

Children's Responses to Gender-Role Stereotyped Advertisements

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Research indicates that adult's gender-role perceptions can influence their responses toward different types of advertising appeals; however, it is not known whether the same is true for young children. Given that children's gender-role stereotypes vary across both age and gender, it is possible that their responses toward different types of advertisements might also vary. Accordingly, this study examines whether preadolescent boys and girls differ in their attitudes toward advertisements that incorporate agentic or communal gender-role attributes. The results are managerially relevant. The findings suggest that marketers can target young boys and girls with a common set of advertisements. However, advertisements should convey agentic themes when targeted toward older preadolescent girls, and communal themes when targeted toward younger preadolescent girls. Considering that children represent a large and growing consumer segment this issue deserves greater attention.

YOUNG CHILDREN CONSTITUTE a substantial market segment. It has been estimated that children account for more than \$30 billion in direct purchases (Schor, 2004) and indirectly influence more than \$600 billion of U.S. household spending—from snack foods to automobiles (Piperato, 2005). Due to the increasing involvement of children in family decision making, spending on children's advertising has risen to over \$15 billion a year (Piperato, 2005). Indeed, a myriad of companies—such as Toys "R" Us, Kraft, and Kellogg's—have been investing significant sums of money on advertisements and promotions targeting children (Thompson, 2005). LA Gear, for example, was allocating approximately 95 percent of its advertising budget to children's media, and Burger King has been spending over \$100 million per year on a series of promotions tied to new movies (e.g., *Beauty and the Beast*, *Aladdin*, *Toy Story*, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, *Lord of the Rings*, *Star Wars*) that are aimed primarily at children (Thompson, 2003). The tremendous growth in the children's market has been accompanied by an

expansion in the number and type of children's media outlets. Companies can now advertise their products via numerous children's television networks (e.g., Nickelodeon, Disney Channel, Cartoon Network, National Geographic Kids, FOX Kids) and a plethora of traditional and online magazines for kids of different ages (e.g., *Sports Illustrated for Kids*, *Highlights For Kids*, *American Girl*, *KidsWorld*, *Ranger Rick*, *U.S. Kids*, *Dogs for Kids*, etc.). Marketers have certainly been taking advantage of these children's media; for example, Nickelodeon forecasted advertising revenues of approximately \$935 million in 2005 (Klaassen, 2005). These facts and figures clearly indicate that children's advertising is a topic worthy of additional research.

Although researchers have examined a multitude of issues related to advertising, most of these studies have been conducted with adult subjects. Consequently, our understanding of how young boys and girls react to different types of advertisements is limited. In particular, little is known about the underlying factors that

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determine the effectiveness of different types of advertising appeals. One variable that has received considerable attention in the developmental psychology literature, but has largely been overlooked in marketing, is children's gender-role perceptions (or stereotypes). Prior research indicates that adults' gender-role stereotypes influence their responses to advertising and purchase behavior (Gilly, 1988; Jaffe and Berger, 1994); however, little is known about the relationship between children's gender-role stereotypes and their reactions to different types of advertising appeals. Although a few studies have documented the use of stereotypes in children's advertising (Hoek and Laurence, 1993; Macklin and Kolbe, 1984) and have examined the effects of gender on children's evaluation of an advertisement (Kolbe and Muehling, 1995), our knowledge is incomplete. Given the substantial sums of money being spent by marketers, it would be beneficial to know whether young boys' and girls' gender-role stereotypes influence their attitudes toward different types of advertisements. The resulting knowledge could aid in developing more effective advertisements when targeting younger children.

Stereotypes

The use of stereotypes throughout society is pervasive. A stereotype is defined as a "fixed general belief, characteristic, etc. that a lot of people believe to repre-

sent a particular type of person or thing" (Collins, 1994). Stereotypes embody (sometimes accurately, sometimes inaccurately) one group's perceptions of the personality traits, predispositions, attitudes, and behaviors of another group of people. Although stereotypes oftentimes reflect a negative bias, their use is common in popular culture. Over the years, marketers have relied on different stereotypes and the perceptions, connotations, and meanings conveyed in order to target their products to various consumer segments. Common stereotypes revolve around the differences between older versus younger people, urban dwellers versus rural folks, and jocks versus geeks. Another pervasive stereotype revolves around the various roles and traits of men versus women. In general, females have been described as weak, nurturing, dependent, indecisive, and emotional; whereas males have been characterized as strong, independent, competent, and stubborn (Meyers-Levy, 1988). Although it is widely recognized that these stereotypes are not altogether accurate, they have been perpetuated throughout the popular culture—e.g., in movies, television, and commercials (Lovdal, 1989)—and in general have been accepted to be indicative of gender-typical behavior.

Components of gender-role stereotypes

Gender-role stereotypes highlight and oftentimes exaggerate common attributes and differences among men versus women.

These stereotypes focus on and contrast the personality traits, predispositions, social orientations, and behavioral tendencies of the two sexes. Bakan (1966) and Parsons and Bales (1955) describe male stereotypes as having an "agentic" or "instrumental" orientation (a primary concern for the self and a cognitive focus on problem solving), and associate female stereotypes with a "communal" or "expressive" orientation (a focus on relationships and group harmony, and a concern for others). Although many of the agentic/instrumental and communal/expressive gender-role attributes are positive, others describe the focal gender in a more negative manner. For males, those attributes that have a more positive connotation include independence, leadership, decisiveness, active, strong, and skillful; whereas the more negative aspects include being aggressive, dominant, stubborn, and self-centered (Meyers-Levy, 1988). For females, those attributes that have a positive connotation include empathy, nurturance, social *grace*, and a concern for others; whereas attributes with a more negative connotation include weakness, indecisiveness, dependence, and emotional.

Influence of stereotypes across age groups and gender

Gender-role stereotypes are oftentimes used by advertisers when targeting adult consumers. By early adulthood most individuals' perceptions of gender-appropriate behavior have reached a steady state. Given that adults' gender-role perceptions remain fairly constant over time, advertisers can target broad age segments with a common set of stereotyped advertisements.

Unlike adults, research indicates that children's perceptions of gender-appropriate behavior vary by age. During the developmental process children typically go through certain stages in their understanding and application of gender-role stereotypes,

being more rigid (as to what is perceived as appropriate) during the preschool years and becoming more flexible during middle childhood (Trautner, 1992). These developmental changes could have important implications for children's advertising. For example, the type of appeal that might be more effective when targeting a younger age group (e.g., children ages 5-6) might differ from the appeals that are more effective when targeting older children (e.g., ages 8-10).

Research also indicates that children's gender-role stereotypes vary by gender. Due to developmental differences, boys and girls—of the same age group—hold somewhat different views of gender-appropriate behavior. In general, girls have been shown to hold more flexible views regarding gender-roles. Compared to boys, younger females are more accepting of both genders' participation in household tasks (Hageman and Gladding, 1983). Accordingly, the type of appeals that might be effective in targeting girls might not be as effective when targeting boys.

Purpose

The purpose of this research is to examine whether the age and gender of preadolescent children influence their attitudes toward advertisements that incorporate stereotypical male (agentic) or female (communal) attributes. Given that previous research has shown that attitude toward the advertisement is a precursor of one's attitude toward the brand (MacKenzie and Lutz, 1989), it is logical to examine those variables that might influence children's responses to various types of advertising appeals. This knowledge can help marketers develop more effective advertisements, in a more efficient manner.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

A rich body of literature in the developmental psychology literature indicates that

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children go through various stages in their cognitive development, e.g., from infancy, through preschool and kindergarten, and on through adolescence (e.g., Piaget, 1954). This research indicates that children's understanding of gender is fluid and develops gradually over time (Weinraub et al., 1984). As children mature they progress from a reliance on physical features to a more complex understanding of their environment. Over time, children develop schemas regarding gender-appropriate behavior (Martin, Wood, and Little, 1990). These schemas progress from the simple (e.g., soft things are feminine and rough things are masculine; girls play with dolls whereas boys play with trucks) to more complex concepts of masculinity and femininity (Martin, Wood, and Little, 1990).

During children's formative years parents and other socialization agents present a framework for "gender appropriate" behavior, modeling and reinforcing the desired behaviors. Researchers generally agree that children begin to be aware of gender as they approach one year of age (Ruble and Martin, 1998). Gradually, children begin to develop abstract models of gender appropriate behavior. As children mature they are more likely to imitate same-sex models (e.g., mother, father, older sister, or brother) in order to ensure gender-

appropriate behavior (Bussey and Bandura, 1984). Interestingly, previous findings indicate that parents put more pressure on boys in regard to gender-appropriate behavior, and thus boys have been found to be more likely than girls to imitate same-gender models and to reject behaviors and objects associated with the other gender (Bussey and Perry, 1982).

The effects of age and gender on stereotyping

Previous research indicates that children's awareness of gender stereotypes begins as early as two and a half years of age (Cowan and Hoffman, 1986). Indeed, Urberg (1982) found that children between the ages of two to four differentiate between males and females on the basis of gender-stereotyped behaviors (e.g., boys are cruel and hit people; girls are fearful and cannot fix things). Similarly, Huston (1983) found that preschool age children associate boys with attributes such as strong, fast, aggressive, and cruel; whereas girls are described with attributes such as helplessness, cries a lot, nice, and affectionate. During this period, their preferences are oriented toward same-gender playmates and activities as they gain more detailed knowledge about the differences between masculinity and femininity.

Differences across age. Previous research indicates that children's gender-related stereotypes vary by age. Early on, as children become aware of gender-role differences, their preference for same-gender activities and objects increases (Edelbrock and Sugawara, 1978; Fagot, 1985), and they become somewhat rigid in their views. However, at later ages they become more flexible and acknowledge a wider range of gender-appropriate activities and occupations. In general, researchers have found that children between the ages of four and eight embrace gender stereotypes more strongly (Katz and Boswell, 1986; Trautner, 1992); and that between the ages of eight and ten children seem to recognize that a wider range of behaviors, occupations, objects, and characteristics are acceptable for their gender.

Differences across gender. Previous studies have found that boys hold more traditional gender-role beliefs and have stronger preferences for same-gender activities as compared to girls (Bussey and Perry, 1982; Martin and Little, 1990). Although young boys and girls alike expand their views of gender-appropriate behavior between preschool and middle school, girls typically become more flexible in their views (Plumb and Cowan, 1984). Interestingly, Etaugh and Liss (1992) found that girls' interest in female sex-typed activities decreased during this same time period, although boys' interest in male sex-typed activities did not change.

Gender stereotypes and children's advertising

Very little is known as to how children's gender-role perceptions influence their responses toward different types of advertising appeals. It is well established that children go through different stages of cognitive and social development be-

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tween their preschool years and early adolescence, and that young boy's and girl's perceptions of gender-appropriate behavior vary. Accordingly, it is reasonable to hypothesize that children's advertisements that incorporate various gender-role stereotypes might be perceived differently by young boys as compared to young girls, and might be viewed differently by preadolescent children of different ages.

HYPOTHESES

This study examines whether young children's attitudes toward gender-stereotyped advertisements vary by age and gender. As previously discussed, gender-role stereotypes have been described using an agentic/instrumental versus communal/expressive orientation (Bakan, 1966; Parsons and Bales, 1955). Previous research regarding gender differences (e.g., Etaugh and Liss, 1992; Huston, 1983; Ruble and Martin, 1998) suggests that young boys, in general, will perceive agentic advertisements more favorably than communal advertisements, and that young girls will perceive communal advertisements more favorably than agentic advertisements. Accordingly, it is hypothesized that:

H1B: Preadolescent girls will report a more favorable attitude for an advertisement embedded with communal attributes, as compared to an advertisement that is embedded with agentic attributes.

H1C: Preadolescent boys will report a more favorable attitude for an advertisement embedded with agentic attributes than will preadolescent girls.

H1D: Preadolescent girls will have a more favorable attitude for an advertisement embedded with communal attributes than will preadolescent boys.

Furthermore, given that studies focusing on age (Trautner, 1992) indicate that children become more accepting of a wider range of gender-typed behaviors as they progress from their kindergarten to middle-school years, it is hypothesized that:

H2A: Preadolescent boys who are in a younger age group will exhibit a more favorable attitude for an advertisement embedded with agentic attributes than will preadolescent boys who are in an older age group.

H2B: Preadolescent boys who are in an older age group will show a more favorable attitude for an advertisement embedded with

H1A: Preadolescent boys will have a more favorable attitude for an advertisement embedded with agentic attributes, as compared to an advertisement that is embedded with communal attributes.

communal attributes, as compared to preadolescent boys who are in a younger age group.

H2C: Preadolescent girls who are in a younger age group will exhibit a more favorable attitude for an advertisement embedded with communal attributes than will preadolescent girls who are in an older age group.

H2D: Preadolescent girls who are in an older age group will show a more favorable attitude for an advertisement embedded with agentic attributes, as compared to preadolescent girls who are in a younger age group.

METHODOLOGY

Subjects

To test the hypotheses a sample of preadolescent boys and girls, of two distinct age groups, was required. Accordingly, the younger preadolescent age group was comprised of children in kindergarten (who typically are 5 to 6 years of age), whereas the older preadolescent group was comprised of children in the 3rd and 4th grades (who typically are 9 to 10 years old). To establish a clear demarcation between age groups, children in the first and second grades (who typically are 7 to 8 years old) were not included in the study. According to previous research, kindergarteners should be more rigid as to what they consider to be gender-appropriate, whereas children who are in the 3rd and 4th grades should be more flexible in their viewpoints (Trautner, 1992). Furthermore, the age groups chosen for this study are consistent with seminal work by Selman (1980) and Barenboim (1981). They assert that during the preschool and kindergarten years (ages 3-6) children describe other people in concrete terms, based on phys-

ical appearances or overt behavior. By ages 8-10, children begin to form impressions of others based on abstract or psychological terms. The sample chosen for this study corresponds to these age groups, thus strengthening the validity of the experimental design.

Data were collected at an elementary school located in the southern United States. The principal and teachers provided valuable cooperation. To participate, students had to have the written consent of their parents. In return for their participation, each student was allowed to pick a prize (e.g., a toy or coloring book); in addition, the elementary school was provided with a new digital camera and color printer. The 280 participants were evenly mixed between boys and girls; in addition, half were in kindergarten and half were in 3rd or 4th grade; 68 percent were Caucasian, 30 percent were African-American, and 2 percent were Asian or Hispanic.

Stimulus materials

To manipulate the independent variable (agentic versus communal gender-role behaviors), advertising storyboards were used as stimulus materials. It is commonly accepted that the use of storyboards is valid for this type of research (Belch and Belch, 2004). One set of advertising storyboards conveyed an agentic theme, while the other set conveyed a communal theme. The storyboards were drawn and colored by a freelance artist, and a voice-over was used to present the audio message. The two storyboards contained both male and female characters. Based on interviews and pretests conducted with graduate students and faculty in the behavioral sciences, and with young children, crackers were found to be a "gender neutral" product and thus were selected as the focal product.

The agentic storyboard was operationalized to reflect independence, competi-

tion, strength, and decisiveness; whereas the communal storyboard was operationalized to reflect nurturance, empathy, harmony, and need for affiliation. The first frame of both storyboards consisted of a picture of the focal product. For the agentic storyboard, the second frame showed a single child (thus depicting independence) in a kitchen taking "crackers" out of a box. The third frame consisted of a collage showing children engaged in different activities—swimming in a pool, running, and playing soccer—in which the goal was to win, thus depicting competitiveness and aggressiveness. The final frame depicted four children running, with one child passing the finish line and winning the race. In contrast to the agentic storyboard, the communal storyboard depicted children in noncompetitive group activities. In the second frame four children were shown in the kitchen snacking on crackers, thus reflecting a communal theme. The next frame consisted of a collage showing children swimming, running, and playing soccer with a group of friends—in which the focus is on friendship, having fun, and being together, thus emphasizing nurturance and affiliation. Similarly, the final frame showed a group of children sitting around in the yard talking, eating crackers, and relaxing, thus reflecting group harmony.

Accompanying both storyboards was a voice-over. The scripts were written to reinforce the various dimensions being depicted in the advertisements. In the agentic advertisement, the voice-over emphasizes winning and independence; in the communal advertisement, the voice-over emphasizes affiliation, harmony, and empathy. To avoid any confounding effects, both a male and a female voice-over were used. The gender of the voice-over was counterbalanced across the agentic and communal storyboards (which in turn were counterbalanced across subjects). The two

advertising storyboards, along with the script, are shown in the Appendix.

The storyboards and scripts were extensively pretested. The first stage of pretesting was conducted with graduate students, who were asked to evaluate the extent to which each frame of the storyboards depicted an agentic or communal orientation. Based upon their feedback, the stimulus materials were modified. A second stage of pretesting then took place, in which undergraduate students were asked to rate the extent to which the stimulus materials reflected the underlying agentic and communal dimensions. Additional modifications were made until it was clear that there was a significant difference between the two storyboards.

Dependent variable

The "attitude toward the advertisement" construct is well established in the marketing literature and has been shown to be a precursor of "attitude toward the brand" (MacKenzie and Lutz, 1989). However, the majority of this research has utilized adult subjects, and hence it is not clear whether preadolescent children are able to discern between these two constructs (see Ward, Wackman, and Wartella, 1977). This concern was particularly relevant in this study, given that children's only exposure to the advertisement and to the brand would be one and the same. The dependent variable was therefore operationalized as a hybrid of children's attitude toward the advertisement, and their attitude toward the brand. To ensure that scale items were appropriate for the age groups being sampled, teachers at the elementary school helped the researchers modify items previously used by MacKenzie and Lutz (1989) and Mitchell and Olson (1981). These items were then pretested with several preadolescent children and were further modified. The final set of items used the

descriptors "great," "like," "fun," and "boring," and were measured with a 5-point "smiley face" scale. The scale was moderately reliable, with an alpha of 0.72. (For parsimony, this hybrid measure will herein be referred to as attitude toward the advertisement.)

Procedure

The preadolescent subjects participated in the experiment one at a time, at prearranged times during the school day. The young boys and girls were ushered between their classrooms and the research station by one of the researchers. The researcher explained that the purpose of the "assignment" was to watch an advertisement for a product and to indicate how much they liked it (i.e., using the smiley face scale). The storyboards were presented on a laptop computer screen, one frame at a time, accompanied by a voice-over. The advertisements were evenly balanced across each of the four groups; one-half of the kindergarten boys and one-half of the 3rd/4th grade boys viewed the agentic advertisement, whereas the others were exposed to the communal advertisement. Likewise, one-half of the 3rd/4th grade girls and one-half of the kindergarten girls watched the communal advertisement, while the others viewed the agentic advertisement. After viewing the advertisement children were asked to respond to the attitudinal items. The researcher read each question aloud and asked children to point to the smiley face that best represented their response. Children seemed to enjoy the experiment and had little difficulty in responding to the questions.

RESULTS

A between-subjects ANOVA design was used to assess the effects of age, gender, and ad type on children's attitude toward the advertisement. The combination of the

two genders (male versus female), the two age groups (kindergarten versus 3rd and 4th grade), and the two gender-role depictions (agentic versus communal) resulted in eight cells. The final data set consisted of 280 subjects, for a total of 35 subjects per cell. A summary of cell and group means for the dependent variable (attitude toward the advertisement) is shown in Tables 1A-1C.

Confound checks

Before testing the hypotheses, confound checks were conducted. Given that the design is completely crossed and there are equal numbers of boys and girls in each cell, there should be no significant difference in attitude across each of the two levels of age, gender, and ad type. Indeed, the main effects of gender ($F_{1,272} = 0.190, p < 0.663$), ad type ($F_{1,272} = 1.344, p < 0.247$), and age ($F_{1,272} = 0.097, p < 0.756$) were not significant. In other words, boys' attitudes (aggregated across both ad types) did not significantly differ from girls' attitudes. Likewise, the attitudes of kindergarten children (across both ad types) did not differ from that of 3rd and 4th graders; and children's attitude (across both ages and genders) toward the agentic advertisement did not differ from their attitude toward the communal advertisement. These findings provide evidence of discriminant validity (Perdue and Summers, 1986); hence, any effects of the independent variables on the dependent measure can be interpreted in an unambiguous manner.

Hypothesis testing

The first set of hypotheses focuses on the effects of gender on preadolescent children's attitudes toward agentic and communal advertisements. The results revealed no significant interaction across gender and ad type ($F_{1,272} = 2.59, p < 0.109$). Contrary to H1A and H1B,

TABLE 1Cell Means—Attitude toward the Advertisement (Full Sample, $N = 280$)

A. Age × Ad Type $N = 280, 70$ per Cell			
	Agentic	Communal	
3rd and 4th	4.28	4.06	4.17
Kindergarten	4.12	4.17	4.14
	4.20	4.11	4.16
B. Age × Gender $N = 280, 70$ per Cell			
	Boys	Girls	
3rd and 4th	4.23	4.10	4.17
Kindergarten	4.11	4.18	4.15
	4.17	4.14	4.16
C. Gender × Ad Type $N = 280, 70$ per Cell			
	Agentic	Communal	
Boys	4.16	4.19	4.18
Girls	4.24	4.04	4.14
	4.20	4.11	4.16

preadolescent boys did not report a more favorable attitude for the agentic advertisement (as compared to the communal advertisement), and preadolescent girls did not exhibit a more positive attitude toward the communal advertisement (vis-a-vis the agentic advertisement). Furthermore, there were no differences between the attitudes of young boys and young girls toward either of the two ad types; thus H1C and H1D were also rejected (see Table 1C for cell means).

The second set of hypotheses pertains to the effects of age on preadolescent children's attitudes toward gender stereotyped advertisements. The interaction of

age and ad type was significant ($F_{1,272} = 3.83, p \leq 0.05$). However, contrary to H2A and H2B, there was no difference in the attitudes of boys in the younger age group—as compared to boys in the older age group—toward either the agentic or the communal advertisement ($F_{1,136} = 0.530, p \leq 0.66$). There were differences, though, in the attitudes of kindergarten vis-à-vis 3rd/4th grade girls ($F_{1,136} = 4.55, p \leq 0.004$) (see Tables 2A and 2B for cell means). As hypothesized (H2C), the younger girls had a more favorable attitude toward the communal advertisement than did the older preadolescent girls ($t_{68} = 2.88, p \leq 0.005$). However, contrary to H2D, their attitudes

toward the agentic advertisement did not differ ($t_{68} = -1.464, p \leq 0.148$).

DISCUSSION

The study of gender-role perceptions within the context of children's advertising addresses an important issue. A large body of research in developmental psychology indicates that gender-role stereotypes vary among children of different ages and genders; i.e., that young boys and girls have differing perceptions as to what constitutes gender appropriate behavior, and that these views are not stable, but change over time. Accordingly, this study examined the effects of age and gender on preadolescent children's attitude toward agentic and communal type advertisements. This study is not only of theoretical value, it is managerially relevant as well. Children constitute a large market segment, with considerable purchasing power and influence, and thus are of interest to advertisers. A better understanding of those factors that influence children's responses to different types of advertising appeals can help marketers develop more effective advertisements, which in turn can have a substantial impact on revenues and profits.

With regards to gender, the results indicate that preadolescent boys do not necessarily respond more favorably to advertisements that are embedded with agentic attributes (i.e., as compared to communal attributes); and that preadolescent girls do not necessarily respond more favorably to advertisements that are embedded with communal attributes (i.e., as compared to agentic attributes). Although these "null" findings at first glance might not seem noteworthy, they are indeed managerially significant. The results suggest that advertisers do not need to develop two different sets of advertisements when marketing a product to both boys and girls. Instead, advertisers can

TABLE 2
Cell Means for Boys and Girls—Attitude toward the Advertisement

A. Gender = Boys			
Age × Ad Type			
n = 140, 35 per Cell			
	Agentic	Communal	
3rd and 4th	4.21	4.26	4.24
Kindergarten	4.10	4.12	4.11
	4.16	4.19	4.18
B. Gender = Girls			
Age × Ad Type			
n = 140, 35 per Cell			
	Agentic	Communal	
3rd and 4th	4.35	3.85	4.10
Kindergarten	4.13	4.23	4.18
	4.24	4.04	4.14

appeal to preadolescent boys and girls with a single underlying theme, built upon either agentic or communal attributes. Even though young boys and girls might hold somewhat different views regarding gender-appropriate behavior, it appears that these stereotypes are more "contextual" or "superficial" in nature and do not extend beyond a "surface" level to the underlying gender-typed attributes. Thus, advertisements that portray boys as empathetic or nurturing can often times be just as appropriate as advertisements that portray them as rambunctious and independent; and advertisements that portray girls as competitive and decisive can be just as effective as advertisements that portray them as caring and relationship oriented.

With regard to age, this study uncovered mixed results. Although kindergarten and 3rd/4th grade girls displayed similar attitudes toward the agentic ad-

vertisement, the older girls responded less favorably toward the communal advertisement (i.e., as compared to the younger girls). This latter finding indicates that as preadolescent girls become older they begin to reject traditional female stereotypes. Considering that the 3rd/4th grade girls actually exhibited a more favorable attitude toward the agentic advertisement vis-a-vis the communal advertisement (see Table 2B), it might be beneficial for advertisers to vary their use of agentic and communal themes when targeting girls of different ages. Marketers might be wise to target older preadolescent girls with advertisements that portray females in non-traditional roles and thus capitalize upon their changing perceptions of gender-appropriate behavior. At the same time, this study found no differences between kindergarten and 3rd/4th grade boys' attitudes toward either the agentic or the communal advertisement. It thus appears

that advertisers who are targeting preadolescent boys of a wide age group can rely upon a common gender-typed theme. A note of caution, though; given that young boys progress through the various developmental stages more slowly than young girls (Etaugh and Liss, 1992), it could be that any corresponding attitudinal changes had not yet manifested. Hence, boys who are in the 5th or 6th grades might respond differently than younger boys.

These findings, while preliminary, should be of interest to marketers. Given that the average cost of producing a 30-second national TV spot is approximately \$350,000 (Duncan, 2005), there are significant financial implications. Furthermore, considering that the creative idea process (from the exploration stage, to insight, execution, and on through the evaluation and copytesting stages) can take considerable time, it is more efficient to be able to create advertisements that can appeal to both boys and girls and/or to children of a broad range of ages.

Limitations and concerns

In almost all research trade-offs are made that affect different aspects of internal or external validity (Cook and Campbell, 1979); that is certainly true with this study. This study is limited in that only one experiment was conducted, and hence the full extent to which gender-role perceptions influence children's reactions to advertisements that incorporate agentic or communal attributes cannot be fully assessed. It should be noted, however, that one difficulty in conducting research among preadolescent subjects is gaining access to large numbers of children. Without the approval and support of local school principals and teachers, or other large civic organizations, the logistics of collecting experimental data from 200-500 children is almost impossible.

The results indicate that preadolescent boys do not necessarily respond more favorably to advertisements that are embedded with agentic attributes (compared to communal attributes), and that preadolescent girls do not necessarily respond more favorably to advertisements that are embedded with communal attributes (compared to agentic attributes).

Nonetheless, to better understand the influence of gender-role perceptions in the context of children's advertising, additional studies are needed.

Another limitation of this study is that the manipulations might not have been strong enough to induce changes in the dependent variable. To ensure a high degree of internal validity, various aspects of the two sets of storyboards were kept as similar as possible. In this study, for example, it was important to distinguish between the concept of gender roles and gender per se; by controlling for gender any findings could more confidently be attributed to gender-role perceptions. Accordingly, the two sets of storyboards were drawn so that males and females were equally represented. In retrospect, the use of both genders in the storyboards might have diluted the effects of the more subtle, underlying gender-role attributes embedded in the advertisements. Young children might pay more attention to superficial gender attributes such as the appearance of the characters than the more abstract attributes and behaviors (e.g., independence and competitiveness versus nurturance and empathy) that were manipulated in this study. Even though the storyboards were accompanied by a voice-

over that reinforced the underlying agentic and communal attributes, stronger manipulations might be needed to determine whether gender-role perceptions significantly affect children's attitudes toward gender-typed advertisements.

Demand artifacts also pose a threat to validity (Cook and Campbell, 1979). Children enjoyed the experiment; viewing the advertisements on the laptop computer was novel, and they knew that they would be able to pick a prize when finished. It could be that the nature of the experiment created a "halo" effect, which resulted in children viewing all advertisements favorably. It is also possible that the youngsters wanted to please the experimenter, and hence responded as "good subjects" (Cook and Campbell, 1979). It is difficult to assess the extent to which demand artifacts influenced children's responses; nonetheless, future research should be designed in such a manner as to better rule out this type of threat.

Future research

The study of gender-role perceptions in the context of children's advertising is in its infancy and is ripe for additional research. Whether children's gender-role stereotypes substantially influence their

attitudes toward different types of advertising appeals remains to be determined. Considering that young children influence approximately \$600 billion of purchases annually in North America (Piperato, 2005), this is an important issue. It is hoped that this study will spark additional research into this topic. Relevant issues include the following: (1) Can children distinguish between gender (a physical and concrete feature) and the more subtle (and hence abstract) elements of gender roles? (2) Does the influence of gender roles manifest itself and evolve at different ages for young boys and girls? (3) Are certain elements of agentic and communal gender roles more germane and influential than others? Answers to these questions could help marketers develop more effective advertising strategies.

SUMMARY

The concept of gender-role perceptions is a relevant issue for advertisers. Many products are designed specifically for young boys or girls, whereas others are targeted to children of either gender. Similarly, some products are designed with young children of a very specific age group in mind, whereas others are developed to appeal to children of a wide range of ages. In the case of products that are designed for both boys and girls—of various ages—it is certainly more cost-effective to develop a single advertisement that has broad appeal. Although research in developmental psychology indicates that boys and girls of different ages do indeed have different perceptions of gender-appropriate behavior, the extent to which these stereotypes influence their attitudes toward gender-typed advertisements has not been known. This study indicates that marketers do not need to create one set of advertisements for preadolescent boys and another set for

preadolescent girls of the same age, when advertising products aimed at both genders. On the other hand, it might be prudent to create different advertisements when targeting preadolescent girls of various ages. Advertisements targeting older preadolescent girls should embed fewer communal attributes and more agentic attributes. In this case, the additional cost of creating two different sets of advertisements might well result in enhanced revenues and profits. In conclusion, these authors agree with Tybout (1995) that the theory is a "work in progress" and suggest that marketing academicians strive to extend our understanding of children's gender-role perceptions and its influence on advertising effectiveness.

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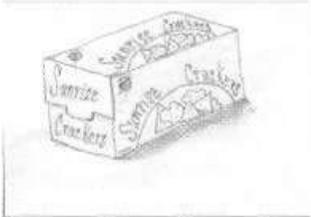
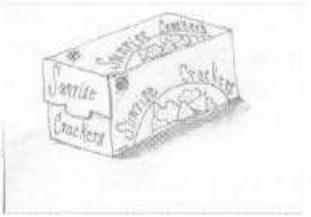
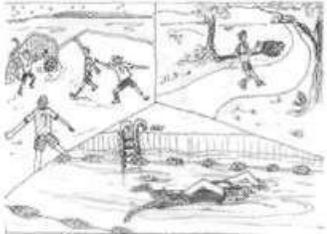
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APPENDIX

Advertising Storyboards and Scripts

Agentic Theme Storyboard	Communal Theme Storyboard
 <p data-bbox="245 689 778 719">Sunrise Crackers is good tasting and full of energy.</p>	 <p data-bbox="975 689 1399 719">Sunrise Crackers is tasty and fun to eat.</p>
 <p data-bbox="252 1040 769 1070">When you eat Sunrise Crackers you'll feel strong.</p>	 <p data-bbox="874 1040 1497 1129">Sunrise Crackers is a great snack to have with your friends. When you and your friends eat the Sunrise Crackers you'll feel friendly and happy.</p>
 <p data-bbox="204 1444 820 1534">You can go anywhere and do anything. You can do things without needing others to help you. When you eat Sunrise Crackers, you can be very active. You'll be fast and strong.</p>	 <p data-bbox="879 1444 1474 1534">You and your friends can do a lot of things together. You can even give a Sunrise Cracker to a friend when they're sad.</p>
 <p data-bbox="209 1868 823 1987">Sunrise Crackers is a great snack for you to achieve your goal. When you eat Sunrise Crackers, you'll have the power to beat others in a race. Sunrise Crackers gives you the power to win.</p>	 <p data-bbox="876 1868 1490 1957">Sharing a Sunrise Cracker together is a great way to make people feel happy. Sunrise Crackers is a great snack for you and your friends.</p>