

Brazilian Mothers and Advertising

A Semiotic Approach on How Brazilian Advertising Has Been Building the Imaginary of Pregnancy and Motherhood

This article¹ discusses how Brazilian advertising has been building the imaginary of pregnancy and motherhood. Our objectives were to map and analyze the advertising signs (images, messages, sales appeals, ideals and cultural issues) used to represent, translate and sensitize pregnant women and contemporary mothers in Brazil. The research corpus consisted of advertisements, published in Brazil (from 2006 to 2009) in the magazines Crescer and Pais e Filhos (top publications in the child-care industry, according to subscription and market share data). The paper begins by reporting on the first stage of the master's thesis research on "Pregnant women, mothers and advertising communications: a semiotic analysis of representations of pregnancy and motherhood in contemporary print media advertising" (Mendonça 2010), in which the qualitative methodology was applied to carry out three group discussions in São Paulo, Brazil, with pregnant women and mothers, in order to survey how these women felt as mothers and also to investigate how they perceived the advertisements which had been studied. Next, the key findings of the semiotic analysis of the advertisements is presented based on Peircean semiotics with contributions from Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic theory. Finally, we discuss interpretations resulting from field study in dialogue with the semiotic analysis of the advertisements.

Firstly, we would like to highlight the fact that this article summarizes the most important lessons learned from the master's research conducted by Maria Collier de Mendonça under the supervision of Oscar Cesarotto at the Catholic University of São Paulo from 2008 to 2010. Maria is Brazilian and the mother of a seven-year-old girl. Her professional background includes 16 years of experience in the areas of qualitative research and strategic planning applied

to marketing, advertising, and public opinion. Oscar is a psychoanalyst from Argentina and has three adult children.

At the outset, the hypothesis that the representations of the feminine universe in Brazilian media and advertising were very different from, as well as more comprehensive than, the representation of mothers in Brazilian media and advertising, sparked our interest in surveying the representations of the universe of pregnancy and motherhood in Brazilian advertising. We noticed that mothers and pregnant women were depicted in advertisements as being totally devoted to their children, with features of purity and sanctity and no sensual appeal, harking back in many respects to the figure of the Virgin Mary, whereas non-mothers were depicted in more sensual, pagan and carnal manners, much closer to the figure and ideals synthesized by Eve.

Our initial curiosity was to understand why this contrast persisted between Eve and the Virgin Mary in media and advertising after so many years of feminine struggle and achievements. It was clear to us that the routines of Brazilian contemporary urban mothers included the need to manage several roles and tasks inside and outside of the home. To do this, most of them are aided by support networks (husbands, schools, relatives or maids). Still, advertising did not seem to have updated its representations or its discourse, which seemed strange to us and arose great curiosity. We decided to focus the research *corpus* on print media advertisements published in the *Crescer e Pais e Filhos* magazines, top publications in the childcare industry.

Our professional backgrounds led us to start our project by conducting an empirical survey. In it we investigated the feelings and opinions of mothers and pregnant women, because it was very important to listen to them in order to understand the context we were investigating. The qualitative methodology and the group discussion technique were used in interviews with mothers and pregnant women who form part of the target audience of the magazines and advertising campaigns surveyed. Next, we conducted a semiotic analysis of the research *corpus*, using concepts from Peircean semiotic theory as well as some concepts from Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic theory. In this second stage of research, we mapped the four theme groups of advertisements. We identified the common elements in verbal and visual languages for each group (I. pregnant women, II. mothers and babies, III. fathers in the scene, and IV. other resources). We then completed the study, presenting the main lessons from the empirical research in dialog with the semiotic analysis of the advertisements surveyed.

It is important to highlight that there is no sign without a context. So, to analyze advertisements directed at Brazilian mothers and pregnant women, we believe that it is crucial to understand the mothering environment along with its social, cultural and constructed aspects, not only from bibliographic research,

but especially from listening to these mothers and pregnant women in group discussions and considering the semiotic analysis of advertisements.

Articulating Peircean Semiotics With Psychoanalysis

According to Lucia Santaella and Winfried Nöth, in Peircean semiotics:

The sign is a triadic relationship between a first or sign (that which is in the place of something else, its object), a second or object (that which the sign determines) and a third or interpretant (another sign produced in the mind of an interpreter due to the relationship of a sign and its object). (2004: 200)

In our understanding, the three elements (sign, object and interpretant), as well as the three categories (firstness, secondness and thirdness), are fundamental concepts to investigating any communication phenomenon from a Peircean perspective. In this context, Santaella (2002) stresses that communicative processes include at least three facets: signification, reference, and the interpretation of messages:

From the facet of signification, the semiotic analysis allows us to explore the inner part of the messages from three aspects. The first aspect refers to the qualities and the sensoriality of its inner properties, such as colors, lines, forms, volume, movement, light, etc. in visual language, for example. The second aspect refers to the message in its specificity, in its here and now in a certain context. The third aspect refers to what it is in the message that is general, conventional, and cultural.

From the facet of reference, the semiotic analysis allows us to understand what messages indicate, what they refer to, or where they apply. In this facet there are also three other aspects: the first aspect comes from the mere power of suggestion of messages which is both sensorial and metaphorical. The second aspect comes from the power of denotation that messages have, from their ability to indicate something that is outside of them. The third aspect comes from the ability of messages to represent abstract and conventional ideas that are shared by culture.

From the facet of the interpretation, the semiotic analysis allows us to examine the effect the messages can have on the receiver. These effects include three kinds: the first are the emotional effects, when the receiver is overtaken by a certain feeling; the second are the reac-

tive effects, when the receiver is led to act according to the message received; the third are mental, when the message causes the receptor to reflect. (2002: 60)

Santaella adds that:

It is only in its relationship with the interpretant that the sign completes its action as a sign. It is only then that the sign effectively acts as a sign. However, when the sign is interpreted, this action embeds the two other aspects of the sign: the aspect of its ground and that of its relationship with the object.... Such care is important so as not to get stuck in the traps of stereotypes.... Oftentimes, when this happens the interpreter is simply imposing a ready interpretation obtained from a previous repertoire. (2002: 37)

In this study, we understand that mothers and pregnant women are—at the same time—objects and interpreters of the signs surveyed. After all, advertisers (who are the senders of the messages) classify them as their target audience (that is, receivers and interpreters of the messages) and the ways in which these women have been depicted in advertising campaigns is precisely what we are investigating.

For this reason, our starting point was empirical research. We started our approach to the *corpus* by talking to this public because we considered it to be important and enriching to know how mothers and pregnant women who read the magazines surveyed felt and what they thought. We also wanted to understand how they interacted with pregnancy and motherhood, what were their pleasures, rewards, concerns, difficulties and doubts were, which advertisements they liked, which they did not like and why, how they saw the representations of motherhood in the media, and which figures of motherhood were most evident in their perception of the panorama of the media and advertisements surveyed.

Thus, it would be possible to enrich the reading of the *corpus* and at the same time prevent the risk of an analysis based on a previous, poor repertoire. As we saw, in order to analyze interpretative effects, it is interesting to investigate not only the advertisement's text, but also what lies outside of it. After all, signification happens in a culture, that is, in the lives and the world of mothers and pregnant women, who read magazines and are sensitized by their advertorial messages.

According to George Gaskell:²

In the empirical social sciences, the qualitative interview³ is a meth-

odology for collecting data that is widely used. It is, as Robert Farr (1982) wrote, “essentially a technique, or method, to establish or discover that perspectives or points of view on facts exist beyond those belonging to the person who starts the interview.”

The first point of departure is the supposition that the social world is not a natural given, without problems: it is actively constructed by people in their everyday lives, but not under conditions which they themselves establish. It assumes that these constructions constitute the essential reality of people, their experiential world. The use of the qualitative interview to map and understand the world of the respondents’ lives is the starting point for the social scientist who then introduces interpretive schemes for understanding the narratives of the actors in more conceptual and abstract terms, oftentimes in relation to other observations. The qualitative interview therefore provides basic data for the development and understanding of the relationships between social actors and their situation. The objective is a detailed understanding of the beliefs, attitudes, values, and motivations in relation to people’s behaviors in specific social contexts. (64-65)

Further, according to Gaskell:

All research with interviews is a social process, an interaction, or a cooperative undertaking, in which words are the main means of exchange. It is not only a one-way process of information passing from one (the interviewee) to another (the interviewer). To the contrary, it is an interaction, an exchange of ideas and meanings, in which several realities and perceptions are explored and developed. Regarding this, both the interviewee(s) as well as the interviewer are, in different ways, involved in producing knowledge. When we deal with meanings and feelings regarding the world and happenings, there are different possible realities, depending on the situation and the nature of the interaction. (73-74)

In our understanding, the exchanges and interactions made possible by the group interviews described by Gaskell are really aligned with the notions of sign and semiosis that form the basis of this study. According to Winfried Nöth, the interpretation of a sign is, for Peirce, a dynamic process in the mind of the receiver:

Peirce (CP, 5.472) has introduced the term semiosis to characterize

such a process, referred to as “the action of the sign.” He has also conceptualized semiosis as “the process in which the sign has a cognitive effect on the interpreter” (CP, 5.484)... For this reason, in order to define Peircean semiotics it is necessary to state that its object of study is semiosis itself, not the sign. (Nöth 66)

Finally, psychoanalysis—despite having been used with limitations—brought important contributions to this study. Because the investigation also involved the way in which advertising affected the subjectivities and daily lives of mothers and pregnant women, we referred in our analysis to some psychoanalytical concepts developed by Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan to help us better walk through the semiotic meshes of the messages we studied here.

Empirical Research

Methodology, Sample, Objectives and Field Procedures

We used the qualitative methodology and the group discussion technique. For this reason, we have referred to works by: Martin Bauer and George Gaskell and Uwe Flick. Group discussion is a technique in qualitative research that allows for the exploration of ideas, perceptions, and feelings related to the topic surveyed so that individual opinions can be enriched by the interaction between different points of view brought up in the general discussion with new visions of the issues presented being formed.

The group is mediated by a moderator that is specialized in this type of research so that participants can express themselves and interact with one another in a free and honest way in moments of agreement and disagreement. The moderator follows a script with open questions and tries to make the conversation flow in a democratic and pleasant manner.

Meetings are held in rooms that are especially prepared for groups and discussions are recorded in audio and video so that after the meetings the contents discussed can be analyzed (qualitatively).

The sample profile is defined based on filter-criteria, such as social and economic class, age group, gender, lifestyle, and other variables or segmentations that are needed. The objectives of this research stage were:

- [1] Survey opinions, attitudes, and perceptions regarding the meanings associated with “being a mother today.”
- [2] Investigate how contemporary pregnant women and mothers perceived themselves in the conditions of mothers; in other words, how they regarded the awards, pleasures, concerns, difficulties, and questions regarding motherhood or pregnancy.

[3] Discuss how participants perceived these advertisements, especially with regard to the representations of mothers and pregnant women and the aspects of pleasantness or unpleasantness related to the main messages, images, and appeal conveyed in this advertising universe.

[4] Survey maternal figures (actresses, characters, celebrities) that stood out in the media and why participants admired these women/ mothers.

The surveyed sample was made up of three groups of six to eight participants each, all readers or potential readers of the magazines surveyed. The first group was made up of pregnant women, the second of mothers with babies between 0 and 12 months of age, and the third group of mothers with children between one to four years of age.

An attempt was made to balance all of the groups using mothers (or pregnant women) who have one or two children and older women and younger women, as well as professionals from different areas, residents of various neighborhoods of the city of São Paulo, with children in different schools.

The participants were invited through the *Crescer* magazine website, the personal contact network of the researcher (Maria Collier de Mendonça), and through the professionals in the magazine's editorial office.

The group discussions were held on the April 4, 8, and 10, 2008, from 9:00am to noon, at the headquarters of Editora Globo publishing in the city of Sao Paulo. Editora Globo offered us a room especially equipped for these activities.

The discussions followed a guideline of open (non-directed) questions and began as a verbal debate, starting with the topic of "being a mother in the world today." Thus, they initially discussed the rewards and pleasures associated with motherhood and, next, the difficulties, concerns, and doubts that the mothers or pregnant women interviewed had.

In the second stage of the meetings, the projective technique of drawing one's own image was used with the aim of collecting non-verbal responses, in order to enrich the material collected through visual expression.

In the third stage of the discussions, the participants received issues of *Crescer* magazine (published from 2006 to 2008) and were advised to select advertisements that they would use to make up two panels: one with the advertisements that they liked and another with the advertisements that they did not like. Next, the reasons for their liking or not liking the advertisements for each panel were discussed, as well as their perceptions of the representations of mothers and pregnant women, main appeals and messages conveyed in the advertisements they selected.

Lastly, we asked participants which maternal figures (be they celebrities,

actresses, models, TV hosts, journalists, or characters from movies, TV series or cartoons) they saw in the media and admired and we asked them to tell us why they admired them.

Next, we will show in detail the main results obtained in this field research following two criteria: we will report the lessons following the order of the discussion script with common opinions (consensus in the three groups) being described before partial opinions (specific for each group or profile surveyed).

Being a Mother Today: Rewards, Pleasures, Concerns, Difficulties and Doubts

First, during the verbal debate about the rewards and pleasures associated with motherhood, the women interviewed stated that mothers feel an unconditional love for their children and that motherhood gives them feelings of joy, happiness, bonding, and complicity when looking at their children and knowing that they are hungry, want to cuddle with them or need something else. They have the feeling that children are forever, whereas boyfriends or husbands can leave. It was also reported that the possibility of following the development and the discoveries of children is extremely rewarding. On the one hand, motherhood allows them to find new meanings to life; on the other, it brings about lots of questioning, causing them review their values and change their priorities and daily habits.

In their words:

Being a mom is opening yourself up to a new world! It's the best experience that exists!

Moms find out what their kids are thinking and learn through shared experience. I feel like her side-kick: I see when she is hungry and end up finding out what she wants through small gestures.

I didn't think that I would like the second as much as I like the first... but, it's unconditional love: you are a mother regardless of everything!

Following the growth and development of the child you love so much and being there for the discoveries is something wonderful!

You see yourself before the many challenges and sense how important it is for the child that you're there!

Maternity makes us stronger! We find strength where we didn't now we had it, you become a lioness and rediscover yourself as a woman!

Among the pleasures and rewards that were specific for each surveyed group, we can highlight:

[1] For pregnant women, being able to generate life gives them a magical feeling and a feeling of completeness that are both reinforced by the corporal changes that happen during pregnancy (the growing belly, the baby's movements, and development). They also say that pregnancy is highly valued by society. So, wherever they go (family gatherings, workplace) they feel they are the center of attention.

No man knows what it is to have a life inside of you, it's a power, it provides a feeling of plenitude!

When the baby moves, I stop what I'm doing, I'm happy and I feel like the most important person in the world, as well as the happiest and most beautiful! Having a life inside of me makes me feel really good!

Seeing the feet and hands of the baby during the exam is magical!

Every day I get presents from friends and they put their hands on my belly! It's really cool! I'm going to really miss that!

Pregnancy relativizes work, before I just lived to work... Now, my life gained a direction and other things are more important! I don't have any more crises with work!

[2] In the opinion of mothers of babies (from 0 to 12 months old), during the first year of life, mothers and children have a period of intense bonding and symbiosis. During this period, many mutual discoveries and daily progress happen: "a new surprise each day, a new sound, a new look, movement or word." According to them, giving birth, the post-partum period, and the difficulties faced in the first months of their children's lives are life experiences that bring about personal maturity and the discovery of internal resources:

Feeling that I could create this being that depends on me, but that every day gains autonomy is a pleasure that only mothers can feel!

My fear was not having kids and spending my life not having this experience.

It's magnificent, it's different, it's dedicating yourself to a person who depends on me for everything! Before it was always work and career... I

would always be waiting for the best time, but it came and I don't regret anything, because it has all been very gratifying.... There was a lot of effort starting with gestation, I discovered myself as a woman and mother... I have talked to other moms and I've been finding out that I feel the same fears, insecurities, and hardships as them!

My fear was that the child would take away my freedom and independence.... I had to adapt, but she loves going in the stroller.... You know that concept of Peruvian moms who wrap their babies up on their backs and go out doing everything? I'm a little like that!

[3] When children reach the ages of one to four, the pleasures and rewards of motherhood begin to be related to socializing and their children's gains in autonomy as well as the aspects mentioned as important in educating and forming the character of children. In this phase, both moms as well as kids open themselves to the outside world, beyond the mother-child dyad. According to those interviewed, this opening of horizons offers a chance for personal maturing and added awareness regarding the world and environment, encouraging them to change attitudes, behaviors, and values in search of a better future for their children and grandchildren:

We want to be better and want a better world for them to live better!

I've undergone a review of values and attitudes....

I worry about smaller issues, for example: saying hello to the neighbors, crossing the street, day to day things.... I try to set good examples: if you fight with someone and yell, the child will see and repeat this later....

I have a seven year old and his school recycles, so he has taught me a lot....

Then the verbal debate went on to the topic of the difficulties, worries and doubts of the mothers and pregnant women that took part in the study. Generally speaking, the main issues mentioned by the three groups concern the difficulties in dealing with the anxiety and doubts when faced with a world that is—in their words—“complicated,” “violent,” “unsafe,” “competitive,” “has no limits,” “locked,” and “professionally and economically unstable” and where we lead a “hectic” life in a society where consumerism, indifference among people, and a crisis of ethical values prevail.

In the domain of education, they are concerned about setting limits and

not “overprotecting” their children. There are also concerns regarding health (parents’ and children’s): fear of diseases and even of death.

They feel pressured by society, which seems to conspire against motherhood when it “demands” that they remain slim, beautiful, and dedicated to their profession. Thus, they report that after giving birth they face great pressure to recover their physical shape quickly and get back to work because there is intense social judgment against the few women who decide to give up their jobs to raise their children. Further, they also feel guilty when they go back to work because they cannot be there for important moments in their children’s development.

When the baby is born, guilt is born with it! Or could it be that guilt is born first because being a woman is synonymous with guilt? We feel guilty for everything! We want to save the world with our kid, be the best professional, the best mom, the best wife, live in the most organized home....

Paradoxically, winning back their own lives is an important challenge, since they state that great effort is needed to reconcile the many concessions following the birth of their children.

Faced with this general panorama, the main consensual issue common to the three groups is related to the manner in which those interviewed redefined priorities since they (themselves) demand that attention be given to children, husbands, and caring for themselves, their homes and their work lives. What makes this issue even more complex is that the values and practices adopted by them in their everyday lives should not contradict the principles of freedom and feminine independence.

In relation to the hardships and doubts of each group surveyed, it is worth mentioning that anxieties and expectations are greatest among pregnant women, especially those who are pregnant for the first time. In addition to the changes to the body and psychology experienced during pregnancy, there is the feeling of being watched and being the target of others’ judgment, of distraction and fatigue at work, and of insecurity in relation to returning to everyday life after maternity leave. Pregnant women are tensely awaiting the results of each exam or medical appointment, since they need to confirm that everything is going well for themselves and their babies. Women who are pregnant for the first time in particular are afraid of birth and of losing children. They question themselves about what they will be like as mothers and, for this reason, seek to calm feelings of insecurity and inexperience by buying everything that is recommended for when their babies arrive. While doing this shopping, they are anxious because they do not know which consumer items are in fact necessary and which are superfluous:

Every time that I go to the doctor, I want to know if everything is okay, how the baby is developing....

I'm afraid of labor because it's a new situation and it scares me....

I can't keep still, I'm so anxious, I want the baby to come soon! I'm restless for the moment to go to the hospital to come soon, I want to see his tiny face!

At first, I felt very sleepy, I wanted to sleep; after the third month, the sleep passed and now I have a lot of energy: I like to tidy up the house for the baby's arrival, I'm going so fast that my husband can't stand me!

I wonder if I'll be able to handle being a mother?

I wonder if I'll need help from my mom and my mother in law?

I wonder if I'll know how to educate my child for the world? Children today are different and restless! Will I be able to establish boundaries? This makes me anxious!

In the first year of life, the total dependence of babies creates significant concern for mothers about health and the survival of their little ones. As a result, they complain of physical fatigue and emotional stress because of sleepless nights, crying, colic, fevers, feeding, and changing diapers that are part of a new and tough reality, especially for the first time mothers. The bond between mother and child is intense; they face the feeling of guilt and separation anxiety when they return to work, which is oftentimes the reason for crying, sadness, or frustration. Because it is hard to build a reliable support network, they frequently postpone returning to their personal, conjugal and professional routines:

I would get up to see if Leticia was breathing because I was afraid of asphyxia.... Then the doctor told me that she wasn't sleeping well because my anxiety was interrupting her sleep... If we sleep, we blame ourselves for being tired and not paying attention to the baby. Anxiety and guilt really mess us up! I'm here, but I'm looking at the clock and thinking of her!

The biggest problem is going back to work! You have to leave the person who you held on your lap for four months and for nine months in your belly... Staying with the baby is wonderful, but you need to be cold, turn your back, and leave....

When he turned two months old, that week I got a job and started working... I cried all night because I left him before I should have. He stays with my mom and grandma: he's very well taken care of! It's my problem!

I'm afraid to hire a nanny because we hear so many things and don't want someone replacing you. I leave (the baby) with my mother in law and my sister in law, but we always feel like only mom is capable of taking care of all of the child's needs.

I have the feeling that the home is a nest, so it's hard to take my child outside of the home because you're protecting... Mother is mother, my lap is the warmest ... the crib at home is the nicest!

For some mothers, mother-child symbiosis evokes concern with taking back their freedom and identity so that in the future mothers and children can have a relationship while maintaining their individualities:

I'm concerned with being myself, maintaining my identity and freedom; it's not just an issue of sanity, it's for her good too. I don't want to be an overbearing and controlling mom, I want to be a mom who is at her side, accompanying her... If I can't be me, she can't be her! I respect each phase: breast feeding, our bond is stronger and I am able to make professional concessions to dedicate myself to her...

When children reach the age of one to four, they begin a process of socialization that fosters an opening of the family to the outside world. These movements demand that mothers be real jugglers in order to return to their activities, yet they need to reconcile several roles (maternal, domestic, professional, etc.). Thus, many of them feel the need to slow down the rhythm of their lives and reassess their work scheme. There are many questions, concerns with their children's health remain, but at this stage the central issues are stopping breast feeding and introducing solid foods. Interviewees are also looking to isolate work problems from the family environment and strive to open a dialog with their kids and husbands in a respectful and patient manner:

Introducing food was so hard... Knowing what to offer and how to balance it... Especially because I don't like to cook...

If he doesn't eat, it seems like he'll be malnourished, I leave home with an apple and other foods in my purse! I'm afraid he'll faint and lose weight...

I'm trying to stop breastfeeding.... Everyone talks about how to breastfeed but no one told me how to stop.

What to do with my job: Keep working? Stop? Or change routine?

There are women who find a middle ground, others work as they did before and others change. I can't even imagine working as much as before: I'm trying to reconcile the routine of working at home, just part time.

Relationships with Husbands

When the kids are born, marriages undergo transformations. The need to reconcile different roles in a fast pace of living becomes even greater for women and caring for children becomes a priority for couples. In this sense, interviewees say that there needs to be a lot of understanding, partnership, and complicity in the lives of couples.

In their opinion, the male contribution has become increasingly important in dividing household chores and in caring for the children, just as the female contribution has become increasingly indispensable to support the family. According to them, with the arrival of children, the couple's relationship is strengthened and greater complicity is created between the couple, which then becomes a "team:"

Before, we were husband and wife.... But, after our son was born, we became Batman and Robin: a dynamic duo that administered our child's care.... Another type of partnership!

Children become the center of attention; however, great care is needed to maintain the intimacy of the couple, since free time is scarce. They feel tired, not very energetic, and without time "to cuddle." In these times, husbands need to be understanding and open to dialog:

We have to do somersaults with time.... We end up having one hour for everything... The children are the priority.... If we don't have husbands who are understanding and open to dialog, it's really hard!

We establish a day, which is Saturday night, to date.... I see women with zero libido and I don't want that! I don't want to be my husband's sister, so we go out, eat a pizza and this preserves our relationship....

In theory, interviewees said they demand that their husbands be more participative; this is why they have taking on a demanding position in their discourse.

Nevertheless, most of them agree that there are still “taboos” to be broken because “their husbands weren’t raised to be as participative as moms (wives) in caring for the kids,” so much so that they still need to participate more and take effective responsibility for the role of the father.

In practice, they act as if they were the starting lineup and treat their husbands as if they were on the bench. Among them there is a predominant impression that their husbands, or rather, the fathers only “help” while they, the mothers, are on the front lines of the family team. Paradoxically, most of those interviewed still do not agree with the ways in which their husbands care for the kids and place themselves in the position of those who do know how to do it, which ends up limiting and de-authorizing male contributions:

*My husband helps me a lot, but the mom has the initiative to do things....
The man doesn't have that intrinsic maternity!*

They have a different view of kids: at bed time, they want to throw the kid in the air and play! Moms know what to do!

There are still stereotypes that men are incapable and women think that only they can do it, so they prevent the men from participating... Often-times people think that their way is the right way, that idea of being super moms.... That is why I try to control myself when I notice I'm inhibiting his movements of wanting to participate....

Some women interviewed (from the group of moms to one- to four-year-olds) were the only ones who verbally expressed how hard it is to delegate:

At home, we're both there ... today I called asking if he put our son's coat in his backpack and he told me that he already knew the check list.... Even so, we still can't get used to delegating, it's hard! I went to a congress and left both kids with my husband. I called home twelve times a day and wanted to continue to coordinate everything from afar, keeping my place in the environment....

We blame ourselves for delegating, to the dad to give a bath.... If this happens, I give him less baths....

I don't blame myself, but I feel cornered out.... I feel rejected when he says that baths are with dad!

It's a contradictory attitude, when he calls mom I think it's great!

He has the same responsibilities as me ... but I feel overloaded anyway, because the woman puts herself out their differently at home, in the family, she wants to coordinate everything, supervise....

Throughout the discussions, we see that most mothers seek to preserve their domestic-maternal territory, which is why they control and coordinate everything that their husbands do and the support networks they build, even by telephone. At any rate, the conclusion for most was that men have come a long way by taking on this new image of dads “who help.” However, they think that the solution to this general feeling women have of being overloaded with tasks will only come with the next generations:

Men have improved a lot, there was evolution: my dad was caring, but he never changed a diaper.... Men today are a thousand times better!

Everything changed a lot! My dad and my husband are very different, there was a leap of six generations, but women are still really overloaded!

Self-image Drawings

In the second stage of the meetings, the projective technique of drawing self-image was applied to the three group discussions with the purpose of collecting non-verbal responses that could enrich the material collected through visual expression. Each participant made a drawing; next, each group set up a panel where these drawings were displayed and each woman interviewed told the rest what she had drawn through a verbal statement.

While the opinions initially verbalized in the debates tended to be nuanced and aligned with the ideological and visual contents perceived by the women interviewed in the advertisements that they selected; the drawings were capable of adding new responses, complementing the results of the study with the expression of quite interesting maternal emotions, contexts and feelings. An interesting and usual movement was seen in all of the groups: their verbal discourse tended to lean more towards the collective imaginary sphere, whereas in the drawings, the women interviewed were looser and projected idealizations, expectations or even more unconscious feelings on the drawings.

Group 1 (pregnant women). Topic of the drawings: “how I feel being pregnant.”

When we analyzed the pregnant women’s drawings, we could see there is a recurrent theme in them that is the feelings and emotions involved in the corporal transformation of the generations and the expectation for the birth of the baby, which includes a more profound load of dreams, expectations and desires.



Figure 1 (butterfly) : verbalization of the woman interviewed: “I made a butterfly which is me (going through the metamorphosis that is pregnancy)... I feel that I am at peace and very free ... exuberant and beautiful like a butterfly.”

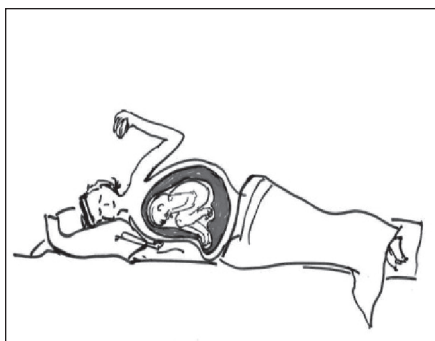


Figure 2 (pregnant woman sleeping): verbalization of the woman interviewed: “Me sleeping, because I have felt very tired since I’ve been pregnant.... And the baby is something that is happening, by himself and will be born....”



Figure 3 (stork): verbalization of the woman interviewed: “I made a stork holding a bag and thought about the overprotective mother that I will be, caring, really a mom and—since pregnancy is a phase that is important to me—I chose a beautiful and clear day.”

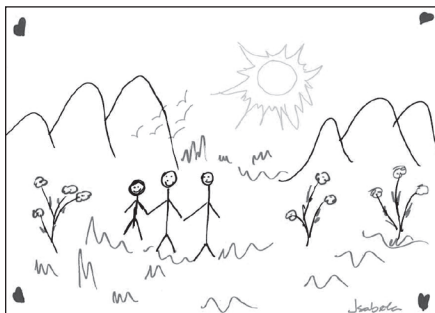


Figure 4 (my children and I): verbalization of the woman interviewed: “I drew myself with my children in a beautiful place ... I think a lot about quality of life and my project for the future is to live for a long time in Sao Paulo.... I think about slowing down and enjoying life with my kids.”

Group 2 (mothers of 0 to 12 month old babies) Topic of the drawings: "how I feel as a mother."

When looking at the drawings of the mothers of babies as a set, it seems that the figure of the mother is shown as a house and the source of life (in the metaphors of water, light and nest) that nurtures and protects the baby.

The metaphor of the nest that here arises as a flower tree with many roots drawn by a doctor:

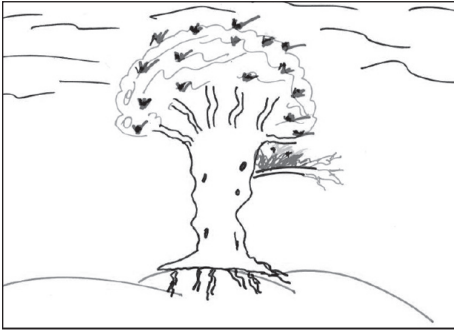


Figure 5 (nest): verbalization of the woman interviewed: "I feel like a tree: after Marina was born I flourished, I put down roots ... I became fortified and the birds have to do with the nest—they're my family, us three together.... My life became more colorful, with nuances, I feel happier!"

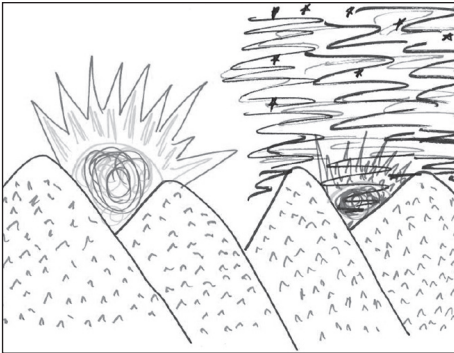


Figure 6 (day and night): verbalization of the woman interviewed: "The mother is like the sun in the child's life... I drew the sunrise and the sunset because I feel that I am present every day, providing human worth and comfort... The sun represents how I feel that I am necessary in my child's life."

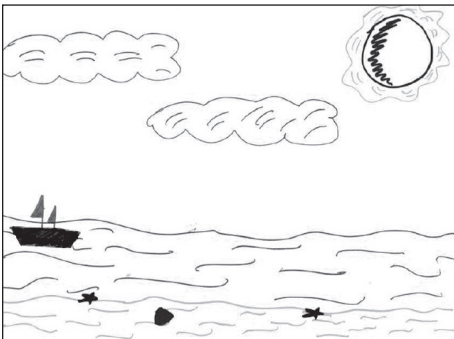


Figure 7 (boat at sea): verbalization of the woman interviewed: "The sea has a lot to do with mothers; it is calm when it needs to be and angry when it needs to be. If I need something for my child, I will go out destroying everything! Without water we cannot live, this is like without a mother we cannot live!"

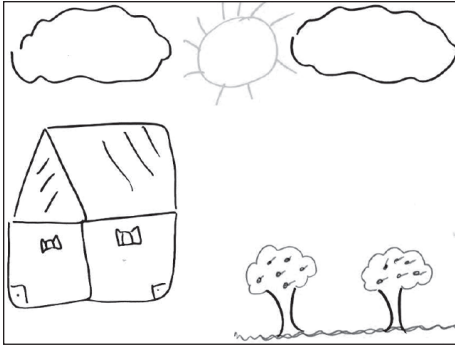


Figure 8 (home): verbalization of the woman interviewed: “Home is the safe port and the baby is in the belly.... Then it goes out into a big old house that is the world... The fact that I feel like a mom is special: the family is important and I don’t want to ever lose the comfort of this, and this is what I imagine for the being that I created.”

Group 3 (mothers of one- to four-year-old children): Topic of the drawings: “how I feel as a mother.”

At this group the mothers’ drawings can already be related to the movement of reestablishing familiar connections with the ‘outside’ world, outside of the mother-child dyad, as we can see in the drawing below of the road of surprises (fig. 9).



Figure 9 (the road of surprises): verbalization of the woman interviewed: “To be able to be a mother is really cool! It is a gift that you open along the way and there is love, a rock, a tear, a flower, night, day, a mountain... it is a winding path with pitfalls that makes you feel really fulfilled at each stage of development.”

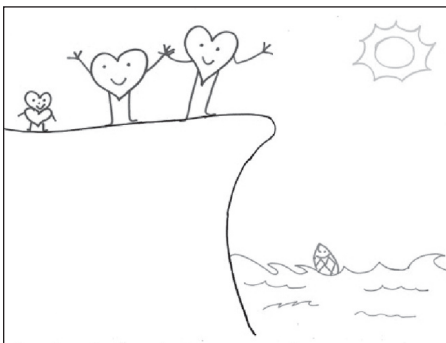


Figure 10 (the abyss and the fish): “There are several strong and conflicting feelings that involve motherhood and I put the family here: me, Cláudio (husband) and Gustavo (son); together at the edge of the abyss. He holds me and says, ‘Don’t throw yourself into the sea ... because we’re here!’”

In this phase, the child can begin to form her own subject and the figure of the father is apparent, as an integral part of the scenes, in the role of a mediator of conflicts, which can especially be seen in the abyss drawing with the mother wanting to throw herself in the water, the more protected child and the fish (which calls back to the Great Other of Lacan...) jumping out of the water and looking at what's happening, up there, in that familiar sphere.

Or in peripheral roles as in the next drawing (fig. 11), where the dad is surrounded by little hearts (Jorge) and the son (Luca) still occupies the center of the universe and the maternal heart:

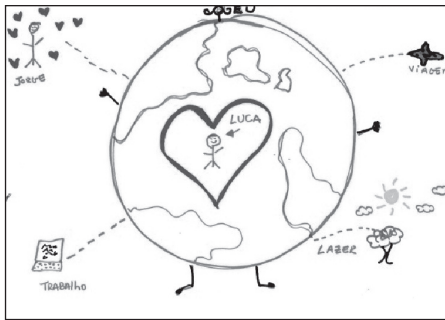


Figure 11 (the child as the center of the maternal universe): verbalization of the woman interviewed: “Luca as the love in the center of my universe, the other things that I like and that are part of my life and that become peripheral ... the love for my husband, work, travel, leisure....”

Another interesting aspect of this phase are the reconstructions of the mothers’ identities which take place through interactions with their children and husbands. In the drawings and verbalizations below, the way that the alterities and identities of the mothers, children (and now also parents) are built can be seen, using mutual exchanges:

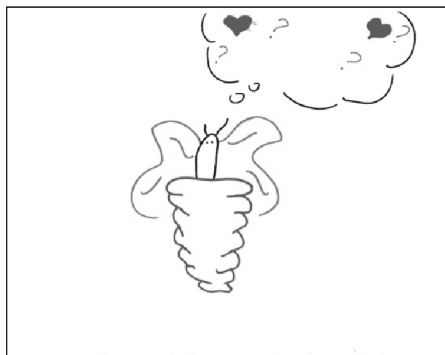


Figure 12 (the mother in metamorphosis): “I don’t know how to explain it; it’s a cocoon and I feel like I’m still inside of it. I don’t know how I am acting with my daughter in the world.... I have to find myself as a mother, I have grown a lot. I do everything for her and she has to adapt to me. I am in the maturing phase.”

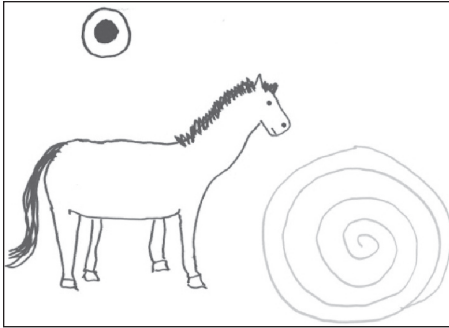


Figure 13 (the horse and the rolls): “Being a mother is learning to draw a horse, which is what he (my son) likes the most.... I still don’t have a lot of things to draw for my daughter, because she is nine months old. She is learning to crawl, so I made a red dot to represent her and a spiral (larger) that is me kind of rolled up...”

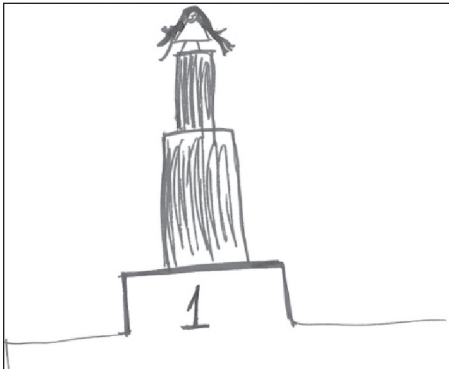


Figure 14 (the number 1): “Since I was pregnant, I started to like myself more because of the fact that I can create a person and after she was born I thought I was even greater; I started to like myself more, find myself more beautiful, thinner. Today I think that I am more special for having made Mariana.”

Advertisements They Like and Dislike

In stage three of the discussions, we set up two panels; one had the advertisements that the interviewees liked and the other had the advertisements they did not like. Next, we debated the main appeals and messages communicated (exploring the main points of what was pleasing or displeasing in each group of ads) and we also investigated the aspects of identification and distancing of those interviewed in relation to the pregnant women and mothers portrayed in the advertisements.

The group of advertisements that were liked

Some nuclear aspects were pointed to consensually (by the sample surveyed) such as pleasing aspects in the advertisements selected, namely: the presence of images and messages that recall the mother-child bond, the sensations and feelings of affection, love, being held, comfort, harmony, peace, serenity and milestone moments in the mother-child experience in the first year of life (the feedings, smiles, discoveries).

The advertisements that the mothers and pregnant women liked, basically show images of the physical contact between mothers and children in a harmonious climate, which only serve to reinforce the physical and emotional bond between them both. In addition to these images, the women interviewed liked the images of children smiling a lot—as these liked advertisements irradiate mothers or children smiling, which also recalls playfulness, development and typical child’s play (yet still under the mother’s watch).

If we could separate two emblematic campaigns that could sum up the main appeals, feelings and messages that were liked, they would certainly be the Johnson’s campaign—“*When a baby is born, a mother is born, too*” (which synthesizes the message and image of the mother and baby in harmony) and the Omo campaign—“*Dirt is good.*” (which synthesizes the incentive to play and stimulates mothers to fulfill this stimulating role in the development of the children). Products and brands that appeal to protection, care, security and stimulus in development and play are in general well received and recall sensations and feelings of joy and happiness.

The group of advertisements that were criticized

The central aspects of criticisms, as well as the main features that created discomfort in the group of advertisements that the women interviewed did not like are: the focus on the sale of products or, in their words, “*the very consumerist approaches,*” the absence of the mother-child bond (in the images and messages), and the lack of emotional appeal, in addition to the “*lifeless*” colors and images or the graphic layouts that were considered to be visually polluted.

Moreover, images of pregnant women or mothers that the women interviewed associated with unpleasant feelings, such as the physical discomfort of pregnancy, the fatigue and the out-of-shape post-pregnancy body (in the Yoga body-shapers advertisements) or the social demands that they be super women (in the Toyota advertisement) while also handling an everyday schedule full of multitasking.

Moms Admired in the Media

In the last stage of the group discussions, we did a survey of maternal figures who stand out in the media scenario with which those interviewed interact. The international celebrity most mentioned by the interviewees was Angelina Jolie (as well as Brazilian models and actresses). Cartoon characters that were most admired in their respective maternal roles were: Elastigirl/ Mrs. Incredible (mother from the Disney Pixar animated feature *The Incredibles*), Fran (mom of the *Dinosaurs* sitcom), and Fiona (in the episode when her and Shrek have a son).

In the opinion of those interviewed, Elastigirl or Mrs. Incredible (mother in *The Incredibles* cartoon):

It's the best way of defining mothers today: she has three kids and takes care of everyone! She is super protective, she's a mom who is all stretchy and can do it all... She takes care of everyone at the same time: a teen, a ten year old, and a little baby.... And the dialog between them is really cool!

The Analytical Mapping of the Representations of Pregnant Women and Mothers in the Advertisements Studied

Each advertisement group was analyzed as a set of images and each set revealed contexts connected to both their marketing objectives and advertising messages, as well as the socio-cultural ideals and values of the target audience to whom they are aimed.

Group 1: Pregnant Women

Pregnant women's images work as signs that evoke the readers' imagination about how their lives will be after the baby's birth. These advertisements are connected to new mothers' expectations and transformations.

John Berger stated advertising proposes to each of us that we change ourselves or our lives by buying something. Its general proposal is the transformation of ourselves or our lives by purchasing a product or its fascinating promise. This promise is associated to the 'would be' future buyer. It promises a kind of happiness that is seen from the outside, by the others. Hence, it provokes a state of envy (among those who have not got the product or promise announced) and it deals with social relations.

Advertisements with images of pregnant women contain: frequent focus on bellies and protuberant silhouettes; presence of pregnant women in static poses reiterates their condition of awaiting for the greatest moment (baby's birth) and hands on their wombs—directing the readers to look at the life that is growing there.

Many images and signs used to represent pregnant women in Brazilian advertisements are connected to ideals of purity and maternal dedication. These are strongly associated to the Virgin Mary and Christian cultural values: the pregnant body is frequently portrayed as a "sacred egg" of the new being that is coming into the world; contrary to representations of non-pregnant women or women in non-maternal roles (frequently in sexy, pagan and carnal poses).

Maria Tereza Maldonado states how important it is to examine the two core female representations within Christian tradition: Eve—the tempting and erotized woman, rarely portrayed as a symbol of motherhood. The eroticism

is associated with the concept of punishment and expulsion from paradise. Weak and frivolous, Eve becomes the symbol of sin and the temptation of women. And the Virgin Mary—who conceived without sin or sex. The notions of purity, charity, humility and obedience connect to a sacred maternal image, dissociated from the practice of sexuality.

Consequently, within Group 1, advertising messages promote a discourse of magic and donation, related to the divine grace of generating a child and giving birth to a baby. Brand and product promises are concentrated on delivering the necessary care and nutrition for the maternal body, home of the new life which is arriving soon.

Group 2: Mothers and Babies

After the baby's birth, mother and child enter a symbiotic phase, which Lacan called the Mirror Stage (or Looking Glass Phase). According to Vladimir Safatle:

The Mirror Stage aims to demonstrate how the EGO formation fundamentally depends on a process that is connected to the Constitution of the self body image. In the early months of a child's life, there is nothing like the I, with its functions of individualization and synthesis of experience.... Actually, the baby lacks from a mental scheme of a self body unit which can allow him to constitute his body as a totality, as well as, to operate distinctions between internal and external, between individuality and otherness. (27)

In most advertisements, mothers and babies look each other in the eye: images are set in closed plans, communicating feelings such as happiness, togetherness, peace, bond and harmony. Mothers appear totally available to care for their babies; however, in real life Brazilian mothers (must) return to work. A majority of them feel guilty and worried about leaving their children with other people (nannies, day-cares).

Full-time maternal availability becomes an imaginary and ideal condition represented in advertising. Once again, it reflects on the Virgin Mary and Christian ideals and values of purity and maternal dedication. Messages of protection, safety, comfort, care, bonding and affection insert consumer products in the symbiotic mother-child context. This discourse of happiness and togetherness does not include imperfections and everyday difficulties, which are very relevant experiences for contemporary mothers.

The Brazilian anthropologist Everardo Rocha states that advertisements edit realities; though inspired by daily lives, they produce idealized narratives:

In the world within the advertisement ... a similar life to ours is performed—real, day-to-day and identical. A drama that remembers life; however, in this case there is no pain, misery, anguish, doubts or human weaknesses; everything is simply perfect. The products have feelings, there is no death, happiness is absolute, the child smiles, the woman desires, the man is absolute and oldness is blessed.... A magical world.... (49-50)

Consequently, product purchases are associated with the reaffirmation of maternal tenderness, care and protection towards the child. It suggests that—besides the products—mothers bought together with them “extra doses of maternal love” and tranquility. As Nenê Dent justifies: “*your baby’s smile does not match pain.*”

Advertising appeals and strategies stimulate perception judgments, which drive interpreters to believe almost the following: “I love my son therefore I want the best for him. If this brand or product is concerned about my feelings, and it is endorsed by tests, I should choose them.”

Messages present a prescriptive discourse, which talks to mothers in a friendly and intimate tone of voice:

Nestlé: “Your son will take many lessons from childhood forever. Good eating habits for example. Nestlé Soups. Now no sugar added.”

Nuk: “The best choice for you and your baby. Nuk encourages breast-feeding, because it provides a deep sensation of well-being and tranquility to both mother and child. It allows great moments of bonding between the newborn and his mother, a relationship that is rich in emotions and sensations—touching, hearing, tasting and smelling. Therefore, Nuk has developed a product line which helps mother and baby to seize these magical moments of breast-feeding.”

A reciprocal understanding—between advertiser and consumer—is proposed in an emotional manner. As stated in Mônica’s diapers advert: “Don’t you feel the desire to protect him? We also cannot resist. Turma da Mônica newborn’s diaper. Ideally sized for those who have just arrived.”

Some verbal information confirmed visual information: inside Natura’s (Brazilian personal hygiene and beauty product brand) message “*fundamental love*”—there is the word “foundation” (basis, origin, structure, birth)—which refers to a love that starts since the birth and links mother with child, just like Johnson’s message: “*When a baby is born, a mother is born too.*” These brand names also communicate the idea of *filiation*: Natura (refers to Mother Nature) and Johnson’s (contains the idea of John’s son).

Group 3: Fathers in Scene

After the mother-child symbiosis period, the father integrates into the family scene. He is the third figure that breaks down this completeness between mother and child. According to Lacan, the father acts as the mediator in the mother-child relationship, he represents the law or the figure of Symbolic Order. The paternal interdiction introduces the subject into the culture; therefore, the culture in psychoanalysis is the domination of instinct, particularly sexual instincts. His law is the prohibition of incest, aiding transition from the natural to the cultural, and the establishment of the Symbolic order.

The appearance of father figures are not frequent in the studied advertising scenario: only a few advertisements show fathers within the scene, however they generally occupy secondary roles within the contexts illustrated. Fathers' images frequently appear behind mothers and babies, with their faces hidden or out of focus.

When brands and products integrate father figures into their communication, they tend to keep mothers as their key target market and do not speak directly or exclusively to fathers. Only a few advertisements speak directly to fathers.

As theorized by Lacan, the father introduces the child into the culture; in this sense, some campaigns show fathers next to their children, outside the home context. In Ortopé's advert, a father and his boy are outside in the rain, walking on the grass. Both are on a small sphere, which represents the outside world to the home micro-sphere (mother-child symbiosis' territory).

Group 4: Others

Within advertisements of Group 4, we have identified the following main selling appeals:

1. Brands and products as experts in motherhood (Alô Bebê)

In this subgroup, messages addressed to fulfill pregnant women's insecurities and lack of experience feelings are recurrent. The imaginary construction of pregnant women as inexperienced mothers, who are emotionally unstable, is very frequent in advertising and Brazilian society nowadays. In these advertisements, the maternal knowledge is then transferred to the advertiser, which offers a large assortment of indispensable products and accessories for the baby's birth and baby's shower.

2. Products and brands associated with better maternal performances (Toyota Corolla)

The visual scene: A thin woman, in front of a Toyota, with a beautiful landscape in the background, where a wonderful beach house indicates status, success and sophistication. The text in the advertisement states:

The Corolla Fielder is perfect to your daily routine: take the children to school, go to work, go to the gym and enjoy the weekend. Its internal room and its excellent drivability offer more safety and comfort for you and all passengers.... Go to a Toyota Dealer and let a Corolla Fielder be part of your life.

A “Wonder Woman” is personalized in Toyota’s protagonist: the copy states that she takes the children to school, goes to work and to the gym; she looks elegant and she has an expensive car and a wonderful beach house; she seems to have achieved financial independence and professional success.... Moreover, she seems able to manage her personal care and maternal roles, which is very difficult in the daily routine of real mothers’ lives.

3. Focus on products functional attributes and benefits (Dermodex and Granado):

In these cases, there is no integration among products, mothers and children. The advertisements lack from emotional appeals and their messages are focused only on communicating products’ functional attributes and benefits:

You have requested, so we have provided you with it. New Dermodex Prevent: now in plastic packaging.

Care and softness in your baby’s bath. Now with relaxing action.

Granado. The care and protection that your baby deserves.

4. Mothers and brands in supportive roles to children’s growth and playing experiences (Havaianas, Monica’s diapers, OMO and Nestlé Ninho Fases Milk)

Frequent advertising approaches encourage mothers to further children’s growth and development and employ brands and consumer products within this context. In these cases, mothers’ images are less physically linked with children (vs. Group 2: mothers and babies). Children are shown having fun, while mothers’ role is to support them in exploring the world through playful and growth experiences with freedom, under those brands’ guardianship. An example is detergent OMO’s campaign: “Dirt is good.” This positions the OMO brand like a close friend who says, “Hey, mom, relax! Let your kids enjoy life in peace. Don’t worry! We will take care of his laundry for you!”

Conclusion

Through empirical research, we have found that at the same time that there

is a common universe in the collective imaginary of the phases studies, which embraces the topic of “being a mother today” in a consensual and more wide ranging manner, there are distinct imaginary and emotional universes and characteristics of each one of the stages studied, or rather, of pregnancy, of the first year of life, and of the period of one to four years of age of the children.

It is worth noting that the opinions raised in verbal debates tends to align with the ideological and image-based content of the advertisements, while the drawings made based on the themes (“how I feel as a pregnant woman/mother”) were capable of providing us with non-verbal answers that complemented the study results. These drawings drew back the curtain on an interesting panorama of emotions, contexts, and feelings exchanged between mothers and children. An interesting and common movement was seen in all of the groups: the verbal discourse tended to move in the symbolic sphere, reproducing socio-cultural values and ideas, while in the drawings those interviewed were given free rein, projecting their dreams, expectations for the future, and even unconscious feelings. This allowed for a richer and broader imaginary of pregnancy and motherhood than the scenes (re)produced in advertising.

As we have learnt in empirical research, pregnant women told of paradoxical emotional experiences that combine feelings of plenty with insecurities and doubts. For these interviews, the corporal and psychological metamorphosis caused by pregnancy creates substantial anxiety and expectations. Thus, the advertisements seek to offer answers to her insecurities through messages such as the one conveyed in the ad for products by Gerare (beauty and personal hygiene products)—“you care for a life and we take care of you.”

In relation to advertorial images of pregnant women, oftentimes we can see traces of sanctity and purity in them, which allude to mythical signs, imbued with socio-cultural values that are fundamental to Christian culture, containing the Virgin Mary as a maternal reference and a model to be followed.

When their children are 0 to 12 month old babies, those interviewed experience a phase of mother-child symbiosis, which includes intense discoveries and daily progress. Nevertheless, these mothers suffer upon returning to work and blame themselves for leaving their children under the care of others. At this time they feel fragile and anguished. Their children, who are so small and dependent, require them to slow down, but this is not possible. That is where the brands come in: as advisers and experts in maternity here and as accomplices and good companions there, as stated by Turma da Mônica diapers: “Don’t you want to protect? We also couldn’t resist.”

Several advertisements, such as Johnson’s and Natura’s, portray the bond and the harmony between mother and child, showing maternal figures who are completely available to take care of their babies, while in real life mothers go back to work feeling guilty and anguished at leaving their children. As a

result, this image of selfless maternal availability is much more highlighted in the imaginary built into the advertisements than in real life, and thus promotes a discourse of happiness and togetherness between mother and child, which is counter to the imperfections and hardships of everyday life.

Another noteworthy observation is that the majority of the advertisements analyzed seem to be directed at first time mothers. According to a report published (in August 2008) in *Veja*, a Brazilian magazine, a Ministry of Health study found that the fertility rate in Brazil, or rather, the average amount of children for each woman in Brazil, reached 1.8 in 2008, versus 5.8 (children per woman) in 1970. This article also highlighted the fact that 57 percent of Brazilian women currently work outside the home, versus 18 percent in 1970.

Finally, the ludic appeal is a widely used approach in these advertisements to reach mothers of older children (from one to four years of age) who have already gone back to their routine of work, which has resulted in a physical distancing from their children. In this context, advertising encourages mothers to foster their children's development, advising them to encourage their children to be stimulated in order to freely discover the world, provided it is under the watchful eye of these brands.

However, we should be aware is that consumption has been inserted into this context as an expression of childhood individuality, desires and discoveries, when in fact, consuming is a complex act that affects various collective dimensions of our everyday lives in contemporary societies (economics, culture, social and environmental responsibility, etc.).

It is important to underscore that in this movement of distancing between mother and child, there is no synthesis of values for mothers to make a new ideal to be achieved. What actually happens is a true accumulation of new and old socio-cultural ideals and values. Regarding the maternal images that advertisers and the media transmit, the models of famous mothers to be followed are able to combine dedication to children, pleasure, sensuality, aesthetic beauty, physical form, elegance, professional success, and conjugal happiness. In other words, they are enviable and powerful women! Most likely it is for these reasons that the Toyota (Corolla Fielder) advertisement bothered our interviewees so much: its protagonist synthesizes and incorporates this accumulation of ideals better than any other advertising figure studied.

Also noteworthy are the meanings associated with the Elastigirl (heroine of the Disney animated feature *The Incredibles* who is held up as the ideal contemporary mother by those interviewed). According to the Brazilian psychoanalyst Maria Helena Fernandes, throughout the history of humanity, the transformation of ideals usually resulted in the abandonment of ancient interests based on the discovery of new interests and needs. However, for women, the changing times have brought an *increased variety* of ideals, so much so that

women today are confronted with a wide spectrum of ideals to be met and achieved. For Fernandes, in the trajectory of women, the ideals of sanctity and beauty are joined by the ideals of success, hedonism and happiness which are so present in our contemporary culture:

Stretched between an identification that is passive and maternal and another that is active and phallic, women are trying to deal with the excess characterizing the demands of their everyday lives. The result is a true accumulation that requires an *elasticity* that before was not even possible of being imagined.

In our master's thesis research, we learned that in contemporary Brazil, advertisers and the media in general spread this excess of ideals which synthesize an *elastic woman* who can do it all; in the meantime, what really happens is Brazilian women become pregnant, then experience the fusional stage with their children, and then return to duty with a "mission impossible" to accomplish, which is chasing after this ideal of the Elastic Mother.

When ideals demand too much, they can result in fatigue, frustration, feelings of guilt, and difficulty delegating. In our analysis, part of the advertorial signs used to represent pregnancy and maternity are old fashioned. In real life, soft movements towards a hybridism and complementarity of maternal and paternal functions are already noticeable in Brazilian family relations. There is a slight interchange or melding between maternal and paternal figures and functions. Perhaps advertising should start by discussing this issue using humor, giving mothers the chance to fail, at least a little, and giving fathers the opportunity to participate more—inside and outside—of the scenarios projected. Elastic mothers need to breathe!

After all, after the fusional moments, these mothers restart journeys that renew their alterities and identities with each passing day. This involves mutual exchanges between mothers, children and fathers. Being a mother, as one of our interviewees stated, is like a road full of surprises; in her words: "it is a gift that you open along the way and there is love, a rock, a tear, a flower, night, day, a mountain... it is a winding path with pitfalls that makes you feel really fulfilled at each stage of development." All of this requires negotiations with themselves, with their husbands and companions, with their children, with their bosses, and even with the messages from the media and advertisements, because the "elasticity" of any woman can break at any time!

This article was translated (from Portuguese to English) by Sarah Jeanne Johnson and Carla Schiavetto.

¹Access to the master's thesis: "Pregnant women, mothers, and advertising communications: a semiotic analysis of representations of pregnancy and motherhood in contemporary print media advertising" complete with all of the texts and images and in its original Portuguese language is available online through the following link: <http://www.sapientia.pucsp.br//tde_busca/arquivo.php?codArquivo=10753>.

²George Gaskell is a professor of Social Psychology and the director of the Methodology Institute of the London School of Economics and Political Science. He wrote, along with Martin Bauer, who is also a professor of Social Psychology and Research Methodology at the London School of Economics and Political Science, one of the works on which our empirical research is based: *Pesquisa Qualitativa com texto: imagem e som: um manual prático*. The original edition of this book in English is: *Qualitative Researching with Text, Image and Sound: a Practical Handbook* (London: Sage, 2000).

³The author is referring to both the individual qualitative interviews as well as the qualitative interviews in groups, which are also termed in the qualitative research area as "group discussions" or "focus groups."

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