

# WARNING

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### **Touch the Boy's Psyche**

*Of all the animals, the boy is the most unmanageable.*

—Plato (428-348 B.C.)

A BOY'S PSYCHE IS AMAZING TO BEHOLD. He can be an angel one moment and a scoundrel the next. It is his way. There will be boogers at mealtime, finger paints on the walls, and the desire to beat his dear old dad at virtually any and all tests of strength or intelligence.

A girl's psyche will share many such elements explained throughout this chapter, but will often manifest itself in far different ways, to be explained in chapter 4. How many of these differences are innate versus the result of socialization, I will leave for sociologists to figure out—but such differences are real and tangible.

Getting in touch with the boy's psyche is crucial. To help prepare for the film *Jack*, Robin Williams and Francis Ford Coppola went camping with a bunch of ten-year-old boys to help them remember what it was like to be that age. They spent two weeks playing games, fishing, and camping. They ate peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and had food fights—the works. They were in search of memories. Afterwards, they made the film. This demonstrates the importance of understanding your audience and the lengths people will go to achieve it.

What follows is not a complete summary of a boy's

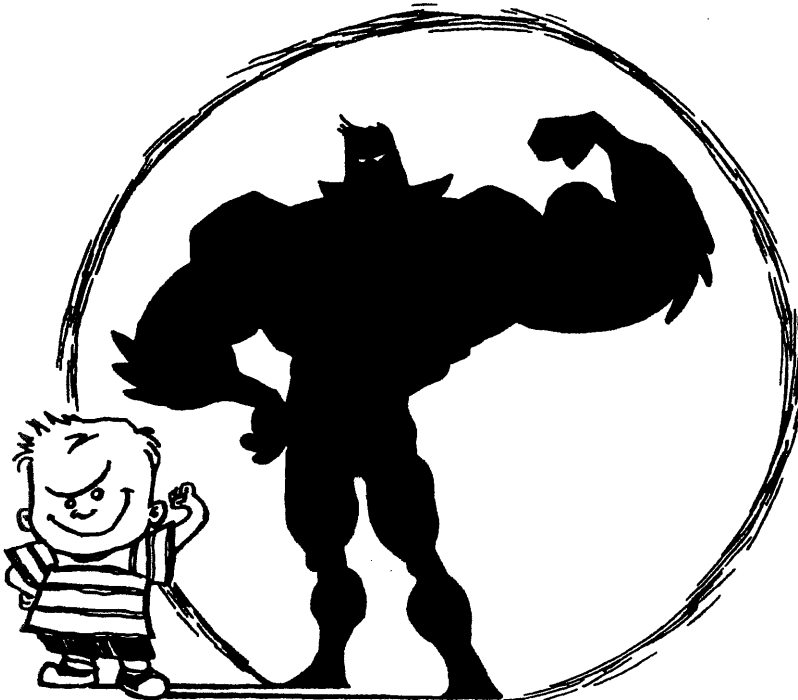
psyche, just those aspects that tend to manifest themselves in the fun of emotional needs fulfilled.

**POWER:** *The ability or capacity to act or perform effectively*

When I was in grade school, I made it a point to arrive fifteen minutes before the first bell rang. The purpose was to match my skills against the other boys in what was referred to simply as *the race*. Dozens of us would bunch up at a fence at one end of the school yard, and at the designated shout from a school chum, we would race to the opposite fence. The winner got the applause, the attention, the admiration for running his fastest and beating the rest. In short, it was pride—a strong emotional benefit—derived from the feeling of power that came from strong limbs, a swift gait, and strength purified. The winner felt like the god Hemes, no less, with sandals fitted with wings. Or, in our case, with tennis shoes known as PFFlyers, whose advertising claimed the shoes would help us run faster and jump higher. It must have been successful for its time, as sales of PFFlyers reached \$100 million at the height of its popularity around the early 1970s.

Boys gravitate toward endeavors that best tell the world that power is theirs. Sports can do that, whether that be blasting a ball over a fence, gliding it into a hoop, or powering it into the end zone. It can also come from performing on a high bar—twisting and turning, releasing and spinning, and dismounting. The feeling of power can come from involvement in the martial arts and the confidence that sport can instill. Power is also derived from intelligence—a score on a test; a correct answer given in class; the ability to out-think, out-strategize, out-smart.

Boys are continuously in search for such icons of power each and every day. It is very much a part of who they are and how they define themselves. The ancient Greeks understood this and imbued their gods with power. Zeus, lord of the sky, wielded the thunderbolt. Hermes was the swiftest with winged sandals. Apollo was the archer-god,



master musician, and healer. And then there was Hercules, the greatest of all Greek heroes—strong, brave, confident. These qualities are the aspiration of all boys, no matter what the age.

Many marketers have associated their brands with some form of power and have achieved wonderful results. Gatorade is one such brand, and it has become a standard at many kid sporting events. The label on a packet of Gatorade reads “delivers the fluids, electrolytes and carbohydrate energy that your body needs for peak performance.” The key power words are *energy* and *peak performance*, and they are served up with concrete proof—*fluids, electrolytes, carbohydrate*. It is the number-one sports drink. The Nike brand has a power derived from attitude—“Just do it.” In fact, the first Olympic chant of the modern era was “Nike! Nike!” *Nike*, it seems, is the Greek word for “victory.” The Mighty Morphin Power Rangers wield their power via the martial arts and use it to vanquish evil. In fact, from Superman to the Terminator, wielding power has been a central goal—one that boys desire to achieve.

One brand stands above the rest year after year in associating itself with physical fitness, implied power, and the sports-related achievement that can come from it. It is not necessarily for just kids, *per se*, but for the kid in all of us. Introduced in 1924 by General Mills, Wheaties soon became the Breakfast of Champions, a claim that hints of power derived from a healthy breakfast and athletic prowess. Wheaties’ first sponsorship of sports was associated with play-by-play radio baseball broadcasts in 1933, which was also the year “the Breakfast of Champions” slogan was first used. Athlete testimonials were a key part of the marketing approach. In the early years, Wheaties was endorsed by the likes of Babe Ruth, Joe DiMaggio, Ted Williams, and Mickey Mantle. The first athlete to appear nationally on a box of Wheaties was Bob Richards, two-time Olympic pole-vaulting champion.

Wheaties and its athletes have become so much a part of our culture that during the 1996 Olympics, the press openly speculated about which athletes General Mills would pick to represent the virtues of today’s champion. Those picked would have the honor to adorn the box of Wheaties itself. In fact, one report stated that General Mills hoped to see Wheaties sales jump as much as 20 percent as a result of the 1996 Olympics.

In this way, Wheaties has captured the winning Ever-Cool formula. The brand appeals to a timeless emotional need (i.e., physical fitness/power), and then routinely defines it in today’s terms (i.e., the celebrity champion). And it works. Wheaties is a well-established brand that stays current and successful year after year.

It is amazing to think that during the 1950s, Wheaties actually abandoned sports to go after the so-called “kids” market by associating itself with the Lone Ranger and the Mickey Mouse Club. The cereal maker gained more kids, but lost too many adults. They went back to their sports roots and captured the kid in many of us, young and old. Wheaties is an Ever-Cool.

**GOOD VERSUS EVIL** *the positive, the moral versus the bad, the wicked*

Boys, so say sociologists, are simply more aggressive than are girls. And good versus evil is one way it manifests itself. So boys will, at times, desire strength and power in order to vanquish some real or imaginary evil foe. This basic good-versus-evil storyline is taught to boys in both subtle and overt ways: God versus Satan, David versus Goliath, Jack versus the Giant. The storyteller’s purpose was to convey a sense of right and wrong, of morality, of codes of conduct. Many parents tell their children that when evil cannot be averted or converted with reason, then force is a possible, although last, resort. Such force may include power, strength, cleverness, intelligence, agility, or speed.

All of these are enticements to a boy, who through countless centuries was called upon to defend nations and homesteads and families from those who would destroy them.

And even in countries today that live in relative peace, a boy's nature cannot be subdued. He will play good versus evil. He will fantasize about defending the universe if need be, thus satisfying an emotional need given to him at birth and nurtured by society. Still, many parents, this one included, will be concerned when their child plays out a good versus evil story in overly violent ways. This will be further discussed in chapter 19.

But of all the brands that have come and gone, only a few have withstood the test of time, vanquished evil again and again to the delight of kids, and won the acceptance of many parents. The G.I. Joe brand is one of them. Why? Because he represents not only strength, not only good overcoming evil, but also our nation's real defense against all evil challengers big and small. So as evils spring up in the real world, boys imagine that they can defend their country from it, and G.I. Joe is the conduit through which they can fantasize. He is a boy's Barbie doll. Sure, the Mighty Morphin Power Rangers or Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, or the Transformers before them, or even He-Man before that, could come to our nation's aid. But they are fads. G.I. Joe figures are here to stay because their play pattern is real enough for all boys to imagine that they are, in truth, G.I. Joe. Significantly, G.I. Joe stays contemporary by introducing updated themes and new "recruits." In 1993, for example, we saw the introduction of a Star Brigade (space) version and a Ninja Force (martial arts) G.I. Joe, among others. In fact, there have been more than 230 different G.I. Joe figures introduced since 1964. And they have equated to more than \$2.6 billion, comprised of more than 300 million soldier figures and some 200 million vehicles (1994 estimates). Hasbro uses G.I. Joe to satisfy an eter-

nal emotion, yet constantly updates him to be relevant in today's world. G.I. Joe is an Ever-Cool.

**GROSS:** *Coarse, vulgar, offensive, disgusting*

In many seminars I have given to marketers, I will often introduce my audience to some rather interesting boys' products. Nothing gets as much amusement as those products that stray to the gross and bizarre side of a young boy's psyche. There is one particular demonstration that I love to give. Sometimes I do it with a product known as S.N.O.T., which stands for Super Nauseating Obnoxious Treat. It is a slimy, green, liquid candy in a clear, plastic container resembling a human nose. When the nose plugs are removed, the candy slides down through the nasal cavity and onto your finger; and then you, the eight-year-old boy, eat it. In my typical demonstration, I select a volunteer from the audience and ask him politely if he would be kind enough to try a product. With a smile he always agrees, and then I pull S.N.O.T. from my bag and watch him squirm. As I squeeze a long drip of the product out of the nasal cavity and onto his finger, the crowd around him starts to laugh, and the volunteer's smile fades to disbelief and then to disgust. He is trapped and he knows it. As he reluctantly tastes it, the crowd howls. Then I ask him how it tasted. The relieved response is typically, "Well . . . fine . . . just sweet."

However, the taste is not the key benefit at all. The key benefit was the howls, the laughs, the attention I sparked when I surprised the volunteer with S.N.O.T. That was the real treat. I was able to be gross and received admiration from those around me—really cool. For somewhere buried deep within the boy's psyche there is a little section with a gross label on it, and every boy goes there often. Still, S.N.O.T. may remain just a forgotten novelty unless its manufacturers can find a way to keep it current each year.

Gross *sells* in many arenas. Nickelodeon and Mattel introduced Gak, a purple goo, inspired by an unruly Nickelodeon

program, “Double Dare.” Eight million units were reportedly sold in 1993 alone. There is also a book entitled *Gross Grub* by Cheryl Porter, which boasts of “wretched recipes that look yucky but taste yummy.” Such great recipes include Boogers-on-a-Stick and Butchered Snake Bits with Barbecue Sauce. Serving such fare is bound to make a boy the center of attention at his tenth birthday party. That is the real benefit. I can easily foresee updated revisions of the book with recipes that continue to explore the gross arena, thus allowing her book to be continuously refreshed. She touched a timeless emotion in a medium that allows her to stay current as fads and trends shift.

The Ever-Cool award may, in the long run, go to Nickelodeon’s “Ren & Stimpy,” a cartoon about a Chihuahua and a plump, gullible feline who find a bizarre friendship. They continue to push the envelope of what is considered gross and bizarre. In fact, they will go to great lengths for a joke. In one episode, Stimpy expels gas, which takes on a live, ghostly appearance. Stimpy then falls in love with it. I will leave the details to your imagination. My wife was repulsed when we saw the episode. My son, however, fell to the floor laughing and loved it all the more because his mother was “grossed out.”

**SILLINESS:** *Frivolous*

The funny bone, what a marvelous thing it is. And while “funny bone” connotes a physical object, the real funny bone is mental, buried deep within the heart of a boy; yet it is ready at a moment’s notice to explode him into laughs, giggles, and howls. The sillier and more outrageous the prank, stunt, joke, or facial expression, the more we can see this part of a boy’s psyche.

Physical humor falls into this category. Witnessing someone slip on a banana peel still makes a boy fall to the floor with laughter. A pie in the Face accomplishes the same response. Marketers in many categories have targeted this

part of the psyche well. Watching the dazed and bewildered Wile E. Coyote just miss catching the Road Runner before falling off a mile-high cliff, punching through low-lying clouds, and finally smacking headfirst into the rock-hard surface of the desert is a real crowd pleaser; we especially love that puff of dust that rises when he hits. It is silly, physical humor, not unlike *The Three Stooges* films many of us grew up watching. Nickelodeon is a master of the silly, among other things. In their show “What Would You Do?” adults commonly get hit with a pie in the face. It is always fun to see someone else a victim of such a situation.

Whereas girls will get a laugh from such antics and then stop, boys will continue to roll on the floor in hysterics. They will even play back the episode time and again and tell it to their friends; they will pass it along endlessly. A girl will just roll her eyes and shake her head as he continues. “Stop being so stupid,” she will say. “It wasn’t *that* funny.” Yet for him it was!

And that silly Trix Rabbit just cannot seem to get those Trix no matter what lengths he goes to. “Silly rabbit,” the kids might retort. “Trix are for kids!” The brand’s advertising, among other things, keeps it contemporary by finding new ways for that silly rabbit to obtain the Trix, only to be foiled once again. It is an Ever-Cool scenario, in this case appealing to boys and girls alike.

**BRAVERY:** *Possessing or displaying courage*

I came home from work one day and was greeted by my son, Matt, at the door. He was excited.

“Gotta see this,” he said while kneeling down to roll up his pant leg. And there, reddened and scraped and oozing, was a huge gash on his knee. As I bent over, concern flooding my face, I asked him if he was OK. He responded with a broad smile and eager pride, “Fine, Dad. Isn’t it cool?” Matt proceeded to tell me how he tried to do a trick on his bike only to take a big spill.

“Didn’t it hurt?” I asked.

“Just a little,” he said, before running outside as his friends passed the house. He was intent upon showing them his wound. Perhaps it was really a badge of courage.

Matt had taken a big spill that day. My wife told me afterwards that he came home crying, his eyes swollen, his nerves unglued. But as he calmed down, and after he realized he had survived a treacherous fate and lived to tell the tale, his fear turned to pride. He saw himself as tough. He had gazed into the evil eyes of terror and had survived, and that was cool.

Boys like the feeling of bravery that can come from testing their nerve against some hurdle, whether that be a force of nature, a force of wills, or a force of circumstance. Such controlled, safe, although implied danger, is fun for boys. Driving a race car is considered dangerous; by driving a go-cart, a boy can feel that he, too, is stretching the limits of safety but in a relatively harmless way. The wind in his hair, the bends of the track, the loud roar of a small engine, the “potential” to crash up. That is bravery!

Some brands have targeted a boy’s desire to take a risk, to be brave, to beat danger. One soft drink called KICK, a citrus soda bottled by Seven-Up/RC Bottling Company, has a warning on the can that reads, “Warning: Contains stuff you don’t even want to know about!” And “May be too intense for some members of the general public.” What a delicious danger it implies. Another is a novelty candy called Busted!, manufactured in Canada for a company called Leaf. It is a bag with ten gum balls that declares “Warning! Three gumballs are way hot! And I double dog dare ya to find out which three!!” MEGA WARHEADS are sour hard candies that come with a caution: “First 50 seconds are EXTREMELY INTENSE! Hang in there!” The back of the bag has a chart that rates how brave you are based upon how long you kept this very sour treat in your mouth. All these novelties offer a touch of a challenge, an

ounce of harmless danger, and a ton of fun. Are these brands fads or Ever-Cools? They are possibly the former unless marketers can discover ways to keep them contemporary.

**TO SUCCEED/TO MASTER:** *The desired result, the skilled*

Many of the emotions cited thus far are interrelated. At the root of many of them is a boy’s desire to be the best he can be, to achieve, to feel competent. Mom and Dad tell him to do well in school; to learn; and to excel at sports, art, or whatever. He understands the notion of getting better with practice, of achieving some noble goal, and of rating headfirst toward some real or imagined finish line.

A boy must achieve! There is nothing like the thrill that comes from being first that pushes him to achieve. It is part power, as cited earlier, but also part inner pride. And there is also the desire to win approval from those who witness the glory. That is why many commercials for board games end in the same timeless phrase, “I win!” In fact, look all around a kid’s world and you’ll find that the desire to win is pervasive. Go into Chuck E. Cheese’s and witness the games that dispense tickets a child can win that are redeemable for prizes. See the long stream of tickets the boy will clutch in his fist, hang about his neck, or stuff in his pockets; these are all a badge declaring he is a winner. Visit the cereal aisle of your neighborhood supermarket and watch as the boy picks up every box, then turns it about to see what prize he can win by sending in box tops. Go to the school yard and watch the face of the boy who comes in first in a noble race, or feel the triumph of the eight-year-old when he makes a game-winning basket from ten feet out. You will see competence displayed.

Yet winning is a tricky thing. If it is too easy to win, the boy gets bored. If it is too hard, the boy gets defeated too often, loses interest, and looks for another place or activity in which he can succeed. The goal, then, is to create a

game that is challenging but possible. Videogame software developers know this too well. That is why the best games have multiple levels. The game allows the boy to feel like a winner when he beats (survives) the first level, yet still gives him the challenge of plenty more levels. This is a very small insight, but a rather brilliant one, indeed.

Mastery takes the form of constructing, of building, of creating and the pride that it engenders. Tinkertoys, Erector Sets, and LEGO come immediately to mind. Each allows a boy to use his imagination to construct a world, neighborhood, or car as he sees it. He can then sit back and say with pride “I did that,” which creates a strong emotional response. The LEGO brand is of particular interest. The word LEGO is formed from the Danish words “LEg COdt” meaning “play well.” In Latin, the word means “I study,” and “I put together.” Evolving for many decades, the LEGO brand was extended into a huge array of sets and themes (e.g., trains, pirates, ships, castles, underwater, etc.) that touch different parts of a boy’s interests and psyche (and a girl’s, too), although in a contemporary way that can be updated as interests change. In fact, some 110 billion LEGO elements were molded from 1949 to 1990. Few brands in the world approach the magnitude of LEGO.

**LOVE:** *Intense affection*

A younger boy, say younger than four years, is open and free with his affection. “I love you, Mommy,” is a common phrase. Warm hugs at nighttime, a kiss good morning, even a Cabbage Patch Kids doll under a Christmas tree is A-OK. It is a need to give and receive love, a need to be needed. The love and affection bubbles near the surface when a boy is younger, and it is a dear comfort to Mom and Dad alike.

Then things change. One day, little Johnny does not kiss Mom back or little Michael no longer reaches for Dad’s hand at the store. The boy may be age five or six now and has friends at school who will readily accuse him of being

babyish if they see him being kissed by his mom. After all, the boy wants power now. He is supposed to win the race. He gets extra points for grossing out girls.

One three-year-old boy loved his Cabbage Patch Kids doll dearly and slept with him every night for years. The doll’s name was Rusty. Years later, Rusty was gone from sight, stuck at the back of the boy’s closet for none to see, because the boy was now nine. Then came an embarrassing moment when Rusty came into view at an inappropriate time when his nine-year-old friends, all boys, were about. “And who’s this?” asked one of the lads with a smirk. After fidgeting with embarrassment and hoping to save face, the doll’s owner replied, “T-Rex!”

Make no mistake, a nine-year-old boy still needs to give and receive plenty of affection. But such a display cannot be as overt as it was in the past. A boy might slug his father on the arm as he passes him to the bathroom. That is love. Or he might save some popcorn for his mom, who had none. That is display of love, too. Or, just maybe, he might surprise her with a big, but quick hug when no one is watching. Family games help provide a connection from boy to parents, as do organized sports. But brands can provide a connection, too. Few of my generation can forget the commercials that depicted a boy and his dad sharing a LIFESAVERS candy. The brand became a conduit of affection between parent and child; it was really well done.

Nickelodeon’s program “Doug” is about a friendly, good-hearted, average kid who, when confronted by life’s average hurdles, always seems to find the right path. There is a lot of nurturing and learning there; that makes it hard to believe that the same young boy who watches “Doug” will also tune in to “Ren & Stimpy,” which pushes the boundaries of gross and bizarre. It is the same kid, with just a different part of his psyche needing to be tickled.

Steven Spielberg touched a nurturing part of a boy’s soul, and everyone else’s, with *E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial*.



Instead of creating a scary extra-terrestrial bent upon destroying the earth, we find, instead, an affable, caring, huggable one who eventually weakens to the point of death and must rely on a boy to nurture him, defend him, and save him. It is nurturing, but in a heroic way and at an exhilarating pace—just how a boy might love it! The film became one of the biggest box-office hits of all time, grossing more than \$700 million worldwide.

### Brand Challenges

- Is your brand the best at touching a boy’s psyche in one or more ways? Does it or can it help him be or feel
  - powerful?
  - like the protector of good?
  - gross?
  - silly?
  - brave?
  - like a winner?
  - nurturing, but in a boy-acceptable way?

## 4

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### Touch the Girl’s Psyche

*Beautiful, golden goddess. . . The breath of the west wind bore her. . .*  
—“Homeric Hymn of the Goddess Aphrodite”

I WALKED MY PRECIOUS FIVE-YEAR-OLD DAUGHTER to school on her first day of kindergarten. The sun was shining. The cool morning breeze was caressing her soft, pink cheeks, and the sounds of a hundred children’s voices punctuated the air as she stood in line. She waited patiently for the morning bell to ring and for her first teacher to open the first door to a new and expanding world.

I stood there, just gazing at her posture.; she stood so straight. Her hands were clasped so delicately before her. Her pretty velvet dress was gorgeous, as was her well-groomed hair. Megan had spent a good amount of time preparing herself that morning—just the right dress, just the right hair style, just the right barrettes. And the other girls in line looked the same: groomed, delicate, calm, and polite as they each stood there, straight and tall and orderly.

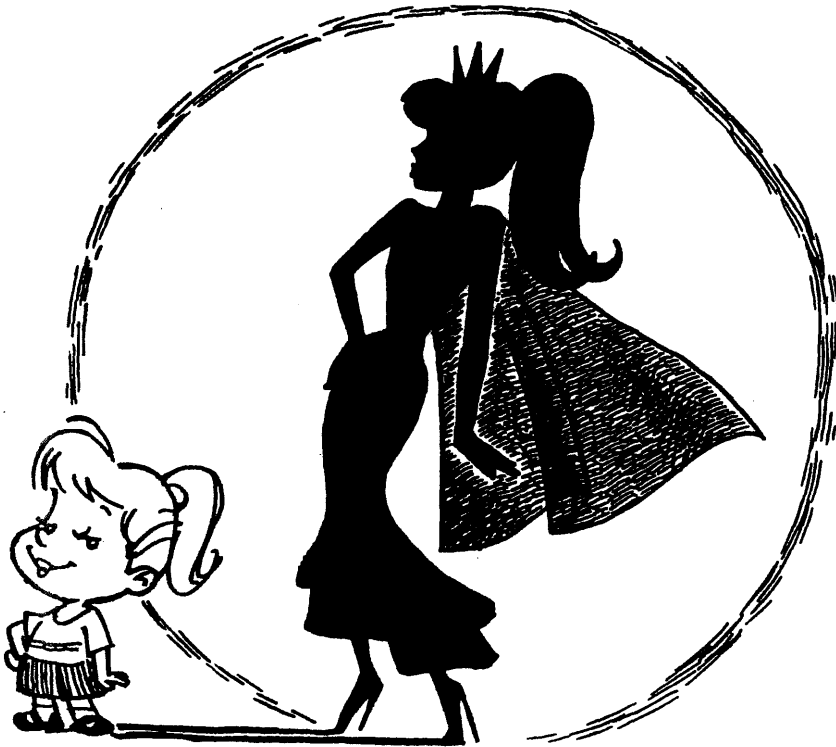
This was quite a contrast to the mangled line of boys next to them. The boys’ mischievous souls could not be hidden by the freshly painted coat of new clothes. Several were pushing each other, each trying to become the line leader. Others were tapping the backs of their classmates two spots ahead of them and then turning abruptly away

before they got caught. They were loud, silly, obnoxious urchins. Their frustrated parents desperately tried to corral the brood.

Now, any parent of one of the girls could mistakenly believe that he simply had better parenting skills. Sure, that explains why the boys were a bit out of control. The boys' parents must not have read all those books on child upbringing. Wrong! Having brought my own son to his first day of kindergarten a few years earlier, I knew that the difference in behavior exhibited in these two lines at kindergarten had far less to do with parenting skills and far more to do with both genetics and deeply rooted social mores. Yes, girls can be challenging, and their psyche shares a lot of common ground with that of boys. But a girl seeks emotional fulfillment in distinctly different ways.

**BEAUTY:** *A pleasing quality associated with the quality of form or color or excellence of craftsmanship*

At focus groups some years ago, I watched from behind a one-way mirror while five- and six-year-old girls tried on cosmetics designed specifically for them. The excitement they expressed even upon learning the reason for the research was telling. There were "oohs" and giggles all around as lip gloss was passed from tiny fingers to tiny fingers around the room. Then, spontaneously, the eight little girls in each group dashed to the mirror and began to apply various colors and shades of lip gloss. Gazing into that mirror, they were looking right at us but could not see us gazing back. And what a sight it was. With lips curled and eyes squinting in concentration, they applied the lip gloss as expertly as five- and six-year-old fingers might. Their eyes told us that they cared much about this craft. Later in the group, in fact, they would each recount how they watched their own mothers as they applied adult brands and hoped for the day when they could as well. Many of the girls admitted that their mothers had already let them wear makeup (mostly a



very light lipstick) and that it made them feel very grown-up. All children have this emotional need to feel grown-up. It is manifested here in a girl's desire to be pretty.

By age five, girls understand that beauty is a craft and most of them are already an apprentice under the care and guidance of their mothers. I am always amazed that marketers are often faulted for placing too much emphasis on beauty when, in fact, such attitudes are reinforced at such an early age in the home. As a mother strives to achieve beauty, so will her daughter, who wants desperately to be just like her hero—Mom.

So, little girls strive for beauty in all its forms: the clothes they wear, the way they fix their hair, their shoes, their socks, and all. The cosmetics they apply become more important as they get older, as does the perfume they wear. Girls simply want to look and feel the best they can in the eyes of their friends and parents. Later in life they seek the approval of boyfriends, but most importantly, they want to look and feel the best they can for themselves.

Boys may be into power, but girls have the market cornered on beauty, and marketers know it. Candy manufacturers have adorned little girls with candy necklaces, bracelets, and more recently, with candy rings. Even makers of bandages seem to realize that if the bandage has a pretty image on it, girls will wear it whether or not they have a cut or scrape. (Boys will, too, but they prefer a different type of image).

Chief among the beauty makers is Tinkerbell cosmetics. In 1952, Tom Fields, LTD., registered the Tinkerbell trademark for a wide range of toiletries and related categories. After that, millions of girls were allowed to feel just a bit older, just a bit more feminine and more beautiful—all very powerful emotional needs. Tinkerbell has become a small rite of passage, for it plays a role in a young girl's life by satisfying those needs. And in so doing, the Tinkerbell line now sells more than eight million units annually. It is

marketed in some seventy-eight countries around the world and has been a favorite across four generations of young women. Importantly, it has managed to freshen itself via new products and packaging and such to remain a contemporary, Ever-Cool part of a younger girl's life.

This desire for beauty also spills over into their artistic side in the crafts girls make, the things they draw, in the works of art they mold or paint. Girls express themselves through the beauty they create. There is pride in that, too, the "look what I did" appeal.

**GLAMOUR:** *An air of compelling charm, romance, and excitement*

While beauty is only skin deep, glamour is something else all together. Glamour is really about excitement, and you don't have to be beautiful to be glamorous. It is the charm that matters, that feeling of romance, the thrill of leading an exciting life.

Many adults do not really understand the Barbie brand. They see her only as a beautiful shell, or worse, as an icon of all that is wrong with society because she presumably overemphasizes an unrealistic, unattainable beauty. That is an adult talking, coming from either a man who never understood the magic of Barbie or from a woman who has forgotten what Barbie meant to her so long ago.

Yes, Barbie is beautiful; but at the heart of it all, Barbie is really about glamour. Barbie leads a romantic, exciting, fun-loving life. And through Barbie dolls, little girls fantasize of a life that they, too, might lead some day. Barbie is independent, her own person, and not the least bit dependent on Ken. Barbie was an astronaut. She was a doctor. She was queen of the ball. She has been a stewardess and a pilot. She has been a gold medalist in the Olympics. And why not? Barbie aspires to be the best she can be at volleyball, at scuba diving, whatever little girls aspire to be in today's world. That is the Ever-Cool formula: timeless emotions satisfied in a contemporary way. And Barbie has a

whole world that unfolds before a girl's eyes of jet planes and a comfortable home, a nice car, and plenty of family and friends.

As one eight-year-old told me not so long ago, "Barbie is so real she doesn't know she's just a doll." That is right. Mattel has applied the Ever-Cool formula so aptly that Barbie has developed a *persona* that girls relate to. And Barbie touches so many aspects of a girl's psyche from adventure to independence to dreams of aspirations, that the emotional connections with the Barbie brand run deep. Find a seven-year-old girl a hundred years from now and ask her what is cool. Providing the caretakers of the Barbie brand continue to apply the Ever-Cool formula, the little girl's answer will be "Barbie!"

**MOTHERING:** *The qualities characteristic of a mother, as in maternal affection*

Somewhere deep within the heart of a girl there exists an emotional foundation that needs to express a gentle, mothering persona. Certainly much of it is innate, but a lot is also acquired as little girls watch their own mothers and others care for younger children. It is a deep-rooted need to give and receive love. It is a need to be needed.

Girls just love to play mom. They will do so with younger siblings, with their baby doll, and in the absence of that, with their pet dog, cat, or hamster—whatever is handy. This innate drive has made many a brand successful. One of the greatest successes in marketing memory is the Cabbage Patch Kids doll.

In Cabbage Patch Kids, girls found a rather pudgy-looking baby just yearning to be loved, with outstretched arms waiting for a loving embrace from its adoptive parent. The soft, squishy body, the snub-nosed face, the quality detail of a newborn, the birth certificate, the adoption papers, the heart-wrenching appeal of a baby without a home, the one-of-a-kind appeal—all of these things said love me, hold

me, adopt me. From the marketer's perspective, they said buy me! At the peak of the Cabbage Patch Kids doll success in 1985, sales were reported at \$600 million.

It proved that the closer marketers can get to creating the mothering experience, the more they could touch the heart of the child, all compliments of Xavier Roberts, creator of the Cabbage Patch Kids doll. Of particular interest was the fact that the Cabbage Patch Kids doll was introduced in an age of "do-something" baby dolls that would burp or pee or eat or talk or whatever. Cabbage Patch Kids dolls had no technology, but they out-sold everything that did. Emotion, in its pure form, is significantly more powerful than batteries. Dr. Paul Horton, author of *Solace*, a study of humans' need for objects to give comfort, told the *New York Times* in 1984 that children "need attachments external to themselves to give solace and comfort" and that a Cabbage Patch Kid doll "is a possession a child is instantly able to make his own."

But the brand struggled in subsequent years because no one was able to find ways to make the brand truly "new" again. Sales in 1986 had dropped to \$230 million. Attempts to contemporize it, even to add a talking feature, could not bring the Cabbage Patch Kids doll back to its top sales performance. The addition of a chewing feature even drew complaints when a few children claimed that the doll chewed their hair. So Cabbage Patch Kids dolls have declined to a lower sales plateau, although the brand remains on the market today as probably one of the best-ever attempts to touch the mothering part of a girl's psyche.

Pound Puppies plush toys took the basic nurturing and adoption concept of Cabbage Patch Kids dolls, applied it to a plush animal, and was very successful. "Rescuing a puppy or kitten from the pound and making it your own is a very strong emotional play pattern for a child," says Scott Masline, vice-president of marketing for Lewis Galoob Toys, Inc. It developed into a very compelling, nurturing brand idea.

To touch a girl's nurturing instinct, Mattel introduced

The Heart Family, a line of fashion dolls that came with Mom, Dad, and a toddler boy and girl. The name said love. The family unit was complete, and it provided girls everywhere with endless' nurturing Fantasies. It did quite well although it eventually declined. But Mattel went on to develop a stream of new brand ideas that freshly satisfied a girl's desire to nurture. This is oftentimes the best solution when faced with a struggling, declining brand that is difficult to "freshen." Instead of throwing more money at it in order to make it appear "new again," it can be more profitable to introduce a new brand that takes a whole new approach. The manufacturing process can be one of innovation, obsolescence, innovation. That is how toy manufacturers survive year after year as they search for an Ever-Cool.

But nurturing does not have to end with toys. In Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*, our heroine, Belle, was able to see the kindness in the Beast that everyone else had missed. Finally, she fell in love with the monster, thus unleashing the prince who was held captive within. There was nurturing in her sensitivity. Girls loved that. Boys undoubtedly cared more about the batde scenes. It became the first animated film ever to be nominated For an Academy Award for Best Picture. Disney's *101 Dalmatians* puts poor little puppies at risk of landing in the hands of evil Cruella De Vil, but they are all saved in the end to the resounding delight of little girls (and boys who love any chance to vanquish evil). Puppies are merely babies with more hair and a cold, wet nose.

*The Baby-sitters Club* book series wins the Ever-Cool award for its many nurturing, supportive appeals. This book series tackles such Contemporary topics as divorced parents, remarriages, the loss of a parent's job, a girl with diabetes, as well as the more traditional issues of boys and friendships. And each issue is experienced, addressed, and overcome. It appeals to many aspects of a girl's heart, all

served up in a contemporary fashion. One source estimated that more than 125 million copies of the books have been sold since 1986.

**SILLINESS:** *Frivolous*

Girls can be silly, too, just as boys can. But they express silliness in vastly different ways. Whereas boys look for silliness in physical forms (there is nothing like tripping a friend on the way to school), girls will more often find silliness in social arenas. Watching parents kiss will make a young girl giggle. It will make a young boy nauseous. Girls will spend time talking on the playground, huddled in a group, laughing about the clumsiness of boys, about the clothes the other girls are wearing, about the dorkiness of their teachers.

Many times girls and boys define silliness similarly. Nickelodeon's "Wild & Crazy Kids" targets the funny bone in girls and boys alike. It is a constant stream of zany stunts. Kids and dentists will race to brush a giant-sized molar. Human bowling games are played in which kids bounce around in inner tubes. Plenty of crazy relay races and obstacle courses are commonplace. The show is very silly, but very fun for boys and girls.

**TO SUCCEED/TO MASTER:** *The desired result, the skilled*

Once in a couple of decades, we discover that something everyone thought was nature turns out to be nurture, or vice versa. Through the 1950s and 1960s, little girls were taught to be, well, little girls. Pretty dresses, tea parties, ballet classes, more pretty dresses. They were expected only to master the arts, whether that be in music, painting, crafts, or performing. They excelled and continue to do so. But they were taught not to compete too much, especially in physical ways, for being too competitive was not ladylike. So, they were not encouraged to play baseball, football, soccer, or any other sport that may have required contact,

speed, strength, or the like. No post-World War II mother wanted her daughter to be called a *tombboy*, that designation given in years past to a class of little girls who could hit a fast ball or slide successfully into third base. Nurture required that little girls stayed free of dirt, grime, and sweat.

Then something marvelous happened. Those little girls of the 1950s and 1960s grew up. They were the baby boomers who questioned convention in all its forms and have continued to change every institution that they have touched. They plunged into colleges in unprecedented numbers. They became doctors, lawyers, and business executives. They balanced their professional aspirations with raising a family. As little girls they were expected to wear a dress, but as women they could wear what they wanted. Convention broke down, and they were the ones who shattered it. Baby boomers just did not see the need to continue the “little girls wear pink and little boys get blue” routine. If little Nancy wanted to play ball, baby boomer Mom was going to see to it that her Nancy played ball. According to the numbers, Nancy did. Almost 200,000 girls played organized soccer in the United States in 1996, according to the American Youth Soccer Organization. In fact, kids playing soccer are now a 60 to 40 ratio, boys to girls. Girls want to compete. They love to win in both physical and nonphysical endeavors. They do both to satisfy such emotional needs as accomplishment, mastery, and pride.

Nature was hidden by nurture. The Greeks understood this better than we, or why else would they have worshipped Athena, a battle-goddess, or Artemis, the huntswoman of the gods? Although both could do battle, they were each nurturing as well. They presented a full persona. A survey by Ocean Spray’s Wave program reported that women who participate in athletics are considered by high schoolers to be both cool and feminine. In fact, one out of three girls plays a high school sport, according to the Women’s Sports

Foundation. Make no mistake, girls are tough competitors. Coed teams are commonplace for kids even in grade school. The age of the tomboy is dead.

Marketers who have recognized this fact have successfully tapped into this precious part of a girl’s soul. Nickelodeon helped lead the way with its introduction of a program called “GUTS.” In it, three kids compete via tough, sometimes radical athletic events in an 18,000-square-foot arena to determine who is the toughest competitor. It takes guts to compete and more guts to win. What is most impressive about “GUTS” is that the great kid athletes compete head to head, regardless of gender. So it is very common to see boys and girls battling each other through a series of physical obstacles to determine who has the greater skill and, hence, the most guts. Nickelodeon also introduced “The Secret World of Alex Mack,” the exploits of a girl who obtained special powers when she was accidentally doused with a top-secret experimental compound. Alex can turn herself into a liquid or shoot balls of electricity out of her hands. She can also control the movement of people and objects by generating a magnetic field. And yet, she is a rather average kid who uses tier secret, super powers to help her through everyday challenges that face her in junior high school.

Appreciating a strong, female lead is not really a recent phenomenon. It is just becoming more consistent. None of us can forget Mary Poppins and her magical powers to do good or Dorothy and her battle with the Wicked Witch of the West.

Wheaties recognizes a girl’s innate needs as well, and once again, applied its successful formula during the 1996 Olympics when it selected swimmer Amy Van Dyken and the seven members of the U.S. women’s gymnastics team to grace its box. Shannon Miller, from the gymnastics team, commented that it is everyone’s dream to be on a Wheaties box. That is a dream shared by all of us, men and women

alike, for it represents supremacy on the playing field. Nike, too, taps into a girl's desire to succeed, to master, and to be the best she can be. Their "Just do it" tagline and attitude is as appropriate to girls as it is to boys.

In such a fashion, girls also strive to achieve power as do boys, but they take a different path. In physical form, a girl's power is more apt to be displayed gracefully, such as that achieved in gymnastics as opposed to football. Girls will also play good vanquishing evil as will boys. But whereas a boy will often choose strength to subdue evil, girls will more often first seek the powers of persuasion and nurturing, the aim of which is to change evil into good rather than to subdue it. They are definitely far less aggressive.

Recalls Maya Levinson, a partner at Ogilvy & Mather who spent some fifteen years researching children while at Mattel, "When Mattel introduced She-Ra, Princess of Power dolls for girls, we conducted play-pattern testing. Like most girls, they spent most of the time getting the dolls ready: dressing them, grooming, etc. Finally, one girl had her doll approach the other girl's doll and, speaking through the doll, she asked politely, 'Hi . . . would you like to fight?' in the same exact tone that Ken often asks Barbie out for a date." So Maya was not surprised when, later, her own three-year-old daughter Danielle arranged her brother's Hot Wheels cars in a row, covered them with a cloth diaper, and said, "Shhhh . . . they're sleeping!"

Boys and girls are the same in so many ways, and yet the weight they place on certain values is different. Says John Gray in his book *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus*, "Martians value power, competency, efficiency and achievement. . . . Venusians value love, communication, beauty, and relationships." Kids are no different. Knowing how boys and girls are alike, and how they differ, will help the marketer create and develop successful brands.

### Brand Challenges

- Is your brand the best at touching a girl's psyche in one or more ways? Does it or can it help her be or feel
  - beautiful?
  - glamorous?
  - like a mom (nurturing)?
  - silly?
  - like a winner?
  - powerful, in a gir-I-acceptingway?