

THIRD EDITION

# KINDERCULTURE

THE CORPORATE CONSTRUCTION OF CHILDHOOD

Edited by Shirley R. Steinberg



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## The Corporate Construction of Childhood

THIRD EDITION

*Edited by*

**Shirley R. Steinberg**

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*To our girls:*

*Hava, Luna, and Maci*

*Bronwyn, Christine, Marissa, and Meghann*



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*Chapter 1*

**KINDER CULTURE:  
MEDIATING, SIMULACRALIZING,  
AND PATHOLOGIZING THE  
NEW CHILDHOOD**

*Shirley R. Steinberg*

ON JUNE 30, 2010, *La Vanguardia* noted a poll listing the top one hundred most influential newsmakers in the world. Among the group ranked were Taylor Swift (twelve), Miley Cyrus (thirteen), and the Jonas Brothers (forty). In the six years since the publication of the second edition of *Kinderculture*, the world has changed. Along with a sweeping tsunami of politics, religious influences, struggles, and advancing web 2.0 globalization comes an incredible phenomenon, kinderculture: Children and youth have become infantilized by popular culture, schools, and adults, and while being considered “too” young for almost anything, at the same time, they are being marketed to as seasoned adults. The result is a consumer public of little girls, for example, who wear chastity rings and hip-clinging jogging pants with “Kiss My Booty” in glitter on the backside. With one voice, adults tell kids to stay clean, avoid sex and drugs, go to Disneyland, and make vows of celibacy . . . with another other voice, the corporate side markets booty clothing, faux bling, and sexualized images of twelve-year-olds. This edition of *Kinderculture* adds to the other editions by claiming that new times have created a new

childhood. However, these new times are conservative and liberal, sexual and celibate, and innocent and seasoned. Evidence of this dramatic cultural change surrounds each of us, but many individuals have not yet noticed it. When Joe Kincheloe and I wrote the first edition of *Kinderculture* in 1997, many people who made their living studying or caring for children had not yet recognized this phenomenon. By the middle of the first decade of the twenty-first century, more and more people had begun to understand this historic change, however many child professionals remained oblivious to these social and cultural alterations. Now, in the second decade of the twenty-first century, the notions of childhood and youth are more complex, more pathologized, and more alien to adults who educate and parent.

In the domains of psychology, education, and to a lesser degree sociology, few observers have seriously studied the ways that the information explosion so characteristic of our contemporary era has operated to undermine traditional notions of childhood. Those who have shaped, directed, and used contemporary information technology have played an exaggerated role in the reformulation of childhood. *Kinderculture* analyzes these changes in childhood, especially the role that information technology has played in this process. Of course, information technology alone has not produced a new era of childhood. Numerous social, political, and economic factors have operated to produce such changes. Our focus here is not to cover all of these issues but to question the ways media in particular have helped construct what I am calling “the new childhood.”

Childhood is a social and historical artifact—not simply a biological entity. Many argue that childhood is a natural phase of growing up, of becoming an adult. The cardinal concept here involves the format of this human phase that has been produced by social, cultural, political, and economic forces operating upon it. Indeed, what is labeled as “traditional childhood” is only about 150 years old. In the Middle Ages, for example, children participated daily in the adult world, gaining knowledge of vocational and life skills as part of such engagement. The concept of children as a particular classification of human beings demanding special treatment differing from adults had not yet developed in the Middle Ages.

## SOCIALLY CONSTRUCTED CHILDHOOD

Childhood is a creation of society that is subject to change whenever major social transformations take place. The zenith of the traditional childhood lasted from about 1850 to 1950. Protected from the dangers of the adult world, many children (up until the twentieth century, boys) during this period were removed from factories and placed into schools. As the prototype of the modern family developed in the late nineteenth century, “proper” parental behavior toward children coalesced around notions of tenderness and adult accountability for children’s welfare. By 1900 many believed that childhood was a birthright—a perspective that eventuated in a biological, not a cultural, definition of childhood. Emerging in this era of the protected child, modern child psychology was inadvertently constructed by the tacit assumptions of the period. The great child psychologists, from Erik Erikson to Arnold Gesell to Jean Piaget, viewed child development as shaped by biological forces.

Piaget’s brilliance was constrained by his nonhistorical, socially decontextualized scientific approach. What he observed as the genetic expression of child behavior in the early twentieth century he generalized to all cultures and historical eras—an error that holds serious consequences for those concerned with children. Considering biological stages of child development fixed and unchangeable, teachers, psychologists, parents, welfare workers, and the community at large view and judge children along a fictional taxonomy of development. Those children who don’t “measure up” will be relegated to the land of low and self-fulfilling expectations. Those who “make the grade” will find that their racial and economic privilege will be confused with ability (Polakow, 1992; Postman, 1994). *Kinderculture* joins the emerging body of literature that questions the biological assumptions of “classical” child psychology (Kincheloe, 2008).

Living in a historical period of great change and social upheaval, critical observers are just beginning to notice changing social and cultural conditions in relation to this view of childhood. Categories of child development appropriated from modernist psychology may hold little relevance for raising and educating contemporary children. In the 1950s, 80 percent of all children lived in homes where their two biological

parents were married to each other (Lipsky and Abrams, 1994). No one has to be told that families have changed in the past fifty years. Volumes have been written specifying the scope and causes of the social transformation. Before the 1980s ended, children who lived with their two biological parents had fallen to merely 12 percent. Children of divorced parents—a group made up of more than half of the North American population—are almost three times as likely as children raised in two-parent homes to suffer emotional and behavioral difficulties—maybe more the result of parental conflict than the actual divorce (Mason and Steadman, 1997). Despite such understandings, social institutions have been slow to recognize different, nontraditional family configurations and the special needs they encounter. Without support, the contemporary “postmodern” family, with its plethora of working and single mothers, is beset with problems emanating from the feminization of poverty and the vulnerable position of women in both the public and private spaces (Polakow, 1992).

### **PARADIGMS FOR STUDYING CHILDHOOD: THE POSITIVIST VIEW OF CHILDREN**

It is important to place *Kinderculture* in paradigmatic context, to understand what I am promoting here in relation to other scholarship on childhood studies and childhood education. To begin with, we are directly challenging the positivist view of children promoted in mainstream articulations of psychology, sociology, education, and anthropology. Positivism is an epistemological position maintaining that all knowledge of worth is produced by the traditional scientific method. All scientific knowledge constructed in this context is thus proclaimed neutral and objective. Critics of positivism (see Kincheloe, 1993, 2001, 2003, 2004, 2008) argue that because of the narrow nature of what positivist research studies (what it *can* study given its rules of analysis), it often overlooks powerful normative and ideological assumptions built into its research design. In this naïve realistic context it often seeks empirical proof of what are normative or political assertions—for example, that adults always know better when it comes to issues involving children.

A key goal of critics of positivism involves bringing these normative and ideological assumptions to the surface so observers can gain a much more textured perspective of what research involves and indicates. Indeed, critics of positivism insist that one dimension of research involves the researcher's analysis of his or her own assumptions, ideologies, and values, and how they shape the knowledge produced. In such a spirit, the editors and authors of *Kinderculture* openly admit their antipositivist, hermeneutic epistemological orientations. Concurrently, we admit our critical democratic values, our vision of race, class, gender, and sexual equality, and the necessity of exposing the effects of power in shaping individual identity and political/educational purpose. This is not an act of politicization of research; research has always been politicized. Instead, we are attempting to understand and act ethically in light of such politicization.

In the positivist perspective, children are assumed to be subservient and dependent on adults as part of the order of the cosmos. In this context adults are seen as having a "natural" prerogative to hold power over children. Positivists turn to biology to justify such assumptions, contending that the physical immaturity of children is manifested in other domains as inferiority, an absence of development, incompleteness, and weakness. One does not have to probe deeply into these biological assumptions to discern similarities between the positivist hierarchy of adults and children and the one subordinating "emotional" women to "rational" men. In our challenge to the positivist view of children, we focus on age and generation to depict children as different from adults but not inferior to them. Children are not merely entities on their way to adulthood; they are individuals intrinsically valuable for who they presently are. When positivists view children as lesser than adults, they consistently ignore the way power operates to oppress children around the axes of race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, etc. The positivist construction of the "vulnerable" child in this context actually becomes more vulnerable as real and specific threats are overlooked because childhood is viewed as a naturally vulnerable state. The threats of different social, economic, political, and cultural "childhoods" are erased (Mason and Steadman, 1997).

The positivist view of childhood has been firmly grounded on developmental psychology's universal rules of child development. Regardless

of historical or social context, these rules lay out the proper development of “normal” children. This mythos of the universal innocent and developing child transforms cultural dimensions of childhood into something produced by nature. By the second decade of the twentieth century, this universal norm for the developing child had been established on the basis of “scientific authority,” based almost exclusively on North American white, middle-class norms and experiences. Schools fell into line, developing a white, middle-class, patriarchal curriculum that reflected the norms of proper development. Reformers, blessed with the imprimatur of science, based their efforts to regulate play on the principles of developmental psychology. Advocates of municipal playgrounds, the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts worked to make sure that children made appropriate use of leisure time (Spigel, 1998).

The decontextualized aspect of the positivist view of childhood shapes numerous problems for those who don't fit into the dominant cultural bases of the proper development of normal children. In failing to understand the impact of race, class, gender, linguistics, national origin, etc., positivism fails to understand the nature of and the reasons for differences between children. Too often—especially in twenty-first-century education, with its obsession with standards, standardization, and testing—such differences are viewed as deficiencies. In this positivist regime of truth, children from lower socioeconomic, nonwhite, or immigrant backgrounds are relegated to the lower rungs of the developmental ladder. The idea that life experiences and contextual factors might affect development is not considered in the positivist paradigm because it does not account for such social and cultural dynamics (Mason and Steadman, 1997).

In addition, as positivism came to delineate the scientific dimensions of child development, male psychologists replaced mothers as child-rearing experts. In the early part of the twentieth century, the psychologist took on a socially important role. Many people believed that if scientific principles were not followed, innocent, malleable children would be led en masse into immorality and weakness. A significant feature of these scientific principles involved exposing children only to developmentally appropriate adult knowledge. The secret knowledge of adulthood, the positivist psychologists believed, should only be delivered to

children at appropriate times in their development. With these ideas in mind, one can better understand the impact TV made on a nation that bought into major dimensions of the positivist mythos. TV was the fly in the ointment, the window to adult knowledge that could undermine the nation's strength and moral fiber.

The positivist view of childhood could be maintained only through constant social regulation and surveillance of the young. Since childhood is vulnerable and socially unstable, the control of knowledge becomes especially important in the maintenance of its innocent format. Indeed, in the positivist view childhood no longer exists if the young gain access to certain forms of adult knowledge. No wonder the last half of the twentieth century witnessed so many claims that after TV and other electronic media, childhood was dead. The positivist position has been deemed by many as an elitist perspective, as adults are deemed the trolls of the bridge of childhood. It is adults who decide what children should know and how they should be socialized. The idea that children should be participants in making decisions about their own lives is irrelevant here. Simply put, in the positivist paradigm children are passive entities who must be made to submit to adult decisions about their lives (Spigel, 1998).

### **FINDING A NEW PARADIGM FOR A NEW CHILDHOOD**

With the advent of a plethora of socioeconomic changes, technological developments, globalization, and the perceived inadequacy of the old paradigm, which helps produce profoundly diverse actions and reactions, Western societies and increasingly other parts of the world have entered into a transitional phase of childhood. This transitional phase has been accompanied by a paradigm shift in the way many scholars study childhood and situate it in social, cultural, political, and economic relations. This scholarly shift takes direct exception to the positivist view of childhood and its expression of a universal, uniformly developmentalist conception of the normal child. This conception of the child as a passive receiver of adult input and socialization strategies has been replaced by a view of the child as an active agent capable of contributing

to the construction of his or her own subjectivity. For those operating in the parameters of the new paradigm, the purpose of studying and working with children is not to remove the boundary between childhood and adulthood but to gain a thicker, more compelling picture of the complexity of the culture, politics, and psychology of childhood. With its penchant for decontextualization and inability to account for contemporary social, cultural, political, economic, and epistemological changes, the positivist paradigm is not adequate for this task (Cannella, 1997; Hengst, 2001; Cannella and Kincheloe, 2002; Cannella, 2002; Cook, 2004; Steinberg, 2010).

Insisting that children existed outside society and could be brought in from the cold only by adult socialization that led to development, the positivist view constructed research and childhood professional practices that routinely excluded children's voices. Advocates of the new paradigm have maintained time and again that such positivist silencing and general disempowerment is not in the best interests of children. In the name of child protection, advocates of the new paradigm have argued, children are often rendered powerless and vulnerable in their everyday lives. As they construct their view of children as active constructors of their own worlds, proponents of the new paradigm work hard to emphasize the personhood of children. The children of the new paradigm both construct their worlds and are constructed by them. Thus, in ethnographic and other forms of new paradigm childhood study, children, like adults, are positioned as co-participants in research—not as mere objects to be observed and categorized. Advocates of the new paradigm operating in the domain of social and educational policy-making for children contend that such activity must always take into account the perspectives of children to inform their understanding of particular situations (Mason and Steadman, 1997; Seaton, 2002; Cook, 2004; Steinberg, 2010).

Thus, central to the new paradigm is the effort to make sure children are intimately involved in shaping their social, psychological, and educational lives. In many ways accomplishing such a task is much easier said than done. In contemporary U.S. society in particular, to attempt it is to expose oneself to ridicule and dismissal by conservative child advocates in diverse social, political, cultural, and educational arenas. Such child-empowerment advocacy is represented by right-wing commenta-

tors as a permissive relinquishing of adult power over impudent and disrespectful children (Mason and Steadman, 1997; Ottosen, 2003). Undoubtedly, it will be a difficult struggle to reposition the child in twenty-first-century social relationships. In this context Henry Jenkins argues, as an advocate of the new paradigm, that his work seeks to provide children with tools that facilitate children's efforts to achieve their own political goals and help them construct their own culture.

In rejecting the positivist paradigm of childhood passivity and innocence, advocates of the new empowerment paradigm are not contending that there is no time when children need adult protection—that would be a silly assertion. Children, like human beings in general, too often find themselves victimized by abuse, neglect, racism, class bias, and sexism. The salient point is that instead of further infantilizing children and rendering them more passive, the new paradigm attempts to employ their perspectives in solving their problems (Mason and Steadman, 1997). In addition, such transformative researchers and child professionals work to help children develop a critical political consciousness as they protect their access to diverse knowledge and technologies. As is the nature of developing a critical consciousness in any context, we are arguing that children in social, cultural, psychological, and pedagogical contexts need help in developing the ability to analyze, critique, and improve their position in the world. This task is a central objective of *Kinderculture*.

Another dimension of the new paradigm of child study involves the explicit rejection of positivism's universalist conception of childhood and child development. When advocates of the new paradigm enter diverse class and racial/ethnic cultures, they find childhoods that look quite different from the white, middle- and upper-middle-class, English-speaking one presented by positivism. In these particularistic childhoods researchers find great complexity and diversity within these categories. For example, the social, cultural, and political structures that shape these childhoods and the children who inhabit them are engaged in profoundly different ways by particular children in specific circumstances. Thus, such structures never determine who children are no matter how much consistency in macrostructures may exist. The particular and the general, the micro and the macro, agency and structure always interact

in unpredictable ways to shape the everyday life of children. A central theme of the new paradigm re-emerges—children shape and are shaped by the world around them.

The editors and authors of *Kinderculture* maintain that the delicate and complex balance between these constructive forces must be carefully studied and maintained. If we move too far in our emphasis of structure over agency, we lapse into a structural determinism that undermines the prerogative of individual social actors—thus, there is nothing a child can do to escape the ravages of poverty. If we move too far in our emphasis of agency, we often lose sight of the way dominant power operates to undermine children's role in shaping their own lives and constructing their own subjectivities. Indeed, the overemphasis of particularism and agency will often obscure just how powerless children can be. Thus, to develop our thicker and more complex view of childhood, we must constantly work to integrate the micro and the macro, to discern new cultural and political economic contexts in which to view and make sense of child behavior (Garey and Arendell, 1999; Ottosen, 2003). In this context new paradigmatic researchers must not only nurture these macro (social, political economic), meso (institutional, e.g., school, media, religious institution, welfare agency), and micro (individuals) interactions but attend to the ways such levels connect to one another. For example, what is the proximity of the individual child to particular social and institutional structures?

These are complex questions, and different students of childhood will answer them in divergent ways. Indeed, some scholars of childhood make distinctions between proponents of the new paradigm who emphasize structural issues and those who stress the agency of individual children. In this dichotomy scholars who emphasize the importance of commercial relations and corporate marketing in shaping children's culture have been relegated to the "structuralist" camp—the authors and editors of *Kinderculture* included. Structuralists are represented in this configuration as emphasizing the corporate invasion of childhood and its resulting exploitation. In this context structuralists are said to view such exploitation as similar in nature to the exploitation of women. The agential perspective often focuses not on the exploitative but the "empowering" dimensions of children's participation in commercial culture.

By arguing that children construct their own lives, such agential scholars maintain that children are capable of avoiding the manipulations of corporate advertising and making positive use of the consumptive act and consumer products. For example, advocates of agency maintain that children appropriate toys and media productions in creative ways that make meanings of them totally unanticipated by the producer.

Illustrating the divergence of the agential and structuralist positions, those labeled structuralists contend that while such creative appropriation certainly does take place, it often does nothing to subvert the ideological meanings inscribed on corporate constructions. When children appropriate toys and media productions, they sometimes make meanings that subvert ideological inscriptions while at other times their appropriations operate to validate the status quo. Such appropriations are complex and must be studied on a case-by-case basis. Our notion of kinderculture is dedicated to the notion that often the separation of structural and agential interpretations creates a false binarism. Indeed, in every situation we study (see Joe Kincheloe's *Sign of the Burger: McDonald's and the Culture of Power* for an expansion of these ideas) we discern both structural and agential dimensions at work. A child, like an adult, can concurrently be exploited and possess agency. Whenever individuals deal with hegemonic and ideological productions, they deal with these competing dynamics (Mason and Steadman, 1997; Ottosen, 2003; Cook, 2004).

As in any sociopolitical situation with the potential for hegemonic and ideological exploitation, children (or adults) can learn to be more sensitive to the ways exploitation takes place while developing strategies for avoiding it. And, as in any pedagogical situation, children (and adults) can develop these strategies on their own or, in a Vygotskian sense, in cooperation with teachers who provide a new zone of proximal development that allows for a deeper understanding of the way power operates. This, of course, is the basis of *Kinderculture's* critical media literacy for children (Steinberg, 2007).

David Buckingham (2003) dismisses the value of structuralist concerns with exploitation and argues that pedagogies of empowerment such as the one advocated here have "increasingly been seen to amount to little more than rhetoric." By denying the possibility of a media literacy of

power, Buckingham lapses into a pedagogy of nihilism that provides no *raison d'être* for scholarly activity in the area of children's culture. Power and exploitation are erased in Buckingham's articulation, as any effort to alert children to the ways the social, cultural, political, and economic domains operate to harm both them and other individuals is represented as a misguided form of "salvationism." Buckingham then equates this so-called salvationism with right-wing attempts to protect childhood innocence via forms of censorship and moralistic regulation. Most discussions between the agential and structuralist positions in the new paradigm of child studies are not—nor should be—this contentious. It is important to specify *Kinderculture's* location in this conceptual matrix.

*Kinderculture* represents the critical new paradigm in childhood studies and childhood education. The use of "critical" in this context signals the "critical" in critical theory (Kincheloe, 2004, 2008) and its concern with power structures and their influence in everyday life. In the case of contemporary children, the sociopolitical and economic structures shaped by corporate power buoyed by the logic of capital as well as patriarchal structures, with their oppressive positioning of women and children, are central concerns of the critical paradigm (Garey and Arendell, 1999; Scott, 2002). Using the production of pleasure as its ultimate weapon, the corporate children's consumer culture we are labeling "kinderculture" commodifies cultural objects and turns them into things to purchase rather than objects to contemplate. Kinderculture, thus, is subversive but in a way that challenges authority in an effort to maintain rather than transform the status quo. It appeals to the agential child and agential child advocates as it offers children identities that Jane Kenway and Elizabeth Bullen (2001) label as autonomous, rational, and hedonistic. Thus, kinderculture is produced by ingenious marketers who possess profound insights into the lives, desires, and cultural context of contemporary children. Such marketers know how to cultivate intense affect among children and use such emotion to elicit particular consumptive and, in turn, ideological reactions.

A key dimension of this consumptive-ideological dimension of *Kinderculture* involves the marketers' understanding that children, particularly middle-class children, are especially interested in TV, movies,

Internet, toys, and even foods (see Kincheloe's chapter on McDonald's and Kincheloe, 2002) that transgress parental norms of "good taste," social status, and educational development. Indeed, this ideology of opposition is central in many cases to what separates contemporary children from their parents and other adults. Such oppositionality operates to subvert the bourgeois educational project of modernity—rational child development based on the achievement of universal stages of reason reflecting adult behavior and ways of being. As it commodifies and lures children into this oppositional conspiracy, it meshes consumption, education, information, knowledge, cultural capital, emotional bonding, entertainment, and advertising (Kenway and Bullen, 2001; Hengst, 2001; Steinberg, 2007). Advocates of the critical new paradigm of childhood studies argue that kinderculture can no longer be ignored in the effort to understand the social, psychological, and educational dimensions of children. In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, corporate children's culture has replaced schooling as the producer of the central curriculum of childhood.

### IS THERE A CRISIS OF CHILDHOOD?

Changing economic realities coupled with children's access to information about the adult world have drastically changed childhood. The traditional childhood genie is out of the bottle and is unable to return. Recent writing about childhood in both the popular and scholarly presses speaks of "childhood lost," "children growing up too fast," and "child terror in the isolation of the fragmented home and community." Images of mothers drowning children, baby-sitters torturing infants, kids pushing kids out of fourteen-story windows, and trick-or-treat razor blades in apples saturate the contemporary conversation about children. Popular culture provides haunting images of this crisis of childhood that terrify and engage our worst fears. The film *Halloween*, for example, is at one level a story of the postmodern childhood—fear in isolation. The isolation referenced here involves separation from both absent parents and a nonexistent community. No one is there to help; even on the once-festive Halloween night, children are not present.

Even in “safe” suburbia, the community has fragmented to the point that the safety of children trick-or-treating cannot be guaranteed (Ferguson, 1994; Paul, 1994). The crisis of contemporary childhood can be signified in many ways, all of which involve at some level the horror of danger faced in solitude.

This crisis of childhood is part imagination, part reality. While children, like all people, are vulnerable to social ills and the manipulations of unscrupulous adults and power wielders, there is a degree of moral panic and general hyperbole in the view that children are facing threats from predators unlike anything they have experienced in the historical past. While certainly not dismissing everyday threats to childhood in the twenty-first century, we should be careful not to let hysterics from diverse ideological perspectives paint a fear-driven portrait of the social landscape. A balanced view would demand that we position the crisis of childhood within the twenty-first-century social, cultural, and economic context. There is no doubt that childhood in Western societies is affected by the decline of industrialized economic arrangements.

In such industrialized societies labor was the most important social force for social integration. In a postindustrial condition people make life meanings outside the boundaries of their work lives. The labor process in this new context plays less and less of a role in shaping identity and constructing life experiences. As industrial jobs that lasted a lifetime with pensions and social benefits decline, more women have entered the workforce. Buoyed by the women’s movement, more and more mothers have sought work outside the home, subsequently placing more pressure on fathers to participate in child-rearing activities. In such contexts children learn to cope with busy and often preoccupied parents. Consequently, they become more self-reliant than middle- and upper-middle-class children from previous generations earlier in the twentieth century.

The changing role of women profoundly changes the role of children in contemporary Western societies. Even though more and more women work outside the home, this does not lead to an equal sharing of domestic work—women still do more than men (du Bois-Reymond, Suenker, and Kruger, 2001). Increasing numbers of single poor women combine both paid labor and child care without the help of a spouse or

partner and with little assistance from the state. Without economic or social support women and children in these categories have experienced harsher and harsher conditions and less and less hope for upward mobility. For middle- and upper-middle-class children, these social, economic, and cultural trends have sometimes provided them more independence and influence in the family. In lower socioeconomic circumstances, such trends exacerbate the effects of poverty and sometimes lead to more neglect and alienation.

In many middle- and lower-class homes, these larger socioeconomic trends operate to make children “more useful” than they had been throughout much of the twentieth century. As women become more and more embedded in the workplace, traditional role expectations continue to erode. In order to adjust to these modified familial relationships, children and youth from the ages of six to nineteen have taken on more responsibilities for caring not only for themselves but for their parents as well. Studies (Hengst, 2001) illustrate that children increasingly are the family members who buy the food. Indeed, the home appliance industry—understanding this trend—is directing more and more of its advertising budget toward children and youth magazines. Industry demographics tell them that a key and growing segment of those who buy food, microwaves, and other kitchen appliances are from this six-to-nineteen age bracket (du Bois-Reymond, Suenker, and Kruger, 2001). This represents a profound change in the way children are positioned in the social order.

This change of the social positioning of children holds dramatic implications for the education of children. As age boundaries blur and age becomes less important in shaping human abilities and role expectations, the crisis of childhood becomes the crisis of education. Children emerging in the new social conditions no longer reflect the expectations for childhood embedded in the structures and organization of schools. “New children” who experience more adultlike roles in other phases of their lives may not react positively to being treated like “children” in the classroom. Teachers who infantilize their elementary students may be shocked by the resentment independent children direct back toward them. Indeed, such dynamics already occur as teachers voice complaints about “children who talk like adults and have

little or no respect for their demands.” What teachers sometimes perceive as impudence and a lack of respect may be as much a reflection of independent, self-sufficient children reacting to forms of regulation that they experience in no other aspect of their lives. We see this redirection of anger to teachers and adults in media representations of children and youth. A savvy kid is often in complete control of not only her or his own destiny but that of a family or possibly the school or entire community. The knowing kindercultured youth of the new millennium walks a balance beam of complexity as the naïve being promoted by caregivers and teachers and as the in-control leader of the covert ops of being a kid in today’s society.

In this changing social context many scholars (Casas, 1998; Hengst, 2001) are making the argument that children are far more cognitively capable than traditionally maintained by developmental psychology. The world of electronic media, along with these changing notions of the social role of the child, has expanded what Lev Vygotsky referred to as the ZPD (zone of proximal development)—the context that facilitates the learning process—of contemporary children. In the ZPD individuals learn to take part in social and cultural activities that catalyze their intellectual development. In the media-created electronic ZPD, with its videos, TV, computers, video games, Internet, popular music, and virtual realities, children learn to use the tools of culture, e.g., language, mathematics, reasoning, etc. (Fu, 2003). The skills learned may or may not be abilities valued by the school. They are valuable abilities nonetheless.

When sociologists, psychologists, and cultural scholars examine what children are able to construct employing the symbols and tools of mediated culture, they realize how sophisticated and intellectually advanced children’s abilities can become in this new ZPD. This electronic kinderculture has quickly become a new culture of childhood learning. Indeed, the space within which many contemporary children play is the same domain in which their parents work. Children access these national and international information networks using the same tools as their parents. In this new domain of learning many children free themselves from the educational project of modern Western societies. Many children in Western societies are no longer learning along a preplanned program of

selected exposure to the adult world by adults. Instead, they are accessing previously considered “adult” information via electronic media. As this takes place, such children are freed from particular parental norms and parental regulations common to bourgeois culture. A cultural aesthetic develops that eschews cultural products provided for the purposes of education and refinement. Kinderculture thus emerges and is produced around the new childhood desire for independence and resistance to things adult. Traditional forms of school learning become less and less important and less applicable to the needs of these new children (Hengst, 2001). Thus, childhood is perceived in crisis because it resembles nothing most people have ever seen before.

### **CORPORATE EDUCATORS**

The corporate production of popular kinderculture and its impact on children is a central concern of this book. Such an effort falls under the umbrella term “cultural pedagogy,” which refers to the idea that education takes place in a variety of social sites including but not limited to schooling. Pedagogical sites are those places where power is organized and deployed including libraries, TV, movies, newspapers, magazines, toys, advertisements, video games, books, sports, etc. Our work as education scholars, we believe, demands that we examine both school and cultural pedagogy if we are to make sense of the educational process (Giroux, 1994). Operating on the assumption that profound learning changes one’s identity, we see the pedagogical process as one that engages our desire (our yearning for something beyond ourselves shaped by the social context in which we operate, our affective investment in that which surrounds us), captures our imagination, and constructs our consciousness. The emergence of cultural studies (Grossberg, 1995) has facilitated our effort to examine the cultural practices through which individuals come to understand themselves and the world that surrounds them (Steinberg, 2007). Supported by the insights of cultural studies, we are better equipped to examine the effects of cultural pedagogy, with its identity formation and its production and legitimation of knowledge, i.e., the cultural curriculum (Kasturi, 2002).

The organizations that create this cultural curriculum are not educational agencies but rather commercial concerns that operate not for the social good but for individual gain. Cultural pedagogy is structured by commercial dynamics, forces that impose themselves into all aspects of our own and our children's private lives (Giroux, 1994). Patterns of consumption shaped by corporate advertising empower commercial institutions as the teachers of the contemporary era. Corporate cultural pedagogy has "done its homework"—it has produced educational forms that are wildly successful when judged on the basis of their capitalist intent. Replacing traditional classroom lectures and seatwork with magic kingdoms, animated fantasies, interactive videos, virtual realities, kick-boxing TV heroes, dolls (complete with their own recorded "history"), and an entire array of entertainment forms produced ostensibly for adults but eagerly consumed by children, corporate America has helped revolutionize childhood.

Such a revolution has not taken place in some crass manner with Stalin-esque corporate wizards checking off a list of institutions they have captured. Instead, the revolution (contrary to the '60s idiom) has been televised, brought to you and your children in HD and digital color. Using fantasy and desire, corporate functionaries have created a perspective on the world that melds with business ideologies and free-market values. The worldviews produced by corporate advertisers to some degree always let children know that the most exciting things life can provide are produced by their friends in corporate America. The economics lesson is powerful when it is repeated hundreds of thousands of times.

While researching schools, education, and corporate childhood, we have become seasoned in the corporate interventions by brands like Pizza Hut (reading program), McDonald's (A students), and Nike (most school sports teams). It is also a time when publishing companies create curriculum for students, with little or no educational or academic input. Certainly, No Child Left Behind was a reflection of the agenda created by McGraw-Hill in the 1990s. Pearson Publishing has been retained to redesign the New York State primary curriculum, without one academic or schoolteacher on the design team. Up until this point, Disney has always had a hegemonic hold on children's culture through the participation of both families and teachers. It has never been unusual to walk into

a primary school, really anywhere in the world, and spy bulletin boards, reading charts, and classroom assignment ledgers thematically displayed by Mickey, Donald, or a princess. In schools that claim a diverse and multicultural view, one will see representations of Mulan, Pocahontas, and Aladdin proclaiming that "It's a small world after all." Disney has recently taken the grandiose step of creating "Disney English." Disney claims an expertise in English, as it has been writing children's books for more than three-quarters of a century. These "qualifications" opened a market in Asia for English-language teaching. Disney English is a multimillion-dollar enterprise that has blurred the boundaries of education and corporate book-making.

One of the most profound events of the last century in world history in general and certainly in the history of childhood involves the successful commodification of childhood. Not only did corporate marketers open a new market but they helped generate a body of meanings, cultural practices, and ideological understandings that continues to shape our world and children around the planet (Cook, 2004). By gaining access to children, advertisers found out early in the twentieth century not only that they could induce children to buy more but that they could get children to nag their parents to consume more (Spigel, 1998). Though many argue to the contrary, it seems increasingly obvious that a large percentage of children and young people in the twenty-first century are enthusiastic participants in consumer society. In recent polls they express the belief that having more money would most improve their lives. Concurrently, they express great faith in the American economic system. Increasing numbers of children and young people own more than one credit card, and many own stocks. Corporate power wielders have worked hard to win such perspectives and orientations among the young. Indeed, consumer capitalism has succeeded in ways unimagined by previous advocates, as more and more children and young people come to hold the values and ideological dispositions that serve the best interests of corporate leaders (Spigel, 1998; Allen, 2003).

In an interesting and insidious way, the marketers and children enter into an unspoken alliance that helps children escape both the control and the educational-developmental agenda of middle- and

upper-middle-class parents. Video games, Internet, texting, TV, MP3 players, and DVDs help create a personal, secluded domain for children free from direct parental regulation. Of course, many parents find such independence frightening, and many understandably worry about children becoming targets for advertising and marketing. While many concerned individuals have expressed anxiety over what they thought was corporate advertising's violation of the social contract protecting the sanctity of childhood, others such as David Buckingham have argued that such fears are overblown. Children, Buckingham maintains, possess the ability to discern advertising strategies early in their lives and can thus protect themselves from corporate exploitation. Moreover, Buckingham posits, there is no evidence that indicates that advertising makes children more materialistic than they would have been otherwise. In an empirical research context Buckingham's assertion is a safe one. Since no one knows how children would have been otherwise, it is empirically impossible to prove such an assertion either true or false. We could not disagree more.

The argument made in this volume maintains that it is our parental, civic, and professional responsibility to study the corporate curriculum and its social and political effects. Indeed, we maintain that as parents, citizens, and teachers we must hold corporations accountable for the pedagogical features of their activities, for the kinderculture they produce. We must intervene in the cozy relationship between popular culture and pedagogy that shapes our identities. In the interest of both our children and the larger society, we must exercise our personal and collective power to transform the variety of ways corporate power (gained via its access to media) oppresses and dominates us. We must cultivate an awareness of the ways cultural pedagogy operates so that we can scold when appropriate and rewrite popular texts when the opportunity presents itself. Kinderculture is primarily a pedagogy of pleasure, and as such it cannot be countered merely by ostracizing ourselves and our children from it. Strategies of resistance must be formulated that understand the relationship between pedagogy, knowledge production, identity formation, and desire. This book attempts to open a public conversation about the effect of kinderculture as the central curriculum of contemporary childhood.

## THE CULTURAL STUDIES OF KINDERCULTURE

Questions concerning kinderculture and its relationship to cultural pedagogy can be clarified and discussed within the academic field of cultural studies. This book resides at the intersection of educational/childhood studies and cultural studies. Attempts to define cultural studies are delicate operations in that the field has consciously operated in a manner that avoids traditional academic disciplinary definitions. Nevertheless, cultural studies has something to do with the effort to produce an interdisciplinary (or counterdisciplinary) way of studying, interpreting, and often evaluating cultural practices in historical, social, and theoretical contexts. Refusing to equate “culture” with high culture, cultural studies attempts to examine the diversity of a society’s artistic, institutional, and communicative expressions and practices. Because it examines cultural expressions ignored by the traditional social sciences, cultural studies is often equated with the study of popular culture. Such an equation is misleading; while popular culture is addressed by cultural studies, it is not the exclusive concern. Indeed, the interests of cultural studies are much broader, including the “rules” of academic study itself—i.e., the discursive practices (tacit regulations that define what can and cannot be said, who speaks and who must listen, and whose constructions of reality are valid and whose are unlearned and unimportant) that guide scholarly endeavor.

Thus, cultural studies holds exciting possibilities for new ways of studying education—specifically childhood education, with its attention to the discursive dynamics of the field. How do children embody kinderculture? How do the power dynamics embedded in kinderculture produce pleasure and pain in the daily lives of children? How do critically grounded parents, teachers, child psychologists, and childhood professionals in general gain a view of children that accounts for the effects of popular culture in their self-images and worldviews? Such questions open new domains of analysis in childhood studies, as they seek out previously marginalized voices and the vantage points they bring to both the scholarly and practitioner-based conversation (Grossberg, 1995; Nelson, Treichler, and Grossberg, 1992). While we are enthused by the benefits of cultural studies of childhood, we are simultaneously critical of

expressions of elitism within the discourse of cultural studies itself—a recognition made more disturbing by cultural studies’ claim to the moral high ground of a politics of inclusivity. Unfortunately, the study of children has traditionally been regarded as a low-status exercise in the culture of academia. So far, at least, the field of cultural studies has reproduced this power/status dynamic in its neglect of childhood study. Indeed, few students of cultural studies have targeted children as the subjects of their scholarship. *Kinderculture* attempts to address this absence and promote new literature in the area.

## TO STUDY POPULAR CULTURE

The study of traditional forms of kinderculture—fairy tales, for example—has granted scholars insights into hard-to-reach domains of child consciousness. Moreover, the more disturbing and violent the fairy tale, some would argue, the more insight into the “primitive” feelings that arise and shape us in early childhood and, in turn, in adulthood. The connection between kinderculture and childhood desires and feelings blows the rational cultural fuse, thus connecting adults to the *Lebenswelt* (life world) of children and granting them better access to childhood perceptions (Paul, 1994). Not only does the study of children’s popular culture grant insights into childhood consciousness; it also provides new pictures of culture in general. Kinderculture, in this context, inadvertently reveals at a very basic level what is disturbing us in our everyday lives, what irritants reside at the level of our individual and collective subconsciousness.

## THE POWER AND PLEASURE OF KINDERCULTURE

Our objective in this book is to promote understandings of kinderculture that lead to smart and democratic pedagogies for childhood at the cultural, familial, and school levels. Cultural studies connected to a democratic pedagogy for children involves investigations of how children’s consciousness is produced around issues of cultural expectations for chil-

dren, social justice, and egalitarian power relations. Thus, our analyses focus on exposing the footprints of power left by the corporate producers of kinderculture and their effects on the psyches of our children. Appreciating the ambiguity and complexity of power, our democratic pedagogy for children is committed to challenging ideologically manipulative and racist, sexist, and class-biased entertainment for children. It is equally opposed to other manifestations of kinderculture that promote violence and social and psychological pathologies. Children's entertainment, like other social spheres, is a contested public space where different social, economic, and political interests compete for control. Unfortunately, North Americans are uncomfortable with overt discussions of power. Such unease allows power wielders to hide in the recesses of the cultural and political landscape all the while shaping cultural expression and public policy in their own interests—interests that may conflict with those of less powerful social groups such as children.

We are not good students of power. All too often references to power are vague to the point of meaninglessness in the worst literature produced by critical scholars. For the purpose of clarification, when we refer to power wielders we are not merely referencing a social class or a category of human beings. Picking up on John Fiske's (1993) use of the term "power bloc," we are referring to particular social formations designated by race, class, gender, and ethnicity that hold special access to various resources (e.g., money, information, cultural capital, media, etc.) that can be used for economic or political gain. Power, as we use the term, involves a panoply of operations that work to maintain the status quo and keep it running with as little friction (social conflict) as possible. Therefore, it is beneficial to those individuals and groups that profit most from existing power relations to protect them from pests like us. When studying this power bloc, we employ Fiske's notion that it can be better understood by "what it does than what it is" (p. 11). Importantly, our use of the concept of the power bloc in the production of kinderculture is not meant to imply some conspiracy of diabolical corporate and political kingpins churning out material to harm our children. Rather, our notion of the power bloc revolves around alliances of interests that may never involve individual relationships between representatives of the interests or organizations in question. Power bloc alliances,

we believe, are often temporary, coming together around particular issues but falling apart when the issue is no longer pertinent.

Those who perceive power to be a complex issue will encounter little disagreement from us. Power and power bloc alliances are nothing if not complex and ambiguous. But because of the power bloc's contradictions and ephemerality, it is never able to dominate in some incontestable manner. Along the lines of its contradictions may exist points of contestation that open possibilities of democratic change. Larry Grossberg (1995) contends that since power never gets all it wants, there are always opportunities to challenge its authority. In this context we begin our study of the corporate production of kinderculture, analyzing the ways power represses the production of democratic artifacts and produces pleasure for children. If power was always expressed by "just saying no" to children's desires, it would gain little authority in their eyes. The power of Disney, Microsoft, Apple, Dreamworks, Pixar, and McDonald's is never greater than when it produces pleasure among consumers. Recent cultural studies of consumption link it to the identity formation of the consumer (Warde, 1994; Kincheloe, 2002), meaning that to some degree we are what we consume. Status in one's subculture, individual creations of style, knowledge of cultural texts, role in the community of consumers, emulation of fictional characters, internalization of values promoted by popular cultural expressions—all contribute to our personal identities. Popular culture provides children with intense emotional experiences often unmatched in any other phase of their lives. It is not surprising that such energy and intensity exert powerful influences on self-definition, on the ways children choose to organize their lives.

Obviously, power mixed with desire produces an explosive cocktail; the colonization of desire, however, is not the end of the story. Power enfolds into consciousness and unconsciousness in a way that evokes desire, no doubt, but also guilt and anxiety. The intensity of the guilt and anxiety a child may experience as a result of her brush with power is inseparable from the cultural context in which she lives. Desire in many cases may take a back seat to the repression of desire in the construction of child consciousness/unconsciousness and the production of identity (Donald, 1993). The cocktail's effects may be longer-lasting than first assumed, as expression of the repression may reveal itself in

bizarre and unpredictable ways. To make this observation about the relationship among power, desire, and the way that the repression of desire expresses itself at the psychological level is not to deny human agency (self-direction). While the power bloc has successfully commodified kinderculture, both adults and children can successfully deflect its repressive elements. The role of the critical childhood professional involves helping children develop what Fiske (1993) calls the affective moments of power evasion. Using their abilities to re-read Disney films along fault lines of gender or to re-encode Barbie and Ken in a satirical mode, children take their first steps toward self-assertion and power resistance. Such affective moments of power evasion certainly do not constitute the ultimate expression of resistance, but they do provide a space around which more significant forms of critical consciousness and civic action can be developed (Steinberg, 2007).

### **NEEDED: MEDIA AND POPULAR CULTURAL LITERACY**

The information explosion—the media saturation of contemporary Western societies, with its access to private realms of human consciousness—has created a social vertigo. This social condition, labeled by Baudrillard as hyperreality, exaggerates the importance of power wielders in all phases of human experience. Hyperreality's flood of signifiers in everything from megabytes to TV advertising diminishes our ability to either find meaning or engender passion for commitment. With so much power-generated information bombarding our senses, adults and children lose the faith that we can make sense of anything (for an expansion of these themes see Kincheloe, 1995). Thus, the existence of hyperreality forces us to rethink our conversation about literacy. Children, who have been educated by popular culture, approach literacy from a very different angle. Media literacy becomes not some rarefied add-on to a traditional curriculum but a basic skill necessary to negotiating one's identity, values, and well-being in power-soaked hyperreality. In many schools such ideas have never been considered, not to mention seriously discussed. Media literacy, like power, is not viewed in mainstream circles as a topic for children (or even adults). The same educators who

reject the study of media literacy or kinderculture are the ones who have to cope with its effects.

As Donaldo Macedo and Shirley R. Steinberg contend in *Media Literacy: A Reader* (2007), a critical understanding of media culture requires students not simply to develop the ability to interpret media meanings but to understand the ways they consume and affectively invest in media. Such an attempt encourages both critical thinking and self-analysis, as students begin to realize that everyday decisions are not necessarily made freely and rationally. Rather, they are encoded and inscribed by emotional and bodily commitments relating to the production of desire and mood, all of which leads, in Noam Chomsky's famous phrase, to the "manufacture of consent." These are complex pedagogical and ideological issues, and they demand rigorous skills of questioning, analyzing, interpreting, and meaning making. Contrary to the decontextualized pronouncements of developmental psychology, relatively young children are capable of engaging in these cognitive activities (Nations, 2001). Of course, in the contemporary right-wing, test-driven educational context, such abilities are not emphasized, as memorization for standards tests becomes more and more the order of the school day.

The political dimension of our critical pedagogy of childhood requires developing and teaching this media literacy. Such a literacy respects children's intellectual ability to deal with the complexities of power, oppression, and exploitation, as it refuses to position them as innocent, passive, and helpless victims. In an era when children can instantaneously access diverse types of information, they need the ability to traverse this knowledge terrain in savvy and well-informed ways. A critical pedagogy of childhood finds this approach much more helpful than pietistic right-wing efforts to censor potentially offensive data from innocent childhood eyes. In their effort to perpetuate the discourse of childhood innocence, right-wing child advocates maintain a positivist developmentalist view that media literacy is irrelevant because children do not have the intellectual and emotional maturity to understand TV advertising or subtle marketing appeals (Cassell and Jenkins, 2002). As much as the advocates of childhood innocence might wish for it, children in the twenty-first century are not going to return to the mythical secret garden of innocence. For better and worse children now live in a

wider, information-saturated adult world. The authors of *Kinderculture* believe that the best thing we can do in this circumstance is to prepare children to cope with it, make sense of it, and participate in it in ways that benefit everyone (Vieira, 2001).

In this context our critical politics of kinderculture re-emerges. Childhood has always been shaped by a potpourri of adult desires and childhood fantasies. The difference between childhood in hyperreality and in other places and times is that in the electronic, mediated world of the present era these desires and fantasies have been commodified and play themselves out in the corporate-produced children's culture central to this book. A critical politics of childhood recognizes these unique and complex dimensions of kinderculture and in this understanding develops new and exciting ways for families, educators, and the society at large to care for and nurture children. Understanding that the positivist developmentalist paradigm always underestimated the abilities of children, advocates of a critical politics of childhood help children develop the strategies and skills necessary for social reform and the pursuit of justice (Cannella and Viruru, 2002). In this context educators, psychologists, sociologists, parents, and other citizens can reflect on children's activities represented by many as "misbehavior." Can we empathize with children who are positioned as self-directed agents in one social domain and incompetent adults in need of constant surveillance and punitive regulation in another? Can we understand the difficulty of dealing with such contradictions in one's everyday pursuits? A critical politics of childhood urges us to take such questions seriously. Indeed, the authors and editors of *Kinderculture* maintain that a politics of childhood involves far more than just protecting children. As we reconsider the notion of competence, advocates of a critical politics of childhood work to ensure that children can use their abilities in a way that improves their quality of life (Casas, 1998).

### TELEVISION AD COMPLEXITY

Commercial TV in America has always been structured by conflicting demands of commerce and democracy. Any study of kinderculture will

find these competing dynamics at work at various levels of the texts examined. When analysts and consumers begin to understand the cultural authority mustered by children's TV and other entertainment forms, the bifurcated imperatives for the medium begin to take on unprecedented significance. The democratic moments of TV are profound but far too rare. The exposure of the insanity of Joseph McCarthy, the evils of racial segregation, the perils of pollution, the most obvious abuses of patriarchy, the inhumane excesses of Vietnam, and the criminality of Watergate undoubtedly represented the zenith of TV's democratic impulse. The unfortunate consequence of such successes has been corporate constraint and governmental regulation of attempts to replicate such achievements. When such media management is combined with TV's tendency to fragment and decontextualize issues, events are often stripped of their meaning. Children (and adults) who depend heavily on TV for their entertainment and thus their worldviews are cognitively impaired by this dynamic (Kellner, 1990; Hammer and Kellner, 2009). Make no mistake, TV's curriculum for children is not crafted by media moguls' fidelity to the principles of democracy. Commercial concerns dictate media kinderculture—profit margins are too important to dicker around with concerns for the well-being of kids.

Society's most important teachers don't ply their trade in schools, just as the nation's "official" children's policy is not constructed by elected officials in Washington, D.C. America's corporate producers of kinderculture are the most influential pedagogues and children's policy makers. In this book, Henry Giroux writes of the blurring boundaries between entertainment, education, and commerce, as Disney Imagineers inject their teachings into the dream world of children. There is nothing transparent about children's TV or movies—clear messages are being delivered to our children with the intent of eliciting particular beliefs and actions that are in the best interests of those who produce them. Bifurcated as TV's imperatives may be, democracy takes a backseat to the logic of capital. Compared with the nonstop promotion of the multiple "products" of kinderculture, child advocates have limited access to the airwaves. Those corporations that advertise children's consumer paraphernalia promote a "consumption theology" that, in effect, promises redemption and happiness via the consumptive act (ritual). Such ad-

vertising and pleasure production grant a direct line to the imaginative landscape of our children—a mindscape that children use to define their view of society and self.

Thus, child professionals and parents must understand that humans are the historical products of the mechanisms of power—an appreciation often missed in the everyday world. This paradox of human consciousness confounds observers with its Zen master double-talk—folks make culture, yet culture makes folks. Meaning emerges from this maze at the level of the social, and individual consciousness is shaped by this interaction and the ways of seeing (ideologies) it produces. As a social and ideological phenomenon, consciousness is constructed not simply by its contact with culture but by an interaction with a view of culture—a view “edited” by ideological refraction. Refraction involves the manner in which the direction of light is changed when it passes through one medium to another—for example, from a crystal to a wall.

The refracted light we see on the wall is different from the light that originally encountered the crystal—one aspect of the light’s “reality” has been displaced. Ideology is like the crystal in that it refracts perceptions of the lived world. This is not to say that the light (world perceptions), prior to its encounter with the crystal (ideology), is God-like or pristine. Our view of ideology understands that no transcendental, totalizing view of the light (reality) exists—we always perceive it from some position in the web of reality. Leaving our metaphor behind, the salient point here is that kinderculture serves as a mechanism of ideological refraction—a social force that produces particular meanings that induce children (and adults) to interpret events within a specific range of possibilities (Thiele, 1986; Donald, 1993; Mumby, 1989).

Kinderculture, like all social texts, speaks with an authorial voice that is either up-front or covert about its ideological inscription (Lincoln, 1995). Not surprisingly, corporate-produced kinderculture chooses *The Price Is Right*’s covert ideological Door Number Three. In this way kinderculture colonizes consciousness in a manner that represses conflict and differences. Thus, the critical childhood professional understands ideology, its refraction, and its effect on consciousness construction as the conceptual basis for his or her effort to expose kinderculture as a politically pristine, uncontested sphere of social activity. Just as classroom

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