How advertising beauty influences children’s self-perception and behavior

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ABSTRACT

We investigate (1) whether the physical attractiveness stereotype applies to children, (2) whether children’s self-perception is influenced by the attractiveness of an advertising model, (3) whether children’s buying intentions are influenced by the attractiveness of an advertising model, and (4) whether age, gender and materialism affect (1), (2) and (3). Results of an experimental research (N=185) confirm the presence of the “what is beautiful is good” stereotype in children. Attractive (versus less attractive) models were also perceived to be less likely to follow the rules. Contrary to expectations from research in adult samples, the presence of an attractive (versus less attractive) model has a positive influence on perceived physical appearance for both boys and girls and also a positive influence on general self-worth for girls. We also found that attractive (versus less attractive) models increase attitudes and buying intentions for boys, but not for girls. No effects of age and materialism were found.

INTRODUCTION

Studies show that children globally have an annual spending power of 300 billion dollar (mainly from pocket money and holiday jobs) and additionally influence the family purchase decisions for a number of products, which in turn additionally accounts for nearly 1.88 trillion dollar (Lindstrom & Seybold, 2003). Children are relying their consumption choices and purchase requests on a range of external stimuli, among which advertising (Bandyopadhyay, Kindra & Sharp, 2001). These advertising stimuli are prominent in children’s lives: it is estimated that children see over 40,000 television commercials a year (Kunkel et al., 2004). Concerns about advertising to children have led to extensive research originating from a psychological, social, ethical, medical, political, juridical and economical perspective. The number of advertising methods used to target children are numerous: marketers incorporate bright colors, humor, catchy music and attractive models in their campaigns to attract children. Research using adult samples has shown that attractive (versus unattractive) models are rated more positive on other unrelated characteristics. This is explained by the physical attractiveness stereotype, also called the “what is beautiful is good” stereotype (Dion, Walster & Berscheid, 1972). This physical attractiveness stereotype has been observed in adult samples in different contexts (social and professional, Abramowitz & Ogrady, 1991; Cash & Kilcullen, 1985; Farley, Chia, & Allred, 1998) and different cultures (Chen, Shaffer & Wu, 1997). Several studies confirmed the presence of this physical attractiveness stereotype in children samples (e.g. Bazzini, Curtin, Joslin, Regan, & Martz, 2010; Ruiz, Conde & Torres, 2005). This “what is beautiful is good” stereotype is learned at an early age and leads children, for example, to rate attractive (versus less attractive) children as more pleasant,
popular and less prone to get into trouble and less attractive children to be more associated
with negative social behaviors like aggression and fear (Bazzini et al., 2010). While research
found that even babies of two to eight months old look longer at pictures of attractive (versus
less attractive) people (Langlois et al., 1987) implying that to some degree the attractiveness
stereotype is innate (Langlois, Roggman, & Rieser-Danner, 1990; Ramsey & Langlois, 2002),
there is little doubt that, despite the biological propensity for the stereotype, the environment
courages the preference by means of socializing agents (e.g., peers, parents, caregivers,
teachers), who expose children to their own values and beliefs. Furthermore, young children
are exposed to increasing amounts of media sources. Popular culture (like movies and
advertising) is a powerful educational force, teaching children cultural norms, regardless of
parental background. Media contributes to the physical attractiveness stereotype by frequently
encouraging associations between beauty and goodness. This association is especially true in
advertising in which attractive models appear in positive settings (Buunk & Dijkstra, 2011).
In nearly 25% of the commercials, some form of attractiveness is present (Downs & Harrison,
1985). Even subtle messages in children’s media become ingrained when children watch films
over and over again, as children often do (Robertson, 1998). The movies children watch, for
example animated children’s movies, including Disney films, link beauty with goodness and
happiness (Bazzini et al., 2010) and even pair beauty with intellect more than in adult movies.
These associations keep the physical attractiveness stereotype alive and can make children
infer that good things only happen to beautiful people, even though attractive women also
have less positive qualities like higher levels of narcissism and have higher rates of divorce
than do less attractive women (Kaner, 1995).

Much is unknown about the effects of this physical attractiveness stereotype in children. Our
goal is to shed some light on the effect of this stereotype on evaluations, behavior and the
self-perception of children. More specifically, we determine how advertising to children (aged
8-12) influences children’s state of mind by presenting results of a study in which children are
confronted with advertising using attractive (versus less attractive) models. We investigate (1)
whether the physical attractiveness stereotype applies to children, (2) whether children’s self-
perception is influenced by the attractiveness of an advertising model, (3) whether children’s
buying intentions are influenced by the attractiveness of an advertising model, and (4)
whether age, gender and materialism affect (1), (2) and (3).

BACKGROUND

“What is beautiful is good” stereotype

A lot of social psychological research documents the physical attractiveness stereotype, or the
perception that physically attractive individuals possess more positive qualities and
experience more satisfying life outcomes than do unattractive individuals. This physical
attractiveness stereotype has been observed in adult samples in different contexts (social and
professional, Abramowitz & Ogrady, 1991; Cash & Kilcullen, 1985; Farley, Chia, & Allred,
1998) and different cultures (Chen, Shaffer & Wu, 1997). The stereotype is most robust for
perceptions of social competency and less predictive of intellectual competence,
psychological adjustment, integrity and concern for others (Eagly et al., 1991). The physical
attractiveness stereotype also has an effect on the evaluation of movie characters and
advertising models (Buunk & Dijkstra, 2011; Caballero, Lumpkin & Madden, 1989). In
movies, attractiveness of a character is often strongly associated with moral goodness, higher
levels of romantic activity, better life outcomes and higher centrality to the plot, and is weakly
related to higher intelligence and slightly lower levels of aggression for both male and female
models (Smith, McIntosh & Bazzini, 1999). Dion et al. (1972) similarly found that individuals who were physically attractive were expected to experience more happiness in their lives (e.g., happier marriages, more professional success) than were less attractive individuals. More recent research on beliefs about attractiveness further supports such expectations. Evans (2003), for example, showed that women tend to believe that professional female models (who embody idealized attractiveness and thinness) are happier than average females.

A number of diverse processes can be at play when employing the “what is beautiful is good” stereotype. Some authors argue that personality might in fact be correlated to the appearance of people (Dion et al., 1972), since attractive people might, for example, behave socially desirable when they learn that peers expect certain behavior from them. The meta-analysis of Langlois et al. (2000) showed that attractive people are in fact more popular, show greater intelligence/performance competence and are better adjusted. The stereotype can also be seen as a projective technique in relationships with others. People may project their own desire to relate to attractive others by ascribing additional positive attributes (compatible to these bonding motives) to these attractive people (Lemay, Clark & Greenberg, 2010).

Several studies confirmed the presence of this physical attractiveness stereotype in children samples (e.g. Bazzini et al., 2010; Ruiz, Conde & Torres, 2005). This “what is beautiful is good” stereotype is learned at an early age and leads children, for example, to rate attractive (versus less attractive) children as more pleasant, popular and less prone to get into trouble and less attractive children to be more associated with negative social behaviors like aggression and fear (Bazzini et al., 2010). While research with babies found that to some degree the attractiveness stereotype is innate (Langlois, Roggman, & Rieser-Danner, 1990; Ramsey & Langlois, 2002), there is little doubt that, despite the biological propensity for the stereotype, the environment encourages the preference by means of socializing agents (e.g., peers, parents, caregivers, teachers), who expose children to their own values and beliefs.

**Consumer socialization & advertising to children**

To be able to act as consumers in the market, children have to acquire skills, knowledge, and attitudes relevant to their role as consumers; a procedure that is called consumer socialization (John, 1999). While growing up, children gain knowledge on products, brands, advertising, shopping, pricing, decision-making strategies, parental control and negotiation approaches (McNeal, 1964; Berey and Pollay, 1968; Ward, 1977; Hawkins and Conney, 1974; Robertson, 1979; Gorn and Florsheim, 1985; John, 1999). Consumer socialization takes place in a social context including the family, peers, mass media, and marketing institutions. Parents interact with their children about purchase requests, giving them pocket money and taking them to shopping excursions (Ward et al., 1977). Peers affect consumer beliefs starting early in life and continuing through adolescence (Moschis and Churchill, 1978). Mass media and advertising provide information about consumption and the value of material goods. Young children are exposed to increasing amounts of media sources. Popular culture (like movies and advertising) is a powerful educational force, teaching children cultural norms, regardless of parental background. Television advertising is an effective tool to motivate consumers to buy products. Children are exposed to a large amount of television advertising as television is considered to be the most well-liked medium, absorbing nearly up to 13.9 h a week from children’s time but higher watching time for those who belong to ethnic minority (15.2 h) and for people having low income (15.5 h) (Livingstone, 2002; Kondo & Steemers, 2006). More recent studies even report television watching times of 3.78 hours per day for preschool
children (Tandon, Zhou & Christakis, 2012). The more time children spend watching television, the more they are influenced by it (Strasburger, 1993). Since the early 1970’s, concerns about children's ability to comprehend and evaluate advertising messages have risen (McNeal, 1992; Young, 1990). Studies show that advertising can persuade children that a product is desirable (Roedder, Sternthal and Calder, 1983; Moore and Lutz, 2000) but that cognitive development plays a crucial role in the processing of advertising. Skepticism towards advertising claims develops only from a certain age once certain cognitive and social developments have taken place. Both Piaget’s theory of cognitive development and information processing theories of child development share a focus on children’s developing skills in the areas of acquisition, decoding, organization and retrieval of information. Most children under the age of seven are limited processors, with processing skills that are not yet fully developed or successfully utilized in learning situations. According to John (1999), children discriminate advertising from content (such as television programs) based on persuasive intent only from the age of 7 to 8 years. Because the development of multiple perspectives and metacognition has occurred during elementary school years (Wellman, 1990; John, 1999; Young, 1990), children at this age may realize that advertisements contain false or exaggerated claims and become more skeptical towards advertising (Moore and Lutz, 2000; Bartsch and London, 2000). By the time children reach the age of 8 years, they are capable to respond to commercial advertisements in a mature and informed way (John, 1999).

**Use of attractive sources in advertising to children**

Advertising to children often uses popular sources as a recognizable spokesperson for a product, thereby influencing children’s preferences and buying behavior (Pringle, 2004). Children are often not solely interested in the product, but rather attracted by the image, as brought forward by the spokesperson that surrounds the product (Acuff, 1999). Hence, source characteristics play an important role in the effectiveness of advertising. Psychological research shows that the effectiveness of an advertising source depends on the similarity, familiarity and likeability of the source (McGuire, 1985). These characteristics are important when judging another person at first instance (Ohanian, 1991). People agree more often with the opinion of attractive (versus less attractive) individuals (Kardes, Cline & Cronley, 2008). Debevec, Madden and Kernan (1986) suggested that higher source attractiveness led to higher verbal and behavioral compliance. The same pattern was found in advertising research: attractive sources are more persuasive than less attractive sources (Baker & Churchill, 1977; Joseph, 1982; Caballero & Pride, 1984). According to the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) however, the influence of peripheral advertising elements, like the attractiveness of a source, decrease when the motivation and the ability to process the central arguments in an advertising message is high. Research also shows that children between 7 and 10 years old have rather low ability and motivation to process arguments in an advertising message demonstrating the potential role of peripheral advertising elements like source attractiveness.

Research in an adults sample shows that the use of attractive sources in advertising can also lead to negative reactions towards the product and the model when the advertisement lowers the self-perception of the target audience (Bower, 2001). The opposite was found for children (Macklin & Carlson, 1999). Children, especially girls with a low self-perception, like advertisements more and are more persuaded by them when they show attractive models. Boys, and girls with a high self-perception, are less influenced by the use of attractive sources in advertising (Macklin & Carlson, 1999).
RESEARCH

Previous research suggests the influence of attractive (versus less attractive) sources in advertising on children, but some questions remain. The following topics are investigated:

(1) Is the physical attractiveness stereotype reaching further for children compared to adults?

Bazinni et al. (2010) found that, while attractive (versus less attractive) adults are not rated as more intelligent by other adults, the attractiveness-intelligence link is made by children. Moreover, children, especially young ones, think differently than adults. Children’s more simplistic representations of concepts might enhance the prevalence and effect of the physical attractiveness stereotype. Ramsey and Langlois (2002) proposed that children are likely to encode, process, and recall information when it conforms to already existing knowledge and schemas. Information that is inconsistent with pre-existing schemas (in this case, the belief that what is beautiful is good) may be disregarded or inaccurately processed. If children are shown movies in which less attractive people perform good acts, they are less likely to correctly recall this movie (Ramsey and Langlois, 2002). This could suggest that the effect of the physical attractiveness stereotype in children’s evaluation reaches further compared to adults’ evaluations. We investigate if children rate attractive (versus less attractive) sources higher on other characteristics (such as intelligence, non-conformity, popularity, sportiness etc.).

(2) Is physical attractiveness, shown in advertising, affecting children’s self-perception?

It has been found that attractiveness shown in ads lowers self-evaluation in adults. The effects of the attractiveness shown in ads to children and its effect on children’s own self-perception has never been investigated.

(3) Do children evaluate advertisements that use attractive (versus less attractive) models better?

Research on adults shows that an attractive (versus less attractive) model results in higher message effectiveness as measured by attitude towards the ad, attitude towards the brand and purchase intention (Parekh & Kanekar, 1994; Phau & Lum, 2000; Liu, Huang, & Minghua, 2007). Our third goal is to identify if children’s evaluations of advertising are also affected by using an attractive (versus less attractive) model.

(4) Are age, gender, and materialism affecting the influence of using physical attractive (versus less attractive) models in advertising to children?

Heyman and Gelman (2000) proposed that when young children (under 8 years) receive information about the appearance of a character, they can reinterpret information about traits that would contradict with the physical information they received. They thereby reconcile the inconsistency that occurs when they receive trait information that is contradicting of the physical attractiveness stereotype (Bazzini et al., 2010). This tendency decreases with age, as older children begin to rely more on behavioral information in making judgments (Hoffner & Cantor, 1985). This suggest that the effects of using a physical attractive (versus less attractive) model in an ad are lower in older compared to younger children. We expect that age affects the pervasiveness of the effect of using attractive (versus less attractive) models, meaning that evaluation of
characteristics is more influenced by the physical attractiveness of the model for younger compared to older children.

Gender influences, amongst others, the positivity of the self-perception (Delfabbro et al., 2011) and reactions to advertising (Moore, 2007). Most studies have investigated the influence of exposure to attractive models on the self-perception of woman, while research on the influence of exposure to attractive models on men is scarce (Blond, 2008). We expect gender differences in the effect of using attractive (versus less attractive) models on evaluations and behavior of children, since previous research has shown that the body image also differs across gender (for example, boys focus more on muscular improvement than girls do (McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2003).

In an advertising context, materialism has been identified as guiding evaluation and purchase intentions of products and influencing advertising efficacy (Osmonbekov, Gregory, Brown & Xie, 2009). Materialist individuals evaluate advertising better than less materialist individuals, leading to suggest that the attractiveness of the model should not influence evaluation of advertisements for higher materialistic children.

Methodology

In order to answer these questions, we performed an experimental research with 185 children (47% girls) aged between 8 and 12 years (M=9.7, SD=1.3). We selected children that are 8 years or older because research shows that children undergo the most important developments in terms of consumer socialization between 7 and 11 years old (John, 1999) and selected children younger than 12 years old because previous research showed that between middle childhood and early adolescence decreases in self-esteem appear, which usually stabilize again after this age and would therefore not be representative (Chaplin and John, 2007). Children were randomly confronted with an advertisement using either an attractive or less attractive same-sex model. Pretesting was performed to identify attractive and less attractive models within the same age range as the respondents. In a pretest 14 pictures of boys and girls were shown to 10 children between 8 and 12 years old. Children had to indicate on a 4-point scale to what degree they rated the boy/girl in the picture as attractive. We selected the pictures that were rated as most (boy, M=3.6; girl, M=3.4) and least attractive (boy, M=1.3; girl, M=1.5).

In the actual experiment, children were randomly assigned to an advertisement with either an attractive or less attractive same-sex model. Pretesting was performed to identify attractive and less attractive models within the same age range as the respondents. In a pretest 14 pictures of boys and girls were shown to 10 children between 8 and 12 years old. Children had to indicate on a 4-point scale to what degree they rated the boy/girl in the picture as attractive. We selected the pictures that were rated as most (boy, M=3.6; girl, M=3.4) and least attractive (boy, M=1.3; girl, M=1.5).

In the actual experiment, children were randomly assigned to an advertisement with either an attractive or less attractive same-sex source playing a new Wii videogame (Rabbids go home), accompanied by the slogan “are you ready?”. This product was chosen because previous research indicated that videogames are rather gender neutral (Van de Sompel, Vermeir & Pandelaere, 2012). After exposure to the advertisement, children filled out their age and gender. Then, they completed items from the ‘physical appearance’ and 'general self-worth’ subscale of Harter’s (1985) Self-Perception Profile for Children (SPP-C) and the 3-item version of the Material Values Scale for Children (MVS-c; Opree, Buijzen, Reijmersdal, & Valkenburg, 2011), on a 4-point scale ranging from ‘Yes, absolutely” to “No, absolutely not’. Advertising effectiveness was assessed with measures on attitude towards the advertising source, attitude towards the ad, attitude towards the brand and purchase intentions on 4-point scales ranging from ‘definitely not’ to ‘definitely’ (Pecheux, 2001; Derbaix & Pecheux, 2003). Finally, they rated the attractiveness of the advertising source using 4-point scale ranging from ‘definitely not’ to ‘definitely’. Self-perception of the advertising sources was included to test the “what is beautiful is good stereotype”, hereby measuring characteristics that are rather unrelated to attractiveness. To measure self-perception of the advertising...
source, we asked children to rate how the sources would answer the following questions: “I am good in sports”, “At school, I follow the rules”, “It doesn’t take me a long time to complete my homework”, “I am popular with my peers” and “I like the way I look”, also using 4-point scales ranging from ‘definitely not’ to ‘definitely’.

Research Results

Manipulation checks showed that attractive sources were rated as more attractive than less attractive sources by both boys ($F(1,85)=31.73, p<0.01$) and girls ($F(1,85)=11.83, p<0.01$). Results show that boys believe that the attractive source views himself as sportive and popular, that he likes the way he looks and that he can quickly finish his homework. In addition, an attractive source is assumed to follow less rules at school. Attractive girls are assumed to rate themselves as being less good in sports and less likely to follow school rules, while they are assumed to rate themselves as more popular and more satisfied with their own appearance.

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<th></th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Attractive M (SD)</td>
<td>Less attractive M (SD)</td>
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<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
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<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am good in sports</td>
<td>2.64 (.96)</td>
<td>2.11 (.78)</td>
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<tr>
<td>At school, I follow the rules</td>
<td>2.58 (.99)</td>
<td>2.93 (.71)</td>
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<tr>
<td>It doesn’t take me a long time to complete my homework</td>
<td>3.13 (.83)</td>
<td>2.80 (.78)</td>
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<tr>
<td>I am popular with my peers</td>
<td>2.53 (1.0)</td>
<td>2.13 (.65)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like the way I look</td>
<td>3.02 (.87)</td>
<td>2.39 (.80)</td>
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</tbody>
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Table 1: The influence of gender and source attractiveness on source characteristics; *<.05; **<.01

Contrary to expectations from research in adult samples, the presences of an attractive (versus less attractive) model has a positive influence on physical appearance for both boys and girls and a positive influence on general self-worth for girls. We also found that attractive (versus less attractive) models increase advertisement and brand attitudes and buying intentions for boys, but not for girls. No effect of age and materialism was found on the influence of using attractive (versus non attractive) models in ads on self-perception and advertising effectiveness.
Table 2: The influence of gender and source attractiveness on advertising effectiveness and self-perception; *<.05; **<.01

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<tr>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Attractive M (SD)</td>
<td>Less attractive M (SD)</td>
<td>F-value</td>
<td>Attractive M (SD)</td>
<td>Less attractive M (SD)</td>
<td>F-value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude towards the ad</td>
<td>3.14 (.67)</td>
<td>2.75 (.59)</td>
<td>8.88*</td>
<td>2.91 (.72)</td>
<td>2.95 (.43)</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude towards the brand</td>
<td>3.40 (.61)</td>
<td>2.96 (.57)</td>
<td>13.42**</td>
<td>2.99 (.77)</td>
<td>2.86 (.47)</td>
<td>.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchase intention</td>
<td>2.62 (.92)</td>
<td>2.31 (.64)</td>
<td>3.58*</td>
<td>2.56 (.92)</td>
<td>2.28 (.58)</td>
<td>2.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical appearance</td>
<td>3.28 (.52)</td>
<td>3.04 (.55)</td>
<td>5.25*</td>
<td>3.19 (.69)</td>
<td>2.91 (.49)</td>
<td>4.49*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General self-worth</td>
<td>3.30 (.55)</td>
<td>3.15 (.52)</td>
<td>1.83</td>
<td>3.27 (.77)</td>
<td>2.99 (.59)</td>
<td>3.61*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Solutions and Recommendations

Since attractive models are often used in advertising to children, it is important to know how children evaluate these models and how this affects their own self-perception and advertising effectiveness. If children’s self-perception would be negatively affected by the use of attractive models, marketers should decrease their use of attractive spokespeople. Also, if results show that children’s evaluation and behavior as well as their self-perception are influenced by the marketing technique of using attractive models, this could encourage governments or other organizations to set up sensitization to attract attention to this topic. Campaigns could be set up to learn children to use the physical attractiveness stereotype less or by invalidating this stereotype by showing its falsehood.

To identify the influence of using attractive (versus less attractive) advertising sources on children, we conducted an experimental research in which 8 to 12 year old children were confronted with an advertisement for a new product using either an attractive or a less attractive model. Our results do only partially confirm the “what is beautiful is good” stereotype in children. Especially boys ascribe more positive characteristics to attractive (versus less attractive) sources. Attractive (versus less attractive) boys were not only rated higher on characteristics related to attractiveness (i.e. “like the way I look” and “I am popular with my peers”) (cfr. Hawley et al., 2007) but also on seemingly unrelated characteristics like “good at sports”. Similar to Bazinni et al. (2010), boys rated attractive (versus less attractive) sources as being more intelligent (i.e. more quickly finishing their homework). Attractive (versus less attractive) boys were also rated as “popular”, which confirms previous research in adolescent samples (Boyatzis, Baloff, and Durieux, 1998). Girls rate attractive (versus less attractive) sources higher on characteristics related to attractiveness (i.e. “like the way I look” and “I am popular with my peers”). Interestingly, girls rate attractive sources as “less good in sports” compared to less attractive sources. This is in line with research that shows that female athletes whose attractiveness receives a lot of attention, are perceived as less talented (Knight & Giuliano, 2001) and less capable (Gurung & Chrouser, 2007). Contrary to previous research, attractive (versus less attractive) girls are not seen as less intelligent (i.e. “It doesn’t take me a long time to complete my homework”), while attractive (versus less attractive) boys are seen as “more intelligent”. Denny (2008) already highlighted that the relationship between intelligence and physical appearance is not easily determined by, for example, measurement issues. Future research can determine if this result can be generalized to other intelligence measures and other samples.
Attractive boys and girls were also believed to “follow less rules”. “Following rules” might be related to characteristics related to non-conformism. Previous studies showed that attractive children are more popular and popular children are in turn perceived to be less boring. Being less boring might be an example of non-conformity or disobeying the rules.

Our results also show that self-perception is not necessarily negatively influenced by attractive advertising sources, contrary to research in adult samples (e.g., Irving, 1990; Posavac, Posavac, & Posavac, 1998; Stice, Schupak-Neuberg, Shaw, & Stein, 1994; Stice & Shaw, 1994).

Consistent with research on adults, an attractive (versus less attractive) model results in higher message effectiveness as measured by attitude towards the ad, attitude towards the brand and purchase intention, but only for boys. No effect of age and materialism on the influence of using physical attractive (versus less attractive) models in advertising to children was found.

Some limitations arise in the present research. In this study, each child saw an advertisement with a same-sex model. This technique has been used in previous studies, but might rule out important conclusions about exposure to advertising sources that are of different sexes. As adults, girls and boys might use different norms and values to evaluate the ‘attractiveness’ of male or female advertising sources. This might also influence the way they react to advertising sources that match these norms.

Due to limitations on the length of the questionnaire in our research, only reduced versions of certain scales could be used. Future research should also consider using the 18-item MVS-c scale, instead of the 3-item version of the materialism scale. By doing this, insights would be gained in the different dimensions of materialism and their relatedness to the effectiveness of the ‘what is beautiful is good’ stereotype in advertising.

Another restriction of this research is the limited age range of the respondents. Children between 8 and 12 years old were selected to account for differences in consumer socialization and development. Nevertheless, insights on this effect across different age ranges might contribute to understanding the developmental factors underlying the effect.

**FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS**

Children are exposed to beauty and attractiveness in advertisements on a regular basis, which necessitates more insights in the impact attractiveness in advertising might have on children’s lives. Since marketers are frequently employing this technique, its effectiveness would seem undisputable. In this chapter, however, we show that using attractive models only impacts advertising effectiveness with boys. Since the effectiveness of advertising with girls cannot be related to the attractiveness of the source, one could believe girls should not be exposed to these advertisement stimuli – since they are ineffective. More research is necessary to establish the reason for these gender differences.

Although our research cannot establish that using attractive sources in advertising is effective with girls, we do find that girl’s self-perception (both physical appearance and self-worth) is higher after seeing attractive models and boys show higher levels of perceived physical appearance. Future research should focus on the drivers behind this effect and should examine if self-perception is temporarily induced, why exposure to attractiveness causes shifts in self-
perception and if children with high (versus low) self-perceptions are responding differently to advertising stimuli.

CONCLUSION

The goal of this chapter was to shed light on the effect of the “what is beautiful is good” stereotype with children. This stereotype has been investigated previously, but despite the impact the stereotype might have, research with children on the stereotype is relatively scarce. By means of an experimental design, we showed that the physical attractiveness stereotype partially applies to children, especially for boys. We also show that the usage of attractive sources has a different impact on children’s self-perception than on that of adults. Children’s self-perception was not negatively influenced after seeing attractive models in advertising (contrary to some previous findings on adults: Bower, 2001). Especially girls’ self-perception is higher after seeing such advertising sources. Boys perceive their physical appearance to be better after seeing these stimuli. We also showed that girls are not relying their brand and advertising attitudes or purchase intentions on exposure to attractive models, whereas boys do.

Practitioners and researchers should take these findings into account for several reasons. Children are exposed to numerous advertising stimuli and because they are relying on these stimuli to perform consumer actions, more insights are needed on our youngest consumers. These insights could help young consumers to make more solid consumer decisions. Moreover, more research on this topic could help unravel the origins of high and low self-perception in children. Research finds more and more evidence that children are—in many ways—different than adults and adolescents so more insights are needed on how and why children behave in the way they do.

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**ADDITIONAL READING SECTION**


**KEY TERMS & DEFINITIONS**

“What is beautiful is good” stereotype = the belief that attractive people also possess other positive characteristics (unrelated to attractiveness)

Physical attractiveness stereotype = “What is beautiful is good” stereotype

Self-perception = the way people evaluate themselves on, for example, physical appearance and self-worth

Gender differences = differences between men (boys) and women (girls)

Source = individual that advocates a brand in an ad

Purchase intention = the intention to purchase a product

Key terms = physical appearance, self-perception, purchase intention, gender differences, “what is beautiful is good” stereotype, physical appearance stereotype, attractive (versus unattractive sources)