

WHAT TO DO TO PROTECT OUR CHILDREN FROM CONSUMERISM

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THE NEGATIVE IMPACT OF CHILD MARKETING

PROFITABILITY. IN THIS GREEDY PURSUIT, COMPANIES REACH OUT TO THOSE LEAST CAPABLE OF DEFENDING THEMSELVES: **THE CHILD**

Like a truck without brakes down a steep road, companies insatiably search for justification of their reason of being: to profit, literally, at any price. In order to attain this objective they refine day after day their selling techniques as well as researches to detect our anxieties, expectations and – why not – our dreams.

Far from announcing products that meet existing demand, advertising evolved into an advanced persuasion technology, according to which the great challenge, as the advertisers brag, is **“to sell refrigerators to Eskimos”**. The worst is that it succeeded. We are Eskimos purchasing refrigerators when we go shopping one late rainy Saturday and end up purchasing items that, truth be told, we do not need, despite the fact that the benefits offered by the product are clearly illusionary.

THE SOUL OF ADVERTISING AFFECTS **OUR HEARTS** MUCH MORE THAN OUR HEADS

The emotions of one's first love, of entering university and of the birth of a child, are opportunistically attributed to the protection of a large bank, the smoothness of a new moisturizer or the taste of a new type of cereal. Proud of our insight we find it ironic "Ha, ha, or so it seems!". But soon afterwards we buy it, conditioned by the emotional appeal attributed to the product. Up to the present moment we have been speaking about the ease of persuading adults, those with the power of decision. So what of the bombardment of publicity aimed at children? Equipped with the means to fantasize, they love cereal high in sugar in the same way they love a large tiger as a friend. What child would not want the power of friendship with a large powerful tiger, which is wild, yet at the same time, protective and affectionate like one's father? Believe it, desire is a natural recourse and necessary for a child. Nobody has the right to appropriate that for profit.

WHERE IS THE ETHIC?

When we ask about what has ethically been done in this case, the reasoning arguments that arise – when they arise – are of the same nature as commercial seduction.

“We are not manipulating, only seeking to speak with children in a language they best understand”. So great is their understanding, that they imagine themselves inferior to a friend who has a Barbie, when they themselves do not. Such is their understanding, that they perceive their mothers as bad for not permitting, as the “affectionate and understanding” advertised mother permits, the hiding of filled-confectionary under their pillows at bed time. That is after having just brushed their teeth. Beyond that, where are the power-of-attorney passed by parents to advertisers, conferring on them the power to influence their children about what they should or should not consume?



WAYS TO PROTECT A CHILD FROM CONSUMERISM

“HOW CAN ONE FAMILY, ALONE, PROTECT THEIR CHILDREN FROM AN INDUSTRY THAT ANNUALLY SPENDS US\$ 15 BILLION TO MANIPULATE THEM?”

Susan Linn

It is up to everyone, parents and citizens committed in one way or another with social well-being and our children's future, to take control of the situation and demand a more conscientious and less greedy position from marketing specialists. Nevertheless, as stated by **Susan Linn** in her book entitled “**Children of Consumption – A Stolen Childhood**”, parents cannot resolve this problem alone.

By questioning, denouncing abuse, orienting and saying “no” whenever necessary, we can deter the clearly vicious cycle whereby a manipulated child inevitably manipulates his/her parents, and they, wanting to see their child happy, give in to consumerism, confusing love with permissiveness. Both publicly and at home, having a limit is fundamental.

As part of her efforts, Susan included in her book suggestions of defending arguments against consumerism aimed at educators, health professionals, defense groups, foundations, concerned citizens and politicians. To follow are some of those suggestions in a concise form.

WHAT PARENTS CAN DO...

at home

- Before helping children deal with their vulnerabilities, parents should understand their own, including the tendency to overspend or to resort to products as a form of gratification.
- Make a habit of engaging in activities with your children that do not involve the media, such as: reading, playing cards or board games, cooking or playing instruments.
- Talk to your children and help them understand the real objective of publicity so that they begin to be aware of their own attitudes in respect of received messages.
- Find ways to help children to understand the significance of celebrations that go beyond commercialism and the nearly always compulsory exchange of presents.
- Participate in national events, such as “A Week without TV” or “A Day without Shopping”.

...in the community

- Share your concerns about advertising aimed at children with other parents. It is easier for groups of parents or even for a few parents, to establish together certain limits rather than doing it alone.
- If a family is part of a religious organization, try to encourage them to regularly discuss consumerism through lectures and other possible kinds of meeting.
- Encourage habits such as reading, playing various games, organization of community library, visits to tourist and museum attractions, participation in artistic activities or cultural events, accomplishment of creative projects, participation in community services and social causes, among others.

...at school

- Fight against the advertising in elementary, middle and high school textbooks.
- Use nutritious ingredients to prepare lunch for children and agree with other parents to do the same, thereby counteracting any possible child complaint of : “Oh, only I bring lunch from home”.
- Don't provide lunch-money to avoid a child purchasing soft drinks and “junk food” of no nutritious value.

...as a citizen

- If parents suspect that a particular type of children's toy is prejudicial to a child's education, parents should confirm their concerns with other people and contact a defense group, asking for help in organizing a protest.
- Begin dealing regularly with existing defense groups. More often than not, merely the threat of an organized consumer protest is sufficient.
- Write letters to the editors of local and national newspapers as well as opinion articles positioned against child consumerism.
- Work with municipal, state and federal candidates, who support a limit to the quantity of advertising that reaches the children.

...while shopping

- Avoid taking a child to the supermarket when he/she is hungry.
- Make prior agreements with children about what they can and cannot buy. It is easier to establish limits when you can say:” Remember? We already agreed on this at home”.
- If possible, avoid taking young children to mega toy stores. Young children find it difficult to control their impulses and are not capable of understanding why you will not buy what they want.
- Purposefully, products most appealing to young children are displayed on lower shelves. Try to save a child this temptation by placing him/her high up in the trolley.

HOW TO ACCUSTOM CHILDREN TO WATCHING TV IN MODERATION

Television is the most powerful medium for the creation of consumer habits. For this reason, the following are a few ideas on how to moderate a child's exposure to TV.

- Decrease the amount of televisions at home, remove television sets from children's bedrooms or avoid placing them there.
- Dividing the time spent in front of the TV with other family members can create conflicts, but it can also help children understand important rules such as negotiation, cooperation and compromise.
- Limiting the number of hours in front of the TV is fundamental for children of all ages, bearing in mind that it is easier to do this when a child is young: "It's from the childhood that..."
- Turning off the TV during meals, besides lowering exposure to advertising, allows a child to concentrate on what they are eating and realize when they are full, thereby avoiding eating disorders.

HOW TO ACCUSTOM CHILDREN TO WATCHING TV IN MODERATION

- Parents of babies and children less than three years of age should follow health professionals' recommendations and keep young children as far from television sets as possible.
- Do not allow yourself to be enticed by videos and computer games for young children that claim to raise their IQ and make them smarter. They do not achieve such.
- Avoid leaving the TV on as background noise while children are playing. This interferes with their concentration and negatively affects their intellectual development.

WHAT ASSOCIATIONS AND FOUNDATIONS CONCERNED WITH CHILDREN, AND FAMILIES, CAN DO

- Financially support researches that examine children's reactions to specific marketing techniques, as opposed to solely concentrating on marketing of violence, alcohol, cigarettes or food. The majority of people that stand up for social causes state that their motive for having stopped researching about child advertising is an inability to obtain funds.
- Financially support defense groups, including bulletins, books and other publications on the subject. Some organizations over the country require assistance.

WHAT PROFESSIONALS THAT WORK WITH CHILDREN AND FAMILIES CAN DO

- Assist parents to understand that the exposure of children to advertising creates health problems which vary from eating disorders to stress.
- Professional organizations involved in Child Psychiatry and Psychology can be good defenders of children.
- Including items about consumerism on conference agendas is a good way to promote conscientiousness in colleagues and make alliances with people who share your concerns.
- Work with activists who carry out their profession in a way that contributes to the fight against growing consumerism in children's lives and denounce practices that collaborate with companies or with projects that commercially explore childhood naivety.
- Work to prevent corporate sponsorship of your professional organization if such were to conflict with your work in favor of children.
- Collaborate with other disciplines by writing articles as much for professional periodicals as for newspapers, magazines and sites evoking concerns about the impact of advertising on children, such as obesity, premature eroticism, violence, lack of initiative and isolation from family.

WHAT THOSE IN POLITICS CAN DO

Support...

- ...after-school programs that provide children with pro-social activities deviating from commercial media, therefore reducing the quantity of advertising to which they are exposed.
- ...associations, foundations and religious organizations encourage their support efforts that concern advertising aimed at children, in order to promote public conscientiousness and influence Politics.
- ...the regulation of marketing research, with or without children, in the same way that academic research is regulated. They should be subjected to revision by a committee that can ensure that the research subjects are duly informed of the nature of the research and potential detriment.
- ...initiatives with the municipal supply departments seeking to prohibit the sale of food of low nutritional value, in schools and teaching institutions.
- ...the approval of legislation that prohibits commercials of caloric and low nutritional value beverages and food, banning them from schools, be they in the form of posters or messages in school books.

WHAT THOSE IN POLITICS CAN DO

ALSO SUPPORT...

...**public media with adequate financial aid, including television, radio and internet sites for children.**

There are various interesting proposals on how to do this. Here are three of them:

1. impose a tax on corporations that advertise to children and use the funds to finance public media for them.
2. impose a fee on corporations for the use of public digital transmission, directing the money collected toward support of transmission without commercials.
3. require that at least one channel for children, from each media company, be exempt from commercials.

...new regulations on child television that prohibit companies from creating children's programs with the intention of selling toys and other products.

...systems of classification that are consistent in all media and extensive to products licensed by media programs. Toys, clothes and accessories must follow the same classifications as the programs that advertise them.

OTHER **RECOMMENDED** POLICIES

- Competent bodies should draw up a document about the minimum nutritional parameters that must be mandatorily displayed on food advertisements aimed at children.
- Jointly, the Ministries of Health and Education should develop campaigns of national scope about healthy food, including preventing future public spending.
- Parents, health and education professionals, as well as congressmen and non-government organizations, should promote campaigns calling the companies in food and related areas, as well as magazines aimed at children, to conduct marketing of food in a responsible manner. In the event this does not occur, they should denounce the breaching companies.

WHEN USED TO INTENSIFY MARKETING AIMED AT CHILDREN, THE FOLLOWING MARKETING STRATEGIES SHOULD BE CONSIDERED CRIMES

- The insertion of products into the content of television programs, websites, videos and movies aimed at children.
- Viral marketing that involves employing or inducing minors to sell or promote products to other children.
- Viral marketing in the form of contracting of unidentified people to enter internet chat rooms with the intention of promoting a product.
- Advertising aimed at children that encourages disrespect of adults.
- Commercials with the duration of programs.

TO FIND OUT WHO IS ALREADY WORKING ON SENSIBLE REGULATION OF MARKETING FOR CHILDREN, ACCESS THE SITES IN THE FOLLOWING LIST

- Let us put an end to advertising aimed at children. The question is not that they are consuming. They are being consumed. Access the following websites and see how many people, how many institutions and how many initiatives are in action in Brazil and the world to curb the bombardment of marketing on our children. You will discover that aside from you not being the only person with a consciousness for preservation, you can do more than you think to help put an end to advertising directed at children.

SITES

National

www.institutoalana.org.br
www.criancaconsumo.org.br
www.espacoalana.org.br
www.desligueatv.org.br
www.unicef.org.br
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International

www.commercialexploitation.org
www.acmecoalition.org
www.tobaccofreekids.org
www.c-cave.com
www.democraticmedia.org
www.cspinet.org
www.childrennow.org
www.commonsensemedia.org
www.jbcc.harvard.edu
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www.commercialfreechildhood.org
www.freepress.net
www.stopcorporateabuse.org
www.motherhoodproject.org
www.savethechildren.org.br
www.screentime.org



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