

'We are the product'

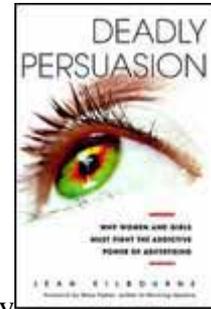
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'Deadly Persuasion' 'Why Women and Girls Must Fight the Addictive Power of Advertising'

by Jean Kilbourne

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(CNN) -- The average American views three thousand ads in one day. Yet remarkably, most of us believe we are not influenced by advertising. In this lively exposé, Jean Kilbourne reveals how deeply advertisers insinuate themselves into our daily lives. Advertisers do far more than influence our taste -- they manipulate our desires so that their products will become our closest friends.

CHAPTER ONE

"Buy This 24-Year-Old and Get All His Friends Absolutely Free"

If you're like most people, you think that advertising has no influence on you. This is what advertisers want you to believe. But, if that were true, why would companies spend over \$200 billion a year on advertising? Why would they be willing to spend over \$250,000 to produce an average television commercial and another \$250,000 to air it? If they want to broadcast their commercial during the Super Bowl, they will gladly spend over a million dollars to produce it and over one and a half million to air it. After all, they might have the kind of success that Victoria's Secret did during the 1999 Super Bowl. When they paraded bra-and-panty-clad models across TV screens for a mere thirty seconds, one million people turned away from the game to log on to the Website promoted in the ad. No influence?

Ad agency Arnold Communications of Boston kicked off an ad campaign for a financial services group during the 1999 Super Bowl that represented eleven months of planning and twelve thousand "man-hours" of work. Thirty hours of footage were edited into a thirty-second spot. An employee flew to Los Angeles with the ad in a lead-lined bag, like a diplomat carrying state secrets or a courier with crown jewels. Why? Because the Super Bowl is one of the few sure sources of big audiences -- especially male audiences, the most precious commodity for advertisers. Indeed, the Super Bowl is more about advertising than football: The four hours it takes include only about twelve minutes of actually moving the ball.

Three of the four television programs that draw the largest audiences every year are football games. And these games have coattails: twelve prime-time shows that attracted bigger male audiences in 1999 than those in the same time slots the previous year were heavily pushed during football games. No wonder the networks can sell this prized Super Bowl audience to advertisers for almost any price they want. The Oscar ceremony, known as the Super Bowl for women, is able to command one million dollars for a thirty-second spot because it can deliver over 60 percent of the nation's women to advertisers. Make no mistake: The primary purpose of the mass media is to sell audiences to advertisers. We are the product. Although people are much more sophisticated about advertising now than even a few years ago, most are still shocked to learn this.

Magazines, newspapers, and radio and television programs round us up, rather like cattle, and producers and publishers then sell us to advertisers, usually through ads placed in advertising and industry publications. "The people you want, we've got all wrapped up for you," declares *The Chicago Tribune* in an ad placed in *Advertising Age*, the major publication of the advertising industry, which pictures several people, all neatly boxed according to income level.

Although we like to think of advertising as unimportant, it is in fact the most important aspect of the mass media. It is the point. Advertising supports more than 60 percent of magazine and newspaper production and almost 100 percent of the electronic media. Over \$40 billion a year in ad revenue is generated for television and radio and over \$30 billion for magazines and newspapers. As one ABC executive said, "The network is paying affiliates to carry network commercials, not programs. What we are is a distribution system for Procter & Gamble." And the CEO of Westinghouse Electric, owner of CBS, said, "We're here to serve advertisers. That's our *raison d'être*."

The media know that television and radio programs are simply fillers for the space between commercials. They know that the programs that succeed are the ones that deliver the highest number of people to the advertisers. But not just any people. Advertisers are interested in people aged eighteen to forty-nine who live in or near a city. *Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman*, a program that was number one in its time slot and immensely popular with older, more rural viewers, was canceled in 1998 because it couldn't command the higher advertising rates paid for younger, richer audiences. This is not new: the *Daily Herald*, a British newspaper with 47 million readers, double the combined readership of *The Times*, *The Financial Times*, *The Guardian*, and *The Telegraph*, folded in the 1960s because its readers were mostly elderly and working class and had little appeal to advertisers. The target audience that appeals to advertisers is becoming more narrow all the time. According to Dean Valentine, the head of United Paramount Network, most networks have abandoned the middle class and want "very chic shows that talk to affluent, urban, unmarried, huge-disposable-income 18-to-34-year-olds because the theory is, from advertisers, that the earlier you get them, the sooner you imprint the brand name."

"Tripod Delivers Gen-X," proclaims a sinister ad for a Website and magazine that features a delivery man carrying a corpse-like consumer wrapped from neck to toe in brown paper. Several other such "deliveries" are propped up in the truck. "We've got your customers on our target," says an ad for financial services that portrays the lower

halves of two people embedded in a target. "When you've got them by the ears their hearts and minds will follow," says an ad for an entertainment group. And an ad for the newspaper USA Today offers the consumer's eye between a knife and a fork and says, "12 Million Served Daily." The ad explains, "Nearly six million influential readers with both eyes ingesting your message. Every day." There is no humanity, no individuality in this ad or others like it -- people are simply products sold to advertisers, of value only as potential consumers.

Newspapers are more in the business of selling audiences than in the business of giving people news, especially as more and more newspapers are owned by fewer and fewer chains. They exist primarily to support local advertisers, such as car dealers, realtors, and department store owners. A full-page ad in The New York Times says, "A funny thing happens when people put down a newspaper. They start spending money." The ad continues, "Nothing puts people in the mood to buy like newspaper. In fact, most people consider it almost a prerequisite to any spending spree." It concludes, "Newspaper. It's the best way to close a sale." It is especially disconcerting to realize that our newspapers, even the illustrious New York Times, are hucksters at heart.

Once we begin to count, we see that magazines are essentially catalogs of goods, with less than half of their pages devoted to editorial content (and much of that in the service of the advertisers). An ad for a custom publishing company in Advertising Age promises "The next hot magazine could be the one we create exclusively for your product." And, in fact, there are magazines for everyone from dirt-bike riders to knitters to mercenary soldiers, from Beer Connoisseur to Cigar Aficionado. There are plenty of magazines for the wealthy, such as Coastal Living "for people who live or vacation on the coast." Barron's advertises itself as a way to "reach faster cars, bigger houses and longer prenuptial agreements" and promises a readership with an average household net worth of over a million.

The Internet advertisers target the wealthy too, of course. "They give you Dick," says an ad in Advertising Age for an Internet news network. "We give you Richard." The ad continues, "That's the Senior V.P. Richard who lives in L.A., drives a BMW and wants to buy a DVD player and a kayak." Not surprisingly, there are no magazines or Internet sites or television programs for the poor or for people on welfare. They might not be able to afford the magazines or computers but, more important, they are of no use to advertisers.

This emphasis on the affluent surely has something to do with the invisibility of the poor in our society. Since advertisers have no interest in them, they are not reflected in the media. We know so much about the rich and famous that it becomes a problem for many who seek to emulate them, but we know very little about the lifestyles of the poor and desperate. It is difficult to feel compassion for people we don't know.

Publications and programs that target minorities are also only interested in the affluent. "At \$446 billion, African American buying power is more than the GNP of Switzerland," says an ad in Advertising Age. Another, for a "Black-owned agency," implies it can "get you inside the soul of the African American consumer." "Are You Skirting a Major Market?" asks an ad for a local Florida television station picturing a Latina in a very short skirt. It concludes, "Channel 23. Because South Florida spends

a lot of dinero!" An ad for Latina magazine says, "She's Latina. She spends more." And the Hispanic Network tells advertisers that "Hispanic families are more responsive to advertising. And ads in Spanish are 5 times more persuasive."

This persuasiveness seems pernicious in an ad placed by an advertising agency in Advertising Age after the 1998 reelection of George W. Bush as governor of Texas. "If you have high ambitions, hire us. He did," says the ad opposite a full-page picture of Bush. The ad continues, "If we can create advertising that persuades Hispanic Democrats to vote Republican, we can get them to buy your product." Although most of us know that politicians are sold like beer or soap these days, it is chilling to see this bragged about in an ad.

Early in 1999 William Eisner, head of an advertising agency in Milwaukee, began a multimillion-dollar campaign designed to repackage Republican presidential candidate Steve Forbes just as he once repackaged Mrs. Paul's fishsticks. "We're trying to resuscitate brands all the time that lost their luster with consumers," said Mr. Eisner. "We're doing the same with Steve." To make the candidate look presidential, some commercials were shot in black and white with backdrops resembling the Oval Office.

Ethnic minorities will soon account for 30 percent of all consumer purchases. No wonder they are increasingly important to advertisers. Nearly half of all Fortune 1000 companies have some kind of ethnic marketing campaign. Nonetheless, minorities are still underrepresented in advertising agencies. African-Americans, who are over 10 percent of the total workforce, are only 5 percent of the advertising industry. Minorities are underrepresented in ads as well -- about 87 percent of people in mainstream magazine ads are white, about 3 percent are African-American (most likely appearing as athletes or musicians), and less than 1 percent are Hispanic or Asian. As the spending power of minorities increases, so does marketing segmentation. Mass marketing aimed at a universal audience doesn't work so well in a multicultural society, but cable television, the Internet, custom publishing, and direct marketing lend themselves very well to this segmentation. The multiculturalism that we see in advertising is about money, of course, not about social justice.

The same is true for the increased visibility of gay men and lesbians in advertising. The gay media have provided the lucrative market of gay men to advertisers, such as IBM, Benetton, Johnson & Johnson, and United Airlines, for years. Hartford Financial Services Group launched a 1998 campaign aimed at gays that not only appeared in the gay media but crossed over to mainstream media. Ads picturing pairings of pink and blue cars promoted Hartford's discounts to gay and lesbian couples with the tagline, "Commitment. Bring it on."

Lesbians are still on the fringes of the gay marketing movement, probably because most women still have lower incomes than men. A male couple would be likely to have a higher joint income than a heterosexual couple, but this is not usually the case for a female couple. Nonetheless, Olivia Cruises ran an overtly lesbian commercial during the coming-out episode of Ellen, and Molson beer launched a commercial featuring a lesbian kiss in Canada in 1997. A Subaru print ad featured two women with the headline, "It loves camping, dogs and long-term commitment. Too bad it's only a car." And American Express ran an ad featuring a real-life lesbian couple with

copy that included, "When you're ready to plan a future together, who can you trust to understand the financial challenges that gay men and lesbians face?"

Advertisers don't casually decide to target gays. They spend significant amounts of money to conduct research on the market and to find out how their products are faring. American Express spent \$250,000 for research in 1997 before committing additional funds to the market. More advertisers are seeking the gay audience on the Internet, ever since a major gay-market study in 1997 found that gays are large online subscribers (51.5 percent use for gays compared with 15.8 percent for the general population).

However, many advertisers who target gay consumers still prefer to remain closeted about it, for fear of offending their heterosexual customers. More than two-thirds of gay-market advertisers contacted in 1997 by Advertising Age chose not to comment for an article on the topic.

The gay market is especially important to the alcohol industry. As is the case with many oppressed groups, gay people have a higher rate of alcohol abuse and alcoholism than do straight people. They have a tradition of congregating in bars, perhaps because there is nowhere else to go and feel safe. According to a corporate relations manager for Coors Brewing Company, gay consumers drink about twice as much as straight consumers -- which is good news for Coors, of course. After all, heavy drinkers are the alcohol industry's best customers. Thus alcohol advertisers often target gay men and lesbians, although they have to be very careful not to alienate their macho heterosexual consumers. "For the last time, it's not a lifestyle, it's a life," says an ad for Johnnie Walker Red scotch, which ran, of course, only in gay publications. Signs of ever more closely targeted niche marketing were evident with the 1997 release by Australian brewers Lion Nathan of a "gay beer." The limited-edition label featured 1950s-style cartoons of same-sex couples and the suggestive slogan "Goes Down a Treat." And Baileys liqueur targeted lesbians with an ad featuring two feminized coffee cups and the copy, "Our limited-edition coffee cups are available nationwide, though only recognized as a set in Hawaii." Hawaii, of course, is the only state that has tried to legalize same-sex marriages.

So, the media round us up -- gay and straight, male and female, African-American, white, Latino, young, and middle-aged (advertisers are not interested in old people, who usually already have brand loyalty and often have limited incomes). Then they spend a fortune on research to learn a lot about us, using techniques like polls, trends analysis, focus groups, and PRIZM, a marketing program that garners information about consumers from their ZIP codes -- and that is advertised in Advertising Age as "the targeting tool that turns birds of a feather into sitting ducks."

Many companies these days are hiring anthropologists and psychologists to examine consumers' product choices, verbal responses, even body language for deeper meanings. They spend time in consumers' homes, listening to their conversations and exploring their closets and bathroom cabinets. Ad agency Leo Burnett's director of planning calls these techniques "getting in under the radar." Robert Deutsch, a neuroscientist and anthropologist who works for ad agency DDB Needham, likens himself to a vampire -- "I suck information out of people, and they love it."

One new market research technique involves monitoring brain-wave signals to measure how "engaged" viewers are in what they are watching. According to the president of the company doing this research, "We are the only company in the industry reading people's thoughts and emotions. Someone's going to be a billionaire doing this. I think it will be us."

Through focus groups and depth interviews, psychological researchers can zero in on very specific target audiences -- and their leaders. "Buy this 24-year-old and get all his friends absolutely free," proclaims an ad for MTV directed to advertisers. MTV presents itself publicly as a place for rebels and nonconformists. Behind the scenes, however, it tells potential advertisers that its viewers are lemmings who will buy whatever they are told to buy.

The MTV ad gives us a somewhat different perspective on the concept of "peer pressure." Advertisers, especially those who advertise tobacco and alcohol, are forever claiming that advertising doesn't influence anyone, that kids smoke and drink because of peer pressure. Sure, such pressure exists and is an important influence, but a lot of it is created by advertising. Kids who exert peer pressure don't drop into high schools like Martians. They are kids who tend to be leaders, whom other kids follow for good or for bad. And they themselves are mightily influenced by advertising, sometimes very deliberately as in the MTV ad. As an ad for Seventeen magazine, picturing a group of attractive young people, says, "Hip doesn't just happen. It starts at the source: Seventeen." In the global village, the "peers" are very much the same, regardless of nationality, ethnicity, culture. In the eyes of the media, the youths of the world are becoming a single, seamless, soulless target audience -- often cynically labeled "Generation X," or, for the newest wave of teens, "Generation Y." "We're helping a soft drink company reach them, even if their parents can't," says an ad for newspapers featuring a group of young people. The ad continues, "If you think authority figures have a hard time talking to Generation X, you should try being an advertiser," and goes on to suggest placing ads in the television sections of newspapers.

Of course, it's not only young people who are influenced by their peers. Barron's tells its advertisers, "Reach the right bird and the whole flock will follow." The MTV ad promises advertisers that young "opinion leaders" can influence what their friends eat, drink, and wear, whereas Barron's sells them leaders "whose simple 'yes' can legitimize a new product, trigger eight-figure purchases, and alter the flow of cash and ideas throughout the economy." Advertisers sometimes criticize my work by saying I imply that consumers are brainwashed, stupid, and easily led. Although I never say this, it often seems that the advertisers themselves describe consumers as sitting ducks.

Magazines like Barron's round up relatively small target audiences, but they can't compare with the precision and efficiency of direct marketing. "Score a bull's-eye with every ad" claims an ad for targeting software that promises, "We have your customers in our sights" and "can help you hit your mark every time." Continuing the analogy, the vice-chairman of a direct-marketing firm said, "Mass marketing is like defoliating Vietnam." He continued that direct marketing is more like dropping a smart bomb with pinpoint accuracy. The violent military language certainly makes it seem that marketers are waging a war against consumers. As another advertiser said,

"We're in an era of global marketing warfare. The number one tactical weapon of the age is advertising."

Direct-marketing techniques make it possible for advertisers to customize ads for subscribers of the same magazine according to what a particular subscriber has previously bought. In 1994 the direct-marketing firm Bronner Slosberg Humphrey Inc. customized a print campaign for L.L. Bean by comparing the company's customer base to the subscription lists of about twenty national magazines. Different ads were tailored to specific customers. Thus if two New Yorker subscribers lived next door to each other, the same edition of the magazine could contain two different L.L. Bean ads. According to Mike Slosberg, vice-chairman of the company, "In essence, the ad becomes direct mail, and the magazine is the envelope."

Perhaps we are not surprised that magazines are only envelopes. But many of us had higher hopes for cable television and the Internet. However, these new technologies have mostly become sophisticated targeting devices. "Now you can turn your target market into a captive audience," says an ad for an Internet news and information service that features a man roped into his office chair.

"Capture your audience," says another, featuring a bunch of eyeballs dripping in a net. This ad is selling software that "allows you to track the clicks and mouse-over activities of every single user interacting with your banner ad." Another company recently launched a massive data-collection effort, with the goal of getting at least one million consumers to fill out surveys. It will use the data to deliver ads it claims can be targeted right down to the individual. "Sorry. We can't target by shoesize. YET," says an ad for Yahoo!, a very successful Internet company, which goes on to tell advertisers, "You're wondering...what do our 35 million registered users offer you? Well, information. A lot of it. About who they are. What they're interested in. What kind of job they hold. How old they are. Get the picture?" As a writer for Advertising Age said, "What was once a neutral platform for global communication and vast information gathering is now seen as a virtual playground for marketers seeking new and better ways to reach consumers."

Home pages on the World Wide Web hawk everything from potato chips to cereal to fast food -- to drugs. Alcohol and tobacco companies, chafing under advertising restrictions in other media, have discovered they can find and woo young people without any problem on the Web. Indeed, children are especially vulnerable on the Internet, where advertising manipulates them, invades their privacy, and transforms them into customers without their knowledge. Although there are various initiatives pending, there are as yet no regulations against targeting children online. Marketers attract children to Websites with games and contests and then extract from them information that can be used in future sales pitches to the child and the child's family. They should be aware that this information might be misleading. My daughter recently checked the "less than \$20,000" household income box because she was thinking of her allowance.

Some sites offer prizes to lure children into giving up the e-mail addresses of their friends too. Online advertising targets children as young as four in an attempt to develop "brand loyalty" as early as possible. Companies unrelated to children's products have Websites for children, such as Chevron's site, which features games,

toys, and videos touting the importance of -- surprise! -- the oil industry. In this way, companies can create an image early on and can also gather marketing data. As one ad says to advertisers, "Beginning this August, Kidstar will be able to reach every kid on the planet. And you can, too."

The United States is one of the few industrialized nations in the world that thinks that children are legitimate targets for advertisers. Belgium, Denmark, Norway, and the Canadian province of Quebec ban all advertising to children on television and radio, and Sweden and Greece are pushing for an end to all advertising aimed at children throughout the European Union. An effort to pass similar legislation in the United States in the 1970s was squelched by a coalition of food and toy companies, broadcasters, and ad agencies. Children in America appear to have value primarily as new consumers. As an ad for juvenile and infant bedding and home accessories says, "Having children is so rewarding. You get to buy childish stuff and pretend it's for them." Our public policy -- or lack thereof -- on every children's issue, from education to drugs to teen suicide to child abuse, leaves many to conclude that we are a nation that hates its children.

However, the media care about them. The Turner Cartoon Network tells advertisers, "Today's kids influence over \$130 billion of their parent's spending annually. Kids also spend \$8 billion of their own money. That makes these little consumers big business." Not only are children influencing a lot of spending in the present, they are developing brand loyalty and the beginnings of an addiction to consumption that will serve corporations well in the future. According to Mike Searles, president of Kids 'R' Us, "If you own this child at an early age, you can own this child for years to come. Companies are saying, 'Hey, I want to own the kid younger and younger.'" No wonder Levi Strauss & Co. finds it worthwhile to send a direct mailing to seven- to twelve-year-old girls to learn about them when they are starting to form brand opinions. According to the senior advertising manager, "This is more of a long-term relationship that we're trying to explore." There may not seem much harm in this until we consider that the tobacco and alcohol industries are also interested in long-term relationships beginning in childhood -- and are selling products that can indeed end up "owning" people.

Advertisers are willing to spend a great deal on psychological research that will help them target children more effectively. Nintendo U.S. has a research center which interviews at least fifteen hundred children every week. Kid Connection, a unit of the advertising agency Saatchi & Saatchi, has commissioned what the company calls "psychocultural youth research" studies from cultural anthropologists and clinical psychologists. In a recent study, psychologists interviewed young people between the ages of six and twenty and then analyzed their dreams, drawings, and reactions to symbols. Meanwhile, the anthropologists spent over five hundred hours watching other children use the Internet.

Children are easily influenced. Most little children can't tell the difference between the shows and the commercials (which basically means they are smarter than the rest of us). The toys sold during children's programs are often based on characters in the programs. Recently the Center for Media Education asked the Federal Trade Commission to examine "kidola," a television marketing strategy in which toy

companies promise to buy blocks of commercial time if a local broadcast station airs programs associated with their toys.

One company has initiated a program for advertisers to distribute samples, coupons, and promotional materials to a network of twenty two thousand day care centers and 2 million preschool children. The editor-in-chief of KidStyle, a kids' fashion magazine that made its debut in 1997, said, "It's not going to be another parenting magazine. This will be a pictorial magazine focusing on products."

Perhaps most troubling, advertising is increasingly showing up in our schools, where ads are emblazoned on school buses, scoreboards, and book covers, where corporations provide "free" material for teachers, and where many children are a captive audience for the commercials on Channel One, a marketing program that gives video equipment to desperate schools in exchange for the right to broadcast a "news" program studded with commercials to all students every morning. Channel One is hardly free, however -- it is estimated that it costs taxpayers \$1.8 billion in lost classroom time. But it certainly is profitable for the owners who promise advertisers "the largest teen audience around" and "the undivided attention of millions of teenagers for 12 minutes a day." Another ad for Channel One boasts, "Our relationship with 8.1 million teenagers lasts for six years [rather remarkable considering most of theirs last for...like six days]." Imagine the public outcry if a political or religious group offered schools an information package with ten minutes of news and two minutes of political or religious persuasion. Yet we tend to think of commercial persuasion as somehow neutral, although it certainly promotes beliefs and behavior that have significant and sometimes harmful effects on the individual, the family, the society, and the environment.

"Reach him at the office," says an ad featuring a small boy in a business suit, which continues, "His first day job is kindergarten. Modern can put your sponsored educational materials in the lesson plan." Advertisers are reaching nearly 8 million public-school students each day.

Cash-strapped and underfunded schools accept this dance with the devil. And they are not alone. As many people become less and less willing to pay taxes to support public schools and other institutions and services, corporations are only too eager to pick up the slack -- in exchange for a captive audience, of course. As one good corporate citizen, head of an outdoor advertising agency, suggested, "Perhaps fewer libraries would be closing their doors or reducing their services if they wrapped their buildings in tastefully done outdoor ads."

According to the Council for Aid to Education, the total amount corporations spend on "educational" programs from kindergarten through high school has increased from \$5 million in 1965 to about \$500 million today. The Seattle School Board recently voted to aggressively pursue advertising and corporate sponsorship. "There can be a Nike concert series and a Boeing valedictorian," said the head of the task force. We already have market-driven educational materials in our schools, such as Exxon's documentary on the beauty of the Alaskan coastline or the McDonald's Nutrition Chart and a kindergarten curriculum that teaches children to "Learn to Read through Recognizing Corporate Logos."

No wonder so many people fell for a "news item" in *Adbusters* (a Canadian magazine that critiques advertising and commercialism) about a new program called "Tattoo You Too!", which pays schools a fee in exchange for students willing to be tattooed with famous corporate logos, such as the Nike "swoosh" and the Guess question mark. Although the item was a spoof, it was believable enough to be picked up by some major media. I guess nothing about advertising seems unbelievable these days.

There are penalties for young people who resist this commercialization. In the spring of 1998 Mike Cameron, a senior at Greenbrier High School in Evans, Georgia, was suspended from school. Why? Did he bring a gun to school? Was he smoking in the boys' room? Did he assault a teacher? No. He wore a Pepsi shirt on a school-sponsored Coke day, an entire school day dedicated to an attempt to win ten thousand dollars in a national contest run by Coca-Cola.

Coke has several "partnerships" with schools around the country in which the company gives several million dollars to the school in exchange for a long-term contract giving Coke exclusive rights to school vending machines. John Bushey, an area superintendent for thirteen schools in Colorado Springs who signs his correspondence "The Coke Dude," urged school officials to "get next year's volume up to 70,000 cases" and suggested letting students buy Coke throughout the day and putting vending machines "where they are accessible all day." Twenty years ago, teens drank almost twice as much milk as soda. Today they drink twice as much soda as milk. Some data suggest this contributes to broken bones while they are still teenagers and to osteoporosis in later life.

Just as children are sold to the toy industry and junk food industry by programs, video games, and films, women are sold to the diet industry by the magazines we read and the television programs we watch, almost all of which make us feel anxious about our weight. "Hey, Coke," proclaims an ad placed by *The Ladies' Home Journal*, "want 17-1/2 million very interested women to think Diet?" It goes on to promise executives of Coca-Cola a "very healthy environment for your ads." What's being sold here isn't Diet Coke -- or even *The Ladies' Home Journal*. What's really being sold are the readers of *The Ladies' Home Journal*, first made to feel anxious about their weight and then delivered to the diet industry. Once there, they can be sold again -- *Weight Watchers Magazine* sells its readers to the advertisers by promising that they "reward themselves with \$4 billion in beauty and fashion expenditures annually."

In the same way, female drinkers are sold to the alcohol industry. As alcohol consumption has been falling in recent years, the alcohol industry has been directly targeting groups that traditionally have been lighter drinkers. One important target is women. Women's magazines are happy to cooperate. *Cosmopolitan* sells its readers to the alcohol industry in a trade publication ad proclaiming, "Cosmopolitan Readers Drank 21,794,000 Glasses of Beer in the Last Week." No wonder *Cosmopolitan* runs articles such as "The Beer-Drinker's Diet." It is also no surprise that Absolute vodka would "honor" *Cosmopolitan* and its founder Helen Gurley Brown in an ad (see next page) that merges all three.

Family Circle promises executives of the alcohol industry that they can deliver women who drink. "Attention Alcoholic Beverage Marketing Executives," headlines their ad in *Advertising Age*. "American women make up 48% of your market. You

need to reach our 16 million to earn your market share." Many people in my audiences gasp out loud at this ad. They expect this kind of thing from Cosmopolitan, but Family Circle is such a wholesome magazine! If it is in the business of selling women to the alcohol industry, then no magazine can be trusted. Which is, sadly, the truth (except for those very few magazines, like Ms. and Consumer Reports, which take no advertising).

Young people are also an important market for alcohol. Sport magazine reminds the alcohol industry that "what young money spends on drinks is a real eye-opener," and, through its ad space, Sport is more than willing to help. "Black people drink too much," says an ad for the Black Newspaper Network. "Too much, that is," the copy continues, "for you to ignore." "Diario Las Américas readers Pour It On," echoes an ad in Advertising Age for a Spanish-language newspaper sold in Florida. The truth is that African-Americans and Latinos don't drink nearly as much as Caucasians, but they represent desirable new territory for the alcohol industry. And so the African-American and Latino media hand them over.

Perhaps this wouldn't matter very much if it didn't affect the content of the media. But it does. "Uncork the black market," says an ad for Ebony magazine in Advertising Age, which promises alcohol advertisers that "nothing sells black consumers better." A few years later Ebony did a story on the ten most serious health problems affecting blacks -- but did not include the fact that alcohol is related to nine out of the ten health problems. There were eleven alcohol ads in this same issue of Ebony.

Magazines, television programs, newspapers, all in the business of attracting advertisers, certainly can't afford to offend them. On the contrary, they promise their advertisers an editorial climate in which their ads will be favorably received. Corporations exert great influence on the programs they sponsor, from news to soap operas to talk shows, which in turn reflect consumerist values and become little more than advertising themselves. It becomes increasingly difficult to tell the difference between advertising and editorial content, which we need to understand in order to take advertising seriously.

Advertising's influence on media content is exerted in two major ways: via the suppression of information that would harm or "offend the sponsor" and via the inclusion of editorial content that is advertiser-friendly, that creates an environment in which the ads look good. The line between advertising and editorial content is blurred by "advertorials" (advertising disguised as editorial copy) "product placement" in television programs and feature films, and the widespread use of "video news releases," corporate public-relations puff pieces aired by local television stations as genuine news. Up to 85 percent of the news we get is bought and paid for by corporations eager to gain positive publicity.

Although people have become used to news reporters popping up in commercials and movies (as Joan Lunden and Linda Ellerbee did in television commercials for Vaseline and Maxwell House coffee, respectively, and as almost everyone at CNN did in the movie Contact), many were shocked in late 1997 when retired newsman David Brinkley became the pitchman for agribusiness giant Archer Daniels Midland, a company that has been convicted of price fixing on an international scale.

In 1998 Nike's sponsorship of CBS's Olympic coverage was rewarded when the correspondents delivered the news wearing jackets emblazoned with Nike's symbolic swoosh. The president of CBS News vehemently denied that this sponsorship had anything to do with the thwarting of a follow-up to a hard-hitting investigative piece on Nike for 48 Hours. The editor of The San Francisco Examiner likewise denied that Nike's cosponsorship of their big annual promotion was in any way related to the decision to kill a column by a reporter that was highly critical of Nike.

In 1996 Chrysler Corporation set off a furor by demanding in writing that magazines notify it in advance about "any and all editorial content that encompasses sexual, political, social issues or any editorial that might be construed as provocative or offensive." According to Chrysler spokesman Mike Aberlich, placing an ad is like buying a house: "You decide the neighborhood you want to be in." Fear of losing the lucrative Chrysler account led Esquire to kill a long story with a gay theme, already in page proofs, by accomplished author David Leavitt. Will Blythe, the magazine's literary editor, promptly quit, saying in his letter of resignation that "in effect, we're taking marching orders (albeit, indirectly) from advertisers." Of course, had Blythe not gone public, the public would never have known what happened. When we don't get the story, we don't know what we're missing.

In reaction to the Chrysler letter, the American Society of Magazine Editors and Magazine Publishers of America issued a joint statement in the fall of 1997 calling for editorial integrity and barring magazines from giving advertisers a preview of stories, photos, or tables of contents for upcoming issues. This is to their credit, of course, but it won't protect us from similar phenomena occurring: According to an article in the Columbia Journalism Review, in 1997 a major advertiser (unnamed in the article) warned all three newsweeklies -- Time, Newsweek, and U.S. News & World Report -- that it would award all of its advertising to the magazine that portrayed its company's industry in the most favorable light during the upcoming quarter.

More often than not, self-censorship by magazine editors and television producers makes such overt pressure by corporations unnecessary. According to Kurt Andersen, the former editor of New York magazine, "Because I worked closely and happily with the publisher at New York, I was aware who the big advertisers were. My antennae were turned on, and I read copy thinking, 'Is this going to cause Calvin Klein or Bergdorf big problems.'" No doubt this is what ran through the minds of the CBS executives who canceled Ed Asner's series after two large corporate advertisers -- Vidal Sassoon and Kimberly-Clark -- withdrew their sponsorship because of Asner's association with Medical Aid for El Salvador.

Sometimes the self-censorship involves an entire industry rather than a specific company or corporation. For example, several radio stations in the Midwest not only refused to play a commercial advocating vegetarianism in which country singer k.d. lang appeared as a spokesperson, but also banned lang's songs from the air. Clearly this kind of thinking has more serious consequences than an occasional editorial omission or favorable mention -- it warps a worldview and distorts the editorial content we read and the programs we listen to and watch.

Nowhere is this more obvious than in most women's and girls' magazines, where there is a very fine line, if any, between advertising and editorial content. Most of these

magazines gladly provide a climate in which ads for diet and beauty products will be looked at with interest, even with desperation. And they suffer consequences from advertisers if they fail to provide such a climate.

Gloria Steinem provides a striking example of this in her article "Sex, Lies & Advertising," in which she discusses an award-winning story on Soviet women that was featured on the cover of the November 1980 issue of *Ms.* In those days, *Ms.*, like every other woman's magazine, depended on advertising. Following that story, *Ms.* lost all hope of ever getting Revlon ads. Why? Because the Soviet women on the cover weren't wearing makeup.

More recently, the editor of *New Woman* magazine in Australia resigned after advertisers complained about the publication's use of a heavyset cover girl, even though letters had poured in from grateful readers. According to Advertising Age International, her departure "made clear the influence wielded by advertisers who remain convinced that only thin models spur sales of beauty products." One prevalent form of censorship in the mass media is the almost complete invisibility, the eradication, of real women's faces and bodies.

No wonder women's magazines so often have covers that feature luscious cakes and pies juxtaposed with articles about diets. "85 Ways to Lose Weight," *Woman's Day* tells us -- but probably one of them isn't the "10-minute ice cream pie" on the cover. This is an invitation to pathology, fueling the paradoxical obsession with food and weight control that is one of the hallmarks of eating disorders.

It can be shocking to look at the front and back covers of magazines. Often there are ironic juxtapositions. A typical woman's magazine has a photo of some rich food on the front cover, a cheesecake covered with luscious cherries or a huge slice of apple pie with ice cream melting on top. On the back cover, there is usually a cigarette ad, often one implying that smoking will keep women thin. Inside the magazine are recipes, more photos of fattening foods, articles about dieting -- and lots of advertising featuring very thin models. There usually also is at least one article about an uncommon disease or trivial health hazard, which can seem very ironic in light of the truly dangerous product being glamorized on the back cover.

In February 1999, *Family Circle* featured on its front cover a luscious photo of "gingham mini-cakes," while promoting articles entitled "New! Lose-Weight, Stay-Young Diet," "Super Foods That Act Like Medicine," and "The Healing Power of Love." On the back cover was an ad for Virginia Slims cigarettes. The same week, *For Women First* featured a chocolate cake on its cover along with one article entitled "Accelerate Fat Loss" and another promising "Breakthrough Cures" for varicose veins, cellulite, PMS, stress, tiredness, and dry skin. On the back cover, an ad for Doral cigarettes said, "Imagine getting more." *The Ladies' Home Journal* that same month offered on its cover "The Best Chocolate Cake You Ever Ate," along with its antidote, "Want to Lose 10 lbs? Re-program Your Body." Concern for their readers' health was reflected in two articles highlighted on the cover, "12 Symptoms You Must Not Ignore" and "De-Stressors for Really Crazy Workdays" -- and then undermined by the ad for Basic cigarettes on the back cover (which added to the general confusion by picturing the pack surrounded by chocolate candies).

The diseases and health hazards warned about in the women's magazines are often ridiculous. *Woman's Day* once offered a "Special Report on Deadly Appliances," which warned us about how our appliances, such as toasters, coffeemakers, baby monitors, and nightlights, can suddenly burst into flame. Lest we think this is not a serious problem, the article tells us that in 1993, the last year for which figures were available, 80 people died and 370 were injured by these killer appliances. I don't wish to minimize any death or injury. However, on the back cover of this issue of *Woman's Day* is an advertisement for cigarettes, a product that kills over four hundred thousand people, year in and year out.

The January 1995 issue of *Redbook* warns us on the cover about all sorts of pressing problems from frizzy hair to "erotic accidents" and promotes an article entitled "If Only They'd Caught It Sooner: The Tests Even Healthy Women Need." On the back cover, as always, an ad for Virginia Slims. Needless to say, being set afire from smoking in bed (one of the leading causes of fire deaths) does not make it into the "erotic accidents" article.

An informal survey of popular women's magazines in 1996 found cover stories on some of the following health issues: skin cancer, Pap smears, leukemia, how breast cancer can be fought with a positive attitude, how breast cancer can be held off with aspirin, and the possibility that dry-cleaned clothes can cause cancer. There were cigarette ads on the back covers of all these magazines -- and not a single mention inside of lung cancer and heart disease caused by smoking. In spite of increasing coverage of tobacco issues in the late 1990s, the silence in women's magazines has continued, in America and throughout the world. In my own research, I continue to find scanty coverage of smoking dangers, no feature stories on lung cancer or on smoking's role in causing many other cancers and heart disease...and hundreds of cigarette ads.

Dr. Holly Atkinson, a health writer for *New Woman* between 1985 and 1990, recalled that she was barred from covering smoking-related issues, and that her editor struck any reference to cigarettes in articles on topics ranging from wrinkles to cancer. When Atkinson confronted the editor, a shouting match ensued. "Holly, who do you think supports this magazine?" demanded the editor. As Helen Gurley Brown, former editor of *Cosmopolitan*, said: "Having come from the advertising world myself, I think, 'Who needs somebody you're paying millions of dollars a year to come back and bite you on the ankle?'"

It is not just women's magazines that tailor their articles to match their ads. The July 1995 issue of *Life* magazine warns us of the dangers our children face, including drugs, and asks, "How can we keep our children safe?" On the back cover is a Marlboro ad. Our children are far more likely to die from tobacco-related diseases than from any other cause, but cigarettes are not mentioned in the article.

Americans rely on the media for our health information. But this information is altered, distorted, even censored on behalf of the advertisers -- advertisers for alcohol, cigarettes, junk food, diet products. We get most of our information from people who are likely to be thinking, "Is this going to cause Philip Morris or Anheuser-Busch big problems?" Of course, in recent years there has been front-page coverage of the liability suits against the tobacco industry and much discussion about antismoking

legislation. However, there is still very little information about the health consequences of smoking, especially in women's magazines. The Partnership for a Drug-Free America, made up primarily of media companies dependent on advertising, basically refuses to warn children against the dangers of alcohol and tobacco. The government is spending \$195 million in 1999 on a national media campaign to dissuade adolescents from using illicit drugs, but not a penny of the appropriated tax dollars is going to warn about the dangers of smoking or drinking.

No wonder most people still don't understand that these heavily advertised drugs pose a much greater threat to our young people and kill far more Americans than all illicit drugs combined. Thirty percent of Americans still don't know that smoking shortens life expectancy, and almost 60 percent don't know it causes emphysema. There is still so much ignorance that, when I was invited recently to give a talk on tobacco advertising to students at a progressive private school outside Boston, the person extending the invitation said she was also going to invite someone from the tobacco industry to represent "the other side." I was tempted to ask her if she felt equally compelled to have a batterer on hand during a discussion of domestic violence.

The influence of these huge and powerful corporations on the media leads to a pernicious kind of censorship. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that many of these corporations own and control the media. In 1996 the Seagram Company ran a whiskey ad on an NBC affiliate in Texas, thus breaking the decades-old tradition of liquor ads not being carried on television. Although network television is leery of running liquor ads for fear of offending their beer advertisers, Advertising Age reported that Seagram might have a "winning card to play," since the company owns 50 percent of both the USA Network and the Sci-Fi Channel. Although both have a ban on hard-liquor advertising, a top executive for USA Network said, "If Seagram came to us with a hard-liquor ad, we'd have to look at it."

Today, Time Warner, Sony, Viacom, Disney, Bertelsmann, and News Corporation together control most publishing, music, television, film, and theme-park entertainment throughout the developed world. It is estimated that by the end of the millennium these companies will own 90 percent of the world's information, from newspapers to computer software to film to television to popular music. We may be able to change the channel, but we won't be able to change the message.

Almost everywhere we look these days, anywhere in the world, there is a message from one of these conglomerates. An ad in Advertising Age shows a huge picture of the earth and the headline, "Do you see the trillion dollar market?" The triumph of democracy is becoming the triumph of consumerism, as the global village is reduced to a "trillion dollar market."

"Why 6,000,000 women who used to carry a little red book now carry a little red lipstick," says an ad for Allure, an American beauty magazine, featuring a Chinese woman in a military uniform wearing bright red lipstick. The copy continues, "When nail polish becomes political, and fashion becomes philosophy, Allure magazine will be there." In the world of advertising the political is only personal. Six million women carrying a book of political ideas might be a movement, even a revolution. The same women, carrying lipstick, are simply red-lipped consumers. Advertisers are adept at

appropriating dissent and rebellion, slickly packaging it, and then selling it right back to us.

Although the conglomerates are transnational, the culture they sell is American. Not the American culture of the past, which exported writers like Ernest Hemingway and Edgar Allan Poe, musical greats like Louis Armstrong and Marian Anderson, plays by Eugene O'Neill and Tennessee Williams, and Broadway musicals like West Side Story. These exports celebrated democracy, freedom, and vitality as the American way of life.

Today we export a popular culture that promotes escapism, consumerism, violence, and greed. Half the planet lusts for Cindy Crawford, lines up for blockbuster films like Die Hard 12 with a minimum of dialogue and a maximum of violence (which travels well, needing no translation), and dances to the monotonous beat of the Backstreet Boys. Baywatch, a moronic television series starring Ken and Barbie, has been seen by more people in the world than any other television show in history. And at the heart of all this "entertainment" is advertising. As Simon Anholt, an English consultant specializing in global brand development, said, "The world's most powerful brand is the U.S. This is because it has Hollywood, the world's best advertising agency. For nearly a century, Hollywood has been pumping out two-hour cinema ads for Brand U.S.A., which audiences around the world flock to see." When a group of German advertising agencies placed an ad in Advertising Age that said, "Let's make America great again," they left no doubt about what they had in mind. The ad featured cola, jeans, burgers, cigarettes, and alcohol -- an advertiser's idea of what makes America great.

Some people might wonder what's wrong with this. On the most obvious level, as multinational chains replace local stores, local products, and local character, we end up in a world in which everything looks the same and everyone is Gapped and Starbucked. Shopping malls kill vibrant downtown centers locally and create a universe of uniformity internationally. Worse, we end up in a world ruled by, in John Maynard Keynes's phrase, the values of the casino. On this deeper level, rampant commercialism undermines our physical and psychological health, our environment, and our civic life and creates a toxic society. Advertising corrupts us and, I will argue, promotes a dissociative state that exploits trauma and can lead to addiction. To add insult to injury, it then co-opts our attempts at resistance and rebellion.

Although it is virtually impossible to measure the influence of advertising on a culture, we can learn something by looking at cultures only recently exposed to it. In 1980 the Gwich'in tribe of Alaska got television, and therefore massive advertising, for the first time. Satellite dishes, video games, and VCRs were not far behind. Before this, the Gwich'in lived much the way their ancestors had for a thousand generations. Within ten years, the young members of the tribe were so drawn by television they no longer had time to learn ancient hunting methods, their parents' language, or their oral history. Legends told around campfires could not compete with Beverly Hills 90210. Beaded moccasins gave way to Nike sneakers, sled dogs to gas-powered skimobiles, and "tundra tea" to Folger's instant coffee.

Human beings used to be influenced primarily by the stories of our particular tribe or community, not by stories that are mass-produced and market-driven. As George

Gerbner, one of the world's most respected researchers on the influence of the media, said, "For the first time in human history, most of the stories about people, life, and values are told not by parents, schools, churches, or others in the community who have something to tell, but by a group of distant conglomerates that have something to sell." The stories that most influence our children these days are the stories told by advertisers.

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