The Implications of Marketing Potentially Harmful Materials to Minors

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

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July 2006

Expected Graduation Date: December 2006
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Table of Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................... 2
Acknowledgements ......................................................................................................................... 3
Introduction: Marketers vs. Parents ................................................................................................ 4
Objective and Organization ............................................................................................................ 4
Defining the Terms ......................................................................................................................... 5
Advertising Appeals and Promotion ............................................................................................... 5
Exhibit 1 .......................................................................................................................................... 7
The Effects ...................................................................................................................................... 8
  Intended Effects: Brand Awareness and Recognition ................................................................. 8
  Intended Effects: Brand Attitude and Preferences ....................................................................... 9
  Intended Effects: Product Purchase Requests ........................................................................... 10
  Unintended Effects .................................................................................................................... 12
    Unintended Effects: Materialism .............................................................................................. 12
    Unintended Effects: Unhappiness ............................................................................................. 13
    Unintended Effects: Unhealthy Eating Habits .......................................................................... 14
Food Industry: Big Food ............................................................................................................... 15
Exhibit 2 ........................................................................................................................................ 17
Tobacco Industry .......................................................................................................................... 19
Figure 1 ......................................................................................................................................... 20
Figure 2 ......................................................................................................................................... 21
Alcohol Companies ....................................................................................................................... 22
Figure 3 ......................................................................................................................................... 23
Media Violence ............................................................................................................................. 24
  Social Learning Theory .............................................................................................................. 24
  Cognitive Script Theory ........................................................................................................... 25
  Arousal Theory ......................................................................................................................... 26
  Desensitization Theory ............................................................................................................ 26
  Catharsis Theory ....................................................................................................................... 27
Types of Research ......................................................................................................................... 27
  Experimental Studies ............................................................................................................... 28
  Correlational Studies ............................................................................................................... 29
  Longitudinal Studies ............................................................................................................... 29
  Meta-Analysis ........................................................................................................................... 30
Current Statistics ........................................................................................................................... 31
Conclusion statements .................................................................................................................. 31
Abstract

Children are a very profitable market segment for businesses because children spend about $4.7 billion of their own money, are future spenders, and have an influence on their parents purchase decisions. Because of this, businesses are spending money and effort to promote their products to children. These products include toys, music, food, clothes, movies, etc. This is a topic that continues to be controversial because parents and other adults feel that marketers are using tricks to persuade children to buy products that are potentially harmful or detrimental to a child’s development. In order to discuss this topic thoroughly, many different ethical implications and questions as well as the psychological impact that the marketing tactic and product have on developing children will be explored. Based on the research, marketers have a social responsibility to avoid marketing products to children that could potentially be a threat to their emotional, physical, and/or mental health.
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Scott Inks for advising me through this process. He raised many ethical questions for me to think about and encouraged me to do my best work. I would also like to thank Dr. Barb Stedman for her encouragement and help sorting out the direction I should take.
**Introduction: Marketers vs. Parents**

There is no question that children are being exposed to products that could potentially harm them. Whose fault is it? Marketers point the finger at parents, claiming children are at the mercy of their parents’ decisions. The marketers maintain that if parents do not want their children exposed to certain content, they should not allow their children to be around it. Parents can censor television programming, internet sites, prohibit certain magazines, and limit what the child eats. This reasoning seems logical, but parents blame the marketers. Parents declare that they are not around their children 24 hours a day. They are usually home by themselves for an hour or more after school before parents arrive home from work. Further, children are permitted to purchase junk food and pop in schools. For those reasons, parents want marketers of products such as junk food, alcohol, and tobacco to stop actively targeting children, and to be aware of where they are advertising.

**Objective and Organization**

The objective of this paper is to review both sides of the issue and reach a thesis based on factual information. First, the terms of the paper will be defined, followed by a discussion of the various advertising appeals marketers use when targeting children. A discussion of the effects that marketing has on children, both intended and unintended will follow. A detailed discussion of the three main industries that market adult material to minors: ‘Big food’, ‘big tobacco’ and alcohol companies will supercede the effects. Afterward, media violence and the various theories that try to explain why media violence has effects on children, followed by the studies that try to prove those theories will be talked about. Current statistics and a conclusion will end the thesis.
Defining the Terms

For the purposes of this paper, the term ‘minor’ will refer to any person that is under the legal age to consume the product in question, or any child under the age 18. For example, an inappropriate target market for the tobacco industry would be any person under 18 years of age. It would be inappropriate for the alcohol industry to target anyone under the age of 21.

Another term that will be used is ‘marketing to.’ What exactly does a company have to do for it to be considered ‘marketing to’ a target audience? Marketing has four basic parts: marketing communications, product, price, and marketing channels. Organizations that manipulate any of these four different parts in an effort to attract children would be marketing to children. For example, a restaurant promotes its products with a clown and friends on children’s networks, gives away toys with the purchase of a child’s meal, and builds playgrounds in the restaurants. Accordingly, this restaurant is targeting or marketing to children.

Advertising Appeals and Promotion

Because children are often naïve, they are often targeted by using appeals that would not normally work on adults. Nancy Shalek, former president of Grey Advertising, said “Advertising at its best is making people feel that without their product, you’re a loser. Kids are very sensitive to that” (Media Awareness Network 2006a). One tactic companies use to market to children is showing advertisements during certain programs and at certain times of the day where children are more likely to be watching. For example, ads for 90% of the food commercials that are aired on Saturday morning cartoon children’s shows were for junk food (Mercola 2003).

Another tactic marketers use is sponsorship which can include everything from school events to incentive programs in which children receive coupons for free goods if they accomplish monthly reading goals. The one place where marketers know they can reach children is in school. In 1999, over 8 million teens watched advertisements on television in school. Soda and
fast food companies cut exclusive deals with school systems to get their product in the lunchroom (Strasburger and Wilson 2002). Sponsorship has been used over time, but more recently, the internet has emerged as a valuable promotion tool.

The internet has become one of the most desired forms of media to target children. “Children as young as four are being targeted by advertisers on the internet and often the interaction with the children is unmediated by parents or teachers” (Beder 1998). Advertisers seek this form of media because it is unregulated, part of youth culture, and can create interactive environments based on products and brand names. This builds brand loyalty from an early age. For example, in Exhibit 1, taken July 31, 2006, a snapshot of www.nick.com, a Nickelodeon website for children, the advertisements are everywhere. The ads are for products that are made by Nickelodeon in an effort to gain brand recognition and loyalty. The internet is a media vehicle that is gaining popularity for every market segment, and marketers are utilizing it to target children. It is part of youth culture, and parents underestimate the extent to which children are marketed to online. The Media Awareness Network states “Kids are often online alone, without parental supervision. Unlike broadcasting media, which have codes regarding advertising to kids, the internet is unregulated” (Media Awareness Network 2006b). There are technologies that make it very easy for marketers to collect information from children for market research. “Studies have shown that children tend to freely give personal information via the internet” (Valkenburg 2004). For all of these reasons, the internet is a very desirable marketing vehicle.
Another appeal marketers use is product placement. Product placement can occur anywhere, appearing in television shows and movies. If a company such as Coca-cola sponsors a television show, it is not uncommon for the characters in the show to be drinking Coke. Any company that pays money for the strategic placement of its products within the television show or movie is participating in product placement.

Merchandising, or licensing, is also a marketing appeal that many companies are using. It involves using a brand from one product to sell another. For example, if a company is releasing a movie, it may market clothing, toys, food, books, etc. with the movie's title and characters. This is especially effective with children because they want to feel like the product was made especially for them. Children can recognize figures like Barney or Dora the Explorer as early as two years old (PBS 2006). Putting those images on fruit snacks or t-shirts has been proven to increase sales.

Within advertisements, marketers use persuasive appeals such as premiums, a prize given with a product as an incentive to buy, and celebrity endorsements. These are not limited to
children’s advertisement, but are especially used when marketing to children. Numerous studies have been conducted to test the effectiveness of these appeals, and the results are mixed. For example, a researcher named Atkin found that including a premium in a commercial tended not to have an impact on children’s intent to ask for the product which is consistent with other studies on premiums (Palmer and Young 1980). The same study however, found that celebrity endorsers do have an effect on children’s product knowledge. Marketers want their promotional activities to lead to brand knowledge and brand loyalty and are concerned with maximizing these effects. Parents are concerned that their children are becoming aware and knowledgeable about products that might be harmful, and would like to minimize the effects of marketing.

The Effects

The effects of marketing to children can be placed into two categories: intended and unintended effects. Common intended effects are children’s brand awareness and recognition, brand attitude and preferences, and product purchase requests. Unintended effects are harder to pinpoint. They include making children materialistic and dissatisfied, causing parent-child conflict, contributing to unhealthy eating habits, and changing self-perception. The following is a discussion of each of these effects and the numerous studies conducted to investigate its relevance to advertising.

Intended Effects: Brand Awareness and Recognition

Two types of studies have been conducted to test the relationship between advertisements and children’s brand awareness: correlational and experimental. Correlational research only proves that one variable is positively or negatively associated with the other variable. Correlational studies on children between the ages of 4 and 14 showed that there was no significant tie between advertisements and brand recall. “It must be noted, however, that when
older adolescents (15-18 year olds) are investigated, advertising does have a significant positive influence on brand recall” (Valkenburg 2004).

Experimental research tries to find a causal relationship between an independent variable, the variable that gets manipulated in an experiment, and a dependent variable, the variable studied and expected to change when the independent variable is manipulated. Experimenters control for all other variables that may affect results. In 1983, a study by Macklin revealed that 4-5 year olds could recognize (brand awareness) a cereal brand after being shown the commercial only once; however, brand recall was affected less by advertising than brand awareness. “A study by Dubow (1995), among 13-17 year olds, demonstrated that television advertising had a large effect on their brand recall, even greater than its effect on adults” (Valkenburg 2004).

Correlational studies have found a positive relationship between age and brand awareness. The younger a child, the more likely he or she is to remember a single aspect of a commercial, like a picture or a specific image. As children get older they are more likely to recall messages and concrete sequences (Palmer and Young 1980). There is greater cognitive effort involved in recalling brands than in merely recognizing them, which could be an explanation for the developmental stage of a child having an effect on his or her ability to recall a brand, rather than merely recognizing it.

*Intended Effects: Brand Attitude and Preferences*

When conducting research on brand attitudes and preferences, researchers are looking to find out whether children who are exposed to advertising like the advertised brand better, whether their desire for the brand is aroused, or whether they have a preference for the advertised brand. Many scholars believe that is impossible for children to prefer certain brands merely
because of advertising. Attitudes in general are difficult to influence. Many factors influence a child’s attitude toward brands including his or her gender, cognitive level, temperament, media preferences, and peer influences. It will more than likely take more than exposure to advertising to change a child’s brand attitude (Valkenburg 2004).

Moore and Lutz conducted a coorelational study on brand preference and found that the relationship between liking a commercial and preferring a brand is greater for children 8-years-old and younger than for older children. Atkin, one of the first to research this topic, found that exposure to advertising was not enough on its own to influence brand preferences (Valkenburg 2004).

In an experimental study by Gorn and Goldberg in 1977, boys age 8 to 10 were shown a cartoon. The study consisted of four experimental groups. The first group was shown one commercial for a new brand of toy during the cartoon. The second and third groups were shown either two or three commercials during the cartoon. The fourth group was the control group and those children were not shown any commercial. The results showed that there was a significantly higher brand attitude among those that had seen the commercial than those that did not see a commercial (Valkenburg 2004). This means that the children who were shown the commercial recognized a link between the brand and its benefit. Brand attitudes are difficult to study because so many other factors affect attitudes and preferences. Advertising can have an effect on children’s brand attitudes and preferences, but it does not necessarily always happen.

**Intended Effects: Product Purchase Requests**

Numerous studies have been conducted to find out if children make more purchase requests for advertised items. One of these is a self-report survey. In the mid-1970’s, Atkin performed a self-report survey to test the effect of advertisements on product purchase requests.
In order to do this he asked 3 to 12-year olds the following question: “Many of the TV commercials are for toys—things like games and dolls and racing cars. After you see these toys on TV, how much do you ask your parents to buy them for you?” Results revealed that 83% responded that they asked a lot or sometimes (Palmer and Young 1980). Atkin also noted that children who watched more Saturday morning commercials asked more often for the toys and cereals that were advertised.

Diary studies are another method used to research this topic. In 1987, Isler, Popper, and Ward had mothers from three age groups (9 to 11 years, 5 to 7 years, and 3 to 4 years) fill out television viewing logs and product request diaries for 4 weeks. The results revealed that children made an average of 13.5 purchase influence attempts for advertised items across the time period. A small but positive correlation between TV viewing and purchase requests was observed. Slightly larger correlations were observed between exposure to television and requests for heavily advertised products According to Patti Valkenburg, “It seems that children who watch commercial television at an above median level have, on average, a 65% chance of asking for advertised products, whereas children of below median level have a 35% average chance of asking for products” (Valkenburg 2004).

Besides exposure to advertising, age and gender may influence a child’s likelihood of making a product-purchase request. Younger children and boys have a greater tendency to make requests than older children and girls. Exposure to advertising, however, does make a significant difference no matter what the age and sex of the child. This is especially important to marketers, and explains why large amounts of money are spent every year for advertising campaigns targeted at children. The unintended effects must be taken into consideration as well, because
much of the controversy lies in these effects. Parents are concerned that their children are being harmed by these unintended effects, while marketers are skeptical of them.

**Unintended Effects**

“All sorts of effects fall into the category of detrimental effects and are unintentional in the sense that they are the ‘innocent’ by-products of creating programming that is alluring to those fickle audiences that so cherish heavy doses of gratuitous sex and violence” (Bryant and Bryant 2003).

In this section, research on the unintended effects will be explored, including: making children materialistic, contributing to children’s unhappiness, and causing unhealthy eating habits.

**Unintended Effects: Materialism**

There have been few studies on the impact of advertising on the materialism of children. One theory why advertising might contribute to materialism among children comes from two researchers, Buijzon and Valkenburg. They contend that advertising can lead to materialism because it is designed to provoke needs for products that would not otherwise be important. Buijzon states, “Advertising emphasizes that possessions are important, and that obtaining these possessions will result in many desirable qualities, such as beauty, success, status, and happiness. Advertising communicates the ideology that desirable qualities can be obtained only be material possessions” (Palmer and Young 1980).

With one exception, all the correlational studies conducted on this topic found a positive relationship between advertising viewing and materialism. Atkin found that almost 20% of children that were heavy viewers and 10% of children that were light viewers were likely to express that the most important thing to them is to have a lot of money. The experimental studies conducted also show that advertising has an effect on materialism and children.
Moschis and Moore, however, found different results. They surveyed sixth through twelfth graders twice across 14 months about their materialistic attitudes and also their exposure to television advertisements. The date found at Time 1 showed a positive relationship between exposure to advertising and materialism. To show directionality, they tested early exposure to television advertising at Time 1 with materialism score at Time 2, controlling for initial levels of materialism and well as age, gender, race, social class, and peer communication. The results of the analysis showed that there was no correlation between advertising and materialism, except for those children who came from families that rarely discussed consumption issues (Palmer and Young 1980). This suggests that advertising only stimulates materialism in children from families where there is no discussion of consumption matters.

This has serious implications for the marketer's side of the argument. It suggests that parents are responsible for materialism in their children, not advertisements. While this is true, it is not to say that parents hold all the responsibility. Another unintended effect that parents could play a role in is unhappiness.

Unintended Effects: Unhappiness

The social comparison theory, according to Valkenburg “assumes that advertising paints a world for children full of beautiful people and desirable products. If children watch too many commercials and compare them to their own situations, the contrast between the two worlds can make them unhappy” (Valkenburg 2004). A few studies have been conducted to test this theory, most of which are on the effect of beautiful models in magazines on the self-perception of teenage girls. In 1991 Richens, found that after seeing a print ad featuring a beautiful model, the majority of the girls felt less good about themselves. In contrast, in 1993 Martin and Kennedy found that there was no influence on the way the girls perceived themselves.
Donohue, Meyer, and Henke (1978) had 6 to 8-year olds watch two McDonald’s commercials. One featured a happy family having lunch and the other featured the McDonald’s fantasy cast, like Ronald McDonald and Grimace. After exposure to the commercial featuring the happy family, 75% of the African American children thought that the fictitious family was significantly happier than their own (Palmer and Young 1980). This data suggests that advertising could also affect children of various ethnicities differently than others. McDonald’s also plays a part in another unintended effect of advertising, unhealthy eating habits.

**Unintended Effects: Unhealthy Eating Habits**

In a later section an in-depth analysis of the roles that the food, alcohol, and tobacco industries have played in encouraging unhealthy habits in children will be discussed. In this section, there will be a focus on the research conducted to test the effect of advertising on children’s unhealthy eating habits.

Children’s television programs often have advertisements that promote food with high sugar and fat content. Repeated exposure to these ads may influence a child’s beliefs and perceptions about food. In 1979, Atkin found that children that watched food ads many times were twice as likely as those who never watched food ads to indicate that sugared cereals and candies were highly nutritious. In addition to Atkin’s study, Signorielli and Lears’ results showed that exposure to television ads was positively associated with mistaken beliefs about both the components of a nutritional breakfast and the nutrition provided by fast-food (Palmer and Young 1980).

A survey of eight to 12-year old American children looked at the links between television viewing and nutrition-related knowledge. The more children reported watching Saturday morning cartoons, the lower they scored on tests of nutritional awareness and knowledge
Furthermore, in 1992, Signorielli and Lears found that the amount of television viewed by fourth and fifth graders was positively correlated with bad eating habits and a poor understanding of the principles of nutrition (Gunter, Oates, and Blades 2005).

The food industry is just one industry that targets children with products that could be harmful and that producing these intended and unintended effects. Parents want marketers of these products to be aware that their messages are having negative effects on children, and to stop promoting these products to children. Next, an analysis of the major players contributing to the marketer and parent controversy will be discussed including: the food, tobacco, and alcohol industry.

**Food Industry: Big Food**

In 2005, high-sugar foods such as candy, sweets and soft drinks dominate nearly 44 percent of the foods advertised during the television programs those children ages 6 to 11 watch the most. Furthermore, Convenience and fast food advertisements made up 34.2 percent of the advertisements during the programs (Commercial Exploitation 2005). Children’s eating habits are influenced by many things, making it hard to isolate advertising effects as a cause of those bad eating habits; however there is consistent evidence that food advertisements do have an effect on a child’s short-term food choices (Gunter, Oates, and Blades 2005).

Just before 2002, the surgeon general released a report that obesity had reached epidemic levels. In Massachusetts, one-third of children aged two to five from all low and middle-income families were obese in 2002. Many people are pointing the finger at “Big Food,” a term given to the junk food industry. If this is true, it means Big Food is targeting children from low and middle-income families. They might do this because the food is relatively inexpensive and fast, making it convenient for laborers or hard-working parents. Because of this more than thirty state
legislatures were considering bills that would require restrictions on the junk food sales in school in 2003 (Schor 2004).

This industry is at the center of children’s lives, whether they admit it or not. The food industry spends approximately $33 billion a year in direct advertising and those dollars are increasingly being used to target children (Schor 2004). In July 2006, I bought Nickelodeon Magazine, whose target audience is six to fourteen-year-olds, to see how many of the ads were for junk food. Of its twenty-four ad pages, seven pages or 29% of the ads were for junk food. This is a significant decrease from a May 2002 issue in which eighteen and a half pages were for junk food. To compare, I also purchased an issue of Mad Kids, whose target audience is eight to twelve-year olds. Of the fifteen ad pages, four pages or 26% of the ads were ads for junk food. Included in both magazines, was an ad for the controversial VERB campaign.

The VERB campaign is run by a private-public partnership between U.S Department of Health and Human Services and the Center’s for Disease Control. It is an anti-obesity campaign that tries to highlight lack of activity as the main reason for child-hood obesity. Many believe that by advertising in this manner, the food industry can downplay the connection between food and obesity in an effort to define the problem as inadequate exercise (Schor 2005).

Magazines are just one form of media reaching children. In 1999, Margaret Gamble and Nancy Cotugna of the University of Delaware performed a content study in which they found that among 353 ads shown on Saturday morning children’s television, 63% were for food products (Schor 2005). There are also junk food placements in the television programs and movies targeted at children.

As stated earlier, marketers are increasingly using the internet to advertise to children. ‘Big Food’ is no exception. Many online games are created around food products to keep
children interacting with brand logos for extended periods of time, contributing to brand awareness. Many children’s sites contain junk food advertising or links to the major food brands (Schor 2005). At one time, Nick.com had the Hostess’s Twinkie the Kid Surf and Skate Challenge. Nabisco, which is owned by Phillip Morris, features games on its site that are full of brand logos. Hershey’s has a “fun stuff” link that has exclusive games and promotions targeted at children. An entire section of McDonald’s website is dedicated to children. Exhibit 2 shows a snapshot of the McDonald’s website that has a link for Ronald McDonald, which features links to current promotions.

Exhibit 2

In-school advertisements are dominated by junk food. Everything from Channel One commercials to incentive programs, and even vending machine ads are just a fraction of what children are exposed to at school. Nationwide, public schools are reported to be given on average
$750 million a year in marketing dollars from snack and processed food companies (Schor 2005).

It is a fact that obesity is a growing epidemic in America. The food industry is getting a lot of the blame, but they point the finger at parents. Paul Kurnit, founder and president of KidShop, a youth marketing company, says that “if you don’t want your child to eat pre-sweetened cereals, don’t buy them. If you don’t want your child to eat at McDonald’s, don’t take your kid to McDonald’s. I mean, on some levels, it truly is that simple” (Schor 2005). I agree that parents play a role in their child’s nutrition, but there are several things Kurnit is overlooking.

Parents are not always home after school, allowing kids to have access to foods at unlimited quantities. In addition to after school eating, children are also away from their parents at school. Soft drink companies have demanded exclusive right to use in schools. The fast-food chains dominate highway rest stops, airports, malls and other public places, so junk food is at times all that is available to eat. Furthermore, Agriculture and food lobbies have pushed through food disparagement laws in twelve states (Schor130). Food disparagement laws make it easier for the food industry to sue any critics for libel. The Texas case involving Oprah Winfrey and Mad Cow Disease is an example of a food disparagement law in action.

In an act of blatant hypocrisy, these corporations are fighting and have always fought against food labeling, but at the same time say that proper nutrition is the consumer’s responsibility. They also use tricks, like labeling a product packed with sugar, Nutri-grain, so parents think it is nutritious.

Caffeine and sugar have addictive qualities, and marketers play on that fact with such taglines as “Need the crave” or “Get the crave.” In one focus group comprised of pre-teen boys,
it was apparent that they also knew the effects of caffeine and sugar. They were quoted as saying “I want to get hyper!” “I want to bounce off the walls when I get home.” “I want Coke, because it has caffeine!” Wynne Tyree, director of research at JustKid Inc, said “Kids say they use sugar like adults use coffee—to give them a boost. Since coffee isn’t allowed, and they have no other means to ‘get them going’ or ‘give them energy,’ they use soda, chocolate, candy, and sugary fruit drinks” (Schor 2005).

The companies that market caffeine to kids are coming dangerously close to associations with drugs. Caffeine is documented as a drug with addictive properties, and plenty of messages stress the ability of caffeine to give energy to the consumer (Schor 2005). Because caffeine is not illegal, it is legal to sell it to children. But is it ethical? ‘Big Food’ will undergo major scrutiny very soon, just as ‘Big Tobacco’ has. Nabisco and Kraft, two players in the food industry, are owned by Phillip Morris, a tobacco company, so it makes sense that there would be a connection between the industries. In the next section, I will discuss the tobacco industry and what they are doing to contribute to children’s unhealthy habits.

**Tobacco Industry**

In 1998, there was a settlement between big tobacco and the U.S. government that prohibited tobacco companies from taking any action, directly or indirectly, to target youth in the advertising, promotion or marketing of tobacco products” (Tobacco Free Kids 2005). Since then, the Camel has introduced new candy-flavored cigarettes. Most experts consider this to be a blatant attempt to once again target youth under 18 years of age. Candy-flavored cigarettes appeal to new smokers, 90 percent of whom are teens or younger. Current smokers are older and unlikely to give up their established brands for these new cigarettes; however, new smokers will
be tempted to try them (Myers 2004). Figure 1 shows these candy-flavored cigarettes ads that were released in 2004.

Figure 1

All of the ads do have a printed Surgeon General’s warning on them. Do these warnings have any effect in deterring young people from smoking? In 1997, a national agreement was reached between all the major tobacco companies and a group of state attorneys. The agreement explains that underage smoking must decrease 30% by the fifth year after enactment of the legislation to print warnings on cigarette packages. Also, a series of new warnings had to be implemented. These new implementations, or warnings, should occupy 25% of the front panel of the package and should appear in the upper portion of the product (Fox, Krugman, Fletcher, Fisher 1998). Research has indicated that after implementation of the legislation, underage smoking has not declined as much as adult smoking.

Tobacco companies have become targets of numerous lawsuits. The most recent case that has gained publicity was filed August 31, 2005 by these six public health groups Tobacco-Free Kids Action Fund, American Cancer Society, American Heart Association, American Lung Association, Americans for Nonsmokers' Rights and National African American Tobacco Prevention Network. If the tobacco companies are found liable, they will have to pay $4.8 billion annually to fund a comprehensive smoking cessation program, pay $600 million annually to fund
public education campaigns in three areas – youth prevention, light/low-tar cigarettes and secondhand smoke. They would also have to prohibit practices the companies have used to market to children, deter smokers from quitting and mislead the public about the harms of smoking and secondhand smoke, set annual targets for reducing youth smoking rates and fine the companies if the targets are not met, ban terms like ‘light’ and ‘low-tar’ that mislead smokers into believing that some cigarettes are safer, and require public disclosure of internal industry documents, including detailed marketing data (Tobacco Free Kids 2005).

Tobacco companies are under so much scrutiny because they have been notorious for targeting children in the past, and are still targeting them today. In 1997, Phillip Morris was criticized “for its introduction of Woman Thing Music in a promotion consisting of a new recording label featuring female vocalists who are particularly popular among female teenagers. The music could only be purchased with Virginia Slims proofs of purchase (Fox, Krugman, Fletcher, Fisher 253)”

In 2005, Brown and Williamson introduced flavored Kool cigarettes. They promoted these new cigarettes with hip-hop themes and images that might appeal to African-American youth.

Figure 2
"Each year, a staggering 440,000 people die in the US from tobacco use. Nearly 1 of every 5 deaths is related to smoking. Cigarettes kill more Americans than alcohol, car accidents, suicide, AIDS, homicide, and illegal drugs combined. Cigarette smoking accounts for at least 30% of all cancer deaths. Smoking is also a major cause of heart disease, bronchitis, emphysema, and stroke, and contributes to the severity of pneumonia. Tobacco has a damaging affect on women's reproductive health and is associated with increased risk of miscarriage, early delivery (prematurity), stillbirth, infant death, and is a cause of low birth weight in infants. Furthermore, the smoke from cigarettes has a harmful health effect on those around the smoke" (Cancer 2003).

Knowing this, why do tobacco companies still target children? They target children because they know if someone does not start smoking by the time he or she is 18, they probably never will. This is because 90% of smokers start smoking before they turn 18 (FatherMag 2006). The tobacco companies' tactic is to make cigarettes seem cool, youthful, sexy, and forbidden, and it is working. According to a 2004 national survey in drug use and health data, 3 million kids under the age of 18 are current smokers. Of those, 82.8% prefer Marlboro, Camel, and Newport—three of the most heavily advertised brands. The tobacco industry is not the only industry illegally targeting children. Alcohol companies have found their own way to market alcohol to children.

**Alcohol Companies**

Five class-action lawsuits have been filed nationally that accuse the alcohol industry of marketing to people under 21 years of age, the Los Angeles Times reported Jan. 27, 2005. These lawsuits accuse the industry of using raunchy and provocative ads to target underage individuals in magazines targeted at youths and on television shows with large youth audiences. Furthermore, the marketing of flavored malt beverages (a.k.a. "malternatives" or "alcopops") like Smirnoff Ice and Mike's Hard Lemonade are targeted at underage drinkers. Many critics see these products as appealing to teens who dislike the taste of beer or hard alcohol (Join Together 2005).
The three leading causes of death for 15-24 year olds are homicides, suicides, and automobile accidents. Alcohol can be a factor for all three. The average age an American begins drinking is 15.9 years old. Alcohol dependence has been linked with depression, anxiety, oppositional defiant disorder, and antisocial personality disorders (FAS 2006). With all of this knowledge, the alcohol companies continue to target children for their own profits. Figure 3 shows alcohol advertisements that make drinking look cool, fun, sexy, and appealing to teenagers.

Figure 3

Alcohol companies have a social obligation, or a social responsibility to regulate their practices because they should not be marketing a substance that is physically and mentally detrimental to the group of individuals that it could harm the most. Individuals that start drinking before 15 years of age have a greater chance of developing alcohol dependence, which leads to medical problems affecting the heart, liver, and brain. It can also cause a person to become more withdrawn and violent (FAS 2006).

Violence is another issue surrounding the controversy of marketing potentially harmful materials to children. Parents are seeing their children acting out more often and seeing society become increasingly more violent. They choose to blame this on violent video games, movies, and television shows. Marketers attribute the increase in violent behavior to bad parenting.
Because this is a big issue, there has been a lot of theorizing and research done on the effects of media violence on children

**Media Violence**

Most of the research and attention related to marketing products to children has been focused on violent and aggressive materials. There are different types of media violence, such as video games, movies, television shows, and music. There are different ways of studying them, and each affects children differently. There are also theories that try to explain if and why media violence has an effect on children. It is not clear which of these theories is the most applicable, but it is agreed that all the theories hold more or less for the different types of media violence and for different types of children.

**Social Learning Theory**

The social learning theory states that children learn what is appropriate and not appropriate by testing their environment. Some actions lead to negative consequences, others have no effects, and others prove to be successful. Judging by their parents’ approval or disapproval of their actions, children can determine which actions are right or wrong. When aggressive acts are punished, children learn to control their impulses. If, however, their attempts at using aggression are successful, they will be more apt to use violence and aggression to reach their goals. If this cycle continues, violence will become routine and will not be a habit that is easily changed.

Aggressive behavior can also be learned by observing other people. For example, if a child witnesses his or her friend hit a younger sibling, and the behavior is immediately punished by a parent, that child will experience that is wrong to hit a younger sibling. On the other hand, if a child witnesses his or her friend hit a younger sibling in the presence of peers, and that
behavior elicits a positive reaction, that child may pick up a different standard of behavior. The child that witnessed his or her friend being reprimanded will be less likely to hit a younger sibling.

Bandura identified three models from which children can learn aggression: the family, the subculture where the child lives, and the mass media. “In one of his classic bobo dolls experiments, he had a group of preschoolers watch a film in which an adult hits and kicks an adult-size plastic doll (called Bobo). Children were randomly assigned to one of three versions of this film. The first group of children watched a version of the film in which the man was rewarded for his aggressive acts: Another man told him that he was a ‘strong champion.’ He receives chocolate bars and a large glass of 7-Up. The second group of children saw the man perform the same actions, but he is now punished. The third group of children watched a neutral version of the film, in which the man was neither rewarded nor punished for his aggressive acts” (Valkenburg 2004). Afterwards the children were allowed to play with the bobo doll. The first group of children were significantly more aggressive that the second and third group.

Bandura’s social learning theory also states that children’s opinions and norms about the use of violence and aggression are influenced by media characters. In movies, physical violence is often times shown to be only way to resolve conflicts. Heroes and villains are rewarded for murders. Researcher Patti Valkenburg said that, “One of the general lessons children learn from media characters is that violence works and is an appropriate way to solve interpersonal conflicts” (Valkenburg 2004).

Cognitive Script Theory
A cognitive script is knowledge of the order and structure in which routine activities occur. A script can describe how people eat dinner, or how people handle conflict. Cognitive
scripts can be formed by daily events, but they can also be formed by media experiences. In television and movie productions, problems are often solved with aggressive behavior. Often, a character who is insulted throws a punch in retaliation. Patti Valkenburg states that, “If children are frequently exposed to a lot of media violence, there is a risk that the scripts in their memory will become more aggressive than those of children who are less avid consumers of media violence. It is assumed that these aggressive, media-induced scripts, which are formed early in childhood, stimulate aggressive attitudes and behavior later in life” (Valkenburg 2004).

Arousal Theory
The arousal theory states that when children are exposed to media violence they become aroused. Arousal is a physical response that results in increased breathing, heart-beat, blood sugar level, sweat gland activity, etc. Media-produced arousal can be provoked by anything from violent programs to sexually arousing media productions (Valkenburg 2004).

Arousal induced by the media will not fade away immediately. This may agitate children and leave them feeling restless. In 1994, Paik and Constock performed a media analysis that demonstrated that violent media productions leave children in a state of excitement and cause more aggressive behavior than media productions that are less violent (Valkenburg 2004).

Desensitization Theory
This theory states that the more children are exposed to media violence, the less they are affected by it. These reactions are carried over into real life situations. Patti Valkenburg hypothesizes, “media-induced desensitization reduces inhibitions against aggression in real life. Negative emotional responses, such as fright or anxiety, have often been shown to operate as restraints against aggressive behavior. Therefore, if a child’s emotional reactions to violence are
reduced or even eliminated, the likelihood that they will engage in aggressive behavior is increased” (Valkenburg 2004).

In 1977 Thomas, Horton, Lippincott, and Drabman tested this theory. In their experiment, eight to ten-year-olds were assigned to watch either a violent police series or a nonviolent volleyball game. Immediately after the film, the experimenter told the children that his friend had a TV camera in a playroom in another part of the building. He then tells the children that he is supposed to be watching a group of preschoolers for his friend, but he has to run to an appointment. He asks the children if they will watch the other group of kids for him. He turns on the TV, which is playing a video of the preschool children in the other room with the camera. The preschoolers in the video started fighting, knocked over the camera, and “broke” it, causing it to stop working. While the children watched the video (the camera was a videotape), the experimenters tested their emotional reactions. The children who had seen the violent police video were much less upset than the children who had viewed the volleyball game.

Catharsis Theory
The catharsis theory is unlike any of the other theories, in that it assumes that media-violence has a positive influence on children. Supporters of this theory claim that children have a natural tendency to be aggressive, and watching violence in the media helps them to discharge their aggressive impulses, without actually being aggressive. They claim that children purify their emotions through vicarious experiences. This theory used to be very popular, but there have been no academic studies to support it.

Types of Research
It is a consensus among social scientists that a wide-ranging exposure to media violence can contribute to aggressiveness in individuals (Strasburger and Wilson 2002). There have been
four types of studies on the impact of media violence on children, including testing for aggressiveness. They are experimental studies, correlational studies, longitudinal, and meta-analysis.

**Experimental Studies**

In typical laboratory experiments, children are randomly invited to the laboratory and the group is also randomly divided in half. One half of the children are assigned to view a violent video, and the other half is shown a neutral film or no film at all. The majority of the experiments show that children who were exposed to the violent media were more likely to exhibit higher levels of aggression than the children in the control group. These types of studies have come under much scrutiny for several reasons. Critics say that laboratory studies utilize unrealistic measures of aggression, are conducted in an artificial manner, involve adult situations that seem to be condoning aggression, and are only able to assess only short-term effects of exposure (Strasburger and Wilson 2002).

In order to overcome these limitations, researchers are now conducting field experiments. In field experiments, researchers investigate children in their existing groups at school or in their homes. Because of this, they are unable to control the other variables if their study, making it a quasi-experiment.

In one early study, a sample of 3 to 5-year-old children were randomly assigned to watch violent or nonviolent television shows for a period of 11 days at their school. Children that watched the violent television show exhibited more physical aggression against their peers during recess than the children that watched the nonviolent television group (Strasburger and Wilson 2002). Because the researchers cannot control for outside factors, they cannot draw any
definitive conclusions about their research. They can only conclude that the relationships they are testing are plausible or implausible.

**Correlational Studies**

The correlational studies that are conducted on media violence try to see if there is a relationship between viewing media violence and aggressive behavior in children. Across numerous studies, higher exposure to television violence was positively correlated with higher levels of aggressive behavior (Strasburger and Wilson 2002). This does not mean that the media violence caused the aggressive behavior. It only suggests that there is a relationship between the two. This is why social scientists have moved toward longitudinal studies.

**Longitudinal Studies**

Longitudinal studies allow researchers to test the cumulative effect of exposure to media violence. In one study conducted by Leonard Eron, Rowell Huesmann, and their colleagues, tested the same children over a 22-year period. The reviewed the television viewing habits and aggressive behavior when the participants were 8, 19, and 30 years of age. The results revealed that among boys, the relationship between viewing television violence in the third grade and aggressive behavior 10 years later was positively correlated. In other words, exposure to television violence during early childhood was predictive of, but not a cause of higher levels of aggression 10 years later. In contrast, aggressive behavior at age 9 was not predictive of violent television consumption at age 19 (Strasburger and Wilson 2002). There was evidence that early aggression led to higher levels of violent viewing habits. From age 8 to 19, there were no significant correlations for females. Among males, there was a link between exposure to TV violence at age 8 and self-reported aggression at age 30. There was also a link between violent TV habits and in childhood and criminal acts performed at age 30.
Longitudinal studies provide evidence that television violence can have an effect on aggression over time. Some of the earlier studies did not show a significant link for females, but there have been more current studies that show females are affected by media violence as well. They also show that TV violence and aggressive behavior may be cyclical in nature, in that each encourages more of the other.

*Meta-Analysis*

Meta-analysis combines many different studies with related hypotheses, summarizes and analyzes those studies using sophisticated statistical techniques. The goal of meta-analysis is to synthesize findings from a large group of studies and provide statistical data that is more accurate than descriptive data.

In 1991, Wood, Wong, and Chachere examined cases that only observed children’s aggressive behavior after viewing violent material. Across a total of 23 experiments, the researchers found a significant effect of media violence on aggression. They concluded that “media violence enhances children’s and adolescents’ aggression in interactions with strangers, classmates, and friends” (Strasburger and Wilson 2004). Ten years later in 2001, Bushman and Anderson examined cases that looked at aggression as an outcome and not just anti-social behavior. After reviewing 212 samples, the researchers found that there was a positive and significant relationship between aggression and media violence. They also concluded that since 1975, “the effect sizes in media violence research have increased in magnitude, suggesting that the media are becoming more violent and/or people are consuming more of this type of content” (Strasburger and Wilson 2004).
Current Statistics

Children are being targeted for adult materials everyday, even though there are laws that prohibit such marketing efforts. In 2000, the FTC released a report that revealed how the movie, music, and video game industries are still marketing violent entertainment to children. They studied 44 films that were rated R, and found that 80% were targeted to children under the age of 17. The marketing plans for these movies included running commercials for them during the hours when young viewers were more likely to be watching. Explicit music were marketed to young people through advertising on the most popular teen television shows, internet sites, radio stations, and magazines. They also found that 70% of video games rated ‘mature’ were regularly marketed to children under the age of 17 through the same media vehicles as the movies and music (Media Awareness Network 2006a).

In June 2002, the Parents Television Council released a report analyzing television commercials during the Family Hour (8pm-9pm) for mature content. They found that 28% of all video game advertisements were rated M. During the second hour of prime time, 37% were rated M. The only networks that showed these advertisements were Fox, UPN, and the WB. 27% of all movie ads were for R-rated movies. 77% of all the R-rated movie ads were aired on NBC, FOX, or UPN (ParentsTV 2003).

Conclusion statements

A parents’ work is never done. These days, their work is even harder. It is very easy to point a finger at the parents when a child acts out aggressively, picks up drinking and smoking at an early age, or is obese. The truth is these industries are infiltrating the children’s sector of the world, making their products seem fun and cool. It is difficult for a parent to combat that sort of power. Advertising affects children differently than adults. Young children have a hard time
distinguishing the truth from exaggerations made to sell a product. Marketing explicit materials to children has a permanent effect on what the child will be like as an adult.

The entertainment, tobacco, alcohol, and food industries need children to stay powerful. Children spend billions of dollars every year, and the industries want that money. Is the money really worth it? What is society going to be like when every adult is an obese, alcoholic smoker that acts out aggressively? It is my conclusion that marketers have a social responsibility to not aide in children’s consumption of materials that could potentially be a threat to their emotional, physical, mental health. They can start by stopping their marketing efforts that target children.
REFERENCES


