Restricting Gambling Advertising and the Third-Person Effect

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ABSTRACT

Along with the rapid growth experienced by the gaming industry in the United States has come increasing calls to restrict or ban gambling advertising. To date, little is known about what motivates people to support such restrictions on advertising. However, one recent theory, the third-person effect, offers a possible explanation. The third-person effect states that when confronted with negative messages, people will overestimate the messages' effect on others relative to themselves. Additionally, it suggests that it is this misperception that motivates them to take action against such messages. This study investigates whether a third-person effect occurs for gambling advertising and if this effect is related to pro-censorship attitudes for lotteries and casinos. The results suggest there is a sizable gap between perceptions of the effect of gambling advertising on one's self versus others, and that the perceived effect on others is related to a willingness to restrict such advertising.

The dark side of consumption has begun to receive greater attention from consumer researchers in recent years. This research stream has taken several different forms. Some research has explored the antecedents and consequences of excessive purchasing (Faber, 1992; O'Guinn

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& Faber, 1989), while others have focused on the illegal acquisition of goods (Babin & Babin, 1996; Cox & Moschis, 1990) or the consumption of illegal goods (Hirschman, 1992). Finally, some researchers have examined aspects of purchasing or consuming legal, but potentially harmful or out of favor, products or services (Boddewyn, 1994; Dietz, 1990). Interest in this later category has also been shown by many public health and public interest groups who have become increasingly concerned about potentially harmful forms of consumption such as smoking, drinking, over- or undereating, gambling, various medical procedures, and prescription drug use. These groups have often led efforts to change social norms and actions regarding these behaviors.

One recent approach used in trying to prevent undesirable consumer behaviors has been to attempt to prohibit or restrict advertising for these legal products. The advertising for controversial products has come under increasing attacks for the potential harm it allegedly does to consumers. The most obvious examples of efforts to censor advertising for controversial products are the current debates over tobacco and alcohol advertising.

Along with the liquor and tobacco industries, one of the most hotly debated product areas for restricting advertising is for gambling activities and establishments. Increasingly, legalized gambling has been used as a way for local and state governments to raise money without incurring the wrath of most taxpayers. However, some people worry about the potential problems and abuses surrounding gambling, especially among the poor. The expansion of legal gambling, the alarming potential of Internet gambling, and the growing impact of the gambling industry on the local and national economy, have stimulated renewed interest on the part of the federal government for the regulation of gambling (Frey, 1998). The recent establishment of the National Gambling Impact Study Commission, charged with examining the social and economic effects of legalized gambling in the United States, is indicative of these concerns (Elvin, 1997; Palmer, 1998).

As concerns about the spread of gambling have grown, there have been increasing criticisms about commercial harms that gambling advertising supposedly causes. Some of these complaints attack falsity and exaggeration in advertising for the gaming industry. Other criticisms address the marketing of casinos as a family-friendly destination, claiming this creates future customers out of children and may increase the number of teenagers with gambling problems. Consequently, numerous calls have been made to limit or restrict the content, expenditures, and/or locations of gambling advertisements (Rathbun, 1998; Reina, 1997).

Calls for the banning of advertising for controversial products rely on the belief that these bans will help reduce undesirable consumption and protect vulnerable groups such as children, women, or minors (Atkin, 1990; Grube & Wallack, 1994; Pierce et al., 1991). Critics believe that advertising for controversial products encourages people to engage in

behaviors that are both undesirable on a societal level and harmful on a personal level.

However, despite emerging efforts to censor advertising for controversial products, there is often little compelling evidence to suggest that advertising is a major factor in causing any of these problem behaviors or that a ban on advertising would result in reduced consumption (Boddewyn, 1994; Duffy, 1996; Fahy, Smart, Pride, & Ferrell, 1995). The attacks on advertising may simply be an attempt to find an easy, and highly visible, scapegoat for much more complex influences on individual behavior (McDonald, 1993). Furthermore, some opponents of advertising bans argue that they would deprive interested adults from learning about desired products and services (Teinowitz, 1997).

Public support for banning advertising for legal products has been found to be rather high. For example, a 1991 national sample survey found that over two-thirds of the public supported a ban on all tobacco ads in newspapers, magazines, and billboards (Louis Harris & Associates, 1992). A majority of respondents have also expressed support for broadcast bans on advertising for other legal products and services such as war toys for children, vasectomy/sterilization services, and abortion services (Fahy et al., 1995).

A growing willingness to prohibit or restrict advertising for legal products has important implications for marketers and consumers. These restrictions applied to state-run lotteries or taxable casino earnings also have crucial ramifications for government taxes and services. Finally, from a public-policy point of view, public pressure to restrict advertising may misdirect attention from policies that might succeed in reducing some behaviors, to ones that may fail to achieve the stated goal. Given these concerns, a better understanding of the underlying rationales and motivations behind pro-censorship attitudes toward advertising for legal products and services seems needed.

To date, research on censorship has generated little systematic knowledge about the factors that differentiate those who favor from those who oppose censorship. However, one emerging area of mass communication theory suggests some rationale and motivation for explaining why some people may support censorship. This is referred to as the third-person effect. This theory claims that people perceive media messages as having a greater impact on others than on themselves (Davison, 1983). Furthermore, this theory argues that a perceptual disparity between the estimated effect of a media message on one's self versus others may lead people to support censorship or restrictions on speech (Gunther, 1995; McLeod, Eveland, & Nathanson, 1997; Rojas, Shah, & Faber, 1996). People may believe that advertising for controversial products does not have any negative effects on them, but fear it will adversely affect others. It is for this reason that they may support censorship on advertising for controversial products in general—and gambling advertising in particular.

THIRD-PERSON EFFECT

Several studies, across a variety of message topics and methodologies, have found that people see a discrepancy between the effects of media on others and on themselves (Perloff, 1993; Price & Tewksbury, 1996). Research suggests that people are more likely to systematically overestimate the extent to which others are affected by mass media while they are likely to underestimate the effect on themselves (Gunther, 1991). This is consistent with the persuasion knowledge model (PKM), which states that as people develop knowledge about persuasion agents' goals and tactics, they will be less likely to perceive persuasion attempts on themselves as being effective (Friestad & Wright, 1994). This may allow such people to perceive effects on others differently from how they perceive effects of persuasion on themselves.

Some authors account for the processes underlying the third-person effect by applying attribution theory concepts such as the fundamental attribution error and egotistical differential attributions (Gunther, 1991; Rucinski & Salmon, 1990). According to the fundamental attribution error, observers generally underestimate other people's awareness of situational (external) factors such as the persuasive intent of media content and, thus, overestimate others' susceptibility to this content. But in judging themselves, observers are quite aware of the role of situational factors like persuasive intent. Due to their awareness, they view themselves as less susceptible to these message effects.

Observers may also engage in self-positivity bias or egotistical differential attributions (Miller, 1976; Stephan & Gollwitzer, 1981). When a message is deemed negative or when being persuaded by it would be regarded as unintelligent, people perceive the message to have more influence on others in order to enhance their perception of personal invulnerability and control (Gunther, 1991). However, when a message is considered positive, they attribute more effect on themselves because they are smart enough to recognize its value (Cohen & Davis, 1991; Gunther & Thorson, 1992).

Theorists have examined the conditions that facilitate these perceptual discrepancies. Some studies have found that there is a greater disparity between perceived effects on the self and others when the source of the message is judged to be negatively biased (Gunther, 1991) or when the audience attributes persuasive intent to the communicator (Gunther & Mundy, 1993). Other research shows that those who consider an issue important (Mutz, 1989), perceive themselves as experts (Lasorsa, 1989), or are highly ego-involved in the message (Perloff, 1993) tend to perceive that others will be more affected by message content. Further, the extent of biased perceptions may increase as the hypothetical others become progressively more psychologically distant from the respondents (Cohen & Davis, 1991; Gunther, 1991).

Although much research has born out Davison's (1983) initial assertion that a bias in perception exists, his contention that the overestimation of negative or harmful effects of messages on others leads people to take some preventive or compensatory action has received less support. Most of the initial research examining a behavioral outcome of the third-person effect failed to detect one (Gunther, 1991). One explanation for these findings is that people do not exhibit the expected behavior because they view their perspective as different from the opinion of the general public; a spiral-of-silence effect inhibits their behavior (Mutz, 1989). However, recent work has linked the third-person effect with a willingness to censor some type of media content such as excessive violence, pornography, or violent and misogynic rap lyrics (Gunther, 1995; McLeod et al., 1997; Rojas et al., 1996).

CENSORSHIP STUDIES

Previous research on factors contributing to support for expressive rights of the mass media in general or advertising in particular has been rather limited, and often yielded mixed results (Shao & Hill, 1994; Tewksbury, Huang, & Price, 1996). Thus, there is little systematic knowledge about the factors that separate those who favor media censorship from those who oppose it.

Some studies have found that attitudes toward censorship are significantly associated with religiosity, authoritarianism, conservatism, and traditional family ideology (Hense & Wright, 1992; McClosky & Brill, 1983; Tewksbury et al., 1996). However, not all studies have found support for these relationships. For example, some studies report little or no relationship between procensorship attitudes and authoritarianism (Schell & Bonin, 1989) or conservativism (Thompson, 1995). One study even reports a reverse relationship between conservatism and censorship attitudes (Suedfeld, Steel, & Schmidt, 1994). Comparable inconsistencies also surround demographic predictors such as gender, age and education (Andsager, 1992; Schell & Bonin, 1989; Tewksbury et al., 1996).

Although conflicting findings exist regarding the impact of attitudinal and demographic factors on willingness to censor messages, one consistent finding across studies is that censorship of speech is associated with the belief that the outcome of communications will be negative (Marcus, Sullivan, Theiss-Morse, & Wood, 1995; Sullivan, Piereson, & Marcus, 1982). Because gambling is regarded by many as a vice activity with potentially undesirable consequences such as eroding public morals or harming social and individual well-being, advertising for gambling may be perceived to fit this category. A third-person effect has similarly been found to occur when the goal advocated in a message is

perceived to cause negative effects. Thus, a third-person effect explanation for a willingness to censor gambling-related advertising seems promising.

HYPOTHESES

To determine if a third-person effect can account for a willingness to restrict or prohibit gambling advertising, the current study looked at the perceived impact of advertising on two different groups of "others": other adults and children. Although various types of gambling exist, this study deals with advertising for casinos and lotteries, which are spreading to almost every state. It is expected that third-person effects will occur for both types of gambling advertising and the perceived effect will be greater on both types of others compared to one's self. Thus, the following hypothesis is given.

H1(a): People will judge advertisements for casinos to have a greater impact on other adults than on themselves.

H1(b): People will judge advertisements for lotteries to have a greater impact on other adults than on themselves.

H1(c): People will judge advertisements for casinos to have a greater impact on children than on themselves.

H1(d): People will judge advertisements for lotteries to have a greater impact on children than on themselves.

Concern over gambling advertising may be particularly great when one is considering its impact on children and teens. Recently, much of the concern regarding socially controversial products such as tobacco or alcoholic beverage has centered on their impact on children and teens (Pierce et al., 1991). Children may be seen as being more distant from one's self than other adults and, therefore, potentially more vulnerable to message effects. Particularly, because advertising for casinos or lotteries will be perceived as a potentially harmful message, it should be seen as affecting more vulnerable people—children or teens. The gaming industry is going to shift its promotional strategy to emphasize entertainment as well as gambling, and this shift may also increase the number of youth with gambling problems. Taken together, the following hypothesis is given.

H1(e): People will judge advertisements for casinos to have a greater impact on children than on other adults.

H1(f): People will judge advertisements for lotteries to have a greater impact on children than on other adults.

Davison (1983) originally stated that the overestimation of the negative impact on others would lead people to engage in some form of protective action. When message is thought to have more powerful and harmful effects on others as compared to one's self, people may manifest procensorship attitudes. An important motivation for censoring this message is the desire to help protect others from the harmful effects of this message. These beliefs could stem from a kind of biased optimism (Weinstein, 1989) and/or self-positivity bias (Raghubir & Menon, 1998). People tend to believe they are not vulnerable to negative messages by seeing themselves as more intelligent or better off than most others, and this would serve to maintain their positive self-image. Therefore, they have little personal need to limit media content. Instead, their procensorship attitudes are predominantly due to a concern that others will be affected by these messages. Because the first set of hypotheses predicted a third-person effect, the third-person perception should result in greater support for restrictions on gambling advertising. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is given.

H2(a): The greater the perceived effect of casino and lottery advertising on other adults, the more willing people will be to censor this advertising.

H2(b): The greater the perceived effect of casino and lottery advertising on children, the more willing people will be to censor this advertising.

METHODOLOGY

The survey was conducted in a large midwestern city during the winter of 1996. Lottery playing and casino gambling are legalized in this area, and its residents have access to advertisements for each form of gambling. Adult respondents (18 and over) were interviewed at shopping malls. Respondents were recruited via a mall-intercept technique, with special attention paid to age, gender, and race in order to insure a broad spectrum of the adult population. They were ushered to a nearby interview room, where they completed a self-administered questionnaire under the instruction of a fieldwork supervisor. Respondents received a $5.00 gift certificate in return for their participation. Completion times ranged from 20 to 40 minutes.

Overall, 194 adults participated in this survey. Ages ranged from 18 to 82 with a mean of 45 years old. The majority (61%) was female. Over half (56%) came from households with an annual income between $20,000 and $59,999. Twenty-five percent reported their incomes as $60,000 and over, whereas 20% reported their incomes to be less than $20,000. As for education, 21% completed high school, just under half

(46%) attended some college or technical school, and 27% completed college or graduate school.

Measurement

The survey instrument consisted of items designed to measure (a) the third-person effect; (b) censorship attitudes toward advertising for each form of gambling; and (c) control variables including attitudinal items, political affiliation, media use, prior gambling behavior, and demographics.

To measure the third-person effect, this study followed the typical approach found in the third-person effect literature. That is, respondents were asked in separate questions to indicate how strongly they agree or disagree that each type of gambling advertising has a powerful impact on themselves, on other adults, and on children. The wording of the items was identical except for the first- or third-person connotation. For example, the "self" question for casino advertising stated "Advertisements for casinos have a powerful effect on me." The "others" questions were phrased "Advertisements for casinos have a powerful effect on many adults" and "Advertisements for casinos have a powerful effect on many children." Respondents rated their level of agreement with each item using 5-point Likert scales ranging from 1 "strongly disagree" to 5 "strongly agree." Two kinds of third-person effects were calculated: the difference between estimates of an impact on self versus other adults and on self versus children.

Censorship attitudes toward advertising for each type of gambling were assessed with two separate questions designed for this study. One concerned attitude toward restricting the advertising (e.g., "There should be restrictions on advertisements for casinos"), and the other concerned an outright ban on the advertising (e.g., "Advertisements for casinos should be banned"). Responses were given on the same 5-point scale. For both casinos and lotteries, the two items showed acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach's alphas were 0.72 for casino ads and 0.76 for lottery ads). Therefore, scores from both items were aggregated for subsequent analysis. The number of scale points ranged from 2 to 10.

To determine other factors that may affect people's willingness to censor gambling advertising, this study included two attitudinal variables—religiosity and authoritarianism—that had previously been found to influence procensorship attitudes. The religiosity scale was measured with four items (e.g., "My ideas about religion are one of the most important parts of my philosophy of life") constructed by Putney and Middleton (1961). The authoritarian scale was assessed with 10 items (e.g., "I tend to boss people around") developed by Ray (1979). Both scales had acceptable internal consistency with an alpha of 0.81 for the

religiosity and 0.67 for the authoritarianism. For each scale, individual items were summed for further analysis.

As for other control variables, a political affiliation measure was constructed combining political party identification with a measure of degree of partisanship. The scale ranged from (1) strong Republican to (7) strong Democrat. Media uses were measured by indicating the amount of local and national TV news watching and amount of newspaper reading per week. Prior gambling behavior was measured through a dichotomous question by asking respondents to indicate if they play lotteries or gamble at casinos. Finally, demographic variables such as gender, age, education, parents' education, and family income were also included.

To minimize response reactivity, items from any one type of measure were randomized and interspersed with items from other types of measures. Though recent work has demonstrated that question order does not alter measurement of the basic effect (Price & Tewksbury, 1996), the "self" and "others" questions on the third-person effect were randomly arranged throughout the questionnaire.

RESULTS

Overall, 40% of respondents play lotteries, and 41% of respondents gamble at casinos. Looking across the two forms of gambling, 26% report engaging in both lottery and casino gambling, 44% do not partake in either type of gambling, and 30% engage in one form, but not the other. The frequencies for engaging in each form of gambling indicate that respondents in this study are ordinary gamblers, not compulsive gamblers (median = 2.0 per month for lottery players; median = 3.0 per year for casino gamblers).

Hypotheses 1(a) through 1(d) stated that people would perceive advertising for both casino and lottery gambling to have a greater impact on others than on one's self. To test these hypotheses, paired *t* tests were run. A significant third-person perception was found in all cases. This was true for both casino and lottery advertising and when the "other" was other adults or children (see Table 1).

For casino advertising, the perceived impact on other adults was 1.52 points higher than on self ($t = 13.89$, $p < .001$) and the perceived impact on children was 1.05 points greater ($t = 9.70$, $p < .001$). For lottery advertising, the mean difference between the estimated effect on self versus other adults was 1.69 points ($t = 14.55$, $p < .001$), and the mean difference was 1.33 points when comparing impact on self with that on children ($t = 11.24$, $p < .001$).

Additionally, Hypotheses 1(e) and 1(f) stated that people would perceive advertising for each type of gambling to have greater effects on

Table 1. Paired *t*-Tests of Perceived Effects of Gambling Advertising

	Casino Advertising	Lottery Advertising
Self vs. other adults		
Self	2.31	2.09
Other adults	3.83	3.78
Mean difference	1.52	1.69
t-value	13.89	14.55
Probability	<.001	<.001
df	189	191
Self vs. children		
Self	2.31	2.09
Children	3.36	3.42
Mean difference	1.05	1.33
t-value	9.70	11.24
Probability	<.001	<.001
df	189	191
Other adults vs. children		
Other adults	3.83	3.78
Children	3.36	3.42
Mean difference	0.46	0.37
t-value	5.16	4.11
Probability	<.001	<.001
df	192	192

Scores ranged from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree.

children than on other adults. Paired *t* tests were also conducted for testing these hypotheses (see Table 1). Surprisingly, for both types of advertising, the mean estimates of the impact on other adults were significantly higher than the mean estimates of the impact on children ($t = 5.16$, $p < .001$ for casino advertising; $t = 4.11$, $p < .001$ for lottery advertising). These findings imply that respondents perceive adults to be more vulnerable to gambling advertising than children.

Hypotheses 2(a) and 2(b) predicted that the perceived effect of gambling advertising on others would lead to people's willingness to censor

Table 2. Regression of Censorship Scales on First- and Third-Person Effect Variables

	Censorship of Casino Advertising[a]		Censorship of Lottery Advertising[a]	
	β	Adjusted R^2	β	Adjusted R^2
Self effect	−.09	.26***	.01	.15***
Other adults effect	.30***		.23***	
Children effect	.33***		.25***	

[a]High scale value = greater willingness to censor.

*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$.

gambling advertising. To test these hypotheses, regressions were performed (see Table 2). The impact of the first- and third-person variables was analyzed individually as recently recommended by Stenbjerre and Leets (1997). Censorship attitudes toward each type of advertising served as the dependent variable. Bivariate correlations between the perceived impact on self, other adults, and children variables were examined to ensure no problems due to multicollinearity existed. The highest correlation among these variables was between the impact of casino advertising on children and its perceived effect on other adults ($r = 0.41$). Thus, multicollinearity is not a problem here.

The results demonstrated a strong linkage between the third-person perception and people's willingness to censor gambling advertising. For both types of advertising, the perceived effects on other adults ($\beta = 0.30$, $p < .001$ for casinos; $\beta = 0.23$, $p < .001$ for lotteries) appeared as a strong predictor in explaining people's desire to censor these ads. The perceived effects on children ($\beta = 0.33$, $p < .001$ for casinos; $\beta = 0.25$, $p < .001$ for lotteries) also had a strong relationship with procensorship attitudes. As expected, the perceived impacts on self were not significantly related to censorship attitudes toward advertising.

To determine if third-person variables were still predictive of censorship attitudes after controlling for other confounding variables, and to estimate the incremental and total variance associated with the variable groups in accounting for censorship attitudes, hierarchical regression analyses were undertaken (see Table 3). Fifteen independent variables were divided into seven separate blocks. Demographic variables (gender, age, education, parents' education, and income), orientational variables (media use and political orientation), and attitudinal variables (religiosity and authoritarianism) were entered in the first three blocks. Prior gambling behavior for casinos and lotteries was included in the fourth block, and each of the first- and third-person variables were then entered separately.

The order of entry of the variable groups followed the approach advocated by Wenner (1985), proceeding from general characteristics of the subjects to specific values or attitudes, and then to the third-person perceptions about advertising. This order permits examination of whether the variables of interest (i.e., the third person variables) explain any additional variance in pro-censorship attitudes that are not explained by other previously suggested predictors. This provides the most conservative possible test for the impact of the third-person effect on attitudes toward restricting gambling advertising.

Overall, all variables included in this analysis accounted for 32% of total variance in the pro-censorship attitudes for casino advertising and 25% for lottery advertising. After all the other variables were controlled, the impact of the third-person effect variables remained stable for each form of gambling advertising.

In the case of casino advertising, both estimated impacts on other

Table 3. Hierarchical Regression of Censorship Scales on Demographic, Orientational, Attitudinal, Product Usage, and Third-Person Effect Variables

	Censorship of Casino Ads[a]		Censorship of Lottery Ads	
	β	Adjusted R^2	β	Adjusted R^2
Demographic		.05*		.05*
Gender[b]	−.22**		−.18*	
Age	.12		.27*	
Education	−.06		−.03	
Parents' education	−.06		−.07	
Income	−.02		.06	
Orientational		.07**		.08**
TV news	−.27**		−.27**	
Newspaper	.14		−.02	
Political involvement	.13		.17*	
Political affiliation[c]	.10		.10	
Attitudinal		.02		.01
Religiosity	.05		.07	
Authoritarianism	−.04		.02	
Product Usage[d]	−.14*	.02*	−.16*	.01
First- & third-person				
Self	−.01	.00	.13	.02*
Other adults	.24**	.10***	.17*	.05**
Children	.29***	.06***	.19*	.02*
Total R^2		.32***		.25***

[a]High scale value = greater willingness to censor.

[b]Coded as 1 = female, 2 = male.

[c]Ranged from (1) strong republican to (7) strong democrat.

[d]Coded as 0 = do not gamble, 1 = gamble.

*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$.

β; Reported are the final betas when all predictor variables are included in the final regressions.

adults ($\beta = 0.24$, $p < .01$) and children ($\beta = 0.29$, $p < .001$) continued to be powerful predictors of people's willingness to censor, accounting for additional 10% and 6% of the total variance, respectively. For lottery advertising, the perceived effect on other adults ($\beta = 0.17$, $p < .05$) and children ($\beta = 0.19$, $p < .05$) also remained a significant predictor of censorship attitudes, explaining additional 5% and 2% of the variance, respectively.

All of the control variable blocks except for the attitudinal variables accounted for a significant amount of the variance in willingness to censor gambling advertising. For both types of advertising, demographic variables explained 5% of the variance in the pro-censorship attitudes. Gender appeared to be a key predictor of a desire to censor gambling advertising; women were more willing to censor ads for casinos and lotteries than men ($\beta = -0.22$, $p < .01$ for casinos; $\beta = -0.18$, $p < .05$

for lotteries). In addition, age showed a positive relationship with censorship attitudes for lottery advertising ($\beta = 0.27$, $p < .05$).

Orientational variables added a significant amount of additional variance in censorship for both casino advertising (7%) and lottery advertising (8%), after accounting for the demographics block. In particular, those who more watched TV news were less likely to support censoring gambling advertising ($\beta = -0.27$, $p < .01$ in both cases). Politically more involved people were more supportive of censoring lottery advertising ($\beta = 0.17$, $p < .05$), although party affiliation was not significantly related with pro-censorship attitudes for either type of advertising ($\beta = 0.10$, *ns* in both cases). Attitudinal variables (religiosity and authoritarianism) did not explain a significant amount of additional variance in pro-censorship attitudes ($R^2 = 0.02$, *ns* for casinos; $R^2 = 0.01$, *ns* for lotteries).

Prior gambling behavior appeared to be a significant, negative predictor of willingness to censor for both types of gambling advertising ($\beta = -0.14$, $p < .05$ for casinos; $\beta = -0.16$, $p < .05$ for lotteries), after controlling for demographics, orientational, and attitudinal variables. In both cases, nongamblers were more likely to be willing to censor these ads than gamblers.

DISCUSSION

This study provides support for our contention that a third-person effect occurs when people consider the potential impact of advertising for legal, but out of favor, products and services such as gambling. The results also show that the third-person effect is positively related to censorship attitudes toward gambling advertising, and that this relationship remains robust, even after controlling for possible confounding variables.

One surprising result to emerge from this study was the fact that respondents perceive greater effects of gambling ads on other adults than on children. Several explanations for this are possible. Respondents may have felt that advertising for gambling is less common or a less desirable activity among children than among adults. They may also have thought that there would be less exposure to these ads by young children than adults. Alternatively, they may perceive that there are strong controls in place to prevent children from engaging in casino or lottery gambling, even if they wanted to. Finally, they may believe that the temptation from advertising on other adults could lead to severe financial problems, but that the stakes involved with children would not be as great. Future research is needed to better understand the cause of these perceptions.

Although most of the findings examined in this study were parallel for the two forms of gambling advertising, there were some differences worth noting. Support for censorship of messages for either type of gam-

bling was not very high; however, there was greater support for restricting casino advertising than for lottery advertising ($M = 6.50$ vs. 6.19, $t = 3.43$, $p < .001$). Respondents were also slightly more likely to believe they were personally influenced by casino ads than lottery ads ($M = 2.31$ vs. 2.09, $t = 2.18$, $p < .05$). Finally, perception of effects on others was a better predictor of a willingness to restrict casino advertising ($\beta = 0.24$ for other adults, $\beta = 0.29$ for children) than it was for lottery ads ($\beta = 0.17$ for other adults, $\beta = 0.19$ for children). All of this suggests that people in this study perceive advertising for casinos to be a greater problem than advertising for lotteries. It may be that the respondents here felt people could experience greater financial difficulties from casino gambling than from buying lottery tickets. Additionally, they might be less willing to restrict lottery advertising than casino advertising because there is a perceived value to the larger community from lottery gambling. In many states, it helps finance state programs such as education and the environment. Future research may wish to explore the perceived differences between the acceptability of advertising for these two forms of gambling.

Although a few of the findings from this study were unexpected, the majority provide additional support for the hypothesized theoretical link between the third-person effect and pro-censorship attitudes. These findings extend the conclusions drawn for research concerning pornography, violence on television, and violent and misogynic rap lyrics (Gunther, 1995; McLeod et al., 1997; Rojas et al., 1996) to a different area of advertising attitudes. This type of research is critical for two reasons: (a) to understand the motivation behind the growing calls for restrictions on advertising and (b) to support a more rational debate regarding public policy decisions related to such restrictions.

The present study has some limitations. This study looked at the perceived impact of advertising on two groups of "others": other adults and children. In estimating the perceived impacts on children, respondents may have perceived the term *children* differently. Some may have thought of children as elementary school age children, whereas others thought of high school students. This may naturally have lead to differences in perceived impact. Future research might specify more directly who is intended in the question. However, it is unlikely that any misperceptions that occurred would seriously change the major findings of the study—that third-person perceptions are predictive of support for censorship for gambling advertising.

As legalized gambling activities spread due to both changing technology (the Internet) and increasing needs to fund government programs, it stands to reason that there will be more instances of gambling problems and abuses. As these situations are publicized, there will be a growing call to limit this activity. Legislators and policymakers may be tempted to respond by blaming advertising and suggesting that it be restricted. However, the findings of this study suggest that great caution

needs to be taken before advocating this approach. Many people may believe that restricting advertising will be a good policy because it will protect others from being affected by the message. However, this assumes that the belief that others are affected by the ads is correct. If it is the case that people overestimate the messages' effect on others, their desire for censorship may be built upon unconfirmed fears of media impact rather than the actual impact of media. Any action that rests on such misperception will likely prove unsuccessful in terms of policy efficiency and consumer protection (Petty, 1992). Therefore, it is important to understand the impact of the third-person effect in developing good public policy.

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