NARRATIVE THEMES USED IN CHILDREN’S FOOD ADVERTISING: A CONTENT ANALYSIS

BY

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To my daughter, Jolie. May this serve as proof that anything is possible. And to my husband, Stephen, who reminded me again and again while writing this.
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I thank my wonderful God who has brought me so far and continues to create new opportunities in this beautiful life.

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Abstract of Thesis Presented to the Graduate School
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NARRATIVE THEMES USED IN CHILDREN’S FOOD ADVERTISING:
A CONTENT ANALYSIS

By

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Chair: J. Robyn Goodman
Major: Advertising

A content analysis was conducted of food advertisements that aired during 4 popular
children’s programs that were segmented to differentiate their target audience of African-
American children, or a general audience of child viewers. “That’s so Raven” and “True
Jackson” were selected to represent black children’s shows, while “Hanna Montana” and
“iCarly” represented the general children’s audience programming. The final sample yielded 46
food advertisements. The ads were analyzed to determine the food category (breakfast, snacks,
artificial drinks, convenience, healthy) and then further analyzed to code for the narrative themes
used in the advertisement. Findings revealed that food advertisements were not
disproportionately aired during black children’s programming. Also, the most common narrative
themes used during advertisements targeted to the respective audiences were the same (magic,
humor/happiness, change in mood).
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Overview

Child Overweight

Medical experts agree that child overweight is a national epidemic. Most recent studies indicate that nearly 34% of children (age 2-5), adolescents (age 6-11) and teens (age 12-19) are overweight or at risk of being overweight (Ogden, Carroll, Curtaint, McDowell, Tabak, & Flegal, 2006). This phenomenon is rather new to our society as significant changes have occurred in just one generation. In 1971, 4% of adolescents were overweight. Today that statistic stands at 19% overweight (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009).

Asking how this happened returns multiple questions and few answers. Most researchers and medical professionals agree that the causes are “multiple and complex” (Dietz & Gortmaker, 1985, p. 810), noting the influences of “geographic region, population density and season, and family characteristics such as parental obesity, parental age, marital status, socioeconomic class, race, and family size” (Dietz & Gortmaker, 1985, p. 810). A recent TIME magazine article supports these claims citing some of the contributing factors to overweight as diet, income, neighborhood and education (Walsh, 2008). However, in spite of these many layers of causes, researchers have been able to identify several common attributes of children who are overweight. These commonalities have caused many to wonder if there are factors that predispose children to being overweight.

One such commonality is race. Across all age groups African American (black) children are disproportionately overweight compared to their white counterparts. One study found that they were more than twice as likely to be overweight (Strauss & Pollack, 2001). When the lives of black children are examined next to the known and common causes of child overweight, it’s
no surprise that they commonly weigh more than their young bodies are meant to hold. Sociological studies reveal that black children are more likely to live in poverty stricken areas where access to healthy food and nutritional education are sparse, but fast food and unhealthy food options are abundant. They are also more likely to come from single parent homes and have very few restrictions on how much television they watch, which is an inherently sedentary act (Roberts, Foehr, Rideout, & Brodie, 1999)

**Food Advertising and Children’s Television**

Tracing back to the 1960s when children were first perceived as a viable audience segment with legitimate spending power (McNeal, 1969), food advertisements have dominated children’s programming. Unfortunately, the majority of these advertisements represent high-sugar food products with low nutritional value (Powell, Szczypka, Chaloupka, & Braunschweig, 2007). This is exemplified in the three food categories that dominate children’s advertising space: cereal, candy/snacks products and fast food (Alexander, Benjamin, Hoerrner, & Roe, 1998). Recent studies estimate those categories comprise more than 72% of advertisements featured during programming intended for a child audience (Alexander et al., 1998).

For the most part, healthy messages are relayed by public service announcements (PSAs), which are government funded messages developed by voluntary advertising services and aired during donated media time. Since fruits and vegetables are not branded products (with the possible exception of the Chiquita Banana and Green Giant products), healthy foods are rarely advertised to children, comprising less than 5% of all food advertisements (Kunkel & Gantz, 1992).

To help provide a snapshot of what food influences children are seeing when they watch television, this study will inspect the similarities and differences between food products that are advertised to an audience of black children versus the mainstream child population. This will be
accomplished by first, examining the categories of food products that appear on the respective types of programs, and second by recording and analyzing the narrative themes that dominate each advertisement. Food advertising employs strategies to increase effectiveness (narrative themes).

The American Marketing Association defines marketing as “The activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large” (The American Marketing Association, 2007). Advertising is a critical function of marketing which assists the company in reaching a desired audience using various media channels including television. Advertising is often expensive; as a result, companies typically spend time and resources ensuring that their advertising will be effective. The effectiveness of an advertisement is measured by its ability to persuade and or influence an audience.

To increase effectiveness, marketers employ various strategies and tactics which determine how, to whom, and when an advertisement will be delivered. They also conduct and implement research (social, psychological, demographic, etc) to determine how the advertising message should be structured to best impact the desired affect on the target audience. One such message strategy is the use of narrative themes, which are groups of variables designed to deliver a single message (Williams, 2006, p. 14). The narrative theme represents a unified story that an advertisement tells (Williams, 2006). It presents the marketer with an opportunity to associate a food product with behavior, rewards and consequences. To children, narrative themes imply, sometimes implicitly, what they have to do to obtain a food product, as well as what might happen once they consume a food product. This could include the portrayal of popularity, as if to imply that consuming a shown product will result in increased popularity. Themes could also
include implication of family togetherness, as if to say that the product will somehow have an impact on domestic relationships. Due to the sophistication of advertising research and development, it can be assumed that narrative themes are used differently when targeting different audiences.

This section of the study will examine narrative themes and how they are used in children’s advertising; specifically, if they are used differently when the advertising message is intended for an audience of black children versus a mainstream child audience.

**Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study is best illustrated by the medical implications overweight can have on a child, the social consequences children will face as a result of being overweight, and the economic burden that affects the community at large.

**Medical Implications**

The medical risks associated with overweight have been well documented. There are metabolic, digestive, respiratory, pulmonary, cardiovascular and skeletal functions that are severely affected by the body carrying too much fat (Daniels, 2006). Being overweight also challenges the cardiovascular system and increases the chances of heart disease. One study found that 60% of overweight children have developed at least one cardiovascular risk factor and 20% have two or more of these (Dietz & Gortmaker, 2001, p. 338).

Such developments can also lead to Type-2 diabetes, hypertension and asthma. Type-2 diabetes is a particularly dangerous form of diabetes which was once thought to be a disease only applicable to adults (Wang & Dietz, 2002; Daniels, 2006). However, in the last two decades children have developed this illness as well. Today, nearly 45% of all newly diagnosed cases of diabetes in children are classified as Type-2 diabetes (Daniels, 2006).
Other diseases once thought to only be applicable exclusively to adults are: polycystic ovary disease, sleep apnea and gallbladder disease. Recently, these diseases have been found in overweight children (Wang & Dietz, 2002; Daniels, 2006). Because children are developing these illnesses earlier in life, medical professionals hypothesize that this could be the first generation of children to die before their parents (Dietz, 1998; Must & Strauss, 1999).

However, the medical implications do not stop with childhood. Overweight children are more likely to become overweight adults (Ogden et al., 2006), carrying unhealthy nutritional habits into their adult years and passing them along to other generations.

Social Implications

The child obesity epidemic also challenges the psychosocial development of an entire generation. In fact, the psychosocial affects of overweight are said to be more traumatic than the physical affects because they are not always as explicit and often cannot be diagnosed or cured (Dietz, 1998).

In a society preoccupied with thinness, overweight children are often identified as lazy or sloppy and are expected to perform at a level beyond their age because of their size. This often leads to feelings of inadequacy, isolation and failure, which contribute to children carrying overweight into adulthood (Dietz, 1998).

Studies show that overweight children are socially marginalized. They are commonly viewed as less desirable friends, which prevents them from being confident or comfortable enough to engage in activities known to build self-esteem such as team sports (Strauss & Pollack, 2003). Overweight children are bullied in school. They sometimes cannot find clothes that fit them and are forced to shop in the adult section. Even the parents of these children suffer, often feeling as though they are being judged or perceived as a ‘bad parent’ (Edmunds, 2008).
Economic Implications

In addition to the social and medical impact, the rise in childhood overweight also affects the national economy. This is largely due to the strain that obesity related illnesses have placed on hospitals (Wang & Dietz, 2002). Between 1979 and 1999, children (defined as ages 6-17 by Wang and Dietz, authors of the cited study) have increased their frequency of hospital visits for obesity or obesity related illnesses dramatically, “the discharges of diabetes nearly doubled, obesity and gallbladder diseases tripled and sleep apnea increased fivefold” (Wang & Dietz, 2002, p. 2).

Not only are overweight children visiting hospitals more, and for more complicated reasons, they are also staying for longer periods. Between 1979 and 1999, “the length of stay for obesity-associated discharges” increased from 5.32 days to 7 days (Wang & Dietz, 2002, p. 3). As a result, obesity-associated hospital costs more than tripled from $35 million to $127 million (Wang & Dietz, 2002). Wang and Dietz conclude: “As overweight children become overweight adults, the diseases associated with obesity and health care costs are likely to increase even more” (Wang & Dietz, 2002, p. 6).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is twofold. First, this study examines the variance of food categories advertised to children of a mainstream audience versus black children. The second goal of this study is to examine the variance of narrative themes used between the two audiences. This study is not an attempt to reach a verdict as to whether these advertisements have caused the disparaging prevalence of overweight that exist in black children versus other children. Nor is this study an attempt to infer that food advertising is a singular cause of increasing overweight in children.
However, it is important to examine the types of food advertisements to which children are exposed for several reasons. Studies discussed in the forthcoming review of the literature reveal that the food categories represented on children’s television are disproportionately high in sugar and contain little to no nutritional benefit. According to the tenants of Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory (1977), if these are the primary images of food children are exposed to, it could be posited that they will believe these foods are what they should be eating. This study will provide a comparison between the advertisements shown during black children’s programming versus the types of foods that are advertised during general audience programming.

By examining behavioral cues and how marketers employ them in advertisements directed to children of different audiences, it is hopeful that the results will lead to the second goal of this study which is to provide an understanding of the use of narrative themes. Narrative themes are used in advertisements to convey a general idea (Williams, 2006). They are defined by behavioral cues that typically exhibit what happens as a result of consuming the product, or what has to be done to obtain the product. These behavioral cues associate the food product with actions or beliefs. As children develop their social self and ideas of nutritional practices, narrative themes could possibly be used to associate eating healthy with positive outcomes.

Many researchers have identified television as a logical venue for intervention (Dietz & Gortmaker, 2001) because children are a captive audience by the millions and are influenced by what they see on television. It is the hope of the author that this body of this research will provide responsible marketers and policy makers with message and strategy recommendations to combat childhood overweight effectively with healthy food messages on children’s television. Perhaps if PSAs and other televised healthy messages to children are able to use similar
strategies as the unhealthy messages that dominate the media space, children will receive them equally and be given a fair opportunity to learn about healthy lifestyles.

While many experts on the subjects of children, obesity and advertising have studied the effects food advertising on children, the forthcoming research uniquely contributes to the current body of knowledge because there is no current, readily available study that examines the differences between food advertisements targeted to black children versus the general population, with an emphasis on narrative themes. Advertising on children’s television is not likely to end anytime soon, but perhaps policy makers and responsible marketers can be more aware of the implied messages that are being sent to children which impact their food choices and social development.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

As one of her first initiatives as first lady of the White House, Michelle Obama chose to take on child overweight. The campaign ‘Let’s Move’ cites its “ambitious but important goal” as “to solve the epidemic of childhood obesity within a generation” (Hellmich, 2010). Indeed this is a generational problem; in just a few short decades child overweight and obesity have evolved from sporadic problems to commonplace issues, affecting more than one in three children (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009). Medical professionals are unanimously concerned with the statistics that “child overweight” has been termed a national epidemic and some fear that it will cause the reversal of life expectancy for the first time in the recorded history of the U.S. (Dietz, 1998). Simply put, this means that many children are not expected to outlive their parents if this epidemic is not controlled, stopped and reversed.

Understanding Overweight

To understand the implications and causes of child overweight it is first necessary to know how it is defined and measured. Unlike adults, weight is not the best indicator because children grow very quickly and at different rates (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009). The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has determined Body Mass Index (BMI) as an accurate measurement of whether an adult or child is overweight or obese\(^1\). “BMI provides a reliable indicator of body fatness for most people and is used to screen for weight categories that may lead to health problems” (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009). BMI is calculated as the weight of a person divided by the square of their height, or:

\[^1\text{Many of the references cited refer to obesity and overweight differently. Some define overweight as above the 95}^{\text{th}}\text{ percentile while others follow the CDC definition that children above the 95}^{\text{th}}\text{ percentile are obese, while children between the 85}^{\text{th}}\text{ and 94}^{\text{th}}\text{ percentile are overweight. For the purpose of this research overweight and obese are used interchangeably since children who are obese are also overweight.}\]
The recommended BMI range for a child between ages 2-19 is relative to their sex and age. This controls for the variables of rate of growth and gender. The benchmarks to determine the weight class of children are based on comparisons of other children in the United States of the same sex and age. The 2000 CDC Growth Charts exhibit these guidelines (Figures 2-1 and 2-2).

As seen in Figures 2-1 and 2-2, children are defined as overweight if their BMI is between the 85th and 95th percentile. They are classified as obese if their weight is above the 95th percentile.

As previously mentioned, recent estimates find that one in three children are overweight or obese (Ogden CL, 2010). To obtain these statistics, a CDC subdivision, the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) administered the National Health and Nutrition Examination Surveys (NHANES). These surveys used interviews and medical examinations of a large cross-sectional sample of U.S. civilian, non-institutionalized, population (Ogden et al., 2006). The surveys began in 1971, and the most recent ones were conducted between 2007 and 2008. By comparing the percentage of overweight children during the first NHANES survey to that of the most recent, the alarming increases are clear.

The cultural variables previously identified by Dietz and Gortmaker (1998) and TIME magazine, could explain why black and Hispanic children are more likely to be overweight than white children (Strauss & Pollack, 2001). Black children have been shown to be uniquely affected by many of the factors speculated to be a cause of overweight (Walsh, It's not just genetics, 2008). They are more likely to fall below the poverty line, come from single-parent homes and commonly have limited access to healthy foods in their neighborhoods (Walsh, 2008).
In fact, data from the NHANES studies reveal that black children are twice as likely to be overweight than their white counterparts (Strauss & Pollack, 2001).

By 1998, overweight prevalence had increased by more than 120% among African Americans and Hispanics, and by more than 50% among whites. By 1998, 21.5% of African American children and 21.8% of Hispanic children were overweight. In contrast, 12.3% of white children were overweight (Strauss & Pollack, 2001, p. 2846).

It is important to note these dynamic causes of overweight because although this study focuses on advertising, it is not intending to imply that advertising alone has caused child overweight nor that changing its content alone could reverse the obesity epidemic.

**Children’s Advertising**

As previously mentioned, there have been several dynamic changes in the way children live in the last few decades that have contributed to their incremental weight gain. Television is thought to play at least a minor role for many reasons, one of which being the content of advertisements children are exposed to while they are watching television (Barcus, 1977). Advertising is a persuasive business practice that very intently identifies a target audience for a product and strategically develops a message to make a product appealing to that audience (Adler, 1980). As television programming for child audiences developed, so did the understanding that children could be a powerful audience.

**Consumer Power**

According to James McNeal, author of more than 80 articles and five books on children’s consumer behavior, “For a group to be termed a market, it must be sizeable, and it must have desire and ability to buy” (McNeal, 1969, p. 16). Sometime around the early 1970s advertisers began to recognize that children possessed both of these qualities (McNeal, 1969). It was during this decade that children’s advertising exploded largely because of the number of shows that were being developed for their entertainment and offered additional space for products to be
advertised to children alone. Food and toy companies were immediately drawn to the opportunity (McNeal, 1969). Before long, food advertising would account for 52% of all advertisements on children’s television particularly cereal, candy and restaurants (Barcus, 1977). By the late 1970s food companies were realizing significant profits estimated at $74 million specifically from children’s food products (Barcus, 1977). The economic power of the child consumer market was no longer a question; it was a buzzing topic with broad possibilities.

More recently, children’s purchasing power has been well documented. They not only control their own direct purchases, but they also have great influence on what their parents purchase. In 2005 just from allowances and earnings alone, children’s pockets were estimated to carry $28 billion (Gunter, Oats, & Blades, 2005), while their influence on parents’ purchasing decisions was estimated to be $290 billion (McNeal, 1999, p. 92). While it is estimated that children influence various purchases their parents make including items as expensive as cars, 50% of their influence is said to drive food product purchases (Gunter, Oats, & Blades, 2005).

**Media Exposure**

In the 1980s, it was estimated that between 20,000 and 30,000 advertisements were seen each year by children watching television (Kunkel & Gantz, 1993). His subsequent study estimated that the number of ads children saw during the 1990s increased significantly averaging 40,000 ads per year on television (Kunkel & Gantz, 1992). However, the dynamics of both advertising and television have changed dramatically since then, rendering his methodology difficult to replicate. Advertisements now come in various shapes and sizes including 15, 30 and 60 second spots making it difficult to generalize the number of ads that appear in a given time. There is also product placement in programs as well as promotional partnerships that are not considered to be obvious forms of advertising. Similarly, television can now be recorded and re-watched, fast forwarding through commercials (Kunkel, 2001). The changes in these dynamics
explain why it is difficult to estimate how many advertisements children see in an average session of television watching.

In the last decade the Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF) has conducted two major studies on children and their media use: *Kids & Media at the New Millennium* (1999), and *Generation M: Media in the lives of 8-18 year olds* (2005). Collective data from the two studies reveals that children from single-parent homes and children of low-socioeconomic status spend significantly more time watching television than children in counter circumstances. These studies also reveal that less educated parents and lower income parents are more likely to have children with TVs in their rooms and are less likely to set restrictions on their television watching.

**Television Targeted to Black Children**

Black children are more likely to be in families of low-socioeconomic status; therefore, they are likely to have a different relationship with television (Roberts et al., 1999). As a result, researchers have paid careful attention to some of the differences between black-targeted children’s shows and mainstream-children’s programming. Tirodkar (2003) examined the difference in food messages on black prime time and general prime time. He defined black shows according to Nielsen Media Research (1998), which stated that black people were more likely to watch shows where the characters were predominately black (Tirodkar & Jain, 2003). He found that black television shows were more likely to portray overweight characters in a positive manner, and that “black prime time contained a greater number of food commercials overall (4.8 per half hour show versus 2.9)” (Tirodkar & Jain, 2003, p. 440). Thirty percent of the black prime time advertisements were for candy or chocolate compared to 14% on general prime time. Also, general programming was twice as likely to have advertisements promoting healthy foods such as bread/grains (Tirodkar & Jain, 2003). While this study did not focus on children’s programming specifically, it does raise awareness that there are differences between
different types of programming. According to Tirodkar, “African American audiences may be receiving nearly three times as many advertisements for low-nutrient foods such as candy and soda and more portrayals of overweight characters, signifying that television viewing for African Americans may promote obesity” (Tirodkar & Jain, 2003, p. 441).

Henderson and Kelly found similar data in their 2005 study in which black television was compared to general population programming. This study examined 101.5 hours of television programs (32 hours black-targeted shows and 69.5 hours general market). When the two were compared, food advertisements were more likely to appear during black television shows than general programming (24% and 15%, respectively) (Henderson & Kelly, 2005). There was also a difference in the types of food that were shown, especially with fruits and vegetables, which appeared in 8% of general population food advertisements compared to only 1% of black shows (Henderson & Kelly, 2005).

More recently in 2007, Powell et al., conducted a content analysis of 224,083 advertisements that aired over a 9-month period during 170 television shows, determined by Nielsen Media Research to be heavily viewed by children ages 2-17 (Powell et al., 2007). They examined the differences between child (2-11) and adolescent (12-17) programming, as well as the differences between “black” and “white” programs. Shows were defined as “black” programs according to Nielsen Media Research, data which was unattainable for this study. Powell et al., (2007) revealed that young children were more likely to be exposed to advertisements for foods high in fat. Regarding the differences between what the different race groups are exposed to: “No substantial differences were found in the nutritional content of advertisements seen by black and white children 2 to 11 years old. However, a slightly higher
proportion of food advertisements in general and across all food-product categories seen by black versus white adolescents were for high-sugar products” (Powell et al., 2007).

As previously mentioned, black children have a different relationship with television due to their common family and socioeconomic status. Researchers hypothesize that they are more likely to “evaluate television shows and ads as being more realistic and believable” (Berry, 1998).

**Regulation**

In the early 1970s, researchers and consumer rights groups began to critically examine advertising directed to children, questioning its fundamental fairness, and studying the content of the ads they were seeing (Barcus, 1977; Atkin, 1976; Winick, Williamson, Chuzmir, & Winick, 1973). The groups were concerned that children did not possess the cognitive development to distinguish the persuasive intent of an advertisement (Barcus, 1977).

One such group, Action for Children’s Television (ACT), formed in Boston in 1968 was comprised of parents, teachers and physicians who were alarmed by the violence and commercialism prevalent in children’s programming and subsequent advertisements (Barcus, 1977). Having observed children’s programming and the structure of the broadcast industry, they commissioned Dr. Francis Earle Barcus, a Professor of Communication Research at Boston University who is cited as one of the first researchers to explore the social effects of television, to conduct a content analysis of the largest scale during its time (Barcus, 1977). The study included a “breakdown of advertising themes, formats, incidents of violence, and descriptions of racial cultural and sexual representations” during Saturday morning and after-school programming (Barcus, 1977, p. Intro.). His findings, which will be discussed throughout this study, provided a broad understanding of what children were seeing on television. On average, 62% of ads children saw on television in 1977 were for food products or services. The majority
of these ads fell into three areas: sugared cereals; candy bars/packaged candy; and eating places (restaurants), while vegetables and fruits were nonexistent (Barcus, 1977). Overall, two-thirds of the food advertisements targeted to children were for highly sugared products. This study was the first indication that food advertisements targeted to children were disproportionately representative of non-healthy foods. This study is credited for sparking the interest of not only other activist groups, but also doctors and parents which, helped to spark interest among the government, sometime in the early 1970s (McNeal, 1987). Eventually, the appropriate governing bodies would take action while working with the advertising industry to establish loose standards for advertising intended for children.

There are two main government agencies that have the ability to mandate regulations on advertising, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and the Federal Trade Commission (FTC). The FCC has the responsibility of “establishing public interest obligations for television broadcasters, while the FTC’s responsibility is to “regulate advertising deemed unfair or deceptive” (Story & French, 2004, p. 12). However, as previously mentioned, the food industry is a vibrant piece of the American economy and the regulatory actions (or lack thereof) have often been speculated as having bias, not wanting to affect the food industry which captures 12.5% of all consumer spending (Story & French, 2004).

There are also influential groups within both advertising and broadcasting industries that act as unofficial governing bodies and create standards for children’s television advertising. Such groups include the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB), the National Advertising Division (NAD), and the Children’s Advertising Review Unit (CARU), all of which are divisions of the National Council of Better Business Bureaus (BBB). These industry groups do
not possess any legal authority; rather, they are in place to regulate practices so that the level of
government involvement can stay at a minimum (Story & French, 2004; Kunkel & Gantz, 1992).

CARU is the most active of these groups. Together with Congress, this group develops the
“Children’s Advertising Guidelines” to monitor the truthfulness of messages delivered to
children (Adler, 1980). However, many believe these guidelines are not as strict as they should
be. Dale Kunkel (2001) for instance suggests that some are considered rather vague. One of the
more detailed rules is that “a product should be demonstrated in a way that can be duplicated by
the child for whom the product is intended.” While this mandate specifically targeted toy
advertisements, it illustrates the concern behind the inherent fairness of advertising to children
who are likely to believe whatever they see. Other mandates leave room for interpretation, such
as, “care should be taken not to exploit a child’s imagination.” (Kunkel, 2001, p. 388). It is also
important to note that CARU is a small group of slightly more than 50 people, many of whom
are employees of the food industry, such as McDonald’s®, General Mills® and Hershey (Kunkel,
2001). As previously mentioned, CARU has no legal authority. Therefore, when an ad is
submitted for review, the verdict of their board is seen strictly as a recommendation. Some have
questioned how well this group can regulate the actions of their own peers when they have a
vested interest (French, Story, & Jeffery, 2001).

The most recent attempt at regulating standards for children’s advertising was the
Children’s Television Act of 1990. This act repealed many of the deregulatory initiatives that
were adopted in the era of President Reagan, and limited the number of minutes per day that
advertisements are allowed to air during children’s programming (Kunkel, 2001). However, as
this Act only restricted the amount of time and not the quantity of advertisements, marketers
have found ways around the mandate by shortening the length of commercials to accommodate more than one in a single time block.

With the attention first lady Obama focused on child overweight, television advertising is back in the spotlight and is recognized as an area in need of change. Mrs. Obama has addressed the responsibility of food marketing in the Let’s Move campaign and has set a goal for when the standards should change.

The food and beverage industry should develop aggressive targets for increasing the proportion of advertisements for healthy foods and beverages. Within three years, the majority of food and beverage ads directed to children should promote healthy foods. (Hellmich, 2010)

However, as seen in the timeline below, the small advancements that have been made to regulate various aspect of children’s advertising have taken decades to move forward.

**Timeline of Key Events and Regulations that Shaped Children’s Advertising**

- 1961 - NAB adopts code of guidelines that included provisions about advertising to children that would later be completely eliminated in the 80s. (Strasburger & Wilson, 2002)
- 1970 - “White House Conference on Food, Nutrition and Health proposes to use television to educate the public on nutrition.” (Adler, 1980)
- 1970 - ACT petitions to remove ads from children’s television. (Barcus, 1977)
- 1974 – Children’s Advertising Review Unit (CARU) of the National Council of Better Business Bureau (BBB) is established by the advertising industry to self-regulate advertising policies. This group was created in response to legislation to restrict or ban advertising to children. (Story & French, 2004)
- 1974 – FCC adopts first federal policies restricting TV advertising including: (Strasburger & Wilson, 2002)
  - Limits on the overall amount of advertising allowed during children’s programming (12 min/hour on weekdays and 9.5 min/hour on weekends)
  - Clear separation between program content and commercial messages (no host selling)
  - Clear delineation when a program is interrupted by a commercial
• 1976 – NAB Code Authority reduces permitted number of non-program material permitted per hour from 10 to 9.5. (Adler, 1980)

• 1978– FTC formally proposes a rule that would ban or severely restrict all TV advertising to children. FTC presents a review of the scientific evidence and argues that all advertising directed to children is inherently unfair and deceptive. The proposal invokes intense opposition from the broadcasting, advertising, food and toy industries and an aggressive campaign to oppose the ban based on First Amendment protection. (Story & French, 2004)

• 1980- In response to corporate pressure, Congress refuses to approve FTC’s operating budget and passed legislation “FTC Improvement Act of 1980” which removed the agency’s authority to restrict advertising. The Act prohibits any further action to adopt proposed children’s advertising rules. (Story & French, 2004)

• 1984- Deregulation of television occurs during the Reagan administration. FCC deregulates all limits on the amount of advertising times, and the restriction on program length commercials. (Story & French, 2004)

• 1990- Children’s advocacy and consumer groups pushed Congress to pass the Children’s Television Act which directed the FCC to require educational programming for children and to limit the amount of commercial time to 10. 5 min/hr on weekends and 12 min/hr on weekdays. FCC reinstates the policy on program length commercials but redefines them. (Story & French, 2004; Strasburger & Wilson, 2002)

• 2005- December, Institute of Medicine (IOM) releases their report stating that food marketing is a “significant contributor to childhood obesity” (Stitt & Kunkel, 2008, p. 575)

• 2006- November, Children’s Food and Beverage Advertising Initiative launched by the National Council of Better Business Bureau (BBB)

Food Products

Since the inception of children’s television programming, food products have dominated the advertising space (Barcus, 1977). Findings consistently show that food advertisements dominate children’s programming sometimes making up more than half of overall ads (Kunkel & Gantz, 1992). A considerable amount of food companies marketing budgets are spent specifically targeting children. In fact, it is estimated that “one-third of the food industry’s $30 billion advertising budget is spent targeting children” (Brownell, 2004, p. 99).
As previously mentioned, Barcus (1977) found that, on average, 62% of ads on children’s television were for food products or services, and the primary categories were cereal, snack foods and eating places. These categories established by Barcus are prevalent and prominent throughout studies of children’s advertising (Alexander et al., 1998; Kunkel & Gantz, 1992). In the decades since the Barcus (1977) study, several content analyses of children’s advertising have been conducted. In addition to the primary food categories established by Barcus (candy/snacks, cereal, and eating places), two others have also emerged: drinks and fresh grocery/all natural foods. Together these five categories capture the majority of food advertisements that are targeted to children.

The Evolution of Food Product Categories

In the time before the Barcus (1977) study, children’s advertising was something that researchers observed but only in the context of studying the quantity of ads, not the content. To help provide perspective on how the content evolved between the 1950s and 1990s, Alexander et al., (1998), conducted a retro-active content analysis of ads shown during children’s programming in the 1950s. The team acquired tapings of 24 shows from that time and coded the advertisements into five categories: toys, cereal, snacks, fast food and other. The study compared advertisements aired during Saturday morning programming to general programming, and then compared those findings to similar studies conducted in the 1970s (Barcus, 1977) and 1990s (Kunkel & Gantz, 1992).

Of the categories, the ‘other’ category was the most dominant (47% during children’s programming and 56% during general audience programming) primarily because the idea of children-only programming was relatively new in the 1950s (Alexander et al., 1998). It was assumed that children were watching programs with their parents, therefore; much of the advertising was for adult products such as laundry detergent (Alexander et al., 1998). During
both child-targeted shows and general audience shows, cereal was the most popular food
category capturing 23 and 20% of the advertising space, respectively. Candy and snacks came in
second (22% and 17%) while fast food was nonexistent (McDonald’s® had not yet tapped into
the potential of child-targeted advertising) (Alexander et al., 1998).

Over the next few decades there was certainly an evolution of marketers who realized the
buying potential of children and began to advertise during child-targeted programs with strategic
advertising. The Alexander (1998) study documents this by comparing the findings of
commercials from the 1950s to what Barcus (1970) and Kunkel (1990) found in subsequent
years. The findings reflect the rising popularity of fast food, the continued reign of cereal, and
the increasing popularity of snacks. These trends are important to observe and understand how
children’s advertising became what it is today (Figure 2-3).

**Nutritional Content**

Research shows that the foods advertised are not nutritiously sound, often being high in fat
and sugar (Powell et al., 2007). McNeal (1987) content analyzed Saturday morning cartoons in
November 1985 on the three major networks (ABC, CBS, NBC) and found that of the food
goods, only two out of 45 were for non-sugared items. Warren et al., (2008) note:

Three content analyses (Harrison & Marske, 2005; Kotz & Story, 1994; Kunkel &
Gantz, 1992) determined that fewer than 5% of all food commercials were for
healthy foods. Byrd-Bredbenner and Grasso (1999) found that fats, oils, and
sweets were advertised almost four times as much as the USDA’s recommended
proportion of such foods in a healthy diet. Dairy, fruit, and vegetable products
were 20% of food commercials, though the USDA recommends that they comprise
the majority of a healthy diet. Harrison and Marske (2005) concluded that a diet
composed of advertised foods would exceed recommended nutritional levels of
saturated fat, sodium, and sugar. The same foods would provide less than 10% of
the recommended daily minimum of essential vitamins and minerals (Warren, et
al., 2008, p. 233).

Moreover, fast food is dominant on children’s television and is seen as a major culprit
regarding healthy messages to children (Powell et al., 2007). A 2005 Brandweek article claimed
that between McDonald’s®, Burger King® and Wendy’s® alone, more than $1.4 billion was spent on media advertising (Hein, 2005) as much as 95% of which is allocated to television (Gallo, 1999). McDonald’s®, being the industry leader for spending in this category, is said to directly target children with 40% of its advertisements (Brownell, 2004). McDonald’s® was also the first to set a trend of giving toys or promotional items with kid’s meals (McNeal, 1987). Child activists argue that this encourages children to think that eating fast food always came with a reward. Just recently in 2010, the state of California outlawed fast food companies giving children toys in their meals in hopes of reversing this trend (McKinley, 2010). It is noteworthy that in recent years some fast food companies have made an effort to offset the fat-heavy nature of their menu with healthy snack options like apple sticks and yogurt (Warren et al., 2008). Data is not available to demonstrate whether these efforts have gotten the attention of children and, or sold more than the typical fat-laden children’s meal of burgers, fries and soda.

Meanwhile, those in the food and advertising industries have begun to address their role on the issue, enacting self-regulated measures such as the Children’s Food and Beverage Advertising Initiative, launched in November 2006 by the National Council of Better Business Bureau (BBB), also the parent organization of CARU (Adler, 1980). Their goal is, “to provide companies that advertise foods and beverages to children with a transparent and accountable advertising self-regulation mechanism” (Council of Better Business Bureaus, Inc., 2009).

To date, 13 of the largest food and beverage companies – estimated to represent more than two-thirds of children’s food and beverage television advertising expenditures have joined the Initiative, making pledges that, when fully implemented, will significantly alter the landscape of food marketing to children. Most of these companies have committed either not to advertise directly to children under 12 or to limit such advertising – including television, radio, print, and the Internet – to foods that qualify as “healthy dietary choices” by meeting specified nutritional standards, such as limitations on calories, fat, sugar, and sodium and/or providing certain nutritional benefits to children (Council of Better Business Bureaus, Inc., 2009).
Unfortunately, fruits and vegetables are rarely represented to children in advertising and when they are it is almost exclusively in the context of a public service announcement (PSA). Of the 1,065 product-selling commercials observed by Kotz and Story (1994), only 68 were for PSAs and only four of them featured actual fruits and vegetables.

Effects of Advertising

As previously mentioned, the increased presence of television in the lives of children is thought to contribute to childhood overweight. Not only is watching television a sedentary act that keeps children from exerting energy, but while they are watching it, they are exposed to advertising for food products that do not promote healthy food behaviors (Gorn & Goldberg, 1982). This has caused concern about the effects of advertising among consumer advocate groups, health professionals, child development specialists, media researchers and government officials alike. Researchers have responded with an overwhelming number of studies examining the effects that advertising has on food behaviors (brand preference and food choices), and purchase requests. (Koon & Tucker, 2002).

Studies on the effects that advertising has on food behaviors often measure the likelihood of a child to choose a product or brand based on advertising exposure (Gorn & Goldberg, 1982). Studies have shown that children are more likely to choose a product for which they have seen an advertisement, even if only one exposure, as opposed to one for which they have not seen an advertisement (Gorn & Goldberg, 1982). As hypothesized by the Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1977), advertising exposure impacts children’s knowledge of and desire to eat healthy foods such as vegetables that are not advertised as often as packaged foods (Koon & Tucker, 2002; Goldberg, Gorn, & Gibson, 1978).

The most referenced experiment proving a positive relationship between advertising exposure and children’s food behaviors was conducted in 1982 by Gorn and Goldberg.
Together, they have examined the effects of advertising on children in varying conditions since 1974 when the topic of children’s advertising was a relatively new concern. Their work is considered to be the foundation of experimental research in this field and is often replicated.

For two weeks in 1982 their study used a sample of low-income children at a summer camp and their daily ‘quiet period,’ during which children watched television, to subject them to four different treatments. The first group of children had commercials for sugared products during their television time, the second group had commercials for fruits, vegetables and juices, while the third group viewed public service announcements and the fourth control group had no commercials present during their viewing time. After watching the television programs in their separate groups, the children were given the opportunity to choose a snack. The findings were significant. The first group of children, who were exposed to commercials for sugared products, overall chose sugared products for their snack. The other children from the control group, and the groups exposed to commercials for fruits and vegetables or public service announcements, primarily chose fruit or juice for their snack, implying that children knew what they were supposed to choose, but advertising influenced the choices they made (Gorn & Goldberg, 1982).

Numerous studies on children’s purchase requests have examined the relationship between advertising exposure and the number of attempts children make to influence what their parents buy (Koon & Tucker, 2002). Diverse approaches including “surveys, diaries, experimental trials and direct observation of mother-child pairs shopping” (Koon & Tucker, 2002, p. 427) have been utilized. The results have consistently shown that while “children’s requests for different categories of non-food products (such as toys) vary by the age of the child, requests for cereals and snack foods remain constant across all age groups” (Koon & Tucker, 2002, p. 428). Most notably, Galst and White’s 1976 study found that, “The more commercial television (a child)
watched at home, the greater the number of purchase-influencing attempts (were) directed at his or her mother at the supermarket” (Galst & White, 1976, p. 1089).

Kunkel (2001) notes that advertisers deliberate and calculated development of commercial messages can have both, intentional and unintentional effects. The intentional effects include behavioral actions stated previously: brand preference and purchase intention. While the unintended effects of advertising exposure are more attitudinal and psychological. Kunkel believes these could have a “far broader sociological influence” (Kunkel, 2001, p. 383) including an increase in materialistic attitudes, an increase in parent-child conflicts, antisocial behavior and an influence on children’s eating habits (Kunkel, 2001; McNeal, 1987).

**Narrative Themes**

Ultimately, the goal of an advertisement is to influence the “recall for the product, desire for the product, and depending on the age of the child- either purchase influence attempts or actual purchase of the product” (Kunkel, 2001, p. 382). Advertisers spend billions of dollars in research trying to perfect strategies that increase the effectiveness of an advertisement (Kunkel, 2001). They decide how and what to promote about the product by being well educated on the habits of their target market. One such strategy used to help a product’s advertisement resonate with an audience is the use of narrative themes (Williams, 2006). Many times these themes are thought to imply something irrelevant to the product itself and, in the case of advertising to children, to present misleading conclusions to them about what will happen once the advertised product is consumed (Gunter, Oats, & Blades, 2005).

The term ‘narrative theme’ is relatively new and has been defined and referred to in several different ways over the years. While the term is new, the study and examination of the content of children’s advertising stretches back to the beginning of studies on children’s advertising. Barcus (1977) was the first to code for traits in an advertisement that were based on themes. He
first identified ‘basic themes’ as a category of interest within children’s advertising and focused on “patterns in verbal and printed statements, product slogans, and other appeals” (Barcus, 1977, p. 136). His study found that nearly 60% of the time, the themes were represented in five subject areas: interpersonal rivalry; the entertainment world; domestic topic (home, family); crime; and the supernatural. Future studies would continue to observe these categories as themes while adding additional dimensions to expand the definition of a theme and examine the associations, relationships and implied affects of using a food product advertised to children (Winick et al., 1973; Williams, 2006; Rajecki, 1994; Roberts & Pettigrew, 2007).

In a study that combined many of the coding definitions from previous content analyses, Williams (2006) coded for narrative themes, stating “commercials typically tell one unified story, and this group of variables is meant to capture this narrative” (Williams, 2006, p. 14). She identified five dominant narrative themes as: “action/sports performance, popularity, a change in mood, competition/achievement, and family togetherness” (Williams, 2006, p. 14).

Many content analyses have used similar dimensions when coding the content of children’s advertisements, food or otherwise. However, other relevant dimensions including healthy/well-being, magic/ fantasy, adult approval or disapproval, improved appearance, trickery and violence/conflict have also been examined (Table 2-1).

In a study of literary themes found in children’s food ads containing a story, Rajecki et al., (1994) defined themes as “characters’ involvement in a codable pattern of thoughts, actions, or social interactions” (Rajecki, 1994, p. 1689). Advertisements were coded for: dependence, enablement, mood alteration, achievement, conflict, trickery, and violence. Rajecki’s (1994) research identified violence and conflict as primary themes in children’s food advertisements, (62% and 41%, respectively), while achievement (24%) and mood alteration (23%) were less
common. Mood alteration was also found by Roberts and Pettigrew (2007) whose analysis of Australian children’s television revealed the prevalence of food advertisements that implied the ability of a product to “improve performance and enhance mood” (Roberts & Pettigrew, 2007, p. 364). Rajeccki also identified trickery as a newly popular dimension in children’s advertising, appearing in nearly 20% of ads (Rajeccki, 1994). This appeal often showed “one of the parties trying to dupe the other out of the product” (Rajeccki, 1994, p. 1690) using costumes or camouflage. Future research continued to find trickery used as an appeal in children’s advertising (Warren et al., 2008; Page & Brewster, 2007).

The theme of family togetherness has gradually decreased in the last 30 years. Winick and Williamson (1973) found a ‘family microcosm’ shown in nearly 13% of ads, while Roberts and Pettigrew (2007) found the portrayal of families actually eating together in less than 7% of ads observed. They cited information from the American Dietetic Association which posits, “Shared family meals have been found to result in the consumption of more fruits, vegetables, vitamins and fiber, and less fat and soft drinks,” and concluded “The heavy emphasis in advertisements on snacking and solitary eating could be cause for concern” (Roberts & Pettigrew, 2007, p. 363). Williams’ study corroborates these findings, citing the theme of family togetherness in less than 8% of ads observed (Williams, 2006).

Fantasy appeals associate the product with magic, charms or spells, and are said to “short-circuit children’s ability to assess realism in commercials” (Wicks et al., 2009, p. 95). Winick and Williamson (1973) found that more than half of advertisements present fantasy or cartoon characters while Warren et al., (2008) cited fantasy in more than 88% of ads.

The use of healthy/well-being appeals has also declined in the last several decades. Barcus (1977) found that this was the most common appeal used, while Warren et al., (2008) found that
less than 30% of ads relayed a message that the product would improve health. Kunkel (1992) and Wicks (2009) found this appeal in less than 1% of ads.

Wicks and Warren (2009) note that the use of the fun/happiness appeal rarely involves showing the food itself, rather focusing entirely on children having fun. Kunkel (1992) notes the prevalence of this theme, appearing in more than one fourth of all ads (26.6%), but more importantly, in nearly 72% of all fast food advertisements “suggesting that good times may be more important than great taste in selling hamburgers to the youth of America” (Kunkel & Gantz, 1992, p. 146). This appeal was also the dominant approach to selling healthy food products (46.7%) “whereas health/nutrition appeals were rarely employed (6.1%) even when they might have been more salient” (Kunkel & Gantz, 1992, p. 146).

Schor (2007) paid particular attention to the dimension of popularity, examining the importance of being ‘cool’ in a child’s world, and the tendency of advertisers to use this type of symbolic appeal in their advertisements, as posited by the Social Cognitive Theory. “An advertisement directed to children not only sells products; it also sells such socio-cultural messages as how to gain peer acceptance and how to evaluate oneself” (Bandura, 1989, p. xxi). Schor notes: “In the last 15 years it appears that children have increasingly been appealed to on the basis of the social value or coolness of products” (Schor & Ford, 2007, p. 15). She found that symbolic marketing messages were present in at least 28% of a small sample of children’s advertisements. “What this implies is that children are being persuaded to eat particular foods, not on the basis of their tastiness, or other benefits, but because of their place in a social matrix of meaning” (Schor & Ford, 2007, p. 16). In addition to ‘cool,’ messages were also found to relay ‘anti-adult’ themes to children. “This strategy typically aligns the marketer (or the company) with the audience, and against adults. This ‘anti-adultism’ is evident in commercial
messages in which adults are portrayed as stupid, uncool, boring, nerdy, out of touch, controlling, or evil” (Schor & Ford, 2007, p. 17).

**Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory**

**Children Are Influenced by Models**

Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory (formerly known as the Social Learning Theory) is the platform for this study and has also provided theoretical support to several other studies about children and television. Researchers have applied this theory to explain how the presence of sex (O’Leary, 1992), smoking (Rinka Van Zundert, 2009), violence (Bandura, 1989), and unhealthy food representation on television is affecting children (Williams, 2006). The broad concept of this theory posits that behaviors are learned by observing others (Bandura, 1977). Once observation of a behavior, belief, attitude or symbol begins (Bandura, 1977), a cognitive process leads to the development of a symbolic representation of reality based on available models. This development of symbolic representation influences our behavior, and the process is known as modeling (Bandura, 2001).

Most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling: from observing others, one forms an idea of how new behaviors are formed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action (Bandura, 1977, p. 22).

The cognitive process that leads to modeling is referred to as observational learning (Bandura, 1977). The likelihood of a child beginning the observational experience and modeling their behavior after a person or character depends on the characteristics of the model and the child’s association of a reward with the exemplified behavior (Bettinghaus & Cody, 1994). If the model is a well-known figure, perceived to have high competence on the subject, or is physically similar to the child, the probability of modeling is increased. If the model receives an award of some kind as a result of the behavior, children are more likely to emulate the behavior.
(Strasburger & Wilson, 2002). These are prevalent types of narrative themes that will be coded in this study, along with others.

However, the type of information that a child observes and actively receives is also dependent upon individual variables for each child. The type of environment the children experience daily, both social and familial, will have a great impact on what children retain (Bandura, 2001). These variables imply that although children from different backgrounds may be exposed to similar symbolic representations, their route to processing the information and the inherent potential for modeling is quite different, hence the comparison of mainstream and black targeted shows in this study.

Observational learning is broken up into four steps which determine and eventually lead to modeling. What children observe, what they retain, how they react and why- are determined by who the child is and in what environment they live (Strasburger & Wilson, 2002). This explains why some children emulate a specific model and some don’t.

Children selectively pay attention to different features of a modeled behavior, they bring forth different experiences to interpret and evaluate the models actions, and they store different information in memory… These mental activities place more emphasis on how children symbolically construe or make sense of a models behavior. Children selectively pay attention to different features of a models behavior, they bring forth different experiences to interpret and evaluate the models actions, and they store different information in memory (Strasburger & Wilson, 2002, p. 92).

Modeling is not restricted to learning behaviors; it can also influence beliefs and attitudes. “Modeling influences serve diverse functions- as tutors, motivators, inhibitors, disinhibitors, social prompters, emotion arousers and shapers of values and conceptions of reality” (Bandura, 2001, p. 139). Therefore, children not only model people, but also they model attitudes and symbolic beliefs that are explicitly or implicitly implied in advertising. Narrative themes have been used to relay such attitudes and beliefs to children by displaying “appealing consequences”
(Williams, 2006) to gain favor in the eyes of children. Bandura referred to these attitudes and symbolic behaviors as “vicarious motivators (Bandura, 2001, p. 276)”. The theory posits that when the result of a behavior is observed as leading to positive or negative reception, the observer internalizes the outcome to help form an attitude or opinion as favorable or unfavorable (Bandura, 2001).

**Narrative Themes Tell Stories and Provide Models**

As previously mentioned, the concept of a narrative theme has been studied by several researchers. However, narrative themes have not always been defined the same way. For the purpose of this study, narrative themes are defined as behavioral cues shown by the available models that exhibit the process or result of consuming a product. This is very similar to the definition applied by Rajecki (1994) who defined narrative themes as “characters’ involvement in a codeable pattern of thoughts, actions, or social interactions” (Rajecki, 1994, p. 1686).

According to the tenants of the Social Learning Theory, by coding for the behavior shown by models and comparing what is seen by general audiences versus primarily ethnic audiences, it may be possible to conclude if there is a pattern of how models are represented to children of various backgrounds.

Models are often represented in television and have greater symbolic meaning to children now more than ever, as television (and inherently advertising) has become such a part of children’s lives that they now watch television more hours than they sleep each week (Roberts et al., 1999). Not only is television watched more now than ever, but there are more options of what to watch (and inherently more models to observe) than ever. As a result, children are not limited to observing the behaviors of their own sub-cultures, rather, they are exposed to “diverse styles of conduct” that they might not otherwise have exposure to if it weren’t for television (Bandura, 1977, p. 24).
On a symbolic level, researchers argue the increased exposure to media that modern-day
children have access to exposes them to inaccurate representations of nutrition and provides
models that do not represent realistic or healthy eating behaviors (Bandura, 1977). While the
presence alone of food advertising has been shown to affect children’s food choices (Gorn &
Goldberg, 1982), many believe that the content of the advertisement has a great impact on the
likelihood of modeling. Some of these implied content strategies which would help a child
model a healthy lifestyle include narrative themes such as action, achievement, healthy or well-
being themes (Rajecki, 1994; Schor & Ford, 2007; Williams, 2006; Winick et al., 1973).

As mentioned above, narrative themes are prevalent throughout food advertising on
children’s television. The goal of this study is to examine all relevant narrative themes that have
been examined over time into one comprehensive study, in hopes of comparing their use when
directed to the mainstream audience versus when they are directed to an audience of primarily
black children. With the help of Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory, it can be posited that
narrative themes affect children of different backgrounds in various ways.

Barcus intro: “Advertising forms an integral part of the child’s television fare. As a
selling vehicle, television provides the young viewer with many of his or her first
concepts of what foods to eat and what toys to own. An advertisement directed to
children not only sells products; it also sells such socio-cultural messages as how to
gain peer acceptance and how to evaluate oneself. The advertiser tells children that
owning something new is fun. He portrays sweetness as the most desirable quality
to be found in food. ” (Barcus, 1977, p. xxii)

Research Questions

- **RQ1**: What are the most common food categories advertised during children’s shows
targeted to a general population versus those targeted to a black audience? **H1**: As seen in
previous studies, it is hypothesized that breakfast cereals will be the most common food
category across both populations.

- **RQ2**: What are the most common narrative themes used in food advertisements shown
during children’s shows targeted to a general population versus children’s shows targeted
to a black audience, and in what food categories do they appear most frequently? **H2**: The
narrative themes most prominent in children’s shows targeted to a general audience will
encourage healthy lifestyles (action, competition/achievement, healthy/well-being) more so than the narrative themes presented in children’s shows targeted to a black audience.
Figure 2-1. BMI Age growth chart for boys. (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009)

Figure 2-2. BMI Age growth chart for girls. (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009)
Figure 2-3. Prevalence of Overweight* Among US Children and Adolescents (aged 2-19 Years).

*Data based on National Health and nutrition Examination Surveys (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2007)

**Data based on National Health and nutrition Examination Surveys as examined by: (Ogden CL, 2010)
Figure 2-4. Advertising product types 1950s – 1990s (Alexander et al.,1998, p. 5)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1950s</th>
<th>1970s</th>
<th>1990s</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Toys</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cereals</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>24.8</td>
<td>31.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candy/Snacks</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>28.8</td>
<td>32.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fast Food</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>46.7</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Definition</td>
<td>Finding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime/Violence</td>
<td>Williams (2006)</td>
<td>Coded for being present in ads, not specifically as a narrative theme.</td>
<td>Found violence in almost a quarter of sample ads, not specifically as a narrative theme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action/Sports/Performance</td>
<td>Warren et al., (2008)</td>
<td>Product consumption will enhance physical performance or energy (e.g., sports performance, stamina).</td>
<td>Found in 3% of advertisements shown during shows children are most likely to watch - both child and adult programming.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Atkin, Heald (1977)</td>
<td>Provides feeling of power.</td>
<td>Only 2% of food ads displayed this theme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Williams (2006)</td>
<td>Identified as one of the major recurring themes.</td>
<td>Coded for being shown as a part of the plot (24%), promised to occur as a result of the product (4%) or both (10%).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popularity</td>
<td>Williams (2006)</td>
<td>Identified as one of the major recurring themes.</td>
<td>Coded for being shown as a part of the plot (59%), promised to occur as a result of the product (1%) or both (3%).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Warren et al., (2008)</td>
<td>Product consumption is associated with acceptance or being better than one’s peers.</td>
<td>Found in 78% of child-targeted advertisements containing animation and other attention-getting production techniques.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Atkin, Heald (1977)</td>
<td>Product increases peer status.</td>
<td>34% of food ads displayed improved status or involved affiliation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Roberts and Pettigrew (2007)</td>
<td>Identified as a promotional appeal used in advertisements</td>
<td>Found in 35% (7 of 20) campaigns.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in Mood</td>
<td>Williams (2006)</td>
<td>Identified as one of the major recurring themes.</td>
<td>Coded for being shown as a part of the plot (8%), promised to occur as a result of the product (37%) or both (3%).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Warren et al., (2008)</td>
<td>Suggests that product will either create/enhance positive feelings (e.g., happiness, relief) or remove negative feelings (e.g., anxiety, anger over not having product). This does not refer to the viewer’s general enjoyment of the ad.</td>
<td>Found mood alteration in 14% of ads shown during shows children are most likely to watch - both child and adult programming. However this was more common in child-targeted ads.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rajecki</td>
<td>Consumption of the product causes the actor to experience a reaction indicating pleasure or psychological change. This could also be indicated by a negative mood being changed as a result of the product.</td>
<td>Found in 23% of a sample of 92 advertisements aimed at children that were coded for thematic and sub-textual content.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Definition</td>
<td>Finding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
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<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition/achievement</td>
<td>Williams (2006)</td>
<td>Identified as one of the major recurring themes.</td>
<td>Coded for being shown as a part of the plot (28%), promised to occur as a result of the product (&gt;1%) or both (5%). Found in 43% of child-targeted advertisements containing animation and other attention-getting production techniques.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Warren et al., (2008)</td>
<td>Product consumption is linked with being able to obtain a desired goal or achieving control over undesirable aspects of self or the environment.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rajecki</td>
<td>Consumption of the product leads to achievement and overcoming obstacles. Enablement typically ends in achievement.</td>
<td>Enablement was found in 18% of advertisements while achievement was found in 24% of ads.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family togetherness</td>
<td>Roberts and Pettigrew (2007)</td>
<td>Defined as the portrayal of families actually eating together.</td>
<td>Found in less than 7% of ads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthy/well being</td>
<td>Williams (2006)</td>
<td>Identified as one of the major recurring themes.</td>
<td>Coded for being shown as a part of the plot (6%), promised to occur as a result of the product (2%) or both (0%). More common in adult-targeted advertisements appearing in 70% of advertisements containing animation and other attention-getting production techniques and only 30% for child-targeted advertisements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Warren et al., (2008)</td>
<td>Product consumption is associated with a general improvement in overall health or well-being as well as claims around weight management or dieting.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kunkel (1992)</td>
<td>Health or nutrition mentioned to promote the food product to children.</td>
<td>1% of ads mention health benefits as a product appeal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Atkin, Heald (1977)</td>
<td>Product refers to general nourishment, mentions number of vitamins, lists specific vitamins.</td>
<td>63% of food ads contained no nutritional information while 47% mentioned either general nourishment or vitamins.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Roberts and Pettigrew (2007)</td>
<td>Identified as a promotional appeal used in advertisements.</td>
<td>Found in 85% (17 of 20) campaigns.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult approval/disapproval</td>
<td>Warren et al., (2008)</td>
<td>Product consumption is linked to either adult’s (or other authority figure’s) approval of child, or getting away with something despite disapproval.</td>
<td>Found in 100% of child-targeted advertisements containing animation and other attention-getting production techniques.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Definition</td>
<td>Finding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved Appearance</td>
<td>Warren et al., (2008)</td>
<td>Improved appearance as the main reason for having the product.</td>
<td>More common in adult-targeted advertisements appearing in 82% of advertisements containing animation and other attention-getting production techniques and only 18% for child-targeted advertisements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rajecki</td>
<td>An attempt by one of the parties to dupe the other out of the product.</td>
<td>Found in 20% of a sample of 92 advertisements aimed at children that were coded for thematic and sub-textual content. This usually occurs on conjunction with conflict.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict</td>
<td>Rajecki</td>
<td>Two parties in an ad want the same thing: usually the product. If one gains or keeps the prize, the other must remain without. Frustration is in evidence.</td>
<td>Found in 41% of a sample of 92 advertisements aimed at children that were coded for thematic and sub-textual content.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presence of rewards,</td>
<td>Barcus</td>
<td>The product is associated with a prize or special offer.</td>
<td>Premiums offered in 19% of all children’s ads.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>premium offer</td>
<td>Williams (2006)</td>
<td>An incentive for purchasing the product other than the product itself.</td>
<td>One-fourth of advertisements offered a reward.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Warren et al., (2008)</td>
<td>Product has associated free gifts or material benefits.</td>
<td>Found in 69% of child-targeted advertisements containing animation and other attention-getting production techniques.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Roberts and Pettigrew (2007)</td>
<td>Identified as a promotional appeal used in advertisements.</td>
<td>Found in nearly 40% (8 of 20) campaigns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humor/ Happiness</td>
<td>Barcus</td>
<td>Children appear to be happy or having fun.</td>
<td>Theme appears in 26.6% of ads on children's television, and 72% of all food advertisements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Atkin, Heald</td>
<td>Product is fun to eat or play with.</td>
<td>Prevalent in 30% of ads.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source</td>
<td>Sampling Method</td>
<td>Sample Size/ Time Frame</td>
<td>Food ads, % of total advertising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barcus 1977</td>
<td>25.5 hrs. children's weekend programming</td>
<td>614 food ads/April 1975</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kunkel and Gantz 1992</td>
<td>604 hrs. children's weekend programming</td>
<td>16,024 ads February - March 1990 (Broadcast)</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kotz and Story 1992</td>
<td>52.5 hrs. children's weekend programming</td>
<td>1065 ads including 68 PSA/564 food ads</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harrison and Marske 2005</td>
<td>40 hrs. of shows most often viewed by children age 6-11 according to Nielsen (network Saturday network part-time, syndication and cable)</td>
<td>1,424 ads, Spring 2003</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Williams 2006</td>
<td>309.5 hrs. children's programming targeted to children 7 or 8 years and younger on 6 broadcast and 3 cable networks</td>
<td>2,334 ads April 10 - April 16, 2005</td>
<td>Data not given</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folta et al., 2006</td>
<td>31 hrs</td>
<td>987 ads (711 ads excluding promotions)</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powell et al., 2007</td>
<td>Ad exposure based on Nielsen program ratings for children aged 2-11 y (6 broadcast 4 cable)</td>
<td>224,083 ads September 2003 through May 2004 (Broadcast)</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warren et al., 2008</td>
<td>672 hrs. compiled from a composite week of programming aired on the most popular child/family programming according to Cable Advertising Bureau during 77 randomly selected days from January to May 2006</td>
<td>4,324 food ads (51% on child targeted channels 49% on general audience)</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 3
METHOD

Television

The intent of this study was to examine food advertisements that aired during children’s programming. A more specific intent was to compare the advertisements that aired during shows designed to target a general or mainstream children’s audience versus shows that are intended for an audience comprised mainly for black children. The FCC defines children’s programming in seven different categories: TV-Y (suitable for all children), TV-Y7 (directed to older children), TVY7-FV (directed to older children- fantasy violence), TV-G (general audience), TV-PG (parental guidance suggested), TV-14 (parents strongly cautioned), and TV-MA (mature audience only). The FCC designates two ratings as being appropriate for children: TV-Y and TV-7. According to the non-profit watch group the TV Parental Guidelines Monitoring Board (operators of www.tvguidelines.org) a program with TV-Y rating is:

- Designed to be appropriate for all children. Whether animated or live-action, the themes and elements in this program are specifically designed for a very young audience, including children from ages 2-6. This program is not expected to frighten younger children. (TV Parental Guidelines Monitoring Board)

- A program with TV-7 rating is designed for children age 7 and above. It may be more appropriate for children who have acquired the developmental skills needed to distinguish between make-believe and reality. Themes and elements in this program may include mild fantasy violence or comedic violence, or may frighten children under the age of 7. Therefore, parents may wish to consider the suitability of this program for their very young children” (TV Parental Guidelines Monitoring Board)

This study focused on shows targeted to children over the age of seven years old because the NHANES studies have found this age group most likely to be overweight (Figure 2-3). NHANES studies have also stated children are likely to develop the cognitive ability to distinguish advertisements from programming around this age (Williams, 2006). The ratings for each television show were obtained on the TV Guide website (www.tvguide.com).
Content Analysis

Various elements of the advertisements were examined and compared using content analysis. Babbie states that content analysis is an effective way to answer “Who says what, to whom, why, how, and with what effect?” (Babbie, 2007, p. 334). Therefore, content analysis was an appropriate method for this research.

Content analysis is defined as the study of recorded human communications (Babbie, 2007) and is commonly used by researchers to describe and quantify a phenomenon (Krippendorff, 1980). Analysis is achieved by carefully examining human interactions to provide a “numerically based summary of a chosen message set” (Neuendorf, 2002, p. 14). As seen throughout the literature review, content analysis was the chosen methodology for many researchers who examine children’s advertising.

The universe of this study includes children’s television shows from both cable and broadcast networks. The shows were separately categorized as mainstream, or black-targeted children’s shows. The individual units of analysis were the advertisements that aired during their commercial breaks. The advertisements were coded to determine the category of food which defines the advertised product, as well as the narrative themes that appear throughout the commercial.

A quantitative approach was applied to code the food product categories and narrative themes used in children’s advertising. Food product categories were coded for manifest content, while the narrative themes were coded by observing the sometimes more latent content. Manifest content is rather obvious and explicit, which made this approach ideal for defining and quantifying the category of the food product (Babbie, 2007). Latent content is more useful in identifying the “underlying meaning of communications,” (Babbie, 2007, p. 325), which is an ideal method to understand narrative themes that are sometimes implied, or implicit. As latent
content is subjective and defined by the appearance of a dimension, not necessarily the frequency, Babbie states that examining both manifest and latent content are ideal for content analysis to ensure reliability (Babbie, 2007).

**Selection of Sample**

As previously mentioned, children today have unlimited access to television. Children watch various programs throughout the day on any given channel; this makes the task of defining children’s television rather difficult. Based on previous research, several criteria were developed to define the sample.

The first criterion was television ratings, which were based on FCC guidelines. It was decided that the following sample would only include shows that were rated TV-7, or TV-G. TV-7 indicates that a show is most appropriate for a child age seven or older. As previously mentioned, children under age seven are thought to confuse advertisements with programming (TV Parental Guidelines Monitoring Board), and they are also the age group least likely to be overweight (Figure 2-3). Therefore, shows targeting children under seven were excluded. TV-G is a rating that indicates the program is ideal for a general audience that could include, but is not limited to, children under seven. TV-G shows are not necessarily limited to shows that target children, but since there is typically no sexual content or violence, most children will have access to these programs on both network and cable television. Since the universe of shows that fit these criteria is extremely vast and impossible to examine, additional criteria were required.

The second criterion required that the shows be intended for a children’s audience. This was achieved by narrowing the search to the most popular children’s networks according to Nielsen cable ratings: Nickelodeon®, and the Disney Channel®. Nickelodeon® has been the top-rated cable channel for children’s programming for 15 years in a row among all basic cable
channels (Nickelodeon, 2009), while the Disney Channel® usually follows closely behind somewhere in the top three (Alford, 2010).

The third criterion required that the chosen television programs be popular among children. Popularity of children’s programming is typically achieved by using Nielsen Media data reports. Due to the cost of these reports, the selection of the forthcoming sample was first based on available secondary research, which often included older Nielsen reports available on the Internet. In addition to Nielsen, other resources used to verify the popularity of a children’s show included TV by the Numbers (http://tvbythenumbers.com/), TV.com, the Emmy Awards and Kid’s Choice Awards.

TV by the Numbers is an independently published online journal and blog site that reports television statistics. The site posts daily and weekly updates including the audience size and share of individual shows. It should be noted that for this website, Nielsen ratings were ultimately the source. Certain websites have access to different reports, depending on their Nielsen subscription; therefore, the author was able to compile Nielsen data from this and other similar websites. The Emmy Awards began in 1949 and are considered the television equivalent of the Academy Awards. The winners are determined by the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences, “a nonprofit organization devoted to the advancement of telecommunication arts and sciences and to fostering creative leadership in the telecommunication industry” (Academy of Television Arts and Sciences, 1995-2010). A television show winning an Emmy Award does not necessarily mean it was the most popular in its group, but it does suggest overall excellence, which qualified the Emmy Awards as a credible source. The Kids’ Choice Awards, which began in 1988, are sponsored by Nickelodeon® and air on that channel as well. Various categories are
honored including favorite movie, music act and television show. Nickelodeon® viewers decide who the winners are by voting on the Nickelodeon® website.

The fourth criterion required that half of the shows could be perceived as being intended for a black audience. To compensate for the lack of access to Nielsen reports, which may have been useful in determining the actual demographic makeup of a program’s target audience, the researcher determined that the only way to designate a show as being targeted to a specific demographic was to consider the perceived race of the main characters. This follows the tenants of Bandura’s theory (Bandura, 1977), and is a similar method that Tirodkar used to determine his sample (Tirodkar & Jain, 2003).

Based on the aforementioned criteria, “iCarly” (Nickelodeon®) and “Hannah Montana” (Disney®) were selected as popular mainstream programs. According to Nielsen data provided by TvByNumbers.com, both were chart-topping cable programs. In the first week of August 2010, both shows premiered the first episodes of their fourth season and “iCarly” was ranked the number one cable program overall with 7.74 million viewers (Nickelodeon Press, 2011). “HannahMontana” (which, the final season is being referred to as “HannahMontana Forever”) ranked fifth with 5.7 million viewers (Seidman, Cable Top 25: iCarly Tops Hannah Montana; Snooki Edges Sookie). Additional secondary research revealed these shows were deemed appropriate for the sample because of their awards and cultural popularity. For example, “iCarly” was voted ‘Favorite Television Show’ at the Kids Choice Awards® 2009 and 2010.

The “HannahMontana” enterprise is a combination of the television show, a clothing line, video game, Billboard chart-topping albums, merchandise, two movies and subsequent DVDs, all of which are most likely familiar to virtually every child in America. In addition to being nominated and awarded several accolades from the Primetime Emmy’s and Kid’s Choice
Awards, one source claimed that the show captured 200 million viewers worldwide in 2008 (Armstrong, 2009), again, legitimizing its popularity.

The fifth and final criterion called for each of the mainstream shows to have a black-targeted show that is similar in nature for the sake of comparison. This resulted in the selection of “True Jackson, VP” (Nickelodeon) and “That’s So Raven” (Disney®). “True Jackson” appeared on Nickelodeon® in 2008 and broke network records for viewers age 6-11 and tweens age 9-14 with 4.8 million viewers (Starr, 2008). It was deemed an appropriate comparison to “iCarly” because both shows are based on the premise of a young girl leading an adult life. For the comparison to “Hannah Montana,” “That’s So Raven” was chosen. Although “That’s So Raven” is in syndication and no longer filming new episodes, it was the Disney Channel’s® highest-rated series for several years and still garnered 2 million viewers per repeat (Seidman, 2009). Furthermore, “That’s So Raven” was seen as an appropriate comparison to “Hannah Montana” because it was an episode of Raven (Goin Hollywood) that inspired the creation of Hannah (Wikipedia).

Unfortunately, the Disney® channel is not an advertiser-supported network. Meaning, episodes of Hannah and Raven would only feature advertisements for other Disney® products. However, both shows are available on ABC Kids, the Saturday morning edition of the Disney® channel that is on local television (ABC) and supported by advertisers. Many researchers have examined Saturday morning programming because it is a time when many children are watching television (Barcus, 1977; Atkin, 1976; Kunkel & Gantz, 1992).

Collection of Sample

A census of one month of the television shows that met the qualifications for the study were recorded via DVR (digital video recorder) on Direct TV cable service for four weeks from October 1, 2010 to October 30, 2010. Due to lack of accessible data citing a specific time of
year when children watch television more, October was selected because it is not during sweepstakes time, when television producers run special programs to monitor audience statistics. October was also selected because it is placed between the school year starting (when children’s schedules are regulated after the summer) and the holidays, when many shows feature specialized holiday programming.

“That’s So Raven” and “Hannah Montana” are the two shows in the sample that are Disney® programmed and aired during Disney’s® Saturday morning cartoon time on ABC. Unlike “Hannah Montana,” “That’s So Raven” airs on ABC at night as well. Therefore, during this four-week period, four episodes of “Hannah Montana” were recorded and eight episodes of “That’s So Raven.” On Nickelodeon® during this time period, “True Jackson” aired and was recorded six times and “iCarly” was recorded 45 times. The total number of shows recorded was 65. With each show running 30 minutes, the total number of hours of television recoded equals 32.5 hours.

The researcher decided that the final sample would consist of four episodes of each show because within the selected timeframe, four was the lowest common denominator for each of the shows. Then, a random sample of each of the shows was selected using www.randomizer.org. The shows were then coded for food category and narrative theme.

Coders

The researcher was designated as the primary coder and a male graduate student was used as the co-coder. Both coders were experienced in research and trained in content analysis. At separate times, they watched the children’s television programs which were recorded via DVR by the researcher. First, the researcher trained the second coder to understand which television shows were classified as black-targeted shows and which were classified as general audience programming. While watching the episodes, the researcher instructed the second coder to
identify advertisements that were promoting food products. These advertisements were then analyzed according to category and content.

The coders first analyzed the category and classified the food ad into its appropriate category and sub-category. For example, if a Frosted Flakes ad was seen during a program in the sample, it would be coded in the breakfast category and the cereal sub-category. Coders then identified which narratives theme(s) were present in the advertisement. Often times, this meant watching the ad more than once. Since the episodes were recorded via DVR, coders were able to pause and rewind the show as many times as needed. This ensured that the advertisement could be reviewed, and coded, for the appropriate narrative themes. The coders counted duplicates or, instances when the same advertisement aired during one program. The coders watched each television program and entered the data onto hard copies and later into an Excel spreadsheet, which was then exported into Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for statistical comparisons.

**Pretest**

A pretest was conducted of four children’s television shows outside of the sample using a popular children’s show, “The Suite Life of Zack and Cody,” which was recorded once a week, on Saturday mornings during September, 2010. The pretest provided coders the opportunity to develop an understanding of the category definitions, narrative theme characteristics, and any additional attributes of an ad that might need to be considered. Both coders found a total of 10 food advertisements during the four pilot shows.

Some questions did arise regarding the attributes of certain narrative themes. The second coder questioned whether a McDonald’s® Happy Meal commercial that showed a child eating apple sticks instead of French fries, and drinking milk instead of soda, could be categorized as fresh grocery/ all natural foods, and whether these traits would qualify the ad’s narrative theme
as healthy. It was decided that the category would still ultimately be convenience because the brand and the product were being promoted by a fast food chain. It was also decided that merely showing healthier options would not qualify the ad as displaying a healthy narrative theme because the ad did not suggest that the healthier options were better, nor did it suggest to children that they choose these options.

The second coder also questioned whether promotional commercials for other programs should be counted in the total advertisements during each show. For example, while watching “The Suite Life of Zack and Cody,” several commercials for the new season of “Extreme Home Maker” aired during the commercial break. The researcher decided that these commercials were not product centered- and therefore, not advertisements and should not be counted in the sample of ads.

There was one advertisement in the pretest that caused debate between the coders whether it should be included in the final sample, should it appear in the selected programming. The advertiser was Dairy Queen, and the product was a Blizzard Maker. The advertisement was for an ice cream maker, and it showed children eating ice cream, but an actual food product from Dairy Queen or any other manufacturer was never endorsed. It was decided that if the ad were to appear it would be included because the children were in fact consuming a food product. However, it did not appear in the final sample.

The final debate pertained to how drinks would be categorized. Originally, drinks was a general category; however, after viewing the pretest advertisements and seeing an ad from Tropicana Orange juice, it was determined that the drinks category should be renamed artificial drinks. This allowed for real fruit juice and water advertisements (should there be any in the final sample) to be coded in the fresh grocery/ all natural category.
Final Coding

The researcher coded the entire sample of 46 food advertisements that appeared during the 4 shows (with 4 recorded episodes each), while the co-coder double coded a subsample of 50% - 23 advertisements. The advertisements for the co-coder were chosen randomly from all four recorded shows. To minimize human error, the coder reviewed the entries of the co-coder and the co-coder reviewed the entries of the primary coder before entering the data into Excel.

Reliability

Krippendorf defines reliability as the “degree to which members of a designated community agree on the readings, interpretations, responses to, or uses of given texts or data” (Krippendorff, 1980, p. 212). In content analysis, reliability is calculated to assess agreement between two coders (Krippendorff, 1980). Several methods are available to assess reliability. For this study, Cohen’s Kappa was selected because it was specifically designed for two coders (Neuendorf, 2002). At the conclusion of coding, Kappa coefficients were calculated using SPSS and found to be .97. Coefficients above .75 are considered acceptable. This indicates a high level of agreement between coders.

Food Categories

Advertisements that aired during the recorded shows were coded by which food category and sub category they were defined, and which narrative theme(s) were present in the advertisement. As a result of discoveries made during the pretest, the categories changed slightly from the researcher’s original plan. While the original category organization was based entirely on previous research, the adjustments made allowed the category organization to reflect the modernization of food. For example, as mentioned in the pretest, the drinks category had to be slightly revised to artificial drinks because all-natural drinks such as water and 100% juice were
decided to be fresh grocery/ all natural options, not just drinks. The final categories and sub-categories are listed below. See Appendix A, the Code Book for complete definitions.

Food Categories

1. Breakfast
   1) Breakfast Pastry
   2) Cereal
   3) Cereal bar

2. Snacks
   4) Candy/gum
   5) Crackers/Cracker Snacks
   6) Cookies
   7) Potato/Corn Chips
   8) Snack Cakes
   9) Fruit Snacks

3. Artificial Drinks
   10) Soda
   11) Diet soda
   12) Sports drink
   13) Flavored water
   14) Fruit drink

4. Convenience
   15) Fast food restaurant
   16) Frozen or prepackaged meal
   17) Canned pasta/ soup
   18) Dried pasta dinner

5. Fresh Grocery and All Natural
   19) Dairy
   20) Water
   21) 100% Fruit juice
   22) Fruits or Vegetables (including if a salad or fruit salad is the primary focus of a restaurant advertisement)
   23) Meat
   24) Bread

6. Other

Narrative Themes

As previously stated, the narrative themes used to code the advertisements in this study were adapted from previous research. However, there were slight changes applied to not only modernize the themes, but also consolidate some meanings. For example: family togetherness was coded as present if a character appearing to be a mother of father were present in the ad.
Whereas, the literature coded for family togetherness only if members of the same family were seen eating together. Also, the magic/fantasy theme was taken rather literally in the literature, coding for behavior that was associated with wizardry or enchantment. This study applied a rather loose definition to the magic/fantasy theme, coding for characters in the advertisements that were cartoons (i.e. from Disney® movies), and also coding for an overall representation of a reality that was not realistic. Meaning, there did not have to be magical behavior for this theme to be applied.

One advertisement can display several narrative themes; therefore, they are not mutually exclusive. Narrative themes were coded to indicate their presence in an ad, but also at times, were coded to indicate how they were used in the ad. For example, the narrative theme of “popularity, making friends, and being cool” could be shown as a part of the ad (children being surrounded by a group of friends), and/or as something that was promised to occur as a result of consuming the product (a child would infer that the product would make them cool). The narrative themes are listed below. See below for their origin, and Appendix A, the Code Book for their full definitions.

Narrative Themes
1. Crime or Violence
2. Action, Strength, Speed, Power, Sports Performance
3. Popularity, Making Friends, Being Cool
4. Change in Mood or Disposition
5. Competition or Achievement
6. Family Togetherness or Bonding
7. Well Being or Healthy Lifestyle
8. Magic, Fantasy, Supernatural
9. Adult Approval or Disapproval
10. Improved Appearance
11. Trickery
12. Conflict, Interpersonal Rivalry
13. Reward or Premium Offer
14. Humor, Fun, Happiness
Analysis

The researcher attempted to use chi-square tests to compare frequencies of the data between populations, categories and narrative themes. However, inspections of the cross tabs indicated that there were many cells with counts less than five, which made the chi square invalid because, in most cases, the study was broken down too intricately. Therefore, Excel was used to calculate frequency counts and percentages, and Pearson’s chi squares were calculated to report the significance of percentage of food advertisements between populations. Chapter Four provides additional details on these analyses.
CHAPTER 4
FINDINGS

Final Sample

The researcher counted the number of advertisements that aired during each show: “That’s So Raven” (N=53), “Hannah Montana” (N=57), “iCarly” (N=59), and “True Jackson” (N=51) and how many of those advertisements were for food products “Raven” (N=10), “Hannah Montana” (N=12), “iCarly” (N=19), and “True Jackson” (N=5), (Table 4-4). The codebook provided specific directions for the coders to account for each advertisement that ran during each episode, but to only code advertisements that promoted food products. There were 220 total ads, 21% of which (N=46) were food advertisements.

Each food advertisement was coded for the name of the show it aired during (“That’s so Raven,” “Hannah Montana,” “iCarly,” and “True Jackson”). Then, each ad was then coded to reflect the target audience of the show that it aired during. General population shows (Gen Pop) included “Hannah Montana” and “iCarly,” while black population shows (Black Pop) included “That’s so Raven”, and “True Jackson.” The ad was then be coded for which network it appeared on, with “iCarly”, and “True Jackson” appearing on Nickelodeon® and “That’s so Raven” and “Hannah Montana” appearing on the Disney® channel’s local station affiliate, ABC. The episode name, date it was recorded, and time of recording were coded for each advertisement. Each food advertisement was also coded for the total number of ads that ran during each episode, and the total number of food ads that ran during each episode when the specific food advertisement aired.

The final data included the name of the product that was advertised including a brief description (Table 4-3). This was necessary to identify the specific advertisements because several advertisers had more than one campaign. For example, McDonald’s® had five different
versions of advertisements for their Happy Meal™. Each advertisement was coded as McDonald’s® Happy Meal™ being the brand and primary advertiser, and the content was noted in the name to specify the ad campaign (Megamind™, Star Wars®, Space Helmet, Young Girl Clay, and Mr. Potato Head®).

**Food Advertisements**

Considering that each show was 30 minutes in length, it was not surprising that they each had approximately the same number of advertisements (Table 4-4). On the low end, “True Jackson” had 51 ads in the sample, and on the high end “iCarly” had 59 advertisements. Shows targeted to the general population (“iCarly, and “Hannah Montana”) had the highest percentage of food advertisements, 32% (N=19) and 21% (N=12), respectively. While shows targeted to the black population (“That’s So Raven”, and “True Jackson) showed the lowest percentage, 19% and 10%, respectively. The findings suggest that food advertisements are not disproportionately placed during black children’s programming ($X^2 = 8.883, df = 3; p= .03$). (Table 4-6)

**PSAs**

Only one public service announcement (PSA) was recorded in the sample. The PSA (Disney’s® Magic of Healthy Living) featured First Lady Michelle Obama and several teenagers including one of the Jonas Brothers, a member of a top-selling pop group. The premise of the ad is promoting healthy lifestyles to children by promoting “getting up, and getting active for just 60 minutes a day,” and eating better, meaning more fresh fruits and vegetables. The group of teens appears to be in an outdoor setting, and they are all eager and excited to talk about the active lifestyle. The call to action is telling children to go to a website (Disney.com/healthymagic) to learn ways that they can learn more and share their own ideas. At the end of the advertisement, the entire group says in unison: “Let’s get healthy together.”
RQ1

• **RQ1:** What are the most common food categories advertised during children’s shows targeted to a general population versus those targeted to a black audience?

  Overall, the most common food category to appear during general population shows (“Hannah Montana” and “iCarly”) was convenience foods, specifically, fast food. This category comprised 42% of the food advertisements that aired during shows targeted to the general population. The second most popular category was artificial drinks (26%), followed by breakfast (23%), fresh grocery/ all natural (6%) and snacks (3%) (Table 4-5).

  The primary advertiser of convenience foods to this population was McDonald’s®, which is within the fast food subcategory. With nine of the 13 convenience food ads promoting the Happy Meal, McDonald’s® was easily dominant (Table 4-3). Of the nine ads, there were five different campaigns promoting the Happy Meal. The specific commercial that appeared most often was the McDonald’s® Happy Meal ad that was coded as “Young Girl Clay.” In this ad, a young girl, animated in clay, is seen skipping along in a make believe world. The jingle that plays while she is skipping says that she was making a list of things she wanted for her birthday, but then realized that that she had everything that she needed just by going to McDonald’s® where her friends and family were eating. At the end of the ad, the narrator says “Joy is a gift, this is the box it comes in,” and then the Happy Meal box appears. It was during “Hannah Montana” (on separate dates) that this advertisement ran a total of three times.

  The balance of convenience food ads consisted of one ad by an additional fast food company (Burger King®), and two ads by a children’s canned soup product, Spaghetti O’s. Spaghetti O’s is within the canned soup subcategory of convenience foods. The ads for Burger King® and Spaghetti O’s only appeared during the episodes of “iCarly,” which is on the cable
channel, Nickelodeon®. The convenience foods that appeared during “Hannah Montana,” which airs on the local ABC/Disney® affiliate, were entirely for McDonald’s®.

Within the artificial drinks category, 100% of the advertisements shown to the general population of children were for Capri Sun®, an artificially flavored fruit drink. There was only one campaign, titled, “Balloon Girl” by the researcher. Between “Hannah Montana” and “iCarly,” this advertisement comprised 26% (N=8) of all the food advertisements that aired. In the Capri Sun® commercial, a boy and girl (assumed to be between the ages 9-12), are seen swinging together on a swing set. The girl has a Capri Sun®, and the boy has two water balloons. He asks the girl if she wants to trade, and she does. Next, the boy is seen with a tricky smile on his face as he accepts the Capri Sun®, and the girl happily takes the two small water balloons. Almost immediately, as the boy is sipping and enjoying the drink, the girl turns into a balloon figure herself and floats away, rising into the air above the swing set. A male narrator abruptly says “respect the pouch, respect it!” while a smaller figurine of the girl floats over a black screen that says “disrespectoids” and “respectthepouch.com.”

Surprisingly, the third most prevalent category was breakfast foods, comprising only 23% (N=7) of the food advertisements aired during general population children’s shows. As mentioned previously in the literature, cereal has been found to dominate children’s advertising for several decades (Alexander et al., 1998); therefore, as stated in H1, the researcher expected this category to be more prominent. There were four different advertisers within this group: Fruit Loops®, Frosted Flakes®, Cinnamon Toast Crunch®, and Honey Nut Cheerios®. The Frosted Flakes® advertisement, titled “Athletes” by the researcher, appeared most often, comprising 43% of the cereal ads. What comes as surprise is that all of these cereal ads appeared
during “iCarly” on Nickelodeon®. None of the ads appeared during “Hannah Montana,” which airs on the local channel.

The final two categories of advertisements aired to the general population were fresh grocery/ all natural and snacks, each comprising 3% of the ads, respectively. “iCarly” had no fresh grocery/ all natural advertisements and only one snack commercial (Goldfish). “Hannah Montana” was the opposite, featuring one fresh grocery/ all natural advertisement (Michelle Obama PSA) and no snacks.

Similar to the advertisements that aired during the general population shows, convenience foods were found to be the most prevalent category during the black population shows as well. In fact, 60% (N=9) of the ads that were targeted to black children fell within this category (Table 4-6). Three categories tied for second place, each comprising merely 13% of the food ads that ran during black population shows (artificial drinks, fresh grocery/ all natural, and snacks). Surprisingly, there were zero ads for breakfast/cereal (Table 4-6).

Once again, the convenience category was dominated by the fast food subcategory, specifically, McDonald’s®. Of the eight fast food advertisements that were targeted to this population, six were promoting the Happy Meal™ with five different campaigns. The campaign that appeared the most (N=3) was the Happy Meal™ advertisement titled “Megamind™,” by the researcher. This ad was also a promotional campaign because it promoted the DreamWorks® animated children’s movie, Megamind™. Surprisingly, this and all of the McDonald’s® advertisements targeted to young black kids aired during “That’s So Raven” on the ABC/Disney® channel. The convenience foods that aired during “True Jackson” were from three different advertisers: Burger King®, Chef Boyardee®, and Cici’s Pizza®. The Chef Boyardee® advertisement was somewhat of an anomaly in this group because it was the only convenience
food to be targeted to black children that was not classified as fast food. Cici’s Pizza® was also a
surprise because the ad appeared to be made for an older audience. During this 30-second ad,
there were no children and no mention of specials for children.

Three categories tied for second place: drinks, fresh grocery/ all natural and snacks (Table
4-6). The ads within the drinks category (N=2) were for Capri Sun®. This was the same
advertisement found in the general population sample. However, none of these ads appeared
during “True Jackson,” which airs on the cable channel, Nickelodeon®. The advertisements
classified as fresh grocery/ all natural (N=2) that aired to this audience were also only found
during “That’s So Raven,” and included Danimals® (yogurt product) and the Disney® PSA
featuring Michelle Obama, the Magic of Healthy Living. The advertisements that aired for the
snacks category (N=2) included Goldfish®, and Sour Patch® candy, and they ran exclusively
during “True Jackson.” This category, along with the other two that tied for second place
(drinks, and fresh grocery/ all natural), comprised 13% of the food advertisements that were
targeted to black children. Surprisingly, there were zero advertisements for cereal airing during
the shows that targeted black children. Thus, based on these findings, Hypothesis 1 (H1) was not
supported. Breakfast cereals were not the most prominent category across both populations.

RQ2

• RQ2: What are the most common narrative themes used in food advertisements shown
during children’s shows targeted to a general population versus children’s shows targeted
to a black audience, and in what food categories do they appear most frequently?

When analyzing the narrative themes (as defined in Appendix X) that appeared most often
in food advertisements targeted to the general population, the most common were magic (71%)
and humor (42%) while change in mood and rewards were tied for third place, appearing in 26%
of the advertisements (Table 4-9). The healthy, adult and trickery narrative themes each
appeared in only 7% of the advertisements, while family and popularity appeared in 5% and 4%,
respectively. The narrative themes that appeared the least were crime (3%), and action (10%), while change in appearance and conflict had zero occurrences in the food advertisements aired during general children’s programming.

While the magic narrative theme appeared in 71% (N=22) of the ads, 50% (N=11) were observed in convenience foods, specifically fast foods. The convenience ad shown the most often to the general population featuring a magic narrative theme were for McDonald’s®, a Happy Meal™ campaign titled by the researcher: ‘Young Girl Clay.’ The storyline of this ad was previously described. However, the magic narrative theme applies specifically to the setting and the characters. The setting can be described as a claymation fantasy, meaning it is not set in reality. The characters are made from the same clay, cartoon-like imaging, including small dragon figures and flying imaginary animals that gradually disappear just before they turn into stars.

The narrative theme, humor, appeared in 26% (N=13) of the ads targeted to a general children’s population. Of the 13 ads, 10 were for convenience foods including two ads for Burger King® and two ads for Spaghetti O’s®. However, McDonald’s® was the prominent advertiser here, running six commercials for its Happy Meal™ to the general children’s audience that featured a theme of humor or happiness. Of the six Happy Meal™ commercials, the campaign titled ‘Young Girl Clay’ was the most prominent. The storyline of this ad was previously described. However, the happiness and humor narrative theme applies specifically to the overall tone and the suggested outcome of consuming the product. The young girl in the ad seems to be very happy as soon as the commercial starts, and the music and general tone suggest the same. The music is a catchy jingle that is easy to remember and carries a light-hearted tone throughout the commercial. The characters that appear at the end of the commercial are also in
high spirits. In fact, some of them don’t necessarily have full facial features (eyes are covered by hair, or appear to be closed), but they are all very clearly smiling. The end of the ad also supports the suggestion that consuming the product will result in happiness. As previously mentioned, the song suggests that the girl already had everything she needed because she had her friends and family, all of whom happen to be at McDonald’s®. The final (and most obvious) link that the ad tries to make between happiness and the product is at the end of the ad when the narrator says “joy is a gift; this is the box it comes in,” as the Happy Meal™ box appears.

Two narrative themes tied for third place: change in mood (N=8), and presence of rewards (N=8). Change in mood was found exclusively in foods of the convenience category, with six of the eight ads promoting McDonald’s® Happy Meal™ and the other two promoting Spaghetti O’s®. Again, the most prominent campaign featured with the change in mood narrative theme was ‘Young Girl Clay.’ As previously mentioned, the young girl in this ad appears to be happy at the beginning; however, her smile is somewhat reserved. At the end of the commercial, and right as she is taking a sip of her drink from the Happy Meal™, her mood is absolute happiness, signified by a very toothy grin. This does exemplify a moderate change in mood because the girl went from happy to elated. It is, however, relevant because consumption of the product was what caused the shift. The presence of rewards was also found exclusively in advertisements for foods in the convenience category. The campaigns titled ‘Star Wars®’ and ‘Strawberry Shortcake®’ were the most prominent, both promoting McDonald’s® and their Happy Meal™. The Star Wars® campaign offered a Star Wars® Clone Wars™ fingerboard, and the Strawberry Shortcake® campaign offered a “scented Strawberry Shortcake® doll” with each Happy Meal™. It should be noted that the Happy Meal™ Star Wars® campaign did not mention what a
fingerboard was or what a child could do with it. It was only mentioned that is was a Star Wars® branded item that came included in Happy Meals™.

The narrative themes that were most common during the children’s television shows targeted to a black audience were magic (80%), humor (53%) and change in mood (47%). Rewards were present in 40% of the advertisements; adult approval/disapproval was observed in 33%, and trickery only in 27%.

Eighty percent (N=12) of the ads that aired during shows targeted to an audience of black children displayed the magic narrative theme. Fifty-eight percent of those (N=7) appeared in fast food advertisements (Table 4-9). This category was very diverse with McDonald’s® Happy Meal™ comprising five of the seven ads with four campaigns, and Burger King® and Chef Boyardee® being the other two in the category. There was a dominant campaign that appeared more than others, but not by much. The McDonald’s® Happy Meal™ campaign for ‘Megamind™’ was found twice in the sample, whereas the other fast food campaigns appeared only once. The remaining food categories for advertisements with the magic narrative theme included snacks (N=2), drinks (N=2) and fresh grocery/all natural (N=1) foods. The fresh grocery/all natural ad was for the advertiser Danimals® in a campaign titled ‘Field Trip’ by the researcher. In this ad, which promotes a yogurt-type snack (dairy), students begin sitting in a classroom looking rather bored. Their teacher, an older man, announces they are going on a field trip. The students get excited for a moment until he reveals that the field trip is to a toothpick factory. The entire class looks disappointed. The teacher then rips off his face in a cartoon-like fashion and reveals a young teenager who announces that the kids could be going to an amusement park instead on a “Danimals® VIP Field Trip” featuring free rides, free food, and no lines. The children are overwhelmed with excitement and next seen de-boarding a school bus,
wearing sunglasses, walking toward an amusement park. The ad prompts them to look inside a specially marked package of Danimals® to enter to win the trip. Magic was used as a narrative theme when the boring teacher ripped of his face to become an exciting teen, and the students de-boarded the cartoon-like school bus that took them to the amusement park.

The Megamind™ campaign, which was prominent in all three of the top narrative themes found most often during shows targeted to a black population, was a promotion for the popular DreamWorks® movie, Megamind™. The commercial begins with the cartoon-like characters from the movie standing outside of a McDonald’s® observing that a “red box” which is the Happy Meal™, is causing children inside to have fun. Megamind™ decides he must disguise himself to enter the McDonald’s® and interact with the children who were enjoying the Happy Meals™. He morphs into four different characters before settling on a disguise of a young boy (magic narrative theme). Next he is seen sitting at the table with the children, and his own Happy Meal™. The result is extreme happiness (humor/happiness narrative theme, also change in mood). The commercial goes on to promote the Megamind™ branded toys that are offered with the Happy Meal™ for a limited time. Megamind™ returns to himself and the children at the table laugh with him.

The narrative theme humor/happiness appeared in 53% (N=8) of the food advertisements shown during shows targeted to a black audience. The eight ads were spread among three categories: convenience (N=5), fresh grocery/all natural (N=2), and snacks (N=1). Once again, McDonald’s® was the prominent advertiser, making up four of the five fast food advertisements. The campaign titled ‘Megamind™’ by the researcher, appeared twice, whereas the other two Happy Meal™ campaigns appeared once. The ‘Megamind™’, campaign was previously
described and the humor/happiness narrative theme was described. There was also a Burger King® advertisement shown to this population that featured humor as a narrative theme.

The third most common narrative theme, a change in mood, was found in 47% (N=7) of the food advertisements aired during shows targeted to a black children’s population. Of the seven ads, five were found in the convenience category while the snack and fresh grocery/all natural categories respectively featured one ad with a change in mood narrative theme. Within the convenience category, McDonald’s® was the most prominent advertiser with four of the five ads promoting its Happy Meal™. The campaign titled ‘Megamind™’ by the researcher was the most frequently used, but just barely.

Food Categories and Narrative Themes

When examining the difference between the categories of food advertisements aired during general population shows and shows created to target a black audience and their narrative themes, the previous RQs provide ample data. Convenience foods were the most prominent category for both demographics comprising 42% (Table 4-5) of the foods ads targeted to the general population, and 60% (Table 4-6) of the food ads targeted to a black children’s population. Within these convenience foods, the same narrative themes were found to be used prominently for each population. For example, the ads for convenience foods that were targeted to a general population showed the narrative themes magic, humor/happiness and rewards (tied with change of mood) the most. Similarly, the ads for convenience foods that were targeted to a black population showed the narrative themes magic, humor/happiness and with change of mood the most. Besides the absence of the rewards theme in the black population shows, there was not much difference in the convenience category, which was the most prevalent to both audiences.

Convenience was the most prominent category and showed similar behavior, but not all of the food categories showed similarities. The narrative themes for the breakfast category cannot
be compared because 100% (N=7) of the breakfast ads appeared to the general population. Within the snacks category, the magic narrative theme was found in 100% of the sample, with 67% targeting black population shows (Table 4-8). The drinks category also incorporated the magic narrative theme most often. However, it was found most often targeted to the general audience (90%). Within the fresh grocery/ all natural category, the theme of humor/happiness was most common, appearing in 75% of the ads that were categorized as fresh grocery/ all natural. The majority of these were targeted to a black audience (Table 4-8).

**Frequency of Narrative Themes**

Between the two audiences, the greatest difference of frequency in appearance was found in 7 narrative themes: action, change in mood, competition, healthy, adult approval/disapproval, presence of rewards, and humor/happiness (Table 4-9).

The action theme was found in an ad for Frosted Flakes®, a breakfast cereal, which was not placed during black programming at all. A change in mood was found almost twice as frequent in ads targeted to the black population than general population shows, (47% and 26%, respectively. Tables 4-7 and 4-8. Competition was not found at all in the sample of ads targeted to black children, and only found in 13% of ads targeted to the general population. This narrative theme was found primarily in the same Frosted Flakes® ad mentioned previously, which features children playing competitive sports and citing the cereal as the source of their energy, and was not played during black children’s programming at all. The healthy narrative theme was seen less frequently in the black population shows than the general population shows, 13% and 23%, respectively. When targeted to black children, they were used in a PSA or in the convenience category, while general audience programming a featured healthy narrative theme in a PSA, convenience food, breakfast cereal or fresh grocery/ all natural food product (Florida Orange Juice). Adult approval or disapproval was found more in the advertisements targeted to a
black audience versus general population 33% and 23%, respectively. Interestingly, nearly all of
the adult approval/disapproval narrative themes were found in advertisements for foods in the
convenience category. This is something both populations have in common. The only exception
would be the Michelle Obama PSA, which aired once to each population. There was also a
difference in the use of presence of rewards as a narrative theme. Forty percent of ads in the
black population sample used this theme, while only 26% of ads in the general population
sample utilized this theme. The use of humor/happiness is also notable, with 53% of the black
population ads featuring this theme, while only 42% of the general population ads used
happiness/humor in their storyline.

Hypothesis 2 stated that: The narrative themes most prominent in children’s shows
targeted to a general audience will encourage healthy lifestyles (action, competition/
achievement, healthy/well-being) more so than the narrative themes presented in children’s
shows targeted to a black audience. However, H2 was not supported (U = 15, z = -1.58, p =
n.s.). While the action and competition narrative themes were found only in advertisements
targeted to the general audience, they were not excessively prominent. Both populations were
exposed to the healthy/well-being theme, however, it was more prominently used in
advertisements presented to a general children’s audience (N=7) versus the audience of black
children (N=2).
Table 4-1. Healthy Narrative Themes by Population

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<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Gen Pop</th>
<th>Black</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Action</td>
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<tr>
<td>Competition/ achievement</td>
<td>N=0</td>
<td>N=4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Healthy/well-being</td>
<td>N=7</td>
<td>N=2</td>
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Table 4-2. ID of Advertisements

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<tr>
<th>Ad ID number</th>
<th>Brand</th>
<th>Campaign Name</th>
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<tr>
<td>01</td>
<td>Danimals®</td>
<td>Field Trip</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02</td>
<td>Capri Sun®</td>
<td>Balloon Girl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03</td>
<td>McDonald’s® Happy Meal™</td>
<td>Megamind™</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04</td>
<td>McDonald’s® Happy Meal™</td>
<td>Star Wars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05</td>
<td>McDonald’s® Happy Meal™</td>
<td>Young Girl Clay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06</td>
<td>McDonald’s® Happy Meal™</td>
<td>Space Helmet</td>
</tr>
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<td>07</td>
<td>McDonald’s® Happy Meal™</td>
<td>Mr. Potato Head</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08</td>
<td>PSA</td>
<td>Magic of Healthy Living</td>
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<tr>
<td>09</td>
<td>Florida Orange Juice</td>
<td>OJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Goldfish®</td>
<td>Dog in House</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Fruit Loops®</td>
<td>Mummy</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>McDonald’s® Happy Meal</td>
<td>Strawberry Shortcake</td>
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<td>Burger King®</td>
<td>Fashion Dream</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>Chef Boyardee®</td>
<td>Army Sergeant</td>
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<td>CiCi’s Pizza®</td>
<td>25th Anniversary</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>Frosted Flakes®</td>
<td>Athletes</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>Spaghetti O’s®</td>
<td>Rock Star</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>Cinnamon Toast Crunch®</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>Spaghetti O’s®</td>
<td>Cruisin</td>
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<td>Honey Nut Cheerio’s®</td>
<td>Cowboy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Sour Patch®</td>
<td>Tunnel</td>
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</table>
Table 4-3. Categories and Brands by Population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Brand</th>
<th>Campaign</th>
<th>Gen Pop</th>
<th>Black Pop</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Breakfast/ Cereal</td>
<td>Fruit Loops®</td>
<td>Mummy</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frosted Flakes®</td>
<td>Athletes</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cinnamon Toast Crunch®</td>
<td>3 guys</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Honey Nut Cheerios®</td>
<td>Cowboy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snacks</td>
<td>Goldfish®</td>
<td>Dog in House</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sour Patch®</td>
<td>Tunnel</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>Balloon Girl</td>
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<td>McDonald’s®</td>
<td>Megamind™</td>
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<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Star Wars</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Young Girl Clay</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Space Helmet</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mr. Potato Head®</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strawberry Shortcake®</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fashion Dream</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CiCi’s Pizza®</td>
<td>25th Anniversary</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Army Sergeant</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rockstar</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cruisin</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthy</td>
<td>Danimals®</td>
<td>Field trip</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Magic of Healthy Living</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida Orange Juice</td>
<td>OJ</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Commercials Aired to Population 31 15

Table 4-4. Advertisements during shows

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>“Raven”</th>
<th>“Hannah”</th>
<th>“iCarly”</th>
<th>“True”</th>
<th>General Pop</th>
<th>Black Pop</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Ads in sample</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Ads</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4-5. Food Categories and percentage of total food ads by episode and population (Gen Pop)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Gen Pop</th>
<th>“Hannah”</th>
<th>“iCarly”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>% Pop</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breakfast</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snacks</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drinks</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convenience</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fresh grocery/ all natural</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4-6. Food Categories and percentage of total food ads by episode and population (Black Pop)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Black Pop</th>
<th>“Raven”</th>
<th>“True”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>% Pop</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breakfast</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snacks</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drinks</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convenience</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fresh grocery/ all natural</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen Pop</td>
<td>Magic*</td>
<td>Humor/Happiness*</td>
<td>Reward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Pop</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Theme</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Breakfast</th>
<th>Magic*</th>
<th>Humor/Happiness*</th>
<th>Reward</th>
<th>Change in Mood*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Theme</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>% Category</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Snack</th>
<th>Magic*</th>
<th>Humor/Happiness*</th>
<th>Reward</th>
<th>Change in Mood*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
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<td>% Theme</td>
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<tr>
<td>% Category</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Artificial Drink</th>
<th>Magic*</th>
<th>Humor/Happiness*</th>
<th>Reward</th>
<th>Change in Mood*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Theme</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Category</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Convenience</th>
<th>Magic*</th>
<th>Humor/Happiness*</th>
<th>Reward</th>
<th>Change in Mood*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Theme</td>
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<tr>
<td>% Category</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>36</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fresh grocery/all natural</th>
<th>Magic*</th>
<th>Humor/Happiness*</th>
<th>Reward</th>
<th>Change in Mood*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Theme</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Category</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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* Coded to indicate whether the narrative theme was shown as a part of the plot/setting, or promised to occur as a result of using the product.
Table 4-8. Most Common Narrative Themes (Black Pop)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Magic* N</th>
<th>Humor/Happiness* N</th>
<th>Change in Mood* N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black Pop</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Pop</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Theme</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breakfast</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Theme</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Category</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snack</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Theme</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Category</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artificial Drink</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Theme</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Category</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convenience</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Theme</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>63</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Category</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Theme</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Category</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Coded to indicate whether the narrative theme was shown as a part of the plot/setting, or promised to occur as a result of using the product.
Table 4-9. Narrative Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Black Pop</th>
<th>Gen Pop</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Action</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popularity</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in Mood</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magic</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appearance</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trickery</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reward</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humor/Happiness</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Goals of the Study

The intent of this study was to explore the categorical and narrative differences between food advertisements that air during children’s shows that target a general population, versus those that target an audience of primarily black children. While previous literature suggested that certain categories of food are more prominent in children’s advertising (Barcus, 1977; Kunkel, 2001; Alexander et al., 1998), and also suggests that programs targeted to blacks (not specifically children) may inherently promote obesity due to a disproportionate number of messages for low-nutrient foods (Tirodkar & Jain, 2003), there has not been extensive research comparing the presence of food categories to children of different demographics.

Similarly, narrative themes in children’s food advertising have been studied before, but to the researcher’s knowledge, never compared between two demographics. This study closely examined both food categories, and narrative themes, and found that convenience foods are the dominant category in children’s advertising, regardless of the demographic. Secondarily, of the 14 narrative themes, only a few displayed notable differences of frequency between general population and black programming. However, notable differences were found in how these narrative themes were used, or, in which category of food they were more likely to be found in, per demographic.

Food Advertisements

In contrast to the Henderson and Kelly study (2005), this study found that food advertisements are more likely to appear to the general population. The reason is unknown and requires additional research. However, it is possible that the general population programs simply have more viewers. While several considerations were taken to ensure that the shows were
comparable, Nielsen data would be the only accurate way to measure. That being said, it was very surprising that only 10% of “True Jackson’s” advertisements were for food. Even though the show is not as popular as its Nickelodeon® general audience counterpart (“iCarly”), it was still assumed that a greater percentage of ads would be for food products, just based on its popularity alone. Considering that a Nickelodeon® press release touted 3.1 million viewers for a “True Jackson” premier in February, and 7.3 million viewers for an “iCarly” premier in June, it can be assumed that food advertisers follow the audience, regardless of color. Since ‘iCarly’ is touted as basic cable’s top entertainment program (Nickelodeon Press, 2011), this idea is further supported. When compared to the entire sample, this program featured the most food advertisements by far.

**Food Categories**

**Summary RQ1**

To summarize, convenience foods were the most common category of food products advertised during general audience children’s programming. Artificial drinks and breakfast rounded out second and third place. Within the convenience food category, fast food was the dominant sub-category, with McDonald’s® Happy Meal™ comprising 70% of the ads.

In summary, the convenience food category was found most often during children’s shows primarily targeted to a black audience. Specifically, the fast food subcategory dominated this space, the vast majority of the ads promoted McDonald’s® Happy Meal™. Artificial drinks, fresh grocery/ all natural, and snacks tied for second place, each category comprising a small percentage of the ads (13%).

**Convenience Foods**

Of the five categories (breakfast, snacks, artificial drinks, convenience, and fresh grocery/ all natural), convenience was the most common among both audiences. When combined,
advertisements in the convenience category (fast food) comprised nearly 50% of the sample. The data is somewhat surprising considering that only Warren (2008) found convenience foods to be the top category of products advertised to children, while most other researchers found either cereal or snacks to be the prominent category (Table 2-1). This is particularly puzzling when compared to the present study, because one television show in the sample had zero cereal advertisements (“True Jackson”), and snacks were found in only 7% of the entire sample.

It is also peculiar that within the convenience (fast food) category, McDonald’s® Happy Meal™ comprised 73% of the entire category. Surely, other quick service restaurant competitors have kid’s meals as well, including: Burger King®, Wendy’s®, Subway®, Sonic®, Taco Bell®, Dairy Queen® and even KFC®. Burger King® was the only other fast food restaurant found in the sample. In fact, an advertisement for a Dairy Queen® product was seen in the pretest, but this turned out to be an ice cream maker, not a food product from Dairy Queen®. Further research is needed to explore why McDonald’s® has such minimal competition in this field.

It is conceivable that the recent economic recession has something to do with this shift in trends. Perhaps if additional research uncovered that McDonald’s® was the top-grossing company with children-centered products, it could be posited that they are simply able to afford a high frequency of advertisements, capturing the market share. In 2006 McDonald’s® spent $818.9 million on advertising in the United States, which is close to $2.5 million a day (Arndt, 2007). Forty percent of which was targeted to children (Brownell, 2004). Meanwhile, General Mills® advertising budget is measly in comparison spending $107 million to market its 8 major cereal products directly marketed to children (Harris, Schwartz, & Brownell). Most likely, considering that McDonald’s® is a global company. However, a larger advertising budget is not a main predictor. The question remains why McDonald’s® has such a dominant presence on the
specific medium of television. Perhaps generic brands from local grocery stores and wholesalers like Walmart have forced the large cereal makers to shift their advertising dollars to the internet and in-store marketing, where children are able to influence their mothers with the ‘nag’ factor. The internet and in-store marketing are most likely more affordable than television; additional research is needed to verify this.

To be more specific within the convenience food category, perhaps McDonald’s® spends a greater percentage of their television advertising budget targeting children than they do adults. (As previously mentioned, McDonald’s® spends 40% of their advertising budget targeting children. It is unknown how this budget is allocated per medium.) Subway® is advertising its $5 foot longs on television; it also ran a recent campaign about its new breakfast menu. However, reason, they are not targeting children. The same can be said for Taco Bell® and KFC® (owned by the same parent company) who have recently advertised a $5 value menu. Clearly, they are on television- but not targeting children. Perhaps other quick service restaurants do not target children because they fear the stiff competition of McDonald’s®. Maybe they are not confident in the appeal of their children’s menus to capture significant enough market share to justify the cost. Further research is needed in this area.

For Subway® in particular, this could be an opportunity. Given the recent attention that first lady Michelle Obama has applied to the obesity epidemic, Subway®’s unique ‘Eat Fresh’ proposition could fill a void in children’s food advertising by promoting quick service foods that are healthy (at least, healthier) for children, because their meals offer low calorie and low fat options with fresh vegetables.

**Food Categories Conclusion**

Since the majority of this study was based on previous research in hopes of providing direction for improvement in children’s advertising, it was important to note major differences
that were found in the current sample compared to some of the previously cited research. For example, cereal has been a dominant category in many studies (Table 2-4). The Alexander study shows that this category dominated an average of 28% of the ads shown during children’s television between the 1950s and 1990s (Alexander et al., 1998). The present research shows only 3.2% of all advertisements aired during the recorded shows were for cereal. Interestingly enough, these ads ran entirely during “iCarly,” a show targeted to general audience on the cable channel, Nickelodeon®.

There were also some notable characteristics about the convenience food category. When analyzed individually, both shows targeted to black children had a 60% occurrence of fast food ads, while the general population shows featured convenience foods as only 42% of the ads. It is also notable that the fast food category has shown some positive improvement in messaging. As previously noted, Warren et al., (2008) found that fast food companies were substituting fries for apples in their commercials. The present study found this to be true as well. Particularly in the case of McDonald’s®, which showed apples with caramel dip and milk (as opposed to soda), in two of the five ads in the sample. Additional research is required to determine if simply showing these healthier options has made an impact on children’s food choices at fast food restaurants.

Previous research has coded between 5-12% of commercials as healthy or fresh grocery/all natural (Table 2-4). Similarly, the present study found that 9% of the total ads aired to children during this period would qualify as advertising a healthy lifestyle or product as the main focus. In previous years and in the current study, these ads were primarily PSAs. However, the present study did include an advertisement for Florida orange juice. As previously mentioned, not many fruits and vegetables are branded products, Florida orange juice is an exception, and it aired once during “iCarly.” There were an equal number of fresh grocery/all natural ads that
aired during general population and black population children’s programming. It is important to note that while fresh grocery/all natural was a main category, the healthy narrative theme used to code these advertisements was quite similar. The distinction is that the researcher did not feel qualified to define healthy versus not healthy foods for children because research is unclear regarding the standards for this definition. However, it is not so unclear when referring to the healthy narrative theme, when Bandura’s theory is applied. The narrative themes will be discussed in depth as well.

Drinks have never been a dominant category in children’s advertising. In fact, many of the researchers defined drinks differently, sometimes including 100% juice and sometimes coding drinks with candy and sweets. The current study defined drinks as artificial drinks, and surprisingly, this category comprised 22% of the total sample. It should be noted that 100% of these ads for drinks were for the same advertiser and same campaign, Capri Sun® “Balloon Girl.”

Snacks fall into another category that has never dominated children’s advertising. Previous studies categorized only 5-12% of advertisements as snacks. In the current study, snacks included candy, crackers, cookies and chips. In total, this category only appeared in 6.5% of the advertisements. However, it is noteworthy that that 67% of those appeared during programs targeted to black children.

Narrative Themes

Summary – RQ 2

Children watching television shows that are targeted to a general population are more likely to see a narrative theme of magic more than any other theme. This theme provides a correlation between the advertised product and charms, spells, rituals, or imaginary settings (Table 2-1). For this audience, magic was used primarily to create a dream-like association between the primary advertisement (McDonald’s® Happy Meal™-“Young Girl Clay”) and its
consumption. This inferred relationship infers that the product could lead to the consumer developing the same fantasy-like emotions and experiences which include pure joy and the love and support from family and friends. The humor/happiness narrative theme was found in second place while a change in mood, and presence of rewards were tied for third. Each of these narrative themes were found most often in advertisements for convenience foods. Children watching television shows which are generally targeted to black kids are more likely to be subjected to the magic narrative theme than any other. As previously mentioned, this theme provides a correlation between the advertised product and charms, spells, rituals, or imaginary settings (Table 2-1). For this audience, the magic theme was used to convey a diverse set of emotions and conjectures, the most common being the use of magic to obtain the product (as seen in the ‘Megamind™’ campaign for McDonald’s® Happy Meal™). The second and third place narrative themes (humor, change in mood) were also found most often in advertisements of convenience foods.

Overall, there were not many narrative themes that were used more frequently from one population to another. When analyzing both general audience programming and programming targeted to a black audience, magic is the most common narrative theme and is found most often in convenience foods. However, when conveyed to the general audience, this narrative theme is more likely to suggest that the magical product will lead to their ultimate happiness; whereas, its use to the black population suggests that the product actually enables one to have magical powers. Moreover, that the product is worth using magic or any stretch of the imagination to obtain.

This data suggests that the way narrative themes are used varies, but the frequency is not significantly different in many places.
Magic

As previously mentioned, the frequency of narrative themes does not vary much between the two audiences. The data in this study suggest that the two demographics are receiving different messages when it comes to specific types of food. For example, magic was the narrative theme used most often to both demographics, and it was found most often in convenience foods for both general ad black audiences programming. However, a qualitative observation reveals that children watching the black programs might conclude that the product gives them magical powers, mostly to obtain the product, while children watching the general audience programs might correlate the association of the product (Happy Meal™) and magic to achieving pure bliss, including happiness, friends, and family. This conclusion is supported by the narrator’s statement at the end of the ad: “Joy is a gift; this is the box it comes in.”

Clearly, utilizing a magic/fantasy narrative theme is thought to appeal to a child’s imagination. Additional research could explore why this seems to be a preferred method for fast food advertisers, and if this theme works well across all categories. For example, how effective is the Michelle Obama PSA, which is grounded in realism? Could PSAs and other health-positive messages benefit from using more imaginative approaches in their communication? It is also possible that the use of this theme takes advantage of the limited cognitive ability of children to distinguish reality from fantasy. Perhaps if children’s advertising were subjected to strict regulation that was actually enforced, it would be a requirement to actually talk about the product attributes rather than just appealing to the undistinguishing minds of children.

Overall Narrative

Williams (2006) indicated that narrative themes are used to help advertisers make their product resonate with an audience. Therefore, an understanding of narrative themes relative to this study would not be complete without examining the ones that are most common during both
general audience programming and black programming, and what type of message their unified presence might represent. Chapter 4 discussed the frequency of narrative themes, specifically that there were seven narratives that showed the greatest difference in occurrence between the two demographics: action, change in mood, competition, healthy, adult approval/disapproval, presence of rewards, and humor/happiness.

To the general audience, the themes action, competition, and healthy were displayed at a greater frequency than when compared to shows targeted to a black audience. In fact, action and competition were not found at all in the sample of ads promoted to the minority audience. Therefore, it could be deduced that children watching shows targeted to a general audience are more likely to absorb the advantages of being competitive and active in life— from the latent messages delivered via narrative themes.

In contrast, the themes change in mood, adult approval/disapproval, presence of rewards, and humor/happiness were more frequently used during shows that were targeted to a black audience. These themes appear to be less goal oriented and could be interpreted as conveying the message that the products will make them experience happiness, receive material possessions, and the respect of adults.

The Social Learning Theory posits that we learn behaviors based on the observation of models. These models, which are often found in children’s advertising, teach us what rewards and consequences to expect as a result of actions. Both Schor (2007) and Bandura (1989) note that these behaviors are often applied to social development. “An advertisement directed to children not only sells products; it also sells such socio-cultural messages as how to gain peer acceptance and how to evaluate oneself” (Bandura, 1989, p. xxi). Therefore, the dissimilar messages found between the two audiences of children could have significance.
Implications and Recommendations

The debate surrounding children’s advertising is not new and is likely not to dissolve any time soon. Although regulators have attempted to develop standards and rules to limit unfair promotion of harmful products to children (such as alcohol, cigarettes, and host selling), when applying the tenants of the Social Learning Theory, this study indicates that the latent content conveyed in advertising could unfairly be targeting children with messages that will affect their social development. Therefore, the data uncovered in this study could provide great value to parents, government regulators, and responsible marketers alike.

This study affirms what several other studies have asserted, that children are not receiving adequate information about living healthy (Barcus, 1977; Goldberg et al., 1978; Winick et al., 1973). This could be easily changed with additional regulations requiring more of a balance in the types of products to which children are exposed. However, monitoring the narrative themes could be more difficult since they are often implicit. One possible way for the government to control this influence would be to apply something similar to what is happening in the restaurant industry- where calorie counts are required to be posted next to food options. Not to suggest that children would understand the consequence of calories, but there are other actual attributes of foods (caloric content, or how the food relates to the recommended food consumption per day) that could be required to mention in commercials that would let children know that consumption of the foods don’t necessarily lead to the implied social benefits. If the government feels that adults are entitled to know the truth about what they are eating, then why not children?

Limitations

This content analysis of children’s advertising is not free of issues. First, the sample may not be inclusive of children’s television viewing experience for a number of reasons. For example, children do not only watch programming targeted to their age group. As exemplified
by Tirodkar (2003), children also watch prime-time television which is targeted to families. Acquiring Nielsen data regarding the overall popularity of shows pertaining to a child audience could provide a more valid sample.

Second, and most importantly, the final sample was based on a series of criteria that were greatly influenced by the lack of Nielsen data. The shows were chosen according to measurements that the researcher deemed relevant because they suggested overall popularity. This overall popularity only indicates that children in general watch the program, it does not indicate whether or not the shows actually attempt to target (or succeed) children of different racial backgrounds. It was assumed, similarly to Tirodkar (2003) that just because the main character(s) was a specific race, that children of the same race would be most attracted to the show. Unfortunately, due to the lack of Nielsen data, this was the best measurement the researcher could apply.

Finally, the coders who were assigned to identify narrative themes were not children, and therefore, may not have perceived messages the way a child would. Williams (2006) noted a similar handicap.

**Future Research**

The field of research in children’s food advertising has unlimited potential for discovery and enlightenment. Although the basic foundation of this study was founded on uncovering some of the basic fundamentals regarding the relationships of children and food advertising, there is still much to learn. Future research could supplement this study by avoiding the same limitations that the researcher experienced. For example- what are the most popular children’s shows and who is their audience? Acquiring Nielsen data specifically pertaining to children’s television could provide a more valid sample of children’s television shows based on actual audience size and demographics. This data could expand the definition of children’s television
beyond programs shown exclusively on children’s networks, or during Saturday morning programming, to include family-centered prime time shows, which capture a child audience as well.

In the Kaiser Family Foundation Study, Roberts et al., explored how the changing multi-media landscape has impacted the lives of children (Roberts, Foehr, Rideout, & Brodie, 1999). This study, like many others, was limited to television. However, television is no longer the only medium for food advertising competing for children’s attention and loyalty, children are now online several hours of the day (Roberts et al., 1999). How have these companies captured an online child audience? Where do they spend their advertising dollars and who is their target audience? More importantly, is their message online different than what is conveyed on television? These questions could be explored in a multi-media study to determine if food categories and narrative themes are represented differently on television than they are on the internet.

Another approach that could be taken to expand on this study would be to do an experiment with children. It would be worthwhile to see if they perceive the latent messages of narrative themes. The experiment by Gorn and Goldberg was able to provide evidence that children’s food choices are influenced by advertisements (Gorn & Goldberg, 1982). However, Gorn and Goldberg did not answer the question that this study attempted to explore which was- why? Why were children attracted to certain food products? Did they think they would gain something from the product? Were they simply attracted to the production techniques using bright colors and action? To validate the effect of narrative themes, it would be valuable to conduct an experiment with children and explore how, if at all, narrative themes are perceived.
Finally, since PSAs have been shown to affect the food choices children make, it would be interesting to explore the use of the most popular narrative themes makes an impact on their affect. For example, the magic theme was found to be the most common across both demographic samples in this study. However, it was not used in the Michelle Obama PSA that promoted a healthy lifestyle and sensible eating. Why not, and would it make a difference? If fast food companies and many others are appealing to the imaginations of children with fantasy appeals, could PSAs help to balance some of the negative food images children see on television, simply by speaking the same language? A PSA could be developed, incorporating the magic narrative theme, and tested on a child audience for recall and impact. Perhaps this would be an important step to understanding the true potential of narrative themes, which could be used to encourage healthy eating to children.

**Conclusion**

This study examined children’s advertising from the point of view of two different demographics: the general audience, and a black audience. While both of these groups have seen a dramatic increase in the number of overweight children, the minority group has suffered the worse. It is feared that this epidemic will reverse the lifecycle for the first time in history, causing parents to outlive their children.

There are several environmental contributors to overweight including diet, income, neighborhood and education; but as children’s relationship with television continues to evolve, the impact of food advertising is undeniable. Several researchers have shown that advertising influences children’s preferences and purchase decisions (Gorn & Goldberg, 1982), but there has not been extensive research to understand why children are attracted to these ads, and if advertising has unfairly targeted certain groups who are shown to be more vulnerable to weight gain.
It is possible to slow down the obesity epidemic and possibly even reverse it. Although parents are ultimately responsible for controlling the environmental causes of weight gain, responsible advertisers and government officials should take responsibility and moderate the messages that children see when they watch television. Understanding narrative themes is one recommended first step that could save a generation.
APPENDIX A
CODE BOOK

**Identifying a food commercial** – Determine if the ad is for a food intended for consumption.

**Name of television program** – Enter the name of the program that was airing at the time the ad played.

**Population of the television program** – Determine if the show is primarily targeting a black audience or a general population audience.

**Network** - Enter the network for which the show airs.

**Episode Name** - Enter the name of the episode of the show being coded.

**Recorded Date of episode** – Enter the date that the episode was recorded.

**Recorded Time of episode** – Enter the time the episode aired in military tie. For example, 6:00 PM would be 1800.

**Unique Ad Number** – Assign unique ad number by combining:
- First letter of the show the ad aired during
- The date the episode was recoded
- The time the episode was recorded
- The number of the ad provided below

1. Danimals® - Field Trip
2. Capri Sun® - Balloon Girl
3. McDonald’s® - Megamind™
4. McDonald’s® Happy Meal™ - Star Wars
5. McDonald’s® Happy Meal™ - Young girl clay
6. McDonald’s® Happy Meal™ - Space Helmet
7. McDonald’s® Happy Meal™ - Mr. Potato Head
8. PSA- Magic of Healthy Living
9. Florida Orange Juice
10. Goldfish® - dog in house
11. Fruit Loops® - Mummy
12. McDonald’s® - Strawberry shortcake
13. Burger King® - Fashion Dream
14. Chef Boyardee® - Army Seargent
15. Cici's Pizza® - 25 Anniversary
16. Frosted Flakes® - Athletes
17. Spaghettio's® - Rockstar
18. Cinnamon Toast Crunch® - 3 guys
19. Spaghettio's® - Cruisin

96
20  Honey Nut Cheerios- Cowboy
21  Sour Patch- Tunnel
- For example: If the Frosted Flakes ‘Athletes’ campaign was aired during That’s So Raven on October 6 at 3 PM would be given the unique id: R1006150016

**Total number of ads airing during program (write in last)** – Enter the total number of advertisements that aired during the episode. Start counting when the credits begin and stop counting when the credits end.

**Total number of food ads aired during program**- Enter the total number of FOOD advertisements that aired during the episode. Start counting when the credits begin and stop counting when the credits end.

**Name of product advertised**- Enter the name of the product advertised.

**Food category/subcategory**
- Breakfast
  o Breakfast Pastry- Such as Pop Tarts® or Toaster Strudel®.
  o Cereal – Such as Kellogg’s Frosted Flakes® or General Mills® Cheerios®.
  o Cereal bar – Such as Special K® granola bars.
- Snacks
  o Candy/gum – Such as candy bars (Snickers®) or sweet or sour candy (Skittles®).
  o Crackers – Such as Goldfish®.
  o Cookies – Such as Oreo’s®.
  o Potato/ corn chips- Such as Pringles® or tortilla chips.
  o Snack cakes- Such as Little Debbie® brand.
  o Fruit snacks- Such as Fruit Roll Ups®.
- Artificial Drinks
  o Soda regular – Such as Coca Cola® or Pepsi®.
  o Soda diet – Such as Diet Coke® or Diet Pepsi®.
  o Sports drink – Such as Gatorade®.
  o Flavored water – This includes any water with natural flavors.
  o Fruit flavored drink – Such as Capri Sun®.
- Convenience
  o Fast food restaurant – Such as McDonald’s®, Burger King® or Wendy’s®.
  o Frozen/ packaged meal – Such as Tostino’s Pizza Rolls®.
  o Canned pasta/soup – Such as Chef Boyardee®.
  o Dried pasta dinner – Such as Kraft® Macaroni and Cheese.
- Fresh grocery/ all natural
  o Dairy – Such as milk or cheese.
  o Water.
  o 100% fruit juice – Orange, Apple,
  o Fruits or vegetables – Including if a salad or a fruit salad is the primary focus of a restaurant advertisement.
  o Meat- Including lunchmeat.
- Bread - Sliced, bagels or sandwich buns.
- Other - PSAs

**Narrative Themes**

**Is crime or violence present?**
No (There is no physical restraint, hitting, falling, flung bodies, explosions, property damage, or dangerous physical act shown)

Yes (There is either physical restraint, hitting, falling, flung bodies, explosions, property damage, or dangerous physical act shown)

**Are action, strength, speed, power or sports performance present?**
Shown as part of the setting or plot of the ad. (E.g. are children shown running in the background of the ad, are the characters playing sports?)

Promised to occur as a result of the product? (Would a child infer that the product will increase their physical performance? E.g. playing sports? Are children shown running faster after they eat the product?)

**Are popularity, making friends, fitting in or being 'cool' present?**
Shown as part of the setting or plot of the ad. (E.g. are children shown playing with peers? Are children surrounded by a group of friends? Typically, this will be coded when more than one child is shown interacting.)

Promised to occur as a result of the product? (Would a child infer that the product will make them cool or make friends? E.g. are children shown surrounded by peers eager to be their friends because they have the product?)

**Is a change in mood or disposition present?**
Shown as part of the setting or plot of the ad? (During the course of the ad does the child’s mood change NOT as a result of the product? E.g. are children shown sad then begin to laugh as a joke is told?)

Promised to occur as a result of the product? (Would a child infer that the product will change their mood or make them happy? E.g. are children shown laughing or smiling after they eat the product? Chose this code if children are not smiling, but then smile after taking a bite. Also, mood change does not have to be happiness. Could be surprise.)

**Are competition or achievement present?**
Shown as part of the setting or plot of the ad? (E.g. are children shown racing each other or playing tug of war? Do characters fight/ tug of war/ chase each other for the product? Do children try to 'get' the product away from other characters?)

Promised to occur as a result of the product? (Would a child infer that the product will give them a competitive edge? E.g. are children shown being better able to play a sport against their peers as a result of the product?)
Is family togetherness or bonding present?
Shown as part of the setting or plot of the ad? (E.g. are children shown eating with their parents? Is a family shown participating in activities together?)

Promised to occur as a result of the product? (Would a child infer that the product will increase their level of family togetherness? E.g. is the family happy only after they've eaten at McDonald’s®?)

Is well being or a healthy lifestyle associated with the product?
No (The product is not associated with vitamins, or a nutritional benefit such as being low-fat.)

Yes (Would a child infer that consumption of the product would lead to health benefits? E.g. The product is associated with vitamins or nutritional benefits such as being low-fat.)

Is magic, fantasy, or anything supernatural portrayed:
Shown as part of the setting or plot of the ad? (E.g. does the plot include charms, spells, magic?)

Promised to occur as a result of the product? (Would a child infer that the product will produce an supernatural effect such as flying or disappearing?)

Is adult approval or disapproval:
Not present

Yes (e.g. Product consumption is linked to adult's approval of child, or getting away with something despite disapproval.)

Does the advertisement feature improved appearance:
As part of the setting or plot of the ad? (E.g. does a character’s appearance improve without consuming the product?)

Promised to occur as a result of the product? (Does a character's appearance improve as a result of consuming the product?)

Is trickery used in the advertisement:
Shown as part of the setting or plot of the ad? (E.g. are characters shown denying, tricking, or deceiving others out of the product? Are characters seen deceiving others in the process of getting the product?)

Are conflict or Interpersonal rivalry used:
Shown as part of the setting or plot of the ad? (E.g. are characters shown arguing or debating before, after, during or in order to obtain the product?)

Is the product associated with a reward or premium offer?
Shown as part of the setting or plot of the ad? (E.g. are children shown eating with their parents? Is a family shown participating in activities together?)

**Are humor, fun, or happiness**
Shown as part of the setting or plot of the ad? (E.g. is the general mood of the ad happy?)

Promised to occur as a result of the product? (Would a child infer that consumption of the product will make them happier or provide good times?)
APPENDIX B
CODE SHEET

Name of television program
1- That’s so Raven
2- Hannah Montana
3- iCarly
4- True Jackson

Population of the television program
1- General population
2- Black population

Network
1- Nickelodeon
2- Disney/ ABC

Episode Name

Recorded Date of episode

Recorded Time of episode

Unique Ad Number

Total number of ads airing during program (write in last)

Total number of food ads aired during program

Name of product advertised

Food category/subcategory
1- Breakfast Pastry
2- Cereal
3- Cereal bar
4- Candy/gum
5- Crackers
6- Cookies
7- Potato/ corn chips
8- Snack cakes
9- Fruit snacks
10- Soda regular
11- Soda diet
12- Sports drink
13- Flavored water
14- Fruit flavored drink
15- Fast food restaurant
16- Frozen or prepackaged meal
17- Canned soup/ pasta
18- Dried pasta dinner
19- Dairy
20- Water
21- 100% fruit juice
22- Fruits or vegetables
23- Meat
24- Bread
25- PSA

Narrative Themes

Is crime or violence present?
   0 – No
   5- Yes
   99 – Can’t tell

Are action, strength, speed, power or sports performance present?
   0- No
   1- Shown as part of the setting or plot of the ad
   2- Promised to occur as a result of the product?
   3- Both
   99 – Can’t Tell

Are popularity, making friends, fitting in or being 'cool' present?
   0- No
   1- Shown as part of the setting or plot of the ad
   2- Promised to occur as a result of the product?
   3- Both
   99 – Can’t Tell
Is a change in mood or disposition present?
0- No
1- Shown as part of the setting or plot of the ad
2- Promised to occur as a result of the product?
3- Both
99 – Can’t Tell

Are competition or achievement present?
0- No
1- Shown as part of the setting or plot of the ad
2- Promised to occur as a result of the product?
3- Both
99 – Can’t Tell

Is family togetherness or bonding present?
0- No
1- Shown as part of the setting or plot of the ad
2- Promised to occur as a result of the product?
3- Both
99 – Can’t Tell

Is well being or a healthy lifestyle associated with the product?
0- No
1- Yes
99 – Can’t tell

Is magic, fantasy, or anything supernatural present?
0- No
1- Shown as part of the setting or plot of the ad
2- Promised to occur as a result of the product?
3- Both
99 – Can’t Tell

Is adult approval or disapproval present?
0- No
1- Yes
99 – Can’t tell

Does the advertisement feature improved appearance:
0- No
1- Shown as part of the setting or plot of the ad
2- Promised to occur as a result of the product?
3- Both
99 – Can’t Tell

Is trickery used in the advertisement?
Are conflict or interpersonal rivalry used:
0- No
1- Yes
99 – Can’t tell

Is the product associated with a reward or premium offer?
0- No
1- Yes
99 – Can’t tell

Are humor, fun, or happiness
0- No
1- Shown as part of the setting or plot of the ad
2- Promised to occur as a result of the product?
3- Both
99 – Can’t Tell
LIST OF REFERENCES


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http://www.cdc.gov/healthyweight/assessing/bmi/index.html

http://www.cdc.gov/obesity/data/index.html


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Prior to attending the University of Florida to pursue a Master of Advertising, Calisha (Oglesby) Anderson worked in the related fields of media and marketing for several years. As a veteran in the industry, her career has provided a well-rounded depth of experience.

Beginning in New York City, her professional life began at CBS Radio, Viacom’s radio conglomerate, where she managed promotional endeavors including a speaking engagement with Rachael Ray as well as official promotions for the New York Yankees. Moving to Orlando, Florida in 2006, she started *The Guest List* magazine, acting as the Director of Strategy and Development. Here she introduced a new concept which focused on the city’s hospitality workers as a special target audience, and delivered a magazine dedicated to supporting their industry. In less than a year, the magazine obtained nationally-known brands such as Budweiser and Gold’s Gym as loyal advertisers. *The Guest List*’s strategic partners included the Orlando Chamber of Commerce, the Orange County Convention Center and Visitors Bureau. Her next professional endeavor while living in Orlando was as a Marketing Manager for Compass Knowledge Group (CKG), where she managed national marketing, advertising and branding campaigns for top-tier university clients including Boston University and Hofstra.

The experience at CKG inspired Calisha to learn more about the industry, which then led to the decision to pursue a master’s degree in the field. After moving to Gainesville and completing the required courses for the degree, she moved to South Florida where an opportunity was waiting at Zimmerman Advertising, the nation’s 14th largest advertising agency. There, she was a Strategic Planner for the agency’s retail and food service clients including Ashley Furniture®, Atlantis resorts®, White Castle® and Boston Market®. She provided key strategic direction based on consumer research and industry intelligence.
The next opportunity that presented itself to her was managing the marketing and development of Creative City Collaborative (CCC), a nonprofit, government funded entity charged with enhancing the artistic culture of Delray Beach, Florida, a popular vacation and cultural center in Palm Beach County. She developed the brand of the CCC while conceiving and launching the marketing plan for the incubator project that is now known as the Arts Garage. The Arts Garage, a now wildly popular venue, hosts several arts and entertainment programs throughout the year and Mrs. Anderson is largely responsible for its successful launch into the market which included regional press coverage and several sold out events.

Living in Lake Worth, Florida, Calisha Anderson is now the Vice President of Business Development at James Ross Advertising. Calisha and her husband, Stephen, who is also a Florida Gator, have one daughter, Jolie Celeste Anderson.