Author's response to reviews

Title: Health Disparities and Advertising Content of Women's Magazines: a cross-sectional study.

Authors:

Susan Duerksen (susand@cts.com)
Amy Mikail (amikail@ucsd.edu)
Laura Tom (farbeyondthestars@hotmail.com)
Annie Patton (anniebanany03@yahoo.com)
Janina Lopez (janinalopez@hotmail.com)
Xavier Amador (xamador@ucsd.edu)
Reynaldo Vargas (rvargas@ucsd.edu)
Maria Victorio (mvictori@ucsd.edu)
Brenda Kustin (bkustin@ucsd.edu)
Georgia R Sadler (gsadler@ucsd.edu)

Version: 4 Date: 22 March 2005

Author's response to reviews: see over
March 8, 2005

Editorial Board

*BioMed Central: Public Health*

Re: Health disparities and advertising content of women’s magazines: a cross sectional study

Dear Editorial Board,

I am pleased to submit the enclosed revised manuscript for review from my research team. Below please find the responses to the reviewer comments. Thank you for considering this manuscript. We hope you will find these changes acceptable.

Answers to Reviewer comments

1) We made some arbitrary judgments in the process of classifying food advertisements as promoting healthy or unhealthy products. These judgments are described in more detail in the revised version of the paper. Categories of foods and beverages, rather than specific advertisements, were judged to have positive, negative or mixed potential impact on health. For instance, all processed cereals were coded as mixed, rather than attempting to evaluate the sugar content of each cereal advertised.

There were only two advertisements, both in the same magazine, that were classified as “pseudotreatments” and were referred to as quackery in the paper. That reference has been changed to “medical treatments with no apparent value.” The advertisements in question were for a “blood treatment” and a “plasma treatment,” neither specifying what the treatment consisted of or what condition it was intended to treat.

2) Yes, some ads had multiple faces, and we counted every face that was, as we said in the paper, “at least half visible.” (We used specific criteria for “half”: either one vertical side of the face including at least part of the nose and one eye, or the top half including hair and eyes or the bottom half including nose and mouth. We decided to exclude photos of people shown from the back or of body parts other than the face, no matter how big the photo or how obvious the subject’s race.) Table 5 indicates the total number of White and Black faces counted in the 2X2 table (positive and negative health impact ads and Mainstream and African-American magazines), and it also indicates the number of advertising pages with even one Black or White face displayed. For instance, the health-related ads in Mainstream magazines had a total of 232 White faces on 138 pages. We reported both because differences in the size of the photos made the number of faces alone somewhat misleading; one face might cover an entire page in some ads but just be among a group of faces in the background of others.

We originally set out to count four categories of faces in the ads: White, Black, Hispanic and Other. "Other" was primarily Asian, but there were almost none in these magazines.
The counts of Hispanic faces also were very low, at least partly because it was difficult to definitively identify a face as Hispanic, as explained in the paper. Therefore, we decided to focus on the differences in the use of White and Black role models in the advertisements. In the very few cases in which there was any doubt whether the person pictured was White or Black, those photos were classified as Other and were excluded from the analysis.

The consensus process included discussions of any problematic coding decisions at meetings of the entire group of magazine reviewers. Problematic decisions were those in which the third reviewer could not comfortably decide between differing coding by the first two reviewers. This process rarely had to be used, and never failed to result in a consensus decision, with authors Duerksen, Mikail and Sadler taking final responsibility for the decisions.

3) We did not perform statistical evaluation of the findings reported. The wording has been changed to reflect that. Regarding the numbers of role models in positive and negative health-related ads, we did not intend to compare the ratio of Black to White faces in African-American magazines, but the ratio of White faces in positive ads versus negative ads in mainstream magazines (138:5 for pages; 232:8 for total faces) and the ratio of Black faces in positive versus negative ads in African-American magazines (30:23 for pages; 47:47 for total faces).

4) Agreed. That citation has been deleted.

5) Reference has been inserted.

6) Point has been clarified and references updated

7) Reference has been inserted

8) All have been capitalized.

9) New wording has been added to define "general interest." We defined it as magazines covering a broad range of topics, not just fashion or celebrity gossip or any other narrow interest.

10) Very good point. The statement has been deleted.

11) That was a typo. It has been deleted.

12) Yes, there were misprints and inexplicable deletions in those three references, and they have been corrected. We have checked the citation list for similar errors.

13) The Pratt study examined only the three magazines. Readership age was reported quite differently, as the number of readers in each of six age categories. Ladies Home
Journal definitely had more readership in the older age categories than the other two, but it is impossible to calculating median age. The specific percentages of alcohol advertisements reported have been added to our paper.

14) Agreed. It has been moved.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with further questions.

Sincerely,

Georgia Robins Sadler, M.B.A., Ph.D.
Clinical Professor of Surgery
UCSD School of Medicine