Gender portrayal in Hong Kong children’s television advertising

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Abstract

A sample of 93 children commercials was content analyzed to examine the differences between commercials directed at boys and girls in Hong Kong. Results indicated that there were more commercials targeting at boys than girls. The voice of the narration is male-dominated. There was evidence of gender stereotypes for boys’ commercials in the production techniques. Commercials targeted at males more often use upbeat music and dark color. Gender stereotype was not strong for girls’ commercials. Girls were as active as boys and they were shown in similar proportion in outdoor locations as in boys commercials. However, girls in commercials always behaved well while boys occasionally showed aggressive and anti-social behaviors.
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Introduction

Extensive research has been done on the issue of gender roles in adult advertising and has supported the stereotyped portrayal of the two genders in television advertising (Dominick and Rausch, 1972; Manstead and McCulloh, 1981; Flitterman, 1983; Livingstone and Green, 1986). Consistently, female characters are more likely to be associated with commercials for domestic products usually in the home setting. Men are most often seen in non-domestic product categories and settings. Commercials more often use male voice-overs than female voices. The pattern of male predominance in terms of numerical representation and of authority has been witnessed for many years, and remained the same in recent years (Gunter 1995; Pearson, West and Turner, 1995; Mackay and Covell, 1997). Research on stereotyping in advertising to children reveals a similar pattern to that reported for adults commercials (Welch, Huston-Stein, Wright and Plehal, 1979; Macklin and Kolbe, 1984; Kline and Pentecost, 1990; Smith, 1994; Furnham, Abramsky and Gunter, 1997).

A number of studies have been conducted to identify gender-stereotyping in adult television commercials in Hong Kong and China (Siu, 1996; Siu and Au, 1997). However, the authors are not aware of any published study on the gender-roles portrayals in television commercials targeted at children viewers in Hong Kong. This research attempts to fill this
The research objectives of the current study are:

- to examine whether there are differences between commercials directed at boys and girls,
  and

- to explore whether a similar pattern of gender role portrayals is present in commercials
  aiming at children as that of their adult counterparts.

The findings can provide information on the role models to which Hong Kong children
are being exposed on television, and the extent of gender stereotyping in Hong Kong’s
children commercials. The results will be useful to child educators and scholars in children
studies, and the government, in reviewing the public policy of advertising regulation in Hong
Kong.

Literature Review

Early studies in adult advertisements

The first major academic study of gender portrayal in television advertising was
conducted in 1971. In a sample of about 1,000 television commercials from network stations
in New York, Dominick and Rausch (1972) reported a profound pattern of gender-stereotype.
They found that the television commercials conveyed the message that a woman’s place is in
the home, with 75 percent of commercials using female characters to advertise domestic
products. Men were more often depicted as professionals (such as pilots, doctors, instructors,
businessmen), and were located outside the home. On the contrary, when women were
featured, over half of the women featured were housewives and mothers, and were shown
inside the home. Men dominated 87 percent of the voice-over of the commercials, while
women occupied 6 percent and the remaining 7 percent as chorus.

The findings were not exclusive to television commercials. In an attempt to examine still
pictures in print advertisements, Goffman (1976) found that camera angles and other
techniques used in photographs also exhibited traditional gender-role stereotypes of men and
women. Female characters were predominantly engaged in submissive gestures which
emphasized eagerness and subordination. Male characters were more often seen as giving
support and protection to women.

The Social Learning theory approach to the study of children advertising

Study of gender role representation on television has derived from the idea that the
televised messages can provide children with models to imitate, and in return, to reinforce
their behaviors. According to the "Social Learning Theory" (Bandura, 1969), a society
defines what is male and what is female and the definition is transmitted to children. Children
learn gender roles through observation and imitation, together with rewards and punishment.
By observing members of their own gender and copying that behavior, children can discover
how they are supposed to behave.

Analysis of content features
Smith (1994) examined 82 "gender-positioned ads" (that is, advertisements featuring one gender of characters only) broadcast on the American network channels in 1991. A profound stereotyping was reported. Smith (1994) hypothesized that, owing to the behavioral difference between girls and boys (girls are more likely to play with boys’ toys than boys to play with girls’ toys), advertisers would position products that are more likely to be consumed by both genders towards boys than towards girls. The findings supported the hypothesis. Of the 82 advertisements, 33 percent were ads positioned for girls, and 67 percent were ads positioned for boys. The gender of narrator was found to correspond to the gender positioning of the advertisements. There is no substantial difference in the category of "activities" in terms of "passive" and "physical" movements. However, it is quite interesting to note that only boys exhibited anti-social behavior. Smith (1994) therefore argued that this might be an outcome of stereotyping, when males are most often portrayed as aggressive, physically active and needing to win, in contrast to female images of nurturing and sharing.

Analysis of production techniques

Welch et al. (1979) examined children’s toy commercials using angles that focused on the "production features," namely the audio and visual presentation techniques such as pace, cuts, sound effects and level of action. Welch et al. (1979) argued that while "form" (or production techniques) is relatively independent of manifest content, it is not devoid of meaning. At a structural level, the subtle messages about masculine and feminine behavior
conveyed by the formal features may be more influential than the explicit stereotypes presented in content. In analyzing a sample of 60 toy advertisements, Welch et al. (1979) found marked differences in visual and audio presentation among commercials targeted at girls, boys and both genders. “Aggression,” in particular towards objects and physical subjects, was found exclusively limited to boys’ ads. Male and neutral commercials had higher rates of cuts and tended to be louder and more dramatic than female commercials. Female commercials contained more fades and dissolves, and were more often accompanied by soft background music. For voice-overs, although the gender of the narrator was usually the same as that of the characters in each type of commercials, the narrators in neutral commercials were found predominantly male.

Welch et al. (1979) therefore concluded that the production techniques for boys’ and girls’ ads would create implicit patterns of masculinity and femininity. The dominance of male voice-overs suggested that males were most often portrayed as the authority figures. Fades, dissolves and soft background music in girls’ ads implied the images of softness, gentleness and predictability. And these were the "unconscious" stereotypes of females as quiet, soft, gentle and inactive. The exclusive depiction of aggression in boys’ ads consolidated the images of toughness, quick changes and high energy, which was distinctively "masculine." The pattern, along with its association with masculine behavior, reinforced that the idea of aggression was within the boundary of men.
Hypotheses

Based on the reviewed literature, the study has the following three hypotheses.

H1: More commercials will position towards boys than girls.

H2: More commercials show girls engaged in passive and obedient behavior, and boys engaged in active and aggressive behavior.

H3: Girls’ commercials are more likely to use domestic settings while boys’ commercials are more likely to use out-of-home settings.

Research Method

Sampling of commercials

Commercials were taped from two major Chinese commercial stations, i.e. TVB (Jade Channel) and ATV (Home Channel) over the first three weekends in February, March and April 1999. Commercials broadcast during children’s programs on Saturday and Sunday mornings between 9:00 a.m. and 11:45 a.m., as well as afternoons, between 3:30 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. in each channel were taped.

Duplicated commercials were not included in order to eliminate the bias from broadcast frequency of commercials. Public services announcements from the Government, station promotional spots and station identity messages were excluded. Commercials that were target at adult viewers were also eliminated from the analysis. These included adult-positioned ads of which the prime purchasers and users are exclusively adults, for example, real estate,
kitchen utensils, electrical appliances, furniture, cosmetics, and skincare products.

**Coding procedures**

The unit of analysis was the individual television commercial as well as the individual central figure within each commercial. Up to two central figures are coded for each commercial. The coding scheme is detailed in the Appendix. The coding scheme was based on the studies of Smith (1994), Welch et al. (1979), Kline and Pentecost (1990), and Siu (1996). All commercials were video-taped and later replayed in order to review each commercial’s content. Two female Chinese graduates with working experience in television advertising carried out the content analysis. One quarter of the sample was re-examined by one of the authors. Discrepancies were resolved after discussion among the authors. The inter-coder reliability for variables coded for the commercial ranged from 0.87 for ‘fade and dissolve’ to 1.0 for ‘voice-over’, ‘product target’ and ‘dialogue’. The inter-coder reliability for variables coded for central figures ranged from 0.79 for ‘authority’ to 1.0 for age and sex of central figures.

**Findings**

The sample consisted of 93 commercials. Table 1 shows the sample profile. Food and drink, and fast food commercials made up nearly sixty percent of the sample. Toys and entertainment occupied another 27 percent and 10 percent respectively.
Table 1. Sample profile (N=93)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product Category</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Toys</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character toys and dolls</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snacks/Food</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>36.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drinks</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fast Food</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stationery</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others (medicine)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 shows the types of children-positioned commercials. Among all sampled commercials, 19.4 percent were commercials with male characters only, 16.1 percent were commercials with females, and 19.4 percent were commercials featuring both genders. There were no substantial differences in the numbers of commercials aiming specifically at girls and at boys.

Table 2. Types of children-positioned commercials (N=93)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Human:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males only</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females only</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both genders</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-human:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cartoons, puppets,</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>animals, toy models</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No human characters</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>30.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Product target

Of the 93 commercials, seventy-three were on products targeting at both genders (79
percent). There were sixteen and four commercials targeting at boys and girls respectively. The percentages of commercials targeting at males and females were 17 percent and 4 percent respectively. Number of commercials targeted exclusively at boys were four times that targeted exclusively at girls.

Result of hypothesis testing: H1 was supported. There were more commercials targeting boys than girls.

**Gender of narrators**

Table 3 shows the cross-tabulation of gender of voice-overs for commercials for different gender target groups. Commercial narrators were predominantly males. Of the 93 commercials, 61 used male voices alone and 23 used female voices alone. The remaining commercials used voice-overs of both genders (2 ads only) or no voice-overs (7 ads). An overwhelming majority of male voice-overs, compared to female voice-overs. For the four commercials targeted at girls, three used female narrators and one used male narrators. However, of the sixteen commercials targeted at boys, none of them used female voices.

Table 3. Voice-overs by product target group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender of voice-overs</th>
<th>Male(N=16)</th>
<th>Female(N=4)</th>
<th>Both(N=73)</th>
<th>Total(N=93)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chi-square: 14.9; significance<0.05
Central figures

There were 51 commercials with central characters, of which 18 were targeted at male children viewers, 15 were targeted at females and 18 were at both genders. Altogether 73 central figures were coded. A majority of the central figures (82 percent) occurred in commercials targeted at both genders. Commercials targeted at boys and girls had nearly equal number of central figures.

Gender of central figures

The proportions of male and female central figures were nearly equal, with 52 percent males versus 48 percent female characters. Gender of the central figures was strongly associated with the gender of the target groups. All commercials targeted at boys used male central figures. A majority of commercials targeted at girls used female central figures. Commercials targeted at both genders contained nearly equal proportion of male and female central figures.

Activity of central figures

Table 4 shows the activity of the male and female central figures. Slightly more male central figures engaged in physically active activities than female central figures. The activities included jogging, riding bikes, strolling along streets, running and chasing each other, and demonstrating the stunts of a toy. Female central characters were more likely to be shown in passive activity. The activities included playing with dolls and toys, reading
storybooks, playing video games or board games, lying on the floor or in a bed, looking at pictures in a photo-album, or simply chatting with her companions. However, some commercials attempt to feature a different stereotype. For example in the "CALBEE Prawn Cracker" commercial, a little girl took the initiative to make friends in a new environment while the boys did not do so.

Only boys showed aggressive and anti-social behaviors and none of the female central figures showed similar behaviors. Boys were seen playing laser guns in a war game scenario and aiming at individuals and objects. They might also be portrayed as trouble-makers at home whose naughty behaviors had threatened their pets and robot toys. None of the sampled commercials showed boys or girls engaged in socially approved behaviors.

Table 4. Activity by gender of central figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Activity</th>
<th>Male(N=38)</th>
<th>Female(N=35)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Passive</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggressive</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-social</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obedient</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eating &amp; drinking</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chi-square: 7.1; Not significant at 0.05 level.

Results of hypothesis testing: H2 was not supported. No evidence showed that males were more likely to engage in active and aggressive role while females in passive and obedient role.
Authority of central figures

Of the 73 central figures, only 13 (18 percent) were presented with an authoritative image, such as giving advice, verbal approval to the advertised products or making recommendation to the viewers. Among the 13 authoritative central figures, six were males and seven were females. Chi-square test indicated that there was no association between gender of central figures and whether he or she was an authoritative character. Female authoritative central figures were mainly adult models, such as mother, grandmother, baby-sitter and celebrity figures. Male authoritative central figures were most often adult models in the role of father, scientist and technical personnel.

Production techniques

Table 5 summarizes the audio and visual presentation of the commercials by different gender target groups. The audio presentation includes use of dialogues, sound effects and music. The visual presentation includes use of quick cuts, fades and dissolves, color schemes and shooting locations. Chi-square tests are conducted to investigate whether the presentation format depends on the target gender.
Table 5. Production techniques

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Production techniques</th>
<th>Total (N=93)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use dialogue</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use sound effect</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up-beat and strong</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soft and slow</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-specific</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use fades and dissolves</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use quick cuts</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Color</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pastel and bright</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solid and dark</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-specific</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indoors</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outdoors</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indoor and outdoors</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fantasy</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unidentified</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sound effects**

Over half of the sample contained sound effects. Sound effects were found in all three types of positioned commercials: 75 percent in males, 50 percent in females and 55 percent in
gender-neutral ads. There was no significant difference in the use of sound effects among the three types of commercials. Most sound effects were associated with the advertised product, such as the dramatic noise made by chewing and swallowing food, the sucking, the shooting in a laser gun fight, the crashing sound in toy vehicles, the magical chimes in fashion dolls and the high-pitched tone from an electronic video game.

**Music**

A majority of children commercials (85%) used music. About two thirds of the sample used music that could neither be classified as upbeat nor soft. Chi-square tests indicated that use of music was related with product target group. Nearly all sampled commercials for boys had loud and upbeat music. The music usually had low bass and drum beats and was frequently occurred in commercials of robot toys. Surprisingly, none of the commercials for girls used slow and soft music. Instead, the commercials for girls all used non-specific music. Rather than using a slow and tender mood of music, the sample of girls’ commercials used music that was uplifting and cheerful.

**Fades and dissolves**

Use of fades and dissolves were not common. Only 20 percent of the sample contained fades and dissolves. Both boys’ and gender-neutral commercials contained fades and dissolves, with 13 percent for the former and 23 percent for the latter. Contrary to expectation, girls’ commercials did not contain more fades and dissolves than boys’ commercials. None of
the girls’ commercials contained these visual features. Chi-square test indicated that there was no association between product target gender and use of fades and dissolves.

**Quick cuts**

Quick-cuts were commonly used in children commercials. Nearly half of the sample had such visual features. Quick-cuts was a significant visual techniques in both boys’ and girls’ commercials, accounting for 75 percent for both types of commercials. Surprisingly, the neutral commercials less frequently used quick cuts. Most quick cuts were used to show products from different camera angles or to highlight different usage of the products. Some shifts were probably production techniques designed to enhance speed, action or even toughness of the product nature, such as guns and vehicle toys.

**Color**

Two thirds of the commercials did not have a specific color scheme. Nearly one quarter of commercials used pastel and bright color and 10 percent used solid and dark color. Boys’ commercials were more likely to use solid and dark color than girls’ commercials. Most of the girls’ commercials used non-specific color and only 25 percent used pastel and bright color. None of the girls’ commercials, however, used solid and dark color.

**Location**

Most commercials used indoor settings (34%) and fantasy and make-believe cartoon settings (32%). Outdoor and an equal mix of indoor and outdoor settings were less frequently
used and contributed to another 17% and 4% respectively. However, chi-square test indicated that location was not associated with product target gender. Result of hypothesis testing: H3 was not supported.

Table 6 summarizes the major findings of the current study.

Table 6. Summary of major findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of analysis</th>
<th>Major findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Gender composition   | • there were nearly equal proportion of commercials featuring males only and females only  
|                      | • there were nearly equal numbers of male and female central figures          
|                      | • there were four times more commercials targeting at males than targeting at females |
| Gender of voice-overs| • male dominance in commercials targeting at both genders                      
|                      | • gender of voice-overs usually same as gender of target group                 |
| Central figures      | • usually same gender as gender of target group                                
|                      | • female central figures more likely to be portrayed as young                  
|                      | • nearly equal number of female and male central figures took authoritative roles |
| Location             | • location was not associated with gender of target group                      |
| Production techniques| • commercials targeted at males more likely to use upbeat music                 
|                      | • commercials targeted at females did not use soft music                       
|                      | • commercials targeted at males only or females only more likely to use quick cuts than commercials targeted at both genders |
|                      | • commercials for males more likely to use solid and dark color                |

Although male dominance was not found in terms of central figures and number of
commercials featuring one gender only, male dominance occurred in terms of number of commercials targeting at a specific gender and the use of voice-overs. Production techniques also showed difference among commercials targeting at males and females.

**Discussions**

Content analysis of children commercials in Hong Kong did not support a strong gender stereotype as that found in previous studies of Smith (1994) and Welch et al. (1979). Perhaps the most striking result was the male dominance found in the use of narratives. As Fitterman (1983) argued, male announcers represented the voice of truth and authority, combined with the omniscient power of the being-beyond-the-screen masculine position. Male voices were regarded as a “guarantee of authenticity” in commercials. Male predominance in voice-overs was found in adult commercials in Hong Kong (Siu, 1996).

The study did not find more commercials featuring males only than commercials featuring females only. There were nearly equal numbers of male and female central figures. However, male dominance was reflected by the fact that there were more commercials targeting at males than females. As hypothesized by Smith (1994), more advertisements would be positioned toward boys than towards girls because girls would show interest in boys’ products than boys were to show interest in girls’ products. Advertisers are less willing to targeted at female audience alone unless the products are exclusively for girls. In the current study, there were only four out of 93 commercials that targeted at girls, including
Barbie dolls, Kelly dolls, a kitchen toy commercial and a snack commercial.

Unlike the findings in most adult advertisements, this study did not reveal that males enjoyed more authoritative roles in children advertising. There were about the same proportions of male and female central figures that took the authoritative roles. Female central figures taking authoritative roles were more likely to be mothers and grandmothers. In children commercials, female central figures were more frequently featured as mothers and housewives who were supposed to stay home and looked after the children. The range of roles for female central figures in children advertising was narrow. On the other hand, male central figures taking authoritative roles had a wider variety of professions. The frequent portrayal of mothers and housewives in children commercials may reinforce in children the restrictive nature of women’s roles as the primary caretakers and homemakers. Central figures taking authoritative role were not exclusive to adult models. Children were also empowered with authority. There were two incidences that children reversed their roles as advice-seekers and became advisers. The first one was the YACULT health drink commercials. The boy enjoyed the drink so much that he reminded his father to take it. The second one was the WRIGLEY’s Extra for Kids gum commercials. A little boy gave opinions on how the product worked to solve tooth decay problem to his peers. Although role reversal was rare in the sample, it was worth-noting that only boys were given authoritative roles. None of the girl central figures took an authoritative role.
The current study found that both genders performed a wide variety of activities. There is no substantial difference in the category of "activities" in terms of "passive" and "physical" movements. Only boys exhibited aggressive and anti-social behaviors. Girls always behaved themselves and were not allowed to make trouble in the commercials. This was the same as found in Smith’s (1994) study. This may be an outcome of stereotyping when males are most often portrayed as aggressive, physically active and needing to win. Aggression is associated with masculinity and is within the boundary of a man’s world.

Similar to the findings of Kline and Pentecost (1990), the most prominent type of music carried in boys’ commercials was upbeat and strong. Whereas for girls’ and neutral commercials, most were found in the non-specific type of music, usually characterized by a pleasant but not distinctive mood of melody. However, contradicted with the findings of Kline and Pentecost (1990), none of the commercials targeted at girls fell into the soft and slow type of music. Soft and romantic type of melody was not common in Hong Kong’s children advertising.

The findings in fades and dissolves and quick cuts revealed an unusual pattern in children’s commercials. Contrary to previous findings by Welch et.al. (1979) and Kline and Pentecost (1990), no girls’ commercials in the sample contained fades and dissolves, but on the other hand, girls’ commercials used quick cuts. For boys’ commercials, though use of quick cuts was common, fades and dissolves were also used. Unlike earlier findings, fades
and dissolves were not exclusive to girls’ ads and the use of quick camera shifts was not dominated by boys’ commercials.

The less frequent use of fades and dissolves and soft music in commercials targeted at girls may be due to the type of product advertised. Previous studies (Kline and Pentecost 1990; Smith, 1994) found that gender stereotype children commercials usually occurred in character toys and toy commercials. Soft music and use of fades and dissolves helped to communicate the quiet and gentle moments playing dolls for girls. However, Hong Kong’s children commercials were dominated by food and drink commercials and toy commercials only made up about one quarter of the sample. Food and drinks commercials need to communicate the enjoyment and fun that are associated with the consumption of the product. Use of quick cuts and cheerful music may better fit the communication context.

Findings in coloration also revealed an interesting pattern. Though a vast majority of commercials were rated as neutral colors, the use of color reflected the stereotyped preferences for boys. Kline and Pentecost (1990) argued that the use of color would definitely influence the feelings of femininity and masculinity one received. Perhaps not surprising, this study revealed that solid and dark tones were still reserved for boys, marking out their boundary of masculinity. On the other hand, none was reported in girls’. However, pastel and bright colors were not limited to girls’ commercials. In fact, most were seen in neutral commercials.
To conclude, gender stereotype did exist in Hong Kong’s children commercials at the subtle level when we examined the production techniques. Findings reported differences in use of music and color. Commercials targeted at males were more likely to use upbeat music and dark color. However, commercials targeted at females were not more likely to use soft music or pastel color. Use of dialogue and sound effect, and shooting location were not associated with product target gender. Quick cuts were not limited to commercials for boys. Commercials targeting at girls also used a lot of quick cuts as well. In other words, there were evidences to show the gender stereotypes for boys but not for girls in Hong Kong commercials.

**Conclusion**

The current results indicated that there were more commercials targeted at boys than girls. Male voices were much more likely to be used in narration. Only boys sometimes make trouble and would show aggressive behaviors. Girls' commercials contained more pleasant melodies (but not soft) in a background of neutral colors while boys' commercials contained more loud music in a dull and solid background. There was no significant difference in the gender portrayal of physical activities and location of boys and girls. To conclude, the study showed that there was some gender stereotypes in children commercials in Hong Kong. The stereotypes were stronger for boys than for girls.
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