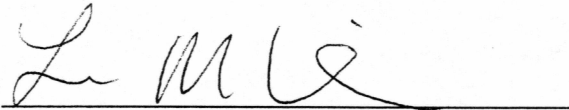


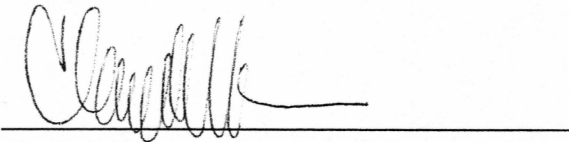
PORTRAYAL vs. REALITY: IMAGES OF AFRICAN AMERICANS
IN MAGAZINE ADVERTISEMENTS

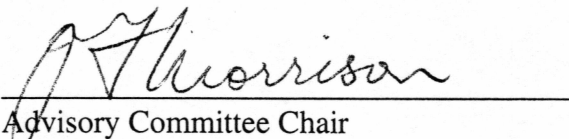
By

Catherine Davis

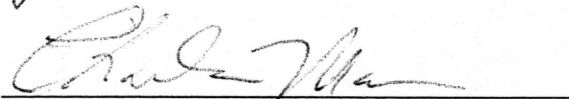
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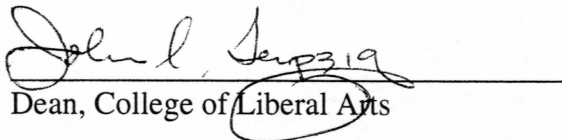


Advisory Committee Chair

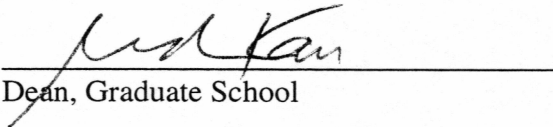


Department Head

APPROVED:



Dean, College of Liberal Arts



Dean, Graduate School

5-21-01

Date

PORTRAYAL vs. REALITY: IMAGES OF AFRICAN AMERICANS
IN MAGAZINE ADVERTISEMENTS

A THESIS

Presented to the Faculty
of the University of Alaska Fairbanks
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
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MASTER OF ARTS

By

Catherine Elizabeth Davis, B.A.

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Abstract

The images of African Americans in magazine advertisements are changing. As these images change, researchers question whether or not African American socioeconomic and familial status are being accurately represented. George Gerbner's cultivation theory suggests that media play a role in shaping people's perceptions of minority groups. Using content analysis, this study compares the portrayal of African American socioeconomic and familial status in magazine advertisements with 1999 United States Census Bureau socioeconomic statistics of African Americans in the United States. This study found that a discrepancy exists between the portrayal and the reality of African American socioeconomic and familial status, with African Americans portrayed as having a different socioeconomic and familial status than United States Census Bureau statistics show. These results provide a basis for further research into the social ramifications of African American misrepresentation in media.

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**To
Gil and Becky Minemier
and
Nick and Sandra Moody**

for their unfailing love and support.

Introduction

Magazine advertisements that once incorporated negative stereotypes of African Americans now use positive, or laudatory, images to sell to both minority and majority consumers. George Gerbner's cultivation theory suggests that media play a role in cultivating one's perceptions of other cultures, especially if one's contact with other groups is limited. According to Gandy and Baron (1998), "the cultivation hypothesis assumes that exposure to relatively homogenous representations of social relations helps to shape or cultivate perceptions of social reality" (p. 511). As advertisers shift their marketing efforts to include positive images of African Americans, researchers question how much, if any, of the true socioeconomic and familial status of African Americans is being reflected in today's advertising.

This paper addresses questions regarding images of African Americans by conducting a content analysis of magazine advertisements that feature African American models. In order to determine if such positive representations are accurate, portrayals of the socioeconomic and familial status of African Americans in magazine ads need to be compared with statistics regarding African American socioeconomic and familial status in the United States. If a discrepancy exists, this study could provide the groundwork for future research into the social ramifications of such inaccurate portrayals.

It has been suggested that, while advertisers may be well-informed in regard to the African American market, they are still promoting the dominant (White)

society (Meijer, 1998). Determining the degree to which advertisers are painting a false picture of African American socioeconomic and familial status becomes important in light of today's continued racism and social apathy (Gandy & Baron, 1998; Tucker, 1997).

Theoretical Background

Cultivation Theory and Advertising. The cultivation theory, as developed by George Gerbner, suggests the effect of exposure to the same media messages produces and cultivates a common world view, common roles, and common values among mass audiences (Severin & Tankard, 2002). Most of Gerbner's research has focused on television viewing and suggests that the more a person is exposed to a particular message on television, the more likely that person is to transpose those messages onto his or her understanding of the real world. Part of the cultivation theory is mainstreaming, which is said to occur when heavy viewing leads to a convergence of outlooks across groups. According to Gerbner (1998):

most cultures consist of many diverse currents. But there is typically a dominant set of attitudes, beliefs, values, and practices. This dominant current is not simply the sum total of the cross-currents and sub-currents. Rather, it is the most general, functional, and stable mainstream, representing the broadest dimensions of shared meanings and assumptions. (p. 183)

Mainstreaming acknowledges that concrete social experiences are powerful determinants of social perception (Gandy & Baron, 1998). When experience with a particular social group is limited, perceptions regarding that group may be replaced by images seen in the media. Social reality beliefs "are seen as related to patterns of exposure to specific media or types of media content" (Armstrong & Neuendorf, 1992, p. 156).

Gerbner's (1998) reference to a "dominant set of attitudes, beliefs, values, and practices" (p. 183) describes what is commonly known as ideology. Ideologies are "widely shared system of beliefs that emanate from and promulgate a certain worldview" (Bristor, Lee & Hunt, 1995, p. 49). In society, people are not necessarily aware of the dominant ideology, it is just "the norm" and may be based on false assumptions (Bristor et al.). It has been suggested that racial inequality is understood through the lens of ideology and the dominant ideology is often reproduced and disseminated through advertising (Gandy & Baron, 1998; Bristor et al., 1995).

Much of advertising's meaning is culturally encoded in signs, symbols, and icons (Bristor et al., 1995; McCracken, 1986; Meijer, 1998; Soar, 2000). Advertising works on the basic understanding that society perceives that its needs can be met through the consumption of products, as suggested through advertisements. "People's needs have never been natural but always cultural, always social, always defined relative to the standards of their societies" (Schudson, 1993, p. 145). Needs that extend beyond basic survival are defined by the standards of society. The need to be included and accepted within society is often the need to which businesses advertise (Schudson).

This need to be included culturally is true for all communities within a society. A desire to belong becomes a structure within which marketers can advertise their products. Advertisers recognize this need for cultural inclusion. What they produce through advertisements are "representations of the social world, images,

descriptions, explanations and frames for understanding how the world is and why it works” (Hall, 1981, p. 19-20). This framework provides a basis for advertising’s message. A product or service is then inserted into the framework, or social picture. The product or service becomes a sign or a thing that has a certain meaning to a person or group (Williamson, 1990). Meaning is transferred to a product by combining a consumer good and a representation of the culturally constituted world together within the frame of a particular advertisement (McCracken, 1986). “Objects contribute to the construction of the culturally constituted world precisely because they are a vital, tangible record of cultural meaning that is otherwise intangible” (p. 73). If taken seriously and collectively as a social and cultural phenomenon, advertisements provide an idea about the social world (Soar, 2000). The significance of advertisements rests in their ability to create and communicate cultural meaning (McCracken, 1986).

Consumption of a product becomes a way to include one’s self within the culture that is being represented in the advertisement. McCracken (1986) explains the process of cultural transmission through product purchases; “cultural meaning is drawn from a culturally constituted world and transferred to a consumer good. Then the meaning is drawn from the object and transferred to an individual consumer” (p. 71). Advertising educates the audience about a way of life that celebrates consumption of a product as an end in itself (Meijer, 1998, p. 237).

Literature Review

Negative stereotypes of African Americans in media. As advertisements cultivate an idea of how the world should work and look, they also cultivate a desire within consumers to be a part of the dominant world that is consistently portrayed. Media images become incorporated into one's cognitive schema and are called upon for evaluation of social identity and comparison (Coltrane & Messineo, 2000). When one's own ethnic community is either misrepresented or not represented at all through advertising, one can conclude that the group is unimportant (Taylor & Bang, 1997). For much of the century, African Americans "were defined as outside the intended audience for most advertisements. Thus their images could be appropriated and used without much concern for what, if anything, they might think about such representations" (O'Barr, 1994, p. 107). Prior to the late 1970s, mass appeals by advertisers were aimed at the audience in the majority, not to the minority who might happen to pick up a newspaper or read a magazine (Wilson & Gutierrez, 1995). When African Americans were recognized by the media, it was often through stereotypical representations.

Much research in the area of stereotypes of African Americans either compares images of African Americans in advertisements with images of Whites in advertisements or examines the amount of African American representation evident in advertisements. In comparing African American images with those of Whites, researchers argue that African Americans are under-represented (Lee & Browne,

1995; Bristor et al., 1995; Coltrane & Messineo, 2000). When African Americans are represented, they are portrayed in token roles or as background characters (Bristor, et al., 1995; Coltrane & Messineo, 2000). According to Coltrane and Messineo (2000), television portrayals of African Americans have been characterized by trivialization and exaggeration. The minority character is generally marginalized or tokenized to avoid upsetting White viewers (Bristor et al., 1995).

When compared to images of Whites in advertisements, a difference in socioeconomic status becomes apparent between the two groups, preserving the ideological assumption of White superiority (Bristor et al., 1995). “Both underrepresentation and stereotyped portrayal can have important consequences, for it suggests that ethnic minorities lack equal access to the symbolic cultural resources available to Whites” (Coltrane & Messineo, 2000, p. 381). The status of the two groups is often depicted through the type of profession represented in the ads. A study conducted by Licata and Biswas (1994) determined that African Americans were found mainly in institutional and service ads. African Americans are also often represented by an African American celebrity. Researchers suggest this is another negative stereotype of African Americans. (Bristor et al., 1995; Lee & Browne, 1995).

Some studies also show a difference between how African Americans and Whites are represented in familial roles. According to Coltrane and Messineo (2000), White models are more likely than non-White models to be shown as parents. Images in the media such as:

welfare mothers, teenage pregnancy, single mothers, public housing projects, and low I.Q. scores have become code words for some image-makers as they begin the creative process of portraying the Black family and its cultural life in America. (Berry, 1998, p.236)

Coltrane and Messineo's study (2000) found that African American men in television advertisements were less likely to be shown at home than White men; suggesting that:

since fantasy images of happy parents, well-scrubbed children, and sparkling homes constitute advertising's view of the American Dream, it is significant that it is mostly Whites who populate such scenes. (p. 383)

From negative to positive stereotypes. Although the scene of the American Dream remains the same, the models are changing. It is no longer difficult to find an African American dominating an ideal scene of the American Dream. One of the most obvious beginnings in this move from negative to positive stereotypes of African Americans in media arrived with "The Cosby Show." By changing the image of African Americans into socially and economically successful citizens, the show was originally hailed as revolutionary. However, these portrayals also raised critical voices that asserted "The Cosby Show" made a habit of investing African American characters with White, middle-class culture and values while ignoring the social and economic realities of African Americans (Tucker, 1997).

Advertising has followed television's trends, and critics are examining these new, laudatory images of African Americans. Although negative stereotypes of African Americans can be found in advertisements, they are not as dominant as they once were. For decades, African Americans were excluded as a target market and instead were included stereotypically in advertisements that targeted White society. As a result, a "psychological distance" separated the African American consumer from the advertising industry (Cassidy & Katula, 1990, p. 94). This psychological distance is a reaction to a history of not being invited to choose among various products, therefore:

to overcome the perception that 'this product's not for me,' [Burrell's] ads associate the product with portrayals of black people at their best - what he calls 'positive realism' - 'people working productively; people engaging in family life...people being well-rounded...and thoughtful; people caring about other people, good neighbors, good parents...people with dreams and aspirations; people with ambition.' In other words, the Burrell Style depicts black people who express the dominant values of American culture, the very values that are directly countered in current pejorative stereotypes of blacks, like the 'lazy ni—er,' 'the welfare mother,' 'the irresponsible father,' 'the ghetto drug-dealer,' or 'the violent, unemployed youth'. (p. 94)

Communication theorists recognize this shift from negative stereotypes of African Americans to positive portrayals in advertising, yet these new images are not without criticism. Although the professional portrayal of African Americans has

improved, critics argue that “the positive image of the black successful business and family man is firmly based in white, middle-class values and it raises the question how much the picture shows of black culture, if anything” (Meijer, 1998, p. 242). O’Barr (1994) asked, “Is this an adequate reflection of society? Or is it merely the emergence of new stereotypes?” (p. 108).

If these images look more like the White, middle class, rather than the African American social and economic status, then such portrayals can promote a means for assimilation by adopting the social values determined acceptable by the White, middle-class majority (Tucker, 1997). These images can also lead to inaccurate perceptions among both Whites and African Americans regarding African American socioeconomic status.

In a poll conducted by *The Washington Post* that questioned the perceptions of ethnic populations in the U.S., surveyors found that the general population had misperceptions regarding percentages of the ethnic population (Gladwell, 1995). For example, both Whites and African Americans perceived that Whites comprised less than 50% of the population, when they actually made up 74% of the population. The two groups also believed African Americans comprised roughly 24 % of the population, when they were only 12% of the population.

These misperceptions transcended beyond numerical representations. The survey (Gladwell) also found that 65% of Whites who saw little difference between social and economic conditions of African Americans and Whites also opposed

additional federal spending to aid low-income minorities. Although most respondents' answers were based largely on personal experience, according to Gerbner's cultivation theory, if personal experience is lacking, then media can become the dominant source of information regarding minority groups. One respondent even stated that her opinion was a result of what she had seen on television about African Americans. Matabane (1988) conducted a survey regarding the extent to which television cultivated perceptions of racial integration among African American viewers. She found that heavy television viewers more frequently perceived that racial integration was more prevalent, that African Americans and Whites were more similar, and that more African Americans were middle-class. Matabane's study supported Gerbner's cultivation theory.

The images of African Americans in advertising are changing from negative stereotypes to laudatory portrayals. Cultivation theory and prior research suggest that, as people are exposed to these new images, their opinions about African American socioeconomic status can change. Perceptions regarding the socioeconomic status and family roles of African Americans can play a significant part in perpetuating today's social and civic apathy (Gandy & Baron, 1998; O'Barr, 1994).

These opinions, when estimated by national surveys and reported in the press, become the kinds of supporting evidence of the public will that politicians use when they decide to expand or eliminate government support for particular

social programs...These changes in public policy would seem to reflect an assessment that either the problem of racial inequality has been eliminated or that whatever inequality we might still find can be explained in terms of individual failure, rather than institutionalized racism and discrimination.

(Gandy & Baron, 1998, p. 505-06)

Research Questions

It has been argued that today's images of African Americans in magazine advertisements reflect a culture that is based more upon White, middle-class values than African American culture. Although it may be difficult to define African American culture, it is possible to define the current socioeconomic and familial status of most African Americans in American society. By comparing secondary data regarding the socioeconomic and familial status of African Americans with the portrayed socioeconomic and familial status of African Americans in magazine advertisements, this study provides a basis for future researchers to develop hypotheses regarding positive images of African Americans in advertising. No major study has been conducted to demonstrate just how far these advertisements stray from reality.

For the purpose of this study, the term "socioeconomic status" is divided into the following sub-categories: profession, income and education. Familial status is also a component of the study.

1) Profession. The first research question analyzed in this study pertains to the types of professions most often modeled by African Americans in magazine advertisements. "Prior to the civil rights movement, African Americans were nearly always depicted in inferior or service positions" (O'Barr, 1994, p.108), which is not surprising considering the time. Such depictions were targeted to a mainstream

audience. As African Americans become a more viable target market for businesses, occupational portrayals of African Americans in advertising are changing (Davis, 1995). If African Americans are accurately portrayed in magazine ads, then the type of profession most often represented should approximate the type of profession commonly occupied by African Americans in society. Thus:

RQ1: How often does the type of profession in which African Americans are frequently portrayed in magazine advertisements approximate the type of profession frequently occupied by African Americans in the United States population, according to 1999 United States Census Bureau statistics?

2) Family. The second research question examines the type of family most often depicted in magazine advertisements that feature an African American, adult/child relationship. While some critics view images of the single mother as pejorative stereotypes of African American culture, such images may still be an accurate reflection of African American society. Thus:

RQ2: Does the type of family in which African Americans are frequently depicted in magazine advertisements approximate the type of family in which the majority of African Americans live in the United States, according to 1999 United States Census Bureau statistics?

3) Income. The third research question pertains to the portrayed level of income of African American models in magazine advertisements. Advertisers often sell more than just a product, they also sell consumption of the product as a means of achieving a particular status...or at least the appearance of having achieved a particular status. The same is true when advertising to African Americans. However, advertisements that portray African Americans at a level of income that does not represent their actual level of income, may leave an impression that the most commonly perceived level of income must be true. Thus:

RQ3: Is the perceived median income level of African Americans in magazine advertisements higher or lower than the actual median income of African Americans in the United States, according to 1999 United States Census Bureau statistics?

4) Education. The fourth research question investigates the portrayed level of education of African Americans in magazine advertisements. As is true with the level of income, misrepresenting the level of education of African Americans in advertisements may lead to a false perception. Thus:

RQ4: Does the level of educational attainment portrayed by African Americans in magazine advertisements approximate the level of education reached by African Americans in the United States, according to 1999 United States Census Bureau statistics?

Methodology

According to Grier and Brumbaugh (1999), consumers' reactions to an advertisement depends on the meanings they assign to it. While advertisers encode meaning through the use of cues, language, and shared cultural symbols, consumers must decode this meaning based on their knowledge and experience. Because much of advertising's meaning is culturally encoded through the use of symbols, it is necessary to use an interpretive methodology, such as content analysis, to decode and analyze such symbols (Bristor et al., 1995).

Simply counting the numerical representation of African Americans is not enough to examine the context in which African Americans are observed. Nor is it enough for understanding the social meaning within the ad. "To identify and understand some of the more subtle and complex aspects of racism in advertising requires a more holistic, interpretive look at images and their context" (Bristor et al., 1995, p. 51). Using content analysis allows for examination of advertising images of African Americans and how those images are interpreted. The content important for study is the latent content of the ad, which focuses on the meaning below the surface elements of the ad. By relying on coders' judgments and believing that the elements in the ad are symbols that can be decoded through use of the coder's pre-existing mental schema, one can analyze the projective content of an ad (Levine-Donnerstein, 1999). Most projective content is based on the subjective interpretation of the coder.

Researchers must, therefore, carefully construct guidelines for coders that will not lower the validity of the study.

Coding. Four coders were provided with magazines that were marked with a reference number. Coders were an African American female, an African American male, a White female and a White male. Each coder was given a code book containing operational definitions of each variable. Coders answered the questions based on their overall perception of the ad, rather than on an individual within the ad. The items measured: the type of profession portrayed by the African American model in the ad, the type of family in which the model appeared, the level of income portrayed by the model, and the level of educational attainment portrayed by the model. Analyzing these four items required examining both the manifest content and the latent content of each ad, paying particular attention to the projective content. Operational definitions of the four items are in Appendix 1.

Sample. Eight magazines were chosen for the study: *People*, *Rolling Stone*, *Newsweek*, *Parents*, *Sports Illustrated*, *Redbook*, *Black Enterprise* and *Jet*. The purpose of this study was to compare portrayals of the African American socioeconomic and familial status in the ads with the actual socioeconomic and familial status of African Americans. The diversity of the portrayals was of primary importance, therefore, it was important to choose magazines most likely to be read by members of each demographic group. Of the eight magazines, four were general interest magazines (*People*, *Rolling Stone*, *Newsweek* and *Parents*), one magazine

targeted women (*Redbook*), another targeted men (*Sports Illustrated*), and two magazines targeted African Americans (*Black Enterprise* and *Jet*). One issue from every other month, beginning with January, was selected from the year 2000. For weekly magazines, two issues per every other month were selected. Only ads that included African American adults were analyzed (Figure 1). This procedure produced a total of 464 ads.

Figure 1: Number of ads per magazine with African American adult models

Magazine	Number of ads with African American adult models
<i>People</i>	35
<i>Rolling Stone</i>	37
<i>Newsweek</i>	32
<i>Parents</i>	28
<i>Sports Illustrated</i>	26
<i>Redbook</i>	25
<i>Black Enterprise</i>	194
<i>Jet</i>	87
TOTAL	464

Analysis. Coders were asked to select one answer per question regarding the content of the ad (see Appendix 2). To determine the type of profession, coders could select 1) Trade/Service, 2) Professional/Technical or 5) N/A. N/A represented “No Answer” for each category, implying that either the question was not applicable for the particular ad or the coder did not have enough cues from the ad in order to answer the question. These categories were based on professional categories listed in the *2000-01 Occupational Outlook Handbook* as issued by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (see Appendix 1).

The type of family of the African American model in the ad was coded as 1) Traditional, 2) Non-traditional or 5) N/A. A traditional family was operationalized as an image of a man and woman with a child, or a single man or woman, without an evident wedding band, with a child. A non-traditional family was recognizable as one man or woman with a child, no wedding band, or two women or two men with a child.

The level of annual income was coded as 1) < \$20,000, 2) \$20,000-\$49,999, 3) \$50,000-\$74,999, 4) > \$75,000 or 5) N/A. Finally, the level of educational attainment portrayed by the model was coded as 1) High school, 2) High school diploma, 3) Bachelor’s degree, 4) Post Bachelor’s degree or 5) N/A. These values are approximate to median income levels and levels of education attained as categorized by the United States Census Bureau. In order to determine the overall portrayal of African Americans in magazine advertisements, duplicated ads were included in the

analysis. Prior research of minorities in magazine advertisements that conducted an analysis both with and without duplicates concluded that the inclusion of duplicate ads does not unduly bias results (Taylor & Bang, 1997).

For each magazine, a mode was calculated for each coder's overall response to a research question. The modes were used to determine a percentage of agreement among coders for each question per magazine. A mean of the percentages was used to determine the overall level of agreement. The coders agreed with each other 73% of the time.

After obtaining primary data through content analysis, secondary data was acquired in order to compare the portrayed socioeconomic and familial status of African Americans with the actual socioeconomic and familial status of African Americans in the United States. Information regarding type of profession, type of family, level of income and level of education of African Americans in the United States was obtained from the 1999 United States Census Bureau, Current Population Reports.

Results and Discussion

Question 1 – Profession. Of the 464 ads containing African American adult models, the coders were able to discern the type of profession in 299. When the type of profession was evident, African American models appeared in Trade/Service occupations 9% of the time. According to the March 1999 United States Census Bureau’s Current Population Reports (McKinnon& Humes, 2000), 62% of African Americans in the United States worked in Trade/Service industries. African American models were portrayed as working in a Professional/Technical occupation 91% of the time, while United States Census Bureau surveys suggest 38% of African Americans worked in a Professional/Technical occupation. The data suggest African Americans are portrayed as occupying Professional/Technical professions at a much higher rate than they actually do. Figure 2 represents the perceived type of profession portrayed for each magazine analyzed.

Figure 2: Coders’ perceptions of type of profession portrayed

Magazine	Trade/ Service	Professional/ Technical	N/A
<i>People</i>	8.57%	57.14%	34.29%
<i>Rolling Stone</i>	8.11%	37.84%	54.05%
<i>Newsweek</i>	3.13%	68.75%	28.13%
<i>Parents</i>	3.57%	25.00%	71.43%
<i>Sports Illustrated</i>	0.00%	53.85%	46.15%
<i>Redbook</i>	8.00%	20.00%	72.00%
<i>Black Enterprise</i>	7.22%	77.32%	15.46%
<i>Jet</i>	4.60%	44.83%	50.57%

Question 2 – Family. Only 33 of 464 ads depicted African Americans in a family setting. Of those ads, 79% of the children were portrayed as living in a traditional family, while 21% were portrayed as living in a non-traditional home. The results per magazine can be found in Figure 3. These findings are nearly opposite of United States Census Bureau statistics regarding African American families. In 1999, 35% of African American children lived in a home where both parents were present, while the remaining 65% lived in a home with a single parent.

Figure 3: Coders' perceptions of type of family portrayed

Magazine	Traditional	Non-traditional	N/A
<i>People</i>	8.57%	0.00%	91.43%
<i>Rolling Stone</i>	2.70%	0.00%	97.30%
<i>Newsweek</i>	6.25%	3.13%	90.63%
<i>Parents</i>	7.14%	3.57%	89.29%
<i>Sports Illustrated</i>	3.85%	0.00%	96.15%
<i>Redbook</i>	4.00%	4.00%	92.00%
<i>Black Enterprise</i>	3.09%	0.52%	96.39%
<i>Jet</i>	11.49%	3.45%	85.06%

Question 3 – Income. The portrayed level of income of the African American model was not operationalized by the researcher. The reason was to be certain the findings were definitely the result of the coders' perceptions and not based on a biased definition developed by the researcher. Findings according to each magazine can be found in Figure 4. Only the ads in which the level of income could be determined

were selected, resulting in 341 ads. The analysis of the ads suggested that in 3% of the ads, African American models were portrayed as earning a median income of less than \$20,000 a year. In reality, 37% of African Americans earn less than \$20,000 a year (McKinnon & Humes, 1999). United States Census Bureau findings concluded that 36% of African Americans earned a median income between \$20,000 and \$49,999 in 1999. Content analysis findings matched the Census report as, 36% of the ads gave the perception that African Americans were portrayed as earning \$20,000 to \$49,999 a year. However, a difference exists between portrayal and reality. The portrayal of African American's median income suggests that only 39% earn less than \$50,000 a year, when in reality, 73% of African American households earned less than \$50,000 a year in 1999 (McKinnon & Humes, 2000). Results of the content analysis also show that 46% of the ads portrayed African Americans as making between \$50,000 to \$74,999 a year. In reality, only 14% of African American households brought home \$50,000 to \$74,999 in 1999. Findings for both the portrayed level of income and the Census Bureau are more proportionate. It was portrayed that 15% of the African Americans in the ads earned more than \$75,000 a year, while Census findings concluded that 13% fell within that bracket for 1999. However, combined, the portrayed level of income greatly differs from reality. The magazine advertisements created an overall perception among both White and African American coders that 61% of the ads portrayed African Americans as earning

\$50,000 a year, when in reality, only 27% of African Americans earned over \$50,000 in 1999.

Figure 4: Coders' perceptions of annual income level portrayed

Magazine	\$20,000 - \$50,000 -				N/A
	<\$20,000	\$49,999	\$74,999	> \$75,000	
<i>People</i>	5.71%	42.86%	20.00%	11.43%	20.00%
<i>Rolling Stone</i>	0.00%	21.62%	21.62%	5.41%	51.35%
<i>Newsweek</i>	0.00%	28.13%	37.50%	18.75%	15.63%
<i>Parents</i>	3.57%	17.86%	17.86%	3.57%	57.14%
<i>Sports Illustrated</i>	0.00%	3.85%	11.54%	30.77%	53.85%
<i>Redbook</i>	4.00%	20.00%	20.00%	0.00%	56.00%
<i>Black Enterprise</i>	2.58%	18.04%	54.12%	15.46%	9.79%
<i>Jet</i>	0.00%	50.57%	12.64%	1.15%	35.63%

Question 4 – Education. To determine the level of education attained by the African American model in the ad, very little was operationalized by the researcher. Figure 5 shows the portrayed level of education attained by African Americans according to each magazine. Only ads that depicted the model in a way that could be coded for level of education were selected, resulting in 313 ads. It was perceived that 83% of the ads portrayed African American adults as having attained a Bachelor's degree, 11% were portrayed as having earned a high school diploma and less than 1% were portrayed as not having graduated from high school. These findings are significantly different from United States Census Bureau information regarding the level of

education attained by African Americans in 1999. According to the census, only 11% of African Americans had obtained a Bachelor's degree, while 35% had achieved no more than a high school diploma and 15% did not finish high school. The United States Census Bureau accounted for African Americans who had completed some college, while the content analysis did not. The comparison between what was portrayed as the highest level of education attained and actual Census findings suggests there is a discrepancy between portrayal and reality. The percent of models portrayed as having attained a Post Bachelor's degree was similar to Census Bureau findings, with both results being 5%

Figure 5: Coders' perceptions of the level of education portrayed

Magazine	<High school	High school diploma	Bachelor's degree	Post Bachelor's degree	N/A
<i>People</i>	0.00%	5.71%	62.86%	5.71%	25.71%
<i>Rolling Stone</i>	0.00%	18.92%	32.43%	0.00%	48.65%
<i>Newsweek</i>	0.00%	6.25%	62.50%	3.13%	28.13%
<i>Parents</i>	3.57%	14.29%	32.14%	0.00%	50.00%
<i>Sports Illustrated</i>	0.00%	0.00%	57.69%	0.00%	42.31%
<i>Redbook</i>	4.00%	4.00%	28.00%	0.00%	64.00%
<i>Black Enterprise</i>	0.00%	6.19%	75.26%	6.70%	11.86%
<i>Jet</i>	0.00%	6.90%	34.48%	0.00%	58.62%

Conclusion

Figure 6 is a summary comparison between the portrayed socioeconomic and familial status as perceived by the coders and the socioeconomic and familial status of African Americans in the United States.

Figure 6: Summary Comparison		
Research Question	Portrayed*	Actual**
RQ1: Profession		
Trade/Service	9%	62%
Professional/Technical	91%	38%
RQ2: Family		
Traditional	79%	35%
Non-traditional	21%	65%
RQ3: Income		
< \$20,000	3%	37%
\$20,000-\$49,999	36%	36%
\$50,000-\$74,999	46%	14%
> \$75,000	15%	13%
RQ4: Education		
< High school	0.6%	15%
High school diploma	11%	35%
Bachelor's degree	83%	11%
Some college	N/A	23%
Post Bachelor's degree	5%	5%

*Represents the percentage of ads that portrayed African Americans according to each question.

**Represents percentages based on the March 1999 U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Reports, Series P20-530.

Note: Only those ads to which the questions were applicable are included in this table.

For several decades, African Americans were excluded as a target market and were, instead, included stereotypically in advertisements that targeted White society. Meijer (1998) argues that “the positive image of the black successful business and family man is firmly based in white, middle-class values and it raises the question how much the picture shows of black culture, if anything” (p. 242).

Research has shown that successful images of African Americans in media are increasing, yet as they increase, critics of these new images assert that values and beliefs expressed by African American characters do not reflect African American culture, but continue to portray White values (Fujioka, 1999). Advertisers are implying that “you may not be able to live in the best neighborhoods, wear the best clothes, or have the best job; but you can drink the same liquor, smoke the same cigarettes, and drive the same car as those who do” (Wilson & Gutierrez, 1995, p. 137). The purpose of this study was to determine if ads featuring African Americans accurately portray African American socioeconomic and familial status. According to the results of this study, these new, laudatory images do not provide an accurate representation of the majority of African Americans.

Limitations of the Study

Conducting a content analysis can raise questions regarding the validity and reliability of the study. With a content analysis, the two often correspond with each other (Levine-Donnerstein, 1999). The coders' perceptions of the ads were important for comparing how African American socioeconomic and familial status were portrayed with United States Census Bureau findings regarding the same. It is not possible to design a coding scheme for projective content because determining the projective content depends on the coders' perceptions (Levine-Donnerstein). Therefore, coders were given an idea of what advertising cues were relevant or pertinent for answering questions regarding the level of annual income and the level of education attained as portrayed. However, such a method lowers the validity of the study because there is no standard by which some measurements were taken.

In terms of reliability, the coders could have very different schema, making consistency in coding difficult. Coders agreed with each other 73% of the time, demonstrating that there was inconsistency in the coding process. Part of this inconsistency could be a result of not knowing whom exactly to code in each ad. Coding was done on the basis of the overall perception of the ad, rather than on each African American within the ad.

The comparison of portrayed familial status and actual familial status is weak as only 35 ads portrayed African Americans in a familial role. Because the sample was small, it is difficult to make generalizations.

Suggestions for Future Research

The purpose of this study was to compare the perceived socioeconomic and familial status of African Americans as portrayed in magazine advertisements with the actual socioeconomic status of African Americans in the United States. The findings indicate a discrepancy between what is portrayed and what is real. For example, researchers have suggested that the image of the single mother, or “absentee father” is an African American stereotype that needs to be combated (Bristoret al., 1995). However, are such images an accurate reflection of society? In 1999, 65% of African American children lived with a single parent (McKinnon & Humes, 2000). The results of this study found that only 21% of the African American children in the ads appeared to live in a single parent home. O’Barr (1994) questioned such images by asking, “Is this an adequate reflection of society? Or is it merely the emergence of new stereotypes?” (108). The results of this study suggest that it is not an accurate reflection.

The findings in this study suggest research into the social ramifications of misrepresentations in advertising may be fruitful. Scholars claim these new, laudatory images “not only show likeable people, they also offer new stories to live by...the ad draws people into a valuable and a socio-cultural awareness of (good) citizenship and it calls for a new and just lifestyle” (Meijer, 1998, p. 242). “A new and just lifestyle” is a phrase that seems to lend itself to the Civil Rights movement, when inequality was protested and fought, both physically and politically. Have the

majority of African Americans achieved a status in society that is, time and time again, depicted in advertisements? According to U.S. Census Bureau Surveys, they have not (McKinnon & Humes, 2000).

As positive images of African Americans in advertising are increasing, programs such as affirmative action are decreasing from the public agenda (Gandy & Baron, 1998). It is not that these social issues are no longer relevant or necessary in the African American community, it is that they no longer *appear* relevant or necessary. Exploring a possible correlation between public policy and the portrayal of African Americans in media as perceived by the public could support Gerbner's cultivation theory.

Meijer (1998) suggested that advertisements offer a new way of living and that advertising celebrates consumption of the product as a means to an end, with the end often being cultural assimilation. The uses and gratification model could provide insight into the purchasing patterns and psychology behind African American consumerism. The perception is that products can do things for you that you can not do for yourself (Williamson, 1990). "In short, advertising leads to consumerism and consumerism marks an identity and a lifestyle which are emptied of civic virtues" (Meijer, 1998, p. 238). Advertising becomes a welcome mat for groups who are often excluded from mainstream society (Wilson & Gutierrez, 1995). Further research into the uses and gratifications of African American consumerism could determine if consumerism is another avenue for African Americans to achieve equality.

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Appendix 1

Operational definitions for the four items measured in the content analysis.

Type of Profession. Examples of Trade/Service professions and

Professional/Technical professions were obtained from the *2000-01 Occupational Outlook Handbook* issued by the Bureau of Labor Statistics within the U.S.

Department of Labor.

1) Examples of Trade/Service occupations are as follows:

- Electrical and electronic equipment mechanics, installers, and repairers
- Computer, automated teller, and office machine repairers
- Electronic home entertainment equipment repairers
- Electronics repairers, commercial and industrial equipment
- Telecommunications equipment mechanics, installers, and repairers
- Other mechanics, installers, and repairers
- Aircraft mechanics and service technicians
- Automotive body repairers
- Automotive mechanics and service technicians
- Coin, vending, and amusement machine servicers and repairers
- Diesel mechanics and service technicians
- Farm equipment mechanics
- Heating, air-conditioning, and refrigeration mechanics and installers
- Home appliance and power tool repairers
- Industrial machinery repairers
- Line installers and repairers
- Maintenance, mechanics
- Millwrights
- Mobile heavy equipment mechanics
- Motorcycle, boat, and small-engine mechanics
- Musical instrument repairers and tuners
- Cleaning, buildings, and grounds service
- Janitors and cleaners and institutional cleaning supervisors
- Landscaping, groundskeeping, nursery, greenhouse, and lawn service occupations
- Pest controllers
- Food preparation and beverage service

- Chefs, cooks, and other kitchen workers
- Food and beverage service occupation
- Health service
- Dental assistants
- Medical assistants
- Nursing and psychiatric aides
- Occupational therapy assistants and aides
- Physical therapist assistants and aides
- Personal service
- Barbers, cosmetologists, and related workers
- Flight attendants
- Home health and personal care aides
- Preschool teachers and child care workers
- Private household workers
- Veterinary assistants and nonfarm animal caretakers
- Protective service
- Correctional officers
- Fire fighting occupations
- Guards
- Police and detectives
- Private detectives and investigators

2) Examples of Professional/Technical Occupations are as follows:

- Aircraft pilots and flight engineers
- Air traffic controllers
- Engineers and engineering technicians
- Engineers
- Aerospace engineers
- Chemical engineers
- Civil engineers
- Electrical and electronics engineers
- Industrial engineers, except safety engineers
- Materials engineers
- Mechanical engineers
- Mining engineers, including mine safety engineers
- Nuclear engineers
- Petroleum engineers
- Engineering technicians
- Architects and surveyors
- Architects, except landscape and naval
- Drafters
- Landscape architects
- Surveyors, cartographers, photogrammetrists, and surveying technicians
- Computer, mathematical, and operations research
- Actuaries
- Computer programmers
- Computer systems analysts, engineers, and scientists
- Mathematicians
- Operations research analysts
- Statisticians
- Scientists and science technicians
- Life scientists
- Agricultural and food scientists
- Biological and medical scientists
- Conservation scientists and foresters
- Physical scientists
- Atmospheric scientists
- Chemists

- Geologists, geophysicists, and oceanographers
- Physicists and astronomers
- Science technicians
- Legal
- Lawyers and judicial workers
- Paralegals and legal assistants
- Social scientists
- Economists and marketing research analysts
- Psychologists
- Urban and regional planners
- Social scientists, other
- Social and recreation workers
- Human service workers and assistants
- Recreation workers
- Social workers
- Clergy
- Protestant ministers
- Rabbis
- Roman Catholic priests
- Teachers and instructors, counselors, and library occupations
- Adult and vocational education teachers
- Archivists, curators, museum technicians, and conservators
- College and university faculty
- Counselors
- Instructors and coaches, sports and physical training
- Librarians
- Library technicians
- School teachers—Kindergarten, elementary, and secondary
- Special education teachers
- Health diagnosticians
- Chiropractors
- Dentists
- Optometrists
- Physicians
- Podiatrists
- Veterinarians
- Health assessment and treating
- Dietitians and nutritionists
- Occupational therapists
- Pharmacists
- Physical therapists
- Physician assistants
- Recreational therapists
- Registered nurses
- Respiratory therapists
- Speech-language pathologists and audiologists
- Health technologists and technicians
- Cardiovascular technologists and technicians
- Clinical laboratory technologists and technicians
- Dental hygienists
- Electroneurodiagnostic technologists
- Emergency medical technicians and paramedics
- Health information technicians
- Licensed practical nurses
- Nuclear medicine technologists
- Opticians, dispensing
- Pharmacy technicians and assistants
- Radiologic technologists
- Surgical technologists
- Communications-related
- Announcers
- Broadcast and sound technicians
- News analysts, reporters, and correspondents
- Public relations specialists

- Writers and editors, including technical writers
- Visual arts and design
- Designers
- Photographers and camera operators
- Visual artists
- Performing arts
- Actors, directors, and producers
- Dancers and choreographers
- Musicians, singers, and related workers
- Accountants and auditors
- Administrative services and facility managers
- Advertising, marketing, and public relations managers
- Budget analysts
- Construction and building inspectors
- Construction managers
- Cost estimators
- Education administrators
- Employment interviewers, private or public employment service
- Engineering, natural science, and computer and information systems managers
- Farmers and farm managers
- Financial managers
- Funeral directors and morticians
- General managers and top executives
- Government chief executives and legislators
- Health services managers
- Hotel managers and assistants
- Human resources, training, and labor relations specialists and managers
- Industrial production managers
- Inspectors and compliance officers, except construction
- Insurance underwriters
- Loan counselors and officers
- Management analysts
- Property, real estate, and community association managers
- Purchasing managers, buyers, and purchasing agents
- Restaurant and food service managers

Type of Family.

- 1) Traditional family: recognizable as a man and woman with a child. In the case of a single adult alone with a child, a wedding band should be present.
- 2) Non-traditional family: recognizable as one man or woman with a child, no wedding band, or two women or two men with a child.

Level of Income. The perception of the African American models' level of income was determined by the coder's analysis of the latent content of the ad. To determine this, coders could use all parts of the ad, including text, the product being advertised, how the model was dressed, etc. The level of income was coded as 1) < \$20,000, 2) \$20,000-\$49,999, 3) \$50,000-\$74,999, 4) >\$75,000 and 5) N/A.

Level of Education. As with the level of income, to ascertain the perceived level of education, very little was defined for the coder. Again, they could take cues from the ad by analyzing any text, the product being sold, how the model was dressed, and by applying the perceived profession of the model. The level of education was coded as 1) < high school, 2) high school diploma, 3) Bachelor's degree, 4) Post Bachelor's degree and 5) N/A.

Appendix 2

Coding Sheet

Magazine title _____

Ad # _____

How many of each are represented in the ad?

Adult male(s) _____ Adult female(s) _____

Male child(ren) _____ Female child(ren) _____

Check one answer per question.

1. In what type of profession does the model(s) appear to be?

Trade/Service _____ Professional/Technical _____ N/A _____

2. In what type of family does the model(s) appear to be?

Traditional _____ Non-traditional _____ N/A _____

3. What is the perceived level of annual income of the model(s)?

< \$20,000 _____ \$20,000-\$49,999 _____

\$50,000-\$74,999 _____ > \$75,000 _____

4. What is the perceived level of education of the model(s)?

< High school _____ High school diploma _____

Bachelor's degree _____ Post Bachelor's degree _____