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A Child's Right to Play:

The Social Construction of Civic Virtues in Toy Libraries

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Abstract

Communities throughout the world generally hold that children have a fundamental right to play. A long history of public policies and laws seek to promote play by providing a range of financial and material resources. Toy libraries are an important resource that can provide children with vital developmental tools for play by allowing families to borrow toys in a process similar to public book libraries. An empirical study of a contemporary group of toy libraries explores how families use the toy libraries to construct different social meanings. The toy library is an important way that parents mediate their children's relationship with the marketplace. Moreover, different conceptualizations of citizenship are modeled within this institution based on sharing collective goods.

Key words: children, play, toys, toy library, sharing, collective goods, materialism

The right to play is a child's first claim on the community. Play is nature's training for life. No community can infringe that right without doing deep and enduring harm to the minds and bodies of its citizens.

David Lloyd George (1926)

Lloyd George asserted that children's right to play is a fundamental right of citizenship (Powell and Seaton 2007). Children's right to recreation was formally affirmed by The Declaration on the Rights of the Child (UN General Assembly 1959). Play was again acknowledged as a basic right of children worldwide in the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child (UN General Assembly 1989), which by the end of 2008 was signed by 192 nations. Within the United States, a wide range of legislation and many public programs seek the equitable distribution of public resources to benefit the nation's youth. For example, Lyndon B. Johnson's legislation for the War on Poverty produced programs that continue today, such as Headstart and the Job Corps (Zigler and Styfco 1996). George W. Bush's No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 sought to close the achievement gap for children from low-income families. While these programs are not without critics and have uneven success rates, they are all based on the assumption that investments in programs that assist children provide benefits to society at large. The strength of a democracy may be undermined if generations of youth grow up in poverty, receive substandard education, or lack access to important cultural and educational resources.

Similarly, marketing and policy researchers view children as a vulnerable segment in our society worthy of special protections (Baker, Gentry, and Rittenburg 2005). For example, recent special issues of different journals explore the controversies surrounding marketing and advertising to children (Oates, Blades, and Gunter 2003), children's susceptibility to advertising (Friestad and Wright 2005), and the influence of the marketplace on childhood obesity (Moore 2007). Contemporary discourses construct childhood as a special space that

should be protected. Yet in economically developed countries, the time of childhood is more and more organized and scheduled across the settings of home, schools, and recreation.

Schools increasingly focus on school work and standardized testing, which means less time for free play (Ginsburg 2007). Afterschool time, which was once free play time, is often filled with organized sports, arts, and entertainment activities (Blackford 2004).

Amid fears that childhood and unstructured play is disappearing, a hotly contested issue is the encroachment of commercialized play areas (Postman 1982). In recent years, privatized play areas are no longer old-fashioned arcades and kitschy miniature golf courses but are an increasingly sophisticated and heavily marketed array of options such as indoor playgrounds, water parks, laser tag, rock climbing walls, and exotically-themed amusement parks. In these spectacular retail environments, how is children's play constrained and controlled by marketers (Kozinets et al. 2004)? McKendrick, Bradford, and Fielder (2000) argue that play is commodified when a normal daily experience is turned into a consumable product and sold. Perhaps even more ubiquitous are free leisure areas, such as soft ball rooms and small indoor play areas, available for paying customers in many fast food restaurants and retail establishments. Empirical work by McKendrick et al. (2000) suggests that parents frequent these commercialized areas of play based on their own need to relax and caution that children are giving up an important right to free and unstructured play. Alternatively, Blackford (2004) portrays commercial spaces, such as the ballroom at McDonald's, as a place that balances the needs of parents and children. In these spaces customized for children, youths can play free from the scrutiny of parents; in fact, children can disappear into tunnels and beneath mountains of balls and parents are physically unable to follow. Mothers and fathers can share the burden of constant parental surveillance with the commercial entity that they trust to provide a safe environment for their child's play while they take a break from

shopping. Still, contradictions abound, such as the promotion of healthy active play amid what is usually a cornucopia of unhealthy fast foods and sugared beverages.

What is clear is that parents, researchers, and public policy makers have a growing concern about child's play, access to play areas and objects, and opportunities for free play. Commercial forces are increasingly colonizing the spaces of childhood as children are treated as consumers who must author unique identities through their consumption practices across toys, clothing, and other consumer goods (Diamond et al. 2009). This paper examines one approach by parents to take back control of their child's play by patronizing and volunteering at neighborhood toy libraries. Toy libraries are locally run facilities that distribute toys to children and parents in much the same way that people borrow books from public libraries (Moore 1995). The toy library is an alternative business model of exchange that is based on sharing rather than ownership (Belk 2010).

While toy libraries originated in the United States, they are popular in many countries particularly in Europe. Specific numbers are not known, but the International Toy Library Association has members spanning sixty countries, and over a thousand toy libraries exist in the United Kingdom alone (Capacity and Play Matters 2007). While the United States has almost two hundred toy libraries, toy libraries have not diffused in the country of its origin as widely as in other countries. Two dominant models of toy libraries exist. First, a Lekotek is a form of toy library developed in Sweden, staffed by professionally trained personnel, that provides toys, support, and information to families to help children with special needs develop through play. Second, community toy libraries serve the needs of local families, tend to be more informal, and are often run by community and family volunteers (Rettig 1998). Community toy libraries are rising in popularity and may serve families with children who are able bodied or face challenges (Mayfield 1993). However, each toy library system is

influenced by the special conditions, needs, and development of its particular country and by each country's cultural and social system (Brodin and Bjorck-Akesson 1992).

First, the role of play in early childhood development is broadly explored. Next, key public policies that have supported toy libraries are reviewed. Against this backdrop, an empirical study of toy libraries examines the social construction of meaning in these community libraries and we conclude with policy recommendations.

The Importance of Play in Childhood

Overview of the Recent Historical Construction of Play

The importance of play in childhood is a relatively modern concept emerging at the end of the 19th century during the Progressive Era (1890s-1920s). Technology and labor force changes led to a decrease in the need for the labor of working class children. Child labor reforms were also well underway during this period. The dramatic growth in compulsory schooling also meant that a child's day became divided into a period of school work and a period of free time. Particularly in urban areas, children within low-income neighborhoods lacked areas in which to play. After school hours, these noisy and boisterous children filled the streets and took over public areas and engaged in a wide range of free play.

During this period, social ideas about play reflected contradictory impulses. Play was viewed as a natural activity crucial for healthy physical, intellectual, and social development. Yet children's free play was also seen as wasteful. Peer groups of working class youths were perceived to be rebellious when they played unsupervised street games based on rules constructed by the children. At the early part of the 20th century, social advocates sought to organize play under adult direction promising to use this play time productively to produce better workers among the lower classes (Halpern 2003). Karl Groos instinctual theory of play was popular at the time and influenced educators and policy makers. Rather than being an aimless activity, play was an instinctual drive through which children practiced the skills they

would need later in life (Keller and Weiller 1993). This rhetoric of progress continues today as discourses on play stress its role in preparing children for the future (Scarlett et al. 2005).

Defining Play and its Impact

Play is often defined by comparing it to what it is not; play does not involve work, it is not realistic, it is not serious, and it is not productive (Edmiston 2007). While these binary definitions could imply that play is unimportant, most theorists see play as a crucial activity of childhood in which children create their own opportunities to explore and learn (Elkind 2007). Nevertheless, nailing down a definition of play is difficult because the role of play is culturally and socially changing, and each theory defines play differently (Saracho and Spodek 2003). Some of the most commonly used criteria to distinguish play from non-play is that it is intrinsically motivated (Dockett 2001), enjoyable, under the voluntary control of the individual, flexible, and involves suspending reality and entering into a world of pretense (Scarlett et al. 2005). Play is also linked to a wide range of functions including physical functions—such as improving fine and gross motor skills (Piaget 1975), emotional functions—such as building self-esteem and confidence, and social functions—such as teaching children to share and cooperate (Elkind 2007). From a consumer research perspective, an understanding of children's play may also enable us to gain a deeper understanding of the experiential aspects of consumption (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982).

Play holds important but different roles in contemporary theories of early childhood development. The psychoanalytical tradition viewed play as being important for managing negative emotional conflicts like feelings of helplessness. For example, when children engage in role playing, such as pretending to be a superhero, they exert control over their world; thus, play helps children to deal with their emotions (Scarlett et al. 2005). Piagetian theory stresses that play moves children through his well known stages of cognitive development (Roedder John 1999). In early infancy, children engage in practice games to master basic sensory-motor

skills. From early childhood until six years old, children engage in games of pretend in which they develop the ability to think symbolically. In late childhood, children engage in games with rules to guide fair play, which is based on the ability to see other people's point of view (Dockett 2001; Piaget 1975). Cultural-ecological theory tends to focus on how play is affected by the cultural contexts in which it is embedded. For example, in cultures in which social interdependency is important, play is more likely to be cooperative and stress harmony. Cultures that value individual achievements are more likely to encourage games with clear winners and losers, such as dodge ball (Scarlett et al. 2005).

Public Policy and Toy Lending Libraries

Toy libraries were first created during the economic hardships of the Great Depression in response to doubling rates of juvenile delinquency in the 1930s (Webb 2004). The first toy library opened its doors in 1935 with the Los Angeles County Toy Loan program, which continues today (Mayfield 1990; Moore 1995). This program was immediately successful and heavily utilized but additional funds were needed to support the city-wide expansion of the program. Under President Roosevelt's New Deal plan, toy libraries were placed under the Works Project Administration and funds were made available (Moore 1995). While the exact number of these toy lending programs is difficult to determine, the city-wide programs in Los Angeles and Milwaukee offer well documented cases that provide historical context (Moore 1995; Webb 2004). These programs emerged in response to the problem of rising crime among youths. The LA toy library was created in response to the petty theft of small toys from dime stores (Toy Loan 2009) and Milwaukee toy library was created after tragic bombings by two teenagers (Webb 2004). The toy libraries were praised for supporting values of good citizenship, such as responsibility, cooperation, sharing, and a respect of property rights (Webb 2004). Multi-stakeholder coalitions emerged to fund and support the toy loan programs including educators, judicial and police officers, businessmen, and religious and

civic groups. Department stores donated unsold toys, schools and civic organizations ran toy drives, and government offices provided rent-free space (Moore 1995; Webb 2004).

The greatest contemporary expansion of toy libraries arose to address the needs of children with disabilities. The 1986 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act made funding available for early childhood intervention and some of this money was used to fund toy libraries (Moore 1995). The Lekotek movement began in the Scandinavian countries in the 1960s and has had a significant international impact. This movement spread to the U.S. in the 1980s and currently the National Lekotek Center operates in thirty-five locations. The National Lekotek Center has forged a relationship with toy manufacturers and toys can be submitted for evaluation and rating on the developmental appropriateness for children with challenges (see www.ableplay.org).

An Empirical Study of Contemporary Toy Libraries

The Methodology

The study was conducted in New Zealand where toy libraries are popular resources. Currently over 200 toy libraries exist in a country with a population of just over four million (when compared to just over 200 toy libraries that exist in the United States with a population of over three hundred million). Most cities and towns in New Zealand (NZ) have a community toy library. But NZ is an attractive site because of its public policies supportive of children. For example, NZ is a leader in early childhood education and was one of the first countries to integrate its early childhood care and education services under the Department of Education to coordinate a national curriculum, funding, and training (UNESCO 2002).

In New Zealand, the dominant form of toy libraries are community based. Members borrow toys for a fixed time period with fees and borrowing rules differing among libraries. Volunteer members run the libraries, with some larger libraries utilizing part-time paid toy librarians. The toy libraries vary considerably with some operations being quite modest

operating in a single room and open fortnightly. The toy libraries in larger communities, however, may be housed in multi-room facilities and open several times a week, and some toy libraries in rural areas have mobile units. Parents were selected from five toy libraries located in the Canterbury region that represent both lower and upper middle class neighborhoods. Large and small toy libraries were sampled; three of the toy libraries had over 150 members and two libraries had approximately 50 current members.

The lead author conducted a qualitative study using both in-depth interviews and participant observation at a toy library. Nineteen in-depth interviews were conducted with parents whose children ranged in age from newborn to seven years old. Based on their involvement, either both parents or the most active parent was interviewed. While initial data collection concentrated on one toy library, emerging themes were challenged by interviewing parents at four other toy libraries to see if patterns differed. In addition, parents were sampled across levels of involvement from active to occasional users (see Table).

(Insert Table about here)

The in-depth interviews were primarily conducted at the informants' homes. These interviews began with broad open-ended questions to encourage the informants to take the lead. For example, parents enthusiastically answered initial questions about their children and their interests. Questions then explored the families' history with the toy library, their most recent visit to the toy library, and contrast questions exploring best and worst experiences. Later questions were more focused and explored their volunteer work at the toy library, comparisons between buying and borrowing, and the meaning of the toy library for each family. The interviews ranged from one to two hours in length and were audio-taped and transcribed. Both authors engaged in coding and analyzing all data using a hermeneutical analysis of the data (for more details, see Thompson 1997). First, the transcribed interviews were coded based on *a priori* conceptual categories as well as unanticipated categories that

emerged from a close reading of the text. To conduct the *intra*-textual analysis, the coded data for each informant was closely read to develop a unique written interpretation of each informant. To conduct the *inter*-textual analysis, themes across informants were compared to look for communalities. Iterative tacking between intra- and inter-textual analyses continued until the tentative themes could be forged into a coherent interpretation.

The interview insights were supplemented with field observations by the lead author who used the toy library bi-weekly with her children and volunteered in a toy library over a two-year period. To gain the perspectives of the children, fifteen children who had or were currently frequenting the toy library were interviewed; seven children were in the primary target group ranging from 3-5 years old and eight children were in the 6-8 year age range who were moving out of the targeted range but were more articulate. In order to conduct these interviews, the first author recruited children during regular borrowing sessions. After a brief description of the study to the children and their parents, children were asked to draw a picture of them at the toy library, describe their drawing, and then asked about what they liked and disliked about the toy library (see Figure for examples of the children's drawings). The human subject policies for interviewing children required that the children's responses were not audio-taped nor were their pictures kept, but notes were taken of their responses and photographs made of the children's artwork.

(Insert Figure about here)

The Context of Borrowing in the Toy Library

A common family ritual surrounds visits to the toy library. Generally, the visit to the toy library begins with children's hopeful expectations—some parents' compared the visit to a "mini-Christmas." Prior to the visit, a scramble often occurred as the toys from the last visit were found and assembled. While few criticisms were voiced by parents about the toy library, the pre-visit scramble was one notable exception. Libraries inventory the toys with an

accompanying form that reminds the parents of the total pieces. Some parents were organized and able to locate all borrowed items. In one of the rare acts of policing, a few parents refused to check out these multi-part toys or when the toy was borrowed they carefully kept track of the pieces to be able to return the toys as they had received them.

Upon leaving home, the parent physically juggles to get the children and toys into the car particularly when large toys are borrowed. Upon arrival at the toy library, the parents check in the toys while their children look for new toys or play with other youthful patrons. Finally, the parents and children select and check out toys within the rules that limit the number of toys borrowed per visit so enough toys will be available for all patrons. The ritual ends when the children return home to play with their new toys. While sometimes parents are busy and decide to return and borrow toys alone, most of the time an integral part of the ritual involves at least one parent and child visiting the toy library together. From field notes taken during the two hours that one toy library was open, 30 families visited the library and 90% were accompanied by children. Mothers and fathers visited together 30% of the time, the mother visited alone 53.3%, and the father visited alone 16.7% of the time.

Children's interest in the toy library changes as they get older. Due in part to the general emphasis on toys for younger children, around age seven to eight, children's interest wanes. For instance, four of the older children responded that they were getting too old for the toy library, or the toys were no longer relevant, and one child even refused to be interviewed saying the toy library is "too babyish." Older children who continue to visit the toy library with younger siblings use the visits to socialize with their friends from school, such as Raewyn's daughter who likes to interact with her school friends: "we usually have a really hard time getting the girls to leave."

Findings

The Benefits of Borrowing for Children and their Parents

For the children, the benefit of the toy library is clearly the toys, which was usually mentioned when asked why they like going to the toy library. Most of the children interviewed drew pictures of themselves playing with their favorite toys, such as toy cars, puzzles, computer games, and a roller coaster; a particularly popular subject were self portraits dressed in various costumes, such as pirate, princess, Maori, and fairy outfits. Several of the children said they liked to go to the toy library to play with their friends, and when asked what they disliked about the toy library, a couple of children reported that they do not like to leave but would rather stay and play.

For the parents, the pleasure of borrowing is best understood in contrast to the pain of shopping. Generally parents described shopping for toys with their children as a “hard,” or “stressful,” task that is full of begging and negotiating. These visits were typified by parents as struggling to control and limit their children; Moira captures these tensions:

The going out shopping thing with them is usually a nightmare because that involves a lot of direction from me in terms of, “don’t touch this,” and “stay here,” and “do this,” and blah, blah. It involves cajoling and bribery and all those sorts of things. (Moira)

Parents describe the toy store setting as fraught with potential conflict and thus try to limit this activity. “In the store there is so much advertising and stuff. You go into the grocery store and you have all the lovely little pink packets and it just drives me crazy (Hannah).” Similarly, Melissa and her husband try to steer their daughter away from brands like Barbie. As such, the informants in this study shopped infrequently with their children for toys. On the occasion when parents did shop with their children, the parents exerted considerable influence and control in the purchase process by having a specific toy in mind or by including the child in a narrow task, such as the selection of a gift in which the child might offer limited input.

While clearly conflict can arise when parents try to get children to leave the toy library, or when a toy is too large or has too many parts, generally visits to the toy library stood in sharp contrast as a relatively stress-free alternative. As expressed by Melissa, “we are

trying to steer her away from labels, away from certain brands, and there is very little branding at the toy library.” When children visited the toy library, they knew that they would leave with toys in hand. As Callie states, “If you want something at the toy library, then you just say, ‘Throw it in!’” Since borrowing involved little financial risk or commitment, the parents gave their children significantly more influence borrowing toys when compared to purchasing. While parents with very young children do select toys, by age two most of the parents let their children participate. While observing several toy library sessions, it was noted that parents encourage their children to select toys and be an active participant in the selection process. Sometimes the parents make suggestions, but most parents let the children select some or all of the toys. As Jane states, “I let them explore their own individuality and imagination and choose what they want.”

The freedom to borrow is facilitated by toy libraries’ policies that edit and restrict toys that might be controversial given local community values. Different libraries have different policies but most select durable toys that are developmentally appropriate and avoid toys that might promote violence (i.e., “no toys of destruction” [Bill]). While sometimes parents do place limits on toys that are too large to fit in their car or, as mentioned earlier, have too many small pieces, parents generally voice few or no restrictions and let children have “all their heart’s desire” (Sheila). While all of our fieldwork was in established toy libraries, clearly establishing the shared values that will guide the purchasing of toys might indeed be controversial if parents have different perceptions on what constitutes appropriate toys.

Different Social Constructions of the Toy Library

The toy library is socially constructed to support a diverse set of meanings, which is explored next. These meanings range from being a good way to save money and have fun to a political act of conscience and a way to build community. Some families frequent the library for a single reason. For instance, Steve and Ann seek primarily functional benefits, Bill strives

to use the toy library as a way to build community, and Callie is most interested in the political implications of her participation. But because many of the families used the toy library for a range of meanings, we choose not to force families into categories but instead explored the range of meanings.

A Provider of Functional Benefits. Some uses of the toy library were functionally driven. Patrons wanted or needed to save money and the toy library provided inexpensive access to toys (Dockrell and Wilkinson 1989). As Karen states, “we don’t have to go out and buy—it is a big motivation.” Similarly, most families wanted ongoing access to developmentally appropriate toys. Carol and her partner had a small home, and were looking for a convenient and economical way to find toys to stimulate their daughter. Similarly, three children mentioned they liked the puzzles and two children mentioned they liked the computer games. Thus, the toy library provided access to toys that offer financial saving for the families and developmental challenges for their children. These patterns are not surprising given they reflect the original intent in constructing toy libraries and the benefits most frequently promoted by toy libraries (Mayfield 1993).

Since toys are borrowed and not purchased, more variety seeking occurs at the toy library when compared to the marketplace; for example, one of the children drew eight puzzles he could borrow. Other children rattled off a range of toys they liked, such as one girl who liked: “the toys, the pink doll’s house, animal video about the zoo, the princess puzzle, [and] the car mat that has a road and a village and you can play on it.” While parents were sometimes surprised by the selection made their children, they generally honored their children’s request, unless the child repeatedly requested the same toy. This diverse and affordable selection of toys is a major benefit that draws both avid toy library families and occasional users. In field notes, grandparents were observed visiting with their grandchildren across several borrowing sessions.

Another benefit is patrons of the library could engage in limited trial of toys to determine if the toys were developmentally appropriate or had significant play value. While they reject those toys found wanting, it was not uncommon for a successful trial to prompt a purchase. The following quote both evokes the variety of toys that Steve has found for his young daughter at the library and the sometimes synergistic relationship with the marketplace.

Last few times I got some dress up clothes and she has really been enjoying those. I could see from the other little girl who she spends time with that this might be popular, and just from the other play I could see that she uses her imagination a lot... A butterfly outfit. A doctors set. I had seen the little friend she plays with a lot, they are also members of a toy library, and she and Sally had enjoyed playing with the doctors set. A tool set because they had also enjoyed playing with that. I've tried to get the sets with castles and knights—because again I think it's good for the imagination. But, I think she plays with those for just a short time, probably not quite old enough to build up the big stories in her imagination. A zoo and a circus. I did bring home a sort of a train set and it made sounds. We brought a trike home because we thought she was ready for a trike—that was really good because it helped us determine that she could actually ride a trike and she really enjoyed it. I think that is really good—when you are thinking about a toy that may be a big expense, to bring it home, give it a go, and then make a decision about whether we would purchase it. (Steve)

Similarly, Jane was surprised by the amount of time that her son played with a borrowed doll house, and this experience motivated the purchase of a doll house for him. While at first blush, toy libraries may appear at odds with the business of selling toys, Fischer Price funded the US Toy Library Association in 1984.

A Developer of Human Capacity. While this study focused on interviewing parents about their toy library experiences, toy libraries are local organizations that are often run by volunteers. Thus, they offer the opportunity to develop local human capacities. Historically toy libraries sometimes had toy workshops where disabled adults were trained to repair toys (Moore 1995). But contemporary toy libraries offer a chance for volunteers to learn a range of new skills from community organizing, leadership, public speaking, fund raising, grant writing, toy repair, and web design, to name a few. One parent described how she had taken principles she had learned while volunteering at the toy library, regarding the care and storage

of toys, and applied them to her job (Sheila). Similarly, a study of best practices in the United Kingdom found that toy libraries teach skills, provide jobs, and develop community capacity (Capacity and Play Matters 2007).

Many of the toy selections led to significant skill building and development for the children as well. Those children who were talented puzzlers might select increasingly difficult new puzzles across borrowing periods. Parents nudged children to try toys and activities that challenged their strengths, explored underdeveloped skills, or developed new skills outside their children's comfort zone. So athletic children might be encouraged by their parents to try a puzzle, while a child who enjoyed construction toys might be encouraged to try musical toys.

... if she keeps going back to the same thing that she's had all the time, I'll try to direct her towards something that's a little bit different.... She's not really big on games, so we were trying to find some different games that we could get her interested in so that she could try and include herself a bit more in other people's play because she has a couple of friends who really like board games.... And so we hit on the Hullabaloo, which she really likes. So that was a good one 'cause there's not a real winner or loser in that one. It's more a fun one. (Carol)

While parents gently tried to challenge and develop their children's skills, the children's freedom to borrow also ended up challenging parent's expectations, as Kim notes:

I never pick the toys--it's always Billy.... Even from the very very beginning when he was probably a year, I let him. I followed his lead and it would be quite interesting [There were] things that I thought would be really cool [that] he's just never been interested in. So I quickly found out that even though I thought something was nice and shiny and new, that I thought would be appealing, they may not necessarily mirror what his desires are. (Kim)

An Organizer of Social Support. The toy libraries are located in the local neighborhoods and so they provide an opportunity for both parents and children to socialize and form informal networks (Brodin and Bjorck-Akesson 1992; Bjorck-Akesson and Brodin 1992; Franyo and Settles 1996). Parents reported that their children, particularly as they got older, looked forward to the social aspect of toy libraries as a chance to play with friends; in

an interview with one of the children, he said: “I like to go to the toy library and play with my friends from school and kindy.” Three children drew themselves playing with their friends at the toy library. Some parents freely admitted that the socializing is even more important for them than their children. However, Jane offers a more dramatic example of the potential support found at her local toy library.

I liked when I would be down there on a Saturday and everybody would come in and we would talk about all sorts of things—our kids, whatever. It was such a nice feeling, a really good feeling. And when I split with my ex it really gave me a place to go, when I often did not feel like it, and it really helped me through some bad times. To get out of bed and have a place to go and someone would give me a hug. And you are volunteering and you feel good about that. It was almost like a life line when you are having a rough time in your life. (Jane).

Dockrell and Wilkinson (1989) suggest that young mothers who are socially isolated can benefit from the social opportunities found at toy libraries. Although this socialization can occur in other venues, such as day care, school, or a friend’s house, this is an important benefit reported by parents and supported by the literature (Capacity and Play Matters 2007).

In addition to providing opportunities to socialize and exchange emotional support, parenting advice is freely shared. A certain esprit de corps binds parents who share common struggles with children who are going through, about to go through, or just went through a developmental stage. The most common counsel is on age appropriate toys and what to expect during different stages of development:

It means you could, you know, you see other people down there with children of a similar age and you can say, you know, “What have you tried?” “What did your child like?” (Barbara)

Well, we were first time parents and we really did not know what we were doing. Baby did not come with instructions—feed me now. Well, Brenda went down there [to the toy library] and it seemed like a good idea and it sounded pretty cool to me... Yeah, you walk down to the toy library and everyone is sort of hanging out and talking, and kids cruising around, and you probably know half the people who are members. We felt that way after only a couple of months. (Bill)

Toy libraries were also found to be an effective way to engage isolated families in areas of social deprivation, and redress part of the imbalance between the supply of play equipment available to children from affluent areas and those growing up in poverty (Capacity and Play Matters 2007). Brodin and Bjorck-Akesson (1992) suggest that toy libraries serve an important social function, providing a valuable meeting place for families, a place to share advice and provide support to others, at a time when family patterns have shifted and support services are increasingly limited.

A Builder of Community. Among toy library families who were more than occasional users, the toy library represents a community based on reciprocity that extends beyond the sharing of toys. A significant number of patrons were focused on both experiencing and contributing to the toy library community.

...we wanted community, we wanted a safe community... where people know each other and you know other people would look out for my kid and I'm expected to look after their's, if you know what I mean. And, I've think we've gotten that there [at the toy library] because we walk in and he goes, "Oh look, there's this person!" (Callie)

During a visit to the toy library with her children, the first author saw this community in action. Karen's husband, who was also a volunteer emergency worker, handed his daughter to a woman he knew volunteering at the toy library, while he rushed to an urgent call. Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) suggest that members of brand communities are also bound to one another by a consciousness of kind, shared rituals, and moral responsibility. But the local toy libraries directly build the social fabric of the local communities through ongoing social interactions, connections, and exchanges.

The toy library community functions through the volunteer efforts and labors of its members. Through volunteering at the toy library, many of the patrons like Carol see this work as an important "way that I feel I can give back, that I'm doing something that's benefiting a wider community." Similarly, Raewyn talks about how the library helped to

integrate them into the community around a shared purpose; “we all participate in the running of it, so it is really our thing—we have a sense of ownership of it.” Bill demonstrated what community meant to him during the actual interview. Bill got a call from a friend who needed help in the middle of the interview; he left the first author alone minding his kids, helped his friend with her car, and came back to the interview. Upon returning, he states: “See, that’s community... I think generally people do need a little bit of help every now and again.”

Informants reported minor and major acts of kindness, such as when a toy library father who was manning the desk helped retrieve a lost part that had fallen down a sewer grate, or when a toy library family who was having economic hardship was quietly given a free membership.

I think it allowed them [the children] to see the importance of being part of the community and contributing to the community. I originally tried not to take them down with me, but being a single parent that was not always practical. I think children from a very young age are able to learn about community and volunteering, from a very young age, I think it is very important from a young age to gently expose them to this sort of thing. Like I expect them from a very young age to take care of things, the house, their toys, and I think toy library has helped me to do this because they are asked to take special care of the toy library toys – to keep them separate from other toys, to bag them up, to keep them clean, you know. (Jane)

Similarly, Sheila suggested that the volunteer work sends a potent message to their children by modeling the behavior they hope their children will emulate: “we’re teaching them, aren’t we, about looking after each other.”

A Transforming Political Act. Similar to the work done by Crockett and Wallendorf (2004) in which African American consumers are guided by their political ideology in their purchase decisions, significant ideological motivations drive the consumption of toy library services for some of the users. The most common political interest driving families’ use of the toy library was avoiding supporting a consumerist society and fueling materialism (i.e., the significance their children might give to possessions; see Richins and Dawson 1992). But other societal interests included protecting the environment by minimizing purchases, trying

to be more conscious in purchasing toys that are more sustainably produced, and supporting an egalitarian vision of society in which all children have the same opportunities and resources. The following quotes demonstrate three of these ideological interests including minimizing materialism, overconsumption, and environmental harm:

I really thought on a very anecdotal level a lot of my friends who had lots of stuff and they were just empty and I just didn't want to raise my kids like that, you know?
(Callie)

It means that we don't actually accrue a whole big pile of toys. So we're not sort of drowning in them—a pile of stuff. The policy of loan rather than own, I think it's a great idea. (Barbara)

No, we don't do that [buy] because we'll end in piles of, mountains of crap. We try to keep the landfill to a dull roar, because that's what it is most of it is just for the landfill. (Bill)

This environmental interest is focused on protecting the local natural environment but also includes a concern for environmental damage in countries where the toys are produced.

In addition, parents believed that borrowing toys develops a different relationship to goods that is a counterpoint to overconsumption and materialism: “You can still enjoy something even when it doesn't belong to you. (Carol)” Thus, parents stress that the toy library teaches their children that goods can have value even without ownership. Another lesson taught is for children to be creative in their play with the toys regardless of whether the toy is new or yours. As articulated by Moira, “...things don't always have to be new and beautiful to have value. That toys can be just whatever a child is prepared to make of them. And I do feel that the toy library has reinforced that.”

While strong yet different ideological themes were found throughout the data, they represent the parents re-appropriating the original meaning and the more traditional benefits espoused within toy libraries (Dockrell and Wilkinson 1989). Moreover, these findings suggest a potentially more relevant and invigorating direction that toy libraries and other communities of sharing might use to attract a broader and more committed set of patrons.

These ideas are expanded upon in the next section where the potential of the toy library to develop future citizens who understand the nature of collective goods is explored.

A national survey of NZ toy libraries users, with a sample size of 397, was conducted using the results from the current study. Consistent with the qualitative results, the survey found support for four groups of consumers: socialites (25.7%), market avoiders (25.9%), quiet anti-consumers (26.2%), and passive members (22%). Socialites sought meaning in the toy library through developing social capital and fostering a sense of belonging. While market avoiders also benefited from community and social ties, they most valued the role of toy library as a market mediator and had the lowest level of materialism. Quiet anti-consumers felt ownership of the toy library but did not seek out social connections. Instead, they strongly supported the values of anti-consumption, frugality, and sharing. Passive members, like the quiet anti-consumers, also felt a sense of duty to the toy library but they did not view the library as a source of friendship nor were they very ideologically motivated (see Ozanne and Ballantine 2010 for further details).

The Sharing of Collective Goods and Creating Good Citizens

Given that some of the toy library parents did not support the value of materialism, many parents expressed concerns over potential deleterious effects of even borrowing when their children have access to a seemingly endless supply of novel toys. Some parents wondered if this bounty might increase object attachments, or that children might be easily bored or become fickle. Remember too that, while frequenting the toy library meant that these parents could avoid buying if they wanted, many still bought toys for their children. While the national survey of toy library users found 52% of toy library users are negative toward consumption, almost half are not against consumption (Ozanne and Ballantine 2010).

While Chaplin and John (2007) suggest that materialism does not increase among children until middle school, Chaplin and Lowrey (2010) suggest that children are aware of

branding at elementary school ages. In this study, parents expressed worry over how the toy library experience might affect their young children's materialism. As Tracey says, "I did worry that they kind of got used to having new toys all the time." While all the toys are borrowed, children do develop object-attachments to favorite toys at the toy library that they regularly borrow. Except for the seven year old girl who found the toy library too infantile, all of the children quickly volunteered and drew pictures of favorite toys. Two forces mitigate person-object attachments in the toy library, which are discussed next.

Sharing Collective Goods. The toys at the library are collective public goods that are shared (Belk 2010). Despite the considerable societal investment in public goods, such as public libraries, playgrounds, and parks, very little research examines the consumption of public goods (Visconti, Sherry, Borghini, and Anderson 2010). Melissa states that the toy library has taught her daughter to understand sharing: "someone else is going to take it home for their turn but maybe we will have it next time." Children learned the concept of sharing at as young as two years of age. For instance, one of the children who was 5 years old drew a picture of her sister sharing a toy with her at the toy library. Another child reported that she liked sharing toys with her brother and "I always let Johnnie go first, but we share, I go after him." Very young children learn that the toys at the library are collective goods that needed to be enjoyed while respecting the next user. In the next quote, Carol stresses that sharing collective goods teaching delayed gratification. Andrew, however, suggests that the whole toy library experience reinforces the nature and benefits of community goods.

You can still enjoy something even when it doesn't belong to you, yeah. And to learn that you have to wait to take your turn. Sometimes you can't have everything right when you want it. (Carol)

Well I guess one of those things about the toy library is that it is outside those circuits of consumption and therefore has a whole different attitude toward children's relationship to play. It's not consumerized. It takes a more direct relationship to the children's own lives, because they are going locally and they can get toys over and over again and they can return them. It's more collective I suppose. (Andrew)

Thus, in much the same way that a child may have to earn money to purchase a toy, delayed gratification can also be fostered in the toy library; one parent described how choosing a toy at the toy library was used as a reward during potty training (Field notes). Moreover, the toy library selects durable toys that are used repeatedly and then mended when they are broken. Thus, the toy library experience offers a model of good stewardship over finite resources. The following quote by Raewyn demonstrates this concept of stewardship.

Well, it has definitely taught them how to care for things that are not theirs because we always say to them that they have to be careful with that toy because it belongs to the toy library and not us. I really noticed this because of the neighbor kids who are not members [of the toy library]. They have absolutely no respect for things, and it drives me crazy. They have broken more of our toys. (Raewyn)

An interesting tension existed in the toy library social norms. On the one hand, the toys are collective goods, so it was expected that the objects of play would get worn, used, and, on occasion, broken. On the other hand, strong expectations existed that goods were brought back clean and in good condition. For example, in the toy library where the participant observation occurred, this expectation was made explicit in a posted sign. Lost toy parts and even broken toys are understandable, but when toys are returned dirty it suggests that the toys were returned without regard to the next user violating the norms around sharing collective goods. One of the interviewed children, a child of three, showed her understanding of the norms of sharing when she said she could not borrow the fairy costume again because “she had broke the fairy costume.”

Well lost pieces, that sort of stuff happens. That’s the way the world goes. Things are going to get lost, you know. I know Harriet’s bitten the edge off a piece of puzzle and things like that... But you know there’s repeat offenders, I mean if a toy comes back with food all over it and has obviously not been cared for. (Bill)

These findings are similar to research on the gift economy found on the internet that is also guided by norms of reciprocity (Giesler 2006). Thus, the toy library models good stewardship in using and caring for collective public goods.

Social Suturing. Object attachments are also not as strong in the context of borrowing because social connections are emphasized throughout the toy library experience (Bjorck-Akesson and Brodin 1992; Dockrell and Wilkinson 1989). Visits to the toy library are usually social affairs in which the children accompany their parents. As mentioned earlier, significant socializing occurs during the visit for both the children and parents. And throughout the process, social linkages are implicitly and explicitly stressed in the discourses surrounding the toy library. For example, children are regularly asked to think of other people as they borrow, use, and return goods. As Hannah states, when explaining the need to share with her daughter: “another family might need this.” Or children often were asked to borrow toys for younger siblings, which fostered an understanding and empathetic concern for the needs of others. In fact, one of the interviewed children said she liked to go to the toy library to borrow toys for her baby sister. Sherry’s son helps find appropriate toys for his younger sister; “How about this Maddie, would you like this?” Carol explains how her daughter artfully considers the needs of several potential ‘playmates’ as she selects toys.

She usually picks two things and one thing she will pick that’s something that she really likes and then she’ll also pick something that she thinks is more of a boy’s toy so that when Johnny comes over he’ll have something to play with and her daddy will play with her. Daddy does not like dolls. So we have a police station right now (from the toy library). We’ve been playing cops and robbers and the Polypockets have been used in the police station.

Finally, within the families in this study, sharing seems to be viral in nature. The positive experience of sharing fosters additional sharing such as joining book cooperatives, informally swapping children’s and adult clothing, participating in a time bank, swapping used toys at a birthday party, sharing cars and lawnmowers, and car pooling, to name a few examples. Similarly, some of the children have donated toys that they have outgrown to the toy library or gifted well loved toys to younger friends.

An Interpretation of Parental Mediation in the Market and Civic Space

Marketing researchers have a long interest in how children acquire the skills and information needed to navigate the marketplace (Roedder John 1999; Ward 1974). Significant research also explores environmental and cognitive forces that impact the socialization of children as consumers (Chaplin and Lowrey 2010; Roedder John 1999; Moschis and Moore 1979; Ward, Wackman, and Wartella 1977). For example, family, friends, and mass media are key agents of consumer socialization (Carlson, Grossbart, and Walsh 1990; Chan and McNeal 2006). Using social learning theory, researchers have examined how parents, in particular, interact with their children to develop consumer skills (Carlson et al. 1990; Chan and McNeal 2006). Ward (1974) conjectured parents are likely to socialize children indirectly through subtle interpersonal processes rather than by direct training. Subsequent empirical research provides support that parents make limited efforts to directly teach their children consumer skills and believe children will learn consumer skills through observation and imitation (Ward et al. 1977).

Thus, a widespread belief exists that parents are a crucial socializing agent of their children in the market. Moschis (1985) holds that parents mediate the impact of outside sources of consumer learning on their children, such as mass media. While the parent's mediating role is well documented, this current study seeks to understand more deeply some of the processes by which this mediation takes place. Specifically, by patronizing toy libraries, the parents directly mediate their children's relationship to the marketplace and minimize what parents see as detrimental effects. In addition, various conceptualizations of citizenship are negotiated within the toy library.

First, the parents perceive that *toy shopping* is contentious and conflictual. Through visits to the toy library, parents reduce the need to shop or buy for their children. Although the literature suggests that brand names are not important to preschool and kindergarten-aged children, product cues are, such as particular characters (Haynes, Burts, Dukes, and Cloud

1993); thus, parents value the toy editing services provided by the toy libraries that remove offensive or objectionable products. Moreover, the toy library is relatively free from the type of in-store displays, promotion, branding, and packaging that inspire children to make purchase influence attempts and offers a level playing field for children to learn. Toy libraries offer parents safe havens from the marketplace and the activities of marketers who lack restraint and seek to influence even very young children with sophisticated techniques of persuasion (Friestad and Wright 2005). Thus, toy libraries can give parents a way to exert control, particularly in countries that lack significant legal controls on business activities directed to young children. Second, the toy library mitigates object-person attachments. All of the goods are borrowed, so children learn at a young age to share collective public goods (Visconti et al. 2010). This collective space for sharing toys offers parents a foil to marketplace messages that they fear will fuel their children's potential for materialism and consumerism. The toy library affirms a relationship to locally consumed objects that is typified by good stewardship over finite and shared resources.

The toy library as an institution is also educating children on the nature of citizenship within a democracy. Dewey (1916) was one of the first theorists to stress the importance of socializing children on citizenship and democracy. Contemporary theorists suggest that within play children come to reflect upon and understand rules, duties, and rights of citizenship (Jans 2004; Elbers 1996). Within the toy library, three different conceptualizations of citizenship are negotiated and reinforced to varying degrees. First, the personally responsible model of citizenship is directly nurtured in the children. From this perspective, the good citizen is one who acts responsibly toward the community by following laws, paying taxes, and helping out in times of need (Westheimer and Kahne 2004). Character-based forms of good citizenship, such as those promoting honesty and integrity, are consistent with this approach (see www.charactercounts.org, for example). So the youthful patrons, through their relationship

with the library's toys, are taught to share the collective goods, take their turn, show empathetic concern for the next user, and be good stewards by taking care of the toys. While these civic virtues are essential for people who want to work well within a community, they are not the skills and values necessary for an effective democracy; thus, other theories of citizenship are important (Westheimer and Kahn 2004).

The participatory model of citizenship is receiving considerable attention recently (Cornwall and Coelho 2007; Daly, Schugurensky, and Lopes 2009). This concept of citizenship is most directly demonstrated through the volunteer efforts of the parents who work to support the toy library. A participatory citizen is actively engaged in the civic and social life of their local and national communities (Jans 2004; Ozanne, Corus, and Saatcioglu 2009); from this perspective, a good citizen has the skills to be able to organize and take actions in the interests of the community. The toy library develops human capacity among the parent volunteers by fostering skills of organizing, leading, and working with others. The toy library expands the skills of the children by offering them a rich diversity of developmentally appropriate toys. Moreover, the toy library develops social connections and networks based on a shared purpose that can be leveraged to help the toy library function effectively.

A third model of citizenship, justice-oriented citizenship, is perhaps least developed in the toy library, although clearly those toy library members who patronize the toy library as a political act are negotiating this conceptualization. This notion of citizen assumes that a good citizen will critique the existing social and economic institutions, look for root causes of injustice, and will organize to change systems to be more just (Westheimer and Kahne 2004). Several of the toy library parents purposively use the toy library to minimize their environmental impact and foster more egalitarian exchange based on sharing.

Thus, in their patronage and volunteer work at the toy library, the parents were modeling and encouraging various conceptualizations of citizenships for their children. A

personally responsible citizen within the toy library would be sure to do their share by returning the toys in good order and completing their volunteer hours. The participatory citizen in the toy library would organize a fund raising drive to buy new toys. And the justice-oriented citizen would critically reflect on the social and political inequities that lead to some children having no access to toys and seek to change the systems that reproduce these inequities. Toy libraries could explicitly develop opportunities for fostering these different conceptualizations of citizens. For example, generally as the children get older, the toy library becomes less interesting. Instead, older children could actively participate in the domains that are relevant to them (Jans 2004), such as cataloguing and caring for the toys, making suggestions for toys, or offering ideas for expansion of services. Similarly, the parents could work more explicitly to flesh out toy buying policies that support a more just marketplace based on greater sustainability.

Given the relative cultural and racial homogeneity of the toy libraries studied, one important aspect of citizenship that did not emerge is balancing the need for solidarity within a democracy with the need to respect multi-cultural differences. For example, in post-apartheid South Africa, citizen education of youths seeks to develop a national South African democratic identity while fostering a respect and appreciation for multi-ethnic and multi-racial differences (Joubert, Ebersohn, and Eloff 2010). One might conjecture that the toy library could be part of this delicate balancing act. With its commitment to equal access to shared collective goods, toy libraries could expose children and their families to a diverse assemblage of culturally rich play objects and thereby foster an appreciation and even normalization of the cultural variety of their local community (see also Diamond et al. 2009).

Limitations

While a broad review of public policies was presented, the data from this study draw from New Zealand and certainly some caveats must be offered. First, although we attempted

to capture a range of experiences with the toy library, by sampling a range of large and small libraries, our findings are likely more representative of lower middle class to upper middle class families. Families of lower socio-economic levels may utilize toy libraries in different ways and derive different benefits. For instance, research in the U.K. conducted in areas of economic and social disadvantage found that parents valued the toy libraries as a “gateway to other opportunities” and an accessible form of work experience (Capacity and Play Matters 2007, p. 15). However, additional research is needed to understand how toy libraries impact the relationship to the marketplace for consumers with fewer resources.

Toy libraries are based on the idea that childhood is a special time worthy of protection and childhood play is an important activity worthy of encouragement. But, of course, in many parts of the world, even young children are engaged in important paid and unpaid labor and have a vital role in the economic viability of their families. In many developing countries, children under the age of eighteen make up over half of the population. Even more sobering is the reality that children are the object of exchange when they are sold into slavery or traded in the sex industry (Bourdillon 2006). Thus, the notion of toy libraries assumes some degree of social and economic stability and a commitment to protect children.

When toy libraries are viable they would need to be customized to the socio-cultural and economic realities of the local context. This customization might involve minor adaptation, such as sanitizing the toys in cultures where hygiene is valued. Or it might involve customizing the toy selection to cultural practices, such as providing more costumes and props in cultures that value dramatic play. But even greater customization might be necessary in the social construction of toy libraries. For example, in contemporary Shanghai, interesting transformations are arising in childhood discourses and practices. In post-socialist China, family sizes are smaller, a market economy is growing, and household incomes are rising. Professional urban families are increasingly able to purchase more commodious apartments.

Both within official and popular discourses, children are increasingly viewed as individuals with rights to privacy and personal space within the home, similar to Western conceptualizations. Yet, ironically, children's freedom of movement, social contact, and free play is restricted by busy schedules; they are "caged at school, caged at home" (Naftali 2010, 304). Since often families have only one child, it is even more important to keep this child safe and for them to succeed academically, which is consistent with traditional Confucian values of duty to family. Within this context, toy libraries might offer safe haven for these children to have greater social interaction with other children, but the toys and activities would likely need to enhance academic skills or be culturally enriching (Naftali 2010).

Public Policy Recommendations and Concluding Thoughts

Finally, we explore three public policy recommendations. First, more funding is needed to create toy libraries in disadvantage communities. The United Kingdom provided six million pounds to fund 150 toy libraries in poor neighborhoods (Capacity and Play Matters 2007). In the United States, 20.7 % of children live in poverty (US Census 2009). Such an investment might lessen the gap between the broad democratic rhetoric of equality and the first-hand inequality that children experience growing up in poor neighborhoods (Joubert et al. 2010). The potential of this institution to be used in less developed countries, once children's basic needs are met, is relatively unexamined. Toy libraries can expand access to developmentally appropriate toys for those children most in need, decrease economic demands on individual families, and facilitate exchanges of advice and support.

In a period of significant economic challenges and reduced government budgets, toy libraries are still a good deal. Toy libraries might be housed in existing primary schools thereby creating a bridge between the formal activities of teachers and informal activities of parents stimulating their children with educational toys. Toy libraries can be run by volunteers and thereby expand opportunities to develop human capacity through training basic job skills.

Toy libraries can be customized to meet unique community needs (Franyo and Settles 1996) that may be based on the economic constraints--such as bridging the digital divide, or social opportunities--such as affirming ethnic and multi-cultural diversity, or physical challenges—such as promoting vigorous play among obese children (Moore 2007). Nevertheless, for many toy libraries, securing adequate funding is an ongoing struggle (Powell and Seaton 2007), and an inadequate budget for marketing and promotion means the general public is often unfamiliar with the concept (Capacity and Play Matters 2007).

Second, given the importance of access to suitable education promised by the Individuals with Disabilities Act, greater funding is needed to increase toy libraries targeted for children with special needs. Appropriate toys for play are particularly important for engaging children challenged by disabilities and even severely disabled children can be engaged when appropriate toys are proffered in a socially supportive environment (Brodin 1999). Children with disabilities often require stronger stimuli and more social support from parents and educators (Brodin 2005). While trained staff is not usually provided in community toy libraries, they are a particularly valuable investment for families with special needs. Play with caregivers can build the self confidence that children need to seek out greater stimulation. Parents often lack the skills and tools to promote play with disabled children; toy libraries for children with special needs can fill this gap (Jackson et al. 1991).

Third, a web-based clearing house could document best practices and share resources. For instance, such a clearing house might provide parent-generated reviews of toys, webinars for training volunteers, methods for documenting the impact of the toy library, promotional materials to increase awareness of services, and courses for improving parenting skills through manipulation of play objects. Toy libraries are informal organizations that are often run by parents and local community members so they provide a safer place for parents to seek help. While formal educational institutions may be threatening to parents who lack literacy

skills, the informality of community-based toy libraries makes them more inviting for say a teen parents who may lack parenting skills or single parents who may be socially isolated.

Perhaps the most provocative findings in this study involve how some of the parents employed the toy library to mediate the influences of the market place and affirm ideological values. These are benefits that could presumably expand the demand for the toy library services. Thus, a clearinghouse might also share various buying principles that affirm values of sustainability, document toys that are more humanely produced, and even provide opportunities for meaningful debate on specific branded products or the commercialization of childhood. The potential of the toy library as a form of citizen education is relatively unexamined beyond promoting personal responsibility. But the toy library is a flexible resource that could be used to advance a range of conceptualizations of citizenship. For instance, the value of unity is affirmed when all members are asked to be good stewards of collective goods, but the value of community diversity can also be affirmed by selecting multi-cultural toys that respect the richness of a community (Joubert et al. 2010).

In conclusion, our findings suggest that parents are actively engaged socializing their children by using toy libraries to mediate the influence of the market on their children. These parents find the toy library to be a stress-free alternative to buying in the marketplace providing their children with greater influence to pursue a wide range of toys and develop diverse skills. While past research suggest that children are becoming more market savvy (Gunther and Furnham 1998) and sophisticated consumers (Valkenburg and Cantor 2001), our findings suggest that parents intervene to diminish the impact of the market on their children. Parents appreciated the non-commercialised space of the toy library that offered a safe haven for exploration and growth through the sharing of collective goods. Finally, parents utilized the toy library to foster important civic values in their children, which is an

area relatively unexplored in the literature and different guiding models of citizenship could be used to enrich the impact of toy libraries.

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Table--Informants

Name	Demographics	Children (age and gender)	Library involvement
Sheila	36, married Secondary teacher, NZ	5 ½-- boy, 3--boy, newborn	Participant
Barbara	34, married City council planner, NZ	3 ½--boy, 1 ½--boy	Active participant
Callie	38, partner Lecturer, American expat	3—boy, 1—girl	Participant
Carol	38, married Receptionist, Canadian expat	6 ½--girl	Participant
Tracy	40, partner Local government worker, NZ	5 ½--boy, 3—girl, newborn	Member
Kim	38, married Lecturer/consultant, American expat	6 ½--boy	Active participant
Ellen	37, married Teacher, NZ	5 ½--boy, 4—boy, 1 ½--girl	Active participant
Steve & Ann	41, married Engineer/Sales, NZ	2—girl	Member
Bill	39, married Builder, Australian expat	4—girl, 1½--girl	Active participant
Moira	37, married Researcher, NZ	4—boy, 2—boy	Participant
Jane	40, separated Mother, NZ	7—boy, 5—boy	Active Participant
Nancy	36, married to Andrew Librarian, NZ	5—girl	Participant
Terri	35, Married Homemaker, NZ	4—girl, 1—girl	Active Participant
Andrew	40, married to Nancy Lecturer, NZ	5—girl	Member
Hannah	37, partner Business development Consultant, NZ	4—girl, 9 month—boy	Participant
Karen	36, partner Curator, NZ	2—girl, 8 week—boy	Member
Raewyn	36, married Part time architect, NZ	7—girl, 4—girl	Participant
Sherry	44, married Lecturer, NZ	6—boy, 2—girl	Active participant
Melissa	38, Married GP, UK	5—girl, 2--twin boy and girl	Participant

Code: Level of involvement is defined as **active participant** who participates beyond the basic membership duties and gets involved with more volunteer work, to **participant** who follows the expectations of regular membership, and **member** who occasionally goes to the library or is a parent who relies on their partner to participate.

Figure –Example of Children’s Drawings



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