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Love Me and Leave Me

Cabbage Patch dolls and Pound Puppies implore feelings of protection and love in children. Pound Puppies, with their soft bodies, hangdog expressions, and defeated postures make us feel sorry for the creature. Cabbage Patch Kids also have soft, rounded bodies with slight smiles, round eyes, and open arms waiting for an embrace. We want to save them. Once saved they are not only the child's property, but also their responsibility. Instilling this sense of responsibility is necessary to create future nurturing members of society who are expected to raise children, raise a garden, own cars, own homes, own property of any kind, and maintain each of these things as if it was their moral obligation. While these toys do not grow older or more complex for the growing mind of a child, they do wear out and become corrupted. It becomes necessary to let go of these beloved toys. Cabbage Patch Kids and Pound Puppies are tools that accentuate humans' natural desire to care for that which is more vulnerable, they tie that desire with the responsibility that comes with ownership, and prepares them for the inevitability of natural breakdown and death.

The name of the doll, Cabbage Patch Kid, is a leading name that immediately brings up an image in your mind's eye a field of vegetables. Certainly on the Cabbage Patch Kid's labeling there is a depiction of a wide field of leaf-engulfed baby heads sticking out of the ground. Cabbage patches, in their true form, are miles of green leafy vegetables waiting to be plucked and consumed. Row after row after row. What would happen if the cabbage was not

plucked from the field? It would rot. Eaten by birds, rodents, or mice. The cabbage would wither under the sun, never to be used to its true intent: to be consumed. When this idea, the idea that this cherub-faced baby would rot without an owner, is inserted into the mind of a child nothing but horror and sadness appear. The doll becomes a quest to right these wrongs; to prevent the horror that awaits a neglected Cabbage Patch Kid. The child must champion over the evil of neglect with their love and care.

Inherently, Pound Puppies sound desperate and lonely. Many children have seen animal shelters and the commercials for animal rights' groups. Pounds are filled with abandoned animals waiting to be rescued. Children want to rescue these dogs so they can pick up the pieces where another person has left off. Without rescue, much like the Cabbage Patch Kid, they would surely rot in their cells and die of sadness. At the toy store, Pound Puppies are positioned in their packaging like any beaten creature. They are crouched almost flat on the ground, their ears flattened against their heads, paws are placed under or near their chin, and their eyes are situated to look up in a supplicating way. They silently beg for adoption so they can be saved from whatever fate they are obviously afraid of. As an adult it is necessary to hone nurturing skills in order to place importance on other items of ownership. If the child did not care about the mental and physical state of his beloved Pound Puppy, how can you be sure this same child will stop and assist an elderly woman across the street, stop their car for stranded motorists, or offer some loose change to a homeless person on the sidewalk? It is not pity that is sought, but empathy that is required in a child.

The very marketing of these toys are insidious ways to attract a child by preying upon their desires of independence. Both toys come with an adoption certificate the child fills out; he assigns a name and birth date. He becomes the creator of its new life and establishes its identity

with its given name. It is the acknowledgement of ownership, the acknowledgement responsibility, and the acknowledgement that the child has “rescued” this toy that creates a connection strongly felt by the child. Children are tended after by their parents, by their teachers, and by their older siblings if applicable. While this feeling of comfort is certainly welcomed by the child, there is still the desire to become independent of those caretakers. These toys make it possible for the child to possess some responsibility for the wellbeing of another life. It is not so much ownership of these toys that make them so endearing to the child; it is the allowance to take responsibility for these toys that is so attractive. Once that responsibility is accepted the child then is free to establish their own ideals upon this toy. As an extension of themselves they now dictate what they wear, how they play, what they play, and where they go. Something they cannot yet do for themselves but is slowly introduced through the ownership of these toys. In American culture it is necessary to hone these skills as one day they will care for another creature; be it a child of their own, a pet, a spouse, their elderly parents, or even a houseplant.

The material used to create these toys is soft, woven, and stitched fabric. Cabbage Patches and Pound Puppies alike are filled with fluffy, light material. Both are also covered with cotton that is easily ripped and stained. While enjoyable to touch, to hold, to stroke; they do not endure even a year of your average children’s play. The longevity of this toy lacks totally when compared to the amount of love these toys are given. With one good rip either would lose its innards, its ear or tail. One trip and grape juice stains them permanently. They can be repaired with stitches and washed with soap, but the ghosts of those temporary repairs still remain. Living creatures’ skin heals and washes clean. These toys will, for its life, bear the mark of a mishap. Inevitably, each will need to be discarded in some way. Losing one of these toys causes

great sadness as not only did the child rescue this toy, but it was loved and cared for intensely. Once a child loses this toy to physical corruption they cannot but help to feel responsible for its loss as they also cannot help but recognize the role they played in the corruption of this toy. As the number of these situations increases over the years of play, so does the child's ability to withstand the sadness and realize that it is a natural part of anything tangible. It slowly becomes apparent that with use comes wear-and-tear, not a lack of love on the child's part. In fact, a well loved toy will show the signs of its use. The child is now used to the aging process and inevitability of that process.

These toys are forceful tools for instilling adult attitudes in children. In today's culture there is a need for society members to care for one another or at least empathize with one another in order to understand that very society. As an adult it is necessary to learn how to take responsibility for the things we chose to own by maintaining a level of care for that object. An adult needs to take responsibility for what he creates as well since it is an extension of his person. An adult accepts the inevitability of physical corruption and loss by the systematic reminder through these shoddily made and soft bodied toys that easily wear and tear with each month of play. These toys are one of many tools adults use to control and shape children into the adults we want to see today. Pound Puppies and Cabbage Patch Kids are perfect examples of how to prey upon natural instincts while honing adult attitudes in children.