

# Children as Consumers: An Ethical Evaluation of Children's Television Advertising

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Television sponsors and broadcasters began to identify children as a special target audience for commercial messages in the mid-1960s.<sup>1</sup> Within only a few years, children's television advertising emerged as a controversial issue. Concerned parents began to speak out and to urge the networks to adopt codes of ethics governing children's advertising. By 1970, the issue had attracted the attention of the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). The FCC received some 80,000 letters in support of a proposed rule "looking toward the elimination of sponsorship and commercial content in children's programming."<sup>2</sup> Public attention to the controversy over children's television advertising peaked between 1978 and 1980, when the FTC, under its authority to regulate unfair and deceptive advertising, held public hearings on its proposal to ban televised advertising directed to or seen by large numbers of young children. More recently parents have complained to the FCC about so-called program-length commercials, children's programs designed around licensed characters.<sup>3</sup>

As this brief chronology indicates, children's television advertising has had a history of arousing people's ethical sensibilities. In this paper I want to propose some explanations for why this is so and to argue that there are good ethical reasons that advertisers should refrain from directing commercials to young children. However, because so much of the public debate over children's advertising has focused on the FTC's actions rather than explicitly on the ethical aspects of children's advertising, a few preliminary remarks are called for.

First, it is important to bear in mind that the ethical propriety of directing television advertising to young children is distinct from its legality. Even if advertisers have a constitutional right to advertise lawful products to young children in a nondeceptive way, it is not necessarily the right thing to do.<sup>4</sup> Our system of government guarantees us rights that it may be unethical to exercise on certain occasions. Terminology may make it easy to lose sight of the distinction between "having a right" and the "right thing to do," but the distinction is critical to constitutional governance.<sup>5</sup> In this paper I will take no position on the scope of advertisers' First Amendment rights to freedom of speech. I am primarily interested in the moral status of advertising to young children.

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A second preliminary point worth noting is that evaluating the ethical status of a practice, such as advertising to young children, is a different exercise from evaluating the propriety of governmental regulation of that practice. Even if a practice is unethical, there may be legal, social, economic, political, or administrative reasons that the government cannot or should not forbid or even regulate the practice. The public policy issues faced by the FTC or any other branch of government involved in regulating children's advertising are distinct from the ethical issues facing advertisers. The fact that it may be impossible or unwise for the government to restrict children's advertising does not shield advertisers from ethical responsibility for the practice.

Finally, I want to point out that public opinion regarding children's advertising is a measure neither of its ethical value nor of the propriety of the FTC's actions. Two critics of the FTC declared that it had attempted to impose its conception of what is good on an unwilling American public.<sup>6</sup> There is reason to doubt the writers' assumption about the opinions of the American public regarding children's advertising,<sup>7</sup> but the more critical point is the implication of their argument: that the FTC's actions would have been appropriate had there been a social consensus opposing child-oriented advertising. Majority opinion, however, is neither the final arbiter of justified public policy, nor the standard for assaying the ethical value of a practice like children's advertising. As pointed out earlier, constitutional limits may override majority opinion in the public policy arena. And although publicly expressed opinion may signal ethical concerns (as I suggested in mentioning the letters opposing commercial sponsorship of children's television received by the FCC), social consensus is not the test of ethical quality. We cannot simply say that children's advertising is ethically all right because many people do not object to it or because people's objections to it are relatively weak. An ethical evaluation requires that we probe our ethical principles and test their relation to children's advertising. Publicly expressed opposition may signal that such probing is necessary, but it does not establish an ethical judgment one way or the other.

Public focus on the FTC has had the unfortunate effect of diverting attention from the ethical propriety of children's television advertising and emphasizing the legal and political dimensions of the FTC's actions. It has also had the unfortunate effect of putting advertisers and manufacturers of children's products in an adversarial mode vis-a-vis their critics. In this mode reasoned discussion of children's abilities and perceptions and children's proper role, if any, in the marketplace can proceed only with great difficulty. For purposes of this discussion, I will set aside the legal and public policy questions involved in government restrictions on children's advertising. Instead, as promised, I will explore the ethical issues raised by the practice of directing television advertising to young children. In the process of this investigation, I will necessarily turn my attention to the role of consumers in a free market economy, to the capacities of children as they relate to consumer activities, and to the relationships between adults and children within the family.

By young children I mean children who lack the conceptual abilities required for making consumer decisions, certainly children under eight. Many researchers have investigated the age at which children can comprehend the persuasive intent of advertising.<sup>8</sup> Depending on the questions employed to test comprehension of persuasive intent, the critical age has been set as low as kindergarten age or as high as nine or ten.<sup>9</sup> Even if this research were conclusive, however, it would not identify the age at which children become capable of making consumer decisions. Comprehending persuasive intent is intellectually less complex than consumer decisionmaking. Even if children appreciate the selling intent behind advertising, they may lack other conceptual abilities necessary for responsible consumer decisions. Child psychologists could perhaps identify the age at which these additional abilities develop. For purposes of this discussion, however, the precise age is not crucial. When I use the term child or children I am referring to "young children"--those who lack the requisite abilities.

Children's advertising is advertising targeted or directed to young children. Through children's advertising, advertisers attempt to persuade young children to want and, consequently, to request the advertised product.<sup>10</sup> Although current voluntary guidelines for children's advertising prohibit advertisers from explicitly instructing children to request that their parents buy the advertised product, child-oriented advertising is designed to induce favorable attitudes that result in such requests.<sup>11</sup> Frequently child-oriented ads utilize themes and techniques that appeal particularly to children: animation, clowns, magic, fantasy effects, superheroes, and special musical themes.<sup>12</sup> They may also involve simply the presentation of products, such as cereals, sweets, and toys, that appeal to young children with announcements directed to them.<sup>13</sup> The critical point in understanding child-directed advertising, however, is not simply the product, the particular themes and techniques employed, or the composition of the audience viewing the ad, but whether the advertiser intends to sell to or through children. Advertisers routinely segment their markets and target their advertising.<sup>14</sup> The question at issue is whether children are appropriate targets.

Advertising directed to young children is a subcategory of advertising seen by them, since children who watch television obviously see a great deal of advertising that is not directed toward them--ads for adult consumer products, investment services, insurance, and so on. Occasionally children's products are advertised by means of commercials directed to adults. The toy manufacturer Fisher-Price, for example, at one time advertised its children's toys and games primarily by means of ads directed to mothers.<sup>15</sup> Some ads are designed to appeal to the whole family. Insofar as these ads address young children they fall within the scope of my attention.

My interest in television advertising directed to young children, as distinct from magazine or radio advertising directed to them, is dictated by the nature of the medium. Television ads portray vivid and lively images that engage young children as the printed words and pictures of magazines,

or even the spoken words of radio, could never do. Because of their immediacy television ads can attract the attention of young children who have not yet learned to read. Research has shown that young children develop affection for and even personal relationships with heavily promoted product characters appearing on television.<sup>16</sup> At the same time, because of their immaturity, these children are unable to assess the status of these characters as fictional or real, let alone assess whatever minimal product information they may disclose.<sup>17</sup> Technical limitations make magazine advertising and radio advertising inherently less likely to attract young children's attention. Consequently, they are less susceptible to ethical criticisms of the sort generated by television advertising.

### Children as Consumers

The introduction of the practice of targeting children for televised commercial messages challenged existing mores. At the obvious level, the practice was novel. But at a deeper level, it called into question traditional assumptions about children and their proper role in the marketplace. The argument advanced on behalf of advertising to children by the Association of National Advertisers (ANA), the American Association of Advertising Agencies (AAAA), and the American Advertising Federation (AAF) reflects the rejection of some of these traditional assumptions:

Perhaps the single most important benefit of advertising to children is that it provides information to the child himself, information which advertisers try to gear to the child's interests and on an appropriate level of understanding. This allows the child to learn what products are available, to know their differences, and to begin to make decisions about them based on his own personal wants and preferences. . . . Product diversity responds to these product preferences and ensures that it is the consumer himself who dictates the ultimate success or failure of a given product offering.<sup>18</sup>

The most significant aspect of this argument supporting children's advertising is its vision of children as autonomous consumers. Children are represented as a class of consumers possessing the relevant decisionmaking capacities and differing from adult consumers primarily in their product preferences. Children are interested in toys and candy, while adults are interested in laundry detergent and investment services. That children may require messages tailored to their level of understanding is acknowledged, but children's conceptual abilities are not regarded as having any other special significance. Advocates of children's advertising argue that it gives children "the same access to the marketplace which adults have, but keyed to their specific areas of interest."<sup>19</sup>

When children are viewed in this way--as miniature adults with a distinctive set of product preferences--the problematic nature of advertising to them is not apparent. Indeed, it appears almost unfair not to provide

children with televised information about products available to satisfy their special interests. Why should they be treated differently from any other class of consumers?

There are, however, significant differences between adults and young children that make it inappropriate to regard children as autonomous consumers. These differences, which go far beyond different product preferences, affect children's capacities to function as responsible consumers and suggest several arguments for regarding advertising to them as unethical. For purposes of this discussion, the most critical differences reflect children's understanding of self, time, and money.

Child-development literature generally acknowledges that the emergence of a sense of one's self as an independent human being is a central experience of childhood and adolescence.<sup>20</sup> This vague notion, "having a sense of one's self as an independent human being," encompasses a broad range of capacities--from recognition of one's physical self as distinct from one's mother to acceptance of responsibility for one's actions and choices. Normally children acquire these capacities gradually in the course of maturation. While this mastery manifests itself as self-confidence and self-control in an ever-widening range of activities and relationships, it depends more fundamentally upon the emergence of an ability to see oneself as oneself. The reflexive nature of consciousness--the peculiar ability to monitor, study, assess, and reflect upon oneself and even upon one's reflections--underlies the ability to make rational choices. It permits people to reflect upon their desires, to evaluate them, and to have desires about what they shall desire. It permits them to see themselves as one among others and as engaging in relationships with others. Young children lack--or have only in nascent form--this ability to take a higher-order perspective on themselves and to see themselves as having desires or preferences they may wish to cultivate, suppress, or modify. They also lack the self-control that would make it possible to act on these higher-order desires if they had them.

Closely related to the sense of self, if not implicit in self-reflection, is the sense of time. Children's understanding of time--both as it relates to their own existence and to the events around them--is another area where their perspectives are special. Preschoolers are intrigued with "time" questions: "When is an hour up?" "Will you be alive when I grow up?" "When did the world begin and when will it end?" "Will I be alive for all the time after I die?" Young children's efforts to understand time are accompanied by a limited ability to project themselves into the future and to imagine themselves having different preferences in the future. It is generally true that children have extremely short time horizons. But children are also struggling with time in a more fundamental sense: they are testing conceptions of time as well as learning to gauge its passage by conventional markers.<sup>21</sup> Young children's developing sense of time goes hand in hand with their developing sense of self. Their capacity for self-reflection, for evaluating their desires, and for making rational choices is intimately related to their understanding of their own continuity in time.

Young children are in many ways philosophers: they are exploring and questioning the very fundamentals of existence.<sup>22</sup> Since they have not accepted many of the conventions and assumptions that guide ordinary commercial life, they frequently pose rather profound questions and make insightful observations. But although young children are very good at speculation, they are remarkably unskilled in the sorts of calculations required for making consumer judgments. In my experience, many young children are stymied by the fundamentals of arithmetic and do not understand ordinal relations among even relatively small amounts--let alone the more esoteric notions of selling in exchange for money. Research seems to support the observation that selling is a difficult concept for children. One study found that only 48 percent of six-and-a-half- to seven-and-a-half-year-olds could develop an understanding of the exocentric (as distinct from egocentric) verb to sell.<sup>23</sup> A five-year-old may know from experience in making requests that a \$5.00 trinket is too expensive, but when she concludes that \$5.00 is also too much to pay for a piano, it is obvious that she knows neither the exchange value of \$5.00, the worth of a piano, nor the meaning of too expensive.<sup>24</sup>

What is the significance of the differences between adults and young children I have chosen to highlight--their differing conceptions of self, time, and money? In the argument for advertising quoted earlier, it was stated that advertising to children enables them "to learn what products are available, to know their differences, and to begin to make decisions about them based on [their] own personal wants and preferences." Ignore, for the moment, the fact that existing children's advertising, which concentrates so heavily on sugared foods and toys, does little either to let children know the range of products available or differences among them and assume that children's advertising could be more informative.<sup>25</sup> Apart from this fact, the critical difficulty with the argument is that because of children's, shall we say, "naive" or "unconventional" conceptions of self, time, and money, they know very little about their own personal wants and preferences--how they are related or how quickly they will change--or about how their economic resources might be mobilized to satisfy those wants. They experience wants and preferences but do not seem to engage in critical reflection, which would lead them to assess, modify, or perhaps even curtail their felt desires for the sake of other more important or enduring desires they may have or may expect to have in the future. Young children also lack the conceptual wherewithal to engage in research or deliberative processes that would assist them in knowing which of the available consumer goods would most thoroughly satisfy their preferences, given their economic resources. The fact that children want so many of the products they see advertised is another indication that they do not evaluate advertised products on the basis of their preferences and economic resources.<sup>26</sup>

There is thus a serious question whether advertising really has or can have much at all to do with children's beginning "to make decisions about [products] based on [their] own personal wants and preferences" until they develop the conceptual maturity to understand their own wants and preferences and to assess the value of products available to satisfy them.<sup>27</sup>

If children's conceptions of self, time, and money are not suited to making consumer decisions, one must have reservations about ignoring this fact and treating them as if they were capable of making reasonable consumer judgments anyway.

There is another reason to question the validity of treating children on a parallel with other consumers. The argument for advertising to children envisions them as similar to other classes of consumers with distinctive product interests, but it appeals ultimately to the principle of consumer sovereignty.<sup>28</sup> Advocates of children's advertising argue that by informing children through advertising, they can "ensure that it is the consumer himself [the child] who dictates the ultimate success or failure of a given product offering." Under the principle of consumer sovereignty, the consumer is king. The preferences he expresses through his purchasing behavior determine what products succeed in the market and set the standard for what products are offered. But who is the "consumer" when children's products are at issue? Children may eat the candy or play with the toys purchased by their parents, but does this entitle them to be regarded as the "consumers" of these products? Should children who are unable to assess a product's effectiveness in satisfying their consumer preferences be the arbiters of a product's success simply because they are the final users?

Whenever the funds for a purchase do not come from the pocket of the user, the identity of the "true consumer"--if we are bent on identifying one and only one consumer--is unclear. But there is no reason to insist that there is only one consumer in such instances. Indeed, when parents buy children's products for their offspring it is much more accurate to regard both parent and child as the relevant consumers. As argued earlier, children alone lack the capacity for responsible autonomous consumer decisions. Moreover, both parent and child have interests in the purchase. Not only does the parent supply the funds and make the decision to buy while the child uses the product, but the parent derives satisfaction from the child's enjoyment of the product. As a consequence of the common and interlocking interests of parents and children, a toy that is the right price, that the child wants, and that the parent wants for the child provides much more consumer satisfaction than a toy that the child wants but that the parent does not want for the child. Whether we view the child alone as the relevant consumer, or include the parent as well, can make a significant difference in which products we regard as successful and which as unsuccessful. It will also make a difference in our assessment of the contribution children's advertising makes to consumer satisfaction.

The argument for children's advertising treats the child as the only consumer who should determine the ultimate success or failure of a product. This view implies for parents a rather minimal role in their children's consumer activities: it implies that parents should simply effectuate their children's consumer desires.<sup>29</sup> Anyone who agrees that children's conceptions of self, time, and money do not equip them to make responsible consumer decisions and who respects the interlocking interests of parents

and their children will find the notion of children as sovereign consumers --and the parental role it implies--problematic. But how far should a parent go in influencing and directing a child's consumer activities? Most parents want to promote and support their children's developing independence, but surely renouncing all responsibility for their children's decisions is not the most effective way to do this. Should a parent restrict herself to attempting to determine what the child's desires would be if they were consistent and informed by price and value information? Or is it legitimate to go further and to permit the child only those consumer goods that reflect the parent's desires for the child? I raise these questions not to explore them but to contrast these visions of the parental role with the vision implied by the notion of the child as the sovereign consumer.

### Consumer Sovereignty and Advertising to Children

The seeds of an ethical argument against children's advertising may be apparent. To claim that a practice is unethical is to claim that it violates some ethical or moral principle that is or ought to be accepted. (I am, by the way, using the terms ethical and moral interchangeably.) There are several principles upon which ethical challenges to children's advertising have been based. The principles requiring veracity, fairness, and respect as well as the principle against causing harm were all appealed to in the FTC proceedings I mentioned. A somewhat different case against children's advertising can be grounded on a principle widely recognized in the business world--the principle of consumer sovereignty, the very principle that advocates of children's advertising invoked in the argument discussed above.

The principle of consumer sovereignty has a venerable heritage. Adam Smith's famous hypothesis of the invisible hand implicitly invokes the principle that consumer desires should be the touchstone for designing an economic system. The free market's efficiency in satisfying consumer desires has traditionally been a source of its moral justification. Many believe that, as compared with other systems, a free market leads to the greatest satisfaction of consumer preferences at the least cost and thus results in the most efficient allocation of economic resources. In addition to its role in justifying the free market economy as a whole, consumer sovereignty is often appealed to in specific cases. As illustrated above, business interests sometimes justify their practices by invoking consumer satisfaction or consumer demand.

Satisfying the principle of consumer sovereignty is not an all-or-nothing proposition. Some products and practices promote consumer satisfaction more than others, but there is no ultimate or perfect practice. Since consumers' preferences are so varied, following the principle of consumer sovereignty is a matter of choosing practices that do more than the available alternatives to promote consumer satisfaction.

As the medium through which producers communicate with consumers, advertising serves an essential function in promoting consumer satisfaction.

A competitive free market can achieve the impressive benefits claimed for consumers only if consumers themselves are knowledgeable about products and their prices. Advertising is an obvious way to provide this information. By informing consumers of the availability, quality, and prices of products, advertising facilitates consumer satisfaction. It can also enhance consumer satisfaction by sharpening consumers' understanding of what their preferences actually are. To the extent that advertising serves these functions, it promotes the speed and accuracy with which the market responds to consumers' actual preferences and thus enhances consumer satisfaction.

It is unquestionable that advertising has the potential to promote consumer satisfaction. But it is also clear that false, misleading, or even merely uninformative advertising detracts from it. I have suggested that child-oriented advertising, too, diminishes consumer satisfaction. In order to develop an argument to support that suggestion, it is necessary first to outline briefly how children's advertising works.

#### How Children's Advertising Works

According to a recent textbook on marketing, the purpose of advertising is to "communicate information, imagery, and purchasing incentives" to prospective buyers.<sup>30</sup> As a description of the purpose of children's advertising, this statement is not quite accurate. Typically, the prospective buyers of products advertised to children are adults, who may never see the ads, and not the children to whom the information and imagery are communicated. In contrast with advertising addressed to adults who will themselves decide whether to purchase the advertised product, child-oriented advertising provides purchasing incentives to individuals who can influence, but who cannot make, the ultimate purchase decision. The desire for the product and the decision to buy lie with different individuals.

Although advertising through children poses the special problem of linking the child's desire for the product with the parent's purchase decision, it is apparently an effective way to sell certain products. From the frequency with which ads for sugared foods and toys, for example, are targeted to children, we can conclude that some companies believe they sell more toys and sweets by advertising to children than by advertising to adults. This must mean that many children ask their parents to buy toys and sweets they see advertised on television and that a significant number of parents accede to these requests. Although toys, sweets, and fast-food restaurants are the staples of children's advertising, they are not the only products promoted through children. Other snack foods and items like records are also targeted to children.<sup>31</sup> It has even been suggested that child-oriented advertising may be more effective than adult advertising for some adult products.<sup>32</sup>

The sales success attributed to children's advertising is thus apparently based on children requesting advertised products they would not otherwise request and on parents purchasing items they would not otherwise

purchase--either because they would not have known about the advertised product or because they would not have purchased it had it not been requested by the child. Research seems to support the conclusion that there is a positive relationship between children's television viewing and purchase requests. Both experiments and surveys show that exposure to advertising increases the number of requests children make: heavier viewers make more requests.<sup>33</sup>

From the advertiser's perspective, there are three critical points in the process by which children's television advertising works: (1) the point at which the child develops a desire for the advertised product; (2) the point at which the child requests the product; and (3) the point at which the parent purchases the product. The first steps, getting the child to want the product and to request it, are facilitated by children's natural suggestibility. As noted earlier, children want a large proportion of the items advertised to them. They also tend to make more purchase requests as they watch more television. Their natural suggestibility and enthusiasm for the products advertised to them can be attributed largely to their lack of familiarity with concepts of cost or worth, to their lack of knowledge or understanding of the economic resources available to them, and to their youthful concepts of self, time, and money that I elaborated earlier. They neither understand their own preferences nor recognize a distinction between what they want and what they are willing to pay for.

Compared with product desires advertising stimulates among mature viewers, children's consumer desires are quite unsophisticated. Mature viewers generally regard advertising critically, noting missing information and possible exaggerations.<sup>34</sup> Their interest in a product, even if initially aroused by an advertisement, is nevertheless tempered by an understanding, not necessarily explicit or even conscious, that the product will cost money and by some evaluation of its merits in relation to its cost and in relation to other possible expenditures. Children's consumer desires lack this background complexity. They are not informed by considerations of value or worth, nor by an understanding of a product's relationship to longer-term and future desires. Even though children's product desires are in this sense "raw" and certainly do not reflect genuine consumer judgment, they are full-fledged desires that frequently lead children to ask their parents to buy the product.

The final step in the children's advertising process--the parents' decision to buy--is actually the most critical one. No matter how effectively an ad arouses children's interest in a product, the ad is not effective from a business standpoint unless parents are motivated and financially equipped to make the purchase. Judging from the widespread use of children's advertising, however, many parents do decide to satisfy their children's purchase requests. The rationale behind children's advertising is that parents who would not otherwise buy a product will do so if their children request it.

Parents' responsiveness to their children's purchase requests is attributable, I believe, to parents' natural inclination to satisfy their children's desires. Parents want to please their children in ways that elicit immediate and obvious happiness and, consequently, do not like to frustrate their children's desires. The disposition to honor children's present desires reflects the affection parents feel for their children and the positive value placed on shared emotional experiences. Parents' inclinations to see their children's immediate desires satisfied and to share the resulting, if temporary, delight operate quite independently of parental desires to see their children's interests maximally satisfied over the longer term. Sometimes parental desires for children's immediate pleasure and for their long-term well-being conflict. It is frequently necessary to refuse children's requests for the sake of their own longer-term or future desires, and it would be irrational, if not irresponsible, not to do so.<sup>35</sup>

It is up to parents to provide the consumer judgments their children are incapable of making. Every purchase decision parents face requires assessment from several points of view: from the perspective of the family budget, other comparable products, and the interests and needs of various family members. But when a child initiates a consumer decision by making a request, a new factor is introduced. In addition to all the considerations that would be relevant had the potential purchase come directly to the parent's attention, the parent must also take into account the child's express desire for the item and the parent's own predisposition to satisfy that desire. The child's potential unhappiness over the denial of the request is not the critical factor, although, by the same token, the strength of the child's desire for the product should not be totally ignored.

This review of the process through which children's advertising works indicates that advertising directed to children affects the consumer decisions faced by parents in two main ways. It increases the number of requests to which they must respond, and it alters the factors relevant to their purchase decisions. The effectiveness of advertising via children is attributable to the ease with which indiscriminate children lacking concepts to evaluate economic worth are persuaded to want what they see and parents' natural inclination to satisfy their children's desires. These factors in combination account for the fact that products that would not attract the attention of or withstand the scrutiny of many potential adult purchasers can nevertheless be sold to them through their children. A parent may buy what he regards as a worthless or overpriced item when requested by his child, provided that it is not too costly in absolute terms and its purchase would not seriously interfere with other parental desires, whereas the same parent may not buy the product on the basis of its merits assessed independently of the child's wishes.<sup>36</sup> The child's request itself introduces a new factor into the parent's decision.

To facilitate discussion, I want to classify the reasons a parent might have for purchasing an item into two categories. "Child-satisfaction" reasons are those which stem from the parent's desire to satisfy the child's request. "Product-related" reasons are those which would govern the

parent's purchase decision in the absence of the child's request. Product-related reasons are not necessarily unrelated to the child. This category might include the product's value for developing the child's interests and capacities or the parent's belief that the child would like the product, as well as more general financial considerations.

Employing this vocabulary, we can now say that increased sales resulting from children's advertising can be attributed in part to parents' child-satisfaction motivation. Even when parents have no product-related motivation to purchase a product, their child-satisfaction desires may be strong enough to supply the motivation to buy. Children's advertising may also promote sales by channeling to parents information that would not otherwise reach them. Parents may buy items they hear of through their children for product-related reasons and not only for child-satisfaction reasons.

Given the variety of consumer preferences, we can assume that both explanations of the success of children's advertising are operative. Certainly there may be some occasions on which parents are glad to learn of products their children point out and willingly buy them for product-related reasons. However, it would be unwarranted to assume that most, or even a large proportion, of the increased sales resulting from children's advertising can be explained by children's drawing attention to products their parents want to buy for product-related reasons. Parents' natural inclinations to look out for their children's welfare and to satisfy their children's desires guarantee that they will be generally attentive and receptive to consumer goods available to express those dispositions. It is much more likely that the greater share of increased sales resulting from children's advertising is attributable to the child-satisfaction motivations supplied by children's requests.

#### The Effects of Children's Advertising on Consumer Satisfaction

This analysis of the process through which children's advertising works provides the backdrop for the critical question: Does child-focused advertising promote consumer satisfaction? Or is there some alternative that would make a greater contribution to consumer satisfaction?

Before looking at the effect of children's advertising on aggregate consumer satisfaction, I want to look at the consumers most directly affected--the child viewers and their parents. I have argued that children's television advertising introduces two new elements into a parent's purchase decision: it introduces the child's desire for the advertised item and it activates the parent's desire to satisfy the child. These two elements are added to the product-related considerations that would otherwise determine the parent's decision. Analysis of the effectiveness of children's television advertising suggests that the products advertised to children are those which would not sell as well if advertised directly to their parents. They are likely to be products many parents would not buy solely for product-related

reasons, presumably because product considerations alone are not sufficiently compelling. This group--the parents who would not buy if not asked by their children--are the critical market for children's advertisers. If the products are ones which parents would buy without the motivations provided by their children's requests, advertising to children rather than directly to parents would have no incremental effect on sales.

Parents in the critical group face a difficult decision when advertising arouses their children's interests in consumer products. They must choose between acting on their product-related judgment and satisfying their children's requests for the products. As diagram 1 shows, if they do not or cannot buy for product-related reasons, they will frustrate their children's express wishes and their own wishes to please their children. On the other hand, yielding to their children's desires puts them in the position of acting against their own better judgment.

Diagram 1. Child-Oriented Advertising

	<u>Parent's Product- Related Desires</u>	<u>Parent's Child- Satisfaction Desires</u>	<u>Child's Desire for Product</u>
The parent chooses not to buy for product-related reasons.	S	U	U
The parent buys the product to satisfy the child but would not buy the same product on product-related grounds.	U	S	S

S = Satisfied; U = Unsatisfied.

From the point of view of consumer satisfaction the parent's product-related judgment ought to prevail.<sup>37</sup> In contrast to the child's raw desire for the product, the parent's product-related desire is presumably based on a genuine consumer judgment informed by considerations of economic value and by appreciation of the child's longer-term and future interests. The parent's product-related judgment more closely approximates an evaluation of the product's contribution to consumer satisfaction than does the child's desire for the product. Because of the limitations described earlier, the child's desire cannot be assumed to represent a judgment of the product's worth to him.

From the perspective of the intensity of their children's desires, however, parents may be inclined to grant their children's requests. Parents who exercise their best consumer judgment and deny their children's requests may find that as a result their children experience unhappiness,

anger, or disappointment.<sup>38</sup> Parents thus face a difficult choice: even if acting on their product-related judgment will maximize consumer satisfaction over the longer term, consumer desires will be thwarted whether they accede to or deny their children's requests.

As noted earlier, advertisers presumably direct commercials to children because they believe it is the most effective way to sell their products. I suggested that the resultant increase in sales can be accounted for at least in part by children's receptivity to persuasion and by the desire of parents to accommodate their children. If it is correct to assume that the products advertised are those which many adults would not buy solely for product-related reasons and that television advertising increases the number of purchase requests to which parents must respond, then for some parents child-oriented advertising has the effect of increasing the number of occasions on which they rationally and ethically ought to deny their children's requests.

From the standpoint of consumer satisfaction, child-oriented advertising has some serious drawbacks. For a significant number of children and their parents it introduces sources of frustration that would not exist if children's products were advertised to adults or not advertised on television at all. The dissatisfactions that these children and parents experience when parents deny their children's product requests and the dissatisfactions that follow when parents grant product requests against their better judgment would be lessened if child-oriented advertising were eliminated. Without child-focused advertising, parents would less frequently face the necessity to choose between their children's consumer requests and their own consumer judgments. While it is certainly true that children may develop desires for products they see advertised in ads not directed to them, the likelihood that those desires will be stimulated is greatly enhanced when the ads are child-focused.<sup>39</sup>

Adam Smith's hypothesis of the invisible hand suggests that profitability or sales is an indicator of a company's success in satisfying consumers. Regardless of whether this is true as a general matter,<sup>40</sup> it appears that increased sales and increased consumer satisfaction do not correspond when those sales are achieved through child-oriented advertising. Additional sales resulting from child-focused advertising are accompanied by increased consumer satisfaction when parents' consumer judgments correspond with their children's requests. But when, as is frequently the case, increased sales do not reflect such correspondence, the net effect on consumer satisfaction is negative. Taking into account the additional disappointment children experience when their requests are denied leads to the conclusion that, on balance, child-oriented advertising detracts from rather than adds to consumer satisfaction.

Some supporters of children's television advertising argue that parental opposition is based on parents' weakness or their reluctance to stand up to their children by refusing consumer requests. They argue that children will be better off if parents refuse their children's requests and

somewhat disingenuously advise parents to do so.<sup>41</sup> While urging parents to deny their children's requests is sound advice in a world where children's advertising exists, it is not an effective response to the argument that children's advertising should not encourage the requests in the first place. As I have tried to show, child viewers and their parents would be better off still if there were no child-focused advertising. Moreover, the proffered advice to parents puts advertisers in the rather peculiar and morally questionable position of deliberately stimulating in children desires that they acknowledge ought to be denied. If advertisers sincerely believed that the parents' decisions on the merits of children's products ought to prevail, would they not then advertise directly to the parents?

I have suggested that the principle of consumer sovereignty should lead advertisers to prefer adult-oriented advertising over children's advertising. But it may be objected that children may want and request products they see advertised even though the ads are not targeted to them. Does my argument suggest that advertisers ought for this reason to stop advertising altogether?

Advertising, as I indicated earlier, plays a very important role in our economic system. Advertising assists consumers in shaping their preferences and in acting on them. Its function is accomplished most satisfactorily when it is addressed to mature consumers. Even with the negative aspects of adult-focused advertising resulting when children are influenced by it, consumers--children and adults alike--are better off with it than without it. Of course, some forms of advertising are more desirable, effective, or tasteful than others. The consumer benefits that result from advertising to children could be produced with diminished attendant costs to consumer satisfaction through adult-oriented advertising. The argument developed here does not lead to the abolition of advertising altogether. It leads to concentrating on developing the kinds of advertising that make the greatest contributions to consumer satisfaction.

The effects of children's advertising on consumer satisfaction actually extend far beyond the child viewers of commercials and their parents. We have seen that when advertising to children works to the advantage of advertisers it does so in part because some parents act contrary to their product-related judgments and satisfy their children's purchase requests. These purchases contribute to the advertiser's sales goals but do not represent increased consumer satisfaction. Since the market responds to consumer behavior and not to actual consumer satisfaction, such purchases contribute ultimately to the misallocation of resources. Resources that would otherwise be utilized to produce goods of greater value to consumers will be channeled into the production of less desirable goods, diminishing the welfare of many consumers as well as of companies that would flourish within a more efficient market.

### Consumer Responsibility and Advertising to Children

In order for the market to fulfill its potential as an efficient allocator of resources, producers, advertisers, and consumers all must do their part. I have argued that in their role as purveyors of information and shapers of consumer preferences, advertisers ought to try to enhance consumer satisfaction. There are numerous ways they can do this: by avoiding advertising to children; by providing truthful product information; by not encouraging unrealistic product expectations. They can also enhance consumer satisfaction by encouraging responsible consumer behavior through the focus and content of their ads.

As my argument against children's advertising suggests, consumers, too, bear responsibility for the market's effectiveness in providing them what they want. At the very least, consumers should spend their money in ways that accurately reflect their preferences. This consumer responsibility is actually rather difficult to fulfill and more complex than it first appears. It requires understanding what one's desires actually are--sorting out priorities, identifying conflicting desires, understanding and anticipating how one's desires will change over time, and allocating one's economic resources to reflect these desires. In addition to a high level of self-awareness and self-control, responsible consumer behavior also requires knowledge of the range of available products and of the components of quality in the product desired--or at least recognition of the risk involved in failing to acquire this information. To the extent that consumers fail to align their expenditures with their preferences, the market becomes increasingly inefficient. It will generate goods and services to satisfy the preferences consumers express through their pocketbook rather than their actual preferences.

When consumers are confused about their preferences, the market's response will be confused. An example drawn from the service sector will illustrate the point. Consumers of child-care services repeatedly deplore the shortage of high-quality care-givers--both institutional and individual--while at the same time offering low wages to individual care-givers and refusing to pay institutional fees adequate to attract superior teachers. People's actual preferences and priorities are unclear. Do they give highest priority to what they say they prefer--quality child care--or to the preferences they express through their market behavior--cheap child care?

This view of consumer responsibility imposes special obligations on parents whose children are too young to exercise responsible consumer judgment. These parents should take special care to evaluate their children's consumer requests and to provide their children with a model of responsible consumer conduct. As their children mature, parents should teach their children the elements of responsible consumer behavior.

Without denying the responsibilities of consumers for their own behavior and for the effects of their behavior on the market, one can also acknowledge the responsibilities of advertisers to encourage responsible consumerism or, at the very least, not to discourage it. Television ads

targeted to children diminish consumer satisfaction, as I argued earlier. They also discourage responsible consumer behavior through their implication that children, who lack the essential capacities necessary for responsible consumer decisions, are nevertheless capable of making such decisions. In addition, child-directed advertising discourages responsible consumer decisions among parents by making those decisions harder.

### Children's Advertising and Basic Ethical Principles

My evaluation of children's advertising has proceeded from the principle of consumer sovereignty, a principle of rather narrow application. Unlike more general ethical principles, like the principle of veracity, the principle of consumer sovereignty applies in the specialized area of business. Addressing the issue of children's advertising from the perspective of special business norms rather than more general ethical principles avoids the problem of deciding whether the specialized or more general principles should have priority in the moral reasoning of business people.<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, children's advertising could also be evaluated from the standpoint of the more general ethical principles requiring veracity and fairness and prohibiting harmful conduct.

#### Veracity

The principle of veracity, understood as devotion to truth, is much broader than a principle prohibiting deception. Deception, the primary basis of the FTC's complaint against children's advertising, is only one way of infringing the principle of veracity. Both critics and defenders of children's advertising agree that advertisers should not intentionally deceive children and that they should engage in research to determine whether children are misled by their ads. The central issue regarding veracity and children's advertising, however, does not relate to deception so much as to the strength of advertisers' devotion to truth. Advertisers generally do not make false statements intended to mislead children. Nevertheless, the particular nature of children's conceptual worlds makes it exceedingly likely that child-oriented advertising will generate false beliefs or highly improbable product expectations.

Research shows that young children have difficulty differentiating fantasy and reality<sup>43</sup> and frequently place indiscriminate trust in commercial characters who present products to them.<sup>44</sup> They also develop false beliefs about the selling characters in ads<sup>45</sup> and in some cases have unreasonably optimistic beliefs about the satisfactions advertised products will bring them.<sup>46</sup>

This research indicates that concern about the misleading nature of children's advertising is legitimate. Any parent knows—even one who has not examined the research—that young children are easily persuaded of the existence of fantasy characters. They develop (what seem to their parents)

irrational fears and hopes from stories they hear and experiences they misinterpret. The stories and fantasies children see enacted in television commercials receive the same generous and idiosyncratic treatment as other information. Children's interpretations of advertising claims are as resistant to parental correction as their other fantasies are. One can only speculate on the nature and validity of the beliefs children adopt as a result of watching, for example, a cartoon depicting a pirate captain's magical discovery of breakfast cereal. Certainly, many ads are designed to create expectations that fun, friendship, and popularity will accompany possession of the advertised product. The likelihood that such expectations will be fulfilled is something young children cannot assess.

To the extent that children develop false beliefs and unreasonable expectations as a result of viewing commercials, moral reservations about children's advertising are justified. To the extent advertisers know that children develop false beliefs and unreasonable expectations, advertisers' devotion to truth and to responsible consumerism are suspect.

#### Fairness and Respect for Children

The fact that children's advertising benefits advertisers while at the same time nourishing false beliefs, unreasonable expectations, and irresponsible consumer desires among children calls into play principles of fairness and respect. Critics have said that child-oriented advertising takes advantage of children's limited capacities and their suggestibility for the benefit of the advertisers. As expressed by Michael Pertschuk, former chairman of the FTC, advertisers "seize on the child's trust and exploit it as weakness for their gain."<sup>47</sup> To employ as the unwitting means to the parent's pocketbook children who do not understand commercial exchange, who are unable to evaluate their own consumer preferences, and who consequently cannot make consumer decisions based on those preferences does indeed reflect a lack of respect for children. Such a practice fails to respect children's limitations as consumers, and instead capitalizes on them. In the language of Kant, advertisers are not treating children as "ends in themselves": they are treating children solely as instruments for their own gain.

In response to the charge of unfairness, supporters of children's advertising sometimes point out that the children are protected because their parents exercise control over the purse strings.<sup>48</sup> This response demonstrates failure to appreciate the basis of the unfairness charge. It is not potential economic harm that concerns critics: it is the attitude toward children reflected in the use of children's advertising that is central. As explained earlier, the attitude is inappropriate or unfitting.

Another frequent response to the charge of unfairness is that children actually do understand advertising.<sup>49</sup> A great deal of research has focused on whether children distinguish programs from commercials, whether they remember product identities, whether they distinguish program characters

from commercial characters, and whether they recognize the persuasive intent of commercials.<sup>50</sup> But even showing that children "understand" advertising in all these ways would not demonstrate that children have the consumer capacities that would make it fair to advertise to them. The critical questions are not whether children can distinguish commercial characters from program characters,<sup>51</sup> or even whether they recognize persuasive intent, but whether they have the concepts of self, time, and money that would make it possible for them to make considered consumer decisions about the products they see advertised. Indeed, if children recognize that commercials are trying to sell things but lack the concepts to assess and deliberate about the products advertised, the charge that advertisers are "using" children or attempting to use them to sell their wares is strengthened. Intuitively, it seems that if children were sophisticated enough to realize that the goods advertised on television are for sale, they would be more likely than their younger counterparts to request the products.<sup>52</sup>

### Harm to Children

Another principle to which appeal has been made by critics of television advertising is the principle against causing harm. The harmful effects of children's advertising are thought to include the parent-child conflicts generated by parental refusals to buy requested products, the unhappiness and anger suffered by children whose parents deny their product requests, the unhappiness children suffer when advertising-induced expectations of product performance are disappointed, and unhappiness experienced by children exposed to commercials portraying life-styles more affluent than their own.<sup>53</sup>

Replies to the charge that children's advertising is harmful to children have pinpointed weaknesses in the claim. One supporter of children's advertising says that the "harm" to children whose parents refuse their requests has not been adequately documented.<sup>54</sup> Another, claiming that some experts believe conflicts over purchases are instructive in educating children to make choices, denies that parent-child conflict is harmful.<sup>55</sup> As these replies suggest, demonstrating that children's advertising is harmful to children, as distinct from being misleading or unfair to them, involves much more than showing that it has the effects enumerated. Agreement about the application of the principle against causing harm depends on conceptual as well as factual agreement. A conception of harm must first be elaborated, and it must be shown to include these or other effects of advertising. It is not obvious, for example, that unhappiness resulting from exposure to more different life-styles is in the long run harmful.

Research indicates that children's advertising does contribute to the outcomes noted.<sup>56</sup> Certainly, child-oriented television advertising is not the sole cause of these effects, but it does appear to increase their frequency and even perhaps their intensity.<sup>57</sup> I believe that a conception of harm including some of these effects could be developed, but I will not attempt

to do so here. I mention this argument rather to illustrate another general ethical principle on which an argument against children's advertising might be based.

#### A Note on Moral Theory

My analysis of the ethical status of child-oriented advertising has proceeded from what Professor R. M. Hare has called "first-level" moral principles, generally accepted ethical principles that guide us in our daily lives as workers, family members, and members of the human community.<sup>58</sup> Without attempting to justify the principles of consumer sovereignty, honesty, respect, and nonmaleficence, I have tried to show how they bear on children's advertising. In order to justify the principles I have relied on, it would be necessary to engage in the sort of moral reasoning Professor Hare has called "second-level" or "critical" moral reasoning. I have here omitted this critical reasoning to avoid straying too far from the central theme of children's advertising.

#### Conclusion

How might advertisers implement their responsibilities to promote consumer satisfaction and consumer responsibility and satisfy the principles of veracity, fairness, and nonmaleficence? There are degrees of compliance with these principles: some marketing strategies will do more than others to enhance consumer satisfaction, for example. One way compliance can be improved is by eliminating child-oriented television advertising for children's products and substituting advertising geared to mature consumers. Rather than employing the techniques found in advertising messages targeted to children under eleven,<sup>59</sup> advertisers could include product information that would interest adult viewers and devise ways to let child viewers know that consumer decisions require responsible decisionmaking skills. If much of the information presented is incomprehensible to the five-year-olds in the audience, so much the better.<sup>60</sup> When they reach the age at which they begin to understand consumer decisionmaking, they will perhaps have greater respect for the actual complexity of their responsibilities as consumers.

The problems of child-oriented advertising can best be dealt with if advertisers themselves recognize the inappropriateness of targeting children for commercial messages. I have tried to show why, within the context of a free market economy, the responsibilities of advertisers to promote consumer satisfaction and not to discourage responsible consumer decisions should lead advertisers away from child-oriented advertising. The problem of what types of ads are appropriate given these constraints provides a challenging design problem for the many creative people in the advertising industry. With appropriate inspiration and incentives, I do not doubt that they can meet the challenge.

Whether appropriate inspiration and incentives will be forthcoming is more doubtful. Children's advertising seems well entrenched and is backed by powerful economic forces,<sup>61</sup> and it is clear that some advertisers do not recognize, or are unwilling to acknowledge, the ethical problems of child-focused advertising.<sup>62</sup> The trend toward programming designed around selling characters is especially discouraging.

Even advertisers who recognize that eliminating child-oriented advertising will promote consumer satisfaction and consumer responsibility may be reluctant to reorient their advertising campaigns because of the costs and risks of doing so. Theoretically, only advertisers whose products would not withstand the scrutiny of adult consumers should lose sales from such a reorientation. It is clear that in the short run a general retreat from children's advertising would result in some lost revenues for makers, advertisers, and retail sellers of products that do not sell as well when advertised to adults. It is also possible that television networks, stations, and entrenched producers of children's shows would lose revenues and that children's programming might be jeopardized by the lack of advertisers' interest in commercial time during children's programs.

On the other hand, a shift away from children's advertising to adult advertising could result in even more pressure on existing adult commercial time slots, driving up their prices to a level adequate to subsidize children's programming without loss to the networks. And there are alternative means of financing children's television that could be explored.<sup>63</sup> The extent to which lost revenues and diminished profits would result from recognizing the ethical ideals I have described is largely a question of the ability of all the beneficiaries of children's television advertising to respond creatively. The longer-term effect of relinquishing child-focused advertising would be to move manufacturers, advertisers, and retailers in the direction of products that would not depend for their success on the suggestibility and immaturity of children. In the longer run, the result would be greater market efficiency.

## NOTES

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1. Richard P. Adler, "Children's Television Advertising: History of the Issue," in *Children and the Faces of Television*, ed. Edward L. Palmer and Aimee Dorr (New York: Academic Press, 1980), p. 241; hereafter cited as Palmer and Dorr.
2. Adler, p. 243.
3. Daniel Seligman, "The Commercial Crisis," *Fortune* 108 (November 14, 1983):39.
4. For discussion of the constitutionality of banning children's advertising, see C. Edwin Baker, "Commercial Speech: A Problem in the Theory of Freedom," *Iowa Law Review* 62 (October 1976):1; Martin H. Redish, "The First Amendment in the Marketplace: Commercial Speech and the Values of Free Expression," *George Washington Law Review* 39 (1970-1971):429; Gerald J. Thain, "The 'Seven Dirty Words' Decision: A Potential Scrubbrush for Commercials on Children's Television?" *Kentucky Law Journal* 67 (1978-79):947.
5. This point has been made by others. See, e.g., Ronald Dworkin, "Taking Rights Seriously," in *Taking Rights Seriously* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), pp. 188ff.
6. Susan Bartlett Foote and Robert H. Mnookin, "The 'Kid Vid' Crusade," *Public Interest* 61 (Fall 1980):91.
7. One survey of adults found the following attitudes to children's commercials: strongly negative (23%); negative (50%); neutral (23%); positive (4%). These negative attitudes are most pronounced among parents of kindergarten-age children. The survey is cited in Thomas S. Robertson, "Television Advertising and Parent-Child Relations," in *The Effects of Television Advertising on Children*, ed. Richard P. Adler, Gerald S. Lesser, Laurene Krasny Meringoff, et al. (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1980), p. 197; hereafter cited as Adler et al.

8. E.g., M. Carole Macklin, "Do Children Understand TV Ads?" *Journal of Advertising Research* 23 (February-March 1983):63-70; Thomas Robertson and John Rossiter, "Children and Commercial Persuasion: An Attribution Theory Analysis," *Journal of Consumer Research* 1 (June 1974):13-20. See also summaries of research in David Pillemer and Scott Ward, "Investigating the Effects of Television Advertising on Children: An Evaluation of the Empirical Studies," Draft read to American Psychological Assn., Div. 23, San Francisco, California, August 1977; John R. Rossiter, "The Effects of Volume and Repetition of Television Commercials," in Adler et al., pp. 160-62; Ellen Wartella, "Individual Differences in Children's Responses to Television Advertising," in Palmer and Dorr, pp. 312-14.
9. Wartella, p. 313
10. Compare the definition of "child-oriented television advertising" adopted by the FTC in its Final Staff Report and Recommendation: "advertising which is in or adjacent to programs either directed to children or programs where children constitute a substantial portion of the audience." See "FTC Final Staff Report and Recommendation," In the Matter of Children's Advertising, 43 *Federal Register* 17967, March 31, 1981, p. 2.
11. *Self-Regulatory Guidelines for Children's Advertising*, by Children's Advertising Review Unit, Council of Better Business Bureaus, Inc., 3d ed. (New York, 1983), p. 6.
12. F. Earle Barcus, "The Nature of Television Advertising to Children," in Palmer and Dorr, pp. 276-77.
13. Barcus, p. 275.
14. Research has been developed to support advertisers targeting child audiences. See, e.g., Gene Reilly Group, Inc., *The Child* (Darien, CT: The Child, Inc., 1973), cited in Robert B. Choate, "The Politics of Change," in Palmer and Dorr, p. 329.
15. Thomas Donaldson and Patricia H. Werhane, *Ethical Issues in Business* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1979), p. 294. In a telephone interview a representative of Fisher-Price's advertising agency told me that Fisher-Price continues to focus its advertising on parents because most Fisher-Price toys appeal to the very young.
16. See "FTC Final Staff Report and Recommendation," pp. 21-22, n. 51, for a description of studies by Atkin and White. Atkin found that 90% of the three-year-olds studied and 73% of the seven-year-olds thought that selling characters like them. White found that 82% of a group of four- to seven-year-olds thought that the selling figures ate the products they advertised and wanted the children to do likewise.

17. Studies indicate that there is very limited use of product information in children's television advertising. Predominant are "appeals to psychological states, associations with established values, and unsupported assertions about the qualities of the products"; Barcus, p. 279.
18. Submission before the FTC, 1978, quoted in Emilie Griffin, "The Future Is Inevitable: But Can It Be Shaped in the Interest of Children?" in Palmer and Dorr, p. 347.
19. Griffin, p. 344.
20. E.g., Frances L. Ilg, Louise Bates Ames, and Sidney M. Baker, Child Behavior, rev. ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1981).
21. On the child's conception of time, see Jean Piaget, The Child's Conception of Time (New York: Basic Books, 1970).
22. Some intriguing illustrations of children's philosophical questions and observations are recounted in Gareth B. Matthews, Philosophy and the Young Child (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980).
23. "FTC Final Staff Report and Recommendation," pp. 27-28, citing the work of Geis.
24. My five-year-old son reasoned thus to explain why a five-dollar piano would be too expensive.
25. Toys, cereals, and candies are the products most heavily promoted to children; Barcus, pp. 275-76.
26. The FTC concluded on the basis of relevant literature that children tend to want whatever products are advertised on television; "FTC Final Staff Report and Recommendation," p. 8. For data on the extent to which children want what they see advertised on television, see Charles K. Atkin, "Effects of Television Advertising on Children," in Palmer and Dorr, pp. 289-90.
27. The results of one study of children's understanding of television advertising messages suggested that although "parents cannot 'force' early sophistication in children's reactions to television advertising, their attention and instruction can enhance the process." Focusing on children's capacities to understand advertising rather than on their capacities to make decisions, the article supports the general proposition that the child's conceptual world differs in many ways from that of the adult. The critical question is, of course: even if we can promote earlier understanding of advertising and consumer decisions, should we do so? See John R. Rossiter and Thomas S. Robertson, "Canonical Analysis of Developmental, Social, and Experimental Factors in Children's Comprehension of Television Advertising," Journal of Genetic Psychology 129 (1976):326.

28. For discussion of consumer sovereignty, see Norman Bowie, Business Ethics (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1982), pp. 80-88.
29. Gene Reilly Group, Inc., advising advertisers who target children, says that "the mother can simply be a 'purchasing agent' for the child"; quoted in Choate, p. 329.
30. Paul W. Farris and John A. Quelch, Advertising and Promotion Management (Radnor, PA: Chilton Book Co., 1983), p. 2.
31. Barcus, pp. 275-76.
32. William Melody, Children's Television (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), pp. 79-80.
33. Atkin, pp. 290-91; Thomas S. Robertson, "Television Advertising and Parent-Child Relations" in Adler et al., pp. 204-07.
34. "FTC Final Staff Report and Recommendation," pp. 22-23, cites work of Roberts to support the notion that adults "counter-argue" when faced with commercial messages.
35. Herbert Spencer cautioned against "the selfishness of affection which sacrifices the higher interests of a child to gain immediate pleasurable emotion"; The Principles of Ethics, vol. 2, sec. 434 (1897; rpt. Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Classics, 1978), p. 361.
36. One study found that a parent will pay 20% more for an advertised product with child appeal--even when a less expensive, nonadvertised product is no different; Melody, p. 80.
37. Atkin, p. 301. Toys and candies are denied more often than cereals. It is estimated that parents reject one-third to one-half of children's requests for products.
38. About one-third to one-half of the children involved in various research projects became unhappy, angry, or expressed disappointment after denials of food and toy requests. The rate was considerably higher among heavy television viewers; Atkin, pp. 299-301.
39. This is certainly the belief underlying advertisers' use of child-oriented advertising. See Melvin Helitzer and Carl Heyel, The Youth Market: Its Dimensions, Influence and Opportunities for You (New York: Media Books, 1970), cited in Melody, pp. 79-80.
40. For criticism of the view that profit maximization guarantees maximal satisfaction of consumer wants, see Alan H. Goldman, The Moral Foundations of Professional Ethics (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1980), pp. 247-57.

41. Comments of M & M/Mars, Children's Television Advertising Trade Regulation Rule-Making Proceeding, Federal Trade Commission (November 1978), pp. 4-5 and 67.
42. For general discussion of this issue see Goldman, chap. 5.
43. See T. G. Bever, M. L. Smith, B. Bengen, and T. G. Johnson, "Young Viewers' Troubling Response to TV Ads," Harvard Business Review, November-December 1975, pp. 109-20.
44. "FTC Final Staff Report and Recommendation," pp. 21-22, n. 51, describes the work of Atkin supporting the conclusion that children trust selling characters. Atkin found in a group of three- to seven-year-olds that 70% of the three-year-olds and 60% of the seven-year-olds trusted the characters about as much as they trusted their mothers.
45. "FTC Final Staff Report and Recommendation," at pp. 21-22, n. 51, describes the work of White, who found that many children in a group of four- to seven-year-olds she studied believe that the selling figures eat the advertised products and want the children to do likewise and that the selling figures want the children to eat things that are good for them.
46. Atkin, p. 300.
47. Quoted in Foote and Mnookin, p. 92.
48. June Esserman of Child Research Services, Inc., quoted in Comments of M & M/Mars, p. 4.
49. Comments of M & M/Mars, p. 5. See also Macklin, n. 8, supra.
50. See n. 8, supra.
51. For a similar view of the relevance of children's ability to distinguish commercial characters from program characters, see Scott Ward, "Compromise in Commercials for Children," Harvard Business Review, November-December 1978, p. 133.
52. Recent research indicates that as children become more aware of advertising's persuasive intent, the frequency of their requests does not decline. This finding is contrary to earlier research purportedly showing that awareness of persuasive intent leads to a decline in number of requests; Rossiter, pp. 163-65.
53. Atkin, pp. 298-301.
54. Foote and Mnookin, p. 95.
55. Comments of M & M/Mars, p. 64. Cf. n. 27, supra.

56. Atkin, pp. 298-301. See also Scott Ward and Daniel B. Wackman, "Children's Purchase Influence Attempts and Parental Yielding," *Journal of Marketing Research*, August 1972, p. 318.
57. For example, one study found that heavy viewers of Saturday morning television got into more arguments with their parents over toy and cereal denials than did light viewers; Atkin, pp. 298-301. See also Ward and Wackman, p. 318.
58. R. M. Hare, *Moral Thinking* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981).
59. The majority of advertising directed to children is targeted to children two-to-eleven or six-to-eleven years of age; "FTC Final Staff Report and Recommendation," p. 46.
60. For the view that children's special capacities and limitations should be respected but that children should not be "contained" in a special children's world isolated from that of adults, see Valerie Polakow Suransky, *The Erosion of Childhood* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).
61. It was estimated that the coalition established to fight the FTC proceedings in 1978 put together a "war chest" of \$15-30 million. According to news reports the coalition included several huge law firms, the national advertising association, broadcasters and their associations, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the Grocery Manufacturers of America, the sugar association, the chocolate and candy manufacturers, cereal companies and their associations, and more; Choate, p. 334. It is interesting to note that supporters of children's advertising tend not to be people who spend a great deal of time with children.
62. "In the area of children's products, the U.S. is an advertiser's paradise compared with many countries"; Christopher Campbell, International Marketing Director at the Parker Brothers subsidiary of General Mills, quoted in Ronald Alsop, "Countries' Different Ad Rules Are Problem for Global Firms," *Wall Street Journal*, September 27, 1984, p. 33. According to Alsop, "The other countries' aim is to protect kids from exploitation."
63. It is interesting to note that in 1949 42% of the children's programs broadcast were presented without advertiser sponsorship; Melody, p. 36.