

time kids spend in school, but if keeping them out of mischief is the goal, Jacob and Lefgren conclude, it would be better to

place them in summer jobs, small after-school programs, or other venues where their numbers don't reach critical mass.

## Consuming Kids

"The Commodification of Childhood: Tales from the Advertising Front Lines" by Juliet B. Schor, in *The Hedgehog Review* (Summer 2003), Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture, P.O. Box 400816, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Va. 22904-4816.

You've heard of focus groups, you've filled out surveys, you've been called by someone wondering what TV shows you watch. But chances are you've not heard of the GIA. The Girl's Intelligence Agency and other firms like it are a subtle and powerful new force in advertising aimed at understanding the likes and dislikes of kids—in the GIA's case, girls as young as six years old.

Marketing products to kids is nothing new: In the 1980s, Levi-Strauss even hired a 10-year-old to tell the company what he liked and didn't like about its jeans. What's different is the financial power kids now wield: In 2002, children between the ages of four and 12 spent as much as \$30 billion. So kids have become an increasingly enticing quarry for advertisers, who have responded with methods that strike Schor, a Boston College sociologist and author of *The Overworked American* (1992),

as a threat to both parents and children.

The GIA approach seems innocuous enough. With its trademark "slumber party in a box," the agency asks one of 40,000 "agents," recruited from kids who've registered on its website, to invite some friends over for a "party." There the girls are offered a sample product—anything from a new toy to a TV show—while researchers study their reactions.

That's where the new techniques become insidious, Schor argues. Though a "party" might be used to gather information, it can also be the launching stage for a "viral" marketing campaign: Kids recommend the featured products to their friends, who recommend them to their friends, and so on. Since each "agent" reaches an average of 512 other girls, the "research" has the potential to generate significant sales. Parents, the traditional "gatekeepers" for

### EXCERPT

## *L.A.'s Lonely Police*

*The West Coast is generally more lightly policed than the East Coast, where police jobs were once important parts of political patronage machines. Los Angeles, however, takes the West Coast's penchant for small forces to an extreme. To police a city of 3.8 million people, the LAPD relies on approximately 9,200 officers—half the number per capita that New York City has. Moreover, these officers patrol an area nearly twice the size of New York. All in all, Los Angeles neighborhoods have only about one-quarter of the police presence that New York's neighborhoods do.*

*The small size of the LAPD has had a dramatic effect on the organization's culture. In New York, if an officer gets into trouble and calls for backup, he can expect a dozen cars on the scene in five minutes or less. In L.A., help may take three times as long to arrive. According to John Linder, a consultant who has worked closely with [L.A. Police Chief William] Bratton in both cities, understaffing in L.A. has over time created a police force whose officers worry more about personal survival than about community relations, and who go into every situation hard, fast, and expecting the worst.*

—John Buntin, a staff correspondent at *Governing* (Dec. 2003)

their children, are out of the picture.

Schor believes that these new methods are turning children into marketing instruments and showing them that “friends are a lucrative resource that they can exploit to gain products or money.” She’s not impressed by marketers’

argument that kids are such savvy consumers that they don’t need their parents’ help. Speaking directly to kids, they say, empowers children. Schor thinks it teaches them the worst possible lessons about the “value” of friendship.

## *Feminism Lives!*

“The Myth of Postfeminism” by Elaine J. Hall and Marnie Salupo Rodriguez, in *Gender & Society* (Dec. 2003), Sage Publications, 2455 Teller Rd., Thousand Oaks, Calif. 91320.

Are we living in a “postfeminist” age? That’s certainly the drift of opinion in the popular press and some scholarly journals. But survey data give the lie to this “myth,” argue Hall, a sociologist at Kent State University, and Rodriguez, a graduate student there.

Such hard evidence is exactly what’s missing from nearly all the 90 decline-of-feminism articles in *Time* and other periodicals that the authors examined. Only about one-fourth of the articles provided any survey data, and the vast majority of those provided none over time, which would be the only way to demonstrate the alleged decline over the 1980s and early 1990s.

According to surveys by the Center for Political Studies, adults looked *more* favorably on the women’s movement in 1996 than they did in 1980. Asked to rank the movement on a 100-point scale, they gave it an average of 63 points in 1996, up from 53 points in 1980. Other surveys show little change in opinion be-

tween 1986 and 1998, with more than two-thirds of adults holding very or mostly favorable views.

Contrary to the postfeminist myth, young women are not less likely than older ones to support the women’s movement, Hall and Rodriguez say. In a 1998 National Election Survey, 78 percent of women 18 to 29 years old expressed a favorable opinion of the movement, compared with 64 percent of middle-aged women. And 73 percent of black women gave the movement a thumbs-up, the largest proportion of any racial group.

Surveys conducted during the 1980s and 1990s consistently showed that about half of American women “considered the movement to be relevant,” say the authors. Yet the postfeminist myth has acquired a life of its own in the mass media, and could “create a future reality in which collective struggle is deemed unnecessary.”

### PRESS & MEDIA

## *Holy Unaware*

“Religiously Ignorant Journalists” by Christian Smith, in *Books & Culture: A Christian Review* (Jan.–Feb. 2004), 465 Gundersen Dr., Carol Stream, Ill. 60188.

Is it too much to expect that journalists who write about religion should know at least as much about their subject as their peers who write about politics, sports, economics, science, or art? Of course not, says Smith, a sociologist at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, who finds the current level of religious journalism, which is to say secular journalism about religion, low indeed. Smith tells of being called by a reporter for a major

Dallas newspaper who wanted to talk to him about “Episcopals,” the subject of a story the reporter was writing. “What an embarrassment. How do I break the news to him that there are no ‘Episcopals’? Actually, they are called Episcopalians.”

How, Smith wonders, is the reporter possibly going to write an informed story, in a matter of days, about so complex a matter as the appointment of the homosexual Episcopalian