



# THE GOLDHABER WARNINGS REPORT



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## ARE WOMEN FROM VENUS AND MEN FROM MARS WHEN IT COMES TO WARNINGS?

In a previous issue of this newsletter (August, 2009), I reported that a study conducted by the British Association of Dermatologists in July, 2009 found that men were twice as likely as women to use no sun protection at all when sunbathing. This difference between how men and women perceive and act on warnings appears quite frequently in the warnings literature. For example, in a recent study conducted by Richard Gilson and others at Princeton University, 33 warning messages that normally appear on consumer products were rated on perceived hazardousness. For all 33 messages, females consistently rated the hazard higher than did males. The authors concluded that males have a lower perception of risk than females.

The marketing literature explains the differences between males' and females' risk-taking propensity as the "cue-sensitivity threshold." This means that a person's sensitivity to the nature of the cues present in a data set determines the judgment outcome. Joan Meyers-Levy of the University of Minnesota suggests that males' more risky judgment is a result of their lack of sensitivity to risk cues. Her studies have found that males are less sensitive to risk cues compared to females. In one study, she gave both males and females descriptions of a new product, which contained a risky attribute. She found that females were more likely than males to perceive the product as dangerous. Thus, males would appear to be less sensitive than females to risk cues in warning messages.

Research that I conducted over a ten-year period with Dr. Mark deTurck found that males are more likely than females to ignore "No Diving" signs and dive into the shallow end of a pool. We attributed this finding to differences in their information processing styles.

Females, as detailed processors are more persuaded by the information contained in the data set than males are. Males tend to process only a portion of the information before forming their judgments. When the data set contains risk cues, the males would register the presence of these cues but would not read their details. Females, however, would read the cues in detail before making their final judgment. Because females process risk cues in greater detail, they are more aware of the dangers implied by these cues, and this leads to more risk-averse judgments. Consequently, the difference between the genders' risky judgments is a result of the difference in their information processing styles.

The implications of these findings and others to the writers of warnings will be discussed in future issues of this newsletter. Feel free to pass this newsletter on to any of your friends and colleagues.