

Racial Stereotypes in Children's Television Commercials

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In our increasingly diverse society, children are deeply engaged in television viewing and their consumption of television programming varies by ethnicity. Ethnic portrayal in children's advertising is an important public policy and self-regulatory topic that may influence children's self-perception and brand perception. This research examines frequency of ethnic representation, as assessed by the proportionality criterion and type of role portrayals by ethnically stereotyped groups in 155 children's commercials. Results indicate that all diverse ethnicities were underrepresented compared to Caucasians. Ethnic representation is also examined by advertised product category, ethnic interaction, and importance of role portrayed by ethnic characters.

INTRODUCTION

For decades, there has been extensive debate about the effects of advertising on children. Because of this, the Children's Advertising Review Unit (CARU), established by the National Advertising Review Council (NARC), states that, "advertisers . . . have a special responsibility to protect children from their own susceptibilities." In other words, children are vulnerable and may assume that the world is the way that it appears on television. Many children, especially those at young ages, do not have the opportunity to experience the world for themselves and often, by the time that they do, the expectations and assumptions created by media are so strong that it can take time to disentangle reality from perception. In light of these facts, CARU further states that "care should be taken to incorporate minorities and other groups in children's advertisements in order to present positive role models. . ."

Relative to the food industry, in July 2005, the Federal Trade Commission and the Department of Health and Human Services jointly sponsored a workshop to examine various approaches to marketing, self-regulation, and childhood obesity. As part of this workshop, issues of race and ethnicity in marketing to children were discussed.

For example, the different food marketing initiatives based on race and exposure issues, as well as the types of messages presented to minority children, were discussed. Thus, race and advertising exposure is currently an important topic in public policy.

These guidelines, regulations, and workshops are particularly important because children view 20,000–40,000 television commercials per year (Leonhardt and Kerwin, 1997). This is not surprising in light of the fact that more than half of all children report that they watch TV seven days a week (Slaughter, 2003). Interestingly, television consumption differs by ethnic group. As shown in Table 1, African American and Hispanic children watch considerably more television than Caucasian children as they are more likely than Caucasians to watch three or more hours of television per day (Slaughter, 2003). Therefore, these ethnic children have greater exposure to television advertising (see Table 1).

Clearly, children represent a large, lucrative, and growing market to advertisers. In 2001, children aged 4–12 directly controlled \$35–\$41 billion in purchases and influenced as much as \$260–\$290 billion of family purchase decisions (Chunovic, 2002; Lindstrom, 2003). Similarly, the annual

TABLE 1
Hours of TV Viewing Time by Race and Ethnicity

Hours of TV Viewing Time	White	Black			Total
	Non-Hispanic	Non-Hispanic	Hispanic	Other	
None to <1 h	24%	13%	15%	21%	21%
1 h to <2 h	41%	10%	44%	29%	37%
2 h to <3 h	20%	12%	11%	33%	18%
3 h or more	16%	64%	29%	18%	24%

Source: Slaughter (2003)

purchasing power of racial minorities constitutes approximately 20 percent of all U.S. consumer spending and is rising at a rate faster than nonminority spending (MBDA, 2000).

For the above reasons, advertising to children, and specifically ethnic children, draws research interest. The present research has two important objectives. First, it provides a descriptive analysis of the frequency of ethnic representations in children's television advertising. This analysis is conducted using the proportionality criterion as suggested by Taylor and Stern (1997). Using this same criterion (i.e., similar analysis) will allow for longitudinal analysis in the future. While this criterion has been used to compare ethnic representation in advertising to that of national ethnic representation, in the current study this criterion is applied using local market census figures as well as the national census figures. This allows for an examination of to what degree children's advertising is reflective of both a local diverse market population as well as the population as a whole. Most previous research has only examined representation as compared to national population statistics. This study goes a step further by examining the representation at a local level to account for advertisements developed specifically for a given marketplace.

Second, the research examines the presence of ethnic stereotypes in character portrayals in this same advertising. Specifically, it examines advertised product category, ethnic interaction, and importance of role portrayed by ethnic characters. As it is a study examining the presence of stereotypes, this research uses the stereotyped group (i.e., negatively stereotyped ethnicities versus positively stereotyped ethnicities) as the objects of analysis as compared to distinct ethnic groups. In other words, this study provides a *current state of the practice* of children's television advertising with regard to the frequency with which advertisers are using ethnically diverse children, as well as presenting them in roles that may positively or negatively affect perceptions of child viewers.

Applying Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) as a guiding paradigm, this study adds to the current body of literature by examining new aspects of children's television advertising and by studying each of the three largest minority groups represented in the United States in one study. While this research provides a current state of the practice of children's television advertising, due to what is known about the potential for children to use media as an agent in building their self-concepts, the research contributes to public policy and the effects of advertising

on children in addition to advertising theory and practice.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Bandura's (1977) SCT contends that human functioning is the product of a dynamic interplay of personal, behavioral, and environmental influences. One very powerful environmental influence is media. Important to the present study, SCT further suggests that viewers of television "learn" from exposure to the medium (Bandura, 1986, 2002). SCT serves as a foundation to guide this research because of the public policy implications of what children take away from advertising targeted toward them. Specifically, the way in which character roles are portrayed on television influences how viewers interpret and respond to the characters (Bandura, 2002). In line with SCT, Duckitt (1992) discusses that media can convey all sorts of ethnic prejudices in various ways, including stereotyping and showing minorities in a disproportionate number of "bad" roles. With regard to children, Shrum, Wyer, and O'Guinn (1998) state that children's thoughts and beliefs regarding ethnic minorities are influenced by the messages and images they see on television, both programming and advertising. Furthermore, previous research also suggests that children more often identify with, and aspire to be like, media characters of their own race (Greenberg and Atkin, 1982). These authors further suggest that television is a major learning mechanism for children. This line of thought would suggest that children may be particularly vulnerable to racial and ethnic stereotypes presented in television advertising. Thus, from a policy perspective, SCT would suggest that if portrayals of racial stereotypes exist on television, they have the potential to affect children's perceptions of ethnicity. The current study examines to what degree these

Children's thoughts and beliefs regarding ethnic minorities are influenced by the messages and images they see on television, both programming and advertising.

stereotypes are evident in children's television advertising.

LITERATURE REVIEW

While much of children's advertising research has focused on consumer socialization (Macklin, 1987), product and brand evaluations (Macklin, 1994), consumption (Moore and Lutz, 2000), and children's understanding of the intent of advertising (Macklin, 1987), it has also explored the significant issues of *race/ethnicity representation* as well as the *ethnic character portrayals* in children's television advertising. Given the amount of television advertising directed at children, the increased sophistication of the medium, and the increased diversity in the United States today, motivation to expand the knowledge of the content of this powerful advertising medium continues to exist. Knowledge of the content can lead the way to important policy implications. In fact, in the June 2004 issue of the *Monitor on Psychology* from the American Psychological Association (APA), one of the recommendations made by the APA Task Force on Advertising to Children is to "encourage more rigorous industry self-regulation" (Dittman, 2004). The current research provides information regarding potential areas for self-regulation. Important to the current study is literature addressing the frequency of representation of minorities in children's television commercials, as well as the types of roles portrayed by minorities in these commercials—specifically, stereotypical ethnic portrayals.

MINORITY REPRESENTATION IN CHILDREN'S TELEVISION ADVERTISING

Prior to the late 1960s, minority representation was absent in children's advertising (Rossiter, 1980). In the late 1970s, Barcus (1977) and Atkin and Heald (1977) both conducted content analyses of minority representation in children's television advertising. Results from these studies indicated that minorities were represented by numbers lower than their representation in the population. This was especially true for African American characters, while other minorities were almost totally nonexistent. Elkin and Handel (1989) later found that about 20 percent of advertisements included Caucasians with non-Caucasian characters. In a qualitative study, Seiter (1990) concluded that minority representation was comprised mainly of African American children with virtually no other minority representation in children's television advertising at that time. By 1997, the racial and ethnic composition of children's advertising was still predominately Caucasian, followed by African American and Asian (Furnham, Abramsky, and Gunter, 1997). More recently, Merskin (2002) concluded that 50 percent of children's advertising on a cable channel sample used exclusively Caucasian characters. Slightly more than one-third of the sample showed mixed racial representation.

Finally, in a recent content analysis, Bang and Reece (2003) concluded that African Americans and Asians were actually overrepresented as compared to their fre-

quency in the U.S. population and Hispanic Americans were underrepresented.

While these studies indicate increased racial diversity in children's advertising, the present research furthers this stream of research by providing a current state of the practice of ethnic representation in children's television advertising. Similar to other studies (Bang and Reece, 2003; Bristor, Lee, and Hunt, 1995), this frequency of representation is determined using the proportionality criterion as recommended by Taylor and Stern (1997). Specifically, similar to Taylor and Stern's (1997) research with prime-time television commercials, the current research also investigates "frequency of representation." This means that the presence of each ethnicity is evaluated by means of the proportionality criterion that states that the total minority representation should approximate each minority's proportion in the population (Faber, O'Guinn, and Meyer, 1987). While many researchers use the national population figures, due to target marketing strategies, there exists rationale for making the comparison using local census figures as well. One may question whether it is even appropriate for television advertising to be collectively reflective of the population norms of the United States, given the differences in minority populations across the country. In fact, advertisers often adapt their advertisements to a particular market. With this in mind, previous research has examined the frequency of representation of minority characters by geographic market to determine if there are differences in this representation by market area (Stevenson and McIntyre, 1995); however, the proportionality criterion was not used as recently suggested (Taylor and Stern, 1997). The comparison population used in this study is that where the data were collected [i.e., Philadelphia, PA and New Jersey Primary Metropolitan Statistical Area

(PMSA)] in addition to the overall national population figures. The PMSA data would reflect the televised media market for the sample. Thus, the following research question is presented:

RQ1: Is the proportion of children's television commercials portraying African Americans, Hispanics, Caucasians, and Asians equal to the proportion of these groups present in the population (national and local)?

MINORITY ROLES IN TELEVISION ADVERTISING: THE POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE STEREOTYPES

Right or wrong, undoubtedly there exist racial stereotypes characterizing various ethnicities. For instance, prevalent beliefs about African Americans can be quite negative. A survey of 1,200 Americans revealed that Americans' stereotypes of African Americans are that they are unintelligent, lazy, and live off of welfare (Anonymous, 1998). Ideological examinations of African-American representation in advertising report that subtle, cultural-based power roles conveyed in advertising vignettes reflect unfavorably on African Americans, and potentially on other non-Caucasian characters. Notably, issues of main character status, level of interaction between races, activity levels, and social status were key cues to character portrayal by race (Bristor, Lee, and Hunt, 1995). Similarly, Hsien-Chang and Kleiner (2003) found that Hispanics are also the victims of negative stereotypes as they are often seen as illegal immigrants who are lazy and are engaged in criminal activities.

While African Americans and Hispanics are often portrayed as less skilled or important, Caucasians and Asians are often cast in a positive light (Hsien-Chang and Kleiner, 2003). Asians "should score a

1600 on the SAT, play the violin or the piano, go to an Ivy League university and win enough scholarship money to pay for it, and aspire to be a brain surgeon" are popular beliefs about Asians (Columbia News Service, 2002).

This stereotype can be communicated to children via parents and peers who are both significant socialization agents. The question of whether this stereotype is presented in children's television advertising is investigated here by analyzing the variables most often used in content analytic studies of ethnic stereotyping. Specifically, this study examines the type of product advertised, the interaction between characters of different ethnic backgrounds, and the importance of the role portrayed by each ethnically stereotyped group. Previous research examining these variables in line with ethnic stereotyping is reviewed here.

ADVERTISED PRODUCT CATEGORY

Merskin's (2002) preliminary children's advertising research and Wilkes and Valencia's (1989) research with prime-time television advertising suggest that there are significant race-product category interactions. Specifically, research has documented that African Americans are often found in advertisements for snack/food products or products of low value (Bang and Reece, 2003; Barcus, 1977; Licata and Biswas, 1993), while Asians appear in commercials for products that symbolize affluence and work life, and less often in advertisements for home and social products. This finding was significantly different from other ethnic groups in a prime-time sample of advertisements (Taylor and Stern, 1997). Further, while in some studies Caucasians were not found to be associated with any particular product category (Licata and Biswas, 1993), they have been found to appear in advertisements for toys or products that are often

perceived to be more discretionary in nature (Atkin and Heald, 1977). These associations with various product categories may possibly play into ethnic stereotypes. Thus, this research investigates whether ethnic stereotypes relative to the advertised product category are found in the current state of practice in children's advertising. The following research question is presented:

RQ2: Are ethnic characters portrayed in advertisements for products that support/do not support ethnic stereotyping in children's television advertising?

ETHNIC INTERACTION

Wilkes and Valencia (1989), in their study examining African American and Hispanic role portrayals in network television, found that both Hispanics and African Americans appeared in predominantly ethnically integrated situations. In fact, they reported that in advertisements containing a Hispanic character, less than 0.5 percent of the total set of advertisements contained only Hispanics. Similar results were reported by Bang and Reece (2003) in their sample of children's advertisements. African Americans appeared by themselves in only 1 percent of the advertisements, while Hispanics and Asians never solely appeared without interaction with Caucasian characters. Moreover, Caucasian characters appeared by themselves in 47.5 percent of the advertisements in their sample. Thus, it appears that there has been very little ethnic interaction in television advertising (i.e., both adult and children's advertising). The following research question is presented to examine the current state of this phenomenon:

RQ3: Do ethnic characters interact with other advertising characters in a way that supports/does not sup-

port ethnic stereotypy in children's television advertising?

IMPORTANCE OF ROLE PORTRAYED

While descriptive research documents an increasing number of African Americans in advertising over time, a small body of empirical research on the portrayals of African Americans in print and television advertising tends to document in descriptive fashion the limited, subservient, and generally low threat roles African Americans assume in such advertising (Branthwaite and Pierce, 1990; Humphrey and Schuman, 1984; Taylor, Lee, and Stern, 1995). Much of this research noticed a tendency to relegate the minority figure to a lower importance status, often described as typical of female treatment in advertisements (Humphrey and Schuman, 1984; Merskin, 2002; Wilkes and Valencia, 1989).

Very little research is devoted to Hispanics in advertising (Czepiec and Kelly, 1983; Greenberg and Baptista-Fernandez, 1980). The small amount of advertising research examining the roles of Hispanics has been lumped in with African American research, or with other groups (Appiah, 2001; Stevenson and McIntyre, 1995; Taylor, Lee, and Stern, 1995; Wilkes and Valencia, 1989). Wilkes and Valencia (1989) investigated the differences of major, minor, and background role portrayals by race and ethnicity and lamented that the sheer lack of identified Hispanics in the advertisements prohibited statistical analysis. This shortcoming was validated in the present study as well. The lack of representation of Hispanics and the small number of Asians portrayed in the current sample of children's television commercials would have precluded separate analysis by race.

Very little empirical research has explored the role of Asians in children's advertising. To date, research in adult ad-

vertising has primarily examined Caucasian perceptions of Asian models (Cohen, 1992) and described their representations in magazines. These descriptive studies conclude that Asians are portrayed in roles as hard-working, competent, serious, and well assimilated (Schmid and Bowen, 1995; Taylor and Lee, 1994). Labeled a "model minority," Asians continue to be stereotyped positively in advertising media and project a privileged minority group, similar to Caucasians. They are a cultural group with strong familial traditions; and thus, the predominance of technical and business role portrayals at the expense of familial settings projects an inaccurate image to non-Asians and a hollow portrayal to Asians (Taylor and Stern, 1997). Given the above literature, the current study examines the importance of the role portrayed relative to these stereotypes. The following research question is presented:

RQ4: Are ethnic characters portrayed in roles that support/do not support ethnic stereotypy in children's television advertising?

As can be seen from the review of relevant literature, there is evidence of ethnic stereotypes in advertising. However, it is still somewhat unknown to what extent children's television advertising perpetuates these stereotypes as assessed by frequency of representation (i.e., compared to national and local population figures), advertised product category, ethnic interaction, and role portrayed. The current research examines each of these variables in one study and analyzes the data by comparing the stereotyped groups. Therefore, in a study examining the presence of stereotypes, it is important to use the stereotyped group as the unit of analysis. Specifically, African Americans and Hispanics are grouped together as they share a similar disadvantaged and nega-

tive stereotype. Likewise, Asians and Caucasians are grouped together because of the similar positive advantages in their stereotypes.

METHOD

Content analysis was used to examine the sample of advertisements (Kassarjian, 1977; Kolbe and Burnett, 1991). Coding variables were identified from previous research on ethnic inclusion and portrayals in advertising (Bang and Reece, 2003; Bristol, Lee, and Hunt, 1995; Maher and Childs, 2003; Merskin, 2002; Stevenson and McIntyre, 1995; Taylor and Stern, 1997; Wilkes and Valencia, 1989). See Table 2 for the measures and literature sources of the variables.

Sample of commercials

The current sample of children's commercials was taped from four television networks (ABC, CBS, NBC, FOX), and one cable channel (Nickelodeon) after school for five days and on Saturday and Sunday mornings during one week in the month of March. These days and times were chosen as they are those in which children are most often exposed to television, and the programming had the largest children's viewing audience. Care was taken to select a time period not occurring near a child focused holiday that might skew the products advertised. In total, 215 commercials were recorded. Including only advertisements that contained at least one human character and excluding Public Service Announcements (PSAs), adult commercials, and network promotional messages, the final sample consisted of 155 advertisements, including duplicate advertisements. Previous content analytic research on televised advertisements included duplicate advertisements in the analysis (Bang and Reece, 2003; Stevenson and McIntyre, 1995; Taylor and Stern, 1997; Wilkes and

TABLE 2
Measures and Literature Sources for Coded Characteristics

Characteristic	Measures	Literature Source
Race or ethnicity	African American	Merskin (2002)
	Asian	Stevenson and McIntyre (1995)
	Caucasian	Wilkes and Valencia (1989)
	Hispanic	
Role portrayed	Major	Taylor and Stern (1997)
	Minor	Stevenson and McIntyre (1995)
	Background	Wilkes and Valencia (1989)
Ethnic interaction	Racially mixed	Taylor and Stern (1997)
	Not racially mixed	Bristor, Lee, and Hunt (1995) Wilkes and Valencia (1989)
Product category	Food	Maher and Childs (2003)
	Restaurant	Taylor and Stern (1997)
	Toys	
	Other	

Valencia, 1989). While some research has not included duplicates, Kassarian (1969) states that there is no *a priori* reason for choosing one approach over another. Furthermore, Wilkes and Valencia (1989) concluded that the removal of duplicate advertisements did not significantly alter findings and Taylor and Stern (1997) suggest that the inclusion of duplicate advertisements actually allows for a more accurate representation of ethnic portrayals. The authors took great care in excluding adult commercials. The advertised products were clearly children's products as developed and targeted by the marketer (e.g., Captain Crunch Cereal, Hot Wheels, Chuck E. Cheese's Restaurants) and aired during children's programming (e.g., *Rugrats*). About 90 percent of the sample consisted of children's advertisements for food/beverage, toy, and restaurant advertisements. The remaining 10

percent included children's advertisements for electronics, magazines, and retailers.

Coding procedure

Procedures recommended by Kolbe and Burnett (1991) to enhance reliability were used in the content analysis: clear coding rules and procedures, coder training, and the use of independent coders not involved with the research. An important finding presented in the literature on race and ethnicity in advertising, including children's advertising, is the interactivity of the viewer and the coder, with the ethnicity and race of the characters portrayed. The literature reports a rich and complex process of identification and crossover between the viewer's heritage and the heritage of the characters present in the advertisement. Caucasians seem to have more ability to crossover and identify with

characters of various backgrounds, or perhaps they crossover more easily because they are less sensitive to racial and ethnic cues (Faber, O'Guinn, and Meyer, 1987; Merskin, 2002; Wilkes and Valencia, 1989). Several studies stressed the importance of using multiple coders representing different races and ethnicities to assure unbiased data collection (Faber, O'Guinn, and Meyer, 1987; Wilkes and Valencia, 1989). For this reason, individuals representing African American, Asian, Hispanic, and Caucasian backgrounds were recruited to participate in the coding process.

The coders were hired by one of the authors and given a codebook containing definitions, coding rules, and procedures on the use of the coding sheet. Furthermore, coders received brief training and practiced coding 10 commercials. A second author conducted the training and answered any questions regarding the definitions of the variables and procedures. Another author operated the video equipment for the coders and remained in the viewing room for the duration of the coding process. Coders worked independently and were not permitted to discuss the advertisements among themselves or with the author. Because of the training and practice provided to the coders, it should be noted that the results presented here most likely reflect the actual incidence of minorities and stereotypes in children's advertising, as compared to what the casual observer would assess without direction, training, and viewing practice.

Coding rules and variables. The operational definitions provided in the codebooks most closely parallel those used by Maher and Childs (2003), Merskin (2002), Stevenson and McIntyre (1995), Wilkes and Valencia (1989), and Taylor and Stern (1997). The independent coders examined the advertisements for the following variables: (1) presence of African Americans,

(2) presence of Asians, (3) presence of Hispanics, (4) presence of Caucasians, (5) product category, (6) ethnic interaction, and (7) role portrayed. To assess the ethnic portrayals in children's advertising, the advertisements were examined at the character level (i.e., actual portrayals) in addition to the advertisement level. Up to four characters in each advertisement were coded, although some advertisements had fewer than four characters.

Variable definitions

Minority representation was determined by examining the presence of ethnic characters (i.e., Caucasians, African Americans, Asians, or Hispanics). Presence of ethnic characters was simply coded as "yes" if that particular ethnic character appeared or "no" if that particular ethnic character did not appear in the advertisement.

The coder was instructed to categorize the advertised product for the *product category* variable in one of the following common children's product categories: (1) toys, (2) food or beverage, (3) restaurant, and (4) other, comprised of various categories.

Ethnic interaction was defined as the interaction (e.g., speaking or playing together) between/among actors of different ethnicity (Stevenson and McIntyre, 1995). The coder was instructed to code this variable as "mixed"—character of different ethnicity interacting with a character of another race, or "not mixed"—characters of different ethnicity present, but not interacting together, or simply characters in the advertisement are of one ethnicity, or only one character is present in the advertisement.

Role in the advertisement was defined as the importance of the ethnic character in the advertisement (Taylor and Stern, 1997; Wilkes and Valencia, 1989). The coder categorized each ethnic character in one of three categories. A character was coded as being in a "major role" when the charac-

ter was very important to the advertising theme or layout, shown in the foreground, or shown holding the product. A "minor role" classification was used when the character was seen as having average importance to the advertising theme or layout. These characters are not spotlighted and do not handle the product, but they are not difficult to notice in the advertisement when casually looking at it. Finally, a "background role" was used when the character was difficult to find in the advertisement, and ultimately not important to the overall advertising layout or theme.

RESULTS

Reliability

The reliability index as proposed by Perreault and Leigh (1989) and used by other researchers investigating ethnic portrayals in advertising (Taylor and Stern, 1997) was used to calculate rigorously the agreement between the coders for the ethnic representation variable. The reliabilities for this variable exceed 0.85, the standard recommended by Kassarian (1977). Reliability estimates based on the Perreault and Leigh (1989) index are 0.88 for presence of African American models, 0.91 for presence of Asian models, 0.97 for presence of Caucasian models, and 0.94 for presence of Hispanic models. The authors of the study worked together, independent of the coders, in resolving disputes in these codings.

For ethnic interaction and importance of role portrayed variables, intercoder reliability was computed when the authors could determine that raters coded the same character in the advertisement. Because coders could code up to four characters in each advertisement, when there was more than one character of a particular ethnic background, the authors could not determine which character had been coded by each judge. Thus, intercoder reliability was

assessed on 33 characters for ethnic interaction and the importance of role portrayed. Reliability estimates based on the Perreault and Leigh (1989) index are 0.86 for ethnic interaction and 0.79 for role portrayed. In advertisements where there was more than one character for a particular ethnicity, a single coder was used. The strong reliabilities computed with the subset of characters provide a level of assurance that codings were done in a proper manner, consistent with coding instructions and variable definitions.

Minority representation

Table 3 reports the frequencies with which ethnic characters appeared in recorded commercials versus the frequencies with which they could be expected to appear based on the distribution of ethnic groups in the local market where the commercials were broadcasted, as well as nationally. To estimate what the expected distribution of commercial characters should be in the Philadelphia market and nationally, the authors multiplied the ethnic percentages from the 2000 U.S. Census/PMSA data times the number of characters in the sample.

Relative to RQ1, a statistically significant difference was found in the relative frequency of minority representation ($\chi^2 = 19.60, p < 0.001$) in the characters in the sample of advertisements compared to local census figures. African Americans are represented by 14.1 percent ($n = 57$) of the characters, which is less than their proportion in the Philadelphia population (17.7 percent). Though the negative z-score ($z = -1.72, p < 0.10$) fails to reach significance, their representation in the sample of advertisements falls short of the proportionality criterion. Similarly, Hispanics are represented by 1.5 percent ($n = 6$) of the characters in the sample while comprising 5.7 percent in the Philadelphia market. They are significantly underrepresented in the

TABLE 3

Proportional Representation of Ethnic Groups in Commercial Sample in Comparison with Local (Philadelphia) Market Census Data ($n = 404$)

Ethnicity	Sample Observed Frequencies	Sample Observed Proportions	Philadelphia Census Proportions	Sample Expected Frequencies	Relative Squared Residual	z
African American	57	0.141	0.177	71.51	2.94	-1.72
Asian	11	0.027	0.032	12.93	0.029	0.54
Caucasian	330	0.817	0.734	296.54	3.78	1.94 ^a
Hispanic	6	0.015	0.057	23.03	12.59	-3.55 ^a
Total	404	1.000	1.000	404	$\chi^2 = 19.60^b$	

^a $p < 0.05$; ^b $p < 0.001$

Notes: Relative squared residual = $(O - E)^2/E$ for each cell, which when summed provides the value of χ^2 . The z -statistic is the square root of the relative squared residual or more conventionally $(O - E)/\sqrt{E}$, which designates the appropriate + or - sign (Koopmans, 1987).

Source: U.S. Census (2000)

sample of advertisements ($z = -3.55, p < 0.001$). While not statistically significant, Asians fall short of the proportionality criterion as well, with a representation of only 2.7 percent ($n = 11$) of the characters in the sample while comprising 3.2 percent in the Philadelphia market. These deficits result in a higher proportion of Caucasian characters than warranted by census figures. Caucasian characters were represented in 81.7 percent ($n = 330$) of the advertising characters, while their actual proportion in the Philadelphia market is 73.4 percent ($z = 1.94, p < 0.05$) (see Table 3).

Interestingly, when comparing the frequency of minority representation of advertising characters to national census figures, a statistically significant difference was again found ($\chi^2 = 20.56, p < 0.001$). However, an examination of the z scores indicates that the significance is in the Hispanic category. Hispanics who represent 5.3 percent of the national population are again underrepresented ($z = -3.33, p < 0.001$). Although not significantly so, Asian representation falls short of the proportionality criterion (3.7 percent of the

national population) while the representation of Caucasians and African Americans exceeds the criterion as they constitute 75.1 and 12.3 percent of the national population, respectively.

Product category

In accordance with RQ2, significant differences in the representation of ethnic stereotypes by advertised product category were found in the sample of advertisements ($\chi^2 = 16.68, p < 0.01$). Table 4 depicts large differences in the restaurant and toy product categories. The negative stereotyped groups (i.e., African Americans and Hispanics) are largely overrepresented in restaurant advertisements, while Caucasians and Asians, the positively stereotyped groups, are much more likely to appear in toy advertisements than African Americans and Hispanics (see Table 4).

Ethnic interaction

The ethnic interaction in the sample of advertisements for the stereotyped groups is shown in Table 5. This comparison of

ethnic interaction among the various stereotypes produces a statistically significant difference ($\chi^2 = 57.32, p < 0.001$). In relation to RQ3, a member of the African American and Hispanic group interacted with a character of another ethnicity (predominantly Caucasian) in 90.2 percent of the character roles, while Caucasians and Asians were involved in this type of interaction in only 37.7 percent of the character roles. Thus, Caucasians and Asians were often found to have no interaction at all (62.3 percent of character roles) (see Table 5).

Role portrayed

The role portrayed by ethnic characters in the sample of advertisements is indicated in Table 6. To examine RQ4, characters in each of the advertisements were coded as having major, minor, or background roles. A comparison between the two ethnic stereotyped groups produces a significant difference ($\chi^2 = 9.73, p < 0.01$). African Americans and Hispanics are underrepresented in major roles and overrepresented in minor roles (see Table 6).

TABLE 4
Ethnic Representation by Advertised Product Category
(*n* = 155)

	African American Hispanic	Caucasian Asian	Total
Food	10 (41.7%)	48 (36.6%)	58 (37.4%)
Restaurants	11 (45.8%)	19 (14.5%)	30 (19.4%)
Toys	2 (8.3%)	49 (37.4%)	51 (32.9%)
Others	1 (4.2%)	15 (11.5%)	16 (10.3%)
Total	24 (100%)	131 (100%)	155 (100%)

$\chi^2 = 16.68; p < 0.01$

TABLE 5
Ethnic Interaction in Advertisements (*n* = 398)

	African American Hispanic	Caucasian Asian	Total
<i>Interaction</i>			
Mixed	55 (90.2%)	127 (37.7%)	182 (45.7%)
Not mixed	6 (9.8%)	210 (62.3%)	216 (54.3%)
Total	61 (100%)	337 (100%)	398 (100%)

$\chi^2 = 57.32; p < 0.001$

DISCUSSION

In today's increasingly diverse society, American children are deeply engaged in television viewing. An understanding of the content of this medium is important due to its powerful influence. This current state of the practice research used the proportionality criterion and examined the frequency of representation of ethnic mi-

norities in children's television advertising as compared to their representation in both the local broadcast area population and the national population. Furthermore, the study investigated the presence of ethnic stereotypes in children's television advertising by specifically examining whether the stereotypes were evident in the advertised product, ethnic interaction,

and importance of role portrayed by ethnic characters.

Overall, results suggest that the frequency of ethnic representation in children's television advertising is not proportional to the ethnic representation in the major metropolitan city in which the advertisements appear. Specifically, African Americans, Hispanics, and Asians are underrepresented as compared to the local market, while Caucasians are overrepresented. Moreover, the frequency of minority representation in the sample of advertisements better reflects the national minority population; however, Hispanics are still underrepresented significantly when national statistics are the figures of comparison. While there were no other statistically significant differences between the representation of minorities in the sample and their representation in the United States, these findings support the notion that the advertisers may follow national norms, rather than the local ethnic makeup, when minority inclusion is of consideration.

Additionally, the research findings support the notion that children's advertising contains ethnic stereotypes by using more of the positively stereotyped characters, Caucasians and Asians, to advertise products of categories considered more discretionary or more sophisticated than food products. These would include items such as toys, electronics, and magazines. Similarly, the positively stereotyped Caucasians and Asians appeared in more major roles and interacted less often with African American and Hispanic characters. Also, Caucasians and Asians are shown less engaged in interaction with other ethnic minorities. While the advertising intent is not hostile or hateful in any way, the messages exhibit an "avoidant form of discrimination" as described by Bristol, Lee, and Hunt (1995) whereby minorities, with the exception of Asians, are shown in lesser roles and in lesser numbers than

The frequency of ethnic representation in children's television advertising is not proportional to the ethnic representation in the major metropolitan city in which the advertisements appear.

they merit. Ethnic minorities in this sample of advertisements were presented in ways that play into popular ethnic stereotypes. Duckitt (1992) suggests that media can convey ethnic prejudices by stereotyping and showing minorities in a disproportionate number of inferior roles. The current research suggests that advertising also plays into this stereotype by portraying minorities in "less important" roles. This problem can be further exacerbated by the national norming of ethnic representation in commercials, because commercial portrayals may have even greater influence in markets where small minority populations limit the countervailing influence of real-world interaction with minority children.

Implications and recommendations for advertising practice

Social Cognitive Theory suggests that children learn about reality from the interplay of personal, behavioral, and environmental influences. Television is an important influence that provides children with information about the world in which they live. This occurs through children's identification with television characters (Bandura, 2002). While previous research documents that children's thoughts and beliefs regarding ethnic minorities are influenced by the messages and images seen on TV (Shrum, Wyer, and O'Guinn, 1998), portrayals of ethnic stereotypes may thus negatively impact this identification process.

Results from the current research suggest that this would be dramatically so for African American and Hispanic children. Consistent with SCT, these children may develop a sense of inferiority due to the unimportant roles and lack of ethnic interaction afforded to these ethnicities in children's television advertising. At the same time, Caucasian and Asian children may develop a false sense of superiority, potentially contributing to prejudices. Our results suggest that the current state of children's television advertising reflects popular ethnic stereotypes as well as supports previous research on the use of ethnic minorities in children's television.

As CARU charges advertisers to "have special responsibility to protect children from their own susceptibilities," and to "take special care to incorporate minorities and other groups in children's advertising in order to present positive role models . . .," then this is an area for self-regulation and a commitment to analyze further this phenomenon and address any areas of deficiency to adhere to guidelines.

While these results are the current state of practice, there are future implications as well. As television is the bridge to new and more interactive web-based media and its accompanying commercial messages, advertisers must recognize some of the benefits of using more minorities and portraying the negatively stereotyped minorities in a more positive light. From a marketing perspective, Deshpande and Stayman (1994) state that members of minority groups are apt to perceive a spokesperson from their own minority group as more trustworthy and believable, yielding more favorable brand evaluations. The current research documents that African Americans and Hispanics are portrayed in less important roles. Thus, it seems that children of these ethnic groups could perceive the advertising to be less credible

TABLE 6
Role Portrayed by Ethnic Group ($n = 398$)

	African American Hispanic	Caucasian Asian	Total
<i>Role portrayed</i>			
Major	15 (23.8%)	115 (34.3%)	130 (32.7%)
Minor	46 (73%)	178 (53.1%)	224 (56.3%)
Background	2 (3.2%)	42 (12.5%)	44 (11.1%)
Total	63 (100%)	335 (100%)	398 (100%)

$\chi^2 = 9.73; p < 0.01$

The positively stereotyped Caucasians and Asians appeared in more major roles and interacted less often with African American and Hispanic characters.

due to the minimal use of main characters from their own ethnic background. This is an empirical question, but if it is the case, then advertisers may not succeed in building trust, favorable evaluations, and brand loyalty among these groups.

Furthermore, Stevenson and McIntyre (1995) also provide persuasive business arguments for including Hispanics in meaningful roles and in representative numbers in advertising messages. They suggest that Hispanics will be more brand loyal to products that are advertised with Hispanic representation. While this is a growth population with similar potential to Caucasians for developing habits of life-long brand loyalty, they were under-represented in this sample of children's television advertising.

It is possible that advertisers are using the "short-cut" approach to ethnic inclusion in their advertisements by merely including one minority figure as the token representative for all nonwhites. This

leaves a major preponderance of white representation at the expense of representing other ethnic groups. Thus, this could lessen opportunities to build brand image with rapidly growing consumer ethnic segments.

Lastly, our research provides a basis for marketers, especially in identified product categories, to ask if they are optimizing their message delivery if their advertising displays negative stereotyping for certain ethnic groups that represent higher population and market growth.

This research also gives compelling reasons for advertisers to consider creative development that digitizes cartoon characters and personified animals and inanimate objects with the product. Using ethnically and gender neutral presentations bypasses the concerns raised in this research. Looking ahead at an increasingly multi and mixed race society, and increasingly diverse immigrant backgrounds, this approach may best serve all

The current research documents that African Americans and Hispanics are portrayed in less important roles. Thus, it seems that children of these ethnic groups could perceive the advertising to be less credible due to the minimal use of main characters from their own ethnic background.

young consumers. Our children are the first to reflect the increasing diversity in our population.

Limitations and areas for future research

Our research demonstrates the current state of practice with regard to the use of ethnic minorities and the portrayals of ethnic stereotypes in children's television commercials. There are several limitations that we would like to discuss. First, we used a convenience sample of children's commercials aired during one week in one geographic area. This precludes any generalizations to a larger population. Future research should address this generalizability limitation by using different samples, including different market areas during different times of the year. This future research should utilize the proportionality criterion to allow for longitudinal comparisons. This type of comparison is important as our society continues to become more diverse. The proportionality criterion should be used to assess representativeness to local and national population statistics. Other geographic areas, as compared to the Philadelphia market, like Miami and San Antonio, would be interesting for comparison purposes as they have a larger number of Hispanics in their populations.

Second, in examinations of ethnic stereotypes, it is important to code data at the character level, in addition to the advertisement level to get a true sense of the roles portrayed and the type of ethnic interaction in the advertisement. However, a difficult challenge for this type of coding is assessing the reliability among multiple raters, as they can be coding different characters simultaneously. For this reason, in our research, we could assess inter-rater reliability on only a subset of the characters in the sample where we were sure that the coders were analyzing the same character. Future research should

try to minimize this limitation by perhaps taking a still picture of the commercial and then identifying the characters in the commercial with numbers, letters, or symbols for all coders to use.

Finally, while SCT guided this research, the study did not test this theory with children of various ethnicities, relative to their exposure to television advertising. Future research should analyze children's perceptions of ethnic stereotypes presented in television advertising to determine to what extent children "learn" these stereotypes and then use them in their processing of other stimuli. This type of research would extend the present content analytic research and could additionally address a point raised in the APA Task Force Recommendations on Advertising and Children that states, "future research should examine whether understanding advertising's persuasive intent and its effects differ among genders, races, ethnicities, and cultures" (Dittman, 2004). Therefore, it would be interesting to ask children of various ethnicities about their understanding of the intent and the messages presented in commercials that target children. This would help reveal what effect a television-created reality (e.g., one depicting stereotypical images) has on children's understanding and expectations about the world in which they live. Because SCT as well as cognitive development theories suggest that young children cannot make distinctions between television and reality, future research should compare the perceptions of racial/ethnic portrayals among children of different age groups (i.e., age groups representing different levels of cognitive ability).

The agenda for further research we have proposed is extensive to say the least. Critical readers could even fault us for promoting conflicting industry goals. On one hand, we are implicitly urging ethical advertisers to be aware of the negative

On one hand, we are implicitly urging ethical advertisers to be aware of the negative consequences of negative portrayals. On the other, we are telling aggressive marketers they may be able to exploit ethnicity and use it to build brand loyalty.

consequences of negative portrayals. On the other, we are telling aggressive marketers they may be able to exploit ethnicity and use it to build brand loyalty. At the heart of the problem, we believe, is recognition of the fact that stereotypes have naturally evolved in human thinking, because like any mental schema, they allow the brain to facilitate cognitive processing by chunking information. Stereotypes, for good or bad, permit faster processing of messages. Given the time constraints of broadcast spots, we are not about to escape their positive or negative influence. Thus, the current state of practice is always an area of public policy and ethical concern.

Today's children are subject to a growing quantity of advertising in a variety of forums with increasing sophistication. Advancing techniques of web-based advertising and interactive TV suggest that an understanding of the nature and impact of children's television advertising is critical. This study quantifies the representation of ethnic stereotypes in children's advertising, and the quality of this representation in terms of how the character is portrayed (e.g., main character, role importance, interactivity, and product association). To this end, this article provides an important assessment of the state of the practice of children's television advertising and reveals an imperfect world. We live in an increasingly diverse

society, and this diversity is most magnified among our youngest and most vulnerable consumers. **JAR**

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