

Dr. Susan Linn

Prof. of Psychiatry, Baker Children's Center, Harvard

MARKETING TO KIDS > The Drool Factor

Today corporations are marketing to infants. If you read advertising magazines or trade journals, people talk about cradle to grave brand loyalty. You know if you don't get a child by two or by six you won't have them at all. Or if you get a child by six you'll have them for life. So all of a sudden infants are now fair game. And it's been discovered that six months old, children as young as six months actually respond to brands and recognize brands. And so it's like the drool factor. The little logo right here and the baby looks down and sees it. So they are now being targeted by marketers.

... Marketing to children has just escalated in the past ten years. It doubled from 1992 to 1997 the amount of money the corporations were spending on marketing to children. Well during that time childhood obesity has become a major public health problem in North America. The largest advertisers on television are foods high in fat and high in sugar and high in calories. Well is there a connection? I think so.

... Corporations have found because babies can be imprinted with brands, that they can do things like create board books for babies based on food characters. So there's the Cheerio's play book, or the M&M play book that are published by reputable publishing companies. And are given to babies. So babies are in their early years having this experience of cuddling with caretakers, or parents. And being read to, which is really important experience of childhood. And they're associating those warm cuddly wonderful feelings with candy. Or with breakfast cereal. I mean that's from the very beginning.

There's evidence that the frontal cortex isn't developed until, fully developed I think until 16. So children's brains are still forming even as adolescents. Adolescents may look like adults but they're not adults. They don't think real clearly. They tend to be overwhelmed by their hormones and their emotions. And they're very vulnerable and so they're vulnerable to manipulation. I think it's wrong for corporations to exploit their vulnerabilities to make a profit.

MARKETING TO KIDS > The Key To Happiness

The corporate message that children are being implanted with is that buying things will make you happy. Things will make you happy. And in fact the research shows that that's not true. What makes people happy is challenges at work. And good relationships. It's not what you own. But that's what children are being taught over and over and over again.

And children are bombarded with corporate messages from the moment they wake up in the morning to the moment that they go to bed at night. And even in school. And they can't escape them they're everywhere.

MARKETING TO KIDS > The Use Of Psychologists

The use of psychologists in helping corporations market to children is very troubling. Psychologists are supposed to do good. They're supposed to help people and marketing to children doesn't help them. It's not helpful to them. And that's trouble and it's something that professional organizations are actually starting to take up. And psychologists are useful to marketers in all sorts of ways.

For one thing they have a good handle on child development which corporations can exploit. So psychologists know a lot about teenagers. And know about teenagers being rebellious and, for instance. And can help corporations plan strategies that will exploit that rebelliousness. You know exploit developmental vulnerabilities. So that's one thing, that's one way.

They can also help corporations understand what children like and don't like. And they can also conduct market research and focus groups. And help corporations understand the results of focus groups. But it's a real twist on what all those skills are, are supposedly for.

MARKETING TO KIDS > The Battle For Kids' Minds

If parents limit television, well what about the Internet? Well what about music? Well what about videos, what about movies? I mean you would be fighting with your child from morning till night all the time. If you really were doing your job protecting children from marketing. And then there's all the marketing that's going on in schools where corporations have a, essentially a captive audience.

So schools are desperate for money because there's not enough federal funding for schools. And they're turning to corporations because they feel like when they get these computers they're free. Well you know they're not free, the children pay for them because of the advertising. Children pay for advertising. They pay with their health. They pay with their sense of well-being. It's wrong.

I happen to feel very strongly about freedom of speech and about the First Amendment here in the United States. And I will defend the First Amendment up, down and backwards. But a corporation is not a person. And marketing is not free speech.

MARKETING TO KIDS > Merchandising

You know Raffi left the Vancouver, you know this, Vancouver International Children's Festival because there was too much corporate sponsorship. And corporate marketing. I mean Raffi is an example of somebody who does wonderful work to children. But I don't see Raffi pajamas. And I don't see Raffi sheets. And I don't see babies being imprinted with Raffi. I don't see Raffi computer games. Raffi is not like Pokeman. He's a person who does wonderful singing for children and creates wonderful things for children.