Fast food is healthy

As if. But MacDonalds, the king of marketing, would like you to believe so. Or at least it is trying to use mothers as emissaries for this message—they call it their "quality correspondents program." I am not making this up. It is reported in today's Washington Post, and it is an attempt to maintain already high levels of fast food consumption high. Apparently, if mothers make the argument that french fries aren't so bad for you, other moms will listen. And if moms think its OK, then kids will be free to consume the "healthy" fries. What MacDonald's claims it's doing, is making sure through this type of PR, that people know they are concerned with food safety and quality.

I have several issues with this. First of all, french fries are not healthy, period. They are deep fried and carry most of their calories from fat. It is inane for McDonald's to pretend otherwise. Perhaps a small order of fries does not have the calorie content say, of a quarter pounder with cheese. If someone wants to eat fries, they do so because they enjoy the taste and not because it is a virtuous choice on the menu.

Second, this type of person-to-person marketing, based on manipulated information, is not what I would call transparent. It is surreptitious. It is pretend. If a woman who is my friend or acquintance tells me something, I have no reason to disbelieve what she is saying. I also don't have enough information. Lots of marketing shifts the burden for more information to the consumer, but this type of marketing is more opaque. Moms aren't going to include a website link to the company, or are they?

What I really wonder is why McDonald's needs to this at all. They are a ubiquitous part of the landscape, and everyone knows what kind of food they sell. Lots of people eat there—what are the up to, zillions served? They have great

brand identity, brand knowledge and good advertising. And in a weak economy, fast food places generally do good business since they are cheap and easy. No one goes to McDonald’s expecting fine or healthy dining. And as far as I know, everyone assumes you will have low-quality standards maintained across the board—clean and fast is what you expect, not high quality and good for you.