2001

The representation of African Americans in television commercials

Amita A. Abraham
San Jose State University

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**THE REPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICANS
IN TELEVISION COMMERCIALS**

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the School of Journalism

and Mass Communications

San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science

By

Amita A. Abraham

December 2001

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A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Cecelia Baldwin", written over a horizontal line.

Dr. Cecelia Baldwin

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Alan Fried", written over a horizontal line.

Dr. Alan Fried

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Bill Tillinghast", written over a horizontal line.

Dr. Bill Tillinghast

APPROVED FOR THE UNIVERSITY

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Jack Pesh", written over a horizontal line.

ABSTRACT

THE REPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICANS IN TELEVISION COMMERCIALS

by Amita A. Abraham

This paper focused on the nature of the images and interracial relationships portrayed by African American models in prime-time television commercials on the channels ABC, NBC, CBS, FOX, WB, and UPN and in the Clio award-winning commercials for the years 1995 through 2000. The subject position theory, the concepts of narration and noise, and the social learning theory together with the literature reviewed that discussed the kinds of African American stereotypes that have persisted in advertising, helped establish an appropriate coding structure for analyzing and interpreting the commercials.

The results of the study showed that although the percentages of African Americans in television commercials approaches their percentages in the United States' population, the tendency to distance African Americans from home environments and the persistence of the dominant white ideology of white adult male superiority in commercials raises concern over the types of advertising messages being put out to a broad audience and the kinds of commercials that are considered worth emulating by the advertising industry.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Purpose of the Study

The number of African Americans in television commercials has increased substantially over the years and they are now portrayed in a wider variety of roles than in the past. Currently, there are a larger number of advertisements in which African Americans are portrayed as independent and respected than there were a decade ago (Coltrane & Messineo, 2000). Unfortunately, however, the depictions of African Americans continue to be narrow and stereotypical (Bristor, Lee, & Hunt, 1995; Coltrane & Messineo, 2000; Taylor & Stern, 1997; Wilkes & Valencia, 1989). Images that exaggerate cultural differences and deny positive emotions to African Americans persist, thereby contributing to the perpetuation of subtle prejudices against them (Coltrane & Messineo, 2000). In fact, several studies indicate that subtle racial elements in advertisements that suggest African American inferiority often mitigate the positive effects of an increase in the number of African Americans in advertisements (Bristor, Lee, & Hunt, 1995). Minimal interracial interaction in advertisements is one of the ways by which images of inferiority are perpetuated (Bristor, Lee, & Hunt, 1995; Dates & Barlow, 1990). Bristor, Lee, and Hunt (1995) call it the “the avoidance form of discrimination” where subtle, “modern” forms replace direct forms of racism (p. 55).

The primary aim of this study was to analyze present-day television commercials to look for such subtle forms of racism. To this end, television commercials aired during

prime-time (8-11 p.m. PST) in a six-day period (November 27-December 2, 2000) on the channels ABC, CBS, NBC, Fox, WB, and UPN were analyzed. In addition, the study explored the standards being set by the Clio Awards, considered to be one of the highest accolades receivable in advertising. Award-winning commercials from 1995 through 2000 (data for 1999 was unavailable) were analyzed to bring out the nature of the depictions that are being honored and that are, thus, setting the standards for the rest of the industry. This study focused on the nature of the interracial interactions and relationships depicted between African Americans and European Americans to try and elicit insights into the power balance that is depicted in modern-day commercials. It also examined the frequency of representation of African Americans, the types of roles that they portrayed, the types of products and services that they were shown modeling for, and the types of settings that they were depicted in. The analysis was carried out to help gauge the meanings encoded in these portrayals to determine whether these images in effect perpetuate subtle stereotypes.

Importance of this Study

In the 1990s, critics speculated about the potential influence of new marketing strategies on race relations but few scholars conducted detailed studies of television advertising to explore how commercials might shape prejudicial attitudes (Coltrane & Messineo, 2000). This study attempted to fill some of this gap in research by taking a more holistic look at advertising images on television to discern whether the depictions of interracial interactions continue to be few in number and stereotypical and if they do, how these depictions help perpetuate subtle prejudices. It focused on linking theoretical

findings on how prejudices are perpetuated by mass media like advertising to actual reflections of these prejudices in advertisements. Television commercials were analyzed because they tend to affect and reflect public perceptions more profoundly than do those that appear in print media (Taylor & Stern, 1997). Passive viewing of television advertising allows for the uncritical acceptance of stereotypical portrayals that assist in shaping the American public's view of minorities (Bristor, Lee, & Hunt, 1995; Wilkes & Valencia, 1989). Apart from analyzing television commercials aired during prime-time on network and cable television, Clio award-winning commercials were also analyzed. The Clio awards are among the most recognized and coveted awards for advertising excellence and, as Bob Welke, chairman and chief creative officer at Euro RSCG Tatham in Chicago and a former Executive Jury member, puts it, are judged "by preeminent minds in the field to ensure the quality of the winners' work....by and against the best in the business"(Clio Awards, 2001, How an ad wins, ¶ 1). The idea behind the choice of a set of award-winning commercials for analysis developed from a determination to examine representations in these commercials that form standards for other advertising professionals to emulate. That winning an award such as the Clio is important to agencies as well as their clients is evident from what Evan Neufeld, Vice President of International Research with Jupiter Communications, has to say, "People may make jokes about award shows, but let's face it, if you win a Clio, you're going to get a raise or your agency will get more clients and you'll both get recognized" (Snyder, 1998, ¶ 2).

Differences from Previous Studies

Previous studies primarily focused on visibility and role stereotypes (Colfax & Sternberg, 1972; Cox, 1969; Hair, Solomon, & Bush, 1977; Taylor, Lee & Stern, 1995, Wilkes & Valencia, 1989; Zinkhan, Cox, & Hong, 1986). This study departed from previous studies in its emphasis on an analysis of both recently aired mainstream commercials as well as Clio award-winning commercials to compare the kinds of images portrayed and the nature of interracial interactions depicted in these commercials. Previous studies (Bristor, Lee, & Hunt, 1995) that analyzed the interracial social interactions of African Americans in television commercials used an interpretive approach that included a limited number of commercials owing to the labor-intensive methodology chosen. In this study, however, the content analysis method was used to identify the types of roles played by African American models in television commercials as major, minor, or background roles. Multi-racial commercials were closely examined to help compare the types of roles portrayed by African Americans and European Americans when portrayed together in these commercials. In addition to the quantitative content analysis, critical observations were made of the nature of relationships depicted between African American and European American adult male, adult female, teenage, and child models to help get a better picture of the interracial relationships and the power balance portrayed in contemporary television commercials.

Limitations of this study

This study was limited to television commercials appearing in a six-day period on the channels ABC, NBC, CBS, Fox, WB, and UPN during prime-time (8-11 p.m. PST).

It is likely that commercials with a greater representation of African Americans appear alongside programming that has higher ratings within this group, most of which are outside prime-time. Although this is a highly diverse area, this Northern California sample is not geographically representative of the United States. However, the decision to analyze prime-time commercials was made, as the idea behind the study was to highlight the picture being portrayed about this group in the general media to the largest audiences. The set of Clio award-winning commercials that were analyzed included only those that originated from the United States and this amounted to 138 commercials. However, the analysis of these award-winning commercials was only carried out to initiate thought on the types of representations in these commercials that are considered commendable and to form a basis for possible further research into the criteria used in selecting award-worthy commercials. As content analysis was used as the primary method of analysis, the analysis was limited to the selected content variables in this study. It is therefore possible that subtle aspects of racism that can only be identified by a detailed interpretive approach were overlooked.

Major Theoretical Concepts Framing this Study

As the primary focus of this study was the depiction of interracial interactions in contemporary television commercials, the major theoretical concepts underlying this study served to explain how audiences view these depictions and how they learn to accept norms through repeated exposure. Thus, the theories and concepts chosen for the framework of this study included the subject position theory, the concepts of narration and noise, and the social learning theory.

The subject position theory, put forth by Barry Brummett and Detine L. Bowers (1999), offers insights into the ways in which media texts require their readers to identify with different positions being portrayed by the images, characters, or themes in these texts. These depictions, especially when portraying minority populations, can tend to be so demeaning that they offer what Brummett and Bowers (1999) term as “object positions” to readers (p. 122). While subject positions are characterized by fully realized “narrations”, object positions are characterized by random disconnected, disjointed information, termed as “noise” (Brummett & Bowers, 1999, p. 131). Repeated exposure to portrayals that offer subject and object positions to their viewers, whether they are an accurate representation of reality or not, result in their being assimilated by people as the norm over time. According to Bandura’s (1971) social learning theory, stereotypes are the result of observations of “actual” differences between groups in a given society or are based on social influences like mass media, school, parents, and peer groups (Bandura, 1971). Dates and Barlow, in their work on African American images in the media, concluded that “Black media stereotypes are not the natural, much less harmful, products of an idealized popular culture; rather they are more commonly socially constructed images...frozen, incapable of growth, change, innovation, or transformation” (Dates & Barlow, 1990, p. 5). These theories and concepts provided an understanding of how audiences relate to portrayals in advertising texts and how stereotypes are perpetuated by exposure to media texts. They formed the framework of this study as they guided the researcher toward looking for evidence of stereotyping and the nature of interracial interactions in advertising.

Methods that were Employed

The quantitative content analysis method was used to analyze the commercials in this study. The set of commercials for this study included all those commercials that were aired during prime-time (8-11 p.m. PST) between November 27, 2000 and December 2, 2000 (one day each was randomly selected in this time-frame for each of the six channels selected, ABC, NBC, CBS, Fox, WB, and UPN) as well as Clio award-winning commercials originating from the United States for the years 1995-2000. This amounted to 455 embedded commercials in 18 hours of prime-time programming and 138 award-winning commercials. The categories of analyses for this study included frequency of appearance, perceived importance, types of character roles, types of products and services advertised, types of settings, and types of interracial relationships evident in the commercial. In addition, critical observations were made of the nature and types of portrayals of African Americans alongside European Americans in the commercials to help gather insights into the power balance depicted in them.

Value of the Study to Practice and Theory

Although studies have been carried out on how other minorities have been stereotyped by the advertising industry, the racial tension between the Whites and the Blacks offer the most important arena for study. The dominance of the industry by Whites and their limited understanding of other cultures can explain, to an extent, the stereotypes surfacing in the advertisements that are created (Bristor, Lee, & Hunt, 1995). Through an additional focus on advertisements that industry experts consider as worth accolades in this study, it is hoped that attention will be drawn to the kinds of standards

that these award-winning commercials set for the rest of the advertising industry to follow. It is hoped that studies such as this will aid in an increased awareness of negative minority portrayals and that a heightened consciousness of their detrimental effects on our society will result in a more cautious and sensitive approach to the creation of advertisements in the future.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Semiology, Framing, and Racism as an Ideology

Advertisements are social texts in that they are culturally encoded in signs, symbols, and icons. The semiological analysis of such texts involves revealing the underlying “cultural meaning” of the text, taken as a whole (McQuail, 1994, p. 247). These texts can be considered to be a sophisticated form of visual rhetoric and much like writing, can be understood as a discursive form, capable of subtle nuances in communication or, like numbers, capable of facilitating abstraction and analysis (Scott, 1994). They are capable of declaration, comparison, and other kinds of symbolic statements and are interpreted in much the same way as numbers and alphabets are, according to learned patterns (Scott, 1994). Interpretation of these texts differ from person to person, at times differing significantly from what was initially meant to have been coded into them. The creator of the advertisement crafts the message in anticipation of the audience's probable response, using shared knowledge of various vocabularies and conventions, as well as common experiences while the receivers of the message use this same body of cultural knowledge to read the message, infer the sender's intention, evaluate the argument, and formulate a response (Scott, 1994). Thus, media texts can be considered to be sites where cultural contests over meaning are waged, where different ideological perspectives representing different interests with unequal power engage in a struggle (Croteau & Hoynes, 2000a). It is the media that gives us pictures of social

interaction by their sheer repetition on a daily basis thus playing significant roles in shaping broad social definitions of what is “normal” and what is “deviant” (Croteau & Hoynes, 2000a, p. 161). Advertising texts have been known to contribute to marginalizing or neglecting people who are “different” from the mass-mediated norm (Croteau & Hoynes, 2000a, p. 161). It achieves this through omission (by ignoring the existence of African Americans), stereotyping, and portraying African Americans in a disproportionate number of low status roles (Bristor, Lee, & Hunt, 1995).

Framing essentially involves “selecting some aspects of a perceived reality and making them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation” (Entman, 1993, p. 52). Media analysts often use this concept of framing to explain how television imagery influences people (Entman, 1993; Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, & Sasson, 1992; Gitlin, 1980). Although recent audience studies reveal that viewers do not automatically mimic what they see on television, the imagery they observe facilitates specific forms of understanding, interpretation, and experience (Press, 1991). Media images provide a confirmation of one’s perceptions of the world, promote acceptance of current social arrangements, and reassure people that things are the way they ought to be. Television commercials, in particular, make race and gender stereotypes readily available and these stereotyped commercials become a resource that can automatically be drawn upon, especially when interacting with someone of a different race, ethnicity, or gender (Coltrane & Messineo, 2000). In this light, advertising

plays a significant role in perpetuating and maintaining one of the oldest known stereotypes; the stereotype based on race.

Ideology, in the context of the media, is a system of meaning that helps define and make sense of the world and makes value judgments about that world (Croteau & Hoynes, 2000a). The way in which the images and words in a specific media text are thought about, even used in defining social and cultural issues are, often, manifestations of a dominant ideology (Croteau & Hoynes, 2000a). In the United States, where the society is characterized by unequal cultural power, ideology is one way by which dominant groups (for example, White men) maintain and legitimize their power over minority groups. The dominant White ideology is based on its belief in White superiority (Bristor, Lee, & Hunt, 1995). The reproduction of this ideological hegemony of the White dominant culture by the mass media only helps to legitimize and perpetuate the inequalities in class and race relations (Dates & Barlow, 1990). From this ideology emerges a concept of racism that can be defined as an ideology involving the domination and subordination of those groups deemed inferior (Bristor, Lee, & Hunt, 1995). The history of subordination goes back in time with its roots anchored in the era of slavery.

History of European American Dominance over African Americans in Advertising

For generations, the American mass media has continuously bombarded the public with images of African Americans that spread the message of hopelessness, being trapped, and unable to change their circumstances in meaningful ways (Brummett & Bowers, 1999). African Americans have been objectified and commodified, reduced to parts that can be equated to or compared with others. A crucial historical fact of this

African American experience is that people were once legally and economically regarded as commodities during the period of slavery. The “slave trade” linguistically and legally legitimized the exchange of bodies as a capital venture (Brummett & Bowers, 1999, p. 126). For years, advertisers have portrayed Blacks in roles that symbolically encapsulated them both occupationally and socially thus ensuring that they would not represent a threat to most Whites (Colfax & Sternberg, 1972). Research on the representation of African Americans in advertising started gathering momentum in the late 1970s when it was found that the “decidedly White imagination of advertising” only reinforced the exclusionary and racist beliefs of the culture of that time (Ewen, 1976, p. 212). Studies show that images of African Americans have changed considerably from the older, stereotypical depictions of Aunt Jemima or Amos and Andy, but researchers do not agree that current television images are substantially more positive or realistic than their predecessors (Dennis & Pease, 1996; Kern-Foxworth, 1994). Non-Whites continue to be underrepresented on television with studies indicating that in television programming and commercials, less than 10% of human appearance time includes any non-Whites (Lichter, Lichter, & Rothman, 1994; Weigel, Kim & Frost, 1995; Wilson & Gutierrez, 1995).

People read advertising texts in various ways and these texts shape people’s perceptions of the world around them. Several theories have been propounded to explain how people engage in making sense of these texts, of which the subject position theory is one of them. An understanding of the subject position theory (Brummett & Bowers,

1999) and how it applies to advertising texts enabled the researcher to identify and analyze the kinds of positions offered by the advertising texts in this study.

Subject Position Theory

A subject position is a “stance, role, or perspective one takes in relationship to a text so as to read or engage the text” (Brummett & Bowers, 1999, p. 118). Media texts offer their “readers” three kinds of subject positions: (a) identified subject positions, wherein the reader finds characters, themes, or images in the text with which he or she identifies with; (b) implied subject positions, wherein the reader does not identify with the characters or images in the text, but is still called to and constructed as a subject so as to read it; and (c) subversive subject positions, in which subjectivities are assumed that are often directly opposed to the call of the text (Brummett & Bowers, 1999, p. 118). According to this theory, people not only assume subject positions in relationship to media texts, but also to others as mediated through these texts.

Teun van Dijk pointed out that “To control other people, it is most effective to try to control their group attitudes, especially their even more fundamental, attitude producing ideologies, because in that case the others will behave out of their own ‘free’ will in accordance with the interests of the powerful” (cited in Brummett & Bowers, 1999, p. 120). The prevalent ideology persuades people that how things are is how they ought to be and that the place provided for people is what they ought to have (Brummett & Bowers, 1999). This ideology of categorization results in the creation of disempowered groups as objects or the “Other”. Some subject positions like those concerning race, are constructed in so damaging and repressive a manner that they are

termed as “object positions” (Brummett & Bowers, 1999, p. 122). By reproducing the ideological hegemony of the dominant White culture, the mass media helps to legitimize the inequalities in class and race relations (Dates & Barlow, 1990). While creating a subject position requires that a text must depict a person or group of people as having authority, as an origin of motive, and as one having a voice, commodification creates an object position by denying active agency to people (Brummett & Bowers, 1999). When people are objectified, their authority to act or make a difference is removed. The voices of images used to create these object positions are literally and figuratively suppressed. A review of the literature showed that the number of object positions offered to African Americans in commercials exceeded the number of subject positions offered to them. Of the few subject positions offered to African Americans in advertisements, the number of implied and subversive subject positions far exceeded the number of identified subject positions.

African Americans as Servants and Menial Workers

The central roles assigned to African Americans in the past were predominantly negative ones such as a menial worker, a poor recipient of charity, and a social problem (Cox, 1969; Humphrey & Schuman, 1984; Stern, 1999). A couple of decades ago, African Americans were rarely portrayed as anything but servants like in Quaker Oats’ Aunt Jemima advertisement and in advertisements for Cream of Wheat and Pullman Company (Olson, 1995). Food and cleaning products were the chief ones to use Black stereotypes, as though these were the subjects that Blacks knew better than Whites (Patton, 1993). Black servants in the Maxwell House advertisements in the early 1900s

were never given a central role. Yet, they were always lurking in the background to ensure a White world of pleasure with no White labor (Manring, 1998).

African Americans as Recipients of Charity

It was common practice in the past to portray African Americans in non-commodity advertisements like those for public services or public utilities so as to “adequately represent” them while not linking them to individual products (Colfax & Sternberg, 1972, p. 14). Humphrey and Schuman found (1984) that a large number of ads run by non-profit organizations, despite being well-intentioned, mostly depicted African Americans living in poverty while very few ads depicted poverty-stricken Whites together with African Americans in the same ad and almost none of the ads depicted only Whites as destitute.

African Americans as Athletes, Entertainers, and Musicians

The exceptions to negative roles have been figures such as athletes, musicians, and entertainers of which the most common stereotype is that of the African American athlete. Apart from the use of celebrity and professional athletes, advertisements have been known to use fictional athletes that, interestingly, are almost always Black (Bristor, Lee, & Hunt, 1995). While African American athletes serve as positive role models and give room for some of the few identified subject positions available for African Americans, this stereotypical Black athleticism is based on the assumption that African Americans are genetically endowed with greater physical skills than Whites and that Whites are more intellectually endowed when compared to African Americans. Bristor, Lee, and Hunt (1995) had previously found that advertisements reflect these stereotypes

as more than 70% of athletes in the ads that they examined were African Americans.

Although African American men on television seem to have gained symbolic access to some of the instrumental benefits of masculinity (primarily through sports), Coltrane and Messineo (2000) found that they were simultaneously constrained by stereotypical images of take-charge manhood that allowed them little symbolic room for experiencing reciprocal romance, gentleness, or domestic fulfillment.

Visual Caricatures Objectifying African Americans

The “simple count” method used in a content analysis of advertisements assumes that pictures merely point to objects and, thus, have no rhetorical impetus of their own (Scott, 1994, p. 259). This method is based on the theory that the meaning of a pictorial text can be derived simply by recording what is pictured, irrespective of how it is pictured or what might have been intended by the picturing (Scott, 1994). One of the earliest content analysis studies conducted on African American images in advertising in 1969 used an aggregate of the appearances of African Americans to measure improvement in racial representation but did not take into account the widespread practice of racial stereotyping through visual caricatures during the period covered by the study (Scott, 1994). Thus, depictions of African Americans with exaggerated lips, noses overly flared, arms drawn long and ape-like, could have been part of the total set of pictures used to measure an improvement in racial representations (Scott, 1994). Such demeaning portrayals in advertising only served to offer object positions to the readers of those texts.

African Americans in Exotic Settings

An ideological analysis of advertisements also involves looking at the secondary discourses within these advertisements, at the ideas about the social relationships that are embedded within the ads (Croteau & Hoynes, 2000a). In the past, theme ads served to distance African Americans from contemporary or domestic settings more close to home where they seemed to be a greater threat to the dominant Whites. African Americans were frequently portrayed in exotic settings in blue-collar occupations like servants, bearers, entertainers, and waiters, as subordinate to the White tourists, as present only as a source of pleasure to the Whites (Cox, 1969; Colfax & Sternberg, 1972).

African Americans as Music "Merchandise"

At one time, the objectification of African Americans was highly prevalent in advertisements for record albums, where they were the "merchandise" not entirely dissimilar from products like soap and automobiles (Colfax & Sternberg, 1972, p. 12).

African Americans as Athletic "Bodies"

In their study, Bristor, Lee, and Hunt (1995) discuss a Mercury advertisement in which the camera focuses on the tremendous physique of a headless African American basketball player with the announcer informing the viewer, "you know, the one that can jump so high" (Bristor, Lee, & Hunt, 1995, p. 53). The player jumps so high that he does not land and his head is always above the screen suggesting that while the person is of no significance, it is the body that counts (Bristor, Lee, & Hunt, 1995). They also discuss a Hardee's advertisement where the hardly visible African American basketball players

behind the prominent White coach and White spokeswoman for the burger place are reduced to mere appetites (Bristor, Lee, & Hunt, 1995).

From the research reviewed it was observed that African Americans were denied significant subject positions in advertising in the past. In fact, studies showed that their objectification appears to have continued, although in much subtler forms, into contemporary advertising, most often, by relegating them to token background roles. By denying them any significant interaction with the European American models they come across as the background noise, a characteristic of the object position.

The Concepts of Narration and Noise

Narration and noise are factors that distinguish subject and object positions. A text that creates a subject position will provide the subject with a fully realized narration. Narration provides an explanation for why people are doing what they are doing. It provides a context for action that grounds motives and reactions of subjects (Brummett & Bowers, 1999).

Noise is the opposite of narration. It is random, disconnected, and disjointed information. It is a characteristic of the object position, where the object has no story to tell. Stories are told about it, but it has no story of its own. When people are objectified, they are stripped of their own story and their descriptors disconnect entropically (Brummett & Bowers, 1999). Noise has two elements: isolation and acontextuality, and otherness (Brummett & Bowers, 1999). An object does not seem to be connected to anything or anybody, nor can its story be connected to lend plausibility to its being there. The reader of the text does not know why it does what it does, how it got to be where it

is, or where it is going and why. Its lack of place in the text or its otherness has been the major resource of racism over the years. For centuries, anything other than White has been treated as the “other” with no story of their own to tell, as isolated from context and relationship.

African Americans in Background Roles - the “Noise”

The few multi-racial advertisements in print and on television in the late 1960s featured African Americans as token faces in a crowd, frequently as token major characters (Hair, Solomon, & Bush, 1977; Stern, 1999). For the most part, when commercials did feature African Americans in non-stereotypical roles in the 1960s and 1970s, they were not central figures. African Americans were incorporated into advertisements without becoming too closely associated with a particular product. They were merely assimilated into a larger White group (Colfax & Sternberg, 1972; Wilkes & Valencia, 1989). Data from 1967-1986 television commercials indicated that, Black presence, in as many as 16% of commercials in the study, sometimes approached the percentage of African Americans in the population (Zinkhan, Quails, & Biswas, 1990). However, the relative infrequency of their appearance in major roles and their large number of appearances in minor and background roles suggested an unwelcome tokenism (Taylor, Lee, & Stern, 1995). They formed the background noise.

Rendering African Americans Invisible

Pieterse (1992) suggests that the presence of a Black person may be transformed into its absence by placing a White man in a dominant role next to the Black person and then by further objectifying the Black person. The dominance and alleged potency of the

White man becomes more pronounced only by putting a Black person in the picture and rendering him invisible.

African American "Tokenism" and White Dominance

An analysis of television commercials in the 1970s indicated that, if ever portrayed in routine occupational roles, White workers were portrayed with identifiably higher occupational status alongside Blacks in the ads (Colfax & Sternberg, 1972). The study carried out by Bristor, Lee, and Hunt (1995) also showed that African Americans were given significantly lower screen presence (which includes character's placement in front of the camera, activity level, and exposure time) in advertisements in comparison to their White counterparts (Bristor, Lee, & Hunt, 1995). They also found that tokenism prevailed in advertisements with African Americans figuring in only 17% of the advertisements as major characters (Bristor, Lee, & Hunt, 1995). Advertisements with only an African American character were found to be rare. The token presence of African Americans in advertisements only served in reaffirming the dominant White ideology (Bristor, Lee, & Hunt, 1995).

Minimizing African American Screen Presence

It was found that by manipulating their level of activity in the ads, the presence of African Americans in ads could be minimized. An advertisement for Jell-O portrayed a bus full of White children with one African American boy who appeared to be extremely passive in comparison to the rest of the rather boisterous White children (Bristor, Lee, & Hunt, 1995). Thus, the theme of domination and subordinate passivity seeps into advertisements targeting little children as well. Lighting and distance from the camera

were other subtle ways by which the African American characters were made practically invisible in advertisements. While a Vicks DayQuil advertisement showed close-ups of the White waiter in the commercial, the African American waiter was always in the background (Bristor, Lee, & Hunt, 1995). In a Ford Aspire commercial, the several White characters were shown in brightly lit conditions while the only African American couple in the advertisement were shown in such low light (due to cloud cover) that they could hardly be seen (Bristor, Lee, & Hunt, 1995). Advertising in the late 1980s saw an increased use of Black music but few Black faces (Dates & Barlow, 1990). So while Black artists like The Pointer Sisters, Bill Withers and Brook Benton sang the jingles, White models flitted across the screen (Dates & Barlow, 1990). Limiting the character's exposure time in an advertisement was found to be another way of making a character's role insignificant.

Brummett and Bowers contended (1999) that while several of the contemporary advertisements had several African American characters, by focusing on them only fleetingly, they came across as the background noise, as good as not being in the picture. Unfortunately, however, people continue to accept object positions because previous exposure to objectifying texts creates in them the habit of assuming an object position (Brummett & Bowers, 1999). This learned behavior can be explained by the social learning theory (Bandura, 1971).

Social Learning Theory and the Perpetuation of Stereotypes

Studies show that there is a close relationship between racism, prejudice, and stereotypes and that advertising plays a major role in propagating racial stereotypes. The

word “stereotype” was originally coined in 1798 to describe a printing process that involved the use of fixed casts of the pages of type (Stroebe & Insko, 1989, p. 4). However, the American journalist Walter Lippman was the first to use the term in 1922 in the context of social and political ideas to refer to “the pictures in our heads of various social groups” (cited in Stroebe & Insko, 1989, p. 4). There are some who define a stereotype as “a relatively rigid and oversimplified or biased perception or conception of an aspect of reality” (Stroebe & Insko, 1989, p. 4). However, Bhabha (1999) believes that this simplification is not a result of false representation of a given reality. This simplification has more to do with it being an “arrested, fixated form of representation that, in denying the play of difference, constitutes a problem for the representation of the subject in significations of psychic and social relations” (Bhabha, 1999, p. 374).

According to the social learning theory, stereotypes are the result of observations of “actual” differences between groups in a given society or are based on social influences like mass media, school, parents and peer groups (Bandura, 1971). Dates and Barlow (1990), in their work on African American images in the media, concluded that “Black media stereotypes are not the natural, much less harmful, products of an idealized popular culture; rather they are more commonly socially constructed images...frozen, incapable of growth, change, innovation or transformation” (p. 5). Advertising plays a significant role in the creating and social learning of such stereotypes. In fact, critical scholars suggest that commercial television does more to foster prejudice than to overcome it, although researchers differ in their evaluation of recent trends and future prospects (Gray, 1997; hooks, 1992; Wilson & Gutierrez, 1995).

The “Uncivilized” Black Stereotype

There was a time when ads, intending to be humorous, portrayed the futility in trying to “wash an Ethiopian White” (Manring, 1998, p. 89). These advertisements were aimed at reminding Whites of their standards of civilization and cleanliness through a comparison with supposedly unkempt and ignorant savages (Manring, 1998).

The “Musically Inclined” Black Stereotype

African Americans figured primarily in advertisements for record albums in the 1960s. The belief that musical talent cannot be “achieved” and the fact that musical talent was the predominant characteristic of the depicted African Americans only served to reinforce cultural stereotypes and neutralize whatever threat might have been implicit in the depiction of African Americans in these, by definition, conventional White-collar roles (Colfax & Sternberg, 1972).

The Servant or Menial Worker Stereotype

While there are hardly any ads with racist comparisons like the Aunt Jemima ads these days, subtle stereotypes in advertisements still persist, as reminders that the seemingly old-fashioned ideas about race and gender remain powerful in contemporary times. Manring (1998) cites the example of the Aunt Jemima ad saying that, despite the innumerable changes that it has undergone over the years, Aunt Jemima’s blackness still remains a silent reminder of the White consumers’ whiteness and that whiteness is a good thing and her sex reminds Black women of their place in the kitchen. Bristor, Lee, and Hunt (1995) pointed out that the African American as a servant or a mammy stereotype in advertisements has been replaced by the fast food or low-wage worker happily helping

White and Black customers citing examples of ads for Kmart, Burger King, Boston Chicken, and Trident Gum. While these advertisements were probably made with good intentions to depict African Americans as employees, the good work is lost in the underlying hints of stereotyping. It is possible that the ads are mirroring reality with a large number of African Americans still working in low paying jobs. However, Bristor, Lee, and Hunt (1995) contend that the comparatively lesser number of portrayals of African Americans in managerial roles or Whites in low wage jobs helping African Americans arouses curiosity about the intentions of such missing portrayals. The disadvantage of such stereotypes is that these images can inhibit the production of other meanings (Bristor, Lee, & Hunt, 1995). According to several researchers (Bristor, Lee, & Hunt, 1995; Humphrey & Schuman, 1984), by frequently portraying African Americans as low wage workers and Whites as not, it can create and reinforce stereotypes in the minds of viewers about a whole group of people, more so if the viewers have little or no contact with African Americans.

White Dominance over Blacks Stereotype

The Black image as a child-image in advertisements was a common way of presenting them in a less threatening manner to the White America (Colfax & Sternberg, 1972). Humphrey and Schuman (1984) also found that the percentage of Black children shown under adult Black supervision in advertisements was less than the percentage of Black children shown under White supervision. In sharp contrast, a majority of the White children were overseen by adult Whites and all the rest were unsupervised, thus, demonstrating the continuing portrayal of African Americans as subservient to White

authority figures (Humphrey & Schuman, 1984). In the past, even advertisements for toys for children (for example, ads for Mammy rag dolls and golliwogs) served in reinforcing and perpetuating racial myths, attitudes, and stereotypes among children at a very early age (Wilkinson, 1974). In a study carried out by Colfax and Sternberg (1972) where they analyzed over 7500 ads in the period starting from 1965 to 1970, in the 6 one-person ads that featured a Black person, the person was a woman. This suggested that the Black female was more accommodated in the advertising world as less threatening much like the Black child but there was no room for the adult Black male (Colfax & Sternberg, 1972). Several advertisements that portrayed Blacks along with Whites seemed to bring out the White ideology of superiority and dominance especially if the White character was a male (Bristor, Lee, & Hunt, 1995). Portrayals of Whites as of higher status come across in several ads even through the clothes that the characters wear (more professionally dressed Whites as against casually dressed African Americans).

Blacks Isolated from Whites Stereotype

Bristor, Lee, and Hunt (1995) found that, in the interracial social interactions depicted in the advertisements that they studied, there was never a time when an African American character dominated an adult White male character. They termed this minimal interracial interaction in advertising as the avoidance form of discrimination where direct forms of racism were replaced by subtle, modern forms. The picture of a segregated world has not entirely disappeared. While more than half of the multiracial ads in a study carried out by Humphrey and Schuman (1984) showed no interactions between the races, only 15% of the all-White ads showed no interaction between two or more Whites.

Similarly, while one fourth of the multi-racial ads in their 1980 study presented Whites and Blacks in an informal social setting, more than two-third of the White-White interactions were of an informal social nature (Humphrey & Schuman, 1984). This leaves us with the disconcerting thought that advertisers were either mirroring White attitudes towards African Americans or were reflecting reality. The relative lack of Blacks in ads depicting wealthy people at leisure may also be due to the desire of advertisers to be in tune with White attitudes. Thus, the advertisements tend to portray Whites, as they would like to think of themselves and Blacks, from the White male's perspective.

Recipient of Charity Stereotype

The Black man as a loser was another stereotype that has been perpetuated through fund-raising ads designed to exploit the White guilt (Colfax & Sternberg, 1972). Corporate "social responsibility ads", almost bordering on being self-congratulatory, that portray how they have worked to alleviate the condition of the African Americans, can only serve to perpetuate racial stereotypes and prejudices (Colfax & Sternberg, 1972). Colfax and Sternberg put it well in their statement (1972):

If ever the advertising image were to be believed, the Black is a record star, an entertainer, a celebrity; if not one of these, he is a child, a woman or a foreigner. As a male, he is in need of public or private charity, and he seldom if ever enjoys the occupational status of the Whites with whom he is depicted. Missing from these ads are Black families and Black males at work and at leisure - in short, the Black American, rather than the Black stereotype. (p. 17)

The Poorly Educated African American Stereotype

Taylor, Lee, and Stern (1995), in their study, pointed out that the greater representation of African Americans in non-technical product advertisements continues

to confirm the stereotype of a poorly educated group. They hold that in failing to show African Americans often using complex and scientifically advanced products, the implication is that they either do not understand or are not interested in learning about this product type.

The Broken African American Family Stereotype

The lack of portrayals of African American mothers playing with their children in advertisements is problematic as it reinforces commonly held stereotypes like that of the broken African American family (Taylor & Stern, 1997). For far too long, African American males have been the victims of open attacks on their manhood, their commitment to care for and support their families, and their importance to the community. In an issue of *Jet*, Toyota ran an ad for its 1999 Corolla that declared of Toyota vehicles, "Unlike your last boyfriend, it goes to work in the morning". The ad went on to describe the Corolla as being "dependable, reliable, and more durable than most relationships. Too bad Toyota doesn't make boyfriends" (Jackson Sr., 1999, 22). The advertisement was termed highly insensitive to African American consumers and the role of Black males in the African American community in particular.

Stereotypical Standards of Beauty

The advertising industry has, for a long time, capitalized on the "hierarchy of skin color" that often exists among African Americans wherein those with lighter skin are considered more socially or culturally acceptable by society (Dates, 1990). The continuing appearance of extremely light-skinned Blacks in advertising and the simultaneous consignment of darker-skinned Blacks to advertisers hoping to draw

provocative contrasts, like Benetton or Calvin Klein, demonstrate the imposition of White standards of beauty on Blacks (Richardson, 1999). According to some, White beauty standards prevail because advertisers assume that White consumers will not buy a product if it is associated with non-Whites (Coltrane & Messineo, 2000) and industry publications indicate that advertisers have been reluctant to increase the number of non-White characters in their ads because they fear a potential loss of offended White customers (Kern-Foxworth, 1994; Whittler, 1991). Consequently, women of color, in particular, have been less prevalent than White women in ads, and they are often pictured with light skin, straight hair, and other White features (Bristor, Lee, & Hunt, 1995).

The Athletic or Physically Endowed Black Stereotype

While society lauds successful African Americans for having transcended the race barrier and internalizes them as role models for Whites as well as Blacks, the reverse is not always true (Bristor, Lee, & Hunt, 1995). Even ads that do feature Blacks as athletes can appear racist and condescending like the "Just For Feet" Super Bowl ad in which a four-member search and rescue team track a Kenyan runner as he trains over rugged terrain, knock him unconscious, and force shoes on his feet (Singletary, 1999). The use of African American celebrities and athletes in advertisements allows the audience to deny the existence of racism and stereotyping. At the same time, it reassures the dominant group of the fact that the African Americans are still under their control and that the few who have slipped away are no threat to them (Bristor, Lee, & Hunt, 1995).

In an advertisement by Burger King for its Whopper meal, the voice-over says, "You come in more than one size" and then the camera pans from a significantly larger

African American man to a much smaller looking Asian man (Bristor, Lee, & Hunt, 1995, p. 51). The visual rhetoric conveys a symbolic meaning that would probably have gone unnoticed had the two men in the ad been White (Bristor, Lee, & Hunt, 1995). The response to the advertisement is based on shared cultural notions of African Americans as large and Asian Americans as small. The other message is a reminder of the stereotype of natural athleticism or manual labor abilities for African Americans and intellectual skills for Asians (Bristor, Lee, & Hunt, 1995).

The social learning theory suggests that repeated exposures to such stereotypical media portrayals will result in viewers accepting the portrayals as being reflective of reality (Bandura, 1971). Research shows that once a stereotype is formed, individuals are likely to note and regard information that supports a stereotype as confirmation of its validity and ignore or discard information contradicting it rather than change the stereotype in a significant way (Miller, 1995). As minority groups are normally the victims of such stereotyping, such repeated portrayals perpetuate a distorted view of them (Taylor & Lee, 1994). Furthermore, repeated portrayals of very little interracial interaction in advertising result in their being accepted as the norm in real life as well.

In summary, African Americans tend to be portrayed quite often (a) in background roles (Dates & Barlow, 1990; Manring, 1998; Stern, 1999; Wilkes & Valencia, 1989); (b) as subservient to Whites (Bristor, Lee, & Hunt, 1995; Humphrey & Schuman, 1984; Manring, 1998); (c) in low status roles (Humphrey & Schuman, 1984; Olson, 1995; Patton, 1993; Stern, 1999); (d) as athletes, musicians, and entertainers

(Bristor, Lee, & Hunt, 1995; Coltrane & Messineo, 2000); and (e) with very little interracial interaction (Bristor, Lee, & Hunt, 1995; Humphrey and Schuman, 1984).

Research Questions

Based on the literature reviewed, it seemed imperative that one investigated both the frequency and nature of representation of African Americans in advertising, with an emphasis on the nature of the portrayals of interracial interactions. These issues were addressed by setting out to find answers to the following research questions:

1. *Frequency of representation:* Are the percentages of African American models in prime-time television commercials and Clio award-winning commercials proportionate to their percentages in the U.S. population?
2. *Perceived importance:* When male and female African American models are present in a television commercial, do they appear most frequently in major, minor, or background roles? Is there a difference in the portrayals with regards to perceived importance between prime-time television commercials and the Clio award-winning commercials?
3. *Roles, settings, products, and interpersonal relationships:* What are the types of character roles and interpersonal relationships that African American models are most often portrayed in with respect to the European American models in multi-racial commercials? In what types of settings are they most often portrayed? What product categories do they model for the most? Do prime-time television commercials and Clio award-winning commercials have similar amounts and nature of depictions of interracial interactions?

Chapter 3

Methodology

Selection of the Research Approach

The method of quantitative content analysis was utilized for analyzing the commercials in this study. Riffe, Lacy, and Fico (1998) define quantitative content analysis as:

A systematic and replicable examination of symbols of communication, which have been assigned numeric values according to valid measurement rules, and the analysis of relationships involving those values using statistical methods, in order to describe the communication, draw inferences about its meaning, or infer from the communication to its context, both of production and consumption. (p. 20)

This methodology was chosen as the process of quantification of content units made it possible to reduce large sets of data, in this case related to the analysis of the television commercials in the study, to manageable forms which in turn helped in answering the questions posed in the study. The greatest strengths in this approach lie in its non-obtrusive and non-reactive nature (Riffe, Lacy & Fico, 1998). The use of a specific set of content variables selected on the basis of the questions posed in the study allowed for the study to have a certain amount of objectivity while still allowing for a clear picture of the reality in advertising portrayals to emerge.

Defining the Sample and Time-Period of the Study

As the aim of the study was to analyze images that are put out to a general audience, the four major network channels with the highest prime-time ratings and reach, ABC, NBC, CBS, and Fox were chosen as the source of commercials for the sample in

the study. The two other channels, WB and UPN, were selected so as to provide an opportunity to analyze and compare these commercials to those aired on the four major networks (ABC, NBC, CBS, and Fox) as they, typically, have larger amounts of programming directed toward African American audiences. The Clio award-winning commercials were chosen to help gather insights into the kinds of images that are deemed meritorious by the advertising industry.

The set of prime-time television commercials for this study were obtained from six consecutive days (November 27-December 2, 2000) of prime-time television programming (8-11 p.m. PST). One day of prime-time programming was randomly selected for each of the six channels from among the six-day study period and the commercials embedded in these 18 hours of prime-time programming were used in the study. This amounted to 455 prime-time television commercials. The set of Clio award-winning commercials used in the study consisted of those that originated from the United States for the years 1995 through 2000 (data for 1999 was unavailable). This amounted to 138 Clio award-winning commercials. However, only television commercials that included live models were retained for the analysis. Therefore, the study sample consisted of 370 prime-time commercials with 2071 live models and 119 Clio award-winning commercials with 1010 live models. The sample size of the ads is consistent with previous studies that used content analysis to examine stereotypes in commercials (Taylor & Stern, 1997; Wilkes & Valencia, 1989). Following Taylor and Stern (1997), the sample was edited to exclude political advocacy messages.

Categories of Analysis and Coding Variables

The categories of analysis for this study included frequency of representation, perceived importance, types of interracial interactions, types of settings, types of interpersonal relationships, types of products and services advertised, and types of character roles that were evident in the commercial.

Frequency of representation.

The variables measured for this category included the race and gender of the models appearing in the commercials (see Table A1). Physical appearance characteristics such as the color of skin and hair and facial features were used to distinguish between African Americans, European Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanic Americans, Native Americans, and Indian or Middle Eastern Americans. The definitions of these variables are listed in Appendix B. For the purpose of coding, an adult was defined as anyone who appeared to be over the age of 21 years, a teen was defined as anyone who appeared to be between the ages of 13 and 21 years, and all others were regarded as children.

Perceived importance.

Roles played, whether major, minor, or background, by African-American adult male, adult female, teen, and child models were compared to those portrayed by European American adult male, adult female, teen, and child models or other minority models in the commercial (see Table A2). The definitions for these variables are listed in Appendix B.

Interracial interaction, character roles, settings, interpersonal relationships, and products modeled for.

Interracial interaction was coded for as shown in Table A3. The coding variables selected for the categories of analyses, types of interpersonal relationships depicted, types of settings depicted, and types of products that the characters modeled for, are listed in Appendix B.

Intercoder Reliability

To determine whether the coding system devised was appropriate, the researcher educated a second coder on the coding system. The second coder then coded for approximately 12% of the sample (57 commercials). The percentages of intercoder agreement ranged from 78% to 100% for the different coding variables (see Appendix C). The average percentage of intercoder agreement was found to be 98%.

Critical Observations and Semiological Analysis

In addition to a quantitative content analysis, the researcher also engaged in making critical observations and in a semiological analysis of the advertising texts to reveal the underlying cultural meaning embedded in them. Individual vignettes or scenes in the commercials were closely examined to elicit insights into the nature of multiracial relationships portrayed and the power balance depicted.

Chapter 4

Results

Television commercials embedded in prime-time programming (8-11 p.m. PST) in a six-day period (November 27-December 2, 2000) on the channels ABC, NBC, CBS, Fox, WB, and UPN were analyzed. Also, Clio award-winning commercials for the years 1995 through 2000 were analyzed (data for 1999 was unavailable). In both cases, commercials without live models were discarded. Therefore, of the 455 prime-time commercials aired in the time-period of the study and of the 138 Clio award-winning commercials viewed, the 370 prime-time commercials with 2071 individuals in them and the 119 Clio award-winning commercials with 1010 live models formed the two sets of commercials that were used in the study. The findings from a content analysis of these commercials coupled with critical observations made by the researcher while viewing these commercials aided in answering the research questions posed earlier in this study and are discussed in this section.

Numerical Representation of African Americans

The key findings from an analysis of the numerical representation of the different ethnic groups, in both the sets of prime-time as well as Clio commercials in the study, indicated that the proportions of both African Americans and European Americans in these commercials approaches their proportions in the United States' population. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, European Americans currently make up 75.1% of the U.S. population while African Americans account for 12.3% of the population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). African Americans accounted for 16% of the characters in both

the sets of prime-time as well as Clio award-winning commercials while European Americans accounted for approximately 76% and 78% of the characters in the sets of prime-time and Clio winning commercials respectively. However, Hispanic Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans, and Indian/Middle Eastern Americans were highly underrepresented (see Table 1). Although these ethnic groups together account for 18% of the U.S. population, their combined representation was a mere 8% of the individuals in the prime-time commercials and 7% of the individuals in the Clio commercials.

Table 1

Ethnicity-Representation by Age Group in All Commercials

Category by age	Ethnicities					
	Prime-time commercials			Clio commercials		
	European Americans (n=1573)	African Americans (n=338)	Other minority (n=160)	European Americans (n=785)	African Americans (n=157)	Other minority (n=68)
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Adults						
Males	46	55	44	70	77	88
Females	30	26	33	24	15	10
Teens	10	6	7	2	0	0
Children	14	13	18	4	8	2

Bristor, Taylor, and Lee (1995) had found using 1994 data that African Americans were depicted in 45% of the prime-time commercials in their study. The presents study's findings of an incidence of 44% for African Americans in the set of prime-time commercials is comparable to Bristor, Taylor, and Lee's (1995) findings and substantially better than the 16% found by Zinkhan, Qualls, and Biswas (1990) using 1986 data and the 26% that Wilkes and Valencia (1989) reported using 1984 data.

The study also found that the largest percentage of the models in both sets of commercials were European American adult males (35% of all the characters in prime-time commercials and 54% of all the characters in Clio commercials), followed by European American adult females (23% of all the characters in prime-time commercials and 19% of all the characters in Clio commercials). African American adult males and females accounted for only 9% and 4% respectively of all the individuals depicted in the prime-time commercials and 12% and 2% respectively of all the characters in the set of Clio award-winning commercials. A comparison of results for the two sets of commercials also indicated that the ratios of adult male to female models for both ethnic groups in the set of Clio commercials was far higher than their corresponding ratios in the set of prime-time commercials (see Table 1).

European American teens and children were also depicted in greater numbers (approximately 7% and 10% respectively) as compared to their African American counterparts (1% and 2% respectively) in the prime-time commercials, in line with their proportions in the U.S. population. 21.4% of the population consists of children below the age of 14 years while teenagers between the ages of 15 and 19 years make up 7.2% of

the U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). However, in comparison with their percentages in the set of prime-time commercials, the percentages of teens and children for both ethnic groups in the set of Clio award-winning commercials were lower.

A comparison of the frequency of representation of African Americans in television commercials aired on the different channels used in the study, ABC, CBS, NBC, WB, UPN, and Fox yielded interesting results. Of the channels selected for the study, UPN and Fox had the most number of African American models in the commercials embedded in their prime-time programming. 24% of the models in each of these sets of commercials were African American. In comparison, 82% of the models that appeared on each of the channels CBS and NBC were European American while less than 12% of them, in both cases, were African American models. Both African American adult male and female models appeared the most on the UPN (14% and 7% of the models in UPN commercials respectively). However, despite the high percentages of African Americans in commercials on these channels, the kinds of images portrayed raised concern. Ads that reaffirmed the dominant ideology of adult white male superiority, that relegated African Americans to background roles, and that depicted no interracial relationship were among those that were included in this count that, on the surface, suggested a marked improvement in the representation of African Americans in advertising. Thus, examining the nature of these portrayals becomes far more important as compared to a simple count of the number of individuals in commercials.

Perceived Importance of African Americans in Commercials

In an effort to find an answer to the second of the research questions posed, the commercials were analyzed to determine the frequency with which African Americans were depicted in major, minor, and background roles. African Americans were portrayed in a larger number of background roles than they were in major roles. In the set of prime-time commercials, the numbers of African American adult males and females in background roles (6% and 2% of all the prime-time commercial models respectively) exceeded their numbers in major roles (3% and 1% of all the prime-time commercial models respectively). However, African American tokenism, as described by Bristol, Lee, and Hunt (1995), was noticeably more prevalent in the set of Clio commercials than what was observed in the set of prime-time commercials (see Table 2).

Unlike the results of the analysis of the set of prime-time commercials where African American adult male models appeared in a larger number of commercials in major roles than in background roles, in the set of Clio commercials, both the actual number of African Americans adult males in background roles (6% of all the Clio commercial models) and the number of commercials in which they appeared in background roles (21% of all the Clio commercials) exceeded their actual numbers in major roles (3% of all the Clio commercial models) and the number of commercials in which they appeared in major roles (13% of all the Clio commercials). The results were similar for African American adult female models (see Table 2 and Table 3).

Table 2

Ethnicity-Role Importance in All Commercials (n = number of actors)

Role importance	Ethnicities			
	Prime-time commercials		Clio commercials	
	European Americans (n=1573)	African Americans (n=338)	European Americans (n=785)	African Americans (n=157)
	%	%	%	%
Adult males				
Major	20	20	22	20
Minor	13	12	19	16
Background	13	23	28	40
Adult females				
Major	16	9	5	1
Minor	8	6	6	4
Background	7	11	13	10
Teens				
Major	4	1	1	0
Minor	5	1	1	0
Background	1	1	1	0
Children				
Major	4	1	1	2
Minor	4	2	2	3
Background	5	1	1	4

Table 3

Ethnicity-Role Importance in All Commercials (n = number of commercials)

Role importance	Ethnicities			
	Prime-time commercials		Clio commercials	
	European Americans (n=349)	African Americans (n=164)	European Americans (n=785)	African Americans (n=157)
	%	%	%	%
Adult males				
Major	48	35	77	36
Minor	58	22	37	36
Background	19	28	28	57
Adult females				
Major	43	16	33	5
Minor	23	12	23	11
Background	14	15	25	30
Teens				
Major	10	3	4	0
Minor	6	4	2	0
Background	2	2	1	0
Children				
Major	12	2	4	2
Minor	12	6	8	7
Background	6	5	3	5

In contrast, European American adult male and female models were depicted in a large number of commercials in major roles (46% and 40% of the prime-time commercials respectively). The actual numbers of European American adult male and female models depicted in major roles (15% and 12% respectively) in these prime-time commercials also exceeded their numbers in background roles (10% and 5% respectively). European American teens and children were also depicted in a greater number of commercials in major roles than in background roles than were their African American counterparts (see Table 3).

In the set of Clio winning commercials, although European American adult models appeared in a larger number of background roles than major roles, it is interesting to note that European American male models appeared in five times as many major roles than did the African American male models and European American female models appeared in twenty times as many major roles as compared to their African American counterparts in these commercials. Also, the number of Clio commercials with European Americans models in major roles far exceeded the number of Clio commercials with them in background roles. 72% of all the Clio commercials had European American adult males in major roles and 31% of these commercials had their female counterparts in similar roles. In comparison, 32% of all the Clio commercials had European American male models in background roles and 24% of these commercials had European American female models in similar roles. European teens and children were also depicted in a greater number of Clio commercials in major roles than in background roles while the few African American teens and children that were present in these commercials

appeared in a slightly larger number of commercials in background roles than they did in major roles (see Table 3).

Analyzing Role Importance in Multiracial Commercials

151 or 41% of the 370 prime-time commercials in the study were multiracial commercials – commercials with both European Americans and African Americans models present in them. A separate analysis of these multiracial prime-time commercials showed that while European American adult models appeared in more major roles than background roles in these commercials (24% in major roles and 19% in background roles), the reverse was true for African American adult models (6% in major roles and 8% in background roles). Although the number of European American adult models in major roles exceeded their numbers in background roles in the multiracial prime-time commercials, their relatively high numbers in background roles is explained by the presence of large White audiences or crowds in several of these commercials. In such commercials, the presence of, very often, a single African American character within these otherwise White crowds, thus, gets “diluted.” For example, of the 18 adult males singing “You’ll never guess what I got you” in a Christmas season commercial for Amazon.com, 15 are White while only 3 are African American. The camera focuses only on the two White men who play major roles while the three African American men get lost in the rows of White men who are in the background. Other such instances include a fleeting shot of a Black couple at an otherwise White family celebration in an msn.com commercial, a commercial for Wendy’s where the only Black character is an adult male barely noticeable in the background eating a burger, a commercial for Polo.com in which,

of the more than 50 models that appear in the commercial, only one is Black and that Black adult male appears in a separate scene from the rest of the characters, a commercial for Washington Mutual where a single Black lady is one of the crowd of White fans that swamp Regis Philbin and the “lady from Washington Mutual” on the street, and a commercial for Kodak where the only two Black characters are soccer players and are very hard to find among the more than 20 other White soccer players in the commercial. In all these commercials, all the major roles were played by Whites.

Instances of African American tokenism in the set of multiracial Clio award-winning commercials include a commercial for the New York State Lottery where three Black professionals are among an audience of more than 20 White professionals listening to a White male boss make a quarterly results presentation, a commercial for the Cartoon Network channel where a predominantly White Cartoon Network “crisis center,” with the exception of two Black characters in the background, help one of the cartoon characters avert a disaster, and a commercial for Stamps.com where the token presence of two Black workers in the background is further “diluted” by the presence of more than 40 other White characters in the commercial. Once more, in all of these commercials, all the major roles were portrayed by Whites.

The third research question posed in the study prompted the researcher to delve in to the nature and types of interracial interactions, interpersonal relationships, settings, and character roles depicted in both the prime-time commercials as well as the Clio award-winning commercials. The results of the analyses carried out are discussed in the sections that follow.

Levels of Interracial Interactions in Commercials

The primary findings from the analyses of the nature and levels of interaction between the various models in the sets of prime-time commercials as well Clio award winning commercials revealed that there were substantially large numbers of all-White commercials in both these sets of commercials while all-Black commercials were rare (see Table 4). While 47% of the prime-time commercials and 55% of the Clio commercials engaged all White characters, less than 3% of both these sets of commercials had exclusively African American characters. 13% of all the prime-time commercials and 15% of all the Clio commercials were all-White commercials with only one in character in total. In contrast, none out of the set of prime-time commercials and less than 2% or 2 of the 119 Clio commercials were all-Black commercials employing one Black character in total, the two commercials being an advertisement for Nike (Michael Jordan is shown dribbling a ball alone on a basketball court) and a promotional advertisement for the VH1 music channel.

Although European American models appeared along with African American models in more than one fourth of the prime-time commercials and Clio commercials analyzed, ads with a large number of African American characters and few European Americans were rare.

Table 4

Ethnicity-Interracial Interaction in All Commercials

Type of interaction	Prime-time commercials (n=370)		Clio commercials (n=119)	
	% of commercials in which ethnicities appear	% of commercials in which ethnicities appear in same vignette	% of commercials in which ethnicities appear	% of commercials in which ethnicities appear in same vignette
European Americans alone or with other European Americans	47	71	55	89
African Americans alone or with other African Americans	0	17	3	14
European Americans with other minorities	20	14	13	9
African Americans with other minorities	2	9	0	21
European Americans with African Americans	28	28	26	27
Other minorities alone or with other minorities	3	7	3	7

Note. Columns do not total to 100% as multiple interactions and multiple vignettes possible in each commercial.

The few prime-time commercials that did use a larger number of African American characters included a PSA for United Way, a promotional ad for the National

Football League (NFL) with several African American football players in their locker rooms, a commercial for Kmart on the WB Channel, and an advertisement for Dockers on the UPN channel where a fictitious African American basketball player wearing the product is surrounded by predominantly Black fans. The only Clio award-winning commercial with a much larger number of African American characters than European American characters were Budweiser's "Whassup" commercials and an ad for Volvo where a White female reporter is shown covering what appears to be a war-ravaged country in Africa - the numerous Africans shown squatting by the road watching the White female reporter and her flashy car account for the large number of Blacks in the commercial as the background noise.

The study also found that while European American models appeared alone or with other European American models in the same vignette (scene) in 71% of the prime-time commercials and in 89% of the Clio commercials analyzed, they were portrayed along with African Americans in the same vignette in only 28% of the prime-time commercials and in 27% of the Clio commercials analyzed.

Analyzing Levels of Interaction in Multiracial Commercials

In addition, the separate analysis of the set of 151 multiracial prime-time commercials revealed that while European Americans appeared alone or with other European Americans in the same vignette in 91% of these commercials, African Americans appeared alone or with other African Americans in the same vignette in only 45% of these multiracial commercials. The results were similar for the set of multiracial Clio commercials (see Table 5).

Table 5

Ethnicity-Interracial Interaction in Multiracial Commercials

Type of interaction	% of commercials in which ethnicities appear in same vignette	
	Multiracial prime-time ads (n=151)	Multiracial Clio ads (n=40)
European Americans alone or with other European Americans	91	95
African Americans alone or with other African Americans	45	35
European Americans with other minorities	11	10
African Americans with other minorities	67	80
European Americans with African Americans	7	55
Other minorities alone or with other minorities	24	15

Note. Columns do not total to 100% as multiple vignettes possible in each commercial.

In an earlier study of prime-time commercials by Humphrey and Schuman (1984), while more than half of the multiracial prime-time commercials in the study showed no interactions between characters of different ethnicities, only 15% of all the all-White ads showed no interaction between two or more White characters. Although the percentage

of all-White ads that showed no interaction between two or more White characters was found to be the same (15%) in this study too, the fact that European Americans appeared with African Americans in the same vignette in 67% of these prime-time commercials is heartening. Ads such as those for the Gap, Nescafe Frothe, Payless Shoe Source, Coke, and Clearasil, depicting groups of White and Black friends together having a good time are reinforcement that the amount of interaction between characters of different ethnicities in commercials has increased.

However, although the number of White-Black interactions in commercials has increased, an analysis of the importance given to Whites and Blacks in terms of the roles that they portrayed when present together in a single vignette in a commercial indicated a subtle persistence of the dominance of the adult White male over the adult Black male. 77 of the prime-time commercials had both African American and European American adult males appearing in the same vignette of which 21 or 27% of these 77 prime-time commercials had both African American and European American adult males appearing in major roles in the same vignette. However, even when present together in major roles, most often the African American adult male was either modeling a product with no speaking part (ads for The Gap and Old Navy), was portrayed in a low-income occupation serving a European American male (as a pet store salesman helping a European American father and daughter pick out a pet in an ad for Discover Card), as an athlete (in ads for Dockers and Tivo), or as a fictitious character or in a fictitious plot (in ads for StoreRunner.com and Honda Accord Coupe). Although the African American adult male is portrayed as the “boss” managing a group of “store-runners” retrieving

products from cyber-space for users of the Store-runner.com website, the fact that the characters are fictitious reduces the significance of the African American adult male being in a more dominant role. The Dockers ad is disturbing for a number of reasons. The African American basketball player emerges from his car to be greeted by several of his fans and photographers. As his fans (mostly African American, only one White adult male fan) jostle for autographs, his White male coach is seen vehemently waving his arms around and shouting at him for having obliged. When the coach finally realizes the fuss is about the athlete's trousers, the camera focuses on the player retreating in to his locker room from the waist-down only. The blatant display of the White adult male as the one in a position of power, putting the Black adult male in his place, and the use of the camera to further objectify the Black adult male, is unsettling. Incidentally, this ad was aired on UPN and was counted in this study towards showing an improvement in the numerical representation of African Americans in television commercials.

Of the 77 multiracial prime-time commercials that had both African American and European American adult males appearing in the same vignette, less than 3% or 2 of these commercials had a Black adult male appearing in a major role while the White adult male did not. In a commercial for Pepsi AC, the African American husband is shown eating every food sample that he can lay his hands on on a trip to a grocery store with his wife. As his wife drags him out of the store, he decides to pass on this piece of information, "Mini-pizzas, aisle 5" to a White male stranger entering the store with his back to the camera. The African American wife is depicted as the sensible woman who curtails her husbands eating binge and gives her husband Pepsi AC; in the process the

Black male is portrayed as incapable of sensible, rational thought process. The second commercial was one for Hallmark cards where a Black football player plays a major role and the White football player is depicted in a minor role. Similarly, it is interesting to note that of the 28 Clio commercials in which both African American and European American adult males appeared in the same vignette, there were only two instances where a Black adult male appeared in a more dominant role than a White adult male — in one scene in a Budweiser “Whassup” commercial, while a couple of African American adult males sit sipping a beer in a bar and belting out “Whassup” to their buddies over a cell phone, a White bartender watches on in the background; in a scene in a Visa ad where the African American basketball player Akim plays a major role while the other White basketball players are portrayed in minor roles.

Interpersonal Relationships in Commercials

The primary finding from an analysis of the types of relationships portrayed by the models in both the set of prime-time ads as well as Clio commercials revealed that European Americans were portrayed in a much larger numbers of commercials as members of families as compared to African Americans. 26% of all the prime-time commercials and 18% of all the Clio commercials analyzed had European American models portrayed as members of families while only 4% of the prime-time and less than 2% of the Clio commercials analyzed had African American models engaged in similar relationships.

Prime-time ads that had African Americans portrayed as family members include commercials for Pepsid AC, Bissell, Olay, Chevy Malibu, Chevrolet, Visa, Macys.

OnMoney.com, Samsung, Enterprise Rent-a-Car, the Fannie Mae Foundation, and a PSA for the “Partnership for Responsible Parenting.” Most notable for its total absence were the images of traditional, intact (two parents and one or more children) African American families. Even images of one African American parent with a child were scarce. A commercial for Bissell vacuum cleaners, a commercial for Macys where an African American father pushes his daughter on a swing, and the “Partnership for Responsible Parenting” PSA were the only three prime-time commercials that had African Americans portrayed as fathers along with their young children at home. A fourth prime-time commercial for Chevrolet shows an old African American father busy lifting bales of hay and toiling in the fields when his well-dressed son drives up in his Chevrolet to meet him. In addition to the “Partners for Responsible Parenting” PSA, African American mothers were shown with their children in only two other prime-time ads; in an ad for Olay and an ad for Chevy Malibu.

In contrast 21 “traditional” White families were shown at home and outdoors in prime-time commercials for State Farm, Stouffers, Sprint PCS, Bounce, Coca Cola, Washington Mutual, and Toyota Prius. The number of commercials with European American fathers abound. A father and son plant trees together in their backyard in a State Farm ad while the mother watches on; White fathers plays with their children in ads for etoys.com and Pampers; White fathers sit at the dining table with their families in ads for Stouffers and Toll House cookies; White fathers are shown with their children in other “slices of life” in commercials for MasterCard, Honda CRV, Bounce, Toyota Prius, Kodak, Washington Mutual, Discover Card, and Folgers, to name a few.

The only two Clio award-winning commercials in the sample that had African Americans depicted as family members were an ad for Volvo 850 T-5 where a poverty-stricken African mother carrying her kid on her back stares into the camera of the White female reporter who is the central character in the commercial and a promotional ad for the Seattle Sonics where the African American basketball player, Sam Perkins, pays an African American family a visit. In contrast, in the set of Clio commercials analyzed, European Americans were depicted as families together at home and out shopping or outdoors far more often than were African Americans (see Table 6).

Table 6

Ethnicity-Interpersonal Relationships in All Commercials

Relationship depicted	Ethnicities					
	Prime-time commercials			Clio commercials		
	European Americans (n=349)	African Americans (n=164)	Other minority (n=81)	European Americans (n=112)	African Americans (n=44)	Other minority (n=11)
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Family	27	9	1	20	5	0
Social	26	21	17	29	20	36
Business	20	21	26	32	34	64
No interaction	28	52	44	29	50	73
Other	5	5	7	4	2	9
One person ad	14	0	7	16	5	9

Note. Columns do not total to 100% as multiple types of relationships may be depicted in a single commercial

OnMoney.com, Samsung, Enterprise Rent-a-Car, the Fannie Mae Foundation, and a PSA for the "Partnership for Responsible Parenting." Most notable for its total absence were the images of traditional, intact (two parents and one or more children) African American families. Even images of one African American parent with a child were scarce. A commercial for Bissell vacuum cleaners, a commercial for Macys where an African American father pushes his daughter on a swing, and the "Partnership for Responsible Parenting" PSA were the only three prime-time commercials that had African Americans portrayed as fathers along with their young children at home. A fourth prime-time commercial for Chevrolet shows an old African American father busy lifting bales of hay and toiling in the fields when his well-dressed son drives up in his Chevrolet to meet him. In addition to the "Partners for Responsible Parenting" PSA, African American mothers were shown with their children in only two other prime-time ads; in an ad for Olay and an ad for Chevy Malibu.

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	European Americans (n=349)	African Americans (n=164)	Other minority (n=81)	European Americans (n=112)	African Americans (n=44)	Other minority (n=11)
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Family	27	9	1	20	5	0
Social	26	21	17	29	20	36
Business	20	21	26	32	34	64
No interaction	28	52	44	29	50	73
Other	5	5	7	4	2	9
One person ad	14	0	7	16	5	9

Note. Columns do not total to 100% as multiple types of relationships may be depicted in a single commercial

European American models were also portrayed in more numbers of commercials engaged in social relationships with friends (in 25% of all the prime-time and in 27% of all the Clio commercials analyzed) than were African Americans (in 9% of all the prime-time and in 8% of all the Clio commercials analyzed) as seen in Table 6.

19% of all the prime-time commercials depicted European Americans in business relationships compared with 9% of the prime-time commercials depicting African Americans in similar relationships. However, the total number of prime-time commercials with African American models was much fewer than the number of commercials with European American models. Therefore, when taken as a percentage, it was more likely that a commercial engaging an African American would depict an African American character in a business relationship than it would a European American character, if present in the commercial. The findings were similar for the set of Clio commercials as seen in Table 6.

African Americans were also far more likely to be depicted in more numbers of both prime-time as well as Clio commercials as having no apparent relationship with the other characters in the commercials than were European Americans (see Table 6).

Analysis of Interpersonal Relationships in Multiracial Commercials

An examination of the multiracial commercials showed that there were a large number of these commercials depicting African Americans and European Americans not interacting with each other. African Americans did not interact with the other characters in 53% of the multiracial prime-time ads and in 55% of the multiracial Clio commercials while European Americans were depicted similarly in 48% of the multiracial prime-time

commercials and in 50% of the multiracial Clio commercials. Examples of such depictions in the set of multiracial prime-time commercials include an ad for Mitsubishi where a couple of African American adult males were seen in the background working out at the same gym as did the central White adult male character in the commercial, a Scotch tape ad where an African American adult male, for no apparent reason, was shown standing on the road vacantly staring up at a host of scissors flying out of a White woman's bedroom window, and an ad for McDonalds, where an African American adult male stares at a White teen pretending his freebie yo-yo from McDonalds to be a dog and taking it for a stroll.

Data for the multiracial prime-time commercials was compared to that for the set of all prime-time commercials. Increases in the percentages of multiracial commercials with European Americans in business relationships and not interacting with the other characters in these commercials and a substantial drop in the percentage of these commercials in which they were depicted in family relationships were noticed (see Table 6 and Table 7). This suggested that when European Americans were portrayed along with African Americans in multiracial prime-time commercials, they were portrayed in a lesser number of commercials in family relationships, perhaps to "accommodate" the presence of African Americans. Similar observations made for the set of multiracial Clio commercials underline this trend.

Table 7

Ethnicity-Interpersonal Relationships in Multiracial Commercials

Relationship depicted	Ethnicities					
	Prime-time commercials			Clio commercials		
	European Americans (n=151)	African Americans (n=151)	Other minority (n=31)	European Americans (n=40)	African Americans (n=40)	Other minority (n=6)
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Family	12	4	0	13	3	0
Social	24	14	11	33	18	50
Business	20	15	28	48	38	50
No interaction	32	35	56	50	55	50
Other	4	3	13	3	3	0

Note. Columns do not total to 100% as multiple types of relationships may be depicted in a single commercial

Settings in which Characters were Depicted

An examination of the types of settings in which models were portrayed revealed that in both the sets of prime-time as well as Clio commercials, European Americans appeared in the most number of commercials in home settings (34% of prime-time commercials and 26% of the Clio commercials), more than four times the number of prime-time commercials and eight times the number of Clio commercials in which African Americans appeared in similar settings. In comparison, African Americans appeared in the most number of commercials in settings that distanced them from home

environments (see Table 8). They appeared in the most number of prime-time commercials in outdoor settings, in ads like those for McDonalds, State Farm, Honda Accord, Verizon Wireless, and Chevy Malibu where they were depicted as either walking or driving down a street and in the most number of Clio commercials, in business or retail settings (11% of the Clio commercials). The number of commercials that portrayed African Americans as husband with wives and as parents with children at home were far fewer than those with European Americans in similar roles and in similar settings. In fact, the only prime-time commercials that showed African American couples at home were those for the Fannie Mae Foundation and OnMoney.com where they were portrayed as trying to set their finances in order, those for Hasbro games and Washington Mutual where they were shown along with two or more White couples at home, and those for Enterprise Rent-a-Car and "Partners for Responsible Parenting." One of the more positive depictions of African Americans in home settings was an ad for Bissell where an African American father in an upscale-looking home tries desperately to keep his children and their European American friends from running all over his freshly vacuumed carpet. The only Clio commercials that portrayed African American families or couples at home were a promotional ad for the Seattle Sonics and commercials for Budweiser.

Table 8

Ethnicity-Types of Settings in All Commercials

Type of setting	Ethnicities					
	Prime-time commercials			Clio commercials		
	European Americans (n=349)	African Americans (n=164)	Other minority (n=81)	European Americans (n=112)	African Americans (n=44)	Other minority (n=11)
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Home	34	17	14	28	9	9
Social setting outside homes	18	16	11	20	20	27
Business	17	13	22	27	25	55
Academic institution	3	4	7	3	2	0
Natural outdoors	24	24	16	22	11	36
Sport-related	3	6	1	8	18	27
Television set/artificial setting	15	20	29	12	20	27

Note. Columns do not total to 100% as multiple types of settings may be depicted in a single commercial.

European American models were also portrayed in twice the number of prime-time ads as well as Clio commercials in social settings outside of homes (17% of the prime-time and 18% of the Clio commercials) as compared to the African American models (7% of the prime-time and 8% of the Clio commercials). Thus, European

Americans were shown in a larger number of commercials at parties, restaurants, parks, and socializing on golf courses with friends (for example, in prime-time commercials for Applebee's, Olive Garden, Planters Nuts, Polo.com, and Jaguar and in Clio commercials for Ross Martini and Pepsi) as compared to their African American counterparts.

There were also a larger number of prime-time commercials as well as Clio commercials that portrayed European Americans in business or retail settings than there were commercials that portrayed African Americans in similar settings.

The likelihood that a commercial would depict an African American in a sports-related setting was higher than the likelihood that a commercial would depict a European American in a similar setting (see Table 8).

Similarly, the likelihood that a commercial would depict an African American on a set or in an artificial setting (for example, in ads for Target, The Gap, and Old Navy) was far higher than the likelihood that a commercial would portray a European American in a similar setting (see Table 8). The fact that African Americans were portrayed in larger numbers of prime-time as well as Clio commercials in artificial settings, in business settings, and outdoors than they were in home settings suggests a lesser degree of "groundedness" for African Americans. A separate analysis of both the multiracial prime-time commercials as well as Clio commercials confirmed this belief. It was found that when portrayed together, both African Americans and European Americans were portrayed in the most number of commercials in outdoor settings (24% and 30% respectively of the set of multiracial prime-time commercials) or in business settings

(28% and 33% respectively of the set of multiracial Clio commercials analyzed), away from homes and family related settings (see Table 9).

Table 9

Ethnicity-Types of Settings in Multiracial Commercials

Type of setting	Ethnicities					
	Multiracial prime-time ads			Multiracial Clio ads		
	European Americans (n=151)	African Americans (n=151)	Other minority (n=31)	European Americans (n=40)	African Americans (n=40)	Other minority (n=6)
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Home	25	15	10	15	5	0
Social setting outside homes	21	17	23	25	23	33
Business setting	17	14	26	33	28	33
Academic institution	4	3	10	5	3	0
Natural outdoors	30	24	23	18	13	33
Sport-related	5	5	3	15	18	17
Television set/artificial setting	21	21	48	23	20	33

Note. Columns do not total to 100% as multiple types of settings may be depicted in a single commercial.

Character Roles Portrayed in the Commercials

An examination of the types of character roles played by individuals in the sets of prime-time commercials as well as Clio commercials revealed that European Americans were portrayed in the most number of commercials as friends or family members (42% of the prime-time commercials and 34% of the Clio commercials) and as professionals (15% of the prime-time commercials and 38% of the Clio commercials), in far more commercials than were African Americans (see Table 10). In fact, a closer look at the prime-time commercials revealed that African American adult males were portrayed as professionals in only six unduplicated commercials. Of these commercials, they were portrayed in major roles in three commercials (as businessmen in ads for Honda Accord, AT&T@ Home Services, and IBM) and in the remaining three, they were relegated to non-speaking minor or background roles (a policeman in an ad for AT&T Digital, a teacher in a commercial for Downy, and a zoo-keeper in a commercial for Tivo). In the ad for Honda Accord Coupe, a group of professionals in the car get carried away by the driving experience and imagine the car to be a spaceship. The African American adult male professional driving the car stifles a suggestion by one of his European American male colleagues on how to command his ship by retorting, "In my ship, I'm in command." Despite the fact that this ad portrayed an African adult male professional in a more dominant role than a European American adult male professional, the underlying fictional theme reduces the importance of the characters in the commercial.

It was also observed that if an African American was present in a commercial, the likelihood that the commercial would portray the African American character as a

pedestrian or a member of a crowd, a celebrity, musician, or entertainer, or an athlete was higher than the likelihood that the commercials would portray a European American in a similar role, if present in the commercial (see Table 10). This higher likelihood suggests that traces of stereotypical roles of African Americans as athletes, as celebrities, musicians, or entertainers, and as the background noise still persist.

The study also showed that the prime-time commercials as well Clio commercials were also more likely to have a European American as a spokesperson for a product than they were likely to have an African American in a similar role. 19% of all the prime-time commercials and 10% of all the Clio commercials had European Americans as spokespersons or models for the products with no other relationship to the other models in the commercial. In comparison, African Americans played similar roles in 7% of all the prime-time commercials and in only 3% of the Clio commercials.

European Americans were portrayed as customers and as salespersons or blue-collar workers in more prime-time commercials as well as Clio commercials than were African Americans (see Table 10). However, it was interesting to note that even when playing similar roles as blue-collar workers or salespersons in the same commercials, there was never a time when an African American model played a more prominent role than a European American model. In prime-time commercials like those for Staples, Toys "R" Us, and Pepsid AC, while the European American salespersons were portrayed in major or minor roles with speaking parts, the African American salespersons were either in background roles or were denied active speaking parts.

Table 10

Ethnicity-Types of Character Roles in All Commercials

Character role	Ethnicities					
	Prime-time commercials			Clio commercials		
	European Americans (n=349)	African Americans (n=164)	Other minority (n=81)	European Americans (n=112)	African Americans (n=44)	Other minority (n=11)
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Professional	16	11	6	38	14	45
Friends/ family	45	23	19	34	11	9
Student	2	2	5	4	7	9
Athlete	5	9	2	10	20	18
Celeb./musician	7	14	7	8	9	36
Spokesperson for the product	20	16	26	11	7	9
Recipient of charity	2	1	9	1	2	0
Blue-collar	12	13	10	26	16	9
Customer	11	10	7	11	7	0
Fictitious character	3	2	0	5	2	9
Crowd	8	16	7	13	25	36
Other	9	4	9	13	11	27

Note. Columns do not total to 100% as multiple characters may be present in a single commercial.

Table 11

Ethnicity-Types of Character Roles in Multiracial Commercials

Character Role	Ethnicities					
	Multiracial prime-time ads			Multiracial Clio ads		
	European Americans (n=151)	African Americans (n=151)	Other minority (n=31)	European Americans (n=40)	African Americans (n=40)	Other minority (n=6)
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Professional	21	11	3	18	15	19
Friends/ family	42	20	19	12	13	0
Student	3	2	0	4	3	3
Athlete	9	7	6	11	18	42
Celeb/musician	11	14	10	4	2	17
Spokesperson for the product	21	7	39	5	3	0
Charity recipient	5	1	23	0	8	0
Blue-collar	21	13	19	19	8	0
Customer	17	11	19	4	2	0
Fictitious character	3	3	0	4	3	3
Crowd	13	17	23	13	17	17
Other	9	5	13	3	5	0

Note. Columns do not total to 100% as multiple characters may be present in a single commercial.

Analyzing Character Roles Portrayed in Multiracial Commercials

As Table 11 indicates, the numbers of multiracial commercials with African Americans portrayed as members of a crowd, athletes, or celebrities, musicians or entertainers were either more than or comparable to the numbers of these commercials with European Americans in similar roles. In addition, the numbers of these commercials with African Americans portrayed as professionals or as family members or friends were less than the numbers of these commercials with European Americans in similar roles, thereby reminding one of the more accepted roles for African Americans.

Relationship between Products Advertised and Ethnicities

The twenty-two categories of products and services that the prime-time commercials and Clio commercials in the study advertised ranged from alcoholic beverages to cleaning supplies to cosmetics and clothing (see Table 12). The most number of prime-time commercials in the study were for food and beverage products (19% of the commercials), followed by commercials for cosmetics and clothing (18% of the commercials), automobiles and automobile related products (14% of the commercials), hardware, software, and internet products and companies (9% of the commercials), and finance related products (7% of the commercials) while the most number of Clio-winning commercials in the study were for food and beverage products (17% of the commercials), followed by commercials for alcohol (14% of the commercials), automobiles and automobile related products (11% of the commercials), sports related products (11%), and cable and network channels (9% of the commercials).

Table 12

Ethnicity-Product Category Relationships in All Commercials

Product category	Ethnicities					
	Prime-time commercials			Clio commercials		
	European Americans (n=349)	African Americans (n=164)	Other minority (n=81)	European Americans (n=112)	African Americans (n=44)	Other minority (n=11)
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Alcohol	0	0	0	11	18	9
Auto	10	13	5	10	5	9
Drugs	4	2	0	1	0	0
Pet Supplies	1	1	0	0	0	0
Household/lawn Supplies	1	1	2	0	0	0
Electrical appliances	5	5	4	3	0	0
Cosmetics/clothing	21	21	23	5	7	0
Office supplies	1	1	2	4	0	9
Furniture	0	1	2	0	0	0
Hardware/software/ internet-related	9	9	5	6	5	7
Sports-related	1	1	0	8	16	18
Food and beverage	20	16	16	21	18	18
Banks/credit cards	9	8	9	6	14	18

(table continues)

Table 12 (cont.)

Ethnicity-Product Category Relationships in All Commercials

Product Category	Ethnicities					
	Prime-time commercial			Clio commercials		
	European Americans (n=349)	African Americans (n=164)	Other minority (n=81)	European Americans (n=112)	African Americans (n=44)	Other minority (n=11)
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Telecom	5	6	13	2	0	0
Transport	0	1	0	0	0	0
Toys	2	3	2	1	0	0
Publication companies/books	2	2	4	4	5	0
Cleaning supplies	2	2	0	0	0	0
PSAs	2	3	5	3	0	9
Network and cable channels	0	0	0	11	11	0
Other products	2	1	2	0	0	0
Other services	3	3	7	4	2	0

Both African Americans and European Americans appeared in the most number of prime-time commercials modeling for cosmetics and clothing products, followed by commercials for food and beverage products and in the most number of Clio commercials, modeling for food and beverage products as seen in Table 12.

Chapter 5

Conclusions and Discussion

Numerical Representation of African Americans in Television Commercials

The substantial number of African Americans in contemporary television commercials, with their percentage in commercials mirroring their percentage in the United States' population, is encouraging. However, the fact that African Americans were portrayed in a larger percentage of commercials in background roles than they were in major roles in both the set of prime-time commercials as well as the set of Clio award-winning commercials suggests that a lesser number of more meaningful, subject positions continue to be offered to African Americans in present day advertisements.

The "Dilution" of African American Presence

An analysis of the perceived importance of characters in the prime-time commercials analyzed revealed that while European Americans appeared in a larger percentage of major roles than background roles, African Americans appeared in a larger percentage of background roles than major roles. However, it was interesting to note that the percentage of European Americans in background roles was in itself high. A closer examination of the commercials revealed that when scenes of large crowds or audiences were shown in the commercials, they, most often, mainly consisted of a large number of European Americans with a few token African Americans thrown in for good measure. For instance, in an ad for Stamps.com, a Clio award-winning commercial, the two African American factory workers were barely visible among the more than 40 European American blue-collar workers portrayed in background roles in the commercial. This

insertion of a few African Americans into large crowds of European Americans, intentionally or otherwise, results in a “dilution” of their presence. Interestingly, the only ads in the set of multiracial prime-time commercials that had a larger number of African Americans than European Americans in the background in the same vignette were an ad for Dockers, where there were more African American than European American fans surrounding the African American adult male basketball player and a PSA for United Way, in which there were a larger number of African American children in the background than there were White children. Of the set of multiracial Clio commercials, only one ad for Volvo, in which the European American female reporter covers the plight of poverty-stricken Africans in what appears to be a war-ravaged country in Africa, portrays a larger number of African Americans than European Americans in the background in the commercial. Although the token presence of African Americans in predominantly White crowds and audiences in commercials improves their numerical representation, the broader message that permeates from these depictions is that, with the exception of a few realms, African Americans must learn to assimilate themselves into a White universe, never the other way around.

The Dominant White Ideology Persists, More Varied Subject Positions for Whites

The presence of a large number of all-White commercials (38% of the prime-time commercials and 47% of the Clio award-winning commercials analyzed) and a relative absence of all-Black commercials (less than 3% each of the sets of prime-time and Clio winning commercials analyzed) in the study leads one to believe that contemporary advertising continues to portray the image of a predominantly White world. A further

observation of a large number of single-character all-White commercials (11% of the prime-time commercials and 13% of the Clio award-winning commercials in the study) and a complete absence of single-character all-Black commercials in the set of prime-time commercial analyzed, endorses this belief. The fact that a Nike commercial (with Michael Jordan in it) and a VHI music channel promotional ad (with a Black musician playing a guitar) were the only two single-character all-Black Clio commercials not only assists in promoting the “physically endowed Black” stereotype and the “musically inclined Black” stereotype, it also reaffirms the rampant belief that African Americans know best when it comes to music and sports-related products and services. In contrast, European Americans appeared in single-character Clio commercials for a wide range of products, in a wide variety of character roles – from a professional working at her home-office in an ad for Staples to a car dealer in ad for Isuzu to an environmentalist (Dr Jane Goodall) in a promotional ad for HBO. These findings suggest that contemporary commercials continue to offer European Americans a far greater number and a wider range of subject positions (as having authority, an origin of motive, and voice) compared to those offered to African Americans and that African Americans are offered more subject positions that are designed to be minimally threatening to Whites.

Increased Number of Commercials with African Americans and European Americans in the Same Vignette in Prime-time Commercials – the Quality of these Interactions is Debatable

This study found a remarkable increase in the percentage of multiracial prime-time commercials with both European Americans and African Americans in the same

vignette (67% of the multiracial prime-time commercials) when compared to findings from a previous study (Humphrey & Schuman, 1984). This number, although substantially lesser than percentage of multiracial commercials with European Americans interacting with other European Americans in the same vignette (91% of the multiracial prime-time commercials), is certainly a step in the right direction. However, the low percentage of multiracial Clio commercials with African Americans and European Americans in the same vignette (23%) compared with the 77% of these commercials with European Americans interacting with each other in the same vignette, is disconcerting given that the Clio commercials are viewed as examples of good advertising worth emulating in the advertising industry.

A closer look at the nature of the interactions between African Americans and European Americans in the same vignette showed that several of the commercials seemed to bring out the ideology of White superiority and dominance, especially if the European American character in the vignette was an adult male. There were a relatively low number of portrayals of both African American adult males and European American adult males together in a scene in major roles and an even lower number of instances of African American adult males in roles signifying more importance and power than those portrayed by the European American adult males that appeared in the same vignette. This further served to reaffirm that the dominant White ideology of White male superiority continues to be perpetuated through contemporary commercials.

In the few instances that did portray African American adult males in more prominent roles than their European American counterparts, the quality and types of

character roles that they portrayed (the child-like husband in the Pepsi AC prime-time ad and the athletes in the prime-time Hallmark ad and the Clio-winning Visa ad) served to reduce the significance of their roles and, perhaps, even perpetuate old, established stereotypes (the stereotype of the African American male with low intelligence and the Black athlete stereotype). When portrayed along with European American adult males in prominent roles in the same vignette, by placing them in roles subservient to the adult White male (as a pet store salesman helping a European American father and daughter in ad for Discover Card), in roles that reassure the dominant group that most African Americans are still in their designated place (as athletes in ads for Dockers and Tivo), or in roles that can be brushed aside as imaginary (as a fictitious “boss” in a Storerunner.com ad), the positive effects of having placed them in roles of comparable prominence, were mitigated.

More White families, the Total Absence of Traditional Black Families, More White Fathers with their Children than Black Fathers with Children

Coltrane and Messineo (2000) pointed out that images that deny African Americans positive emotions contribute to the perpetuation of subtle prejudices against them. This study found an almost complete lack of portrayals of African Americans as “traditional”, intact families (two parents with one or more children). Barring the one instance of a “traditional”, intact Black family (two parents with one or more children) in a Clio-winning promotional ad for the Seattle Sonics, there were no other instances of African American fathers and mothers together with their children in any of the other Clio winning commercials analyzed or in the set of prime-time commercials in the study

thereby reinforcing the commonly held stereotypes of broken African American families. There were also a lesser number of instances of even single African American parents with their children, especially instances of African American fathers with their children compared to instances of European Americans in similar relationships. In addition, the products and services that these African American families modeled for and the types of settings that these families were depicted in leaned towards more stereotypical portrayals and associations. To elucidate, of the eight ads that depicted African American parents with children (combining the set of prime-time and Clio commercials together), one was a PSA for "Partnerships for Responsible Parenting"; the second commercial portrayed an impoverished mother with her baby on her back being photographed by a White female reporter in a Clio award-winning ad for Volvo; the third commercial for Chevrolet showed an old father doing manual labor on a farm to give his son a better life; while an ad for Chevy Malibu with Jackie Joyner-Kersey was a salute to "moms like you", the ad promoting the Seattle Sonics was the only ad with a traditional, intact Black family. On a more optimistic note, the Bissell ad that showed an African American father in an upscale-looking home supervising his children and their European American friends was a positive portrayal of African American males at home in a position of authority and control. What were sorely missing from the commercials were more "slices of life" like the one in the Bissell ad where African American parents are shown in every day situations at home with their children.

Large Number of Interracial Social and Business Relationships Depicted – the Power Balances in these Portrayals Significant

European Americans were portrayed together with African Americans in a large percentage of commercials engaged in business and social relationships. However, a closer examination of these relationships in these multiracial commercials revealed that, in several of these ads, the African American's presence was rendered less significant by denying him or her active agency. For instance, in a prime-time ad for Staples an African American salesperson stands passively by while his European American colleague extols the virtues of a particular product. A Clio award-winning commercial for the New York State Lottery was extremely disturbing. Of the more than 20 professionals watching a quarterly results presentation, only three were African American. The White male professional in the major role who is trying to stifle his laughter throughout the presentation, sprays spit on his African American male colleague sitting next to him but makes no effort to apologize. Neither does the African American male colleague do anything about it apart from turn his face away a bit. In commercials for msn.com and Coca Cola, the camera fleetingly pauses on the single African American couple in each of these ads at predominantly White social gatherings. Thus, while there were a fair number of commercials in which both African Americans and European Americans appeared together in social relationships and business relationships, the nature of these portrayals suggest the persistence of stereotypical images of White-dominated business and social environments and token efforts to assimilate Blacks into a White world but never the other way around.

High Percentages of Multiracial Commercials with No Interactions between Characters

Dates and Barlow (1990) contended that minimal interracial interaction in advertisements is one of the ways by which images of inferiority are perpetuated. This study revealed that both European Americans and African Americans were portrayed in a large number of prime-time commercials as having no apparent relationship to the other characters in the commercials (22% and 19% of the set of prime-time commercials respectively). However, these numbers shot up dramatically when the multiracial prime-time commercials were separated out and analyzed. African Americans did not interact with the other characters in 53% of the multiracial commercials while European Americans were portrayed in similar contexts in 48% of these commercials. The results were similar for the set of Clio award-winning commercials. These substantial jumps in the percentages of commercials depicting African Americans and European Americans not interacting with the other characters in the commercial when portrayed together in commercials, are clear manifestations of what Bristor, Lee, and Hunt (1995) term as the avoidance form of discrimination.

African Americans Portrayed as Less "Grounded" – Distanced from Home Settings

In the past, advertisements portrayed African Americans in exotic settings in a bid to include them in commercials while at the same time distancing them from domestic settings where they would appear to be a threat to the dominant White (Croteau & Hoynes, 2000b). This study found that this trend appears to be continuing in contemporary advertising, although in a far more subtle form. African Americans were found to appear in the most number of prime-time commercials, in outdoor settings and

in the most number of Clio winning commercials, in business settings. In comparison, European Americans were portrayed in the most number of both prime-time ads as well as Clio winning commercials, in home settings. Even when African Americans were portrayed in commercials in home settings, there were far fewer depictions of African American families in home-settings (4% of the set of prime-time commercials) as compared to the number of commercials with European American families portrayed in home settings (15% of the set of prime-time commercials). This tendency to portray African Americans in more commercials far removed from home-settings suggests a certain degree of less “groundedness” for African Americans as compared to European Americans.

African Americans Portrayed with European Americans in a Large Percentage of Commercials in Social and Business Settings but do not Interact

The study also showed that European Americans were portrayed in a greater percentage of commercials socializing with friends on golf courses and beaches (ads for Planters Nuts), at parties (ad for Jaguar), and restaurants (ads for Applebee’s and Olive Garden) and in offices and retail settings (in ads for Staple, Wal-Mart, and Office Depot) than were African Americans. However, by depicting European Americans with African Americans together in social settings but with no apparent relationship between them, the importance of their being portrayed together in social settings was minimized. For instance, although the Clio winning commercial for the New York State Lottery, portrayed both African Americans and European Americans together in a church (social setting), there appeared to be no apparent relationship between the African American and

European American parishioners. In addition, every time the camera focused on the European American parishioners listening to the sermon, the African Americans were blurred out and vice versa. Commercials for Applebee's, Wendy's, and Blue Nile, showed African Americans with European Americans in the same restaurants or fast-food joints but with no apparent relationship between them. Similarly, there were a large number of prime-time as well as Clio winning commercials that depicted both European Americans and African Americans together in business settings but with no apparent relationship to each other in the commercials (for example, African American customers in background roles and European American salespersons in major roles assisting other European American customers in ads for Hewlett Packard and Toys "R" Us).

Besides being portrayed in a large percentage of commercials in outdoor settings, African Americans were also portrayed in a high percentage of both prime-time ads as well as Clio winning commercials on sets or in artificial settings. The study also showed that when portrayed along with African Americans, the percentage of commercials with European Americans in artificial settings rose dramatically, suggesting a distancing of the interracial relationships depicted from home settings and family-related settings where they would seem more of a threat to the dominant Whites.

Thus, although there seems to be a fair number of commercials with European Americans portrayed along with African Americans in social, business, and outdoor settings, the large number of depictions of no interaction between them, suggests that African Americans were incorporated into predominantly White settings without becoming too closely associated to the dominant Whites themselves.

Higher Percentage of Commercials with Whites Portrayed as Family Members and Professionals

European Americans were portrayed in a larger percentage of the commercials analyzed as friends or family members and as professionals than were African Americans. Both the sets of multiracial prime-time as well as Clio award winning commercials, had more numbers of commercials with European Americans as family members or friends and as professionals compared to those for African Americans. Even fewer were commercials that portrayed African American adult males as professionals and those that did, often negated their importance by relegating them to non-speaking minor or background roles (for example, a teacher in a Downy ad, a policeman in an AT&T Digital ad, and a zoo-keeper in a Tivo ad, none of whom have speaking parts) or by trivializing their presence in a major role by weaving a fictional plot into the commercial (for example, the ad for Honda Accord Coupe).

Greater Likelihood of Commercials Portraying Athletes, Members of a Crowd, and Musicians to be Commercials with African Americans

Although European Americans appeared in twice as many prime-time commercials as did African Americans, both European Americans and African Americans appeared in approximately the same number of commercials as celebrities, musicians, or entertainers, as members of a crowd or as pedestrians, and as athletes. This implies that when African Americans appear in prime-time commercials, they are more likely to be in commercials that portray them in these roles than are European Americans. This greater likelihood hints at the persistence of stereotypical roles of African

Americans as athletes, musicians, entertainers, celebrities, and as the background “noise”.

As the social learning theory suggests, the repetition of these narrow, stereotypical depictions, especially in multiracial commercials – of African Americans being more physically endowed and more musically inclined than Whites and of European Americans as having more brain than brawn - can result in a continued propagation and acceptance of these fixated forms of representation as the norm.

Comparable Numbers of Multiracial Commercials with European American and African American Spokespersons for Products

An examination of the set of multiracial commercials revealed that both European Americans and African Americans were portrayed in approximately the same numbers of these commercials as spokespersons for the products. However, one of the characteristics of the role of the spokesperson is an apparent lack of any relationship to the other characters in the commercials. Very often, these “spokespersons” lacked active, speaking parts (they modeled for a product with a voiceover or music playing in the background). Thus, it would appear that the casting of African Americans together with European Americans in these multiracial commercials in comparable roles as spokespersons is considered an effective way by agencies and advertisers of walking a fine line between assuaging their own guilt of not creating more truly integrated commercials while not alienating their dominant White audiences at large.

More Contemporary Commercials with European Americans as Customers and Salespersons than African Americans

European Americans were portrayed in a larger percentage of prime-time ads as well as Clio commercials as customers and salespersons compared to African Americans. In studies conducted in the 1970s, Colfax and Sternberg (1972) had found that even when African Americans were portrayed with European Americans in routine occupational roles, the European American character was always portrayed alongside the African American character in a role that signified higher status and power. Despite the passage of 30 years since that study, the number of instances in which an African American character was portrayed in a more prominent or dominant role remains scarce. In several of the commercials in this study, while the European American characters were portrayed in major or minor roles, the African American salespersons in the commercials were denied active speaking parts (for example, in ads for Staples, Toys “R” Us, and Pepsid AC), thus forming part of the background noise. As Pieterse pointed out (1992), here too, the dominance of the European American character was made more pronounced only by putting a Black person in the picture and rendering him invisible.

Greater Number of Multiracial Clio Commercials with European Americans in Blue-collar Roles than in Roles as Friends or Family Members

European Americans were portrayed in more number of Clio commercials as friends or family members (in 28% of the set of Clio commercials) than they were as blue-collar workers or salespersons (in 21% of the set of Clio commercials). However, in the set of multiracial Clio commercials, the order was reversed with European Americans

portrayed in a larger number of multiracial Clio commercials as blue-collar workers or salespersons (in 45% of the set of Clio commercials) than they were as friends or family members (in 30% of the set of Clio commercials). This leads one to believe that when interracial interactions are depicted between European American and African American characters, both the European American and African American characters are more likely to assume low-status roles in more number of commercials than be depicted together in these multiracial commercials as friends.

Directions for Future Research

Due to the limited amount of time available for the study, the period of the study was limited to a six-day period of prime-time programming. A larger sample of commercials would make the identification of images of minorities in advertising or the lack of it clearer. Moreover, the commercials in this study were taken from prime-time television programming aired in November and December, at the beginning of the holiday season. This raises the question of whether the numerical representation and types of portrayals of African Americans would have been the same had the study been carried out at another time. Further studies that sought an answer to this question would be enlightening. Despite the choice of two channels that typically have more programming directed to an African American audience, the fact that these channels have shifted their African American-oriented programming outside of prime-time made it difficult to make any substantial comparisons between the commercials aired on the networks to those aired on these channels. A more exhaustive study that compares the nature of portrayals in commercials aired during programming targeting African

American audiences to those in commercials aired during prime-time programming on the same channels would be interesting as it would highlight the differences in the images portrayed to different audiences. While this study has attempted to analyze aspects of the relationship between race and gender, further studies that specifically focus on the race-gender power balance portrayed in multiracial commercials would be interesting.

Conclusive Statement

It is indeed heartening to see large percentages of African American characters in contemporary commercials, portrayed alongside European Americans in a far greater variety of roles, relationships, and settings, than those in which they were depicted in the past. However, there appears to be a continuing trend to create advertising with token representations of African Americans in predominantly White groups of people in the hope that they come across as truly integrated commercials. An analysis of the commercials in the study proved that merely placing African Americans with European Americans together in the same commercial or even in the same vignette hardly implies that the commercial is a truly integrated commercial. The types of interracial relationships that they engage in and the power balances portrayed are real yardsticks of how far advertising has progressed in minimizing the number of stereotypes and in portraying more meaningful, more positive images of African Americans in advertising. The dominant White ideology of White superiority continues to be perpetuated by the creation of large numbers of all-White commercials, large numbers of commercials with greater numbers and varieties of subject positions offered to Whites, and large numbers of commercials with European Americans and African Americans not interacting with

each other in the commercials. It would appear that very little has been done to get rid of the stereotype of broken Black families. The White male dominance becomes more apparent through the greater numbers of commercials with European American fathers with their children compared to the low numbers of commercials with African American fathers with their children. While a large number of interracial social and business relationships are depicted in contemporary advertising it would be prudent for advertisers to reexamine the kinds of power balances portrayed in these relationships. The depictions of African Americans in settings that suggest less "groundedness" for them may be perceived as other manifestations of the broken Black family stereotype. By placing them in social, business, and outdoor settings along with European Americans in commercials and then, very often, denying them meaningful relationships with the European Americans, all the good work of having portrayed them together, is lost. The continuing trend of portraying European Americans as friends, family members, and professionals in a larger numbers of commercials as compared to African Americans and the greater likelihood of contemporary commercials portraying athletes, members of a crowd, and musicians to be commercials with African Americans in them, are subtle suggestions of the persistence of some stereotypical depictions for African Americans and European Americans. The large numbers of commercials with both African Americans and European Americans as spokespersons for the product is encouraging. However, the lack of any significant relationships between these characters leads one to wonder if this, perhaps, is a new way that advertisers have devised to create the impression of integrated commercials while leaving the perceptions of a dominant White

world largely intact. By portraying European Americans together with African Americans in a higher percentage of commercials in low-status roles and a lower percentage of commercials as friends or family members and then by reversing the trend when portraying European American alone in commercials, it would appear that advertisers find it more acceptable to portray African Americans along with European Americans in more numbers of commercials in low-status role than have them associate with each other as friends or family.

As the social learning theory suggests, repeated exposures to such subtle stereotypical media portrayals will result in viewers accepting these portrayals as being reflective of reality. It is therefore imperative that advertisers and the advertising industry go about the creating of advertisements with a great deal of sensitivity and caution. Although this study is far from complete, it is hoped that it highlights some of the problems in the portrayals of African Americans in contemporary advertising and helps create a heightened consciousness of the need to make more prudent advertising decisions in the future.

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Appendix A

Examples of Tables Used for Coding

Table A1

Ethnic Representation by Age Group in Commercials (in Terms of Number of Actors)

		All models					
		Ethnicities					
Ad No.	Name of Ad	African American	European American	Hispanic American	Asian American	Native American	Indian/Middle Eastern American

(table continues)

Table A1 (cont.)

Ethnic Representation by Age Group in Commercials

		Adult males					
		Ethnicities					
Ad no.	Name of ad	African American	European American	Hispanic American	Asian American	Native American	Indian/Middle Eastern American

(table continues)

Table A1 (cont.)

Ethnic Representation by Age Group in Commercials

		Adult females					
		Ethnicities					
Ad no.	Name of ad	African American	European American	Hispanic American	Asian American	Native American	Indian/Middle Eastern American

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(table continues)

Table A1 (cont.)

Ethnic Representation by Age Group in Commercials

		Teens					
		Ethnicities					
Ad no.	Name of ad	African American	European American	Hispanic American	Asian American	Native American	Indian/Middle Eastern American

---

(table continues)

Table A2

Ethnicity-Role Importance Depicted in Commercials (in Terms of Number of Actors)

Number of people												
Ad	African American adult male			African American adult female			African American teen			African American child		
	Major role	Minor role	BG role	Major role	Minor role	BG role	Major role	Minor role	BG role	Major role	Minor role	BG role

(table continues)

Table A2 (cont.)

Ethnicity-Role Importance Depicted in Commercials

Number of People												
Ad	European American adult male			European American adult female			European American teen			European American child		
	Major role	Minor role	BG role	Major role	Minor role	BG role	Major role	Minor role	BG role	Major role	Minor role	BG role

(table continues)

Table A3

Levels of Interaction Depicted in Commercials (in Terms of Number of Commercials)

		Number of commercials					
Ad no.	Ad name	Interaction in commercial					
		European Americans alone or with other European Americans	African Americans alone or with other African Americans	Minorities alone or with other minorities	European Americans with African Americans	European Americans with other minorities	African Americans with other minorities

(table continues)

Table A3 (cont.)

Levels of Interaction Depicted in Commercials

		Number of commercials					
Ad no.	Ad name	Interaction in a vignette in a commercial					
		European Americans alone or with other European Americans	African Americans alone or with other African Americans	Minorities alone or with other minorities	European Americans with African Americans	European Americans with other minorities	African Americans with other minorities

Appendix B

Operational Definitions for Coding Variables

Ethnic categorization

African American:	Person appears to be of African ancestry.
European American:	Person appears to be of European/Caucasian ancestry.
Hispanic American:	Person appears to be of Hispanic descent.
Native American:	Person appears to be of Native American descent, a member of any of the Aboriginal peoples of the Western Hemisphere.
Indian/ Middle: Eastern American	Person appears to be of Asian Indian descent or belongs to the Indian subcontinent or one of the Middle Eastern countries.
Asian American:	Person appears to be of South and East Asian ancestry, such as Chinese, Koreans, Vietnamese, and Japanese (excludes people from the Indian subcontinent)

Role Importance

Major role:	Character is shown in the foreground or shown holding the product. Seen as important to the advertising message.
Minor role:	Character is not in the spotlight and does not hold the product, but is not difficult to find and is of average importance to the advertising message.
Background Role:	Character is difficult to find in the commercial (not easily noticeable) and is not important to the advertising message.

Character Role Categorization

Professional/ Managerial	Includes all roles that signify higher educational qualification. Includes banker, lawyers, police officers, teachers, and doctors.
Athlete:	Both celebrity and fictional athletes.

Celebrity/ Musician/ Entertainer	Includes both celebrity and fictional musicians and entertainers and other non-athlete celebrities.
Model/spokesperson:	Character speaks about the product or wears/holds/uses the product. Appears to have no other significant relationship with other characters in the commercial.
Recipient of charity:	Includes characters in non-commodity advertisements like those for public services.
Blue-collar worker/ salesperson	Includes roles that do not signify high educational qualifications. For example, a waiter/waitress or an automobile mechanic.
Friends/Family:	Includes fathers, mothers, husbands, and wives with children, grandparents, couples, brothers and sisters, and friends.
Customer:	Person is in a business or retail setting and is being served or helped by a salesperson.
Fictitious Character:	For instance, individuals dressed in cartoon character costumes.
Audience/Crowd/ Pedestrian	Person is a member of a crowd or a large audience, is walking or standing on a road. Has no significant relationship to the other characters in the commercial.
Other /cannot : categorize	All other roles that do not fit in the above mentioned categories.

Product categorization

Food/beverages	Hardware/Software/PC related
Alcoholic beverages	Sporting goods
Automobiles/ auto related	Publications
Over the counter drugs	Banking/financial services
Household/lawn and garden supplies	Telecommunication

Electronic appliances	Transportation
Cosmetics and clothing	Real Estate
Furniture	Cleaning Supplies
Entertainment supplies	PSAs
Toys	Network/Cable channels
Pet Supplies	Other products
Other services	

Settings

Business:	Factories, sales or office rooms, and retail settings in which consumers are depicted inside stores.
Home:	Recognizable as a residence, room, or rooms, garage, yard, home or apartment driveway or parking space.
Outdoors/ natural scenery	Includes forests, rivers, ocean, fields, or sky as well as streets, public roads, sidewalks, or pathways, and parks. Includes holiday getaways. Does not include outdoor settings at individuals' homes or outdoor social settings.
Social setting: outside home	Includes public places such as auditoriums, restaurants, churches, or movie theaters. Where people meet and congregate for social purposes.
Sports field/ arena:	For example, basketball courts, football and hockey stadiums, and baseball parks.
Television Set/ Artificial Setting	Includes artificial settings (stages or specially built props or backgrounds), setting where characters talk directly to the camera with no other identifiable setting around them and any other setting not listed.

Relationship to Others in the Ad

Family context:	Includes husband and wife and any relationship between relatives, including children as well as extended family such as aunts/uncles, grandparents, grandchildren, adopted children, foster children.
Social context:	Includes friends or any other two people depicted in a social setting, with the exception of family members depicted in a social context.
Business context:	Depictions of members of or workers in the same company, those who are employed by the same company. Also colleagues in the same profession or occupation even though they may be employed by different companies. Includes any relationship between employees or professionals who work together and relationships between customers being assisted by employees or professionals.
No interaction: between characters	More than one character appears in the ad, but there is no apparent relationship between the characters.
Nobody else in ad:	Only one model appears in the ad.
Other relationship:	Any relationship other than those listed.

Appendix C

Intercoder Reliability Tests

The tables in this section provide the percentages of intercoder agreement for all the coding variables in all the categories of analyses.

Table C1

Percentage of Agreement for Ethnic Representation by Age Group

Category	% of Intercoder agreement					
	Ethnicities					
	European Americans	African American	Hispanic American	Asian American	Native American	Indian/MidEast American
Total	86	97	98	100	100	100
Adults						
Males	87	96	99	100	100	100
Females	91	91	100	100	100	100
Teens	99	100	100	100	100	100
Children	100	100	100	100	100	100

Table C2

Percentage Agreement for Ethnicity-Role Importance in Commercials

Role importance	% of intercoder agreement	
	Ethnicities	
	European Americans	African Americans
Adult males		
Major	93	96
Minor	89	95
Background	95	97
Adult females		
Major	93	96
Minor	91	96
Background	96	99
Teens		
Major	100	100
Minor	100	100
Background	78	100
Children		
Major	97	100
Minor	97	100
Background	100	100

Table C3

Percentage Agreement for Levels of Interaction Between Different Ethnic Groups

Type of interaction	% of intercoder agreement	
	Level of interaction	
	In same ad	In same vignette in ad
European Americans alone or with other European Americans	99	97
African Americans alone or with other African Americans	100	95
European Americans with other minorities	100	100
African Americans with other minorities	100	95
European Americans with African Americans	99	97
Other Minorities alone or with other minorities	100	99

Table C4

Percentage Agreement for Ethnicity-Interpersonal Relationship Variables

Relationship	% of intercoder agreement		
	Ethnicities		
	European Americans	African Americans	Others
Family	99	99	99
Social	100	100	100
Business	97	97	100
No interaction	99	97	100
Other	99	100	100
Only one person in ad	100	100	100

Table C5

Percentage Agreement for Ethnicity-Setting Coding Variables

Setting	% of intercoder agreement		
	Ethnicities		
	European Americans	African Americans	Others
Home	97	100	100
Social setting outside homes	100	100	100
Business	97	98	100
Academic institution	100	100	100
Natural outdoors	98	98	100
Sports- related	100	100	100
Television set/artificial setting	97	98	100

Table C6

Percentage Agreement of Ethnicity-Character Role Coding Variables

Character role	% of intercoder agreement		
	Ethnicities		
	European Americans	African Americans	Others
Professional	98	100	100
Friends/family	100	100	100
Student	100	100	100
Athlete	100	100	100
Celeb/musician/ entertainer	100	100	100
Spokesperson for the product	100	100	100
Recipient of Charity	100	100	100
Blue-collar/ salesperson	97	97	100
Customer	98	98	100
Fictitious character	100	100	100
Crowd	100	100	100
Other	100	100	100