The Future World Champions

Contemporary European Ideals for Upbringing Seen through Advertisements

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The Future World Champions?  
Contemporary European Ideals for Upbringing Seen through Advertisements  
by Malene Gram

Abstract
The general European discourse of childhood presents children as innocent and vulnerable, but within this discourse different images of ‘the perfect child’ exist. What ideas about upbringing and future adults do European parents have?

In this paper ideals for upbringing are studied through French, German and Dutch advertisements for children’s products. The sample consists of 290 advertisements collected in the period 1995-1998 from women’s magazines, and the analysis consists of a content analysis and a qualitative analysis of typical advertisements. Different interpretations of play, intellectual development and well-being are central.

The advertisements are analysed for what they highlight as “good” for children. Especially remarkable is it that development, growth and stimulation of the intellect of the child are in focus in the French advertisements, and less well-being, love and play as in the German advertisements. In the German advertisements “playful learning” is frequently mentioned, highlighting both the creative and the learning aspect, which seems to be typical for the German perception of what is good for children. In the Dutch advertisements focus is on the physical development of the child, too, and that the child should have fun and only very little on the intellectual development.

Within Europe significant differences exist with regard to what ”good” childhood is and what the results of the upbringing should be. The results reflect different perceptions of ideal upbringing and different values, which might explain difficulties in co-operation among European adults e.g. in EU settings when it comes to questions of welfare and schooling.

Introduction
In the general Western discourse of childhood, children are presented as being innocent, vulnerable, passive and dependent of adults (Zelizer, 1985; Qvortrup, 1990; Young, 1990; Cunningham, 1995; James et al. 1998; among others). As Qvortrup (1990) describes it children tend to be perceived as human becomings rather than as human beings. The reason for this, Qvortrup argues, is that the aim of socialisation is to bring up every child as an effective participant in production, as a good spouse and a loving parent. In recent decades a different and more active view of the child has found its way into much research, offering a more adequate perception of children’s role in society. The “old” view is, however, still dominant within public perceptions of children. Young (1990) points this out: “The child is seen as progressing from a state of vulnerability to sophistication, from an earlier lack of skills to a later possession of abilities” (Young, 1990, p. 41). This common Western way of perceiving children naturally implies consequences in terms of perceptions of how children, seen as vulnerable and innocent, passive and dependent, should be treated and socialised.

1 This paper is based on a chapter (Advertisements for Products for Children) in my Ph.D. dissertation “Grounds to Play. Culture-specific Ideals in the Upbringing of Children in France, Germany and the Netherlands” (Aalborg University, 2000). In the Ph.D. dissertation the analysis of ideals is approached more broadly with an analysis of school and family aspects as well.
The view of children as innocent, passive and in the need for protection is, however, a relatively new way of perceiving children as pointed out by a number of researchers starting with Ariès in the 1960s, and it is a perception which stems from a number of events and developments within the Western world such as romanticism, industrialisation and the creation of nations (Cunningham, 1995; Hendrick 1997 among others). This indicates that the perception of childhood is closely linked to the society and culture in which it exists. Qvortrup writes “we […] know from historical studies and studies in the third world that children’s conditions vary widely from one type of society to another. It is therefore a plausible thesis that childhood has different meanings in different cultures and societies” (Qvortrup, 1987, p. 6).

It is the aim of this paper to take a closer look at the contemporary European image of childhood and at the variety of ideas of good childhood and good socialisation which exists within the common Western frame of ideas on childhood. It is my argument that the content of a “human becoming” and also a “human being” is defined locally and even nationally. As my three case examples I have chosen France, Germany and the Netherlands: three European countries; almost neighbours in Europe, having shared many of the same historical events and developments, yet each having their own priorities and ideas about good childhood and good upbringing. In order to examine this, I have chosen to analyse advertisements. I have especially concentrated on advertisements for products for children, aimed at adult buyers. In these advertisements, the ideals of the upbringing of children are a central issue; advertisers play on the fact that most parents want to bring their children up the “right” way.

Whether or not advertisements reflect the culture in which they have been created is an issue that has been discussed by several researchers over the last decades as advertising has gradually become more and more present in society. On the relation of advertising and society, the French Professor Geneviève Cornu writes:

“La publicité est un fait de civilisation majeur, à la fois produit et reflet de notre société […] La publicité porte des messages conscients et inconscients ; au-delà des contraintes du marketing, elle est un lieu où s’expriment les tendances profondes d’une époque, les angoisses, les mythes et la sensibilité modernes. L’analyse de l’image peut se comparer à un travail d’ethnologue attentif à découvrir dans les productions humaines des traces de la vie sociale et du travail de l’imagination” (Cornu, 1991, p. 11).2

Wiles et al. present two different attitudes towards this in recent research (Wiles et al, 1995). First representing the sceptical attitude, Lazier and Kendrick note, especially concerning the way gender roles are presented in advertisements, that “because advertising’s role is to sell, rather than to portray the realities of life, it is a constantly biased misrepresentation” (Wiles et al., 1995, p.36). Wiles et al. notice that even though a very high percentage of women in Sweden work outside the home, and even though Sweden has one of the highest percentages in the world of women in their Parliament (33%), less than 10% of advertisements with women in Swedish magazines show women working. Advertisements have been criticised for being reactionary in

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2 “The advertisement is a major object of civilisation, both product and reflection of our society […] The advertisement carries conscious and unconscious messages; besides the constraints of marketing, it is a place where the deep lying tendencies of an epoch are expressed, the fears, the myths and the modern sensibility. The analysis of the image can be compared with the work of the ethnographer, eager to reveal traces of social life and imaginative work in human production.”
some respects, not giving an up-to-date picture of the society in which they are created. The other attitude presented in the article is in line with Cornu’s opinion:

“that advertising is simply a mirror of the existing values and traits of a culture. It is a source of information about values, beliefs, style and life activities of a culture. As a form of cultural expression, it is a mirror of social conditions which exist” (Wiles et al., 1995, p.37).

In the search for new trends and the latest changes in lifestyles, the analysis of advertisements is possibly not always the right path to choose. In this study, however, I work with ideals that do not change from year to year, and I have found that the advertisements are an interesting “relic” to study. Belk et al. argue that content analysis of advertisements has been used successfully to depict the use of racial images in advertising, or the perception of the elderly shown in advertisements, among other themes, and “[t]hese macro applications illustrate that content analysis can be a useful research tool with which to understand consumption values through time and in different cultures” (Belk et al., 1989, p. 459).

Dominique Bouchet (Bouchet, 1983, p.71) maintains that advertisers are interested in feedback, and for this reason advertisements are dynamic. The advertisement does not have to be conservative, but one should not expect either that it reflects the society in which it is created as would a real mirror. The question is, then, what kind of a mirror is the advertisement? Advertisements reflect an ideal world, not the real world. For example, in advertisements for children’s products, none of the many children - who are shown in almost all of the advertisements - are crying. The advertisers for these products are appealing to parents by showing them how the advertisers think parents would want their children and the relations between children and parents to be. The advertisers concentrate on the values they think parents consider important in their relation with children. The advertisers pass the values and images on; their source material is the world around them, which they make use of in order to present a given product.

John F. Sherry (in Jean-Umiker Sebeok (ed.), 1987, p. 448) also sees advertisements as a reflection of culture, comparing them with rituals: “Advertising can be understood as a [...] ritual in which shared values are dramatized”. That there actually is a close relation between society and advertisements becomes clear when we see a dated advertisement. It reflects another period: different dress codes, different argumentation, etc. Still one should not forget what kind of a mirror the advertisement is, which Brochand and Lendrèvie remind us of:

“La publicité est optimiste. C’est dans notre monde, surchargé de communication la seule qui n’annonce que des bonnes nouvelles, qui ne voit que le bon côté des choses et qui écrit des contes de fées pour supermarchés. La publicité voit le monde avec des lunettes roses.[...] La publicité c’est à la fois toutes les modes, toutes les aspirations et toutes les contradictions d’un moment. [...] il n’appartient pas à la publicité d’être un miroir vériquique réaliste et sans complaisance d’une société. [...] Elle a une fonction cosmétique. Mais maquiller, ce n’est pas tromper, c’est embellir une réalité” (Brochand and Lendrèvie, 1993, p.10).

3 The main role of the advertisement is to sell, not to reflect society.
4 “The advertisement is optimistic. It is, in our world overloaded with communication, the only thing that only brings good news, that only looks on the bright side of things and that writes fairy tales for supermarkets. The advertisement
In this context, I wish to uncover the differences and similarities in ideals related to bringing up children in France, the Netherlands and Germany. I am not trying to find out how children are actually brought up, but how the parents think they should be brought up. For this reason, I believe analysis of advertisements for children’s products can be a useful tool.

The research questions of this paper are: which themes are recurrent in ads from France, Germany and the Netherlands in ads for children’s products and what is highlighted as being “good” for children? Where is the child perceived to be on the scale between a human becoming and a human being in the three contexts?

Methodology
In order to examine the ideals that marketers and advertising agencies use when they market children’s products to parents, I have analysed several advertisements from French, German and Dutch women’s magazines. These magazines were chosen because this is where products for children are promoted. It can be argued that these magazines are only read by women and thus not representative of any national norms. However, there are some important differences between the three countries in the way the advertising agencies try, in the advertisements, to appeal to women, and it is my argument that the creators of the advertisements seek to appeal to common ideas about children in the cultures, and that these differences thus reflect not only what is perceived to be women’s ideal images of children but also national representations.

While content analysis has proved useful for the analysis of the manifest content of advertising texts, it is less effective for analysing the advertising image and the more subtle meanings of advertising texts. In order to study the advertisement as a whole, it is therefore necessary to combine content analysis with semiotic analysis (Leiss et al., 1990; Gram and Niss, 1998). In this study a combination of traditional content analysis and semiotics was used. Details of the analysis are explained below.

French Advertisements
In order to examine the values that French manufacturers of children’s products use to sell their products to French parents, I analysed 100 advertisements from the French women’s magazines (Femme Actuelle, Enfant magazine, Prima, Avantages, Familii and Parents). The products marketed in these magazines for children are: food, vitamins, candy, toothpaste, sun lotion, study books for the vacation, shampoo, toys, etc. I have grouped the advertisements into 4 product categories (food: 53; toys (including books, children’s music and computer programmes): 15; child and baby care (lotion and medicine): 12 and other products (diapers, clothes, holidays, insurances, car seats, etc.): 20). Of course, special values are attached to food in opposition to nappies. I search for the general ideals and values presented as the goal of upbringing and thus looking for what the preferable condition for the child is presented as being.

In the French advertisements in the sample, children are the main actors (in 87 advertisements out of 100), then women (in 17 out of 100) and finally men (in 5 out of 100). One expert man is shown. By “expert man” I mean a man who is presented as being guarantor for the product, often dressed in a white coat. The general values that are emphasised are “development” (mentioned in

sees the world through rose-coloured spectacles. [...] The advertisement is at the same time all the moods, all the aspirations and all the contradictions of a moment. [...] it is not the task of the advertisement to be a truly realistic mirror without indulgence. [...] It has a cosmetic function. But to use make-up, that is not to cheat, it is to make reality more beautiful”.

The numbers mentioned are summed up in a table after the analysis of the three national samples.
17 ads) and “growth” (14) – physically and intellectually. “Stimulation of the child intellectually” (9) and that the first years are decisive for the future of the child (6). The child should get “énergie” (13) from the products to “faire fonctionner leur tête et leurs jambes à plein régime” (“make their head and legs function at full steam”) as one advertiser puts it. Tenderness between parent and child is strongly emphasised in many of the photos, and that the child is in a nutritional balance (“équilibre”: 7) is also important. “Jeu” (“play”) is mentioned 6 times, “jouer” (“playing”) 4 times, “amusant” (“funny”) appears 3 times. Security and safety are mentioned respectively 5 and 4 times. Creativity appears 3 times. Imagination is not mentioned.

Looking at advertisements in French women’s magazines, the underlying values of success in school for children and parents’ ambitions for their children very clearly shine through. A typical sentence in these advertisements is “donne toutes les chances” (“gives every chance”) in future for the intelligence, the teeth, etc. “Eveil”, a word that is often used about children and the way of bringing them up, which can be translated into the English word “stimulation”, also occurs frequently. The brain is mentioned directly (“cerveau” (“brain”) (3), “bon développement cérébral” (“a good development of the brain” (2)) and the “intelligence” (3) or the “développement intellectuel” is also an issue in the advertisements. Why would the French marketers mention the brain? If the ad is considered through Roland Barthes’ word couple denotation (primary straightforward meaning) and connotation (secondary symbolic meaning, Barthes, 1964), it could be said that the brain denotes an organ in the head which is used to think with. The development of the brain connotes how the child will manage in school and a good development of the brain connotes success in school. This refers to a common belief in the idea that the good life is based on success in school, which is very strong in the French society.

The concern with the intellect can be seen already in the advertisements for products for the youngest children, as in the advertisement from *Enfant magazine* March 1995, where Danone promotes its little yoghurts “Petit Gervais Croissance”. Two thirds of the advertisement is a photo of 8 toy bricks built up to create a little wall. “50 % des enfants réussissent ce test à 2 ans. Avec 2 mains, 10 doigts, des acides gras essentiels et du fer” (“50% of children succeed in this test when they are 2 years old. With two hands, 10 fingers, important fatty acids and iron”), it says in the headline. In the text below the bricks, the product is shown and presented as being important for the harmonious development of the brain and the nervous system of the child. On the denotative level the statement “50% succeed” signifies that half of the 2-year-olds can build this wall. On the connotative level the signification goes beyond the brick wall and connotes the school system where approximately 50% of the children fail to pass the “bac” every year. As it is an unhappy situation not to pass, one would want one’s child to be among the succeeding 50%. The ad’s scenery is inscribed in the common French perception of the importance of school.

Already for the 2-year-olds, Danone presents a test that half of all children fail to pass. This clearly indicates the will to stimulate the physical and intellectual capacities of the child in expectation of future tests that have to be passed (at school).

An even more explicit example of this is the vitamins “Lecitone jeune” produced by Yves Ponroy: “supervitaminé. Pour soutenir 8h de cours et mieux réussir du primaire à l’université” (“supervitamins. To endure 8 hours of school with a better result from primary school to university” from *Femme Actuelle*, February 1994). A teenager is shown, pencil in hand, ready to learn, and various graphs and a table “prove” that the concentration of the children is getting better, that they are getting less agitated in class and - last but definitely not least - their grades are getting better. These two examples would never occur in e.g. Danish magazines, where it is
taboo to talk in this undisguised way about ambitions on behalf of one’s children. In the Danish context collective representations of the good life are different. In France, réussir – meaning succeeding in school – is a magic word. Having just a normal child is not the goal in France. Standard is not enough. As Playschool claims in its advertisement for toys “La plupart des jouets sont conçus pour un enfant qui s’appelle Standard” (“The majority of toys are created for a child whose name is Standard”), and Playchool offers more.

The text is often expressed in a tone indicating that the child is something very special. In some advertisements – often for the smallest children – the language is very childish, even baby language: “Maman, je veux Rémond” (“Mom, I want Rémond”), combined with another text in a more scientific language. In this way the text manages to communicate both the points of view of children and of “scientists”. Of course the copy is supported by beautiful photos of healthy and happy children.

The phenomena that are highlighted as being negative, are bacteria, stomach problems, allergy, tiredness, television and too many sweets but also the risk of not having enough energy when at school: the risk of having “l’esprit vides lors de l’interro de maths” (“an empty head when questioned in the maths class”), so that the child cannot perform. In contrast to the other two countries in the survey, the text in the French advertisements do not really focus on the “without” (without additives, without sugar). The French producers are proud to announce that their products are “enrichie en” (“enriched with”) extra vitamins, minerals, iron, or flavours (baby milk with biscuit flavour is one example).

German Advertisements
In order to analyse the values highlighted by German marketers in the advertisements for products for children being purchased by adults, I have examined 100 advertisements collected in the period from June 1995 till February 1997. The magazines from which the advertisements have been chosen are Eltern, Familie & Co, Eltern for Family and Leben und Erziehen. The number of advertisements in the four product groups are: food (25), toys (45), child and baby care (17) and other (18).

As in the Dutch and French advertisements, the advertisements in the German magazines for products for children are very colourful. Many children appear in the advertisements, demonstrating how to use the products or just being there, smiling or “acting naturally”, but of course not crying. The main actors in the German advertisements are the children (in 71 advertisements out of 100) and then women (in 24 out of 100) and then men, who are rarely actors in these advertisements (in 8 out of 100).

“Mami”, “Mutter”, “die beste Mami der Welt”, “Mutterliebe” (“Mum”, “the best Mum in the World”, “Mother love”): are all words which emphasise the mother and child relationship. Especially in Germany, where there are still very traditional gender roles, women are often the main carers of children and therefore also often responsible for purchasing children’s products. The fathers in the advertisements are for example seen on their yachts having fun with their children, while mothers are seen feeding and grooming their children. A few men are shown - not in the father role - but as the expert (the doctor or the scientist in a white coat).

Healthy, strong, happy children are often shown in cute or funny situations. For the smallest children the main arguments in the advertisements are the close relation between mother and child. The responsibility of parents is highlighted; buy this, do that: “Aus Liebe für Ihr Kind” (“Out of love for your child”). Many photos show mothers and babies or children very close to each other. “Liebe” (love) is mentioned 15 times in the advertisements. “Schutz” (“protection”) is
mentioned 8 times. There is a focus on “development” (“Entwicklung” is mentioned 7 times) and “health” (“Gesundheit”) is mentioned 7 times.

For the older children, intellectual challenges and school are themes of great importance. A number of the advertisements clearly shows that German society – as the French – is a competitive society. “Flaschen spielen gar nicht erst mit” (“Idiots/Bottles are not in the game”) “...die bleiben auf der Reservebank!”, (“they stay outside the game, waiting to come in and play”) is said in an advertisement from Tetra Pak. This is an advertisement for juice in cartons, and the word “Flaschen” both refers to bottles and to idiots. This can be interpreted as focussing on the elite (in sport, here): “Genau das Richtige für ein starkes Team” (“Exactly the right thing for a strong team”). The strong clever kids are in the game, the others are not. On the denotative level “Flaschen” refers to glass bottles which are not convenient to have in the sports field. Because of the double meaning of “Flaschen”, this also means that idiots are not in the game. This can be interpreted to connote that only the clever kids are in the game which on a symbolic level can be seen to refer to that children are placed in society according to intellectual skills.

“Die künftige Weltmeister” (“The future world champion”) ad for Moltex nappies (showing a boy with a football, a girl applauding in the background) is also focussing, in a more humorous way, on winning: German society is a place where you strive to win, where it is not enough to be on the “Reservebank”. In the advertisements, numerous arguments focus directly at school. “Logische Denken”, “ein kluger Kopf”, “Motivation”, “Konzentration”, “Lehrvermögen”, “Ergänzung zur Schule”, “Karriere”, “Zukunft” (“logical thinking”, “a clever head”, “motivation”, “concentration”, “ability to learn”, “getting ready for school”, “career”, “future”) are all words that point in the direction of success at school.

Läufer markets equipment for the child’s desk (pens, pencils, etc.) in a very colourful design. “Spielend lernen beginnt damit daß der Kinderschreibtisch nicht wie “der Ernst des Lebens” aussieht” (“Playful learning starts with the child’s desk bearing no ressemblance to “the seriousness of life””), even though – it seems – this is where it is decided whether the child will get “erfolgreich durchs Leben” (“successfully through life”). A successful life is dependent on success at school. Still “Schule hin, Schule her, das Spielen darf nicht zu kurz kommen” (“School here, school there, it must not be at the cost of playing”) the toy company Haba claims. Play also appears to be important.

“Spielen” (play) is the single most used word in the German advertisements (mentioned 24 times) followed by “Spaß” (“fun”; mentioned 16 times). Learning in a playful way (“spielend lernen”) is mentioned 9 times. Creativity (mentioned 3 times), imagination (6 times) and the German word “basteln”, which is a word meaning working with e.g. paper and scissors, with glue, making something, is often used about what children do, and this could have to do with the importance of creativity and play. Being the homeland of industrial toys, having had important pedagogues like Fröbel emphasising the importance of play in the development of children, it is perhaps no wonder that play is a central value in German society. The importance of play also appeared already in the 18th Century in the advice from doctors on upbringing and is an integrated part of the German school system today. As mentioned the second most used word is “Spaß”, and the activity or the product must be “aufregend” (“exciting”; 5 times), or “spannend” (“exciting”; 5), give room for “Abenteuer” (“adventure”; 3) and “austoben” (“doing wild activities”; 2). The child should learn - but in a playful way, and still find the activities “lustig” (“amusing”; 7) and have “Erlebnisse” (“Experiences”; 4). For the products, “natürlich” (natural; 11) and “ökologisch/biologisch” (ecological/biological; 4) are arguments that are also used frequently. That the product is natural (whatever that is) seems to be important. The child is often shown
naked or only in a nappy in many of the advertisements, which could be seen as emphasising the “natural” aspect of the products.

**Dutch Advertisements**

In order to analyse what values and ideals that are highlighted by Dutch manufacturers and advertising agencies, 90 advertisements from Dutch women’s magazines were content analysed (from *Margriet*, *Ouders*, *Kinderen*, *Junior World* and *In Verwachting*). The Dutch advertisements differ significantly from those of the other two countries in the survey. They are harder to find, there are fewer of them (this is the reason why I had to make do with 90 advertisements in the Dutch sample). It is a smaller country with fewer people and this means fewer resources for advertisements in national magazines. Regarding style and content, Dutch advertisements were less emotional than the other advertisements in the survey. The number of advertisements in each product type category is: food: 16; toys: 19; child and baby care: 16 and other: 39. The actors in these advertisements are, not surprisingly, also mainly children (78). They are shown both as serious and happy, and in some cases they are shown in adults’ clothes to stress how small they are even though they are growing. Women are the second biggest group of persons in the advertisements (20) and seven men appear.

In Dutch advertisements it is stressed that the child is growing (9) and that this is a very important task that should be given the best circumstances. For this reason he or she must eat “well” (4): nutritious, quality food and drink. The child should be protected (his or her teeth, skin, whole person) “beschermen” (“protect”: 6) and “veilig” (“safety”: 7) are important issues. The child should have “pleasure” (9), “adventure” (8), “fun” (7), “surprises” (6) and have the possibility of “discovering the world” (5). “Play” (4), “playing” (3) and “play pleasure” (4) have some importance, and the relationship especially between mother and child is important (mentioned 5 times). The children shown in the photos are healthy, smart, natural and curious. In the text it is stressed that it is important that children “develop their imagination” (3), “ability to concentrate”, that they “develop their language” and that they are “spelenderwijs” (4) stimulated (stimulated in a playful way). Children should experience adventure, have fun, enjoy their childhood, feeling cozy (“knus”6) and happy moments. Well-being is an underlying value. Phenomena that are highlighted as being positive are “nature” (3), “physical resistance” (2), “natural development” and “well-being”. In relation to several food products, it is stressed that there are no colours or other additives, or that the products are without sugar, ecological or “natural” in other ways. That the product is easy to use and time saving are other arguments that are highlighted. Above all, the product should match the children’s needs, being “leuk” (fun), and help give them “a good basis for later life” (“en goede basis voor later”). The advertisements for toys and book clubs emphasise that their products give the child the carefree joy of playing, stimulate him or her to learn: “als wetenschapper in de dop” (“as the scientist-to-be”) as Duplo/Lego puts it, “leert spelenderwijs” (“learning by playing”), “vroelijk en veelzijdig” (“merry and many sided”), developing the senses, “leernt de wereld spelenderwijs kennen” (“getting to know the world by playing”). The book clubs claim that their books develop the personality of the child and the ability to concentrate and speak, and stimulate the imagination.

The good parent is reflected in the advertisements as being responsible; responsible for children getting a good start in their lives. The mother can be a fairy godmother who surprises the children, who makes the children happy. In the advertisements for books, reading aloud is highlighted as giving moments of closeness between (mostly) mothers and children, resulting in

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6 The word “knus” is difficult to translate into German and French, similar to the Danish word “hygge”, the meaning of the word indicates that well-being is important for the Dutch.
situations where the child experiences safety and security and where he or she is at the same time 
stimulated intellectually thus preparing for school and the future in general. An example of this is 
the Atlas book club where the stories in the books are followed by questions to check that the 
child has understood the story. Few negative values are mentioned in the advertisements. The 
heavy industrialisation and the busy highways are used as a situational picture in the 
advertisements for the ecological Hipp baby food, as a threat to the happiness and well-being of 
children today. The fear of losing the child, that it should get lost by accident, is used in one 
advertisement for children’s identification discs. But except for these few examples, the 
advertisers play only on positive values.

In many cases the Dutch advertisements describe the product in a factual way (the exact content 
of the food for example). An interesting trait is that no tables and graphs, etc. are used to 
convince the receiver of the advertisement by using a “scientific” explanation of the qualities of 
the products. Also no doctors or other specialists in white coats guarantee the quality – an 
argumentation form used in German and French advertisements. Identification between adult and 
child is used in some cases to make the receiver of the advertisement understand the need for the 
product. In some advertisements for books it says: “do you remember what it meant for you to 
hear those wonderful stories?” Or an advertisement for nappies that keep even very active babies 
dry: “Did you sit still yourself as a baby?”

Only one advertisement for milk products for new-born children was found in the sample. In 
France, milk products were the biggest single product group. This is of course due to the fact that 
Dutch women typically breast-feed, which French women do not.

The form and style of the advertisements are respectful. The advertisers do not talk about the 
mother as “mama” as is the case in many French and German advertisements. They use the more 
formal “moeder”. Thus the advertisers do not try to enter the family sphere by using baby 
language, and when the text is addressed directly to the child, this also happens in a respectful 
way. Children are shown as individuals as the advertisement for “Mini’s” juice shows (Ouders, 
June 1996). Five children, 5-7 years old approximately, are lying on their stomachs, next to each 
other, in a grass field. There are two blond children and three coloured children. They all wear 
very colourful and different clothes. There are two girls and three boys. They are laughing, 
thinking, smiling, expressing individuality, openness, imagination, energy and joy. Several 
human races are lying next to each other in harmony. The product is shown underneath: four little 
juices in different colours. The text is: “they are so small and still so big, they are so pure and so 
natural, that is why you can enjoy them so much and give everyone what he or she likes”. The 
parallel to the children is clear, and the sentence “they are so small and still so big” - transferred 
to the children stresses the fact that they should not be underestimated, they are small persons. On 
the first level of signification happy children of various skin colours are seen together, on the 
second level of signification they connote tolerance, a harmonic multicultural society consisting 
of equal individuals which is a part of a Dutch vision of an ideal society.

Children also look serious and thoughtful in several advertisement, as in the advertisement for 
spectacles. The children are growing up and that is a serious matter. The children are in some 
advertisements shown in adult clothes as in the example from the margarine company Blue Band, 
where a boy of 5 or 6 is seen in an oversized sweater (Margriet, October, 1995). The text says: “Kleine mensjes in een grote mensen wereld gebruiken veel energie” (“Small people in a big people’s world use a lot of energy”) followed by a detailed description of what the 
vitamins in the product are good for. It is not easy to be a small child in a world made for big 
people, not really taking the needs of the children into consideration. This lack of congruence is
underlined by the fact that the boy is wearing the oversized sweater. Children are entitled to special care.

Some advertisements point to the fact that children do not like ordinary food like vegetables or other food items that adults think children should eat. For this reason they need special food products like vitamins, biscuits with special supplements, to avoid compromising on “the right nutrition”, which is stressed as being very important. This is in great contrast to France, where the ideals for the upbringing of children stress that children should eat everything (ABC+ survey) and in that way adapt to the adult world. In the Dutch context it is more important that children are seen as individuals who should be respected as being different from adults, thus having special needs. The most frequently used words in the advertisements were growth, fun and safety. That the child should feel at ease is important too more than in any of the other case studies.

**Comparison of Advertisements**

In this section I compare the findings from the advertisements in the three countries. First I compare the difference in the number of advertisements in each product group, secondly I briefly compare the actors in the advertisements and eventually I compare the 10 most used words in the advertisements and link these to the profiles of the national advertisements sketched in this chapter.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product group</th>
<th>France (n = 100)</th>
<th>Germany (n = 100)</th>
<th>Netherlands (n = 90)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toys</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baby-care</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 1. Number of products in each category by country.*

The most significant difference in the number of products in each category are the way food products dominate in the French sample. When the advertisements in the survey were gathered from the magazines mentioned above, all advertisements promoting products for children were systematically collected and duplicates were removed from the sample. There is almost double the amount of food advertisements in the French sample, whereas toys dominate in the German sample. One factor that might explain this difference is infant milk which is the single most promoted product in the French advertisements in the survey (25 out of 45 food advertisements).

This is of course, as already mentioned, linked to the fact that most French women do not breastfeed in contrast with a large part of German and Dutch women. Another explanation could be the importance of food in French culture, where food is a very important part of living (as in all cultures), but also as a subject for conversation and an important part of being together. Food is a key issue in France, which might explain the difference in this survey.
In the German sample, toys are seen to be very well represented with nearly double as many advertisements as in the French and the Dutch survey. In the Dutch survey there are slightly more toy advertisements than in the French. Play and creativity and that the children have fun are all seen as being very important in the German context as concluded in earlier sections. All three countries have approximately the same number of baby and children’s care products.

In the category of “other products”, the Dutch advertisements show the highest number. What kind of products causes this difference? In the two other samples, this category is composed of advertisements for numerous product types: car seats, holidays, clothing, etc. In the Dutch sample there is a large number of holiday ads, bank saving ads, and several children’s furniture ads. The Dutch advertisements are thus spread out over more products.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>France (n = 100)</th>
<th>Germany (n = 100)</th>
<th>Netherlands (n = 100)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert men</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Actors in the ads.

The main actors in the advertisements are children, not surprisingly: the products are for children. Men are not frequently exposed in the ads, slightly more in Germany and in the Netherlands than in France. There is a more significant difference with regard to women in the ads. In the French sample there are women in 17 out of 100 advertisements, compared to 24 out of 100 in Germany and 22 out of 90 in the Netherlands. This might be explained by the fact that more French women work outside the home, and that the advertisers are more eager here not to present the child as being very dependent on the mother. In the German advertisements mother and child are often shown in emotional situations, very close together, which is also the case in some French ads. In the Dutch advertisements there is an emphasis on activities between mother and child together. Many Dutch and German mothers work at home, and one could imagine that the higher number of women shown in these advertisements is an attempt to show a child that is dependent on the mother, thus justifying her position.

The words used to promote the products reveal great and interesting differences. In the French key-words there is a strong emphasis on growth and the energy needed for growth on both a physical and an intellectual level. The emphasis on growth is in line with a very strong historical focus on survival and growth regarding children in the French context. Play is mentioned as being the 7th most important word. In Germany play and fun are the most important words in the

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7 The numbers in table 3 do not in all three cases go from 1 to 10. In the French ads, the number 7 appears twice, and this refers to the fact that some words or phrases were mentioned equally often.
ads, sharply followed by love and safety\(^8\). That the products should be natural is an argument used far more in Germany and the Netherlands than in France.

“Spielend lernen” is quite an illustrative connection of words: children should learn but this should happen in a playful way. In the Dutch advertisements the focus is on growth and pleasure, adventure, fun and safety. There is much less focus on intellectuality. The word “brain” does not occur in the Dutch ads. In the French advertisements “cerveau” ("brain") is mentioned 3 times, and “développement cérébral” (“brain development”) is mentioned twice. In the German advertisements “brain” is paraphrased in a more indirect way such as “ein kluger Kopf” (“a clever head”) which is mentioned 3 times.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>France</th>
<th>Germany</th>
<th>The Netherlands</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Développement</td>
<td>Spielen (playing)</td>
<td>Groien (growing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Croissance (growth)</td>
<td>Spaß (fun)</td>
<td>Plezier (pleasure)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Energie</td>
<td>Liebe (love)</td>
<td>Avontuur (adventure)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Grandir (grow)</td>
<td>Sicherheit/sicher (safety/safe)</td>
<td>Veilige (safe)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Eveil (stimulation)</td>
<td>Natur/natürlich</td>
<td>Leuk (fun)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Equilibre (balance)</td>
<td>Spielend lernen (learning playfully)</td>
<td>Beschermen (protect)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Jeu (play)</td>
<td>Freude (happiness)</td>
<td>Verrassing (surprise)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>La premiere année est déterminante(^9)</td>
<td>Schutz (protection)</td>
<td>Naturlijk (natural)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Amuser (have fun)</td>
<td>Entwicklung (development)</td>
<td>Ontdekken (discover)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Protéger (protect)</td>
<td>Gesund (healthy)</td>
<td>Vrolijk (happy)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3. Most frequently used words.**

**What’s in a Human Becoming?**

In many respects it can be said that similarities in the ads in this survey are greater than the differences. Children are presented as happy and cute to the amusement of adult readers. The argumentation and themes of the ads centre around growth, protection, having fun and playing,  

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\(^8\) It should be noted, however, that there are significantly more advertisements for toys in the German sample than in the French where food is the dominant category, which might explain some of these differences. Still the very different priorities in themes are striking.

\(^9\) “The first year is decisive”.

[12]
even though this is in different configurations in the three case-studies. This is all very coherent with the Western discourse of childhood. Children must survive and grow, needing to be entertained and protected.

Regarding Qvortrup’s considerations of the tradition of perceiving children as human becomings rather than human beings, it seems that the values and ideals reflected in the French ads have the strongest emphasis on the child as a human becoming. These ads are strongly oriented towards the future – development of the child’s brain, the child as fit for working well in school. The focus is more on the result than on the process. The Dutch ads focus on growth and thereby also indirectly on the complete grown-up person of the future, but also to a high extent on the well-being, fun and experiences of the child at the present. This is because of a conviction of the Dutch that the harmonic child (feeling well, at ease, well entertained) is a good basis on which to build the adult and thereby also an indirect consideration of the human being to be. The German ads can be placed somewhere in between France and the Netherlands also with a strong orientation towards the future but with an adherence to play at the present to reach results in school, which – also in the German society – is seen as decisive for the future.

It is clear that the ads draw on situations and scenarios from collective representations. An example is the mother/child relationship which is reflected more intensively in the German ads which is in line with the more traditional gender roles in Germany. Also the overrepresentation of infant milk ads in the French context reflects cultural ways of nurturing new-born babies. At the same time the ads represent the rose-coloured part of reality as described by Brochand and Lendrevie. The ads draw on scenarios from each cultural context, and within Europe it is thus not a universal aim to create “future world champions” as it is written in the German nappy ad. In some contexts it is enough to settle for less or even other qualities.

Different childhood discourses create varying realities for children which can be seen in schooling contexts, family relations and policy making, and these differences in views of human becomings naturally have implications for views on human beings with different priorities of what matters with different emphasis on for example well-being versus ambition. This might be an explanatory factor in the difficulties in collaboration between European adults in EU settings as soon as social and educational issues are in question.

References
Qvortrup, Jens (1990): Childhood as a Social Phenomenon. An Introduction to a Series of National Reports, Barndomsprojektet, University Centre of South Jutland, Esbjerg.