

Sexy Innocence: Loves Baby Soft

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Throughout the ages, the advertisement industry has portrayed women as beautiful bodies or as sexual objects that are weak and vulnerable. The over-sexualization of women was common in the '70s. Many, if not all ads in the '70s presented women as sexual objects or as the submissive housewife Kilbourne (2015) in "Sexist ads in The Seventies" said, "Ads in the 1970s were very bluntly sexist". [. . .] In those days, there was no consciousness about the fact that this might not be a good idea or that this might be offensive" (para. 5). The advertisement industry is trying to show women and especially young girls that they must be sweet, innocent, and vulnerable. Great examples of this are the "Loves Baby Soft" perfume ads in the 1970s. Loves Baby Soft perfume was made by Menley & James Laboratories, and their ads' target audience was young girls; they show girls that they have to be childlike, innocent, vulnerable, sweet and must be protected at all times but still maintain a level of sexiness. The technique used to sell in this ad is sex. The advertisement industry uses the idea or the need for sex to promote their products. In "Sex and Advertisement," O'Barr (2011) states, "After reviewing evidence from the mid-1800s to the early 2000s, Reichert concludes that using sex in advertising has frequently, but not always, increased consumer interest and often aided in the selling products and building strong brand identities" (para. 11). This kind of ad does not just try to sell the product, but also sells a particular concept of sex. Through this, it also sells a mixed and rather disturbing image of girls and women. More importantly, it's a good example to look at, as its age makes it easier for us to criticize. Yet, we must remember that this type of sexualization of young children continues even in our "evolved" day and age.

This ad for Loves Baby Soft perfume, is set up in a white room with only a grown woman in the center (Menley & James Laboratories, 1975). Since the woman is the only person

in the room, all of the attention is on her. The ad starts with a music box playing and a close up of the woman's face. The woman is biting a lollipop seductively as she looks directly at the camera. The narrator says, "There is one person nobody can resist and that is a baby, so Loves Baby Soft has created a scent of clean, cuddly, baby that grew up very sexy" (Menley & James Laboratories, 1975). As the narrator is saying this, the camera is slowly backing away to reveal the woman's full outfit, a little girl's pink and white dress, but this dress is showing a lot of the model's legs and cleavage. As the camera centers on the woman's full frame, the narrator continues to introduce the product. When the narrator has finished introducing the product the camera centers again on the woman's face, and the narrator ends with "Because innocence is sexier than you think" (Menley & James Laboratories, 1975). The model is dressed to look like a little girl, but she is a little girl with cleavage. The fact that she is raising her skirt, her legs are apart, and that she is licking a lollipop, creates a powerful sexual image, yet at the same time, it denies it, which is precisely what the product is telling young girls to do: be both innocent and sexy at the same time.

This type of ad is dangerous for young girls because they are in a vulnerable stage in life where they are discovering who they are, finding their own identity and finding how to be an individual all while working on their self-esteem. Kilbourne (2006) in "Jesus is a Pair of Jeans" says, "Self-image is deeply affected. The self-esteem of girls plummets as they reach adolescence partly because they cannot possibly escape the message that their bodies are objects and imperfect objects at that" ("Unnatural Passions," para. 1). Young girls see unrealistically thin bodies often in social media and advertisements. Ad campaigns portray women as physically "perfect," with clean, clear skin and semi-naked bodies showing not an ounce of fat; this can have an impact on young girls' and women's' views of their bodies and their dieting habits. The

advertisement industry is everywhere, on social media, television, magazines, and so many other places. Images of skinny or curvy women are seen all over in ads, which can prove the media, is spotting a light on how a woman's body should be. Young girls compare themselves to these images every day, and failure to live up to them is inevitable because they are based on perfection that does not exist.

This ad is also insulting for grown women. It is infantilizing women, telling not to be mature or be adult. Instead, it is telling them to be weak and vulnerable, because being weak, unable to take care of themselves, or make their own decisions will make them appear sexy. By infantilizing grown women in the media, it opens the door to the idea that women need men to care and protect them. A woman's image of being a strong independent person is covered up by the advertisement industry with a false sexual image. The advertisement industry has changed in many ways but has remained stable in other things. Women in ads are in more strong independent roles than just a housewife or a sexual object. More and more women are displayed as independent and strong, making their way in a man's world. Although advertisements have changed over the years, many sexist and controlling ads remain and the only difference is that they are not as bold and upfront as older ones like this Menley & James Laboratories ad. The advertisement industry hides sexist points of view behind subtext, humor, and other techniques. Hiding sexist ideas behind subtext lets the audience interpret the ad in their own way, and by hiding subtext behind humor, it makes the audience feel good and think it is an innocent joke.

For many years, the advertisement industry has portrayed women as the beautiful, sexual object every girl wants to be and every boy wants to have, or as the submissive housewife that only lives to clean and serve her family and their needs. Society is changing more every day, women are showing how strong, and independent they are. Yet, the image of the woman as a

woman-child is age-old, and while we don't see ads as blatant as this, we can still look at the media and see the way it continues to sexualize young girls. As a recent report notes that, "not only brands through conventional advertising but also editorials of fashion media are using eroticizing images of children" (Rodriquez, Vetisca, & Alves, 2016, p. 158). Rodriquez, Vetisca, and Alves (2016) also point out that "society has already recognized that these images impact on the lives of children, taking into account that 'childhood is a unique period of rapid physical and psychological development during which young people's physical, mental and emotional health and well-being can be permanently affected for better or worse' (UNICEF, 2012)" (p. 160). It's easy to say that sexualization of girls and women in the media are something that happened "back then," however, the problem continues, and sadly, it is now prevalent with young boys too (see Rodriquez, Vetisca, & Alves, 2016). Because of this, the Loves Baby Soft ad should serve as a good reminder of how easy it is to think that old problems aren't our problems.

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