

2008

# The African-American male in magazine advertising : a content analysis

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THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALE IN MAGAZINE ADVERTISING:  
A CONTENT ANALYSIS

A Thesis

Presented to

Faculty of the Department of Journalism and Mass Communications  
San José State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science

by

Patrice Siarras

December 2008

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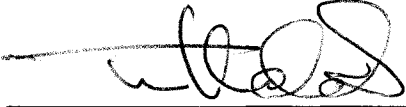
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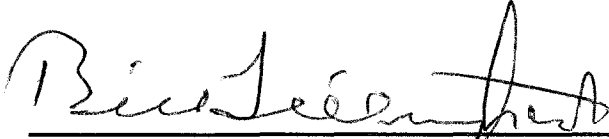
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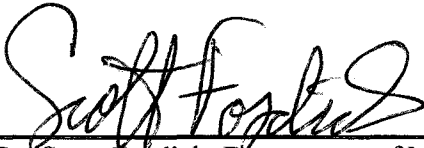
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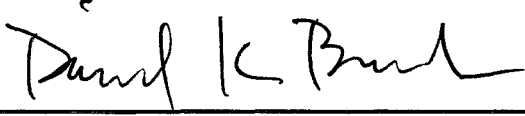
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## ABSTRACT

### THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALE IN MAGAZINE ADVERTISING:

#### A CONTENT ANALYSIS

by Patrice Siarras

This thesis addresses the topic of black men in five publications targeted at different consumers over a period of 25 years. It examines five aspects of models in advertising: role prominence, occupational role, product categories, interaction, and setting. By finding the recurrent trends in each magazine analyzed, it was determined how publications carry stereotypes, and what types.

Early research on this topic reveals minimal visibility and highly derogatory portrayals while more recent studies found increasingly positive depictions and the use of stereotypes in more subtle ways. A sample of ads in black-oriented publications helped determine if blacks were better represented in magazines targeted at them.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

In 1999, a commercial by the National Rifle Association (NRA) aimed at opposing gun control caused a stir among black leaders who believed the advertisement was racist. Using a series of mug shots of black and Hispanic males, the commercial's main goal seemed to convey the message that irresponsible gun use was mostly an occurrence among minorities, and that guns should be taken out of their hands, further nurturing the notion that blacks or Hispanics were all criminals (Browne, 1999).

Representation of race in advertising has been the focus of many studies, with seminal work starting as early as 1953 (e.g., Shuey, King, and Griffith), and other trailblazer studies being published in 1969 (e.g., Kassarjian), and 1970 (e.g., Dominick and Greenberg). Research on images and frequency of minorities in advertising has been relevant and important for two main reasons: first, to determine if their diffusion is proportionate to their actual number in American society, and second, to decide if their representation is an accurate reflection of their societal role as this is how they might actually be perceived by the mainstream population outside of these ads. Accurate and positive depiction of minorities in advertising is significant because it is also acknowledging the presence of these minorities as an equal part of society. Similarly, images in advertising play a significant part in how individuals perceive themselves, trigger self-esteem issues, and create the impression that the minorities are not important in a given social context (Knobloch-Westerwick and Coates, 2006). About 10 years earlier, Bristol et al. (1995) noted for instance that the paucity of positive images were likely to influence the self-esteem of young African-Americans.

Taylor et al. (1995) noted:

Negative stereotypical depiction of minorities or their exclusion from advertisements in mainstream media has been found to have harmful social effects. (...) To the extent that minorities are invisible in advertising, group members may experience the dominant culture as unwilling to embrace them as full participants in a range of human and social activities.

As an example, many studies have noted the overrepresentation of African-American males in athletes or entertainers roles; while these studies noted the positive aspect of these depictions, they also observed the unrealistic message that they send. Taylor et al. wrote: "If African-Americans are often depicted as athletes or entertainers, children may see role models whose achievements are not realistic for most of the population." Consequently, this overrepresentation may also be an issue in black-oriented magazines. By the 1950s advertising represented 60 percent of the content of many black publications, wrote Leslie (1995). Staples and Jones (1985) noted that such depiction is also rooted in the assumption that black men possess genetically endowed physical skills that are not accorded to whites (as quoted in Bristor et al., 1995). A significant impact of the negative portrayal of blacks in advertising is how they will be perceived in their daily life. In 1984, Humphrey and Schuman wrote that since contacts between whites and blacks were minimal it induced whites to rely solely on the media's depiction of blacks as their only source of information.

Many of the previous studies have in common that they often centered on minorities as an entity such as African-Americans, Asian Americans, and more rarely Hispanics. However, traditional research has mostly studied African-American models (Knobloch-Westerwick and Coates, 2006).

The present study will determine the status of black men in magazine advertising over a period of 25 years. Albeit previous research has studied the portrayal of blacks in advertising, none has looked solely at the representation of black men in magazine advertising over an extended period of time. One important aspect of these studies, as observed by Plous and Neptune (1997), is that there has been a significant stream of research on racial portrayals but rarely have these studies distinguished between male and female depictions, and indeed results of those studies often are associated with men, e.g., blacks as entertainers, blacks as athletes etc. It can be noted the constant reference to the black model as a male in some of the pioneer studies. As an example Colfax and Sternberg (1972) repeatedly referred to the black model as a *he*, although there is no mention that the study is centered on male models.

This present study is important first because studies on portrayal of black men have not been updated; albeit there is one notable work by Bailey (2006) that focuses on black males in magazine advertising, but only over a one-year period of time. Secondly, the emergence of more targeted publications among black consumers has led advertisers to realize the market potential that exist among this particular group (Zinkhan et al., 1990), and thus raise questions as to how representation in these predominantly black publications differ from that of a more mainstream readership. One issue is to know if stereotypes, even positive ones, are as frequent as in more general periodicals. Another issue remains the evolution of portrayals overtime. All in all, publications aimed at black men have constantly been excluded from research in that field, simply because most of them emerged later than “white” magazines geared towards men, or “black” magazines

read by African-American females. As an example *Ebony* was first published in 1945 while *XXL* (a hip-hop magazine popular among black men) was first launched in 1997. Lastly, the significance of the present study lies in the lack of major research on Blacks this past decade. Significant research can be noted in the seventies, eighties, and nineties but considerable work during the new millennium is minimal.

The image of the black male in the media has historically always been controversial. In 1972, Colfax & Sternberg noted how the black model would at times be replaced by a child or a woman in an attempt to manage the color problem in American society and introduce a color under a form that appears less threatening to white America. So what is the status of the black male in today's magazine advertising? And how has it evolved?

#### *Overview of Study*

This study will analyze the diffusion and portrayal of black men in magazine advertising in black-oriented and mainstream publications, and draw a comparison between the results.

The study will be divided into several stages:

First, the frequency of black models in advertisements, and the predominance or absence of men in ads that appeared in black magazines will be determined. Magazines will be picked and collected according to their relevance and circulation both in the black market and the mainstream one. A study of how the models were represented to determine their images will then follow. Several factors will be taken into account.

Studies have commonly used, among others, the following criteria: the type of positions

that the models hold in the ads, e.g., do they hold lower skills or higher skills positions?  
Do they appear in interracial ads or with other black models? When they hold major roles  
in the ads is the product perceived as important and is it aimed at non-targeted audiences?  
Does the model interact with white models?

A second research work will aim at studying the same variables in black women's  
magazines, and in magazines read by black men (four publications total).

This study is based on a previous work by Bailey (2006), *A Year in the Life of the  
African-American Male in Advertising: A Content Analysis*. It is meant to extend the  
study, and observe the evolution of the portrayal of black males over a larger period.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

This section will provide an overview of the relevant literature related to representation of blacks in advertising.

### *Visibility*

Visibility of blacks in advertising has increased significantly since Shuey, King, and Griffith first reported the results of their study in 1953 —the first one in that field— which at the time reached a paltry 0.6 percent of ads featuring blacks (Bailey, 2006; Zinkhan et al., 1990). The percentage later increased from 8.3 percent in the 1980s to reach 11.8 percent in the 1990s (Plous and Neptune, 1997). A study by Bush, Solomon, and Hair (1977) found that more blacks appear in television commercials, observing a significant increase from 1967 to 1974. Over ten year later, Wilkes and Valencia (1989) noticed the same phenomenon: “commercials with blacks continue to increase and are increasingly likely to be racially integrated.” Similarly, two years later, Licata and Biswas (1991) noted that the preceding 25 years had witnessed a notable increase in ads featuring blacks. A similar study by Williams et al. (1995) found that minorities were more often used in ads that had traditionally excluded them.

Research on blacks in advertising usually revolves around two main variables: visibility and portrayal. Visibility of minorities in advertising has actually remained the most investigated aspect in that field (Taylor et al., 1995); with racial content of magazines becoming a focus of research during the civil rights era and early 1970s (Ortizano, 1989), which not surprisingly coincide with some of the pioneer studies in that field. The 1960s witnessed civil right groups appealing to advertisers to include more

blacks in ads to present a more balanced view of American Society (Zinkhan, Qualls & Biswas, 1990). However, although many studies acknowledge progress, other studies would find the percentage to remain surprisingly low (Zinkhan et al., 1990), and the overall findings on racial representation rather mixed (Plous and Neptune, 1997; Taylor et al., 1995; Zinkhan et al., 1990).

Research on visibility also showed that increase in frequency has stemmed from the rise of black-oriented publications. As Baker (2005) wrote “because of the limited opportunities available for blacks in all aspects of the mainstream media, there have emerged media options designed by blacks specifically for blacks audiences,” although targeting blacks in advertising started as early as 1940 (Morris, 2007). The 1990s for instance witnessed the launch of a series of black magazines that cater to the black community including *The Source*, *Vibe* or *XXL*. These more specific publications have been a turning point in the evolution of blacks in advertising because advertisers prefer targeting these communities through specific channels, as members from these particular groups often pay little attention to mainstream media (Knobloch-Westerwick & Coates, 2006).

Not surprisingly, black-oriented magazines tend to be more racially exclusive; *Ebony* for instance featured 81 percent of models of African descent in ads over the span of 9 years from 1978 to 1987, and 98 percent from 1990 to 1997 (Knobloch-Westerwick & Coated, 2006). Bailey (2006) noted that a perusal of black-oriented magazines indicates a significant number of ads portraying African-Americans.

Many studies often tended to analyze the frequency of black men as opposed to their female counterparts. Wilkes and Valencia (1989) observed that black women are seen more often in integrated commercials. However, Humphrey and Schuman (1984) found that there was no significant difference in the male/female ratio. Nevertheless, their findings revealed an underrepresentation (in terms of demographic parity) of females regardless of their ethnicity in some publications such as *Time Magazine*. Millard and Grant (2006) found an underrepresentation of black women in fashion magazine photographs. Leslie's (1995) findings revealed the non-visibility of dark skin black models:

Black models in newspapers, handbills, and other media of the period [1957-1989] were invariably light complected. Blacks with thick lips, broad noses, dark skin, and other typically African or Negroid facial features were routinely ridiculed and their image excluded from advertising pages.

As a result, black women in mainstream magazines have often appeared as light skinned, with straight hair and other white features (Brown, 1993). However, Leslie (1995) also noted that advertisers were responsive to the *Black is Beautiful* movement and that more natural blacks later gained access to the pages of *Ebony* during that period.

#### *Racial Composition*

There is no doubt that ads are now more racially integrated than they used to be. "When minority models were used, they tended to be used with whites in mixed-ethnic ads," (Bowen and Schmid, 1997). Yet, research has also shown that when blacks are portrayed along with whites, they usually play minor roles (Bristor et al., 1995,; Humphrey and Schuman, 1984; Wilkes and Valencia, 1989; Green, 1999). Humphrey



and Schuman (1984) found that few ads included blacks and whites appearing together, but they found a significant increase of depictions of blacks in mixed race peer settings from the 1950s on; findings that are correlated by Stevenson and Swayne (1999). However, in their study, a sample of ads from the same period show that blacks and whites never portrayed interacting in an informal way, but mostly in subordinate/dominant roles. By 1980, they noted that this depiction had disappeared completely, but only a low percentage of ads pictured interracial contacts, and most of them included children. Equally, Bowen and Schmid (1997) observed a mostly formal interaction between white and minorities with informal relationships reaching less than 2 percent of all the ads studied. A possible explanation of limited interaction by Bristor et al. (1995) is that it “reflects the avoidance form of discrimination.” However, Whittler (1990; 1991) who in two different studies found that whites react positively or negatively to black models in ads pointed out that mixed audience ads make more economic sense.

Overall, albeit greater use of integrated ads in mainstream media can't be denied, research noted the paucity of social interaction within these ads.

### *Portrayal*

While visibility remains an important aspect in advertising, an even more relevant study is how blacks are portrayed within these ads. Research found that early appearance of blacks would often be derogatory. In addition, traditional representation of black men and women were often limited to unskilled laborers, servants, and in a more positive, yet still stereotypical way, as entertainers and athletes. Humphrey and Schuman (1984) observed that blacks would often be depicted as whites would think of them. In addition,

the same study noted that for a long time the majority of consumers would be whites so blacks would be portrayed in what would appeal to the mainstream. Kern-Foxworth (1994) wrote:

Some of the earlier advertising featuring blacks was highly offensive and greatly exaggerated physical features. The mouth was opened unusually wide and filled with very large and/or carnivorous white teeth by exceptionally large, thick, ruby-red protruding lips. The eyes in these advertisements were most often seen uncontrollably with ecstatic fright. Adjectives such as “saucer” lips and “banjo” were often used to describe blacks with negative connotation.

Patton (1993) described Aunt Jemima as wide-mouthed, rag headed, and crudely rendered, and noted that her popularity as such a caricatured persona was immediate. However, the first changes in stereotypes had been observed since the 1960s (e.g., Cox, 1969).

The 1953 Shuey, King and Griffith study noted that 95.3 percent of the time blacks were portrayed as unskilled laborers, and entertainers and athletes the rest of the time (Bailey, 2006). While it's true that studies such as Humphrey and Schuman's (1984) found a significant increase in the frequency of blacks in advertising from 1950 to 1982 the main concern by then would be the occupational role and/or portrayal of blacks.

While some of these depictions are largely nonexistent or have been reduced (Plous and Neptune, 1997), more subtle forms of stereotypical representations have taken place (Colfax and Sternberg, 1972; Kern-Foxworth, 1994; Coltrane and Messineo, 2000; Thomas and Treiber, 2000). Coltrane and Messineo (2000) noted that a general representation of minorities and whites in an average 1990 television commercial would be to portray black men as aggressive and white men as powerful. The same study also

observed that black men were often portrayed as buffoons, menacing, unruly youths, and hyper masculine thugs, or as subservient to whites (Humphrey and Schuman, 1984; Coltrane and Messineo, 2000; Wilkes and Valencia, 1989).

If it is true that most studies agreed that blacks are more visible than decades ago, they also tend to find them in more diverse roles. As a matter of fact, changes in more positive depictions have occurred since the 1960s (Taylor et al., 1995; Humphrey and Schuman, 1984). However, blacks do not always appear in products that qualify as prestigious. Numerous studies have found them to be repeatedly associated with fast food (Bristor et al., 1995; Wilkes and Valencia, 1989). They for the most part appear as low wage workers that help white customers:

At Burger King, African-American (and white) women help primarily white customers with their orders. At Boston Chicken, food is dished up by an African-American man (and served by a white woman). At Wendy's an African-American man takes Dave Thomas's order. At the lunch counter in a Trident Gum advertisement, an African-American woman serves the primarily white customers. At Winn Dixie, an African-American woman runs the cashier for all white customers (Bristor et al., 1995).

In fact, food and cleaning products were the top products used by advertisers to convey black stereotypes (Patton, 1993).

Similarly, Greenberg and Brand (1993) observed that blacks were the most represented minorities, and when they appear they were mostly men who often held service occupations, and were seldom seen as managers or professionals.

In his study, Bailey (2006) observed that while black men were likely to be granted major roles in ads in black men's magazines, they were also seen in "laidback" representations (outdoors and non-work-related settings). In sharp contrast, an additional

study by Bailey found a greater percentage of managerial/professional depictions when they were actually given occupations. Similarly, Bailey (2006) found that African-American men were typically portrayed in non-occupational roles; when they were indeed depicted in occupational roles, it was for the most part as entertainers and athletes. He added the absence of representation in managerial or professional roles.”

In their study, Bristor et al. (1995) observed the rarity of traditional, intact black families. Bang and Reece (2003) supported this when their findings showed that blacks were almost never portrayed in traditional family settings. Similarly, Coltrane and Messineo (2000) found that whites were most likely to be portrayed as spouses, and in a home setting. McLaughin and Goulet (1999) found that the frequency of families were the most significant contrast between black and mainstream magazines; noting that while families were more ubiquitous in black oriented magazines, the representation of the traditional family was rare. However, they also argued that the portrayal of single parent women was meant to gain “the empathy, and subsequent patronage of this particular group.” Coltrane and Messineo (2000) noted that among African-Americans, women were more likely to be shown in a home setting than their male counterparts. These representations often convey the message that black children grow up without fathers or in destroyed families.

Overall, according to recent studies, settings appear to be a factor of ethnic inequality. Martin (2004) found a racial imbalance in outdoor leisure activity in magazine advertisements. Similarly, Reid et al. (1995) observed more work portrayals in ads featuring whites.

Some of the earliest depictions of blacks in advertising were among others as entertainers and athletes. Quite often so, research has explained that white audiences view sports, or music, as acceptable occupations for blacks (Bowen and Schmid, 1997).

While portrayal of blacks as such conveys a positive message, it may also send the wrong message that this is the only field where they can succeed. This overrepresentation according to Bristor et al. (1995) may be dangerous in the sense that it may influence young blacks into thinking that sports and entertainment are the only viable options for them:

Nike exploits this distortion in its P.L.A.Y. advertisements in which Michael Jordan and Jackie Joyner-Kersey ask, "What if there were no sports, would I still be your hero?" The visual backdrop for this query is a series of black and white images of impoverished, at-risk youths in urban settings. The message clearly implies that without sports, urban ghetto youths have similarly low future prospects for achieving superstardom; the key difference is that white youths may have more options. The media offers white youths many other successful models.

In their study, Humphrey and Schuman (1984) found that 14% of portrayals appear as entertainers and athletes. Bowen and Schmid (1997) wrote that representation of blacks in these categories is not wrong in itself, but that it fails to show the various "interests, skills, and talents" of this community. They added "white models are portrayed in a variety of occupations and situations and the differences are used to amplify the product's versatility. Minorities deserve comparable consideration."

The image of blacks in advertising had a significant momentum when celebrities started to appear in ads. Kern-Foxworth (1994) noted an increase of the use of blacks in advertising occurred during the 1980s with the success of Michael Jackson's *Thriller* or *The Cosby Show*. The major difference by using black actors according to Kern-

Foxworth is that they appeal easier to mainstream audiences, but at the same time “allows the audience to deny the existence of racism,” (Bristor et al., 1995).

### *Product Categories*

Another relevant aspect in images is the type of products associated with the models. Research has shown that blacks (and minorities in general) were often associated with predefined products (e.g., food, clothes, and shoes among others). They tend to be absent in ads that promote high-value products, personal computers, computers supplies, electronics among others. The product that is associated with a certain group of consumers is important because repeated association ignites stereotypes. Taylor et al. (1995) wrote:

If African Americans or Hispanics Americans are stereotypically portrayed as uneducated, they are not likely to be depicted frequently in publications with highly educated readers, such as *Scientific American* or *Business Week*. (...) In reference to products, a group perceived as uneducated is unlikely to be frequently portrayed as users or purchasers of technologically sophisticated products, such as electronic diaries or computer systems.

The product category, and the interaction that the model has with a product, are another way to measure portrayal of blacks in advertising. Direct interaction with a product for instance will evidence a more important role for a model (Licata & Biswas, 1991). It is thus understood for the present study that product interaction will give the model a major role or more importance in the advertisement.

### *Role Prominence*

In 1991, Licata and Biswas found that only 31 percent of ads featured blacks in major roles, which, surprisingly, happens to be less than in 1968, 1973, and 1974. In

1995, Taylor et al. found higher results (37 percent). In contrast, the same study found that Hispanics and Asians appeared in major roles in 47.4 percent and 50.8 percent respectively, although they are less visible than black models. As said previously, blacks are often associated with certain products. In 2003, a study by Bang and Reece revealed that they were mostly found in advertisements promoting low value products. In that respect, Kern-Foxworth (1994) noted that “using blacks in advertising has always been a strategy employed by advertisers.” LaFerle and Lee (2005) explained that media employ stereotypes as a categorization tool to avoid ambiguity and favor easier cultural understanding. But they also stress the negative aspect of such method for ethnic members.

Research has also shown that many blacks appearing in ads were given minor roles. Bowen and Schmid (1997) found that less than 25 percent of minorities are portrayed in prominent roles. Academic researchers have often employed the term “tokenism,” which consists in minimizing a screen presence, by relegating the minority in a crowd scene for example (Bristor et al., 1995). Colfax and Sternberg (1972) wrote:

The representation of the black gives him some visibility, but the predominantly white composition of the groups in which he is depicted reiterates his minority status, on the one hand, and averts the possibility that he might become too closely identified with a particular product in the minds of the white audience, on the other.

All in all, the token technique is used to reaffirm the dominant white ideology (Bristor, Lee, & Hunt, 1995).

### *Theoretical Framework*

Previous studies on roles and portrayals of a specific group of consumers (e.g., African-American) have usually framed their research on two major theories: Social Learning theory and Cultivation theory.

a) Social Learning theory is a theory originally developed by Albert Bandura that states that people learn from observational learning. Knobloch-Westerwick and Coates, (2006) wrote:

Models for behavior can be observed in the immediate social environment, but in modern societies, a vast amount of information about values and behaviors is obtained from the symbolic mass media environment. Advertising messages form a large part of media content, portray actions in repetitive manner, and show rewards for these actions. These aspects should, according to social-cognitive theory, encourage onlookers to adopt behaviors seen in advertisements.

b) Cultivation theory is a theory by George Gebner that describes impact of advertising effects on the conceptions of social reality.

In sum, monitoring the representation of race is relevant as consumers learn from the media, and might shape their perception of the group represented. Humphrey et al. (1984) and Bailey (2006) stated that since many whites had little contact with blacks, the media depiction of blacks was more likely to influence them. Bailey (2006) wrote:

A significant percentage of consumers who purchase the magazines in Study 1 [The Source, Vibe] are not African-Americans. In addition, in the mainstream magazines [GQ, Spin], the majority of readers are not African-Americans. If non-African American consumers view images of African-American men in ads in these magazines, and rely solely on those images to form opinions of African American men, overtime they may come away with the view that African-American men are concerned solely about certain types of products, do not mix with others, and are unoccupied professionally.



In addition, cultivation theory also reveals that depiction affects the specific group represented. Knobloch-Westerwick & Coates (2006) observed:

If one's social group is underrepresented in the media, this observation is likely to undermine self-esteem by creating the impression that people like oneself are not seen important in the given social environment.

Based on social learning theory, the images of black men in the present study are potential models and behaviors that people may be able to learn from, model or imitate. In the present study, cultivation theory applies to advertising in the sense that audiences will expect black men, for instance, to meet predefined social, fashion, or other similar standards.

## *Overview*

There has been a large amount of studies on the portrayal of blacks in advertising that often focused on two main variables, visibility and portrayal. Over the years, many researchers have started to innovate in their approach, and extended their studies to different media channels (images of blacks in business mail, in fashion magazine photographs, among others).

For the present study, Bailey (2006) conducted research on two different levels, by looking at the status of black men in black men's magazines, and studying their representation in mainstream men's magazines and in black women's magazines. He then compared the findings of both studies. This study remains key for the current research as the same logic will be applied by studying the portrayal of black men in black women's magazines, mainstream men's magazines, and black men's magazines. As a result, Bailey (2006) remains the principal foundation for the present study.

Other notable studies are Taylor et al. (1995) who analyzed representation of minorities in magazines, their frequency and the nature of their portrayal, as well as their role within the ads studied. Humphrey and Schuman (1984) studied the frequency and portrayal in advertisements. This research has remained a turning point mostly because it was the first study of its kind in the 1980s (only a few pioneer studies were published before that in the 1950s and late 1960s and early 1970s). It showed how frequency and portrayal have evolved for both women and men. Finally, the 1990s have seen the emergence of another significant study by Zinhkan et al. (1990) who confirmed earlier findings, both in print advertising and TV commercials, on an increase of black models.

In 1997, Plous and Neptune studied gender and racial bias in magazine advertising by analyzing the portrayal of black men, white men, black women, and white women, and how they differ from one another.

In light of these studies, the present research will attempt to determine the status of the African-American males in various publications aimed at different consumers.

## Chapter 3: Method

### *Data Collection*

The same method employed in the Bailey study will be repeated in the current research. As a result, the proposed method for this study will be to conduct a content analysis, where factors such as frequency and portrayal in advertisements will be analyzed to determine the status of black men in magazine advertising. The study will be limited to men. It will look at mainstream magazines and black-oriented publications. In his research, Bailey (2006) conducted two studies: the portrayal of black men in publications that target them, and a similar study in mainstream men's magazines and black women's magazines. As a result, a similar approach will be conducted.

Relevant publications will include *Ebony*, *Essence*, *The Source*, *Spin*, and *GQ*. These magazines were picked because of their relevance and circulation, and will be studied during 5 years (1980, 1987, 1994, 2000 and 2007) over a period of two and half decades.

For the year 1980, 1987, 1994, 2000 and 2007 all issues of *Ebony* and *Essence* will be used. Only seven months of 1994 will be coded for *The Source*, and all but one issue (November) will be used for 2007. All issues from January through December will be used for *GQ*, and *Spin*, starting in 1994. Overall, 60 issues of *Ebony*, and 60 of *Essence* will be coded. 30 issues will be used for *The Source* and 36 issues for *GQ*, as well as for *Spin*. Altogether, 222 issues of magazines will be collected and coded for the present study.

The frequency of black models and their representation will be determined, and the following criterion will be looked at: role in the ads (major/minor), settings, product categories, occupational roles, and interactions.

*Coding Categories*

Frequency: Number of times the model appears out of the total number of ads.

Portrayal:

a) Occupational roles

Athlete: Both celebrity and fictional athletes.

Blue Collar: Occupations that do not require high educational qualifications. (e.g., waiter, plumber).

Managerial/  
Professional: Occupations that require higher educational qualifications; include bankers, lawyers, police officers, teachers, and doctors.

Entertainers  
(Musician,  
Celebrities): Both celebrity and fictional musicians.

Clerical: Of or relating to a clerk position.

Non-occupational: Model appears not to be holding any position.

b) Role

Major Role: Character is shown in the foreground or holding the product, considered the main actor of the advertisement.

Minor Roles: Character is not in the spotlight and does not interact with the product, but is easy to see.

Mixed/Shared: Model shares major role.

Background: Character is not easily noticeable, and is not important to the ad.

Settings:

Outdoors: Includes forests, rivers, ocean, fields, or sky as well as streets, public roads, sidewalk, or pathways, and parks.

Staged: Artificial setting or specially built background for the advertisement.

At Play: basketball courts, tennis courts, football and hockey stadiums.

Home: Recognizable as a residence, room, garage, yard, home, or apartment driveway or parking space.

Business Work: Factories, sales or office rooms, and retail settings in which consumers are depicted inside stores.

Interactions:

By Self: Only one model appears in the ad.

African-Americans  
(Males only): ad only features men of African descent.

African-Americans  
(Males and females): ad feature both men and women of African descent.

Diverse male/female: Group includes various models of different ethnic backgrounds.

Family Context: Couples, children, grandparents, grandchildren, adopted children, foster children.

Social Context: Friends (exclude family members).

**Business Context:** Depicts workers in the same company, colleagues, in the same profession, occupation, but also customers and employees relationships.

**No interaction:** Several characters appear in the ad but there is no apparent relationship between them.

Product Categories:

Alcohol	Education/Training Jobs
Clothing, Shoes, Accessories	Furniture
Corporate	Household/garden/lawn supplies
Destinations/Vacations	Retailers
Food and Drink	Telecommunications
Entertainment	Transportations
OTC Drugs	Publications
Personal Care/Hygiene	Military/Navy/National Guard/Marines
Financial/Insurance/professional service	Other Services
Cars and motorized vehicles	

Ethnic categorization:

**Black:** Person appears to be of African ancestry.

**White:** Person appears to be of European ancestry.

*Research Questions*

**RQ1:** What type of occupational roles does the black model hold?

**RQ2:** What type of products are the models most likely to be associated with?

**RQ3:** What is the proportion of integrated ads in black magazines and mainstream publications?



## Chapter 4: Results

Albeit this study was an extension and update of an already existing research, a few components had to be modified from the original method as some data were missing, thus rendering the replicate of the initial research difficult. For instance, the study by Bailey (2006) included two publications that were not used for the present research, *XXL* and *Vibe Magazine*. The former was launched in the late nineties while data from the latter were not available for the entire year of 1994. Similarly, dividing the research into two independent studies, as was the case in the original model *Ebony*, *Essence*, *GQ*, *Spin* on one hand, and *The Source*, *Vibe* and *XXL* on the other was not seen useful as not all original publications were available in the early years of the proposed study most notably 1980, 1987 for the aforementioned reason.

Therefore ads in five magazines were coded, *Ebony*, *Essence*, *GQ*, *Spin*, and *The Source* to produce one single study. Yet, samples of ads still missed in some instances five months of *The Source* magazine in 1994 have remained unavailable as well as one month of 2007. However, in no way was the effectiveness of the study affected as a sample of six months was often found to be enough to determine the overall trend of a particular year considering that ads were often found to be repetitive from one month to the next. The two mainstream magazines used for the present study, *GQ* and *Spin*, did not have a large sample of black models during the early and mid 80s, which led the study for those two publications to start as late as 1994, as opposed to *Ebony* or *Essence* whose advertising trend could be observed from as early as 1980. Finally, *The Source* was first launched in the early nineties so data from 1980 and 1987 were non-existent. In

the end, a total of 2,672 ads were coded over a period of 25 years, and five magazines, with the most ads featuring black models found in *Ebony* and *Essence*, followed by *The Source*, *GQ*, and *Spin*. *Ebony* took the lead, not solely because of its complete available 25-year- period sample, which was at times defaulting with other publications, but also because it had an overall larger sample of ads. The year 1980, for instance, offered a plethora of advertisements that featured both female and male models while the publication of *The Source* for the year 1994 did not have an abundance of ads, with or without black male models for that matter, and indeed the highest amount of advertisements found for any given month would revolve around 15, although an increase of ads in 2000 can be noted for all publications, which decreased in 2007. The same tendency was found in *Spin*. In contrast, while *Essence* was found to have a significant amount of ads, albeit not as much as *Ebony*, few featured black male models. In short, the ratio of ads-models was greater in *Essence* and *GQ* than it was in *Ebony*, *The Source*, or *Spin*. Table 1 gives an aperçu of the frequency of black men in each publication.

Table 1

*Number and Percentage of Black Male Models Found in the 5 publications*

Year	Ebony	Essence	GQ	Spin	The Source
1980:	289 60%	231 27%	N/A N/A	N/A N/A	N/A N/A
1987:	306 38.2%	181 25.7%	N/A N/A	N/A N/A	N/A N/A
1994:	192 28.6%	123 18.5%	37 3.9%	26 7.3%	30 41.7%
2000:	221 28.3%	132 15.3%	115 9.4%	84 12.3%	302 50.7%
2007:	129 18.3%	116 12.6%	67 7.6%	34 10.4%	57 49.6%

*Comparison between Black Media and Mainstream Media*

One of the main distinctions between black-oriented publications and mainstream ones, and this relates perfectly with early findings, remains the frequency of the black models. On one hand, black publications tended to feature more black men in the early 80s than their mainstream counterparts, but decreased overtime; on the other hand, the proportion of black men increased overtime in mainstream magazines, going for instance from 0 in 1987 to 34 in 2007 in *Spin Magazine*. Of course, the number of black models

from 0 in 1987 to 34 in 2007 in *Spin Magazine*. Of course, the number of black models was always higher in black magazines, but if a comparison of each magazine per se is drawn, a decreasing ubiquity is observed in publications such as *Ebony* and *Essence*, and an increasing presence in *GQ*, and *Spin*, although a subsequent decrease is observed in 2007. All in all, the most noticeable discrepancy remains the frequency between mainstream magazines, and more targeted ones. In 1994 for instance, *The Source* featured black models in 41.7 percent of its ads while *GQ* only featured 3.9 percent.

Significant differences in the portrayal of black men are also worth mentioning. With no surprise, and as previous studies showed, professional depictions were more likely to be featured in *Ebony* and *Essence* while mainstream publication such as *Spin* and *GQ* were more likely to portray black men as athletes and entertainers, to put it simply. However, a few nuances were found across magazines. First, *The Source* magazine seemed to act as an exception in many instances. It had the highest proportion of non-occupational roles among all publications, which seems to rebut the popular belief that black models are better represented in magazines targeted at them. In addition, depictions in this publication were often narrowed to one single product, clothes. In contrast, if it's true that *Spin* and *GQ* feature a lower percentage of black models, they also portray them in more diverse roles and product categories. Second, another significant nuance was the fact that professional depiction, although higher in black publications, was not significant in any of the magazines.

As mentioned earlier, *Ebony* accounted for the majority of the ads (42.6 percent) followed by *Essence* (29.3 percent), *The Source* (14.6 percent), *GQ* (8.2 percent), and *Spin* (5.4 percent). Out of a total of 479 ads that *Ebony* offered in 1980, 60% percent featured black male models. In contrast, out of a total of 705 ads in *Essence* (1987), black men appeared in 181 of them (25.7 percent), which can be possibly be explained by the audience that *Essence* caters to, black women aged 18-34, while *Ebony* is more a family-oriented publication. In 1994, *The Source*, a hip-hop magazine geared towards black men aged 18 to 35, had a total of 72 ads, 36 of which contained human models, and 30 of those ads featured black men (83.3 percent). They appear to be underrepresented in mainstream magazines with *GQ* featuring 7.6 percent of black models in their ads in 2007, and indeed the highest percentage found in mainstream magazines was 12.3 percent in *Spin* in 2000. *GQ* is a men's magazine with a median age of 34, and whose readership is college educated, while *Spin* is a music publication.

### *Product Categories*

There were 19 product categories coded, and the black models were found to be heavily associated with clothing/shoes (20.1 percent), personal care (18.2 percent), alcohol (9.2 percent), cars (8.2 percent), food/beverages (7.4 percent), and cigarettes (7.1 percent). The products were chosen based on Bailey's previous study; however some categories were added as the present study progressed. For example, publications in the 80s had a significant amount of Army, Navy or National Guard advertisements. They decreased during the 90s, but yet remained present.

Not surprisingly, ads for clothing/shoes were mostly found in *The Source* (56.5 percent), *GQ* (21.4 percent), and *Spin* (12.1 percent). An increase of these ads was observed in 2000. *Ebony* and *Essence* distinguished themselves over the same period of time with an overrepresentation of black males in personal care advertisements. They had respectively 67 and 56 of them while by contrast *GQ* had 18 of them, *The Source*, 17 and *Spin*, 12. Other such distinctions were found with cars, and cigarettes ads, where, again, *Ebony* and *Essence* were leading the pack. The products that black males were most likely to promote are found in Table 2.

Table 2

*Most frequent products found to be associated with black men*

Products	Frequency	Percent
Clothing/Shoes	539	20.2
Personal Care	484	18.1
Alcohol	247	9.2
Car	220	8.2
Food/Drink	197	7.4
Cigarettes	189	7.1
Army	99	3.7
Financial/Banking/Insurance	89	3.3
Corporate	79	3.0
Education	67	2.5
Vacations	65	2.4
OTC Drugs	60	2.2
Transportation	51	1.9
Telecommunication	41	1.5
Entertainment	39	1.5
Computers/Electronics	38	1.4

### *Role Portrayals*

There were four role categories namely major, minor, mixed/shared and background. The findings revealed that African-American men were more likely to be represented in major roles across all publications, representing 51.2 percent in that role and 33.3 percent in mixed/shared roles. *Ebony* and *Essence* were the exception in 1980 where African-American models were found more often in mixed/shared roles (46.6 percent), where they, for the most part, shared the major part with an African-American female model or, more rarely, with a child. *Essence* was the only publication that had an overall greater percentage of males in mixed/shared roles, 42.9 percent versus 35.6 percent in major roles.

Overall, as observed by Bailey (2006), in no way did the representation of the black male happen to be overshadowed, either by a white model or by a product. There were only a few instances where the black model was in a minor or a background role, and these accounted for 12.6 percent and 2.9 percent of the total number of ads. It is important to note that the instances that found the black model in such roles in *Ebony* and *Essence* are the result of their sharing the part with another black model (female or child). However, they were more likely to be overshadowed by a white model in the mainstream publications when found in these roles.

In short, the African-American male was more likely to be significant to the advertisement than irrelevant to the promotion of the product. Table 3 provides the percentage and number of ads that depicted black males in major, minor, shared, and background roles.



percentage and number of ads that depicted black males in major, minor, shared, and background roles.

Table 3

*Frequency of Roles*

Role	Frequency	Percent
Major	1369	51.6
Minor	338	12.6
Mixed/Shared	888	33.2
Background	77	2.9
Total	2672	100

*Occupational Role*

For the most part, black men were portrayed in non-occupational roles, even in magazines that target black consumers. Representation as professional/managerial was not significant and only accounted for 8.8 percent; in stark contrast more than 2000 ads portrayed black men in non-occupational roles (81.2 percent). Without any exception, all magazines throughout the 25-year period sample had the highest number of ads portraying models in non-occupational roles. For instance, in 2000, *The Source* accounted for the most ads with non-occupational roles (38.4 percent), which at the same time compares well with the findings that Bailey (2006) had reported for the year 2001. *Ebony*, *Essence* and *GQ* followed with respectively 23.3 percent, 15.7 percent and 13.9

percent. *Spin* had 8.7 percent for that same period. Bailey's findings were higher though 65 percent for the simple reason that the study only involved three magazines.

The second highest representation was managerial/professional, yet remained absent in some publications. No models were represented in such roles in *Spin*, and *GQ* only had a total of four ads that depicted black men in that category while *The Source* had five. As predicted, these depictions were concentrated mostly in *Ebony* and *Essence*. This ignited significant distinctions across magazines. If a comparison is drawn between *Ebony* and *Spin* in 1994 onwards, for instance, the latter had absolutely no ads that depicted black men in managerial/professional roles while the former had ninety-one.

Unlike what previous research works found, depictions as athletes and entertainers were not so prevalent, neither in mainstream publications nor in black-oriented ones. There were, however, athletes or entertainers representing products, but they were not necessarily "at play" or even representing products related to sports, entertainment or any other activities that might have been an indication of their real-life status. In total depictions of black models as athletes accounted for 1.6 percent and 2.8 percent for entertainers.

The blue collar and clerical category were the two categories that were found to be non-existent during specific periods, namely for one and two years. Indeed, there were no models in blue collar positions in 2007 and none in clerical roles both in 1987 and 1994.

Finally, the category "other" often included models that were represented as students or soldiers, and at times, other Army officials. A significant amount of

education and Army ads in *Ebony*, especially during the 80s, had some black models in student roles and soldiers. In total, the “other” category represented 4.2 percent of all occupational roles, 112 ads.

While the present study had six categories, the publications often limited their portrayal to two and sometimes three categories, and each time the non-occupational category appeared to be the leading one. For instance, in *Ebony* whenever black men were not portrayed in non-occupational roles, they appeared in managerial/professional depictions; in *GQ* the depictions were limited to either non-occupational or entertainers and athletes, depending on the year analyzed. In short, there never seemed to be any balance between the categories, and this applied to all publications. This greatly emphasized the lack of diversity in representing “the skills, talents and interests” of the black community.

#### *Settings and Interactions*

The settings and interactions varied from one publication to another. In *The Source*, men tended to appear by themselves or with other African-American males while they were more likely to appear by themselves or in diverse groups in mainstream publications. And with no surprise they tended to be portrayed more overwhelmingly in family context in *Ebony* and *Essence*. However, portrayal as such in those magazines was often problematic, largely because the family context category rightfully included couples; still, portrayal of those “couples” would often render a different image than that of a family, but rather one of two models that have been put together for the sake of an advertisement. This issue seems to be more apparent by the fact that those models were

often portrayed in staged settings (and to some extent because of their non-occupational status) rather than in more “natural” backgrounds such as a home, restaurant, or school, which, when was the case, gave more credibility to the concept of family than its staged counterpart. Most notably, *Ebony* and *Essence* had an abundance of such ads during the year 1980 with 41.1 percent and 47.1 percent of ads respectively featuring blacks in staged settings. All in all, across all publications, the top settings were either staged or outdoors, representing 41.6 percent and 28.6 percent of ads.

Interactions were another variable that were looked at. As shown in Table 4, black men were most likely to be depicted singly, albeit the overabundance of couple depictions in *Ebony* made the family percentage higher (39.7 percent) followed by ads where the African-American was portrayed by himself (32.6 percent). They appear more often in integrated ads in *GQ* and *Spin*, more often with other black men in *The Source* and were more ubiquitous in family context in *Ebony* and *Essence*. The integrated ads were a context that was largely missing in black publications, yet could be seen in a few instances in *The Source*.

Another significant absence was the portrayal in business, social and home context, which compares well with early studies. The home settings represented 11 percent while 5.4 percent of ads accounted for business work settings and 1.6 percent for social settings.

Table 4

*Frequency and Type of Interactions*

Interactions	Frequency	Percent
By Self	870	32.6
AA group	293	11.0
AA men	134	5.0
Diverse	290	10.9
Family Context	1062	39.7
Business Context	23	0.9
Total	2672	100.0

*Changes Over Time*

It is hard to say that changes were significant considering that the only 25-year period observation only applied to two publications. The biggest change for *Ebony* and *Essence* were undoubtedly the frequency with which they featured black men, from 60.3 percent in 1980 down to 18.2 percent in 2007, the percentage for *Essence* went down to 12.6 percent in 2007 up from 27 percent in 1980. The two mainstream publications had a reverse change going up from 3.9 percent to 7.6 percent for *GQ* and from 7.3 percent to 10.4 percent for *Spin Magazine*.

In terms of representation, no significant change could be observed. The black male model was not better portrayed or in a less flattering manner; for all years and all magazines analyzed, the non-occupational category was the most pervasive depiction. As an example, in 1994, *The Source* had the most ads for clothes, and shoes, and that remained true for 2007. Ads for personal care in *Ebony* and *Essence* tapered off in 2007. Overall, changes over time were hard to qualify as being patent mostly because of the short period available for most publications.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

The study was aimed at determining the status of the African-American male in advertising across various magazines that target different audiences over a period of 25 years. Previous studies had shown that blacks were more likely to be featured in exclusive ads in black magazines, and integrated ads in mainstream magazines, and that they were more likely to be associated with certain product categories. In many instances, the present study fitted other findings. It is true, for instance, that family depictions are more likely to appear in black publications, or professional portrayals are more frequent in black publications. This study also revealed an underrepresentation of blacks in mainstream publications, although an increase is noted over time.

However, the present study rebutted other findings in some instances: it did not find a significant association of black models with food products, as observed in other studies; only some instances found the black model in minor roles in integrated ads, or else portrayal as entertainers and athletes were not present to a great degree in mainstream magazines but indeed higher than in targeted magazines.

As the study showed, the frequency of the African-American male in magazine ads increased throughout the years, with a significant surge in 2000. However, it was not so much the ubiquity of the black male in publications that seemed problematic, but rather the products he was associated with along with his occupational status and the settings in which he appeared. As a striking example, black male models were rarely represented in a home or family context, which compares well with early findings, or in business work, which could create the impression that the black man is unoccupied

professionally, and “feeding the negative stereotype of the idle African-American, who is ‘just chillin’” (Bailey, 2006), and totally disconnected with the concept of family or work. Furthermore, the overrepresentation of the black model with products such as hair products, clothes, shoes, cigarettes, or cars gave the false impression that black men have narrow interests. A lack of portrayal in ads that promoted high-value products, except in car advertisements, also contributed to this issue. They were rarely seen in ads for computers or other technology-related products, and again, this relates well with previous studies.

Surprisingly, black-oriented publications did not necessarily help counteract stereotypes that were sometimes prevalent in mainstream magazines. *The Source*, for instance, accounted for the most ads in clothing/shoes among all magazines. *Ebony* and *Essence* led the way with the most personal care, food, cigarette, and car advertisements. Yet, at the same time, they also had the most educational ads, financial/banking products and ads that depicted black men in more managerial/professional roles. Therefore, it is difficult to say that mainstream publications are totally disconnected from the representational trend seen in black magazines. None of them had a significant number of ads that portrayed blacks as entertainers or athletes. All publications reasonably portrayed black males in major roles, which corroborates the original study by Bailey (2006).

Another issue that could be raised concerns the settings in which models appeared. As previously mentioned, the two leading ones were outdoors and staged.



These settings often gave the impression of a lack of interaction, that the model did not belong in a more natural environment, and that he has no social contact.

Yet, it is safe to say that African-American males are, for the most part, depicted in a positive way but are merely associated with repetitive product categories and settings. However, it is worth mentioning that ads that appear in these magazines are only the result of a marketing plan aimed at targeting specific consumers. Why a publication such as *The Source*, which is targeted at young black men aged 18-35 and that qualifies itself as the “bible of hip-hop” would not contain a majority of ads for clothes when we know that they are a big part of the hip-hop culture? Similarly, it is only logical that a large number of ads in *Ebony* and *Essence* revolve around beauty products as these magazines are for a black female readership, and it is a popular belief that beauty is a significant part of the black experience.

In short, there was not anything shocking in how any of the publications analyzed approached their portrayal of the African-American male. He may be missing in some categories, but many of these magazines do not seem to offer advertising for any of those “missing” products in the first place.

#### *Limitations and Future Research*

Given the limitations of the present study, in terms of magazine genres, in no way is this study representative of the image of the African-American male in magazine advertising but is simply a small aspect of it. Furthermore, this research only included print media, and representation of black men might differ in TV commercials and other publications. As a matter of fact, other magazines that target different audiences could

serve as samples as well, and offer different findings. Other publications could include, for instance, *Black Enterprise*, where black men are maybe more likely to be represented in managerial/professional roles and less in non-occupational roles; *Time*, *Newsweek*, *BusinessWeek* may be interesting samples as well, and provide various results for a similar study.

A possible and relevant future research work would be to analyze the portrayal of the African-American female over the same period of time and in adequate magazines, and compare the results with that of the present study; few studies, if none at all, had seriously looked at black women in advertising as most studies on blacks have always been associated with males. Finally, another interesting study would be to analyze the representation of black children in different publications, and see how they differ, or see if there are portrayed in stereotypical ways or what products they are mostly associated with. In this instance, the study would not look at occupational roles, but rather at roles within the ads, interactions and settings. That would be interesting to see, for instance, if black children are more often portrayed in home settings, and if so, how often they appear in single-parent context (along with a model playing the role of their mother).

The present study has helped determine how black men are portrayed in certain magazines genres, but most importantly it leaves the door open for other potential research in the field, as it was the first time a study on African-American males in magazine advertising was done over a long period of time.

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