

Television and today's youth

[Food & Diet](#), [Junk Food](#)



Television and Today's Youth Television and Today's Youth In today's world, violent and sexy television is seen as normal, everyday programming. Parents constantly have to monitor what their children are viewing. What happens when the television hurting your children isn't the programming? What happens when the media doing the damage is actually the commercials spliced between those carefully chosen shows? Surely, parents cannot watch everything! In the average year, the advertising industry spends and up to \$12 billion dollars on ads specifically targeted toward children (Linn, 2004). A great many of the advertising dollars spent toward the child demographic are pumped directly into television ads, although it has seen a slight decreased with advertising companies starting to spend more revenue on internet advertising. It is estimated that the average child will be exposed to over 40, 000 commercials during a years worth of viewing, that boils down to almost 100 commercials every four hours. When thinking about how many commercials our children are faced with daily, you start to ponder what they could possibly contain. What on earth could possibly take up so much time? First and foremost, it appears that advertisements for fast food, junk food, and sugary cereals account for many of the commercials our children are exposed to. In an independent study conducted on three different networks, using 95 half-hour increments, comprised of preschool programming, found that 130 junk food ads were shown and over half of them were aimed at children. Think of it, your preschooler tells you they want a Happy Meal® out of the middle of nowhere. Not many people stop to think that maybe the television their children are watching is what is causing their odd craving. In the past few years, childhood obesity rates have

exploded along with the number of fast food commercials that have appeared on television. In April, the U. S. Trade Commission actually requested information from 44 different food, drink, and fast food companies so they could examine how their advertising may be directed towards children (Thompson & MacArthur, 2007). Studies have also shown that children, who are exposed to more television, tend to eat more junk food than adults (Strasburger, 2002) due to children not having the skills to recognize that advertising is make-believe (Comstock, 1991), a simple marketing tool. The fast food industry has been hasty to try and comply with many of the APA's requests, fearing a backlash; they are just wondering when enough will be enough. Many people associated with the industry believe that politicians, the APA and the public cannot be satisfied. A fast food executive has claimed focusing on their industry in direct correlation with obesity is " a witch hunt". He went on to say that " if anyone is to be picked as a scapegoat it's likely to be the fast feeder. " (Thompson & MacArthur, Obesity fear frenzy grips food industry, ¶3) A lawyer for fast food and soft drink companies agrees. Ron Urbach states, " the more you probe, the more you'll find. " Even the Senator of Kansas, Sam Brownback, thinks that the inquiries have drawn on long enough and that advertising cannot be held responsible for all of the country's obesity issues. Not only are commercials changing kid's eating habits; they are also changing their buying habits. Children as young as age three are starting to recognize different brands of merchandise. It is estimated that brand loyalty can actually start to change what children ask for as far as clothing and toys between the ages of 2 and 3. According to a leading expert in brand

advertising, 80% of all globally known brands are deploying a "tween" strategy (Hulbert, 2004). An overwhelming number of children have actually admitted to feeling a great sense of pressure about the type of merchandise they purchase because their friends or other classmates buy a certain brand. The Center for a New American Dream (2002) found that over 50% of kids say that wearing a certain brand of clothing makes them feel better about themselves. Not all of this spending just means more money out of the parent's pocket, it also means more aggravation. The Center for a New American Dream found that "more than 10% of 12 to 13 yr olds admitted to asking their parents more than 50 times for a product they had seen advertised." As a result of the commercialization of today's youth we are seeing a larger number of kids leaving school with little to no understanding of issues having to do with savings or debt. As of 2005, we have seen that the amount of debt accumulated by people ages 18 to 24 as doubled (Villavecencio, 2005). Imagine what the average young persons credit will look like when today's children reach that age! When thinking about a product actually changing the way our children feel for the better, you also have to step back and examine if products are changing the way our children are feeling for the worse. We have already seen that children have a difficult time comprehending the difference between what advertizing companies state as truth and the actual truth. In 2004, The American Psychological Association (APA) formed a task force to examine the effects of commercials on children's self-esteem. The APA task force found that advertisements with sexualized images of women have been found to promote low self-esteem as well as depression and eating disorders in young girls. After the study was

released, it was recommended by the APA to remove the sexualized images from the ads in favor of women shown in a positive setting, ones that will show today's youth images of women as unique and fully competent.

Although all of the APA's taskforces have recommended either changing the way today's companies advertise or limiting the type of recent

advertisements, no company has done so to date. It appears that it will

always be the job of the parent to carefully screen what their children are

routinely exposed to, including the advertisements in media cluttered world.

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