

Changing the Game: Racial and Ethnic Minority Depictions in Advertisements in *Sports Illustrated* Magazine

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Racial and ethnic minorities are growing as a percentage of the U.S. population. From 1940 to 2000 alone, the percentage of non-Hispanic White residents decreased from 88.4% of the U.S. population (Census Bureau 2002) to 75.1% (Census Bureau 2000). At the same time, Hispanics grew from 1.4% to 12.5%; African-Americans grew from 9.8% to 12.3%; Asians from 0.2% to 3.6%. As a result of this growth and increasing sensitivity to minority groups inspired by minority rights and consumer movements starting in the 1960s, there is an increasing focus on minority markets. How demographic changes and business's responses to them are impacting society are popular and important areas of study (Stern 1999).

Media, in particular advertising, provide both an archival record and normative guide for the consumer culture (Belk and Pollay 1985; Goffman 1979). Studying advertisements can provide valuable information both on how societal views evolve and on the sorts of behavioral standards being conveyed. Such aspects of ads as the frequency of appearances of multi-cultural models and their representation within the context of the advertisements can be used to show the evolving role of minorities in the larger society over time.

The purpose of this study is to build upon the past work of Kassirjian (1969) and Taylor and Lee (1994). In these studies, the authors conducted content analyses of advertisements in order to chronicle changes in depictions of minority groups in society. This study will both explore the increasing frequency with which minority models are represented in print advertisements and will assess how their representations change over time. It uses a periodization originally proposed by Clark (1969) and adapted by Branchik (2007) to place these changes within their historical context. This framework asserts that minority groups go through phases in media depictions beginning with invisibility and ending with diverse depictions. In between these bookend phases, groups are depicted in ways stereotypical to their respective group.

The author completed a content analysis of fifty-one years of advertisements in *Sports Illustrated* (SI), a weekly magazine targeting a primarily male readership with a total paid subscription of over 3 million readers (Sports Illustrated 2006). The author and a research assistant

analyzed advertisements for male grooming products and fashion/apparel in five randomly-selected issues per year from its inception in 1954 through 2004. This number of issues represents about ten percent of total SI issues. The author followed Kassirjian's (1977) guidelines to ensure an objective, systematic, and quantifiable content analysis.

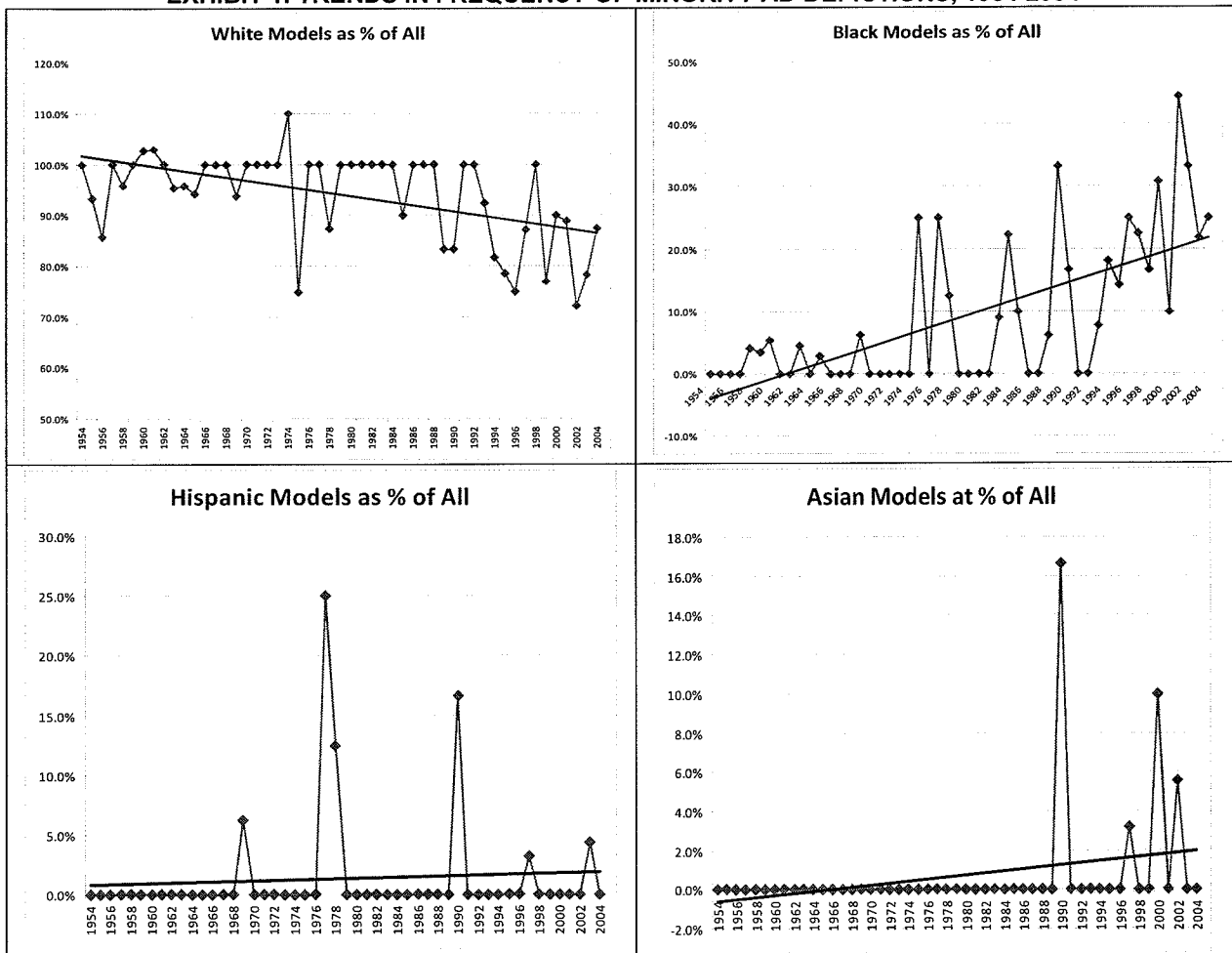
Government and industry-created categorization schemes for grooming and fashion products determined which product advertisements the study would analyze. Over 1100 advertisements in randomly selected issues were photographed and issue/date recorded. Approximately 70 advertisements were removed from the analysis. Several were found to be for watches and shoes, categories not analyzed per the industry-provided categorization scheme. A few others were for fabrics or fabric treatment processes rather than apparel itself. Ultimately 1031 advertisements were coded. Two coders, the author and a graduate research assistant, recorded the presence, number, and apparent ethnicity of any models featured in each ad; the presence of product image and/or body copy; and product category. Ethnic categories included White, Black (African-American), Hispanic, Asian, and other. Those containing models of color were further analyzed as to their position and role in the advertisement.

The coders conducted five rounds of analysis of 25 sample advertisements each to become accustomed to the process, refine the coding form, and improve inter-coder reliability. As a result of this process, inter-coder reliability increased from .50 to .915. This result exceeded Kassirjian's (1977) .79 guideline. An embedded test-retest of a sample of 50 ads was completed for intracoder reliability of .95.

Preliminary analysis reveals the following:

There were virtually no Black models in any of the advertisements until 1958; no discernible Hispanic models until 1969; and no Asian models until 1990. By contrast, in the ten-year period from 1995 to 2004, Black models appeared in 24.4%, Hispanics in 0.8% and Asians in 1.9%

EXHIBIT 1. TRENDS IN FREQUENCY OF MINORITY AD DEPICTIONS, 1954-2004



Linear trendlines show a definite downward direction for White models (as percentage of models in all ads), while at the same time the trendline for Black models shows a definite upward trend. While Hispanic and Asian models both show an upward trend, the angle is much lower than with Black models. In particular, Hispanic models show the lowest upward trend of the three groups analyzed. This may be due to the difficulty in visually assessing the Hispanic background of a model without any other detail. Trendline tables are provided at Exhibit 1.

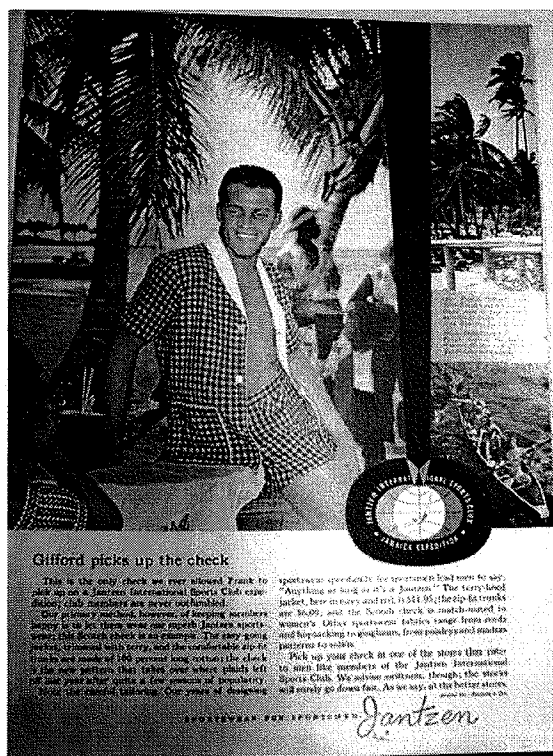
Early representations of Blacks in the ads tend to depict them in subservient or peripheral roles in the scenario being presented in the ad image. A 1960 example is provided at Exhibit 2. The use of celebrity athletes then increases the frequency of African-American images. The centrality of athletes to ads is not surprising given SI's theme. It is not until the mid-1990s that a diverse set of representations emerges.

Through the 1990s, Hispanic models tend to be sports celebrities with Hispanic names. However, models with

dark features – dark skin, hair, and eyes – tend to imply *Hispanicness* of the models. These characteristics do not necessarily mean the model is Hispanic. The use of models with these physical characteristics does, however, indicate a transition from light hair and blue or green eyes typically found in models early on in this study. A 1969 ad featuring a Hispanic model – the first noted in this study – is found at Exhibit 3.

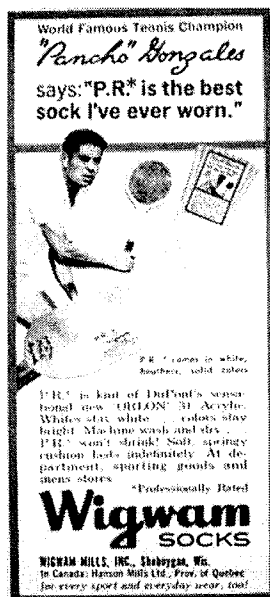
Asian images, although infrequent overall, reflect more diverse representations. This is indicative of the time period where Asian images begin to appear. By 1990, the industry effort to include more diverse representations in advertisements was well under way. It is worth noting that the product categories selected for this study omit technology products. Previous research indicates that Asian models are most often used for ads for technology-based products (Taylor and Lee 1994). It may be that this analysis of ads for clothing and grooming products impacted not only the frequency but also the depictions of Asian models. As a result, an analysis of ads for such

EXHIBIT 2. 1960 EXAMPLE OF BLACK MODEL (SEE BACKGROUND) IN ADVERTISEMENT FOR JANTZEN SWIMWEAR



Sports Illustrated Vol. 12, Issue 17, 1960

EXHIBIT 3. 1969 EXAMPLE OF HISPANIC MODEL IN ADVERTISEMENT FOR WIGWAM SOCKS



Sports Illustrated Vol. 30, Issue 1, P. 84, 1969

EXHIBIT 4. 1997 EXAMPLE OF ASIAN MODEL IN ADVERTISEMENT FOR LEVIS



Sports Illustrated Vol. 87, Issue 15, special insert, 1997

product categories as technology-based products may have provided more stereotypical representations (Taylor and Lee 1994). A 1997 example of an advertisement featuring an Asian model is provided at Exhibit 4.

The use and depiction of racial and ethnic minority models in advertising is increasing as the U.S. population becomes increasingly diverse and as industry itself reaches out to minority markets. This trend should continue with representations becoming more diverse over time. Stereotypical images, such as the Black athlete or Asian technology expert will continue, however, into the future.

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