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GENDER, AGE, CLASS AND RACIAL STEREOTYPES, AND POWER RELATIONS IN TELEVISION ADS: 2011-13 vs 2021-22

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ABSTRACT

This article demonstrates how faculty and DEI experts can use resources included in this paper to highlight how a range of stereotypes are created and reinforced in television ads, and it identifies several topics for future analysis. To understand how depictions of gender, class, age, and race intersect in 8 television ads featuring the relationship between the race of individuals depicted in romantic and platonic relationships this article examines 4 pairs of commercials from 2011-13 and 2021-22. Drawing on concepts of intercategory complexity, it describes product, setting, characters and relationships to help gain a deeper understanding of how various stereotypes operate and intersect in specific ads over time. The findings indicate that while interracial relationships were portrayed positively over both time periods, which was not the case with same race ads. In addition, stereotypes of age, class, and gender were perpetuated in the some of the ads from both periods.

Keywords: stereotypes, intercategory complexity, television, advertisements, race, class, gender, age

This article demonstrates how faculty and DEI experts can use resources included in this paper to highlight how a range of stereotypes are created and reinforced in television ads, and it identifies several topics for future analysis. Analyzing the relationship between the race of individuals depicted in romantic and platonic relationships in television advertisements is as positive as recent research suggests and to analyze those relationships as they intersect with depictions of gender, class, and age, it examines 4 pairs of commercials from 2011-13 and 2021-22. Drawing on concepts of intercategory complexity (McCall, 2005), it observes product, setting, characters and relationships to gain a deeper understanding of how various stereotypes operate and intersect in specific ads over time. The findings indicate that while interracial relationships were portrayed positively over both time periods, such may not be the case is same race relationships as other stereotypes of age, class, and gender were perpetuated in many of the ads that were analyzed.

RATIONALE

Advertisements often reflect society's changing sense of social responsibility in defining their brands' messages, including the representation of product, settings, character, gender, age, plot, and the presence of same race and mixed-race friendship and romantic relationships. As Acuff and Kraehe (2020) observe "Mass media are pervasive in the modern world, so much so that when people encounter them in daily life, the content may be consumed unconsciously and the meaning internalized with little criticality (p. 11)." For example, prime time television ads play an important role in shaping popular attitudes toward race, gender, class, and age. As consumers experience ads casually and episodically, attention economics demand that advertisers use visual, aural, and linguistic means to communicate instantly.

Given that television advertising and related media include a wide variety of depictions of characters of different races, ages, class, and gender, and in uneven power relationships, research shows that historically depictions of characters based on these factors have been disparate and that much of what might appear to be progress relies on stereotypes and easy to understand tropes. This is why it is important to study these depictions, as the research is unsettled on where there is progress and where progress can still be made. McCall (2005) points out that the dominant form of quantitative research required of many leading journals focus on single variable studies, such as race, gender, age, and class. By contrast, intercategory complexity "focuses on the complexity of relationships among multiple social groups within and across analytical categories and not on complexities within single social groups, single categories, or both" (p. 1773). This approach "requires that scholars provisionally adopt existing analytical categories to document relationships of inequality among social groups and changing configurations of inequality along multiple and conflicting dimensions"(1773). "In fact, the size and significance of each element is perhaps why current quantitative social scientific research is divided, regrettably, into separate specialties on gender, race, and class, with little overlap among them" (1787).

In particular, US viewers have seen television ads portraying same race and Black/White interracial friendship and romantic relationships, many of which generated significant public comment. How these friendship and romantic relationships are portrayed in same race/different race relationships in ads matters in themselves and also because they also reflect perceptions of power, gender, age, and class relationships for the audiences that advertisers, who have wealth, power, and privilege, target (Acuff & Kraehe, 2020). As the analysis of the eight ads in this study show, creators of ads that feature same race and interracial friendship and romantic relationships still promote stereotypes within those spaces. It also demonstrates how faculty and DEI experts can use these resources to highlight how a range of stereotypes are created and reinforced in television ads, and it identifies several topics for future analysis.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature on intersectionality, some of which is summarized below, reveals the limitation McCall identifies: the often-single focus on race and gender, class, and age without examining their intersection with other variables, such as power relationships, in the characterization of the ads' actors.

Race and gender

Recent research generally reveals significant advances in public acceptance of Black/White friendship and romantic relationships. Hackenmueller (2020) found that interracial couples are not portrayed differently than their intraracial counterparts in the ads studied. She also found that interracial relationships are overrepresented in ads (19% in ads vs. 10% of population), with this caveat: that "interracial couples are found at further distances from each other, and...a relationship between non-White males and White females are underrepresented within interracial relationships. Approximately 30% of the interracial couples portrayed in the television commercials consisted of a non-White male and a White female, a significant underrepresentation from the 37% proportional representation interracial couples in the US population (p. 31)."

Babbitt et al. (2018) hypothesized and confirmed that racial stereotypes differ by gender. Whites and Blacks reported that White men are seen as more prejudiced than White women. Young's (2015) analysis of ads with a matrix of interracial couples revealed that the ads featuring the Black female – Caucasian male couple, the Black male – Caucasian female couple, and the Black couple all generated significantly more *likely to purchase the brand* scores than the ad featuring the Caucasian couple. Further analysis showed that female respondents generated significantly more positive attitudes toward the ad scores for the ads that feature interracial couples than ads that feature same race couples.

Similarly, in a sampling of a high school and college-aged cohort, Young (2015) found "that ads featuring interracial couples generated significantly more positive attitude toward the ad scores than the ads featuring same-race couples, for the sample" (p. 35). Specifically, the ads featuring the Black female – Caucasian male couple, the Black male – Caucasian female couple, and the Black couple generated significantly more positive attitude toward the ad scores than the ad featuring the Caucasian couple. Additionally, Parker (2020) found "no systematic relationship between implicit and explicit biases with regards to race and interracial dating" (p. 59).

On the other hand, Bhat et al. (2018) using a sample of subjects in a wide age range found that ads depicting Black-White couples stimulated more negative emotions though the responses were not related to subjects' own race and gender, suggesting older Americans may be less open to interracial relationships.

Davis' (2019) analysis of an international review of 2000 advertisements reveals that females are portrayed as less powerful and less professional than males on a variety of measures including age, humor, objectification, location, and work. Sharma & Bumb (2021) summarize additional research findings on gender stereotypes in tabular form. (See Appendix A).

Age and class

Ng & Indran's (2023) comprehensive literature review on aging in media found "positive stereotypes include being warm, generous and kind, while negative stereotypes include being slow, irrelevant and incompetent" (p. 2). Surprisingly, they found that "individuals with egalitarian beliefs—specifically those who champion gender and racial equality—are actually more likely to endorse ageist beliefs" (p. 9).

Kraus and colleagues (2017) have argued that social class stereotyping is in part a consequence of *social class signaling*—the way social class is communicated through speech, dress, preferences, and other social behaviors. Connor et al. (2020) and Fiske et al. (2002) posit that social class stereotypes abound in social perception and occur for both warmth and competence dimensions. Of the dimensions, the most robust class stereotype is between class and competence. This data suggests an "inverted U"-shaped relationship between social class and warmth, with the middle class considered more warm and the rich and poor stereotyped as less warm.

AD ANALYSIS

Paired 30-second television ads were analyzed. Sponsored by 4 companies-- Philadelphia Cream Cheese, Aflac, Snickers, and KFC—and promoted to American audiences on prime-time television--the ads aired in 2011-13 and 2021-22 respectively featuring same race and interracial platonic and romantic relationships. The criteria for choosing commercials were that they were nationally televised and appeared frequently during the time they were collected. The commercials are representative of the larger body of commercials and the way different types of relationships are depicted to particular target audiences. We recorded field notes on the roles characters play, detailed descriptions of relationships, a summary of the general plot including setting, product, and character actions in each commercial. The ads were also analyzed for target audience; intersections of gender, age, class and race stereotypes; and power relationships.

As theoretical lenses we used several widely employed criteria for assessing how gender, age, class and racial stereotyping are constructed as well as visually and linguistically presented (summarized in Tables A, B, and C in the Appendix) such as Sharma and Bumb’s (2021) Negative Issues Concerning Women; Hughey’s (2009) “Magic Negro,” analysis; Vera and Gordon’s (2003) concept of “sincere fictions of the White self;” and Goffman’s (1979) analysis of gender role depictions.

PEDAGOGICAL APPLICATIONS

The materials provided in this paper can be used as pedagogical tools for helping students develop nuanced perspectives on how stereotypes are used to promote products and brands. Specifically, faculty can preview the short 30-second ads by providing the tables in the Appendix for criteria by which students can evaluate these ads, then assign groups to view one set of paired ads and to ask them to fill in charts similar to those provided in the body of this paper so they can develop an understanding of the critical dimensions on which the ads can be evaluated. Faculty can also provide the data in the tables and the commentary that follows for additional content analysis, class discussion, and reflective thinking.

STUDY QUESTIONS

Observing eight television advertisements, we explore these questions:

- How are romantic and platonic relationships portrayed relative to the intersection of race, age, class, power, and gender of individuals depicted in television advertisements?
- What other stereotypes related to age, gender, power, and class are promoted in these ads that suggest topics for further exploration?

DETAILED ANALYSIS OF COMMERCIALS

For ease of comparison, the product, settings, characters, relationships, plot, summary of stereotypes, and power relations are shown in tabular form, followed by additional analysis of each paired commercial. The tabular format allows readers to find a single variable quickly and to compare the same variable across all eight ads.

Table 1 Philadelphia Cream Cheese Commercials

Link to ad	https://youtu.be/rKWuzhuOBQs	https://youtube.com/watch?v=PsExXVxSnZ4&feature=share
Product	Philadelphia Cream Cheese 2011 “Stir in a Pheeling”	Philadelphia Cream Cheese 2021-22 “You Don’t Just Taste It. You Feel It”

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Target audience	Females 20-39 middle to higher economic class of professionals and executives.	
Setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Male/Female hugs in an old-fashioned elevator. • Couple close together over a kitchen stove and leaning across from each other at a table in a small hip urban apartment , suggesting a starter dwelling. <p><i>Jingle: Spread a little love with me</i></p>	<p>Living room with near all-White décor in a hip urban apartment with a view of the city</p> <p>Ad accompanied by romantic song lyrics.</p> <p>Take a Look by Irma Thomas.</p> <p><i>Take a look at this heart</i> <i>It's the one I'm gonna use to love you</i> <i>Take a look at these arms</i> <i>They're the arms I'm gonna use to hug you</i></p>
Characters and Relationships	<p>Light skinned Black female and White male in their late 20's.</p> <p>Male holds female's hand. Each initiates a kiss with the other and the ad ends with a mutual kiss.</p> <p>Both are outgoing, at ease with one another, and communicate their mutual affection wordlessly.</p>	<p>A casually yet expensively dressed light skinned Black female with full make up, earrings, and a ring on the fourth finger of left hand.</p> <p>In her mid-30's, she enjoys being alone with her pure White cat, a signal that she is strong and independent. She is confident, relaxed, and appreciates stylish décor</p> <p>All action is nonverbal.</p>
Plot	<p>The couple return from food shopping and laugh throughout the ad, even as they spill their bag. Ad cuts to couple making pasta in close proximity to each other including stirring Philly into the sauce. Each feeds the other a forkful of pasta. Passionate kiss concludes the ad.</p>	<p>Female smiles indulgently as she spreads cream cheese on an English muffin. She garnishes it with slices of cherry tomatoes and a sprig of rosemary. After one bite she closes her eyes and wraps herself in a White shawl while leaning against her White couch. She smiles dreamily and embraces the shawl while the cat meows in puzzlement. Her fingers touch the contours of her body. While touching, she caresses shawl around face, neck, shoulder.</p>
Presence of IRR and Type of Depiction	<p>Male gives total attention to female reflecting an ideal of hetero-sexual romantic love.</p>	<p>Ambiguous relationship status. Female is portrayed as self-reliant, completely happy in this “alone” moment in her own world, which she is sharing with her cat.</p> <p>Me-time is important to her.</p> <p>The ring and lyrics suggest she has a strong relationship with someone whose absence is required for her to enjoy this experience. Delayed gratification. One bite enjoyed over time.</p>
Gender & Class Depictions	<p>White male and Black female portrayed in a positive way research suggests viewers prefer.</p> <p>Equality, though male initiates most handholding, kissing, cooking and sharing pasta.</p>	<p>Sexually attractive female is shown lying down as camera pulls away. She closes her eyes, removing herself psychologically from her physical surroundings. She hugs the shawl in what some might see as an erotic gesture of beauty, submissiveness &, self-nurturance.</p>

Gender, Age, Class and Racial Stereotypes, and Power Relations In Television Ads: 2011-13 vs 2021-22

Gender & Class Depictions (Continued)	Warmth and competence. Gourmet cooking, upwardly mobile. Couple shops and cooks together in the kitchen. Married or friends with benefits?	It complements the pleasure she feels as she savors the muffin. White color suggests class, style, childlessness. Upwardly mobile, professional, finer things, gourmet food, warm, competent. Implied romantic relationship. Contrast to Wanda Sykes portrayal of older, angry Black female.
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The 2011 Philadelphia Cream Cheese ad reinforces the normality of a White/Black romantic relationship, promoting a theme of mutual, equal, happy love. Suggesting gender and racial equality, the couple, sophisticated urbanites, are unaffected by their racial differences, lovingly touching each other throughout the ad, with the caveat that the male, while paying rapt attention to the female, takes the lead in all activities with female acceptance. At the same time, the nature of the relationship is ambiguous—it is unclear whether this is a fling, a long-term relationship, or a marriage. (This ad supports Branchik’s (2007) suggestion that advertisements eventually reflect reality and that positive changes are on the horizon for the types of couples shown in ads.)

The 2021 Philadelphia Cream Cheese ad demonstrates the intersection of class, gender, and racial stereotypes. While Goffman’s Ritualization of Subordination is present, as women are often shown lying down as a way to show that they are subordinate to males, in this ad the female, sophisticated in her tastes in clothing, décor, and food, is shown as confident in her choices and in her solitude, with a focus on indulgent self-care while the ring and music suggest she is engaged in a romantic relationship outside the frame of the advertisement.

Table 2 Aflac Commercials

Link to ads	https://youtu.be/X8orTQuG29Y	https://www.thedrum.com/news/2022/03/01/aflac-launches-march-madness-pre-pain-show-with-wanda-sykes-and-lil-rel-howery
Target audience	Consumers in the 35- to 54-year-old age group and to boost sales of accident and disability insurance.	
Product	Aflac Insurance 2012	Aflac Insurance 2022 Pin-Ah-tah
Setting	A Black male and a White male who are friends in a leaking rowboat fishing on a lake.	Wanda Sykes, who is in her late 50’s, & has identified as lesbian and has a White partner, is featured as spokesperson at an outdoor party where a pinata is being struck by a child.
		Sykes is sitting in a broadcast booth looking down on the action at the party as if she were commenting on an athletic event with a male middle-aged Black colleague to whom she is superior in rank.

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Characters and Relationships	This ad features two friends. The first is a White male and the second is a Black male who has injured his arm. As they discuss insurance, a duck is constantly stating “Aflac,” to which both men are oblivious. White man is nervous; Black man is responsible in a gentle, reassuring way.	Younger Black male is trying to avoid being hit with a pinata bat He is bent over submissively, looking to the announcers for help. He is nervous with no plan of escape. The announcers speak with confidence and pay little attention to or show pity for the young victim.
Plot	Two males who are friends have gone fishing. The Black male is reminding the White male of all the things his current insurance program does not cover. A duck continuously suggests that “Aflac” would fill those gaps.	Child shown hitting a pinata. Bat is shown swung near the head of a young Black male. Wanda Sykes and a Black male commentator promote Aflac protection plan benefits. Violence is used as humor. Sykes says she is going to call victim’s Mother after sound of bat hitting victim.
Presence of IRR and Type of Depiction	There is a clear interracial friendship in this commercial as it features two guys, one White and one Black, out fishing together on a lake, implying common interest and trust in one another.	Friendship among sports commentators No romantic relationship Sykes knows the victim’s mother. Young Black male shown as afraid Commentators seem indifferent to his situation Sykes speaks most of the words

Both ads have traditionally male settings: a fishing boat on a lake and a booth with sports commentators. The Aflac ad depends upon the stereotype of a Black character who relates “folk wisdom,” (Hughey, 2009) to his uninformed White male friend. He has an abundance of knowledge that his White friend has not considered. The interracial relationship relies on the idea that in this friendship the Black character is able to advise the White character on what choices he should make in his life, and about his insurance. The Black male shares power with the Aflac Duck in helping his friend, with a patient and polite approach, to understand the importance of purchasing supplemental insurance. This implies that the White character, who is agreeable to this advice, needs a wise Black friend to inform him of all of the bills he would have to pay beyond that which his current insurance covers. Both males are sitting in a leaky rowboat, dressed in casual clothes suggesting a lower middle-class identity. They reinforce a stereotype of non-college educated males not noticing what’s going on in their environment, even as the Aflac duck warns of their peril, as gender, class and racial stereotypes intersect.

The more contemporary ad reinforces a one-dimensional image of the angry, Black, middle-aged female, shown in popular culture stereotypes (Motro et al., 2022), dramatically promoted in Madea movies, viewing the pain of a young Black male with condescension and disdain. It reinforces a negative image of some young Black men as having weak character, a theme highlighted in such classic literature as Hansberry’s *Raisin in the Sun* and Baldwin’s *Sonny’s Blues*. This ad, suggesting the announcer has a same race friendship relationship with the victim’s mother, stands in stark contrast to the Philly ad of interracial romantic love, where the couple sees each other in a positive light.

Table 3 Snickers Commercials

Links to ads	https://youtu.be/UQnD0X2cQmo	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hD3WqYhopsw
Target audience	All-age group that belongs to middle, upper-middle and an upper-class section of society.	
Product	Snickers Candy Bar 2013 Get Some Nuts Inner Diva	Snickers Candy Bar 2022 Snickers Unfiltered
Setting	A locker room full of football players of various races in their 20s in their underwear and Joan Collins.	A living room with two heterosexual White couples in their 20's participating in a game night.
Characters and Relationships	<p>Role reversal of some gender stereotypes. Joan Collins is com-fortable among half naked athletes.</p> <p>She plays on her celebrity to reinforce her image of diva privilege.</p> <p>Her strong posture, assertive delivery and condescending remarks suggest she sees herself as powerful in a male environment.</p> <p>Only ad of 8 featuring characters in their 60's and 70's. Both are portrayed as cold.</p>	<p>Unmarried couples are at ease with one another at first; uneasy by end of commercial.</p> <p>2nd Female is portrayed as sexually liberated, open to multiple sexual partners--and interpersonally imperceptive.</p>
Plot	<p>Joan Collins berates two White players suggesting one of them stole her deodorant. A White male gives her a Snickers and she transforms into a middle-aged White male.</p> <p>Ms. Beacham at end reinforces the over the hill angry diva stereotype.</p> <p>Tagline: Get Some Nuts</p>	<p>First Female suggests a swap.</p> <p>Second female interprets it as a proposal for a sex swap and asks if she would move in with the first female's boyfriend.</p> <p>Both boyfriends show discomfort non-verbally.</p> <p>Second female's boyfriend shows dismay nonverbally at potential of being less preferred than the other male.</p> <p>The 1st female is irritated and clarifies she meant a swap of the team players.</p> <p>The 2nd female says "Of course" and backtracks in embarrassment.</p> <p>Ad blames her behavior on hunger.</p> <p>Tagline: When You Are Hungry, You're Unfiltered. Snickers Satisfies</p>

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<p>Presence of IRR and Type of Depiction</p>	<p>While an interracial friendship among the athletes is portrayed, the two insulted White players are the only athletes who speak. Collins is transformed into a male after a White male who plays the voice of reason gives her candy. The males are secondary to the central female characters, who are both White.</p> <p>The ad reinforces the idea that males are rational, women emotional.</p> <p>The ad implies the older women want to have sex with the males, a role reversal.</p>	<p>2nd female is open to a sex swap and the 3 other participants are uneasy that she would suggest it in the presence of the first female, her boyfriend, and the first female's boyfriend.</p> <p>All the characters are young and White.</p>
<p>Gender and class depictions</p>	<p>Angry privileged divas: much older White women in a testosterone-heavy venue; both reflect Goffman's description of dominance, in this case, of women--superior posture: holding the body erect and head high, a marker of superiority and disdain.</p> <p>Diva sees herself as sexually attractive, healthy, engaged, productive and self-reliant.</p> <p>Male indifference suggests she is not welcome in this setting and her behavior seen as inappropriate</p> <p>Gender swap: male is voice of reason. Women speak more than males, open and close the ad.</p>	<p>Couples sit close together. Males do not speak with only nonverbal indications of discomfort.</p> <p>2nd female is portrayed as unfaithful to the male who accompanied her to game night.</p> <p>She misunderstands how her proposal would be received by the other 3.</p> <p>Two women are the only speakers. Males are voiceless.</p>

The White male in the 2011 commercial swoops in to correct the rudeness of the aging female. The gender stereotypes are manifest: while the White female comes across as agitated and angry, she behaves as if she is the person with power. In reality, the White male, as the voice of reason in the commercial, is the one with the power, as once he gives his friend a candy bar, she turns from being a female, into a rational male. This ad reflects a stereotype with the rational White male giving the aging, passionate White female the advice she needs to succeed in getting the attention she craves. Black characters are voiceless and in the background. (This act of stigmatizing older women is not harmless. It reinforces societal stereotypes of being unaware and unfiltered.)

The contemporary Snickers ad features a similar scenario with a demographically contrasting cast of characters: a young, unmarried, heterosexual White female who speaks openly of switching sexual partners--embarrassing what viewers are to believe to be her three friends. She assumes her friends share her sexual openness and when she realizes they are uncomfortable with her suggestions, (unlike Joan Collins), offers an unconvincing apology. Viewers probably are expected to believe that her initial comment will weaken her trust relationships with the other three. This ad counters some stereotypes with a sexually progressive woman suggesting swapping for a sexual encounter. She defies stereotypical WASP traits: She is neither faithful nor a believer in delayed gratification. She, not the men, is interpersonally unaware of the situation and interpersonal dynamics... and as a result, draws the disapprobation of the other three White characters.

Table 4 Kentucky Fried Chicken Commercials

Links to ads	https://youtu.be/VrN4lAonpN8	https://youtu.be/OmKnMIPmIRk
Target Audience	Children Teens and young adults Families Budget customers	
Product	Kentucky Fried Chicken 2012 Ladies You're Welcome	Kentucky Fried Chicken 2022 Around the Table
Setting	<i>She's a Lady</i> cover. throughout Various settings, such as home, bus, office, and bar with males acting badly.	Entirely in various home kitchens.
Characters and Relationships	Working female, perhaps an administrative assistant, encounters rude boorish males, including husband, bus passengers, & office workers, except for KFC cook. She is portrayed as hardworking, responsible, and perseverant. Men are oblivious/indifferent to what is going on in their environments.	Characters have blue collar vibe Internal dialogs of White male, Black females praising KFC White family & Black family characters are outgoing and at ease enjoying the tastes of KFC products. Seniors not included among characters.
Plot	Female encounters rude White males in a series of situations from morning until after work. She shows nonverbal frustration at each until she is seen shopping with a friendly Black female and spots a smiling male KFC cook. She may be thinking "chivalry is dead."	A variety of characters eat KFC fried chicken sandwich, fries, mashed potatoes, and bucket chicken. <i>Repeated Tagline: That's finger lickin' good</i>
Presence of IRR and Type of Depiction	White male partner is indifferent. Rushes into the bathroom ahead of partner; takes the last of the milk. White female gives bus seat to pregnant female who males ignore. White male co-workers watch female carry heavy bottled water without offering to help. Black female friend relates well to frustrated White female. Children not included ad.	1 Black and 2 White characters are shown enjoying eating alone White family Dad, Mom, 2 preschool kids share a meal. Black Mom, teenage daughter & son eat Together. Black Daughter and others who demonstrate casual table manners are presented in a positive light. White woman speaks the most words.

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Gender and class depictions	Working class female who sees herself as put upon by her male partner and a series of other males. Fetishization of female irritants Males portrayed stereotypically as rude, self-centered, oblivious, unhelpful. Annoyance expressed entirely nonverbally. No romance in partner portrayal. Friendship with Black female. Females are warm and competent; males are cold and indifferent.	Black family with older children absent a Dad. Mom glances at son; Black Teenage son and daughter focus on their food. White family of 4 with small children. Family characters absorbed in eating an unsophisticated fast-food meal, Kids do not look at one another. White Dad interacts with kids White Mom psychologically weak Daydreams; <i>sometimes I bribe my kids with fries and mac n cheese.</i> Wife. Mother.
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The older ad is performative--men and women reacting to societal expectations for masculine and feminine behavior. It plays on several stereotypes with a variety of men being indifferent to a put-upon woman's needs. The female character, while frustrated and feeling powerless, does not confront any of the men. Instead, she seems to be sharing her story with a Black female friend on the way to and at a KFC. This ad reflects how a non-executive woman experiences public patriarchy—free to participate unaccompanied in public transportation, restaurants, and the labor force, yet oppressed and exploited in the service of male interests. The KFC woman--whose dress and demeanor suggest she works as an office administrator--is subject to male indifference to her needs stands in sharp focus to the Philly women whose clear identity as part of a sophisticated consumer class also suggest a self-confidence lacking in the KFC protagonist.

In the 2022 ad, several stereotypes are promoted. The White family reflects an old-fashioned American ideal: married White couple with one son and one daughter, and a Black mother, no visible partner, with older children, one son and one daughter. The mothers are portrayed in a traditional “homemaker” manner, quietly acknowledging their value in their ability to meet her family's needs through the selection of take-out menu items. This ad also makes an appeal to the importance of Moms and their primary roles as meeting children's needs, while also showing KFC to be a meal to be enjoyed while alone. This sort of “traditional” family reflects Hochschild's (2012) argument that women have a “second shift” where mothers may simultaneously be expected to work, serve their husbands and kids, and take care of the house, so they may not have time to make dinner from scratch but are still in charge of getting dinner on the table, something implied in the 2012 ad as well.

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR CLASSROOM ANALYSIS

Faculty might explore these additional questions about how stereotypes might be represented in contemporary television ads when viewed through the lens of intersectionality.

White women vs. Black women

Are White and Black women portrayed differently? The 2021 KFC commercial that shows a traditional White family eating together supports previous research that argues that White and Black women are treated differently in advertisements, with White women portrayed as needing the approval of men whereas Black women are often portrayed, as in this ad, as not in relationships with men (or with unidentified relationships as in the Philly ad or as angry as in the Black female character in the Aflac ad). By contrast, the Black and White singles are portrayed as being happy eating their meals alone, prioritizing savoring their food, similar to the 2022 Philly ad, to sharing conversation with others as they eat.

Same race insults

Do insults in television ads happen primarily in same race relationships? In our examples, Collins insults two White men; Sykes disses a young Black man; the White Snickers sexual adventurer promotes herself as a partner to a White male, insulting the other three White friends, perhaps suggesting a sensitivity about interracial insults in ads.

Sex positive roles

Are men and women portrayed equally as sex positive? Both the Philly ads and the Snickers ads highlight sex positive women while only the Philly ad suggests a sex positive man.

Angry mature females

As all 3 older women (Snickers 2; Aflac 1) are portrayed negatively as rude to younger men while they demonstrate strong physical function and confidence in their demeanor and communication, do their depictions counter some age stereotypes and reinforce others? (Rowe and Kahn, 1997).

Unflattering male stereotypes

Are there more negative portrayals of males, given that men in the ads we examined are more likely to be labelled with unflattering stereotypes, such as being patriarchal, condescending, unaware, insensitive, and boorish, than their young female counterparts?

Unflattering images of non-professional workers

Do ads reflect classism toward the middle class, as suggested in the Aflac rowboat and KFC ads?

TOPICS FOR FUTURE EXPLORATION

Alternative analyses might also explore the intersection of age, class, gender, power, and race stereotypes in different types of ads and in different categories, such as those for outdoor equipment and automobiles, which historically have featured men, and anti-depressant, cosmetics, and fashion ads, which historically have featured women, and ads directed to children.

CONCLUSION

While this analysis supports research findings of societal acceptance of interracial friendship and romantic relationships, it also illustrates that other gender, class, race, power, and age stereotypes persist over time. That is, these ads proved to be sensitive to some stereotypes while reinforcing others. As Giroux (2004) observes, media learning is ubiquitous, a *public pedagogy* that influences how consumers view themselves within the world. Our analysis shows that many recent, short prime-time television ads are visual, aural, and textual carriers of gender, racial, age, power, and class narratives and meanings that persuade viewers to see these intersecting categories of difference as self-evident—and that close examination can help faculty and students better understand how some of these stereotypes have persisted over time.

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APPENDICES**Table A. Common Stereotypes of Females in Media (Sharma & Bumb)****Negative Issues Concerning Women**

Parameter	Description
Females are dependent and need men's protection	Advertisements depicting females dependent on male counterparts, often shown as seeking protection from males. Female's decision is dependent on other members at home
Less Intelligent	Advertisements showing females as less intelligent than men
Submissive and face aggressive behavior from men	Advertisements showing females to be silent and facing aggressive behavior from men, through verbal, physical, or mental abuse
Advisory roles/ do not make important decisions	Females, when shown in employment, are in advisory roles or do not take any important decisions
Younger than males	When males are present, females are depicted as younger. This creates an impression that ageing is a taboo.
Weak physical positioning with respect to males	Females are often portrayed as lying down on the ground or on a bed, making females passive, and in some cases is a clear indication of social hierarchy.
Sexy/skimpy clothing, skin showing	Advertisements with females wearing sexy/skimpy clothing reflects emphasis on skin showing
Sexual postures/ expressions/ gestures	Showing females to have expressions, posture, and gestures that induce sexual appeal
Focus on certain parts of body	Focusing on certain parts of a female's body to incite sexual appeal
Object of desire	Females shown primarily as objects of male sexual desire, rather than as whole people--
Successful females are depicted as sexually attractive	Often the females who are successful are shown as sexually attractive
Weak posture	Females are portrayed having a weak posture, with a knee or head bent towards ground.
Unfocused attention	Unfocused attention includes withdrawal symptoms in which females do not focus on anything firmly. This aspect indicates that she is psychologically weak and less stable. She is more dependent on the surroundings for her stability.
Feminine touch	Females are shown with their fingers touching their contours to feel the body. While touching, the caress is usually on face, neck, shoulder, depicting females as delicate and fragile.
Passive behavior	Females remain passive and silent and tend to appear unalert and removed from social settings.
Happy housewife	Focusing on the role that females are happy as housewives and their only duties are limited to home, concerned with the kitchen and bathroom--and not shown in offices or working environments
Relationship roles	Females are shown in relationship roles i.e., as a wife, mother, sister, and not as independent females.
Focus on certain products	Females are shown with products such as cleaning, housekeeping, cooking and not in products such as cars, gaming stations, insurance policies.

Table B. Power Relations in Advertisements

Power Relations As with stereotypes, the short nature of most commercials means that advertisers rely on commonly held social ideology about power as a way of quickly getting across the plot and message of the commercial. Table B summarizes the qualifications for identifying unequal power relationships in advertisements

Power Relations	Relative Size: Goffman (1979) “One way in which social weight—power, authority, rank, office, renown—is echoed expressively in social situations is through relative size, especially height” (p. 28).
	<i>Function Ranking:</i> Characters are depicted as having a ranking order. Instruction or relationships typically involve a subordinate character. In many advertisements, one person “is likely to perform the executive role, providing only that one can be fashioned... This arrangement seems widely represented in advertisements, in part, no doubt, to facilitate interpretability at a glance” (Goffman, 1979: p. 32).
	<i>The Ritualization of Subordination:</i> Specific physical positions demonstrate one character in an advertisement having power over another. Goffman: “A classic stereotype of deference is that of lowering oneself physically in some form or other of prostration. Correspondingly, holding the body erect and the head high is stereotypically a marker of unshamedness, superiority, and disdain” (1979: p. 40).

Table C. Portrayal of Blacks in Advertisements

Stereotypes	Sincere Fictions of the White Self: Vera and Gordon (2003) use the term “sincere fictions of the White self” to describe depictions of Black people or of interracial relationships that are created to appeal to White audiences, appease minority groups, and assuage White guilt and White complicity in accepting the systems of power that have historically oppressed Blacks.	
	Common media stereotypes: This includes the stock Black character who has magical powers of redemption and salvation for White characters, minorities as <i>Minstrels/Entertainers, the Mammy and Tom</i> which is the happy and faithful servant, and the stereotype of the Black male as lazy, unreliable, unintelligent, and oversexualized (Hughey 2009).	
How these stereotypes are depicted in commercials	Black Characters	White Characters
	Sincere fictions of the White self—Black characters need help from White characters and lack socioeconomic mobility on their own.	Affluent, professional, long-term goals Sophisticated upwardly mobile Focus on long-term goals
	Folk Wisdom: Romantic advice for White males. Moral lessons from life and the streets. Spirituality and material detachment	Fact-based and inferential reasoning—lessons from school and business experience. Material values of the upper class Attached to finer things.
Traditional stereotype: Happy, subordinate, part of family. Blacks have a cultural deficiency, poor grammar, and respond to the short term—fast food, cars, women, clothes.	Dominant member of the family. Ambitious, successful, married, faithful, honest, and enjoy delaying gratification to attain finer things like gourmet food or expensive reliable cars.	