Shame on You: An Analysis of Guilt-Based Advertising Strategies Directed at Parents

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Shame on you:

An analysis of guilt-based advertising strategies directed at parents

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BY

Jamie M. Alexander

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Shame on you: An Analysis of Guilt-based Advertising Strategies Directed at Parents

Jamie Alexander

Thesis

Advisor: Dr. Molly Niesen
ABSTRACT

This thesis examines print advertisements in Parents, a popular parenting magazine, for a period of two years. This study uses critical discourse analysis to find meaning in these print advertisements. Through this analysis, three prominent themes were found in the two-year data collection period. The first of which is the #1 Recommended, a theme that highlights the cultural importance of using only products that have been recommended by medical professionals or hospitals, thereby emphasizing the social power of such persons or establishments. The second is comfort, care, and the good stuff, a theme that highlights a maternal desire to provide comfort, care, and the good stuff for one’s child, doing so by purchasing the products that promote being able to best comfort and care for children. The third is fun and imagination, a theme that highlights a contemporary desire for children to be children, in which fun and imagination is fostered, done so by again, purchasing products that taut being able to foster this fun and imagination in children. All three themes subsequently underscore the oftentimes manipulative wording and phrasing used in advertisements. Manipulative wording and phrasing which is used specifically because it is effective to sometimes guilt viewers into becoming consumers. This thesis makes connections between the themes discovered through this analysis and the themes seen in previous analyses, while at the same time answering questions such as, what are guilt appeals really communicating, what are the larger cultural assumptions, how have advertising messages changed since the 1920s, and more. This thesis looks at advertisements and the emotional appeals within them, yet the wider suggestion this thesis makes about these advertisements is that emotional appeals, and the overall messages in advertisements as a whole are much deeper in meaning than simply using guilt as a means to get moms to buy products.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, Advertisements, Guilt Appeals, Moms, Parenting
DEDICATION

Solomon, my life’s greatest teacher.
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God is good. He can dream bigger things for you than you can for yourself.

My parents, who show me every day what love, devotion, faith, and belief in someone looks like.

My beautiful sisters, who make me laugh and keep me humble, on a regular basis.

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Dr. Angela Jacobs, my fellow veteran and sister in arms, thank you, thank you, thank you. A thousand times, thank you. Thank you for your time. For your service. For your devotion. For your dedication. For your fight. For your sacrifice. Thank you for your service. As I do for myself and every other veteran, present and future service member, I pray and hope that you find peace, and comfort, and satisfaction in this life. You’ve earned it.

To my thesis committee as a whole, thank you for taking the time to read my prospectus, and subsequent thesis, and thank you for agreeing to be on my thesis committee.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................... 2
Dedication ........................................................................................................................................ 3
Acknowledgements ......................................................................................................................... 4
List of Figures .................................................................................................................................. 6
Chapter 1: Introduction ................................................................................................................... 7
Chapter 2: Literature Review .......................................................................................................... 11
   The history of advertising to parents
   Child, parent, and advertiser
   Advertising in the 1960s and 1970s
Chapter 3: Methods ....................................................................................................................... 16
   Research questions (RQ)
Chapter 4: Results ......................................................................................................................... 19
Chapter 5: History repeats itself ..................................................................................................... 31
Chapter 6: Discussion ..................................................................................................................... 33
Chapter 7: Conclusion .................................................................................................................... 39
References ....................................................................................................................................... 43
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 ................................................................. ............................................................... 7
Figure 2 ............................................................................................................................... 20
Figure 3 ................................................................................................................................ 21
Figure 4 ................................................................................................................................ 21
Figure 5 ................................................................................................................................ 22
Figure 6 ................................................................................................................................ 23
Figure 7 ................................................................................................................................ 24
Figure 8 ................................................................................................................................ 25
Figure 9 ................................................................................................................................ 26
Figure 10 ............................................................................................................................... 27
Figure 11 ............................................................................................................................... 28
Figure 12 ............................................................................................................................... 29
CHAPTER 1

Introduction

A new parent’s every waking thought is focused on doing what is best for this brand new life. Parents try to listen to advice from friends and family, and are considerably more aware and interested in product labels than ever, with frequent news reports and studies leading to labels that tout: organic, natural, #1 recommended by physicians/dermatologists, etc. Although parents try to read labels thoroughly, they run short on time, or money, or both, and make a choice based on convenience or budget. And if it’s not the product advertised as being the best for their child, they wonder and worry, and think constantly about how the product(s) might not be the best for their child. Many new mothers may experience a sense of guilt over the products they choose, which is reinforced by the constant flow of advertisements and commercials about what’s best for their child.

In the August 2015 issue of the parenting magazine, Pregnancy & Newborn, there are numerous advertisements, all of which target parents, and mothers in particular. One particular advertisement for Pampers diapers shows an image of a baby being cradled in the arms and held against the chest of a woman, presumably the baby’s mother. This advertisement reads, “a trust like no other. #1 Choice of hospitals. You’re the one your baby trusts most. So it’s comforting to know that you can wrap your baby in the softness and protection of Pampers Swaddlers, the only diaper trusted to be the #1 choice of hospitals. Pampers. lovesleep&play” (See Figure 1). The obvious goal of this advertisement is to persuade mothers to buy and use Pampers diapers; by highlighting that this brand of diapers is the top choice of medical facilities. There is also an implicit guilt-based message here for parents: if a parent does not purchase this brand of diapers, then somehow the parent would be less deserving of their child’s trust.
The art of advertising is interesting because it is used as a stepping stone by advertisers and businesses. Meaning, advertisers use ads as stepping stones to sell products, it behooves the businesses to use manipulative, and guilt laden wording. It benefits the advertisers to use words that will in essence make people feel bad, because if people are happy with a product, themselves, their lives, etc., then they don’t need to purchase the product advertised. Yet, if a person is made to feel bad, inadequate, self-conscious, guilty, etc., then they might be more apt to buy the product advertised, in order to alleviate whatever poor feeling they are experiencing. One of the largest and most prominent functions and purposes of an advertisement is to sell a product, thus, making the advertiser money. Advertisements play a large role in contemporary cultural messages. They do so by portraying images of the perfect mom. They do so by telling moms, through the words and images the ads contain, what moms should do.

This study will examine the phenomenon of advertisements that employ guilt-based strategies directed at parents. This include advertisements that are both implicit and explicit. The implicit being notions or common understandings that are implied, while the explicit is that which is actually written in the words of the advertisement, or seen in the images of the advertisement. The implicit works because the advertisements are sending an implied or unspoken message, such as, a consumer should be guilty for not buying the product advertised, because that then means that the consumer does not care as much about x-y-z. The explicit works because the advertisements are sending overt messages, such as the choice of many moms, meaning, if the consumer does not purchase this product, they are in the minority. For the purpose of this study, the definition of guilt that will be used is that of Dana-Nicoleta Lascu (1991), in which “consumer guilt is defined as an affect triggered by the anxiety a consumer experiences upon the cognition that he is transgressing a moral, societal, or ethical principle.” Likewise, the feeling of guilt is intertwined with the feeling of fear (Lascu, 1991).

Situated in the broader social and cultural history of advertising, this study reveals the extent to which modern advertisements directed at parents are, in fact, not modern. Advertisements today use similar strategies from the past. For example, most parenting magazines rely primarily on the gender stereotype that women do most of the parenting. However, in the last decade, gendered parenting roles have shifted in the United States, whereby “shared parenting,” and “hands on fatherhood” have become the norm.
(Sunderland, 2006). Thus, this study acknowledges the present day gender bias in parenting magazines while also exploring constructions of parenting roles via gender dynamics. Along with this, this study acknowledges the historical continuum of the power of the medical professional, as seen throughout advertisements of the 20s and 30s and advertisements of today, which tout being the "#1 recommended" or "#1 choice of hospitals and/or doctors," as will be seen in the analysis to follow. Likewise, this study also makes note of the susceptible parent who is caring, loving, and just wants the best for their child, as seen in advertisements from the early and mid-1900s to present day advertisements, which will be demonstrated in the analysis to follow.

This study and the topic of this study are important in the realms of the communication discipline because it highlights messages (guilt) embedded within messages (advertisements). It not only looks at the guilt being communicated from advertiser to consumer, but also how guilt appeals in advertising are being communicated from advertiser to consumer.

Guilt appeals according to James Larsen (n.d.) evoke a feeling of guilt, thus rousing viewers, or attempting to rouse viewers to buy the merchandise advertised. Advertisements employing guilt, according to Larsen (n.d.) are effective because they arouse feelings and fears of failure. Thus, purchasing the product will alleviate these feelings. This is seen in the above referenced advertisement. The advertisement implies that if a mom cares about having the best top rated product for her child, then she will purchase Pampers. Likewise, this advertisement suggests that if a mother is to continue to keep the trust inherent in the mother-child relationship, then she will purchase Pampers diapers. Therefore, if a mom does not use Pampers diapers, she must not care about what is best for her child, or keeping her child’s trust as much as mothers who do use Pampers diapers. Guilt, according to Huhmann and Brotherton (1997), is a feeling associated with anxiety and shame and is thus able to be influenced by advertisements. Guilt appeals can exploit one’s vulnerabilities and fears, ultimately invoking a feeling of responsibility for an undesirable result or consequence. This, of course, is more salient in parents of young children, who may struggle with internal conflicts over what’s best for a child. Guilt appeals tend to resonate more with the viewer when it pertains to caring for other people, as is obviously the case with mothers (Huhmann & Brotherton, 1997). Many advertisements use visuals instead of direct copy to appeal to guilt, such as a crying infant or grumpy child.
This study considers the ways in which parenting discourse in ads has changed alongside parenting itself. The most important changes include more women in the workforce, who take on both professional and parenting roles (Jaffe & Berger, 1994). Although more women than ever are working outside the home, women are also taking greater responsibility for care of children. In fact, research suggests that guilt tends to be more pronounced in working mothers, who struggle with balancing parenting and professional duties (Guendouzi, 2006).

Guilt appeals, according to Coulter and Pinto (1995), act as a stimulus, and these can often have an emotional impact. Guilt appeals done with moderate to little obviousness yield the best results, with a certain level of stability between customers’ responsiveness and provoking guilt (Coulter & Pinto, 1995). Mothers, in terms of advertising messages, according to Coulter and Pinto (1995) are themselves a main objective for advertisers. Through this targeted advertising, mothers not only feel more guilt, but also allow their purchasing habits to be altered by the amount of guilt they feel. Yet, it must be said that some advertisements with more overt selling strategies can sometimes be counterproductive by irritating or annoying a mother, versus playing up her desire to give her child the best. Most advertisers have learned that guilt based techniques need to be subtle in order to be most effective. This is important to this study because it lays the groundwork for a better understanding of the impact guilt in advertisements may have on mothers.
CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

The History of Advertising to Parents

Advertisements using guilt and shame appeals are not a new invention. At the turn of the last century, advertisers tried to influence purchasing decisions by employing variations of guilt. This was essentially to pursue thoughtless agreement. During the 1920s, according to Roland Marchand (1985), advertisements used parables to sell products. Parables, not unlike biblical parables, were called so “not because they conform to prevailing definitions of Jewish, New Testament, or secular parables in every respect, but because they attempt to draw practical moral lessons from the incidents of everyday life” (Marchand, 1985, P. 206-207). These parables used themes of morality, in conjunction with purchasing a certain product. For example, advertisers would use the “parable of the First Impression,” whereby they would encourage consumers to buy a particular product in order to make a good first impression. This method of advertising plays on people’s anxiety about being accepted by peers, coworkers, and employers (Marchand, 1985).

Advertisers used the parables in particular ways for mothers. For example, the “parable of the Captivated Child” was employed by companies to assist mothers in employing newly discovered scientific techniques to convince children to, for example, eat the vegetables in soup. These ads were essentially teaching parents how to feed their children “healthy food” without constant struggles or tantrums.

Strategies aimed at exploiting mothers’ deep fears and desires about child rearing and nutrition became more sophisticated in the 1930s. For example, the “parables of the unraised hand and skinny kid” each tapped into fears that improper nutrition would lead to poor performance in school, and malnourished children, respectively. This was a particularly salient strategy during the Great Depression, when reduced purchasing power often meant less food on the table. The take home point of these messages: if a child was inadequate in some way, it was because of the parents, and it could be resolved by buying the right consumer product. Ironically, many of these products touting superior nutritional value were for highly processed foods, like dry cereals and canned soup. As was the case in the 1920s, these methods often exploited emotional insecurities to convince moms that the advertised product was better for their children’s health and well-being.
**Child, Parent, and Advertiser**

These strategies laid the groundwork for future guilt-based techniques used by advertisers to sell products. Advertisers no longer only try to convince parents to buy products, but also target kids themselves as a multi-billion-dollar demographic group. According to Cross (2002), we should pay attention to and delve deeper into the connections among the three major players in advertising—the child, the parents, and the advertiser. Thus, advertising directed at parent’s influences children, and vice versa. Most existing studies merely look at how parent’s purchases affect children or at how advertising to children affects the purchasing habits of their parents. Instead, according to Cross (2002), we should look at the two in conjunction with each other, and how one affects the other.

In many ads targeting kids, advertisers in essence are hoping the child will beg and whine enough to provoke the parent to purchase the advertised item, also called “the nag factor” (Bridges & Briesch 2006). Furthermore, children, according to Shoham and Dalakas (2006) yield a certain amount of power over the buying habits of their parents. Whether it be to throw a temper tantrum, beg, or barter, children are very effective in influencing the buying behaviors of their parents. This links closely with guilt advertising, because both advertising methods use a parent’s child as a means to get that parent to purchase a particular product.

Advertisements as a whole, according to Grigsby-Toussaint and Rooney (2013), tend to be most effective on families with small kids in the home, especially when those small kids shop with the parents. This is because stores tend to have added advertising for unhealthy foods. Criticism of advertisements for children’s products, according to Ferguson, Contreras, and Killburn (2014) comes from their marketing of unhealthy foods. This too links closely to guilt advertising, because many parents’ magazines have copious advertisements directed at mothers of small children. A prime example of this is the Pampers advertisement given at the very beginning of this study.

According to Niesen (2015), three moms formed an advocacy group, the Action for Children’s Television, which pressured the U.S. Federal Trade Commission (FTC) to look deeply into the issue of advertising to children during the 1970s. Pressured by the potent cadre of businesses and advertisers, Congress shut down the FTC near the end of the decade, and the agency was stripped of its power to regulate children’s advertising. The issue of advertising products to children has been resurrected in recent
years when Michelle Obama made childhood obesity and nutrition her primary cause (White House, 2010). Although much of the public criticism has been focused on advertisements targeting kids specifically, little attention has been paid to the ways in which children are affected by the food purchases of their parents, or how parents themselves are pressured to purchase certain products for their children. However, according to Hughner and Maher (2006), children in the developmental stages of middle childhood tend to be more affected by communication about food from parents, than any other medium.

Nutrition, according to Hughner and Maher (2006), is the single greatest factor parents consider when purchasing food for their families. Thus many parents look to foods that have statements of health on the front of food products. Advertisers are certainly aware of this. Many advertisements include statements about a product’s vitamin content, even though the product might not be nutritious otherwise. For example, the drink HiC boasts about its vitamin content, but its main ingredient is sugar.

Advertisers and subsequently advertisements, according to Dixon, Scully, Kelly, Donovan, Chapman, and Wakefield (2014) have become more focused on marketing to parents because of the increasing attention and worry about advertising to kids. Emotions in advertising (Chang, 2011) are generally employed as a means to stimulate influential messaging. Such plays on emotion as guilt in advertising are recognized to be prevalent and widespread, particularly when it comes to societal promotions of goods. Guilt appeals used in advertising, according to Chang (2011) tend to have greater influence than advertisements not using guilt appeals.

Parents, according to Stanton and Guion (2013) often enhance the accumulation of advertising they receive. They do this by reading magazines designed specifically for them (parents, mothers). These magazines contain advertisements explicitly targeting parents. Some of these advertisements try relating to the parents’ existing habits, while others attempt to change it, so as to make their goods seem more desirable. According to Stanton and Guion (2013), when advertisers use guilt as a means of marketing, it often has one of two effects. First, the guilt appeal can backfire, and the consumer is agitated at this manipulative approach. Second, the consumer’s own fears and anxieties are reinforced by the guilt appeal thus fostering mistrust in their ability to make a judgement about a product. These types of studies show that while guilt based selling strategies are effective, they can have negative consequences by provoking
anxiety and self-doubt. Thus, it is crucial to understand how themes of guilt are employed in advertisements themselves.

**Advertising and Second Wave Feminism**

Betty Friedan was a feminist and activist who was largely credited with having launched the second wave of the feminist movement. Friedan authored articles and books, namely her 1963 book *The Feminine Mystique*, which was one that attempted to address the issues and reasons behind unhappy women, specifically wives and mothers. Friedan seemingly chose to study advertisements because she saw them as reinforcing stereotypes. The stereotype of women as wives and mothers only and nothing more. These advertisements thus implied that women did not want or need professional or personal goals outside of wifedom and motherhood. Friedan wrote “…the perpetuation of housewifery, the growth of the feminine mystique, makes sense (and dollars) when one realizes that women are the chief customers of American business…the really important role that women serve as housewives is to buy more things for the house” (Friedan, 1963, p. 197). Friedan’s analysis only goes to strengthen the analysis found here because Friedan attempted to uncover manipulative undertones in advertisements, and subsequently address what she thought to be their role in the making of unhappy wives and mothers. Friedan’s analysis is not unlike this one which seeks to uncover the manipulative and guilt laden appeals in advertisements, especially those directed predominantly at mothers.

bell hooks, in her *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (1984) wrote that there must be an altering of the consciousness when it comes to peoples understanding of motherhood. She wrote directly in response to Friedan and other white feminists who had claimed that motherhood was an obstacle to women’s liberation by preventing women from working. hooks argued that their view of motherhood alienated Black women from the feminist movement because from antebellum to contemporary times, women of color have held jobs ranging from outdoor field work, industrial factory and laundry work, to work as domestic servants. Instead of viewing parenting as an obstacle to liberation, she argued for a revolution of parenting in which women were not the sole caregivers and child-rearers of children. The revolution hooks called for is akin to the notion of “it takes a village.” hooks wrote about a new understanding of motherhood, in which children were cared for, looked after, raised, and reared by a community that was steeped in the very area in which the mother and children lived, to a community of
friends, to a community of family. Hooks outlined the value of what she called “community-based child
care,” as being a revolutionary way to de-burden mothers, make for happier mothers, and altogether more
well-rounded children. This revolutionary notion of mothering strongly relates to this very study, because
hooks is pointing out the flaws in the notion of motherhood, in ways it is depicted in the advertisements in
this study. That is, according to hooks, women are too often thought of and portrayed as the sole caretakers
of children. This study also argues that changes should be made in portrayals of mothers, and portrayals
should include more community-centered notions of parenting.
CHAPTER 3

Methods

This study builds on existing scholarship about how advertising has formed contemporary parenting dialogues and how parenthood is shaped in present-day consumer culture. To accomplish this, I used a critical discourse analysis. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) according to Fairclough, Mulderrig, and Wodak (2011) is a method that seeks to provide more clarity on/for various societal dialogues. Critical discourse analysis typically looks at societal discourses through the lens of the non-dominant (e.g., minorities, single mothers, etc.). Along with this, critical discourse analysis is a method in which research is strengthened throughout the research process. Meaning, critical discourse analysis takes an idea or a theme upon which study is done, and through that study the concrete reason for research comes to light (Fairclough, Mulderrig, & Wodak, 2011).

An example of this would be looking at advertisements for their use of emotional appeals directed at parents. Wherein a researcher inquires and explores advertisements in parents’ magazines, only to learn that there are several advertisements employing guilt appeals, but more than that, there are several advertisements that employ multiple types of guilt appeals. Yet, instead of being directed at parents, they are predominantly directed at mothers. So, in this example, perhaps the disparity in numbers between advertisements towards fathers and mothers becomes the concrete reason for research. Through the research, these more in-depth themes, which were initially not apparent to the researcher, begin to cement. In short, critical discourse analysis is a method for understanding and looking deeper at society and the discourses within. In this way, CDA is both a theory (a way of understanding the discursive power dynamics) and a method (a procedure for exploration).

Discourse in advertising, according to Scott (1994) is often a contrivance set to a particular motive of the advertiser of the message. Advertisements are thus typically used specifically to sell a product; such as the advertisement seen in Figure 1. It is for this reason that it is imperative for print advertisements in particular to adhere to a set of themes; for example, advertisements must showcase a particular thing (e.g., a product), along with that thing relating to the message being received, and in essence being able to be tied back or relatable in some way to society. This is again demonstrated in the Pampers advertisement above. The thing being advertised is diapers, which relates to the message because it is about “caring for,
nurturing, and earning/keeping the trust of the child” using Pampers diapers to do so. This then relates to society by tying this advertisement to the cultural power of medicine, and medical professionals.

Scott (1994) argues that advertisements must aim for one of two things; affective response or information processing. Affective response is when a consumer sees an image they are instantly reminded of a product, for example, the snuggle bear in relation to Snuggle fabric softener. Information processing, is when a consumer sees an image and it influences that consumer’s perspective. Advertisements use a culmination of societal ideals and images to create a discussion; that discussion being for the purpose of turning viewers into consumers. Some advertisers take this notion of discussion to new lengths, not just attempting to turn viewer into consumer, but attempting to do it by whatever means is plausible, such as relying on guilt and insecurities to sell products (Scott, 1994).

The data collection for this study consisted of the years 2014 and 2015. The advertisements studied were taken from the parenting magazine Parents. Parents is one of the most popular parenting magazines (Cision, 2013) and has a “circulation of 2.2 million, and a readership of over 13.7 million” (Meredith direct media, 2015). I photographed every ad that was “speaking” to parents, 740 ads in total. Once the advertisements were photographed, they were coded by theme. Such themes were bullying, comfort care & the good stuff, fun & imagination, and #1 recommended. This subsequently allowed conclusions to be drawn about the types of messages present in advertisements.

This study examined the advertisements in order to understand how parenting is constructed in contemporary commercial messages surrounding guilt. This analysis contributes to the conversation of scholars in media studies, advertising, consumer culture, and visual rhetoric, because it helps us understand how advertisers exploit worry, concern, fear, or hopes of parents through their message and themes. Print advertisements from parenting magazines were studied as cultural artifacts. A parenting magazine was studied because these types of magazines appeal to a particular target market, making them an ideal venue for advertisers. Consumers often engage longer with printed material as opposed to a pop-up ad or television commercial. Parenting magazines are prominently displayed in the story check-out lines, and they are almost always present in the waiting rooms at doctor’s offices. In addition, overall branding strategies are typically carried across all media, so the print advertisements are a lens through which I can examine overall advertisement strategies.
Specifically, the following research questions will be answered:

RQ1: What are guilt appeals communicating?

RQ2: What are the larger cultural assumptions that underlie the discourse in advertising about what constitutes good and bad parenting?

RQ3: What do the advertisements themselves say about what society thinks about modern parenting, motherhood, and childhood?

RQ4: How have advertising messages changed since the rise of advertising to parents during the 1920s?

CDA is a fluid method of study for which the goal is to essentially take a deeper look, with the aim being to better understand the multitude of layers of society, and the subsequent messages in each layer. The data for this study was originally looked at by years, finding prominent themes among both. Yet, as the research progressed, many themes crossed between both years, and many themes intertwined with other themes. This is what led this study to the heart of the CDA research method and the crux of the research. Which is that there are profound and sometimes exact themes tying both years of data from Parents magazine together. Thus, in true CDA fashion, this study became less about the themes in each individual year, and more about the themes across both years of data. Likewise, as the themes were examined, a strong connection was discovered between the themes and advertising methods of the data set of this study, and those of years past. This led to the inclusion of a section in this study about the strong ties between today’s advertisements and those more historical. This analysis was started looking at one simple thing, and while that wasn’t deviated from drastically, this study ended up looking deeper into the data at another thing.
CHAPTER 4

Results

The parenting magazine *Parents* is filled with advertisements, so much so, that almost every other page is an advertisement, ranging from occasional advertisements for animal food and health, to advertisements specifically for women’s health and beauty, to a few advertisements specifically for couples who have children, such as keeping the spark alive and for birth control. Yet the overwhelming brunt of advertisements were laden with words and images directed at mothers of small children, with a minimal number of ads featuring both parents or a father in the advertisements. In fact, no advertisement spoke directly to fathers. Across the two years, there were three themes that came to the forefront of the data. The advertisements to follow are but a representation of the whole.

#1 Recommended

The first theme, seen throughout the two-year data collection span was that of the #1 recommended. This theme is named for and based on the wording throughout many, if not most advertisements throughout the years of data. Wording in which the advertisements conspicuously and frequently touted the goodness of a product based on its #1 recommended status.

Many of these advertisements throughout the data collection contained words akin to “#1 recommended by pediatrician, #1 choice of hospitals” etc. These advertisements were unique, in that they attempted to use the power of the perceived medical superior as a selling point for their product. The following are just a small sample of the advertisements using this theme in *Parents*, across the data set.

*Aveeno* is a skin care product that also has a set of Aveeno Baby daily care products. The advertisements in *Parents* for Aveeno Baby had images of a baby or young child holding what appears to be a woman’s finger/hand. Many of Aveeno Baby’s advertisements throughout the year said (see figure 2):

*Aveeno. Baby. Naturally beautiful babies. Babies are naturally soft. Aveeno just keeps them that way. Our wash and shampoo gently cleanses while our lotion contains 5 nutrients naturally found in baby’s healthy skin...it’s the #1 pediatrician trusted brand for the use of natural ingredients (Parents, 2014, March, April, June, August, October, & November).*

*Aveeno. Active naturals. Naturally beautiful results. Trusted sun protection for baby and mom. Our products offer superior broad spectrum protection...Maybe that’s why so many moms choose Aveeno, the #1 pediatrician trusted brand for the use of natural ingredients (Parents, 2014, May & July).*
These Aveeno Baby advertisements blatantly mention mothers, but not fathers. These advertisements also seem to attempt to employ the power of many, by stating that many moms use the product. This is of course, a part of the #1 recommended because this theme attempts to use the power of the many, the power of the many hospitals, doctors, etc. Likewise, these advertisements, like many more seen throughout the data set reference the approval of a seemingly higher professional authority as a selling point.

(Figure 2)

The advertisements from Johnson’s included images of babies and/or babies being kissed by a woman. Johnson’s advertisements said (see figure 3):

‘Mom, my birthday suit is gentle wash only.’ My baby skin is ten times more sensitive than yours, Mom. So I like the gentleness of Johnson’s baby head-to-toe. It’s the #1 choice of hospitals too. Relax mom. You’re using the gentle stuff (Parents, 2014, January, February, April & June).

‘You really believe Johnson’s baby can help me fall asleep…’ The only routine clinically proven to help baby fall asleep faster. Just add a little Johnson’s baby bedtime bath to my warm bathwater, then give me a relaxing rubdown with Johnson’s baby bedtime lotion, followed by a little quiet time. You (yawn) amaze me, Mom (Parents, 2014, March, May, August, November & December).

Johnson’s baby. Your promise is our promise. You’ve heard of a pinky promise? This is our promise. Johnson’s baby head-to-toe wash is our most advanced all-over baby was ever, now with an added moisturizer to help promote skin hydration after bath. Safe, gentle, effective. That’s a promise that works all over (Parents, 2014, September).

Johnson’s baby. Your promise is our promise. There’s a new promise born every second. You promise to do everything to keep her safe. We do, too. That’s why we’ve created our most advanced baby products. Hypoallergenic, paraben and phthalate free. The best for your baby. We promise (Parents, 2014, October & November).

Johnson’s advertisements speak in terms of the power of the promise. This is seen in words like, “Your promise is our promise. You’ve heard of a pinky promise?” The advertisement is essentially promoting the idea that the organization is just as invested in a child as that child’s parents. Likewise, Johnson
frequently speaks in advertisements specifically to moms, and also attempts to use the power of a perceived higher authority, with words such as "#1 choice of hospitals" and "clinically proven." Johnson's attempts to use science and the common understanding of medical authority as a means to sell its product.

(Figure 3)

Advertisements for Orajel included images of kids brushing their teeth, and images of children with a woman next to them. These advertisements said (see figure 4):

Orajel is big with little mouths. Orajel is the #1 pediatrician recommended brand for infants and toddlers...From teething. To training. To brushing... (Parents, 2015, January, February, April, June, August, September, October & November).


This advertisement like others state that they have or are the #1 choice or recommendation of certain individuals. Advertisements such as these are also akin to the previous year through their mention of various steps of early life, as seen in words like "from teething. To training. To brushing." These advertisements attempt to use the power of a higher societal-medical-scientific authority, and a parent's desire to be present and have the best for the various stages of their child's life, as a means to sell a product.
Advertisements for Dreft clothing detergent included images of pregnant women, and babies with women. These advertisements used the following words (see figure 5):

Only babies can lure us in with their roly-poly legs and addictive little scent. The amazing scent of Dreft keeps your baby smelling like, well, a baby. Dreft’s hypoallergenic formula is gentle on babies’ skin (Parents, 2015, January & March).

Only babies could get you excited for teeny, tiny laundry day. While preparing for your baby’s arrival, wash with Dreft. Dreft’s Hypoallergenic formula is gentle on babies’ skin. #1 choice of pediatrician (Parents, 2015, February).

Welcome to total pea mayhem. Dreft. Welcome to the big, messy, beautiful journey of #AMAZINGHOOD (Parents, 2015, April).

From nesting to food flinging to that baby fresh scent, you’re covered every step of the way… (Parents, Dreft, May).

Welcome to the extreme sport of nesting. Hypoallergenic and the #1 choice of pediatricians. Welcome to the big, messy, beautiful journey of #AMAZINGHOOD (Parents, 2015, October).

Welcome to your new 8lb. 2oz. laundry-maker. Hypoallergenic and #1 choice of pediatricians. Welcome to the big, messy, beautiful journey of #AMAZINGHOOD (Parents, 2015, August).

Dreft advertisements also employ the use of a parents concern for their child’s health with words like “hypoallergenic and #1 choice.” Likewise, Dreft like other advertisements seen throughout the data set use the ideas of togetherness, and feelings of awe, as seen in words like “AMAZINGHOOD.”

These advertisements induce guilt because they blatantly state being the product #1 trusted by a doctor. Thus, if a parent does not purchase this product, they are not purchasing the #1 trusted product for their child. This implies that they perhaps do not care about providing the best for their child, as much a
parent who purchases this product. Likewise, these advertisement uses the words “why so many moms choose Aveeno.” This induces guilt because if a mom does not purchase this product, they are in the minority among “so many moms.”

**Comfort, care & the good stuff**

The second theme is based on an overarching trend among many of the advertisements throughout the data set. This trend is the use of emotional words such as caring, comfort, soft, the good stuff, hug, firsts, and anything of the like. Emotional words that play on a woman’s desire to provide the best (“the good stuff”) for her child.

Some prime examples of this theme are to follow.

The advertisements for Garanimals children’s clothing contained images of babies and toddlers, either sitting or playing. Many of the advertisements throughout the data set said the following (see figure 6):

- **Mom knows newborns need something comfy to drool on.** A newborn may not have fashion sense, but they have comfort sense. That’s why more moms choose Garanimals. We use only soft, comfortable fabrics, with very comfortable prices to match. For boys and girls... Garanimals. Comfort’s big when you’re little (Parents, 2014, February).

- **Moms know you can still be comfortable on a tight budget...** They're soft, comfy, and very affordable. Garanimals. Comfort’s big when you’re little (Parents, 2014, March).

These Garanimals advertisements are very blatantly talking to moms, and moms alone. The advertisement not only speaks solely to mothers, but insinuates that mothers are obviously the caregivers, and the ones the advertiser needs to be talking to.

(Figure 6)

During the data set there were multiple advertisements for Huggies diapers, with images from babies, a toddler and mother, a baby on a woman’s chest, a little girl and her parents next to a toilet, and
two kids in a bathroom. The Huggies advertisements throughout the data collection period said (see figure 7):


Huggies. There’s nothing like a hug. Give your baby a hug they can take with them... (Parents, 2014, June, July, August, September & October).

Huggies. There’s nothing like a hug. Messes live in every room. Now your wipes can too... (Parents, 2014, July, August & October).

Huggies. There’s nothing like a hug. The first hug they ever feel is from you. Make sure the second hug feels just as good. Give your newborn outstanding skincare with our new gentle absorb liner... (Parents, 2014, August, October & December).

Huggies. There’s nothing like a big hug. He just spent nine months in the most comfortable place ever. How will his skin be greeted?... (Parents, 2014, August & October).

How will you celebrate your toddler’s first flush? Start with pull-ups. They’re proven to deliver more potty training success (Parents, 2014, March, April & May).

Welcome to the Huggies Pull-Ups big kid academy...Pull-ups has all the training tools you need to help you learn (Parents, 2014, December).

The Huggies advertisements make minimal references to mothers specifically and spoke more in terms of overall comfort and care of children, as seen with words like “there’s nothing like a hug,” along with insinuations of expectations, as seen with words like “How will his skin be greeted?” Likewise, the Huggies advertisements talk about the success of one’s child in terms of developmental growth and advancement. This is particularly seen in a series of advertisements run throughout multiple months, with words such as “how will you celebrate your toddler’s first flush,” and “Pull-ups has all the training tools you need to help you learn.”

(Figure 7)
Advertisements for Walmart included images of babies, babies with women, kids playing, and an image of a baby and a man. The advertisements for Walmart stated (see figure 8):

Walmart. Save money. Live better. Parenthood is full of firsts. Make the most of every first with all the quality brands you trust, at our low prices every day. With you every little step. Walmart (Parents, 2014, June).

Walmart. Save money. Live better. Parenthood is full of firsts. Find the quality brands you can trust in our stores... All at our low prices, every day. With you every little step. Walmart (Parents, 2014, October).

Walmart. Save money. Live better. At home. On the go. We're there for you. Be prepared for all your first trips, with the quality brands you trust, at our low prices every day. With you every little step. Walmart (Parents, 2014, August).


Walmart advertisements spoke regularly of parenting firsts, using the parenting desire to be there for the first everything (roll-over, crawl, walk, etc.) of one’s child. Walmart also did something few advertisements did, Walmart advertisements talked about money. Specifically, Walmart advertisements spoke in terms of how to “save money” and how that would in turn help to “live better.” These advertisements play up the expense of raising children, while at the same time, advocating for the organization’s ability to make a life or lifestyle a little “better.”

(Figure 8)

The Good Stuff is an advertisement by Parents. The advertisements used images of various products. The advertisements contained the following words (see figure 9):

Good stuff. Parents. Must-haves and must-dos for mom and family... (Parents, 2015, January, February, March, April, September, October, November & December).
The Good Stuff advertisements are singular in that they are advertisements by the actual parenting magazine. These advertisements insinuate that the magazine knows which products are the “good stuff” for “parents.” Specifically, the advertisements mention “mom and family,” implying that mothers are the prominent caregivers of the family.

Horizon Organic is a natural food product supplier, predominantly for dairy. These advertisements used images of the product itself, such as milk cartons, and images of cows. These advertisements said (see figure 10):

Organic cheese? Yes, please! We know the best foods are the ones that leave parents and kids cheering for more. That’s why we always do our best to use simple, recognizable ingredients, like real organic cheese and pasta in our delicious mac. It’s a choice parents can feel good about-and a whole lot of yum for kids (Parents, 2015, March).

Imagine the possibilities. Fuel your child with a full family of snacks from Horizon Organic. With no artificial colors, flavors or preservatives... (Parents, 2015, August, September & October).


Horizon Organic is not significant in the mention of healthier or natural food throughout the two-year data range. The significance behind Horizon Organic’s advertisements is that they are seen with greater regularity than any other product espousing to be “natural.” Likewise, Horizon Organic is one of the only company advertisements that advertise its being organic versus, or in conjunction with its being natural.
These advertisements induce guilt because they play on a parent's desire to care and comfort their child. This is seen in advertisements that tout being the best at providing comfortable clothes for babies; providing a hug for the baby, just like the parents; providing organic foods for children and more. This induces guilt, because the advertisements insinuate that if a parent does not purchase the product advertised as being able to provide comfortable clothing, a hug like theirs, or good healthy organic food, then they are somehow giving their children less-than. These advertisements induce guilt because they imply that if a parent does not purchase the product, they do not care about their child having comfort, care, or the good stuff, and certainly not as much as parents who purchase the product.

Fun & imagination

The third theme of fun and imagination emphasizes the child's learning and/or educational experiences in terms of certain products. This particular theme uses the notion of independence and play, or fun and imagination as a means to sell a product. This particular theme represents the attempts of advertisers to manipulate mothers into buying products by using the old adage "let kids be kids."

This particular theme is seen throughout multiple advertisements across both years of the data collection. A few samples of this theme are to follow.

Lunchables are essentially an already made and packaged lunch, a lunch that a child can just grab and go. The advertisements for Lunchables contained images of children dressed up and playing, this includes playing outside to playing musical instruments. The advertisements said (see figure 11):

Let them mix up lunch time too (Parents, 2014, May, August, June, July, September & November).

'I'll let you hug me at random times and for no reason at all.' Kids will say the craziest
things to get them. It’s all about the Lunchables (Parents, 2014, February).

‘Thank you.’ Kids will say the craziest things to get them. It’s all about the Lunchables (Parents, 2014, March).


These Lunchable advertisements employed the notion of change, and that which is different and “crazy”. This is particularly seen in words such as “let them mix up lunch time too,” and “kids will say the craziest things.”

(Figure 11)

CapriSun is a fruit juice drink. Advertisements for CapriSun contained images of children playing. These advertisements used the following words (see figure 12):


Give them more unstructure. PushPlay. You decide what they drink. Leave the rest up to them. Now with no high fructose corn syrup (Parents, 2015, June & August).

Yes to baskheadball. No to high fructose corn syrup. PushPlay. You decide what they drink. Leave the rest up to them. Now with no high fructose corn syrup (Parents, 2015, July & September).

CapriSun advertisements are very similar to the Lunchable advertisements in that they both promote fun, a seeming ease of character or parenting, and a push for childhood independence. This is seen in such words as “PushPlay. You decide what they drink. Leave the rest up to them,” and “Give them more unstructured.”
These advertisements induce guilt because they not only state the value and importance of childhood fun, and an independent childhood, but they insinuate that if a parent does not purchase the product advertised, then that parent does not care about their child having fun, or being independent. Likewise, these advertisements induce guilt because they imply that while many things, such as nutrition are a parent's responsibility, so is a child's having fun and an imagination. Meaning, the advertisements pressure parents to provide certain products in their parental duty, but then to essentially back-off.

All of the advertisements represented in these three themes induce guilt in viewers and consumers, because they imply that a parent needs advice, encouragement, and help from not only medical professionals, but also, advertisers. These advertisements imply that in order to best parent, one must heed the advice and marketing of doctors and the businesses selling the product. These advertisements induce guilt because they imply that doctors and the advertisers themselves know what is best for someone else’s child, with the underlying message being that the parent better follow their advice, and if they don’t, then they obviously do not care, want the best, or value fun and individuality as much as other parents who purchase the product advertised. These advertisements induce guilt because they imply that a parent needs help making smart choices for their children. These advertisements induce guilt because they imply that a parent needs help being a good parent. Again, meaning, that if a parent does not purchase the product advertised, then they are shunning help, and do not in fact want to be as good of a parent as those who purchase the product.

None of these advertisements blatantly express whether they are speaking to first time parents, rather than non-first time parents. Yet, many of the advertisements seem to be directed at both, either
together or independently. Advertisements that tout being the best health product, the most organic product, the best product for independent child, and the like, seem to be directed at all parents. While it could be argued that advertisements that tout being the #1 choice, the choice of many moms, and the like, are directed more towards first time parents, because seasoned parents would undoubtedly already have a product that has worked for them in the past, therefore they wouldn't necessarily be as susceptible to certain verbiage in advertisements.
CHAPTER 5

History repeats itself

Throughout the data set, the numerous advertisements that graced Parents pages began to form obvious and conspicuous themes. These themes incidentally resemble and parallel themes of years past. The old adage, “if you don’t learn from your past, you’re doomed to repeat it,” seems to be particularly true in the instance of emotional and guilt advertising through the years. The following words showcase how the three distinct themes found in advertisements in Parents between the two-year data range came to parallel parables of the past.

*The parable of the #1 Recommended-Parables of the Skinny kid/Unraised hand*

The theme of #1 recommended is frequent in several advertisements across the two years spanning the data collection. The #1 recommended theme is seen in advertisements that tout “#1 recommended by pediatrician...#1 choice of hospitals...choice of moms.” These words pressure parents, oftentimes moms, by using what is perceived to be a societal superior, such as medical professionals or institutions.

This particular theme is akin to the parable of the skinny kid, because the parable of the skinny kid emphasized the uncertainties and concern of parents with regard to the child’s unsuitable nourishment, playing on the fear that this unsuitable nourishment would inevitably mean low performance in school, and altogether undernourished weak, thin children. Likewise, this theme is similar to the parable of the unraised hand, because this parable played on the worry and doubt of parents. Whereby the unraised hand emphasized that if a child was insufficient or poor at something, it was essentially the fault of the parent. The insinuation being that this insufficiency could be remedied through the purchase of a particular good.

Methods such as the skinny kid and the unraised hand frequently subjugated emotional anxieties, in order to influence and persuade mothers that a certain marketed good was best for a child’s strength and overall condition. The parables of the skinny kid and unraised hand, along with the theme of #1 recommended both pounce on the fear, and angst many parents feel with regards to the health, nutrition and overall well-being of their child.

*The parable of Comfort, Care and the Good Stuff-Parable of First Impression*

The theme of comfort, care and the good stuff is seen all throughout the advertisements of Parents during the data set. This particular theme is seen in every advertisement referencing babies, children,
motherhood, and families. This is especially true of advertisements for diapers, infant care products, and infant formulas. All of which specifically mention care and love in the form of “hugs...all-nighters...every little step,” with some advertisements explicitly using the words care and/or love. Likewise, many of the advertisements reference the idea of being a “good mom.”

This theme is similar to the parable of the first impression, which again is a method that emboldens a viewer to purchase certain merchandise as a way to make a respectable and lasting first impression. This parable acts on the apprehension and desire of viewers to be liked by peers, colleagues, and potential bosses. The theme of comfort, care and the good stuff, and the parable of the first impression use methods of emotional advertising that play on a person’s wish to not only provide a good and suitable first impression, but also to be perceived as a good person, especially when that goodness is in relation to raising children.

The parable of Fun and Imagination-Parable of Captivated Child

The theme of fun and imagination is one that is seen with regularity throughout the two years of data. This theme emphasizes and uses the joys of childhood as a means to attempt to sell a product. This particular theme uses images and words that emphasize fun and imagination. This is seen in advertisements that show children playing, or dressed up in costumes. Likewise, the theme is seen in words such as “you decide what they drink. Leave the rest up to them.” The advertisements thus promote childhood independence, through fun and imagination.

This is relatable to the parable of the captivated child which, as Marchand (1985) stated, was used by organizations as a means to aid mothers in providing recently revealed scientific practices to influence children to do certain things, such as eating their vegetables. These advertisements basically informed parents how best to provide for and nourish children with substances deemed to be “healthy.” The ultimate goal being to have the child eat healthier with a minimum of fighting and fits. The fun and imagination theme and the parable of the captivated child are similar because they both promote an idea of ease in dealing with one’s child. This theme and parable aim at mitigating fits and fighting in getting children to consume a product, one is done through promoting fun and imagination, while the other is done through promoting current ways of thinking.
CHAPTER 6
Discussion

From the data collected it is clear the advertisements directed towards parents, and particularly mothers are communicating something more than just “here’s our product, please buy.” Many of the advertisements communicate that a parent should purchase a product because a medical professional or facility either says so, or uses it themselves. This method of using the medical world as a means to advertise is a prime example of advertisers trying to bully, scare, push and guilt parents into buying a product. Likewise, many advertisements attempt to use the power in numbers by saying “moms...many moms...8 out of 10 moms...sisterhood...motherhood.” This in essence tells the viewer that if she does not purchase the product advertised, she is not only in the minority and going against medical professionals—which in our society is frowned upon—but that she perhaps might not care as much as other moms.

A large number of advertisements also use words such as “care...comfort...love...every step.” These words in reference to moms and their young children blatantly tell moms that if they want to best comfort, care, and love their child they will purchase the product advertised. Likewise, if a mom wants a product that supports her child at every stage of life, she will purchase the product advertised. The overwhelming implication is that if a mother does not purchase a product that claims to best help a woman “care...comfort...love,” then she does not want what is best for her child, and perhaps is not all that concerned about being the most caring, comforting or loving mom. These advertisements often work at convincing moms into buying the product advertised by using very emotionally loaded images, and even more so, words, such as “care, comfort, love, hugs, #1 best, etc.”. These words undoubtedly are specifically chosen due to the emotions and feelings they evoke in moms. Thus, these advertisements often convince moms into buying products by forcing feelings of guilt, doubt, a need (to provide the best), and the like.

The blatantly clear cultural assumption that underlies the discourse in these advertisements about what constitutes good and bad parenting, is that when it comes to good parenting, society is predominantly talking about moms. A vast majority of advertisements from Parents contained images of parents that either consisted of a set of male and female parents, or a mother. There were a very small number of advertisements that had images of just a father as the parental figure. Likewise, the advertisements only
spoke in terms of parents, or mothers, not one spoke directly to a father. Meaning, while minimal advertisements had images of a father, they did not use words that mentioned a father specifically. This reinforces the notion of cultural assumptions of good parenting as being a maternal issue.

A prominent cultural assumption underlying the discourse in advertising about what constitutes bad parenting is seen in words like “#1 recommended by pediatrician...#1 choice of hospitals...proven.” The underlying dialogue being that if a parent wants to do what is best for their child, thus not being a bad parent, they will purchase a product that has been blessed off by a medical professional or science. The implication then, is that societally bad parents are those who seemingly do not care enough about their child to purchase products based on their approval by educated medical professional or specialists-as with words like pediatrician.

The advertisements themselves have underlying implications about what society thinks about modern parenting, motherhood, and childhood. This study argues that the overwhelming implication in these advertisements about modern parenting is, in fact, not modern. It is clear through all the advertisements that society still expects the mother to be the main if not sole caregiver of children, especially young children. This is seen in every advertisement as mentioned above, that mentions either parents as a group, or moms; neglecting to even once literally speak directly and solely to fathers.

The underlying implication about what society thinks of modern motherhood is naturalness and ease of mothering. Examples of this can be seen in advertisements that invoke words like “sisterhood of motherhood...amazinghood.” Words like these imply an almost mother-nature like societal understanding of motherhood. Meaning, it is implied that motherhood is not only a sisterhood and amazing, but that it is natural, and easy.

The insinuation about what society thinks of modern childhood is that there is value in the unstructured. This is seen in numerous advertisements that use images of children, playing, dressing up, and being messy. This is likewise seen in advertisements that mention the “beautiful mess” of life. Along with this, advertisements imply of modern childhood that there is value in the unstructured through words that promote independence and difference. This is most aptly seen in advertisements that used words such as, “let them mix up lunch time too...kids say the craziest things...you decide what they drink, leave the rest up to them.”
There seems to be a paradox of terms and societal understanding, in which the advertisements make parenting look easy while at the same time giving parents endless amounts of advice. The divergence present in the analysis of this research question can be seen in the break of contemporary advertisements from antiquated ones. Advertisements used in the 1920s and 1930s employed fear based tactics, were starkly rigid in terms of the rules of parenting, and scarcely promoted the fun and independence of childhood. Modern advertisements, though not free from flaws—such as using a degree of fear—are blatantly different from advertisements of years past. Contemporary advertisements stray from the rigidity of parenting rules and promote the fun independence of childhood by “leaving the rest up to them.” Although this might be a step in the right direction in terms of how consumer culture constructs parenting discourse, and, an emphasis on playing with kids is positive. However, studies have shown that Americans are working longer hours, and more women have entered the workforce (Parker, 2015; Jaffe & Berger, 1994). This begs the questions: if we are working more, when do we have time to fit in this playful time with kids? Once again, advertisements do not merely reflect reality, they promote a certain ideal that is too often unattainable, triggering feelings of guilt and inadequacy for consumers, in this case, moms.

These advertisements often reproduce power through objectification and domination by the sheer number of advertisements that referenced and talked to mothers alone. Speaking to them as though they are the sole caregivers of the family and the home; reinforcing the old standard and understanding of power—that fathers “work” and mothers “parent.” Advertisements further perpetuate such objectification and domination by the images they use. Most advertisements used images of children, while many advertisements used images of women with children. All of this goes to reinforce power through the objectification of women, implying that they are or should only be homemakers, and sole caregivers. This is not to say that women who wish to be homemakers are anything less than hard working and admirable. It is to say, however, that times change, and perhaps advertising methods should too. Though portrayals of women as homemakers and caretakers has remained very much the same since the time of Marchand’s analysis in 1920, and Friedan’s expose in 1963, the role of women in reality has very much changed. Compared to the 1950s (Jaffe & Berger, 1994) and 1960s (Parker, 2015), more and more women have entered the workforce, with less leisure time. Thus, women now are working “two full-time jobs”—they are both breadwinners and primary caretakers of the home and family (Jaffe & Berger, 1994). According to
Jaffe and Berger, "today, over 56% of women are employed outside the home, compared to less than 25% in 1950. By 1995 more than 80% of all mothers with children living at home are expected to be employed outside the home" (p. 1, 1994). "Among married couples with children under age 18, dual-income households are now the dominant arrangement (60%). In 1960, only one-in-four households had two incomes; 70% had a father who worked and a mother who was at home with the kids" (Parker, p. 2, 2015).

Advertisers have a responsibility to include more realistic and responsible portrayals of men as caretakers and homemakers as well, since ads promote powerful cultural messages.

There is a great connection between the contemporary advertisement messages I have analyzed here and the analysis of both Marchand and Friedan. The three analyses are strongly related because not only do they analyze similar aspects of advertisements, just in a different time, they also found similar things. All three analyses found that advertisers use a great amount of emotional appeals as a means to sell products, perhaps even to alter the normal patterns of purchase. All three advertisements indicate that advertisers use not only a great amount of guilt as a powerful and persuasive method to sell goods, but they also use a consumer's child against the consumer. This is seen in Marchand's the skinny kid parable, where if one's child was malnourished is was a direct result of bad parenting. It is also seen in Friedan's assessment of advertisements for bras that contain fake breasts for girls as young as 12. Likewise, this is seen in my own analysis of advertisements such as those for diapers, which tout being the #1 choice or recommendation of hospitals/pediatricians/doctors. All three examples, and all three analyses highlight the often overly manipulative, emotional, and guilt laden advertisements lobbed at mothers across time. Something for which, I have found, has not much changed.

Interestingly, almost all of the advertisements across the two-year span of analysis showed images of only white women and white children. There were only a few advertisements that showed images of mothers or fathers who were non-white. Yet, there were slightly more advertisements that showed images of children who were non-white, for example, a little girl brushing her teeth who looked to be Asian, or a boy playing outside who looked to be African-American. While some advertisements showed images of mothers, parents, and/or children who were non-white, an overwhelming majority contained images that exclusively contained people who were Caucasian. Additionally, few advertisements seem to take issues of class into account in their messages. When advertisements as mentioned in the previous paragraph,
insinuate or blatantly state that a child’s malnourishment, potential marital failure, and lack of a medically bless off product (such as diapers) are the direct result or indicator of bad parenting, they do not take into account a parent’s ability to physically pay for the product. Not only is the advertisement attempting to guilt a parent, but they are inevitably shaming the parent as well. This is interesting because it is not something that I even thought about going into this research, and yet, when brought to my attention I could not help but see how prolific this race disparity was in these advertisements. Likewise, it’s interesting because Marchand and Friedan themselves seem to make no connection between the advertisements and the race of the people depicted in the images within ads, or a consumer’s ability to purchase what is advertised. Therefore, it seems that there is an entirely different avenue of approach in terms of researching advertising messages that few have touched on. It is for this reason, that issues of race and class, in terms of advertising messages and guilt appeals are ripe for the taking. Something for which should undoubtedly be explored further.

Yet, advertising messages have changed since the rise of advertising to parents during the 1920s. Advertisements during the 1920s emphasized and reinforced the cultural standards of the time. The advertisements directed their words and images to mothers, who were by and large stay-at-home moms, and thus the sole caregivers of their children. The advertisements of this age also played-on the stereotypical pettiness and vanity of women by using words and images that stressed the importance and value of other people’s opinions, thus the “parable of the first impression,” and others like the “parable of the skinny kid,” which only served to heighten the perceived importance and value of the opinion of others.

On the other hand, advertising messages today starkly contrast the prominent culture of today. These advertisements depict the ideals of an outdated and antiquated time. Today, more fathers are staying at home as stay-at-home dads, while more mothers are working outside the home. Yet, many women are still called upon to be the main caregivers of the children and the home, despite of the fact that more of them are working outside the home as well. The advertisements of today do not reflect this. The advertisements of today still speak solely to mothers by still showing images of mothers as primary caretakers of the children and the home. This means that mothers are pressured to juggle a “double shift” in which they are working paid jobs outside the home, but are still shown in popular culture as primary caretakers. The themes of fun, easy, natural parenting make this ideal as portrayed in advertisements even
more difficult to achieve. When Friedan discussed the “problem that has no name” she was speaking about how women were unfulfilled as housewives and mothers, advertising stereotypes perpetuated a problem she said. Today, women’s roles have shifted, but unfortunately advertisements have not. The new nameless problem could be that the pressure on women as ideal mother and professional are simply too much, contributing again to women’s unhappiness, albeit in a slightly different form.

Advertising messages in the past spoke to the cultural standards of the time, and used emotional appeals to enhance and reinforce those standards. Advertising messages today speak in contrast to the cultural standards of the time. These advertisements use emotional appeals to depict an almost ideal notion of motherhood, not parenthood. These advertisements seem to almost be advertising a certain lifestyle, more so than just a product. Contemporary cultural standards have changed drastically since the 1920s, and while in many regards the advertisements have not, there is much to be said about the ways in which the advertising messages themselves have.
CHAPTER 7

Conclusion

A vast majority of advertisements use guilt-based appeals as a means to convince mothers into buying products. This inevitably resurrects historical messages in advertisements about what constitutes good and bad parenting, along with who is primarily responsible for the children’s well-being. True to CDA, through comparing years of advertising messages, I found commonalities in the data that caused me to dig deeper, and take a longer harder look at themes across both years of data collection. It was with this more in depth study that I found three prominent themes that crossed both years of the data collection period. Likewise, upon the analysis of the data, I soon discovered a strong connection and parallel to historical studies. This led to yet another further analysis of how contemporary and historical advertisements were similar.

The issues raised in this study highlight the manipulative undertone of advertisements, and shows that advertisements across time have not excessively changed, in spite of the changing world around them. Advertisements from the 1920s and 1930s from Marchand’s (1985) study, and advertisements from the 1960s from Friedan’s (1963) study, used emotional appeals directed mostly at moms, as a means to sell products. These advertisements played on a mother’s desire to provide the best for care for her child, as seen in Marchand’s the parable of the skinny kid and parable of the unraised hand. These advertisements played on a mother’s desire to ensure her child’s future was secure, as seen in Friedan’s critique of the feminine mystique. Messages in ads today still play on a mother’s desire to provide the best for her children, as seen in advertisements that proclaim they are “the #1 choice of hospitals, #1 recommendations of pediatricians,” and advertisements that emphasize a mother’s love and care for her child and the trust she inherently has as a mother. These advertisements, from the 1920s to now, exploit a mother’s desire to provide the best for her children in all manner of ways, because they imply that the lesser product means lesser parenting.

The advertisements in Parents show mothers in a very particular and singular way. These advertisements, not unlike those analyzed by Marchand and Friedan, demonstrate an imagery of mothers as caregivers and child-raisers, nothing else. This is aptly seen in advertisements that almost exclusively show mothers and not fathers, or mothers holding and caring for children in what looks to be a home. As Frazier
(2014) puts it, “In a popular Subaru ad, mothers, not fathers, still drive the kids to hockey. In this 
Johnson’s Baby ad, recycled every Mother’s Day, it’s mothers who bathe the babies” (p. 3). The 
advertisements mentioned by Frazier are like those analyzed in Parents, because they all reinforce the 
stereotype of a stay at home mom, who does all the caring, nurturing, rearing, educating, and loving. Of 
course, stay at home moms are wonderful, and many women love to be stay-at-home moms, or wish they 
could be stay-at-home moms. Yet, as Parker (2015) stated, more and more households are becoming ones 
in which it is essential to have two incomes, or one wherein the women are heads of the household. This is 
a fact for which advertisements in Parents across the two-year data range did not make note or mention of, 
nor did they attempt to imply it through the imagery used in the advertisements. Likewise, “More fathers 
are staying at home to care for kids. Today, 7% of U.S. fathers with children in their household do not 
work outside the home—that’s roughly 2 million dads. Although stay-at-home dads represent only a small 
fraction of fathers, their share is up from 4% in 1989” (Parker, p.5, 2015). This too, is not represented in 
the advertisements in Parents. The advertisements of Parents represent child caregivers as mothers, 
completely negating the slowly growing trend of stay-at-home dads.

The overall implication about women and mothers from these advertisements is that their roles in 
life and contemporary culture have not changed in almost a century, yet we all know they have. This 
means that while women are often working “two-jobs, outside of home and in” (Jaffe & Berger, 1994), 
they are inundated with advertisement that showcase a life they don’t/can’t have, don’t want, or already 
have. Two of the three lend themselves to feelings of guilt, guilt for not wanting it, and guilt for not being 
in a financial state to afford to have it. The images of women in advertisements not only reinforce outdated 
stereotypes, they also reinforce notions of guilt for women.

Most of what consumes a mother’s thoughts are her children, and what is best for them. 
Advertisers are well aware of this, and rely on these emotional insecurities to sell products. Guilt appeals 
themselves have been used in emotional advertising since the parable of the “Captivated Child” in the late 
1920s and early 1930s. We have little understanding of the cultural assumptions that underlie the discourse 
in advertising since the time of Marchand’s seminal work, despite the fact that these guilt appeals as a 
means to influence consumer-purchasing habits has been a powerful force in shaping modern notions of 
parenting. It is for this reason that there is a great value in furthering the knowledge and understanding of
guilt appeals in advertising, something on which this critical discourse analysis will shed light and spread awareness about how advertisers have constructed modern notions of parenting.

The broader implication of this study is that emotional appeals and implied messages go far beyond guilt-based appeals towards moms. Further study of this topic could delve into a longer range of advertisements from *Parents* or a range of other parenting magazines. Other implications of this study, which could and should be further analyzed are issues of race and class, and their relationship to the advertisements and the messages relayed by advertisers. The overwhelming majority of advertisements seen throughout *Parents* from the data set showed images of white women. While very few showed images of men, fewer still showed images of minorities. The correlation between advertisements and issues of race, most certainly could and should be further analyzed, if for no other reason than to truly assess the relationship between the two. Likewise, this study lends itself to future research in terms of issues of class and social status in relation to advertisements.

Based on this study, I recommend for advertisers to promote a better and more accurate portrayal of parenting by incorporating more images of real-world modern parents. Advertisers can do this by using words that talk to both parents instead of just mothers. Advertisers can do this by using images of mothers and fathers, together and separate. It is also important for advertisers to use more diverse images in ads. Advertisers can do this by using non-white images of parents, bi racial couples, as well as more images of same sex partners. The old adage “a picture is worth a thousand words” is true, because there is great power in imagery. Advertisers could go a long way in more accurately portraying contemporary parenting by simply showcasing images of these contemporary parents.

Advertisers could make great strides in helping moms to feel less guilty by no longer showing images of perfection. Many advertisements show images of a perfectly organized home and family. This is not real life. Likewise, advertisers could help moms to feel less guilty by simply ceasing to use manipulative wording. Wording that is specifically chosen to emphasize a mother’s feelings of guilt, in the hopes of pushing her to buy a product. Advertisers could help moms to feel less guilt by using words like, “life sure is hard, and we know you, like us, are doing your best. If you happen to need more diapers, our brand will do the job.” It’s not perfect, but it most definitely is a start.
So, what can advertisers, parents, and society learn from all of this research and analysis? Of course, this is a multifaceted question, and quite open to interpretation, because what you learn from this is undoubtedly different in some ways than what I have learned. Yet, what I hope advertisers, parents, and society are at least able to recognize from this study, is that since Marchand’s analysis of advertisements in the early 1900s, little has changed in ways of how advertisers portray women and mothers, even though society has changed. Advertisers should use honest and realistic advertising messages, not ones that guilt and manipulate parents into purchasing a product. This builds trust and brand loyalty. Parents should be more aware that they are susceptible to such advertising tactics, and parents should have improved media literacy about which products are actually best. Consumer Reports, the only independent non-commercial product rating organized in the United States, is a great place to turn for parents interested in unbiased ratings on product efficacy and safety. As this study has demonstrated, ads don’t just sell products; they also promote powerful cultural messages. In this sense, advertisers should promote more realistic messages about parents, and this in turn can invoke less guilt for moms who are unable to meet the unrealistic portrayals in advertisements.
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