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Adolescents' responses to the gender valence of cigarette advertising imagery: The role of affect and the self-concept

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Abstract

The studies presented in this manuscript evaluated the role that affect and the self-concept play in adolescent never smokers' reactions to the gender valence of cigarette advertising imagery. Study 1 (n=29; 59% female) revealed that adolescent females have more positive affective reactions to female-valenced cigarette advertising imagery compared to male-valenced cigarette advertising imagery. Study 2 (n=101; 56% female) revealed that adolescent females viewed female-valenced cigarette advertising imagery as more relevant to their self-concepts compared to male-valenced cigarette advertising imagery. Across both studies, male adolescents did not respond differently as a function of the gender valence of cigarette advertising imagery. Thus, female-valenced cigarette advertising imagery may have specific effects on never smoking female adolescents by enhancing positive affect and suggesting that women who smoke hold the same characteristics as do the young women themselves.
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1. Introduction

Smoking prevalence rates increased throughout the 1990s in both male and female adolescents; male adolescents' smoking prevalence rates peaked at 37.7% in 1997 and female adolescents' smoking prevalence rates peaked at 34.9% in 1999 (CDC, 2002a). Smoking prevalence rates among both male and female adolescents decreased from 1999 to 2002 (CDC, 2002a, 2002b; Johnston, O'Malley, & Bachman, 2003), though a relatively large

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percentage of adolescents of both genders can still be classified as current smokers (males at 29.2% and females at 27.7%; CDC, 2002a, 2002b). Additional gender differences have been observed with other smoking behaviors, for example, male adolescents are more likely to report having ever tried smoking compared to female adolescents (66.3% vs. 61.6%) and to report regular heavy smoking (>10 cigarettes/day on each day smoked for 30 previous days; 5.2% vs. 3.1%; CDC, 2002b). A greater proportion of male adolescents seem to experiment with smoking at earlier ages and initiate regular smoking at earlier ages compared to female adolescents (USDHHS, 2001). Thus, there is a clear need to uncover factors that contribute to differences in initiation between males and female adolescents, and also, which contribute to differences in their ongoing smoking behavior.

Myriad factors are probably responsible for smoking initiation among adolescents, but a chief contributing factor may be exposure to cigarette advertising (USDHHS, 2001; Wakefield, Flay, Nichter, & Giovino, 2003). However, very little information is available about precisely how cigarette advertising might influence smoking among adolescents specifically (USDHHS, 2001; see also Shadel, Niaura, & Abrams, 2001). Studies that have examined cigarette advertising with reference to adolescent smoking have focused on the images displayed by the advertisements (Covell, 1992; Covell, Dion, & Dion, 1994; Krupka & Vener, 1992; Krupka, Vener, & Richmond, 1990; Romer & Jamieson, 2001; Shadel, Niaura, & Abrams, 2002, Shadel, Niaura, & Abrams, in press; Slovic, 2001). Cigarette advertisements that use extensive amounts of text are relatively rare; most advertisements present images with a single theme and minimal text describing cigarettes or the effects of smoking (Warner, 1985). Cigarette advertisements appear to be tailored differentially to males and females (USDHHS, 2001). Cigarette advertisements designed to appeal to females use images that emphasize issues that may be of special concern to women (USDHHS, 2001), for example, that smokers are lean, attractive, independent, and self-reliant (Krupka & Vener, 1992; Krupka et al., 1990). In contrast, cigarette advertising that is tailored to males may emphasize so-called masculine images (Krupka & Vener, 1992; Krupka et al., 1990; USDHHS, 2001). However, the reasons that such images may differentially influence smoking behavior adolescent males and females are not well understood (USDHHS, 2001).

Several theory-driven mechanisms may account for the differential effects that gender-valenced imagery in cigarette advertisements may have on male and female adolescents' smoking behaviors. First, affective responses to advertising are an important component of their persuasive efficacy in general (Geuens & DePelsmacker, 1998), and the positive affective reactions that cigarette advertising produces may in part drive adolescents' decision to smoke (Romer & Jamieson, 2001; Slovic, 2001). As such, female-valenced advertising imagery (i.e., images that emphasize themes of relevance to women) would be expected to produce more positive affective reactions among female adolescents compared to advertising imagery that is male valenced (i.e., images that emphasize themes of relevance to men). Male adolescents would be expected to show more positive affective reactions to male-valenced imagery compared to female-valenced imagery. Second, the self-concept undergoes a significant degree of change during adolescence (Harter, 1999) and adolescents may look to outside sources, such as to cigarette advertisements, as they struggle to define and redefine themselves (Shadel et al.,

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