to packaged, branded, and advertised products. The authors concluded that food manufacturers were not just promoting products; rather, they were attempting to train consumers. This was a sophisticated critique that went beyond the regulatory debates over "fraudulent" advertising.

The advertising industry took notice of these books. In October 1937, *Printer's Ink* reviewed *Poisons, Potions and Profits* and *40,000,000 Guinea Pig Children.* The joint review dismissed *Poisons, Potions and Profits* as sensationalist and "by far the poorest of the consumer books."[68] On the other hand, the reviewer declared that *40,000,000 Guinea Pig Children* warranted "serious consideration" by advertisers because it avoided "the meretricious sensationalism that mars so many consumer books."[69] The review noted, "thousands of children are being deprived of their full share of certain elements of nutrition because of selfish advertisers."[70] Offering a small critique, the reviewer did suggest that Alpher, who was a doctor, should investigate his own industry, as many doctors received kickbacks from food and drug manufacturers. Warren Dygert's 1939 *Radio As an Advertising Medium*, aimed at a business audience, acknowledged the work of Palmer and Alpher. He agreed "exploiting Young America via radio" was a "great American pastime" for

[67] Ibid, 70.
[68] "Poisons and Guinea Pigs," *Printer's Ink*, October 7, 1937, 88.
[69] Ibid, 89.
[70] Ibid, 89.

advertisers. His solution to the problem was simply for advertisers to scale back efforts to avoid "tremendous ill will and downright antagonism."[71]

An attack on children's food marketing was even written for children. Parents were the intended market for *40,000,000 Guinea Pig Children*. The book represented both a guide for concerned parents and a depiction of just "how far" food advertisers were willing to go to push branded goods of questionable value. In contrast, in 1938 Ruth Brindze published *Johnny Get Your Money's Worth (and Jane Too!)*, a book for children.[72] An early form of media literacy, this book addressed children as critical consumer-citizens who were not merely dupes to food marketers. A section of the book advised young readers about "how to choose candy." The book cautioned children that although "manufacturers may say that if you send a certain number of wrappers from their candy by a certain date they will give you a prize," to get this number of wrappers "you would have to eat far more candy than your regular share." Children were told bluntly that contests functioned to sell candy and that "a prize is a first-rate advertisement for them." Finally, addressing the issue of long-term consumer socialization, Brindze noted:

> When you are collecting coupons or wrappers, you form a habit of buying a certain kind of candy. And long after the prize contest is over, you may continue to buy the same kind of bar. You have developed a taste for it. This is good business for the manufacturer. It helps him to sell more of his candy.

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[71] Dygert, *Radio as an Advertising Medium*, 80.

[72] The original book was published by Vanguard Press. Ruth Brindze's story was recently re-published in Julie L. Mickenberg, and Philip Nel, ed. *Tales For Little Rebels* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 64-8.

Brindze's book was, in many respects, a reiteration of *40,000,000 Guinea Pig Children* for a younger audience. While Palmer and Alpher placed responsibility on the shoulders of parents to help protect their children, Brindze's story recognized that children themselves could be educated as critical consumers. She addressed children as active participants in resisting a branded consumer culture.

Policy and Regulatory Interventions

Children's broadcasters and advertisers frequently introduced self-regulatory measures to appease critics and stave off Federal regulation. This strategy, however, was hardly new. Decades before, advertisers adopted self-regulatory mechanisms to showcase their "responsible" and "ethical" ways to both citizens and policymakers. Prior to World War I, advertisers, through local advertising clubs and national professional organizations, developed ethics codes and set up "vigilance committees" to monitor the practices of peers.[73]

Commercial broadcasters attempted to regulate radio advertising through the NAB. The NAB introduced its first advertising code of ethics in 1929, described as an attempt to "raise the bar" against "any advertising statements which the broadcaster knows or believes to be false, deceptive, or grossly exaggerated."[74] Another NAB code, adopted in 1935, included a section dealing exclusively with children's broadcasting. This code was largely a token effort, as it only limited the most malicious practices. The code contained provisions that contests for children

[73] Stole, *Advertising on Trial*, 58.
[74] "Cleanup Planned By Radio Stations," *Washington Post*, March 26, 1929, 4.

must be based on skill and not luck. It further prohibited sponsors from requiring children to partake in dangerous activities in order to receive premiums or enter contests. The NAB's code appeared to be merely a public relations gesture to construct children's broadcast advertisers as responsible, mitigating the attacks of critics.

The Federal Communication Commission (FCC) also paid attention to broadcast advertisements, including those directed at children, but only intervened in the most egregious cases. The 1934 Communications Act charged the FCC with ensuring that the "public interest, convenience, and necessity" would be paramount when granting and overseeing broadcast licences. Following the Communications Act, the FCC initiated a campaign to rid radio of fraudulent medical advertising.[75] In one instance in 1935, the FCC also held hearings over the national *Jack Armstrong* radio program, sponsored by Wheaties. Jack was an "All-American Boy" and young listeners enjoyed his adventures throughout the 1930s. A 1935 episode told listeners that Jack's mother was in the hospital, sick, and waiting for an expensive operation. Jack took to stamp collecting, in search of rare stamps to pay for his mother's operation. Most of the episode described Jack's stamp collecting adventures. The episode ended with an invitation for children get their own *Jack Armstrong* stamp by sending in a nickel and a Wheaties box top. With the pitch, "you'll be doing Jack a mighty big favor if you join his stamp club right away," children may have thought their nickel and box top were helping Jack's mother get

[75] See Smith, "Quelling Radio's Quacks."

her operation. The FCC investigated the program after parents complained their children were tricked into believing Jack's mother would die if they did not participate in the premium offer. CBS and Wheaties immediately cancelled the offer, but continued to promote many other premiums directly related to the show--such as Egyptian Whistle Rings or Hike-o-meters--without raising the eyebrows of regulators.

Although several new advertising and product regulations were signed into law during the 1930s, none of these dealt specifically with advertising to children. Despite the multitude of parties involved in the policymaking process, the issue of children's advertising was left off the table as the Tugwell Bill evolved into the Wheeler-Lea Amendment of 1938, which gave the FTC the power to prosecute false or misleading advertisers.[76] The Wheeler-Lea Amendment left the FTC with no special standards or procedures for dealing with children's advertising. Policymakers did not consider how advertising to children required different ways of defining what was "false" or "unfair."

On the other hand, the new Food, Drug, and Cosmetics Act, implemented in 1938, gave the FTC power over certain manufacturing and retail-level practices that appealed to children. This Act prohibited manufacturers from adding alcohol and "inedible substances" to candy. Confectionary manufacturers had been embedding small premiums, often metallic toys, within candy. *Consumers Guide* wrote about the

[76] See Stole, *Advertising on Trial*, 138-58 for an account of these debates.

risk of children "unsuspectingly swallowing" prizes along with the candy.[77] The *Consumers' Research Bulletin* advised mothers to make candy at home so as to save money and eliminate the potential for such danger.[78] The FTC also objected to retail "lotteries" used to sell candy.[79] Stores lured children with games. Children could buy a single piece of penny candy and with that purchase have the opportunity to punch a slip of paper on a large board. If the child punched a lucky name or winning number, they received bonus candy. If a child did not win on the first try, according to the *Consumers Guide*, "the gambler's fever gets a hold of him, and in the heat of it away goes his pocket money, not to mention his appetite."[80] Other retailers offered "break-and-take" lotteries where children broke off a piece of chocolate from a wrapped bar. If under the wrapper the piece was coloured, the winner received an additional chocolate. The FTC, in keeping with the Food, Drug and Cosmetics Act, determined such lotteries as unfair methods of competition.

In summary, Federal regulators only cracked down on some of the most extreme sales techniques (e.g. candy store lotteries or *Jack Armstrong*'s stamp premiums) while leaving untouched the vast majority of national advertising practices. Despite powerful critiques from Palmer and Alpher, policymakers and regulators took a limited interest in children's food advertising practices during the latter half of the

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[77] "New Rules For Food and Drugs," *Consumers Guide*, July 11, 1938, 3-7. This was not the first time children's consumption of candy created controversy. Candy was controversial even at the tail of the Progressive Era because candies were sold unwrapped--with the potential for contamination and disease. See Samira Kawash, "The Candy Prophylactic: Danger, Disease, and Children's Candy Around 1916," *Journal of American Culture* 33 (2010): 167-82.

[78] "Candy," *Consumers' Research Bulletin*, December 1936, 17-19.

[79] "So You Have a Sweet Tooth?," *Consumers Guide*, January 30, 1939, 7-10, 19.

[80] Ibid, 19.

1930s. Industry moves to self-regulate may have helped convince regulators that advertisers were responsible and ethical in their appeals to children; no policymaker, for instance, proposed a total prohibition of advertising to children. These regulatory shortfalls were further exacerbated by a much-publicized "moral panic" that backgrounded the commercial nature of radio.

"Children are Going to the Dogs"

The most frequently discussed controversy over children's media culture during the 1930s involved radio program content, not the sales techniques of the sponsors. During the 1930s, major newspapers publicized the issue of children having trouble falling asleep, feeling restless, or having nightmares after listening to crime, mystery, adventure, and "thriller" radio programs. Related objections, including the lack of "wholesome" programs for children, merged with concerns about over-stimulating content. Parents spoke out about their children imitating the slang used by radio characters and called for programs that were less frightening and more educational. Some claimed radio ruined the imagination of children.[81] Ridding radio of sensational, non-educational programs during times when children listened became a top priority for parents, parent-teacher associations, religious organizations, psychologists, and academics.[82] A "moral panic" developed over radio program quality.

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[81] Mark I. West, *Children, Culture, and Controversy* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1988), 38.
[82] Boemer, *Children's Hour*, 31-42.

The campaign to improve children's radio programming started with parent groups in New York.[83] In January 1933, mothers in Scarsdale met to discuss how children were suffering from emotional and anxiety problems because of radio. The mothers constructed a survey and distributed it through their local parent-teacher association. The survey results revealed that the majority of parents in the neighbourhood agreed popular children's programs were of "poor" or "very poor" quality. By February 1933, the women began a letter writing campaign to the radio networks, organized through their local parent-teacher association and the Scarsdale Women's Club, to protest the over-stimulating radio programs. The *New York Times* even reported on their activities.[84] In the *Times* piece, NBC's president gave a generic answer to these complaints, stating broadcasters and sponsors always attempt "to make their form of entertainment as acceptable as possible to the greatest number of people."[85] Unsatisfied, the Scarsdale group continued to organize letter-writing campaigns.

Initially written off as "coming from a small minority," attacks from parent-teacher and related organizations quickly started giving "radio executives and advertisers a severe headache," according to the *Chicago Tribune*.[86] *The Nation* reported on the issue in April 1933, stating poor programs "will continue to blight the homes of Scarsdale and all of America."[87] That same spring, *Parents' Magazine*

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[83] Bruce, "Creating Consumers," 75-91.
[84] "Broadcasters Act to Curb 'Bogyman,'" *New York Times*, February 28, 1933, 21.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Larry Wolters, "Juvenile Show Sponsors Meet A threat in East," *Chicago Tribune*, February 17, 1935, N6.
[87] "The Children's Hour," *The Nation*, April 5, 1933, 362.

ran an editorial instructing parents to "write to the sponsor of the program and tell them why you object to it."[88] In 1934, the Michigan Child Study Association sent a petition to Ovaltine, protesting that *Little Orphan Annie* was "unwholesome entertainment for children" that placed "too much emphasis on crime."[89] The National Congress of Parents and Teachers even discussed national boycotts of sponsors at its 1935 convention in Washington. Complaints continued to mount and by the end of the 1930s Columbia University's Teacher's College distributed pamphlets with advice to parents about how to monitor and control their children's radio listening habits.[90]

Newspapers covered this issue far more than the matter of advertising. In 1935, a writer in the *Washington Post* resolved "children are going to the dogs" and this was the fault of radio.[91] *Newsweek* reported on the issue in 1937, noting that the FCC was "swamped" with mail over the subject of poor quality and over-stimulating radio programs for children.[92] Newspapers published letters to the editor about the issue. A 1937 letter in the *Chicago Tribune* described the "awakening consciousness of the worthless and vicious quality of our children's radio programming." The same letter expressed amazement in "how long we have tolerated the exploitation of our

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[88] Clara Savage Littledale, "Better Programs for Children," *Parents' Magazine*, May 1933, 13.

[89] A. Mann, "Children's Crime Programs," *Scribner's*, October 1934, 244-6. Focused on the "over-stimulating" aspects of the show, the petition failed to mention anything about Ovaltine's promotional tactics.

[90] "Advice to Parents on 'Child Radio," *New York Times*, April 30, 1939, 186.

[91] Katharine Smith, "Survey on Children's Programs on the Radio Finds Marked Improvement," *Washington Post*, June 9, 1935, S. 15. The "children are going to the dogs" line, however, was used somewhat sarcastically. This piece, however, also argued there were improvements since 1933.

[92] "Radio Core Criticized for Making Children's Hour a Pause that Depresses," *Newsweek*, November 8, 1937, 26.

young through the radio" and characterized radio--because of program quality, not sponsorship arrangements--as "even more malignant" than gambling.[93]

These press accounts should be approached with caution. McChesney draws attention to the biased newspaper coverage of radio during the first decade of network broadcasting. Some newspapers owned radio stations while other metropolitan dailies saw radio as a competitor for advertising revenue. Newspapers held a conflict of interest. Coverage of children's radio never questioned the sponsor-supported economic model of children's radio programming, even if they did assail the content of individual programs. Because newspapers also relied on advertising, questioning it fell outside the boundary of debate for most writers. As McChesney notes of journalism in the 1930s, "while criticisms of specific programs and actions was permissible, criticism of U.S. commercial broadcasting as a whole was decidedly off-limits."[94] This offers a potential explanation for why the issue of radio program quality received far more mainstream press attention than criticisms of children's radio advertising.

In 1937, FCC Commissioner George Payne threatened to intervene on this issue if broadcasters did not improve children's programs.[95] Turning to self-regulation, broadcasters designed their own internal standards to define content acceptable or unacceptable for young audiences. CBS instituted new guidelines that prohibited

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[93] Mrs. O. Anderson, letter to editor, *Chicago Tribune*, September 21, 1937, 12.

[94] Robert W. McChesney, "Press-Radio Relations and the Emergence of Network, Commercial Broadcasting in the United States, 1930-1935," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio & Television* 11 (1991): 41-57.

[95] "Calls for Raising Radio Standards," *New York Times*, December 2, 1937, 28.

both "making heroes of gangsters and criminals" and promoting "disrespect for parental or other proper authority."[96] NBC agreed to broadcast mystery and crime dramas only after 9:30 p.m. ABC promised to hire staff to develop educational children's programming. The NAB also called on its member broadcasters to air additional parent-friendly "classics," like *Treasure Island* and *Robin Hood*.

In 1939, the NAB and NBC jointly created the Radio Council on Children's Programs, which was intended to be a "watchdog" for children's programming. This council invited participation from the women who led groups such as the United Parents Association and the Progressive Education Association.[97] The council introduced an eight-point standard for children's programs. Children's programs had to be entertaining, include only reasonable amounts of suspense, possess high artistic quality, express correct English and diction, appeal to a child's sense of humour, be within the scope of a child's imagination, stress positive human relations, and promote cultural appreciation.[98] This group served the political interests of the NAB, which according to Amanda Bruce, "expressed relief that women's organizations no longer seemed to pose a threat."[99] The NAB effectively co-opted voices of resistance without significantly changing network programming. The Radio Council on Children's Programs was never given the authority to actually review shows before they aired and had no regulatory power to discipline offending

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[96] Paul M. Dennis, "Chills and Thrills: Does Radio Harm Our Children? The Controversy Over Program Violence During the Age of Radio," *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 34 (1998): 42.

[97] Bruce, "Creating Consumers," 120-21.

[98] "Adopt Radio Formula For the Children," *New York Times*, December 19, 1939, 21.

[99] Bruce, "Creating Consumers," 122.

stations. Like other self-regulatory initiatives, the council functioned more as a gesture of goodwill than a publicly accountable regulator.

Concerns over children's radio program content embodied aspects of a "moral panic."[100] As Kline suggests, throughout history "youthful leisure and lifestyles have become a site of constant struggle."[101] In the nineteenth century librarians and parents expressed outrage over children reading "dime novels." By the 1950s, comic books became associated with a "youth crisis" of juvenile delinquency.[102] The 1980s saw moral panics over violent children's television programming and, by the 1990s, children's use of the video games and the Internet caused similar "loss of childhood innocence" panics.[103] Critics in all of these cases constructed childhood as a "psychologically fragile" state and framed media as an over-stimulating and/or corrupting influence.[104] Buckingham argues that these moral panics tend to reflect more on those *making* the criticisms.[105]

Children are inserted into a kind of "politics of substitution" to better dramatize an issue with which adults are concerned (e.g. violence, media, technology, sexuality). "Invoking fears about children," according to Buckingham, furnishes "a powerful means of commanding public attention and support" in a "climate of

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[100] Ellen Wartella and Byron Reeves, "Historical Trends in Research on Children and Media, 1900-1960," *Journal of Communication* 35 (1985): 120.

[101] Kline, "A Becoming Subject," 201.

[102] Hawes, *Children between the Wars*, 89-92.

[103] Ellen Wartella and Nancy Jennings, "Children and Computers: New Technology, Old Concerns," *The Future of Children* 10 (2000): 31-43.

[104] West, *Children, Culture, and Controversy*, 42.

[105] Buckingham makes this argument in *After the Death of Childhood*.

uncertainty."[106] Moral panics over children's media use relate to "broader concerns about the impending collapse of the social order at the hands of the undisciplined 'masses'"[107] The "collapsing social order" is often directly related to class. For example, in the early 1930s Scarsdale parents complained that their children were using radio "slang." Scarsdale was a wealthy suburb and this objection could have been a way of articulating concerns over the "urban slang" of lower, immigrant classes. Parents invoked the figure of the "threatened child," in this case, to simultaneously dramatize and mask an issue of class and cultural conflict.

The moral panic over radio content may have distracted parents and organizations from the consumer socialization of young people, or the commercial structure of broadcasting.[108] Furthermore, broadcasters and advertisers were better able to react to criticisms over program *content* compared to criticisms over the economic structure of their businesses. Broadcasters instituted token self-regulatory codes to quell agitating groups. Some consumer activists, including Palmer and Alpher, discussed how food sponsors attempted to train children to be brand-loyal consumers. Nevertheless, the most publicized controversy related to children's media during this critical juncture--at a time of mounting anti-advertising

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[106] Ibid, 11. Buckingham argues conservative campaigns against homosexuality have been reframed as campaigns against pedophiles. Likewise, Banet-Weiser opens her *Kids Rule!* with an anecdote about groups protesting a *SpongeBob SquarePants* educational video that promoted tolerance for gay parents. In both cases, "children" were brought in to dramatize, yet subtly mask, the pre-existing biases of the adults making the criticisms.

[107] Ibid, 125.

[108] Hawes, *Children between the Wars*. Hawes' history of childhood during the interwar years discusses how both movies and music were thought to corrupt children. These "crises" overshadowed concerns over the commercialization of childhood.

activism--centred on the over-stimulating, "lowbrow" content of shows, not the issue of advertising.[109]

Epilogue: From Television to McDonald's

The 1930s furnished an opportunity to limit, or possibly prohibit, children's food advertising. A window of opportunity existed because these years saw an active consumer movement, political debates over advertising and broadcasting, the introduction of several new regulations, and the industry at times backpedaling to manage public perceptions. Moreover, funding children's media via advertising was still relatively new. It was restricted to several product categories, such as cereal and confectionary. Finally, in the 1930s, advertisers had not yet mounted powerful freedom of speech objections to advertising regulation. Nonetheless, children's food advertisers traversed a decade of advertising resistance relatively unscathed.

Not even World War II restrictions could curtail the promotional practices of food producers. The strategies food advertisers utilized in 1933 closely resembled those used in 1945. Materials were redirected from consumer products for wartime uses, and some food companies shifted their production to support the war effort.

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[109] Buckingham might argue that even if the mainstream press focused on the consumer socialization of children, this would have still constituted a "moral panic": adults projecting their own insecurities about mass consumer culture on children. I disagree. A key component of a moral panic is adults framing children as "easily manipulated" in order to make *themselves* feel superior, confident, and in control in a changing society. Moral panics are fundamentally about criticizing an *other*; children. Moral panics create a "self/other" dichotomy. However, the consumer movement of the 1930s widely acknowledged how advertisers deceived adults (in spite of their intelligence and capacities to be wise consumers). All consumers, even the ones writing critical books from Vanguard Press, were framed as "victims" to unfair advertising; a self/other dichotomy did not exist.

Women were told to garden and can vegetables to help the war effort.[110] Yet, the staple products most commonly associated with the brand socialization of young people, breakfast cereals, were not affected by wartime restrictions or rationing.[111] A writer in *Printer's Ink* noted in 1946 that food-sponsored children's clubs had increased during the war.[112]

The positioning of children as brand-loyal participants in the marketplace would prove significant during the post-War decades when thrift became un-American, credit became plentiful, the ownership of suburban houses filled with appliances defined "freedom," and the consumer movement retreated.[113] With food accounting for up to one-third of 1950s family budgets, the efforts of early children's food advertisers appeared to be excellent long-term investments.[114] The child advertising audiences of the 1930s may have even had their own children in the post-war years.[115] And so the cycle continued.

Without significant intervention, promotional strategies were "imported from radio" and "exported to the future."[116] Several children's radio shows and characters migrated to television to continue serving food advertisers. In 1949, the Kellogg's

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[110] Amy Bentley, *Eating for Victory: Food Rationing and the Politics of Domesticity* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 114-41. On women being hailed as "consumer citizens" to help with rationing and the war, see also Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic*, 62-83.

[111] "The Processed Foods Industry," *Advertising & Selling*, September 1942, 40.

[112] "Children's Clubs are Potent Sales Makers," *Printer's Ink*, October 18, 1946.

[113] Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic*, 194-256. The consumer movement, in fact, was "red baited." Politicians vilified consumer activists as critiques of communism escalated.

[114] Gilbert, *Advertising and Marketing to Young People*, 10.

[115] This support's Althusser's argument that ideology is fundamentally concerned with the *reproduction* of dominant relations.

[116] Alison Alexander, Louise M. Benjamin, Keisha Hoerrner, and Darrell Roe. "'We'll be Back in a Moment': A Content Analysis of Advertisements in Children's Television in the 1950s," *Journal of Advertising* 27 (1998): 6.

Singing Lady went on the air as the first cereal-sponsored television program. Although children's "variety" programs, for example, *Roy Rogers* or *Howdy Doody*, departed from the drama and adventure fictional narratives of children's radio, they were still written for, and around, sole food sponsors. *Roy Rogers* moved to television in 1950 and ate Post Sugar Crisps cereal on-camera while boasting to his "buckaroos" about the taste. Roy Rogers addressed young "buckaroos" in the same way that Annie spoke to her "Secret Society" listeners. Advertisers used television personalities, such as Roy Rogers or Howdy Doody, just as they used Annie, Bobby Benson, Tom Mix, Buck Rogers, and Jack Armstrong to invite children into the "club" of brand loyalty. Similar to the sports comic strips of the 1930s, branded cereal provided a way for children to feel closer to an idol.

Family co-reading, or rather co-viewing, was also carried forward. Television was marketed to the middle class as a technology that could unify the suburban family.[117] Once again, advertisers leveraged popular discourse about family life and family "together time." Networks developed family variety shows and sitcoms to appeal to multiple age groups.[118] 1950s children's programs advertised non child-friendly products, such as pet food, indicating a partial audience of adults.[119] Dichter warned broadcasters that fathers "monopolizing" television would be a problem for advertisers trying to reach mothers and children. Dichter's 1957 interview research

[117] Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 59.

[118] See Downing, "What TV Taught."

[119] Alexander et al., "We'll be Back in a Moment," 6.

also showed the value of reaching children as co-viewers of television advertisements. He described a unique phenomenon:

> We found that many of the children seemed to practically know all the commercials and also were able to sing the theme songs in great detail and with great enjoyment. By hearing commercials hummed by children in the home, something interesting is happening. Commercials which by and large are considered a nuisance by most people acquire a kind of cute character this way and become part of folklore and can thus in an innocuous way penetrate into the consciousness of the potential buyer.[120]

Consequently, the dynamics of co-viewing made otherwise-unpleasant commercials effective with adults, the "potential buyers."

Television food advertisements also utilized premiums and contests, two common strategies of 1930s radio and comic strip efforts. Premiums appeared in nearly one-fifth of television ads aimed at children during the first half of the 1950s.[121] Kellogg advertised "Atomic Submarine" premiums in 1952 for those who purchased Coco Pops, Sugar Smacks, and Sugar Ricicles. Kellogg promoted the submarines as being tested by the "Royal Navy" and instructed children to collect all four different colours. In 1957, Gilbert wrote "premium offers mean a great deal to young people because their wants are many and their means are relatively slim."[122] Additionally, many shows required children to submit box tops to participate in contests. For example, Post Sugar Crisps gave away a pony in 1953, through the *Roy Rogers* show.

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[120] "American Broadcast Company Memo on *Mickey Mouse Club*," July 1957, box 16, report #448.2E, Ernest Dichter Papers, Hagley.

[121] Alexander et al., "We'll be Back in a Moment," 5.

[122] Gilbert, *Advertising and Marketing to Young People*, 244.

Fast food dining became popular in the 1960s. Family restaurant dining was limited during the 1930s and 1940s and "fast food," in the way we define it today, was almost non-existent. These two categories would become important in the post-war years. McDonald's, which prospered in suburban car culture, became an important socializer of young consumers in this context. John Horn, the advertising manager for McDonald's in the early 1960s, recognized that children were the ones who led their families into the fast food outlets. As described in a 1963 *Chicago Tribune* article, McDonald's devoted "the bulk of their marketing effort toward making the greatest possible number of children bellow the loudest when they see a McDonald sign."[123] Not unlike the case of Cream of Wheat in 1928, it was all about the *brand.*

[123] "McDonald Beams its magnetism at the power of hungry child," *Chicago Tribune*, June 9, 1963, box 17, J. Walter Thompson Corporation Vertical Files, Duke.

Chapter 7 - Conclusion

In 1960, poet Randall Jarrell wrote a critique of post-war society, lamenting that:

> Children of three or four can ask for a brand of cereal, sing some soap's commercial; by the time that they are twelve they are not children but teen-age consumers, interviewed, graphed, analyzed. They are on their way to becoming that ideal figure of our culture, the knowledgeable consumer.[1]

This dissertation located, through a history of food advertising, the emergence of the child who asks for a brand of cereal, the youth graphed and analyzed, and the young consumer as an idealized subject. What Jarrell witnessed in the post-war years were, in part, the consequences of food advertising from the late 1920s to the mid-1940s. It was through the small everyday staples, especially cereal, that advertisers called on children to be subjects in a brand-laden consumer culture.

Jarrell argued that commercial media were "the substance[s] through which the forces of our society act upon us, make us into what our society needs."[2] Commercial mass media were important pre-conditions to the sudden boom in children's food advertising during the 1930s. As Mosco writes, mass media are the "immediate site of commodity production," but also play an important role "in the process of commodification throughout the economy."[3] Because food advertisers and children's media have enjoyed such a close relationship for almost a century, to discuss the problems of advertising to children often means discussing the commercial nature of children's media. We cannot deal with advertising

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[1] Randall Jarrell, "A Sad Heart at the Supermarket," *Daedalus* 89 (1960): 359-72. Jarrell later published a book of essays with the same name.

[2] Ibid, 360.

[3] Mosco, *Political Economy of Communication*, 147.

controversies without considering the commercial media contexts in which advertisements are distributed. This was true in the 1930s, the 1950s, and remains so today.

Jarrell argued that mass media "first of all and last of all" need us to be consuming subjects "who want much and will want more."[4] The early history of advertising food to children is significant because the "brand-loyal child consumer, " as both a subject to ideology and an audience segment from which advertisers and media could derive profits, emerged through the practices described in this dissertation. Food producers, through their advertising efforts, attempted to draw children into a modern marketplace of branded goods. Moreover, food advertisers taught the lesson that branded foods--over non-branded, or even home made--were always preferable. This was consumer socialization. But another kind of socialization was also conducted *within* the advertising industry from the late 1920s until the early 1940s. A substantial amount of market knowledge was created by and for food advertisers during the 1930s. This market knowledge coincided with, took advantage of, and possibly influenced, changing attitudes about the role of children in a more "companionate" and "democratic" middle class family.

In fact, Jarrell's essay also underscored how advertising and media lay in "the middle of everything, between a man and his neighbor, his wife, his child, his self."[5] The early history of advertising food to children highlights the role of parents in children's consumer culture. It is important to consider the "triad" of the child,

[4] Jarrell, "A Sad Heart," 360. Dallas Smythe made similar observations in the late 1970s.
[5] Ibid, 360.

parent, and advertising.[6] Advertisers, parents, *and* children were always in the equation during the first half of the twentieth century. Formerly, food advertisers sold exclusively to parents, encouraging them to prioritize the health of their children. Cream of Wheat, with its 1928 H.C.B. Club, re-arranged the relationship between parents and children. Instead of parents "pushing" food products on their children, children were trained to "pull" for those brands. Even when food advertisers began to communicate directly with children, parents remained in the picture. For example, parents and children alike enjoyed comic strips. Food advertisers valued young comic strip readers because comic strips positioned children as co-readers alongside their purchasing parents. Marketing and media experts throughout the 1930s even cautioned advertisers not to offend parents, but rather to help foster a close relationship between children and parents as they sold.

In the contemporary North American food marketing landscape, the gap between children and parents has grown considerably. Schor argues that a spirit of "anti-adultism" now drives food marketing.[7] Busy parents are less able to spend media time together with their children and are more likely to simply "give in" to the nagging "pester power" of them. Kid-friendly food products, packaging, and promotion are successful precisely because parents do not necessarily approve of

[6] Cross, "Valves of Desire," 445. However, parents should be considered for their contextual role in the consumer culture of children. Advertisers, historically and in the present context, take advantage of the attitudes and circumstances of parents. In the late 1920s, food marketers leveraged new parenting attitudes, such as the rise of the "companionate family." In the 1980s, as parents worked longer hours and spent less time with their children, advertisers leveraged the guilt parents may have felt for not doing enough with their children. However, this emphasis on parents does not mean we should take a neoliberal approach and blame individual parents for not effectively regulating their children's media consumption or consumer desires.

[7] Schor, *Born to Buy*, 122.

them.[8] This marketing approach works because it empowers children against the adults who always told them to not "play" with their food. However, although children's food marketing appears to have shifted from companionate "co-reading" to "anti-adultism," the fact remains that parents (as either friends or foes) still play a role in how children are addressed by advertisers.

Of course, Jarrell was neither the first nor the last critic of advertising to children. In the twenty-first century, policymakers, medical professionals, academics, consumer activists, parents, and teachers have banded together to criticize the way children are bombarded with advertisements for food of questionable nutritional value. This dissertation demonstrates that objections to children's food advertising are not in any way new. Both the strategies of advertising food to children and the criticisms of these practices trace back to the Depression era. Palmer and Alpher's *40,000,000 Guinea Pig Children*, a remarkable 1937 book-length attack on children's food marketing, reads as though it was written in the present decade. Although other products were advertised to children between the 1920s and 1940s, food advertising made the consequences of a branded consumer culture visual: in weight gain, weight loss, or even tooth decay. Food provoked the first significant controversy over children's advertising and, with children estimated to influence

[8] Charlene Elliott, "Healthy Food Looks Serious: How Children Interpret Packaged Food Products," *Canadian Journal of Communication* 34 (2009): 359-80. Consider the coloured ketchup, hot dog buns, and other products that have been introduced since the year 2000.

$100 billion in food and beverage purchases in 2011, remains one of the most controversial aspects of advertising to children.[9]

Children are nodal points for social change, which is precisely why both marketers and critics have paid close attention to them for nearly a century.

Contributions to Academic Literature

Advertising history falls within the larger realm of consumption studies. Slater characterizes the academic "field" of consumption as a "spaghetti junction of intersecting disciplines, methodologies, politics."[10] Examining children's advertising makes this "spaghetti junction" even messier because it brings additional fields, such as childhood studies, into the fold. It is debatable whether the critical study of children's advertising and consumption represents a distinct "sub-field." Nonetheless, since the 1990s, dozens of monographs, book chapters, and articles have been published on contemporary children's advertising, commercial media, and consumption.[11] My dissertation contributes to this burgeoning scholarship by

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[9] Matt Richtel, "In Online Games, a Path to Young Consumers," *New York Times*, April 20, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/21/business/21marketing.html.

[10] Slater, *Consumer Culture and Modernity*, 2. The appreciate the diversity of theoretical approaches to consumption, see Martyn J. Lee, ed. *The Consumer Society Reader* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000).

[11] See, for example: Banet-Weiser, *Kids Rule!*; Buckingham, "Selling Childhood?"; Elizabeth Chin, *Purchasing Power: Black Kids and American Consumer Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001); Cook, "The Missing Child in Consumption Theory"; Cook, "The Dichotomous Child"; Stephen Dale, *Candy from Strangers: Kids and Consumer Culture* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 2005); Barrie Gunter, Caroline Oates, and Mark Blades, *Advertising to Children on TV: Content, Impact, and Regulation* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2005); Matthew P. McAllister, "Girls with a Passion for Fashion: The Bratz Brand as Integrated Spectacular Consumption," *Journal of Children and Media* 1 (2007): 244-58; Matthew P. McAllister and Matt Giglio, "The Commodity Flow of U.S. Children's Television," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 22 (2005): 26-44; Linn, *Consuming Kids*; Dave Marshall, ed., *Understanding Children as Consumers* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2010); James McNeal, *The Kids Market: Myths and Realities* (Ithaca, NY: Paramount Market Publishing, 1999); Elizabeth Preston and Cindy L. White, "Commodifying Kids: Branded Identities and the Selling of Adspace on

offering important historical context interpreted through a critical media studies lens. Although the history of toy advertising has been researched at length, advertising food to children, comparably, has received less attention in this field.

Many scholars have taken an interest in children because they offer a unique entry point into cultural and political-economic analyses of advertising and consumer culture. Kline suggests it is easier to "recognize the deeper paradoxes of our consumer culture when it is refracted back to us through the mirror of childhood."[12] In a similar vein, according to Pamela Pennock, criticisms of alcohol and tobacco advertising to youth offer a "distillation of a broader critique of the values promoted by unrestrained consumerism."[13] Likewise, Leiss, Kline, Jhally, and Botterill note that "questions of greatest societal importance" are revealed in debates over how marketers socialize children.[14] The children's market is where advertising is often most innovative, but also most controversial. In following, the study of children's advertising contributes to a better understanding of consumer culture more generally. Children make visible aspects of our consumer culture that affect all ages.

On this note, my research contributes to recent scholarship on the social, cultural, and political implications of branding. In recent decades, brands have

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Kids' Networks," *Communication Quarterly* 52 (2004): 115-128; Quart, *Branded*; Schor, *Born to Buy*; and Steinberg and Kincheloe, *Kinderculture*.

[12] Kline, *Out of the Garden*, 12.

[13] Pamela Pennock, *Advertising Sin and Sickness: The Politics of Alcohol and Tobacco Marketing, 1950-1990* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2007), 227.

[14] Leiss, Kline, Jhally, and Botterill, *Social Communication in Advertising*, 618.

become a significant cultural force.[15] Brands have evolved into wide-ranging corporate philosophies and a way of constructing and understanding our own identities in late-modern capitalist society.[16] Brands are weapons in "sign wars" and everything from hospitals to Ph.D. students can be branded. Because brands have become so important to the contemporary sociological, cultural, and business landscape, it is also important to consider the history of branding practices.

While the goals of branding were more limited in scope during the first half of the twentieth century, food advertisers attempted to teach children important lessons in brand loyalty through clubs, premiums, and contests. The advertiser-created "clubs" were prevalent, leveraging the peer culture children were already experiencing during these years. The clubs attempted to keep members demanding the same brand of cereal, but also engendered feelings of exclusivity, pride, accomplishment, and excitement. The "club" offers a unique way to theorize the relationship between consumers and brands. These clubs made promises that a number of brands, ranging from Apple, to Lululemon, to Virgin Mobile, make today: empowerment, social status over peers, and a sense of belonging that can be

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[15] For recent social and cultural analyses of branding, see: Melissa Aronczyk and Devon Powers, ed., *Blowing Up the Brand: Critical Perspectives on Promotional Culture* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010); Adam Arvidsson, *Brands: Meaning and Value in Media Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Robert Goldman and Stephen Papson, "Capital's Brandscapes," *Journal of Consumer Culture* 6 (2006): 327-53; Douglas B. Holt, *How Brands Become Icons: The Principles of Cultural Branding* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2004); Klein, *No Logo*; Celia Lury, *Brands: The Logos of the Global Economy* (New York: Routledge, 2004); and Moor, *Rise of Brands*.

[16] See Alison Hearn, "'Meat, Mask, Burden': Probing the Contours of the Branded 'Self,'" *Journal of Consumer Culture* 8 (2008): 197-217.

achieved through regular, loyal purchasing.[17] A brand is a profitable community of consuming peers.

My dissertation also contributes to the field of business history. The food industry provides a case study as to how business leaders socially constructed and valorized a representation of childhood. Furthermore, this research challenges views that targeted marketing did not fully exist until after 1945. Cohen, for example, places the start of segment marketing in the 1970s.[18] Cohen also writes that, "advertisements targeting children as a segment in the 1950s and 1960s sought to lay the groundwork for a lifetime of consumption, preparing the way for their voyage from child to teen to adult male or female segment."[19] My research places this business goal decades earlier. National food brands did not simply "mass market" during the 1930s. Advertisers treated children as a distinct market, even breaking them down further by age and gender demographics.

However, the business historiography also reveals some of this study's limitations. Laird warns about the problems of examining advertising history without sufficient historical or business context.[20] Although this dissertation attempted to include as much context as possible, further work could be done. As a specific example, my narrative places advertising as the driving force behind both the development of children's commercial media and the social construction of the

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[17] Virgin Mobile now refers to its mobile phone subscribers as "members," with the tagline "it's better to be a member."

[18] Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic*, 298-309.

[19] Ibid, 320.

[20] See bibliographic essay in Laird, *Advertising Progress*.

brand-loyal child consumer. Yet, advertising is only one component of marketing, and socio-cultural, change.

Changes in food retailing occurred in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, which also contributed to the positioning and socialization of children as consumers. Grocers considered the role of children at the retail level. *Progressive Grocer: New Idea Book for Food Merchants*, published in 1941, outlined several ways that grocers could make their stores hospitable for children. The author described how some Safeway stores gave child shoppers their change in a small sealed envelope, with text on the outside reading: "We appreciate your confidence in sending your child to Safeway. Thank You! If any item is wrong in any way, please telephone us or send it back."[21] At the Morgan Grocery store in Chicago, a sign declaring, "let the children shop!" hung above the cashier. Other grocers welcomed children by giving out candy as goodwill, while the Garrett Grocery store in Corpus Christi "found a way for mothers to dispose of their children while shopping" by offering a playroom with books, radio, and snacks.[22] The sample snacks were said to promote sales of these same products. Hence, a broader scope and further context is needed to unpack the historical rise of the child as a consuming subject.

Closing Reflections

In 2011, as American regulators keep an eye on food advertisers and some cities battle with McDonald's over Happy Meal toys, what historical, or even

[21] Ralph F. Linder, ed., *Progressive Grocer: New Idea Book for Food Merchants* (New York: Progressive Grocer, 1941), 17.

[22] Ibid. Ikea, the massive home furnishing and decor retailer, offers similar facilities today.

historiographical, lessons can be learned from this dissertation? I suggest that instead of pointing to a solution, or pointing to a particular tactic of resistance today's concerned citizens should employ, this research demonstrates that there are no simple solutions to the problems of advertising to children. A variety of semi-autonomous institutions were responsible for the first boom in advertising food to children, but these institutions all operated within both a cultural context and a larger economic structure. This research shows that the idealized child consumer is deeply (measured by both time and intensity) entrenched in our world of brands, and that food advertisers are deeply entrenched in children's commercial media culture. Simple regulatory responses prove ineffective when this controversy is examined in historical context. Stole describes advertising to be "like an aggressive virus," able to outpace those who seek to stop it.[23]

Despite claims by food advertisers, self-regulation cannot be relied upon to substantially alter the children's food advertising landscape. The advertising industry has relied on voluntary self-regulation since the first decade of the twentieth century. Self-regulation was also utilized in the 1930s to combat rising anti-advertising opponents and parents concerned about radio program quality. Food advertisers in the twentieth-first century continue to use self-regulatory codes to stave off criticism and regulation. A number of academics and policy experts have pointed out the flaws of these self-regulatory attempts.[24] Bill Jeffery argues that

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[23] Stole, *Advertising on Trial*, 197.

[24] See Kyle Asquith, "A Critical Analysis of the Children's Food and Beverage Advertising Self-regulatory Initiatives," *Democratic Communiqué: Journal of the Union for Democratic Communications* 23 (Fall 2009): 41-60; Bill Jeffery, "The Supreme Court of Canada's Appraisal of the 1980 Ban on

advertisers "have both a vested financial interest in weak standards and a professionally honed skill for 'selling' such weak standards as tough regulatory oversight."[25] Self-regulation appears to be merely a public relations tactic advertisers use to quell criticisms; my research identifies a lengthy history of this.

However, there are also problems with government intervention. Cross notes there are challenges with regulation based on "protecting" innocent children from advertising. Cross argues that the "age of reason is more difficult to discern than is sometimes suggested by the highly rationalist approach taken by consumer researchers."[26] Arguably, many adults do not fully understand the persuasive intent of certain types of advertisements. Furthermore, constructing children as "innocent victims" is falsely premised on the notion there exists a pure and innocent childhood separate from the marketplace. As this and other historical works show, advertisers have both contributed to and benefited from cultural constructions of innocent childhood. Similarly, when critically examining children's marketing, we must avoid moral panics over the "corruption" of innocent childhood. Instead, we must deal with the structural and institutional conditions that allow advertising to flourish. The solution requires getting right to the roots, although this is no easy task.

Regulating children's food advertising has been a challenge since the 1930s because advertising does not fit into any "neat" policy categories. Within debates

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Advertising to Children in Quebec: Implications for 'Misleading' Advertising Elsewhere," *Loyola of Los Angeles Law Review* 39 (2006): 237-76; and Michele Simon, "Can Food Companies be Trusted to Self-regulate? An Analysis of Corporate Lobbying and Deception to Undermine Children's Health," *Loyola of Los Angeles Law Review* 39 (2006): 169-236.

[25] Jeffery, "The Supreme Court of Canada," 246.

[26] Cross, "Valves of Desire," 441.

over controversial advertising practices, important questions are posed concerning values, science, health, constitutional rights, the nature of commercial free speech, and who should have the right to "draw lines" around consumer culture.[27] Effectively challenging advertising means considering greater social questions. Issues such as giving corporations constitutional free speech rights, the commercialization of public airwaves, public broadcasting funding, public school funding, or tax laws are just as important as direct advertising policy mechanisms. If advertisers did not fund radio in the late 1920s, if newspapers were not so desperate for ad sales in the early 1930s, or if all public schools received adequate funding for materials during the Depression, advertising food to children would not have taken off in the way that it did. As McChesney argues, commercial media systems are not natural or inevitable.[28]

While examining folders from the JWT archives at Duke University's Hartman Center, I came across some amusing "memorable" quotes from J. Walter Thompson, agency founder. Some quotes offered humorous advice on dealing with clients. I found one undated quote to be rather interesting:

> Advertising was not invented like a patented clock. It is the permanent result of an economic revolution which brought it to the surface after centuries of ferment. It sprang into existence in a hundred places, and in a hundred different ways at once. It could not be abolished or reduced to any noticeable degree without changing the entire economic aspect of life.[29]

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[27] Pennock, *Advertising Sin and Sickness*, 222.
[28] McChesney, *Communication Revolution*, 118-9.
[29] J. Walter Thompson Quotes, date unknown, box 13, J. Walter Thompson Colin Dawkins Papers, Duke.

Thompson, a model capitalist in every sense, articulated a rather Marxist notion: that advertising is inseparable from, and entirely necessary for, the economic system. As an advertising historian, I also found this quote reassuring. Although it was never my desire to go on a "holy grail" quest for the first ever food advertisement aimed at children, this quote reminded me that such a research objective would have been foolish, for advertising practices sprang "into existence in a hundred places, and in a hundred different ways at once." At the start of the 1930s, with so many food advertisers suddenly taking an interest in children--and using remarkably similar strategies--it is difficult to credit any single advertiser with the status of "inventor."

Instead, an advertising historian should be attentive to not only the pressures and boundaries set by the larger "economic revolution" (i.e. capitalism), but also to the more specific conditions, contexts, and institutions that brought advertising "to the surface after centuries of ferment." The function of advertising in capitalism, though undeniable, does not alone explain why certain practices--such as the targeting of certain audiences--begin at specific times in the history of capitalism.

During a critical juncture from 1928 until 1945, food advertisers helped to create the brand-loyal child consumer. This happened in a particular time and place. As my narrative shows, various interrelated contexts and institutions were at play and aligned to create the food advertising boom of the 1930s: *political-economic*, such as the rise of branded, packaged foods and the business conditions of the Great Depression; *media*, with new advertising platforms, plus their (favourable)

commercial, social, and political regulation; *cultural*, ranging from constructions and representations of childhood to the newly invented meal of breakfast; and *social*, such as changing relationships within the family and the flourishing peer culture of young people. These are the complicated and intertwined roots of a heavily branded food marketplace that has capitalized on the enthusiasm of children for over 75 years.

As Slater contends, "the great issue about consumer culture is the way it connects central questions about how we should or want to live with questions about how society is organized."[30] Children's food advertising is more than a collection of television spots for Happy Meal toys, cartoon cereal mascots, school sponsorships, or online contests and advergames. Rather, children's food advertising is the historical and cumulative result of a particular kind of society and the more specific choices members of this society made.

[30] Slater, *Consumer Culture and Modernity*, 3.

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