

**I'll Show You Mine:
An Examination of Energizer's "Never Let their Toys Die" Advertisement**

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We are born into the world full of wonder. As we grow, this wonder is part of our basic education before we even step foot into a school. We wonder why the sky is blue. We ask where the rain comes from. We want to know who turns the light in the refrigerator off. Part of exploring our world is also exploring one another. There comes a point in everyone's life when we realize that we're not all the same. Some of us have brown skin and some tan. Some of us have green eyes and some brown. Some of us have penises and some vaginas. That natural curiosity is at the center of one of the "Never Let Their Toys Die" ads by Energizer (2008). This ad, while initially cute, is telling a different story between the lines. A close look at it will reveal that it appeals to its audience using fear, and also perpetuates the myth that people, especially women, are soiled from a very young age and that children must be saved from themselves.

This ad for Energizer batteries is set in a child's playroom. The room is very clean, with only a few toys in the background. Against the pink walls there is a dollhouse with a few toy dishes scattered in front of it. In the one corner that is visible, there is a wicker basket with a stuffed teddy bear sitting on top of it, and above and to the right of that are some child-like drawings tacked up on the wall. In the center of the picture are two young children, probably about three years old. The picture is taken from approximately adult eye-level, creating the feeling that the children are being looked at from the adult perspective. The boy and girl are facing one another and the boy is wearing only baggy red shorts. The little girl, whose back is partially toward the viewer, is wearing a yellow sleeveless dress. The little boy is holding his pants away from his waist and the little girl is peering down them as if to see what he's go in

there. In the top right corner of the ad the text reads “Energizer Batteries: Never let their toys die.”

While this advertisement has a number of images that are also compelling, one of the more subtle, but highly important things, in the power of this ad is the text that appears in the top left-hand corner: “Never Let their Toys Die.” This is an imperative sentence, so it has the voice of authority. It is a direct command, and it could also be construed as a warning. By creating the feeling of danger in this situation, it appeals to parents’ need to protect and nurture their children. While the picture is cute and may get a chuckle or two, seen in context of the threatening text, it creates an ominous picture of what kids might do when the batteries in their toys die. This message is trying to sell the idea that human curiosity is bad, and that any knowledge of the opposite sex is dangerous. It ignores the fact that this is a natural process for children and not something that they see as sexual. As an imperative sentence, it carries both the weight of a warning and guidance, creating a sense of danger and fear. In “The Language of Persuasion,” the authors point out that “Ads use fear to sell us products that claim to prevent or fix the problem” (New Mexico, 2010). In this case, it’s implicit that the speaker in the text sees the actions of these two children as a problem, and the advice given is a solution to that problem.

Additionally, being photographed from the eye-level of an adult adds the sensation that this is what parents might see their children doing. When coupling that with the warning in the text, it insinuates a message from one parent or adult to another. This creates a bond between the speaker and the viewer that puts them on a similar level—one of power, but separates them from the children and their actions, placing those in a lower position and therefore making them subjects of the warning. This warning of fear is aimed at a parent’s drive to protect. Lopez (2004) points out that “Fear messages are directed at our insecurities, such as “no one will like

you if you have dandruff," or "bald people are losers" (p. 2). To these examples, we could add the implication that children will become debase or perverted if left to their own devices.

Another detail that leads into the feeling of fear and danger is the bare room with very few toys, and the fact that there are no toys that use batteries visible in the picture despite the fact that this is an ad for batteries. The picture creates a feeling of a large open and empty space. By having very few toys in the room and placing the small children in the center of the room, the feeling of emptiness is amplified. This creates the impression that the children are alone in a room that is not really used. It's not a room the kids play in; rather it feels more like a place to hide. If they're hiding, it implies that they may be up to something. Because of this feeling, the message becomes one of secrecy and shame surrounded by a sense of fear.

Finally, this ad perpetuates is the stereotype that women are inherently promiscuous. This room is obviously the girl's room as evidenced by the pink walls and the dollhouse. As her space, there's an implicit idea that she's in charge there. Additionally, she is looking down the little boy's pants instead of *vice versa*. All of these things add up to create an image of her as the aggressor in the situation, and in light of the dire warning and sense of secrecy and shame established by the ad's text and setting respectively, it creates an image of her as the initiator of this bad deed.

Fowels (1998) points out that "[w]hen advertisers put forth the image of something diminutive and furry, something that elicits the word "cute" or precious," then they, are trying to trigger" our drive to protect (p. 6). After getting past the humor, this appeal is apparent in the advertisement. When the image is coupled with the text, it creates a feeling that these children are in danger and should be protected or taken care of. The irony is that we should actually be taken care of and protected. We should be protected from an image that implies a basic

immorality in all of us, and that pushes us to further obsess about our fear of sex, and saddle our children with a misshapen sense of sexuality. The United States' double standard of a highly sexualized media juxtaposed against a puritanical attitude toward sex has created a discomfort with our natural state. This ad plays into that simultaneous fascination and repulsion. This ad is not evil in itself, but in combination with the other mixed messages pervasive in the media, it is part of the tension we have with our sexuality and ourselves.

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