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MULTIRACIAL FAMILIES IN TELEVISION COMMERCIALS: DIVERSIFYING
NOTIONS OF THE FAMILY

By

CRYSTAL ANNETTE BEDLEY

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Multiracial Families in Television Commercials: Diversifying Notions of the Family

By Crystal Annette Bedley

Dissertation Director: Catherine Lee, Ph.D.

Families with parents who identify with different racialized groups and their multiracial offspring, especially Black/White interracial families, have come to symbolize the pinnacle of racial harmony by representing racial unity through interracial intimacy. At the same time these families also symbolize racial tensions and reflect the racist attitudes of those who disapprove of interracial unions. This project explores how the media shape dominant views of the family in response to increasing racial and ethnic diversity and the growth of interracial unions and families. Secondly, this project addresses the role of the media as it informs the ways people think about multiracial people. Using multiple methods including content analysis of three television commercials portraying interracial families and news and industry reports pertaining to these commercials, as well as focus group interviews with viewers, I show how advertisers reliance on multiculturalism engages the framework of detached difference by treating diversity as uniform and decontextualizing it from the political, historical, economic and social forces that in reality make ethnoracial difference meaningful. Moreover, through the portrayal of these families in television commercials, a multiracial trope may be emerging as uniform phenotypical appearances that portray a preferred biracial look of racial in-betweeness. Finally, I discuss how the commercials evoke a positive emotional response in viewers,

the notion of hot cognition, which serves to render interracial families as an aspirational family form.

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Introduction

In May 2013, General Mills aired a Cheerios commercial with a “family that America fell in love with”, showing a multiracial¹ family, a first of its kind for Cheerios (Hunt 2013). In the commercial, a racially ambiguous young girl with a medium skin tone and curly brown hair approaches her fair skinned mother at the dining room table to verify that Cheerios is “good for your heart” as her dad had mentioned. A bit surprised by the question, the mother refers to the box of Cheerios and states that the whole grain oats inside can lower cholesterol, which is heart healthy. Upon this discovery, the young girl smiles slyly, grabs the box of cereal and runs away. Cut to the next scene where a dark skinned man wakes from an afternoon nap to find his chest covered in a pile of Cheerios, end scene. Then the familiar yellow of the Cheerios box becomes the background to one word prominently displayed: “Love” with a Cheerio quaintly serving as punctuation.

A multitude of viewer reactions emerged online mirroring the ambivalence, support and disdain that multiracial families embody. These comments reflect the racialized, and sometimes racist, attitudes maintained by Americans of different racial backgrounds. On the one hand, comments about this commercial display hostility and prejudice:

“a very, very rare American family. Interracial marriage is still uncommon. The more typical situation if they want to show something interracial would be a fat white woman in a section 8 apartment with 5 half black kids and the baby daddies no where to be found. That is what an interracial American family of today looks like” (thephora.net n.d.)

Other comments show the personal impact that the depiction of interracial families can have:

¹ A note about language: When used to describe families comprised of individuals who identify with different racialized groups, the terms interracial and multiracial are used interchangeably. I also use multiracial to describe individuals who self-identify with more than one race.

“Thank you very much Cheerios for making a commercial that represents MY family! My 4 year old has a commercial that represents HER family! Please do NOT back down to the narrow population that is an ever dwindling minority in this country!” (Hunt 2014)

Families with parents who identify with different racialized groups and their multiracial offspring, especially Black/White interracial families, have come to symbolize the pinnacle of racial harmony by representing racial unity through interracial intimacy. At the same time these families also symbolize racial tensions and reflect the racist attitudes of those who disapprove of interracial unions. Comments like the ones above also raise questions about how (non) representative interracial families are as *the* American family of today. In other words, these comments underscore assumptions about the racialized norms associated with the institution of the family. Specifically, the notion that families not only share the same race, but are White.

Broadly speaking, this is a study of how the media shape dominant views of the family in response to increasing racial and ethnic diversity. Secondly, this project addresses the role of the media as it informs the ways people think about multiracial people. Given the contestation over racial meanings attributed to interracial couples and their offspring, along with disparate attitudes about these families, the originating question for this research project is: *how are people making sense of this form of ethnoracial diversity in their everyday lives?*

This project is sociologically significant because it explores how interracial families and their multiracial children, who have historically been marginalized, are now being used by advertisers to appeal to all ethnoracial groups and to demonstrate institutional commitments to diversity. This is a tremendous shift in how we think about race and the family, and television commercials provide one empirical site for

interrogating this shift, its limits, and the aspirations that such families symbolize. This project shows how the media work to normalize particular racial images and thinking. In turn, viewers' perspectives align and diverge from these media messages as mediated by their lived experiences. Central to this investigation are the mechanisms that are working to normalize interracial families and the multiracial children of these families.

Throughout this project, I'll highlight several of these mechanisms, chief among these are representation, authenticity, and racial difference. Representation addresses how advertisers and viewers alike grapple with questions about how common interracial families are and the extent to which these families can represent the American family. Discussions of authenticity throughout this project illuminate how interracial families and multiracial people have been constructed to symbolize an aspirational form of racial unity that, in reality, has yet to be achieved. I'll also show how when profits are at stake, attempts to minimize racial difference and its associated inequalities can be counterproductive. As advertisers tend to flatten racial difference through colorblind tactics, they risk alienating viewers who are attune to the ways in which racial difference has political, economic and social consequences for non-Whites.

To understand how people are thinking about interracial families and how the media is informing these conceptualizations, I answer the following research question: *How are dominant views of race and the family being constructed through the marketplace?* On the one hand, the marketplace is comprised of producers—companies that commodify collective symbols of race and the family while simultaneously informing new conceptualizations. On the other hand, the marketplace is ruled by

consumption—viewers literally consume the symbols present in advertising, but also are active purchasers of the products advertised.

To answer this question, I pursue a three-pronged methodological approach. I begin by performing a content analysis to provide a rich and nuanced interpretation of the commercials that are central to this study. Next, I analyze news stories and industry reports of the advertising campaigns in which these commercials are situated, supplemented with two interviews with advertising executives, to elucidate some of the intentions and assumptions of the producers of these commercials and to make inferences about how production in the marketplace informs the social construction of race and the family. Finally, I report the findings of 11 focus group interviews, which are comprised of an ethnically and racially diverse and convenient sample of adults living in the Northeast. The 57 participants watched, reflected upon, and discussed three advertisements depicting what viewers will most likely interpret as Black/White interracial families. In summary, these three analytic approaches allow me to triangulate the findings, ultimately improving the comprehensiveness of this qualitative multi-method project and provides some leverage for generalizing beyond the samples discussed. The findings and conclusions drawn from this project will illuminate an area of research rarely addressed by scholars, namely by explaining how media consumption and institutional commitments inform everyday understandings of racial difference/hybridity and the family.

In the next chapter, I will show the complexity of counting interracial couples and multiracial families to discuss how this demographic shift is shaping the racial identities of the children of interracial unions and to provide a rationale for why advertisers are

increasingly interested in multiracial families. We'll see that as racial identities are becoming more complex, so are our understandings of race. But what's informing these conceptualizations of race? While there are a variety of influences, I focus on describing television's role in racial socialization. Because there has been little to no research on how television (let alone television commercials) shapes understandings of people who identify with multiple races, I next turn to a discussion of how Multiracials are treated in advertising to begin to bridge the literatures on racial socialization through television and my research interest in how television and advertising inform everyday understandings of interracial families and are active players in ethnoracial group-making.

Specifically in Chapter 2, I will introduce the commercials that are the focus on this research by analyzing their visual and audio content. Empirical questions to be addressed: What are the discursive frames are invoked through the representation of multiracial families? How are viewers being primed to interpret these commercials? Chapter 3 contextualizes these commercials by exploring advertising executives' perspectives on the use of multiracial families in television commercials through an exploration of public comments made by advertising executives to the news media and gathered through informational interviews I conducted. Empirical question(s) to be addressed: What cultural norms about race are advertising executives trying to sell to their audience? What assumptions do advertisers make about how the audience will interpret viewing multiracial families? Chapter 4 will focus on the viewers' reaction to these commercials. Viewers' reactions are captured through focus groups interviews with a convenient sample and are designed to provide insight into the extent to which these interpretations converge with and diverge from the framing described in chapter 2.

Empirical question(s) to be addressed: How does the viewer's racial identity impact his/her interpretations? What other factors are influencing their interpretations? Chapter 5 will seek to summarize themes across the preceding chapters, draw some conclusions and suggest directions for further research.

What this multi-method approach will show a deftly performed tango between seemingly contradictory notions of race and the family. On the one hand, producers sell and consumers buy into notion that families need not be racialized, projecting an aspirational and romantic view of interracial families and Multiracial individuals. On the other hand, both producers and consumers continue to subtly convey that racial difference within families is meaningful by continuing to advance racial stereotypes and applying these stereotypes to what it means to be multiracial. These two sides of the same coin ultimately show the social tension between a reality that is not nearly as accepting of interracial intimacy as the idealized vision for the future contends.

Chapter 1: *Multiracial Families: Estimates, Symbols and Challenges*

As Kimberly DaCosta argues (2004:20), “the emergence of multiracial families as families represents a significant cultural shift in American conceptions of family and race.” In this case, the cultural shift is a recognition that family members need not identify with the same racial groups. Multiracial politics, specifically the collective mobilization around the recognition of a multiracial category and advocating for the rights of multiracial individuals to identify as such, bring increased attention to multiracial families by attempting to normalize what has been conventionally invisible and pathologized (Moran 2003, DaCosta 2004). Yet, a focus on multiracial families reifies the notion that interracial couples and their children share some unifying experience or characteristics. Ironically, if there is any unifying characteristic that multiracial families share it is that they are inherently diverse.

This project focuses on the depiction of Black/White interracial couples and their children given the specific political and historical challenges these couples have faced and the legacy of slavery that has reinforced White superiority and Black inferiority. This power dynamic has served to give White, middle class, nuclear families ideological, political, economic and social support, inevitably reinforcing the notion of White families as the idealtypical family form. In comparison, Black families have been systematically denied economic and political resources, and culturally are “treated like the cancer eating away at the backbone of good society” (Dalmage 2000:4). Interracial couples and their children complicate these narratives and provide an opportunity for people to reevaluate their views about race and the family. At the same time, multiracial families must also grapple and make sense of these competing messages regarding their own families.

An examination of multiracial families is also an examination of the ways in which families are socially constructed and the family's importance as a social institution. As Catherine Lee (2013) argues, conceptualizations about what families mean and what constitutes family, the notion of *family ideation*, relies on idealized features including sexuality, gender and race and ethnicity. There is strong reason to believe that the collective notion of family envisions a nuclear family, one that is comprised of heterosexual parents fulfilling traditional gendered roles *and* who share the same ethnoracial identity as their offspring. Conceptualization of the family are critical to investigate because we often define ourselves racially in relation to our parents (i.e., I am White because both of my parents are White). In other words, race is made meaningful through kinship. Arguing that kinship cannot be understood without a racial dimension, DaCosta (2004) argues that people already possess a framework for making sense of multiracial families, a framework that assumes the racial singularity of each parent, followed by racial mixing resulting from the union of two differently racialized people. For instance, everyone knows that Tiger Woods is from an interracial family because he has a Black father and an Asian mother. Not only do families teach us about our own racial identities, we also pick up prejudicial and/or racist attitudes and beliefs from them. As Heather Dalmage (2000:2) argues, "family has been a primary means through which a racially divided and racist society has been maintained." Families are also conceived as a crucial site for the creation, reproduction and transformation of racial categories. Investigating how people think about multiracial families can bring to light racialized attitudes and beliefs about family, race and identity that might otherwise remain hidden (Chito Childs 2005).

Representation and Interracial Families

It is important to understand some of the demographic characteristics of the multiracial population to make sense of how viewers and advertisers conceive of this amorphous and emerging category(ies). In other words, knowing the “number” of interracial families and self-identified Multiracials helps to contextualize viewers’ and advertisers’ comments about the extent to which multiracial families can represent the institution of family.

Currently, multiracial families are a growing, but are still a minority family form. While the rates of interracial marriage have been on the rise since the 1980s, the vast majority of Americans settle into relationships with someone who shares their racial background. It’s safe to assume, however, that at least one in every ten people is in an interracial relationship. Currently, the rates of interracial marriages in the United States range from 9.5 percent when Hispanic/Latino is defined as an ethnic group (Johnson and Kreider 2013) to 15 percent when it is defined as a racial group (Wang 2012). Interracial couples who cohabitate are even more common than married couples making up 9 percent of the opposite sex cohabitating partners and 10 percent of same sex cohabitating partners (making up 19 percent of all cohabitating couples) (Vespa, Lewis and Krieder 2013).² Based on these numbers, interracial cohabitating couples are overrepresented among couple who cohabitate (Qian and Lichter 2011). Another trend is that racial minorities are more likely to be living or married to Whites than to other racial minorities. But, of course, these trends are uneven and dependent on the particular

² These finding are based on data from the American Community Survey where Hispanics/Latinos are treated as an ethnic group rather than racial group. One can imagine that the rates of interracial cohabitation are even higher if Hispanics are treated as a racial group, but there are no nationally representative studies constructed in this way.

ethnoracial group. Historically, Asians, Native Americans and Latinos have much higher intermarriage rates with Whites than do Blacks (Qian and Lichter 2007; Rosenfeld 2008). Focusing in on Black/White interracial marriage, there has been incredible change since the 1980s, specifically a threefold increase in the number of these marriages from 1980 to 2008 (Qian and Lichter 2011). Interestingly, roughly three-quarters of these marriages are between Black men and White women. While Blacks are still the least likely ethnoracial group to marry Whites, they more often live together. For instance, while 14 percent of married Black men had White wives, 18 percent of Black men cohabitate with White women (Qian and Lichter 2011). On the other end of the romantic pairings spectrum is when an interracial union dissolves. Dissolution of these unions serves as an indicator of the challenges faced by interracial couples. Bratter and King's (2008) research suggests that divorce is higher for interracial couples than couples who identify with the same race.

Worth noting is that these counts of interracial marriage, cohabitation and divorce obscure the racial politics associated with racial identification. As the meanings associated with racial groups transform over time scientists' abilities to identify interracial marriages have become more complicated (Waters 2000). In other words, our understanding of what constitutes discrete racial groups is constantly being refined. While racial identity is stable for many people, some scholars have suggested that the norms of hypodescent are loosening (Khanna 2010; Larson 2002), which is creating opportunities for people's racial identities to be more fluid—especially for those who identify with multiple ethnoracial groups. While there may be opportunities for more fluid expression of racial identities, the cultural, political, economic and legal

reinforcement of the idea that racial categories are pure, untainted, and lacking a history of racial “mixing”—especially for Whites—provides incentives for consistently identifying with the same racial group over time. Regardless, most, if not all, research on interracial marriage rates cannot account for this variation in racial identification nor can it account for the ways in which racial categories are continually being socially constructed. These rates might best be understood as rough estimates of contested and changing racial categories.

Racism and Interracial families

Beyond demographic research, there has been sustained scholarly interest in theorizing about the significance of interracial families as well as people’s attitudes towards these unions. Such theorizing elucidates symbolic quality of interracial families as a primary site for anti-racist projects to be constructed. Given the continued racism experienced by interracial families and their multiracial offspring, I begin to lay the groundwork for viewer claims that interracial families are symbolic of our aspirations for the institution of the family, namely that love and intimacy transcend racial boundaries.

Symbolically, scholars cite interracial marriage rates as evidence of assimilation (Gordon 1964), racial social distance, prejudice and discrimination (Burton et al. 2010, Lee and Bean 2010) and increasing social acceptance of these unions (Schuman et al. 1997, Joyner and Kao 2005, Lee and Edmonston 2005). In line with the rise in interracial unions, attitudes towards these unions have regarded them more favorably over time. On the whole, the vast majority of Americans support interracial marriage and interracial dating (Wang 2012). For example, when asked if people of different races marrying each other is better, worse or makes no difference for society, 43 percent of the survey

respondents view interracial marriage as improving society while 11 percent of respondents reported a worsening of society as a result of these unions (Wang 2012). When focusing on Whites' attitudes towards interracial marriage (a longstanding research tradition), recent research shows that about equal percentages (one-third) of White respondents both reject and endorse interracial relationships, with modest evidence that Whites are less willing to marry and have children than to date interracially (Herman and Campbell 2012).

While the evidence suggests that sizable numbers of people view interracial unions in a positive light, the lived experiences of interracial families do not always align with these views. Donna Pinckley's art project "Sticks and Stones" (2014) highlights the animosity that interracial couples and families experience. Handwritten captions—insults each of the couples pictured has received—plainly show the racist attitudes that interracial families experience in their daily lives.

In one image, we see a light skinned teenaged boy with curly light brown hair who is nearly as tall as the mother standing next to him. With a similar complexion and shared features, the mother is holding a toddler girl with curly black hair and a medium complexion, while the dark skinned father stands on the right with his hand placed on the girl's ankle and a wedding ring visible upon inspection. The family stands close to one another displaying their unity, yet no one is smiling. The handwritten caption beneath the image reads, "Bitches like that are the reason we can't get a good black man." The viewer is left imagining that the somber expression on these family members may be a reference to the racial prejudice they experience. At the same time, the caption insinuates disdain for White women and a sense of competition for Black men. So while resistance to

interracial families may be dwindling, such anecdotes remind us that this resistance persists. The scholarship on this topic echoes the sentiments portrayed here. Namely, that interracial couples must face negative reactions to their union from strangers (Dalmage 2000, Chino Childs 2005, Tashiro 2012).

Yet, we need not rely on anecdotes to make sense of the racism encountered by multiracial families, an interrogation of miscegenation (i.e., the “mixing” of racial groups through sex, dating, cohabitation and marriage) laws highlights the racism and prejudice interracial couples (and often their children) experience. From the mid-1600s to the mid-1900s, miscegenation laws were some of the most enduring racial restrictions in the United States. Primarily restricting sex and marriage among Blacks and Whites, they reflected and produced racial meanings regarding the “purity” of racial groups (Pascoe 1996). Thirty-eight states adopted miscegenation laws banning White-Black relationships (while 14 states had bans on Asian-White unions and seven banned Native American-White unions), essentially treating interracial unions as immoral, unnatural, genetically dangerous (should the couple procreate), and ultimately served to reinforce racial boundaries and to maintain that racial groups were distinct from one another (Moran 2003).

As evidenced in arguments made in *Scott v. Georgia* (1869); "The amalgamation of the races is not only unnatural, but is always productive of deplorable results. Our daily observation shows us, that the offspring of these unnatural connections are generally sickly and effeminate ...They are productive of evil, and evil only, without any corresponding good." The Virginia's Racial Integrity Act of 1924, the purpose of which was to prevent "abominable mixture and spurious issue" by forbidding "miscegenation on

the grounds that racial mixing was scientifically unsound and would ‘pollute’ American with mixed-blood offspring,” continued the narrative of interracial couples and their children as unnatural, aberrant, and a serious social problem (Sollors 2000). These sentiments would be echoed in some 40 years’ time as a lower court judge ruled to uphold Virginia’s miscegenation law; “Almighty God created the races white, black, yellow, malay and red, and he placed them on separate continents. And but for the interference with his arrangement there would be no cause for such marriages. The fact that he separated the races shows that he did not intend for the races to mix.” This lower court ruling did not stand, however, and in 1967 the Supreme Court heard the *Loving v. Commonwealth of Virginia* case, finally striking down the remaining legal sanctions banning interracial couples from marrying. Fast forward to today and among interracial couples and families in-the-know in major metropolitan areas like New York City and Los Angeles, and internationally in places like Amsterdam and Tokyo, June 12th (commonly referred to as “Loving Day”) is an annual celebration of this landmark decision.

As racial tolerance became a dominant racial attitude, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2004) argues that a new racial ideology emerges—colorblind racism. Colorblind racism advances the idea that the racial inequality evident today is not a result of racism, but rather some shortcoming of the racial minority groups that are affected. In other words, the belief that race no longer shapes life outcomes for non-Whites. The legacy of this Supreme Court decision, coupled with this surge in colorblind ideology, have shaped practices which de-emphasize racial categories in the marriage process. Based on the assumption that “granting public recognition to racial categories seemed to be

synonymous with racism itself” (Pascoe 1996), many states stopped collecting race data when granting marriage licenses. Yet even with these changes enduring divisions between Blacks and Whites have persisted, such as marriage between these two groups. As a result, even though interracial unions had historically been labeled problematic by Whites, the problematic nature of such unions shifted from the tainting of racially pure groups to concerns about raising biracial children and the additional burdens placed on interracial families (Bonilla-Silva 2004). What hasn’t changed is that interracial families are thought to be different from other families, non-normative, and aberrant. To elaborate, Foeman and Nance (1999) argue that Black/White unions are still often stigmatized as intrinsically dysfunctional relationships by virtue of their racial status. This stigmatization relies on antiquated stereotypes about black sexuality, hypergamy (i.e., “marrying up”) and neuroses that develop as a result of living in a liminal space where the interracial couple and their children represent at least two cultural groups while at the same time belonging to neither (Foeman and Nance 1999).

Similar to the declining emphasis on race at the state level, currently race ideologically occupies an increasingly peripheral place in romantic decision-making for individuals (Moran 2003). A common refrain, in line with a colorblind, romantic individualism, is that we chose our life partners because we love them, not because of the color of their skin. As Moran (2003:119) argues, this focus on individual choice in romantic partners “suppresses the significance of race in personal decisionmaking but also deflects attention from structural factors like segregation that limit a person’s ability to meet, date, and marry someone of another race.” Ironically, the persistent low rates of interracial marriage and cohabitation draws attention to these unions, even though these

unions are shrouded in a veil of racial tolerance and acceptance of racial difference. The notion of racial endogamy as normative underscores not only romantic decision-making, but also serves to define interracial unions as aberrant. In other words, despite a rise in the number of interracial unions and more favorable attitudes towards interracial relationships, there are still significant cultural barriers that interracial families endure.

A growing body of scholarship has identified challenges facing interracial couples (Bill and Hastings, 2015; Wang et al. 2006; Chito Childs 2005; Dalmage, 2000; Killian 2003; Lewis and Yancey 1995; Root 2001). Adolescents in interracial relationships are less likely to tell their parents about this romantic involvement as well as being less likely to meet their partner's parents or make their relationship public (Wang et al. 2006). These patterns demonstrate the lack of social support from significant others, family members in particular, which has characterized some interracial unions (Ferber 1998, McNamara, Tempenis, and Walton 1999, Chito Childs 2005, DaCosta 2007). There is also evidence showing higher rates of psychological distress for intermarried African American and Native American husbands and wives (Bratter and Eschbach 2006) and the challenge of contending with ever present racism and discrimination (Rosenblatt, Karis and Powell 1995). Given these challenges and the policies and practices at play that reinforce the notions of monoraciality, we see that interracial families are not only embedded in historic transformations about kinship, ideology, and social relations, but also shaped by conflict, contradiction and struggle (DaCosta 2004, 2007).

The Rise of the Population of People Who Identify with Multiple Races

I would be remiss in discussing interracial families without also emphasizing the multiracial children who not only become the embodiment of the interracial union, but

also embody the attitudes towards these interracial romantic pairings. Noting increasing rates of interracial marriage and cohabitation as indicators of declining social distance among different races, scholars engage in an ecological fallacy, namely assuming that bi/multiracial people are inherently more racially tolerant. According to this logic, the offspring of interracial unions embody this decreased social distance through their physically ambiguous appearances. For example, Herbert Gans (1999) argues that multiracial persons represent a “literal melting pot” through “embodied multiculturalism”, which over generations serves to flatten the differences in visible physical features until, he predicts, these racial markers finally fade into invisibility. This flattening of difference is a theme I pick up in the next chapter when discussing the notion of detached difference, a strategy employed by advertisers to superficially portray company commitments to diversity using interracial families to sell their products. Advertisers surely seem to ascribe to Gans’ premise that Multiracials can dissolve racial differences and to a lesser extent the viewers I interviewed share in these views.

Others claim that the multiracial population defies the social order by blurring racial and ethnic group boundaries (Root 1992; Lee and Bean 2004; Qian and Lichter 2007). These perspectives suggest that multiracial people on the whole are challenging the existing mutually exclusive racial categorization of the racial hierarchy similarly to how interracial couples challenge the notion of “pure” racial groups. This challenge to the racial hierarchy, in turn, has been linked with notions of multiculturalism, diversity, and the dissolution of the racial hierarchy altogether in the newly formed “color blind era.”

As the racial and ethnic landscape of the United States continues to diversify, more people are identifying themselves with non-White and multiple racial identities. So

much so that some demographers predict that by 2050, not only will Whites no longer constitute the racial majority, but also predictions suggest that one in five Americans will identify as multiracial (Bean and Lee 2004:221). At the same time, racial classification is becoming more complex.

Although portrayed as a recent phenomenon in the press, racial and ethnic “mixing” has been a part of the U.S. landscape for centuries. At times officially recognized by the State, as is the case with the inclusion of the “mulatto” category on the U.S. Census, the year 2000 marked an important shift in the measurement of race on this national scale. From this point onward, individuals now have the option to self-identify with multiple race categories rather than the mutually exclusive categorization that existed in the past. The counting of people who identify with different races also opened the door for advertisers to engage in the multiracial group making process.

Indeed the United States is becoming increasingly multicultural. This multicultural composition is being driven by increased immigration primarily from Asia and Latin America since the 1970s. From 2000 to 2010, the Hispanic population grew the most, a 43 percent increase to 50.5 million (equaling 16 percent of the U.S. population). Following Hispanics, Blacks make up 13 percent of the total population in 2010, Asians comprise 5 percent and Native Americans account for less than one percent (Social Science Data Analysis Network, 2011). While Whites maintain majority representation in the United States, their numbers are diminishing. During this same ten-year time span, 2.5 percent or 1 in 40 people (6.8 million) selected multiple races on the Census. By 2010, 2.9 percent (9 million) reported multiple races, a small but significant increase.

From the recent census data emerge several important demographic trends—first, multiracial identification is fluid. Even though the Census can provide a sketch of the multiracial population in the United States, these static categorical assignments fail to capture the complexity of identification choices available and articulated by those who identify with multiple ethnic and racial groups. Multiracial identification is often a moving target, and survey methods are ill-equipped to keep pace with the whim (or strategic decision) of the respondent. This is not to suggest that surveys should be treated as anachronistic gibberish. Instead, researchers who analyze surveys that include multiple racial identification measures find repeatedly that identification choices are influenced by contextual factors, including the setting in which the survey is taken, the respondents' perceived institutional use of the data, familial relations, among others (Harris and Sim 2002; Brunsma 2006; Bedley 2013).

To illustrate this trend I return to the 2000 Census. At the time, multiracial respondents most often recorded a racial combination of White and “Some Other Race.” White and American Indian was the second most common combination reported, followed by White and Asian, and finally, White and Black (http://www.censusscope.org/us/chart_multi.html accessed November 27, 2011). By 2010, the most common combination was Black and White, followed by White and Some Other Race, White and Asian, and American Indian and White respectively (Saulny 2011). Moreover, the 2010 Census demonstrates an increase in the number of Hispanics who identify as Native American (Decker 2011). It would be dubious, if not outright false, to assume that the rise in Black/White or Hispanic/Native American identifications are being driven by Black/White and Hispanic/Native American unions since there no

similar increases in interracial marriages between these groups. It is more accurate to assume that multiracial identities and identifications are produced at the intersection of an individual's understanding of the self, her surroundings, upbringing, and the moment in which she is recording her race.

Exploring this intersection, Kerry Ann Rockquemore (1998) constructs a multiracial typology that describes a broad range of identity choices for the multiracial individual, including traditional identities, which follow the norms of the one-drop rule, Border Identities—where biracial individuals situate their identity beyond the predefined social categories (i.e.-Black and White) as being something more than the sum of their different races, Protean Identities—where biracial individuals shift their racial identity situationally according to the context of the particular interaction and finally, Transcendental Identities—where biracial individuals discount race as part of their identity altogether. While in theory there are more racial identity choices available to the mixed-race person, this is not to suggest that mixed-race people's identity choices are uninhibited. To the contrary, DaCosta's (2007) work shows that Multiracials' collective identity is characterized in part by perceived marginality and does not mirror White ethnic options (Waters 1990) because of the investment Multiracials have in their identity, which is inextricably linked to notions of the family. In other words, her multiracial respondents were deeply committed to their multiracality because they saw it as a symbol of their parents' relationship to themselves. Given the multiplicities of identity and identification options available to mixed-race people, it should come as no surprise that the meanings attributed to this category in the making are similarly diverse.

The second trend worth noting is that the multiracial population is young and growing. According to the U.S. Census, while there were only 460,000 children living in mixed-race families in 1970, that number had increased to 1.9 million by 1990. Analysis of data from the 2000 census shows that 42 percent of the multiracial population was under the age of 18, approximately 2.9 million (Herman 2004:730). By 2010, the multiracial youth population grew 50 percent to 4.2 million children (censuscope.org). Importantly, census data on the under 18 population relies on racial designations made by the head of household, often the parent of the child. Thus, the census provides one estimate of the young multiracial population, but is incapable of representing the self-identification of these minors.

Our understanding of the young multiracial population is shaped by a variety of factors, prominent among these are decisions parents make about children's racial classification, influence of the context in which race is being reported, and the ethnoracial background of the individual. Using data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, David Brunsma (2005) finds parental identification of their multiracial children's races primarily adheres to the one-drop rule, where youngsters—between the ages of 4- and 6-years old—are more often classified by their non-White race. The notable exceptions being Hispanic/White and Asian/White children whose parents more often identified their kids as White or Multiracial, racial designations argued to be less stigmatizing. In their study of adolescents, Harris and Sim (2002) show that racial identification varies contextually (whether the teen was classifying him/herself at school or at home) and that racial identification is most fluid for White/Native American youth, who also comprise the largest multiracial population in their sample. Subsequent research shows Hispanic

identification for adolescents to be fluid as well (Brown et al. 2006). Arguments explaining why these multiracial identifications are fluid rely on claims about greater racial diversity, where diversity is linked to notions of virtue and declining racial prejudice.

Thirdly, the emerging multiracial category/ies is/are best characterized by its/their inherent diversity rather than homogeneity. To speak of a “multiracial category” obscures significant differences in the lived experiences of its members. At the same time, this category is being made meaningful by those who study, advocate for, report on and depict mixed-raced people as a coherent group. Hence, a tension has emerged between those who are interested in the similarities of the multiracial experience and those who focus on the differences. Scholars are more often interested in multiracial variation, whereas activists more often work to build a coherent meaning and agenda around the notion of multiraciality.

Whether or not the concept of multiracial or “multiraciality” is analytically useful, a multiracial category (or more precisely, categories) is/are forming. Because meanings are still being formulated around these categories, we can look to how scholars, activists, pundits and journalists and advertisers frame “multiraciality” and how individuals are responding to these frameworks and to each other to better understand Multiracials’ role(s) in race relations.

The trends outlined here have not gone unnoticed by advertising executives and agencies. Today the commodification of racial diversity has become big business (Mora 2014, Davila 2001, Shankar 2015). DaCosta (2007) further points out that ethnic marketing is one of the fastest growing segments of the advertising industry. Once

viewed as niche marketing, now ethnic marketing, at times, takes the place of mainstream mass marketing. As one journalist notes, “the diverse images reflect a trend that has been quietly growing in the advertising industry for years: Racially mixed scenarios — families, friendships, neighborhoods and party scenes — are often used as a hip backdrop to sell products” (Texeira 2005).

This growth is fueled, in part, by the increased buying power of people of color, including Multiracials (see Table 1).

Table 1: U.S. Buying Power by Race
(Adapted from *The Multicultural Economy*, Humphreys 2008, 2013)

<u>Race</u>	Buying Power (billions of dollars)			
	<u>1990</u>	<u>2000</u>	<u>2008</u>	<u>2013</u>
White	3,816.20	6,231.10	9,135.70	10,376.00
Black	318.1	590.2	913.1	1,070.90
American Indian	19.7	39.1	61.8	96.1
Asian	116.5	268.9	509.1	712.8
Multiracial	0	58.3	101.2	161.3
Total	4,270.50	7,187.60	10,721.00	14,013.70

Table 1 shows that Black Americans have the greatest minority buying power, followed by Asians, then Multiracials (Humphreys 2008, 2013). The diversity of the multiracial population, however, poses challenges for marketers attempting to determine who is “the multiracial consumer”. Thus, not only are advertisers using multiracial actors to appeal to a range of racial and ethnic consumers, advertisers are also interested in the demographic make-up of the multiracial population in order to target this population, and through their marketing efforts are playing a central role in the formation and maintenance of a multiracial category.

While “multiraciality” in advertising connotes competing definitions, the focus of this section is on actors who are clearly identifiable as being multiracial rather than focus on racial diversity or a focus on actors/models that are racially ambiguous. As multiracial identities become more legitimate, a cultural space is emerging where mixed-race people who identify as such are visible in the media (Rockquemore et al. 2009). DaCosta (2007) argues that depictions of Multiracials as such began to appear in ads with some regularity beginning in the 1990s. These representations in the media are one way in which a multiracial category is crystalizing. To date, the marketing of multiraciality emphasizes an ideal of racial harmony and the transcendence of racial division through racial blending and cultural hybridity (DaCosta 2007; Streeter 2003), notions which are captured nicely in this 1998 Levi’s print advertisement (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Levi Strauss, 1998

As Streeter (1996) points out, controlling what the multiracial body signifies is critical to the continued coherence of racial ideologies. In this case, beyond the poor grammar, the

multiracial woman, clearly self-defined as such, uses her “multiraciality” to make the argument for being anti-racist. As previously described, a trait that may be becoming a defining characteristic of the multiracial population. Subsequent research suggests that multiracial people are portrayed as a bridge between racial groups, who go against social convention to signal the future (DaCosta 2007).

In addition to being the embodiment of racial harmony, “multiraciality” has also been linked to anti-racist ideologies. Spickard, Fong and Ewalt (1995) argue that Multiracials undermine the very basis of racism, by exploding the categories by which racial inequalities are maintained. While not all the meanings attributed to multiraciality and ethnoracial ambiguity are positive, there is substantial evidence supporting the idea of multiracial people have the power to dismantle racial inequality by promoting racial integration through their own embodied hybridity. Specifically, Ann Morning (2005) describes this multiracial anti-racism as taking, at least, three forms: (1) Multiracials as a special community whose transformative power is to make the U.S. free of racism, (2) mixed-race persons as a symbol of racial tolerance, and (3) that people who identify with multiple races are free of racial prejudices because they blur ethnoracial boundaries. There is modest evidence to support her position, Shin et al. (2007) find that when asked to select between biological and social explanations for races, multiracial subjects more often ascribe to social explanations. Other research shows a reduced tendency for multiracial participants to essentialize race (Pauker and Ambady 2009). These findings suggest Multiracials are less committed to traditional understandings of race as immutable, which is not-antiracist in and of itself, but could support anti-racist sentiments. In comparison, there is still support among the general public that race is

biological, an essentialist understanding of race. Research on racial conceptualizations suggests that understandings of race are now beginning to integrate biology and culture to make sense of what is perceived as racial difference (Morning 2008). Thus, there seems to be some evidence that people who identify with multiple races may have a more expansive view of race than their monoracial counterparts, but at the same time what we may be witnessing is racial conceptualizations on the whole are expanding beyond simply biological explanations. To summarize, not only is the multiracial population young and growing, this population is becoming increasingly important for understanding racial inequality and are looked to as actors in overcoming racial injustices, an important theme throughout scholarly discussions of Multiracials' role in shaping race relations.

Up to this point, I've discussed differences in the experiences of interracial families and their children in comparison to families that share the same racial background. In addition to differences in experience, I've focused on describing how interracial families and their children are racially conceptualized as being different from their single race peers, highlighting the role of advertising in the formation of a static multiracial category. This treatment of interracial families as non-normative leads one to wonder how it is that these conceptualizations of family emerge, especially in light of the idea that advertisers are attempting to normalize interracial families. While there is surely a myriad of influences (the family being one important site), I now turn to the role of television as a socializing agent to make sense of the scripts that inform these conceptualizations.

Racial Socialization through Television

Gordon Berry (1998:234) argues that “No medium within our vast communication system is more competitive with the traditional agents of socialization than television. From watching television families, vicarious learning of family roles, attitudes and behaviors is expected for, in many instances, television is a more readily available and attractive socializing agent than the family itself.” While there are many ways in which people form and maintain racial attitudes (specifically towards multiracial families), one prominent socializing influence is the media, and more specifically, the messages portrayed on television and through television commercials. These messages shape not only our attitudes, but also our worldviews.

Practically since televisions became commercially available, they have become central fixtures of life in the U.S. Even in this complex digital age where viewers have multiple screen options, television still reigns (and some evidence indicated that television watching may even be on the rise). A 2015 report produced by the Bureau of Labor Statistics finds that people spend most of their free time watching television, on average watching 2.8 hours each day. The most recent data from Nielsen Co. reports that adults watch about four and a half hours of live TV each day. In comparison, the second most popular screen option, browsing the web/using apps on a smartphone, take up about one and a half hours of each day (Nielsen, 2015). There are, of course, differences in television watching by socioeconomic status and race, but these data show that television watching continues to be central form of media consumption for all Americans. Given that Americans engage with the media through a variety of mediums, Grindstaff and Turow (2006:103) claim that television is still a primary “media stream that individuals encounter in their everyday lives to make sense of their worlds.”

As Henderson and Baldasty (2003) argue television advertisements merit particular attention because they are a key component of television, making up 25 percent of prime-time content. Entman and Rojecki (2000:162) take this position a step further to contend that T.V. commercials are “‘indicators of the culture’s racial heartbeat,’” representing both cultural norms, but also having the transformative potential to improve racial relations. It is difficult to think of a more fitting method for exploring race relations and understandings of racial difference and hybridity than through an exploring of the meanings attributed to multiracial families (by viewers). Key to this approach is that it illuminates the process through which television commercials both shape and reflect the way people think about race and the family.

Given television’s centrality and pervasiveness, scholars have long studied television’s socializing influence. One of the more prominent theories of the relationship between television consumption and socialization is cultivation theory. Simply put, cultivation theory advances the idea that what we watch on TV shapes our social realities. While generally accepted, questions about how exactly television manages to cultivate our views and cultural norms exist. Regardless of the mechanisms, “cultivation theory maintains that TV operates as the primary socializing agent in today’s world” (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, and Shanahan, 2002). An important aspect of the media’s ability to shape our perspectives, is its influence shaping our understandings of people different from us. Social expectancy theory (Jussim 1990) posits that the mass media contribute to one’s expectations about people and events in the real world. In particular, children use information disseminated through television to make sense of other ethnic groups and form attitudes about these groups (Graves 1993). While it’s unclear how

enduring these racial understandings and attitudes are, our thinking can be refined upon reflection of the messages we're encountering on television. For instance, Duckitt (1992) points out that media can convey ethnic prejudices through stereotyping and showing minorities in a disproportionate number of inferior roles, thus rendering these caricatures of racial groups as natural (Hall 1981; Kellner 1995), an argument that the evidence seems to bear out.

While intuitively there seems to be an increase in the representation of non-White actors in television advertising, very few studies to date have systematically analyzed racial representation in television commercials. There seems to be consensus, however, that since the 1970s, people of color are underrepresented in mass media (see Graves 1970, Larson 2002, Barcus 1977, Atkin and Heald 1977). Analyses of television programming and commercials specifically have describe stereotypical portrayals of non-Whites (Baptista-Fernandez & Greenberg 1980, Schmid and Bowen 1995; Taylor and Lee 1994) as athletes (Li-Vollmer 2002, Burton and Klemm 2011), or in lower class occupations such as fast-food workers (Bristor et al. 1995; Zinkhan et al. 1990) and in minor, nonspeaking roles (Riffe et al. 1989; Taylor et al. 1995; Wilkes and Valencia 1989). There is also some scholarly agreement that White/Non-White multiracial women have been characterized as both "exotic" and "tragic" in popular culture and the media (Currington et al. 2015, Beltrán and Fojas 2008; Joseph 2012; Nishime 2014; Osei-Kofi 2013; Sims 2012).

For television commercials specifically, Whites and Blacks are disproportionately shown, with little representation of Latinos and Asians (Merskin 2008, Li-Vollmer 2002). When non-Whites are included, Blacks appear most frequently, with few appearances by

Latinos, and Asians. By the late 1980s, about 20 percent of commercials included both White and minority characters together (see Elkin and Handel). More recent research conducted by Henderson and Baldasty (2003) find that 37.5% of the 825 ads examined showed people of color selling a range of products. Yet, these depictions most often showed the person of color in peripheral roles, where the only racialized group routinely featured is Blacks. Researchers also find evidence of racial stereotyping in television commercials. For example, East Asians being commonly portrayed as business professionals or workaholics who are technologically savvy and academically keen (Pake and Shah 2003, Li-Vollmer 2002), and as workers in banks, telecommunications, retail (Taylor and Stern 1997), and technology (Mastro and Stern 2003).

Most of the scholarship on racial socialization through television and television commercials focuses on children, relying on the assumption that the pervasiveness and repetition of racial messages, both obvious and subtle, teach children about ethnoracial groups with which they do not have much or any direct interaction. When looking at the representation of Blacks, Latinos, and Asians in children's television commercials in relation to the ethnoracial composition of the local market, Maher et al. (2006) find that these groups are underrepresented, while Whites were overrepresented. Larson (2002) similarly finds "racial representations in these commercials targeted at children are remarkably close to the proportion of White people to people of color in the general population." Blacks are, however, portrayed as less educated than Whites and are shown in lower status roles (Merskin 2008; Li-Vollmer 2002). In addition, people of color most often appear in food commercials (Wilkes & Valencia 1989), specifically selling

snack/food products or products of low value (Bang and Reece 2003; Barcus 1977; Licata and Biswas 1993, Baumann and Ho 2014).

Very little research focuses on racial interactions, Riffe and others (1989) concluded that characters interacted only with other characters of their own race. Seiter (1990) finds that Asian, Latino and Native American children were passive observers of White children and appeared together only in public places. Similarly, Maher et al. (2006) find that Whites and Asians are shown as being less engaged with Black or Latino children. In contrast, Larson identifies cooperative interactions (i.e., playing with toys) between actors of different races and captures non-Whites in main roles. Even less research has described families depicted, although Baumann and Ho (2014) find that the “White Nuclear Family” is most commonly portrayed in Canadian television commercials. There has been more scholarly attention placed on depictions of multiracial individuals, so I turn to this topic now to describe how advertisers are reflecting and informing the changing ethnoracial landscape.

While there are many reasons to investigate television commercials’ influence on racial meaning making, I argue that this medium’s attempt to appeal to a broad audience will also be an appeal to dominant cultural values and norms. One could further argue that television commercials are recalcitrant to change. For example, while demographic findings shows that single parent as well as same-sex parent families are on the rise, we rarely, if ever, see such families depicted in commercials. The same can be said for interracial families. The continued depiction of White nuclear families serve to normalize this family form. Yet, since we’re witnessing the (still very limited) use of interracial families in commercials, what implications can be teased out regarding people’s

understanding of the significance of such families in shaping racial meanings, race relations, and the ways in which we conceptualize the family? And what role does the media and the marketplace play in shaping these understandings?

The Marketplace and the Multiracial Family

In an attempt to profit from a growing population of people who are the offspring of parents who identify with different racial groups, the market plays an important role in attributing meaning to the emerging, amorphous and contested category commonly referred to as Multiracial, and by extension multiracial families. Because there is no group “history” or culture that all multiracial people and families share, in an attempt to cater to this population advertisers are involved in group making as well as influencing how this “group” is conceived in the mind’s eye. Akin to the construction of the panethnic categories of Latino and Asian, which attempt to identify shared characteristics among ethnically and culturally diverse populations, advertisers are not only grappling with the characteristics of the multiracial consumer, they are also using multiracial images to appeal to general audience. This appeal is underscored by an assumption that viewers from many ethnoracial groups will search for and usually find something in the actor’s racially ambiguous appearance with which they can identify (Texeira, 2005; La Ferla 2003). Casting the multiracial person as appealing to all seems to be an emerging, but consistent theme of this project. Advertisers explicitly state that portraying Multiracials in television commercials is an intention way to appeal to the masses and the viewers I interview perceive advertisers intention to reach the broadest possible audience through their use of interracial families.

This project is grounded in Omi and Winant's (1994) racial formations perspective and Rogers Brubaker's (2004) work on ethnicity without groups. In this sense, "multiraciality" is not treated as a fixed category, but rather an exploration into group making, a process shaped by economic, historical, political, and social forces. Furthermore, as Brubaker (2004) aptly suggests, we should conceptualize ethnoracial "groups" as "practical categories, situated actions, cultural idioms, cognitive schemas, discursive frames, organizational routines, institutional forms, [and] political projects." While no one project can tackle all of these dimensions, I will address some of the practical categories, discursive frames and cognitive schemas employed by audience members that imbue "multiraciality" and the family with meaning.

To date, the scholarship on race and television has focused primarily on how ethnoracial groups are produced through the advertising industry. Only a handful of scholars have explored the relationship between consumption, ethnoracial group making and the marketplace. It is at this nexus that this project will serve to clarify how interracial families and multiraciality are conceived. Social scientists who study identity projects through consumption practices have long argued that Americans define their identities and compete for social status through their consumption (Bourdieu [1984]1988, DiMaggio 1994). Extending this argument, Zukin and Maguire (2004) claim that consumer culture is an important institutional field for producing new ethnic identities. Halter (2000) argues that most people construct their identities and define others through the commodities they purchase. She further claims that the marketplace assists in negotiating and enforcing identity differences. Given these trends, she points out that an "awareness of demographic changes and the dynamics of multiracial communities has led

some manufactures to include pitches for racial harmony as part of their advertising strategies” (Halter 2000:173). As stated earlier, this is accomplished in part by using racially ambiguous actors to reach the widest possible audience while at the same time reflecting multiethnic make-up of the United States.

In her research of the marketplace’s role in the making of a Latino category, Davila (2001) shows that marketers shape the relevance of racial groups by determining how they are represented. DaCosta further demonstrates how marketers shape racial boundaries and imbue racial categories with substance. For example, Tiger Woods Nike campaign “I am Tiger Woods” suggests that we are all like Tiger, his “racial mixedness makes him accessible to all” (DaCosta 2007:167). In this colorblind era where “interracialism” is not the focus of the message, such images are still an expression of the subtle recognition of changing norms.

Beyond being the “cultural racial heartbeat” of America, the condensed format and need to empathize, charm, appeal or shock the consumer in thirty to sixty seconds, means that creating commercials necessarily entails simplification and typification (Davila 2001). To create generic mass appeal, commercials often reflect dominant values and aspirations. Racially speaking, as Omi and Winant point out;

“In US television, the necessity to define characters in the briefest and most condensed manner has led to the perpetuation of racial caricatures, as racial stereotypes serve as shorthand for scriptwriters, directors and actors, in commercials, etc. Television’s tendency to address the “lowest common denominator” in order to render programs “familiar” to an enormous and diverse audience leads it regularly to assign and reassign racial characteristics to particular groups, both minority and majority.”

The need to stereotype reinforces the racial hierarchy by characterizing racial minorities as subordinate to Whites. Repetitive messages are another important dimension of television commercials as they pose the risk of not only reinforcing stereotypes, but also subtly conveying racial bias. Li-Vollmer (2002:222) argues that “few adults, let alone

children, are likely to analyze the differences in the distribution of race in various kinds of product commercials, or the settings in which various characters appear, or even the occupational roles assigned; as a result, both adults and children would be hard pressed to even consciously recognize the racial biases, no matter how sensitive they are to such issues.”

Institutionally, Whiteness in advertising thrives because this industry is ideologically embedded in colorblind/post-racial world (Shankar 2015). While these explanations make sense when discussing seemingly discrete racial categories—like White, Black or Asian—once again an interesting problem arises when these categories are blurred as is the case for the offspring of the interracial couples seen in the commercials that I will be investigating. Shankar’s (2015) research highlights that marketers have decoupled racial and ethnic difference from ethnoracial inequality and prejudice by showcasing aspirations norms through entertaining and “authentic” storytelling. Shankar goes on to suggest that there is some evidence that a new approach to general marketing is moving beyond ambiguity to represent ethnoracial differences in more culturally recognizable ways. In this project, I will assess the ways in which this particular form of ethnoracial difference is made culturally recognizable.

Studying How People Think about Race and the Family

Returning to the research question-- “*How are dominant views of race and the family being constructed through the marketplace?*”-- I look more precisely at the cultural influences on cognition that provide a framework for understanding how television commercials shape our thinking. Sociologists of culture who advocate for new institutionalism view commercials as part of discursive fields as a set of symbolic

structures that establish parameters for evaluation of experience (Cerulo 2000; Zucker 1991). Imagining new institutionalism as an explanation for the structures in which people make sense of their experiences, social cognition theory is useful for describing the content of these sense making structures. Social cognition theory (Bandura 1986, 2002) posits that viewers learn from exposure to television and television commercials. One mechanism useful for making sense of the “symbolic structures” (i.e., messages) presented on TV is the construction of schemas. According to schema theory people store and organize knowledge about their encounters with groups of people (either vicariously through the media or through real life interactions) into role schemas. These role schemas are then applied to new encounters or in situations where the viewer is required to make a judgement about a group (Baumann and Ho 2014, DiMaggio 1997). Applying schema theory to the notion of family, Karen Pyke (2000) advances the idea that mainstream culture informs dominant views of this institution and shapes people’s views about their own families and what is considered a “normal American family”. This project seeks to interrogate the notions of normativity as they related to the racialization of families and suggests that dominant views of family are imbued with colorblind ideology. This study focuses on a specific form of social cognition, hot cognition, which is cognition that is influenced by emotions (rather than by rational thought). Hot cognition is an important strategy used by advertisers to align positive emotional responses with the products they are selling. In the next chapter I will show multiple ways that hot cognitions are evoked through the images and dialogue present in the commercials analyzed.

While one cannot readily observe cognitive schemas, they become activated through some stimulus or cue (Brubaker, Loveman, and Stamatov 2004). In this study,

the stimuli are images and narration present in the commercials shown to focus group respondents and the messages advertisers are attempting to convey through these commercials. Seeking to fill an important gap in the research on marketplace's role in the social construction of race and family, I chose to focus on cognition in this setting as it more closely approximates actual interactional contexts in which schemas are activated, unlike prior research on this topic which relied on artificial experimental setting to study this phenomena (Brubaker et al. 2004). Focus groups are an exceptionally useful method for studying how schemas inform the social construction of multiraciality and families because they allow the research to scrutinize subjects' cognitions as they unfold (Cerulo 1998). Thus, this project unfolds by analyzing the commercials themselves, narratives constructed by producers of television commercials and other advertising executives views of these commercials, and finally an analysis of how these commercials are interpreted by viewers.

I show that through the marketplace multiracial families are symbols of collective commitments to anti-racist projects. For those interested in advancing notions of racial tolerance and intimacy, multiracial families serve as authentic representations of these ideals. The televisions commercials I closely examine in the next chapter show company commitments to these ideals, how multiracial families are being normalized in the marketplace and also show the limitations of the aspirational and normalizing forces of the marketplace in constructing multiracial families as *the* American family.

Chapter 2: *Portrayals of Interracial Families in Television Commercials*

This chapter provides a critical content analysis of the three television commercials shown to focus group participants, including the advertising campaigns in which these commercials are situated, to explore the ways in which the producers of these commercials attempt to prime viewers to imagine multiracial families as normative. I argue that these commercials prime viewers to focus on interracial families as ordinary or typical families by highlighting traditional family values, such as love, togetherness, and caring for one another. The normalization of interracial families is also evident through imagery that emphasizes belonging to the middle class and to a nuclear family. A secondary interest of this chapter is to explore how these commercials and advertising campaigns attempt to elicit a positive emotional response from the viewer—the notion of hot cognition—by emphasizing love, drawing the viewers' attention to the cuteness of children, and through humor.

What is missing from these commercials is equally important. The viewer sees a complicated picture of intimacy among the family members. The competing messages embedded in these commercials demonstrate a push for multiracial families to be viewed as everyday American families, yet concurrently subtly project that such families are not quite unremarkable.

I'll begin by analyzing each commercial frame-by-frame and will then describe the cross-cutting themes evident. The frame-by-frame analysis will include the dialogue present in the commercial to the right of the related image(s).

Cheerios' Just Checking



Frame 1

Child: Mom?

Mother: Yes, honey.

The commercial begins with a light skinned woman with straight, chin length, brown hair wearing a brown patterned shirt sitting at a large dining room table in front of a set of windows on a sunny day (see Frame 1). The perspective is a wide shot from a distance where the viewer can see a counter to her left and the refrigerator to the right as if the viewer is standing in a doorway. In walks a young girl (early elementary school-aged) with light blue tights, a lime green skirt and purple long sleeved shirt. She has a darker complexion than the woman. The child places a yellow cereal box on the table and the viewer hears a firm knock of the box on the wood table. The first word spoken is “mom”, to which the person who we now know is the mother responds, “Yes honey?”, establishing and naturalizing the relationship between the two actors on screen. Moreover, this image signifies a middle-class background as the viewer can see what appears to be a large house.



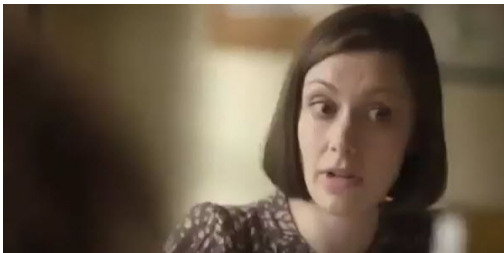
Frame 2



Frame 3

Child (continues): is that true?

The point-of-view changes, the viewer now sees a close-up of the young child (the background is blurry, but one can see the outline of the mother and realize that the viewer is peering over the mother's shoulder). The viewer can also see the upper third of the daughter's body above the table as she stands slightly off center. To her right, a portion of a cereal box is visible. The child's round face, button nose, full lips and light brown complexion are visible with soft brown, tightly curled ringlets framing her face—all signifiers of cuteness. An earnest expression appears across her face, "Dad told me that Cheerios is good for your heart" as she seamlessly leans her head forward, maintains the serious look and asks, "is that true?" (see Frame 2 and 3).



Frame 4

Mom: Says here that Cheerios has whole grain oats



Frame 5

The perspective changes again, we now see the mother right of center (the background is still blurry), eyebrows raised looking at the cereal box. She begins to respond, “says here that Cheerios” at which point the camera angle switches back to the daughter. She looks contemplatively at [one can assume] the mother, chin slightly raised as her mother continues, “has whole grain oats.” The daughter’s eyes now glance to her right as she looks at the cereal box (Frames 4 and 5). The perspective changes again (similar to the opening view, but closer up). The viewer can now see the dining room table, and from left to right, the daughter, box of Cheerios, and mother holding a pencil, as the mother finishes her sentence, “that can help remove some cholesterol and that’s heart healthy” (Frame 6). The child is focusing on the mother’s words, which not coincidentally are focused on describing the health benefits of the product.



Frame 6

Mom (continues): that can help remove some cholesterol and that’s heart healthy.



Frame 7



Frame 8

The perspective changes again. The camera returns to the close-up of the daughter with her lips firmly pressed together, eyebrows furrowed, as she picks up the Cheerios box, then grins slyly with her mouth closed (Frames 7 and 8). The viewer can now see the back of the box and in easy to read font, we see the words “Heart Healthy”. This image thus complements the mother’s dialogue once again emphasizing the health benefits of the product.



Frame 9



Frame 10



Frame 11

The perspective returns to the view of the dining room table and we see the daughter begin to run out of the room with the box of Cheerios. We hear her footsteps as she runs on the hardwood floor, and the perspective changes so we can now see down the hallway leading out of the kitchen as the daughter runs around the corner (Frames 9-11).



Frame 12



Frame 13



Frame 14



Frame 15

Dad: Jan!

The scene now changes completely. We see a close-up of a darker skinned man, with a buzz cut and blue collared shirt, sleeping on what we can assume to be a couch (Frame 12). He is waking up. The perspective changes so we can now see that he is indeed laying on a brown couch in a living room with his shoes off. On the left side of his chest rests a large pile of cheerios (Frame 13). He begins to sit up and we hear and see the cheerios falling off his chest. A moment one can assumed is to infuse the commercial with humor as the child naively thinks that the if the cereal touches her father he'll

receive the health benefits the mother just described. The father looks up confused and the scene ends (Frame 14). The viewer now see the familiar yellow of the Cheerios brand with the word “Love” and several cheerios falling onto the word as a man’s voice can be heard yelling, “Jan!” with the Cheerios jingle playing in the background. While most of the Cheerios fall off the scene and out of the viewer’s gaze, one Cheerio remains serving as a period to the word “Love” (Frame 15). Hence visually associating the product (an actual cheerio) with a positive emotion in an effort to promote hot cognition.

Interpretation: This 30 second spot includes only 35 spoken words, almost all focused on the health benefits of the cereal. A superficial reading of this commercial suggests that the daughter loves her father and wants to promote his health, with Cheerios being a great choice for keeping her father healthy (perhaps implying that Cheerios is great for heart health no matter your racial background).

In essence, the dialogue is designed to have the viewer focus solely on the product, even as the visuals draw attention to the young child and ultimately to the interracial family portrayed. Importantly, the viewer never sees the mother, father, and daughter in the same scene. We see the mother and daughter separated by the kitchen table and we only see the father by himself. As a result, without the dialogue present in the commercial, identifying the relationships shown might be more difficult to discern, especially because of the difference in skin tone. Thus, to ensure that the viewer interprets the actors as a family, the commercial begins by identifying the mother-daughter relationship, as the first word spoken is “mom”. Very quickly (three words later to be precise) the daughter establishes that she is indeed a member of a nuclear family when she says, “*Dad* told me ...” (emphasis added). Jane McCarthy’s (2012) analysis of

the meanings attributed to family in Western thinking is useful to consider here. McCarthy points out that family represents togetherness and a sense of belonging. Therefore, by invoking family at the beginning of this commercial, the commercial producers are implying that the actors we see belong together, helping to normalize this family form. Worth noting is that at about the 20 second mark, any lingering suspicions as to whether this commercial was showing an interracial family is put to rest as we see the dark-skinned man on the couch. Hearing him call out his wife's name, Jan, the interracial dynamic is reinforced as Jan is a more traditionally White name. Importantly, identifying that the actors on screen are a family immediately highlights that interracial families need to explicitly identified.

While the dialogue helps to establish that the viewer is looking at a family, the background (the "house" in which the commercial takes place) serves to depict a middle class status with its large kitchen (seen from multiple angles) and living room. Thus, the commercial frames the actors that we see in a culturally normative way as a middle class, nuclear family. The suggestions through both visual and verbal cues of the middle class, nuclear family support viewing multiracial families as typical American families.³

This commercial also focuses much of the viewer's gaze on the biracial daughter. A focus that will be made even more explicit in the follow-up commercial discussed below. The child can be seen for about 19 seconds or roughly two-thirds (63 percent) of the commercial. This focus on the child seems to be included to evoke a positive emotional response (i.e., hot cognition) in the viewer by focusing the viewer's attention on the cuteness of the child. Importantly, there is evidence suggesting that when an

³ In the next chapter, I will discuss the extent to which focus group participants viewed the interracial families depicted as typical American families.

emotional connection is made that entity is better remembered (Cerulo 2010), which would be a useful strategy for improving brand recognition.

Turning our attention to the end of the commercial, the final image of the word “Love” contrasts with some of the messaging. While the child’s actions show love, the physical distance among family members suggests otherwise. Displaying “Love” prominently seems to be an attempt to turn the viewer’s focus to the family dynamic, away from message that the cereal is a healthy choice. It also artificially imposes this notion on images and audio that do not necessarily lend themselves to this interpretation to promote this central family value. Worth considering is that the notion of love is multidimensional. The viewer does not know if “Love” refers to parental love for their child, the child’s love for her parents, romantic love or so on. And perhaps it doesn’t matter which interpretation of love the viewer chooses because ultimately all forms of love should elicit the positive emotion response that the company is priming the viewer to engage. At the same time, evoking the theme of love at the end of the commercial can be seen as a way to distract from the unconventional “family” being shown. Instead of focusing on the racial difference present, the advertiser is suggesting that one should focus on the love that the family shares, especially the love of the daughter for her father. Chapter 4 shows how this focus on love is a successful strategy for both normalizing interracial families and provoking a positive emotional reaction from the viewer. As we’ll see, this same priming strategy (i.e., focusing on the theme of love) is employed in the follow-up commercial—which is named after the fictional daughter, *Gracie*—to similar effect.

Gracie

The actors in the *Just Checking* commercial were bought back for the follow-up commercial, *Gracie*, which aired during the 2014 Super Bowl. Cheerios had never aired a commercial during this coveted event suggesting not only a strong economic motivation for bringing back this family, but also showcasing their commitment to the original contentious portrayal of an interracial family on one of the biggest platforms in the world.

The commercial opens with the father and daughter sitting at the dining room table, a yellow Cheerios box positioned in-between them, while the mother stands by the kitchen counter. This perspective is similar, but not identical, to the opening shot of the *Just Checking* commercial as the viewer is positioned in the doorway leading to the kitchen (Frame 1).



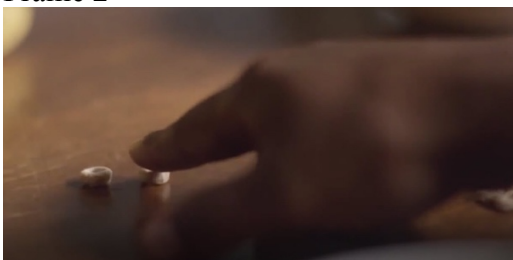
Frame 1

Dad: Hey Gracie, you know how our family has a daddy



Frame 2

Dad (continues): a mommy



Frame 3



Frame 4



Gracie (excitedly): and me!

Frame 5

The father begins the dialogue as the viewer sees his finger pushing something across the table, “Hey Gracie, you know how our family has a daddy”, the viewer now sees a close-up of individual cheerios that the father is using to represent each family member (Frames 1-3). He continues, “a mommy,” and with an excited, quick gasp, Gracie pushes a Cheerio towards the other two and says, “and me” (Frames 4 and 5). Once again, the viewer is immediately told that she is looking at an interracial family. By having to identify the actors as such, the implication is that families don’t typically look like the family being portrayed.



Frame 6

Dad: Yeah that's right. Pretty soon you're going to have a baby brother.



Frame 7

The viewer hears the father talking, but sees the mother looking at what the viewer can assume is the conversation taking place. The father continues; "Yeah that's right. Pretty soon you're going to have a baby brother." As the father is speaking, we see the mother lean backwards slightly, resting against the counter, and a small baby bump is now visible under her long shirt (Frames 6 and 7).



Frame 8



Frame 9



Frame 10



Frame 11



Frame 12

Gracie: And a puppy.



Frame 13



Frame 14

Dad: Deal.

Next, a close-up of Gracie's face shows a concerned and thoughtful expression, and then with a grin, the viewer sees her push another Cheerio towards the "family" pile

as she says, “and a puppy” and gives her father a sassy look (Frames 8-13). Once again, the spotlight on Gracie focuses the viewer’s attention on her cuteness. The father then smirks and the viewer sees the two of them at the dining room table (the Cheerios box still conspicuously placed between them and much easier to see in Frame 14) as the father says, “deal” and the viewer hears the Cheerios jingle begin to play.



Frame 15



Frame 16

The last perspective is of the mother, who is still standing by the kitchen counter as her eyes widen in disbelief about the deal the father just made (Frame 15). We then see the yellow screen with the word “Love” punctuated by a cheerio (Frame 16).

Interpretation: In contrast to the *Just Checking* commercial, this commercial brings to the forefront the family, where cheerios are used symbolically to represent the family and the dialogue is focused specifically on the changing family dynamic. In other words, while Cheerios (the brand) is still featured in this commercial, the product is less prominent than in the preceding commercial. Similar to *Just Checking*, there is a lack of physical affection and intimacy among the family members and in particular, between the parents.

This lack of affection is particularly important given the subject matter, the announcement of a baby brother, which the viewer could assume is the result of the romantic love shared by the parents. It is unclear why the parents do not engage this topic together. While the mother says little in the first commercial, she is silent here (her body language “speaking” for her). This lack of unity is furthered by the deal brokered by the father about also bringing a puppy into the family, who does so without consulting the mother (her look of surprise suggesting she may not agree with this deal). While this surprised face may likely have been included to infuse a bit of humor into the commercial, thus promoting hot cognition, it can also be interpreted as a sign of dissension between the parents.

It is difficult to see the love among the family members in this commercial. Perhaps because of this, the producers wanted to ensure that the viewer makes this connection by ending the commercial with the word “Love”. Of course, the symmetry present between the endings of both commercials suggests that love is the most important attribute of these commercials, potentially minimizing any tension arising from the mixed messages embedded in the images and dialogue, and surely is included to elicit a positive emotional response from the viewer.

A more generous interpretation of this commercial is that the viewer symbolically sees intimacy between the parents, which has result in another child. The viewer is also privy to this loving family moment since sharing the news about a baby brother represents the idea that there will be even more love to be shared among the family members. Cheerios then become a convenient way of storytelling by bringing an important announcement to life.

Considering this superficial interpretation with the *Just Checking* commercial, it becomes clear that Cheerios wants to be associated with the notion of loving families. The Cheerios website's homepage currently underscores this notion by describing what Cheerios as a brand believes matters most: Bees, Gluten-Free, Honey, Oats, Famers, Hearts and Family (in that order). To promote "families matter" Cheerios displays an image of a seemingly Black father with his young (also seemingly Black) child on his shoulders. The webpage for the "family matters" section of the site also includes a one minute video called the family breakfast project, which prominently displays a nuclear White family, including a father, mother, and two daughters. The video opens with the whole family sitting at the dining room table enjoying breakfast together as they laugh and talk. On the one hand, the Cheerios commercials analyzed here fall squarely within this theme, the idea that breakfast as a family promotes health. On the other hand, the immediacy in which we see closeness among the White family members stands in stark contrast to the lack of closeness we see among the interracial family portrayed in these commercials. While subtle, the physical distance among the family members who do not share the same race reminds us that the kind of love we're viewing is, at least, slightly unconventional.

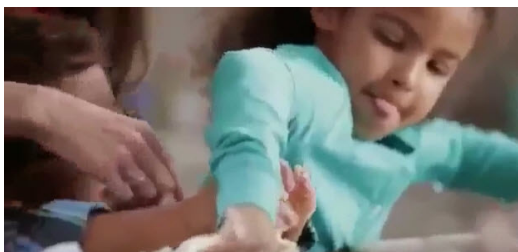
Pillsbury Holiday Cookies Commercial



Frame 1

The commercial begins with the camera looking inside of a refrigerator. This view is just above the curly brown hair of a child who is reaching inside to pick up a roll

of cookie dough. In white letters on a light blue package the words “Sugar cookies” can be read and we see the image of a sugar cookie shaped as a reindeer with pretzel antlers and see the Pillsbury Dough Boy’s face adjacent to the reindeer (Frame 1).



Frame 2



Frame 3

Female narrator: Holiday cookies are a big job.

Next, the viewer hears the sounds of high pitched, festive jingle bells playing and sees a scene with two children, a girl concentrating with her tongue partially stuck out and a boy whose face is partially blocked by a fair skinned hand pointing to the dough that the children are grabbing for on the counter. We can see a difference in the shade of the feminine hand in the frame and the two children who share a similar light brown complexion and curly brown hair. The narrator’s feminine voice is heard telling the viewer that “Holiday cookies are a big job” as we simultaneously see the young boy with glasses peering over the countertop watching the fair skinned hand slicing the cookie dough into long strips (Frames 2 and 3). The boy steps closer to the female figure whose face we do not see because it is out of the frame (we do see, however, the red long sleeved shirt she is wearing).



Frame 4



Frame 5

The perspective now changes to a close-up of the young girl's hands flattening a piece of cookie dough. The viewer then sees the young girl picking up the young boy (who is assumed to be her brother) to help him reach across the counter. Both children are smiling (Frames 4 and 5).



Frame 6



Frame 7

Next, the viewer sees the young boy scooping frosting out of a tub that is held by the light skinned feminine hand (Frame 6). The viewer still only sees a woman's hands and body. The perspective changes again, and we can see the length of the counter. This

view is near the boy in glasses who is decorating a cookie with his “sister” in the background doing the same thing (Frame 7).



Frame 8

Narrator: Everything has to be *just* right.



Frame 9

Narrator: Perfection is in the details.



Frame 10

Next is a close-up the girl, who can be identified by her teal shirt (since we only see a close-up of her hands and body), as she pours sprinkles on a frosted cookie and onto the counter. The female narrator is heard saying, “everything has to be *just* right” (Frame 8). The viewer returns to a shot of the girl who is laughing while her “brother” is smiling (Frame 9). The narrator then says, “perfection is in the details” as the viewer now sees the counter as if she is standing behind the boy. The countertop is filled with cookies decorated in winter themes, including snowmen (Frame 10).



Frame 11



Frame 12

The viewer then sees a close-up of one of the child's hands pressing a small, blue, round candy onto a cookie, which is decorated like a reindeer with pretzel antlers, white frosting and a green gumdrop nose (Frame 11). The viewer next sees the young girl, her complexion visibly darker than in early frames, taking a bite out of a cookie that is only being raised slightly off the counter so we can see candy decorations littering the countertop. In the right-hand corner of the frame a portion of the cookie dough roll in the blue wrapper is visible (Frame 12).



Frame 13

Narrator: Get to holiday fun faster with Pillsbury cookie dough.



Frame 14

Eleven seconds into this fifteen second commercial, the viewer finally sees the woman's face as the perspective has zoomed out so that we can see the young boy on the left eating a cookie (Frame 13). The brown-haired woman smiling at the boy, stands in the middle, as the young girl smiling then reaches her arm around the "mother's" shoulder and moving her face in closer (most likely for a kiss that is never shown), a plate of decorated cookies in front of them. The narrator tells us that to we can "get to holiday fun faster with Pillsbury cookie dough" and the scene changes to a white background with the words "Let The Making Begin" and the Pillsbury dough boy standing behind the roll of sugar cookie dough.

Interpretation: In comparison to the Cheerios' commercials, this 15 second spot includes 26 words all spoken by a disembodied female narrator. During this commercial, we see the camera change angles 13 times and the viewer sees the children's faces for about 40 percent of the commercial (6 seconds). The viewer sees even less of the mother's face, which is visible for about one second. Importantly, the viewer sees the cookie dough product throughout the entire commercial, clearly showing that the focus should be on the product, not the actors.

While the viewer never sees a father figure and therefore may draw different conclusions about the relationship of the actors, there are implicit clues suggesting that the viewer is seeing is an interracial family. For one, the act of baking holiday cookies is

traditionally seen as an act a mother engages in with her children. Holidays are culturally considered important moments for families to celebrate together, so the making of holiday cookies (rather than other kinds of cookie making) also suggests that the viewer is looking at a mother and her children.

Two phrases spoken by the narrator can be interpreted in multiple ways. The first, “everything has to be just right,” on the surface seems to be a comment about cookie making, but it can also be understood as an ethical evaluation of the “family” being portrayed, namely that it is morally good to show diverse families. The second phrase, “perfection is in the details” is most likely referring to the details of the decorations on the cookies, but can also be referring to aligning the notion of perfection with an interracial family. Surely, the images of cookies, use of words like “fun”, “perfection” and “right”, festive music as well as the happiness presented throughout-- displayed through the giggles and smiles of the actors--all serve to prime the viewer to evaluate these positively. The ending of the commercial is clearly an attempt to prime the viewer to buy the product (now that all these positive emotions have been evoked) as the phrase “let the making begin” is directing the viewer to make holiday cookies using Pillsbury products. Importantly, engaging in a traditional (even ritualistic) activity such as making cookies for the holidays supports the normalization of this seemingly non-traditional family. At the same time, affection among the family members is minimized, and abruptly so when the daughter seems to be leaning in to kiss the mother as the scene cuts to the final frame. Thus, the images and audio presented reinforce notions of togetherness, but obscure the affection and love family members have for one another

(and which the Cheerios commercials try to make artificially explicit by ending on the word “love”).

Swiffer Effects Campaign: Rukavina Family

For this campaign, I will describe both the 30 second television commercial and an extended cut of this commercial that is about three minutes in length. Comparing the two helps to highlight messages about family that are minimized on television, and others that are brought to viewers’ attention.



Frame 1

Dad: Hi my name’s Zack.



Frame 2

Mom: My name’s Afi.



Frame 3

Mom: This is Cosa.
Dad: And this is Weyah.



Frame 4

Weyah: Hi Cosa.
Cosa: Hi.

This commercial begins with what can clearly be identified as a family sitting by a kitchen counter. We see a light skinned, brown haired father and in his lap a young girl with a medium complexion wearing a pink shirt. Next to the girl we see a dark-skinned mother with tight ringlets of shoulder length black hair. She is smiling as a younger girl is being flipped around in her lap. The words “The Rukavinas Los Angeles, CA” are written in the lower left hand corner of the screen as the family members introduce themselves.



Frame 5

Mom: How we met... Well we were
in the grocery store



Frame 6

Dad: I went in line, she came up
behind me



Frame 7

Mom: And then he wound up
walking me to my car



Frame 8

Dad: After I asked though
Mom: Yeah
Dad: You have to ask before you just
follow someone to their car
Mom: Well this is true

The older sister (a preschool aged child herself), Weyah, leans towards her younger sister to hug her as the younger sister says “hi” to the camera (Frames 4 through 8). The conversational style of the commercial means that the husband and wife interrupt each other as they tell the story of Zach meeting Afi at the grocery store and walking her to her car. He makes a point of saying, “You have to ask before you just follow someone to their car,” before the scene changes and the viewer witnesses a quick kiss between the parents (Frame 9).



Frame 9



Frame 10

Dad [voiceover]: I lost my arm two and a half years ago to cancer um

The viewer then learns more about Zach's physical disability, "I lost my arm two and a half years ago to cancer um I had a lot of pain in that hand after a year and half they finally found out what was causing all the pain and that was a certain type of sarcoma, which is a type of cancer." As he tells his story we see the family's closeness, Afi holds Cosa, Zack hold Weyah, and the parents lean their heads towards one another as they (and Weyah) smile and laugh. We then return to the parent's love story and hear about their first date hiking (Frames 11 through 15).



Frame 11



Dad (continues): I had a lot of pain in that hand after a year and a half they finally found out what was causing all the pain and that was a certain type of sarcoma, which is a type of cancer

Frame 12



Dad: Yes. It's been pretty good.
 Mom: Yeah. I love him. I like him. He's a keeper.
 Dad: Ditto
 Mom: Yeah.

Frame 13



Mom: He decided to take me on a date hiking

Frame 14



Frame 15



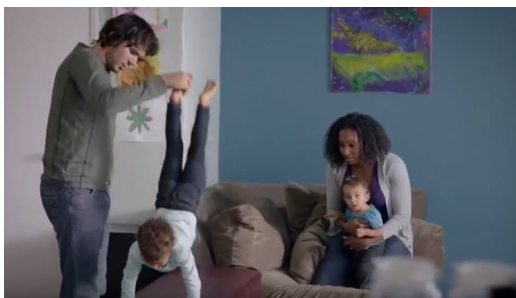
Frame 16



Frame 17



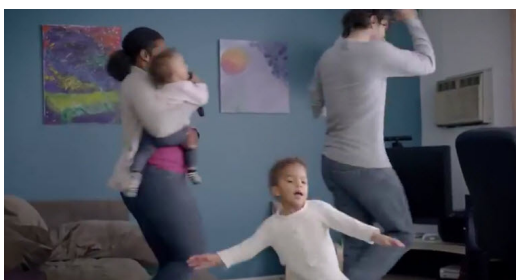
Frame 18



Frame 19



Frame 20



Dad: It was an easy choice to amputate it because if I didn't there's an 80 percent chance the cancer would come back. I think anyone would trade their arm for their life so

Dad (continues): kids are pretty easy the hard part is having to clean up after they've played. Kids just attract anything that they run into

Dad (continues): kids are pretty easy the hard part is having to clean up after they've played.

Frame 21



[Children giggling]

Frame 22



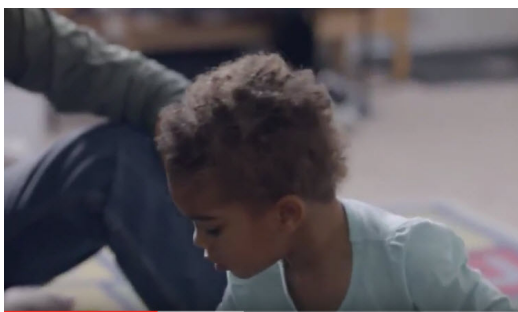
Dad: Kids just attract anything that they run into

Frame 23



Mom: And if they go to the park you bring half the sand with you

Frame 24



Frame 25



Frame 26



Frame 27

Dad: There's always more dirt at the end of the day like—



Frame 28

Mom: Zack and I have this thing we like to say, "ok are we winning or we're losing"



Frame 29

Mom (continues): and then when it comes to cleaning we're just like, "oh we've lost we should just stop now."



Frame 30



Frame 31



Frame 32



Frame 33



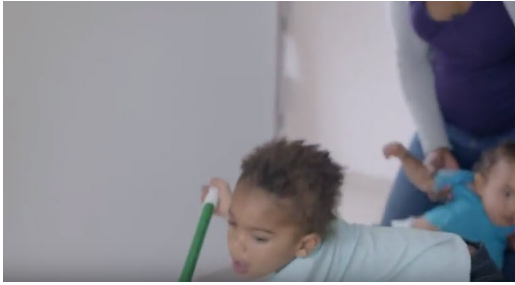
Frame 34

Dad: my wife and sweeping



Frame 35

Mom: I don't think I am meant to sweep.



Frame 36

Mom: Weyah actually sweeps better than I do.



Frame 37

Dad: I do have an excuse with no arm to be a worse sweeper, but I'm not.

Next, the dialogue returns to Zach's cancer story; "It was an easy choice to amputate it because if I didn't there's an 80 percent chance the cancer would come back. I think anyone would trade their arm for their life" (Frames 16-17). We continue to see images of the family together, each parent holding a child and smiles all around. The images help to distract from this change in topic, as the viewer now hears Zach talk about how his kids attract dirt. Afi confirms that the kids bring home sand when they go to the park. Instead of seeing the family at the park, however, the viewer sees the family sitting in what can be assumed to be the living room playing on the floor with blocks (Frames 18-26). Afi then describes how the parents always feel like they're losing when it comes to cleaning (Frames 27-30). We see the challenges Afi has sweeping as Zach describes how poorly Afi sweeps and how much better he is at the task in spite of only having one arm (Frames 31-38).



Frame 38



Frame 39



Frame 40

Mom: For me it's like the dust, the clouds of sweeping dust cl--, its horrible.



Frame 41

Dad: I'm definitely a perfectionist when I clean.



Frame 42

Mom: He's very meticulous.



Frame 43



Frame 44



Frame 45

Dad: It's hard to like start cleaning and you find out



Frame 46

Dad (continues): it just took you an hour to clean something that only use to take you 20 minutes.

Then the viewer sees Zach on the step stool as before, but now we see a close-up of Afi and Cosa, who is happily making a mess of the cereal she is eating, as Zach the self-defined “perfectionist” cleans the ceiling fan. The viewer then sees Zach holding Cosa as he describes his frustration with how much longer it takes him to clean since his

amputation as he remarks, “It’s hard to like start cleaning and you find out you just took an hour to clean something that use to only take you 20 minutes” (Frames 41-46).



Frame 47



Frame 48



Frame 49



Frame 50

Dad [voiceover]: It was definitely frustrating to not help out as much as I use to. And some of these things you can't just combine and do it both at the same time we tried like with



Frame 51



Frame 52

Mom: It's a challenge, but you work through it
Dad: Yeah



Frame 53



Frame 54

Mom: That's where the teamwork comes in

The perspective changes and the viewer sees the oldest child playing in the living room and then helping her father clean as he describes his frustration with cleaning. The next scene shows Zach sweeping with a broom, using one foot to hold the broom steady and Afi holding the dust pan for him while they describe working through the challenges of cleaning as Afi comments, "that's where the teamwork comes in" (Frames 49-54).



Frame 55

[doorbell rings]



Frame 56

Dad: Let's open it up.



Frame 57

Mom: It's a Swiffer sweeper.



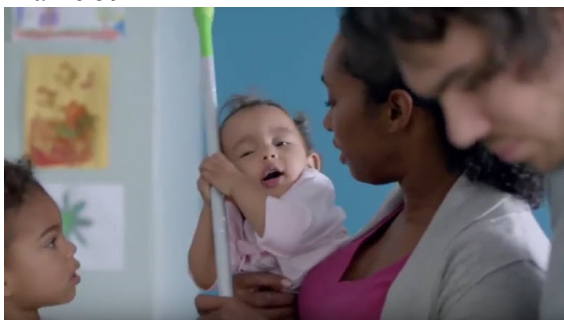
Frame 58

Dad: Swiffer dusters.



Mom: Nice.
Dad: Does this mean I won't
have to sweep anymore?
Mom: No!

Frame 59



[Cosa cooing]

Mom: Are you hugging it?

Frame 60



Dad: I can extend so I don't have to get on the step stool.

Frame 61



Dad: When you enter the house we'll just dust you

Mom [overlapping]: Dust you off. Yes [laughs]

Frame 62

Now the viewer sees the scene of the bright green Swiffer box being dropped off and the family identifying the products as they unpack the box. The viewer sees Cosa hug the handle of the Swiffer Sweeper, then sees Zach easily using the dusting product to reach the ceiling fan, followed by a humorous moment where he sweeps Weyah's white sweater as she sits on a stool smiling. Zach then says, "Maybe when you enter the house we'll just—"and Afi completes the sentence, "just dust you off" and laughs (Frames 55-62).



Frame 63



Frame 64



Frame 65



Frame 66

Dad: Water free dusting.

Mom [voiceover]: You can get a lot more places.

Dad: Really?

Mom: You got more dusting to do, haha!

Dad: That'll save time. I don't know how it stays on there, it's like a dirt magnet just like my kids.



Frame 67

Dad [voiceover]: I can finally win the battle against cleaning and actually get it done way faster



Frame 68



Frame 69

Dad: But the best thing is I don't have to get my wife to get the dust pan and that makes things a lot easier

Next, the viewer sees Zach using the duster and we can hear (but cannot see) Afi commenting in a playful manner, “you can get a lot more places, you got more dusting to do, A-ha!” Zach is then shown smiling and we hear in the voiceover that he feels like he can finally win the battle against cleaning and “get it done way faster.” We see the dirt on the sweeping product as Zach’s voiceover continues, “the best thing is that I don’t have to get my wife anymore to get the dustpan, and that makes things a lot easier” (Frames 63-69).



Frame 70

Mom: You can actually focus on family time. Cool.

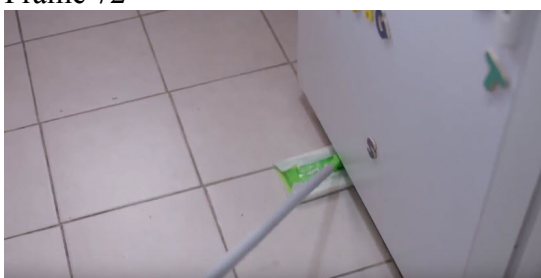


Frame 71



Frame 72

Mom (continues): This is the danger zone. I am the queen of clean.



Frame 73



Frame 74



Frame 75

Mom: That is crazy. This is for you. You can finish, yay!

Dad [overlapping]: Yeah.



Frame 76

Dad: I think we do get family time back

Mom: We get some serious family time back



Frame 77

Mom: Yeah we can dance

Dad: [overlapping] Yeah



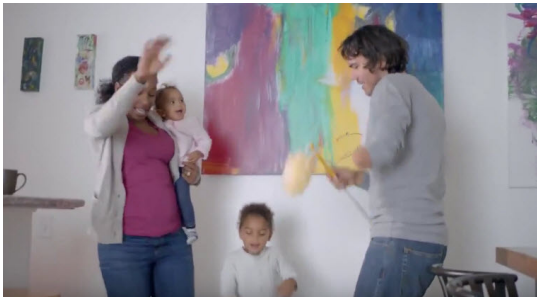
Frame 78

Mom: we can play we can do gymnastics we can do whatever let's get our boogie on what uh



Frame 79

Afi's voiceover begins as the viewer sees the family dancing together in the living room, "You can actually focus on family time." We then see her using the sweeper and calling herself "the queen of clean", all the while holding their youngest daughter. The viewer then sees the parents sitting down looking at each other as they confirm that "we get some serious family time back." Afi describes how they can play and "get our boogie on" as Zach and Afi dance (still sitting on the floor) and Cosa plays in front of them (Frames 70-79).



Frame 80

Mom [singing]: Hands up, dut
dut duh



Frame 81

Dad: It definitely doesn't solve all
the problems of having one arm but
any more time you can have with
family is always better



Frame 82



Dad [voiceover]: Nice jump baby.

Frame 83

The next quick scene shows the whole family dancing in the kitchen with Weyah holding the sweeper and the Zack holding the duster (and the Afi holding Cosa). Finally, we return to the couch where Weyah is jumping into her father's arms as Zach's voiceover states, "it definitely doesn't solve all the problems of having one arm, but any more time you can have with family is always better." The commercial ends with the bright green background with the phrase "give cleaning a new meaning" prominently displayed (Frames 80-83).

In comparison, the 30 second commercial begins in the same fashion as the extended cut with the family sitting near the kitchen counter together with the words, "The Rukavinas Los Angeles, CA" displayed. But rather than introducing themselves as they do in the extended cut, the dialogue begins with the father describes his physical disability, "When you only have one hand you're not doing anything as fast as you use to."

The scene now changes and the viewer sees the father's body, slightly bent forward as he sweeps with one hand around a high-top table and chairs, the other arm clearly missing the forearm and hand. The father continues, "which is funny..." and the scene returns to the first perspective, but now we see a close-up of the father's face peering at his wife as he (perhaps half-) jokingly says, "because I still do it better than

her.” The viewer may also notice a disclaimer across the bottom of the screen that reads, “Real people aware their comments may appear in advertising.”

The scene changes to a kitchen where the viewer can see the mother sweeping, with the same broom the father used, saying, “You know, I don’t think I was meant to sweep.” The perspective changes and we see a close-up of the mother using the broom and dust pan, which then zooms out. We see her squatting down with the broom and dust pan as she continues; “It’s a little frustrating. Look!” then sweeps dust towards the counter. It is unclear who she is instructing to look, but it is reasonable to assume she is speaking to her husband (or the viewer) even though she is the only person in the frame.

The scene changes again and the viewer sees the father on a step stool cleaning a ceiling fan while the mother is sitting by the kitchen counter holding the smallest child. The father says, as the point-of-view changes to a close-up of him holding a blade of the ceiling fan steady with his amputated arm and dusting the other side of the blade, “I can’t help out as much as I use to.”

The scene changes again and he is dusting a shelf in what one can presume is in a living room. His older daughter sitting on a brown leather ottoman looking at her father asks, “Do you need help?”

The scene changes again to what is most likely a front porch. The viewer sees the lower half of a body walking away briskly as she hears the sound of a doorbell and see a bright green box with the Swiffer logo.

Next the viewer sees the mother, oldest daughter and father checking out the box and hears the father say, “let’s open it up.” The mother in this scene is holding the youngest daughter, but the child is obscured by the mother’s body and it is most likely

that the casual observer would not see her. The perspective changes to a close-up of the contents of the box. We can see the body of the oldest child and the mother's hand as she picks up a Swiffer Sweeper box and identifies it.

The perspective changes to one where we are behind the father and he picks up a Swiffer product that he identifies as a Swiffer Duster. We then see him extend the handle as he describes that the handle extends, "so I don't have to get on the step stool."

The scene changes and we can see him using the dusting product on the same ceiling fan shown earlier with his wife and youngest daughter looking at his actions in awe.

The perspective changes yet again and the viewer sees a close-up of the yellow duster covered in dust, which the father shakes and says, "I don't know how it stays on" as the camera pans up to his face and he continues smiling, "It's like a dirt magnet, just like my kids" and laughs.

The scene changes to the kitchen and we see the broom-like product being used under the refrigerator. We can only see the product, but we hear the mother say, "This is the danger zone." The scene changes and we see her body, but not face, and a close-up of the dirt collected on the sweeping pad as she excitedly says, "That is crazy!"

The scene changes once more and the viewer sees the youngest daughter, mother and father sitting on the couch as the oldest daughter jumps into her father's arms. Then the viewer hears giggling in the background as the scene fades out and into a bright green background with the Swiffer logo and the words "Sweeper" and "Duster". Underneath these words, "Give cleaning a new meaning" is displayed with images of both products. We hear the father's voice one last time, "Yeah, no this definitely beats hanging out on a step ladder."

Interpretation: If the thick description of the 30 second commercial suggests multiple scene changes, it is because there are 19 changes in the camera's perspective. Unlike the previous commercials analyzed, there is much more dialogue (115 spoken words to be exact). All of the dialogue is used to explain the difficulties of cleaning and how the Swiffer products can help. For about 16 seconds of the commercial (53 percent), the Swiffer logo and/or products are visible. In about 18 seconds of the commercial (60 percent) at least two of the family members can be seen, yet the whole family is only present for about 4 seconds of screen time. If these lengths of time are any indication of what the producers of the commercial want the viewer to focus on, then it seems that not surprisingly, the focus is on the product. Interestingly, the slogan attached to this commercial, "give cleaning a new meaning," alludes to the difference represented by showing a multiracial family as well as how effective such products can be for people with physical disabilities (or people who are simply not skilled at cleaning).

The written phrases in the beginning of the commercial (naming the family and the disclaimer that states that the people the viewer sees are indeed real) serve to promote the authenticity of this family and the commercial itself. Worth noting is that the commercials in this advertising campaign use real people, state their names, geographic location and include the same disclaimer. Authenticity is also promoted through the dialogue that mirrors natural speech. In this commercial, statements like "yeah, no" and the minimal use of voiceovers are an attempt to prime the viewer into thinking that they are watching people's natural (rather than artificial) reactions when using these cleaning products. Mimicking natural speech is present in all of the commercials in this campaign as well.

There are a couple important differences, however, when comparing the other commercials in this campaign to Rukavina family commercial. Most notably is the absence of this commercial in the current iteration of the campaign. It is not possible to find this commercial on any of the official webpages for the campaign, even though commercials that aired in a similar time period to this commercial are visible. Many, but not all, of the commercials associated with the campaign immediately identify the family members (including pets), whereas this commercial places attention on the physical disability immediately. Both the invisibility of the commercial (even though other non-traditional family forms are presented in the current campaign) and the lack of identifying the family members by name serves to treat this interracial family as other, and minimizes the significance of their kinship.

Comparing the 30 second television commercial to this extended commercial, it becomes easy to recognize that intimate moments among the family (such as the children hugging each other and quick kiss shared between the parents) are intentionally never included in the 30 second commercial. One could argue that there simply isn't enough time to show intimacy, but editing decisions left only 4 seconds of footage that includes all four family members, none of which show the affection displayed in the extended cut. The lack of family intimacy and affection serves to reinforce the notion of interracial love as taboo, even in the context of a nuclear family where such acts are arguably more socially acceptable (or at least socially acceptable when the family members share the same race). Moreover, the intimate moments of the longer commercial are shown when the dialogue is addressing difficult topics, namely the challenges of cleaning and living with a physical disability. By focusing on what is being shown and less on what is being

said in these moments, Swiffer can continue to promote a positive evaluation of the family and their products.

In many ways, the Rukavinas are unlike other families. While a statistical minority of families may have a father who does most of the housework or are faced with challenges related to a physical disability *or* are multiracial, to see all of these elements in one family is unusual. Yet as different as this family is, Swiffer attempts to normalize this family by making their family values explicit. Their desire and ability to have more family time as a result of using Swiffer products highlights an important cultural norm about family, namely that families enjoy spending time together. Similar to the Cheerios' commercials, the images in the Swiffer commercials suggest a middle class status and are explicit about the fact that the viewer is seeing a nuclear family, both elements that once again underscore the idea that this family is a typical American family.

Cross cutting themes

So what messages do these commercials share in common? Perhaps the most prominent theme is a complicated story about love, affection, and intimacy among family members. Overtly, the commercials aim to show the love that interracial families share. Once again, a love that transcends racial boundaries as an ideal-typical form of romantic love. The emphasis on love not only reinforces the notion that the viewer is seeing a family, as love is central to the family unit, but it also serves to normalize the interracial "families" depicted. Through this normalization, the social forces that make such unions difficult to achieve and maintain are rendered invisible. In the next chapter, I elaborate on how this minimization of the social, political, economic and historical forces that have

maintained social distance between Blacks and Whites is detached from the symbolic use of interracial families to show company commitments to diversity.

While love may be at the forefront of these commercials, affection and intimacy are relegated to symbolic gestures rather than visually demonstrated. As described in Chapter 1, the vast majority of images we see of families in the media, and in commercials in particular, show White families in intimate spaces, namely the home. Rarely do we see people of different races in intimate spaces, let alone interracial families. Beyond their presence in an intimate space, physical intimacy and affection are kept to a minimum. Affection is primarily expressed symbolically through the brief vision of a pregnant mother, the almost kiss on the cheek of a young daughter, and the naively sweet act of the pouring of Cheerios on a father's heart. In contrast to the campaigns for these commercials where White and Black families are depicted with more visible physical affection towards one another, the lack of affection among interracial families becomes more visible. This absence ultimately suggests that interracial affection and love are not as socially acceptable as showing affection and love among families of the same race.

There are also competing messages evident in these commercials. Some of the messages support the notion that multiracial families are typical of the American family, while other messages suggest that they are not quite ordinary. At least in the case of the Cheerios and Swiffer commercials, they explicitly claim that the actors the viewer is seeing are indeed a family. The need to identify these actors as such suggests that multiracial families are not nearly as normative as the comments made by advertising insiders suggest. At the same time, each family displays some warmth among family

members, whether it be through a shared activity, showing concern for a family member's health or working together. This togetherness primes the viewer to associate positive emotions with the family they are seeing and serves to normalize this family form as they are seen demonstrating traditional notions of family values, especially love for one another. Moreover, these commercials seek to normalize the notion that interracial families as unremarkable by depicting them as being middle class. Once again, while the overt messaging is designed to show how ordinary interracial families are, there are more subtle indicators that complicate this message.

We also see framing around the cuteness of the children across the commercials. Cognitive science researchers argue that certain external stimuli can trigger a nurturing response (one form of a hot cognition) with cuteness being a primary trigger. Characteristics of cuteness include large eyes, round faces and small body sizes in proportion to head size (Cerulo 2010). The children in these commercials embody these characteristics of cuteness. In fact, in the next chapter creative advertising director, Peter Moore Smith, alludes to the idea that Gracie's cuteness deserves the spotlight, and focus group participants commonly referred to these children as cute. Not to mention that the Pillsbury commercial incorporates its famed mascot, the Pillsbury doughboy, to up the ante on cuteness. Thus, viewers are primed to not only focus on the cuteness shown to them, but one possible effect is that their nurturing response is activated, a complementary mindset to notions of the family as we often associate family with our ideas about caring for and nurturing family members. Of equal importance is that the focus on cuteness is strategically employed to evoke a positive association with the product being sold.

Visually, all the multiracial children share certain phenotypical features, namely medium skin tones and curly (tight ringlets of) brown hair. Because each of the children embody this look, it is difficult to imagine that these images are coincidental. Instead, it seems that we may be beginning to see a stereotype emerging, one in which black/white multiracial people have phenotypical features that depict in-betweenness. Hair that is not straight, but not kinky and skin tones that are not pale, but also not dark. Even though there is huge variation in phenotypes within racial groups, this imagined biracial look may be consistently being portrayed in the media. Ultimately, there are too few depictions of Black/White biracial folks in the media to substantiate this claim. Yet, the focus group responses will provide some empirical support for the claim that a Black/White biracial look is emerging.

Finally, to evoke hot cognition these commercials also rely on humor to sell their products. The use of humor in TV commercials is a common practice. About 20 percent of television ads contain humorous elements (Beard 2005). Positively, some research has demonstrated a link between humor and the viewer liking the commercial (Gelb and Pickett 1983, Sternthal and Craig 1973, Eisend 2009). Humorous messages also attract attention and awareness (Sternthal and Craig 1973, Madden and Weinberger 1984). At the same time, humor has been shown to have no effect on commercial content recall (Sutherland 1982, Eisend 2009), or on effectiveness of the commercial (Gelb and Pickett 1983). On the other end of the spectrum, research suggests that humor negatively impacts the credibility of the commercial (Madden and Weinberger 1984, Eisend 2009). Thus, while humor may draw a viewer's attention and make a commercial more likeable, it does little to make a commercial more effective. If humor is no more effective at

conveying the advertising message(s), then it's important to consider other possible reasons for its use in these commercials. Clearly, the Cheerios and Swiffer commercials use humor both through the images and dialogue. Perhaps this humor is incorporated to balance the potential for a negative reaction by the viewer seeing an interracial family. For viewers who may react negatively to seeing interracial families, humor distracts from the stigma and lightens otherwise intense dialogue, like discussing how cancer led to an arm amputation. If nothing else, the depiction of interracial families and use of humor bring greater attention to the company and its associated product(s). With the constant advertising exposure in this multimedia era, greater viewer attention may be useful in and of itself. In the next chapter, I'll show that on the whole these commercials are liked by viewers, but not just because they are humorous. Through a combination of colorblind messaging, cuteness, and humor, these commercials are well received by viewers. Of course, whether the viewer chooses to buy the product is another story. In the next chapter I will also show that the viewers interviewed often provide positive evaluations of the commercials, but these positive evaluations do not necessarily translate into the action of purchasing the product, a finding that is supported in the literature on humor in advertising (Sternthal and Craig 1973, Duncan 1979, Speck 1987, Weinberger and Gulas 1992, Madden and Weinberger 1984, Eisend 2009), but may also have implications for the literature on cognition and advertising.

Next, I will turn my attention to how advertising executives working within, but also outside of these companies make sense of the use of interracial families to sell their products. Their views shed light on the ways in which interracial families are being incorporated into the mainstream, primarily through colorblind messaging, notions of

authenticity, and portraying racial difference to signify company commitments to diversity and inclusion.

Chapter 3: Normalizing Interracial Families, Advertising in the Multicultural Era

Since the late 1980s there has been a tremendous shift in how interracial images are used in advertising moving from representing taboos to appealing to the masses. In a sea of White images, clothing company United Colors of Benneton is oft-cited as one of the first companies to use interracial images to shock the consumer and thusly draw attention to their brand and products. Specifically, Benneton “pushed the limits of the public’s tolerance for interracial intimate imagery” (DaCosta 2006) with images such as a dark-skinned woman breastfeeding a pale infant. As shown in chapter 1, by the mid-1990s multiracial images become symbols of trendiness, signaling that companies such as Levi’s are hip and edgy (Streeter 1996). It is at this historical moment that advertisers begin to suggest that multiracial images while unconventional can make products accessible, “taking fashion ads from the catwalk to the sidewalk” (Kane 1998). Other advertisers including Nike, Tylenol, and Verizon featured multiracial in their ads as symbols of the “new” and unexpected (DaCosta 2006). While the viewers that I interviewed also suggest that interracial images are still novel, they suggest that such images are to be expected. This changing expectation from families as being monoracial to multiracial is also evident in the advertising executives comments to be discussed shortly.

More recently, ethnically ambiguous appearances are gaining in prominence, used to appeal to a broad audience. Take L’Oreal (2012) True Match Foundation commercial where pop singer Beyoncé Knowles croons, “There’s a story behind my skin ... it’s a mosaic of all the faces before it.” Which in Beyoncé’s case includes African American, Native American and French ancestry, all prominently displayed on screen to

demonstrate how L'Oreal's foundation reflects the multiethnic background of its spokesperson and conveys to the consumer that she too can find her shade. As I demonstrate in this chapter, advertisers' motivation for using these images is based on the assumption that such images will evoke positive qualities and feelings for the viewer. While multiracial images continue to be used to appeal to a broad audience, something that is clearly on the minds of those who I interviewed, this chapter will explore the depths of what multiracial images have come to symbolize in the 21st century marketplace.

I will explore the mass appeal of interracial and multiracial images and the marketplace's role in racialization by focusing on how companies frame and describe the portrayal of interracial families in their television commercials. This chapter consists of three analytic units: 1) Textual analysis of 24 news and industry reports written about the Cheerios and Swiffer campaigns. These reports were written between the airing of the Cheerios commercial in 2013 through 2016 when the focus group interviews took place. 2) An analysis of the public statements made by advertising executives who worked for these campaigns and from other executives from 2013 to 2016 drawn from the 24 reports. 3) As a supplement, informational interviews with two advertising executives conducted in the Spring 2017.

Through these data, I show the paradoxes that exists when advertisers attempt to normalize the interracial family while simultaneously signaling diversity and authenticity. As advertisers continue to produce colorblind messages, essentially attempting to erase race from the picture, I argue that racial difference cannot be obscured and is still very much relevant to collective understandings of the family and the racialization of mixed-

race children. Such meanings reinforce dominant ideologies about interracial families, multiraciality and the institution of family more generally. To this end I seek to answer the following questions: What messages about race are companies promoting as they attempt to sell their product? And what cultural norms about race are advertising executives trying to sell to their audience? By examining producers expressed intentions for how their commercials should be interpreted, I will be able to explore whether this messaging is perceived by viewers as intended in Chapter 4.

I also find it useful to compare these commercials to other contemporary television commercials that show, but do not focus solely on interracial families and instead show interracial families as one of several family forms. In other words, while the commercials shown to focus group participants only depict interracial families, there are also commercials that show interracial families juxtaposed to other diverse family forms, such as same sex families and single parent families. What these commercials share in common is that they are geared towards a “general audience” and seek to render interracial families as culturally normative by showing nuclear, heterosexual, and middle-class families who incidentally belong to different racial groups. The normalization of interracial families is significant because it reflects shared understanding of how the increasingly diverse ethnoracial make-up of the United States is expanding notions of the family to include people who identify with different races. Importantly, in rendering interracial families as culturally normative, producers of these messages are also minimizing the significance of racial difference through colorblind and multicultural rhetoric. Equally important is that some advertisers view families as being a way of representing “the average American.” As one of the advertising executives I interviewed

describes, “let’s say we’re looking at everybody, as opposed to a particular cultural segment ... we’ll start with the family unit.” By showing interracial families we also witness advertisers’ construction of the multicultural consumer. Advertisers are suggesting that the typical consumer is someone who identifies, or at least appreciates, different cultures. I further argue that advertisers engage colorblind ideologies by actively avoiding notions of racial difference and racial inequality, what I call “detached difference”, replacing such politically charged notions with multiculturalism and diversity. An emphasis on multiculturalism and diversity not only serves to minimize racial difference and inequality, but also equates multiculturalism with authenticity and inclusivity, while maintaining that multiculturalism is both current and ethically good. Moreover, this detached difference makes diversity palatable for White audiences, sometimes at the expense the ethnoracial minority populations.

Furthermore, I claim that the purpose behind advancing colorblind ideals is an attempt to provoke hot cognitions, the idea that emotions color one’s thinking and ultimately how she makes sense of the media images and messages. Specifically, these advertisers are framing their commercials to evoke a positive emotional response from the viewer by treating multiracial families as culturally diverse. Moreover, the rendering of racial differences as invisible suggests that interracial families are a typical family because love and intimacy are not bound by race. This normalization occurs through the engagement of U.S. racial demographic change narratives and through publicized company commitments to diversity and inclusion.

Adapting to Changing Demographics: The Multicultural Consumer

Viewers reactions to multiracial families in television commercials, especially those broadcasted on the major television networks, are one small reflection of the general public's racial attitudes. In an era of increased racial tolerance, it comes as little surprise that the Cheerios' *Just Checking* commercial would succeed. Amobee—an advertising analytics and ad tech firm—analyzed “hundreds of millions of daily traditional Web, social Web and mobile content views” in the days immediately following the commercial's first airing. Their results show a 77 percent increase in online brand exposure in this week (Heine 2013). Communications company North 6th Agency declared the commercial to be the 2nd most influential commercial of the year. Another advertising analytics firm, Ace Metrix, published a report based on a consumer survey of 500 people. The report showed that *almost* all demographic groups—that is all but White men over 50 years old—gave high scores to the commercial. They also found that African Americans gave the highest scores (Symonds 2013). Its popularity suggests that this commercial has grabbed the attention of the general public and advertisers alike, primarily because of its depiction of an interracial family, an unusual image in the commercial landscape.

Many of the news articles analyzed explicitly reference the changing U.S. racial demographics as the driving force behind interracial families being represented in commercials. For some journalists, these demographic changes are described as a process, the continuous ethnoracial diversification of the U.S. For others, racial demographic change is an outcome: the U.S. has achieved racial diversity. For all, these shifts in racial demographics are treated as being unremarkable. Casting these demographic shifts as unremarkable underlies assumptions that interracial families and

their multiracial children are also unremarkable. The underlying logic being that racial diversity simply exists and this alone is reason enough to depict interracial families. As one advertising executive I interviewed points out, “When you talk about multicultural families you’re basically—corporations are making a statement that they understand families don’t look like the 1950s, you know, *Leave It To Beaver*.” Camille Gibson, vice president of marketing for Cheerios, alludes to this notion in one news report when describing how the actors in the “Just Checking” commercial were strategically chosen to reflect the changing U.S. population, “at Cheerios, we know there are many kinds of families and we celebrate them all” (Italie 2013).

Even though portraying an interracial family was a first for this “wholesome and all-American” brand, the decision to depict an interracial family is described as a response to a diversifying U.S. population. Yet, showing an interracial family in a television commercial is more unusual than such explanations suggest as there has only been a handful of commercials to ever show these families. Perhaps because it is still rare to see racial diversity in television commercials (as evidenced in Chapter 1), most of the authors of these industry news stories are critical of the advertising industry’s slow response to mirror the racial diversity present in the U.S. (Nudd 2013). For example, this critique is evidenced in the following headline, “Ad Campaigns Are Finally Reflecting Diversity of U.S.” (Zmuda 2014). The narrative continues by stating that this slow adoption provides opportunities for savvy marketers to reach a general (rather than niche) audience through depictions of interracial families (Morse 2012). Underlying this narrative of wanting to reflect the changing ethnoracial landscape is the company’s desire to appear to be inclusive, as one advertising executive I interviewed describes,

“corporations are basically looking to send the message that they are inclusive, that they’re aware that family units are not exclusively one culture or another, in isolation or silos.” Therefore, in addition to wanting to portray that the companies are keeping up with the times, interracial families also suggest that companies value inclusivity.

This narrative of “catching up” to the realities of race in America assumes that interracial families (and multiracial contexts more generally) are normative. The logical leap between interracial families existing and interracial families as common is a theme that runs throughout industry executives’ public comments about these commercials. For example, Allen Adamson, chairman of the branding consulting firm Landor Associates, in reference to the Cheerios commercial claims that “to succeed today, big brands like Cheerios need to be in touch with what's authentic and true about American families" (Italie 2013). In this case, the link among interracial families, authenticity and truth reinforces the idea that many families are interracial and that interracial families are able to represent “American families”. The following quotation from an editor at a leading industry magazine illustrates my claims about interracial families’ broad appeal and representativeness as a traditional family, “I think what that ad communicated is [General Mills] felt it was important that in their advertising that they’re speaking to the average American, who today isn’t necessarily one color, isn’t necessarily one race, one cultural background, but really could be a mixture of many different backgrounds” (Rohan 2013). Moreover, Meredith Tutterow, associate marketing director for Cheerios, echoes the notion of multiculturalism being mainstream when discussing the backlash to the Cheerios spot; “Our actors reflect so many families across America...Multicultural families are everywhere, including on television, so the attention this has received from

the media is somewhat surprising” (Hunt 2014). Here we see normativity (embodied by “the average American”) linked to multiculturalism, and perhaps can even claim that these ideas are one in the same (i.e., the average American is multicultural). This narrative is one that has been reinforced by assimilation narratives of America as a melting pot.

Such narratives are problematic, as David Smith (2011) argues, because they render diversity within our society as being uniform, ultimately ignoring the disparities that exist among racial groups. In reality, while there may be nothing “average” about the depiction of interracial families, some industry insiders make this connection because multiculturalism appeals not only to a mass market by promoting social solidarity, but is positively associated with commitments to justice and equality when tend to evoke a positive emotional response from viewers (Kivisto 2012). Implicit in the treatment of interracial families as normative is an ethical evaluation that depicting such families is morally good. As one advertising executive I interviewed describes, “The smartest marketers and the most open-minded are not only saying, ‘Hey, I’m doing this so that I can speak to a broader cross section of America,’ but they’re also saying, ‘why should there be a problem with presenting these real-life family combinations.’” The logic is that because interracial families are ubiquitous, the public surely must approve and the company is simply reflecting what has already been accepted (while conveniently targeting a broader audience to improve sales).

Of course, there are economic incentives for promoting multiculturalism and completely ignoring racial inequality. Through what has been called a “total market approach”—a marketing strategy that falls somewhere between niche and general

marketing, but targets multicultural consumers—these advertisers are clearly using portrayals of interracial families to target diverse audiences. As Lynne Collins, a spokeswoman at Saatchi & Saatchi, the advertising agency that created *Just Checking* states, "it is important for us to make sure the work reflects the people we're trying to sell products to." Yet, it would be dubious to assume that this commercial was created for interracial families (and specifically White/Black multiracial families), since economically speaking their market share isn't worth the potential risk associated with showing an interracial family. Instead, such comments allude to the idea that commercials depicting interracial families are attempting to speak to and sell to not only to diverse audiences, but also to White audiences. As one advertising executive I interviewed describes; "So, you have a big group of White Americans who are excited and interested in making sure that their children are exposed to positive value messages about diversity." The depiction of interracial families does double duty by appeasing Whites who value racial diversity and broadening the target audience.

Detached Difference and Racial Insensitivity

There are consequences to promoting a view of racial diversity than appeals to the White majority. Diversity symbolizes social integration, as multiple cultures occupying the same space effortlessly. The thought that both White and "multicultural" consumers would connect with a multiracial family seems to suggest that social integration supersedes racial, ethnic or cultural differences, regardless of how contentious or innocuous these differences may be. In other words, the conflation of multiracial depictions with messages targeting both Whites and "multicultural" consumers is instrumental in not only commodifying difference, but advancing a very flat

conceptualization of difference, what I call “detached difference”. Detached difference ignores (or fails to recognize) the formative processes, namely historical, political, economic and other social forces that create, shape and maintain these distinctions and the power relations that imbue these distinctions with meaning. Difference, whether it is racial difference or cultural difference, may be visible, but it is rendered irrelevant in the advertising landscape. We may see difference, but this difference is superficial at best.

One might claim that the notion of detached difference presents a strawman’s argument since displaying the complexity of racial inequality is not the primary objective of advertisers. While I would agree that it is not advertisers’ intent to depict the nuances of racial difference, this does not diminish the fact that these cultural productions are symbols of the colorblind logic employed by advertisers in this chapter. They suggest that racial difference is literally only skin deep. In other words, the difference shown is merely differences in phenotype. Regardless of intention, racial difference in these commercials is by design unremarkable, yet I’ve shown in that not only does the social reality of many interracial families contrasts sharply with these symbolic portrayals, I’ve also shown the subtle ways that advertisers construct interracial families as unconventional.

An important consequence of portraying racial difference superficially is that such portrayals are susceptible to being interpreted by viewers as being racially insensitive. Ironically, as advertisers attempt to downplay racial difference, viewers attune to the importance of racial difference will read these messages as being racially stereotypical and/or insensitive. In this study, the viewers who identify with non-White identities point out their annoyance with the racial stereotypes they see present in these commercials.

Detached difference provides one explanation for why, even after extensive market research, advertisers are still producing commercials that turn off some viewers. While the marketplace may want to be blind to racial difference, it is impossible for it to be divorced from the structural racism that has not only shaped the marketplace, but has shaped the experience and interpretations of viewers.

Hot Cognition and the Aspirational Interracial Family

Advertisers primarily want to engage viewers' hot cognitions because positive associations with specific brands is good for business. The act of positively priming viewers serves another purpose as well, it enforces the idea that interracial families are an aspirational family form. Families, because of their love, should be able to transcend race. Moreover, engaging the viewers' hot cognitions is an important strategy for reinforcing ideas about social integration and detached difference. If we are made to feel good about depictions of differences because they are always shown in socially integrated spaces, we can remain blissfully unaware of the significance of these differences. There is no doubt that the "Just Checking" commercial was designed to engage the viewer's hot cognitions. In fact, Gibson is described as directing Saatchi & Saatchi "to inject some feeling into its ads, which had focused principally on health and nutrition" (Stanley 2014). Thus, there is an explicit effort to engage people emotionally, but not just any emotions, they want to people to respond positively to the company's assumed commitment to diversity and inclusion. And while the focus group participants in this study tended to positively evaluate commercials depicting interracial families, there are other indicators that this advertising campaign successfully engaged people's hot cognitions. From the abundance of positive comments left on the Cheerios' YouTube

page to the Ace Metrix report referred to at the beginning of this chapter that reports that the viewers' surveyed described the "Just Checking" commercial as being "adorable" and "sweet" (Symonds 2013).

Importantly, the imagined multicultural consumer need not necessarily be racially diverse, but interpretations like this one suggest that multiracial families are one prominent representation of multiculturalism. I am not the first to argue that discussions of race and often circumvented using multicultural rhetoric (see Lentin 2005; Darder and Torres 2004), nor am I the first to claim that images of multiracial people have been used to represent multiculturalism (Streeter 2003), but this is the first attempt to explore how the institution of the family, specifically, interracial families, is used to further colorblind ideologies and multiculturalism. Extending Shankur's (2015) argument that colorblind ideologies are foundational to the advertising industry, my conclusion about the relationship between culture and race differ from Shankur's claim that general marketers are attempting to make ethnoracial differences culturally recognizable. From my vantage point, multiracial families are being made less culturally distinct as they are extending and reshaping our notions of traditional families. To state this point differently, multiracial families are being rendered simply as American families. From an industry perspective, there is nothing remarkable about interracial families beyond their ability to appeal to a wide audience, and ultimately garner more profits. This ability to appeal to a wide audience reinforces ideas about interracial families being normative, surely ignoring most of ways in which these families are actually remarkable (as outlined previously).

Company Commitments to Diversity and Inclusion

While colorblind messages permeate the advertising industry, not all the narratives surrounding interracial families ignore race completely. My focus group findings show viewers' classification of the actors' race(s) are not clear cut. In contrast, several of the industry reports paint a quite literal black and white picture. Dark skinned actors are labeled by the reporters as being "black" (with only one report using the term "African American") and the lighter skinned individuals always labeled as "white." For example, Ron Dicker (2014) writes about the Swiffer commercial as follows; "the commercial ... shows how Swiffer impacts the real lives of the Rukavina family in Los Angeles. She's black. He's white." And when the child(ren) are discussed, only the label "biracial" is used. Since the commercials never explicitly identify the actors' racial background, these classifications by news reporters reflect societal norms about race.⁴ Namely, that racial classification is straightforward and that biracial is a sufficient way to racial classify the offspring of people whose racial identification is easily identified (and oversimplified). To the extent that these articles describe an awareness of changing racial demographics, the language they use to describe the races of the actors is far less sophisticated. In contrast, only one author—a self-identified Chief Hispanic Marketing Strategist—questions the racial classification of the actors in the Cheerios commercial as well as exposing our collective assumptions about family; "The child seems more white than biracial. But so what? Even those with the fairest skin tones can in fact be African-American. Are these parents, step-parents, friends with benefits, adoptive parents? And the list of possibilities goes on. We can certainly make some assumptions,

⁴ My own bias is evidenced as well. By stating that the commercials in this study depict White/Black multiracial families I am making similar assumptions about the putatively "unmixedness" of the parents, and in the case of the Pillsbury and Cheerios commercials, there is the assumption that the children portrayed are the biological children of the adult actors.

based upon body language and some scripting, but do we really know who's who and what's what for sure?" (Carrasco 2013). While viewers (and many of the focus group participants) assume that the family are biological families (i.e., adult couples and their biological offspring), it is true that there is not enough information presented in these commercials to definitively confirm this. Thus, not only *can* we make assumptions about the nature of the families shown, it's clear that we *do* make these assumptions. And even if we are witnessing a broader conceptualization of what family means along racial lines, the notion of the biological family is as firmly entrenched societal norm as being able to easily identify someone's race(s) based on her appearance.

Another theme emerging from these industry reports is that racial diversity signifies company commitment to diversity more generally. Racial diversity as symbolic of all forms of social diversity is not new. Analyzing 166 in-depth interviews, Bell and Hartmann (2007) find that people talk about diversity in abstract and universal terms, but the examples they use to illustrate diversity rely on interactions with people of different races. They further argue that while diversity tends to promote hot cognition (i.e., cognition that is influenced by emotions, in this case positivity and optimism), while at the same time "like colorblindness and related rhetorical strategies, the actual language of diversity deals with race by downplaying or diluting it, lumping it together with a host of social differences" (Bell and Hartmann 2007:905). The idea that having a positive emotional response to notions of diversity is not lost on those who create television commercials. Donny Deutsch, chairman of advertising agency Deutsch, Inc. explains, "in reality you're making a statement about your company: 'We're progressive, we're inclusive, we are about today'" (Stump 2013). Peter Moore Smith, former executive

creative director at Saatchi & Saatchi (who held this position when the Cheerios commercial was made) has a different take on the situation as New York Times advertising reporter Stuart Elliott (2014) reports; “Mr. Smith demurred at a suggestion that Cheerios may be trying to exploit a contentious issue. ‘If we’re milking anything ... it’s this delightful little actress,’ referring to Grace Colbert, and ‘a little girl’s special relationship with her dad.’” This colorblind response serves to again normalize the interracial family as unremarkable.

The question still remains though, why would General Mills (and other companies) use an interracial family to symbolize diversity? In an interview with the *Today* show, Gibson explains, “We were trying to portray an American family. And there are lots of multicultural families in America today” (*New Cheerios ad sparks racist comments*, 2013). Once again, her comments suggest that interracial families are culturally normative. As a matter-of-fact, portraying an interracial family is portraying an American family. At the same time, Gibson avoids the use of racial language in her response, instead using “multicultural” to describe difference. A cynic could interpret her word choice as an attempt to circumvent the backlash of racist consumers by using a more inclusive term that is (potentially) less politically charged than race. A supporter may interpret her response as being more inclusive, as culture extends beyond race to include other social identities, like religious affiliation, ethnicity and immigration status. Yet, the suggestion that interracial and multicultural are interchangeable concepts is a precarious claim that potentially contradicts Gibson’s claim that interracial families are representative of an American family. Gibson assumes that different racial groups inhabit different cultures, yet if these people from different racial backgrounds are ultimately

American, the dominant cultural milieu would be most apparent and therefore an interracial family would not necessarily clearly depict multiculturalism. We would need more context to understand the extent to which the family shown demonstrates multiculturalism as there is nothing noteworthy in the commercials themselves to indicate cultural differences. What is obvious is that an interracial family shows difference in the form of racial difference because racial difference is highly visible, but this is not necessarily the same idea as cultural difference.

The slipperiness examined here is not unique to advertising, Bethany Bryson (2005) claims that multiculturalism is an amorphous and contested concept based on her study of college English departments. Furthermore, multiculturalism can be conceived as a cultural space where ideas and *ideals* about solidarity, belonging and incorporation are constructed (Hartmann 2015). Peter Kivisto (2012:4) provides a more precise definition of multiculturalism, as a political process “with the goal being to learn to live with diversity in ways that promote equality, justice, and expanded levels of social solidarity predicated on mutual recognition and respect, intercultural dialogue and exchange, and fair distribution of resources.” This definition suggests that multiculturalism is no less political of a term than interracial, but does reinforce the positive emotional response advertisers want such commercials to elicit by emphasizing equality and solidarity, without explicitly tackling the racialized inequalities and social distance present in contemporary U.S. society.

As I show in the previous chapter, these actors were bought back for the follow-up commercial, *Gracie*, showcasing their commitment to inclusivity. This follow-up commercial is significant because it underscores the idea that while Cheerios may

advocate for celebrating a variety of family forms, the portrayal of a racially diverse family continues to be the mechanism through which diversity is portrayed. The success of the *Just Checking* Cheerios commercial that introduced consumers to this imagined interracial family are the driving force behind such depictions. Camille Gibson, again comments on the motivation for this commercial and the choice to air during the Super Bowl; “Like millions of Americans, we just fell in love with this family. The big game provided another opportunity to tell another story about family love.” Ironically, Gibson’s colorblind rhetoric is reflected by “millions of Americans” who advocate that race no longer shapes social outcomes, that love transcends race, even in the face of mounting evidence suggesting otherwise. Ace Matrix (Symonds 2013) report shows that viewers responses are also colorblind (as are many of my focus groups participants’ reactions). Analyzing every response that used “the term ‘black’, ‘white’, ‘couple’, and ‘racial’ and the total percentage of usage for those who responded with a verbatim was less than 5%. Of those responses only two mentioned the use of a multiracial family in a negative way.” This idealization of what family should be about (i.e., love, not race) reinforces notions of inclusivity and the integration of multiracial families into the cultural mainstream, while ignoring racial difference or at least rendering this difference as detached from reality.

Importantly, depicting interracial love through the institution of family speaks to the ways in which interracial love is hegemonic and culturally sanctioned. For much of Hollywood’s history, interracial love (especially love that is sexual) was taboo and so such images were forbidden. When interracial love was finally shown starting in the 1970s, it was included to titillate audiences, but still stigmatized (Cortes 1991). Today,

we see that interracial love is appropriate when shown in the context of a nuclear family, and can still illicit a visceral and prejudicial reaction by viewers. While portraying interracial love through interracial families softens the stigmatization of interracial intimacy, many of the viewers I interviewed are still aware that such unions are not culturally normative. Moreover, I've discussed how interracial intimacy is in the background rather than the foreground of the commercials studied suggesting that interracial intimacy is still stigmatized.

Authenticity and Interracial Families

Discussions of authenticity are theoretically thorny. Who has the authority to declare what is authentic? Does authenticity refer to a reflection of a social reality or commitments to brand images through the messaging present in these commercials? How does understandings of authenticity vary between viewers and producers? In this section, I primarily examine authenticity as a reflection of social reality. In other words, advertisers argue that depictions of interracial families are authentic because more and more interracial families are being formed. Secondly, producers use authenticity to convey that they are truly committed to diversity and inclusion. In this sense, authenticity refers to the believability of the brand's image.

Showing interracial families in television commercials is a strategic effort by companies to seem more authentic. Authenticity in advertising is critical to convey since the boundary between the real and imagined has been blurred for quite some time. By signifying authenticity, the viewer does not need to interrogate what s/he sees, but can recognize that the commercial is reflecting some truth about families, as well as company

commitments to diversity and inclusion filtered through colorblind and multicultural rhetoric.

“Advertisers for many years always took the safe route, which was to try to ruffle no feathers and in doing so became less and less authentic and real,” Allen Adamson, a chairman at the branding consulting firm Landor Associates states. Even though advertisers may have missed the mark, one can argue that authenticity has been and continues to be a central project of the industry, as Adamson continues, “to succeed today, big brands like Cheerios need to be in touch with what's authentic and true about American families” (Italie 2013). Swiffer attempts to sell the authentic American family through the “Swiffer Effect” campaign. What is the Swiffer effect? A series of commercials depicting real life families who find themselves having more family time, or as Swiffer claims, “more time for the things that matter most” when they use Swiffer products. Online people are encouraged to post their own photos of cleaning with Swiffer products and can read about cleaning tips that inform them of which Swiffer products work best in different situations, and of course, where to go to buy these products. The Swiffer ad campaign has several commercials that feature non-traditional family forms, including a presumably black single father and his son, a presumably Jewish elderly couple, and the Rukavina family. What could be more authentic than showing us how Swiffer helps real families than by casting a real family? Moreover, industry reports quickly pointed out the multiple ways this commercial represents extreme inclusivity (Beltrone 2014; Dicker 2014). We see a breakdown in gendered norms (a man cleaning the house and being better at doing so than his wife), a presumably interracial couple and their multiracial children enjoying each other’s company, and most prominently—

according to the focus group participants—an amputee’s ability to perform these household chores because of Swiffer products.

The strategy of selling diversity through authentic images of real families is employed by other brands as well. For instance, Honey Maid’s “This is wholesome” commercial, shows a presumably white gay couple and infant and a multiracial family (a dark-skinned mother, light skinned father and three children) with a close up of the parents holding hands⁵. Diversity thusly being represented through diversity in family forms, as the marketing director for Honey Maid states publicly; “We recognize change is happening every day, from the way in which a family looks today to how a family interacts to the way it is portrayed in media. We at Honey Maid continue to evolve and expand our varieties to provide delicious, wholesome products so they can be a part of everyday moments of connection in a world with changing, evolving family dynamics.” Unlike the Cheerios commercial, showing real families in these commercials is an application of the authentic to make their messages appear to be more real, less contrived. For Swiffer, their products help families spend more time together. For Honey Maid, interracial families are as wholesome as the snacks they produce. Cheerios makes a similar claim by being a “wholesome and all-American” brand, thus their use of an interracial family suggests that such families are also wholesome and all-American. Ultimately, these claims of authenticity serve to normalize interracial families as just another family drawn together by their love for one another. The use of terms like “wholesome” and “all American” are not coincidental. These terms also imply moral judgement, namely that multiculturalism is good.

⁵ Honey Maid makes a point of showing that the families in this commercial are real life families

While other companies (i.e., Cheerios) show imagined families, the companies who show real families recognize the existence of interracial families in a different way. They claim that interracial families are authentic and current. By advocating for authenticity and moral goodness, company commitments to inclusivity and diversity should not come into question. Yet, how authentic are these commercials? Stated differently, what about these commercials is authentic? All commercials involve intensive planning and execution. Even the commercials portraying real families are similarly staged like the Cheerios commercial. Zack Rukavina is a real-life actor. Suddenly the sharp distinction between imagined and authentic melts away. Ironically, the authenticity portrayed in these commercials is actually superficial. Ultimately, the only authentic attribute of these commercials is that they show real families in imagined scenarios.

Engaging Difference

After Honey Maid received instant backlash from viewers through social media outlets for their “This is wholesome” commercial, within a month they responded with a video reaffirming their commitment to diversity and inclusion. The video, which has been viewed over four million times to date, shows a clip from the commercial followed by some of the criticism received, including comments like, “Disgusting!!” The video then shows two artists rolling printed pages of these negative comments and forming a three-dimensional sculpture of the word “Love.” Next the company points out that they received ten times as many positive comments and show the artists extending the sculpture with similarly rolled printed pages of these positive comments. Seeing the volume of positive comments effectively shows the amount of support they received from

viewers. The video ends with the statement, “Proving that only one thing really matters when it comes to family... Love.” While probably coincidental, it is interesting that both Cheerios and Honey Maid are not only companies that want to be associated with wholesomeness, but that they explicitly align interracial families with notions of love. Unlike Cheerios though, Honey Maid chooses to engage the stigma associated with diverse family forms while Cheerios executives publicly expressed surprise that such stigma exists.

Tylenol recently used a similar strategy of recruiting real families for their advertisements as well as showing a diversity in family forms with the explicit intention of challenging notions of conventional families. In early 2015, Tylenol aired a commercial called “How We Family,” depicting both traditional (i.e., heterosexual, same race families) and newer family forms. The commercial begins with a female voice asking the question, “When were you first considered a family?” We then see a presumably white teenage couple taking pictures at what appears to be their prom as the voice asks, “when you fell in love?”. Then we see a light skinned couple on their wedding day eating the first slice of cake as the narrator asks, “when you got married?”. Next we see a dark skinned family, mother, father, and four girls as the narrator continues, “when you had kids?” As the scene changes and a blurry image comes into focus the narrator then asks (as we see the question prominently displayed), “When did you first *fight* to be considered a family?” And we see a light skinned lesbian couple at their prom, a presumably Black woman and white man kiss on their wedding day and three families, the first are White parents, with two toddler aged children—one Asian and one Black—the next, an interracial family (Black father, White mother, and biracial

daughter) and a white single mother and two teenaged children as the narrator restates the questions posed moments ago. The narrator continues, “family isn’t defined by who you love, but how” and we see a gay couple and their infant son. Before we are reminded that this is a commercial for Tylenol and the phrase, “For what matters most.”

Like Honey Maid, (and unlike Cheerios and Swiffer) Tylenol is clearly demonstrating a commitment to diversity and inclusion, but is unique in that it explicitly recognizes the challenges faced by non-traditional family forms. In this commercial, race is not the sole marker of diversity or inclusion, as we see multiple forms of interracial families (i.e., interracial adoption and parents who are different races) as well as multiple same sex couples and their families. Importantly, fighting to be considered a family is meaningful as the Supreme Court would soon be making the historic decision to legalize same sex marriage later this same year. Hence, this commercial engaged the politics of love and family, which is in opposition to the detached difference portrayed in Cheerios and Swiffer commercials. This commercial once again reminds the viewer that love should be the most meaningful dimension of the family, not the social categories in which couples and their children are assigned. Interestingly, this commercial also seems to be engaged in normalizing interracial families, but does so by engaging the challenges faced by interracial families, not by ignoring them.

Thinking about the unifying characteristics of these commercials and advertising campaigns, I propose that multicultural advertising, in which we see portrayals of interracial families, incorporates several important dimensions. Advertisers who engage this framework are claiming that their companies are current by showing an awareness that not all families look the same. They are also showing company commitments to

authenticity, diversity, and inclusion by visualizing diversity in an effort to reach a broad audience. Moreover, advertisers are suggesting that multiculturalism is morally good, an ideal that should be promoted. At the same time, the explicit avoidance of racialized language begins to undermine advertisers' positive framework. Advertisers use racial diversity to signify multiculturalism, but intentionally avoid using racialized words. In other words, advertisers never use terms such as multiracial, even when they are clearly showing racially diversity and are ultimately imagining the racial identities of potential consumers, especially catering to liberal White consumers. The multicultural advertising advanced by the companies in this study are predicated on the notion of detached difference. Superficially showing difference, racial or otherwise, is sufficient. Engaging the inequalities that make these differences meaningful is often not desirable or worthy of attention. In Chapter 4 we'll see the implications of ignoring racial inequality as we see the emergence and perpetuation of racial stereotyping.

Taking a step back, it's clear that commercials such as the ones examined in this project are still outliers, but perhaps this is reason enough to pay particular attention to them. They may in fact be signaling a tipping point in advertising where we will see a surge in more racially diverse casting. As an anti-racist project, there is some hope to be found in advertisers' aspirations to sell interracial families as mundane, typical and unremarkable, even if the reasons are predicated on profit-making more so than commitments to social justice. It becomes clear that when social justice considerations are infused into these commercials that the promotion of diversity and inclusion extends beyond interracial families. At the same time, strategies that serve to ignore racial difference and its associated disparities through the use of multicultural rhetoric do little

to promote racial harmony beyond sell consumers the idea that the companies who promote such advertisements are superficially committed to diversity and inclusion, and even superficially committed to notions of authenticity.

And while it makes economic sense to prime viewers to interpret television commercials showing interracial families positively, emphasizing the love among family members, I have demonstrated in the previous chapter that a close reading of these commercials exposes competing narratives. These competing messages suggest that the depiction of interracial families is not necessarily culturally normative, or even a clear representation of the multiculturalism that advertising industry insiders are claiming such depictions project.

The viewers I interview in the next chapter tend to buy into the main messaging and describe positive reactions to the depictions of interracial families. At the same time, many viewers recognize and are critical of the economic imperative for idealizing the interracial family. As I will show, viewers are expanding their notion of family to include diverse family forms, including interracial families and are attuned to the use of interracial families to appeal to the masses as a symbol of collective aspirations for racial unity.

Chapter 4: Viewers Interpretations of Interracial Families in Television Commercials

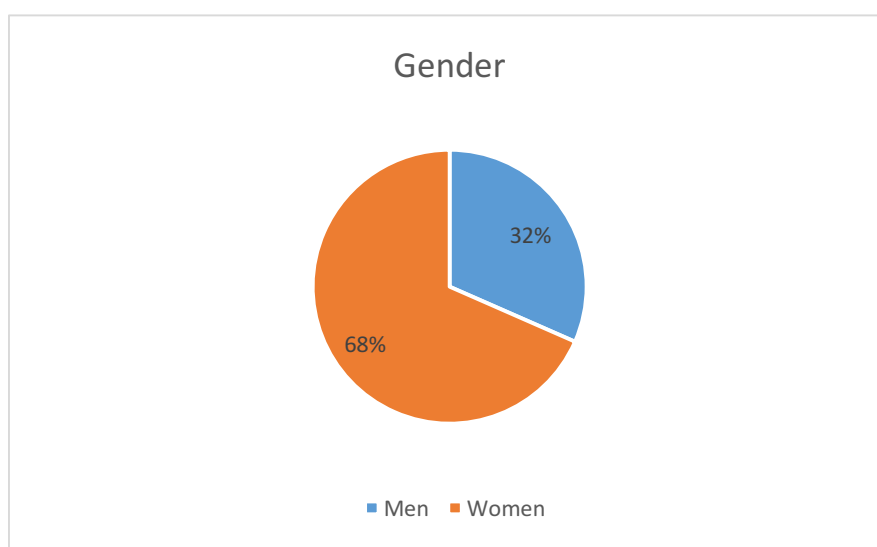
The preceding chapters have explored how the producers of television advertising frame interracial families in an increasingly multicultural context, and I argue that these depictions serve to normalize interracial families and minimize the significance of ethnoracial difference. The analysis of the commercials themselves shows that overt and subtle messages can at times be contradictory allowing for multiple interpretations of family dynamics, while at the same time sharing some commonalities that may be suggesting the emergence of multiracial tropes, such as uniform phenotypical appearances that portray a preferred biracial look. This focus on production and the content of the commercials, while important should not supersede the interpretations of viewers. To more fully understand the critical distinctions that people make when thinking about, classifying and evaluating interracial families, it is necessary to engage viewers in discussion about such commercials.

Focus groups are one of the most important qualitative methods to investigate consumers' mindsets (Davila 2001). Focus groups are an especially appropriate method for this research since this technique is designed to capture "minds at work" as participants evaluate specific stimulus materials (Cerulo 1998). Furthermore, focus groups draw attention to cognitive processes that are revealed through interaction that would not otherwise be observable (Morgan 1998). This research design promotes participants to "think out loud", which is useful for identifying cognitive and sociocultural factors shaping the participants' interpretation of the television commercials.

Demographic Characteristics of Viewers

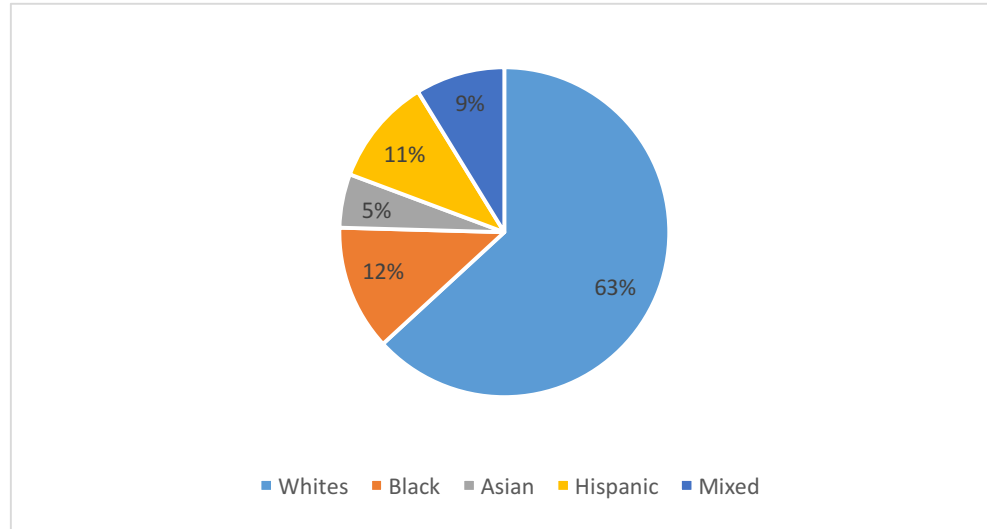
Thus, I conducted 11 focus group interviews with a diverse cross-section of 57 participants recruited via word of mouth and public advertisements (see Appendix for detailed methods). While this group is a convenient sample of adults living in the Northeastern United States, the demographic characteristics of this group closely mirror the U.S. population. For instance, the average age of participants is 39-years-old (ranging from age 19 to 64), and 31.5 percent of the participants identify as male (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Gender composition of focus group participants (n=57)



In terms of racial self-identification, Figure 3 shows that 63 percent of the participants identify as White, 12 percent as Black, 11 percent as Hispanic, 5 percent as Asian and 9 percent of the sample identified with more than one ethnoracial category (e.g., Black and White, White and Latina). It's worth noting that the majority of the focus groups included people with different racial backgrounds. Only two focus groups had all White participants.

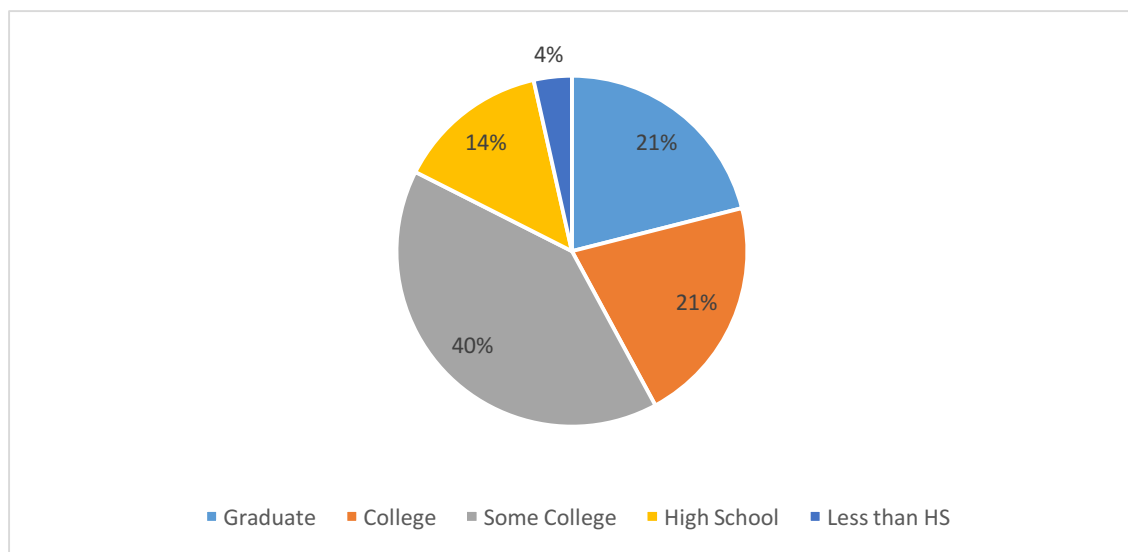
Figure 3: Ethnoracial composition of focus group participants (n=57)



63 percent of the participants (n=36) self-identify as middle class.

There are two demographic characteristics that vary from the U.S. population, but are present in this sample: an underrepresentation of men (a common occurrence in qualitative research) and the sample is well-educated. 21 percent of the sample hold a graduate degree (n=12) and an additional 21 percent have earned a bachelor's degree. 40 percent of the sample have attended college, but not completed a degree (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Educational Attainment of focus group participants (n=57)



Worth noting is that regardless of education, participants are attuned to advertising goals when speaking about their perceptions of the advertisers' intentions. Education seemed to shape responses about interracial families as an aspirational family form. Specifically, less educated participants described interracial families in the present, while more educated participants more often described interracial families in the future, but this bias is complicated by differences in age. Whereas younger (roughly 30 years old and younger) participants—who also happened to be more educated—tend to make future-oriented statements, older participants' comments were more retrospective, discussing how interracial relationships have changed over the course of their lives. By and large, the fact that most of the participants grew up and continue to live in the Northeastern United States is the most overt bias. Many described growing up in interracial contexts, a characteristic that is likely not shared by viewers in other regions of the U.S., which may be biasing this sample towards seeing interracial families as normative.

Importantly, 70 percent of the participants report watching television commercials either often or sometimes and the average amount of time spent watching television is 1.9 hours a day. The sample spent an additional 2.3 hours are spent online on average, with 60 percent of participants using their cell phone to access online content. On the whole, the participants are engaged in multiple forms of media daily and exposed to the advertising content that is unavoidable in this media landscape.

I will show that the ethnoracial and gendered identities of the viewers influence their interpretation. Broadly speaking, White respondents more often describe the commercials using colorblind language as their interpretations often aligning with the

framing of the commercials described in the previous chapters. Non-Whites interpretations diverge from White respondents inasmuch as they more often saw instances of racial stereotyping present in the commercials. Gendered identities tend to most prominently shape how they viewed the commercials' ability to sell the product. Men more often articulate that the commercials are not effective in convincing them to purchase the product advertised, while women more often found the commercials to be effective. I will show that if not the most, one of the most important demographic characteristics shaping viewer interpretations is whether they are contact with interracial families (either as a member of an interracial families or having multiracial family members as part of their extended kin network). For these individuals, they can see the limits of the idealized interracial families portrayed in these commercials.

Many participants had seen at least one of the commercials (most often the Cheerios spot), suggesting that their responses are not always their first reactions, although some participants did share their initial thoughts retrospectively. At the same time, no participant mentioned having seen the Pillsbury commercial prior to the focus group, so for this commercial in particular, their comments are a close reflection of their initial and immediate thinking about what they are viewing.

Conducting the Focus Group Interviews

I structured each focus group similarly. After being introduced to the project, creating name tags, signing consent forms, and turning the audio recorder on, I explained that the groups would be watching three commercials (Cheerios' *Just Checking*, Swiffer's Rukavina Family, and Pillsbury's cookie dough commercials) and asked the same series of questions for each commercial (See Methods Appendix for interview questions and

prompts). First up, *Just Checking*, would be projected on a screen or shown on a television (depending on the location). Showing the Cheerios commercial first was a strategic choice as I wanted participants to become comfortable talking about the content of the commercials as quickly as possible and assumed that showing them a familiar commercial would jump start the conversation. I would then ask the participants if they'd like to watch the commercial again, and most often the focus groups would watch the commercial three times before I asked for their initial reactions to the commercial. Next, I would preface the Swiffer commercial as being different from the Cheerios commercial in a few important ways: 1) The participants would be seeing an extended cut of the commercial which would run about three minutes and 2) the family presented was an actual family, not actors as seen in the first commercial. Participants only saw this commercial once in the interest of time. Then I would ask the same round of questions as before. Finally, I would inform the participants that the last commercial is only 15 seconds and that we may need to watch it several times (And indeed we did watch the commercial several times, usually three times). Now most participants could anticipate the questions I would ask and began stating their initial reactions. Once we had discussed all three commercials, I asked a few follow-up questions about all the commercials, such as "Do you think we'll see more commercials like these in the future? Why or why not?"

The interviews were then transcribed and analyzed (see methods appendix for details). The quotations presented in this chapter are representative of each theme described. In other words, the quotations to come are illustrative of the general trend. There are only a couple of noted instances where I share an atypical response, which is always juxtaposed to the representative response to show the reader the range of

responses given. What we will see are many of the ways that racialized experiences color the participants' interpretations. Whether these are experiences of being a ethnoracial minority or a White person navigating interracial contexts, I will show that people are evaluating the content of these commercials against their racialized lived experiences.

The Typical American Family?

To determine whether dominant views of families are expanding to incorporate interracial families, it is useful to analyze viewers' immediate reactions to the commercials. For some viewers, the interracial family shown in the Cheerios commercial was the first aspect of the commercial noticed. For example, Julia, a 49-year-old, White, dog groomer, says; "The first thing that jumped off at me was that she defined her mother and said, "Mom, dah, dah, dah." I mean like, I don't know. I was thinking because people who were watching it wouldn't associate that woman as her mom right away." Julia's comment suggests that racialized notions of family (as sharing the same racial identity) are the reason why it's important to establish the relationship between the two actresses. In other words, it is not normative for a mother to be a different race than her child, so it's necessary to establish this relationship explicitly. Tamara, a 57-year-old, Black business administrator, elaborates on this idea as she describes her thinking about the significance and prominence of the interracial family after watching the commercial;

"They gave us a biracial baby, she's adorable and then the first thing she says is "Mom!" So it's like okay this is the mom and she looks nothing like her, so I'm just like okay! My mind is kinda going, like she must have a black father because that it, that's not hers. I'm not even paying attention to the commercial, I'm just in my own head like "Whoa! Her dad is black. I wonder if they're going to show him. Oh! They show him and he's attractive too. They make such a cute baby!" And then watching it again... [I'm] realizing the overall picture of the message, the overall picture is Cheerios is good for your heart."

Tamara describes reading the racial cues presented in the commercial as a way of determining that the family is multiracial ("she looks nothing like her...she must have a

black father.”) She subtly reinforces the notion that families share the same race when she suggests that the child cannot belong to the light-skinned “mother”. The focus on the child’s cuteness and interest in seeing if the father is Black lead Tamara to miss what she sees to be the intended message of the commercial, that the Cheerios brand is heart healthy. Yet, Tamara quote illustrates that there are multiple messages embedded in this commercial. It is unclear whether the intent of producers of this commercial was to catch the viewers’ attention by showing a novel family form or whether the producers assumed that people would adopt a colorblind perspective to focus their attention on a cute little girl who wants to make sure her father is healthy. Regardless, Tamara’s quote suggests that she assumes the advertiser’s intent is to focus on the benefits of cheerios, even though she initially focused on the racial dynamic presented. In comparison to the Cheerios commercial, many participants stated that they immediately noticed the interracial family in the Swiffer commercial. This is not surprising considering that the family is the first image the viewer sees.

To the extent that advertisers are trying to sell the notion that interracial families are normative, I also asked participants whether they thought the families shown in these commercials are representative of a typical American family.⁶ Because I did not define what would represent a typical family for the participants, some of their comments reflect their thinking on what would constitute a normative family form. For instance, Gerald, a 32-year-old plant operator, comments, “it’s not typical, but it’s very common, like it’s not an uncommon thing.” One could interpret Gerald’s comment as suggesting that interracial families may not be the dominant family form, but are one of many prominent

⁶ Of course, some participants asked for clarification about what would constitute the typical American family, but I directed them to define this notion for themselves when answering the question.

forms of family. Imbedded in this comment is the idea that the family is being conceptualized to include a range of family forms. This expansive thinking about family as an institution is evident in Diandra's (a 44-year-old, Black senior program coordinator) remarks; "As an adult we have gone through so many changes in our world that this is our typical family. The untypical is typical." Diandra's comment suggests that the dominant family form (i.e., white, heterosexual, nuclear families) is losing or has lost its cultural dominance and has been replaced by a range of family forms, including multiracial families.

Interestingly, Hannah, a 30-year-old, White student, suggests that interracial families may instead be considered an aspirational family form;

"I think that they're depicting the idealized typical family. So it's heterosexual, two parents, particularly the first two [commercials]. The whole, they're not the same race, that is definitely a more modern derivative of the ideal family because that would have not been accepted like not that long ago. But I think it's more like the idealized two parent heterosexual, more than so actually reflecting, just speaking in terms of demographic trends. You know there's a lot of single parent families and actually there aren't that many mixed race families still. I mean really there are more now as time goes on, but it's not like there's tons of interracial marriage cause there's not. So I think maybe it's what we want to see from a family. It's like a modern idealized image, a modern twist on the standard two parent in a house family."

Hannah's comment suggests that the typical family is a heterosexual, nuclear family, yet as the U.S. becomes more ethnoracially diverse, multiracial families are symbolic of what future family forms will, but more importantly, *should* represent because they speak symbolically to the easing of racial tensions. Aaron, a 30-year-old, White engineer, echoes the notion that multiracial families are symbolic of a collective aspiration for families to transverse racial boundaries; "I think typical is in itself a stereotype of what you're trying to be, like what America is trying to be. It's like, it's just a family in America."

Of course, some participants did not view interracial families as being typical. The explanations they gave focused primarily on the idea that they are still a small proportion of families in the U.S., or relied on a colorblind logic as Sandy, a 59-year-old White teacher, responds to the Swiffer commercial; “I didn’t think of any difference if the mom was White. To me it’s a typical family, again I don’t see that he’s White, that she’s Black.” This brief exchange among several participants also highlights that multiracial families are normative--if one overlooks their racial composition:

Ariel: “I see a man, for me it’s a regular family, having a commercial that the little girl loves daddy and says, for the heart that she’ll go put [the cereal]... she just loves daddy and she wants the heart to function good. So, that’s what I would say.

Sandy: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Samantha: I’m with you too, I love that.

Aaron: That’s what I thought.”

The races of the actors are not mentioned by these participants because they are focused on the love shown, exemplifying the framing that the producers of the Cheerios commercial intended. To contrast, Evelyn, a 29-year-old, Hispanic teacher, describes how identifying as Spanish and being in an interracial relationship shapes her perception that multiracial families are normative, “I think yeah because I see in my own situation I am Spanish, he is White, and you know, see more of like mixes going on whether they be Black and White or Spanish and White.” Importantly, Evelyn’s claim that she more often recognizes interracial families and thus can conceive of them as being typical is directly tied to her interracial relationship status.

“She’s so cute!” and Other Colorblind Interpretations

Beginning with the Cheerios’ commercial—once again, the first commercial participants watched—most commented that they immediately noticed the little girl, but for many different reasons. Of those who noticed the young actress first, almost all commented on her appearance. Some simply mentioned that the actress was cute, as Donna⁷, a 31-year-old, White student points out; “well I remember the first time I saw this. I didn’t really think about the fact that the child was mixed, which I do now obviously. I just remember thinking how cute the kid was.” Donna’s comment highlights colorblind rhetoric, language employed by several, primarily White, participants as they describe their reactions to these commercials, when she suggests that she does not initially notice the race of the young girl because she is focused on the girl’s attractiveness. Other participants echo Donna’s thinking with brief quips about how cute the child actress is, but Donna’s statement most explicitly aligns with advertising executives framing that multiracial people are not remarkable or noteworthy simply because of their racial difference. It is not a coincidence that Whiteness is coupled with colorblind ideology since maintaining the perspective that racial difference is not worthy of attention serves to maintain White supremacy (Bonilla Silva 2001). It could also be the case that White participants are self-censoring by not explicitly discussing racial difference, so as not to appear racist. Finally, it could also be the case that cuteness is more easily perceived than race especially since the racial identity of the actress could be ambiguous.

⁷ Pseudonyms are used throughout to protect the identities of the participants.

Like the Cheerios commercial, several participants noticed how cute the kids are, even explicitly stating that the children's cuteness trumped one's vision of their ethnoracial identities, as Sabrina, a 21-year-old, Black student, recalls, "But I guess I kind of didn't realize the race because I'm like "Oh my gosh! They're so cute! Everyone's so cute!" Again, if the actor/actress is attractive, this attractiveness is described as being the most salient characteristic, so much so that race is unremarkable.

Others described immediately noticing an authentic family, as Amber, a 61-year-old, White leadership development specialist, says; "The love between the two sisters. You felt like they were real sisters not actors."

Juxtaposing the language of authenticity used to describe the Swiffer commercial (e.g., "they felt like *real* sisters" [emphasis added]), some participants rely on physical appearance to determine that the Pillsbury commercial is inauthentic. In other words, that the Pillsbury commercial doesn't reflect everyday life. For example, Diandra comments; "The first thing that came to mind is that the mom like didn't fit. Like did the teacher take the kids home? On TV in general they overdress people. Like you're at home, making cookies. It didn't look genuine." In these cases, it's difficult to discern whether the participants attribute the lack of authenticity to the depiction of an interracial family and/or because the actors did not share similar physical characteristics. This ambiguity is present in Drew's, a 22-year-old Hispanic student, response as well, "What I got from that commercial, I saw the kids, they're not just white, but when I saw the mom I didn't immediately think that's their mom." Tom, 51-year-old, White mechanic echoes these comments, "You didn't see the mother or the woman right away, you saw two kids, so right away you just thought, okay holiday cookies ... then they show you the mother and

... you don't know if she's the mother because you don't have—the kids don't say nothing.” Whereas the Cheerios commercial immediately identified the relationship between the actresses, Tom's comment shows that familial relationships cannot be taken-for-granted when traditional markers of family are not obvious or are simply missing.

I also asked participants to describe each of the commercials using one word (or phrase) to better understand what frames are most prominently entrenched in their view of the commercials. Figure 5 shows a word cloud of these descriptions. Note that the size of each descriptor corresponds with the frequency of usage. In other words, the larger the font, the more often participants stated that word or phrase to describe the commercials viewed. The most common descriptor is “cute” showing that the producers' choice in actors effectively persuaded these viewers to focus on the children, invoking hot cognition in order to foster a positive association with the products being sold. Moreover, regardless of frequency, almost all the descriptions have positive connotations, with many focused on the family dynamics portrayed. Most prominently, descriptors like “loving”, “love”, “happy”, “cute”, “adorable”, “sweet”, and “family” are used to characterize the commercials. Less frequent terms echoed these sentiments (e.g., “unity”), but also speak to the timeliness (e.g., “relevant”) and family values (e.g., “inspirational”, “heartwarming”, “courageous”) of these portrayals. Given these one word descriptions of the commercials, there's no doubt that advertisers are able to elicit a positive emotional response from these particular viewers. Worth noting is that no one mentioned race when prompted to provide the one word descriptions of the commercials suggesting that, even for those who noticed racial difference, racial difference is not the

[and I] we're a biracial couple so right away when we saw the girl we're like 'the little girl is biracial'. We noticed that right away." Throughout the focus groups, participants referenced how their own experiences and racial identities shaped how they interpreted the commercials. In this case, being in an interracial marriage made the actress' racial identity salient. Similarly, Gabriella, a 58-year-old Black/White administrative assistant, pays closer attention to the children's ethnoracial identities in the Swiffer commercial; "I'm looking at the kids. I want to see their complexion - if they are mocha, if they are light, if their hair's curly, if they're dark. That's what I was looking at." In these examples, the focus on the races of the children is clearly informed by the viewers' lived experience. Gabriella, who identifies with multiple races, is looking for biracial phenotypical features in the children, while James credits his interracial relationship to why he focused on the biracial daughter.

Further discussion of the appearance of the children in the commercials by focus group participants suggests the emergence of multiracial stereotyping. A few participants point out that they can identify multiracial people based solely on appearance. For example, Damien, 34-year-old Black trackman, claims that he can tell that someone belongs to more than one racial group when he looks at the person, "I mean for the most part we can tell by, just by looking ... looking at you, I can tell you're mixed." Moreover, this ability to identify multiracial people seems to be amplified when one has the opportunity to see one or both of the parents of the multiracial person. The following exchange among several participants highlights the assumptions made about the appearance of multiracial people:

Interviewer: Were you surprised they didn't look like what you'd imagine when you think of a biracial?

Jasmine: I thought those last two would have been a little darker, they were a little light.

Tamara: Whereas me, the opposite. The first commercial, I would've thought the child would have been a little darker.

Gabriella: I agree with you in that respect.

Sabrina: Hmm...I don't know. When I hear biracial, I grew up my mom's half-brother he's dark, he's Haitian. He married an Asian woman, she was Chinese I believe. Their first child, he looks Asian. He's fair skinned, the eyes, he looks Asian and then their second child, he looks like the babies up here. Nice light skin, curly hair, mocha, but my mom's half-brother is dark-skinned, but their baby is light skinned. When I hear biracial, I don't always go to...in commercials they like bombard you with it like "OKAY! We get it!" The mixed children, mocha color, they're adorable, but there are other colors out there. I'm aware of them but I feel like others out there aren't aware of them.

Jasmine, Tamara and Gabriella's expectations that the skin tone of the actors did not match what they envision a Black/White multiracial child would look like based on the appearance of the "parents" in these commercials. Jasmine, who identifies as White, expected the children in the Pillsbury commercial to have a darker complexion even without knowing the complexion of the father, while Tamara and Gabriella (who self-identify as Black and Black/White respectively) assumed a darker complexion for the child in the Cheerios commercial, presumably because the father is dark-skinned. Even though their expectations are individualistic they demonstrate that there is a biracial reference to which they are comparing the actors in these commercials. Sabrina elaborates on how her own family dynamic of having cousins who are multiracial informs not only her understanding of a multiracial trope, but also her ability to perceive a range of multiracial appearances. Specifically, Sabrina attributes her ability to recognize that there are "other colors out there" to being a member of a multiracial

family. She also suggests that in commercials multiracial children are portrayed having “nice light skin, curly hair” and that this trope is pervasive when she says; “OKAY. We get it!” Sabrina is also one of several participants who suggest that multiracial people have stereotypically curly hair. For example, in speaking about the young child actor, Samantha, a 32-year-old, Latina retail worker points out, “his hair is like really curly, like on purpose, come on now you know.” Here Samantha suggests that having curly hair is a contrived feature (a feature that she is critical of) rather than an attempt at showcasing an authentic feature of a multiracial youth.

Roxanne, a 20-year-old Black student, describes the notion that multiracial people are essentially attractive as an overt stereotype applied to multiracial people, “You know the cliché, they make beautiful babies or beautiful children.” Michelle, a 24-year-old White teacher, furthers this stereotype/trope by describing that multiracial children are assumed to have an attractive White mother; “they weren’t innovative at all, at all. When I see cute biracial baby, in my head I’m thinking, ‘Probably a white mother. She’s probably attractive.’ Because there’s a lot of Lifetime movies about a white girl and she’ll go get knocked up by a black football player in college and she’s stuck with his baby. Ah! Cute baby, light-skinned, curly hair. I’ve seen it before.” Importantly, Michelle attributes the attractive features of the biracial child to not just the mother, but a white mother reinforcing the privileging of whiteness as the standard of beauty. Interestingly, Diana, a 49-year-old, White/Hispanic media specialist, suggests that White mother have a difficult time styling the curly hair of their multiracial offspring as another stereotype present in these commercials, “its like a stereotype because if there is a family has a White mother, their kids’ hair is crazy.” As many of these comments suggest, participants

most often thought the multiracial actors were being whitewashed. Mary, a 31-year-old, Asian teacher, makes this point in reference to the Cheerios commercial; “I do think that the baby had green eyes, but neither of the parents do. And I feel that biracial babies are kinda depicted like always as having different colored eyes and lighter features and I think that was a stereotypical biracial baby to pick.” Furthermore, Mary suggests the depiction of Black/White biracial people is a multiracial stereotype in and of itself, “I think mixed race has been stereotyped to Black and White and it’s so much more than that.” Serena, a 31-year-old White/Hispanic higher education administrator, sums up the notion of a multiracial trope nicely when reflecting on the Pillsbury cookies commercial, “the irony of this whole cookie cutting thing, its hitting me that this biracial [look] is becoming cookie cutter. Even the skin complexion-- I know a lot of interracial couples who have kids... They are defining like what the ideal biracial child should be so that’s kind of bothering me.” Serena recognizes that these commercials are showing an idealized, non-representative image of what mixed race children should look like rather than depicting the diversity embodied by people who identify with multiple races. Importantly, the multiracial tropes described are not bounded by the racial identities of the viewers. Viewers of different racial backgrounds noticed that the children in these commercials had similar features and these commercial images often conflicted with the viewers’ knowledge of the range of appearances embodied by multiracial people.

As I’ve argued earlier, producers’ attempts to normalize interracial families through a reliance on colorblind messaging that emphasizes multiculturalism and avoids explicit mentions of race—the notion of detached difference—are not wholly successful. While the majority of participants did not identify any racial stereotypes being portrayed

in the commercials, some participants described a range of racial stereotypes that producers may have overlooked. In addition to the multiracial stereotypes just described, three prominent stereotypes emerged during the focus groups, all focused on negative stereotyping of Blacks. Importantly, most of the participants who described negative stereotypical messaging and images identify with a non-White identity showing how racial identity can influence a viewer's interpretations. For instance, Greg, a 40-year-old, Hispanic hotel manager incredulously asks, "Why does a black guy got to have a bad heart?" When self-identified White participants comment on racial stereotypes they frame their response in terms of the "fact" that Blacks have higher rates of heart disease. When white participants identified stereotyping, they focused exclusively on contextualizing this stereotype that Blacks suffer from heart disease at higher rates than other racial groups as a factual observation. For instance, Victor, 60 years old, White, and retired, expresses this idea, "There's stereotypes in there but I wouldn't, I mean, I guess I kind of felt it but looked past it when watching it. It's because the stereotype is well it's based on a fact that black people are more likely to have heart issues than a white person." Victor's comment also suggests that such stereotypes are not necessarily overt and can be overlooked by the casual viewer.

Some participants thought that the father's role in the Cheerios commercial was stereotypical as well. One atypical response is Christopher's, a 30-year-old, White engineering technician, who notices a negative black stereotype; "for the Cheerios commercial it was like why is the dad like laying on the couch? Why is an African American man lying on the couch? Like looking like a bum?" Other non-White participants who characterized this moment as a stereotype questioned why the roles of

the mother and father couldn't have been reversed and still have the same effect and suggest that this moment makes the father look lazier than the mother, which is inextricably tied to persistent racial stereotyping of Blacks being lazier than Whites. While most of the stereotypes identified can be found in the Cheerios commercial, a couple of participants pointed out what they perceived to be a stereotype in the Swiffer ad as well, as Raymond, a 46-year-old, Black librarian explains;

Raymond: When she's describing their first date, she says, he took me hiking...

Interviewer: Oh, that's right.

Raymond: Black people don't hike, only white people hike.

Raymond's seemingly flippant response may be informed by the body language of the mother in this commercial (see chapter 2). While these perceived stereotypes may seem like minor slights or mere insensitivity, their presence underscores the tension resulting from producers' attempts to frame their messages as colorblind or multicultural without addressing the very real racial inequalities that pervade their work and society at large. Ethnoracial minorities in this study may be more attuned to racial stereotyping, but this is not to suggest that White viewers never notice such stereotyping. As advertisers attempt to appeal to a broad audience by using interracial and multiracial images, they may be failing to recognize how colorblindness and multicultural framing can be perceived as reinforcing racial stereotypes.

Racial Classification: Not so Black and White

Rather than assume viewers assigned the actors in these commercials to the same racial groups, I asked participants to tell me the race of each of the actors. Overall, their responses show that racial classification cannot be taken-for-granted as participants classified each actor with multiple ethnoracial groups. While most participants identified

the light skinned mother in the Cheerios commercial as White (or Caucasian), a handful of participants thought she might be Hispanic/Latina as Sue suggests, “she could be Latina because she’s not blonde.” Similarly, participants most often classified the dark skinned father in the commercial as Black (or African American). One notable exception is that several self-identified Latino participants (who identify as Puerto Rican) thought that the father could be Puerto Rican, suggesting a reflection of their own ethnoracial identities in how they perceive racial difference. But it’s also worth noting that a couple other (non-Latino/Hispanic) participants thought the father could be Puerto Rican or Dominican, which may reflect the regional ethnic and racial compositions where these interviews took place where large concentrations of Puerto Ricans and Dominicans live. Regardless of the viewer’s racial identities, it’s clear that racial classification is not black and white. Moreover, the blurring of racial and ethnic identifications is also prevalent in the ways viewers classified other actors.

Another example of this blurring of ethnic and racial boundaries occurs when classifying the parents in the Swiffer advertisement. While the father is most often referred to as being White/Caucasian, a couple of participants classified him as being non-White, specifically Hawaiian (based, in part, on the names of the children). While many identified the mother in this commercial as being Black, she is also identified as being Jamaican, West Indian, Caribbean, Latina, Arab/Middle Eastern, and Mixed Race (Black/White). Hannah’s comment shows the tension between the seemingly obvious racial classification of this actress and the possibility of different identifications; “She actually, I feel like I mean I guess she’s Black. But I mean honestly she could be Latina, like I don’t know. She’s kinda like a little bit--doesn’t pop out at me [as being] one

thing.” By not being easy to identify, it’s important that Hannah suggests the actress could be Latina (as opposed to belonging to a different ethnoracial category) because such a statement equates perceived ethnoracial ambiguity with being Latina. Even the mother in the Pillsbury cookies commercial is classified in multiple ways. While most see her as being White, a few participants thought she was Latina.

The tensions that exist around racially classifying others in an increasingly ethnoracially diverse period are evident in the viewer’s understandings of ethnoracial identification and race relations. For example, Gina, a 48-year-old White director, states when referencing the actor in the Cheerios commercial that “most likely the dad is already mixed, I just read something that said that lots of people who identify as African American also claim Native American ancestry.” In this example, Gina assumes that a history of miscegenation provides the basis for identifying Blacks with multiple racial groups. All in all, the participants’ racial classification of the parent actors in these commercials do not reinforce the notion of the racial singularity of Whiteness that has been advanced in the literature (Lee and Bean, 2004 and others). Instead, these viewers’ responses show much more ambiguity in the assignment of ethnoracial identifications for both Blacks and Whites, while also suggesting that Latino and Black identifications encompass a wide range of phenotypes.

Across the commercials, the child actors are overwhelmingly described using some derivative of belonging to multiple racial groups, as being either mixed, half Black/half White, or biracial. One minor exception is that the boy in the Pillsbury cookies commercial is identified by one participant as White and the girl in this commercial is identified as Black by another participant (perceptions which may be fueled by the fact

that there is no father shown). Therefore, even when the racial identifications of the parents differ, there is no denying that the offspring of these interracial unions represent multiple ethnoracial groups. To better understand what classifications like biracial and mixed mean to these participants, I asked participants whether terms such as biracial and mixed are equivalent and sufficient for racially classifying the actors to explore whether biracial as a racial category is meaningful. Many participants who commented stated that these terms were interchangeable, but some offer distinctions between these terms. For instance, Joyce, a 63-year-old, White housewife, suggests that “biracial is an older term and I think mixed is more of a recent [term].” Corrine, a 36-year-old, White director, provides an alternative distinction that mixed refers to belonging to more than two racial groups, “nowadays it’s more than biracial, so, I guess that’s why we say more mixed than biracial because normally there’s more than one [race] on both sides.” Janay, a 21-year-old White/Latina student, suggests that there are degrees of “mixedness” when describing the races of the children in the Swiffer commercial;

Janay: Super mixed

Interviewer: When you say “super mixed”, what do you mean by that?

Janay: Like the last commercial, I was pretty positive that the girl was only White and Black. But with these kids if I looked at them on their own, I would have no clue.

In comparison, Amanda, a 22-year-old White student, provides a more specific definition of being mixed, “I think when most people say mixed they are referring to half Black and half White, because like I’m mixed with a bunch of stuff, but not Black and White.” For Amanda, even though she identified with multiple ethnoracial identities, she views the

term “mixed” as being reserved for this particular group, a distinction that *if* maintained by others could serve to reinforce the multiracial trope described earlier.⁹

Viewers' Perceptions of Company Motivation and Effectiveness

Participants also commented on the aspects of the commercials they enjoyed and disliked as well as addressed questions specifically about how effective they perceived these commercials to be. Their interpretations shed light on how the individuals make sense of messages permeating the marketplace. The viewers I interview are aware that the messages embedded in these commercials are designed to turn a profit. Because viewers assume profit-making is at the core of these commercials, their responses show that these advertising campaigns are effectively selling the notion that families can be racially diverse.

Not surprisingly, most participants liked many dimensions of these commercials unrelated to the interracial families portrayed. The most liked attributes included how cute all the children are, seeing the daughter in the Cheerios commercial concerned about her father's heart health, the realness of and the perception that the Rukavina family spent a lot of quality time together, and the cookies in the Pillsbury commercial. For instance, Sabrina positive response towards the Cheerios commercial is representative example; “It's a special commercial. I remember the first time I saw it, I said I would never forget that commercial.” A small number of participants discussed that they liked that the commercials portrayed interracial family and Adrianna, a 27-year-old, White instructional aide, commented on liking the bravery of depicting multiracial families, “I like that they actually have the balls enough to do it.” Implicit in Adrianna's comment is

⁹ In this study, however, Amanda's perspective is an outlier.

that there is risk involved in portraying interracial families suggesting the racial tensions that such families symbolize. Keira, a 27-year-old, White program coordinator, suggests that the commercial is even more admirable because the messaging moved beyond the political; “Also I liked the fact that they ... were making a statement about race, [but] they also had rich content. Like I was thinking why is the child putting the cereal on the heart, instead of serving it in a bowl? Its rich content that’s not just oh rah rah we’re a good company that’s evolved and here’s a biracial commercial.” Kiera’s comment suggest that the depiction of a multiracial family isn’t just to show company commitments to diversity, but rather coupled with a compelling message that makes the appearance of a multiracial family meaningful. While she would have been turned off by a commercial that just showed an interracial family for the sake of diversity, Kiera finds this commercial compelling because the focus of the commercial isn’t about race, but rather about the care the daughter shows for her father. Importantly, the main messaging of these commercials became the aspects that these viewers found to be most enjoyable to watch. These messages had much less to do with the racial composition of the family than they had to do with promoting either the product or the positive dimensions of family, including kinship, love and care for one another.

When asked what they disliked about these commercials, many participants did not find any aspect of the commercials to be unappealing, reinforcing the idea that the producers of these commercials effectively aligned positive emotional responses with their depictions of multiracial families. Also reinforcing this notion is that a few participants noted disliking that the Pillsbury commercial doesn’t focus on showing the family as Janice, a 33-year-old, White senior loan officer says, “You didn’t see the

mother ‘til the end, like you really didn’t know if it was a family or not.” Some participants are also critical of the Swiffer commercial, describing it as overly dramatic. Tamara’s reaction to the father being an amputee calls into question how power is represented;

“Why did the White guy have to be the amputee? Why did he have to have the sob story? Why couldn’t the Black woman have the sob story? Oh because not everyone relates to Black women, some people like Black people, some people don’t like Black people. Let’s give the White man [the story]. Black people will accept the commercial because it’s like alright we expect the White man to be the dominant role so that’s fine.”

Tamara’s critique alludes to the negative impact that detached difference can have when assumptions about inequality are intentionally obscured or ignored. Focusing on the White father and his “problems” overlooks the challenges that his Black wife experiences and because of his dominant position in the racial hierarchy, Tamara predicts that Black viewers will just accept that idea that racial inequality isn’t worthy of being addressed.

Even with the critiques of these commercials, most participants think the commercials are effective at selling their associated product. For example, Gina describe the Cheerios commercial as being so effective (because of its portrayal of an interracial family) that it positively shifted her perception of the company;

Gina: I see Cheerios in a whole different light.

Interviewer: Really? I don’t want to put words in your mouth but it sounds like Cheerios has transformed your perception of the company.

Gina: Yes it has because like we mentioned earlier, race is a very sensitive topic in America today and in our world and when we see something like a commercial that is positive and bringing people together, cause that’s what it reflects to me showing that people are coming together, it makes the brand—puts [it] in a better light for me.”

Robin, a 58-year-old, White accountant describes this particular commercial as being effective for a related, but different reason. From her perspective, the Cheerios commercial is effective because the multiracial family can target multiple demographics;

“it makes you feel a little empathetic because it’s a White woman and a dark-skinned Black man, and a light-skinned baby, different sets of people relate to that. Some people are going to relate to the baby more than to the father than to the White mother, it’s kind of like even though we’re all different colors, we still like Cheerios and you still will buy Cheerios. If you walk past them in the supermarket, you’ll be like, “I’m going to get Cheerios because I saw the commercial so I’m going to pick up Cheerios” so it’s like it branched out to so many different people that can relate to this one commercial.”

Implicit in Robin’s response is the idea that commitments to racial diversity can be demonstrated through the purchasing of this product. Therefore, not only can multiple racial groups relate to the image of a multiracial family, but all consumers can support the notion of interracial families by buying Cheerios. Janay’s remarks support Robin’s response as she explicitly states why she’s committed to buying this product, “I would. I really like how they made the effort not to just feature a typical White family. Since I identify as biracial, I think it’s awesome how they made the effort to show they are explicitly supporting [biracials]. After seeing that, I would be more likely to go buy Cheerios just because of that commercial.” The importance of politically aligning with a product and purchasing those products that align is evident in Hannah’s response; “We feed my son Cheerios, so I was already purchasing them...so it didn’t make me more likely. But it did send me the message that Cheerios are more aligned with my political views than I might have thought before and there are companies that I know are not aligned with my political views that I will not buy from.” Even though Hannah bought Cheerios before seeing this commercial, her response shows that viewers can frame their purchasing decisions through the personal politics. One might feel more empowered to continue to buy a brand that shows political commitments, like a commitment to racial diversity, just as she may stop buying a brand that promotes politics that conflict with her personal politics. Worth noting is that gender seemed to shape the discussions of the effectiveness of the commercials. Women, such as the ones I quoted above more often

commented that they would buy the product advertised after watching the commercial, while men were much more critical. For example, Anthony, a 25-year-old, White planning and analysis associate, points out that commercials in general are not effective at selling products to him, “I don’t think commercials force me on anything. So, I would buy it if I would, the commercials never influences me on anything.”

Others describe the effectiveness of the Cheerios commercials more simply as being memorable and attention-grabbing. It’s important to keep in mind that the reasons this commercial is memorable and attention-grabbing extend beyond the depiction of an interracial family as some participants described the act of pouring the cheerios on the father’s heart as the reason this commercial stands out. In comparison, when participants describe the Swiffer commercial as being effective, the main reason for its effectiveness had to do with the fact that the father is disabled underscoring what is arguably the main messaging of this commercial. For the participants who focused on this direct messaging of the commercial, they describe that the product must be effective if someone who is physically disabled finds the product easy to use. Unlike the Cheerios commercial where political commitments to racial diversity are a driving force behind the effectiveness of the commercial, the interracial family dynamic presented in the Swiffer commercial seem to distract the viewer, as Janay suggests, “For me I don’t think [its effective]. I was focused on the family too much, rather than the product.”

Mary points out that the messages of the commercial can be effective, even if the commercial doesn’t persuade the viewer to buy the product; “At the end of the day, I need some fruit and nuts in my cereal and Cheerios is not gon’ cut it. It’s effective in getting a message across. I don’t know if I would say in selling the product.” Thus, one’s

decision to buy a product is mediated by not only political commitments, but also personal preference.

Mass Appeal of Interracial Families

As participants discussed the effectiveness of these commercials, they also thought through why these companies used interracial families to sell their products. And the majority of the participants thought that by showing interracial families that company would appeal to the broadest audience, as Serena points out, “I think they were trying to reach a broad audience, maybe they were trying to be targeted, but I think they were trying to be strategic.” Participants think that interracial families have a broad appeal because both Whites and Blacks should respond positively to these portrayals. As Donna suggests; “I suspect there was probably a hidden agenda. Like we want to be seen this way. We want to appeal to ...I guess a broader audience.” Several participants make a similar point;

Peter: It covers the Caucasian, it covers the interracial girl, and it covers the Black father.

Interviewer: So to hit this multiple audiences?

Victor: Yes, of course.

Ida: Anybody can eat cheerios.

This is an important diverging understanding of how race is used in mass marketing. Most campaigns, although there are notable exceptions, use White actors to garner mass appeal. By suggesting that interracial families can have a similarly broad appeal, these viewers are highlighting that the changing ethnoracial landscape may be leading the media to begin to prioritize ethnoracial diversity. At the same time, Ida’s statement that anyone can eat Cheerios suggests that interracial families can symbolize the notion of the average American, a claim echoed by several advertising executives in Chapter 3.

Samuel, 61 years old, White, and retired, echoes this sentiment; “I think what they’re saying is no matter what color, what nationality, it doesn’t matter. Everybody has a heart and everybody has to worry about their cholesterol and their habits. So, everybody should eat Cheerios.” Again, Samuel’s comment suggests that interracial families are symbolic of the American people. Their race isn’t what’s important to notice, but rather their different racial backgrounds signals something that is relatable to everyone.

While many participants describe the mass appeal of interracial families, others think that companies may be motivated to use interracial families to sell their products because such families are novel and current. Comments about interracial families being “what’s trending” right now or that showing such families is “a new thing to do” highlight that interracial families are still working their way into the mainstream and are therefore attention-grabbing. Hannah suggests as much; “It kind of makes it stand out more. Because I mean honestly, you still don’t see that many interracial couples on TV, so it stands out when there is one.” Christopher and Raymond’s brief exchange echoes Hannah’s thoughts;

Christopher: “It’s also to catch your eye.”

Raymond: Yeah, like “Hey, look at us.”

The idea that interracial families can represent Americans broadly, while at the same time be novel are not contradictory. If anything, they suggest a rapid transformation in family forms that people are still trying to understand. It’s also possible that as interracial families gain recognition, this recognition is reshaping normative notions of family as Corrine suggests when describing why she thinks companies are using interracial families to sell their products, “Because it’s trending, it’s becoming more common, it’s becoming more of the norm.”

In contrast, a couple of participants thought that the use of interracial families is to stir controversy. Ascribing to the adage that “all publicity is good publicity”, Janice points out, “now people are talking about their work, they put a racy commercial out [and] more people are talking about Cheerios.” Similarly, Rebecca, a 30-year-old, South Asian social worker, says, “It ended up being something that people were talking about as controversy. Maybe that’s what they were going for, like somebody will talk about this.” Comments such as Janice’s and Rebecca’s temper the notion that interracial families have broad appeal, acknowledging that such families also illuminate racial tensions and divisions.

What the Future Holds

When I prompted participants to project to the future of interracial families in advertising, it’s not surprising that many people imagined seeing more commercials like these in the future. For some, an increased representation of interracial families in advertising will simply be a reflection of the prevalence of this family form, as Gina suggests; “I don’t agree with some thoughts behind the commercials, but I appreciate the visuals that we are a country with many different people. It helps to understand what the country looks like, and where we are going as a population.” Bianca, a 19-year-old, Asian student, echoes this statement, but also suggests a moral commitment as well, “cause its more common, and it’s the way it should be.” Not only will more interracial families exist in the future according to these projections, but Bianca points out that advertisers have an obligation to reflect this ethnoracial diversity in their work. Conversely, Serena describes being critical of the idea that such depictions should continue, “Not if they are going to keep doing the cookie cutter thing, like this is what biracial looks like.” Serena’s

comment suggests that it's not enough to simply show more interracial families through the detached difference that I have described, but rather such depictions need to be even more inclusive and authentic.

Serena is not the only participant who wants to see more authenticity in future depictions of interracial families. Mary makes this point as well;

I would like to see more mixed race families on television. However, I would like to see it from an advertising team that is more in the know ... I don't want to think of corporations appealing to me just to get [me to buy] their product, and they know mixed race families and same sex couples, they're almost trying to glaze over these in their own way by sliding their products in there with it. So that annoys me, it annoys me a lot. Sometimes it rubs me the wrong way. But sometimes you can tell when something is more genuine and not just trying to sell you the product, which is the ultimate goal, but also trying to make it more relatable to your own lives. Which is why I think I like the Swiffer commercial the most. I would like to see more real families. I want to see more realness. I want to see a mixed family like during Thanksgiving and you see how crazy it is.

While Mary is interested in seeing greater representation of interracial families, she wants such depictions to reflect actual families rather than some ideal type. And even though she knows the companies are attempting to sell the viewer a product, she is more inclined to appreciate a commercial for its seemingly accurate portrayal of interracial families, than a commercial where including an interracial family solely to drum up interest in the product. The following exchange reinforces the idea that these viewers are interested in what they view as authentic depictions of interracial families, ones that they haven't seen yet. They argue that ultimately these depictions will exist because interracial families will be considered normative;

Donna: I kind of agree with those ideas. I would like to see more, but I would like to see more because that's the way it is, not because that's what they think it should be. We have to get more people of different races into you know more equal positions. Do you know what I'm saying? I feel like we have to go through those forced things with probably a bunch of White men saying "let's put in more mixed race people in because it's a hot topic." We probably have to go through that in order for it to become normal.

Janay: I agree with that ... Like why don't they include people who appear to be of other races? Like they are specifically trying to get White and Black families. Like why not get an Asian? ... I get that it has to be forced to make this progression, but the way that they're forcing it, they're not hitting the nail on the head, they're not getting it right. Yeah you're getting a Black person and a White person to be this family for a commercial, but what about everybody else?

What advertisers see as an attempt to portray inclusivity is being interpreted by these viewers as short-sighted and insincere. Both Donna and Janay believe that current portrayal of interracial families are a necessary first step in order to eventually show greater ethnoracial diversity within the family unit. From their perspective, such depictions will be more authentic as interracial families become more normative and as advertisers move beyond simply depicting Black/White interracial families.

While one can never accurately predict how families will look in the future, these projections shed light onto what viewers want to see, which is ultimately a reflection of their own values and attitudes towards interracial families. In a study such as this it is not surprising that participants value interracial families, and one can imagine that these individuals have a vested interest in promoting racial diversity and racial tolerance/acceptance. The expectation is that we will not only continue to see interracial families portrayed in advertising, but that we will see a more complex representation of these families as these families continue to be normalized in our collective conscious.

Summarizing Viewers' Interpretations of Interracial Families

Even though commercials depicting interracial families are still rare, viewers' interpretations of these commercials shed light on several important themes present in this project. First, the viewers in this study recognize that interracial families are not yet the most common family form and may better represent aspirations for what the families will look like in the future than a reflection of what families look like today. Furthermore, these families also symbolize a collective aspiration for racial unity, reinforcing the idea that romantic and familial love transcend racial difference. To the extent that collective

understandings of the family are broadening to include ethnoracially diverse families, this broader perspective is limited by traditional notions of the family. In other words, interracial families are viewed as families when traditional markers are present, namely the depiction of heterosexual couples, with middle-class status, and the nuclear family form.

This chapter also shows that overall ethnoracial minorities are more attuned to racial difference and stereotyping, even when advertisers seek to minimize racial difference. I argue that by minimizing racial difference (i.e., engaging in detached difference) through colorblind and multicultural rhetoric and strategies, advertisers run the risk of being racially insensitive. Indeed, some viewers interpreted these commercials as advancing racial stereotypes.

Perhaps the most salient racialized experience shaping these viewers' interpretations of the commercials is whether the viewer is a member of a multiracial family. Throughout the chapter, I provide examples of viewers referencing the interracial families in their own lives to make sense of the depictions presented. Racial identity is also meaningful as well. Most notably, is that self-identified White participants engage colorblind rhetoric. Of course, not all White participants engage in colorblind rhetoric, but when colorblindness is invoked, it is exclusively invoked by White participants. Ethnoracial minorities are not privileged enough to live lives where their ethnoracial identities are inconsequential, whereas White participants do have this privilege and this privilege (or lack thereof) clearly informs how viewers see the content of these commercials.

Moreover, this analysis reinforces the idea that a Black/White biracial trope is emerging and noticeable to viewers. We also see that interracial families are believed to have broad market appeal as I argued previously. The assumption that viewers from many different ethnoracial groups will find something to relate to when seeing interracial families is a concept that is not lost on these viewers. While viewers do question how effective the commercials are at appealing to a broad audience, they believe that the advertisers are intentionally portraying interracial families for this purpose. At the risk of being redundant, the belief that multiracial families can represent all Americans is a new concept. As the U.S. becomes more ethnoracially diverse, people are responding to this shift by casting multiracial families appealing to all because they are a site for racial unity and integration. In this study, interracial families are not shocking, even if they are still novel. They are becoming emblematic of the rich racial tapestry that is slowly becoming what it means to be an American.

Chapter 5: Pushing the Boundary of Our Understanding of the Family

The relationship between the production and consumption of media messaging about interracial families is not unidirectional. Producers are careful to craft messages that they believe are in-line with dominant views of family and race as well as a reflection of demographic trends, ultimately advancing the notion that families are increasingly becoming more diverse. What we witness then is not the magic bullet theory of mass media, where the media affects the viewers in a powerful, immediate, and direct way, but rather we see a symbiotic relationship between consumer and producer where the messages are designed to reflect what people think, and at the same time are shaping how people think about interracial families. For some, especially those who identify with interracial families, certain notions about family and race are reinforced. For others, depictions of interracial families bring to light their own biases about these concepts. These affirmations, biases and collective understandings make their way into the social milieu and are picked up by producers, commodified and retold (and sold) to consumers. As people's lived experiences change, so do the messages advertisers craft. This study shows, if nothing else, that viewers and advertisers are aware that the family is no longer a singular concept predicated on Whiteness. Most importantly, this study suggests that interracial families are symbols for a racially integrated society. The marketplace is critical in constructing interracial families as symbols of a collective aspiration for dismantling racism and racial inequality. Yet, the marketplace also highlights the contemporary limits that thwart this aspiration, interracial families must be carefully crafted to seem authentic, and even these careful constructions are sometimes negatively interpreted.

It is not surprising that advertisers want to obfuscate or even make invisible the stigma surrounding interracial families to avoid negative associations with companies and their products. Yet, there are costs to relying on multiculturalism to frame advertising messaging. Ultimately, multiculturalism's seemingly apolitical connotation is in actuality much more political than advertisers might believe. Clearly, race and culture are not one and the same. Not only does racial difference structure our everyday lives, it is a distinct stratifying system that cannot be lumped together with other forms of diversity. Yet, advertising reliance on multiculturalism engages the framework of detached difference by treating diversity as uniform and decontextualizing it from the political, historical, economic and social forces that in reality make racial difference meaningful.

Importantly, this colorblind logic may be leading advertisers to ignore the ways in which they perpetuate racial stereotypes and continue to subjugate non-Whites even as they state that they are promoting moral goodness by pushing multiculturalism to the forefront. Advertisers who flatten racial differences then risk perpetuating racist notions that they claim they do not want to have associated with their companies and products. The colorblind logic employed by cultural producers, like advertisers, which treats racial difference superficially, runs the risk of being out-of-sync with viewers perceptions, leading producers to quickly correct course or risk alienating the very people to whom they are trying to persuade. Just ask Dove, SheaMoisture, or PepsiCo., which have all received backlash from viewers for airing racially insensitive commercials. Perhaps most prominent of these recent examples is PepsiCo, which garnered heat from viewers arguing that a recent commercial trivialized the Black Lives Matter movement. In

response, the company quickly removed the commercial for all media platforms and publicly apologized for its error in judgement (Victor 2017).

This colorblind, multicultural approach also exacerbates the tension between appealing to a broad audience and catering to racially tolerant White audiences. Ultimately, advertisers are still pandering to White audiences when they encode portrayals of diversity with colorblind messaging. Comments such as, “we know there are many kinds of families and we celebrate them all” seem hollow when the visuals presented are overwhelming White families with the lone interracial family portrayed in the *Just Checking* and *Gracie* commercials. In reality, what these advertisers are promoting are dominant (i.e., White) views of diversity—that representation matters most and that diversity is easiest to see when it’s race-based. While the viewers in this study interpret racial diversity as a strategy to make a company’s product relatable to everyone, which mirrors the claims of advertising executives, non-White viewers are also the main voices suggesting that these commercials do not genuinely reflect their lived experience and these viewers are the ones to primarily see how racial stereotyping is subtly conveyed.

By portraying racial difference superficially within the family, the love, care, and affection among family members become the *only* dimensions worth acknowledging and celebrating. At the same time, this focus on love seems to be an attempt to distract the viewer from making a negative judgment about the multiracial messages conveyed in these commercials. This flat messaging about what interracial families represent leads viewers to question the authenticity of what they are seeing. While advertisements will never be authentic (in the sense that constructing messages to make a profit), this study

shows that viewers are critical of how realistic the messages conveyed about interracial families are, even though they enjoy what they're seeing. Furthermore, by ignoring the social forces that imbue racial difference with meaning, advertisers suggest that interracial intimacy is socially desirable, or at least sanctioned, so long as this intimacy isn't explicit. Once again, advertisers chose to not show physical intimacy, and in the commercials presented in this study, intimacy is only conveyed symbolically. The parents in the Cheerios commercial don't interact and the casual viewer never sees the kiss shared between the parents in the Swiffer commercial even though the footage exists.

As advertisers try to advance the idea that interracial families are normative—by showing interracial families that are nuclear, heterosexual and middle class—the portrayals themselves and viewers' interpretations of these portrayals challenge the normativity of interracial families. While people's racialized thinking about family may be adapting to the changing ethnoracial landscape, what remains entrenched are that families are the gendered, sexuality, nuclear, and class norms of family. If racial assumptions about family are beginning to loosen, the rate of change is slow. Families still must be clearly identified or risk not being perceived as such. Many viewers in this study point out the thinking necessary to conceive of people from different racial backgrounds as family members. In other words when racial difference is obvious to the viewer it is more difficult for the viewer to associate this difference with their notion of the family. Thus, conceptualizations of family are still very much about perceived racial similarity. In other words, when we can't rely on racial markers as a way of determining family, we rely even more heavily on the other social cues to make sense of what we are seeing (is the couple heterosexual? Do we see two parents and their children? Are we

seeing symbols that we associate with the middle class? Do the people interact in a loving and caring manner?)

Moreover, the multiracial children in these commercials become effective tools for selling superficial diversity. While eliciting a positive emotional response from most viewers, these children are tropes for cuteness and an idealized form of racial hybridity. An important contribution of this project is that I show the development of multiracial stereotyping. Clearly, people have an image in their minds of what a biracial person looks like. Images that are no doubt informed by the media (as well as informed in other ways). Thus, if advertisers continue to sell a particular image, one that represents racial in-betweenness, we may be witnessing the privileging of an aesthetic that will have broad consequences particularly for scholarly thinking about colorism. The “literal melting pot” that Herbert Gans (1999) refers to when he casts projections about the future of race in America, is possibly one where racial hybridity is easily identified and by which attractiveness is measured. On the surface, depictions of racial hybridity seem favorable, people respond positively to these images. A more critical inspection reveals a preference for Whiteness. The participants in this study who commented on skin tone suggested that the advertisers depicted biracial youth that are lighter than the biracial people participants interact with daily.

While advertisers put forth particular frames for interpreting these commercials, this study shows that such interpretations are always subject to the lived experience of the viewers. The analysis of the focus group interviews shows that what the viewers chose to focus on initially can fall in line with advertisers desires, as is the case with focusing on how cute Gracie is in the Cheerios commercial. But more often than not, viewers filter

messages through their own schemas, such as when James first noticed Gracie and described that she stood out to him because he's in an interracial relationship. Or when Tamara is so focused on seeing the father in the Cheerios commercial that she misses the intended message. Or the multiple examples of self-identified White viewers engaging colorblind interpretations.

Finally, others and I argue that the messages produced through advertising are ideal and aspirational (Shankur 2015, Davilla 2001). While advertisers may attempt to be reflecting the current environment in an authentic way, they may be doing more work to forecast a future that may or may not come to fruition. While the commercials themselves are brief and superficial signifiers of dominant cultural values, they are also situated in the present, but typically oriented towards an imagined future. Advertisers struggle to make multicultural seem authentic because depictions of racial diversity, especially within the family, are still relatively scarce and detached from the racialized structures that continue to shape everyday life. This aspirational quality is a critical mechanism for why interracial families “appeal to the masses”. They are symbols of social integration along racial boundaries that are becoming increasingly porous. They represent beliefs that love being able to transcend race. All of which suggests that multiracial families are less stigmatized, moving away from the periphery to become an emblem of our ethnoracially diverse nation.

Study Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study is not without its limitations. Chief among these limitations is the empirical narrowness of this project. Since I began working on this project, I have not

seen many more depictions of interracial families in television commercial¹⁰, but have seen more commercials showing interracial couples. At this point in time it's difficult to decipher whether we are witnessing the beginning of wider representation of interracial families in advertising or simply a moment when interracial families are considered trendy. Because I do not systematically analyze commercials depicting families of the same race, it is impossible to know whether the themes presented in this study are unique to interracial families. Worth noting is that depictions of families who share the same race do not stir controversy in the same manner that the commercials highlighted in this study do. Within the advertising campaigns examined, these commercials are unique in that they portray much less affection among family members compared to the portrayals of monoracial families. If nothing else, this project shows that interracial families in television commercials are novel.

This project also only touches on the surface of how lived experiences shape the viewing experience. While I had envisioned having several focus groups of all White participants, all Black participants and several groups with people who identify with different races, recruiting participants in this fashion was not feasible. Subsequent research should consider using this research design to better understand how racial identities shape one's interpretations of media content. Another interesting approach would be to learn more about the family dynamics of participants to better understand how their experiences align and diverge from what they watch. Given the research design in this study, I am only able to glean information about the participants' families when

¹⁰ One notable exception is a 2016 print advertisement for the clothing company Old Navy depicting a fictional family with a White father, Black mother, and biracial son. Online responses to the advertisement echoed the responses to the Cheerios commercial with some people conveying disgust and contempt for Old Navy, while others expressed their support.

they commented on the topic and therefore I have an incomplete picture of people's experience with interracial families. Collecting data on participants' family history would allow researchers to answer questions such as, are people in interracial relationships more likely to view these commercials in patterned ways? Do parents view these commercials differently than people without children?

An important next step for this research would be to better understand the motivations and decisions advertisers make when depicting interracial families. An ethnography of advertisers who work in creative departments focused on decisions from casting to content to delivery of such commercials would clarify advertisers' framing of these families and the assumptions they make about viewers, race, and family. Such a project would provide ample evidence for advertisers' intent, whereas this study can only draw on intention through the filter of public relations campaigns and news reporting. Even with this limitation, it's clear that racial difference is not part of the language of multicultural advertising, even though race-based messages subtly permeate this medium.

Final Thoughts

If thinking about the role of race in the conceptualization of families is becoming more expansive, the cultural stranglehold that suffocated the idea that family could be anything other than White, is becoming more like a sturdy harness that we might be able to escape from and ultimately free ourselves from the constraint of the notion that families must share the same race. As the "untypical becomes typical" cognitive schemas of family might be stretching to include a range of family forms, which include multiracial families. Yet, some traditional markers of family must remain unchanged in order to make sense of these non-traditional forms as families.

Importantly, interracial families symbolize romantic notions of love's ability to transcend adversity. To the extent that interracial families are aspirational, it's comforting to think that racial difference is and will continue to be celebrated. If, as the viewers in this study claim, interracial families appeal to everyone, then there is at least hope that the family can be a site for diminishing racial prejudice. Yet, we must proceed down this hopeful path with caution. Racial inequality still fundamentally structures life in the United States and no one institution alone can be the great equalizer. Commodified images of interracial families will continue to remain divorced from the experiences of interracial families, as advertisers attempt to sell us a rosy outlook that will inevitably be tempered by our everyday experiences. Even in advertising, interracial families continue to embody both ambivalence towards racial unity and symbolize racial social integration. For now, interracial families will continue to be a contested field for exploring the implications of racial difference in an increasingly multiracial society.

Appendix:

Drawing from media and cultural studies data collection and analysis methods, I employed multiple qualitative methods in an effort to understand how producers construct messages about interracial families through the use of television commercials, the content of the commercials, and viewers' reactions to this messaging and content. In this appendix, I describe the methods for each empirical chapter, including the limitations of each, and conclude by discussing the advantages of this mixed-methods approach.

First, Chapter 2 uses content analysis, a common method for analyzing recorded communication, to explore the messages embedded in commercials depicting interracial families and their related advertising campaigns. Moreover, content analysis is particularly appropriate when research on a phenomenon is limited because of its inductive nature. Because interracial families (and perhaps especially the multiracial children in these families) are newly emerging and contested categories, interpretations are not preconceived, but rather through an iterative process, assumptions and meanings associated with these families come to light.

I analyze the commercials shown to the focus group participants (Chapter 4), so that the reader can become familiar with the content of these commercials, but I also expanded the dataset to include the Swiffer and Cheerios advertising campaigns in which these commercials are situated.¹¹ I transcribed all dialogue from the commercials and included all text in the advertising campaigns as part of the dataset for this chapter. I also included every scene change (which I refer to as frames throughout this project) in the dataset. I used NVivo to code and analyze the visual and textual data.

¹¹ I could not identify the advertising campaign for the Pillsbury Holiday Cookies commercial

By analyzing the advertising campaigns for Swiffer and Cheerios, it becomes clear what information is intentionally left out of the commercials and situates these interracial families in relation to other family forms. Content analysis is integral to this project not only so the reader can have a clearer understanding of the content of the commercials, but this close reading of each commercial brings to light subtle messages that may otherwise be overlooked if one is watching the commercials in real-time. A major benefit of this method is that it enables me to show how there are multiple messages being presented in each commercial.

Importantly, this chapter is formatted so that the reader can easily assess the reliability of my interpretations. While ideally the reader would be able to watch the commercials, the frame by frame depiction of each commercial with the accompanying dialogue allows the viewer to interpret the commercials to determine whether she agrees with my interpretation.

A major limitation of the data for this chapter is that there are so few commercials analyzed. In reality, there are very few commercials that (even briefly) depict interracial families. On the one hand, the lack of commercials reinforces the idea that depictions of interracial families are indeed newly emerging. On the other hand, the representativeness of the meanings and tropes described are limited. Readers of this project should think of these commercials as tools that people use to make sense of and attribute meaning to the notion of interracial families. These are by no means the only tools people use, but they provide an opportunity for viewers to reflect on what makes interracial families meaningful.

Similar to the content analysis previously described, Chapter 3 includes both a textual analysis of industry reports interspersed with quotations from informational interviews of advertising executives. As Alan McKee (2002:1) argues; “Textual analysis is a way for researchers to gather information about how other human beings make sense of the world. It is a methodology—a data-gathering process—for those researchers who want to understand the ways in which members of various cultures and subcultures make sense of who they are, and of how they fit into the world in which they live.” As a tool for sense-making, textual analysis provides a framework for the researcher to be able to interrogate culturally specific meanings at particular points in time to highlight how culture and temporality shape people’s realities. For contested and emerging categories, like interracial families and multiraciality, textual analysis brings to the forefront dominant interpretations of these categories and shows how people are making sense of the rapid changes happening in the United States in terms of its racial and ethnic composition.

Data collection for the textual analysis consisted of searching for news articles from the two most influential (in terms of number of years in operation, number of subscriptions, and revenue) weekly trade publications, *Advertising Age* and *Adweek*. I ran keyword searches using the search engine for each publication’s website, in addition to two additional news databases, Factiva and Access Word News. Search terms included all references to the specific commercials and “interracial families in commercials” from 2013 (when the Cheerios’ *Just Checking* commercial aired) through May 2016. This approach yielded 21 news articles, primarily from the two trade publications, but also a

handful of others news outlets, including the *New York Times*, *Huffington Post*, and the *Today Show*.

Several close readings of the news stories and industry reports allowed me to inductively create high inference categories (Lindlof and Taylor 2002) suited to answer the following questions; What messages about race are companies promoting as they attempt to sell their product? What cultural norms about race are advertising executives trying to sell to their audience? See Table 2 for list of categories employed in this textual analysis and their frequency of occurrence.

Table 2: Codes for News Articles and Industry Reports

<u>Code: Operationalization</u>	<u># of Instances</u>	<u># of Sources</u>
Assumptions: Any mention of assumptions about why interracial families were being portrayed	9	5
Classification: Any instance to the race of the actors in the commercials	7	7
Cognition: Any instance of how to think about interracial families	1	1
Cultural Norm: Any instance of interracial families being described using normative language	10	28
Evaluation: Any instance of how commercials are being interpreted by the author	17	50
Family: Any mention of interracial families	15	30

Market: Any instance of the selling, buying, or economic marketplace	11	16
Motivation: Any mention as to why interracial families were being portrayed	4	6
Racialization: Any instance about the formation, maintenance, and transformation of racial categories	6	11

I then used NVivo, a computer assisted qualitative data analysis software program, to open code the stories and reports according to the derived categories. Analysis of each code made evident themes among the stories and reports, as well as exceptions to these themes.

Of course, there is bias inherent in the analysis of news stories and industry reports. Foremost, is that the advertising executives cited in these reports and stories will always frame their messages positively. Any tensions that arise when thinking about how to present interracial families will not be shared with the reporters. In fact, some of the advertising executive quotes in these stories originated in press releases from the companies, which have been professionally crafted and vetted to promote the company and product addressed. In essence, the data analyzed here provide an idealized view of interracial families at a particular historical moment. At the same time, these reports also bring to the forefront the main messages producers want viewers to take away from these commercials. By providing a narrow interpretation of what these commercials represent, the limited evidence presented in this chapter brings a razor-like focus to dominant views of interracial families.

To move beyond the static and narrow focus on the news stories and industry reports, I also two informational interviews with advertising executives about their views of the use of interracial families in television commercials.¹² These executives have had lengthy careers in the advertising industry, with roles ranged from a former president of a Hispanic marketing company to a casting agent for a large corporation tasked with casting interracial families for the company's advertising campaign. Figure 6 shows the interview guide for the informational interviews.

Figure 6: Interview Questions for Advertising Executives

1. Why cast an interracial family in [name of commercial]?
2. What message(s) are being conveyed by casting an interracial family?
3. Do you think interracial families represent the typical American family? Why or why not?
4. Do you think there should be more commercials like this one on TV today? Why or why not?
5. Do you think we'll see more commercials like this in the future?
6. Why plans, if any, do you have for making commercials that show interracial families?

By speaking with executives who did not take part in the advertising campaigns analyzed in this project, I lose out on the opportunity to understand the motivations for using interracial families as well as the challenges encountered for the three commercials included in this study, but I gain insight into how advertisers see interracial families as being important representations of family. Because the executives have no vested interest in promoting the companies I analyzed, they provide a greater range of voices for understanding the significance in interracial families in the mass media. Future research

¹² Proper institutional approval for this research project was received before any interviews were conducted.

should systematically interview advertising executives who have worked on campaigns that use interracial families.

For Chapter 4, I recruited participants for the focus groups using a few different approaches, including posting a recruitment notice in local libraries and through a university weekly email bulletin that is sent to all faculty and staff at this particular university. I also placed an advertisement in the largest circulation local newspaper. In addition, two research assistants sent the recruitment notice to their peer groups. Finally, I reached out to my personal network and through word of mouth recruited additional participants. Interviews took place at both on- and off-campus locations. The number of participants in each focus group ranged from one to nine, with the average focus group consisting of five participants. Focus groups lasted from about 45 to 90 minutes. Figure 7 provides the interview guide used.

Figure 7: Focus Group Interview Guide

Step 1: Welcome participants and thank them for coming.

Step 2: Give each participant a focus group packet.

Step 3: Read through consent form with participants, make sure there are no questions about the form/answer questions, ask participants to sign form.

Step 4: View first commercial

Step 5: Discuss reactions to commercial. The following questions will be used to guide the conversation.

1. What's the first thing you noticed about this commercial?
2. What was the race(s) of the first person you saw in the commercial?
3. What is one word you would use to describe this commercial?
4. What do you like about this commercial?
5. What do you dislike about this commercial?
6. Does this commercial represent the typical American family? Why or why not?

7. What do you think the race(s) of the mother is? The father? The children?

8. What racial stereotypes, if any, do you see in this commercial? Is there anything offensive about this

commercial?

9. Why do you think [company name] used an interracial family to sell their product?

10. Do you think this is an effective advertisement for selling [product name]? Why or why not?

Step 6: View second commercial

Step 7: Discuss reaction to commercial 2, using the questions outlined in Step 5.

Step 8: View third commercial

Step 9: Discuss reaction to commercial 3, using the questions outlined in Step 5.

Step 10: Thinking about these commercials as a whole:

11. Do you see any commonalities among the commercials shown today? What are these commonalities

(if any)?

12. Do you think there should be more commercials like these on TV today? Why or why not?

13. Do you think we'll see more commercials like these in the future? Why or why not?

Before participants watched the commercials they completed the consent procedures and a short demographic questionnaire (see Figure 8).

Figure 8: Demographic Questionnaire

Please complete the following questionnaire.

1. My name is:

2. I was born in the year:

3. My race(s) is/are:

4. My gender is:

5. My occupation is:

6. Please check the social class that best describes you:

___ Upper

___ Upper-Middle

___ Middle

<input type="checkbox"/> Working <input type="checkbox"/> Poor 7. Please check the option that best describes your highest level of education: <input type="checkbox"/> Less than High School <input type="checkbox"/> High School graduate/GED <input type="checkbox"/> Some College or Special Training <input type="checkbox"/> College Graduate <input type="checkbox"/> Graduate School 8. On a typical day, how many hours are you actively watching television? <input type="checkbox"/> hours 9. Typically, how often do you pay attention to commercials aired on TV? <input type="checkbox"/> Never <input type="checkbox"/> Rarely <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> Often	<input type="checkbox"/> All the time 10. On a typical day, how many hours are you online for enjoyment (not for work or school)? <input type="checkbox"/> hours 11. Which device do you use most often to access the internet for enjoyment? <input type="checkbox"/> Cell Phone <input type="checkbox"/> Computer <input type="checkbox"/> Tablet 12. Typically, how often do you pay attention to commercials aired online? <input type="checkbox"/> Never <input type="checkbox"/> Rarely <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/> Often <input type="checkbox"/> All the time
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I then audio recorded participants as watched and responded to each of the three television commercials, beginning with Cheerios, followed by the Swiffer and Pillsbury commercials. Finally, participants received \$10 compensation for their participation.

Participants responses were transcribed and I systematically analyzed the transcriptions using the codes presented in Table 3. Beginning with open coding to

observe patterns in the data and identify new and unexpected themes. Then I closed coded the data to identify themes that relate directly to the research questions and consolidated the themes that emerged in the open coding process. Finally, I identified themes that contradict or conflict with my expectations and assumptions about the data (Miles and Huberman 1994).

Table 3: Focus Group Codes

<u>Code: Operationalization</u>	<u># of Instances</u>
Appearance: Any mention of the appearance of the actors in the commercials	20
Authenticity: Any mention of being authentic or real	12
Biracial: Any instance of an actor being of more than one race	26
Colorblind: Any mention that the participant did not see color/race or that color/race didn't matter to their viewing of the commercial	31
Difference: Any mention of racial difference	4
Effectiveness: Any instance of the effectiveness of the commercial	44
First Reactions: The first description participants provided for each commercial	80
Future: Any mention of the future of interracial families	25
Interracial Families: Any instance of interracial families	20
Like: Any instance of what participants liked/enjoyed about the commercials	52

Motivation: Any mention of why advertisers used an interracial family to see their product	48
One Word Descriptions: Responses to the question, “What is one word you would use to describe this commercial?”	57
Race Relations: Any discussion of interactions between different racial groups	19
Racial Classification: Participants’ mentions of the race(s) of the actors	90
Racial Stereotypes: Any instance of describing an essential characteristic of a racial group	30
Typical American Family: Any mention of interracial families as being normative	45
Other	21

The multiple qualitative methods used, including textual and content analysis, one-on-one and focus groups interviews, are an attempt to improve the comprehensiveness of the findings. By exploring the phenomenon of interracial families in television commercials through these different perspectives, parallel findings are arguably more robust.

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