



PROMOTING CONSUMPTION AT SCHOOL

HEALTH THREATS ASSOCIATED
WITH SCHOOLHOUSE COMMERCIALISM

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PROMOTING CONSUMPTION AT SCHOOL HEALTH THREATS ASSOCIATED WITH SCHOOLHOUSE COMMERCIALISM

THE FIFTEENTH ANNUAL REPORT ON SCHOOLHOUSE COMMERCIALIZING TRENDS: 2011-2012

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Executive Summary

Many states and communities are in chronic fiscal crisis. So it is no surprise that beleaguered educators are ever more open to offers of corporate “partnerships” that might bring in additional money for their schools. Unfortunately, many school-business partnerships are little more than marketing arrangements that have few benefits for schools while carrying with them the potential to harm children in a variety of ways. *The 2011-2012 Annual Report on Schoolhouse Commercializing Trends* is the third in a series of annual reports to examine how commercializing activities in schools threaten children’s well-being. Prior reports examined psychological threats (2010) and educational threats (2011). The focus of this report is the health threats posed by the marketing of food and beverage products in school.

The incidence of childhood obesity has tripled over the past 30 years, and its consequent illnesses threaten to reduce both the length and the quality of life. Although no specific food nor any one marketing campaign has been causally linked to higher rates of obesity, research indicates that food advertising does influence children’s food preferences, their purchase requests, and their eating behavior. In schools, this means that advertising for foods of minimal nutritional value or for foods high in fat, sugar, and/or salt is designed to convince children to like and want more and more of a product that is unhealthy when consumed to excess.

Food products are heavily marketed in schools by appropriating space on school property, exclusive marketing agreements with schools and districts, digital marketing, fundraising, school program sponsorships, incentive programs, and supplementary educational materials.

The health threat posed by an advertised food is tied to its nutritional quality, but psychological and/or educational threats are often also implicated. Commercializing activities in schools may, therefore, be problematic, even if a specific advertised product is not a threat to children's health. Thus, the potential threat to children posed by marketing in schools is great enough that we believe the default assumption for schools, districts, and state and federal policy-makers must be that marketing in schools is harmful unless explicitly proven otherwise.

Recommendation

Policymakers should prohibit advertising in schools unless the school provides compelling evidence that their intended advertising program causes no harm to children.

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THE FIFTEENTH ANNUAL REPORT ON SCHOOLHOUSE COMMERCIALIZING TRENDS: 2011-2012

*After an all-night session, the House passed a budget that cuts \$183.2 million from K-12 and \$270.8 million from universities and community colleges **for a total of \$454 million in cuts to education in Arizona.** The budget was a compromise negotiated among Governor Brewer, the House and Senate. While the Governor promised to hold education cuts to levels proposed in her budget, cuts to education were increased.*

—Arizona Education Network, August 15, 2011¹

School districts are leaving no stone unturned to come up with additional sources of revenue.

—Steve Chodes, CFO of the Springfield, MO, School District²

The fact is that the arts, humanities, the entire civic mission of schools have been downsized and outsourced to families, churches, and donors.”

—Larry Cuban³

Introduction

Education funding continued to decline in 2011-2012. One review reported that of 46 states that provide data that permit historical comparisons, 37 provided less funding per student to local school districts in 2011-2012 than they provided the year before, 30 provided less than they did four years prior, and 17 cut per-student funding by more than 10 percent from pre-recession levels. ⁴ In Arizona, where \$183.2 million was cut from K-12 spending in 2011-2102, a proposition to create a permanent sales tax to fund education was rejected by voters in November 2012.⁵ Also rejected were the majority of the state’s override measures, which proposed property tax increases that would allow school districts to exceed their state-imposed budget limits.⁶ School districts across the nation are fiscally stressed, leaving them ever more open to the enticements of corporate “partnerships” that might bring in some money—any money at all.⁷

Despite reports indicating that little revenue is realized from advertising programs, states and municipalities are increasingly opening their school doors to marketers.⁸ In a 2012 report of school district revenues from commercial partnerships, Public Citizen reports that many district officials described a “desperate need for funding that they believe warrants the intrusion of advertising into the educational system,” and believed that this advertising brought financial benefits worth what they perceived to be relatively insignificant risk. Public Citizen found not only that district officials were often unaware of exactly how much they were making from commercial arrangements, but also that the financial gain usually accounted for less than one percent of their district budgets.⁹

When they consider corporate advertising activities in their schools, well-meaning stakeholders typically consider the particular type of advertising that children may see, the prevalence of advertising in children’s lives outside of school, and their need for any and all funds to keep programs running.¹⁰ Resulting regulations or district advertising guidelines try to prevent potentially offensive advertisements for potentially offensive

Children are unlikely to discount advertising in school in the same ways that they might in clearly commercial settings.

products by restricting features of the ad (such as sexual, political, religious, criminal, violent or profane undertones or depictions) and/or the products to be advertised (such as alcohol, tobacco, or—oddly because they should not be advertised anyway—illegal drugs).¹¹ According to one marketer in Georgia, his company works with each school to make sure that no advertisement passes review that would run the risk of offending anyone in the school community.¹² While these efforts are certainly commendable, the test of whether a particular product or advertisement is “offensive” does not go far enough. Some highly advertised products that typically don’t offend stakeholders, such as fast foods or sports drinks, may indeed carry a health cost for children. And further, by their very nature, advertising and marketing activities promote the values of commercialism. Although definitions of commercialism may vary in their particulars, they all suggest, in one way or another, an excessive emphasis on consumption.¹³ Any marketing in schools should, therefore, give us pause.

Commercial activity in public spaces has expanded at an exponential rate over the past century.¹⁴ It is so ubiquitous in modern Western nations that we tend to assume that it is natural—even necessary. In reality, it is neither.¹⁵ And all advertising, regardless of the particular product being advertised or the blandness of any given advertisement, contributes to a global message reflecting the values, stories, and morality that promote a consumer culture.¹⁶ Advertising affects how children think about their families, friendships, romantic relationships, environment, society, and selves.¹⁷ While no one particular advertisement or advertising campaign has this effect on its own, the underlying message of consumerism as the highest good is “sold” by every advertisement, regardless of its success in promoting a given product.¹⁸

The fact that children are exposed to advertising in almost every other domain of their lives does not make it any more natural or necessary for them to be so exposed at school.

On the contrary: especially because of the omnipresence of advertising in children's environments, their schools remain one of the only places where children are not immersed in the dominant consumer culture, where they can have space for hopes and dreams other than those that marketers offer. Furthermore, schools are qualitatively different than other environments in which children find themselves. Children in school are a captive, pre-segmented audience, present in that location ostensibly for the purposes of being guided toward learning and growth by adults who have special training and qualifications to provide them with educative experiences. These unique qualities of the school environment are, frankly, what make it so attractive to marketers.

Regardless of how gullible or how savvy they may be about advertising, children are especially susceptible in this particular environment to advertisements that are essentially “embedded,” like product placements, in a relatively uncluttered space. They are also susceptible to believing that the products advertised are endorsed by their teachers and administrators. Although they are unlikely to think about it explicitly, students are likely to expect that the gatekeepers of the information transmitted to them at school are, in fact, serving their best interests by bringing in accurate information and weeding out attempts at manipulation. They are unlikely to discount advertising in school in the same ways that they might in clearly commercial settings. These are situational factors associated with the school environment that would contribute to the persuasion of even the most sophisticated targets of advertising, which children are not.¹⁹

Our research over the last several years has explored the potential toll exacted by exposing children to corporate commercializing activities at school. If these activities—such as advertising programs, fundraising programs, sponsored educational materials and activities, and incentive programs—were not at all harmful, it could reasonably be argued that they are a benign way for schools to pick up a few extra dollars and to demonstrate their engagement with the business community. However, our analysis suggests that there are specific, serious threats to children associated with corporate commercializing activities at school. Our 2010 and 2011 reports examined potential psychological and educational threats; the 2012 report explores health threats, particularly those associated with the marketing in schools of foods low in nutritional content and the consequent risks associated with obesity.²⁰

Research suggests that advertising poses a threat to children's psychological health.²¹ Children exposed to advertising suffer displacement of values and activities other than those consistent with materialism, heightened insecurity about themselves and their place in the social world, and distorted gender socialization.²² Advertising not only persuades children to want and buy more, but it also promotes the idea that they can derive identity, fulfillment, self-expression, and confidence through what they buy.²³ As psychologist Allen Kanner points out,

The more that people believe they need an endless array of material goods to be happy . . . the more time that is devoted to consuming—from making money, to worrying about making money, to shopping, to thinking about consuming, either through exposure to advertising or fantasizing about new purchases—the less time is devoted to activities that satisfy non-material needs—family and friends, creative and artistic endeavors, spiritual practices, etc.²⁴

By displacing their self-directed, unstructured and creative play, consumer-oriented activity distorts children’s development. Part of what gets pushed out in favor of consumer-oriented activity is creative thinking.²⁵ The subsequent effects are negative: materialistic values encouraged by consumer culture are associated with higher rates of anxiety, depression, psychological distress, chronic physical symptoms, and lower self-esteem.²⁶ In teenagers, higher materialistic values also correlate with increased smoking, drinking, drug use, weapon carrying, vandalism and truancy.²⁷

Especially for teenagers, advertising exploits psychological vulnerabilities—in particular, their reduced ability to control impulsive behaviors and to resist immediate gratification—and increases their susceptibility to peer influence and image advertising.²⁸ In other words, advertising creates or amplifies adolescents’ insecurities and then, literally, sells them a “solution” for those insecurities in the form of a product that cannot solve the problem that the advertising itself created or attached itself to. Again, in addition to promoting a particular product, every advertisement reinforces the assumption that consumption leads to happiness and satisfaction, the central tenet of consumer culture. This latent message is especially effective because it is invisible and assumed, and therefore seldom questioned.²⁹

Advertising in schools also poses a threat to students’ education.³⁰ Specifically, it can undermine curricular messages, as when McTeacher nights or soft drink ads contradict nutrition lessons,³¹ and it often displaces educational activities, as when students in Ireland go on a class trip to Tayto Park, an amusement park owned and operated by Tayto, the country’s leading potato chip maker.³² It can also be a vehicle for indoctrinating children with a positive attitude toward a corporation’s sponsored brand or worldview, as when Shell’s *Energize Your Future* sponsored curriculum addresses the importance of developing many energy sources and casts Shell as a leader in alternative technologies.³³ Shell’s materials may not explicitly contradict what the children learn about energy in their regular curriculum, but they are designed to be portrayed as fact, rather than as a self-interested perspective or corporate public relations. They are also designed to be transmitted by a trusted source of information—the teacher—and thereby to influence students’ attitudes about both energy and the company.

The fundamental purposes of education (to empower) and advertising (to persuade) are inherently at odds. From our perspective, then, advertising in schools is necessarily corrosive of education. Although some commercial programs in schools may be designed to address national standards for basic skills, or may encourage analytic thinking about contemporary issues like energy policy, it is not in the interest of corporate sponsors to promote the development of critical thinking and the habits of mind associated with it.³⁴ Sponsors’ interest is in selling their products or cultivating students’ favorable attitude

toward their brands and worldviews; critical thinking might lead students to question the story that sponsors tell about their brands.³⁵ For this reason, sponsored messages avoid touching on anything that might lead to thinking inconsistent with the intended message. Advertising programs do not promote a school environment that would encourage students to ask questions, to think about their thought processes, and thus to develop habits of mind that would enable students to transfer any critical thinking skills they learn in class to other, unrelated, situations.³⁶

Focus of the 2012 Report: Health Threats

The most significant health threat associated with advertising in school has to do with the preponderance of advertising for food products, and the potential relationship of this advertising to obesity.³⁷ Food and beverage products are by far the most advertised class of product in schools, with a heavy orientation toward foods of little or no nutritional value. In other words, the foods advertised tend to provide little nutrition but lots of calories—the types of foods implicated in the rapid increase in childhood obesity. In the United States, childhood obesity has tripled in the past 30 years, with the percentage of obese six- to eleven-year olds increasing from 7% in 1980 to nearly 20% in 2008, and the percentage of obese twelve- to nineteen-year-olds increasing from 5% to 18% in that same period.³⁸ The U.S. is not the only country with a childhood obesity problem. Statistics are similar in Ireland, for example, where the Department of Health reports body weight as the most prevalent childhood disease affecting Irish children.³⁹ One Irish study of 3,482 6-year-old children found 27% of them to be either overweight or obese.⁴⁰

Pediatric studies warn of the significant threats obesity poses for children's health.⁴¹ Among these threats are higher cholesterol levels and blood pressure, and greater incidence of type 2 diabetes, coronary plaque formation, several types of cancer, bone and joint problems, sleep apnea, gout, gallstones, and a shorter life expectancy.⁴² Additional medical implications continue to be revealed. Type 2 diabetes, for example, progresses more rapidly in obese children than it does in adults, and typical treatment fails to slow it.⁴³ Consequently, obese children are at risk for complications, such as heart disease, eye problems, nerve damage, amputations, and kidney failure much earlier in life than people who become diabetic as adults.⁴⁴

Research points also to psychosocial problems.⁴⁵ Children as young as three begin stereotyping fat as “bad,” and overweight children are less accepted by their peers and more socially isolated.⁴⁶ The more overweight they are, the more children are teased by their peers. Such teasing has been found to lead to depression, anxiety, lower self-esteem, poor body image, and suicidal thoughts.⁴⁷ Teasing also makes overweight children more likely to binge eat and to be reluctant to engage in the physical activity that they need to become healthier.⁴⁸

Although there is no direct evidence tying any specific advertising campaign to obesity,⁴⁹ or any specific type of food to obesity, a collection of studies makes a strong case that advertising influences children's food preferences and eating behavior.⁵⁰ So also do the

huge sums of industry money spent on advertising and lobbying to prevent any possible restriction on marketing to children.⁵¹ As Margo Wootan explained in an episode of *The Knife and Fork Show*, “Food marketing affects what children want to eat, what they’re willing to eat, what they do eat . . . [and] helps to shape what kids think of as food . . .”⁵² Research finds that food advertising influences which foods children prefer (both immediately and over time), what they ask their parents to buy, and even how much they eat in a sitting.⁵³

Foods of minimal nutritional value, or foods high in fat, sugar, and/or salt may be safely eaten in small quantities. Advertising, however, is designed to convince its targets to like and want more of the product being advertised. In schools, then, advertising for these kinds of foods is designed to convince children to like and want more and more of foods that are unhealthy when consumed to excess. In doing so, such advertising influences children’s eating habits in a direction that contributes to obesity and the many health problems associated with it.⁵⁴

Developments in Food Marketing to Children 2011-2012

Money Spent on Advertising Food to Children

Available data suggest that the total amount of money spent on advertising food and beverages to children, both in and out of schools, has decreased over the past few years.⁵⁵ However, any reduction in spending reflects at least in part a shift to less expensive, but more effective, alternative media advertising.⁵⁶ In December 2012, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) released an update to its 2008 report of the amount of money spent by the food and beverage industry on marketing to youth. Whereas the 2008 report analyzed data collected in 2006, when industry self-regulation had just begun, the 2012 report analyzed 2009 data, after self-regulation was under way. The 48 major national food and beverage marketers studied in 2012 spent nearly \$149 million on youth-directed in-school marketing for their products (\$37 million less than reported in 2008). About 93% of this \$149 million was for the marketing of carbonated beverages (\$82.3 million) and juice and other non-carbonated beverages (\$55.9 million), and was mostly directed at teens.⁵⁷ Of the total \$149 million spent in schools, \$31.3 million was directed at children rather than teens. According to the FTC, these data actually underestimate in-school marketing of food products; much of the sales in schools of quick service restaurant foods is done by local or regional franchisees under contract to the school, and data were not collected on expenditures by these franchisees.

In 2008, the FTC recommended that the food corporations it studied expand their efforts to educate children and teens about the importance of healthy eating and exercise, especially among minority populations.⁵⁸ These education efforts, called “counter-marketing,” are a form of stealth advertising—just another way for companies to put their brands in front of children in school, and likely also to reflect the corporation’s perspective

on health, as when Coca-Cola emphasizes the role of exercise in combating obesity.⁵⁹ These practices are problematic because they shift the onus of responsibility from corporations to children. Instead of calling on advertisers to harness their advertising programs, they call on children to correct the problem caused by the advertising (i.e., that the children—as advertisers intended—consumed excessive amounts of the food marketed to them).

Several companies reported to the FTC such school-based counter-marketing efforts to teach children about nutrition and physical activity.⁶⁰ These included dissemination of materials for teachers to use, partnership with the Afterschool Alliance to create a tool kit for students participating in after-school programs across the U. S., and a multi-media campaign to promote the benefits of drinking milk that included in-school posters, a teen-targeted website, print advertising, and other promotional programs.⁶¹ Research performed by the companies and reported to the FTC showed modest, if any, effect of their counter-marketing programs on the adoption of healthy behaviors. In contrast, one marketer submitted “consumption research” that indicated increased sales partly as a result of its promotional techniques.⁶²

Regulation and Self-Regulation

Food companies have been policing their own efforts to restrict advertising to children. The Children’s Food and Beverage Advertising Initiative (CFBAI), established by the Better Business Bureau in 2006, now has 16 member corporations. With respect to advertising in schools in particular, the CFBAI reported “excellent” compliance on the part of member companies with their commitments not to advertise branded foods and beverages.⁶³ The CFBAI’s restrictions do not, however, cover such activities as fundraising and other donations to schools, adult-directed marketing, public service messaging, and materials that identify products offered for sale in schools (such as menus and placards used in conjunction with food displays).⁶⁴ In addition to CFBAI, beverage companies have focused their efforts on reducing the calorie count of the beverages sold in schools, in conjunction with the American Beverage Association and Alliance for a Healthier Generation.⁶⁵

Although public health advocates disagree with industry on the adequacy of these self-regulatory efforts, industry points to them in its contention that legislated regulation would be superfluous, at best.⁶⁶ On this note, Congress and regulatory agencies debated and resolved two school food-related issues in 2011-2012⁶⁷: In January 2012, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) released new nutrition standards for school meals⁶⁸; and by May, 2012, it was evident that an Interagency Working Group publication on voluntary guidelines for food marketing to children was not going to be released.⁶⁹ Both processes were heavily influenced by lobbying by the food industry.⁷⁰ According to an analysis by Reuters, food and beverage groups spent over \$175 million lobbying between January 2009 and May 2012, which was more than double the \$83 million spent in 2006-2008.⁷¹

In the end, the Center for Science in the Public Interest described the new nutrition standards as “one of the most important advances in nutrition in decades.” The standards

doubled fruit and vegetable servings, increased the variety of vegetables, set standards for sodium, trans fat and whole grains, required all milk to be low-fat or fat-free, and set appropriate calorie standards.⁷² Still, even as first lady Michelle Obama was engaged in high profile advocacy for school vegetables, the food industry persuaded Congress to maintain French fries as a menu staple and pizza as a vegetable. It also persuaded Congress to effectively halt the activity of the Interagency Working Group, whose proposed voluntary guidelines for the marketing of food to children had already been presented to the public for comment. Evidence that the lobbying money paid off appeared when work on the guidelines was suspended after Congress added a requirement that the agencies do a cost-benefit analysis of their recommendations before finishing the report.⁷³ The agencies said that such a requirement was both unprecedented for voluntary guidelines and too expensive to conduct, and so they abandoned the project.⁷⁴

Food industry concern centered on the fear that the voluntary guidelines would eventually become mandatory, as government would arrange to punish marketers who failed to meet the voluntary standards.⁷⁵ An important part of industry's argument is that regulation threatens the corporate First Amendment right of free speech.⁷⁶ Public health advocates, however, argue that because advertising to children under the age of 12 is inherently misleading (because children are not cognitively able to recognize the persuasive intent of or to fully comprehend advertising), it is not protected by the First Amendment.⁷⁷

Calls for actual regulation also come from sources other than activists. The Institute of Medicine (IOM), for example, recommended in May 2012 that if marketing standards for children and adolescents are not adopted within two years, policymakers at all levels “should consider” setting mandatory nutritional standards for marketing to this age group.⁷⁸ The IOM suggested that “schools are uniquely positioned to be a national focal point for obesity prevention because children spend up to half of their waking hours in school and consume between one-third and one half of their daily calories there.”⁷⁹ And in his 2013 book, journalist Michael Moss suggests that federal regulation could actually benefit the food companies, which are motivated to produce and sell more and more unhealthy food by intense pressure to compete with one another and produce revenues. “If nothing else,” he offers, “federal limits on salt, sugar, and fat would put the food manufacturers in the same boat.” He cites a former CEO of Phillip Morris, who ran the company when it owned Kraft Foods, as begrudgingly agreeing.⁸⁰

Methodology

To examine current trends in commercializing activities in schools and the threats to children posed by them, we conducted systematic searches over the course of 2011-2012 for the following: current examples of corporate engagement in schools where we live, in North America and Ireland⁸¹; developments and perspectives in the marketing and food and beverage industries; developments in regulation and self-regulation of marketing to children in schools; developments in public health activism regarding children's health and commercialism and children; and academic research and analysis of marketing to

children and pediatric health. To do this, we identified a set of websites (identified in the Appendix) associated with these domains that we searched regularly for articles, reports, and news releases. We signed up for news alerts on relevant topics. Sources identified were contacted if further information was needed. We also conducted regular Google searches using the following terms (with and without quotation marks): “school advertising,” “school commercialism,” “education commercialism,” “education advertising,” and “school bus.” We explored any relevant entries that appeared in these searches, and followed up on them as appropriate to develop further lines of investigation.

Nutritional Threat in School: 2011-2012

How Food Is Advertised in Schools

All kinds of foods are advertised in schools, and the extent to which advertising presents a nutritional threat is tied to the nutritional value or threat of the particular food promoted and, in general, of the foods carried by the brand. Some foods are so low in nutritional value they have been labeled foods of “minimal nutritional value” by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Moreover, although foods may have nutritional value, they may also be high in fat, sugar, and/or salt. Restaurant foods—even when nutritionally sound, such as some of the items sold by Chick-Fil-A, McDonalds, or Panda Express—are used to promote restaurant brands that feature many unhealthy options. Food *advertising* is different from

Even as first lady Michelle Obama was engaged in high profile advocacy for school vegetables, the food industry persuaded Congress to maintain French fries as a menu staple and pizza as a vegetable.

food *sales* in that the brand is promoted in addition to the particular food itself. This is well known to food corporations, who, as Michael Moss points out, readily create healthy product extensions to address consumers’ particular health concerns, knowing that they will benefit from sales of the new items, from goodwill engendered by their effort, and also, oftentimes, from increased sales of the main product line generated by the brand extensions.⁸²

Food products are advertised in multiple ways in schools. In our prior work we defined seven categories of school commercializing activities: (1) appropriation of space on school property, (2) exclusive agreements (3) sponsorship of school programs, (4) sponsorship of supplementary educational materials, (5) digital marketing, (6) sponsorship of incentive programs, and (7) fundraising. Examples of these general types of advertising appear below. Most of them, regardless of what else they do, appeal to schools because they double as fundraising programs. Sometimes an advertising activity might bring in actual funds (for example, when a district gets a percentage of the money earned from vending

machine sales), and sometimes it pays for a program so that school or district funds can be used for something else (for example, when a sponsor pays for sports equipment or computers).

Appropriation of Space, Exclusive Agreements, and Fundraising: Food Sales in Schools

Having specific products for sale is the most obvious way that foods are advertised in schools. The United States General Accounting Office (GAO) estimated in a 2004 report that nearly 9 out of 10 schools offered competitive foods (that is, foods not included in the National School Lunch Program) in à la carte cafeteria lines, vending machines, and school stores.⁸³ Such food sales involve multiple categories of advertising, including space appropriation, exclusive agreements with marketers, and fundraising. Space is appropriated as company logos appear on vending machines, cans, cups, wrappers, and so forth, both at the original point of purchase and throughout the school as students carry products with them. (According to the GAO, high schools and middle schools have more competitive foods than elementary schools.⁸⁴)

Food advertising via vending machine and school stores is prevalent, and other spaces that may be branded include scoreboards, rooftops, bulletin boards, walls, textbooks, and school buses. A 2008 study of schools in Montgomery County, Maryland, found that all of its high schools, half of its middle schools, and a quarter of its elementary schools had school stores, most of which (80%) sold foods and beverages. The high schools housed an average of 21 vending machines each.⁸⁵ Similarly, a 2006 study of 20 California high schools found that all but one of the schools surveyed contained vending machines, mostly located in high-traffic areas, for a total of 276 vending machines across the 19 schools.⁸⁶ A 2012 study of Maine high schools found that despite a 2007 law prohibiting both the sale and advertising of foods of minimal nutritional value, 85% of the high schools allowed such advertising. On average, 28 different noncompliant foods were advertised in each school, with brand names seen most frequently in yearbooks and on scoreboards, posters, and vending machines. Brands were also advertised in school media and on paper products, sports equipment, athletic uniforms, and other school equipment and supplies.⁸⁷

Exclusive agreements, especially for drinks, determine which brands students see in school. When beverage companies, in conjunction with the Alliance for a Healthier Generation, began in 2006 to reduce sales of high-calorie sweetened soft drinks in schools, they reduced the number of beverage calories consumed in school.⁸⁸ However, schools with soft drink vending contracts continue to advertise products more acceptable to critics because they have some nutritional value (juice) or are low calorie (diet soda or branded water).⁸⁹ A school or district with a Pepsi contract advertises Pepsi products such as Tropicana, Gatorade, and Diet Pepsi. One with a Coca-Cola contract advertises Coca-Cola products such as Minute Maid, Powerade, Dasani water, and Diet Coke. In Madawaska, ME, for example, the middle/high school has vending machines that sell Powerade and Dasani water during the school day. After school, Coke, Diet Coke, and Sprite are also sold at the canteen.⁹⁰

The high schools in Flagstaff, AZ, demonstrate the value of branded vending machines. In these schools, Pepsi-branded vending machines are functional only after hours, but they sit in school space, like billboards, during the school day as well. During the day, other vending machines sell water.⁹¹ According to a district administrator, Flagstaff schools have seen a significant drop in drink sales since Arizona implemented strict school food guidelines. Even with less income, he posited, students' exposure to the brand is worth the cost to the company of maintaining the vending contract.⁹²

Sponsored Programs and Educational Materials: Propaganda Disguised as Education

In earlier reports we have pointed out that all advertising in schools is “embedded” advertising, in much the same way as product placements are embedded in television shows or movies.⁹³ Like food sales, sponsorship of educational programs and materials is another form of embedded advertising. Although a case has been made for distinguishing between sponsorship and advertising,⁹⁴ it is unconvincing because the benefits of advertising routinely accrue to sponsorships. Unless a corporation anonymously donates the money for a sponsored program, at the very least it gets public credit for providing something to the school. It is also common for sponsorships to provide programs or materials that enhance its agenda among schoolchildren.

The best-case scenario is that a sponsored program provides a way for a sponsor to “do well by doing good.” For example, when New York Giants football team members visit schools in the New York City area “to promote the irreplaceable values of books and storytelling” as part of the National Education Association's annual *Read Across America* program, they also promote the team to the students they visit.⁹⁵

A more intense version of sponsorship turned up in 2012 in Surprise, AZ, where for \$2500 annually, local companies are sponsoring specific classrooms at Arizona Charter Academy.⁹⁶ The “Discount Cab fifth grade,” sponsored by Discount Cab's parent company, Total Transit, used its money in 2011-2012 to buy a classroom set of Kindle e-readers preloaded with new novels. National Bank of Arizona's second grade bought a butterfly garden. The class sponsors also visit with their students monthly, and sometimes bring gifts.⁹⁷ Second graders received goody bags containing a paper bank for the children to fill with quarters and bring to a bank branch to start a minor's saving account, along with a letter to parents on the importance of saving from a young age. Fifth graders got to check out a Discount cab up close and ask questions about it. Total Transit's general manager told an *Arizona Republic* reporter, “We talk to the kids, so it gives us a chance to get out into the community to get our name out there as well. There's some benefits besides being just a donor.”⁹⁸ According to marketing firm Education Funding Partners, the “cause marketing” involved in such activities as sponsoring a classroom “is about leveraging a charitable brand to increase sales, support product positioning or differentiate from competitors.” It is “the intersection of philanthropy and marketing.”⁹⁹

Corporations can also seem philanthropic when they provide sponsored educational materials—what used to be more accurately called “propaganda”¹⁰⁰—to schools and

teachers. These materials can be colorful and engaging, and can align with state and now Common Core standards, but they also present a worldview consistent with that of the sponsor. Nestlé's *Healthy Steps for Healthy Lives* program, which provides lesson plans for K-3 students, is a case in point.¹⁰¹ For example, the stated objective for one lesson plan, called "My Hydration Communication," is for students to classify foods into food groups.¹⁰² According to the plan, the students learn about the different food groups and then spend quite a bit of time learning about their need for water. The teacher is instructed to introduce the children to the ideas of "empty calories," and "moderation." Things get more interesting when the teacher is instructed to have the students brainstorm which other beverages they drink, and then determine which of those beverages "count toward the five servings of water they should have every day." The answer provided is "They all count. Drinking water, water in beverages, and even water contained in food all contribute to total water intake. Some choices are better than others because of empty calories."

In closing the lesson, the teacher is instructed to "ask students what they would do if they had four choices of beverages offered to them at one meal (i.e., fruit-flavored drink, 100% no sugar added fruit juice, low-fat milk, and water)." The ideal response offered is "All four drinks count for the amount of water I need to drink; I would choose the fruit-flavored drink last because it has added sugar and does not count toward the Fruit Group; If I have already had enough fruit for the day (1½ cups) then I would choose the water; If I have not eaten any Fruit or Dairy Group foods yet, I would choose the 100% fruit juice or low-fat milk because I need to eat more of those groups and stay hydrated."¹⁰³ Nowhere in this lesson is the brand Nestlé mentioned, and there are no branded materials. The problem here is more subtle, in that the lesson teaches children as fact, in the guise of a class session led by their teacher, the view of hydration preferred by Nestlé and other beverage corporations.¹⁰⁴

Another example of propaganda disguised as education is offered by SchoolTube, which provides "The best videos from schools everywhere. Safe, secure, and free!"¹⁰⁵ In addition to teachers and students, however, sponsors can also create channels on this platform. To sponsors, channels are described as "a designated page on SchoolTube.com to convey your messages through the power of video."¹⁰⁶ Sponsors can brand their channel with a banner that links back to their website. More than that, they are assured that SchoolTube is approved in 90% of schools, endorsed by top associations, including the National Education Association, and unlike most social networks and video sharing sites that are blocked by schools' firewalls, is one of the few universally accepted web platforms in all schools.¹⁰⁷

When we looked on SchoolTube for videos related to nutrition, we found several videos posted by the American Meat Institute that promote the perspective of the meat industry. The videos featured academic experts in an effort to "debunk the myths" that may cause viewers to eliminate meat from their diet. One addresses the "myth" that Americans eat too much meat and that meat's saturated fat content leads to heart disease. Another addresses the "myth" that grass-fed beef is safer than "beef from cattle finished on corn and grains," and yet another shows what beef processing looks like "when it's done right."¹⁰⁸ Unaddressed in this last video is how often processing is not done "right," what

that may look like, or what the effects of that might be. These videos may be valid as argument in a debate with nutritionists who are concerned about the nutritional value of meat, but they are biased in favor of the meat industry, and without being placed in the context of a lesson by the teacher, amount to propaganda.

Digital Advertising: Schools Reinforce and Encourage Exposure

The marketing and advertising industries believe their future lies in digital marketing strategies.¹⁰⁹ Conducted over computers, videogame consoles, handheld game players, and cellular telephones, digital strategies are ubiquitous. Especially worrisome is that food companies are leading the way in digital messaging, especially to teens.¹¹⁰ Digital media are exceptionally well-matched to both support and manipulate teens as they struggle with the developmental challenges of adolescence: they provide teens with opportunity for self-expression, identity exploration and social interaction, and they facilitate mobility and independence.

Notably, the vast majority of digital advertising to teens and all children takes place outside school walls. Schools enter the picture when they expose children to digital marketing media and messages and when they reinforce those messages.

Schools serve as a portal to ubiquitous digital advertising by encouraging students to be connected, as education moves increasingly on-line. Not only do schools typically require students to do internet-based research (not at all unreasonable in an era when that is the dominant research method) and teachers recommend homework-help or other interesting educational sites (also not unreasonable), but many districts and even states (e.g., Alabama, Florida, Michigan, and New Mexico), have implemented requirements for students to take virtual courses.¹¹¹ All of these push children to spend more time on-line, and increase the likelihood of their exposure to on-line advertising.¹¹²

Schools reinforce digital advertising that children see outside of school by exposing them to those same products and brands in school. For example, beverage pouring rights agreements with schools reinforce powerful online marketing programs such as *My Coke Rewards*, a crown jewel of the Coca-Cola Company. Coca-Cola is the most successful digital marketer in the world, as evidenced by its social media success: of 10.6 billion total social media brand impressions generated by the Top 100 brands in July 2012, 1.4 billion were generated by Coca-Cola (not even counting those impressions generated by Sprite, a Coca-Cola brand that came in eighth place).¹¹³ Coke's vast number of impressions was made on digital users of all ages, but Carol Kruse, the executive responsible for developing the popular *My Coke Rewards* loyalty program, acknowledged that, "We're especially targeting a teen or young adult audience. They're always on their mobile phones and they spend an inordinate amount of time on the Internet."¹¹⁴

My Coke Rewards launched in 2006 and is still active, with 14 brands and the option in 2013 for participants to donate their points to participating schools.¹¹⁵ Participants create online accounts at MyCokeRewards.com so that they can enter PIN codes printed on bottle

caps and cartons to redeem rewards. In their analysis of the specific techniques used to target teens via *My Coke Rewards*, the Center for Digital Democracy and the Berkeley Media Studies group point to the following: creating immersive environments that keep users engaging with the site (i.e., with the brand), infiltrating social networks such as Facebook and Twitter, sending news alerts, rewards info, sweepstakes opportunities, bonus points and other exclusives via location-based and mobile marketing, collecting

Advertising in schools favors special interests by allowing access to students to any company that buys it.

personal data both from participants themselves and from others whose profiles suggest that they would be likely to be interested in the program, and studying the subconscious in order to try to trigger it.¹¹⁶ With each visit to the site, participants “supply demographic and psychographic details” that allow Coke’s marketing team to “identify consumers across brands and experiences, and learn when and how to connect with them”—by, for instance, personalizing the look and messaging of a particular web page, email or mobile content, or by sending an exclusive offer.¹¹⁷ These strategies are pioneered and mastered by Coca-Cola and other food corporations (e.g., Frito-Lay, McDonald’s, Pepsico), but are used widely by countless companies on the internet, where encouraging consumer “engagement” with brands is the prime marketing goal.¹¹⁸

My Coke Rewards is part of a “360-degree” marketing strategy designed to engage with young people over and over, wherever they are and whatever they are doing—browsing cyberspace, watching television, or engaging in an offline activity.¹¹⁹ When Coke brands are present in school (in the form of actual branded products, branded but inactive vending machines, or signs on playground fences), the school’s implied approval of the brands reinforces the relationship with students that the corporation works so hard to construct. The financial value of in-school marketing was made obvious by the furor that erupted among bottlers when a company executive suggested—before *My Coke Rewards* even existed—that the company remove itself from schools.¹²⁰

Incentive Programs: Molding Student, Family, and School Behavior

General Mills’ BoxTops for Education has been engaging schools in fundraising since 1996.¹²¹ The genius of the Boxtops incentive program is that it encourages parents and other adults to devise ways to encourage the children to collect as many Boxtops as possible. In January, 2013, its website shared tips on how some of its most successful coordinators raised money for their schools. The secret? Getting Boxtops in front of the children, teachers, and parents at all times, especially in the classroom.¹²² One coordinator, for example, initiated a *Box Tops Across America* program, for which she sent every student home with a self-addressed envelope to send to a distant relative or friend with a note asking that person to collect Box Tops on behalf of the school. Then she created a U.S. map to display in the school hallway and pinned the cities and states as envelopes of Box

Tops arrived.¹²³ Another coordinator arranged for the classroom that collected the most Box Tops to win extra recess time, and created a “traveling Box Tops trophy that is proudly displayed in the classroom.” She gets teachers involved and encourages each classroom to set—and meet—a Box Tops goal.¹²⁴ Finally, a coordinator in Idaho offers this advice to others: “I’d recommend being consistent—consistently reminding students about Box Tops in the classrooms, consistently reminding parents about saving Box Tops. I’m a substitute teacher, so I’m popping into the classroom to remind kids to bring in their Box Tops every chance I get!”¹²⁵

Incentive programs similar to BoxTops for Education are not new to Ireland. For years, stores there such as Tesco and SuperValu have run promotions in which, for a designated period of time, families collect receipts that are then redeemed by schools for sports or other equipment.¹²⁶ New to the country, however, is JD’s Gourmet Popcorn, which in March 2012 invited teachers in Dublin and Meath to take orders for candy-covered popcorn from children and their families in return for a share of the profits. According to JD’s Canadian-born owner, who as a child had sold chocolate-covered almonds to raise money for his own elementary school in Canada, “This is a well-proven, efficient, hassle-free and safe way to raise funds needed in Irish schools. It’s a new concept in Ireland, so it will take time to convince people.”¹²⁷

Fundraising: The Ultimate Motivation

Many of the advertising programs described above are portrayed as business partnerships with schools in order to save or raise money for those schools. To the extent that budget cuts present the “new reality” for schools in the United States, fundraising becomes seen as a necessary and assumed component of school funding rather than as a supplement to regular, sufficient state funding.¹²⁸ Such a reality suits both the needs of corporations that benefit from advertising to children in schools and of marketing companies that promote these partnerships.¹²⁹

Fundraising can cause conflict for schools and districts, as seen in school board debates around the country.¹³⁰ It can also cause conflict for national entities, such as the National PTA and the National School Board Association. In 1990, the National PTA adopted a strongly worded resolution against commercialism that explicitly supported federal regulation or legislation to eliminate certain types of commercial programs.¹³¹ The 1990 resolution has since been archived, as other legislative concerns have taken priority and as the PTA looks for funding.¹³² The organization, for example, promotes Jamba Juice as one of its “select national sponsors” in 2013.¹³³ The National School Board Association recommends against advertising it considers “harmful,” such as advertising for illegal substances or tobacco, or advertising that glorifies violence. Other than that, the organization’s position is to recognize that policy varies substantially from district to district, and it avoids weighing in on what it considers to be “local options.”¹³⁴

Appropriation of space agreements, exclusive agreements, digital advertising, and incentive programs all may be adopted to raise money for schools. Additionally,

community fundraisers are a form of advertising via food sales. A 2007 survey conducted in Montgomery County, MD, found that all the high schools, half the middle schools, and about 30% of the elementary schools held food-related fundraisers, most often in the form of fundraising nights at local fast-food and chain restaurants.¹³⁵ A 2006 study in California found that 53% of the surveyed schools' yearbooks and newspapers contained food and beverage advertisements, primarily for local restaurants.¹³⁶

Developing a Theory of Threats

The Intensity of the Threat Posed by Advertising Varies

All advertising programs are not the same: specific features of the sponsor, the product, and the advertising itself vary and combine to determine degree of threat to students. This is, in fact, what school board members recognize when they struggle to develop their advertising guidelines, trying to eliminate the most egregious offenders from the list of what they would allow children to be exposed to. In prior reports we referred to the “harms” associated with advertising. Our intent in changing our terminology to “threats” is to acknowledge, as school officials do, that ads differ substantively. Often, the “harms” associated with advertising are potential rather than immediate and are relative in their impact. Therefore, advertising presents a threat of harm that varies from program to program and situation to situation. Advertising in schools is relatively more threatening to children to the extent that:

- *Parents and students perceive the school as an authoritative source of information.* The more the school is considered authoritative, the less likely children would be to question or evaluate advertising presented in the school context. “Democratic schools,” such as those described by Weinstock and his colleagues in their examination of how those schools’ practices encourage students to make more autonomous moral judgments,¹³⁷ might be more likely than regular schools to encourage critical thinking about any advertising programs accepted by the school.¹³⁸
- *The advertising targets children rather than adults.* That is, ads target children when they are located in areas of school property that children frequent. For example, ads allowed by the Orange County Public Schools (OCPS) that are placed in a parking garage used by OCPS employees and Orlando Tech students, and not by its K-12 students, do not target children.¹³⁹ In contrast, ads OCPS allows in the high school gyms that students use regularly do target those students.¹⁴⁰
- *Ads also target children when they are for brands and products children use.* The photos of the parking garage and gym floor ads on the OCPS website both show advertising for the CFE Federal Credit Union.¹⁴¹ CFE is not nearly as compelling to students as Panera Bread, which has signs posted in the gym, or Powerade, which

has goal wraps on the football field.¹⁴² At the same time, if the students repeatedly see CFE banners in the gym, it becomes a familiar option to turn to when it comes time to open a bank account.

- *The advertising is present in the classroom.* The classroom is the school location most central to student life, and it also is the most academic. Advertisements in the classroom, like the posters provided by the *Core Essentials* character development program that acknowledge fast food sponsor Chick-Fil-A,¹⁴³ are more likely to threaten children educationally than advertisements in school locations more physically distant from their learning. Consider, for example, the way that Chick-Fil-A posters in a classroom silently undermine a nutrition lesson taking place there.¹⁴⁴ In recognition of the power of classroom advertising, the North Penn School District disallows classrooms as advertising sites in the policy it established in 2012.¹⁴⁵
- *Ads can also be “present in the classroom” when they are integrated into sponsored educational materials or programs.* A strong example is the High School for Innovation in Advertising and Media in Brooklyn, NY.¹⁴⁶ The school itself is sponsored by 4A’s, an advertising industry trade association. In May 2012 the school opened its own advertising agency, and according to a 4A’s press release at the time, was “in conversations with potential clients including PepsiCo and PBS as well as local retailers to produce ad campaigns.”¹⁴⁷ Students from the school also created an ad campaign for Michelle Obama’s *Let’s Move* initiative.
- *The advertising takes up school time.* An obvious example is the class trip to Irish potato-chip company Tayto’s Tayto Park, which features attractions called Tayto Plains, Crispy Creek, the Tayto Sky Walk, Pet-Tayto Corner, Mr. Tayto Critter Country and The Potatohontus Native American Village.¹⁴⁸
- *The advertising contradicts what children learn in school.* Pouring rights contracts present a clear example of how advertising can contradict school nutrition policy. In Maine, students are taught to avoid foods of minimal nutritional value. Yet, according to a 2012 representative study of high schools in the state, 85% the schools have some form of advertising—usually several instances—for foods of minimal nutritional value.¹⁴⁹
- *The advertising is specifically harmful to children’s health or psychological well-being.* For this reason, the Los Angeles Unified School District specifically prohibits “sponsorship by corporations that market, sell or produce products that may be harmful to children including, but not limited to, tobacco, alcohol, firearms, gambling, or high fat and calorie foods and drinks.”¹⁵⁰ (This district specifically references food and drink; many districts do not.) By recognizing both the sponsor and the product, LAUSD acknowledges that the two are connected, particularly if the brand is well known. If, hypothetically, a local McDonald’s franchise were to provide salads for a LAUSD event and be recognized with a banner that says, “Thank you, McDonald’s, for your support!” as per the district’s sponsorship

guidelines, Big Macs would be subtly promoted also. Popular McTeacher nights, disallowed by LAUSD but embraced by many districts, support every product McDonald's offers.¹⁵¹

To the extent that children do not see an advertisement, as when only parents receive information about a sponsorship, its educational and other threats are reduced. This is where quiet donations to school foundations come into play, or ads like those in the Orange County Public Schools employee parking lots.¹⁵² More threatening would be ads on a marquee in front of the school that students might see but that actually target passing adult traffic.¹⁵³ More threatening still are ads and other promotional materials directly targeting the student market.

How Threats May Interact

We have organized threats into three general categories (psychological, educational, and health-related) to help clarify the different ways that advertising affects children. In reality, however, multiple types of threats can and do exist simultaneously and interact to affect children in multiple ways. Consider, for example, the health threat associated with a highly visible educational program sponsored by a food company, as is the case in Panda Express's sponsorship of an elementary school's adoption of Franklin-Covey's *Leader in Me* program.¹⁵⁴ In this case, the campaign encourages uncritical acceptance of the Panda Express menu, a potential health threat because of high levels of sodium in most menu items and an extended menu of soft drinks with high sugar content. At the same time, an educational threat is generated when program discussion displaces the regular curriculum. One parent reported a teacher suggesting that parents teach children math in the car on the way to school to make up lost instructional time.¹⁵⁵

We conceptualize the interaction among threats associated with advertising as illustrated in the Venn diagram in Figure 1. In the environment outside the school setting, each of the seven options is possible, but advertising in the school setting almost always is associated with some kind of educational threat. A given advertisement may avoid taking up school time, and it may not actively contradict what students learn in school, but by virtue of existing in the context of schools, it threatens to affect the learning environment by the simple action of bringing a brand or the sponsor's corporate worldview into the school. In some cases the attempt to influence what students are taught and how they think about a brand or corporate interest is strong; in those cases we categorize the advertisement as carrying an explicit educational threat. In other cases, the potential educational threat is relatively minimal or subtle, and is overwhelmed by the psychological or health implications of the ad. In those cases we classify it according to the overwhelming primary threat.

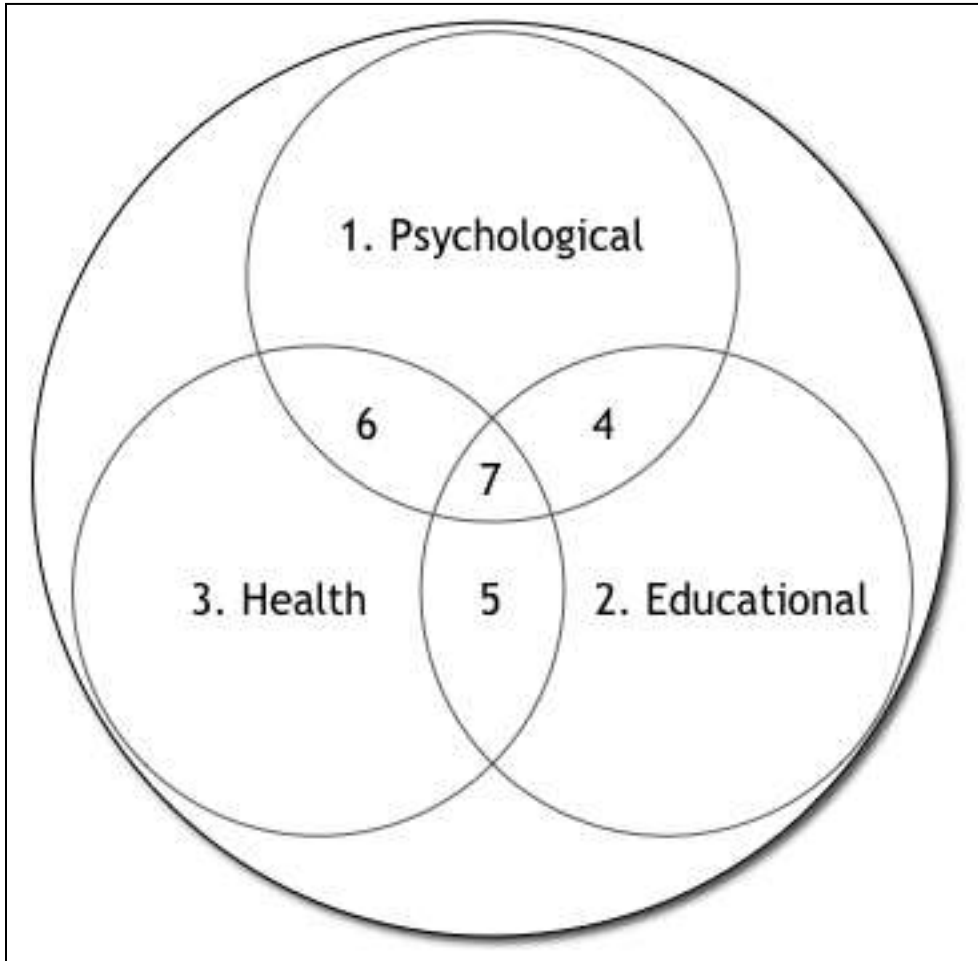


Figure 1. The Interaction of Psychological, Educational, and Health Threats

Although the graphic representation in Figure 1 may suggest equal and tidy relationships among the types of potential threat, in reality the nature and degree of the threats will vary by person, advertisement, and context. Some examples illustrate how the theoretical construction works in real life:



Primarily psychological threat:

Until a shower of complaints led it to stop selling them in June 2012, Scholastic marketed “Boys Only” and “Girls Only” versions of the book *How to Survive Anything*, for children age 8+. ¹⁵⁶ The boys’ book teaches boys how to survive a shark attack, plane crash, flash flood, tornado, and the like. The girls’ book teaches girls how to survive a BFF fight, a fashion disaster, becoming rich, and a breakout (of pimples, not war), among other

similar disasters. It also offered direction on such things as how to show you're sorry and how to have the best sleepover ever. Although the books are no longer available for sale on the Scholastic website, *The Boys' Book of Greatness: Even More Ways to Be the Best at Everything* is.¹⁵⁷ And, the original books are still available at Amazon.com.¹⁵⁸ These books guide children toward a narrowly defined gender identity that constricts the behaviors, attitudes, and accomplishments they consider possible or acceptable for themselves. The "Girls Only" version received more negative evaluations than the boys' version by readers on Amazon.com, likely because the shallow, powerless stereotype offered to girls is more obviously offensive than the resourceful, powerful stereotype offered to boys. However, the narrowness of stereotypes offered to boys can limit them too, as noted by such authors as Sut Jhally and Lyn Mikel Brown and her colleagues.¹⁵⁹

Culture is never tidy, and we could also argue that the extreme gender stereotypes promoted here contribute to the health threats associated with eating disorders or teen steroid use. Moreover, because these books are sold in the school context, there is necessarily some level of educational threat connected to them. However, as long as they are not kept in the school or class library, or actively used in teaching, the psychological threat—in this case encouraging hypersexualized gender identities and stereotypes—is dominant enough that for our purposes here, we classify this example as primarily a psychological threat.



Primarily educational threat:

In 2012, timed to coordinate with NBC's launch of the new musical drama series *Smash*, NBC and iTheatrics initiated the promotional program *NBC's Smash: Make a Musical*. Its ostensible goal is to "create sustainable musical theater programs in underserved schools nationwide."¹⁶⁰ Schools in 20 cities across the U.S. were encouraged to apply for the program, with ten winning schools selected to have a full *Make a Musical* program installed in their schools and an additional twenty schools awarded an MTI Broadway Junior Collection "ShowKit" of resources. Sponsors intend to expand the program in 2013 and 2014.¹⁶¹

Although the idea of initiating sustainable musical theater programs in schools—especially in underserved schools—is laudable, this program does not by any means uniformly help students. In fact, in several ways it does them a disservice. First, it appropriates school time from the approved curriculum to the program, both for the application process and then, if the school is lucky enough to win, for participation in the program itself. In this instance, instructional time spent on musical theater is not "wasted" time (as it is with Channel One, for example¹⁶²), but it is time not designated or approved by the professionals charged with determining school curriculum. Instead, instructional time is diverted to musical theater only because NBC has provided incentives. (Many corporations use similar strategies to appropriate instructional time, as when Chick-Fil-A or Panda Express pays for character education—specifically, branded character education.¹⁶³)

Second, anything students may learn or experience as part of the activity is necessarily intertwined with marketing for the TV show. Students aren't learning just about musical theater, but rather about musical theater in the context of *Smash: The Musical*. And third, students may very well spend a lot of time and effort toward preparing their application, and then not win the contest prize. This type of funding is capricious because it depends both on the corporate funder having a product or an agenda to push and on a participating school actually winning the contest.



Primarily health threat:

The New York Jets football team runs several programs in New York and New Jersey public schools. The *Eat Right, Move More* campaign includes the placement in every New Jersey school cafeteria of posters that feature Jets player D'Brickashaw Ferguson exhorting students to eat right and move more.¹⁶⁴ Schools are also encouraged to make their meals healthier and creative via a contest in which the five schools with the “most creative meal selections” each year are recognized, with one receiving a grand prize of \$5,000 and being honored at a Jets home game.¹⁶⁵ *Eat Right, Move More* is a good example of a relatively nonthreatening cause marketing effort designed to benefit both children and sponsor. With respect to the latter, at the very least, it promotes the Jets in every school cafeteria in New Jersey.

More problematic is the team's partnership with the Public Schools Athletic League (PSAL). Its “Heads Up!” program has helped to create eleven new and developmental school football teams, reconditioned helmets, provided two \$5,000 college scholarships and expanded the C.H.A.M.P.S. Middle School Flag Football League to over 75 programs throughout the New York City public school system.¹⁶⁶ In prior years this program, like *Eat Right Move More*, may also have been considered a relatively non-threatening pro-social effort, with the benefit to the team of promoting football as a sport for students to engage in as both players and spectators. Now, however, with so much evidence mounting about the role of football in causing brain injuries—even with helmets—encouraging children to play football can only be considered a health threat.¹⁶⁷



Combined psychological and educational threats:

Channel One's student audience has shrunk by more than 25% since 2005, but 5.5 million students are still forced to watch it daily.¹⁶⁸ The broadcast is 12 minutes long, including two minutes of acknowledged commercial time (plus unacknowledged product placements), for a total 32 hours per year, more than a week of displaced instructional time.¹⁶⁹ Even more disturbing, Channel One began targeting elementary in addition to middle and high school students, via its partnership with Promethean, a company that produces white boards.¹⁷⁰

Watching Channel One at school has been associated with a variety of psychological threats. In 1993, a study found that children attending schools with Channel One were more materialistic than students attending schools without it.¹⁷¹ Recently, the Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood found problematic advertising on websites advertised on the broadcast and its associated website, channelone.com, which is promoted on the broadcast. Ads for websites operated by Channel One's parent company, Alloy Media and Marketing, such as teen.com and gURL.com, contain highly sexualized content, such as racy photos of TV stars and pages on such topics as “How are you when it comes to playing hard to get?” and “Can you leave your house without makeup?”¹⁷² Hypersexualization like this is linked to pressing mental health problems for girls, including eating disorders, low self-esteem, depression and poor sexual health.¹⁷³



Combined educational and health threats:

Coca-Cola's sponsorship of school playgrounds is accompanied at least in some cases by playground signage.¹⁷⁴ And when the Howe Elementary School of Excellence on Chicago's West Side received a \$25,000 recreation grant for a new playground from Coca-Cola's *Sprite Spark Parks* program, the children wrote thank-you letters to Coke during school. For homework, they made healthy resolutions. Nutrition curricula teach children to avoid sweetened soft drinks, and the beverage companies themselves have acknowledged the potential problem with calories associated with such drinks in their voluntary effort to remove them from school sales around the United States.¹⁷⁵

Both Coca-Cola and its competitor PepsiCo have launched several health and wellness initiatives designed to promote physical activity and movement, in response to concerns that their products may contribute to the obesity problem.¹⁷⁶ Although these types of initiatives are recommended by the Federal Trade Commission,¹⁷⁷ they are problematic in that they shift the onus for obesity from the corporation's responsibility to market healthy food to the consumer's responsibility for making healthy choices. When that change in conversation takes place in school, as it did with the Howe Elementary children's homework assignment, it shows how corporate involvement can distort what children learn in school. In a situation in which the school just received a \$25,000 playground from Coca-Cola, it is only reasonable for the teachers to consider the corporation's view of its products' relationship to obesity, and to present the issue “fairly”—not as an issue of whether sweetened soft drinks are to be avoided, but rather in terms of balance, moderation and sensible choices. How could they possibly be expected to react otherwise? And how could the children, who just received the playground, think of Coca-Cola as anything but benevolent?



Combined health and psychological threats:

Axe and Old Spice are brands notorious for marketing masculinity to teen boys.¹⁷⁸ Of the two, while Axe has probably been banned in more

high schools,¹⁷⁹ Old Spice has tried to connect its brand with high school football. In the early 2000s it sponsored the *SchoolSports Rivalry Tour* and the *Old Spice Red Zone High School Showcase*, and more recently it has involved high school coaches in nominating their top players to be awarded Old Spice Player of the Year.¹⁸⁰ Psychologist and author Lyn Mikel Brown claims that such products preach an extreme, singular definition of masculinity at a time in their development when boys are grappling uneasily with identity. She argues that these products “cultivate anxiety in boys at younger and younger ages about what it means to man up, to be the kind of boy they’re told girls will want and other boys will respect.”¹⁸¹

In addition, Old Spice products, like many other personal care items marketed to children and teens, contain chemicals that may increase users’ risk for certain health problems.¹⁸² The perfumes in these products contain “secret ingredients” that are legalized by a loophole in the Federal Fair Packaging and Labeling Act of 1973. In a laboratory study of 17 popular perfumes (including products actively marketed to children such as “Hannah Montana Secret Celebrity” for girls and Old Spice and Axe body sprays for boys), the Environmental Working Group found that the perfumes contained an average of 14 secret chemicals, 10 “sensitizing” chemicals that can lead to allergic reactions, four known hormone disruptors and 12 chemicals that have not been assessed for safety industry or government.¹⁸³ Adolescents, who are going through significant hormonal changes in their transition to adulthood, may be particularly sensitive to exposures to trace levels of hormone-disrupting chemicals.¹⁸⁴



Combined psychological, educational, and health threats:

The non-profit organization Junior Achievement (JA) has opened BizTown simulation centers for children in more than 20 cities around the United States.¹⁸⁵ Under construction in 2013 is a Biztown and connecting Financial Park in Atlanta, Georgia, funded by Chick-Fil-A and other sponsors.¹⁸⁶ In Atlanta, 30,000 middle schoolers yearly are expected to take school trips to JA Biztown and JA Financial Park, where they will “work” for one of the sponsor companies and “shop” in the Biztown shop for products provided by other sponsor companies. In total, the Atlanta model city will incorporate 18 brands. As one JA appeal to potential sponsor companies puts it, Biztown

. . . introduces students to the free enterprise system through active participation in a simulated town filled with citizens who buy, sell, consume and create products and/or services. Your help in providing select products and services can create a wide variety of positive opportunities for your company, your employers and even your business partners.¹⁸⁷

As in the case of *NBC’s Smash: Make a Musical*, described above, the Atlanta children’s time both during the trip and in their four-week preparation for it in school will be diverted to a pursuit that benefits the sponsors’ interest, which here is indoctrinating them into the consumer system and introducing them to brands that (the companies hope) they

will develop a fond memory for and want to do business with later. In other words, it contributes to the development of the consumer worldview that emphasizes material rather than nonmaterial pursuits, and to the psychological threat associated with such a worldview.¹⁸⁸

A trip to Biztown is certainly colorful, and Junior Achievement of Georgia is working with local school systems to align its curriculum to Georgia Performance Standards and to the new Common Core Standards, in an effort to support rather than displace the regular curriculum. Even if the curriculum aligns with the common core, however, the primary goal of Biztown is to serve the interests of the sponsors. It is designed to teach children the message that the sponsors want to convey, not to think critically about anything related to any of the sponsor companies or about the validity of the economic system that supports those sponsors. Who exactly the sponsors are at any time in any Biztown determines to what extent health threats are implicated; in Atlanta, Chick-Fil-A is the primary sponsor. Some of the 30,000 children each year will work for the simulated Chick-Fil-A, and all the children will be exposed to it. Although not all of Chick-Fil-A's offerings are high in fat, sugar, and/or salt, many are, and are unhealthy when consumed to excess.

Determining the Extent of Threat

One way of thinking about the extent of threat caused by any particular advertising program is that the threat level increases as a greater number of threats are implicated. According to this kind of analysis, Atlanta's JA Biztown is especially problematic because it is associated with psychological, educational, and health threats. It can be reasonably argued, however, that not all threats are equally threatening—although stakeholders are likely to disagree about which campaigns are the most threatening. Some may be more concerned about the hypersexualization promoted in Channel One's regular advertising than by the intensive, but one-time and more culturally normative JA Biztown experience. By considering the relative threats caused by various advertising programs, however, and the ways that they threaten children, stakeholders can better evaluate whether the various "school-business partnerships" offered to them are really worth the money they hope to earn from them.

The Threat Posed by Marketing as a Policy Consideration

While it is realistic and worthwhile to consider the relative threats posed by various advertising programs, our effort to do so leads us simultaneously to argue that commercializing activities do not belong in school at all. The premise "first, do no harm" is associated with policymaking as it is with medicine. It underlies the requirement for new pharmaceuticals to be tested and reviewed before being allowed on the market. Drugs are not approved for use until they are proven to cause no harm to potential patients and to provide the benefits claimed. Current policy with respect to commercializing activities in schools rests on the assumption that advertising is benign unless proven to be harmful.

The available evidence, however, suggests that the opposite is the case: advertising to children is likely to be harmful unless proven to be benign.

Advertising in schools favors special interests by allowing access to students to any company that buys it, simply because that company offers money or programming or has a

Commercializing programs in schools bring with them serious threats to children's education and to their psychological and physical well-being.

connection to a marketing company that has negotiated a contract with the school. Although school or district policy may claim not to favor its sponsors,¹⁸⁹ in reality, children are likely to perceive advertising in their school to be approved by the school.¹⁹⁰ On top of that, social forces in the school setting do often lead to an environment of support for sponsors' products and worldviews.¹⁹¹

Further, these processes take place in a system that is inherently inequitable. Advertising schemes that can raise significant sums of money, such as the placement of marquees to be seen by local traffic,¹⁹² are applicable only in high-income districts. However, the focus of many harmful advertising activities is on urban schools that serve low-income children. In these situations, the districts are so desperate for money that they are forced to overlook the threats to the children's longer-term well-being.

Finally, examples such as JA Biztown and NBC's musical theater program demonstrate that free-will corporate donations or corporate marketing programs are not reliable or appropriate sources of school funding. Such contributions are dependent on the corporation's business interests, not on an obligation to provide a steady source of funding to schools independent of any financial interests. From a business perspective, this is appropriate: corporations are legally bound to their stockholders to profit, not to prioritize education or any other outside interest. A corporation's claim to an interest in a particular community because it has customers or employees in that community cannot be considered a valid argument for depending on it as source of funding or for prioritizing its concerns in the education of the community's children: if the corporation moves its plant to a less expensive location or shuts an unsuccessful store, the corporation's interest in that location ends. State legislatures may also be capricious, but they are, at least, subject to democratic control and pressure. And because it takes so long to shift state funding formulas in any given direction, they are inherently more stable than corporate largesse.

It can be tempting to school and district administrators to accept or even solicit corporate sponsorships that promise to fill the holes in their budgets. Likewise, it can be tempting to follow the old advice to "not look a gift horse in the mouth." Our analysis suggests, however, that in the case of commercializing activities in schools, a critical look is definitely called for. Commercializing programs in schools bring with them serious threats to children's education and to their psychological and physical well-being. By considering the educational, psychological and health threats likely to be presented by various

advertising programs, and by considering factors that might augment or reduce those threats, stakeholders can begin to understand the effects that these programs have on children. Our analysis shows that advertising programs in schools are not neutral. They do affect children, and it would be naive to assume that they do not.

We recommend that stakeholders at all levels carefully assess the threats posed by advertising at their schools, whether the advertising is currently in place or proposed as a solution to current budget woes. In this report, we offer two frameworks that can assist stakeholders in this mission: first, the categories of schoolhouse commercialism can help identify how seemingly innocuous activities like a sponsored contest actually function as advertising; and second, the model of psychological, educational, and health threats can help clarify how these activities may harm children. Finally, our 2010 model legislation offers stakeholders three different ways of responding to the threats of commercialism: mandates, balancing tests and regulatory requirements, and process-based reform.¹⁹³ Parents, teachers, school and district decision-makers, and legislators can explore these options to define the response that best meets the needs of their community.

With obesity and its consequent illnesses so prevalent in our society, we must be concerned about the promotion of foods that are harmful when eaten to excess—particularly when those foods are the class of product most advertised to children in schools. At the same time, we must not lose sight of the more global reason to disallow commercializing activities in schools: to provide opportunity for children to develop fully as individuals and as citizens. Outside of school, children are surrounded by a consumer culture that encourages them to want more, to buy more, and to see consumerism as the highest good. We can allow that culture—with its attendant threats to children’s well-being—override the schools as well. Or, we can fund schools appropriately and help them realize their mission of nurturing in students the skills of critical thinking and self-determination.

Recommendation

Policymakers should prohibit advertising in schools unless the school provides compelling evidence that their intended advertising program causes no harm to children.

Appendix

The following websites associated with advertising and marketing, health care and nutrition, government policy, education, and academic research were regularly reviewed for material relevant to this report.

Table 1.

Source	Website
<i>*Advertising Age</i>	http://www.adage.com
<i>American Advertising Federation</i>	http://www.aaf.org/
<i>American Association of Advertising Agencies</i>	http://www2.aaaa.org/Portal/Pages/default.aspx
<i>American Beverage Association</i>	http://www.ameribev.org/ http://www.ameribev.org/blog/
<i>Association of National Advertisers:</i>	http://www.ana.net/
<i>Center for Science in the Public Interest</i>	http://www.cspinet.org/
<i>Consumers International</i>	http://consumersinternational.org/
<i>Food Marketing Workgroup</i>	http://www.foodmarketing.org/
<i>Consortium for Media Literacy</i>	http://www.consortiumformedialiteracy.org
<i>Federal Communications Commission</i>	http://www.fcc.gov/
<i>Federal Trade Commission</i>	http://www.ftc.gov
<i>Institute of Medicine</i>	http://www.iom.edu/Reports.aspx
<i>Interactive Food and Beverage Marketing - Montgomery & Chester</i>	http://www.digitalads.org/
<i>Kidscreen</i>	http://www.kidscreen.com
<i>British Psychological Society Research Digest Blog</i>	http://www.bps.org.uk/publications/rd/rd_home.cfm
<i>Campaign for Commercial Free Childhood</i>	http://www.commercialfreechildhood.org/
<i>Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives</i>	http://www.policyalternatives.ca/
<i>Commercial Alert</i>	http://www.commercialalert.org/
<i>Empowered by Play</i>	http://www.empoweredbyplay.org/
<i>*Journal of Consumer Research</i>	http://www.press.uchicago.edu/ucp/journals/journal/jcr.html
<i>Medpage Today</i>	http://www.medpagetoday.com
<i>Nielson</i>	http://www.nielsen.com/
<i>*Pediatrics</i>	http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/
<i>PEN Weekly Newsletter</i>	http://www.publiceducation.org/newsblast_current.asp
<i>Product Placement News</i>	http://productplacement.biz/
<i>Public Education Network</i>	http://www.publiceducation.org/newsblast_current.asp
<i>Youth Markets Alert</i>	http://www.epmcom.com/

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The definition of commercialism is somewhat more elusive. *Commercialism* is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as “the principles and practice of commerce; excessive adherence to financial return as a measure of worth.” James Twitchell describes commercialism as consisting of two processes, “*commodification*, or stripping an object of all other values except its value for sale to someone else, and *marketing*, the insertion of the object into a network of exchanges only some of which involve money.” The Center for the Study of Commercialism characterized it as “ubiquitous product marketing that leads to a preoccupation with individual consumption to the detriment of oneself and society.”

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"Individuals are controlled through the power of the norm and this power is effective because it is relatively invisible. In modern society, the behaviour of individuals is regulated not through overt repression, but through a set of standards and values associated with normality which are set into play by a network of ostensibly beneficent and scientific forms of knowledge."

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"So the images, the values, the ideas of advertising are lodged inside us because that's the way all culture works. To not be influenced by advertising would be to live outside of culture. No human being lives outside of culture."

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Halpern (1998), points out (p. 453) that the transfer and use of critical thinking skills to a variety of real-world situations is facilitated by the creation of elaborated cognitive structures associated with those skills. Although she does not focus on the classroom and school environments as a source of developing those elaborated cognitive structures, she emphasizes that any program to teach thinking should draw questions and scenarios from the real-world contexts of the workplace and “in the exercise of citizenship” (p. 453). To the extent that students get practice extending the thinking skills they learn in class to the “real-life” contexts they face out of class, they may be more likely to recognize when other real-life situations emerge that warrant the application of their skills.

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Weinstock, M., Assor, A., & Broide, G. (2009). Schools as promoters of moral judgment: The essential role of teachers' encouragement of critical thinking. *Social Psychology in Education*, 12, 137-151.

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67 A subsequent accomplishment was the U.S. Department of Agriculture's release of draft standards for sale of competitive foods in schools in February 2013. As of press time, public comments are still being received by the USDA, and the final disposition of the standards is not yet determined.

Find the draft standards here:

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81 Our focus on North America and Ireland is based on where we as authors live and what we see around us, but we believe this is not particularly problematic. The theory we are trying to develop is about the effect on children of corporate engagement in their schools, not about such engagement in any particular location. Our examples are meant to be illustrative, not exhaustive.

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1. The decentralized nature of curriculum development and approval processes in the U.S. meant that each school and school district is forced to depend on its own, often limited, resources for evaluating the accuracy, fairness, and educational value of each sponsored material or program offered to them.
2. The principle of democratic control of curriculum content (generally through an elected school board) is jeopardized by the abundance of unsolicited and unevaluated materials following into the schools from well-funded outside interests.
3. Sponsored materials and programs pose a distraction from the already crowded course of study required to meet state or local standards.

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