



## **Deadly Persuasion: Why Women and Girls Must Fight the Addictive Power of Advertising**

*Jean Kilbourne*

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Discusses the advertising establishment, revealing what advertisers know about human nature and how they exploit it to make a profit.

## **Deadly Persuasion: Why Women and Girls Must Fight the Addictive Power of Advertising Details**

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## **From Reader Review Deadly Persuasion: Why Women and Girls Must Fight the Addictive Power of Advertising for online ebook**

### **Kibibi Mincey says**

Interesting. Gave credit to some what I already knew. However, the author has a very narrow view and only focuses on advertising's impact upon the Caucasian women. Non-white ads and non-white peoples were glaring absent within the subject matter.

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### **Sierra Gardner says**

Not only genuinely one of the best books I have ever read, but also one I can say truly changed the way I viewed the world forever. A must read!

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### **Susan Payton says**

I read this 10 years ago and am coming back to it. Love Jean Kilbourne's perspective on women in advertising. It rings true today!

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### **Chris says**

Despite the fact that the cigarette chapter is out of date, this book is still important today. Over a decade after it was published. Don't believe me?

Look at this:

or

or

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### **Christi Koenig says**

Good thesis (that women and girls are overwhelmingly targets and subjects of advertisement), but it was driven by anecdotal evidence from various commercials and magazine ads, which were quoted, even when the ad was directly adjacent to the paragraph referencing it. These ads, when taken together, do paint a circumstantial portrait of violence to women in advertising. It lacks, however, reference to peer-reviewed articles and respected experts in this field (other than the experts own opinion), for example. Instead, the author relies heavily on opinion and overall ick factor, which when taken together read as, "of course advertising works and shows an inherent violence to women because look at how many ads we see everyday." She doesn't refer to psychologists or psychiatrists to provide evidence that a lack of attention paid does not mean unconscious intake or response doesn't happen. This book billed itself as a hard-hitting analysis of the advertising world and its overall treatment of women, but it failed to reference many, if any, experts other than the author. As such, I expected something other in quality of research and data than what this book gave me and was disappointed when it did not fulfill those expectations.

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### **Drina says**

Where Kilbourne succeeds is her examination and interpretation of advertising as a form of artist expression (while slyly denying it the prestige other art forms generally receive). She used anecdotal evidence and a honed understanding of both advertising and it's environment to build awareness in her audience. Her examples are plentiful and her analysis clear and thought provoking; she leaves plenty of room for her audience to develop their own understanding throughout the book, pulling back from a more heavy handed lecture style.

I appreciated Kilbourne's approach to this subject, as I feel purely scientific approach would have limited her scope, but I still feel she would have benefited from a wider sociological explanation of what was going on in the world as themes in advertising developed and grew. I was surprised at how few footnotes I ran in to through the course of the book, expecting her to draw more on at least historical events if not necessarily psychological studies or data. There was also an issue with the heavy use of anecdotes and lengthy descriptions of ads which, while necessary to demonstrating how themes exist in advertising, had the unfortunate effect of desensitizing the reader. A story about an add featuring a woman dressed in cat parts can leave a strong impression on your audience, but not if it's delivered within five pages of almost identical examples.

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The content of the book is important and can greatly benefit an engaged, proactive audience. My concern is its ability to engage an apathetic reader or to convince an antagonistic one. I sincerely hope for the best!

### **Katie says**

This is an important book, if somewhat of an overwhelming read. Kilbourne packs in the examples, facts, and theories so tightly, you'll need to stop and rest now and then to catch your breath. If a lot of the ideas in here seem familiar, it's only because Kilbourne virtually founded this genre of cultural studies singlehandedly in the 1970s. Read this if you are worried about raising children in an era of overwhelming consumerism, or if you are interested in dissecting its effects on your own mind and behavior and that of your neighbors.

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## S.A. Alenthony says

There is no greater expert on the subject of how aggressive marketing can degrade the quality of a culture than Jean Kilbourne. As a writer, filmmaker, and internationally recognized expert on advertising, addiction, and women's issues, it has been estimated that she has given lectures at roughly half the universities and colleges in the U.S. Her unique talent is her ability to see and expose the underlying strategies and tools employed by purveyors of all manner of goods to persuade us—methods that seem all the more shocking when we actually see them. Her book *Deadly Persuasion*, which has also been published under the title *Can't Buy My Love*, is a fascinating study of the power of the ubiquitous ads that surround us in our every waking moment.

(Before I go on, I'll point out that to oppose the manner in which much modern advertising is performed is not to oppose a healthy capitalistic economy, a system that quite clearly has worked better than any other. This is not a diatribe against the availability of every imaginable trifle, or the competition amongst companies to market a more useful product. It is rather about certain methods that advertisers continue to use that have, Kilbourne asserts, a negative effect on the way we interact and the way we view ourselves, others, and material goods. It is about devaluing the currency of genuine human contact.)

The book considers advertisements in magazines as television, and considers a number of different kinds of campaigns in dedicated chapters. There are individual discussions on alcohol marketing, the auto industry, food, tobacco, and the exploitation of human relationships.

“Advertising encourages us not only to objectify each other but also to feel that our most significant relationships are with the products we buy.” Kilbourne states in her introduction. “Although we like to think of advertising as unimportant, it is in fact the most important aspect of the mass media. It is the point.” She goes on to show how a key goal is to make us insecure about our present lives, for example, as is done in the ubiquitous women's magazines that juxtapose images of cheesecakes or pies on the cover with articles on weight loss tips and images of skinny models inside. After all, “people who feel empty make great consumers.”

“Advertising... twists the notion that we can recreate ourselves – not through dedicated work, but merely by purchasing the right product... [It:] often sells a great deal more than products. It sells values, images, and concepts of love and sexuality, romance, success, and perhaps most important, normalcy... we are surrounded by hundred, thousands of messages every day that link our deepest emotions to products, that objectify people and trivialize our most heartfelt moments and relationships.”

To give some examples of the objectification she cites, I'll just mention the commodity that receives perhaps the most lavish attention from Madison Avenue: the automobile. Kilbourne devotes an early chapter to the subject of car advertising (Can an engine pump the valves in your heart?), and through a series of oddly similar examples, shows how many ad campaigns aim to humanize their machines: “Rekindle the romance”; “If anyone should ask, go ahead and show them your pride and joy” (this under a picture of a wallet showing two photographs – one of a couple of children and the family dog, the other a Honda); “We don't sell cars, we merely facilitate love connections”; “Stylish, responsive, fun—if it were a man you'd marry it”; “Drive the new Paseo, fall in love”; “She loves her new Mustang. Oh, and whatshisname too”; “A change from you high-maintenance relationship”; “It's not a car, it's an aphrodesiac”; “What makes you happy? Is it the sparkle in a lover's smile? Or the warmth of a goodnight kiss? But could it be a car?”; “While some cars can hug the road, very few can actually seduce it.” And so on. Kilbourne does more than list these and countless other examples: she deconstructs them and their implications.

Another troubling issue that the book addresses is the pernicious effect of advertising that is directly aimed at children. This is even more troubling in light of studies that show that young children don't differentiate between the shows and the advertisements. The chapter on children led me to wonder how much of our national drug-abuse problem among teens is stoked by the way advertising is generally presented. While certainly the causes are many and varied, I think about my own typical childhood, growing up with hours of television every day. And the ads are still relentlessly telling us that purchasing a product makes wonderful things happen: a man opens a soda and a marching band explodes out of his TV into his room; the interior of an SUV becomes a landscape with waterfalls; wearing the right brand of jeans causes your world to shift into a nighttime city scene where a lovely brunette looks at you longingly. It seems quite rare anymore to see to a commercial anymore where use of a produce does not result in some kind of supernatural effect. Perhaps in the process of growing up, when we come to realize that the implicit, fantastical promises of the ads are not true – perhaps this adds to the appeal of drugs that can help make the world seem as magical as we thought it would be?

In short, if you've ever wondered how advertisers try to manipulate us, and what the consequences of the onslaught of false promises might be, I highly recommend Kilbourne's fascinating book. You will not look at your TV the same again, and you'll likely come to agree with the author's observation that "advertising and religion share a belief in transformation and transcendence... [but:] in the world of advertising, enlightenment is achieved instantly by buying material goods." And that although one may "love" their possessions, they cannot love one back.

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### **Allison Kuenle says**

From cigarettes and alcohol to sexuality and exploitation *Deadly Persuasion* covers a vast variety of topics all relating back to how the advertising world portrays their product. Jean Kilbourne speaks on a multitude of subjects all pertaining to advertisements.

Never have I ever actually realized just how powerful one silly advertisement can be. Throughout the whole entire book from chapter to chapter different topics that the media has tweaked upon were discussed and somewhat torn apart. By that I simply mean that Kilbourne exposed how advertisers exploit a weakness to make you feel as if you must purchase their product. As a reader I found the theme to be quite obvious. My take on what Kilbourne's goal for a theme was to simply educate and bring awareness to how something as simple as an advertisement can lead to such extreme scenarios. On the front of the book it states "Why women and girls must fight the addictive power of advertising." Yet, I think the book hit home to more than just the females. It spoke on specific issues like race or sexuality as well as gender. I found it odd that the front displayed that message yet spoke on so much more. That phrase itself caught my attention immediately. I felt as if there was war between women and advertising that I was completely unaware of, and I was right. *Deadly Persuasion* lived up to my expectations based on the short snippet I had skimmed before making the decision to read it.

If you were completely oblivious to this ongoing issue as I was I would most definitely recommend reading this book. Or perhaps you are a strong anti-feminist and maybe then you might choose to avoid this read. Check it out to find out more on the horrifying statistics that go hand and hand with the advertisements created to make you feel less about yourself.

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## **Sarah Kelleher says**

I thought this book was crazy and super interesting. It gave me a lot to think about, and I know that I haven't looked at commercials or magazine ads the same way since I read it. I only got it because I found it on a bargain table, but once i got into it, I couldn't put it down. i let a friend borrow it a few years ago and I really wish I had it back... BRADEN.

What i remember about it was all the make up and beauty ads it talked about... The book showed all these examples of how ads in girls magazines would encourage girls to "Speak out Loud!" or "Be Heard!" or "Make a Statement!" and then the ad would mean that the way for a young girl to do all those things would be to buy a new shade of lipstick or something. This is just an example off the top of my head, it's not exactly right. But there were so many examples and they were all so sadly funny and interesting.

When I think of all the time I spent poring over my Teen and Seventeen's and YM's in my early teen years, rather than doing homework or ANYTHING else more productive... and all the money i spent on all that junk... oh it makes me feel sad. dumb and sad.

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## **Ami says**

What I enjoyed about this book is it got me thinking about how advertising shapes society in ways that had never been pointed out before. For example, a TV show will never be about a broken system. It will always talk about how the cops and the justice system will protect us and that in the end, everything will be ok, because what advertiser will otherwise want to align its product with a hopeless, or less than positive message? Another example is how the Daily Herald, the most widely circulated newspaper in the UK, had to scale back on its distribution and size because it could not sustain itself on advertisements for the middle-class. Instead, advertisements geared towards the rich and famous are what sell and media thus shapes our discourse. Before I read this book, I didn't know that major brands like Hilfiger and Lucky Jeans advertise through characters in indie films and rebel themes, which you would think indicate counterculture, not mainstream fashion. I applaud Jean Kilbourne here for pointing out such things that otherwise go largely unnoticed.

In spite of all that I learned and the way it changed my way of thinking, this book is **far** from 5 stars. Quite possibly the most annoying thing Kilbourne does is make gross generalizations that are not supported by research, and without corroboration other than hearsay, may be untrue ("Children in very poor countries often tie their Nike shoes around their ankles so that they aren't stolen while they sleep." --**WHAT?** Having lived in 3 "very poor" countries, I never heard of such a thing. Also, how are these kids getting such expensive shoes?). The main reason why it took me so long to get through this book was the message was enthralling, yet repetitive and oftentimes belabored. The tone is preachy and at times, overly pedantic – it's almost as if Kilbourne attempts to make her point accessible by dumbing down the message, yet she leaves the reader to make his or her own logical leaps as conclusions. Still, I would **highly** recommend this book because it certainly changed the way that I see advertising and gets out an important message. As Kilbourne notes, so many of us claim that advertising never affects us, and that is the mark of a good advertising campaign.

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## **Sarahc Caflisch says**

A friend lent me this book, knowing my unrelenting feminist kill-joy tendencies ([sfonline.barnard.edu/polyphonic/print...](http://sfonline.barnard.edu/polyphonic/print...)), and I picked it up reluctantly thinking, "Psh, I probably already know all this because I've studied, "Killing Us Softly," and this book was published back in 1999 and it's probably hopelessly Boomer second wave and etc."

Unsurprisingly, I don't already know everything and thank goodness I was given this book.

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## **Amber says**

It's just not in me to give Kilbourne a bad review for all the amazing research she has collected for us, but the book's formatting is a bit of a nightmare for the academic. (Where the sources are listed in the back to keep the flow of the text, but the text isn't marked with the sources and it's a massive headache to flip through the book's text, notes, then biblio. Oy!!) However, she provides some great quotes! Although repetitive, it seems readable to the average reader.

*Deadly Persuasion* first builds a case that advertisement does affect us ("The fact is that much of advertising's power comes from the belief that advertising does not affect us. The most effective kind of propaganda is that which is not recognized as propaganda."), how prevalent advertising is, and how we are always the target and being sold something, even when the ads are seemly anti-advertising. Hey, it's business!

Major points in the book are how ads are teaching us to disassociate from reality, by tossing aside our relationships with people for reliable products that promise a dreamy paradise, with a chapter on car ads, food ads, violence against women, and body image for women and girls. ("The More You Subtract, The More You Add" chapter is probably the chapter most interesting for those that are coming into *Deadly Persuasion* from her documentary series *Killing Us Softly* ). The biggest concerns Kilbourne has are reestablishing healthy relationships with other people and the way advertisers downplay the horrific affects of alcohol and cigarettes.

"We must recognize that all of these problems – addictions, eating disorders, male violence (including battering and rape), child abuse, and increasing commercialization of the culture, the exploitation of children by advertisers, gun violence, and the objectification of women and girls – are related. We cannot solve these problems by treating them as separate issues." (293)

Do advertisements cause all these problems? Kilbourne is totally forward in saying not always, but ads are both creating and reflecting these problematic attitudes, and they're presenting them over and over again. We definitely should pay attention! I find the entire book compelling, depressing, but overall a "call to action" that is relevant as ever.

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### **Heather says**

I met Ms. Kilbourne when she spoke at Nebraska Wesleyan University and got her autograph. I had already read her book many times. It is all spot-on and still completely relevant; in fact, things still seem to be getting worse. Every woman needs to read this book!

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### **Mark Greene says**

You won't look at ads the same way again. Watch her videos on youtube, too.

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