

NOTE: This student paper has been only lightly edited to correct its most egregious grammar and punctuation errors, leaving the great majority. Your critical response to this paper should be based on its content in terms of your understanding of our class writing principles, more than on mere surface matters, unless they are a distraction from the content of the paper.

Grocery Store Distractions

"Thirty percent of all items purchased by consumers are done so without previous intention of buying," according to Albertson Grocery Store Assistant Manager Paul Gibbons. This impulse buying can be attributed to subconscious actions made by the buyers themselves. My study of the Albertson's grocery store in Richardson, Texas, on Plano Road and Beltline, demonstrates how much psychological manipulation contributes to much of this "unnecessary buying (Gibson)." In particular, the cereal aisle at Albertson's is especially illustrative of these psychologically manipulative techniques.

On first looking at the Albertson's cereal aisle, I noticed the psychological use of colors on the sugar cereal boxes aimed at children, versus the more adult cereals. The items on the middle and lower shelves, containing the sugar cereals within a child's reach, attract a buyer's attention with their bright colored boxes. Warm colors, such as red, yellow and orange, are used on 80% of the sugary cereals (Gibbons). For example, the background of the box of Kellogg's FROOT LOOPS® is a bright, bright red. The letters spelling "Froot Loops" on the upper portion of the box appear to jump out at the consumer. This is done by shadowing the white letters with a dark black, creating a three-dimensional effect. Not only is the name of the product outlined in black, all other objects appearing on the front of the box are shadowed to enhance their visual appeal. Other bright, primary colors, such as neon orange, purple and lime green, are seen throughout the face of the box. These colors are most attractive to the eye of a child. My further research into the effect of color on children shows that bright colors on boxes of sugary cereals is designed. Child psychologist Lynn Erickson points out that "children are taught the basic colors at a very early age. Since the cereals that appeal to children are boxed in the same primary colors, the boxes are more

recognizable to a child's eye (Erickson)." An even more direct kind of color manipulation is aimed at the children who want cereals such as FROOT LOOPS®. Dr. Erickson explains: "Bright colors, such as the ones used on the FROOT LOOPS® box, create excitement within a child's brain. The color red, for example, stimulates interest and curiosity within a child (Erickson)." If a child is stimulated by the colors on a box of a particular kind or brand of cereal, it makes sense that the child would want that box, not because it tastes good, but because it looks good.

The psychological manipulation by the colors used on cereal boxes is demonstrated by contrast in the designs of the healthier cereals aimed at adults, the boxes on the higher shelves, where only adults can reach. The boxes of healthier cereal have darker and earthier toned colors. These tones, such as shades of brown and green, give the idea of nature and healthiness to an adult's mind. Dr. Erickson explained to me that earth colors, like the brown on many adult, healthy cereal boxes, "create a sense of peace within an adult's mind (Erickson)" Kellogg's COMPLETE BRAN FLAKES® is a perfect example of this color scheme. It uses a dull, brownish-orange background on the upper portion of the box, fading into a dull yellow toward the bottom. With this kind of color scheme, manufacturers are appealing to adults, not children. Generally, these earthy colors are less exciting; they do not stimulate buying as strongly as the primary colors aimed at children. This is because product is more important to the adult than excitement, according to Dr. Erickson, at least when it comes to breakfast cereal (Erickson). Still, different colors are used to appeal to the child's eye and to the adult's eye. This is the kind of color psychological manipulation that is used on the cereal aisle at Albertsons.

In addition to color manipulation, the crafty placement of products on the Albertson's shelf can also increase impulse buying by appealing psychologically to children. This is done by the way merchandise is placed on the shelves. The cereal section of Albertson's is arguably the most thought-out and carefully planned aisle of the entire store. The cereal aisle

measures fifty-six feet long and three and a half feet wide; the shelves are six feet high. Healthy cereals, the ones that appeal to adults, are placed on the top shelves at an adult's eye level, easy for an adult to reach without having to bend down. Sugary cereals, the ones whose bright colors appeal to children, are located on the middle and lower shelves, from four and a half feet to ground level. The average five to seven year old is approximately three and a half to four feet tall (Townsend), making the boxes on these lower shelves accessible to young children. This low placement of sugar cereal allows a child sitting in a shopping cart to easily see and grab the nearby box. While analyzing the cereal aisle for its manipulation design, I witnessed a mother with two young children, approximately five and ten years old, shopping for cereal. As the mother selected RICE KRISPIES® for the whole family from the top shelf, the two children came to agreement on a box of FRUIT LOOPS® on the bottom shelf. When the kids handed their choice of cereal to their mother, she sternly declined. Disappointed, the children proceeded to throw a fit, begging and pleading for the box they wanted. After a short skirmish, the mother surrendered to her whining children and bought both brands of cereal. This demonstrates that hurried shopping coupled with begging can make a parent more likely to make a hasty decision to buy the sugar cereal that children can see and reach. It's almost like the box jumps off the shelf into the shopping cart. As this little scene shows, the shelf placement of the cereal also contributed to the buying of both boxes, increasing purchases.

Looking at the cereal aisle, it is easy to understand how a large percentage of shoppers can make the mistake of buying unintended or unnecessary items at Albertson's. Psychological color design and careful placement on grocery store shelves can really raise profits. Next time you're in the cereal aisle of your favorite store - or any other aisle, watch out for the manipulation techniques so you don't come home with something you don't really need.

Works Cited

Erickson, Lynn, child psychologist: personal interview on July 30, 1994.

Gibbons, Paul, Albertson's Assistant Manager: personal interview on July 22, 1994.

Townsend, Richard, doctor: telephone interview on July 22, 1994.