



# Longing and Belonging: Parents, Children, and Consumer Culture

*Allison Pugh*

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Even as they see their wages go down and their buying power decrease, many parents are still putting their kids' material desires first. These parents struggle with how to handle children's consumer wants, which continue unabated despite the economic downturn. And, indeed, parents and other adults continue to spend billions of dollars on children every year. Why do children seem to desire so much, so often, so soon, and why do parents capitulate so readily? To determine what forces lie behind the onslaught of Nintendo Wiis and Bratz dolls, Allison J. Pugh spent three years observing and interviewing children and their families. In *Longing and Belonging: Parents, Children, and Consumer Culture*, Pugh teases out the complex factors that contribute to how we buy, from lunchroom conversations about Game Boys to the stark inequalities facing American children. Pugh finds that children's desires stem less from striving for status or falling victim to advertising than from their yearning to join the conversation at school or in the neighborhood. Most parents respond to children's need to belong by buying the particular goods and experiences that act as passports in children's social worlds, because they sympathize with their children's fear of being different from their peers. Even under financial constraints, families prioritize children "feeling normal". Pugh masterfully illuminates the surprising similarities in the fears and hopes of parents and children from vastly different social contexts, showing that while corporate marketing and materialism play a part in the commodification of childhood, at the heart of the matter is the desire to belong.



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