



Children's Center

Bridgewater State University

March/April 2011

Children and Advertising: Parents' Role

by Anna R. McAlister, PhD and T. Bettina Cornwell, PhD

From a very early age, children are specific targets of advertising and promotional messages. Companies invest in child-directed marketing because children are seen as representing three valuable markets: buyers' market (i.e., they may make purchase decisions and spend their own pocket money), influence market (i.e., without spending their own money, children may request that their parents make specific purchases) and future market (i.e., if they like a brand during childhood, then they may purchase that particular brand when they are old enough to spend their own money).

Marketers, and the companies they represent, continually try to figure out how they can cultivate the brand faithful. Even the youngest consumers, including preschoolers, receive these messages—but do they understand them? Our recent research reveals that young children experience some of the same marketing pressures as young adults.

In our two-part study, published in *Psychology & Marketing*, we first assessed brand recognition levels in 38 children aged three to five years. Mainstream-brand logos, like Lego and Coca-Cola, were presented to children on a card. In individual sessions, brand names were shown to the children with questions like, "Have you seen this before?" and "What types of things do they make?" The children's recognition rates were as high as 92 percent for some of the 50 brands tested. The most commonly recognized brand was McDonald's, followed closely by other brands of fast food, soda and toys. The results showed clearly that children as young as three can recognize the brands marketed to them. Even though many of these children could not yet read, they were very good at telling us relevant information about each brand (e.g., what products they made, where the local store was, etc.).

The second part of the study tested another 42 children between the ages of three and five. Each child was asked to place smaller cards with pictures on them on a collage that started with only the brand logo. For example, we presented a McDonald's board and Burger King board and asked the child to place all the smaller picture cards that belonged with McDonald's (e.g., French fry box, "drive thru" sign) on the McDonald's board and all the Burger King ones on the Burger King board.

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MenTeach - New England Honors Dan Anderson

by Nancy Clark,
Children's Center Director

Dan Anderson received the Emerging Professional Award from MenTeach - New England on April 1st. This award is given to a man in the beginning stages of his early childhood career who has demonstrated leadership potential and a commitment to the field through direct work with young children and families, professional development, and advocacy for men. MenTeach is a non-profit clearinghouse which has sought to increase the number of men working with young children since its inception in 1979. Dan has assisted MenTeach

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Dates to Remember

April 10-16

National Week of the Young Child
(check your parent mailbox for a full list of events planned)

April 14 - Thursday

Children's Center Ice Cream Social
sponsored by
the Office of Commuter Services
2:30 - 4 p.m.
in the Burnell cafeterium

April 18 - Monday

Closed for Patriots' Day

Self-portrait
by
Aidan



Curriculum Notes – Investigator Group

by Debbie Drago, teacher

Happy Birthday:

Logan	March 20
Maggie	April 1
Max	April 6

Goodbye winter, hello spring! After the long and snowy winter, I'm sure most of us are happy to turn the calendar and enjoy more daylight and warmer temperatures.

February and March Highlights:

Health and Nutrition

To encourage the children to be healthy, we began a theme on health and nutrition. Our group time discussions focused on the importance of healthy eating, proper hygiene, exercise and sleep. The children learned to cough and sneeze into their elbows, keep fingers out of their mouths and noses, and to wash hands after using a tissue. We went outside as much as possible to get fresh air. Large motor activities were provided in the gym and movement room on days when we had to stay indoors.

One of the highlights of this unit was making the loft into a "doctor's office." The children really enjoyed pretending to be a doctor or a patient, and we believe acting out various medical play scenarios helped some to overcome their fears about visiting the pediatrician. The doctor's bag contained stethoscopes, thermometers, band aids, and other medical supplies to enhance their dramatic play. Exploration of the tooth model and dental tools in the science area led to new understandings about teeth and dental care. To promote healthy eating, our snacks included a variety of fruits, vegetables, whole grains and dairy products. Visit www.mypyramid.gov and www.nutrition.gov for helpful charts and articles about health and nutrition for children and families.

Valentine's Day

The children enjoyed making valen-

tines and decorating paper bags to collect cards from their friends. A special treat of fresh strawberries and whipped cream was served for snack. The Investigators had many opportunities to practice their literacy skills as they wrote names on their cards and matched the envelope to the appropriate friend's bag.

Feelings/Emotions

To expand on the children's interest in giving, love, and kindness, we focused our curriculum on feelings for the next two weeks. At group times they shared what makes them feel happy, sad, mad, and afraid. For art they finger painted, made paper plate faces, silly putty, and face collages. Our goal was to help them identify, understand, and express their feelings in appropriate ways. We are accepting of all their emotions, not just the positive ones. When children are angry or upset they are often redirected to sensory activities such as play dough, sand, and water play because these materials are so comforting and soothing.

Imagination

The children enjoyed many stories in early March, including Harold and the Purple Crayon, written and illustrated by Crockett Johnson. In this classic story, young Harold wanders out for a walk in the moonlight. Armed only with a purple crayon and a vivid imagination, Harold creates his own world to explore. After listening to the story of Harold's wonderful adventure, the children used their imaginations to write their own "purple crayon" stories, which were displayed in the group area.

Play has the potential to contribute to young children's development in many unique and critical ways. Preschoolers need unstructured play time throughout the day when they can use their imaginations to shape and

define play according to their own evolving needs and purposes. They realize many educational and therapeutic benefits from trying out "different hats" and pretending to be various characters. At home, you can provide prop boxes of clothes and other items, and then sit back and watch your child's imagination bloom!

Spring Break

During the optional week of March 7-10, the Investigators were combined with the Explorers in one group. The children interacted well with each other, despite the change of routine and teachers. The spring break theme was "Anything Goes," for which the teachers planned a variety of popular activities as well as some new ones. Our recently purchased light table was a hot spot where the children explored color with our new transparent Prism Bricks®.

Dinosaurs

This has always been one of the top 10 themes requested by young children. They are universally fascinated by dinosaurs' enormous size, strength and funny names. We introduced some new concepts and scientific words during this unit, such as *extinct*, *fossils*, *paleontologist* and *excavation*. Other discussions focused on what these ancient creatures ate, where they lived and how they died.

Sneak Peek into April:

We are looking forward to celebrating the National Week of the Young Child with you and your children from April 11-15, when many fun activities are being planned. Watch your parent mailbox for a complete list of events.

Hopefully the weather will be warmer soon so we can take some nature walks. The children will be using binoculars and magnifying glasses to look for signs of spring, and maybe they will find some bugs!

Curriculum Notes – Explorer Group

by Nicole West, teacher

Happy Birthday:

Hayden	March 2
Aidan	March 3
Leela	March 26
Rhiannon	April 29

Finally, spring is arriving! (Thank goodness!) With the warmer weather approaching we decided it was time for a new theme in the classroom. Because the children enjoy playing with our musical instruments, *music* became our next theme. We brought in many new instruments for the children to try out and explore and they loved it! The theme currently on display is *The Museum of Fine Arts Meets BSU*. We have been introducing art of all kinds and encouraging the children to make their own. On the walls in our classroom you can find paintings, drawings, and other art projects your child has made. With it we've included descriptions of the pictures, or what inspired them while making their project. The children have really been enjoying this theme so be sure to check out the gallery for their artwork.



Shayna is experimenting with color.

As many of you know, we have a student teacher with us this semester, Caitlin Mulcahy. For her unit, she introduced *germs and how to keep our bodies healthy!* This will be further explained in the message from Caitlin below.

With spring in the air and suggestions from the children, it looks as though our next project will be focused around *birds*. We are seeing more and more birds on the playground, in the field, and hanging around the bird feeders!

Notes:

Although it's April, the weather can still be unpredictable, so please be sure that your child has a weather appropriate coat as we will be going outside as much as possible.

We are continuing with Professor Greg Nelson and his math lessons, rotating the Pre-K and the younger students every week. We are also enjoying music and learning new songs with Professor Sarah McQuarrie every Tuesday!

A Message from Caitlin

My name is Caitlin Mulcahy and I am currently a senior here at Bridgewater State University. I am majoring in Early Childhood Education and Care and dream of becoming a preschool/ kindergarten teacher when I graduate. At the moment I am doing the student teaching required of my major, and could not be happier that I am able to complete this requirement at the Children's Center with all the wonderful children here.



Caitlin is showing how germs spread from hand to hand.

In order to complete my student teaching I am required to create a themed unit for the children. I decided that *germs* would be a great topic for the children to learn about. This was decided due to all of the sickness going around, and I felt that learning good hand washing techniques and what germs are, among many other topics, would be a great experience for them. These activities include art, science, language, social studies, math, and even more exploration of the world around them.

It has been such a rewarding experience to work at the Children's Center since this past September, and see all the children grow and mature throughout the year. I am so happy that I have been able to be a teacher in this classroom and cannot wait to see how the rest of the activities I have planned unfold for the children.

Please feel free to approach me if you have any questions about the activities I have or will be conducting, or just to say hi. I will be graduating in May and would love to be able to leave knowing I answered all the questions that you have.

Children and Advertising: Parents' Role

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Although this task sounds very easy, some children performed well while others could not distinguish between various brand pairs.

After scoring was completed, this test found children were more likely to know a lot about “kiddy” brands. Brands that are mostly targeted to teens and adults (e.g., Nike) were less understood by preschoolers. This may be because children see logos for kids’ brands each time they open a packaged item or perhaps they have a vested interest in being able to request some items by name to a parent or caregiver.

An additional aspect of the study examined if children understand brand meaning. In addition to knowing what products are offered from each brand, some young children know that brands communicate other meanings. Some preschoolers understand that brands can serve as indicators of other things, such as the personality of the user or the quality of the products. Just as an adult might judge the wearer of Versace jeans to be wealthy, confident or sophisticated, some preschoolers judge other children on the basis of the brands they use. For example, another child who plays with Lego toys might be judged to have many friends and be a fun play partner.

Before we conducted this research, other studies had suggested that children do not use brands in their judgments of others until age seven or eight. The results in both segments of our recent study clearly show this can happen much earlier than grade school, but it depends on the individual child’s development. We believe when messages are tailored to captivate a child’s attention, information may be more easily processed and stored, therefore increasing a child’s brand understanding.

This study showed us that some preschool children really do understand the differences between brands like

Coke and Pepsi—and at a much earlier age than previously theorized. As we more fully understand how and when children develop brand knowledge, we will know when they should be shielded from advertising pressures.

What Should Regulators Do to Help?

The results of this study could not be timelier, given the recent “Let’s Move” nationwide campaign announcement by First Lady Michelle Obama. The “Let’s Move” campaign aims to support nutritional meals in schools with an additional focus on increasing physical activity. It’s a fact that one in three kids is overweight or obese in the U.S. and costs the U.S. \$150 billion per year to treat obesity-related illnesses. The outcomes of our study help paint the picture that young children really do understand the power of branding and advertising. These findings highlight the need for lawmakers to continue to monitor and regulate advertising to children.

This study shows children use brand cues to determine what food products will be exciting or which toys will be the most enjoyable, and values associated with items (like food choices) are formed as young as three years old. There are plenty of three-to-five year olds that base their drink choices on “bubbles and fun.” It’s clear from the fast food branding segment of this study that we need public policies that address the development of eating habits very early on in a child’s life.

Parental Role

For every argument against advertising to children, the defense raised by marketers is that parents should be responsible for determining the content to which their children are exposed. Whether marketers’ defense of their clever tactics is fair is a topic too broad to cover in this article. Instead, we focus on delivering some of our top tips for parents who hope to protect their children from the poten-

tial adverse effects of advertising exposure.

Reduce Commercial Content

Consider restricting the amount of advertising to which your child is exposed. One of the simplest ways to achieve this is to replace TV time with DVD viewing. DVDs do not contain as much advertising content as commercial TV.

Talk to Your Child About Advertising

Make time to talk to your child about advertising. Our findings suggest that young children are starting to understand brands, but that does not mean they question advertising messages. Encouraging a healthy level of skepticism may be beneficial.

Explain the Rules

Research in developmental psychology suggest that the most effective parenting style involves a family “democracy.” While parents maintain ultimate control, children can benefit from understanding why rules are set. If you refuse to purchase a particular brand of toy or food for your child, then the chances of your child respecting the rules without a tantrum are higher if you provide an explanation. Young children may have trouble controlling their emotional responses, but be patient. If you consistently explain the rules, then children will eventually learn not to ask.

Be Firm But Fair

Occasionally, let your child make purchase decisions. Set some clear boundaries that allow your child a “safe” space in which to practice making independent decisions. For example, if your child insists on choosing her own breakfast cereal, first you make a shortlist of allowable products (four or five that you will definitely agree to), then encourage your child to choose whatever she wants from that set. If your child is old enough to understand these simple rules, then you might feel comfortable telling her that she can spend her allowance on

whatever she likes, so long as particular brands or categories are not purchased. As children grow older, allow more leeway in their decision making.

Serve Take-Out Meals on Plates

Other studies have suggested that children learn a lot about brands via packaging. In particular, children may learn to like the taste of energy-dense foods because they hold positive relationships with the brands that are promoted heavily on the wrappers. If you purchase take-out food for your child, then serve it on a plate at home. Without the commercial packaging, your child has less opportunity to associate the food with the brand. He can make a decision about liking the food without marketing and advertising associations. While he may know exactly where you purchased the

food, he can focus on family conversation rather than gaze at the brand logo. If your child is young enough to be “duped,” then consider adding some fresh veggies to the plate beside the burger and fries; he may develop a liking for the vegetables at the same time!

Anna McAlister (PhD, University of Queensland, Australia) is a Lecturer at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She was Postdoctoral Research Fellow and Lecturer in Marketing at the University of Queensland, Australia. Her research focuses on consumer behavior with a special interest in the application of theories of developmental psychology to the study of children’s consumer socialization. Email: armcalister@wisc.edu.

T. Bettina Cornwell (PhD, University of Texas) is a professor of Marketing and Sport Management at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. Prior to joining the School of Kinesiology at the University of Michigan, she was a professor in marketing at the University of Queensland in Australia. Her research focuses on marketing communications and consumer behavior, especially with regards to international and public policy issues. Email: tbettina@umich.edu.

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www.pedsforparents.com

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Annual Children's Resource Fair

Portuguese American Civic Club (PACC)
 175 School Street—Taunton

Saturday, April 30th * 9 am—12 noon

This indoor event is **FREE** for all families and children! Hope to see you there!

*Presented by Family and Community Engagement, a program of Triumph, Inc.
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 the Department of Early Education and Care.*

MenTeach - New England

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with this mission by designing brochures and flyers, and by creating a FaceBook page in an effort to connect with and support other men entering the early childhood field.

Gender is the first core identity to capture young children’s attention. Male and female role expectations are among the strongest messages children receive from their families, culture, peers, and society. Rigid perceptions of gender roles may lead some children to avoid certain explorations and play, thereby robbing them of the activities necessary for the fullest development of their abilities and skills. Gender bias causes others to struggle with conflicts between what they would like to do and what societal stereotypes or their peers say they are “supposed” to do.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, men comprised only 2.2% of the total number of preschool and kindergarten teachers in 2009. The Children’s Center is fortunate to have Dan Anderson on staff to model a range of roles and interests that transcend traditional gender stereotypes.

Where Do the Children Play?



Where Do the Children Play? is a PBS documentary, book, and outreach project about the vital importance of open-ended

play for the healthy development of children. This kind of play is disappearing from children's lives because of unsafe neighborhoods, parents' fear of "stranger danger," even in safe neighborhoods; the seductiveness of electronic games and entertainment; an increase in teacher-led instruction in preschool and kindergarten that is pushing child-initiated learning and exploration out of the classroom; and children's diminishing access to woods, fields, vacant lots, parks, and other semi-wild play spaces.

As part of the Children's Museum in Easton's outreach program, the PBS documentary *Where Do the Children Play?* will be presented at the Raynham Public Library on:

Monday, May 16th at 7 p.m.

This 50 minute film will be followed by a one hour discussion.

For more information, please contact the Children's Museum in Easton at (508) 230-3789.

The documentary film was inspired by Elizabeth Goodenough's book *Secret Spaces of Childhood* (University of Michigan Press, 2003). Goodenough, a scholar in the emerging field of children's studies, noted that time outside school was increasingly filled with adult-organized activities and indoor screen time. Children no longer had

the space or opportunity to organize their own play or discover their own secret spaces.

Writer and director Christopher Cook and consulting producer Mark Harris created *Where Do the Children Play?* The film won five Emmy Awards and has been broadcast on American Public Television. The DVD is available for public screenings through the Alliance for Childhood or for private purchase from University of Michigan Press. Outreach director and film advisor Goodenough has edited *A Place for Play*, a full-color companion volume with a foreword by Richard Louv. This collection summarizes research and documents the diverse partners working to reconnect children with nature. It offers practical advice and model programs with a portfolio of playgrounds by award-winning aerial photographer Alex MacLean.

Outreach includes another film, *Childhood Places/Secret Spaces*, in which children's author Christopher Paul Curtis (*The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963*) returns to his hometown Flint, Michigan and speaks with schoolchildren about their experiences.

For information about the film contact:

Michigan Television:
www.michigantelevision.org/childrenplay

To reach Elizabeth Goodenough, originator of the film and outreach director: lizgoode@umich.edu

To organize a public screening: e-mail Ashley Miller at amiler84@gmail.com (AmeriCorps intern) or call (607)664-6333.

Books related to *Where Do the Children Play?*

A Place for Play and *Secret Spaces of Childhood* are available from the University of Michigan Press,

www.press.umich.edu and Perseus Distribution (800.449.4499x145; fax 877.364.7063; Flex Dr., Jackson, TN 38301).

Websites of organizations that promote creative play

www.allianceforchildhood.org

www.ipausa.org

www.cfcp.org

www.cnaturenet.org

<http://web.gc.cuny.edu/che/cerg/>

www.hookedonnature.org

www.kaboom.org

www.nifplay.org

www.naturalearning.org

www.playwales.org.uk

www.playborhood.com

www.sierraclub.org/youth/blog

www.truceteachers.org

www.wild-zone.net

Children's Center

Bridgewater State University
Burnell Hall, Room 135
Bridgewater, MA 02325

Staff

Nancy Clark, director
Jane Doyon, lead teacher
L. Eileen Estudante, lead teacher
Dan Anderson, teacher
Debbie Drago, teacher
Joanne Hogan, teacher
Nicole West, teacher
Laura Corbett, clerk

Reprint by permission:
Phone: 508-531-1244
Fax: 508-531-6165
Email: nclark@bridgew.edu

<http://www.bridgew.edu/childrenscenter/>