

GENDER DIFFERENCES IN THE PERCEPTION OF CONSUMER PRODUCT HAZARDS. Stephen L. Young and Michael S. Wogalter, Ph.D., University of Richmond, Richmond, VA 23173.

An important consideration in the prevention of consumer product accidents is people's perception of the hazards. People are more likely to look for and read warnings on products they perceive to be hazardous (Godfrey, Allender, Laughery, & Smith, 1983; Wogalter, Desaulniers, & Brelsford, 1986). Looking at individual differences, Larue and Cohen (1987) found that females in general were more willing to read warnings on products than were males. This suggests that males and females may perceive product hazards differently. The present study examines whether males and females differ with respect to hazard perception, and whether this perception is moderated by the product's attributed masculinity/femininity. Sixty-five undergraduates (25 males and 40 females) from the University of Richmond participated. Seventy-two common consumer products employed by Wogalter et al. (1986) were used as the stimuli. Each subject received one of two randomly-determined orders of products, and responded to five questions for each product: A) "How masculine or feminine is this product?" anchored from very masculine (1) to very feminine (7), B) "How hazardous do you feel this product is?", C) "How often do you use this product?", D) "How confident are you in knowing all the hazards related to this product?", and E) "In your experience, How severely have you or someone you know been injured by this product?". The last four questions were anchored from low (0) to high (8). The 72 products were split at the median of the masculinity/femininity scale, such that half were classified feminine and half masculine. Three separate 2 (subject gender) X 2 (masculine vs. feminine product) ANOVAs were performed with hazardousness, frequency of use, and confidence in knowing hazards as the dependent variables. For hazards, there was no significant main effect of gender, but there was a significant main effect of product masculinity/femininity,  $F(1,63) = 69.94$ ,  $p < .0001$ , and a significant interaction,  $F(1,63) = 5.13$ ,  $p < .03$ . Both males and females judged masculine products as significantly more hazardous than feminine products. Females rated masculine products as significantly more hazardous than did males. For frequency of use, there was no significant main effect of gender, but there was a significant main effect of product masculinity/femininity,  $F(1,63) = 225.48$ ,  $p < .001$ , and a significant interaction,  $F(1,63) = 59.71$ ,  $p < .001$ . Males used masculine products significantly more than females, while females used feminine products significantly more than males. For confidence in knowing hazards, there were no significant main effects, but there was a significant interaction,  $F(1,63) = 27.09$ ,  $p < .001$ . Males and females were equally confident in knowing all the hazards for the feminine products. Males were significantly more confident for the masculine products than were females. Males were equally confident for both masculine and feminine products, suggesting that they may fail to read important warnings on certain products. Females might take precaution with unfamiliar masculine products, but might fail to do so for more familiar and seemingly less hazardous feminine products (Godfrey & Laughery, 1984) and therefore may miss warnings of product hazards. These results suggest the possibility that warnings should be designed to overcome the perceptual biases of its user. This suggestion is especially important for certain products targeted primarily for use by persons of one gender because they still may be used by persons of the other gender.