

AN EXPERIMENT IN RACISM

TV Commercials

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This paper describes an experiment germane to the teaching of media literacy. It gives a quantitative account of interracial behavior, using a methodology which could be used in the approach to many other types of interpersonal interactions such as sexism or childism. In fact, it was a study of childism that led to this work (Pierce and Allen, 1975). The investigators hoped that by presenting the rationale and data of an experiment, teachers could extract principles which would aid them in making students hyperaware of television content. In that way citizens will become more expert in media consumption. Such sophistication would lead to more sensitive media production because of ever more informed critical discernment by the public.

The methodology evolved in an effort, which had some success, to bring to the attention of networks and sponsors

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how commercials fomented racism. The method depended on observers making before-the-fact statements about what the rules of American society would dictate concerning interpersonal interactions, e.g., which people would be depicted most often (more than by chance) in the serving as opposed to the served role. After such statements were elucidated, they were coded from actual TV content in order to be treated statistically.

Hence, the first step in this sort of experiment is the elaboration of statements of expected behavior. The subtlety, accuracy, and meticulousness of these statements depends on both the perception and theory of the observer. Thus it is important to realize that this, like any content analysis study, reflects the fraction of truth that the investigator professes. The recognition of this concept, though seemingly anti-scientific, is of especial concern to the execution and interpretation of racial studies. From the view of the authors, an interracial team, almost all that is taught and believed by American citizens about racism suffers seriously because of the failure to do studies from the viewpoint and theory of minority members. The study to be described is based on a theory of racism by a black.

THEORY

There are two component parts that persuade the theoretical aspects of this study. On the one hand is the theory of how TV affects individuals. On the other hand is the theory of how racism enters into TV content. The joining of these theoretical issues results in the statements of expected behavior that can be objectified and interpreted.

Therefore, the purpose of the theory is to develop a reliable and valid objective method of assessing the role played by television commercials in reinforcing or promoting racist

attitudes and behavior. A preliminary analysis by the authors of an unbiased sample of television commercials has demonstrated clearly and sufficiently that there are numerous and excessive negative representations of minority groups. It is contended that: (1) many such representations are gratuitous and unnecessary, and (2) that changing the content of these representations (which could be done easily and without thwarting creativity or profit-making) would help to fashion healthier and more effective interracial attitudes and behavior.

THEORY OF TV EFFECTS

It is argued by many that there is no proof that TV causes any effect on a viewer. Our theoretical position takes as an axiom that TV does cause effects. Further, we believe that observation of 2 year olds indicates that children can repeat and use correctly content material as seen on TV commercials. Therefore, it does not seem unlikely that the preliterate child, even before being able to talk, can be influenced by TV. Further, we hold that nearly any child up to age 5 has intellectual capabilities far in excess of nearly any adult. For example, such a child, at say age 3, can be learning several languages, the cues to a culture, and the rules of his household while attending to his surroundings at large, with variable degrees of curiosity. Few adults, if any, would be capable of negotiating such prodigious intellectual accomplishments. We believe that amongst the possible influences that enter into these accomplishments is the TV set.

The average consumer experiences 10,000 commercials each year. A child, however, is likely to hear at least 300,000 commercials before age 12. The amount of time viewing just commercials would be sufficient for even adults to learn a language or to learn how to fly an airplane.

When one realizes that by twelfth grade a child has spent more time before a TV set than he has in school, one can

appreciate the possible influence in molding behavior. The toddler and the octogenarian can repeat national slogans as they are performed on TV. *TV content probably both reflects and molds the society.*

It is this psychodynamic possibility that is addressed in the study. Since TV presents to any person—black, white, red, brown, yellow—old, young—rich, poor—male, female—what our society is, what it can be, what it ought to be—its influence on interpersonal actions is limitless. For many people the relatively passive acceptance of TV fare defines what is typical, what is desirable, what is probable, and what is possible. In fact, lower-income people, minorities, and children may be more likely to believe that what they see on television represents reality. Also, they probably are less likely to “tune out” commercials.

For these reasons, TV is a powerful, if not the most powerful, persuader in telling Americans how black and white should regard and treat each other. Hence, TV exerts immense influence in training people how to act toward other races and how other races should act toward them. When everyone is made aware of this training process, it may mean that ways can be found to alter it so as to insure more harmonious and just human relations.

THEORY OF RACISM

The present study is based on theoretical positions published previously (Pierce, 1969, 1970, 1973, 1974). Roughly, it is held that in the United States racism is a mental and public-health illness in which skin color determines whether or not one is expected to operate from an inferior or superior vantage point. Both races come to expect and accept as unremarkable, that the blacks' time, energy, space, and mobility will be at the service of the white. As a result, members of

both races are proracist, in that they permit, insist, encourage, and sustain that the black will be dependent and deferential (in regard to time, space, energy, mobility) in all interpersonal interactions. Further, both races expect and accept as unremarkable that the black will be under variable surveillance. These laws are so immutable as to operate with a mathematical precision. Therefore, they operate ubiquitously, including on TV and in TV commercials.

It is upon the application of these laws that a study can be built which would gather basic data for direct and systematic observation. These basic data can be analyzed in terms of categories that the theory of racism tells us are the important manifestations of proracist behavior. These categories of behavior are the critical means of training people to perform and accept such behavior.

The chief vehicle for proracist behaviors are microaggressions. These are subtle, stunning, often automatic, and non-verbal exchanges which are "put downs" of blacks by offenders. The offensive mechanisms used against blacks often are innocuous. The cumulative weight of their never-ending burden is the major ingredient in black-white interactions. This accounts for a near inevitable perceptual clash between blacks and whites in regard to how a matter is described as well as the emotional charge involved.

They can be sought on TV commercials to be counted. For example, in our society one would predict that on TV blacks would:

- (1) be seen less frequently than animals
- (2) never teach whites
- (3) be seen to eat more frequently than whites
- (4) have less involvement in family life
- (5) have less positive contacts with each other

- (6) more often work for wages
- (7) not live in the suburbs
- (8) entertain others
- (9) never initiate or control actions, situations, events
- (10) have less command of technology
- (11) have less command of space
- (12) be more concerned about bodily and/or sexual matters
- (13) be more often used for comedy
- (14) show more teeth
- (15) show wider opening of their eyes.

It is our view that TV is but one of a plethora of sources which spew out microaggressions through offensive mechanisms to blacks. In media alone, such microaggressions are daily occurrences in newspapers, radio programs, films, billboards, subway posters, textbooks, statues, and so on. Once a child, black or white, can diagnose these microaggressions and diagnose offense maneuvers, the child will think differently and perhaps behave differently. At least such awareness provides the possibility of no longer expecting and accepting as unremarkable that one group should always be life-shortening (in terms of rendering over time, space, energy, mobility) and the other life-transferring.

METHOD AND MATERIAL

DATA

The data for this study consist of two sets of videotaped commercials. The first set of 90 commercials comprises all commercials (duplications omitted) shown on adult prime

time TV (from 7:30 pm to 11:00 pm) on three consecutive nights in May 1972. These commercials occurred during shows that were all predominantly white, that is, white actors played all the major roles and whites were on camera 98% or more of the time. The second set consists of 100 commercials, half of which were videotaped during predominantly white prime-time shows, and half of which were obtained from predominantly black prime-time shows (shows in which blacks took major roles and could be expected to be on camera at least 50% of the time). Commercials in this set were videotaped continuously until the target numbers of 50 white-show commercials and 50 black-show commercials were reached. Not surprisingly, it took two nights of prime time viewing to complete the former quota but two *weeks* to achieve the latter since there were only five programs which qualified as black shows or three hours of programming per week from which to obtain the black-show sample. The average number of ads for the white shows of the first and second data sets was approximately 15 per hour, while the average number of ads for the black shows was closer to 12 per hour. In all, we accumulated 100 minutes of commercials from white shows and 24 minutes of commercials from black shows.

The two sets of data have been analyzed separately but for the purposes of this investigation we shall limit ourselves to reporting a study which combines the two sets and uses the same method of analysis on both sets.

CODING PROCEDURES

The data were coded by two female students (one white, one black) who had considerable familiarity with the guiding theory and who had had training in media literacy. Two one-hour videotapes containing the 191 commercials were played on a Sony videotape recorder AV 3600 which allowed the tapes

to be stopped after each commercial and played back as often as necessary to complete the coding. Each commercial was coded in terms of 36 variables. The first 10 commercials on the tapes were viewed and coded independently by the two coders and agreement on all variables was checked and found to be 92%. The coders then reconciled discrepancies by reviewing the tape and discussing points of disagreement until mutual agreement was reached. This step was repeated four times, agreement being checked after each set of 10 commercials was independently viewed and scored. Consistency between the coders increased slightly from checkpoint to checkpoint reaching 94% on the fifth checkpoint. The remaining 140 commercials were then viewed jointly by the two coders. In this phase of the coding each commercial was independently scored by each coder, then their scoring was immediately compared, the videotape reviewed, and discrepancies discussed until mutual agreement on final codes was reached. In most cases, differences in coding were resolved simply by viewing the commercial again and checking on objective facts. But in other cases the commercial itself was unclear or ambiguous or the category definition somewhat subjective, and differences in judgment had to be resolved through discussion or by assigning a rating of "unclear."

CODING CATEGORIES

The first 7 coding variables identified the commercial, its location on the videotape track, the program, type of show, network, and time of night at which it occurred. Overall characteristics of the commercials were then coded. These included:

- (1) the number of characters classified in terms of race (black/white), sex, age (adult/child), human versus animal, and real versus animated;

- (2) the types of product being sold (beauty products, car products, and so forth);
- (3) the setting in which the major action takes place (e.g., outdoors-suburban, outdoors-urban, indoors-bathroom, indoors-kitchen);
- (4) the form of the ad (e.g., actors in a skit, candid-camera interview);
- (5) the background of the ad (e.g., people talking, instrumental music);
- (6) the accents used by the characters (e.g., standard American, southern, foreign-European, foreign-Third World).

The remainder of the coding concerned the occurrence of specific types of activities or attributes. The coder noted whether this activity occurred or attribute was presented in the ad and who performed it. The performers could be one or more white males, white females, black males, or black females or a combination of these. For example, a single commercial portraying a group of three white males, two white females, one black male, and no black females eating in a restaurant would be rated as showing six incidents of eating, three by white males, two by white females, and one by a black male. Or a commercial which showed a white woman cleaning the kitchen floor and also testifying to the efficiency of the cleanser in a voice-over would be scored as showing one incident of performing household chores by a white female and one voice-over by a white female. Thus, the same person might perform more than one activity in an ad and be scored for each activity or several different people might perform the same or different activities.¹ Here is a list of all the activity categories or attributes that were coded:

- (A) Exerts authority or demonstrates superior knowledge
 - (1) doing voice-over
 - (2) teaching

- (3) demonstrating technology
- (4) initiating action
- (B) Dispenses material goods or favors
 - (5) giving, being generous
- (C) Is model of the beautiful or the sexually attractive
 - (6) grooming self
 - (7) grooming others
 - (8) depicting ideal beauty or sexual attractiveness
- (D) Shows affection or family relationship
 - (9) touching another person in a positive way
 - (10) receiving a positive touch from another person
 - (11) touching another person in a negative way²
 - (12) receiving a negative touch from another person³
 - (13) family relationship stated
 - (14) family relationship implied
- (E) Is dependent or subservient
 - (15) works for wages
 - (16) is at leisure⁴
 - (17) serves others
- (F) Engaged in "unthinking" or routine pursuits
 - (18) eating
- (G) Miscellaneous
 - (19) performs household chores
 - (20) sneaky behavior
 - (21) serving self

TABLE 1
Overall Characteristics of Commercials

Type of Show:	Movie	Adventure/ Detective	Drama	Comedy	Sports	Documentary
% commercials	28		13	27	5	2
Network:						
% commercials	ABC	CBS	NBC			
	24	39	37			
Time Segment:						
% commercials	7:30-8:00pm	8:00-8:30	8:30-9:00	9:00-9:30	9:30-10:00	10:30-11:00
	3	18	14	16	14	19
Type of Product:						
% commercials	Beauty	Car/gas	Personal Cleansers	Pet food	People food	Home Cleansers
	6	13	10	1	27	9
% commercials	Bank/In- surance	Home Appliances	Stores Restaurants	Airlines	Personal Appliance	House im- provements
	6	3	2	1	3	1
% commercials	Communica- tions Corp.	Network				
	2	6				
Setting of Major Action:						
% commercials	Suburban	Outdoors	Urban	Kitchen	Bathroom	Dining-room
	7	14	1	6	3	1
	Living-room	Rural	Dressing Rm.	Indoors	Bedroom	
	2	1	1	Public Place	Mixed	Mixed
% commercials	Actors in skit	Study		Authority Fig- talking to audience	Studio-set	Unclear
	64	1		11	19	10
Form of Ad:						
% commercials	Interview	Animation	Instrumental	Machinery	Mixed	None Unclear
	4	6	1	1	9	8
Background:						
% commercials	People-talking Laughing	Animals	Music	Vocals	Mixed	None Unclear
	5	1	20	11	24	39
Accents of Characters:						
% commercials	Foreign- European	Western	Southern	Foreign-non- European	Standard American	Unclear
	2	2	0	1	93	1

*The percentages do not necessarily add to 100% because of rounding errors or occasional blanks.

(22) entertains another person

(23) is entertained by another person

RESULTS

Table 1 provides a breakdown of the overall characteristics of the commercials—the type of product being sold, the setting, form, and background characteristics of the ads. We note briefly the following points which establish qualitatively the representative nature of the sample:

- (1) Roughly one-quarter of the programs in which our sample of commercials occurred were movies, one-quarter were detective/adventure programs, one-quarter were comedies, and smaller percentages were drama, sports, or documentary programs. Our sample accurately reflects the kinds of programs typically offered on prime-time TV.
- (2) The major networks, NBC and CBS, were sampled nearly equally (they provided 37% and 39% of the commercials), while ABC was sampled to a lesser extent (24%).
- (3) The sample of commercials was drawn roughly equally from half-hour time slots starting at 8:00 pm and ending at 11:00 pm.
- (4) The type of product shown in the commercials covered a wide range. Food for people, beverages, and cigarettes were the types of products most often shown (27%), followed by car and gasoline products (13%), and personal products like soap and deodorants (10%).
- (5) The form in which the commercials were presented was typically that of actors performing a skit (64%). Authority figures talking directly to the audience (9%) and animation (6%) were also used.
- (6) The accents of the characters were, in the vast majority of cases, standard American (93%). Black dialect or ethnic speech was never used.

TABLE 2
Proportions and Frequencies of Different Types of Activities Performed
by Persons of Different Races and Sexes on Television Commercials

	<u>Total n</u>	<u>White</u>		<u>Black</u>		<u>Male</u>		<u>Female</u>		<u>White</u>		<u>Black</u>		<u>Male</u>		<u>Female</u>	
Proportion of total TV characters	671	.92 (618)	.08 (53)	.92 (618)	.08 (53)	.57 (381)	.43 (290)	.53 (353)	.04 (265)	.57 (381)	.43 (290)	.53 (353)	.04 (265)	.53 (353)	.04 (265)	.39 (265)	.04 (25)
A. Exerts authority; demonstrates superior knowledge																	
1. does voice-over	152	1.00 (152)	.00 (0)	.94 (143)	.06 (9)	.94 (143)	.06 (9)	.94 (143)	.06 (9)	.94 (143)	.06 (9)	.94 (143)	.06 (9)	.94 (143)	.06 (9)	.00 (0)	.00 (0)
2. demonstrates technology*	46	.85 (39)	.15 (7)	.61 (28)	.39 (18)	.61 (28)	.39 (18)	.59 (27)	.02 (1)	.59 (27)	.02 (1)	.59 (27)	.02 (1)	.59 (27)	.02 (1)	.13 (6)	.13 (6)
2a. demonstrates technology*	30	.97 (29)	.03 (1)	.74 (22)	.26 (8)	.74 (22)	.26 (8)	.74 (22)	.00 (0)	.74 (22)	.26 (8)	.74 (22)	.00 (0)	.74 (22)	.00 (0)	.03 (1)	.03 (1)
3. initiates action	65	.97 (63)	.03 (2)	.62 (40)	.38 (25)	.62 (40)	.38 (25)	.59 (38)	.03 (2)	.59 (38)	.03 (2)	.59 (38)	.03 (2)	.59 (38)	.03 (2)	.00 (0)	.00 (0)
B. Dispenses material goods or favors																	
4. is generous	26	1.00 (26)	.00 (0)	.54 (14)	.46 (12)	.54 (14)	.46 (12)	.54 (14)	.00 (0)	.54 (14)	.46 (12)	.54 (14)	.00 (0)	.54 (14)	.00 (0)	.00 (0)	.00 (0)
C. Models the beautiful or the sexually attractive																	
5. grooms self	37	1.00 (37)	.00 (0)	.38 (12)	.68 (25)	.38 (12)	.68 (25)	.32 (12)	.00 (0)	.32 (12)	.68 (25)	.32 (12)	.00 (0)	.32 (12)	.00 (0)	.00 (0)	.00 (0)

Table 2 (Continued)

	Total n	White	Black	White	Black	White	Black	White	Black
		Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Proportion of total TV characters	671	.92 (618)	.08 (53)	.57 (381)	.43 (290)	.53 (353)	.39 (265)	.04 (28)	.04 (25)
6. depicts ideal beauty/ sexual attractiveness	63	.95 (60)	.05 (3)	.24 (15)	.76 (48)	.24 (15)	.71 (45)	.00 (0)	.05 (3)
D. Shows affection or family relationship									
7. touches positively	87	.97 (84)	.03 (3)	.41 (36)	.59 (51)	.39 (34)	.58 (50)	.02 (2)	.01 (1)
8. receives positive touch	79	.96 (76)	.04 (3)	.57 (45)	.43 (34)	.54 (43)	.42 (33)	.03 (2)	.01 (1)
9. family relationship implied	57	.98 (56)	.02 (1)	.15 (10)	.85 (47)	.17 (10)	.81 (46)	.00 (0)	.02 (1)
10. family relationship stated	49	.98 (48)	.02 (1)	.37 (18)	.63 (31)	.37 (18)	.61 (30)	.00 (0)	.02 (1)
E. Is dependent or subservient									
11. works for wages	134	.69 (96)	.31 (38)	.68 (85)	.32 (49)	.49 (65)	.23 (31)	.15 (20)	.13 (18)
12. is at leisure	244	.95 (231)	.05 (13)	.58 (141)	.42 (103)	.54 (131)	.41 (100)	.04 (10)	.01 (3)
F. Engaged in "unthinking" pursuits									
13. eating	77	.92 (70)	.08 (7)	.63 (52)	.37 (25)	.60 (46)	.31 (24)	.08 (6)	.01 (1)

Table 2 (Continued)

	Total n	White		Black		Male		Female		White		Male		Female		Black		Male		Female	
		White	Black	White	Black	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Proportion of total TV characters	671	.92 (618)	.08 (53)	.57 (381)	.43 (290)	.53 (353)	.39 (265)	.04 (28)	.04 (25)												
G. Miscellaneous																					
14. household chores	29	.96 (28)	.04 (1)	.17 (5)	.83 (24)	.17 (5)	.79 (23)	.00 (0)	.04 (1)												
H. Items having small frequency of occurrence																					
15. teaches	12	.93 (10)	.07 (2)	.75 (9)	.25 (3)	.58 (7)	.25 (3)	.07 (2)	.00 (0)												
16. grooms others	10	1.00 (10)	.00 (0)	.50 (5)	.50 (5)	.50 (5)	.50 (5)	.00 (0)	.00 (0)												
17. touches negatively	9	.89 (8)	.11 (1)	.78 (7)	.22 (2)	.67 (6)	.22 (2)	.11 (1)	.00 (0)												
18. receives negative touch	9	1.00 (9)	.00 (0)	.89 (8)	.11 (1)	.89 (8)	.11 (1)	.00 (0)	.00 (0)												
19. serves others	19	.95 (18)	.05 (1)	.05 (1)	.95 (18)	.05 (1)	.90 (17)	.00 (0)	.05 (1)												
20. serves self	16	.75 (12)	.25 (4)	.50 (8)	.50 (8)	.31 (5)	.44 (7)	.19 (3)	.06 (1)												

*"Demonstrates technology" is calculated twice because in the first calculations one commercial accounted for all but 1 of the Black entries and this exerted an undue influence on the results. In the second calculation this commercial is excluded.

- (7) The setting for the action, when outdoors, was almost always suburban or rural—despite the fact that the majority of Americans live in cities or towns. Only one ad used a city background. Blacks were never seen in suburban or rural settings.

We turn now to the data which are most relevant to the considerations of this research. First, the relative proportions of blacks and whites on television commercials. Table 2, line 1, shows the number and proportion of blacks and whites in these commercials broken down by sex and race. Blacks are clearly underrepresented and so are women. In the national population, they make up 12% and 51% respectively, while in this television sample they make up 8% and 43% of the total commercial population.

The remainder of the table shows the proportion of each type of activity that is performed by all whites, all blacks, all males, all females, white males, white females, black males, and black females. From the theory of racism that we have elaborated it would be expected that:

- (1) whites, and especially white males, would be shown more often as exerting authority or possessing superior knowledge. They would do the *voice-overs* which tell the TV viewer that the product is superior, they would be the *teachers* and purveyors of important information, they would be the *demonstrators of technology*, and they would be the *initiators* of action;
- (2) whites would more often be shown as dispensers of material goods and favors;
- (3) whites, and especially white females, would more often be shown as models of the beautiful and the sexually attractive. They would be shown more often *grooming themselves* and *depicting ideal beauty or sexual attractiveness*;

- (4) Whites would be shown more often in affectional relationships. They would be shown *touching each other positively*, and the presence of a *family* would be implied or stated more often;
- (5) in contrast, blacks would be more likely to be shown in dependent or subservient roles. They would be depicted more often as *working for wages* rather than *at leisure* and as *serving others*;
- (6) also, in contrast, blacks would be shown more often as engaged in unthinking pursuits. They would be shown *eating* and involved in sports or *physical activity*.

These hypotheses were tested using a method of analysis in which the proportion of the total counts for each type of activity engaged in by white males, white females, and so forth is compared to the corresponding proportions of white males, white females, and so forth in the total sample of all characters depicted in the commercials. For example, Table 2, line 1, shows that white males make up 53% of all characters presented in the 190 commercials. The proportion of voice overs (94%, Table 2, line 2) that are done by white males is compared to this percentage and this difference is found to be highly significant by statistical test. Similar comparisons are made for white females, black males, and black females. In essence, this analysis probes the extent to which different activities are undertaken disproportionately by different groups of people who make up the special television population. Strictly speaking, the proportions performing different activities ought to be compared to the proportions of white males, white females, and so on in the population of *real* people in the United States. And it is clear that if we were to use these proportions as standards, the results would be more dramatic. However, we feel that this bias in representing the real population is already indicated by line 1 of Table 2 and that our

TABLE 3
Profiles of Activities Engaged in by People of Different
Races and Sexes in Television Commercials

	White	Black	Male	Female	White Male	White Female	Black Male	Black Female
A. <u>Exerts authority; demonstrates superior knowledge</u>								
1. does voice-over	.135 (152)	.000 (0)	.118 (143)	.017 (9)	.228 (143)	.018 (9)	.000 (0)	.000 (0)
2. demonstrates technology	.026 (29)	.012 (1)	.018 (22)	.015 (8)	.035 (22)	.014 (7)	.000 (0)	.030 (1)
3. initiates action	.056 (63)	.024 (2)	.033 (40)	.047 (25)	.061 (38)	.051 (25)	.042 (2)	.000 (0)
B. <u>Dispenses material goods or favors</u>								
4. is generous	.023 (26)	.000 (0)	.012 (14)	.023 (12)	.022 (14)	.024 (12)	.000 (0)	.000 (0)
C. <u>Models the beautiful or the sexually attractive</u>								
5. grooms self	.033 (37)	.000 (0)	.010 (12)	.047 (25)	.019 (12)	.051 (25)	.000 (0)	.000 (0)
6. depicts ideal beauty/ sexual attractiveness	.053 (60)	.037 (3)	.012 (15)	.091 (48)	.024 (15)	.091 (45)	.000 (0)	.091 (3)

Table 3 (Continued)

	White	Black	Male	Female	White Male	White Female	Black Male	Black Female
D. <u>Shows affection or family relationship</u>								
7. touches positively	.075 (84)	.037 (3)	.030 (36)	.097 (51)	.054 (34)	.101 (50)	.042 (2)	.030 (1)
8. receives positive touch	.068 (76)	.037 (3)	.037 (45)	.064 (34)	.068 (43)	.067 (33)	.042 (2)	.031 (1)
9. family relationship implied	.050 (56)	.012 (1)	.008 (10)	.089 (47)	.016 (10)	.093 (46)	.000 (0)	.030 (1)
10. family relationship stated	.043 (48)	.012 (1)	.015 (18)	.059 (31)	.029 (18)	.061 (30)	.000 (0)	.030 (1)
E. <u>Is dependent or subservient</u>								
11. works for wages	.085 (96)	.469 (38)	.071 (85)	.093 (49)	.104 (65)	.063 (31)	.417 (20)	.545 (18)
12. is at leisure	.206 (231)	.160 (13)	.117 (141)	.195 (103)	.209 (131)	.202 (100)	.208 (10)	.091 (3)
F. <u>Engaged in "unthinking" pursuits</u>								
13. eating	.062 (70)	.086 (7)	.043 (52)	.047 (25)	.073 (46)	.048 (24)	.125 (6)	.030 (1)
G. <u>Miscellaneous</u>								
14. household chores	.025 (28)	.012 (1)	.004 (5)	.045 (24)	.008 (5)	.046 (23)	.000 (0)	.030 (1)

Table 3 (Continued)

H. Items having small frequency of occurrence	<u>White</u>		<u>Black</u>		<u>Male</u>		<u>Female</u>		<u>White</u>		<u>Black</u>		<u>Male</u>		<u>Female</u>	
	White	Black	White	Black	Male	Female	White	Black	Male	Female	White	Black	Male	Female	White	Black
15. teaches	.009 (10)	.024 (2)	.007 (9)	.002 (3)	.011 (7)	.006 (3)	.042 (2)	.000 (0)								
16. grooms others	.009 (10)	.000 (0)	.004 (5)	.009 (5)	.008 (5)	.010 (5)	.000 (0)	.000 (0)								
17. touches negatively	.007 (8)	.012 (1)	.006 (7)	.004 (2)	.010 (6)	.004 (2)	.021 (1)	.000 (0)								
18. receives negative touch	.008 (9)	.000 (0)	.007 (8)	.002 (1)	.013 (8)	.002 (1)	.000 (0)	.000 (0)								
19. serves others	.016 (18)	.011 (1)	.001 (1)	.340 (18)	.002 (1)	.034 (17)	.000 (0)	.030 (1)								
20. serves self	.011 (12)	.049 (4)	.007 (8)	.015 (8)	.008 (5)	.014 (7)	.063 (3)	.030 (1)								
<u>Total activities</u>	1,123	81	676	528	628	495	48	33								

purpose is better served by demonstrating that *over and above* this initial bias there are further biases in the roles and attributes assigned to different groups. Our findings show that it is not enough for sponsors of commercials to merely increase minority representation. They must increase and occasionally decrease this representation in specific categories of activities if they wish to project an image of blacks on television that is on par with that projected for whites.

Now let us examine exactly what types of biases occur in the performance of different activities. The results of Table 2 may be briefly summed up as follows:

- (1) To a disproportionate extent, whites are shown exerting authority or displaying superior knowledge. Blacks *never* do voice-overs (0% versus 100% for whites) and seldom demonstrate technology (3% versus 97%) or initiate activity (3% versus 97%).
- (2) To a disproportionate extent whites are shown as dispensers of goods and favors. Blacks, apparently *never* have anything to give (100% for whites versus 0% for blacks).
- (3) To a disproportionate extent whites, and especially white females, are used to depict ideal beauty or sexual attractiveness. Of all such portrayals, 71% use a white female while only 5% use a black female. The white male is sometimes cast in this role (24%) but the black male *never* is so cast. Similarly, whites are disproportionately more likely to be shown grooming themselves or grooming other whites. We did not find one instance of a black grooming himself in all the 190 commercials.
- (4) To a disproportionate extent whites are depicted in such a way that the presence of a stable family is stated or implied (98% for whites, 2% for blacks). In particular, black males are *never* placed in the context of a family.
- (5) To a disproportionate extent blacks are shown as dependent and subservient. Blacks are disproportionately more likely

TABLE 4
Proportions and Frequencies of Different Types of Activities Performed
by Persons of Different Races and Sexes on Television Commercials
(males and females considered separately)

	Males		Females	
	White	Black	White	Black
<u>A. Exerts authority; demonstrates superior knowledge</u>				
1. does voice-over	1.00 (143)	.00 (0)	1.00 (9)	.00 (0)
2. demonstrates technology*	.96 (27)	.04 (1)	.67 (12)	.33 (6)
2a. demonstrates technology*	1.00 (22)	.00 (0)	.87 (7)	.13 (1)
3. initiates action	.95 (38)	.05 (2)	1.00 (25)	.00 (0)
<u>B. Dispenses material goods or favors</u>				
4. is generous	1.00 (14)	.00 (0)	1.00 (12)	.00 (0)
<u>C. Models the beautiful or the sexually attractive</u>				
5. grooms self	1.00 (12)	.00 (0)	1.00 (25)	.00 (0)

Table 4 (Continued)

	Males		Females	
	White	Black	White	Black
6. depicts idea beauty/sexual attractiveness	1.00 (15)	.00 (0)	.94 (45)	.06 (3)
<u>D. Shows affection or family relationship</u>				
7. touches positively	.94 (34)	.06 (2)	.98 (50)	.02 (1)
8. receives positive touch	.96 (43)	.04 (2)	.97 (33)	.03 (1)
9. family relationship implied	1.00 (10)	.00 (0)	.98 (46)	.02 (1)
10. family relationship stated	1.00 (18)	.00 (0)	.97 (30)	.03 (1)
<u>E. Is dependent or subservient</u>				
11. works for wages	.76 (65)	.24 (20)	.63 (31)	.37 (18)
12. is at leisure	.93 (131)	.07 (10)	.97 (100)	.03 (3)
<u>F. Engaged in "unthinking" pursuits</u>				
13. eating	.88 (46)	.12 (6)	.96 (24)	.04 (1)

Table 4 (Continued)

	Males		Females	
	White	Black	White	Black
G. Miscellaneous				
14. household chores	1.00 (5)	.00 (0)	.96 (23)	.04 (1)
H. Items having small frequency of occurrence				
15. teaches	.98 (7)	.02 (2)	1.00 (3)	.00 (0)
16. grooms others	1.00 (5)	.00 (0)	1.00 (5)	.00 (0)
17. touches negatively	.86 (6)	.14 (1)	1.00 (2)	.00 (0)
18. receives negative touch	1.00 (8)	.00 (0)	1.00 (1)	.00 (0)
19. serves others	1.00 (1)	.00 (0)	.94 (17)	.06 (1)
20. serves self	.62 (5)	.38 (3)	.87 (7)	.13 (1)

“Demonstrates technology” is calculated twice because in the first calculations one commercial accounted for all but one of the Black entries and this exerted an undue influence on the results. In the second calculation this commercial is excluded.

to be shown as working for wages (they are shown four times as often working for wages as their presence in the TV population warrants).

A second way of looking at these data is presented in Table 3. In this table, proportions for each activity are calculated using as a base the total number of all activities engaged in by each category of persons (white males, white females). The result is a profile of activities for white males, white females, and so on which can be compared one to another. The results are striking. Blacks engage in a much smaller range of activities than whites. One type of activity accounts for nearly 50% of the black female's activities on television commercials—working for wages. Three types of activities account for nearly 70% of all of the black males' activities—working for wages, being at leisure, and eating. These figures contrast dramatically with those for the white male and white female whose profiles include a much wider range of activities and are much more evenly distributed across these activities. Interestingly, the peak activities for white males are doing voice overs and being at leisure, while the peak activity for the white female is to be at leisure. The message of these findings could hardly be more obvious.

A third way of looking at the data is given in Table 4. In Table 2 there were many significant differences between males and females and possible statistical interactions between the race and sex variables which may have made it difficult to visualize race differences per se. Table 4 helps to clarify the findings by presenting the data for whites versus blacks *within* a sex category. Here, proportions are calculated for white males and black males using as a base the total number of counts for the given activity engaged in by all males. Similarly, proportions are calculated for white females and black females using as a base the total counts for the specific activity engaged

in by all females. The results of Table 4 strongly reinforce and extend what we have already said. Consider first all the male voice overs, all acts of generosity, all grooming of self, all references to a family are represented by white males. None are represented by black males. The only activities in which black males are overrepresented (relative to their proportion in the male television-commercial population) are working for wages and eating. Turn now to the females. Now we see that all voice overs, all initiating of action, all acts of generosity, and all grooming of self are undertaken by the white female. None are undertaken by black females. The only activity in which the black female is overrepresented relative to her proportion in the television population is working for wages.

CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study show that there are numerous and excessive negative representations of blacks in television commercials. Most of these representations are gratuitous and unnecessary and could be easily changed without interfering with the creativity of artists or the profit of the sponsors. Experience gained in this study convinced us that a simple index could be developed which could be used recurrently to assess the quality of television commercials and programming. This index could be applied to the problem of improving race relations or, for that matter, relations between men and women, or adults and children. (Actually, our data analysis indicates extensive sexism and childism as well as racism, and our scales could be equally well applied to monitoring these features in television commercials.)

The TV commercials presented nowadays might be somewhat different—and improved. However, at the time these data were accumulated, people had impressions that blacks

were being shown much more frequently and in a far more favorable light than the study had indicated. It is our belief, however, that the microaggressions verified in this inquiry continue to be apparent on TV in both commercial and program content.

The method used in selecting categories for study can be used to do more extensive studies in racism or studies in other interpersonal interactions. With students of all ages who are accustomed to much TV viewing, the findings can be objectified on an individual or group basis and used in classroom discussion. Such teaching may lead to different interpersonal activities and perhaps lead to modification of TV productions.

NOTES

1. To avoid giving undue weight to any one ad, an arbitrary upper limit of 5 was imposed so that, for example, if more than 5 white males were seen eating in an ad, this was scored as if there were only 5 white males eating.

2. The activity or attribute is negatively related to the theme implied by the overall category level.

3. See 2 above.

4. See 2 above.

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