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FETTERED DESIRE:
CONSUMPTION AND SOCIAL EXPERIENCE
AMONG MINORITY CHILDREN IN NEW HAVEN, CONNECTICUT

by

ELIZABETH CHIN

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Anthropology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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9/24/96
Date

Chair of Examining Committee

9/24/96
Date

Executive Officer

Vincent Crapanzano
Vincent Crapanzano

Cindi Katz
Cindi Katz

John Sherry
John Sherry

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Abstract

FETTERED DESIRE: CONSUMPTION AND SOCIAL EXPERIENCE AMONG MINORITY CHILDREN IN NEW HAVEN, CONNECTICUT

by

Elizabeth Chin

Adviser: Professor Delmos Jones

This ethnographic study of children's consumer lives focuses on 21 black and hispanic, poor and working class children from New Haven, Connecticut. This dissertation examines consumption as a social process through which social inequalities are generated, perpetuated, and to some degree resisted. A framework for understanding how consumption operates at once as a global force and as a force in individual lives is developed, combining recent theoretical developments in social geography with ethnographic investigation on children and consumption from anthropology, marketing, and consumer behavior research. Results from qualitative and quantitative investigation suggest that these children experience and enact their consumption in an intensely social matrix where sharing and interdependency are valued at home. These children are also critically and playfully engaged with consumption, especially when in sites such as corporate supermarkets and the downtown mall. Little comparative research exists, particularly across class and across cultures; longitudinal studies as well as further documentation of children's behaviors, possessions and beliefs are called for.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

For African American and Hispanic ten-year-olds living in Newhallville, a predominantly poor and working class neighborhood in New Haven, Connecticut, the most common engagements with consumption are everyday events and activities such as school lunch, visits to the supermarket and corner store, musings about popular toys while seated on a stoop. These activities, in fact, rival television and media in their importance in children's daily lives. Most scholarly and popular attention aimed at children such as these, however, documents their out of control desires for status goods, emphasizes the overwhelming pressures of the drug trade, of single-parent families, of living on welfare. The connections between minority children's consumer lives and other social factors have been widely assumed but not systematically investigated. This ethnography of consumption among poor and minority children challenges both popular and scholarly assumptions about consumption by examining children's consumer lives in the wider social, political and economic context in which they take place and are shaped.

The ethnography of children's consumption is currently dominated by marketing and consumer behavior research. These studies have focused almost exclusively on middle class, white American children and to some extent conflate the consumption experience of all American children with this one segment of the population. In contrast, this thesis demonstrates that factors which are by and large ignored in the extant body of

work -- race, class, and to some extent gender -- are of central importance in children's consumer lives, shaping what they own, want, hope for, fear, and dislike.

The results of my research further indicate that consumption is a sphere through which forms of structural inequality, in particular class, race, gender and age, are experienced and perpetuated. While the family and schools play central roles in shaping the way children come to understand, participate in, and/or challenge these structural inequalities, this research shows that the consumer experiences, practices, beliefs, and opportunities of Newhallville children are deeply influenced by the local political and economic context. Race relations, employment patterns, educational opportunity, public and private investment in downtown shops and local neighborhoods shape children's consumer lives as profoundly as do television, toymakers, and pop music.

These multiple forms of social inequality are given shape by the geographic spaces in which these lives take place. Not only is there difference and variety among and between groups of children as consumers, but individual children also experience difference and variety in their engagement with consumption. Much of this difference is spatial: a ten year old girl from a working class black family, for instance, has a different relationship to and experience of the consumer sphere when in her bedroom than she does in Macy's, in the food court at the mall, in the corner store, or at a large corporate supermarket.

Evidence from Newhallville shows a strong orientation among children and their families toward valuing sharing, interdependence and reciprocity in the social relations of consumption. While the role of consumption in creating and maintaining social

relationships is not neglected in other studies of children's consumption, neither does it seem to be of primary importance in these works. Rather, individual possession, individuality, and privacy are emphasized in contemporary ethnographies of children's consumption. Social critiques of consumerism most often assume materialism, alienation and anti-social tendencies as an unavoidable result of consumerism.

With its focus on poor and working class minority children in an economically troubled city in the industrial northeast, this ethnography locates children's consumption as taking place not just in the market, but in a global cultural, political and economic context. This work makes clear the imperative need to re-think theories about children's consumption which currently are based on a highly specialized, nearly homogeneous group: white, middle class Americans. As consumption expands globally across cultures and societies, such cross-cultural understanding is of critical importance.

Understanding consumption as tied to social inequality is a stance which engenders a critique of the market economy itself. Such critique is rarely highlighted in those disciplines which currently are generating some of the most in depth and sophisticated studies of contemporary consumption: marketing and consumer behavior research. Researchers in these disciplines are generating a growing critique of neoclassical economic models and assumptions which have shaped research for decades, and increased attention to social and cultural factors in these disciplines must ultimately lead to serious considerations of social inequality in the consumer sphere. In this vein, my ethnography documents the ways in which Newhallville children are systematically discouraged, prevented, or courted as consumers. While made to feel unwelcome as

shoppers in the downtown mall, for example, minority youth are paradoxically the mall's single largest customer group. Dilemmas such as this have clear implications for social policy.

The process of consumption has not created structural social inequality, and just as scholarly analysis of current social problems cannot in itself cure them, it is not within the power of those who endeavor to shape the consumer sphere -- whether business people, industrialists, or market researchers -- to transform the consumer environment into a utopic realm free from injustice. However, the ways in which market segments are identified, investigated, produced for and marketed to need not necessarily reproduce the "natural" divisions of class, race, gender, and age. In the realm of consumption research, the naturalness of such divisions has not seen sufficient challenge, though investigation in this area is on the rise. The ethnographic analysis of Newhallville children's consumption providaes a case study illustrating the ways in which consumption operates as a sphere through which "natural" social inequalities are perpetuated, experienced, and challeged.

Contextualizing consumption

Consumption has been recently cited as anthropology's emergent guiding concept (Miller 1995b), a kind of keystone for understanding cultures worldwide, which has influenced the investigation of contemporary cultures from the Amazon to the urban United States. Miller argues that consumption's importance to the discipline will rival the study of kinship that proved so central in the discipline's first hundred years. Miller's

comment, though somewhat hyperbolic, draws attention to the profound worldwide social and cultural changes that can be traced to or enacted through consumption, whose impact must be seen as being of the scale attributed to that of capitalism itself. No less than capitalism, consumption is implicated in transformations of the world order and, consequently, to people's views and experiences in and of their own personal worlds.

Surprisingly little research deals with the consumer lives of children, and even less has directly addressed consumption in a non white, non-middle-class setting (Honeycutt 1975 is one exception). This attention gap arises in part because the notion of the poor consumer is an apparent oxymoron: how can one engage consumption without the means to materially consume -- that is, without the money required to buy, possess and use commodities? The common assumption is that those without economic resources consume dysfunctionally; and poor consumers who are also black and young are portrayed not as merely dysfunctional but as pathological in their patterns of consumption.

In a growing literary genre that seeks to portray life on the mean streets of big cities like Chicago, Los Angeles and New York, out-of-control consumption is continually evoked to provide garish accent to descriptions of the grinding routine of living life in deep poverty. Liberal accounts such as Nightingale's On the Edge (1993) take the position that the pathology is not really the fault of any given individual, but is due to a faulty social system and the evils of consumption itself; conservative treatments of the issue see nothing much wrong with consumerism but rather bemoan the loss of "family values" morals and a lack of ability to delay gratification (Wilson 1987).

Consumption is much too pervasive to attempt to reject or wish away, and the issues presented by looking at consumption in communities like Newhallville must be understood not only as acts of individuals but also as acts which take place in a particular set of circumstances. What Newhallville kids do as they shop, earn money or play with toys reflects, among other things, the fearsome struggles in which Newhallville residents must daily engage as they negotiate territories of race, class, gender and age.

It is my primary assumption in this work that the consumer lives of Newhallville children are not pathological. In focussing on the everyday, I have chosen to move my attention away from the spectacular kinds of incidents that so often have been used to reinforce the notion of the poor -- and especially poor children and youth -- as walking time bombs whose frustrated desire is bound to erupt into paroxysms of consumerist violence. My view is that consumption is at once a sphere of inequality on its own and a medium through which other forms of inequality are perpetuated. As with other structural inequalities, such as race and gender, the mechanisms perpetuating inequalities in the consumer sphere are subtly enforced in and through mundane activities: television watching, shopping, reading, playing. Children witness and experience themselves as situated in terms of race, class, gender and age as they see ads for things they know they cannot possess, as they are closely monitored when browsing in stores, as they play with toys whose fantasy world they reject. This process is perhaps clearest in communities like Newhallville, where consumption is at its most contradictory and contested -- both among residents and in the public imagination. Newhallville children undertake consumption under the same circumstances that shape all other aspects of their lives: in

the midst of wrenching economic change, rising social unrest and continuing (some would argue deepening) racism. In New Haven, these processes are starkly evident.

New Haven is ranked high among the nation's poorest cities. The city is separated, if not segregated, by race. The Newhallville neighborhood's population is 91.7 percent minority; more than 26 percent of Newhallville's residents live in poverty, as do nearly half (44 percent) of resident children. Local high schools have an embarrassingly long tradition of graduating significant numbers of teenagers who lack basic literacy skills while a two-tiered educational system provides some public school students the opportunity to attend classes at Yale University free of charge.

As schools continue to equip students inadequately for assembly lines that are now located in other states and nations, a high school diploma is not enough in some cases even for fast-food employment. The illegal drug industry provides alternatives to former types of employment, and has grown tremendously in recent years. The accompanying violence associated with this business has done much to refashion New Haven's landscape; Newhallville's infamous "mudhole" -- an empty lot used at night for doing business in drugs -- is an important area landmark. The downtown commercial district, on the verge of collapse, has often laid much of its embattled economic state at the feet of New Haven's black population, at times making obvious attempts to discourage the presence of African American, youth in particular, from downtown spaces.

The children among whom I studied, ten years old when I met them, are members of the first cohort of toddlers to be directly addressed as consumers in their own right. Fundamental changes in the form and intensity of the consumer realm have occurred

within the last ten years, but for these kids, such "new" conditions do not represent change at all: they are simply the facts of life. These include what is now being touted as the "information superhighway"; an ever-lowering of the age of targeted consumers; the rise of licensing as a marketing tool; deregulation of children's television; the introduction of Whittle Communications' Channel One, a commercial television station broadcast only to junior and senior high school classrooms; and the possible creation of for-profit primary and secondary schools. These factors affect child consumers in important ways, creating a consumer world that is dense, ever-present and compelling.

Primarily a descriptive ethnographic work, this project is less concerned with questions of children's consumer competency -- their ability to compare prices, effectively locate merchandise in stores or evaluate quality -- than in the social and political economic context in which Newhallville children's consumer orientation is generated. Not enough is known about consumption among urban minority populations to know if, how or why consumption is different in these communities than it is elsewhere. How do issues of consumption emerge in kids' everyday conversations? What stores do kids visit and why? How can their experiences in different kinds of stores be characterized? What values and strategies about consumption do family members and caretakers attempt to instill in children?

New Haven's political economy and that of the global consumer culture provide the context in which the consumption of Newhallville children takes place. Theirs is a particular kind of experience, and one which underscores the need to move away from theories and studies of consumption that are too often based on an implicit assumption of

middle-class values, resources and social context. In documenting the consumer lives of this group of Newhallville children, this dissertation addresses significant gaps in studies of consumption, which have given but scant attention to children, minorities and the poor or working class much less poor and working- class minority children. Likewise, this dissertation adds to a limited body of ethnographic work that has children as its main subject rather than adults.

The research

The data for this work were gathered during a two-year period from September 1991 to August 1993. My discussion centers around a core group of 25 children from 22 households. One child in each of 20 families was a member of a fifth-grade class which I observed and with which I participated intensively for an academic year (the children in the two additional families were good friends of children from the main study group). My research was concerned primarily with the 20 fifth-grade children (a number of whom I met when they were in fourth grade), but as I came to know families more intimately, I got to know these children's siblings as well, and over 50 children were included in these households altogether.

Participant observation was the primary methodology, undertaken in a variety of settings, and placing me in several roles in the Newhallville community. These included teaching in an after-school program (conducting a project in which kids learned to do anthropology and completed an ethnographic project); volunteering in these children's fifth-grade classroom; tagging along behind children as they shopped independently

downtown, sat on stoops or wandered through the neighborhood. I engaged with their families as well, accompanying them on shopping trips for groceries and clothes, watching television, eating meals and going to church. Other methods included conducting inventories of children's possessions; taking children on shopping trips; conducting formal and informal interviews with children, parents, teachers, police, community activists and city officials. Because my primary interest is in children's active use of and participation in culture, I focus more on their independent activities than those conducted in the company of caretakers, teachers and other adults.

Participant observation at school Participant observation in the schools was often mixed with the teaching role. The ethnographic project, initiated in the spring of 1992, was completed in the fall of 1993. I worked with children two afternoons a week each semester. In the first semester we develop and refined the interview, which focused on "What Newhallville was like when you were a kid" Then the children conducted interviews as a group in the classroom, as well as in their homes. The following fall, the same students summarized data from the interview transcripts, writing a report which they presented to their classmates and to the Department of Anthropology at the City University of New York Graduate Center.

The oral history project was perhaps not so much a method as a medium. It provided me a role in the community -- that of teacher -- one which was central to my becoming accepted into the homes of the families I later visited. Developing and discussing the questionnaire provided me with more information about how these

children felt about their neighborhood than direct interviewing could have. As they thought about the kinds of questions they wanted to ask and how to ask them, students talked a great deal about the current state of their neighborhood, school and families. On one hand, the oral history project sent children out to interview their elders about Newhallville in past years; it also connected me to the oral tradition of Newhallville as it currently exists among its children.

During the 1992-1993 academic year I also spent time in the fifth-grade class whose members constituted the core subjects of the research. Throughout the year I spent an average of one or two days a week in the classroom, accompanied the class on school trips and participated in other special events. Most often I fell into the role of classroom assistant, helping with lessons, homework, art projects an on occasion, discipline. On days when I was there for lunch, I sat with children in the cafeteria, eating with them -- which few other adults at the school did. These lunchtime experiences were highly instructive, involving, as they did, complex negotiations over trading food items, who was sitting next to whom, passing of information and in between, eating.

Participant observation in the neighborhood In order to get to know and understand as much about Newhallville as possible,I not only spent time with children, but their families and other community members as well. My activities were various, and encompassed not only those which could be considered consumption related. When several children I knew were on double-Dutch jump rope teams that made it to the state finals, I accompanied them to Hartford -- along with family members -- to watch them

compete. Many afternoons and evenings were spent on neighborhood porches and stoops, watching the street, chatting, making jokes. I also went to dance parties organized for older local youth by a newly formed activist group called Elm City Nation. I regularly attended neighborhood churches and stopped in at local groceries and restaurants, getting to know customers and proprietors.

Occasionally, someone would organize a trip where a group of people would charter a bus to go shopping in Jamaica, Queens, or to visit an amusement park for the day. I went on one of each type of these trips. I also accompanied a family when they went to New York City on their own to do some back-to-school shopping. I accompanied several different women on shopping trips to the supermarket, as well.

I also provided activities for some kids -- such as taking them to the movies or hosting a sleep-over party -- in order to spend longer stretches of time with them than was usual, and to see them as they interacted in small groups away from caretakers. Most of my participant observation time was spent alone with children -- wandering the neighborhood, conducting errands, walking to or from school, going downtown, tooling about the mall.

Focus groups Originally planned as a comparative study among middle-class and poor children, My research plans had to be revised when operating simultaneously in more than one New Haven community became too time-consuming. I did conduct three focus group interviews with ten-year-olds at a local private school. These hour-long group interviews covered issues such as allowance, shopping, television and toys, and

provide information on differences between the two populations of children. The limited amount of time spent with these children, along with the small number of focus groups, does limit the usefulness of the information they contain in terms of providing quantitative data. Differences between these children and those of Newhallville are apparent on several points, however.

Inventories Misconceptions abound when it comes to the material possessions of working-class and poor families. To my knowledge, Oscar Lewis' carefully conducted survey of the possession's of poor families in Mexico is unique in anthropology. It is common among anthropologists working in "primitive" societies to conduct inventories of an entire culture's material goods. In industrialized economies, anthropologists often document a family's economic information and certain pertinent material possessions such as a home or car; less often do they conduct systematic surveys of people's material goods.

In order to concretely document the kinds of things that Newhallville children actually possess, I conducted inventories of children's rooms. In the initial stages of the study, I conducted two inventories with middle-class boys from the private school where I did the focus groups. In Newhallville, five inventories were completed. These inventories accounted for seven children's possessions (two of the rooms were occupied by pairs of siblings).

My original plan to conduct inventories with at least one child from each of the 21 households proved unworkable. For parents, allowing me access to a space as private

as a child's room was an exceptional act of trust, and one that not every family was willing to undertake. Scheduling inventories was difficult, and appointments, once made, were often changed or canceled. Though they were usually completed in about two hours, the inventories also proved tedious and exhausting for all concerned. After the first few I began to think that they would be better conducted in two sessions rather than one. Managing inventories in two parts, however, would have been a monumental task of scheduling. The two visits would need to be close enough together for the rooms' contents to remain basically the same.

Inventories show the importance of concrete documentation of people's possessions, but proved too demanding and time- intensive to fit easily into a wide-ranging qualitative study such as this. A study focused exclusively on generating inventory material would be an important addition to what is currently known about consumption among children, and among the poor and working class. The results of the five inventories discussed in chapter 6 show some of the issues a larger study might address with more depth.

In the inventories I asked kids to take me through their rooms object by object, picking up and showing me each one. As we went through their rooms, I asked them to tell me about each thing -- where it came from, how much it cost, who gave it to them. The inventories were audio-taped, and I wrote lists of items as we proceeded through the room. Couching this verbal interaction in the physical process of going through their rooms often got children to speak about the feelings, memories or experiences associated with their belongings. This happened more often with special possessions, and even for children who had relatively few things, the number of objects was too large for them to

go into an in-depth discussion of everything they had. Thus the inventories served two functions: one, to document the kinds, number and range of things these children had in their rooms (which were usually the bulk of their personal possessions) and two, to provide a medium through which the children could begin to talk about their feelings and ideas regarding their things.

Study participants

Most of these children come from poor or working class families. Half of the 22 families are dependent on the state for their incomes. Households range in size from two to six resident members (data are summarized in the Appendix). Fourteen households are headed by single women; of these, 11 are unmarried, 3 are widowed. Most single heads of household are mothers of resident children, but 1 is a grandmother, and 1 a great-grandmother. (No households are headed by single men.) Eight households are headed by husband and wife. In 4 of these, married parents of study participants who head the household; in the 4 others, the married heads of household are the grandparents of children in the study.

Table 1.1

Marital Status of Heads of Household

Single	11
Widowed	3
Married (parents)	4
Married (grandparents)	4

In 9 cases the heads of household are also home owners. Home owning, made possible in the years when relatively high blue-collar salaries allowed the working class to invest part of their income, is not necessarily an indication of economic security in Newhallville. Natalia's family, with an income her grandfather estimated at $18,000 a year, does not technically qualify as living below the poverty line: her grandfather receives a pension from a local utility company, and her grandmother is a home health aide. Though the family owns their home, recent and substantial increases in the expenses of home ownership in New Haven have taken a growing toll on those with small and/or fixed incomes. New Haven property taxes nearly doubled in 1991 as the first installment of a five-step tax hike that will raise taxes an average of 238 percent (Yarrow 1992b). These taxes, coupled with mortgage payments, are substantially more expensive than renting, especially when rent subsidies for much of the population are available under Section VIII. The growing number of abandoned homes in Newhallville testifies to the unmanageability of rising tax burdens in this community.

Almost as many households rent as own their homes (information was unavailable for 3 of the 22 households). Some renters pay their rent themselves, while others have their rent subsidized with Section VIII funds (table 1.2). Two of the renter households paying market rents and two of the Section VIII households, however, occupy apartments in homes owned by close family members (often a mother or sister). A total of 13 households, then, live in homes they own themselves, or rent in homes owned by family.

Table 1.2
Renter Households: Payment Method and Relation to landlord

Payment method	Relation to Landlord	
	Non family member	Family member
Pays market rent	2	2
Section VIII voucher	4	2

It has not proven easy -- much less accurate -- to attempt to classify families as simply "poor" or "working class," or "middle class." Households in Newhallville are sometimes made up of members who can be considered to be at somewhat different socio-economic levels. Several families in this study who rely on welfare funds are also members of a home-owning household. Tionna's family is an example: Tionna lives with her grandmother and great-grandmother. The home is owned by Tionna's great-grandmother, and the three share a ground-floor apartment. Tionna's grandmother is on public assistance, but her great-grandmother receives a pension from Yale. Tionna's great-uncle, sporadically employed, occupies the house's upper apartment. Though one member of a family might own a home, that home almost invariably is a resource for extended kin. Most often these include unmarried, welfare-dependent daughters with children; unemployed adult children; and minor grandchildren, nieces and nephews living in informal fostering arrangements. Less frequently,households also include unemployed adults with drug or alcohol problems, people working in the illegal drug industry and those recently released from prison.

Keeping in mind the complex nature of Newhallville households, some generalization about economic status can be made. Eleven of the 22 families or half the

study group, depend on public assistance as their primary source of income; the remainder are pink- and blue-collar workers, typically holding union jobs or, if retired, receiving union pensions. One family is quite well off, with a combined income of $90,000. This is the only family where both parents have college degrees. Eleven families own one car and 2 families own two cars (I do not have this information for 3 households).

Even when taking individual complexities into account, the majority of families discussed here are poor or working class. Most live from paycheck to paycheck, and homeowners seem to be hardly better off than families who rent. These families are typical of Newhallville in general: like most families, there households are intergenerational, heads of household must make do with too many expenses and tight funds and like most families, caretakers worry about the children's well-being in school and in the neighborhood.

Studying children anthropologically

Anthropological methods are not, in general, designed either to make use of or take into account children's unique developmental and social qualities. Anthropological ethnographies on children -- many generated by the culture and personality school -- have commonly adapted methods from the discipline of psychology (Henry 1974; Roheim 1941; Toren 1988). These methods are often incompatible with the goals of participant observation, and have limitations in cross-cultural use (Landy 1960; Malinowski 1927; Stephens 1962). This is not to say that there are no cross-culturally appropriate methods

which have been developed in psychology, but the different goals and assumptions of the two disciplines make methodological crossover difficult.

Child-centered ethnographies feature methods created for that particular project. Schildkrout (1980) in research on the productive work of children in Kano, Nigeria, left a tape recorder for his subjects in a central location. Kids would stop by when they had time and describe their activities since their last visit to the recorder.
Bateson and Mead (1962) documented the way Balinese children are physically enculturated, using 4,000 photographs from a body of over 25,000 taken between 1936 and 1939. Like these and other studies (Hubbard 1989; Katz 1986; Kelly-Byrne 1989), this work incorporates several methods designed to allow me to ethnographically understand and document children's lives.

The distinctive communicative needs and abilities of children require methodologies that are less heavily interview-based than is common in most ethnographies. Even in cultures such as Bali, where direct questions are a form of rudeness, anthropologists find ways to work around the etiquette of talk. Though ten-year-old children have formidable verbal skills, their conversational style and abilities are distinctive not only because of who they are socially but where they are developmentally. Attention spans and abstract thinking among children are not the same as those of adults, and the types of interviews upon which most ethnographies are based are inappropriate for children. Studies of children's language socialization are one place where people have worked out developmentally appropriate ways to interview children (Miller and

Moore 1989; Schieffelin 1990; Schieffelin and Ochs 1986). Few ethnographies, stray from this primary interest in speech, however.

Because long, intensive interviews are not attuned to children's developmental abilities and social style, my methods were designed to engage children physically, something which often triggered vocal commentary. These methods included the inventories of children's rooms, shopping trips and the oral history project conducted by the children themselves.

Organization of the dissertation

Chapter 2 assesses theoretical problems and issues in the way that children, consumption and children's consumption have been theorized in the social sciences. Connecting children's changing identity to specific geographic sites situates children in time and in society as persons who engage with their surroundings, rather than portraying them as passive receptors of reproductive energy. This understanding of children's consumption as intimately bound up with social geography is fundamental to the way I propose children, consumption and children's consumption can be profitably reframed and understood.

The setting and context of New Haven and Newhallville are outlined in hapter 3. Like other cities in the formerly industrial Northeast, New Haven has, in the latter half of this century, undergone profound economic and social change. Much of this change has involved a concomitant growth of poor and minority populations, shifts in employment sectors, declining tax base and rising racial and ethnic tensions. In the course of these

transitions. Newhallville has emerged as what is often referred to as an inner-city neighborhood: one with a largely minority population, high poverty rate and a reputation for random violence. As a result of these changes, day-to-day life in Newhallville, particularly for its children, is characterized by multiple forms of isolation: geographic, economic, social and commercial. These multiple forms of isolation are instrumental in shaping the form and tenor of children's consumer practice and experience.

Consumption encompasses a vast array of activities, behaviors and practices, and the case studies of three children in chapter 4 chronicle some part of this variety, from daily household interactions to downtown shopping trips and conversations taking place as these children roam their neighborhood. The dissertation compares three similar but profoundly different consumer settings -- local groceries, area supermarkets and the downtown mall -- in chapter 5. This comparison has as its aim an ethnographic description of the ways that these particular children engage with these places which serves, in part, to illustrate how previous works, focussed more exclusively on the point of view of middle-class and white consumers, fall short in accounting for or considering how other sorts of consumers engage with these places. Chapter 6 moves back to Newhallville and into children's rooms and homes to discuss the inventory results in conjunction with the social practices governing the use of space and objects in Newhallville. I argue that these practices provide much of the underlying moral and ethical framework that pervades children's consumption in Newhallville: a valuation of sharing, interdependency,and reciprocity. The dissertation develps an analytical framework for understanding consumption as a global yet local process, one that at once

affects the world and individual people. It is suggested that considering the ways in which consumption intersects with aspects of social inequality provides one central way for understanding how and why consumption varies so greatly, and yet maintains a certain cohesiveness as a social form. Further, by understanding consumption as one process through which social geography is constituted and negotiated provides a means through which to see consumption as social and global while it also shapes and is shaped by individual lives. Chapter 7 concludes by showing how consumption, social inequality, and social geography together form the matrix for the consumer lives of three Newhallville girls. Their changing stances in engaging with the consumer sphere as they move about their neighborhood, visit local stores and go to the supermarket and mall reveal that theirs is a world where a kaleidoscopic array of fantasies are abutted by changing settings for the real.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The study of consumption and of children exists in tension with powerful normative models which permeate the national media, political institutions, social service agencies, schools, families, neighborhoods, as well as academic theory and research. These models are modeled largely upon the euro-American, white, middle class thus often casting those who are "other" or "marginal" to this group as being problematic and deviant. Regina Austin (1994) charges that African American consumers, for instance, have been widely portrayed in both popular and scholarly literature as "a nation of thieves": what they buy, wear, use, and covet is seen as rooted in or leading to social pathology. Similarly, much of the social scientific literature on children makes both implicit and explicit assumptions about the nature, capabilities, behaviors, and beliefs of children deriving from white, middle class values and experience.

In both the study of consumption and of children, this primary focus on one segment of the population has resulted in literatures which have yet to explore social inequality as a significant dimension.[1] My ethnography of consumption among children from a poor and working class, African American neighborhood is located precisely within the territory of unequal consumption as it exists in a particular political, economic,

[1] A substantial psychological and sociological literature on children from racial and ethnic minorities does exist, but in the discipline of anthropology, this literature remains small.

and cultural context. While examining the specific forms of consumption that exist among Newhallville children, this work also takes to task the ideology that portrays consumption among those without resources as fundamentally deviant if not pathological, and views children as future adults, rather than as participants in, bearers and creators of culture.

Anthropologists are generating growing literatures on both the ethnography of children and of consumption, but the ethnography of children's consumption is dominated by marketing and consumer behavior research. Despite sometimes vast differences in theoretical, political, and methodological orientations, these bodies of work share several significant similarities. First, marketers have been among the first researchers to take children seriously as powerful social actors and participants in culture, and anthropologists have not been far behind. Rather than analyzing children as future adults, a perspective common to socialization literature in a wide variety of disciplines, new ethnographic work on children focuses both on children's own culture, and their importance to culture at large (cf., Stephens 1995). As yet, however, this literature remains small, and has not influenced theory or methods on a wide scale, as have, for instance, feminist approaches. Second, in these disciplines consumption is increasingly understood to be a social process that is neither the opposite of nor complement to production. Rather, the two are understood to be bound in a cyclical, even dialectic, relationship. A critique of models of the consumer that have their roots in neoclassical economics has grown out of this perspective; such models, which view consumers as rational decision making individuals neglect factors of social ties and cultural influences

(Belk, 1995; Fine, 1995; Miller, 1995a; 1995; Rutz and Orlove 1988). A final significant similarity between otherwise disparate literatures is a marked lack of attention to structural inequality as it operates in the sphere of consumption or in children's lives, either within or between cultures.

In documenting the ways that Newhallville children take part in consumption or are excluded from it, this research lays some of the groundwork necessary for understanding the dynamics of inequality in the consumer sphere. Such inequality arises from and is perpetuated by the political economic processes of which consumption is inevitably a part. The understanding that consumption is a fundamentally social process, and one that operates in and through global systems of provisioning and exchange is critical to the emergent scholarship on consumption, and social geography has had a decided influence on the development of this understanding (Jackson and Thrift 1995; Miller 1995a; Sherry 1995). New work in this area has alerted other social scientists to the social, political, and economic processes involved in the production and maintenance of both public and private spaces, and it is social geographers who have perhaps gone the furthest in developing a theoretical framework examining consumption, systems of provisioning, and social inequality together with individual experience. In joining recent and ongoing theoretical and methodological perspectives in anthropology, marketing, and consumer behavior research with social geography, this study formulates an ethnographic understanding of political economy of consumption, social inequality, and individual lives.

Ethnography of children and childhood

Much anthropological research on children and childhood treats them in near isolation from the rest of the society of which they are part. A long tradition of studying children's peer cultures does exist (Corsaro and Eder (1990) provide a review of this literature); but this concern has been concentrated in social sciences other than anthropology, and most studies do not seek to understand how children's lives have an influence that extends beyond peer culture. Due in part to this stance, children have not been viewed as actors in "grand" social theory. Chayanov's classic treatise on peasant economy (1966) and Yanagisako's definitive review of household and family (1979) are only two cases where children are curiously absent except as receivers of care and resources.

Though anthropologists are just now beginning to investigate the ways in which children themselves engage in or understand what Sharon Stephens calls "the politics of culture" (1995), anthropological studies of education and children's productive work have laid the foundation for understanding the political and economic contexts in which children operate. Initially, anthropological studies of education -- where children figure prominently -- began with works whose purpose was to demonstrate that "primitive" cultures do educate their members, even though they often do not have the kinds of institutionalized forms of schooling commonly found in complex societies (Nadel 1970 [1942]; Raum 1938).

The 1960s saw an upsurge of studies on the role of state-administered education systems in perpetuating class and race inequality. Jules Henry (1963) leveled a diatribe at

the American schoolroom as a regimented, oppressive site. Bourdieu and Passeron (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977) use the term "symbolic violence" to describe the main mechanism of education in ensuring some people's access to privilege and preventing others from attaining such access. Several studies relate in detail the plethora of subtle ways in which interactions between students and their teachers -- eye contact, demands for sitting still, assumptions about intelligence -- influence what and how children learn, thus influencing their trajectories later in life (Leacock 1982; Philips 1983).

More recent work in this vein has looked at these experiences through the eyes of present or past children -- in one case examining what the author terms children's "unofficial literacy," located in censured activities such as comic book reading and passing of notes (Hubbard 1989). Another recent article focuses on the remembrances of adults who attended Indian schools as children, examining the strategies they devised for circumventing harsh rules. Among these rules was a prohibition against students speaking their native language(s) and another requiring female students to wear bloomers, a part of their school uniforms they found especially hateful (Lomawaima 1993).

Ethnographies of children and childhood tend to be intensely local. In addition to a focus on children at school, much careful attention has been paid to children's lives in the home, the village and the neighborhood (Broch 1990; Mead 1930; Ochs 1986; Wulff 1989). This confined focus is not completely inexplicable: children's lives are arguably more geographically circumscribed than those of their elders, and children are in general often to be found in homes, schools and within their neighborhoods or villages. Studies of children in other settings, notably the street and other public, extra-domestic or

reproductive spaces, look primarily at problematic and dysfunctional issues such as homeless and street children (Aptekar 1988; Walsh 1992). Similarly, children's involvement with work -- and hence places like factories and workshops -- is likewise often negatively interpreted and conflated with child labor which is not, strictly speaking, the same thing (but cf., (Munroe and others 1984; Schildkrout 1980; 1981).

There are some indications, even within the ethnographic literature itself, that the range and tenor of most anthropological ethnographies of children are limited not so much because children's lives are limited, but because the kinds of research undertaken on children are subtly influenced by western notions about the nature and capabilities of children. In Nisa: the Story of a !Kung Woman (Shostak 1981), Nisa recalls days spent with other children in "children's villages" out in the bush. Here, kids as young as three or four, along with older children, and on occasion, teenagers, would spend their days playing "house," "husband and wife," and so forth. Similar ethnographic examples of children's independent lives, and of time spent in places other than home, school, village or neighborhood, are rare: ethnographers generally spend most of their time with adults, and thus do not follow children as they roam away from adult supervision. Researchers in other disciplines have looked at the "lifespace of children" (Boocock 1981), which includes a much wider range of places than those commonly studied (cf., Hart 1979; Katz 1986; Medrich 1982).

These latter works are also part of an emerging body of research that views children as actively involved in the politics of living. The relevant sphere may be the classroom, or it may be the tension-filled space between cultural groups (a space at once

physical and social), which some see as being most effectively mediated by children (Rasmussen 1994; Salamone 1978). In these works, children are not portrayed as the objects of cultural processes, but rather as participants in or originators of such processes. This is not to say that kids are ultimately or even primarily self-determining, but studies of linguistic socialization, in particular, provide a model for ways that ethnographers may view and interpret children as active in acquiring and using culture, as well as active in the ways they influence those who seek to enculturate them (Miller and Moore 1989). This dynamic situation is what Bambi Schieffelin calls the "give and take of everyday life" (Schieffelin 1990). Children's active involvement in culture can extend well beyond the local scope to have national and even international impact: in South Africa in the years before the end of apartheid, children as young as eight became actively involved in political protest and as a result were jailed, tortured and killed (Ndebele 1995; Reynolds 1995).

Childhood and capitalism

Western notions of childhood, as they have developed and intensified since the latter half of the nineteenth century, are grounded in industrial capitalism. At the beginning of the industrial period, children were integrated into the labor process, particularly where production remained home-based (Tilly 1984). As production and populations became increasingly urbanized, however, the labor of children became both an economic and moral issue (Zelizer 1985). Changing conceptions of children have included the belief that their developing bodies should be fed, exercised and protected in

special ways and that their minds must be systematically stimulated and engaged to develop their intellectual potential and abilities. In the United States, compulsory schooling, increased medical supervision beginning before birth and child protection agencies are all products of these beliefs about the special needs of children. Changes in American educational, medical and social service institutions have certainly led to objective improvements in literacy child mortality and rates, and in the recognition and monitoring of child abuse. These changes do not represent a deepening understanding of the essential nature of children and their needs however; these changing conceptions are cultural constructions tied deeply and fundamentally to political economic processes.

Childhood under industrial capitalism is constructed as a time of life that is ideally safe, protected and explicitly free from productive labor. These notions have, more often than not, been unreflectively incorporated into anthropological analyses of children and childhood (Schwartzman 1978). However, a growing corpus of new ethnographic work conceptualizes children as knowing, historical subjects who actively shape the world in which they live (Katz 1986; Kelly-Byrne 1989; Salamone 1978; Wulff 1989). These works explicitly understand the child and childhood to be historically specific social constructions; they show how children themselves participate in maintaining as well as challenging of these ideas about children and childhood.

Understanding children and childhood as connected to political economy is one way to rethink how children are connected to spheres beyond those with which they are ideologically associated in the West (the home, the family and the school). This project has already been underway for nearly two decades in the school setting (cf., Fine 1990;

Fine 1993; Willis 1977), though it has been noted that these studies neglect variations among settings, and do not connect the school to other important sites, such as street corners and neighborhoods (Rutheiser 1993).

Social scientists have become increasingly concerned with the connections between capitalism, industrialism and consumerism (Ewen 1976; McKendrick et al. 1982; Mukerji 1983). There is a growing body of research documenting and exploring the dynamic and conflictual relationship between youth and consumership, primarily in England (Fiske 1989; 1994; Hebdige 1979; Willis 1990). This relationship is seen by these scholars as developing from political and economic conditions and as being intimately tied to issues of work, class and education. Much research along these lines in the United States highlights the role consumption plays in impelling youths' involvement with the illegal drug trade, work and crime (Finnegan 1990a;1990b; Sullivan 1989; Williams 1989; Williams and Kornblum 1985). These studies focus on teenagers and young adults; the work presented here combines recent approaches to "children and the politics of culture" (see essays in Stephens, 1995) with previous works on youth culture, style and consumption. These works understand children's involvement in consumer culture as political not so much because of its "subculture" status, but because of intimate connections to the larger political economy.

Anthropology and consumption

Beginning in the mid-1980s, anthropologists increasingly viewed consumption as a cultural form through which people understand and shape the wider social, political and

economic setting. McCracken proposed in 1986, for example, in his influential book Culture and Consumption that consumption had become the basis for American culture and society, while Rutz and Orlove (1988) suggested that consumption is at once a cultural arena in which issues of power, hegemony and ideology confront each other and a medium through which these confrontations are mediated. The stance taken by these works is more explicitly political than that of previous material culture studies, which in their earliest form consisted of catalogues and taxonomies of complete cultural assemblages (Kroeber 1922; Kroeber and Waterman 1931). At a further extreme, postmodern and semiotic theories influenced by the work of Baudrillard (1968; 1981a; 1981b; 1986; 1988) see material culture as a distant second to the proliferation of signs and the "ecstasy of communication" between them. (cf., Sahlins 1976; 1994). In this vein, Haug (1986) asserts that in contemporary capitalist society, sign value is use value.

Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood's The World of Goods (1979) occupies the middle ground between Kroeber's taxonomy and Rutz and Orlove's political economy, and while dealing with semiotics, remains firmly grounded in material culture. Douglas and Isherwood are concerned not only with the meanings of objects but also their uses in daily life, from social interaction to accomplishing chores. This interest is at once semiotic and structural; ultimately, their interest lies in understanding the resulting synthesis of meaning and action in and through objects. These authors approach the question of social inequality, but fall somewhat short of understanding consumption and goods as either media for creating and maintaining such inequalities, or as means of communicating about them. They are interested in understanding how goods can operate

as signs -- or even results -- of social divisions without placing so much emphasis on understanding how those divisions arose and are perpetuated.

Pierre Bourdieu's Distinction (1984) takes up this very problem and examines consumption not as a relatively consensual process, but as one from which some people are actively barred. According to Bourdieu, consumption is partly based in special forms of knowledge and experience, that are often acquired through inarticulate, quotidian experience he terms "habitus." In discussing his notion of habitus, Bourdieu pays special attention to children: in the habitus the child is socialized to the small gestures and bits of knowledge that allow a person to operate as a member of one's culture or class: how to eat, where to sit, inflection of the voice, what to wear. This knowledge and experience accrues as what Bourdieu calls "cultural capital," a term chosen expressly to communicate the fact that class is not just clothes or education or accent but the result of a tremendous, life-long acquisition process. As Veblen (1912) had noted, class mobility is restricted not only because climbing the ladder is plain hard work, but because people at the top are actively trying to prevent those below them from following too closely.

One of Bourdieu's enduring contributions to the study of consumption is his detailed analysis of the processes through which the apparent homogeneity within groups is shaped. Contrary to popular belief, personal choice and preferences are not the main determinants of individual consumption. Rather, the habitus offers opportunities for "controlled improvisation," and the range of improvisations varies according to one's position in and experience with the habitus (1977). The acquisition of cultural capital further shapes consumption choice and opportunities. In this context choice is not free

but constructed, not endless but bounded. Bourdieu is not alone in making the observation that the endless proliferation of choice in contemporary consumer society is in fact an illusion. Stuart Ewen (1976; 1988) and Susan Willis (1991) have explored this theme as well, but without laying out as carefully as has Bourdieu the mechanisms through which even the choices that are potentially available present restrictions.

Bourdieu assumes that, given the choice, everyone would choose the same things -- that ultimately what members of a given society want is more or less the same. Veblen's earlier account of social differentiation is based on a similar assumption: the upper classes continually change their consumption patterns because members of classes below them continually try to consume what people of the upper classes do. This notion is implicit to the bulk of consumption studies. Carrier and Heyman find this assumption problematic: "We do not think it is safe to assume that people would consume the same things if they had the money. We can neither neglect the question of whether people have the money, nor the question of how people enact distinctive life trajectories with the money they do have" (22).

The questions Carrier and Heyman raise regarding differences in what, how and why people consume point to a fundamental weakness in most consumption theory: the idea that all other things being equal, people's consumption would be essentially the same. Anthropologists have spent enormous effort to document why such universalist ideas have little practical application. In the study of consumption the notion that all other things are not and cannot be equal has been pursued almost exclusively in looking at the confrontation between "the West" and its "others," resulting, paradoxically, in an

overall neglect of complexity within cultures, including the question of social inequality as it shapes consumption.

Anthropologists have done an admirable job of documenting the great variety of ways people from diverse cultures deal with commodities and consumption, primarily by documenting the ways in which indigenous conceptual and cultural frameworks differ from those of the West, or, conversely, the ways that "others" have appropriated and transformed western commodities (cf., Creighton 1992; Heath 1992; Taussig 1980). In documenting and analyzing cargo cults, for instance, anthropologists have put the study of consumption in the context of political economy and understood consumption as a process tied to forms of social inequality, albeit the inequality between a hegemonic western culture and a less powerful "other" culture (Worsley 1957). Inequality in the sphere of consumption thus is most commonly portrayed as existing between cultures, but not within them. This point of view leads to a tendency to see the politics of consumption as the hegemonic incursions of European and North American goods, values and media, with people attempting to maintain their cultural integrity in the face of those products even as they incorporate them into their lives (cf., Heath 1992; Hugh-Jones 1992; Turner 1992). More often than not, these confrontations have taken place under circumstances of colonialism, genocide, slavery, or economic or martial battle. When viewed from a global and long-term historical perspective, the similarities between dilemmas faced by the migratory North American Naskapi Indians entering the fur trade and East Indian states under British Colonial rule are more striking than obscure (Wolf 1982). Moreover, changes in western consumption -- the drinking of sugared tea among

the British working class, for example -- have been seen to be fundamental to changes in production in industrialized centers, as well as a powerful means of drawing areas such as India and the Caribbean into the capitalist system (Mintz 1985). That is, consumption has been critical in the emergence of modernity.

In anthropology, the incorporation of a modern/primitive dichotomy in the analysis of consumption has proven extraordinarily difficult to dislodge (Weismantel 1997). Western consumption is portrayed as being relatively undifferentiated, and in some cases appears as an almost reified, static entity. Commodity consumption in cross-cultural context has thus been understood as a strange mix of authenticity, imitation and contagion. It is at once the western intrusion into and distortion of "pure" cultural forms and the local imitation of authentic western templates (however objectionable these templates may be). Ethnographic explorations of economic systems featuring wealth and trade based upon unalienated commodities provide contrast to -- and shed light upon -- the unique nature of commodity consumption under capitalism. For example, Melanesia has long been the site of a wide range of studies examining aspects of such economies including gender, the role of gifts, commodities, barter and trade (Cheal 1988; Gell 1992; Malinowski 1922; Valerio 1994; Weiner 1985).

The distinction often made in anthropology between economies and forms of consumption that are "primitive" on the one hand and capitalist (as opposed to socialist or communist) on the other is perhaps a little too neat (Philibert 1990). Miller (1995b) notes some of the central problems with this dichotomous anthropological understanding of consumption:

> Central Africans in suits, Indonesian soap operas, and South Asian brands are no longer inauthentic copies by people who have lost their culture after being swamped by things that only North Americans and Europeans "should" possess. Rather there is the equality of genuine relativism that makes none of us a model of real consumption and all of us creative variants of social processes based around the possession and use of commodities (144).

Miller's observation that "none of us [is] a model of real consumption" bears repeating. And yet, Miller's "central Africans in suits," for instance, do not and cannot exist apart from a cultural politics and political economy that at some level does indeed measure them against notions of what people like them "should" possess. His notion of "the equality of genuine relativism" appears to gloss over prickly historical details. The European history of those suits and the problems that history poses for their wearers cannot be settled merely by recognizing that central Africans can and do legitimately dress in suits rather than boubous or loincloths; likewise, notions of "style" do not adequately account for the cultural politics inherent in the mass merchandising of African inspired fashions to the American buying public.

Ethnography of children's consumption

It has been noted recently that "some of the most incisive accounts of how kids think and respond to the daily flux of modern communication systems are written in the pursuit of new ways of selling more chocolates and dolls (Kline 1993, 18). Both marketing and consumer behavior research are undergoing rapid and radical change, moving from positivist and quantitative methods and theories to inclusion of anthropological, ethnographic, and qualitative methods and perspectives as well seeing

growing influences from feminist, political economic and critical studies (Belk 1995; Sherry 1995). One outcome of these developments is that these disciplines have made impressive strides in developing methods, approaches and data which constitute a serious ethnography of children and childhood (Clark 1995).

However, these studies for the most part have been narrowly focused on white, middle class children from the United States, resulting in a body of work pays particularly little attention to the ways in which structural inequalities such as race, class, and gender shape children's lives as social beings and as consumers. With some significant exceptions, (cf., Lundgren 1987; 1988) the anthropological literature on consumption, like marketing and consumer behavior research, has not yet delved deeply into questions of the relationship between consumption and forms of social inequality, even though the discipline examines populations which may be considered at some level to be "other" or "marginal" to white, middle class American society: those from poor, minority, and/or third world cultures.

Consumption and social inequality

Social scientific research on consumption has built its theories and conducted its research primarily on the American middle class, generally understood to be adults. Consumer behavior research on children has focused on consumer socialization (Faber 1988; Ward 1974; Wartella et al.1977) and kids' relationships to advertising and mass media (Comstock and Cobbey 1979; Kerkman 1991). The influence of class and race

upon children's consumption have seen particularly little attention.[2] Hill's (1992) work on the meaning of possessions in homeless children's lives is an exception, and illustrates aspects of the distinctive consumption orientations of these children, who lack "the most basic of material possessions, a home." As will be discussed later, expanding the understanding of consumption beyond relatively inexpensive commodities such as clothes to include relatively expensive ones such as homes and automobiles has been one way that several researchers have been able to move theoretical accounts of consumption away from a focus on individuals and issues of preference or skill to structural circumstances shaping these preferences and skills: economics, politics, labor and so forth.

Accounts of the consumption of poor and minority children, especially those living in the "inner city", can most often be found in social science and ethnographic texts, which do not generally focus on consumption per se (Kotlowitz 1991; Nightingale 1993); conversely, recent social scientific accounts of children and their engagement with the toy industry, such as Marsha Kinder's Playing With Power (1991), focus exclusively on middle-class subjects. While attempting also to outline consumption issues pertinent to minority and lower-income groups, these works cannot do so on the basis of comparable bodies of data.

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[2]The vast majority of studies included in James McNeal's comprehensive A Bibliography of Research and Writings on Marketing and Advertising to Children (1991) focus on American, middle class children.

An upsurge of interest among marketing and consumer behavior researchers about "disadvantaged consumers" and the "ghetto market" was sparked in the late 1960s, precipitated by widespread urban unrest and the 1967 riots in major U.S. cities, including Chicago, Los Angeles, Detroit and New Haven (Andreasen 1975; Caplovitz 1967; Honeycutt 1975; Sturdivant 1969). Looting, or what Fiske (1994), in an examination of the 1991 Los Angeles riots, calls "radical shopping", was an important element in these riots, and one which alerted consumer and marketing researchers to the effects of race, class, poverty and ghettoization on consumers. It could be argued that the problems sparking the riots of 1967 have actually intensified since that time (real wages are down, unemployment is up, social welfare budgets are shrinking along with municipal tax rolls, businesses are fleeing "inner city" areas and so on), yet the interest in the consumer lives of those who are not middle class seems largely to have fizzled. Andreasen (1986, 113) charges that "these changing and worsening problems [are] subject to sustained neglect on the part of academic researchers".

Extant studies document the particular difficulties typically faced by disadvantaged consumers: local stores carrying inferior brands for inflated prices, high incidence of time-payment at usurious rates of interest; poor access to well-stocked supermarkets and pharmacies; an absence of local banks; and a dearth of businesses such as dry cleaners, hardware stores and the like (Alwitt 1995; Andreasen 1975; 1976; 1986; Honeycutt 1975). These studies document, as well, the money management strategies adopted by households where earnings often are not generous enough to cover the cost of rent, food and transportation, much less items such as cleaning supplies, telephone

service, school pencils and notebooks, household appliances, clothing and medical care. The consumer lives of Newhallville children cannot be understood apart from the productive milieu. The conditions present in the local, national and even global economies that create, for instance, landscapes dominated by empty factories, abandoned homes and empty lots, and a social scene with poverty and joblessness on the rise and education on the decline are conditions that profoundly influence the ways in which these children come to understand themselves and the world in which they live. Consumption is a central, contested part of that world and the people who populate it.

In advocating a "social economy" approach to the question of consumption, Rutz and Orlove (1988) emphasize that production and consumption should not be considered in isolation, much less in opposition. Production and consumption are twinned processes, bound up with and dependent upon one another. This recognition implies that in the lives of individuals as well as in social and economic structures, consumption and production are interlocked. This connection has been explored with regard to the question of housing, and also in relation to a primary body of social practice taking place in and around homes -- that of social reproduction.

Consumption, social reproduction, housing and home

In seeking to develop an anthropological understanding of consumption that can effectively address issues of political economy and social reproduction, Carrier and Heyman (n.d.) turn their attention to the issue of housing:

> because it has an undeniable influence on the household's reproductive strategies and because it stands in marked contrast to the sort of cheap consumables that dominate the study of consumption. Also, it shows particularly clearly the ways that consumption strategies by sets of households have consequences for the strategies of other sets of households, consequences that can be malignant where the situations and orientations of those sets of households diverge.(22)

Housing seems an obvious place to start in the study of consumption because of its "undeniable influence on the household's reproductive strategies," as Carrier and Heyman put it. Hill (1992) describes a home as the most basic of material possessions. It is certainly among the most costly.

Housing, food and transportation together account for the bulk of any household's expenses, except perhaps for the very wealthy (Alwitt, 1995). It is these expenses which most profoundly influence how much of a household's income can comfortably (or conceivably) be used for buying anything else, from clothing and medical care to manicures, books and video games. The average household in the United States expends 57% of its income on housing, food and transportation; households from the bottom 20% in terms of income spend 69% of income on these items (Alwitt 1995). One study found that residents of an area of New York's lower east side spent 87% of income on food and rent alone (Sharff 1987). Those households with the least income, then, spend the greatest proportion of funds on the relatively fixed categories of housing, food and transportation; as a result, low-income households have proportionately smaller disposable incomes than wealthier households. These proportionately smaller disposable incomes, coming as they do from budgets that were already on the bottom of the scale, dramatically restrict these

household's ability to make purchases of any significant expense. In some cases, housing costs are so high that heads of household must decide between paying the rent for the month and buying food (Jeffers 1967).

Taking housing as a starting point for the analysis of consumption highlights not only income differences and their outcomes, but also makes the housing itself relevant. This includes elements such as the quality and type of the housing, whether it is available for sale or rent, financing policies, location, neighborhood makeup, local businesses, nature of the people living there. These variables bring to the fore processes such as urban development and gentrification, political movements and organization, and changing availability of jobs and education (cf., Williams 1988; Zukin 1989 [1992]), and further emphasize the relevance of government policies at the local, state and federal levels in shaping what Saunders (1981) calls "state provisioning of resources," or "collective consumption." Saunders, like Carrier and Heyman, emphasizes the political and economic factors at work beyond the household which shape consumption undertaken by households' members, effectively locating both house and household in this larger context.

Feminist scholars focusing on issues of social reproduction have similarly located households at the juncture of production, consumption and reproduction, typically emphasizing issues related to gender inequality and the domestic economy in a critique of previous production-oriented Marxian research (Folbre 1984; Marshall 1991; O'Laughlin 1977). This stance serves in part as a way to assert that the domestic setting is a site of political and social struggle -- which, I would like to point out, is as true for

children as it is for women. Though not primarily concerned with consumption, Laslett and Brenner's definition of social reproduction highlights some connections:

> Among other things, social reproduction includes how food, clothing, and shelter are made available for immediate consumption, the ways in which the care and socialization of children are provided, the care of the infirm and elderly, and the social organization of sexuality. (Laslett and Brenner 1989, 382-3)

The home is one of the primary sites where consumption is articulated with processes of social reproduction, often through the distinctive kind of labor that Carrier (1990) calls the appropriation of commodities -- "the work of making a personal possession of the anonymous commodity" (583). In contemporary society, social reproduction and commodity appropriation are forms of labor that share significant similarities. Both have been described as "invisible" labor -- that is, as necessary work that is not often recognized as such. Both are at once unpaid -- and perhaps undervalued -- and yet central to production. Both are undertaken in large proportion by women. Finally, while neither commodity appropriation nor social reproduction is limited to the home, both figure prominently among the activities undertaken at home or by householders.

It is this array of "activities and attitudes, behaviors and emotions, responsibilities and relationships" (Laslett and Brenner 1989) that is central in bridging the gap between the mass-produced commodities that dominate daily life in industrial economies, and particular people's lives: mass-produced food items purchased at corporate supermarkets -- vegetables (whether fresh or canned), branded containers of milk, flour, salt, pasta and tuna fish -- and are transformed from shelved commodities available to any buyer to a particular meal, prepared in a particular style, which nourishes a particular family or

group of people. These daily activities taking place in the home -- preparing, serving and eating food; preparing, cleaning, and wearing clothes; cleaning and maintaining rooms, yards and bodies -- are materially central to consumption, reproduction and production. As the large bodies of work on clothing and food attest, these activities are likewise ideologically and symbolically powerful (Barthes 1983; Weiner and Schneider 1989; Weismantel 1989).

Social geography

From the perspective of historical materialist or Marxist social geographers, the landscape and the built environment are generated by and experienced through processes of culture, history and political economy. Soja (1989) calls this relationship between people and place the "sociospatial dialectic," while Harvey (1989) focusses on the ways in which global geography is reshaped according to the changing imperatives of capitalism. Similarly, Knox interprets the emergence of "new urban landscapes" featuring specialized business, residential and commercial developments, postmodern architecture and "master-planned communities" through a "theoretical framework rooted in historical materialism, in which the built environment is seen as part of the superstructure that is not only produced by but also helps to sustain the dominant relations of production" (Knox 1991, 203). My concern is with the processes through which the "inner city" has been constituted as a particular spatial form, and the ways that, as children move among distinct sites -- the "inner city" to downtown, to the mall and to the supermarket -- their consumption experience and options change as well.

One of the primary features on Knox's new urban landscape is the shopping mall. Malls have been analyzed extensively, and are widely recognized as spaces which not only shape consumption distinctively, but which are also the result of a distinctive coalescence of developments generated by a new world order and transformed world view under capitalism (see essays in Sorkin 1992b). Malls, like the department stores that are so often their main retail draw, are often architecturally spectacular -- and spectacularly expensive ones as well. These spaces now dominate the American retail scene. Located most frequently in suburban areas and with some regularity in urban downtowns, malls have been constructed, conceptually, as "an idealized social space free, by virtue of private property, planning and strict control, from the inconvenience of the weather and the danger and pollution of the automobile, but most important, from the terror of crime associated with today's urban environment" (Goss 1993, 24). The terror mentioned by Goss is the not-so-secret flip side of the mall-as-consumer paradise, described chillingly in an article outlining for lawyers the bases upon which they might file "inadequate security actions" against malls:

> Below the surface of a seemingly carefree shopping environment lies an underworld of gang violence, abductions, carjackings, armed robberies, sexual assaults, and crimes against young children. Indeed, in some ways malls represent ideal locations for criminals -- vast parking lots and garages, upscale shoppers, victims available day and night, private property with few if any regular police patrols, and a population led to believe that malls represent refuges from inner-city ills. (Everett 1994)

This conceptual shutting out of the unwanted and unpleasant has entailed a range of complex social, political and economic strategies that have yielded profound effects. As Goss (1993) observes, "the malling of downtown could not work, however, without the

legislative and financial support of the local state" (24). The flood of municipal and other governmental funds to the privately developed and administered malls and shopping centers has left many urban areas financially high and dry.

The creation and spectacular expansion of utopian spaces such as the mall has been accompanied by the sequestering of urban poverty areas (what are called "inner cities"), and concerted efforts to prevent residents of urban poverty areas from entering, using or having a visible presence in new civic spaces. This process has been characterized as "spatial apartheid" by Trevor Boddy (1992), who writes:

> With the heady gas of modernity everywhere, North Americans spoke loudly and lustfully of the shining new potential for European and Japanese cities, and longed for a strategy that would allow them, too, to build massive, boxy projects at the very center of town. This hyper-modern desire, when coupled with the Dickensian virtues of slum clearance, resulted in a similar transformation of cities on this continent. Present, too, was a scarcely disguised racism among planners and politicians, who sought to eradicate the most vocal -- and visible -- pockets of nonwhite inner-city life . . .(p. 135)

Boddy's description could well be an account of what took place in New Haven from the 1950s onward. Boddy and others (cf., Greenbaum 1993; Massey 1984) have criticized explanations that attribute the deterioration of certain urban areas to "locational characteristics." The "locational characteristics" point of view, like theories of poverty which point to individual failures in motivation, education or perseverance are interpretations that blame the victim and give short shrift to the importance of the social, economic and political context. In the case of ghetto communities in the United States, this context includes, among other things, a dual housing market where minority residents are disadvantaged from the outset.

In recent, continuing transformations in the geography of New Haven and cities like it, increasing segregation needs to be seen as intimately connected to private development of once-public civic space; as the result of "a barely disguised racism among planners and politicians," as Boddy says. This spatial and social organization takes place city wide and, with far-reaching effects, tying individual consumption to the social geography of the city, and creating linkages between the development of downtown and the deterioration of the ghetto. In seeking to explain why the infant mortality rate among New Haven's black population is more than double that for whites, a recent report notes that "reaching the medical triangle (where most health services for the city are located) requires taking at least two buses and at least 1 hour of traveling time" (Reguero and Crane 1994, 647). The authors go on to say that "it is believed that these differences are rooted in unequal opportunity for jobs, education, and collectively the failure of our society to ensure access to an improved socioeconomic standard of living for all our citizens" (651). These problematic and unequal conditions are the flip side of the clean, orderly spaces in modern malls.

The contentious social politics of public and urban space, though often analyzed through sites such as the mall, have been powerfully evident in other kinds of places, such as New York City's Tompkins Square Park (Smith 1992). What sets the mall apart from spaces such as Tompkins Square, however, is the re-creation of civic, public space not only in a retail setting, but on private property. Just as private, gated communities may legally monitor and restrict the entry and behavior of those who seek access -- whether temporary or long-term -- so do malls, by dint of their status as private property.

have the right to overtly and covertly observe those who enter, as well as enforce standards of dress (New York Times 1995b) and behavior. Jurists are attacking mall-related issues of civic space from both sides. On the civil rights flank, suits focused on rights to free speech have been upheld by courts viewing malls, though private, as civic spaces analogous to the proverbial town green. On the safety and security side, the law has been moving closer to a position that mall owners and operators have a responsibility to take steps to prevent "foreseeable" criminal attacks (Everett 1994, 62).

Conclusion

Geographically situating the consumer lives of children from Newhallville in the homes, neighborhoods and stores where they spend time provides a way to understand how class, race, gender and age are materially created and enacted, symbolically and materially, in both individual lives and by the larger society. Some theorists, notably Baudrillard (1968; 1973; 1981), have viewed contemporary commodity consumption as consisting mainly of a vast array of disembodied meanings and symbols, simulacra interacting primarily with each other. There is no doubt that members of contemporary societies consume images, and do so in distinctive ways. But consumption is not only characterized by simulacra; it is deeply material, and perhaps nowhere more so than when located in particular places -- houses, malls, downtowns.

The very material nature of consumption, coupled with the once again material exigencies of social inequality -- manifestly observable in housing and social geography -- make consumption a process at once palpable and yet deeply resonant symbolically.

Desire in this context is not a free-floating, unreal need manufactured by individuals out of their interactions with mass-produced commodities. Desire itself is not available on an equal-opportunity basis. Anyone is free to want what is advertised on fantasy-like television commercials or what is displayed on department store mannequins, but first they have to have a television set or a way to get to the mall. In considering consumer lives like those of Newhallville children, it becomes apparent that some are removed even from certain forms of consumer alienation -- the vicarious pleasures and frustrations of window shopping, for example.

When Goss describes contemporary, postmodern culture as marked by the commodification of reality, he sets the stage for understanding this reality as differentially accessible. Harvey's collapse of "space-time" may influence the lives of everyone on the globe, via cable television, the Internet, supersonic travel, or what have you, but not everyone may participate in experiencing such collapse. Experiencing the world as a collapsed, densifying, "just-in-time" produced place implies specific social and economic positions, positions which are overlaid with the complexities of nation, class, race, age and gender. This is the context in which desire is generated and experienced: it exists in a social, political and geographic context that continually brings flights of fancy back to earth.

CHAPTER 3

NEW HAVEN AND NEWHALLVILLE

Connecticut is the southernmost state in New England, renowned for its spectacular autumnal foliage and picturesque small towns with their well-tended central greens, Episcopalian churches and colonial cemeteries. Connecticut is also known for money, both old and new. This reputation for wealth is not undeserved: Fairfield County, located at the border that Connecticut shares with New York, is the wealthiest county in the United States, and Connecticut has the nation's highest per capita income (Yarrow 1992a).

Connecticut's wealth is not distributed on a per capita basis, however, and the impressive concentration of wealth in the state is rivaled by an oppressive concentration of poverty: Bridgeport, the largest city in Fairfield County, is ranked among the top ten poorest cities in the United States, along with Hartford, the state's capital. Wealth is not the only resource to which some Connecticut residents have more access than others: housing, education, jobs and commercial districts are unequally distributed as well. The circumstances leading to and perpetuating these inequalities are of fundamental importance to the consumer lives of Newhallville kids. The various forms of exclusion and isolation faced by Newhallville kids -- geographic, social, economic and commercial -- have far- reaching implications for the way in which they consume, what they consume, where they consume and what they learn about themselves, others and the world in the process. This chapter focuses on New Haven and Newhallville on the ways

in which these multiple forms of isolation shape the social and political economic territory lived in and experienced by Newhallville kids.

New Haven

Located 80 miles northeast of New York City on the shore of Long Island Sound, New Haven is a medium-sized city with 130,000 residents. It is the seventh poorest city of its size in the United States (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1980); for cities over 100,000, New Haven ranks first in the nation in infant mortality (Reguero and Crane 1994).[1] At the same time, New Haven is home to one of the nation's wealthiest and most elite educational institutions, Yale University. The city also possesses a hefty illegal drug trade, a bankrupt shopping mall, a struggling downtown area, and deeply troubled public schools. Once a bustling manufacturing-based town producing guns and other munitions, tires, beer, paper, caskets, apparel and bagels, New Haven's population has shrunk by over 20,000 since its peak of economic activity in the 1950s. Today the primary employment sector is service-based with local hospitals and educational institutions, along with retail stores, utilities, and restaurants providing the bulk of local employment opportunities.

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[1]In New Haven there are 18.5 infant deaths per 1,000 live births. There are some who argue the infant mortality rate in the city is inflated because Yale-New Haven hospital has one of the nation's premiere neonatal units, and thus a higher concentration than normal of women with high risk pregnancies and seriously ill infants. However, one New Haven neighborhood had an infant mortality rate almost three times higher than that of the city as a whole, with 66.7 deaths per 1,000 live births (Reguero and Crane 1994).

Newhallville

With a reputation as one of the poorest and most problem-ridden areas of the city, Newhallville and its residents are isolated from the rest of New Haven geographically, socially, economically and commercially. Eleven of New Haven's 28 census tracts have a minority population above 60 percent; Newhallville has a minority population of 91.7 percent. The neighborhood's median household income in 1990 was $20,569; 26.6 percent of Newhallville residents live in poverty (U.S. Department of Commerce 1993).[2] This is not to say that there is no contact whatsoever between Newhallville residents and those from other parts of the city. Many who live in Newhallville work downtown or at Yale University or the hospital; most school-teachers come in from surrounding towns and neighborhoods; some children attend magnet schools outside their area.

The sycamores and maples that line the streets in the neighborhood are old and tall; the branches of trees on one side of the street arch above to mix with those of trees on the other, creating a tunnel-like effect. The two- and three-story wood frame clapboard houses and the occasional six- to ten-unit apartment building have small, grassy yards front and back where children play and gardens of flowers or vegetables are planted. Newhallville has neither tenements nor housing projects. The poor live side-by-side with owners of homes and businesses; on occasion the poor are themselves owners

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[2]In contrast, in 1960 the Newhallville poverty rate was 17.6 percent for all persons; Newhallville's ethnic mix was 18.2% white, 81.2% "Negro", and .6% other. Between 1960 and 1990, then, the poverty rate rose by half (51%), while the minority population increase was not commensurate, growing 12.9%. Newhallville's racial segregation does not appear to have a simple cause and effect relationship with the area's rapid rise in poverty.

of homes and businesses. While one house is caving in on itself, the home next door is carefully painted and boasts verdant lawns and abundant flowers.

After a property tax hike of about 40 percent in 1992 (as noted in chapter 1, the first step in a five-step tax increase due to raise payments an average of 238 percent), abandoned buildings have begun to multiply at an alarming rate and can be found on almost every block in the neighborhood, fallout from bankruptcies and the vagaries of absentee landlords: 62.6 percent of Newhallville housing units are rentals (U.S. Department of Commerce 1993). Boarded up, covered in graffiti, used as crack houses, these buildings were one sign in the early 1990s that the troubles in Newhallville were more than an undercurrent. Most blocks also had at least one empty lot filling with trash and discarded household appliances. Gunshots are a common occurrence, and street-dealing of drugs takes place at several well-known sites as well as many more clandestine ones. At night, police routinely stop cars driven by young white men on the assumption that they have entered the neighborhood to buy drugs.

When Newhallville is referred to as a ghetto or inner-city neighborhood, it is the large minority population, visible drug trade, deteriorating housing stock and high poverty rate that are being indirectly referenced. Susan D. Greenbaum, writing about a similar neighborhood in Kansas City, Kansas, cautions that "Ghetto is a monolithic concept, describing districts that may be ethnically uniform but which reflect a large degree of variability, both internally and among different cities. . . .When folk categories like ghetto are reified and made respectable in the models and taxonomies of scholars and analysts, consequences and intentions become viciously intertwined" (Greenbaum 1993,

140). If Newhallville, with its graceful trees and carefully painted frame houses does not appear to be a "typical" ghetto or inner-city community, it is because these terms assume a great deal, and like the term underclass are so vague that they are nearly useless for the purposes of social science (Kornblum 1991; Kuttner 1991; Marks 1991; Singh 1991).

Avoiding the loaded terminology of ghetto or inner city, I focus instead on particular elements which distinguish Newhallville and neighborhoods like it from the cities in which they are located. Among the most important of these elements are geographic isolation, social isolation, economic isolation and commercial isolation. These overlapping forms of isolation are not merely the effects of an inward-turning community but rather a community from which much of the rest of the city has turned away.

Geographic isolation Most Newhallville residents must leave the neighborhood in order to shop or work. Once in high school, students must also leave the neighborhood to go to school. Stepping over Newhallville borders is a charged activity; many Newhallville residents do not feel welcome in other New Haven neighborhoods or in the city's downtown. Such tensions and conflicts imbue most everyday activities with their peculiar flavor; under the circumstances the consumer lives of Newhallville children, are similarly seasoned with these same tensions and conflicts.

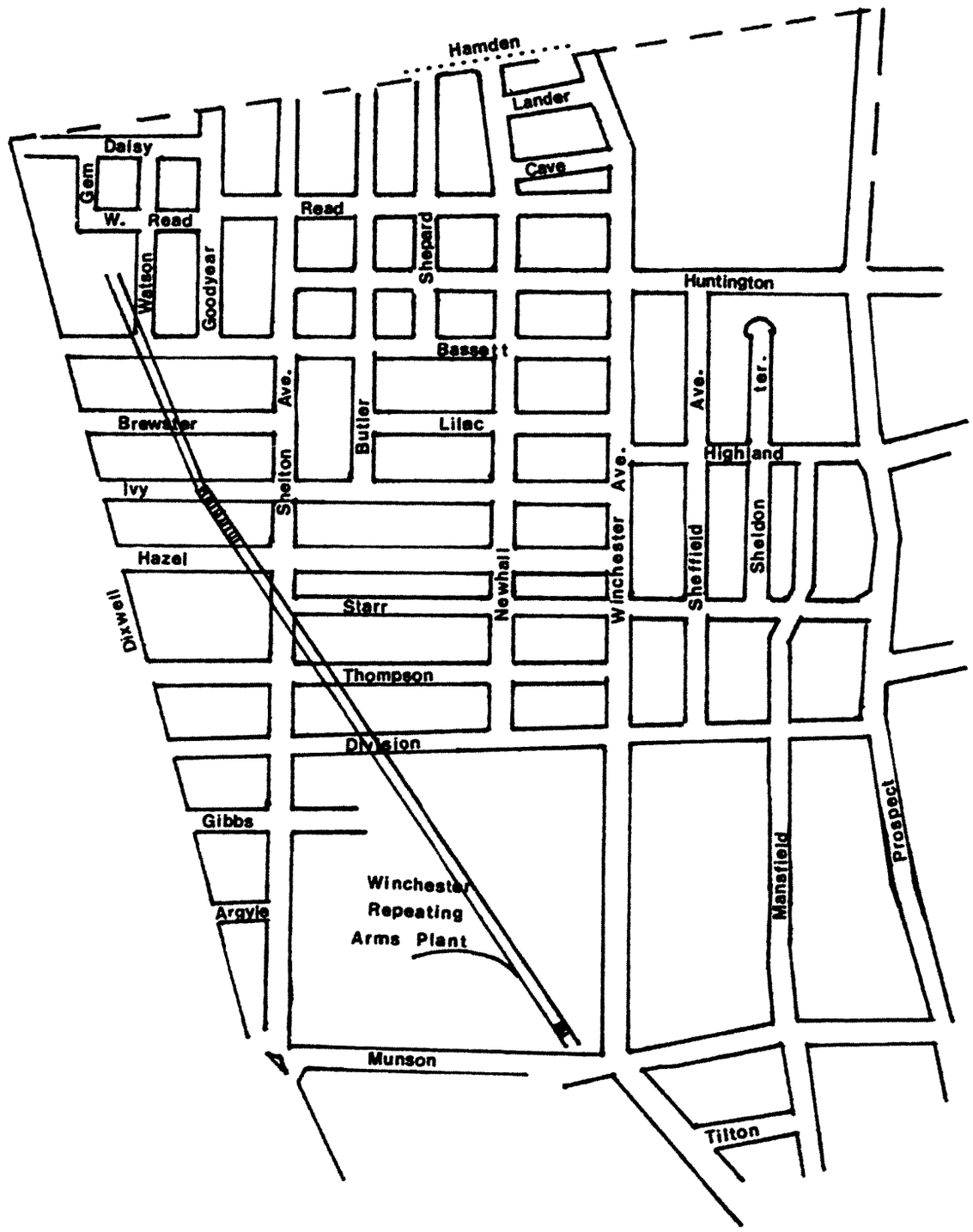
Newhallville's borders are clearly demarcated on three sides (figure 3.1). At the West, Newhallville abuts the Dixwell neighborhood, and though the populations of the two neighborhoods are substantially similar, being comprised of mostly poor and

working- class minority residents, the two areas are geographically distinct. Unlike Newhallville, Dixwell has several large housing projects and the concentration of population and poverty characteristic of housing projects has lead to a particular set of problems for the Dixwell community. Dixwell also still has a commercial district, albeit one that is struggling, while for all intents and purposes, Newhallville does not. People from Newhallville -- especially children -- move between the two neighborhoods often and with ease. This may be in part because local schools draw children from both neighborhoods, but not from the north, east, and south, where Newhallville's borders are less permeable.

Newhallville's northern edge is at the border of the suburban town of Hamden. Where Hamden begins, the streets abruptly become better paved, and a sleek junior high school atop a grassy hill overlooks Newhallville's increasingly decrepit Jackie Robinson Junior High. In contrast to Hamden's windowed, brick school building, Jackie Robinson is bunker-like and largely subterranean. Inside Jackie Robinson resembles nothing so much as a surreal prison which, given the orange-dominated color scheme, could only have been imagined (much less constructed) in the mid-1970s.

Much of this border area on the Hamden side is simply uninhabited, with a chunk of space taken up by a sizeable park covering an area equal to about four or five city blocks. This park is little used by either Hamden or New Haven residents, being

Figure 3.1 - Map of Newhallville



inconveniently located for residents of both cities. The park is also perfectly flat and has neither trees nor structures which might, provide shade on a sunny day. It has a playground which is used at times, but there are neither benches where parents might sit nor picnic tables to make longer interludes or family meals convenient. Located along the route to Hamden's commercial strip where many Newhallville residents shop, this border area is for the most part an unpeopled buffer zone.

To the east lies Prospect Street, which winds its way along the ridge of a hill separating Newhallville from the affluent Prospect Hill and East Rock neighborhoods. Lined on both sides with mansions of 20 rooms or more, Prospect street is not a place that any Newhallville resident I knew ever approached on foot. One man referred to Prospect Street as "the DMZ," the demilitarized zone, a sort of dangerous and charged no-man's-land to be avoided. The street itself is wide, an impression that is magnified by the expanses of lawn stretching out before houses set well back from the street. In contrast to the Newhallville stoops and front porches where people sit, observe the action or keep tabs on their children, Prospect Street marks the transition into neighborhoods where people stay indoors or in back yards, minding their own business or observing others from behind curtains or screen doors. The street's relative emptiness contrasts with Newhallville's lively atmosphere, lending Prospect a feeling much like that of the little-used park at the Hamden border -- an unpeopled buffer zone.

This sense of quiet and privacy is valued by Prospect Hill residents and is zealously protected. In 1992, when a New Haven woman attempted to buy a Prospect Hill home to live in with her several foster children, residents unsuccessfully attempted to

block the purchase through the courts. They cited increased noise and traffic as their primary objections.[3] The woman, who did eventually buy and occupy the house in question, is black, as are most of her foster children. The incident, then, resonates with issues of race and class. Not just an attempt to maintain the racial and class homogeneity of the neighborhood, residents' efforts to prevent the group from moving in may also be seen as an attempt to maintain the integrity of the "DMZ" to keep the dividing line between a troubled black neighborhood and an insular white one clean and clear.

On Newhallville's southern edge, the site of the Winchester Repeating Arms plant occupies a space equivalent to perhaps half a dozen square blocks, creating another buffer, or bulwark, between Newhallville and the city beyond. Now only partially occupied by gun production facilities, the bulk of the former factory has been torn down or rehabbed for other uses. The largest project has been Science Park, a business development designed to attract scientific research and development companies.

In the process of transforming the former site of the Winchester Repeating Arms factory into Science Park, a portion of Winchester Avenue -- a main neighborhood thoroughfare -- was permanently closed to the public. Gates manned by 24-hour guards now stand at corners that were once bus stops. The message is clear: Newhallville residents have been shut out of a part of their own neighborhood. That this has taken place on a site which once was the area's main employer has only added insult to injury.

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[3] Prospect Hill is almost exclusively white as Newhallville is black, and the neighborhood has a reputation for being hostile to non-white and non-Christian families who attempt to live there. New Haven's exclusive Lawn Club, which no longer officially excludes black and Jewish members, has many Prospect Hill residents as members.

The same processes that hems Newhallville residents in, also shuts them out of the city's downtown center. During the early 1990s the Yale campus, like the Winchester site, became progressively more enclosed by walls, gates and guarded entrances. While town-gown relations have long been problematic, such visible efforts to shut residents out of the campus palpably exacerbated tensions. The permanent closing of a block of Wall Street in the downtown area of the campus -- for which Yale compensated the city with a one-time payment -- fueled suspicions of many minority residents that city hall and the University are in cahoots to fence out those they deemed undesirable. These suspicions took shape in a rumor that the city and Yale have together cooked up a plan to cut off water and electricity to selected parts of New Haven if there should ever be a repeat of the 1967 riots in the black community.

Social isolation The African American population in New Haven has a long history, stretching back nearly to the colonial period. While there were several waves of African American migration to New Haven from the south, one of the largest occurred during the post-war boom years: between 1950 and 1960, the African American population nearly doubled from 9,600 to 23,000 (Minerbrook 1992, 37). More recently, immigrants from Central America and the Caribbean have increased the city's minority population, which now constitutes over half of New Haven residents. The city's diversity has not resulted in an integrated residential sector: as already noted, 11 of New Haven's 28 census tracts had minority populations of 60% or more in 1990 (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1993).

Residential segregation, already well under way in the first half of this century, was given a big boost in the years during which New Haven undertook extensive urban redevelopment. Thus the social isolation of neighborhoods such as Newhallville may be seen as primarily a product of urban redevelopment, not of social factors internal to the Newhallville community. Having got in on the ground floor of the nation's urban revitalization efforts, New Haven emerged as the nation's model "model city" by the time the Great Society years were in full swing (Dahl 1961; Fainstein 1974). John Dahl, in his classic study of political organization and participation in New Haven, writes:

> By the end of 1958, New Haven had spent more federal funds per capita for planning its redevelopment projects than any of the country's largest cities, more than any other city in New England, and more than any other city of comparable size except one. Only one city in the country, the nation's capital, had received more per person in capital grants. . . .By 1959 much of the center of [New Haven] was razed to the ground (pp. 121-2).

From the late 1950s through the early 1970s, over half a billion federal dollars funded urban redevelopment projects to improve economic and living conditions in New Haven. Urban revitalization programs ostensibly sought to wipe out blight but many "improvements" had a debilitating impact on the black community. Urban renewal projects eventually displaced almost 40 percent of New Haven's black population, leveling long-standing communities of houses and home-owners to relocate residents to housing projects owned and administered by city and federal agencies. Between 1950 and 1970, about 10,000 units of housing were destroyed (Minerbrook 1992); equivalent

replacement housing never materialized, and most new units were intended for middle-class and elderly residents.

New Haven's residential segregation, and hence its social isolation, is hardly the result of such social processes as individual preference; rather, it can be seen as the not wholly surprising outcome of programmatic urban restructuring undertaken by successive New Haven political administrations and city agencies.

The schools' populations also provide a sense of the social isolation experienced in Newhallville. In the elementary school where I conducted research there were over 500 students, not one of whom was white. There were a handful of Puerto Rican and Pakistani students, but the overwhelming majority were black. The nearest high school had 3 white students in 1992, one of whom was valedictorian. This girl, who was disturbed about the racial and social segregation in New Haven, was not allowed to deliver her graduation day speech which dealt with these issues.

Few who are not residents of Newhallville regularly come in to spend time from outside the neighborhood unless they are from nearby Dixwell or have relatives there. Those outsiders who do regularly come in have distinctive roles to play on the social scene. Most are educators, police officers, health-care workers or social science or medical students. Most are white and middle class, and a number of them are uniformed, so their status as outsiders is visible and underscored in multiple ways -- not the least of which is that most are there to mend or circumvent social problems.

Although, this visibility is often characterized by tension, that is not always the case. In particular, teachers at the elementary school (many of whom are black) are well

loved and respected. The city's police chief, Nick Pastore, can often be found in front of the Newhallville community police station -- early in the morning, midday and late at night, clad in a white shirt and tie, talking with neighborhood kids, teenagers and adults, and dispensing his signature hug to nearly everyone who comes within his reach.

Economic isolation The story of the changing fortunes of the Winchester Repeating Arms Plant captures the upheavals that have faced New Haven and Newhallville residents in the past fifty years. From the turn of the century until the 1950s, Winchester was a major employer in New Haven and the focal center of Newhallville. In the course of running three full daily shifts, the factory set the rhythms for the community night and day. During the years around World War II, Winchester employed 12,000 people, many of them from Newhallville (City of New Haven 1982). Only 475 people worked at Winchester in 1992. Like Winchester's employment figures, the character and population of Newhallville had changed dramatically in forty years. From the time that the neighborhood's main employer was the carriage factory owned by George T. Newhall until the 1950s, the area had been occupied primarily by German, Irish and finally Italian immigrants of the working class.

Local employers began downsizing and relocating soon after the end of World War II. By the 1970s, changing employment opportunities left a bleak vista. Winchester's roster, for example, had dropped over 40 percent to 7,000 workers. By the 1990s, the entire city of New Haven had just over 7,000 manufacturing jobs. Like many other places nation-wide, New Haven had made the transition from a manufacturing-

based economy to one where service industries were providing the lion's share of jobs. Today New Haven's largest employers are Yale University and the Yale-New Haven Hospital, respectively, together accounting for 14,979 jobs (New Haven Downtown Council 1992). These jobs are, on the whole, not only less plentiful than their manufacturing counterparts once were, they are less secure and offer fewer benefits and lower pay. They often require higher degrees of literacy or special technical skills that necessitate secondary or vocational education. Given that the cumulative drop out rate for New Haven high schools is probably near 40 percent[4], there is a high probability that public school students, at least, are unlikely to acquire the needed skills and education to secure available jobs.

Employment is a primary problem in Newhallville. This issue is delicately alluded to in a City report to the Mayor regarding plans to develop unused portions of the Winchester plant into a business park:

> Because the park cannot easily compete with downtown or suburban sites for office-related space, it is suggested that more of an emphasis be placed on looking for labor-intensive employers who can benefit from the nearby supply of available labor. (City of New Haven Blue Ribbon Commission 1990)

Two years after this report, much of what had been the Winchester plant consisted of piles of rubble surrounded by high fences. Only a small portion of the old factory had

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[4] Official figures are hard to obtain here. This figure was quoted to me by the head of the city-wide PTA. I was also told by several school administrators that significant numbers of drop outs occur in the junior high school years. High school drop out rates, then, fail to account for those students who do not even make it that far.

been refurbished as a development for science-based businesses and renamed Science Park. Most of this newly developed space remained unoccupied. The irony of the situation was only intensified when one of the most visible occupants of Science Park proved to be the New Haven Family Alliance, a non-profit organization devoted to helping dysfunctional families and troubled youth. Neighborhood residents had to ask security guards for permission to enter the former site of their (or their parents), employment in order to visit an organization whose purpose was to help families deal with stress and behaviors brought on by their poverty and underemployment.

Commercial isolation In the 1950s, the area had developed a varied and lively commercial sphere and was home to a dry cleaners, at least two drug stores, one corporate supermarket, several small to medium-sized groceries, a butcher, several luncheonettes, two laundromats, one at least, one dentist's office, doctor's office, hardware store, and auto repair shop. According to long-time residents, besides the Winchester plant the neighborhood also housed a dairy plant, a pharmaceutical distribution company and a popcorn supply house.

Not only constitutive elements of the consumer setting, these latter establishments were large-scale employers of neighborhood residents. Moreover, many local businesses provided crucial services, particularly medical care. Today, the only neighborhood

medical care available is from the MotherCare van, a mobile facility that is parked in front of the local elementary school every Thursday[5].

Stephen Taylor's account of the Newhallville he knew as a child in the 1950s includes a striking example of the interconnection among the community's commercial establishments, the people who owned them and the community in which they operated. Growing up, Stephen lived with his family in a two-family house owned by what he called a "club" of eight men from the neighborhood. The first floor of the Stephen's building was run by this club and used for wedding receptions, parties and the like. Stephen describes one of the members of this club, who also owned the neighborhood's only dry cleaners:

> He used to be one of the two guys who would come around to collect the rent. They [the club] also used to give out scholarships to needy kids, one hundred or two hundred bucks to go to school. That was in sixty-seven, sixty-eight, sixty-nine. After that he opened up the cleaners. He was the only cleaners in Newhallville. He closed down about three years ago, and now it's a storefront church.

According to Stephen, New Haven's political climate was highly charged in the 1960s, and the politics of race were especially volatile. The tension culminated in a series of incidents related to police clashes with local Black Panther leaders and with riots in 1967 in which the federal government deployed the National Guard. It was in this atmosphere that some Newhallville residents began to feel hostile toward white-owned

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[5] Funded and operated by the local Catholic hospital, the MotherCare van provides prenatal, pediatric and general health care, but does not provide services or information related to birth control or abortion.

businesses in the area. Some white business owners, in turn, were disturbed enough by the violence of the riots to move their businesses elsewhere; other businesses were destroyed in the burning and looting that took place. Jackson Rollins, who took me on two walking tours of his childhood neighborhood, remembers the doctor, dentist, hardware store and pharmacy all to have been white-owned. The black-owned enterprises that came in afterward did not replace these businesses in kind: as can be seen today, they are typically small groceries, barbershops, liquor stores and bars. Further, as Winchester and other large employers closed, businesses (such as lunch counters) which catered to factory workers foundered. Finally, an urban revitalization plan (undertaken with limited community support, according to some informants) razed a large stretch of shops in preparation for a modern, new shopping strip. This new commercial center was never built.

Before the late 1960s, the very variety of Newhallville businesses made the neighborhood a place where it was possible to conduct most kinds of daily shopping and buying, and a wide range of consumer activities took place within the community's boundaries. Children were exposed to and took part in these activities in numerous ways. They could accompany adults as they shopped in the area; it is also probable that children undertook a wider variety of independent shopping and consumer activities than they do today. There were more kinds of stores and places of business for them to explore and get to know, and more places of business to which they might be sent on errands -- to pick up the dry cleaning, a hammer, some milk or to see if the car was ready. With a spectrum of businesses located in the community, consumer activity for children and

socialization was integrated into daily life -- in a way that it is not today. Opportunities for children to engage in independent consumer activity are especially sparse.

The informal economy, probably of long-standing importance in this community, continues to shape the consumer setting. Changes in the types of activities dominating the informal economy in Newhallville have further reshaped the neighborhood's social and geographic character. Primary among these changes is the rise of small-business drug entrepreneurs and the violence associated with their work.

Informal economic activity in the consumer environment

At present, fewer than twenty public places of business operate in Newhallville (current commercial locations are noted in chapter 5, figure 5.1 and table 5.1). I stress the term public, because what is known as the underground economy has a strong presence in Newhallville. This underground economy includes, most notoriously, the male-dominated drug trade. However, dressmaking, hairdressing, selling of food and snacks -- activities predominantly conducted by women -- also figure strongly in Newhallville's informal economy. While I did not conduct research on the informal economy in Newhallville, it has recently been estimated that purchases worth $42 billion are made yearly in the U.S. informal sector (Smith 1987). Research needs to be done on children's involvement with and knowledge of the informal economy. Aside from their exploitation as illegal laborers (Bequele and Boyden 1988), and their activities in the illegal drug trade (Bourgois 1995; Williams 1989) little is known about the importance of the informal economic activities in children's consumer experience. These activities may place

children in roles as producers, laborers or consumers and are numerous. Examples encountered during my observations do not provide a complete catalogue but include selling and bartering of backyard grown produce; buying and selling food and snacks; providing and using beauty, hair care or seamstress services.

My observations do suggest that the non-drug, related informal economy may be of particular importance for girls, and that because of its embeddedness in community and even familial relationships, this kind of consumer experience can be fundamentally different from that found in the public commercial sphere. Girls, for instance, frequently get their hair braided, permed and styled with braid-ins, extensions and weaves. While girls are sometimes taken to a beauty parlor, it is more common for them to get their hair done by someone who does hair styling on an informal basis, for pay or barter. Women's hairstyling is often done at home as well.

The most visible portion of the informal economy in Newhallville is the drug trade, and this visibility is both literal and symbolic. Drug dealers, runners and their friends occupy many well-known street corners and houses and can be seen and heard at nearly all times of the day and night. Their presence in the city's and nation's imagination is perhaps even more dramatic, and media portrayals of this industry seem to accrue at a stupefying rate.

The drug industry shapes the consumer environment of Newhallville's children in two fundamental ways. First, consumption and the drug trade are intimately bound up one with the other: it is a truism that many young boys become involved in this lucrative field in order to satisfy consumer desires for flashy clothes, cars, girls and a "phat" life-

style. Children as young as eight or ten years old can earn a few hundred dollars a week operating as lookouts or runners. The second major influence of the drug trade which has transformed children's consumer experience is the violence associated with this business. Drug-associated violence, particularly shootings, affects the whole neighborhood, and children are kept indoors in greater numbers for longer periods of time because of this violence.

The following discussion, which outlines the ways Newhallville children's consumer experience is affected by the drug industry, has as its backdrop the wider implications of the drug trade for the community. The impact of the drug industry and its associated violence undoubtedly affects children's whole lives, not just their consumer experience. A survey of 2,500 New Haven kids found that 40 percent had witnessed a violent crime in the past year, while nearly every 14-year-old in the study knew someone who had been killed (Lytle 1992). The group of children I studied have a wide range of associations with the drug trade and neighborhood violence. Some have a parent who actively deals; others have classmates or friends who work in the drug trade; one child's mother had been killed in a drug-related incident; another's uncle had been killed in crossfire; some children's parents have been through rehab programs. During the period of my research as far I knew, none of the children who were part of my study were themselves actively involved in the drug business. Regardless, both the drug industry and violence play a large part in their everyday lives, and much of the influence shapes their day-to-day consumption.

Involvement in the drug trade The involvement of children and youth in the drug industry is often attributed to consumer imperatives (see, for example, Nightingale 1993). Though consumption could be said to fuel the desire to be part of any lucrative profession from bond trading to movie producing, street-level drug dealers are often singled out as driven by consumer passions of a pathological degree.

Drug dealers have achieved a sort of mythical status in the imaginations not only of the Newhallville community but the nation at large. In the media, they are portrayed in a wide variety of often conflicting ways as violently glamorous, glamorously violent, charismatic, brilliant, crazy, doomed, trapped, visionary and crass -- the list, of course, could go on and on. While for much of the newspaper-reading, television-watching and movie-going public such characters are almost pure fantasy, in Newhallville drug dealers are daily visible on street corners, driving by in flashy cars, dancing in nightclubs and saying goodnight to their children at home. Not all dealers live outrageously ostentatious fantasy lives, but some certainly do. One ex-dealer to whom I spoke told me he had earned over $7,000 a week when still in his early teens. In a heavily publicized federal bust-up of a New Haven drug gang known as the Jungle Boys, high living figured prominently in coverage of the affair. One article (Kovner 1992) featured a photo of gang members aboard a large fishing boat (presumably owned by one or more of them). The boat's ominous name, Terminator, dominates the lower portion of the photo, and conveys a sense of the intoxicating hash of decadence, consumerism, violence and love of media that drug entrepreneurs make of their lives. The same article mentions that two defendants owned a Mercedes and Volvo respectively, and had placed these vehicles on

the train to Orlando, "where they paid cash for tickets to the sold-out NBA All-Star game in February." This obsessive attention paid to detailing these men's consumer practices -- the cash paid for basketball tickets, for instance -- is common in the genre depicting pathological consumerism.

The big-money drug entrepreneurs are considerably older than the ten-year-old whom I knew best. Younger kids like him can certainly make tidy sums as lookouts and runners, and several hundred dollars a week has often been quoted to me as the going rate. In Newhallville it is generally believed that young kids who are involved in the drug trade have caretakers who are not doing their duty. Caretakers' failings may be of two kinds: first, failing to provide for children's daily needs for food, clothing and a reasonably comfortable home (e.g., one that is heated in winter); second, failing to discipline children and set clear limits for them -- that is, failing to prevent kids from entering the drug trade and other aspects of the "street life."

Thus, on the one hand, kids may be impelled to enter the drug business in order to buy things they want -- status clothes, jewelry, cars, even houses. On the other, children may become involved in this industry because their needs are not being provided for at home -- that is, that caretakers' consumption on behalf of children may have broken down or be inadequate. While kids in the first instance may <u>feel</u> that their needs are not being provided for, in Newhallville and New Haven in general, people from minority neighborhoods distinguish between these two major reasons for children's involvement with drug selling. The first is seen as stemming primarily from the child's inappropriate wants and desires, while the second places blame more squarely on caretakers'

inadequacies. These two pressures need not be considered as mutually exclusive and can exist in combination.

It is boys who are most often actively and even forcefully recruited.[6] In one heavily publicized incident in 1992, a boy was shot by a drug-dealing group who for some time had been trying to enlist him despite his repeated refusals to join them. If this was not disturbing enough, the event had a bizarre addendum. The boy's father, who previously was not living with the family, had returned to live at home expressly to protect his son from harm. Media attention paid to the shooting alerted the public welfare office that the boy's parents were cohabiting, and the family's welfare benefits were summarily cut off (Schulster 1992). The family, in return, demanded not a reinstatement of their state benefits, but a public apology from the welfare administration.

Negotiating a landscape of violence For the children I studied, none of whom were involved in buying or selling drugs, the most profound effect of the drug trade has been the re-formation of their landscape. The neighborhood elementary school, for example, does not allow its students outdoors -- even into the school-yard -- during

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[6] Girls do participate as well, and efforts are made to bring them into the business. Tarelle, who lives across the street from a major Newhallville drug dealing corner, would occasionally tell me that older kids who hung across from her home had offered her money. While she was tempted to take the money, she refused. "I'm straight with them," she'd say confidently, meaning that at eleven years old, Tarelle had things between these older teenagers and herself under control. Her confident tone sometimes belied not-so-deeply buried worries; she stated outright that these older kids were probably trying to get her involved in some aspect of the drug trade.

school hours due to fears about stray bullets and other forms of danger. These fears do not appear to be entirely unfounded. One afternoon a boy leaned out a casement window in a school stairwell and proclaimed, "Yep, it's still there," pointing out to me a bullet casing resting on the ledge below the window. Many corners and even whole streets are off-limits to children because of drug-related activity. Because drug-involved groups often mill about near neighborhood groceries, several of these stores are approached by some children only unwillingly. The effects of this re-formation have affected kids' consumer lives in multiple ways.

The most tangible effect is that children may be kept indoors, not only by their schools, but by their caretakers as well. Adults regularly spoke of their fears about the safety of their homes. During one such discussion, I had with "Talia"s grandfather, he reached over behind the chair where I was sitting to heft a loaded shotgun into his hands. One girl's mother told me that she will not vacuum her apartment when she is alone at home because she is afraid someone might come in without her hearing. This woman's fear of intruders has further affected her ability to sleep at night and she prefers to sleep during the day, when she feels more secure.

When kids stay home, they are isolated from other kids, and from the spontaneous and relatively unmonitored social and imaginative play that takes place in children's peer communities, like the !Kung "children's villages" discussed in chapter two. Preliminary fieldwork at a youth center in another New Haven neighborhood pointed to the importance of children's social time together as an opportunity for intense negotiations which were often mediated by exchanges of candy, gum and small toys. These

interactions sometimes took on the aspect of ritual sharing, and because bought goods were central to these activities, they fall within the bounds of children's consumer lives.

When children are confined within their homes, what becomes of their social consumer practices? An increase in television watching is likely, and with that, an increase in certain kinds of consumer knowledge and desires. Leaving the house to go to the store, to run errands or what have you, becomes scary -- especially for girls.

Today, caretakers often comment that they do not want their girls "running in the street," and make strong efforts to monitor and limit their away-from-home time and activities. In contrast, most boys have bikes and are able to go distances of several miles, usually in groups, to visit McDonalds, malls and New Haven's downtown. Caretakers are sometimes ambivalent about boys' mobility and independence, and when Stephen's grandmother gave him a bicycle for his birthday, Stephen's mother, Sandra, said, "I could have died!" While she forbids him to play in the front yard when neither parent is home, Stephen often does so anyway. "At his age, I can't keep him in the back-yard," she told me. "I can't keep him chained in his room. His friends are playing outside, they're riding their bikes -- and the more I keep him inside, the more rebellious he gets."

Aside from worrying that Stephen might inadvertently get into trouble or danger, she is constantly on the alert for signals that her son may have become actively involved in the drug trade, saying:

> Well, you know, I go through pockets when I do the laundry. It's not that I'm being nosy, but there might be something in there that will ruin the clothes, and that's happened. He's had some candy in there and it turned everything red. . . .So I check the pockets. My biggest fear is that one day I'll go through his pockets and find drugs or worse, a weapon. There are

> kids out there a whole lot younger, they're lookouts. Any time I see any money, [I say] "Where did you get this? What for?" When he graduated from fifth grade, he got every award -- except the attendance one -- citizenship, scholarship, uniform. Alison's boyfriend gave him ten dollars because he was proud of him. When I found ten dollars in his pocket I panicked. "What are you doing with money?". . . . We make it crystal clear that if we ever thought or found out that was what he's doing [being involved in drug selling] we'd break his legs. He'd be within an inch of his life. I've never ever physically punished him, but I'd try to kill him.

For children and their caretakers, the random and inexplicable aspects of not only the violence but also who becomes involved in the drug trade make staying out of its way doubly difficult. Sandra is always on the alert for signs that her son Stephen, who it seems to me is highly unlikely to become involved in the drug industry, has done just that. Children daily trace new paths as they cross streets to avoid drug dealers: meanwhile, in New Haven, people are regularly injured and even killed when stray bullets enter their homes.

Conclusion

Newhallville is set apart from most of the rest of New Haven -- and the nation as a whole -- by geographic, social, economic and commercial barriers. These barriers are neither impermeable or inflexible, but as will be seen in following chapters, they seriously constrain the lives of Newhallville children and shape their consumer practices in profound ways. This setting's recent development is connected in particular to economic shifts. In the past, Newhallville was, a very different place.

Stephen Taylor, Sr. grew up in Newhallville and now lives there with his wife and three children (his youngest child, Stephen Jr, was involved in my research). When interviewed about the Newhallville of his childhood, he said:

> I remember as a kid if you rode down Hazel from Dixwell, the [Sealtest] factory was to the left. . . .They packaged milk and ice cream. Inside was a thrift shop, like seconds, or if they made too much of something, they sold it there for less. A lot of times, though, it was thrown out. There was a dumpster out back and there would be all this ice cream in there and we used to jump the fence. We knew that he was going to throw it out at five o'clock, so we'd go over there at about five-fifteen, and there'd be all this ice cream in there. "You get out of there!" he'd yell, and we'd run out with five or six half-gallons. And you could buy milk there cheaper. There used to be this real gigantic milk bottle that was a water tower in the shape of a milk bottle. Every year I remember the guy used to go up there and paint the milk bottle. They were trying to turn that place into an elderly home or something, and I think they took the milk bottle down. . . . New Haven used to be a manufacturing town. The problem is it has gone from a manufacturing town to whatever it's going to be but nobody knows. There was a gun factory, a car radiator factory, a brewing company, a meat-packing company, two dairy companies. This was a big manufacturing, place and that's why the family was so great here. Families worked together, you used to work with these people and then buy their products in the store. At that time Yale started employing people more -- in the sixties, seventies.

Stephen Taylor ties the presence of a manufacturing base in New Haven and in Newhallville to the strength of family in the community. Not only does he stress the strength within families, but in saying that "you used to work with these people and then buy their products in the store," Stephen also draws an image of different families relating to each other in multiple ways, through contact in business, as customers and as coworkers.

In this manufacturing-based community, there was also a cyclical continuity, captured in Stephen Taylor's memory of the yearly painting of the huge milk bottle atop the Sealtest factory. In Stephen's recollection this bottle is removed after the factory has closed and efforts are being made to change the building into a home for the elderly -- an institution that itself signifies a loss of family cohesion and continuity.

Perhaps significantly, this account links the demise of the manufacturing base and Yale's increasing dominance of the employment sphere to an implied lack of community and family solidarity today. High levels of ambivalence exist in Newhallville regarding the community's relationship to the university. Stephen Taylor's description of Newhallville and its changes seems to tie the university's importance as an employer to a concomitant disintegration of the community, a connection that is not wholly surprising.

The recent burgeoning of the drug trade in the Newhallville environment stems not primarily from out-of-control consumer desires, but from the neighborhood's changing social reproductive milieu: loss of jobs, deterioration of schools and changes in government enforcement of drug laws. The appeal of the drug trade is not solely driven by the pull of a fantasy-glamour lifestyle: for the majority of street dealers -- who do not earn the fabulous sums their more notorious counterparts rake in -- the drug trade is perhaps their single avenue of available employment. In the summer of 1992, it was rumored that 205 people applied for a single job at a local McDonald's.

The connection between the drug trade and employment opportunity in New Haven has been explicitly recognized by one grass-roots organization, Elm City Nation. This organization, created by and for "inner city" youth, many of whom are or have been

involved in the drug industry, has as one of its aims the creation of economic alternatives to the drug trade. Using connections in the apparel industry, the group has also made an overt connection between the importance of controlling production for local economic growth. The group has begun to manufacture and sell a clothing line which includes hooded sweatshirts ("hoodies"), leather coats, accessories and other goods. This endeavor has not been able to entirely break free of current circumstance, however, and the garments are cut and sewed in Brooklyn, rather than in local shops (few of which exist in New Haven). In addition, the group has resurrected a yearly Black Expo (once one of the biggest annual events in the black community), a weekend-long exposition of black -owned businesses held in the New Haven armory.

Elm City Nation's economic alternatives have become eminently consumerist ones. Recognizing that consumption is central to economic survival, this organization has consistently sought to empower the black community in all aspects of consumption and production. Rather than decrying the consumer impulses of black youth, the organization has endeavored instead to ensure that the benefits and profits of African American consumption accrue to their own community. The Elm City Nation solution reflects, as well, not just the influence of Malcolm X's advice to the black community, but structural changes in local and global economies as well. Primary among these changes has been the transition from a production-based economy (the Winchester factory) to an economy dominated by service provision (direct marketing, catalogue sales and infomercials).

The way in which Newhallville residents understand and conduct their own consumption differs profoundly from the way it is portrayed and thought about in the media, or among the more commonly studied white middle class. Elm City Nation's solution to the problematic consumption and economic conditions of African American youth, crafted by these young people themselves, is unlike those generally proposed by the outside community. This solution is at once radical and retrograde; while refusing to accept the view that black consumption is pathological, consumption itself, as a problematic and contradictory undertaking, is not subjected to scrutiny.

The 1992 Black Expo sponsored by Elm City Nation arranged booths and presenters in formations that resembled city blocks divided by grid-like aisles serving as streets. This reconstituted city, inhabited almost exclusively by minority shoppers and business -people was a kind of through-the-looking-glass representation of Newhallville and New Haven's other black neighborhoods. Here, black consumers were not evaluated against hegemonic, white-middle class image. The commodities on offer reflected a decidedly black aesthetic that again-made-little, if any, reference to outside dominating discourse. In this newly configured landscape the street names posted to identify seller's aisles memorialized black heroes: Nelson Mandela Avenue and Angela Davis Way.

Class, ethnicity, race and age all have deep influence on the way in which individuals engage with and practice consumption. People's own experiences are widely variable; history and political economy, as embodied in socially created spaces, are one of the important ways in which consumption experience is shaped. If the social geography of Newhallville were more like that imagined inside the New Haven Armory

in 1992, consumption as a social process and problem might not be that different over-all: it would still bear the hallmarks of a commodity-based, capitalist political economy. But consumption for poor and working class, black kids would be different in such a place, as would their lives as a whole.

CHAPTER 4

CONSUMPTION IN EVERYDAY LIFE

The bulk of this dissertation examines specific issues and events in the consumer world and lives of the Newhallville children whom I studied. The necessary result of this approach is a fragmented view of both the children themselves and what they do. To partially counter this fragmentation, this chapter's main focus is upon three girls whom I came to know particularly well: Tionna and her friends Natalia and Asia. The chapter is organized as a roughly chronological series of incidents and events, beginning with one of my first meetings with Tionna and ending with events taking place after my fieldwork had formally ended. My purpose is to present aspects of these girls' lives in order to cast some light upon the lives of Newhallville children in general, providing a multifaceted and detailed view of what life is like for Newhallville children, and the ways in which consumption is integrated into their daily experience.

Tionna, Natalia and Asia

Tionna's great-grandmother Ella had been her primary caretaker since birth. Tionna's grandmother Celia was also living in the same household. The family was neither especially well off nor especially poor in comparison to other Newhallville residents: Ella owned the family's home, paying for the mortgage, property taxes, insurance, heat and utilities on her retirement income. After working for more than forty years in the cafeteria of the local hospital, Ella retired at age 70 due to knee trouble.

Celia, Ella's daughter, was in her early fifties, and receives state aid for her own and Tionna's support.

Tionna was nine years old when I met her. She was tall for her age, with a sweet, intelligent face that she could transform into a mask of baleful reproach in an instant. Her gait was a shambling and slightly off-balance, as if she were being pulled to the side by some sort of weight or absence. And there was a large absence in her life: the year before we met, Tionna's mother was shot and killed. One afternoon early in my fieldwork, I walked Tionna home and she told me of her mother's death in a matter-of-fact, almost distant manner, saying, "My mother said she'd be there for my birthday but things didn't work out like that." She was the only child in the study to have lost a parent to a violent death, yet many of the others had lost close relatives in a similar manner, to AIDS or to the penal system.

Natalia, one of Tionna's close friends, had the stick-thin figure of a girl who has just shot into puberty. She lived around the corner from Tionna with her older brother and her maternal grandparents. Natalia's mother lived only a few blocks away, with her boyfriend, and Natalia moved back and forth between these two homes. She had a particular talent for managing to be away from her grandparents' home when it was time to go to church -- where her grandmother was pastor and her grandfather a deacon -- on Sunday mornings and Thursday evenings. Natalia's well-timed absences contributed to her reputation for being a little wild and unmanageable. Never someone to walk when she can run, the small frame house her grandparents own often reverberated from the

force of Natalia's feet pounding on the stairs as she dashed up to answer the phone or down to get the door.

Natalia's cousin Asia had recently moved in next door. Asia's father had died the year before from heart trouble, and Asia's mother, deeply depressed, gave up the family's home and was unable to work for several months. Asia, her mother and brother shared a two-bedroom apartment with Asia's aunt and uncle. Unlike Natalia and Tionna, who attended the local elementary school, Asia went to a parochial school in another neighborhood. She had a dry, ironic sense of humor, and often made up tales, telling them to friends with great drama lighting up her round face and almond-shaped eyes.

The three girls spent time together nearly every day, sitting on their stoops, wandering the neighborhood, playing, running errands and on occasion, going downtown. Their caretakers all knew and trusted each other, telling me that they are "good people," and when one girl was with the family of the others, caretakers knew they did not have to worry about where the girls were or wait watchfully for them to return home. These girls' friendships, though strong, also seemed to proceed in cycles, with Tionna sometimes complaining about Asia, Natalia complaining about Tionna, Asia complaining about one or the other of the girls. They would take breaks from each other's company, sometimes for weeks at a time, spending time with other kids instead and pointedly ignoring the others. Nevertheless, overall their friendship endured during the time I lived in New Haven, and I found them in each other's company more often than not.

At home

August, 1992. When I arrived for an impromptu visit with Tionna, she came to the door braiding her hair as she walked. Her grandmother Celia was in the dim bedroom that they share, sitting atop the chenille bed spread, and she said she was going to get back into bed as soon as Tionna was done doing her hair. Celia did not feel well, and said she'd been running a fever all week. It was time, she said, to do some back-to-school shopping for Tionna; she was hoping to get a ride out to K-Mart. The store was several miles away and, while accessible by bus, the route is inconvenient and time-consuming.

Tionna spied a glazed donut lying on a paper napkin on top of the bureau. "Ma, is that your donut?" Tionna asked her grandmother. "Yes," Celia answered, and Tionna intoned "I want one..." "Well they're your grandmother's donuts," Celia said (Tionna often calls her grandmother "Ma" and her great-grandmother "Grandma"). "You have to ask her if you can have one." Either Tionna did not want to ask or Celia decided she did not need the whole donut because she quickly called Tionna back and told her she could eat half. "I won't be able to eat the whole thing, anyway," she said gruffly.

* * *

In a way, Tionna and Celia made up a separate household that coexisted with Ella in her home. Tionna and Celia shared a room, and a bed as well, and when at home, they generally kept to their small room. There was some tension between Celia and Tionna on the one hand and Ella on the other, especially regarding the day-to-day tasks of raising Tionna and maintaining the house. Ella complained that Celia did not want her to have

any say-so in Tionna's upbringing, but added that Tionna's mother, before her death, had specifically asked Ella to take care of the little girl. Ella complained as well that neither her daughter nor great-granddaughter helped her to keep the house clean, something Ella was no longer able to do as well as she would have liked. These tensions had given rise to a somewhat divided household, one where resources such as space and food seemed to be at times partitioned off, as in the case of Ella's donuts or Celia and Tionna's room. The family rarely ate together; Ella often declared that she was tired of cooking after fifty-odd years in the kitchen. She was overweight besides, and because she had heart trouble she was constantly battling to lose a few pounds, a task made more difficult because of a recent double knee replacement. Dinner was sometimes nothing more than a bowl of cereal -- not because the family was too poor or even too disorganized to rustle up something more elaborate, but because none of the three cared to make the effort.

Like many of the older generation in Newhallville, Ella had roots in the rural South, where she grew up. Discipline in families was strict and swift and physical. Mothers were obeyed unconditionally, and Ella herself had a mother who was deeply imposing. Ella had to sneak out to get married, pretending she was just going into town; she had her best dress on and her mother told her to go upstairs and change it, which she did. Ella was so afraid of her mother's reaction to the clandestine marriage that she spent a month continuing to live at home as if nothing had happened.

When Ella talked about "kids today" the theme was likely to be that they had no respect. "When I was a girl," she said, "if my mother said she didn't have it, I didn't get it, and that was it! Today you say "I don't have it" and they'll go out and get it

somewhere else. We used to get five pennies together and we would buy the world with those pennies! 'I'll buy a house with this one...' That was in the days where gum was one penny a stick. Kids today ask for a dollar! Tionna asks for two or three dollars. 'What are you going to do with that much money?' I ask her."

The imperatives of consumption have entered and influenced Newhallville households in a variety of ways. Ella talks about her frustrations in what she sees as younger people's demands for money. Her comments reflect, as well, a sense that kids' desires are out of control. Today, unlike when Ella was young, a caretaker's unequivocal "no" is not the final word. "Today you say 'I don't have it' and they'll go out and get it somewhere else," she said. This statement reflects sentiments common among the older generation in Newhallville. Focused on children's lack of respect, or their wilfulness, or the belief that they would do anything to get what they want if you do not give it to them, these statements were loaded with meaning: the world today is in disorder; children are out of control; kids' values are off-kilter. These intergenerational tensions are not endemic only to communities such as Newhallville; common complaints can be found in homes with well-to-do residents as well.

Children are well aware of what their elders and caretakers think. Tionna knows that her great-grandmother thinks she is wasteful and greedy about money, but she also knows that today she cannot even pretend to buy the world with five pennies as Ella did when she was a child in rural Alabama. It is true that children today in Newhallville are likely to have more and to want more and to feel entitled to more than their parents or grandparents when they were young. The conflict in Newhallville -- and perhaps in the

society at large -- is that children's lack of self-control or values are often blamed for this, rather than larger forces at work. This dynamic creates a great deal of tension and conflict, particularly among household members -- even over something as apparently insignificant as a glazed donut.

Living on the margins

One afternoon as I was just getting to know Tionna and Natalia, the two girls accompanied me part of the way home. A hill separates Newhallville from the neighborhood where I lived during most of my fieldwork. Prospect Street runs along the ridge of this hill and is lined with mansions of grand proportions. This street, (which one man in Chapter One as the "DMZ") is only two blocks away from Winchester Avenue, Newhallville's main thoroughfare, now lined with boarded up store fronts and often thronged with young people vending drugs.

Out of the blue, Tionna told me that a man who died the day before in a motorcycle accident was a friend of her cousin's boyfriend. 'Talia also told me she had recently found out that a friend of her father's had died a few months ago. Standing on the corner of Prospect, Tionna and 'Talia and I somehow got into talking about reading the paper. Tionna said that she reads the funny papers and then looks to see who has died. 'Talia said the same thing. I found this sad, and striking. Tionna was describing the injuries that had happened to the motorcyclist, saying he died because his arm was crushed and "his stomach bust open." Here she grimaced and had no words, to describe

the severity of the injuries, but waved her arms over her stomach. "When your stomach is bust open like that," 'Talia said "they can't stitch it up, can they?"

There was a traffic light at the intersection where we were standing, and occasionally one of the girls would look at the people in the cars as they went by. "Wass up?!" they'd roar. "What are you looking at, you white people?" Tionna yelled once. "Wass up? Wass up??" They yelled again and again, mischievously and in unison.

* * *

Early in our acquaintance, themes which consistently recurred in these girls' interactions with me were evident. Perhaps most dramatic is their deep concern with death, and its everyday presence in their lives -- underscored by their saying the first thing they look at in the newspaper are the obituaries "to see who died." Their discomfort, intermixed with excitement, with standing on the community dividing line (on the Newhallville side of Prospect Street) surfaced as they sassed and challenged the passing cars. Their cries of "Wass up?", something they would say to each other, or to someone they knew from the neighborhood, contrast lexically and grammatically with Tionna's carefully articulated "What are you looking at, you white people?" Perhaps feeling a little out of place and conspicuous, she asserts her right to be where she is and questions the "white people" who she thinks have taken notice of her, a black girl. It seems to be part of the dynamic that she has actually called this notice to herself by yelling "Wass up?" -- and then takes a confrontational stance toward those who (potentially) respond to her. This sort of discomfort surfaced dramatically any time the kids ventured off their territory, and particularly when downtown in certain stores where

they felt they were being unfairly singled out for observation, even being followed around.

Summer jobs and sexual politics

Tionna did not receive a regular allowance, but her grandmother provided her with pocket money when she needed it. Occasionally, if Tionna was going to go downtown with a friend, her grandmother might give her ten dollars to spend. During the summer of 1992 Tionna and Natalia had a job dropping off Natalia's young niece and nephew to the babysitter in the morning and then picking them up again to take them home in the afternoon. Natalia's older brother was the father of the two children, and worked in a local hair salon. He gave the girls five dollars a week for doing this chore and they split the money. It seemed to me that aside from the money, the girls really enjoyed this job because it meant pushing two babies along in a stroller and being able to boss and take care of these younger children who were about one-and-a-half and two-and-a-half years old.

One day, when we were dropping the two younger children off, a man in his twenties detached himself from a group near the house and struck up a conversation with me. Within a few minutes he was asking for my phone number. At that moment 'Talia came up behind me and said "I think I'm ready to go," deftly cutting the interaction short. "He's probably a drug dealer," Talia said with assurance as we walked away. "He probably rapes little girls," she added.

The girls had just been paid by 'Talia's brother, who had given them fifteen dollars, eight for her and seven for Tionna. 'Talia said she'd been using the money to help pay for camp. Tionna said she could just spend the money on whatever she wanted. When I asked her what she bought with it she said "I don't know. Food." "What kind of food?" "I don't know. Just things to eat!"

The girls began talking about someone who had died, a classmate's grandmother. Their friend had missed a few days of school and when she had come back was acting short tempered and "babyish." The conversation turned to what would happen if various people in the girls' families died. "If my grandmother died, I'd stay with my great-grandmother," Tionna said matter of factly, "and if she died I'd have to find my way to Augusta, Georgia." "Maybe you could stay with me!" 'Talia suggested, then went on, "I wouldn't want to go into foster care, because the foster parents sometimes rape the kids." As we continued on our walk, 'Talia's sandal came unglued from the sole and she walked along dragging her foot so the sole wouldn't flap against the broken and glass-glittered cement.

After a few minutes Tionna said, "I think men go after little kids because they can't talk, they can't say anything, because they're little." 'Talia didn't think about this very long. "They go after big kids too," she replied with sureness. "And women too."

* * *

Talia's vision of the lifelong threat of rape, and the matter-of-fact way in which she delivers this vision, is chilling. The girls' heightened awareness of sexual danger, evident in their everyday conversations about men "who rape little girls" and the way

these men exploit young children "because they can't say anything because they're little" surfaced again and again, in varying forms, during the time I spent with them.

These girls find many ways to speak about their fears and frustrations, and as will be seen later in this chapter, the consumer sphere is one medium they turn to this purpose. The consumer lives of these and other Newhallville girls are entwined with their emergent sexual awareness in multiple ways, and serve not only as a way for them to articulate a sense of sexual danger, but also as a wellspring of fantasies about "the man of my dreams," dating, and romance: shopping and roving New Haven's downtown doubles as a sort of fishing expedition for "slammin'" boys.

'Talia's use of her babysitting money to help pay for camp was not unusual. The Newhallville children I knew were expected to spend part of their pocket money on things they needed -- underwear, socks, barrettes -- or to help pay for special activities like camp. In these and other ways, kids are made acutely aware of the costliness of their maintenance, and their responsibilities as members of families and the extended kin group. This awareness lays the foundation for an experience of consumption that is deeply social, and where individual needs and desires must always be measured and evaluated in reference to those of others.

Children's sense of endangerment makes them acutely aware of how much they depend on their kin and kin networks. Children do not always view themselves as the endangered ones; on several occasions, and with seemingly no connection to conversations or events taking place, children spontaneously launched into discussions of what they would do if their mothers died, or if someone was trying to hurt their mother.

Children's fierce protectiveness of their mothers was evident in these discussions which included detailed descriptions of how they would hurt or kill threatening individuals by grabbing guns, knives or any weapon close at hand. At the same time, children also mentally laid escape routes should their present situations fail them, as did Tionna when she said "If my grandmother died, I'd stay with my great-grandmother, and if she died I'd have to find my way to Augusta, Georgia." Tionna's assumption seems to be that if both her grandmother and great-grandmother died, she would be alone, and faced with the prospect of making her way by herself to Augusta Georgia, where a number of her great-grandmother's relatives live.

Birthdays

July 17, 1992 was Natalia's tenth birthday, and on that same day her mother moved into a new apartment two blocks from her previous one. Natalia invited me to come to her birthday party. Natalia's mother had bought her an ice cream cake which was in the freezer at Natalia's grandparents' house, about four blocks "down the hill" from Natasha's mother's new home. The girls and I walked through the July heat to her grandparents' home to get the cake.

Natalia went into her grandparent's house alone while Asia, who lives next door, waited with me and Tionna on her shady front porch. Several minutes later Natasha came bursting through her grandparents' front door holding her birthday cake in its box and running full speed. "Asia, can you put this in your freezer?" 'Talia asked, her voice at once squeaky and breathless. 'Talia's brother, who doesn't even like ice cream cake,

had been threatening to take a slice before the party began. Asia took the cake upstairs to her apartment and 'Talia went back to her grandfather's house.

She came hurtling out of the house again, followed by her grandfather who was visibly angry. He took her over his knee on the front porch, though he did not seem to spank or hit her. Throughout, 'Talia, furious, remained silent. Asia, Tionna and I watched from the safety of the porch, the girls trying to tell me about Talia's grandfather. They slipped me tidbits of information from the sides of their mouths, so that 'Talia's grandfather, if he happened to look over, would not see them talking. When 'Talia was released she joined us on Asia's porch. The ten-year-old girl birthday girl was a vibrating tower of anger. I asked her how she felt, and her response was to wither me with a burning glance. Asia and Tionna laughed the whole thing off and made fun of 'Talia.

We collected the cake and some paper plates and took it to the apartment out of which 'Talia's mother was moving. The large, second floor apartment was nearly empty, holding only a legless couch and clothes in piles. 'Talia's mother had not expected her daughter and entourage to arrive there and had already sent the dishes and flatware to the new apartment. We had no forks to eat the cake with, though there was a knife to cut it. 'Talia's mother continued packing and moving while the party was going on. She did stop to bring the cake out, and we sang "Happy Birthday" to 'Talia in as many keys as there were people. Natalia asked what she should wish for, and her cousin said "Just wish for a million dollars." Putting slices of melting ice cream cake onto the paper plates, we ate them with our hands.

* * *

'Talia's party was probably not supposed to be the impromptu, disorganized event it turned out to be. Though Talia's mother was moving on the day of her daughter's birthday and was mostly unavailable for celebrating, she had gone out of her way to order an $18 birthday cake for Natalia and had picked it up downtown the day before. My guess is that the family had planned a small gathering for that evening, after the move was over, in the home of Natalia's grandparents -- where the cake was being stored. Whatever her reasons were -- and Natalia never explained, beyond the problem that her brother was threatening to eat the cake before it was time -- Natalia took matters into her own hands, removing the cake from her grandparents' home and taking it to her mother's former apartment. While Natalia's mother was unprepared to have the party there she did not object to what Natalia had done or tell her to go back with the cake to her grandparents' house.

This was the single birthday party I attended during my time in Newhallville: birthday parties were rarely held for these children.[1] Gifts were few as well: Cherie, on her tenth birthday, received three gifts: a jumprope and a bingo game (carefully wrapped in brown paper from a grocery bag) from her mother, and an inexpensive plastic toy from her grandmother. Her father, who lives in another town, was supposed to have taken her to buy school uniforms as a birthday gift, but never did. Cherie did not have a birthday party, either with family or friends, though her mother made her a chocolate cake, which Cherie picked out.

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[1]A similar lack of children's birthday parties has been noted in a Massachusetts community much like Newhallville (Jeffers, 1977).

Children I knew in Newhallville did not exchange birthday or Christmas gifts with each other (neither did they exchange cards). While these children may not have expected birthday parties, this does not mean they did not wish for them. Toward the end of my fieldwork time I had a slumber party for Natalia, and on Tionna's birthday took her and several friends to the movies. These parties were not my idea, but the result of long, repeated pressure from the girls themselves. While the celebration of a birthday was certainly an important element of these parties, by far the most important ingredient was the celebration itself, which had little birthday related content. The girls did not talk about the birthday girl's age, though some did give birthday hits, punching her once for each year and once more for good luck. We did not sing "Happy Birthday" at these gatherings. As I found was often the case, the girls asked for very little, and demanded even less.

The cucumber stand

One hot July afternoon, I found Tionna and her friend Tiffany, who lives two doors away, acting as proprietors of a cucumber stand. They had a table set up in front of Tiffany's house and were selling cucumbers that Tiffany had grown in her backyard. They had piled the cucumbers on paper towels and taped signs to the edge of the table saying "Cucumbers, fresh and clean" and another stating the price of the large ones as forty cents, small ones a quarter.

Some time later Tionna came out with a quite large cucumber and they tried to figure out what the price should be. Tionna suggested sixty cents. Tiffany wondered if it

should be seventy-five. Then, with authority Tionna announced the price should be fifty cents because then they could split it easier and wouldn't have to wait for some change. Tiffany told me the woman next door had given them a dollar to get their business started. Tiffany's grandmother came by and bought a large cucumber, putting fifty, rather than forty, cents into the pot. The kids would occasionally count the money and divide it into two equal piles, since they were planning to split the money equally. They ended up with each having about a dollar seventy-five.

Later that afternoon, my own next door neighbor's child -- about five years old -- had set up a lemonade stand on the walkway to her home. The neighborhood where I lived at the time (occupying a spare bedroom in my godparents' home) is populated by Yale professors, doctors, lawyers -- well-off professional people, or those, like these neighbors, who are graduate students on their way to professional careers. "I think she does it just so she can meet people," her mother said. The girl had been provided with a large bowl full of change and was charging a sliding scale for the cups of lemonade. As he passed by and saw the girl, a child psychiatrist who lived down the street stopped at the stand and began grilling the five-year-old proprietor about her "return on investment" and "reinvestment of capital."

* * *

My neighbor's observation about her child's motivation for setting up her lemonade stand -- that she wanted "to meet people" stands in contrast to the psychiatrist's interest in educating the girl in business finance. Tionna and Tiffany likewise had highly social reasons for setting up their cucumber stand. For one, it provided them a legitimate

reason to stay outside and talk to people with whom they otherwise would have no reason to communicate. For another, it made them objects of attention -- and usually praise. Passersby, even if they did not buy, usually made comments such as "Isn't that nice!" or "Those are good looking cucumbers." It offered, of course, the opportunity to make some money, but it is interesting to note that the girls' concern with sharing whatever money they generated seemed to supersede their pursuit of high prices, and they decided to price the largest cucumber at fifty cents rather than seventy-five because it was an amount easily divided equally between the two.

Television

While the girls were minding their cucumber stand I asked Tionna about the television programs she watches. She did her sassy act for a while, saying "I don't know," in a bratty, challenging way when I'd ask her about shows she watches and when they're on. Eventually, she took the pad from me and started writing them down herself. Her list is not particularly long and includes only 11 shows; even during the summer, a period in which she might be expected to watch a lot of television because of increased free time, especially during the day, she includes only two daytime shows:

MTV Raps	daytime	MTV
Video Soul	daytime	BET
Living Color	night 8:30	61
Rachel Gunn, R.N.	night 8 or 9	61
Who's the Boss?	night	20
Bill Cosby	day/night 5 & 6	20
Growing Pains	night	20
Full House	nighttime	?
Family Matters	nighttime	61

TGIF	nighttime	61
Step by Step	nighttime	61

* * *

With three televisions in her home, one or more of which was nearly always on, Tionna had plenty of opportunity to watch all kinds of programs. Her great-grandmother had a penchant for daytime talk shows like Oprah and Sally because, as Ella herself said, "I like to watch people being stupid!" Whether Tionna actually watched much television was unclear, and it always seemed to me that she spent a great deal of her free time sleeping. There were programs she liked and watched fairly regularly; all of them evening shows. Like most Newhallville families I knew, Tionna's family imposed few rules on her watching, the primary one being that she had to finish her homework before watching television. The lack of rules did not mean, however, that Tionna was glued to the set four hours a day.[2] She was much more interested in spending time with her friends, usually outside, or often playing when inside. Even when watching TV, Tionna engaged in a variety of activities simultaneously -- from braiding her hair (or her dolls' hair) to talking on the phone with friends.

School exchange

Being at school provides children with a wide range of experiences, and important among them is being around lots of other kids all day long. They exchange information

[2]In contrast, middle class parents whom I interviewed were in several cases able to exactly state how much television per day or week their children watched. This specificity was the result of highly structured and enforced television-watching rules.

about styles and fashions in dance, music, clothes, hair, jewelry, television, and toys; they gossip about each other and each other's families. They engage in complex trading and sharing and even selling interactions, often clandestinely. Early in Tionna's fifth grade year, her classmate Stephen sparked a gimp craze and sold lengths of the colored, plastic cord to most children in the room. At nearly every time of day kids were busily weaving the bright gimp into key chains or necklaces, until Lucy Aslan, their teacher, had to ban it except for certain approved times.

One afternoon, during an art class, Tionna, Cherie and I fell into conversation about what they wanted for Christmas. "What about that ice cream maker, do you want that?" Cherie asked Tionna. Cherie continued, "My mother said that the one they make now isn't that good. The one they used to have is what they should come out with now." Tionna said in the voice of experience, "I had it, and I made that ice cream with it and it was corny so I took it back." She then started describing another thing she wanted, and thought neither she nor Cherie knew the name of it, but they both knew what they were talking about. "It's like a book bag," Tionna told me, "but you wear it on the front. You can feel the baby kicking and then you open it and you see if you got twins or triplets or quadruples." "You can feel what it was like when your mother was pregnant?" the art teacher asked them. "Well, not really," Tionna answered. "So this thing isn't very realistic?" I asked. The kids looked at me rather blankly, wondering, I think, what I was getting at. "I mean, is it really like being pregnant?" "No!" They both shouted. "Why?" I asked them. "Because," answered Tionna, as if she were speaking to the village idiot, "you can unzip it and zip it up again and unzip it and zip it up again and take the baby out

and put it in. You can't open up your stomach and take the baby out and put it back and take it out and put it back."

* * *

The toy the girls were discussing had been the object of some heated debate in the public arena, as certain toys always are. A sort of pouch worn on the stomach to simulate the look of pregnancy, it contains baby dolls that can be activated to make movements and the wearer can feel the baby moving, as a pregnant woman might. There were fears expressed that kids would get the wrong idea about what pregnancy really is -- that it is removable like the pouch, or that giving birth is like opening up a velcro flap. It is possible that such misunderstandings might arise among very young children: Tionna's pointed remarks show she was, however, in no danger of entertaining such a misunderstanding. While she found the toy interesting, and might even have admitted to wanting one, she had no illusions that the strap-on pouch is anything like a real pregnancy.

Throughout the school day children constantly discuss clothes, toys, and other products. They say what they like and why, what is cool, what is "corny," and in so doing express something of who they are both separately and together. They give each other consumer information, as did Tionna in telling Cherie about taking back the ice cream maker. They also sometimes supply each other with coveted items -- for a price -- as Stephen did with the gimp.

School lunch

Tionna got up from the lunch table, remembering that she had a bag of cookies up in the classroom, and ran up to get them. She came back down with the cookies -- a package of chocolate chip, two packages of wafer cookies, and one of Nutter Butters. She had bought them at Bob's (a local corner store) the other day with her grandmother. She said I could have some chocolate chip ones. She also let some other kids have them -- handing them out in a casual fashion to those sitting near her. She gave the last three cookies in the pack to Carlos, who was sitting next to me.

Stephen was also sharing his homemade M&M-studded cookies, giving one to the person next to him and one to 'Talia, and then handing me the baggie which now held only broken pieces and crumbs and telling me I could have the rest. Teyvon, who was eternally hungry, was looking downhearted because nobody had given him any cookies. I took a large crumb for myself from the baggie Stephen had given me, then I gave Teyvon the rest.

* * *

Lunch time was always a period of intense interaction among the kids. Trading portions of school lunch, homemade lunches, or cadging money to buy cookies -- which the "lunch ladies" (as the cafeteria workers are called) sell for 25 cents the pack of three -- were activities conducted in a fevered pitch that often rivals that found on the trading floor of the New York Stock Exchange.

The intensity of the lunch period was heightened by the fact that this half hour was the children's only free time during the day. Fear of drug-related violence had lead

the school's principal to keep students indoors from the first morning bell until afternoon dismissal. There was no recess period -- that is, neither indoor nor outdoor playtime -- and the gym period, which children attended two or three times a week, was likewise conducted inside. In order to keep the lunchroom chaos to a simmer, classes of children waiting to join the cafeteria line had to sit at their tables with their hands folded on the table and lay their heads down on top of their hands. They were not allowed to talk. Lunch periods were one half-hour long; kids sometimes waited as long as 20 minutes to get their food, which left them with only ten minutes to sit and eat their meal. Sometimes it seems as if kids had no sooner taken their seats at the table with their lunch tray when the school's security guard began pushing the rolling garbage can past the table telling students to hurry up, finish eating and throw away their remains.

Exchange episodes, such as the one above with Tionna, Stephen, and the distribution of cookies, took place daily at lunch. Having something to give -- and something that other children want -- invested Tionna and Stephen with great power: they meted out gifts to a select few among the many who were loudly clamoring, or quietly eyeing the treasure. This was sometimes done with an air of careless largesse, as if the receiver was almost invisible; at other times, those who receive were chosen with elaborate care, and relationships were often cemented or celebrated through exchanges of particularly prized foods.

Another element to the lunch-time exchange scene was the content and quality of the school lunches served. The fifth graders received lunches the same size as first graders, and were often still hungry after eating. Most children told me they did not like

these lunches in the first place. Meals were sometimes made up of a curious -- if not bizarre -- combination of items. The day of the cookie exchange lunch consisted of a scoop of tuna salad, a pile of cut up iceberg lettuce, peanut butter and jelly between graham crackers (this item wrapped in a printed foil so it looked like it might be an ice cream sandwich, albeit a small one), and a "wafer cookie." Some kids had muffins too, which looked as if they might have been left over from breakfast.

Kids very often refused to eat all or part of the lunch served; if they were willing to eat part of it (for instance the peanut butter and jelly on graham crackers) they would barter vigorously to get someone else's portion of that item and "Are you going to eat that?" was a phrase often repeated throughout lunch time, in concert with "Can I have your milk?" or "Do you want your pizza?" The negotiation of relationships between children lay clear on the face of these interactions and I have seen children pointedly dump uneaten portions of their lunches -- coveted by others at their table -- into the garbage. As a gesture of rejection, such an action could hardly be more decisive.

It was in these interactions with each other that I saw children's desires most clearly expressed. It was the only situation where kids consistently made requests of other people: they wheedled, begged and pushed to get what they wanted. This direct expression of their wants may have been made possible, in part, because they were among their own; such begging and pushing was rarely tolerated by their elders. In addition, because the lunch was provided to them by the relatively anonymous school cafeteria, it did not enter their lives already enmeshed in the complicated world of obligation and reciprocity that family meals, for instance, were likely to embody. These

wants, their expression, and the negotiations taking place between children were multifaceted and ranged in emotional tenor from lighthearted and teasing to crabby to plain mean and angry. Despite the range and complexity of all that went on in the lunchroom, I never saw kids get out of hand in regard to trading food, giving it away, or receiving it as a gift. Their desires, so openly expressed, nevertheless remained contained and controlled overall.

Going downtown

A couple of weeks before Christmas I took Tionna and Natalia shopping. Though the event was engineered by me -- I provided the money and opportunity to make the trip -- the girls ran the show. A detailed account of Tionna and Natalia's trip provides a view of how highly complex an afternoon downtown was for these children. By this time, Tionna and 'Talia were allowed to go downtown by themselves, and did so regularly.

* * *

The second we walked out of Tionna's house, she pulled out a tube of lipstick which belonged to Natalia. They both stopped to put the lipstick on, looking at their faces in the side view mirrors of parked cars, and taking quite a bit of time getting it on just right. None of their caretakers want them wearing makeup. As we walked along Prospect street toward downtown they began making up a song to the tune of "Jingle Bells" that goes like this: "Mario, Mario, raped Barbie all day long/ Batman tried to save the day but Luigi got her anyway!" (Luigi and Mario are Nintendo video game characters.) Then they made up a sort of rap to sing as we walked, a call and response

chant they traded off singing, "Hey hey, hey hey, I'm walking too fast now I got some cramps, I'm walking too fast so I got some cramps." This changed and evolved into several different variations, all of them loud and interspersed with squawks and giggles.

Entering the mall, the girls spotted a boy from their class and chased after him calling his name. He was on the escalator going up to the second floor and they were hot on his heels, but they lost sight of him. I suggested going to the food court to make a game plan, but I quickly learned that the game plan was that there was no game plan, except to spot some cute boys and follow them.

Sitting at a table in the second-floor food court, the girls watched closely as three boys wandered through and sat by the windows overlooking the town green. "I dare you to go over and talk to them and I ain't comin'," Tionna said to Natalia. "They ugly!" Natalia shot back. "Well one is a yellow light," Tionna answered, appraising them. Tionna explained to me that a "green light" is an ugly boy, a "yellow light" is a medium-looking one, and a "red light" is cute.

A man standing near us was wearing a baseball jacket with a complex design embroidered on the back. The jacket caught my eye and I stared at it for several moments. "What are you looking at, Miss Chin," demanded Natalia. "I was looking at that guy's jacket," I said. She asked me "What would you do if someone came over here and asked you for a date?" "I'd probably say no," I answered. Tionna jumped in and set the scene, trying to get me into the game. "What if you had been seein' him all around the mall and he'd been seein' you and you had a crush on him and he has a crush on you and he's the man of your dreams!" Natalia continued: "And he comes over and sits down

and says, 'Would you like to go on a date with me? Tonight. At eight o'clock.'" I said that since he was the man of my dreams maybe I'd meet him at a restaurant, but I wouldn't give him my phone number or let him know where my house was. "Why not?" they asked.

* * *

In contrast to the girls' assurance that a man we ran across in Newhallville "probably rapes little girls," in the mall setting, their romantic fantasies take wing. Yet on our way to the mall, the girls voiced some of their lingering fear about sexual threat in their fractured version of Jingle Bells: Mario, Mario raped Barbie all day long/ Batman tried to save the day but Luigi got her anyway! As a commentary on their lives, the song is devastating. It speaks not only of their hopelessness in feeling safe from men -- something evident not only in this ditty but from many, many other encounters -- but emphasizes as well their sense of threat and even victimization in the consumer sphere. And yet these girls are able to make these materials, mass produced and middle-America as they may be, speak about the particular issues being faced by them as "inner city" children. These children instantly recognized that even the dark-skinned Barbies have very little relevance to their own lives. There were some moments where they wrapped themselves in the fantasy life offered by these (and other) toys; at other times, they acted upon or talked about the ways these toys represented to them a foreign, almost imaginary world.

The fantasy life offered by Barbie is akin to the romance fantasy the girls spin for me when they catch me staring at a man's jacket. It is not based in their own daily

experience, but partakes of a cultural fund of similar scenarios -- those found in fairy tales, Harlequin romances, and the like. Tionna and Natalia were not alone in creating such romantic fantasies about my life, and how I would fall in love with a man. Cherie also spun a startlingly similar tale for me, where a man took me on a series of increasingly impressive dates, culminating with a flight to New Orleans and a ride in a limousine. It is, I believe, no accident that the girls' fantasy lives took off so buoyantly when at the mall. One of the safest places to be away from home, the mall provides children a space to relax and play in ways they cannot in their own neighborhood.

Christmas

Ella had sworn up and down that she was not going to do anything for Christmas, but had broken down and prepared a Christmas dinner of pork shoulder, beans and corn, corn bread, greens, sweet potato pie. There was a little Christmas tree set up in the front room, covered with tinsel garlands and lights and a few ornaments. Tionna's presents were laying beneath the tree -- a "Starla" doll, headbands, a pair of underpants, a small walkman-type tape player, and a little musical keyboard. Tionna was still in her pajamas, hair all stuck out like a night creature of some sort, watching the film "Teen Witch" in Ella's room. Celia was watching a movie in her room.

While I was sitting at the kitchen table with Ella, Tionna came in and pulled the gold hairbow off my head. Ella immediately yelled at Tionna to get off my hair, Celia came out of her room and told Tionna to stop "pickin' at my head," and Ella said that she and Natalia were always in my hair and to stop it. A short while later, Asia and Natalia

stopped by. Tionna had done her hair so that it wasn't sticking out any more. Asia and Natalia stopped in the front room to look at Tionna's presents. Natalia was carrying a walkman which belongs to her cousin. The three girls lay around in the front room, listening to tapes. They also played on Tionna's keyboard. Tionna ran into the kitchen and Ella told her not to run. The other two girls were waiting in the front room. Tionna sort of threw her garbage into the garbage bag, and this riled Ella up. "You stop showin' off now," she hollered. "I'll take that belt to you, you know I will," she said with a raised, threatening voice.

* * *

The Christmas season arrives in Newhallville with a drama which is marked most visibly by the decoration of many houses and yards. Across the street from Tionna's home, a three-story house with a balcony and a porch seems to have a Christmasy touch on every available surface. Fat, plastic snowmen and santas perch on the porch and balcony rails, augmented by festoons of glittery garlands and blinking lights. The well-manicured house next door is similarly decorated, with the addition of mechanized figures looking out from some of the windows, bowing and waving their arms. One house is itself wrapped up like some giant Christmas gift and is tied with a great shining gold and silver bow. Another features a Nativity scene, each of the three-foot-tall figures glowing with the aid of an internal light bulb. At night, with all the frantically blinking lights turned on, it is like being on some wacky amusement park ride. A few blocks away, on one of New Haven's richest streets -- Prospect -- holiday decorations present quite a different image. At one house a single red velvet bow is placed on each of the

evergreen bushes that rings the huge, flawless lawn; at another a lone electric candle shines from every window. There is nary a blinking light in evidence.

Newhallville's over-the-top home and yard decorations belie the often modest celebrations taking place inside these homes. The children I knew in Newhallville received few Christmas gifts; these came from immediate family, sometimes aunts, uncles and godparents as well. The children gave few, if any, gifts either to friends or family. As Tionna's classmate Carlos commented: "The only thing I don't like about Christmas is they be lying at Christmas. They say 'this is from the kids,' and we didn't buy it for them. They know we broke! They be buying it and say that the kids bought it. They bought it and gave it to them." The children are not the only ones who are broke: Tionna's grandmother began talking in July about beginning to save for her granddaughter's Christmas presents. The presents Tionna received that year -- a "Starla" doll, a walkman, a small keyboard, some headbands, and a pair of underpants -- could not have cost more than 75 dollars all together.[3]

By the time I arrived at Tionna's home on Christmas afternoon, the family had separated, each watching television in a different room. Tionna was the only one in her household to have received any gifts. While Tionna looks forward to receiving Christmas presents, she is utterly prepared not to receive anything at all.

Christmas day had gotten off to an odd start for her. Tionna told me that she had been bad right before Christmas. When she woke up Christmas morning and ran into the

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[3] Over $10 billion dollars are spent on toys alone during the Christmas season, an average of just over $350 per child aged 6 to 13 in the United States [Pope, 1993].

living room to look under the tree, she did not see any presents there. She figured Santa just hadn't left her anything, since she'd been misbehaving, and decided she might as well go back to bed. When Tionna went back to the bedroom, where she sleeps with her grandmother, Celia asked her why she was coming back in. "Because Santa didn't leave me anything," Tionna answered her. Her grandmother said Santa had, and so Tionna went back out and found the gifts.

In talking with me about her Christmas in 1991 she told me what she did receive: a Shani doll from her uncle ("I didn't even want it, but then I liked it"), a Barbie Knitting machine (which nobody could figure out how to work), a Barbie Mobile home and a Barbie washing machine. The present she had really wanted that year was the Barbie dream house and with a glowing face described its wondrous features. When I asked why she did not get one she said because her grandmother did not have the money.

Carlos gives his mother his Christmas list in October and she buys his presents a bit at a time. When I asked him what he was getting for Christmas, he wrote a very exact list:

Some GI Joes
Vehicles for GI Joes
Arctic Batman
Batman Jetfoil
Green Beret Rafael
Jetfighter

Carlos knows how much his asked-for gifts cost and where his mother is likely to buy them; none were more than fifteen dollars. Moreover, because his mother buys him what he has written on the list, Carlos knows before Christmas what he will be receiving from

her. He continued, later, "I forgot to put X-Men on my Christmas list but I already gave it to my mother. We tell what we want for Christmas and then she makes pretend that she tells Santa Claus and at Christmas Eve she wake up at like two o'clock in the morning and wrap the presents and puts them under the tree and makes believe she didn't do it." Like Carlos, Natalia and her brother Darnell knew well before Christmas what their primary gifts would be: an electronic doll for her and a Super Nintendo game system for him.

Carlos' sharp awareness of the circumstances and origins of his own Christmas gifts, and Tionna's willingness to accept that Christmas might not even happen at all for her are not the only aspects of children's experiences of this holiday in Newhallville. Fantasy and longing are also to be found, and one afternoon in the classroom where Natalia and Tionna go to school, I was sitting with LaQuisha and Sam while waiting for their reading group to begin. I asked LaQuisha what she wanted for Christmas. She wrote down her Christmas list, adding prices for each at my request:

Money	1,000
dolls	25
clothes	500
Magic Potty Baby	20
food	
pictures	
cameras	20
tv	3
vcr	5
watch	10
car	500
Magic jewels [trolls?]	
Talking Baby Alive	
phone	30
keyboard	100

sneakers	50
computer	200
watch	10
Super Nintendo	100
Play Doh	10
Sorry	20
Game Gear	100
Atari	100
house	500
Game Boy	100
coat	30
book bag	30
earrings	30
bracelets	30

The results of LaQuisha's inventory, conducted the July after the Christmas she anticipates in her list (and discussed in chapter 6), shows she received few, if any, of the gifts she hoped for. As the sum total of her gift list adds up to nearly half her family's yearly income (and many of her estimated prices are much too low) it is not surprising that the difference between her list and the presents she actually received is great.

After LaQuisha gave me her list, Sam looked at me and said, "I feel like a child," his face breaking into a grin almost too big to contain. "Why?" I asked. "Because I wrote a letter to Santa Claus." I asked what he asked Santa to give him, and he replied that he wanted a Super Nintendo and a trip to Disney World. "The first time I saw a program on Santa Claus, I believed it," he confided.

Both LaQuisha and Sam have Christmas wishes that are destined to remain largely unfulfilled. Neither comes from a household with a large income: Sam's life is further disrupted because his primary caretaker, an aunt, is in and out of jail. Though his Christmas list contained only two items, it is likely he received neither of these.

When kids received much wished-for gifts, there was little mystery about where they came from or how much they cost. Natalia's main Christmas present in 1992 was a blonde-haired, blue-eyed electronic talking doll which she referred to as her "brat." "It cost sixty dollars," she told me. She also received a pair of gold earrings from her mother's boyfriend. "They were thirty-nine-ninety-nine at Caldor's," she told me excitedly. "They were originally a hundred dollars," she added, "but they were on sale. My mommy told me to keep them in the box so I don't lose them."

Children whose Christmas booty was relatively abundant are not absent, however. Tarelle, who has three grown up brothers, is the baby of the family and the only girl. Her mother works about 60 hours a week as a nurse, and her brothers also have steady jobs. Tarelle is indulged all year long by her family and Christmas is no exception:

1) I got a camera
2) I got a outfit
3) I got some boots
4) I got some sneaks
5) I got a night gown
6) I got three games
7) and a pouch
8) I got $40.00 from my brother
9) I got $10.00 from my aunt
10) I got $20.00 from my aunt
11) I got some sock and
12) I got $100.00 from my mother
13) and I got a watch

It is not especially surprising that the amount and kind of these children's Christmas gifts are closely tied to levels of family income, and children are aware of the sorts of limits this income imposes upon the scope of their wishes. As a result, Carlos is

careful to keep his requests within his mother's budget, while Tionna is perpetually prepared for disappointment.

Babies

Tionna, Natalia and I were hanging out in my kitchen, and Tionna asked me when I was going to have a baby. Then she caught herself and said, "No, don't have any babies, Miss Chin." "Why?" I asked. "Because then you won't have any time to pay attention to us!" she answered, smiling. "Yeah," Natalia piped up from the chair where she sat next to me. "We'll come over and ring the doorbell and you'll say, 'I'm sorry, you can't come in today, I had to stay up all night taking care of my baby and I'm tired.'" We bandied this idea about for a moment and then Natalia looked me straight in the face and said "Did you know I had a baby?" she paused for dramatic effect, her face utterly deadpan. "I put it in the dumpster." Another pause. I started playing along. "What happened?" I asked. "Well, I couldn't keep it because I didn't want my family to know about it," she said. "Besides, I didn't know who the father was. I've been with so many men," she added with a sigh. Natalia just turned eleven a couple of months ago. "I just kept shooting back all this food so my family would think I was just getting fat," she went on.

"I had a baby too," Tionna went on. "I put it in the garbage. I had all these people's garbage, a whole lot of it, and I put the baby in the bottom of the can and put the garbage on top. Then the garbage men came, and they recycled it! They recycled my baby!"

* * *

The baby in the garbage can scenario, much like the "man of my dreams" scenario from our trip to the mall, is one widely available to the girls on television and in the newspapers. Like meeting the man of your dreams, the baby in the garbage can (or garbage chute or dumpster or toilet) does occasionally happen, and is not simply an urban legend. It is a stereotype, much like the killer drug dealers who wear Air Jordans and drive Mercedes, propagated in the media out of all proportion to its actual rate of occurrence. Like Barbie, Nintendo and Nike Air sneakers, these images are mass produced, consumed the way commodities are. Though they are not paid for in currency, these images, when used, do exact a price.

What is affecting is that Natalia launches into this tale after a discussion of the girls' fears of being abandoned by me. The girls well knew of my wish to have a baby, since during group time one day at school when each person had to say what they were afraid of, I had blurted, "I'm afraid I'll never have a baby." What was 'Talia saying when she told me her "story"?

Natalia and Tionna's playfulness, in the midst of a serious encounter, should not be discounted, and they enjoyed the pretend aspects of telling the "baby in the garbage can" tale as well as its potential shock value. That this particular tale is one so familiar to them is perhaps what is most upsetting. Moreover, we all knew, even as we played, that there was a possibility that this "story" might one day come true.

Conclusion

Consumption intersects with every arena of importance in these children's lives: family, friends, school, neighborhood, eating, sexuality, romance, and babies. These are not children, however, who consume in great material quantity. As a social process, medium of knowledge, and realm of experience, consumption does not acquire force in these children's lives because they have, want, or receive great amounts of clothes, food, toys, or money; indeed, they are required in many settings to keep their consumption behavior and desires within clearly delineated boundaries and are tremendously skilled at doing so.

In a variety of forms, consumption is an important medium through which many of these children's every day social and kin relationships are created and maintained. The glazed donut that Tionna ate half of was drenched in complex meaning -- among them conflicts between Tionna's grandmother and great-grandmother over household expenses, upkeep of the apartment and disagreements over who was responsible for Tionna's upbringing and care. The heated negotiations among children at lunchtime during school days are likewise about much more than whether child A is willing to trade child B a cookie for a bag of potato chips.

Such interactions and negotiations do not take place simply between individuals or among groups of people. They take place in the context of the larger society -- one from which many Newhallville residents are, at various levels, alienated; and they take place in particular sites, whether the neighborhood, local stores, the mall, or supermarket. These spaces at once shape children's consumer lives and are consumed by kids as they

use and interact with them, often in unexpected ways. Chapter 5 turns to three major sites where children's consumption takes place: the neighborhood small grocery, the supermarket and New Haven's downtown mall.

CHAPTER 5

SITES OF CONSUMPTION

This chapter examines three important sites of consumption: local groceries, corporate supermarkets and the mall.[1] I begin with an analysis of Newhallville's businesses to illustrate the ways in which the economic, social and geographic isolation of Newhallville is likewise reflected in the neighborhood's immediate consumer setting. Newhallville houses a limited range of stores providing a small variety of products and services. Children spend most of their time in the neighborhood, and in terms of the places where they most often visit and make purchases, the local small grocery, or "corner store" is in many ways the most important consumer site where they spend time.

Geographic, economic and social isolation, discussed in chapter 3, all contribute to the local importance of corner stores in urban neighborhoods like Newhallville. These processes of isolation work not only to keep people in, but also to shut them out. As shoppers who are variously viewed as undesirable, threatening or lacking in spending power, Newhallville residents -- and particularly children -- experience particular forms of subtle and overt discrimination in supermarkets and malls.

Supermarkets and shopping malls play an important role in Newhallville consumption and in Newhallville children's consumer lives. The inequalities so evident

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[1] While this chapter focuses on commercial locations sites of consumption are not limited to stores -- they can include street corners, parks, and bedrooms as well. The underground economy in Newhallville illustrates this principle -- turning street-corners into offices, kitchens into beauty parlors, and as in one case, a school bus into a mobile mom and pop shop.

in New Haven's patterns of employment, schooling and residence also shape people's experiences of and behavior in supermarkets and malls. Shopping malls are widely cited as the best example of the social, symbolic and economic changes taking place in contemporary consumption (Sorkin 1992a, 1992; Walsh 1993); the dramatic growth of social inequality is one of these changes.

I use the term "site of consumption" to refer to a place where consumption happens. This notion is flexible and broad because a given place is not always, at all times, a site of consumption. Places, like things, have a "social biography" (Kopytoff 1986). This term, which refers to the movement of things in and out of commodity status during their "lives" in society may similarly be applied to places, which can move in and out of being consumption sites. Like the domestic spaces discussed in chapter six, supermarkets and local groceries are geographic sites. Their physical qualities -- location, size, layout and contents -- help to shape the nature of consumer experiences there. These qualities are the result of political, economic and social processes. As people come to these sites, using and interacting with them, both the people and the places influence and transform each other. These interactions may well take place before people even set foot in them: my analysis of supermarkets begins with the kinds of interactions Newhallville residents have with these places when they are <u>not</u> there.

Commerce in Newhallville

Looking at the range and numbers of stores in Newhallville makes it is immediately apparent that the consumer sphere is limited. Figure 5.1 shows 1992

commercial sites located within the Newhallville census tract. Businesses include: barber shops, liquor stores, bars, local groceries, a laundromat, a lunch counter, a florist. Figure 5.2 shows the locations of Newhallville's numerous storefront churches, many of which occupy sites formerly housing lunch counters and other types of shops.

The small number of Newhallville's local businesses and their limited range is not unusual for an urban neighborhood -- indeed, many urban neighborhoods may have few or no stores located within their boundaries. The consumer environment in Newhallville has, however, undergone profound change since the 1960s. Once home to a significant number of employers and a wide range of businesses, the neighborhood today has no health-care providers, supermarkets, butchers, hardware stores or dry cleaners, all of which it had in the past.

Interviews show that in the years around 1960, there were at least 14 types of businesses in Newhallville, compared to 7 today. Not only has the range of businesses shrunk by half, but in every category except one (while there was one nightclub in the 1960 period, there are currently two), the number of businesses is smaller. Figure 5.3 shows businesses once located in Newhallville, based on interviews from several informants who grew up in the area during the 1950s and 1960s. Table 5.1 provides a comparison of businesses located in Newhallville around 1960 and in 1992.

Of the 18 places of business shown in figure 5.1, 5 are either liquor stores or nightclubs. It is illegal for children to make purchases in these places. Though kids

Figure 5.1 - Businesses in Newhallville, 1992

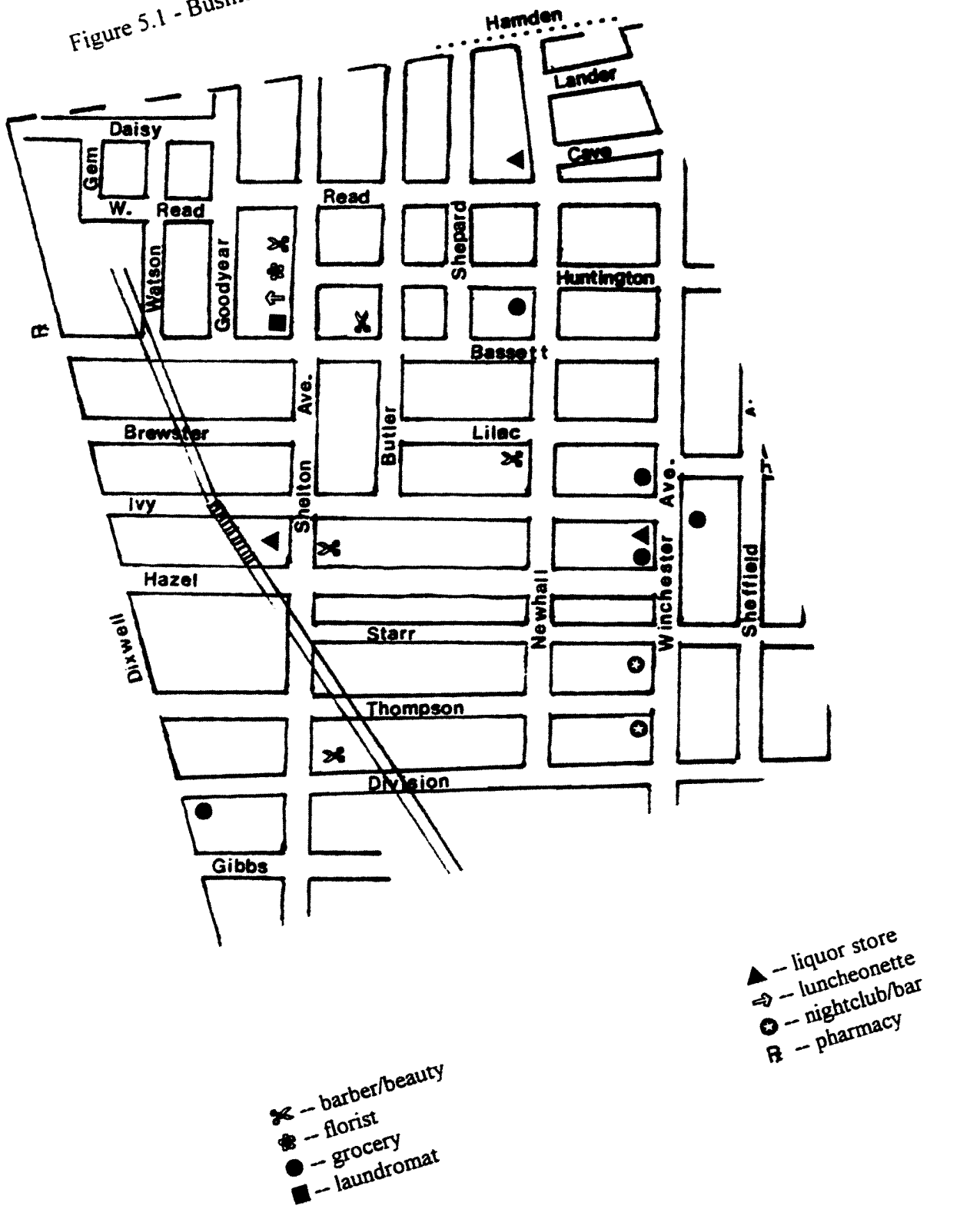

Figure 5.2 - Churches in Newhallville. 1992

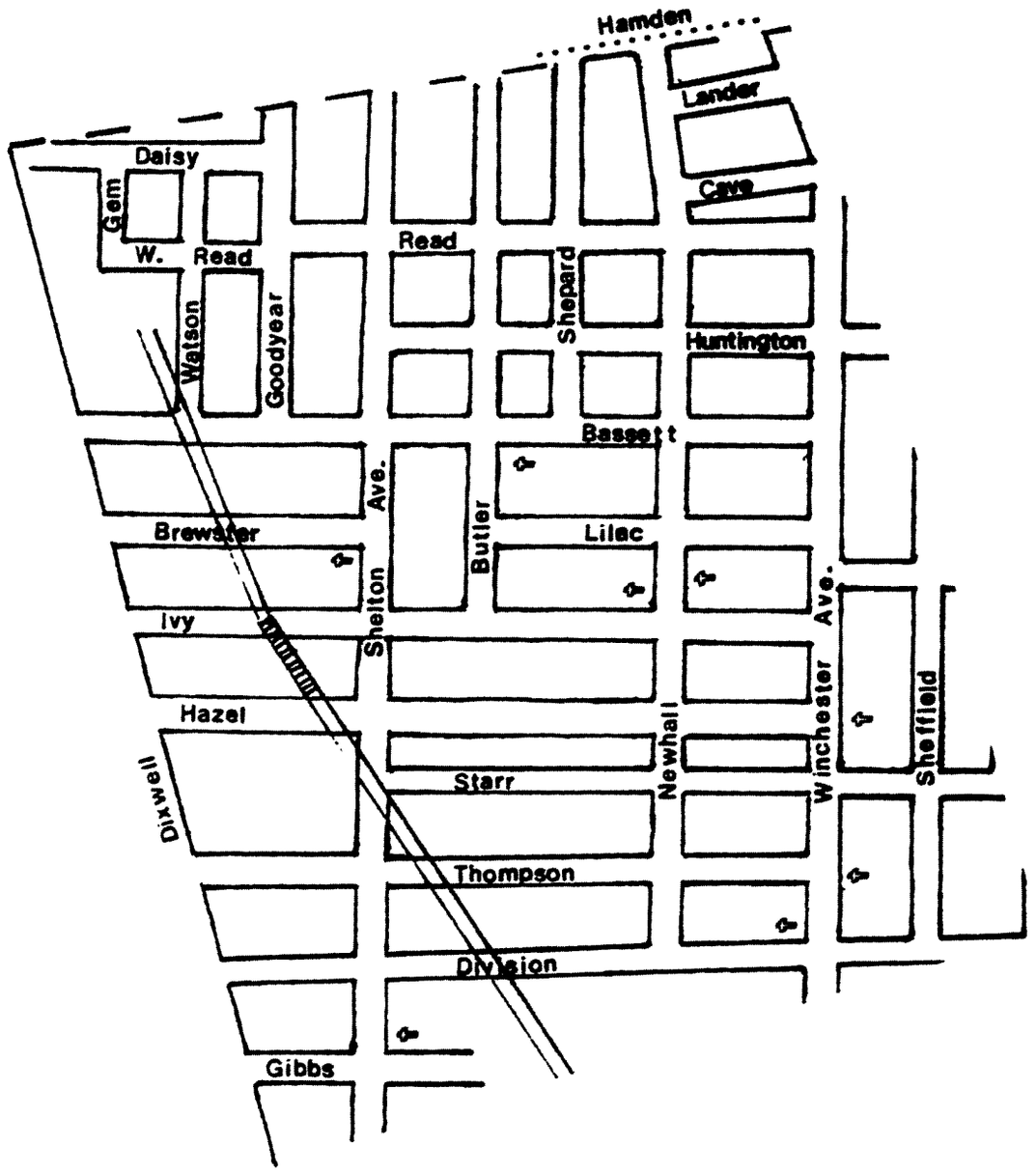

Figure 5.3 - Businesses in Newhallville, ca. 1960

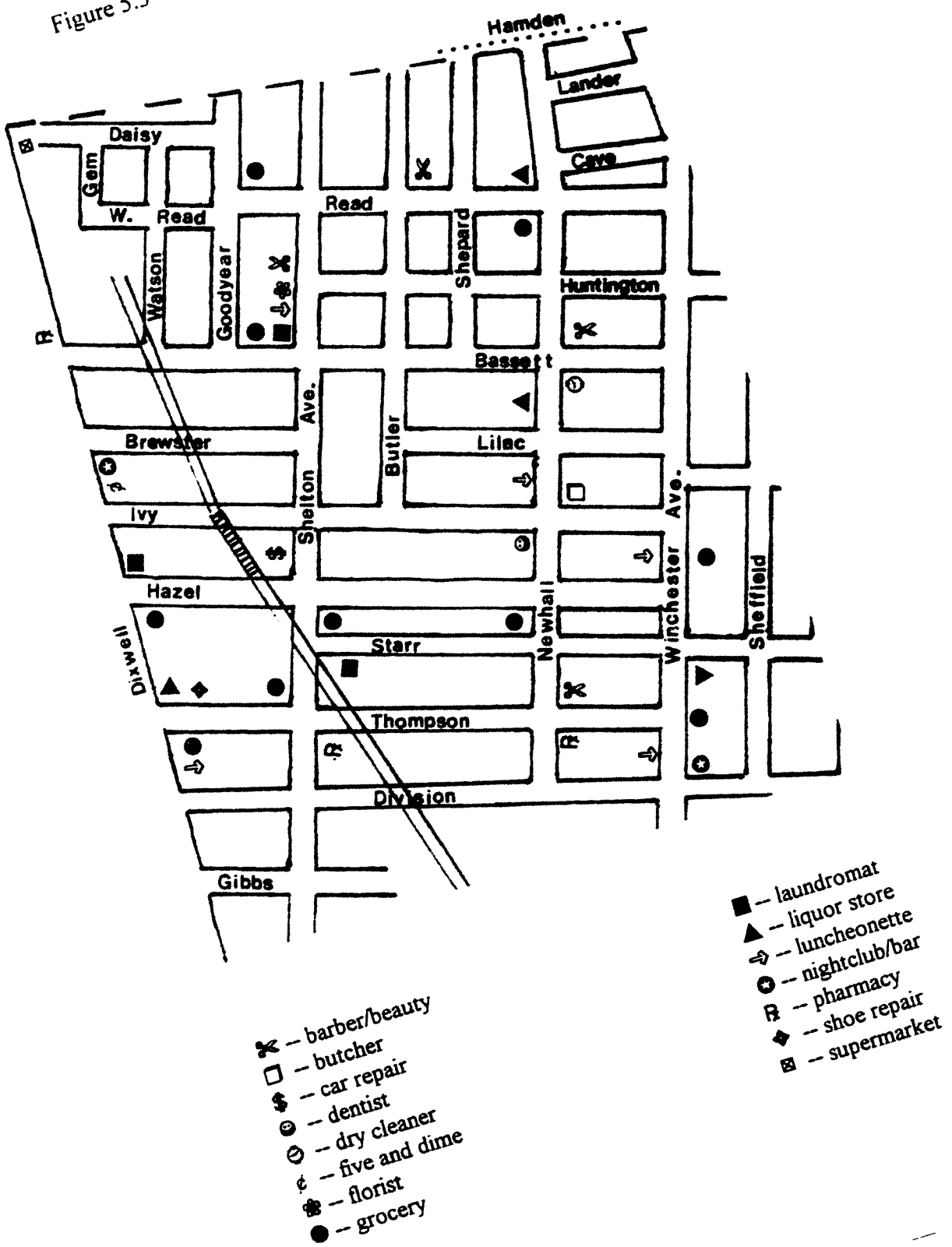

Table 5.1 - Businesses in Newhallville, ca. 1960 and 1992

Type of Business	ca. 1960	1992
Barber/Beauty	6	5
Butcher	1	0
Car repair	1	0
Dentist	1	0
Dry cleaner	1	0
Five and dime	1	0
Grocery	10	5
Laundromat	1	1
Liquor Store	4	3
Luncheonette	3	1
Nightclub	1	2
Pharmacy	2	1
Shoe repair	1	0
Supermarket	1	0
Total	34	18

could attempt to make such illegal purchases, I never heard of or observed any such instance. Of the remaining 12 stores, 5 are barber shops, which children did not, in my observation, visit independently (except on a single occasion in order to buy gum). I rarely observed children at the lunch counter; when they did come in it was to buy candy or chips. Though I did not spend time at the florist, it is hard to imagine children doing much shopping there. Again, comparison with the setting of the past provides insight into the range of experiences and activities once available. Newhallville residents who had grown up in the neighborhood recalled a wide range of consumer-related activities in which they would engage: buying fresh doughnuts at the bakery on the way to school, sneaking ice cream out of the dumpsters behind the dairy plant, going into the five-and-dime store just to look.

The primary consumer venue attracting and catering to children in Newhallville is the small grocery; four are shown in figure 5.1. The bulk of children's independent consumer experience in the neighborhood revolves around these four stores, all of which carry relatively similar, (if not identical) merchandise. When I asked kids where they spent their money in the neighborhood, they answered "B and K," or "Bob's," or "Moody's," the main small groceries in the area. Among children's purchases, small snacks predominate: cookies, orange drink, chips. These children's consumer experiences in neighborhood stores consist of two main activities: buying snacks for themselves and running errands to the store for others. These can be rich and complex undertakings; however, Newhallville's commercial make up does not offer children the varied environment it once did. Most profoundly, the visible and palpable presence of

social reproductive activity -- many kinds of shopping, working and so on -- has faded from most of Newhallville's streets.

Local groceries

Though children's consumer experiences in Newhallville are relatively constrained today, particularly in the small, neighborhood groceries. These stores, all black-owned and operated, remain firmly embedded in the community, and unlike liquor stores and bars, are not generally regarded as contributing to the area's downslide. Complaints about high prices are common; as much as these places are social centers and their proprietors parental figures for neighborhood kids, there is an underlying sentiment of resentment at being exploited as a sort of captive customer. Unable in many cases to take their business elsewhere, residents must submit to paying prices they know verge on the exorbitant.

Small groceries occupy store front spaces, and consist of two or three aisles of goods. Store owners must make their purchases through a supplier, and reliance on such middlemen is one reason why prices are higher in these stores, which because of their size are also unable to realize economies of scale. A well-stocked store might offer perhaps 1,000 different items, but usually the number is much smaller. (In comparison, Walsh 1993 notes that corporate supermarkets now commonly carry more than 25,000 different products.) They offer little or no fresh or perishable foods, other than prepared sandwiches; most food items are staples such as bread, milk and flour, sold in small packages which likewise cost more per measure than larger sizes of the same item.

Easily prepared or processed foods are also available in relative quantity: canned soup, baking mixes, chips, soft drinks, cookies, boxed cereal.

Whether or not this product mix arises from the preferences of Newhallville's residents is unclear. Certainly enough of the products available in these small groceries are purchased that the stores do a tidy business. Yet they do not stock the kinds of items many residents would actually like to purchase, in fresh foods, in particular -- meats, fruit and vegetables. And while poor urban households are commonly rumored to consume more than their share of processed foods, in the majority of households where I saw meals being prepared most of what was being served did not come from a can or ready-to-cook from the freezer. These households did have access, to large supermarkets, however access which some Newhallville residents may have only intermittently, and at some cost.

An afternoon at Bob's Walking into Rabbit's Grocery, otherwise known as Bob's, Bob himself greets me with a loud "Hi, stranger!" in his southern-accented voice. He stands behind the counter-topped glass case filled with candy bars and gum, an overhead cigarette rack cutting off my view of the top of his oiled black and silver curls. From this vantage point, Bob can see his entire store. The store has two aisles and a refrigerator case and Bob also sells cold cuts and subs, which he makes fresh and to order; there is a grill for making hot items like steak and cheese sandwiches and Jamaican beef patties. One thing I notice every time I go into Bob's is that there is only one brand of nearly every item: Heinz mustard, Morton salt, Domino sugar, Ragu spaghetti sauce.

Much of the shelf space is half-filled or empty. The store's door jamb and a post stationed at the middle of one of the aisles serve as community bulletin boards. A notice taped to the post at eye level reads: "Three bedroom apartment for rent, section eight accepted." Other announcements include a flyer for a talent show and a photocopy of a photocopy of a letter warning about new types of racism.

Bob carries a wide array of snacks -- cheese crackers, chips, cookies -- in small packages, partly because so many children come in to spend their pocket money on these items. A mother comes in with her children and lets them each choose a snack: a sticky, icing- covered donut, a bag of chips, a candy bar. Kids are in and out at all times of day, buying for themselves or on errands. A girl comes in holding a wrinkly paper bag containing a package of corn meal. She was supposed to get corn muffin mix, she tells Bob. " Okay". Bob tells her, "Change it for corn muffin mix, but get two boxes because you're not going to get any money back and besides, you know the rules." He takes the package of corn meal out of the bag and deposits the two boxes of corn muffin mix inside it instead. He acts extra gruff with her so she won't make this kind of mistake again. Another girl, about nine years old, comes in with two younger children, holding on to one of them by the wrist with a practiced, firm and unwavering grip. Bob tells me later that there is "something wrong" with this younger girl. The eldest girl has been sent to buy batteries and Bob asks her, "What size?" She doesn't know, and so Bob lets her use the phone behind the counter to call home. On the phone for a minute or two, uttering half-finished sentences that are being both misunderstood and interrupted at the other end, the girl uses her most reasonable voice, saying, "Mom, will you PLEASE let me speak to

Duane?" She repeats this entreaty several times. Meanwhile, Bob is both tending to other customers and directing a steady stream of advice and interrogation to the girl behind him. "What size do you need? Double A? Let me talk to your mother!" "Mom, put Duane on the phone, PLEASE!" "What size do you need?" "Mom!" Finally, Duane is on the other end of the line, and tells the girl to get double A batteries. At $2.95 for a package of two, they are very expensive; Toys R Us sells a pack of four for $3.99. Toys R Us, however, can only be reached from the highway and is in the next town.

Two video-game machines have recently been installed, and a couple of tall, rangy boys are playing. Bob says the machines bring in about $300 a week; he gets half. Bob says that he feels he is doing something to keep kids busy and off the street by having the games there. In the next breath he is comparing playing these games to having a dope habit. "I've seen kids spend thirty, forty-five dollars at a time," he says. One boy was stealing money from his mother's purse to come down to Bob's store to play the games. She called Bob and told him to refuse to let her son near the machines.

Bob seems to know everybody and everything about everybody who comes into his store. "That kid," Bob tells me, gesturing to a twelve-year-old boy's retreating back. "He's sharp, but his mother's not with it. It's a shame." Continuing a tradition that many say was once the norm in Newhallville and the southern communities from which many of its older residents come, Bob -- like many storekeepers -- keeps an eye on the kids who come in. His attention is not so much directed toward the prevention of shoplifting, but rather toward simply keeping the kids in line, having them act right, making sure they are

okay. He does not hesitate to tell kids when they've stepped out of line, chastising them like a stern uncle.

Bob is having a high-volume conversation about gray hair with an older woman. She later tells me that she's seventy-nine years old, though I had thought her much younger, perhaps in her early sixties. She and Bob get on the subject of kids, and how they don't have any manners today. The woman says: "Today when I ask a little boy, do you want to go to the store for me, well, it used to be 'do you have a quarter?' Now it's a dollar!" "Inflation?!" I say. "Kids today just don't have any manners," they reply. "You got to talk to that baby, even when it's in your stomach," says the woman. "Then they know that voice. And then when the baby's born you got to hold it and kiss it and let them know: mommy loves you." Then that baby could be, like in the back of the store here, and nobody can get it to quiet down, but the mommy says, 'what's that?' and the baby is quiet because it knows that voice. I used to spank that baby even in my stomach," and she demonstrates by patting her middle vigorously. (It doesn't look like a spank to me at all.)

"I was born depressed," Bob says, "Because I was born in a depressing time, 1936. We weren't getting nothing to eat!" "But the babies they still eat the same," the woman interjects. "Not me, my mother couldn't nurse me," Bob answers. "She was nursing the baby of the people who owned the plantation and she didn't have enough for both of us, so I got left out!" "That's right, and up in that house, your mother probably got so angry, she spit in their food, too," the woman says. "She made all their food," Bob goes on, "That's what she did." As this conversation moves along, Bob is ringing up

sales for kids wandering in and out. The kids, overhearing this dialogue, seem to know that is aimed partially at them and steal ironic glances at each other out of sight of their elders. "Grownups!" they seem to silently say to each other, slightly rolling their eyes, quirking the corners of their mouths.

When things quiet down, Bob and I sit in folding chairs behind the counter and he tells me everything I want to know about his place. In business in Newhallville for eleven years, Bob says his store brings in sales of about a quarter of a million dollars a year. While perhaps not seeing too much seasonal change in the flow of business, the store bustles with even greater intensity on and just after the third and sixteenth of the month, "check day," when welfare payments arrive in Newhallville mailboxes. Bob's till is filled with food stamps, and he is a stickler about the rules, won't let someone buy a one-dollar item with a five-dollar food stamp, which would result in four dollars cash change. Cheri's mother, Deanna, has complained about this: "If I want to get some change to buy a beer, that's my business!"

* * *

As for what the children I know had to say about Bob's, it was often very little. Their day-to-day trips to his store, and stores like it, seemed to them unremarkable, of little interest and hardly worthy of the investment of breath and conversation that talking to me about it would have required. Teyvon did tell me, however, that he went to one of the local stores about ten times a month and thought he spent about twenty dollars a month -- just the amount of his monthly allowance -- buying snacks and "junk food" (kids invariably pronounced this phrase with a note of gleeful indulgence, stretching out

the second word to sound like "junk fooooood"). The lady who ran the store knew him, and Teyvon told me that if he is fifty cents short, she let him pay the next time he came in. Teyvon did add that he did not go to the store after dark.

While these kids may go to the store regularly, it is not a place where they are welcome to hang out -- unless playing video games -- and they know this. Accordingly, they make their purchases and then leave. They may not have much to say about the place because although they visit it often and with regularity, they spend little time there. Bob is one of a few shopkeepers who has been successful in preventing older teenagers from turning the sidewalk in front of his store into a hang-out. This may have something to do with what struck me as his store's relative popularity over others among younger children, such as those among whom I conducted my research. For these younger children, negotiating a sidewalk strewn with big kids -- many of whom are engaged in gambling, drug-selling and the like -- is a frightening experience. One girl spoke with me about the fear she feels in being sent to the store, although her mother sees little reason for these fears. By going to Bob's, big kids can be skirted. Staying in at night, is another way to avoid danger, and so, like Teyvon, few children go to the store after dark.

Supermarkets

The supermarkets most often visited by those I knew in Newhallville are the Super Stop & Shop and Pathmark, located about two miles north of Newhallville in Hamden. New Haven proper has only two large supermarkets within its borders; these are on the opposite side of town almost as far away from Newhallville as the Hamden

stores. The lack of local supermarkets is common in urban neighborhoods like Newhallville (U.S. House Select Committee on Hunger 1990).

As discussed earlier, Newhallville food stores were once more plentiful, more diverse and, in some cases, larger than they are today. Butchers, bakeries and relatively large markets have all disappeared from Newhallville, and corporate supermarkets have not come into Newhallville, or even New Haven, to replace them. As the city of New Haven has become home to an increasingly large population of poor and minority inhabitants, investment has slackened and businesses have failed or moved away. Corporate supermarkets are located in places where the suburban customers they wish to attract are not afraid to go, yet close enough to neighborhoods like Newhallville that it is not impossible for residents to get there. Nevertheless, Newhallville residents feel, on the whole, more like a captive audience than valued customers. Rumors circulate around the area that special coupon circulars are delivered to nearby upscale neighborhoods but not to Newhallville, and that supermarkets routinely schedule their best sales on the second and fourth weeks of the month, a strategy that makes it hard for people shopping with food stamps -- which come on the 3d and the 16th of the month -- to take advantage of the bargains. I was never able to substantiate these rumors. Whether or not they are true, that many in Newhallvile believe these and similar stories about supermarkets highlights the degree to which people feel alienated from and exploited by these stores[2].

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[2]Honeycutt reports similar rumors in among low income, African American residents of a housing project in Roxbury, Massachussetts (1975, VIII-1).

Pathmark and Stop & Shop are the closest and most convenient supermarkets to Newhallville, but they are not the only supermarkets where Newhallville residents want to shop. Many Newhallville shoppers prefer to buy their meats at Minore's and Ferraro's, stores known for their low prices, quality cuts and bulk packaging. There is also a commercial bakery discount outlet located next to Minore's, where bread, rolls and the like are available at low prices. These stores are located two miles south of Newhallville, the opposite direction from the Hamden supermarkets. Whenever their destination, Newhallville residents must travel in order to do their grocery shopping. If one travels the city for the best bargains, going to Stop & Shop for produce and canned goods, Ferraro's for meats and the bakery outlet for bread, grocery shopping can be a day-long affair.

The literature on "disadvantaged consumers" has long pointed out that such consumers comparison-shop less than their more affluent counterparts, and that they also shop in a smaller variety of stores (Andreasen 1970; 1975). The evidence from Newhallville shows that this pattern can arises not only from a lack of accessible, affordable stores in what Andreasen calls "atomistic and inefficient ghetto markets" (p.117), but also from the complex social situations that arise from negotiating transportation to and from the stores that <u>are</u> available. In examining the shopping practices of the poor and working class, it is important to remember that these social interactions exact their own sort of price, which may render comparison shopping too costly to be possible.

A high proportion of black households in New Haven do not have cars. Census data show that in 1990, 41.8 percent of black households in New Haven did not have a vehicle (Commerce, 1993. Since Newhallvile is one of the less affluent and least integrated census tracts in New Haven, the proportion of Newhallville households without vehicles is likely to be similar to or higher than the city wide figure. For families who do not have cars, grocery shopping involves either taking the bus, taking a taxi, borrowing a car or being taken to the store by friends or family. None of these options is convenient, and all can be costly in both financial and social terms. At the time of my research, the bus cost eighty-five cents per passenger: in April 1994 the fare was raised to ninety-five cents. Friends and family sometimes require payment for trips to the grocery store, either in goods, food stamps or cash. These payments can equal or exceed taxi fare, which is about ten round trip. Tensions arise easily over the kind or amount of such payment. Scheduling shopping trips involves a whole new round of negotiation, further complicating an already complicated situation.

When I once took Cherie's mother, Deanna, to do her monthly shopping, she decided to go to Minore's since she planned to buy large quantities of meat. Deanna mentioned several times that while Minore's meat prices are very good, their prices on just about everything else are too high. Though I offered more than once to take her to Stop & Shop as well, she refused, saying she did not want me to drive her all over town. After the shopping, we stopped to have lunch and she insisted on paying for both of us, as a way of repaying the favor I had done her by taking her to the market. Deanna was clearly concerned about imposing on me, and did not want our relationship to go out of

balance because of the trip. Her insistence on paying for lunch helped restore the balance, making our excursion one of mutual exchange rather than consisting of my patronage toward her and her acceptance of my it. Similarly, Vanessa would insist on buying me some groceries if I took her to the supermarket. Visiting more than one store would only have magnified the social debts these women incurred with me. Vanessa and Deanna evaluated the "price" of the shopping trip in nearly identical terms: the "repayment" each woman made to me was just under ten dollars. Given the expense attached to even a one-store trip, incurring greater debt by visiting more stores or traveling further would have been costly indeed.

The array of social, economic and geographic factors surrounding supermarket shopping for Newhallville residents affects children's relationship with these places. One effect is that because actually getting to the supermarket is so inconvenient for many Newhallville families, children are not likely to be part of grocery shopping expeditions. My informal observations of family shopping patterns point to a tendency for families who own cars to take children along to the supermarket much more often than families who do not. This pattern may be tied not just to car ownership, but to levels of financial security. Informal conversations with and observations of family members also suggest that those with tight funds tend to leave kids at home to minimize tensions during shopping. Food stamp allowances often fall 15-20% short of nutritional needs. Women shopping with food stamps must maximize their shopping dollars, and in interactions I did see, mothers were rarely in a negotiating mood when shopping under these circumstances. Families that generally included children on grocery shopping trips were

also financially the most secure. These families often made conscious efforts to teach their children the complex subtleties of grocery shopping -- how to locate particular items, how to evaluate price per unit and, on some occasions, allowing them a certain amount of money to spend as they wished or letting them choose foods such as breakfast cereal.

Teyvon's mother, Vanessa, impatiently awaited postal delivery on check day at the beginning of the month, when she received $168 to feed herself and her three children for the next four weeks. By the time the check arrived, Vanessa's cupboards were often nearly bare. Her children, ranging in age from ten to fifteen years old, had been made palpably aware of the cost of the food they ate: when Teyvon, Richie and Sharonda had eaten too much of the food too quickly, Vanessa started charging them for some of what they are, requiring them to give her fifty cents from their allowance for some cookies or to chip in a dollar apiece to buy a bag of oranges. It is hardly surprising that she rarely allowed her children to accompany her on grocery shopping trips.

While Vanessa's may be an unusual solution, the problem is common. Food shortages are one way in which children are made viscerally aware early on of the connection between their own consumption and that of the household. The lesson coming with this connection is often one of interdependence, mutual responsibility and the importance of sharing. I often heard kids saying that they wanted to earn money "to put some food on the table," as one girl said.

These complex pre shopping negotiations -- between shoppers and the store, and between people as they prepare to go shopping -- important elements in the context of

Newhallville children's experiences with large supermarkets (and shopping in general). Whether or not these children actively participate in any of these negotiations, they are often, nonetheless, party to them. Women from the family sit around the kitchen table discussing sales, coupons, which stores to go to, when to go and what to buy; people wrangle over making arrangements for getting to and from the store, and so on.

Michelle's shopping trip I realized the importance of supermarkets rather late in the research and was unable to conduct systematic visits with families and children to these sites, as I did to malls. I did accompany Ronna and her children Michelle and Damon, on a spur-of-the moment shopping trip to the supermarket. Moreover, I myself shopped regularly at the supermarkets frequented by Newhallville residents and informally observed children's behavior there on a near-weekly basis. Michelle's shopping trip then, is suggestive of the possibilities of children's experiences there. Because Michelle's family is among the more well off in the study, she visits supermarkets with more frequency than most children discussed here.

For Newhallville kids, supermarkets are not just about food for Newhallville kids. They may not be entirely about shopping, either, and all stores are cultural and social sites as well as being consumer venues. With floor space in the 10,000 square, foot range, large, scale corporate supermarkets provide a sort of safe, enclosed space which kids can explore at some distance from their caretakers without being too far away from them. A wide variety of social, cultural and consumer activities suffuses these children's experiences at these (and other) stores.

Early one spring I accompanied Michelle, her mother, Ronna, and her five-year-old brother, Damon, on an afternoon's round of errands. One of the stops was an hour-long visit to Pathmark. This was not one of Ronna's major food-shopping trips but one to pick up odds and ends. Michelle's family is one of the more financially comfortable of those I know in Newhallville: both parents work and have their own cars, and they own their home. For Michelle, then, visits to the store may entail less conflict and frustration than visits by her less well-off peers. In particular, the family need not deal with purchasing restrictions imposed by food stamps. Nevertheless, the richness of Michelle's supermarket encounter did not seem to be dictated by finances alone, and gives some insight into the impact of this kind of experience for children's lives, and the lives of Newhallville children in particular.

* * *

Pathmark is, as they say, the size of a football field. Bathed in fluorescent light and swathed in cool, conditioned air, the store's interior is spotless and almost industrial in feel. Ronna is pushing a cart that she has asked Michelle to pick out, reminding her to get one of the blue ones, which she says roll better, being new. Near the store's entrance is a display of hair bands and ponytail elastics. Michelle asks her mom if she can have some elastics and is turned down. Moving to the back side of the free-standing display, she shouts, "Mom! Over here, they got headbands!" Ronna remains uninterested.

We begin moving through the store from right to left. Passing a counter stocked with photography supplies, Michelle picks up several entries for a contest to win a car. She presses a few of the paper slips into my hand, and as we trundle up and down the

aisles. Michelle stops to fill out her entries whenever she finds a shelf with a bit of empty space. Michelle stops in the beauty aids aisle as her mother and younger brother continue on. She is looking at different kinds of Dep hair products -- hair spray, gel and so on -- and wants to buy some to use on her dolls. "But first I have to see what it smells like," she says. She seems to be primarily interested in the smell of the product rather than its formulation (gel, hair spray, or conditioner). She uncaps the pump containers, sprays some onto the edge of the shelf and then sticks her nose up close and takes a big sniff. After going through this process three or four times she decides to think about it.

We run to catch up with Ronna and Damon. After moving through a few aisles, we come upon a woman near the store's entrance who has a little table set up with samples for cookies and crackers. We each take a sample, and Ronna is given coupons for these items. In the fruit section Ronna asks Michelle to get her a few plastic bags. While Ronna is filling one bag with apples and another with corn, Michelle makes a beeline for a bank of plastic bins filled with loose candies. Taking another plastic bag, she measures some Sour Patch Kids into it. Ronna tells Michelle that she can put a little more candy into the bag. We move on to the fish counter, and Damon, who has been sitting in the cart's child seat, is intent on getting a Sour Patch Kid to eat. Michelle rations him two. Ronna leaves to get something she's forgotten from an aisle we have already visited and Damon takes this opportunity to try to get more candy. He is leaning backwards down into the cart, reaching for the plastic bag, which Michelle is burying beneath other items as fast as Damon can toss them aside. Michelle finally gives up and gives him another Sour Patch Kid.

Every week, Ronna lets Damon get a Hot Wheels car from Pathmark, and today she sends Michelle to accompany him to the toy aisle to choose one. While he contemplates the toy cars, Michelle is looking at school supplies: pens, pencils and notebooks. She takes them off the display pegs, turns them over in her hands and then carefully replaces them. Damon has picked out a car, managing to drop several others onto the floor in the process. "Pick those up," Michelle directs imperiously. Damon ignores her and trots back toward Ronna's cart as if he cannot hear his sister. "I'm going to tell Mom!" Michelle warns, heading back to the cart as well. "Go back and pick that up." Ronna says to Damon when she hears what he did. "Michelle, you go with him. He can't go alone." When the two children return, Ronna asks Michelle to go get a package of Saran Wrap.

Continuing on, Ronna stops in front of a display of microwave popcorn, for which she has a coupon. "Do we have any popcorn at home?" she asks. Michelle, who has returned with the Saran Wrap, says no. A moment later, Ronna asks Michelle to pick out a loaf of bread, saying, "Check the dates." Michelle apparently knows what kind of bread to get because she does not ask her mother what kind to choose. She expertly flips over the white tags holding the plastic wrappers, to check the freshness date. Damon is getting tired and crabby, as he nearly always does in the supermarket, and waiting in the checkout line, he spies some fifty-cent bags of chips and wants them desperately. Ronna says no, because she's already got a big bag of Doritos in the cart. Michelle suggests that they could get these little bags instead and Ronna agrees. As Michelle reaches for two small bags of Doritos, Damon squeals "I want that kind!" and points to the top rack.

"THEY'RE ALL THE SAME!" Michelle, Ronna and I nearly shout in exasperated unison. As Michelle and I begin to unload the cart, she reminds me to save the chips for last.

* * *

Michelle's visit to Pathmark was highly complex. It included product evaluation of hair gel, choosing a loaf of bread, using the store as a source of play (filling out contest forms) and engaging in sibling rivalry and elder sisterly bossiness. Michelle also deftly avoided a crisis toward the end of the trip by negotiating a way for her younger brother to get the chips he wanted. She helped her mother shop by providing information, picking out items Ronna had forgotten, and she made attempts to draw her mother's attention to items she wanted for herself (the hair bands). Michelle sometimes went through the store independently, and at other times pushed the shopping cart or tagged along behind her mother. She used the store for her own purposes at times, and when shopping did so idiosyncratically -- her method for testing and comparing hair products is a fine example. Michelle was able not only to watch her mother's shopping habits and practices (Ronna is an expert coupon user) but also to hear them, as Ronna often would think out loud while evaluating purchases: "Ten cents off. Big deal, I'm not buying it."

Michelle's diverse catalogue of activities during this one visit is hardly exhaustive of the possibilities. She did not buy anything with her own money. Nor did she engage in shoplifting, an activity which several children told me they at least attempt on occasion. Shoplifting in these stores, for the children I know, usually consists of picking out pieces of candy from the open displays of sweets which can be mixed and paid for by

the pound, and then eating them as they walk through the store -- or depositing them in their pockets and hoping to escape undetected.

Spatial considerations The layout and design of corporate supermarkets is generally uniform -- or significantly similar -- from store to store in the same chain. Organization inside the stores -- which aisle contains what, what items are to be found on a given shelf -- is carefully planned and analyzed. Items are placed in particular aisles, on certain shelves or near the checkout in order to influence shoppers. Higher profit-margin items, for instance, are commonly placed on the middle shelves, with lower-priced items on the lowest and highest shelves. The idea here is that shoppers are more likely to buy what they see at eye level than in less easy-to- reach spots. While the highest shelves are inconvenient for all but the very tallest shoppers, low shelves are at eye level for kids who are not riding in shopping carts. This is one way in which a kids'-eye-view and experience of the supermarket is different from an adult's.

Supermarkets are highly structured, highly monitored spaces designed to constrain and shape people's behavior, particularly as consumers, in specific ways. These strategies are often effective. Placing candy and snacks at the entrance to the checkout line is famously effective way to nudge a few more purchases out of a shopper. These displays cater especially to children, who are often tired and crabby by the end of a shopping trip, as Damon was, and parents who stand their ground to deny kids a last-minute request for chips or candy often have to steel themselves for a temper tantrum. After much complaining from shoppers, some stores now have candy-free checkouts.

The response of an individual to a given display, product or store remains largely unpredictable, regardless of corporate efforts to constrain or shape people's reactions and behaviors. Damon's demand for chips was just what a marketer or industrial designer would have hoped for. Michelle's wide array of behaviors and modes of interaction with space and products in the store shows, however, that intent on the part of designers does not always elicit the desired behavior in consumers.

The supermarket offers kids a vast array of shopping, amusement and excitement opportunities, but its social atmosphere is fairly impersonal and disconnected. Supermarkets do typically contain areas devoted to community interests -- bulletin boards for notices, a rack for flyers and home-made advertisements that stands next to the ATM machine (this rack is usually empty except for coupons for Pampers and feminine hygiene products). These "community" areas do little to dispel an institutional and impersonal atmosphere.

Most people shopping in the store are strangers both to each other and to store personnel; young children have had it drummed into their heads from early on that speaking to strangers should be avoided. Children and their families may know some employees, but the number is small. In addition, the corporate nature of the store mitigates against the formation and/or maintenance of personalized relationships between the store employees and shoppers. If a person is a few dollars short at the check-out, for instance, the cashier is not free to allow that person to come back later with the missing funds, no matter how well the cashier knows them. In large markets like Stop & Shop

and Pathmark, such personal favors -- common in Newhallville's local groceries -- cannot be done, except on a clandestine basis.

The mall

Late in April 1992 it was announced that Macy's, the mall's anchor store, was going to close in June. The mall, near bankruptcy, was a sinking ship. April 1 of that year, a New Haven Register headline read, "White Person Slips, Falls at Mall: Black Teenager Being Sought." Looking more closely, it turned out the headline was an April Fool's Day joke published by the New Haven Advocate, a local weekly tabloid that emulates the Village Voice. The headline condensed several prickly issues New Haven residents were mulling over: first, the widely held perception that the local newspaper is less than even-handed in how it reports on the black community; second, that the mall is an unsafe place for white shoppers; and finally, that African American kids are the reason why whites feel uncomfortable there. This tension between the middle-class, predominantly white, and often suburban population and the poorer and darker New Haven residents is one that typifies malls throughout the country, particularly those located near urban areas:

> Below the surface of a seemingly carefree shopping environment lies an underworld of gang violence, abductions, carjackings, armed robberies, sexual assaults, and crimes against young children. Indeed, in some ways malls represent ideal locations for criminals -- vast parking lots and garages, upscale shoppers, victims available day and night, private property with few if any regular police patrols, and a population led to believe that malls represent refuges from inner-city ills. (Everett 1994)

The failing fortunes of the New Haven mall could be blamed upon those same African American kids who, by making people feel unsafe, kept them from spending money in New Haven's mall. Rather than braving the city, the logic went, suburban shoppers chose to stay closer to home, shopping at malls in the nearby towns of Milford and Hamden, where the "inner-city ill" to which Everett alludes above are at least minimized.

Malls in Connecticut, including New Haven, have taken steps in attempting to reduce the presence of minority youth. After a protracted legal battle, a Connecticut mall, Trumbull Shopping Park, gained the right to ban public transit from making stops on its property on Friday and Saturday nights. Their express reason for making this decision was security problems arising from teenagers -- most of whom were minority youth from Bridgeportm (a Connecticut city with even greater poverty problems than New Haven) (New York Times 1995a). New Haven had employed a similar strategy, moving bus stops from directly in front of the mall to relocate them across the street on the town green. This move was not as obstructive as that employed by Trumbull Shopping Park, but involved a considerable increase in discomfort for bus riders. The original bus stops, located in front of the mall, were placed on a covered walkway open to the street that provided at least some protection from rain and snow. Across the way on the green, two rather small bus shelters hardly provide the same amount of protection from harsh weather conditions.

Some malls have gone so far as to monitor kids' dress, and the Sunrise Mall in Corpus Christi, Texas, instituted a policy banning backward-facing baseball caps (New York Times 1995b). As a result, fashion trends among poor and minority youth are

branded as signaling trouble and are likely to be prohibited from the mall. Practices such as dressing alike -- common among many minority youth and not just gangs -- are increasingly likely to get kids ejected from malls on the grounds that this in itself is a marker of gang affiliation however (though it is hardly likely that a group of cheerleaders in uniform would be singled out.) This trend is significantly more troubling than the old "No shirt, no shoes, no service" policies which at least were usually clearly posted.

In most cases policies limiting kids' access to malls, their appearance or behavior have been spurred by a violent incident involving guns, and in two cases, fatal shootings. Ironically, these much-feared kids often say themselves that they go to the mall in order to be safe. In New Haven, the neighborhoods these kids come from -- Newhallville, The Hill, Dixwell -- are widely held by residents and outsiders alike to be unpredictably dangerous. Although the incidence of random violence and injuries from stray bullets in these areas is treated in the local press with sensationalism, nevertheless most children in Newhallville are intimately acquainted with its effects.

For a time, the owners of the 70 shops in the Chapel Square Mall considered for a time a proposal to limit the hours during which unaccompanied young people could be on the premises. When word of the proposal reached the public, it was widely criticized as being racist. The conflict was typical of those cropping up around the country in regard to the nature of mall spaces: are they public or private? How do you define "security"? If the spaces were deemed public, shop owners hardly had the legal right to bar access to kids. The management company that runs New Haven's mall already has an official policy of keeping school-age shoppers out of the mall during school hours.

Regardless of the reasons for which consumers who are older, more affluent, or lighter-skinned have abandoned Chapel Square, youth and teens (mostly minority) now constitute the mall's most important market (New York Times 1993). Shop owners have had to develop subtle means of discouraging young people from spending too much time in the mall's public spaces, while attempting to continue to entice them to spend their money in its commercial venues. These strategies include an increasingly visible uniformed security force and the use of piped music featuring genres thought to be unappealing to undesirable youth. In a variation of what Russell Baker (1992) jokingly called "the Beethoven Defense," I found on one visit to the New Haven mall the building's hidden speakers filling the space with songs by Frank Sinatra.

Though the relatively large proportion of black shoppers in the New Haven mall might have something to do with its economic decline, there nevertheless seem to be other factors at work. First, in comparison to larger, newer and more architecturally and visually spectacular malls, the New Haven mall -- which was built in the 1960s -- is run-down, offers little variety and, in contradiction of a basic mall dictum does, not even have free parking. Currently the mall houses no outlets of prominent chains such as Gap, Express, Banana Republic, Pottery Barn, Crate & Barrel -- all stores that would attract a more economically varied clientele; instead, discount enterprises -- Sam's Dollar Store, and Payless Shoes, for example -- are in the majority.

Development of nearby areas has encouraged the movement of moneyed shoppers away from the mall. A prominent local development company, Schiavone, has considerably perked up the upper Chapel Street area, located two blocks above the mall

and directly across from part of the Yale Campus. This newly renovated stretch of shops and restaurants is now distinctly upscale, housing downtown's priciest venues. Further up, the run-down Broadway area is currently being rehabbed -- with a $7.5 million federal grant and a $1.9 million contribution from Yale (Charles 1994), siphoning off whatever upscale business remains downtown and relocating it closer to the Yale campus.

Lower Chapel, which once housed a large Kresge's store (Kresge's is the predecessor of K-Mart), is now home to discount stores and jewelry shops. Nearly all those shopping on Lower Chapel are black and Hispanic; while shoppers on upper Chapel and Broadway are racially and ethnically diverse, few are poor or working class. As one person, who had grown up in Dixwell, which borders the Broadway shopping area, said "We used to go down there to look at the people walking funny!" This remark was accompanied by a raucous imitation of the stiff, uptight walk of the middle class, whites, or fearful Yale students.

In a city already starkly segregated in its residential areas, downtown is now headed toward a similar segregation. Lower and upper Chapel Streets house shopping areas that cater to those coming from lower-income levels on the one hand, and upper income levels on the other. The mall physically occupies the middle ground between the two, and though perceived to be used by an ever-poorer and darker population, people who go there remain relatively diverse in terms of both race and socio-economic level, especially when compared to the territories on either side. As the physical and perceptual middle ground downtown, the mall is a conflicted site. Many shopkeepers are caught between trying to appeal to the customers they would like to have (middle class and

white), and not alienating the customers that they do have (young and of color). Others have attempted to capitalize upon the mall's changing demographic mix and have opened stores carrying hip-hop fashions, African folklore and artisanry or Afrocentric merchandise.

The Chapel Square mall is not unusual in its attempts to maintain a profile as a safe, communal space that exists in distinct opposition to the chaotic, violent city beyond. The maintenance of this image spurs, in part, the attempts to limit or prevent young people's presence there, since they are perceived to threaten the pacific atmosphere. Such consumer community building, the proffering of togetherness through shopping, is most evident in the yearly Christmas spree of conviviality and community events -- from the perennially popular picture on Santa's knee to caroling and dance performances. Halloween, in particular, has emerged as a time when the mall is supported as a healthy alternative to the New Haven street and all its dangers. This perception of the mall as an alternative to the city itself as a site of communal activity is supported not only by its own publicity efforts but also by institutions such as the public schools. For several years running, mall shopkeepers have distributed candy and Halloween balloons to hordes of costumed kids who trick-or-treat their way around the two story concourse on a weekend near the 31st of October. Significantly, this event is designed to appeal to young children and their families (segments of the population which mall management finds amenable), not problematic older children and teens. During my fieldwork, the principal of the Lincoln School, where I was based, sent a note to each child's family that encouraged caretakers not to allow their children to trick-or-treat door-to-door, but instead advised

them either to take children only to family members' homes or to go trick-or-treating at the mall. While in this scary world you cannot be sure that your neighbors will not insert razor blades into the apples they put in your child's goodie bag, you can trust that your local store owner is not so perverse as to harm his or her customers or their families.

Community, in this situation not based on the kinds of mutual obligation and civic commitment embodied in the notion of neighborliness, because you cannot trust those you know. Trick-or-treating is safer amid the relative anonymity of the mall, where shopkeepers know better than to bite the hand that feeds them, so to speak. While eschewing the bite, shopkeepers do bark, however, and it is often at their younger customers that they bark most often.

Newhallville girls go to the mall From the time they are very small, Newhallville children accompany their families, whether parents or older siblings or cousins, on downtown shopping excursions. When children -- especially girls -- are about ten years old, many of their families begin allowing them to go downtown without the accompaniment of their elders. Among the children from the main study group, girls go downtown alone more often than do boys, who spend much of their unsupervised time riding bikes around the neighborhood -- or farther afield.

For these girls, going to the mall alone is often a thrilling experience, and one that allows them to be playful in ways that are impossible at home and in the neighborhood. Despite widespread feelings in New Haven that the mall is not a particularly safe or comfortable space to be, the statements and behavior of Newhallville

children indicate that for them, the mall offers freedoms unavailable elsewhere, while also imposing particular forms of restraint.

Spatial freedom As mentioned earlier, some kids go to the mall because they feel safer there than they do on the street. "Kids come here to stay out of trouble and to shop," said 16-year-old Cherie Lee in an interview with the New York Times (1993). Though none of the kids I knew stated this feeling quite so directly, I was struck by the changes in their demeanor when we went to the mall. The mall space itself seemed to be the sort of safe, protective milieu it was designed to be from these children's point of view, at least in some respects. Some of these changes, discussed in the following section, had more to do with the social setting than with the spaces or architecture of the mall itself; and while I examine the spatial and social aspects of Newhallville kids' mall experiences separately, they are ultimately mutually determining.

Malls are often compared to theme parks such as Disneyland (see essays in Variations on a Theme Park (Sorkin 1992b)) in part because, like theme parks, malls feature, controlled and utopian-yet- carnivalesque atmosphere. Several recent mega-malls, such as the Mall of America in Minnesota or West Edmonton Mall in Canada (5.2 million square feet) actually contain theme parks, further eliding these two forms which are at once architectural, social and economic. When Tionna, Natalia and Asia, went to the mall, they often used its spaces as their own kind of personal amusement center, going down the up escalators, and up the down ones, running through public spaces loudly laughing and shouting, tailing cute boys like easy-to-spot, giggly spies. When

Macy's was still open, the second-floor breezeway connecting the mall to the department store was a glass-encased tunnel through which they could run, run-walk, gallop, shuffle or tumble. Macy's itself was a kind of playground, with its three floors, numerous escalators and accessible displays of electronics, jewelry and makeup. Excerpts of field notes from a shopping expedition taken shortly before Christmas in 1992 detail some typical activities in which these kids engaged when visiting the mall:

> Asia and Natalia lean over the second, floor railing throwing pennies into the fountain on the mall's main floor below. Bunches of poinsettia plants are set high upon wire pillars that rise up out of the fountain and the brilliant red flowers seem to float in the air. By the edge of the fountain is a cart whose proprietors are selling religious clocks and metal, laser-etched images of saints and reproductions of the Last Supper. Asia and Natalia decide to try to throw a coin down on top of someone's head. They drop some pennies down. The coins miss the unsuspecting person, who is minding the cart with the Last Supper reproductions. The girls come running up to me, jumping, hopping, vibrating with the excitement and danger of what they have done. Then they spot some cute boys and take off in close pursuit. I take off after them.
>
> They have lost the boys and decide to look for them in the Macy's game section one floor up. They go up there, pretending to shop, looking at electronic typewriters. The boys are not there. After a few minutes of playing and fiddling with electronic displays, Natalia says, "Now we got to go boy huntin' again." As we are walking, Asia says, "Miss Chin looks hype. All she got to do is lose the bags." Natalia, however, announces, "Miss Chin is bad luck." Meaning it's my fault they lost the boys. We are by the escalator and the girls consider going downstairs. "That's where the perfume is," Natalia says. We go up to the third floor again. No boys. "Miss Chin, you're making us lose men," Natalia wails. We go all the way to the first floor and the girls stop at the Clinique counter for a few minutes, playing with the facial "computer" there. We head back upstairs again, on an escalator, and on the way the girls place coins on the moving rubber rail, calling to me and saying, "We gave the coins a ride!"

In pursuing the boys the thrill is in the chase itself. Exploring different departments in Macy's, playing with electronic typewriters and children's toys, riding the escalators,

fiddling with cosmetics displays are fun and exciting for these kids. These activities would be fun for any kids, but what was absent from the surface, at least, of these children's playful meandering, was any engagement with most spaces as consumers with money to spend. They played with the typewriters just to play with them, not so that they could think about buying them or even wish that they could have one of their own. The escalators were by far the most exciting and fascinating element, aside from a certain pleasure they seemed to take in knowing they were on the verge of wildness -- all the roaming up and down and up and down again -- and yet unlikely to suffer any painful consequences.

This was their mall: a large, open, interesting, exciting space, full of cute boys though dotted with inconvenient security guards and disapproving grownups; lined with stores containing fascinating merchandise; punctuated by escalators that lifted them to the mysteries above or lowered them to the unknown below. They were not there only or even primarily to shop, but to explore, to go "boy huntin'" as Natalia said, and to generate a safe yet thrilling excitement. This is perhaps not the use for which Macy's or the mall were designed; like the amusement park, Macy's and the mall presented the girls with a closely monitored -- and hence relatively safe -- space.

Social freedom As will be discussed later in this chapter, being at the mall does not place kids in a field of unadulterated freedom, but it does allow some pressures and problems to recede from the forefront of their experiences. Cautious and on guard for dangers posed by men when at home in the neighborhood, Tionna, Natalia and Asia can

revel in being girls at the mall. At home, they worry that men might be after them; in the mall, they chase boys as if every day were Sadie Hawkins day. The following are portions of an interaction that took place in the mall's food court:

> Asia spies a boy she knows. With ten-year-old bravado, Natalia says that she's going to get up and go over to them. Asia tells her to go ahead. Overcome with the idea, Natalia suddenly decides she can't possibly do it. Asia gets up and goes over to the boys, tells one of them that Natalia likes him. Natalia squirms, moans, giggles, slides under the table and, emerging again, tries to bury herself inside her coat. Asia comes back. I drink my soda and they eat, glancing back at the boys who are sometimes looking our way. The taller boy comes over and says to Natalia that the other boy wants her to go over there. Now she's really dying. She's saying she's too shy, she can't etc. etc.
>
> "I don't know his last name so I can't look it up," she says. "I am so mad at you," she continues. "Rashad is going to be pissed!" Rashad is the missing boy. "The only thing you had to do was get up, walk over there and say hello, run back and that's it," Asia said. "Miss Chin," Natalia said, "It's all your fault. I told you you were bad luck." "Right this minute we could be walking with them," Asia said with exaggerated wistfulness, totally fake and somewhat funny. "If I see him I'm going to call him and say wait right there, here she is!" "If you see him," Natalia said, "You're going to start laughing."

From an adult point of view the freedom might appear child like, even though much of it focusses on boy-girl interactions of a romantically (but not sexually) charged nature. The raucous behavior, the playing around, the play is what kids do. However, the girls, at least, also think of these mall outings as a way to begin explore growing up, not being kids. Later, Tionna explained that at the mall "We try not to act like kids. When we're here, at home, then we act like kids, we play, we play with our dolls." Being able to explore the city and the mall on their own is thus not just an expansion of their horizons not just as shoppers or individuals, but a mark of maturity -- one intrinsically opposed to

the vulnerability of childhood and playing with dolls at home. Children often yearn to be grown up for a whole host of reasons. For Tionna, Natalia and Asia, one of these might be that feeling of freedom and safety they receive when roaming downtown.

Constraints As stressed in my earlier discussion of the New Haven mall, pointed efforts at constraining the activities and limiting the presence of minority youth permeate the atmosphere. Children are hardly unaware that they are at best only temporarily welcome -- in most mall spaces and then only under certain circumstances -- and that they are almost if not literally unwelcome in others. Like Tionna's loud and confrontational behavior on the Prospect Street corner when she yelled at passing cars, the loud and often disruptive behavior of Newhallville kids in the mall can be seen, in part, as an assertion of their right not only to be where they are, but to be in the world.

The most obvious way that kids are made to feel self-conscious is when store employees or owners pointedly watch or follow them as they move through stores. Children are extremely sensitive to this, and while often not letting on that they are aware of this close monitoring, they often discuss such experiences, which may also involve outright confrontation with store personnel. When preparing to enter Claire's, an inexpensive accessory store, Asia recounted a recent experience in which she wanted to one-up a sales clerk whom she felt had mocked her on an earlier occasion because she was short of money:

> "Last time I was in there the lady was laughing because I didn't have enough money. The other day I went in and I bought all this stuff and the lady said, 'that will be forty dollars.' I pulled out a fifty dollar bill and

> said, 'Here.'" Asia demonstrated, and the look on her face was both self-satisfied and challenging. "I swear I was about to say 'keep the change' until my grandmother came up," she said.

Asia's story captures the pressures many Newhallville kids face in having to assert their right to be in the mall by demonstrating their ability to buy. In Asia's story, when she is at first unable to pay for what she wants, she is sure that the sales-lady is laughing at her. The pleasure she took in being able to later present this woman with a fifty-dollar bill was palpable, as was her frustration in not being able to add insult to injury by imperiously directing the woman to keep the change.

Such problematic interactions -- where black shoppers are assumed to be unable to make purchases, where they are steered toward inferior merchandise or where they are treated as if giving them attention is a waste of time -- are recounted often by young and old alike. These kinds of problems are one reason, why many Newhallville residents dress up when they go downtown to shop: they want to appear respectable to store personnel, and thus to be treated with attention and respect. Interactions in which kids like Asia are made to feel inadequate or even nonexistent often make shopping an undertaking fraught with difficulty.

Regardless of the impressions kids want to create, money is often an issue for them. Walking through Macy's one afternoon, Asia spotted an outfit she thought was "cute." After looking at the price tag, however, she said, "Once you see the price of clothes it's not cute any more. It's expensive." Kids often had such reactions to what they saw as high prices for clothes, toys and other items. Their experience of desire was

circumscribed by their own sense of what was a good price for something -- and, I suspect, by their keen knowledge of the limited nature of their own and their familys' finances.

Carlos' mother, Ana, and her friend discussed their point of view regarding children's desires.

> "If you get them used to having all this stuff, when they get older and you say no, they get real upset," Ana said, explaining why she is so adamant now about saying "When I say no it means no," to the kids. "I don't promise them things," she said. "I say, we'll see.'" "What do you mean when you say they get upset?" I asked. "Well," said Ana's friend, "if you buy them all these expensive things when they're little, they still expect you to buy it when they're older. My mother raised seven children alone and she worked three jobs. She always got us the best of everything. She went to the best stores, we always had nice clothes. Now I still get mad when I can't have things. I can act like a little kid, and I say 'I want that!'"

More than once I came across children in Newhallville with tear- stained faces after they had been punished for being "bad" in the store, which usually meant asking one time too many for something. By the time kids are nine or ten, they seem to know better than to ask or pester. In the course of over 25 separate shopping trips with children, I only heard them say, "I want that" once or twice. Only one child directly asked me to purchase anything. This was Teyvon, who later explained to me that he was purposely testing me and announced, "You weak!" Several refused my offers to buy them small things, such as a soda or ice cream cone, saying, "I don't want to spend up all your money, Miss Chin!"

Conclusion

Local groceries like Bob's and B&K have a lively, intimate and almost homey atmosphere, where kids are well known to store proprietors, who not only sell them goods but keep them in line, give them advice, do them favors and even communicate with their parents about their behavior. The central communal role played by such stores is made vividly clear by the discussion between Bob and one of his older customers -- aimed in large part at the children who were in the store at the time -- which was an oral continuation of narratives of slavery and life in the South which have been passed down for generations in this African American community. A similar encounter in a large supermarket is hard to imagine. In neighborhood stores, social and community elements, on the one hand, and products on the other, seem to be present in inverse proportion to that found in large supermarkets, where impersonal and product-oriented relations overwhelm and disconnect the social flow. This is not to say that these small markets represent the ideal consumer setting. They are understocked and overpriced, and practically speaking, cannot provide either children or their families with everything they need to fill their kitchens, clean their homes, feed their pets and maintain their bodies.

Supermarkets are complex social, cultural and consumer sites for Newhallville children, and a substantially greater range of merchandise than do stores such as Bob's. However, while providing immensely rich opportunities for a wide variety of activities, they are simultaneously constraining and alienating. Much of the experience is shaped by who these children are: African Americans of working-class and poor background. Yet at the same time, the very nature of the supermarket itself stamps children's time there with

its distinctive mark. Especially noteworthy is the combination of material abundance with a lack of social embeddedness; Michelle's in-store activities were social only insofar as they related to her immediate family. The somewhat limited nature of these social interactions does not reduce either their importance or their complexity. Michelle's relations were primarily with products and the store itself. It is these relations between people and products upon which much of the social science literature on consumption and supermarkets has focussed (Carrier 1990; Willis 1991). Taken together, these conditions -- high levels of product involvement, low or limited levels of social interaction, corporate-mandated physical conditions -- stand in sharp contrast to that of Newhallville's local, neighborhood groceries.

The downtown mall offers an even greater contrast to Newhallville's grocery stores, both in the range of social dilemmas it presents kids and in the range and variety of merchandise available. Choice cannot be confused with freedom, however, and Newhallville kids are under serious constraints as they cruise the mall, searching for "slammin'" boys or "dope" outfits. Malls, as places specializing in the simulation of gracious civic life, are not often meant to include those from all socioeconomic levels, ethnic groups or subcultures. The New Haven mall is, ideally (from the mall's perspective), a place from which Newhallville's children are absent. As a result, a variety of strategies for accomplishing their absence, or at least monitoring their presence of children from Newhallville. These include preventing public transportation access; regulating shoppers' style of dress; regulating access of youth; playing music certain groups are thought to dislike; closely following and watching youthful and minority

shoppers as they browse in stores. All of these strategies make Newhallville children's experiences in the mall unlike those of their better-off or lighter-skinned peers, against whom many -- if not most -- of these strategies are not aimed, much less deployed.

The growing social science literature on consumption often points out that "we think we are free when our choices have in fact been consciously constructed for us. This is a dangerous illusion of freedom" (Tomlinson 1990, p. 13). Large (usually suburban) supermarkets are seen by some as presenting this "dangerous illusion" with particular effectiveness (Willis 1991), and malls perhaps even more so. However, for Newhallville children, these places -- particularly when compared to local groceries -- actually do offer a great deal of choice, albeit choice that is circumscribed and predetermined both by a corporate entity and capitalism at large. At the same time, such choice is not to be confused with freedom. For these children (and their families) these stores offer often painful glimpses of what they might be able to buy if they only had the money. This uncomfortable gap between wanting and possession is perhaps a common experience in a culture such as ours, where the perpetuation of a consumer culture is predicated on the continuing generation of wants and needs; but in this case the experience of denial and loss-before-having is not centered upon luxuries and lifestyle (Baudrillard's "simulacra") but rather, upon the most basic levels of life itself.

CHAPTER 6

HOUSE, HOME AND ROOM

This chapter focuses on children's rooms and their homes to examine the ways in which domestic space is socially constructed and organized in Newhallville. Notions of privacy, individuality, sharing, possession and communality are central to the ways in which domestic space is understood and used. These notions, in turn, shape consumption in Newhallville, and I argue that the social construction and organization of domestic space has important implications for children's consumer lives. In this way, my point of view and analysis differs sharply with that of many other contemporary observers of consumption in similar areas. Desire is often portrayed as a reflexive response to the imperatives of advertising, image peddling, and the ready availability of goods; this desire is seen as being particularly potent among poor minority youth (Nightingale, 1993). Looking at the contents of Newhallville children's rooms and analyzing the social use of domestic space reveals the multiple ways in which family and community tether and reshape these desires. Children -- and other people -- do not exist alone in their relationship with consumption of any sort. In their rooms and homes, Newhallville children are constantly reminded of their place in their kin and friendship networks, and of the mutual responsibilities and burdens that maintaining day-to-day relationships engenders.

I begin by looking at the contents of children's rooms. These rooms illustrate one way in which space, family and consumption come together in Newhallville. Inventories

of five rooms occupied by seven children document the sorts and variety of their possessions, providing a snapshot of a moment in their consumer lives. Like the majority of North American children, kids in Newhallville do not buy themselves most of their possessions, but instead receive them, often as gifts, from family, kin and friends. These possessions show how deeply children's consumer lives are embedded in a network of kin and friendly relationships. Like the socially constructed spaces of their homes, kids' possessions are material reminders of the kin and extended kin to whom they are obligated to give care and from whom they expect to receive care: they are the embodied result of what Di Leonardo (1987) calls the work of kinship.

Special possessions can evoke for children important aspects of these relationships both in their scope and limitation. For these ten-year-olds, poised to begin moving out of childhood, toys representing that childhood can be especially meaningful. Playthings are viewed by scholars and lay persons alike as powerful socializing agents. I do not enter that debate here. Rather, I examine the kinds of playthings children have in their rooms to see what they reveal about the skills, activities and fantasies caretakers and kin have for their children.

Children experience their homes socially and spatially not only in their rooms, but through the entire domestic space of the homes where they spend time. People in Newhallville place importance in sharing, communality and flexibility in the use of domestic space both within and between households; they emphasize similar qualities in the way consumption is conducted. Thus, in using and negotiating domestic spaces, children also travel a complex social terrain; in the process, their consumer lives take

shape. Extended family ties are often maintained, affirmed and tested by and through children, who, more than any other family members, move freely from house to house across what can be considered extended domestic space. I view children's active involvement in the negotiation of such spaces to be part of Di Leonardo's "work of kinship" (1987). This work, as Di Leonardo describes it, is deeply engaged with consumption. Some significant consumer-related activities she mentions include buying gifts and cards and symbolically managing "images of family and kin vis-a-vis the images of others, both folk and mass media" (Di Leonardo 1987, 443). Children take part in these kinds of activities actively, effectively and imaginatively.

Contents of children's rooms

The inventories had as their primary and simplest goal the documentation of the kind and number of items contained in Newhallville children's rooms. Though not all of each child's possessions were found inside his or her room, the majority of them were.[1] The inventories thus documented not only the contents of children's rooms but also the bulk of their possessions. In the discussion that follows, I use the terms interchangeably. Children's rooms did contain things belonging to others, and these are noted and treated separately from children's own possessions. These items were most commonly books and clothes.

[1]In contrast, Rheingold and Cook (1975) found in a study of the contents of children's rooms in a "well-to-do" neighborhood that many children did not have most of their possessions in their room, but rather somewhere else.

Five inventories were conducted of the possessions of seven children. The group includes three girls -- Namisha, LaQuisha and her sister LaTwana -- and four boys -- Carlos, Stephen, Teyvon and Richie (see table 6.1). The families of each of these children, except Stephen, are on federal assistance and have annual incomes under $10,000. Stephen comes from the most financially well-off family I knew in Newhallville. Both his parents are employed full-time, and Stephen's father estimated the family income at $90,000 a year (see appendix 1 for household characteristics). The effects of Stephen's affluence relative to the other children are evident in his inventory results, and not only does he have considerably more possessions than the other children, a greater portion of his possessions are more costly than is the case for other children.

It is tempting to make explicit comparisons between these children and middle-class children regarding the kinds and numbers of their possessions. Unfortunately, there are no comparable data on the possessions of middle-class children. The one available study that does analyze the contents of children's rooms is limited to children between the ages of 1 and 71.6 months (Rheingold and Cook 1975). It is therefore difficult to place the results of the inventories in the context of a population of children in the United States that is more diverse either ethnically or economically. Stephen's results do give some indication of what might be found: a larger variety of possessions, a larger portion of which cost upwards of 10 or 20 dollars; more possessions related to reading, learning, art, and creativity.

Methodology The inventories usually lasted about two hours, which I felt was the upper limit for children's ability to maintain concentration. In most cases, I conducted the inventory alone with children in their rooms. In Teyvon's and Richie's inventory, the whole family ended up in the bedroom, adding their commentary to everything we came across. Moving from a random starting point in the room, I asked children who each possession came from and on what occasion, how much it cost and any special feelings or stories associated with each item. Clothing was not inventoried, both because it would have taken much too long and because I felt that inventorying the contents of children's clothes closets and dresser drawers was too invasive.

Appointments were made ahead of time, and I always arrived at a child's house to find the room recently cleaned and neatened in preparation for my inspection. In Namisha's case, she had gone so far as to have laid nearly all of her possessions neatly on top of her bed and was able to systematically present them to me while discussing them.

Inventory results Contents of children's rooms fall into 15 major categories (table 6.1). The first four categories are electronic: television, game system (Sega, Nintendo), hand-held game and cartridges (used for playing games on the systems). Six of the categories fall under the general rubric of toys: dolls, stuffed/plush (usually furry animals such as rabbits, gorillas and in one case a banana), action figures, vehicles (including trucks, Hot Wheels cars, and so on), guns and weapons (the items in this group were all toys, not actual weapons), fast-food toys. Additional categories include: sports equipment, games, licensed (Hook sheets and World Wrestling Force coin banks, for

instance), books, miscellaneous toys and miscellaneous other items (for example, a plastic briefcase).

Books In every room but one, books are the largest single category. LaQuisha and LaTwana have the smallest number of books in the group (N=4) and these books are all reference volumes -- three dictionaries and a thesaurus. Books are a problematic category, since upon close inspection it became apparent that in every room but Stephen's, many of the books did not belong to the children but rather to adult family members. These books included texts from vocational and college courses, religious materials and novels, all of which children identified as belonging not to themselves but to resident adults.

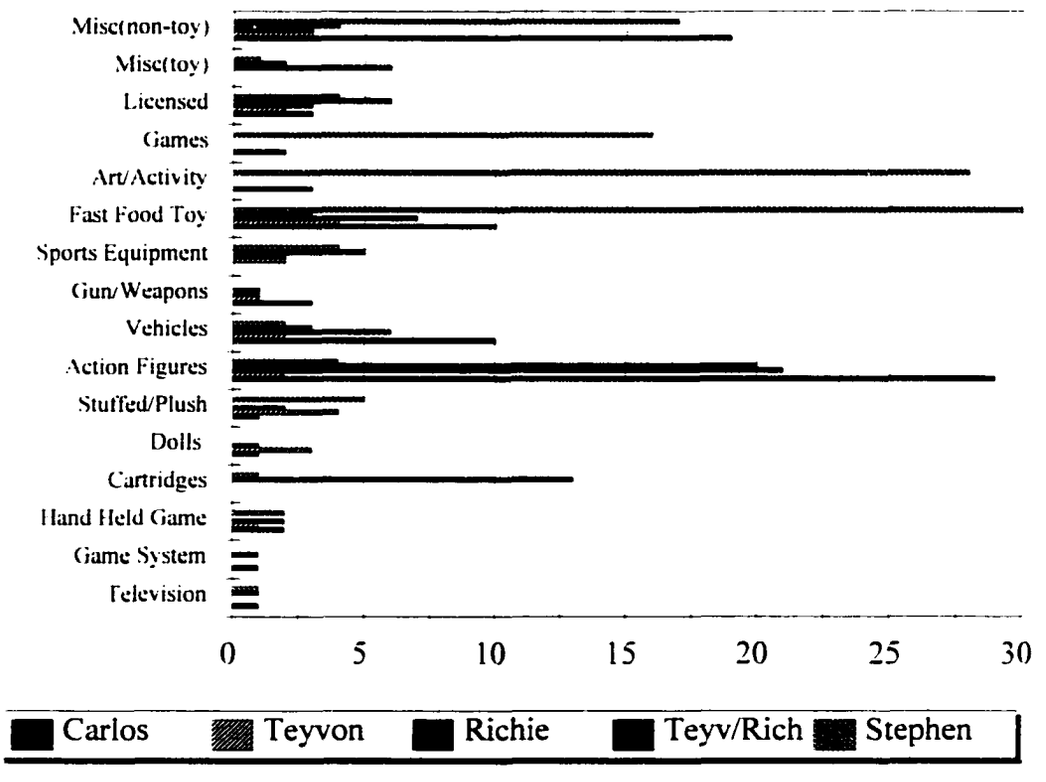
The majority of the 75 books in Carlos' room belonged to his mother, along with several volumes from an encyclopedia set, a dictionary, and find-a-word booklets and similar activity books. Carlos said he did not read his mother's books, though he did sometimes use of the encyclopedia. Teyvon and Richie also said they rarely read the books in their room. In both of these households, children's rooms were the only place where books were stored. That is, the living room or parents' room did not have contain books or a place to keep them (i.e., a bookshelf). Stephen had 61 books, fewer than Carlos or Teyvon and Richie, but he told me his mother had recently insisted he throw away or get rid of "about three hundred" books, most of which were now too simple or childish for him.

The most striking difference between Stephen's books and those of other children is that most of Stephen's books were written for children and young adults. Stephen

Table 6.1
Contents of Children's Rooms by Category

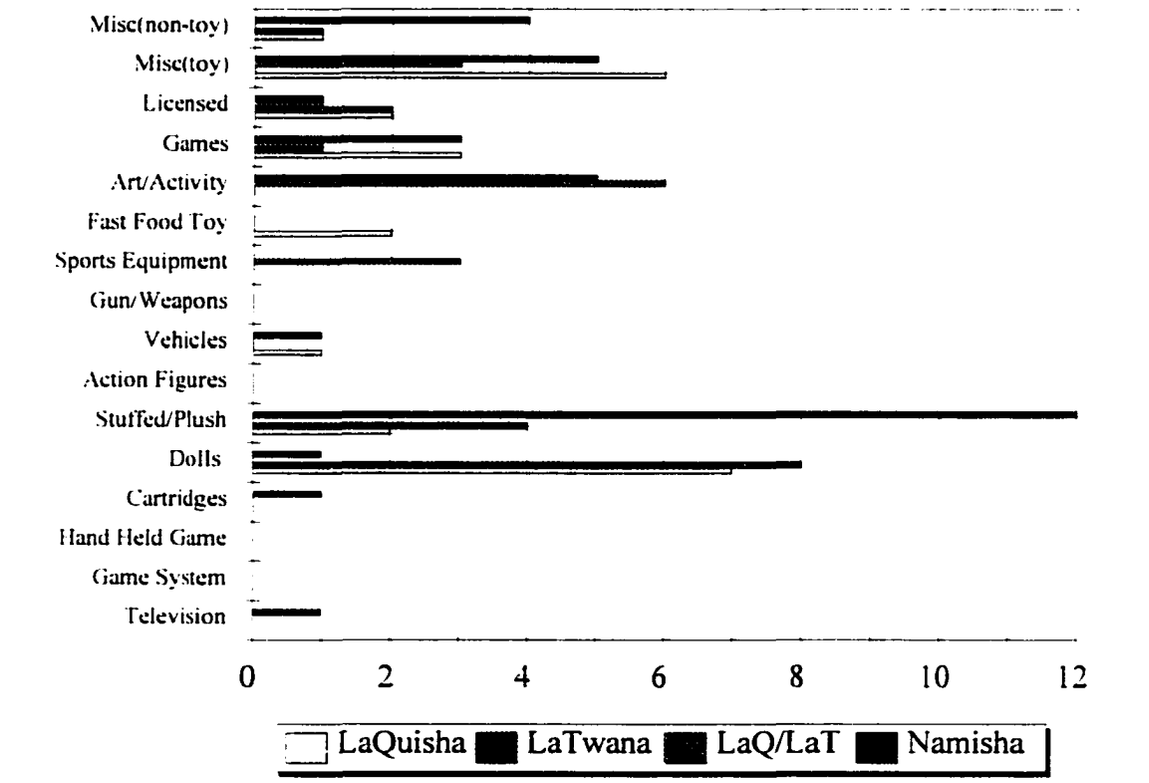
Name	LaQuisha	LaTwana	LaQ/LaT	Namisha	Carlos	Teyvon	Richie	Teyv/Rich	Stephen	Total
Television	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	4
Game System	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	2
Hand Held Game	0	0	0	0	2	1	2	0	2	7
Cartridges	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	13	1	15
Dolls	7	8	0	1	1	3	1	0	0	21
Stuffed/Plush	2	4	0	12	1	4	2	0	5	30
Action Figures	0	0	0	0	29	2	21	20	4	76
Vehicles	1	0	0	1	10	2	6	3	2	25
Gun/Weapons	0	0	0	0	3	1	1	1	0	6
Sports Equipment	0	0	3	0	0	2	2	5	4	16
Fast Food Toy	2	0	0	0	10	4	7	3	30	56
Art/Activity	0	0	6	5	3	0	0	0	28	42
Games	3	1	1	3	2	0	0	0	16	26
Licensed	2	2	1	1	3	2	3	6	4	24
Misc(toy)	6	0	3	5	0	0	6	2	1	23
Misc(non-toy)	1	1	0	4	19	3	3	4	17	52
Books	0	0	4	37	75	0	0	104	61	281
Total	24	16	18	71	160	24	54	163	176	706

Figure 6.1
Boys' Possessions
(Books not included)



*Category Teyv/Rich denotes possessions shared by Teyvon and Richie, brothers who occupied the same room.

Figure 6.2
Girls' Possessions
(Books not included)



*Category LaQ/LaT denotes possessions shared by LaQuisha and LaTwana, sisters who occupied the same room.

seems to read more than the other children, and at the time of the inventory was in the middle of a novel-sized science-fiction fantasy trilogy. Few books written expressly for young people were found in any other child's room. Since most of the books in children's rooms were reference or adult materials, the presence of relatively large numbers of books in children's rooms does not seem to indicate a caretaker or familial emphasis on reading as an activity in which kids are encouraged or expected to engage. Another interpretation of the presence of books in children's rooms and their absence in other parts of the home might be just the opposite: that putting books here rather than somewhere else is precisely a way of encouraging them to be familiar with books, to use and read them. However, if this is the case, comments by several children indicate that simply putting books in their rooms does not mean that they will be read. The small numbers of children's storybooks and novels further suggests that practices such as bedtime-story-reading are not typical in Newhallville. While storybooks are available at school and public libraries, interviews showed that parents do not often visit libraries with their children.[2]

Electronics The primary electronic items found in children's rooms were televisions, game systems, game cartridges and hand-held games. These were also

[2] During my fieldwork, public library hours had been shaved down to 30 hours a week from a 90 hour week. At the same time New Haven public schools also cut back severely on their libraries, laying off librarians in some cases, leaving school libraries all but unusable.

among the most costly items. All rooms except LaQuisha and LaTwana's had a television set. Of the four televisions, two were black-and-white. Carlos and Namisha's televisions had cable hookup. While costly in relation to other children's possessions, the televisions in children's rooms were old, and even when new, probably did not cost much more than $100.

Interviews with children and parents seemed to indicate that while kids tended to have their own television sets, they did not watch them all that much. Both Carlos and Stephen said that they watch their televisions only at night, when they are trying to go to sleep. Their parents also said this was the case, and noted that earlier in the evening, the family usually watches television together. In Carlos' household the family television-watching takes place in the living room, while Stephen usually watches television with his parents in their bedroom.

The boys all have video game systems, and all have the old Nintendo 8-bit version, which in 1991 was overshadowed by Nintendo's introduction of the more impressive 16-bit system. In Newhallville the newer versions of these systems were rarely bought when first introduced, but rather a year or so later, when prices had dropped. By the winter of 1992 prices on the 16-bit systems were falling, and some children I knew in Newhallville received them that Christmas. Carlos had several game cartridges in his room (the children call these game cartridges "tapes"); these were borrowed from his next-door neighbor and best friend, Gerald. (Game cartridges range in price but generally cost between $10 and $25 for 8-bit games. Cartridges for the newer

systems can cost as much as $60.) Teyvon and his brother Richie have 13 cartridges between the two of them.

Each of the boys had small hand-held video games, while none of the girls did. These games included baseball, football and double dragon. While two inventories included portable Walkman-type tape players, neither belonged to the room's occupant (in each case the tape player has been included in the miscellaneous nontoy category). Stephen had the most electronics among the group. In addition to a television and his mother's Walkman, he had a telephone, a computer and a non working video-cassette recorder.

In two households the game systems, though located in children's rooms, were used by the whole family. In these households, the presence of electronic entertainment equipment did not mean that children were retreating to private, isolated lairs where they spent hours alone relating to nothing else but the changing images on the screen and a joystick. Other family members freely came in and out of Carlos' room, or Teyvon and Richie's, to use their video games.

Toys Various types of toys dominated the inventories. Stuffed or plush toys (usually some type of furry animal) were found in each of the five rooms; the only other category found in each room was licensed goods. Every room but Stephen's had a doll of some sort -- though only girls' rooms had baby dolls with plastic or cloth bodies. Dolls found in boys' rooms were not baby dolls but instead small figures (8-12 inches) and depicting popular characters such as Marge Simpson. Dolls were the largest category for

both LaQuisha (7 dolls) and LaTwana (8 dolls), while Namisha had only 1. These girls' dolls included a Cabbage Patch Kid, a Baby Roller Blade, and various Barbies and Barbie-like dolls.

Action figures were present only in boys' rooms and constitute a second major category of children's toys. Action figures are usually 4-6 inches tall (as compared to a standard Barbie's 11 ½ inches) and are made of hard plastic with movable arms, legs and head.[3] They often come equipped with small weapons, helmets and other accouterments. Unlike girls' dolls, almost all action figures represent well-known and popular characters in Saturday morning or after-school cartoons (e.g., G.I. Joe, X-Men). Toy soldiers, which do not have the individual characterization of action figures, were also found in large numbers (Carlos, Richie and Teyvon had about 20 in each of their rooms). These relatively large numbers may be due not only to the popularity of toy soldiers among boys, but also to the fact that they are commonly bought by the bag, which contains between 10 and 20 of the toys.

Both dolls and action figures are toys that represent people. Boys' and girls' toys representing people do not do so in a neutral way, but overtly address issues of both race

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[3] Although G.I. Joes were originally manufactured in the smaller size as are most toys classified as action figures in the toy industry, they are currently manufactured on a scale similar to that of the Barbie. The toy industry continues to classify G.I. Joe as an action figure, however, and not a doll. My classification follows suit for clarity. This classification does reproduce a gendered understanding of action figure versus doll, where types of play which may be generally understood as role play, for instance, are categorized differently for boys and for girls. However, this gendered understanding is evident in the layout of toystores, the contents of children's toyboxes, marketing and advertising, as well as children's play itself.

and gender -- and more subtly encode information about class and social status. The dolls and action figures in these children's rooms are from diverse racial groups -- primarily black or white -- but show little preference for those representing people of color. Of the 15 dolls that LaQuisha and LaTwana showed me, 3 were black, 1 was Hispanic, and the remainder were white. LaTwana's Hispanic doll, from Olmec's Hip Hop Kids line, was the single toy in the inventories made by a black-owned and operated toy company. Likewise, it was the only explicitly "ethnically correct" toy; that is, one with a facial mold made specifically to represent the ethnicity of the doll rather than simply using plastic of a darker tint in the basic doll mold from which white dolls are likewise manufactured. All of the girls' dolls were female, and all of the boys' action figures were male -- except for alien figures, which were of indeterminate gender.

Vehicles appeared in most rooms, but in markedly larger numbers among boys (N=23) than girls (N=2). Items in this category ranged from small, inexpensive Hot Wheels cars costing no more than a dollar or two, to vehicles for action figures, such as a Batman Jet Foil, to the most expensive items in this category, remote-control cars. While a smaller category than vehicles in terms of numbers, guns and weapons showed even more gender distinction, with all of the boys except Stephen and none of the girls possessing a toy weapon of some sort. However, Carlos was the only child to have more than one weapon, and the single weapon that Teyvon and Richie each had was a "water bow," a sort of bow-and-arrow toy that used water instead of an actual arrow. The total number of weapons in children's rooms (N=6) was the smallest by far in the toy category, and overall, it was the third-smallest category, with only televisions (N=4) and game

systems (N=2) appearing in smaller numbers. The few game systems and televisions can be explained in part because of the expense of each item, as well as the lack of a need for more than one in a child's room.

There is evidence that it is the explicit policies of parents that result in the small numbers of weapons. Caretakers do not approve of real or fake weapons for their children, and they especially do not approve of toy guns, which no caretaker I interviewed allows their child to possess. The only item representing a gun (other than a small accessory for an action figure; such accessories were not inventoried separately) was a pistol-shaped Nintendo "zapper" in Teyvon and Richie's room. Their mother, Vanessa, told me she does not allow them to use it because it is shaped like a gun.

The small toys found inside fast-food children's meals were well represented, and Namisha was the only child not to have any fast-food toys. Two such toys appear in the inventory of LaQuisha and LaTwana's room, and a larger collection of these small toys was displayed in the living room of their apartment, atop the family television. In a similar style, Stephen had a collection of 30 small fast-food toys which, along with numerous other small figures, he had glued to the top shelf of the work desk in his room.

The bulk of art and activity toys were found in Stephen's inventory; he had 28 such toys, including puzzles, a rock tumbler, a spin painting kit, art supplies and an air brush kit. Several other children had possessions falling into this category, but the most common such items were inexpensive soft-cover activity books that have pages where kids can connect the dots, color a picture, find hidden images and so on. Activity toys

also included those that "did" something, such as Namisha's sewing machine, and toy photocopier fax machine and LaQuisha's toy typewriter.

Sports equipment Sixteen pieces of sports equipment were found among all inventories. These ranged from simple and inexpensive items such as the three tennis balls in LaQuisha and LaTwana's room to Stephen's baseball mitt. No specialized equipment -- cleats, helmets, shin guards -- was noted, as none of the children were currently participating in organized sports, either at their school or in a community league.

Games The most common games found in children's rooms were board games (Teyvon and Richie did not have any board games). Stephen was the only child to have more than three board games, and the difference between him and the other children was considerable: Stephen had 16 board games. Many of Stephen's games were educational in nature -- either word and vocabulary games (Scrabble, Pictionary, UpWords) or games involving knowledge of world facts (World Traveler). The abundance of Stephen's games and their subject matter may be related both to his family's level of affluence and his parents' level of education (both are college graduates). Board games are expensive, usually costing over $15 and often as much as $25. With the exception of Stephen, all the children had very few possessions in this price range overall (see figure 6.3).

For children of both genders, games are a distinctive sort of possession because they are typically used in a social context; that is, with the aid and involvement of other

people. In this way, they are similar to sports equipment, which is usually intended for social use as well.

Licensed goods Licensed goods are a problematic category since items belonging to any of the general categories might also be licensed goods -- an example is Teyvon's Marge Simpson doll.[4] I have included items like the Marge Simpson doll under the primary category -- in this case, doll. The licensed goods category includes such things as Lion King sleeping bags and candy containers in the shape of X-Men characters. Such items are a fairly new and expanding sector of child-oriented goods. I have in this analysis restricted the category of licensed goods to common household items -- sleeping bags, sheets, pajamas -- that incorporate licensed design elements. Such design transforms these goods, making them commercial and consumable in a way they are not when decorated with designs that do not have the connections and "tie-ins" with mass media and mass marketing.

The level of licensed goods in children's rooms provides some insight into the consumer practices of both child and family. Licensed items are generally more costly than "plain" items of the same type. In rooms where children have a lot of licensed merchandise, the implications are twofold: that children want licensed goods, and that caretakers are willing to provide them. Caretakers' opposition to buying licensed goods may rest on notions of hostility to commercialism, or on economic terms -- not wanting

[4] Marge Simpson is a character on the popular animated series "The Simpsons."

to pay extra for something that could be purchased more inexpensively. It is not correct, however, to assume that licensed goods are by definition costly. Many are quite inexpensive; for example, the X-Men candy containers in Teyvon's and Richie's room cost less than $2. Licensed goods did not appear in children's rooms in large numbers, and few of the licensed items were expensive. (Richie had a sleeping bag with popular Disney characters on it; Stephen had Hook sheets and a comforter.)

Miscellaneous These items have been subdivided into toy and nontoy categories. The toy category included 23 items overall. Objects included in this group were diverse in both type and price: a dress for a Barbie doll, a diary, a coin bank in the shape of a stegosaurus. Nontoy items were diverse as well, and ranged from the two bicycles parked in LaQuisha and LaTwana's bedroom to Carlos' collection of miniature baseball caps and Stephen's jar filled with water-growing crystals.

Prices Price information was not taken for books, which are not included in the discussion that follows (figs. 6.3, 6.4, 6.5). Leaving Stephen aside for the moment, the prices of children's possessions show some distinct tendencies. First, the overwhelming number of kids' possessions cost less than $10. Among the girls, nearly three-quarters (70.4%) of their possessions cost $10 or less; for boys, the figure is even higher, at 91.4 percent. Less than 2 percent of boys' possessions cost over $20, and for girls, the proportion is larger, but not much so, at 3.4 percent. In raw numbers, the figures appear

Figure 6.3
Prices of Boys' and Girls' Possessions (dollars; Stephen not included)

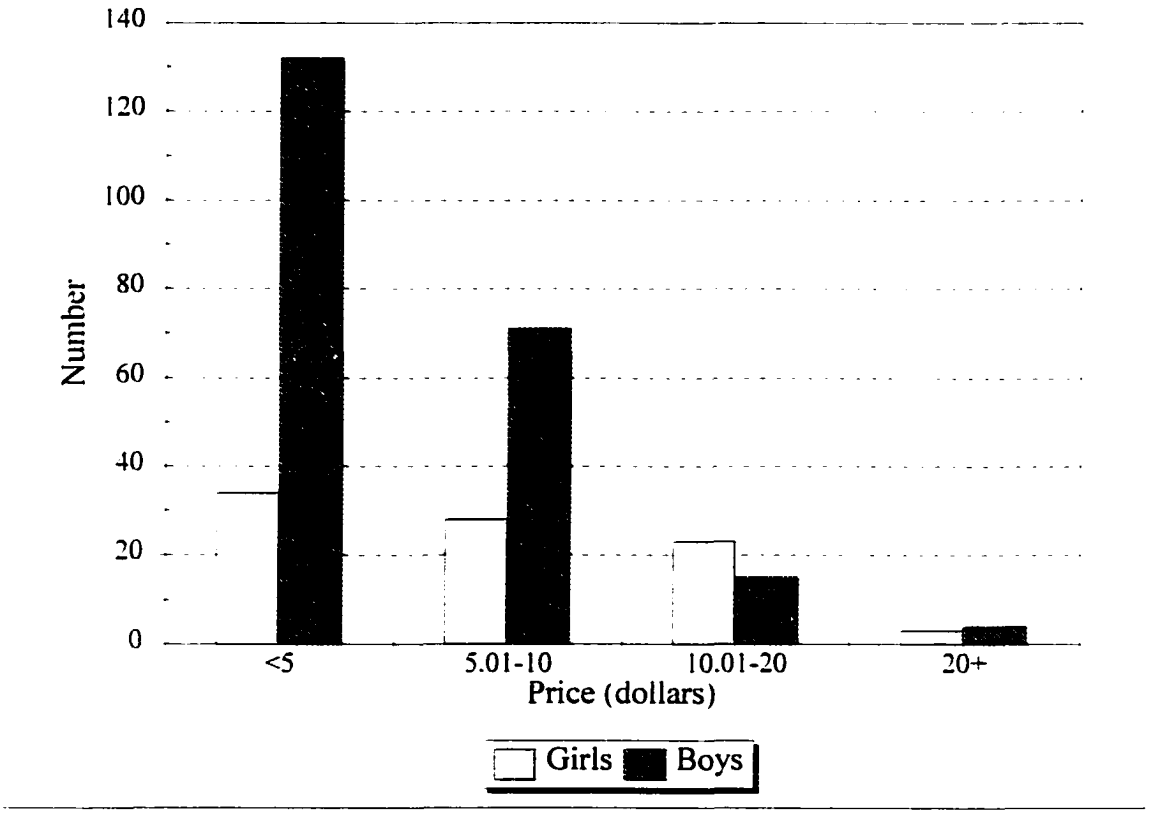
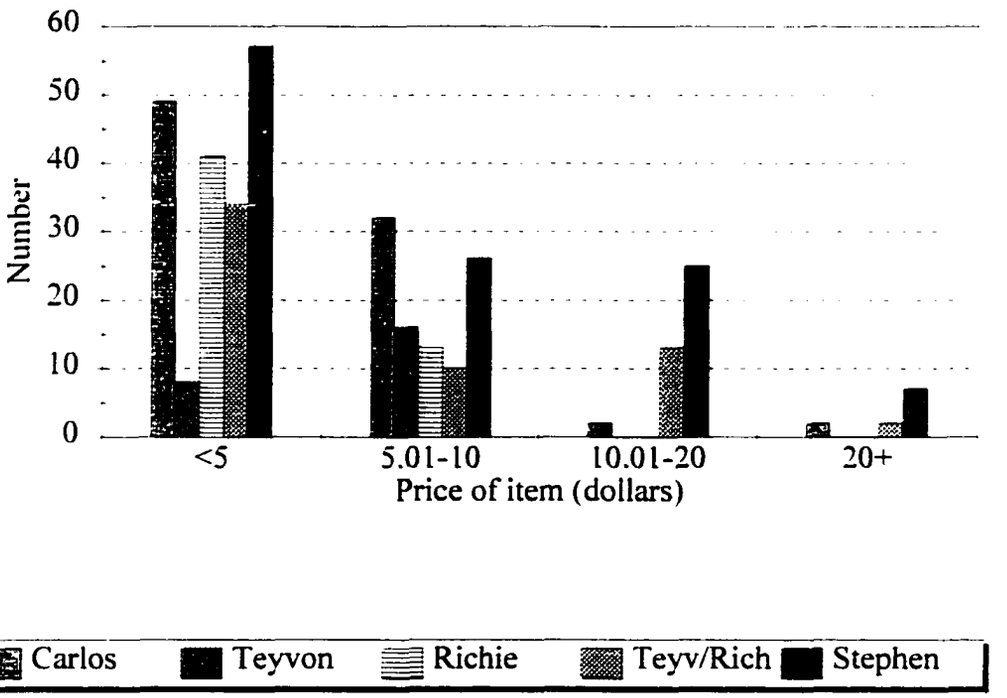
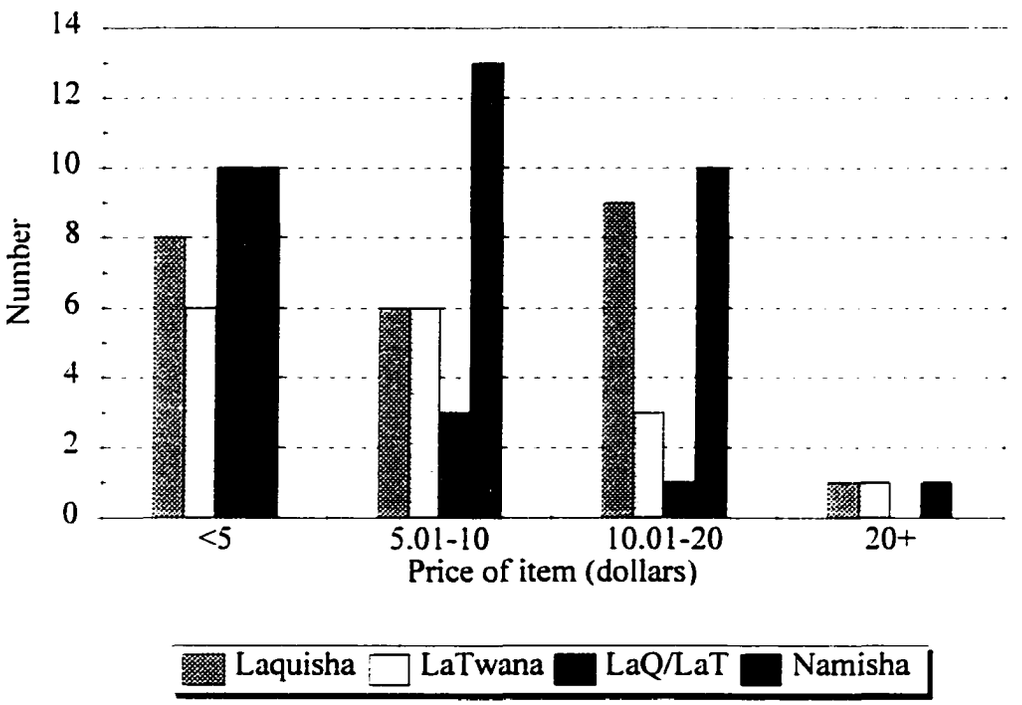


Figure 6.4
Boys' Possessions (by price)



*Category Teyv/Rich denotes possessions shared by Teyvon and Richie, brothers who occupied the same room.

Figure 6.5
Girls' Possessions (by price)



*Category LaQ/LaT denotes possessions shared by LaQuisha and LaTwana, sisters who occupied the same room.

perhaps even more stark: the girls' rooms had three items costing more than $20, while boys' rooms had four.

While just over 72 percent of Stephen's possessions cost under $10 (a figure similar to that of girls), Stephen's 115 possessions (not counting books) was the largest number by far among the children. Stephen also had the most items in the most expensive categories, with 7 items costing over $20 and 25 items priced between $10.01 and $20. Teyvon and Richie had the second-largest number of items in the $10.01-20 range (N=13), but shared all of these items.

Discussion

Making meaningful generalizations is difficult given the small sample size. Nevertheless, some patterns do suggest themselves and raise questions that should be answered through further and more extensive research. These patterns concern gender differences in the type, amount and prices of children's possessions; the implications of these possessions for socialization and education; and the effect of income differences on the things children are likely to possess.

Gender differences The most striking difference between the contents of boys' and girls' rooms is the number of things. Excluding books, the girls average 29.3

possessions each, while the boys average 74.[5] This disparity cut across all categories, and while one of the girls might have had more of a particular item than one of the boys, in only two categories does one of the girls' rooms contain more of a given item than each of the boys' rooms: these are dolls and stuffed/plush. To restate: boys not only had more possessions in total, but had more than girls in most categories overall -- except for dolls and stuffed/plush. Boys also had a high number of things that girls had very few of, such as action figures and hand-held games.

In several categories the differences between girls and boys were marked, but not extremely so. Namisha was the only girl with electronic possessions: a television, a music system (the only one among the inventories) and a game cartridge. Each boy's room had electronic items, including a television, a game system, game cartridges and hand-held games. Similarly, girls had few or no action figures, sports equipment, vehicles, weapons or fast food toys, while boys had them in comparatively much larger numbers. These patterns seem to suggest that boys have a larger absolute number of possessions which are spread over a wider range of categories than do girls. The contents of LaQuisha and LaTwana's room fell into 9 categories, and in Namisha's room, 11. Each of the boys' rooms contained goods falling into 14 of the 17 categories in table 6.1.

Though girls had fewer possessions overall, in comparison to Carlos, Teyvon and Richie, the girls had a larger proportion of possessions costing over $10. It is therefore

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[5] In this discussion, results from Stephen's inventory are not included in figures for boys' possessions. Results from Stephen's inventory are used as contrast in this discussion, as his inclusion substantially skews this already tiny sample.

difficult to draw conclusions about gender disparities based solely on raw numbers of possessions -- girls had fewer possessions, but the possessions they did have were on the whole somewhat more costly than those of boys.

Stephen, of course, stands apart from the other children, not only for the large numbers of his possessions, but also for the large numbers of his costly possessions. Some of the distinctive character of his possession assemblage is likely due to gender factors, but I suspect the primary differences arise from education and affluence.

Socialization and education In all categories of items related to education, literacy, sociability and intellectual skills, Stephen had the most possessions: these included games, puzzles, art supplies, activity toys and books written for children and/or young adults. A variety of explanations might account for the small numbers of such toys found in other children's rooms. The first is expense, since toys like Stephen's rock tumbler cost well over $20; the games in his room were likewise on the high end in terms of price.

Another influence upon socialization is hinted at in the contents of the two rooms shared by siblings. Here, children shared nearly as many possessions as they possessed individually. Additional research among children sharing rooms is called for in order to determine whether this pattern is pervasive or even common in Newhallville; if it is, the tendency for children who share rooms to also share possessions is a refraction of practices in the use of domestic space that also emphasize sharing. (The use of domestic space is discussed in the latter half of this chapter.)

Income differences Unlike the other children inventoried, Stephen had a wide variety of art supplies, educational games and creativity toys (such as a rock tumbler and air-brush kit). Stephen has more than twice the art or activity toys (N=28) than all the other children combined (N=12), and he is also the only child inventoried who has his own computer. In fact, no other Newhallville child or household I knew had a computer. (After my fieldwork was over, Vanessa bought one on credit for her sons Teyvon and Richie. She had to return it after several months, however, because she could not keep up the payments.)

Stephen has a Koolaid Koolburst radio, a promotional item that he got by saving the envelopes from two hundred packages of Koolaid. He continues to save additional envelopes in case another promotional offer comes along. The planning, organization and patience this sort of undertaking requires is prodigious and was not seen either among the other children inventoried or among any of the other children I knew. This observation is not meant to suggest that other children I knew are incapable of such planning, organization or patience. Rather, I believe that it indicates differing consumption strategies and patterns. Stephen's careful planning with the Koolaid packages can be seen as analogous to his parents' careful financial management which includes an IRA and other investments. Stephen Sr. and Sandra, like their son Stephen Jr., were unique among caretakers in making long-term investments like these. (Many in the study owned homes, which of course are a long-term investments in themselves.)

While the small sample size allows for little pattern finding, it is significant that Stephen's family has both the highest educational levels in the study and the highest

yearly income. The connection between these socioeconomic factors and the amount and kind of Stephen's possessions does not seem accidental.

The inventories document the kinds and numbers of children's possessions but reveal little about how children use or think about them. Toys are widely viewed as primary instruments for children's socialization (Sutton-Smith 1986; Voneche 1978), but the character of such socialization does not inhere in these objects; it is realized only through the actions and thoughts of the people who make use of them. Children's possessions -- which consist primarily of toys -- are central in the process of social reproduction, and the primary insights provided by the inventories are perhaps in the realm of illuminating the ways in which arenas of social reproductive activity are delineated. Children who have few books, for instance, will likewise have few opportunities to read at home, a circumstance which has far-reaching and life-long implications.

Stephen stood apart from the other children inventoried in terms of both the amount and kinds of his possessions, which were consistently more numerous, more costly, and more educational in nature than those of his peers. This difference permeated Stephen's whole life: his parents had the highest educational levels in the study, as well as the highest income. In sixth grade, Stephen began to attend one of the more prestigious private schools in New Haven, and was one of only two children in the study who had left the public school system (Cherie attended a parochial school).

Children's possessions in social context

Most of these children's possessions had been received as gifts. Their possessions, then, are in part kinship and social networks are made manifest in children's daily lives. Caution needs to be exercised in interpreting the scope and nature of those relationships from the objects alone. Gifts given to children do provide insight as to the wishes and even fantasies people have about what children will or should do with themselves. While kids do relate to their possessions in important ways, the social construction of domestic space provides kids with much of the structure through which they interpret and understand relationships to things, space and people.

Every child inventoried had stuffed toys (usually animals, but Stephen did have a plush, furry banana), and one of these nearly always had deep emotional significance. Teyvon's grungy old teddy bear was called "Hole in the Head" because when Teyvon was little he tried (somewhat unsuccessfully) to give the bear a haircut. Namisha had a small stuffed animal that she was given when she was still in the hospital after her birth. Carlos had a Pooh Bear that reminds of him of his earliest years:

> I got it when I was in Puerto Rico. *When you were in Puerto Rico?* When I was born. *Were you born there?* Yeah. I stayed there until I was three years old, then I came here. I went to kindergarten here. That's when I learned to speak English. *So this is special to you?* Yeah, it brings back memories. *What kind of memories?* My great grandmother. My aunt always took care of me. And um . . .my uncle Pablo. . .*So what kind of other memories does that bring back?* At nighttime when my mother took care of me she used to wrap me up in the covers. *You remember that?* Yes. *That's a nice feeling, isn't it?* Yep. *Does she still do that*? No. *No.* No, I'm too big. *What else are you too big for?* Kisses in public.

For Carlos, the Pooh Bear was a bridge not only to his early childhood, but to another life in another place. The Pooh Bear embodied his memories of family, but also of warmth and closeness between himself and his mother -- a warmth and closeness that was still visible between them, but growing perhaps slightly brittle as Carlos was becoming a young man. As he asserted, Carlos was getting too big for certain demonstrations of affection: being tucked into bed or getting kisses in public.

This special stuffed animal, one that the child received while still a newborn in the hospital, is one of the first gifts received in life. This first gift is one that many children I knew in Newhallville continued to cherish, albeit clandestinely at times. This clandestine attachment to a stuffed animal was particularly tricky for boys. Stephen said "Most things boys have are like cars or . . .I don't know, but, but they don't have stuffed animals." Contrary to Stephen's statement that most boys do not have stuffed animals, I did not find this to be the case either in the inventories or in more informal observations. While not shy about showing me his stuffed toys, Stephen did point out that other people, if they knew he had them, would tease him about having them.

Kids' rooms may house the bulk of their possessions, but they are only one place where kids spend time. And in the case of LaTwana and LaQuisha, many of their things were stored not in their room, but in the living room closet. Wood and Beck (1990) state that the living room is "a field of rules essentially for the child," emphasizing that social space in the home is deeply child centered, even if the attention centered on the child is meant to limit and constrain behavior. Embedded in the social use of domestic space are notions of relationships and responsibilities among kin and community. In turn, these

notions shape children's relationship to consumption. I now turn to a discussion of the social use of domestic space in Newhallville.

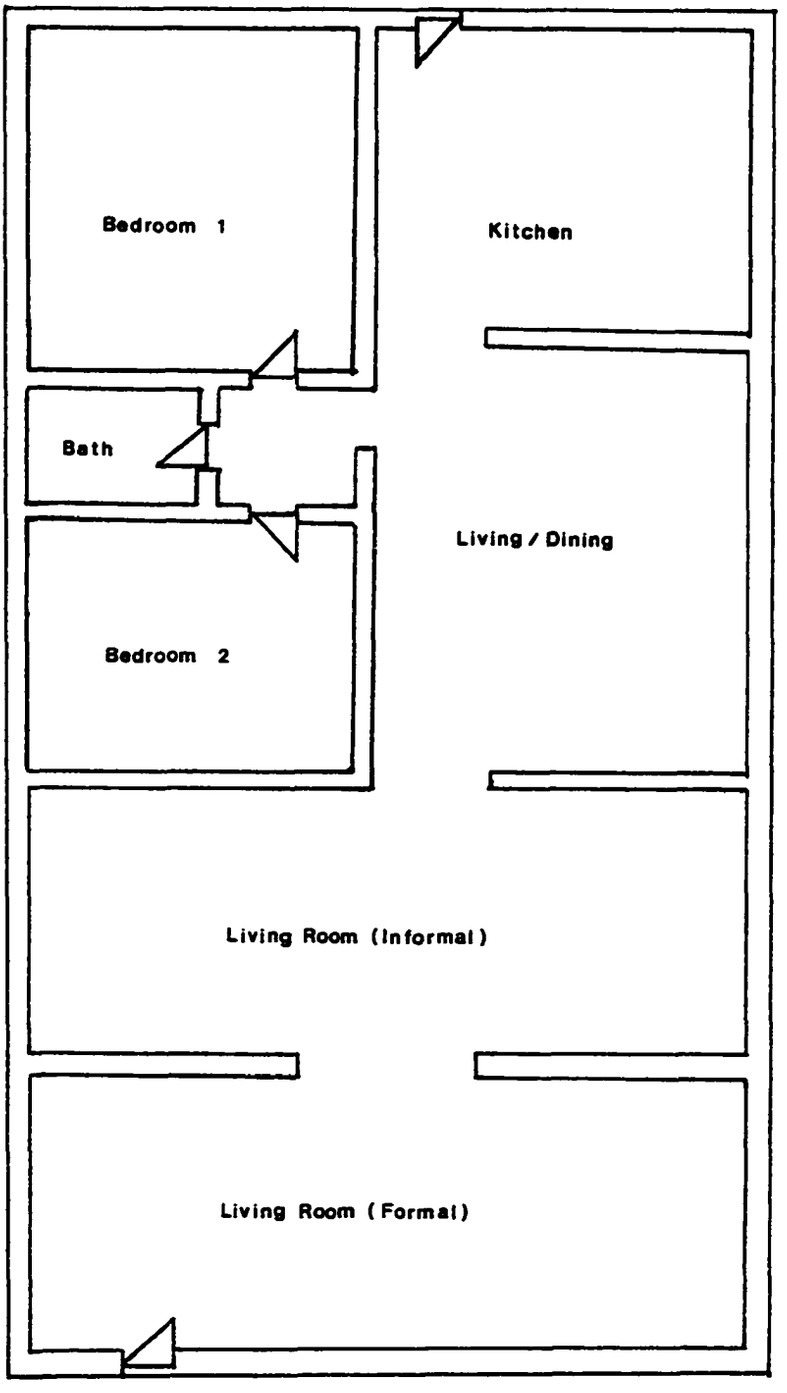
Domestic space in Newhallville

In this section I look at some aspects of the way domestic space is apportioned among Newhallville families. The discussion is based on 41 children from 20 households varying in size from 2 to 6 members. My focus is first upon describing the general layout and use of space in Newhallville homes. Following this I examine public and private domestic space, particularly as regards sleeping arrangements of the 41 children.[6]

Three-story, three-family frame houses are by far the most common in Newhallville. Some streets are lined as well by single-family homes of modest proportions. Several small (six-to-ten unit) apartment buildings of three or four stories are also scattered through the neighborhood. The floor plan shown in figure 6.6 is typical for a Newhallville apartment on the first or second floor of a three-family house. The basic apartment has six rooms plus a bath. Four of the rooms are arranged "railroad" style, one room following the other in a straight line; the fourth room, at the back of the building, is usually the kitchen. The first three rooms are connected by open archways, cannot be closed off, and are most commonly used as living room, family room and

[6]A total of 48 children were resident in the 20 households; the sleeping arrangements of 7 children (4 of whom were adult children of resident parents and 2 of whom were infants) were unknown, and are not included in the discussion that follows.

Figure 6.6 - Typical floor plan of a Newhallville apartment



dining areas. The two rooms which flank the bathroom are used as bedrooms. These three rooms have doors for privacy.

More than half the households discussed here (N=11) lived in homes that, with small variations, had this basic layout. Of the remaining households, 4 lived in single-family houses, 2 live in apartment buildings, 2 live in apartments with atypical layouts, 1 lived on the third floor of a typical house (third floors have less floor space than first-and second-story apartments, though they generally still have two bedrooms) and 1 family lived in an apartment whose interior I never saw.

Household space was divided into that accessible to family and that accessible to outsiders. Bedrooms were closed off from outsiders both visually and spatially; as the four-room progression moved toward the back of the house, rooms were increasingly less formal in nature. Typically, the front room was a formal living room, the second an informal living room, followed by a dining room and then the eat-in kitchen. Two households use one of the more publicly accessible front rooms in the apartment as a bedroom.

Sharing bathrooms fosters subtle, everyday forms of cooperation (Pader 1994), and 17 of the 20 households had a single bathroom. When children share bedrooms, as almost half the 41 children discussed here do, cooperation and sharing are part of kids sleeping, as well as their waking, moments.

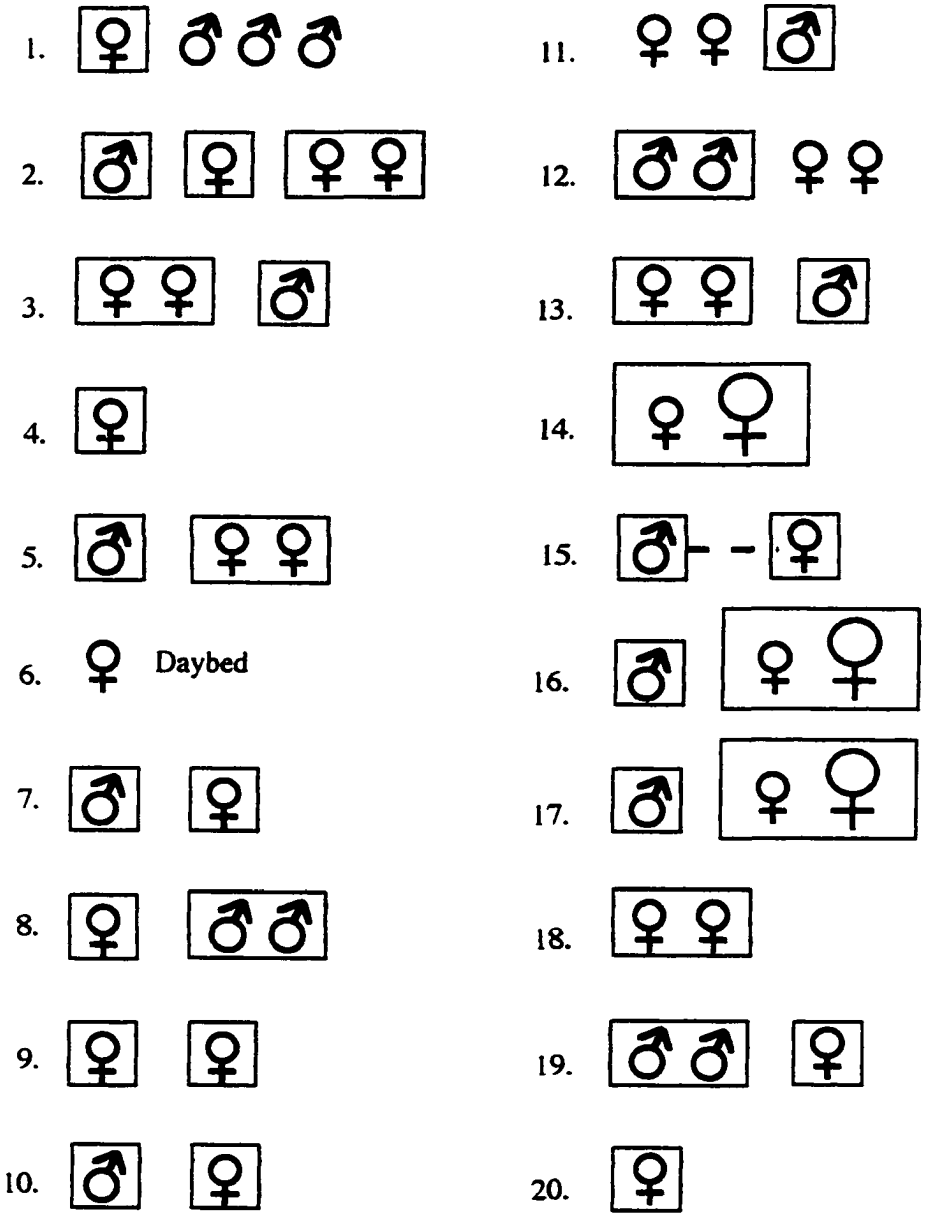
Looking at children's sleeping arrangements and then going beyond the household to look at relations between households and children's place in these interconnected homes, the use of domestic space can be seen to emphasize flexibility and

mutual dependence rather than the accommodation of the needs and wishes of separate individuals. Because household members' needs and wishes often are at odds with each other, these ideals of flexibility and mutual dependence are frequently being challenged, negotiated and reaffirmed.

Children's sleeping arrangements Table 6.2 summarizes the information on children's sleeping arrangements. Twenty-three of 41 children had their own rooms, while a little under half shared sleeping space (N=18). Fourteen of those sharing sleeping space did so with a single sibling of the same sex. Sharing rooms with siblings, while showing some indication of familial versus individual orientation in the dispensation of domestic space, is not all that uncommon in other populations, though I think it is likely that among the middle class, room sharing among siblings is on the decline, as is sharing bathrooms with any household member -- including conjugal partners.

Four children -- LaShonda, Asia, Tionna and Cherelle -- had more unusual sleeping arrangements. Cherelle's situation was unique among the children. She slept on a daybed in the dining room of her grandmother's home. This apartment, where Cherelle's uncle also lived, had the same basic floor plan shown in figure 6.6. The six-room apartment had three full-time residents, and was spacious enough for Cherelle to have her own room, albeit one that would not have had total privacy. Cherelle's grandmother, who owned their three-unit house, kept a dining room and both a formal and informal living room, in addition to the kitchen and two bedrooms. These bedrooms were occupied by Cherelle's grandmother and uncle.

Table 6.2
Children's Sleeping Arrangements



Solid lines are drawn around occupants of bedrooms. Resident children whose sleeping arrangements are unknown have no lines drawn around them.

Tionna lived in a two-bedroom apartment with her grandmother and great-grandmother, and shared a room and a bed with her grandmother, Celia. The other bedroom in their apartment was occupied by Ella, Celia's mother. Like Cherelle's grandmother, Ella owned her home, which contained two apartments. Ella occupied the first floor, and her son lived in the upper apartment. The house was a bit smaller than is typical, and Ella's apartment had five, rather than six rooms. Ella's front room, like that in Cherelle's home, was a formal living room, filled with knickknacks, a piano and furniture protected by plastic covers. This room was rarely used, except on special occasions. Family friends who visited Ella's home generally did not sit in the living room, but joined her instead at the kitchen table or on the front porch. The dining room also saw little use: family meals, when they happened, were eaten in the kitchen.

Ella's house was a resource that she chose to share, and one to which Tionna and Celia did not have proprietary rights. There was some tension over the arrangement, with Ella sometimes feeling taken advantage of, and as a result, when Ella and Tionna were home they tended to keep to their room, often eating their meals on the bed. The mixed use of space was not as clearly evident in Tionna's home as it was in Cherelle's. Tionna and Celia very often took their meals on the bed but this was not some household rule. In Cherelle's case, having a bed in the dining room was mixed use of a more permanent sort.

Asia, her brother and her mother, Dottie, had recently moved into an apartment shared by Dottie's sister and brother. Asia's brother slept on a converted porch that served as a bedroom; this space could be made private by closing glass-paned doors that were covered by shades. Asia's aunt and uncle each had their own bedrooms, while Asia

and her mother shared a room. The apartment had a living room and eat-in kitchen as well.

LaShonda lived with her older teenage brother, her mother, mother's brother and paternal grandfather in a two-bedroom apartment. Her grandfather and uncle shared a bedroom, while LaShonda slept with her mother. Her brother, who had recently returned to New Haven after two years of living "down south" with relatives, had the other bedroom to himself.

Most child-rearing manuals caution against parents sleeping with their children in the same room, much less the same bed; prospective foster parents must show that they can provide the child with his or her own appropriately furnished room. These examples, which illustrate some of the assumptions held in the dominant culture of the United States, indicate that the sleeping arrangements of these latter four girls are somewhat unusual from the perspective of that dominant culture. Sleeping arrangements of Newhallville families in general reflect these dominant culture ideals regarding children's sleeping arrangements: the majority of children either shared rooms with same-sex siblings or had rooms of their own, a pattern indicating that the situation of these four girls did not conform to the norm in this community. Though not ideal, however, these girls' sleeping situations did not seem to be censured or evaluated in a particularly negative way by householders, other family members, or friends. These are examples of the manner in which Newhallville residents resolve competing needs in the use of domestic space, where eating, entertaining and a host of other activities need to be accommodated.

Poverty and/or lack of space are plausible explanations for why LaShonda and Asia shared rooms with their mothers. Tionna slept in the same bed with her grandmother or Cherelle had a daybed in the dining room. There are indications that poverty and lack of space are not the only possible causes, nor even primary ones: in each of these households, it would have been possible to provide each girl with her own bed, or bedroom, but this would have required turning a dining or living room into a sleeping space. Cherelle's home provided the single instance bordering on such a solution, and during the day her bed was transformed to appear like an oversized couch. These instances, though few, suggest that Newhallville families who must make a choice opt to share intimate domestic spaces (bedrooms) in order to maintain formal, public spaces, in particular, living rooms -- many of which are seldom used.

Apartments in Newhallville commonly had between 4 and 6 rooms. Households discussed in this chapter had from 2 to 6 members, and are in this respect like most households in Newhallville with which I was familiar. Most apartments had two bedrooms, though some only have one and others might have three. Thus, a household with three or more members and two bedrooms -- a common situation in Newhallville -- could not provide each resident a private bedroom. Conjugal partners generally shared a bedroom, and children of the same sex were likely to share a room also, if the need arose. Another possible alternative when space is short was for adults in the household to sleep in a less private area. This was the case in two households, where the apartment's front door opened onto the mother's bedroom. In these two households, mothers' rooms were relatively public (all visitors, for instance had to pass through these bedrooms to reach the

living room), while resident children had private bedrooms. An alternative solution to space problems would be for adults to sleep on a living room couch or pull-out bed in order to free up private bedroom space for children. I did not observe this arrangement in any of the 20 households discussed in this chapter -- or in any other household I visited in Newhallville. Children, too, might sleep in these more public spaces, but Cherelle was the only child I knew who did so.

Decisions about who will sleep where were made primarily by adults. Children's participation in these arrangements was more or less involuntary, or at least not especially instrumental. Yet, as will be discussed later in the context of what I call extended domestic space, children, like others in positions with little access to social power, do have a range of options open to them if they wish to express, enact or make clear their unhappiness, displeasure or discomfort. They can complain to other householders, for example. Given the strict nature of many families, this might not be a viable option if a child wanted to escape punishment for being disruptive, but a child could still complain to friends. If unable or unwilling to talk about their feelings (or in addition to being vocal), children could also engage behavior that would bring their concerns to the attention of others. They could, for instance, attempt to make caretakers with whom they share sleeping space feel that this arrangement was not worthwhile; they could attempt or arrange to sleep in other households where they were welcome or felt comfortable.

These girls sometimes wistfully mused that it would be to have "my own room," as did other children who shared sleeping space. Asia's mother often expressed her

dissatisfaction with her living situation, which she emphasized was only temporary.[7] Among these four girls, neither their behavior nor their talk indicated that they felt particularly uncomfortable about their sleeping arrangements or that they felt any special urgency in changing them. On the contrary: when Tionna's grandmother was hospitalized for several weeks, Tionna's great-grandmother Ella told me that Tionna was having trouble sleeping because she felt lonely at night. Tionna's anxiety about her grandmother's well being certainly played a part in her feelings and her resulting sleeplessness -- but it is also true that the deep intimacy that develops out of the kind of prolonged, close contact generated from sharing a bed may well have made her bond with her grandmother particularly strong.

Lack of money and limited space in the home forced householders to make decisions about sleeping arrangements that may not have accomplished the ideal of providing all individuals but conjugal partners with private bedrooms. Given the range of possibilities for making use of domestic space, however, caretakers' sharing of bedrooms and beds with children was hardly the inevitable outcome of space shortage. Instead, this solution represents an active decision on the part of householders, and one in which children's cooperation must be enlisted if it is to be a comfortable solution. Why, then, did family members on occasion choose to share beds and bedrooms if it was neither ideal nor absolutely necessary?

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[7]Shortly after I finished my fieldwork, Asia's mother rented a single-family house and moved her children there.

Balancing public and private spaces Privacy in Newhallville homes must be balanced against the maintenance of public household spaces -- dining and living rooms. These rooms were used almost exclusively for entertaining guests and outsiders, when they were used at all. When the number of residents required choosing whether to compromise public spaces by turning them into bedrooms or to have householders share bedrooms and/or beds instead, priority was given to maintaining public space. This solution was rooted in an orientation to social and domestic space that values sharing and communality and places less emphasis on individual privacy. It was a solution that allowed both public and private domestic space to be shared: much-valued public space within the home was shared not primarily among householders themselves, but rather was shared by the household with visitors. In some cases, retaining living and dining rooms meant that householders shared their private bedroom spaces. As discussed earlier, this does not appear to be a solution which is particularly stigmatized, and may be the preferred alternative to any others available.

In Newhallville, children and adults will have their own rooms when the space allows: 23 of 41 children did have their own rooms. The number of children with their own rooms results mainly, I believe, from the rather large size of many Newhallville apartments, combined with a number of household members small enough to allow children their own rooms without even having to consider compromising other spaces in the home. No child's bedroom was created out of a former or potential public space.

Living and dining rooms were, in nearly every household, rarely used but carefully maintained: for example, Tionna's great-grandmother Ella regularly hung a

fresh set of living room curtains to reflect the changing seasons, but I never saw her make use of that room. Ella's graciously arranged living room held a matching sofa and chairs, piano, family photos. She regularly lamented the loss of a beautiful carpet in a fire some years ago which was replaced by the insurance company, she said, with one of poor quality. The formal living room in Cherelle's home contained a brocaded sofa, matching chairs, piano and glass-topped coffee table upon which were scattered framed family photos.

Rarely used rooms such as these, carefully decorated and kept up, are on one level a sort of conspicuous consumption of space. They are as well a testament to a family's aspirations to a comfortable, gracious and hospitable life style. They hold forth the promise that someday, perhaps, the family might occupy an entire home where every room is filled with signs of similar comfort, graciousness and hospitality. They are a kind of museum of the future, a material dream of middle-class life. When so many families choose the maintenance of that vision over the more immediate question of providing private bedrooms, they affirm that this aspiration is a collective one.

Again, children may acquiesce to this vision more or less unwillingly -- only obeying rules against the casual use of living rooms when they are being observed, perhaps, or minding such rules with bad grace. Certainly, however, no child to my knowledge viewed living rooms as potential bedroom spaces for themselves, feeling cheated or belittled by having to share a bedroom with a sibling or caretaker. Not all living rooms were completely formal and off-limits to kids. Most were a kind of combination living/family room, with a television that people could gather to watch.

Kids could lie and lounge on living room furniture in these settings, and often did, but these rooms were almost always kept clean enough for company, even if other parts of the house were in disarray. Children were expected to contribute to the upkeep of these rooms -- as well as participating in housecleaning chores, another way in which they were encouraged (or forced) to view family life as collective.

Extended domestic space Assessing the way domestic space is used and understood in Newhallville cannot be done without going beyond individual households. Most families in Newhallville were extended, and children had access to homes of their aunts, uncles, cousins, brothers, sisters, parents and grandparents. The importance of the extended family in the black community is well documented (McAdoo 1981; Stack 1974; Taylor 1990). It is in looking at children's place in multiple households that a familial orientation clearly emerges. Moreover, it is in the interconnection between households where children's consumer lives similarly find much of their communal, familial (as opposed to individualist) basis.

Several children lived in multi unit, family-owned homes where most or all units were occupied by households belonging to the extended family. Likewise, most children had relatives living within a few blocks, and all had extended family in New Haven. These children spent time -- sometimes as long as weeks or months -- in households belonging to their parents, siblings, cousins, aunts, uncles, grandparents and godparents. Natalia, for instance, lived in a single-family home with her maternal grandparents and brother. Natalia's father, sister and stepmother lived across the street; her mother lived

four blocks away. Natalia had a bedroom both in her grandparents' and in her mother's home. Natalia had nearly unrestricted access to her grandparents', mother's and father's households.

Like Natalia, Nyzerraye lived with her maternal grandparents, who occupied the first floor of the home they owned. Nyzerraye's mother lived in the second-floor apartment with her young son, and Nyzerraye spent time in both households. Interrelated households such as these provided a sort of extended domestic space for children, who generally had the run of these various homes. In other families, children were sent to relatives "down south" for periods of time -- sometimes the school year, in order to avoid the dangers of the urban school setting.[8] More often kids went south during the summer, when caretakers wanted them off the street and out of trouble. Children whose fathers lived outside New Haven often spent summers and holidays with their fathers or in the homes of paternal kin.

Carol Stack's (1974) work among poor African Americans describes a pattern similar to that in Newhallville, where children often circulate among households, as do such resources as money, foodstuffs, clothing and even furniture. As Tionna's living situation shows, homes are themselves recognized as a family resource which can be

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[8]The current pattern is a reversal of that described to me by an informant who was a teenager in New Haven during the 1950s. She told me that during that time, relatives of New Haven's black families would send their teenage children north during the school year to attend schools that were not segregated and that were perceived to provide superior educations. New Haven's schools, like many urban education systems, are increasingly dangerous. At least one family with whom I worked in Newhallville has since moved back to the southern state they came from a generation ago. Several other families spoke of their wish to go back to the South.

made available to some, denied to others. Negotiations over the distribution of this and other resources are not without conflict, and children are not exempt: they are regularly reminded that they are being provided a place to live, food to eat and clothes to wear. In Newhallville children are instilled with the knowledge that in being provided for, caretakers are often doing without themselves; thus, these children come to view their consumption as fundamentally connected to that of others, and are palpably aware of both the social and monetary costs of their own maintenance. Teyvon's mother Vanessa made this point by having her three children pitch in part of their allowance for household groceries if they ate up the food before their next monthly allotment of food stamps arrived.[9]

Having access to several households in the extended family spreads the burden of providing for particular children, and likewise provides children a safety net. Children can apportion their own demands and needs among these households, a skill which they can wield with considerable calculation by the time they are ten years old, the age of those I studied. Likewise -- especially in extended households such as Ella's, or in situations such as Nyzerraye's, where multiple family households are located in one family-owned building -- children witness and take part in the conflicts, negotiations and

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[9]This point apparently hit home with Teyvon. In the summer of 1994, when he was 12, Teyvon had a job working in a summer school program. With his first paycheck he bought groceries for the family, cat food ("The seven dollar cat food!" said his mother) and a pair of sneakers from a discount outlet. He put the rest in a new bank account to begin saving for a car.

resolutions that arise over the distribution of family resources, particularly domestic spaces.

Conclusion: Children and the work of kinship

In this chapter I have examined results of inventories of children's possessions and analyzed the social construction of domestic space. Both provide ways to see how children are literally and metaphorically located in networks of kin and social relationships. Moreover, the principles around which these relationships are organized and understood do not only influence children's relationships to their possessions or homes, but shape their consumer lives as well. These are processes in which children are actively involved: the work of kinship, conceived by Di Leonardo as primarily the province of women, is, I argue, work conducted by children as well, and often through the medium of consumption.

The great majority of children's possessions were inexpensive. Informal observations show that the more costly presents received by Newhallville kids are likely to be clothing items, placed on layaway and retrieved for special holidays: Easter, Christmas and birthdays. Families with limited incomes are limited in what they can spend on toys or books for children; in Teyvon and Richie's case, they shared nearly every possession they had that cost over $10. Similarly, LaQuisha and LaTwana shared nearly as many things as they each possessed. In this way, the themes of need and sharing -- discussed earlier in the context of food and shopping -- are commingled in children's rooms.

Children's things provide a material connection to kin because most of what they have has been given to them. These feelings are especially apparent when children talk about special possessions, such as Teyvon's "Hole in the Head" teddy bear or Carlos' Pooh Bear. Even hand-me-down items, such as televisions in children's rooms, may carry these kinds of associations with them. Children's rooms also manifest connections to the larger network of family and friends in that children often had borrowed items in their rooms -- Carlos had 13 borrowed game cartridges from his best friend. Not only did borrowed items have a presence in children's rooms, but in some cases, resident adults used closet space for their own clothes. In others, the family's books were stored in a child's room. While unquestionably a private or semi-private space for children, their rooms also had boundaries that were more or less permeable, and interiors that were, to a greater or lesser degree, shaped by the presence of family and friends' possessions as well as their own.

The inventories are particularly important because no existing work documents children's possessions, and especially the possessions of children such as those in Newhallville. The importance of possessions in homeless children's lives has been explored by Ron Hill (1992) and provides more information than these inventories on children's feelings and fantasies regarding their possessions and material goods. It will be important, to do comparative work along these lines in the future to assess the differences between the possessions of children such as these have and possessions of children from more affluent communities.

Children's movement among households of the extended family through what I call extended domestic space is an important constitutive element in maintaining the extended family as such. There is a socializing aspect to children's experience of this extended domestic space -- children are shown that they will be welcomed, cared for, fed, clothed, and given a place to sleep in a range of households. While adults do on occasion make arrangements between themselves about where children will stay and for how long, by the age of eight or nine, children have begun making these decisions for themselves. The older children are, the more often they make these decisions. In doing so they are not only taking themselves into households where they want to be but also they are engaging in what Di Leonardo (1987) calls the work of kinship. She defines this work as

> the conception, maintenance, and ritual celebration of cross-household kin ties, including visits, letters, telephone calls, presents, and cards to kin; the organization of holiday gatherings; the creating and maintenance of quasi-kin relations; decisions to neglect or intensify particular ties; the mental work of reflection about all these activities; and the creation and communication of altering images of family and kin vis-a-vis the images of others, both folk and mass media. (442-3)

This work, involving as it does a wide variety of resources and exchange, is bound up with consumption in fundamental ways. Di Leonardo's conception of the work of kinship focusses on women as the primary group engaged in this work. But in Newhallville, children's movements among and between households, as well as their presence in them, must also be seen as central to the work of kinship. It is work that children actively take on, and it differs in some respects from the work of women.

Children generally have the least power in the family, and are less able to satisfy their demands and wishes than adults. As a result, their strategies in undertaking the work of kinship differ from those of adult women: children may influence their movements among households, for instance, by being "good" in households or situations where they like to be and "bad" in households or situations they dislike. This cooperation or lack thereof may be seen in the sharing of bedrooms and sleeping space as well.

The sharing of beds and rooms by conjugal partners -- often heads of household -- is a symbolic testament to the commitment of the pair to that kinship unit. Likewise, sharing of rooms between siblings, which is fairly common, reflects in part an expectation that children, too, must be committed to sharing and cooperating in making the family work. Children's sleeping arrangements further suggest that the work of kinship falls in greater proportion to females beginning at an early age. Sleeping arrangements departing from the ideal were evident in 6 of 20 households, and only females were involved, whether adults or children. These arrangements took on several forms: bedrooms in relatively public spaces, caretakers sharing rooms or beds with children, or beds placed in rooms used primarily for more public functions, such as dining. Girls take on the work of kinship early in life, often undertaking it in the most intimate ways, like sharing beds and bedrooms with adults.

Among the children discussed in this section, only girls shared sleeping space with caretakers or slept in a space that also serves other purposes. There are good reasons why girls and not boys who were found in these types of sleeping arrangements. First, because most primary caretakers were women, it is unlikely that they would share their

rooms or beds with male children, especially children on the cusp of adolescence. Second, females are the chief arbiters of the distribution and negotiation of family and kin resources, particularly those less tangible resources such as time and space. Sharing rooms and beds is one of the myriad ways that girls become aware of the importance of sharing resources within the family, even something as intimate as sleeping space.

Sharing, communality, and flexibility are concepts that guide the consumption of objects and of space in Newhallville. However, these ideals are not always -- or perhaps even often -- lived and experienced free from conflict and contention. I have focused my analysis on the principles underlying ideals in an effort to provide a basis upon which to understand and analyze consumption in Newhallville. Other, recent analyses of consumption among similar populations have based interpretations on concepts such as "self-esteem" and "compensatory consumption" (e.g., Nightingale 1993). Such concepts place the consumption of children like those discussed here within the rubric of a dominant cultural discourse that views their actions and affinities as tainted from the start. Beginning not with an assumption of deviation, but rather giving attention to the practices and principles that make sense in Newhallville gives priority to understanding the complex ways in which these people negotiate living in a consumer world while possessing so little. Yet this is not a culture that stands apart or even in opposition to the national and global scene within which it is located. It is not an example of a subculture with different ways of looking at the world, with values and modes of being which are incompatible with dominant values and modes. It is, rather, a place and a people wholly

intertwined with the dominant, wholly engaged with the dominant, whether in struggle, aspiration, fear or hope.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

> Consumption is the commodification of socio-cultural needs; it is the penetration of capital into all facets of human need-satisfaction previously fulfilled outside the realm of contract. It is, in other words, the commodification of everyday life, of culture in the broadest sense (Teeple 1995).

I have argued throughout this dissertation that consumption is a social process, and as such, it is part and parcel with processes of social inequality. It is not my intention, however, to imply that consumption is "really" or even primarily about social inequality. Rather, by illustrating in depth the way consumption becomes intertwined with social inequalities of race, class, gender and age through everyday acts and practices, this study shows how deeply consumption has permeated all realms of contemporary lives and social existence. From the intangible realm of imagination and fantasy to the concretely material terrain of urban geography, this study has investigated the ways in which consumption, one of the primary hallmarks of contemporary cultural existence, shapes and interacts with the lives of Newhallville children.

In this study, I have also emphasized, however, that consumption is not uniform, precisely because it is bound up with social inequality. Again, while elements of social inequality are hardly the only determinants of consumption limitations or opportunities, they do provide a basis upon which people's consumer lives are differentiated. Consumption is varied and multiple not only because social inequality is varied and

multiple, but also because individuals are multifaceted -- in feminist terms, subjectivity is multiple, as is social positioning or positionality (Moore 1994).

Difference is not inherent in a particular aspect of social identity, whether it is being black, or being a girl. Rather, difference emerges out of the interaction of individuals with the political economic context along with the social construction of blackness, femaleness, poverty, or any other aspect of social being. The complexity of this process can be seen when following individuals across geographic sites, where profound changes in the configuration of identity become evident: the same basic elements are recombined to yield experiences, behaviors, and so on, that are at once widely various and yet of a piece. In combining theory from social geography with ethnographic investigation of consumption, this study adds a crucial element to current anthropological perspectives on consumption, which have examined the "cultural biography of things" (Kopytoff 1986); the function of goods in social relations (Douglas 1979); the changing relationships individuals may have to one object over the course of years, or a houseful of things accumulated over generations (McCracken 1988; 1989). This study augments, as well, work in marketing and consumer behavior which has begun to incorporate ethnographic approaches (Belk et al. 1989; Sherry 1983; Sherry 1984). This study is not the first to connect geography and consumption process, but unlike other work in this vein, this study has been anchored upon on particular, rather than generalized, individuals. Moreover, this study has not looked at one site, but rather a range of sites that are central to the community being studied. In an ethnographic approach that moves from city and region, through schools, local groceries, corporate

supermarkets, the downtown mall, into the family home and children's bedrooms, this study demonstrates the importance of all of these places in the formation of consumer orientation, social experience, and cultural being.

Throughout, children have been the objects of this ethnographic inquiry. My nearly exclusive focus upon them, their perspectives, and experiences has been as unapologetic as is usually the case in ethnographies that focus exclusively on adults. This has been a purposeful stance, and one that is meant to drive home the point that social theory legitimately can be built upon investigating children as cultural participants. As different as children are from adults, they do not represent a world apart. If theory about all of society can be built upon studies that have exclusively delved into the lives and experiences of adults, surely the opposite must also be true. The research presented here yields information about culture and society that has relevance to a population much larger than that encompassed by ten-year-old, poor and working class black kids.

I have emphasized throughout that one of the central elements shaping consumer lives of Newhallville children is the local, regional, and global political economy. Shifts in the latter half of the twentieth century have resulted in neighborhoods, like Newhallville, which are characterized by geographical, social, economic and commercial isolation. As local industry failed, moved out of state, or overseas, job opportunities in manufacturing dwindled, to be replaced only partially by service oriented jobs in local hospitals, nursing homes, utilities, and the like. Simultaneously, federal and local funding for urban redevelopment in New Haven resulted in the displacement of a substantial portion of the black community into racially homogeneous neighborhoods and

housing projects while razing neighborhoods where many had previously owned homes. As economic hardship hit the northeast more squarely in the 1970s, 80s, and 90s, financial resources were consistently diverted in New Haven away from urban redevelopment into development of the downtown commercial sector, where local minority residents were viewed as contributing the economic decline, and hence as a population whose presence ought to be minimized in malls and stores.

These events resulted in a situation where Newhallville children were at once hemmed into their neighborhood and shut out of the rest of the city. Not just passive in relation to the geographic, social, economic and commercial factors that constrain their lives, this study has shown Newhallville children as people who engage actively with the people, places, and things around them. In a wide-ranging description of events from the lives of Tionna, Natalia and Asia shows how, given the problems and limitations the New Haven and Newhallville setting pose, children also find opportunity for play, self expression, exploration of fantasy and of fear. Moreover, they are also capable of making sophisticated critiques of consumption in general, and the consumer sphere as one that is intertwined with racism, sexism, and where children are targeted with particular zeal.

As wide-ranging as children's physical and imaginary wanderings may be, participant observation made it clear that the local political economy had created a landscape where three commercial sites played central roles in children's everyday experiences of and engagements with consumption. Two of these sites, the downtown mall and corporate supermarkets, have been treated extensively in a variety of literatures. The third, and for Newhallville children, arguably perhaps the most pivotal, is the local

small grocery, a site which has been little analyzed by academics to date. This research has illustrated the ways in which the experiences of Newhallville kids in these sites is fundamentally different from that of the more generalized consumer (i.e., middle class and white) most often posited -- whether implicitly or explicitly -- in literatures on malls and supermarkets. While several studies have raised the issue of social inequality in downtown or public spaces (Boddy 1992; Smith 1992) they have done so from the more distant perspective of the social theorist. This work supplements that perspective with an ethnographic point of view that can address not only the structural inequalities presented by current social geography and political economy, but which describes in detail the experiences, feelings, and perceptions of a group of children who experience these inequalities as they go about their daily lives.

One of the primary concerns of my work has been to develop a framework through which connections between individuals and the larger political economy, as manifested in the realm of consumption, may be described and understood. My argument has tacked back and forth from macro and micro-perspectives: first from a general discussion of New Haven, the industrial Northeast, and the United States to a girl's-eye view of Newhallville and New Haven. The focus pulls back again to address major consumer sites and then zooms in to the intimacy of the family home, and children's own rooms. In this final chapter, connections are drawn between the intimacy of the domestic sphere and the context in which values and ideals of sharing, interdependence, and individuality are forged. These values and ideals are not generated endogenously, but instead are responses to the same larger shifts and pressures that have shaped New

Haven's geography and economic situation, the same shifts and pressures which have resulted in the multiple isolations faced by Newhallville residents.

Directions for future research

The children in this study were several years younger than those who are thought to provide the most serious examples of consumer pathology -- kids in their middle and late teens. The nature of children's engagement with consumption, as explored in this study, seems to differ radically from media images, which focus primarily on teenagers. It is possible that this difference represents in part the result of developmental changes: ten year olds are quite different from 17 year olds. Longitudinal studies of children are thus also called for, in order to assess the ways in which children's consumer practices, beliefs, tastes, and behaviors change over time as they grow and mature. I anticipate doing a follow up study of these Newhallville children when they are 16 and 17 years old, to see how they have grown and changed both as consumers and as social beings. While I do not think I will find that they have become the sort of social shrapnel that is so often described in the media, neither do I think that they will be the same ten-year-olds I knew in the early 1990s. They may still be in school; some may have dropped out; some may be working; some may be parents; some may be involved in taking or selling drugs; some may be in prison. Some, I fear, will be dead. As before, however, they will be deeply engaged in consumption, both in their neighborhoods and in farther flung sites, and this involvement will not be of a character that supports stereotypes or dominant society assumptions.

This research shows the need for both qualitative and quantitative documentation about the consumer lives of children who fall outside the unmarked norm of being white and middle class. Beliefs abound about the kind, number and nature of children's possessions from all sorts of social groups, but surprisingly little hard data exists. It is currently nearly impossible to make comparisons between even middle class and poor children as consumers, regardless of race or gender, because of the absence of such data. Statements about the differences between the consumption lives of affluent, middle class, working class and poor children remain on the whole programmatic and impressionistic, but continue to appear with regularity in mainstream media as well as in scholarly works on children living in poverty, inner city neighborhoods, and youth involvement with crime. These generalizations cry out for substantive documentation.

An obvious place to start is with children's possessions, a category of consumer items that have the potential to reveal information about children themselves, their kin networks, emotional ties, fantasies, wishes, preferences, as well as providing a material base for evaluating just what it is that kids have and how much. In order for intelligent generalizations to be made about children's possessions, inventories need to be collected from a wide range of children from varying types of households, communities, and cultures. Moreover, further close observation of children and their everyday activities is needed in order to develop an understanding of how, when, where, and why consumer imperatives have entered into children's lives; what children themselves make of these developments; how children think about, use, and engage with the consumer sphere. This demands not only close observation of children's activities described in this study --

going to school, tagging along while wandering the neighborhood, visiting stores -- but also plumbing the extent and nature of relationships between social, political and economic issues as they affect family, neighborhood, region, nation, and globe.

Assessing the role of public and private investment in local business, infrastructure, employment, and education as they affect consumption opportunity and practice perhaps lies beyond the purview of traditional marketing and consumer behavior research efforts. However, the centrality of these issues for consumption in neighborhoods such as Newhallville is clear. As minority communities themselves become increasingly involved in creating businesses with a social agenda (I am thinking in particular here of the economic and business endeavors of the Nation of Islam), it behooves marketers and consumer behavior researchers to understand these developments both as a potential area of expansion, and as a response to needs among populations which have historically received but little attention. The implications of this lack of attention move well beyond the business and marketing sphere, and have made themselves violently evident in urban riots, most recently in Los Angeles in 1992. And yet, minority and economically straitened communities have continually made in evident that they consider the consumer sphere not only a proper arena for political action, but one where solutions to the most pressing problems their communities face may be forged. Investigating with seriousness the ways in which such solutions might be fashioned holds the promise for yielding benefits which are at once social and economic.

Conclusion

Looking across sites of consumption helps to underscore the point that the ability to manipulate the mass produced in some settings does not necessarily indicate effective agency. Wherever Tionna, Natalia and Asia go parts of them remain victimized, fearful, angry hopeful, powerful and full of sass. They remain young, poor, black and female and at least potentially at a disadvantage for each of these attributes. Though they speak to themselves, each other, and occasionally an outsider such as myself, their words are heard by few. The larger structures of consumer culture remain undisturbed by the ripples such "weak power," as John Fiske (1993) terms it, creates. Fiske emphasizes that "weak power" such as that exercised by Tionna, Natalia, and Asia is localizing, while "strong power" is imperializing. That is the girls' use of the "weak power" available to them works to make their lives and situation understandable and bearable, but not to change the conditions under which they live and grow. That is, Tionna's shouts aimed at passing cars hold little potential for changing her position in society, and in actuality perhaps hold greater potential for passersby or people in nearby homes to call the police in order to stop her behavior cold. This is a perspective that recognizes and perhaps even celebrates the radical intent of the actions of people who are marginalized and oppressed in a multitude of ways, without overly romanticizing the ultimate results of such resistance. As has been amply illustrated in Paul Willis' seminal work on working class British boys (1977), resistance often, in fact, leads people further into the oppressive situations they seek to escape or challenge (cf. also Bourgois 1995).

The girls themselves seem to recognize this, though they do not do so all the time. It is important, I think, that the most powerful statement they made about the victimization and fear they experience both at home and in the consumer sphere occurred in the transitional -- or "liminal" space of the "DMZ." In Newhallville, Asia wonders where the fat, the pregnant, the abused Barbie is. In the mall, Natalia asks what I would do if the man of my dreams asked me for a date. In the DMZ, however, consumption, sexual threat and romantic fantasy come together in one fantastic package: Mario rapes Barbie all day long. This, it seems to me, is devastatingly creative way of saying "damned if you do, damned if you don't".

The findings of this work suggest that these children are consumers who are unlike their white and middle class peers, and yet unlike the "inner city" children whose images are projected in multiple media forms. Understanding the nature of consumption as it exists among Newhallville's population and particularly its children and youth is important not simply because it dispels destructive stereotypes; such knowledge challenges and extends the understanding of what is perhaps the most pivotal social, economic, and political process of our era. This challenge is proffered not by posing the question in terms of us versus them -- as has often been the case in efforts to describe the differences between commodity and non-commodity consumption, primitive versus modern consumption, and so on -- but rather through looking at a "them" with whom the dominant discourse about consumption (and society) has consistently engaged, a "them" who exist in the midst of "us."

Appendix 1 Main Study Group: Selected Household Characteristics

Child	Size of Household	Children in Household	Primary Caretaker(s)	Other Resident Adults	Rent/Own Home	Occupation/Employment of Primary Caretaker(s)	Own Car?
Asia	5	2	M	MS, MB	rent	State aid	Y
Carlos	3	2	M	0	sec. 8/rent/FOH	State aid	N
Cherelle	3	1	PGM	FB	HO	Caterer and Seamstress	Y
Cherie	2	1	M	0	sec. 8/rent/FOH	State aid	N
Davy	5	4	M	0	DK	State aid	N
Gerald	5	3	M, F	0	HO	Secretary Building maintenance	Y
Kiana	3	2	M	0	rent/FOH	Group home supervisor	Y
LaQuita	5	3	M	MP(pt)	sec. 8/rent	State aid	DK
Marelle	3	2	M	0	sec. 8/rent	State aid	N
Michelle	5	3	M, F	0	HO	Secretary	Y (2)
Natalia	4	2	MGM, MGF	0	HO	Domestic worker Retired utilities clerk	Y
Nerissa	3	2	M	0	rent		Y
Nyzerraye	4	1	MGM, MGF	MS	HO	Retired schoolteacher Retired firefighter	Y
Ricky	6	4	M	MP	sec. 8/rent	State aid	N

Appendix I Main Study Group: Selected Household Characteristics

Child	Size of Household	Children in Household	Primary Caretaker(s)	Other Resident Adults	Rent/Own Home	Occupation/Employment of Primary Caretaker(s)	Own Car?
Sam	5	DK	MS	DK	DK	State aid	DK
Shaquita	5	3	MGM. MGF	0	HO	Domestic worker Retired construction contractor	Y
Stephen	5	3	M. F	0	HO		Y (2)
Tanika	4	2	M. F	0	HO	Secretary Mechanic	Y
Tarelle	6	4	M	MS	FOH/rent	Nurse	Y
Terry	2	DK	MS	0	DK	State aid	DK
Teyvon	4	3	M	0	sec. 8/rent	Student State aid	N
Tionna	3	1	MGM. MGGM	0	HO	State aid Retired cafeteria worker	Y

F = Father
M = Mother
MP = Mother's Partner
MS = Mother's Sister
MB = Mother's Brother

PGM = Paternal Grandmother
MGM = Maternal Grandmother
MGF = Maternal Grandfather
MGGM = Maternal Great-Grandmother

HO = Home owner
Sec. 8 = Section 8 voucher
Rent/FOH = Living in a multi-unit home owned by a family member and paying market rent
DK = Don't Know

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