

# Visible Minority Women In Mainstream Advertising: Distorted Mirror Or Looking Glass?

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## ABSTRACT

This paper updates a previous study on visible minority women in advertising. A content analysis of advertisements in *Maclean's* between 1984-1994 yields a mixed message. Although visible minority women are no longer under represented in terms of numbers, they continue to be misrepresented with respect to product associations and role placement.

## RÉSUMÉ

Cet article met à jour une étude antérieure sur les femmes de minorité visible dans la publicité. Une analyse du contenu des annonces publicitaires dans *Maclean's* entre 1984 et 1995 donne un message contradictoire. Quoique les femmes de minorité visible ne soient plus sous-représentées, quand on parle de nombre, elles sont encore présentées sous un faux jour en ce qui concerne les produits avec lesquels on les associe, et les rôles qu'on leur attribue.

## BACKGROUND

The 1989 autumn issue of *Atlantis* contained an article that confirmed what many had long suspected. Multiculturalism is long on principles but short on practice when the media are involved. In a paper entitled, "The Distorted Mirror: Images of Visible Minority Women in Canadian Print Advertising," Robert M MacGregor (1989) revealed how the changing roles and status of visible minority women were *not* reflected in the popular media. To put this hypothesis to the test, the article summarised the findings of a thirty year longitudinal study of media (mis)treatment of visible minority women in Canada's national news magazine, *Maclean's*. Content analyses of over four thousand ads appearing in the 1954, 1964, 1974, and 1984 issues of the magazine revealed gradual increases in the proportion of visible minority persons in ads. Although the presence of visible minority women in ads had increased over the past three decades, the type of representations remained stuck in stereotypes. Their appearances were generally restricted to tourism and charity ads, as decorative or poor/idle. The majority of ads also depicted visible minority women as atmosphere/background "filler" who rarely interacted meaningfully with the product in

question.

In discussing the significance of his findings, MacGregor foregrounded a key observation in the 1984 report *Equality Now!* (Daudlin, 1984). He said that "visible minority women remained close to being invisible in one of Canada's most important and widely circulated magazines" (139). Limitations in the roles and the narrow range of goods/services associated with women of colour did not reflect or flatter Canada's ethno-cultural mosaic. What existed instead was a "distorted mirror" at odds with the growing presence and importance of diversity to Canadian society-building. In that public beliefs and attitudes may be adversely affected by media messages, the imperative to challenge minority stereotyping was deemed critical. MacGregor concluded by conceding the potential for improvements: certain visible minority groups had articulated and received fairer treatment from the media, while the media themselves were under pressure from regulatory bodies to "mainstream diversity" by eliminating racist and sexist stereotyping (e.g., CAF, 1992a; 1992b; 1992c; 1992d). One of MacGregor's final statements proved most challenging: "There should be ongoing research to serve as a barometer of change - or the lack of it" (p.143). We decided to take up this challenge.

## THE RATIONALE

Our purpose was to follow up and extend MacGregor's work by examining ads in the 1994 issues of *Maclean's*. We expected our study to yield significant improvements in the quantity and quality of visible minority depictions in general, and visible minority women in particular. We also anticipated a wider range of roles prescribed to visible minority women in 1994 than in earlier decades. After all, had not the period between 1984 and 1994 proven a time of profound social, political, cultural, and demographic upheaval in reshaping Canada's social contours? This unprecedented transformation along pluralistic lines would presumably catapult the concept of media mainstreaming from a "principle" to "practice." Several trends accounted for our optimism.

First, the publication of the Parliamentary report *Equality Now!* drew attention to discrepancies between Canada's multicultural ideals and the reality of entrenched Anglo-centric practices. The passage of the federal *Employment Equity Act* in 1986 and the *Multiculturalism Act* of 1988 may be interpreted as a response to *Equality Now!* What both of these acts had in common, despite obvious differences in scope and outcomes, was a commitment to the principle of institutional accommodation to the demands of ethnic groups by improving the numbers and treatment of visible minorities in the workplace (Agocs and Boyd 1993). Two years after the passage of the *Multiculturalism Act*, the Canadian Advertising Foundation formed the Race Relations Advisory Council on Advertising (RRACA) in 1990. Its goal was to increase the presence and improve the representation of visible minorities in advertising.

Second, demographic changes exerted pressure for progressive institutional reform. Ethno-cultural minorities were rapidly emerging as a powerful demographic force that the media could hardly ignore as audience or consumers. The 1991 census showed that nearly 45 percent of all Canadians had some non-British or non-French ancestry, while the percentage of visible minorities grew from 6.3 percent of the population to 9.1 percent between 1986 and 1991, the vast majority of whom were concentrated in the urban centres of

Canada (Badets and Chui, 1994). According to Citizenship and Immigration Canada (1996), 219,510 individuals immigrated to Canada in 1994, a majority of whom from non-European countries (e.g., 57.4% from the Asia-Pacific region and 13% Africa and the Middle East). Further, over half (53%) of those who came in 1994 were women. (The 1996 census data on immigration and visible minorities will be released early 1998).

Third, a discernible shift could be detected in public discourses pertaining to diversity (Agocs and Boyd 1993). Diversity was perceived as a resource of potential benefit for business if managed properly. Many of the visible minority members are well-educated, young, and affluent, with plenty of potential purchasing power (Pollock, 1995). For example, by the year 2000, the Chinese and the East Indian populations in Vancouver, Montreal and Toronto will make up nearly 15% of the purchasing power in these three cities. A consumer survey commissioned by RRACA demonstrated that one in three Canadians perceived that inclusion of visible minority in ads bolstered the appeal of the products/services being promoted (CAF 1992d). Especially among visible minority members surveyed in the study, many expressed a preference for products if they could see people like themselves in the ads. Refusing to incorporate diversity ran the risk of consumer protest which would probably negatively affect the bottom-line, i.e., profits.

In sum, the social, political, demographic, and cultural context between 1984 and 1994 underwent striking transformations. The magnitude of these changes fostered an institutional climate that compelled institutions to move over and make space. Advertisers may have found themselves under pressure to modify their advertising content for economic and political reasons even if not from principles of justice or national interest. For example, some marketers have included ethnic minorities or interracial families in their advertising campaign, resulting in an increase in sales (Lynn, 1995). With that in mind, we set out to determine whether *Maclean's* treatment of visible minority women in its print advertising improved between 1984 and 1994.

## DATA ANALYSIS

According to Carty and Brand (1992), the term "visible minority women" was coined by the Canadian state. In 1986, the Canadian government sponsored the National Organization of Immigrant and Visible Minority Women, which represented over 500 immigrant and visible minority women's groups in Canada. Elsewhere, in the United States for example, visible minority women have been referred to as "women of colo(u)r." Both terms are problematic for several reasons. First, the classification of "visible" or "coloured" is arbitrary, because it is based upon skin colour only (Fleras and Elliott, 1996). By using this term, the social and cultural differences within this "visible" or "coloured" group have been overlooked (Carty and Brand, 1992; Fleras and Elliott, 1996). For example, the experience of a black nurse could be very different from that of a black artist. Second, by describing one group as "visible" or "coloured," it is implied that the reference group is white. The "invisible" or "white" is thus given an omnipresent supremacy, reinforcing the assumption that "white" is the standard against which we measure our values and conducts (Moore, 1992). Third, these terms are restricted to certain geographic boundaries. While in North American and European countries, "women of colour" or "visible minority women" can mean non-white, the reverse would apply to South American, Asian or African countries. Inadequacies aside, we decided to use the term "visible minority women" throughout the text in order to be consistent with MacGregor's study. Further, as will be shown in the findings, representation of women in advertising often appears to follow the lines of "visibility" as defined by skin colour.

In order to ensure comparability of data, we attempted to replicate MacGregor's survey as closely as possible. We felt it important to capture the "spirit" of the research by coding the data according to topologies established by MacGregor. But we found it necessary to extend previous work by incorporating changes in society and in advertising since 1984. For instance, compared to 1984, more computer-related advertisements are placed in the 1994 *Maclean's* (e.g., software,

hardware). Increased emphasis on healthful living also results in more commercials for food and non-alcoholic beverages. Automobile ads seem more inclusive of women and visible minorities, thanks to the perceived purchasing clout of these groups. In addition to the categories used in the 1989 study, we have added technology, food and beverages, automobile, clothing, and medical services.

Advertisements in all 52 issues of 1994 *Maclean's* were sampled. These ads were categorized according to the product/service being promoted: 1) alcohol, 2) beauty / hygiene, e.g., skincare products, shaving gels, and cosmetics, 3) charity, 4) tourism, 5) communications, 6) financial services, 7) medical services, 8) automobile, 9) technology / appliances, 10) food and non-alcoholic beverages, and 11) clothing and accessories. For people ads (i.e., ads involving people), models were first identified based upon skin colour and complexion, i.e., white, non-white. We decided to omit the role frequencies of visible minority women by race or ethnic categories, such as Asian / Indian, black, Latin, and Native; due to the small sample, appearances by race and ethnic categories did not yield much information. Further, all models were categorized into men, women or children (both boys and girls). With regard to role characteristics, MacGregor has used ten categories: decorative / idle, dancers, poor / idle, musicians, labour, craft / artisan, waitress, receptionist, spokesperson, and interactive / positive. To be compatible with the study, we followed these categories as closely as possible. The roles or activities of the models were classified into: decorative, blue collar, professional, entertainer, crafts / artisan, stewardess, parent, patient, and at leisure. We found it difficult to duplicate parts of MacGregor's typology because of problems in operationalizing his categories for analytical purposes. The "poor" category in his study, for example, proved too elusive. Most of the roles classified in the present study are self-explanatory except for the terms "decorative" and "at leisure." "Decorative" means that there is little connection between the product and the model. "At leisure" describes the person being on vacation, reading, or socializing with others. The person's occupation is not specified in either case. Overall, we made an effort to duplicate MacGregor's study

as closely as possible.

Two research assistants were coached to code the ads based upon these categories. To ensure reliability, ads in ten of the issues were analysed by both assistants. The coders agreed on 99% of the categories; the remaining one percent could not be accurately identified and subsequently were discarded from the analyses. The total sample consisted of 1,233 ads.

### FINDINGS

In general, there appears to be a decline of ads involving people from the 1970s to the 1980s. Among ads in 1994, fifty-three percent of them involved people. Proportion of ads involving people by category was shown as follows: medical services (88%), beauty / hygiene (76%), clothing & accessories (63%), charity (59%), tourism (58%), technology / appliances (51%), communications (48%), food / beverages (42%), financial services (40%), alcohol (21%), and automobile (20%). Twenty-one percent of the people ads featured visible minorities. Figure 1 indicates a steady increase of visible minorities in ads since 1974. This was especially evident over the past decade. In 1984, only 1.5% of the ads featured visible minority women, compared to 6% in 1994. A similar pattern was found among visible minority men (Figure 2).

Among people ads, the percentage of those involving visible minorities were as follows: charity (43%), clothing / accessories (42%), tourism (36%), technology / appliances (35%), alcohol (33%), automobile (27%), financial services (23%), medical services (9%), beauty / hygiene (8%), food/beverages (1%) and communications (0%). Among people ads, the proportion of those including visible minority women were found in the following descending order: tourism (13%), financial services (13%), technology / appliances (12%), food / beverages (10%), automobile (10%), medical services (9%), charity (7%), beauty / hygiene (4%), clothing / accessories (0%), communications (0%), and alcohol (0%).

Consistent with MacGregor's findings, visible minority women were absent from alcohol ads. While women occupied all beauty/hygiene ads

with people (Table 1), only 4% of these ads included visible minority women. The presence of visible minority women was more evident in ads for tourism; 13% of the ads included visible minority women. Improvement has been noted especially in financial services ads. Visible minority women appeared in none of the financial services ads in 1984, but they were shown in 13% of the financial services ads in 1994 (Table 1).

Given the uneven distribution of visible minority women across these categories, it was necessary to examine the roles prescribed to them in the context of the products they endorsed (Table 2).

Visible minority women were portrayed as professionals (e.g., accountants, bank managers) in 3 of the 4 financial services commercials. All three automobile ads with visible minority women depicted them as professionals. Tourism ads, by contrast, continued to portray visible minority women either as decorative or as individuals in the hospitality or entertainment industries such as chamber-maids, flight attendants, or musicians. In the 1994 *Maclean's* ads, 14 out of 22 (63%) of those including visible minority women were for tourism. Less than half of them (6 out of 14) cast visible minority women in leisure roles (i.e., reading, vacationing, and socializing). While white males were often portrayed as business travellers in commercials for airlines, we have yet to see whether the same roles would be assigned to visible minority men. (A research project on this topic is under way.) The persistence of "whiteness" in beauty ads and the prevalence of visible minority women in tourism ads may be associated with gender/race stereotypes existing in the mainstream society (both of which will be discussed in the next section). Children were most often featured in charity ads. This is partly due to the type of ads that appeared in the magazine (e.g., a majority of them were for organizations such as Planned Parenthood and WarAmps).

### DISCUSSION

According to Jhally (1995), advertising is "a discourse through and about objects." It is in the realm of advertising that the "politics of diversity

and its concomitant insistence on representation" have the most impact (hooks, 1992:28). Through advertising, consumers (i.e., readers) are presented with a product that connects the lifestyles, social order, and values with which they are familiar. Diversity is apparent in the ads found in the 1994 *Maclean's*. It surely reflects that marketers have paid attention to the growing purchasing power of visible minorities in Canada. Our findings tend to corroborate as well as contradict those in MacGregor's study. With respect to *numbers* per se, visible minorities are no longer underrepresented in proportion to Canada's population at large. The proportion of them who appear in ads in relationship to whites has more than doubled (from 7.4% to 18%). This increase corresponds with the growing visible minority populations in Canada since the 1980s.

Numbers per se, however, do not imply that visible minority women are portrayed in a non-stereotyping manner. A more important question would be: *how* is diversity presented in advertising? Most ads are positioned in two broad spheres of life: work (such as banking, using a computer), and leisure (such as entertaining and vacationing). For example, commercials for alcohol are often centred around leisure settings (Kunz, 1997), and resort vacation promotions are usually built around the concept of an escape from the mundane routines of everyday life. When the ads focus on work, we are shown that visible minority women are entrepreneurs, accountants, and financial planners. While white women may be working side by side with white women, these ads show no interactions between whites and non-whites. At leisure, visible minority women also appear to be revolving in a world of their own. They serve and entertain tourists, most of whom are white. Further, they are rarely seen as spokespersons for beauty products. In the following paragraphs, we shall illustrate our points by analysing a few ads.

It is worth noting that visible minority women are more likely to be featured in tourism ads with non-European destinations, such as the Far East and the Caribbean resorts. European destinations, however, are for white men and women only. In a 12-page promotion of tourism for a European country, for example, none of the pages

feature visible minority women either as tourists or locals. In an ad for the Barbados, however, two snapshots are presented against the scenic backdrop: one featuring a black woman cleaning the room, the other, a white couple enjoying the sun. In another Caribbean tourism ad, we are shown that golfers are white but entertainers are black. Sex and race stereotypes are also evident in tourism ads that use drawings rather than photos. For example, a travel club promotes its resorts through a series of drawings titled "Another World Awaits." One of the drawings resembles the cover of a harlequin romance, a tanned white woman falling into the strong arms of a man. The other drawing depicts two Javanese or Polynesian girls resting in a tropical garden. Both paintings seem to suggest that these vacations can bring individuals to a dream world where the traditional sex and race stereotypes prevail. One might ask: do visible minority women ever travel to Europe or the Caribbean Islands? According to those ads, the answer is NO, although tourism statistics can easily prove otherwise.

It is not surprising that, in spite of the increasing inclusion of ethnic groups in advertising, 69% of the respondents in a CAF survey still think that advertising today is too geared to whites (CAF, 1992c). Apart from tourism, consumers have singled out the alcohol, car, cosmetics, and real estate industries to be not representing Canada's multicultural mosaic. With regard to including visible minority women, our study indicates that the automobile industries have made progress in this respect. But little improvement has been found with regard to the alcohol and cosmetic industries. Further, an increase in the number of visible minority women in ads has not yet translated into improvements in the images of these people. Our study tends to concur with MacGregor in suggesting that the quality of appearances is *not* fundamentally different from what it has been for the past decades. With few exceptions, visible minority women continue to be slotted into a predetermined set of roles. The beauty industries, for example, are still lagging behind, while tourism remains a typecasting ghetto (CAF, 1992c). To be sure, a blanket indictment of all advertising is inappropriate: certain sectors such as financial, food, and auto have attempted to embrace visible

minority ads.

### STEREOTYPING WOMEN OF COLOUR

Over the past decades, while women in general confronted the spectre of sexualization through stereotyping, visible minority women were *racialized* through stereotypes that simultaneously denied their difference (if different, then inferior) or their sameness (if same, loss of authenticity). Visible minority women have historically been typecast with certain products or services, presumably on the basis of market-driven research that reinforces a link between products / services and values or ideals (Fleras, 1991; 1993). Visible minority women have often been portrayed as the "other," especially in tourism and beauty ads. Aboriginal women were depicted as "princesses" or "squaws" (Harris 1993); Indo-Pakistanis typified manipulative and irrational "shrews"; Asian-Canadian women came across as docile and passive; Jewish women were portrayed as meddlesome nurturers; Polynesian women embodied graceful love goddesses; and Middle East women resembled hot-blooded spitfires. On the one hand, visible minority women were rarely employed in beauty/personal hygiene ads, so deeply entrenched was the image of whiteness with its narrow casted focus as the preferred standard of beauty (Bledsloe 1989). On the other, who better to hype foreign airlines, quality chamber-maid service in hotels, tropical destinations, or sexual experiences (O'Barr 1994)? That kind of dormant hostility has the effect of disempowering visible minorities by depoliticizing their status and contributions to society (see Farli 1995).

Why would visible minority women continue to be "otherized" in tourism ads in the era of Multiculturalism? Is it because they prefer to be distinguishable through their ethnic attires? This is surely not the case among visible minority participants in the CAF focus groups (CAF, 1992a). Many of these participants have expressed that they would like to see visible minorities to be portrayed in ads as "typical, normal, everyday Canadians, who go to work, have families, and live ordinary lives, just as whites are currently portrayed" and as "Westernized Canadian consumers who fit

comfortably into the Canadian lifestyle - wearing jeans and Reeboks, not turbans or saris" (p.10). Through a cursory look at the ads in the 1994 *Maclean's*, we should say that some industries such as the banks, automobile manufacturers, and technologies have made improvements in this respect. For example, in a computer ad, an Asian woman was pictured wearing a jean jacket rather than a kimono. In tourism ads, however, advertising images of people of colour are still filtered by Anglo eyes (Wilson and Gutiérrez, 1995:114-117).

### THE ETHNIC VS. THE MAINSTREAM

As hooks (1992:21) once argued: "Within commodity culture, ethnicity becomes spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture." Images of "exotic" visible minority women are therefore meant to "spice up" the daily life of white people. When the emphasis is on fantasy, white females represent the object of romantic desire, beautiful and fragile, whereas non-white females symbolize the "lost world," primitive and docile. When the emphasis is on escape, white females usually can relax on a tropical island or enjoy the high culture in Europe. For the visible minority women, however, they are seen working to make these escape possible. A problem with these ads is that they dichotomize individuals into the "visible" (coloured) and the "invisible" (white). When it comes to tourism, visible minorities are not expected to explore the "white" European culture, whereas white tourists automatically have the nostalgia to experience the "primitive" world. These tourism ads reflect the white supremacy that originated from the colonial era by suggesting that it is the white people who initiate contact with the primitive world (hooks, 1992).

In beauty ads, women are also grouped along colour lines. Visible minority women seldom act as spokespersons for a product, although they may appear in some ads. Their images, however, are filtered by the lens of white standards. Regardless of skin colour, the image of feminine beauty is still white, slim and youthful. In beauty ads, therefore, black women are usually shown to have lighter skin tone and straighter hair than in

reality. Cosmetic products are often placed on the dressing-room counter of a white woman, although visible minority women are just as likely to use make-up. By doing so, visible minorities are relegated to be the inferior "other." Cosmetic products are meant to make women, white or non-white, conform to the mainstream beauty standards. For visible minority women, it is often difficult to find make-up products that match their skin-tone.

Even when visible minority women appear as professionals or parents, they are often seen interacting with people of the same ethnic origin. Interactions between white and non-white still remain rare in print advertising. White and non-white models can be promoting the same product in two separate ads. While acknowledging the changing face of the Canadian society, perhaps some advertisers still insist on targeting two markets: the "ethnic" (i.e., non-white) and the mainstream (i.e., white). This insistence on the mainstream vs. the "ethnic" completely ignores the reality of the Canadian mosaic where the "ethnic" is the mainstream (Lynn, 1995). In other words, ethnic minorities are no longer fringe players stuck in their ethnic enclaves. Rather, they are becoming major forces of the Canadian society.

A primary goal of advertising is to increase sales. Understanding the product and the values of its potential consumers are keys to a successful campaign (Ogilvy, 1983). If depiction of visible minority women as decorative or primitive results in fewer vacation bookings, then advertisers will take note. Given that visible minority consumers do not want to be seen as subservient or at the fringe of the society, why then do racial stereotypes still exist in beauty and tourism ads? Can we assume that those ads are intended for the so-called "mainstream?" If this is the case, is it justifiable to say that we are socialized into the ideology of white supremacy and are unconsciously accepting the white standard of beauty and the image of the "lost world" (hooks, 1992)? Perhaps the persistence of these images reflect the thinking of some readers.

Is the problem, then, one of *eurocentrism*? With eurocentrism, whites are portrayed as the norm and standard by which others are judged and criticized; minorities, in turn, are dehumanized or

"otherized" as people removed in time and space and beyond the pale of civilization. Advertising is a potent source of information (Steinem, 1995). For decades, advertising and other forms of media have been permeated with racial stereotypes that are insulting to visible minorities. The Judeo-Christian-liberal-democratic-capitalist tradition at the core of modern media is so culturally embedded and tacitly accepted that the inferiorization of the "other" through stereotypes is rendered natural and inevitable (George and Sanders 1995). These eurocentrist commercials have been internalized in our minds to the degree that we might even take their values for granted. This may explain the persistence of racial stereotypes in tourism ads.

The advertising media have taken steps to improve their relation with visible minority groups. Depictions that fail to incorporate diversity in a meaningful way run the risk of being labelled as staid and boring by consumers that count. At the forefront of this shift is increased awareness of the racialization that complicates and compounds the sexual stereotyping of visible minority women. In many cases, inclusion of visible minorities have become the norm. However, adding a few more visible minority members in advertising does not automatically address ethnic groups' demand for equitable representation. Ogilvy (1983) has stated that advertising reflects social mores, but does not influence them. If this is the case, perhaps we as readers or consumers need to examine our perceptions about cultural diversity. For example, do we regard tourism to non-European destinations as encounters with the "uncivilized" world? Although colonialism is something of the past, hooks (1992) found that the desire of "conquering" the "primitive" non-European cultures is still alive among many white people. Even for non-white people, many may have unconsciously accepted the standard of beauty presented by the media. Instead of taking pride in their cultural heritage, visible minorities may want to downplay their ethnic features. For example, some may want to straighten or bleach their hair (hooks, 1992) or lighten their skin-tone. Perhaps a more important challenge is for us as consumers to "decolonize" our thinking so that we can break away from the confines of white supremacy and to truly celebrate differences

through self love (hooks, 1992:9-20).

### CONCLUSION

Mainstream media do not exist to inform or entertain; as discourses in defence of ideology, they exist to make money by linking audiences with advertisers. As declared by a former creative director for a large advertising firm in emphasizing the priority of fantasy over reality: "The point of advertising, after all, is to associate a product with hope, dreams, sex, fun, and well-being. If you can make people feel good about a product, they will buy it. *Reality is beside the point*" (emphasis, ours) (quoted in Campbell 1995). Many will argue that this commercial imperative must be balanced by a corresponding commitment to social responsibility. To date, the media have not lived up to their responsibilities as instruments of progress in a multicultural milieu. Nor have they shown much enthusiasm for public accountability of their actions. Women of all colour have been deprived of an opportunity to exercise power or make decisions at all levels of the media industry (Steaves 1993). Exclusion of women from the creative and decision-making process culminates in media images that reflect male rather than female interests. Female contributions to society are further diminished by a social climate that fosters the sexualization of women as frivolous commodities whose primary concerns lapse into appearances and relationships (Gist 1993).

Media mistreatment through stereotyping has sharply penetrated the lives and life chances of visible minority women (hooks 1995). The world we inhabit is a world of representation. Media do not just represent reality that exists "out there;" nor do they simply reproduce or circulate knowledge. As active producers of knowledge in their own right, media construct and constitute the very core of our social existence (Goldman 1992; Fiske 1994; McAllister 1995). By updating a previous study on the representation of visible minority women in advertising, we have shown they are still being treated as the "other" especially in tourism ads. Compared to white women, visible minority women are more susceptible to social and psychological damage through the internalization of

hateful images that deplore or reject. Women generally have been sexualized, in advertising, as objects of (men's) desire. Their worth is often defined by their physical appearance, i.e., being young, white, and blond. In order for visible minority women to be beautiful as seen in advertising, they must lighten their complexion and straighten their hair (for black women). In other words, visible minority women must make themselves "invisible" to pass the mainstream beauty standards. Such misrepresentations are not simply a mistake in perception. They constitute a system of *social control* even when secured through enlightened images (Jhally and Lewis 1992).

The control of knowledge and its dissemination through mass media images is fundamental to the exercise of power in society. Media institutions are central to the production, reproduction, and transformation of ideology. Representations of reality are framed through images: these media images are critical for conveying shared cultural beliefs and underlying assumptions that organize and shape our understanding of social reality. The observations of Bannerji are worth noting:

visual images in that sense are congealed social relations, formalizing in themselves either relations of domination or those of resistance. The politics of images is the same as any politics; it is about being the subjects not the objects of the world that we live in. (1986:20)

In the final analysis, media-minority relations constitute relationships of power and inequality. That amplifies the need to understand how these unequal relations are constructed, congealed, challenged, and transformed around the symbolic representations of minorities. The media may constrain or deny people of colour by reshaping the world to justify ideology and dominant culture. What the media cannot control is the potential to challenge and resist these images through inversion or appropriation (Fiske 1994; Nakhaie and Pike 1995).

Knowledge is empowerment, so we are told, and improving visible minority representations



contests the privileged discourse that functions to control and dominate. Isolating and challenging the misrepresentation of visible minority women through direct action is a complex and demanding undertaking (George and Sanders 1995). Yet until media minority representations are acknowledged as expressions of power, and dealt with accordingly, any moves to escape the imprisonment of image are destined to falter. Nor will there be much progress by refusing to acknowledge how gender is superimposed on and intersects with race in ways that are mutually reinforcing yet contradictory (Stam 1993). These complex articulations not only depoliticize the concerns and

aspirations of women of colour. Their realities and contributions to society are diminished through placement in an environment where stereotypes displace substance. With the growing politicization of diversity in Canada, the media are likely to intensify as contested sites in the competitive struggle over the politics of image.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We gratefully acknowledge the support of the Secretary of State (Multiculturalism) for funding of research on the broader topic of "Media-Minority Relations" upon which this paper is based.

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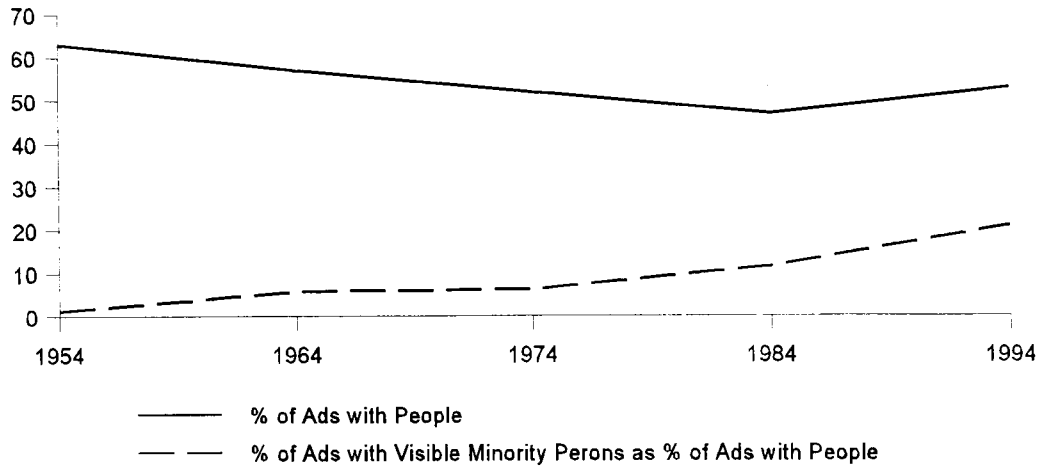
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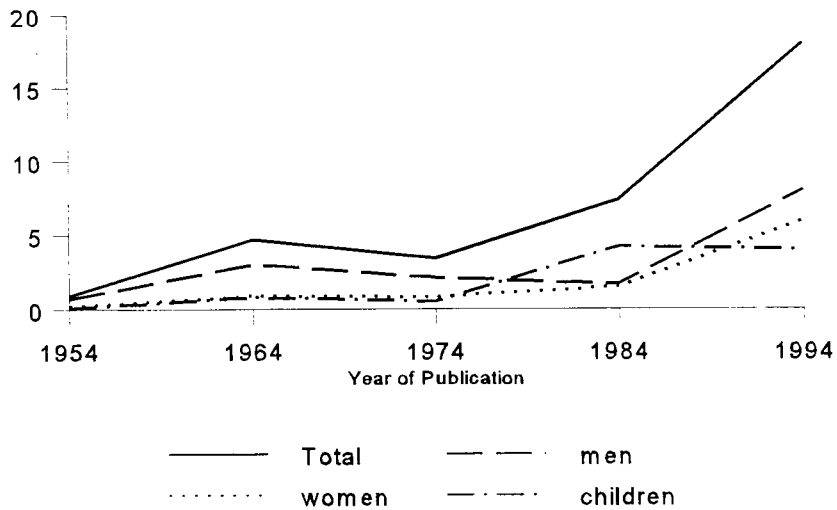
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Figure 1. Percent of Ads with People and Percent of Ads with Visible Minority Persons (1954-1994)



Data for 1954-1984 are from MacGregor (1989).

Figure 2. % of Visible Minorities as Total Number of People in Ads



Data for 1954-1984 are from MacGregor (1989).

Table 1. Visible Minority Women Portrayed in Product/Service Categories (1984-1994)

Year	1984		1994	
Product/Service Categories	No. of Ads which includes V.M.W	No. of V.M.W	No. of Ads which includes V.M.W	No. of V.M.W
Alcohol	0	0	0	0
Charity	3	11	2	2
Communications	1	6	0	0
Beauty/Hygiene	0	0	1	2
Financial Serv.	0	0	4	4
Tourism	8	16	14	21
Medical Serv.	N/A	N/A	2	2
Automobile	N/A	N/A	2	2
Clothing/access.	N/A	N/A	0	0
Tech/appliances	N/A	N/A	8	28
Food/beverages	N/A	N/A	2	2

Data for 1984 are from MacGregor (1989:140).

Table 2. Number of Ads Portraying Visible Minority Women by Role Categories

Role					Product	Service		
Category	Beauty/Hygiene	Financial Service	Charity	Tourism	Automobile	Tech/Appliances	Medical Services	Food/Beverage
Decorative				3				
Labour								1
Professionals		3			3	1		
Musician				2				
Crafts/Artisan				1				
Waitress/Stewardess				1				
Parent			1	1				1
Leisure	1	1	1	6		7		
Patient							2	
Total	1	4	2	14	3	8	2	2