

“Sorry, You’re Not What We’re Looking For”:
The Segmentation of African American Models in U. S. Television Commercials

By
Zsavonne L. Perryman

Departmental Honors Thesis
The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga
Communications

Project Director: Dr. Elizabeth Gailey
Examination Date: March 17, 2005

Dr. Elizabeth Gailey
Dr. Kittrell Rushing
Dr. Peter Pringle
Bill Prince

Examining Committee Signatures:

Project Director

Department Examiner

Department Examiner

Liaison, Departmental Honors Committee

Chairperson, University Departmental Honors Committee

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT	3
INTRODUCTION.....	4
<i>Liminal vs. Ethnic</i>	5
BACKGROUND.....	8
LITERATURE REVIEW	9
METHOD	13
<i>Coding System</i>	14
RESULTS	17
<i>Alcohol</i>	18
<i>Finances</i>	18
<i>Technology</i>	18
<i>Vehicles</i>	19
<i>Clothing</i>	19
<i>Luxury</i>	19
<i>Medication</i>	20
<i>Food</i>	20
<i>Beauty Products</i>	20
<i>Miscellaneous</i>	21
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS	21
LIMITATIONS.....	26
REFERENCES	27
APPENDIX	32

Abstract

In recent years numerous scholars have examined the frequency of African Americans shown in television commercials and the significance of the roles they play. But few media analysts have thoroughly examined the physical characteristics of Black models and what their appearance reflects about persistent stereotypes and other attitudes in U. S. society pertaining to “Blackness.” This paper presents a qualitative (nonstatistical) content analysis research study of African Americans in U.S. television commercials aired during the five top-viewed primetime shows during February 2005. Black models were grouped into two categories: (1) *liminal*: on the border between Black and White; and (2) *ethnic*: the opposite of the “White ideal.” Findings show *liminal* Black females were used primarily for advertising high value products such as luxury vehicles or beauty products. Meanwhile, *ethnic* Black males were used primarily in commercials for mass-produced low value products like sport drinks or for services such as financial-debt counseling. Findings are discussed in relation to previous advertisement portrayals and possible solutions for improvement.

Introduction

Studies examining African Americans in advertising have dealt with the particular roles they play, frequency of appearance, and stereotypical portrayals (see e.g. Bristor et. al., 1995; Gren, 1999; Peterson, 2002). What these studies have ignored is the significance of the particular physical traits of African American models chosen for commercials. By examining the physical attributes of African American models chosen for specific parts in commercials, this study will investigate the subconscious level of racial discrimination, assumptions, and stereotypes portrayed in these images and the new form of modern racism. As Entman and Rojecki (2000) write,

The signal of dark skin color is enough to trigger associations among many Whites with pollution and danger; even if African Americans dress and speak in a conventionally acceptable manner, employ a restrained verbal style, obtain degrees from Harvard and Yale, and run major corporations, they cannot totally surmount the barrier posed by Whites' automatic generalizations from physical traits to moral, behavioral, and intellectual qualities and achievements. (p. 52)

This research is an extension of a content analysis study, initiated in 2002 (Perryman, 2003). In that study African American males were found primarily in television commercials for mass produced products, while, African American females were positioned more with products of high value and esteem. This study also found a significant difference in the portrayal of gender in relation to product representation.

The most pressing questions left unanswered by that study, as well as previous studies, include the following: What is the significance of “Blackness” in relation to product representation featuring African American models in television commercials? Do these representations allude to subtle prejudices concerning economic status and material attainment of Blacks in the U. S.?

To address these complex questions, a more detailed and closely monitored quantitative (nonstatistical) content analysis was developed using and expanding the model from the previous study (Perryman, 2003). Commercials aired during the five top-viewed primetime network TV shows were included in this study along with commercials aired during the 2005 Super Bowl and Grammy Music Awards. In particular, this paper examines these ads in order to develop a framework for the basis of a discussion on *liminal* and *ethnic* portrayals of African Americans in U. S. television commercials.

Liminal vs. Ethnic

This study is designed to shed light on the symbolic meaning of “Blackness” in the mass media. In other words, what are the components that deem models to be “Black enough” or “too Black?” White models enjoy a wide and varied range of “types” when it comes to representation. By types, this study refers to superficial standards of beauty, e.g. height, weight, facial structure, etc. used to cast models in particular commercial roles. White models, for example, may be turned down for commercials because they are too tall, have too many freckles, or lack “the girl next door” look. Black models, on the other hand, not only face these restrictions, but are

selected based on their degree of “Blackness.” When White is the understood norm and default, advertisers are able to move on to the requirements of representing the product. However, for African American models, the stigma of being Black is the first measure of acceptability--before beauty “types” even come into play. As Entman and Rojecki (2000) observe, “When editors think ‘an American person,’ they automatically think ‘White.’ When they are trying to show a group of ‘American persons,’ they consistently recognize the need to show diversity and throw it in” (p. 54). When “the other” comes into play, racial codes are inescapable. Blacks have no more control over being born Black than Whites have control over being born White. Yet Blacks are constantly reminded of their race, while Whites go on living life oblivious of their own race. As Shome (2000) writes,

Whites are taught about racism as something that puts others at a disadvantage but not taught to see its flip side—White privilege, which is socially maintained and constructed, and which, through various interlocking systems of communication, produces Whites as “raced” subjects. (p. 366)

In today’s advertising there are many more Blacks than in previous years (see e.g. Gren, 1999; Entman and Book, 2000; Craig, 2002). However, scholars have found that the type of African American models used in these ads are categorized according to a degree of “Blackness” (see e.g. Coltrane and Messineo, 2000; Perryman, 2003). One such category, described by Entman and Rojecki (2000) is the *liminal* Black. Entman and Rojecki define the *liminal* state in *The Black Image in the*

White Mind (2000) as, “by their nature, potentially polluting, disruptive but not necessarily destructive of the natural order since they are ‘no longer classified and not yet classified’” (p. 51). They suggest that African Americans in general are moving towards a state of liminality in U. S. culture; that is, they are no longer considered completely opposite of Whites or inferior to them. Blacks have become more acceptable and imbued with value in mainstream U. S. culture. Although African Americans can never be White, liminality suggests that they can achieve and harbor the same goals as Whites.

Not completely satisfied with Entman and Rojecki’s definition of the term, liminality, this study has altered it and incorporated the findings from Coltrane and Messineo’s 2000 study to develop distinct classifications of *liminal*. For this study, aspects of the *liminal* Black are close to those who meet the ideal—pure Whiteness. For example the *liminal* Black is a model with light skin and European features. To counter the *liminal* is the *ethnic* Black, who is unmistakably Black and markedly distinct from Whites. *Ethnic* Blacks have pronounced dark skin, styled kinky hair (also known as locks), false hair, or a multitude of braided styles. They are shown wearing hip-hop clothes and are sometimes portrayed as embracing the “I’m Black and I’m proud” attitudes of the seventies. These representations are a subtle system of codes that signify the differences among African American and specifically, their degree of “Blackness.”

Background

The history of early U. S. media is one of overt and emotionally striking images of African Americans. These depictions demeaned Blacks and set them apart from the White ideal. Stereotypical portrayals of African American traits were a huge part of the success of minstrel shows, which became the most popular form of American entertainment in the 19th century. In the White imagination, the Negro had “huge red lips, a wide pearly white smile, bulging eyes and a wide nose” (Kern-Foxworth, 2000, p. 30). This image of the African American entertained Whites while demeaning Blacks. The White performers who first wore blackface wanted to distance themselves from African Americans as much as possible; hence the exaggeration of the physical features. Minstrelsy was the attempt of Whites to explain “Blackness” to other Whites (Anyiwo, 2005). Over time, there emerged a few minstrel shows with Black actors in blackface, but these actors, according to some historians, were parodying White actors in blackface (Anderson, 1996, p. 4). However, audiences were so ingrained with the preconceived caricature of the Negro in a minstrel show, they did not recognize the satire.

The turn of the 20th century ushered in caricatures of African Americans being used to advertise a multitude of products. The Gold Dust Twins—two babies with exaggerated features and black skin—were used to promote soap (with the suggestion the soap was so strong it could clean the black off their skin). Meanwhile Uncle Ben and Aunt Jemima touted the superiority of their rice and pancakes, respectively (Kern-Foxworth, 2000, p. xviii). African Americans were used in product advertising,

but disproportionately dominated aspects of domesticity and home life. Such overt segmentation deemed Blacks experts in the realm of cooking and cleaning, but decision-making and financial planning remained a White domain.

Strides have been taken to escape these images of the African American in the U. S., but overt stereotypes lingered overseas. *Darkie Toothpaste*, a Far East product of the Colgate-Palmolive Company, was marketed as recently as the 1980's in Japan. The image on the box and tube of toothpaste itself is of a very dark African American male, with large white eyes, wide nose, and emphasis on his huge and pearly white smile (Kendrix, 1997).

The 1980's and 90's saw a continual increase in the frequency of Blacks in advertising, but many of the models were celebrities. Michael Jackson and Ray Charles sang and danced to Pepsi-Cola's tune while Bill Cosby popularized Jello Pudding (George, 1992, p. 20). Straying from the overt, these advertisements portrayed more subtle messages about race and emphasized the entertainment quality of African Americans. This paper will explore yet another even more subtle realm of racial discrimination in the 21st century as evidenced through use of *ethnic* and *liminal* Black models.

Literature Review

Previous studies examining African Americans in advertising have dealt with the particular roles they play, frequency of appearance, and stereotypical portrayals (see e.g. Bristor et. al., 1995; Gren, 1999; Peterson, 2002). Initial studies of African Americans in advertising dealt with magazine ads (see e.g Stutts, 1982; Zinkhan et.

al., 1990; Taylor et. al., 1995). Pollay, Lee and Whitney's 1992 study of Blacks in cigarette advertisements found racially segmented ads for Blacks and Whites existed depending upon the inclusion of the ad in *Life* or *Ebony* magazine. The ads shown in *Ebony* primarily featured Black professional athletes. Even though these athletes had wide appeal to Black and White audiences alike, none of these models appeared in the *Life* magazine advertisements.

As more scholars began to examine Blacks in advertising a theme emerged. Due to the Civil Rights Movement, more Black models and actors were shown in advertising than before (Kern-Foxworth, 2000, p. 135), but the roles they played pointed to subtle stereotyping (see e.g. Whittler, 1991; Sturgis, 1993; Gren, 1999). Coltrane and Messineo's 2000 study, for example, examines the way in which Black models are portrayed in these television commercials. Everything from type of role played, number of times shown in the ad, and placement in relation to the principle model were examined. The key findings of this study found "1990s television commercials tend to portray White men as powerful, White women as sex objects, African American men as aggressive and African American women as inconsequential" (p. 1). Coltrane and Messineo point out that advertisements show "perpetuation of subtle prejudice against African Americans by exaggerating cultural differences and denying positive emotions" (p. 1).

With these studies laying the groundwork, scholars were now able to examine the details and intricacies of Black models in TV ads. Entman and Rojecki (2000) conducted a study of the interaction and type of contact between Blacks and other

models in TV commercials. They looked for physical interaction between members of various races and divided the commercials into categories such as automobile ads, alcoholic beverages, snack food, etc. Entman and Rojecki found that, “When they [advertisers] want such concepts as ‘fantasy vacation,’ ‘luxurious,’ ‘cute baby,’ ‘warm family scene,’ or ‘sexy romantic couple’ to animate an ad, most sponsors and their advertising agencies automatically think White” (p. 180). Commercials with on-screen physical interaction between Blacks and other characters were “nearly taboo in prime-time commercials judging by the substantial differences from Whites’ contact images” (p. 169). Final conclusions were as follows,

Good intentions, political pressure, and market forces have yielded real progress, making African Americans more visible in advertising... However, Blacks were not randomly distributed in commercials, as they would be if the transition to colorblindness had been achieved. (p. 180)

As researchers examined advertising effects further, they gave particular attention to how images and messages provided by the media affect children (see e.g. Taylor and Stern 1997; Bang and Reece, 2003). Licata and Biswas (1993) conducted a content analysis of 813 children’s television commercials that examined “minority representation in numbers, prominence, and age; single group representation; and representation by product type, setting and relationships depicted in the ads” (Bang and Reese, 2003, p. 2). Taking commercials aired during the top five “typical” prime-time shows in 1991, they found that “Black models were more likely to interact

with low value products than high value products, although Caucasians did not seem to have an association with a particular product category” (p. 2). Licata and Biswas also found that the percentage of Blacks in advertisements (20%) was greater than the percentage of Blacks in the U. S. (12.1%).

Delving further into the twenty first century and reflecting upon the impact of the Civil Rights Movement, the question must be continually asked, “How far has the media come in its portrayal of Blacks?” Using the terms *ethnic* and *liminal*, this study examines what these representations of values and “types” of African Americans convey about society’s construction of “Blackness,” as well as the economic status, goals, and attainments of Blacks.

In 2002, a brief convenience sample of commercials aired on the major networks, such as ABC, CBS, and NBC was conducted (Perryman, 2003, p. 6). Focusing only on ads where the entire cast was Black, these ads were difficult to obtain other than on the Black Entertainment Television (BET) channel. An examination of these ads showed that Black models possessed many common qualities. They were usually dark skinned (darker than a brown paper bag); they had kinky or natural hair; and their features bordered more on the side of *ethnicity* than *liminality*. This was particularly true of Black males,.

For the present study, a quantitative (nonstatistical) content analysis of Black models chosen for product representation was conducted. This analysis was designed to critically examine Black models’ juxtaposition with products conveys about Black attainment in U. S. society and continuing the social construction of “Blackness.

Method

This study focuses on television commercials watched by a large majority of the U. S. adult population. In order to obtain these commercials the Neilson ratings published in *Variety Magazine Online* from January 26th through Feb. 1st 2005 for top-viewed shows during primetime were examined (Kissell, 2005). The top five shows with a total viewing audience of 15 million viewers or more were included in the study. The top viewed shows were as follows:

Rank	Show	Night	Aired	Network	Rating (millions)
1.	American Idol	Tuesday	8:00-9:00 pm	Fox	28.3
2.	CSI	Thursday	9:00-10:00 pm	CBS	21.8
3.	ER	Thursday	9:57-11:00 pm	NBC	19.7
4.	Everybody Loves Raymond	Monday	9:00- 9:30 pm	CBS	17.7
5.	2 ½ Men	Monday	9:30-10:00 pm	CBS	17.2

The shows fell into the following genres: reality (American Idol), crime drama (CSI), health drama (ER), and sitcom (Everybody Loves Raymond and 2 ½ Men). The shows in this study and the accompanying commercials were videotaped for the entire month of February 2005. In addition to the shows above, special events in February including the Super Bowl and the Grammy Music awards were also examined for their commercial content.

Only commercials using African American models were examined for calculations. Models were coded if they had a major role: very important to the

commercial theme or layout, shown in foreground and/ or shown holding the product and/ or appears to be speaking. Models were coded if they had a minor role: average importance to the commercial theme or layout, does appear to speak or handle product (Wilkes and Valencia, 1989, pp. 21-22). However, models in a background role (hard to find, not important to the commercial theme or layout) were excluded because they usually appeared in crowds where it was difficult to accurately count and examine them.

Repeat commercials were allowed because the frequency of portrayal was more important to this study than different portrayals. Only commercials that advertised consumer products or services were used. Excluded from the study were commercials advertising network programming or movies.

Coding System

There are no real standards for what qualifies as Black. Measurements of facial features and accurate skin color are hard, if not impossible, to accurately measure. With so much discrepancy and ambiguity surrounding degree of racial determination, another system of categorization was used. Instead of focusing on one specific feature of the Black individual, the person as a whole was observed. The two categorizations used were the *liminal* versus the *ethnic* Black¹.

For the purpose of this study, a character was classified as *ethnic* or *liminal* if he or she possessed three or more traits from either category in the following table:

¹ Refer to Images 1-4 in Appendix.

<u><i>Ethnic</i></u>	<u><i>Liminal</i></u>
Darker than a brown paper lunch bag	Light as or lighter than a brown paper lunch bag
Big eyes	Narrow/ small eyes
Big lips	Small/ thin lips
Wide nose	Small/ narrow nose
Natural style hair	Straight/ chemically relaxed hair
Use of Ebonics or slang	Use of proper English

The specifications for the coding come from a multitude of understood American descriptions of the African American race. Many of the physical characteristics stem from the obvious differences between African slaves and their European owners. Standards of *liminality* developed with the mixing of races. Those possessing characteristics similar to their master were more valued and considered “beautiful” compared to those maintaining the dominant traits of the African (Craig, 2002). Dating back to the time of slavery, specifications for race based on color have been very detailed, but also very confusing. Everything from the obvious dark pigmentation to the “one drop” rule has been used to determine “Blackness.” For the purpose of this study the “paper bag test” was used as a determinant of skin color. This test stems from the Black elite of the early 20th century who wanted to distinguish themselves from Blacks of the general working class (Graham, 1999, pp. 3-5). If the person was as light or lighter than a brown paper lunch sack they would be considered among the elites. Other measures of physical attributes are in accordance with forensic anthropology standards of racial determination. Possessing a wide nose, large jaw structure, and jutting teeth are classifications for labeling an individual as African American (Burns, 1999, pp. 38-39). (These classifications come from the

Forensic Anthropology Training Manual currently used in forensic anthropology classes at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, 2005.) Hairstyle and use of language fall under the style category and are culturally developed measures of identifying with a particular category. (Note: As further studies are carried out, changes to these specifications may need to be made in order to reflect cultured norms.)

Two coders were independently shown a subsample of 50 videotaped commercials containing Black models. Each coder was allowed to pause or review the commercials as desired. However, using this method comes with some limitations as Wilkes and Valencia (1989) explain:

In reality, of course, an audience would see ads in a real-time format (i.e., with no opportunity for review unless and until the commercial was re-broadcast at a later time or the viewer had videotaped the commercial). Consequently, results presented here are likely to err on the side of increased confidence and to reflect more closely the actual incidence of Blacks than a casual observer would be able to assess. (p. 21)

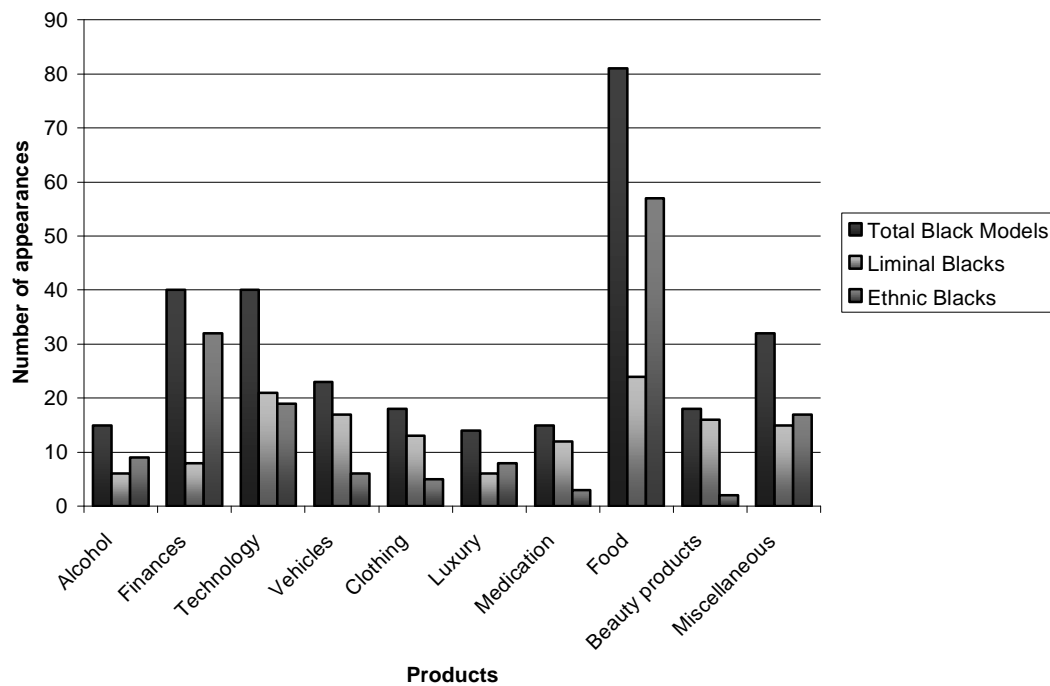
Coder one, a White college female, identified 41 codeable advertisements and coder two, a Black college male, identified 48. They agreed on 37 codeable commercials using *liminal* and *ethnic* Black models. A Holsti intercoder reliability test yielded a score of .831 or 83.1% reliable.

Results

In the total sample of 551 commercials viewed, 169 (30%) codeable commercials were identified using Black models. These 169 commercials are the basis for the following calculations and all observations made. A total of 296 Black models were examined in these commercials (62.5% male and 37.5% female)². While the difference in appearance for *liminal* (138 or 46.6%) and *ethnic* (158 or 53.4%) Black models were not significant, their appearance with various products warrants close examination (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

**Total Commercial Analysis
February 2005**



² Refer to Table 1 in Appendix

Alcohol

Black models in clothing ads only accounted for 5.1% of the total sample, but *ethnic* male models made up 60% of this category. *Liminal* males were shown 20% of the time, *liminal* females were also shown 20%, and *ethnic* females were not shown at all. (It should be noted that no alcohol advertisements were shown during the five top-viewed shows; however, this category ranked third among total commercials featuring Black models during special events, 27.3%³.)

Finances

Figure 1 shows that 40 (23.7%) of Black models were in commercials pertaining to finance products (e.g. credit cards, financial counseling, lotteries, etc.). The majority, 80%, of the models in these ads were coded as *ethnic* Blacks. *Ethnic* males were used primarily (50%) compared to *ethnic* females (30%). It should be noted that *ethnic* males in these commercials were usually found in lottery advertisements; however, the majority of *ethnic* females were financial counselors for tax preparation. *Liminal* Blacks only accounted for 20% of the models in these ads with males and females being shown 5% and 15% respectively.

Technology

Forty (13.5%) Black models were shown in commercials for technology products (i.e. cell phone, computers, digital media, etc.). Males (26 or 65%) were used significantly more than females (14 or 35%). When separated into aspects of

³ Refer to Figures 2 and 3 in Appendix

“Blackness,” *ethnic* males accounted for 37.5% of all portrayals, *liminal* males for 27.5%, *ethnic* females for 10%, and *liminal* females for 25%. When portrayals of *liminals* and *ethnics* are grouped together, 52.5% and 47.5% respectively, there was no significant difference in appearance.

Vehicles

There were 23 Black models in commercials for new vehicles. *Liminal* models (17) were overwhelmingly shown more than *ethnic* models (6), with 73.9% of the *liminal* models being female. There were no *ethnic* females in these commercials. *Liminal* and *ethnic* males made up 17.4% and 26.1% of representation respectively.

Clothing

Black models in clothing ads only accounted for 6.1% of the total sample, but *liminal* models made up 72.2% of this category. *Liminal* males were shown 27.8% of the time, *ethnic* males were shown 22.2%, *liminal* females were shown 44.4%, and *ethnic* females only accounted for 5.6% of product representation. (It should be noted that only 1 *ethnic* female was seen in all ads for clothing.)

Luxury

Only 4.7% of Black models were used in ads for luxury items (expensive jewelry, fine dining, vacations). Roughly 43% of these models were *liminal*, and 57.1% were *ethnic*. Thirty-five percent of the *liminal* models were female, and only

7.1 % of these models were male. *Ethnic* males accounted for the full 57.1% of *ethnic* models shown, because there were no *ethnic* females.

Medication

Of the small percentage of Black models in medication ads (5.1%), *liminal* Blacks made up 80%. Fifty-three percent of these models were female, and only 26.7% were male. *Ethnic* males were shown 20% of the time, while there were no appearance of *ethnic* females.

Food

Nearly half of all Black models, 47.9%, were in commercials for food products (e.g. snacks, fast food, soft drinks, etc.). The majority of these models, 70.3%, were coded as *ethnic* Blacks. *Ethnic* males were used in food commercials 61.7% compared to 8.6% of *ethnic* females used. *Liminal* Blacks only were only used 29.6% of the time, with males and females making up 18.5% and 11.1% of the representations respectively.

Beauty Products

The use of *liminal* females in commercials for beauty products (cosmetics, teeth whitening, facial creams, etc.) was significant. These models were shown 72.2% of the time compared to their male counterparts were shown 16.7% of the time. Combined, *liminals* represented 88.9% of Black portrayals for this category. *Ethnic*

models only made up 11.1% of portrayals, but these figures only include two *ethnic* females shown. No *ethnic* Black males were coded in these ads.

Miscellaneous

Commercials in the miscellaneous category ranked fourth in portrayals of Black models (10.8%). It should be noted that products and services in this category included insurance, political campaigns, and commercials for stores similar to Walmart. *Liminal* and *ethnic* models were shown 46.9% and 53.2% of the time respectively. The distribution of male and female *liminal* models was nearly even, 21.9% and 25% respectively; while, *ethnic* males were shown 46.9% of the time compared to a small 6.3% showing of *ethnic* females.

Discussion and Conclusions

Television commercials are more compelling than print ads because of their pervasiveness and accessibility. “Ninety-eight percent of American households have at least one TV, the average household TV is on for over 30 hours each week, 20% of every broadcast hour is made up of commercials, *but* less than 10% of human appearance time is by non-Whites, most of which are African Americans” (Coltrane and Messineo, 2000, p. 2). Television advertisements, unlike magazine advertisements, enter viewers’ consciousness so quickly, they make snap judgments and decisions. This is necessary in order to move to the more important task of forming an opinion about a product. This underlines the importance of studying images that enter the viewing audience members’ subconscious, especially

concerning images of minority groups. Images of these groups are not shown as frequently as those of the larger default group. Since Blacks are not seen as frequently as Whites in advertising, their depictions are normalized or understood as “the way things are.” As Coltrane and Messineo (2000) write, “Television commercials...shape images of others and sustain group boundaries that come to be taken for granted. Feelings of entitlement, subtle forms of prejudice, and institutional racism are thus reproduced in and through commercial television imagery” (p. 13).

A major contribution of this research is the identification of two distinct types of African American models used in advertising. Past studies have overlooked this key element or have merely mentioned it as a side note. This study’s finding that *ethnic* and *liminal* Blacks are segregated according to product desirability has serious implications for Blacks’ self-concept, as well as negative stereotyping of African Americans by White viewers. As clearly shown in the data, *ethnic* Black male models were overwhelmingly used in commercials for food products, ranging from fast food to unhealthy snacks and soft drinks. *Liminal* Black female models were most likely to be seen in advertisements for vehicles or cosmetics. The data strongly support a division in “types” of Black models used for various products. Simply put, *ethnic* Black male models are cast as users and promoters of cheap junk food while *liminal* Black females are shown enjoying the luxuries of new cars and beauty products. As Entman and Rojecki (2000) write, “When they [media] endorse racial difference and hierarchy, however subtly and unconsciously, the media may reinforce tendencies toward prejudiced thinking apparently built into human cognition” (p. 57). Despite

the positive image of an *ethnic* Black female as a financial counselor, this kind of advertisement is not pervasive enough to override the dominant image of low attainability and aspirations of *ethnic* Blacks as an entire group.

Even with nationally recognized African American holidays, there is only a diversity of advertisements on stations with a large Black audience. For example, during Black history month McDonald's runs a "365 Black" campaign which promotes African American history and heritage throughout the year. The campaign, though positive, mainly airs on channels with a high percentage of African American viewers, such as Black Entertainment Television (BET) and UPN. These commercials are not run on the major networks. Blacks enjoy these commercials, but would it not be beneficial for the majority of the American population to see these commercials as well? And it should be noted McDonald's and its products fall into the food category, which is a limiting portrayal of African Americans as discussed previously.

Historically, Blacks have been socialized to internalize and live out aspects of "White standards" of acceptability. A person has to simply spend a few minutes watching beauty commercials on television or flip through any popular teenage magazine to understand White standards of beauty and acceptability. Due to these beauty standards and rules, Blacks, in the eyes of Whites, are constrained from attaining upper levels of wealth and stability in U. S. society. As Entman and Rojecki (2000) write,

Blacks are prisoners of the widespread acceptance of Whites of what is understood to be the prototypical—the most representative—Black

person. For Whites, the prototype of the Black person is a lower class or “under” class individual of little economic attainment or status. That means Blacks of outstanding attainment in several of the dimensions will be seen as atypical, as the exception. (p. 53)

This study’s finding’s shed light on what is known as “modern racism” (Waller, 1998). A form of racism that is subtle but still harmful to the self-identity of Blacks as well as Whites. Entman and Rojecki (2000) believe media images using race should be carefully scrutinized:

Racial identity remains an important component of social appraisal, and this continues to disadvantage Blacks while benefiting Whites...although race clearly remains a strong predictor of life choices, the public face of race is now cloaked in a chameleon-like form, an ever-changing camouflage that obscures its force. (p. 1)

These images not only affect African American adults, but Black children are also at great risk. Bang and Reese (2003) note that many African American children pay attention to and draw conclusions from the few minority images of themselves they see on TV. Usually the conclusions drawn from these images are negative ones. These children may form unrealistic perceptions of themselves if they see a model from their own ethnic group repeatedly playing a minor role.

However, it should be noted that the position of this paper is not to lay the blame fully on the shoulders of unconscious advertisers. Entman and Rojecki (2000) clearly make this point:

The images we find do not rise from individuals deliberately setting out to sustain racism, but from normal institutional processes.

Decisions on racial casting are rooted especially in the assumption that Whites react negatively to commercials that have “too many” Blacks. Advertisers usually choose actors with the goal of appealing to a predominately White target audience... Those who craft commercials probably do not recognize the subtle but pervasive way their products may inadvertently perpetuate the traditional racial pecking order. (p. 180)

Regardless of advertisers’ motivations, Blacks are still not represented fairly in media advertising. This is the case whether one is counting the number of appearances, roles played, or the type of interaction with other models in the commercial. Blacks’ portrayals may be far more diverse than portrayals in past centuries, but the same concept of Black segmentation is reproduced. Advertising agencies’ primary goal is to satisfy advertisers instead of their viewing audience. Even though Blacks spend a significant percentage of money on the very same products advertised to Whites, advertisers cater to the majority. Often agencies copy the same advertisement created for a White audience, but use Black actors. It is as if they say, “Here you go, an ad with Black people.” It is only when advertisers realize that Blacks and other minorities are a significant part of their buying audience that they will change their approach. This change in approach will not only reflect the goals and nature of African Americans more accurately, but also act as a platform to

help White audiences overcome the stereotyped understanding of Black culture and identity.

Limitations

A major limitation of this study is the size of the sample used. Although findings were consistent with a prior convenience sample, the sample size, compared to the total number of television ads using African American actors is relatively small. Another constraint of this study is the sample was confined to the month of February. Further studies should be carried out in other months to analyze if findings hold true for an extended period of time. (February is Black History Month as well as “sweeps” month and these distinctions of February may have some effect on the data.)

While this study was developed after years of preliminary and historical background research, more information is yet to be gathered. This study should be replicated over the course of several years. Adaptations in the definition of the terms *liminal* and *ethnic* should be modified due to changes in style, fashion and culture. The results of this study are limited and suggest further testing of the *liminal* and *ethnic* portrayal of African American models theory is worthwhile.

References

- Anderson, Lisa M. (1996). "From Blackface to 'Genuine Negroes': Nineteenth-century Minstrelsy and the Icon of the 'Negro.'" *Theatre Research International*, 21, Spring (1), 17.
- Anyiwo, Melissa. (2005). "Black Stereotypes in U.S. Popular Culture." [UTC NAACP Chapter meeting]. Chattanooga, TN. (28 Feb. 2005)
- Bang, Hae-Kyong. Bonnie B. Reese. (2003). "Minorities in Children's Television Commercials: New, Improved, and Stereotyped." *The Journal of Consumer Affairs*, 37, Summer(1), 42.
- Bristor, Julia M, Lee, Renee Gravois, Hunt, Michelle R. (1995). "Race and Ideology: African-American Images in Television Advertising." *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, 14, Spring(1), 48.
- Burns, Karen Ramey. (1999). *Forensic Anthropology Training Manual*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, Inc.
- Craig, Maxine Leeds. (2002). *Ain't I a Beauty Queen? Black Women, Beauty, and the Politics of Race*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Coltrane, Scott and Melinda Messineo. (2000). "The Perpetuation of Subtle Prejudice: Race and Gender Imagery in 1990s Television Advertising." *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research*, March, 363.
- Entman, Robert and Andrew Rojecki. (2000). *The Black Image in the White Mind*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

- Entman, Robert and Constance L. Book. (2000). "Light Makes Right: Skin Colour and Racial Hierarchy in Television Advertising" In Robin Andersen & Lance Strate, (Eds.), *Critical Studies in Media Commercialism* (214-224). New York: Oxford University Press.
- George, Lori A. (1992). "A Study on the Effectiveness of Target Marketing to the African American Market." Master's thesis, American University.
- Graham, Lawrence Otis. (1999, July). "Living in a Class Apart: The Separate World of America's Black Elite." *BeachBrowser.com*. Retrieved March 8, 2005 from <http://www.beachbrowser.com/Archives/News-and-Human-Interest/July-99/Living-in-a-Class-Apart.htm>.
- Gren, Corliss L. (1999). "Ethnic Evaluations of Advertising: Interaction Effects of Strength of Ethnic Identification, Media Placement, and Degree of Racial Composition. Gender and Multicultural Issues in Advertising" *Journal of Advertising*, 28, Spring, 49.
- Harris, Marvin. (2001). *The Rise of Anthropological Theory*. Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Pub.
- Kendrix, Moss H. (2002). "The African-American Image Abroad: Golly, It'd Good!" *The Museum of Public Relations* Retrieved November 17, 2003 from <http://www.prmuseum.com/kendrix/abroad.html#top>.
- Kern-Foxworth, Marilyn. (1994). *Aunt Jemima, Uncle Ben, and Rastus: Blacks in Advertising, Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers.

- Kissell, Rick. (2005, January 28). “ ‘ER’ Sews It Up for NBC.” *Variety.com*
Retrieved February 2, 2005 from
http://www.variety.com/index.asp?layout=print_story&articleid=VR1117917118&categoryid=1275.
- Kissell, Rick. (2005, January 31). “ ‘Home,’ ‘Magic’ Top Sunday.” *Variety.com*
Retrieved February 2, 2005 from
http://www.variety.com/index.asp?layout=print_story&articleid=VR1117917192&categoryid=1043.
- Kissell, Rick. (2005, January 26). “ ‘Idol’ Helps Build ‘House.’” *Variety.com*
Retrieved February 2, 2005 from
http://www.variety.com/index.asp?layout=print_story&articleid=VR1117916959&categoryid=1043.
- Kissell, Rick. (2005, January 27). “ ‘Idol,’ ‘Simple’ Make It Easy for Fox.”
Variety.com Retrieved February 2, 2005 from
http://www.variety.com/index.asp?layout=print_story&articleid=VR1117917008&categoryid=1043.
- Kissell, Rick. (2005, February 2). “ ‘Medium’ Still Living Large.” *Variety.com*
Retrieved February 2, 2005 from
http://www.variety.com/index.asp?layout=print_story&articleid=VR1117917248&categoryid=1043.

- Licata, Jane W. and Abhijit Biswas. (1993). "Representation, Roles, and Occupational Status of Black Models in Television Advertisements." *Journalism Quarterly*.70, Winter, 868-882.
- Morris, Eugene. (1993, January). "The Difference in Black and White." *American Demographics*, 15(1), 44.
- Perryman, Zsavonne. (2003). "The *Liminal* Versus the *Ethnic* Black In Television Advertising." Unpublished term paper. North Carolina State University.
- Peterson, Robin T. (2002, April). "The Depiction of African American Children's Activities in Television Commercials: An assessment." *Journal of Business Ethics*,36(4)(1), 303.
- Shome, Raka. (2000, September). "Outing Whiteness: Review and Criticism" *Critical Studies In Mass Communication*,17, 3.
- Sturgis, Ingrid. (1993, September). "Black Images in Advertising: A Revolution Is Being Advertised in 30-Second Commercials." *Emerge*, 21-23.
- Stutts, Mary Ann. (1982). "Blacks in Magazine Ads: Are They Growing in Numbers?" *Mid-South Business Journal*, 2,24-27.
- Taylor, Charles and Barbara Stern. (1997). "Asian Americans: Television Advertising and the "Model Minority" Stereotype. *Journal of Advertising*, 26, Summer, 47-61.
- Taylor, Charles R.; Ju Yung Lee; Barbara B. Stern. (1995, February). "Portrayals of African, Hispanic, and Asian Americans in Magazine Advertising." *American Behavioral Scientist*, 38(4), 608.

Waller, James. (1998). *Face to Face: The Changing State of Racism Across America*.

New York: Insight Books.

Whittler, Tommy E. (1991). "The Effects of Actors' Race in Commercial

Advertising: Review and Extension." *Journal of Advertising*, 20, Winter(1),

54.

Wilkes, Robert E., Humberto Valencia. (1989). "Hispanics and Blacks in Television

Commercials." *Journal of Advertising*, 18(1), 19-25.

Zinkhan, George M., William J. Qualls, and Abhijit Biswas. (1990). "The Use of

Blacks in Magazine and Television Advertising: 1946 to 1986." *Journalism*

Quarterly, 67 Autumn, 547-53.

Appendix

General findings in Figure 1 were replicated when separating the commercials into regularly scheduled network programming (N=114) versus Super Bowl and Grammy commercials (N=55).

Figure 2 Regularly Scheduled Network Programming Results
February 2005

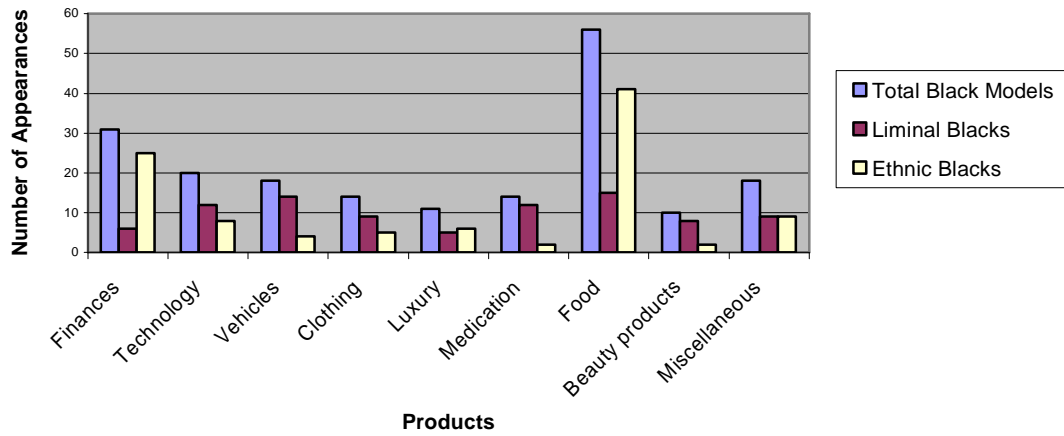


Figure 3 Super Bowl and Grammy Awards Results
February 2005

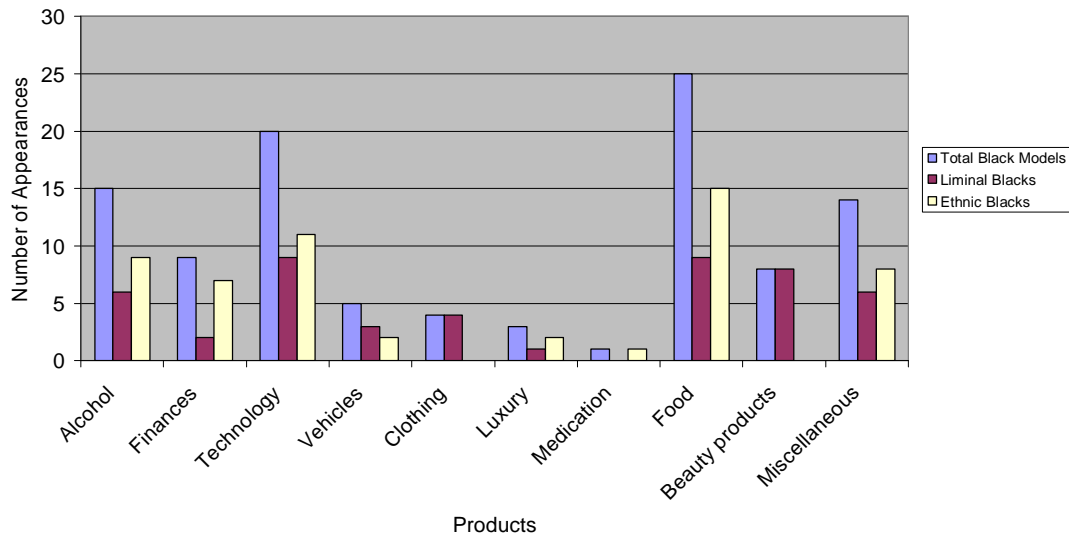


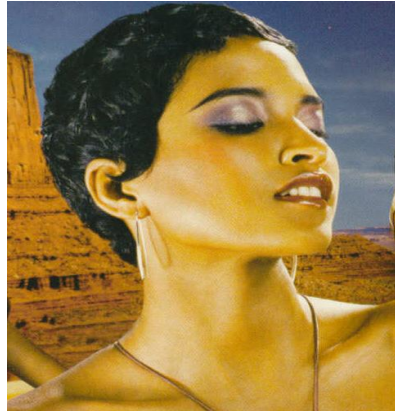
Table 1 **Total Commercial Analysis for February 2005 (Coding Sheet)**
(Number of Appearances)

	<i>Liminal Male</i>	<i>Ethnic Male</i>	<i>Liminal Female</i>	<i>Ethnic Female</i>	<u>Total</u>
Alcohol	-	-	-	-	-
	3	9	3	-	15
	3	9	3	-	15
Finances (credit card, financial counseling)	1	17	5	8	31
	1	3	1	4	9
	2	20	6	12	40
Technology (cell phone, computer)	6	6	6	2	20
	5	9	4	2	20
	11	15	10	4	40
Vehicles	2	4	12	-	18
	2	2	1	-	5
	4	6	13	-	23
Clothes	1	4	8	1	14
	4	-	-	-	4
	5	4	8	1	18
Luxury (jewelry, dining out)	1	6	4	-	11
	-	2	1	-	3
	1	8	5	-	14
Medication	4	2	8	-	14
	-	1	-	-	1
	4	3	8	-	15
Food (snacks, fast food, drinks)	11	35	4	6	56
	4	15	5	1	25
	15	50	9	7	81
Beauty products	3	-	5	2	10
	-	-	8	-	8
	3	-	13	2	18
Miscellaneous (insurance, politics)	5	7	4	2	18
	2	8	4	-	14
	7	15	8	2	32
<u>Total</u>	34	81	56	21	192
	21	49	27	7	104
	55	130	83	28	296

Note: Black models appearing in network commercials and special event commercials are listed on the left side of each column, respectively. The combined totals are listed on the right side of each column.

Image 1

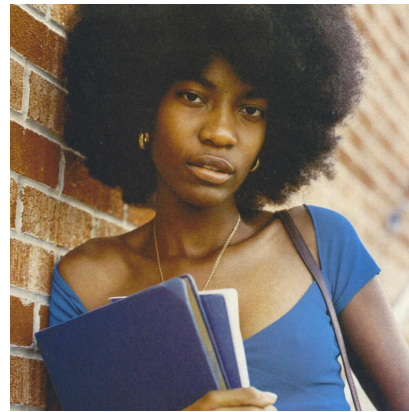
Liminal Female



Samsung Cell Phone. Advertisement
Vibe. January 2005.

Image 2

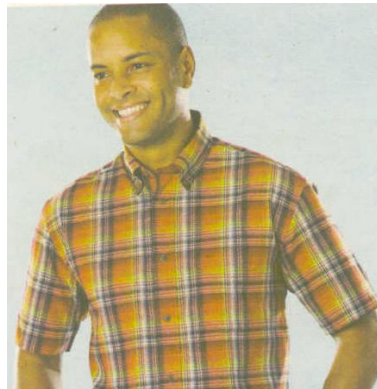
Ethnic Female



McDaniel, M. (February 2005). Cooley High.
Vibe. 131.

Image 3

Liminal Male



Consensus Cotton Sportshirts. Advertisement.
Proffitt's 10 Mar. 2005, newspaper insert.

Image 4

Ethnic Male



Martell Cognac. Advertisement. *Gentlemen's Quarterly* October 2004.

Note: These images are from magazine advertisements; however, they are representative of the types of images portrayed in television commercials.