

# Watching Each Other: Portrayals of Gender and Ethnicity in Television Advertisements

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**ABSTRACT.** The stereotypical depiction of men and women and of ethnic minority groups in advertisements is problematic because studies have shown that repeated exposure to selective portrayals of particular groups can lead to viewers adopting distorted beliefs about those groups. The current study examined the contemporary portrayal of men and women and of ethnic minority groups in New Zealand television advertisements. Over 3,000 advertisements were coded. Men and women were less often depicted in stereotypical roles than has previously been reported. However, White actors dominated the screen with Maori and Pacific Island people only being proportionally represented in advertisements that presented negative stereotyping. The findings were similar for Asians whose portrayal also appeared to be stereotypical. The authors call for more equitable appearances of women and ethnic minority groups.

Keywords: advertisements, ethnicity, gender, stereotypes, television

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TELEVISION IS A UBIQUITOUS SOURCE of information about culture and society (Davies, Spencer & Steele, 2005) through which “appropriate” roles in society are portrayed. Viewers are constantly bombarded with images of families and people on television that in many instances are fictional, but for many viewers represent an unspoken reality. Indeed, television has been shown to consistently affect some viewers’ future behaviors and beliefs (Morgan & Shanahan, 2010). Similarly, television advertisements induce buyers to purchase particular products. Clearly advertisers would not spend large sums of money advertising their products unless their goods sold as a result. Further, while television programs have moved toward portraying some ethnic minorities and males and females in

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less stereotypical roles than previously, less is known about the portrayal of these groups in advertisements, particularly in more recent times. The current study explored the kinds of advertisements in which the dominant group and various minority groups are incorporated and also investigated the inclusion of males and females in advertisements. The context for this study is New Zealand, which, as will be seen, provides a useful domain for examining the stereotypical portrayal of societal groups in advertisements.

Television has the widest reach of any medium in the western world, and its content has the potential to influence and shape viewers' beliefs and values. Its power is derived from the passive reception of televised messages, which are assimilated without activating the information processing responses in the brain (Bristor, Lee & Hunt, 1995; Wilkes & Valencia, 1989). As in many parts of the world, watching television is a major part of the New Zealand lifestyle, and it connects and communicates to the diverse peoples in whichever country it is being viewed (Dana & O'Sullivan, 2007). In 2008, in New Zealand, viewers over the age of 5 years spent an average of 188 minutes per day watching television (Media Works, n.d.). Every hour there are on average 12.5 minutes of advertisements. Hence the average New Zealander potentially watches approximately 263 minutes per week of advertisements or over 17,000 hours per year (assuming they do not engage in another activity while the advertisements are on). Thus, the power of advertising is pervasive.

### *Cultivation Theory*

Cultivation theory was originally posited by Gerbner (1958) and then refined and expanded during the 1960s. Later, Gerbner and Gross (1976) developed cultivation analysis as a methodology for examining the effects of television on audiences' beliefs and attitudes. This type of analysis examined the independent contribution of television to viewers' perceptions of aspects of society at large (Morgan & Shanahan, 2010). There was no claim that television could influence perceptions of individuals about their particular lives and their worlds, but rather that television educated viewers at the societal level about what the rest of the world was like (Morgan & Shanahan, 2010). Gerbner (1966) argued that long-term exposure to particular stereotypical portrayals and biased reporting could result in distorted perceptions about particular groups. "Television is a medium of the socialization of most people into standardized roles and behaviors. Its function is, in a word, enculturation" (Gerbner & Gross, 1976, p. 175). For example, Hetsroni and Tukachinsky (2006) measured the independent contribution of television to consumers' perceptions of crime rates and proportions of the elderly within society. They showed that high consumers of television perceived greater levels of crime and a smaller proportion of elderly people than was representative of the actual proportions in society.

Cultivation theory has been applied to studies that have expanded its applicability. For example, the study just mentioned examined whether high television consumers' beliefs about social reality more closely mirrored those portrayed on television. Perhaps not surprisingly, those with more moderate viewing habits were able to judge more accurately actual crime rates and percentages of the elderly within society. Cultivation researchers have also examined the effects of other media on the attitudes of the public. Lubbers, Scheepers and Vergeer (2000) investigated attitudes of the majority culture (in the Netherlands) when they read a particular newspaper characterized by negative reporting of ethnic minorities and frequent reporting of their crimes (while ignoring crimes of the majority culture). In contrast to those who read other newspapers, they found that those who read the widely distributed newspaper reported perceptions that minority cultures were threatening and dangerous.

Cultivation theorists have also ventured into studies that relate to particular genres and their influence on attitudes and beliefs. Generally, they have found that those who watch a particular type of program pronounce views that more closely align with the attitudes portrayed. Further, as might be expected, viewers will watch programs that most closely reflect their world view (Morgan & Shanahan, 2010). For instance, viewers of talk shows are more likely than others to have more open attitudes toward homosexuality (Rössler & Brosius, 2001), to express support for government policies that will help families (Glynn, Huges, Reineke, Hardy, & Shanahan, 2007), and to consider that levels of marital infidelity and pre-marital sex are high (Woo & Dominick, 2001). Interestingly, while viewers may choose to watch specific genres, they do not have entirely the same choice when it comes to advertisements (unless they consistently undertake another activity while the advertisements are playing). Hence, they may be exposed frequently to advertisements portraying stereotypical perspectives that reinforce a particular world view that they would not necessarily choose to watch given free will.

The effects of these distorted images can be influential, particularly in relation to ethnic minorities when viewers have limited contact with certain groups and television is the sole source of these contacts (Mastro, Behm-Morawitz & Ortiz, 2007). In this way, the world created by the media becomes the reality of its viewers. One example of this is a study by Mastro and colleagues (2007), in which they found that exposure to television news reports of Latinos committing crimes predicted negative attitudes toward Latinos. However, this effect was moderated by interactions with Latinos in real life.

Cultivation theory is a useful backdrop for examining advertisements because of their repetitive nature and because viewers do not have the same choice about which ones they watch. Continued depiction of stereotypical images may affect attitudes, as has been shown above, and yet cultivation theory has been infrequently used in thinking about the persistent portrayal of particular images during advertisements. Instead, content analysis has been used, which generally excludes repetition of advertisements, and thereby misses the acknowledgement of likely

effects on attitudes when particular portrayals are repetitive—one of the core elements of cultivation theory. Bang and Reece (2003) have argued that not just the misrepresentation of groups in advertising is likely to have a cultivation effect but also that the under- or over-representation of groups can affect viewers' perceptions. However, their study examined the portrayal of minority group children (and not gender) in advertisements during children's programming, rather than providing a broader view of the advertisements played throughout programming. Further, to our knowledge, no previous study has examined the portrayal of both gender and ethnic groups in one study. Considering both in one study is useful in providing a broader picture of stereotypical portrayals in advertising than might be gained by simply focusing on one area.

### *The New Zealand Context*

New Zealand offers an interesting contrast to the majority of studies that have been carried out in the United States since it has a quite different population. The most recent New Zealand census (Statistics New Zealand, n.d.a), reported that 68% of the population were New Zealand European, 15% were Maori, 9% were Asian and 6% were Pasifika. Hence, the current study investigated whether these proportions were found in the advertisements on television. The study also investigated the proportions of males and females portrayed in advertisements. Further, New Zealand offers quite a different perspective in relation to the cultivation of attitudes as a result of television viewing, in that home grown programs make up only a small proportion of the viewing (around 20%, including sports) while a large proportion of advertisements are home grown. Even advertisements for international products are often made in New Zealand (e.g., an advertisement for a Toyota truck uses a New Zealand icon driving the truck over rough New Zealand country land). Hence, it might be argued that New Zealanders may see more of their lives (or the social reality portrayed) within advertisements than within the often-seen American and British television programs with which they may not so readily identify. A further feature of television viewing in New Zealand when the current data were collected was that apart from one paid television provider, there were only four channels available to viewers, two government owned and two privately owned. Hence the types of advertisements and the actual advertisements being viewed are the same or similar across all four channels. Finally, New Zealand has always portrayed itself as an egalitarian country, one in which resources were "spread widely and equitably throughout the community and not as elsewhere, in massive disproportion between the very rich and the very poor . . ." (King, 2003, p. 509). It was the first country in the world to become a full democracy (King, 2003). For these reasons, we might hope to find the portrayal of minority groups and women to be less stereotypical than similar depictions in the United States or in other western countries.

### *Advertising and Gender*

Gender is one area in which stereotyped portrayals on television have been examined. Although the imbalance of males compared to females on U.S. and UK television appears to be diminishing, the persuasive nature of television advertisements and the brief but repetitive exposure of each advertisement have resulted in the gender roles being stereotyped to appeal to the target markets (Wolin, 2003). To reach the intended audience, advertisers usually screen household products targeting female customers during the daytime and advertise sports-related products for male buyers during weekend afternoons. During prime-time viewing, the product categories and gender roles are interspersed throughout the evening (Craig, 1992). Males and females have also been portrayed differently in physique, traits, status, domains and product categories in line with societal stereotypes (Furnham & Mak, 1999; O'Barr, 2006; Rak & McMullen, 1987; Rutherford, 1994). Moreover, when appearing together on the screen, female characters have often been portrayed in roles supportive to their male counterparts, and they are usually younger than the males who are featured (Furnham & Mak, 1999; Gerbner, Gross, Morgan & Signorielli, 2002). Men have been portrayed in outdoor, leisure, and sports products, while women have been more often seen in home advertisements or with self-enhancement products (Furnham & Mak, 1999). Weekend afternoon advertisements targeting the male audience have seldom shown female characters appearing alone or acting in the primary role, and have frequently portrayed the male fantasy of getting away for the weekend (Craig, 1992). Even in family settings, men tend to be shown as possessing the knowledge or they participate in activities typically thought of as male (such as in a high-tech environment or in relation to a sports product); they have been less likely to have been seen doing housework or shopping with women. Portrayals of males in stereotypical roles reinforce the strength and power possessed by the male character (Kaufman, 1999).

Further, gender stereotyping in television advertisements is widespread and exists across continents (Furnham & Mak, 1999). Mazzella, Durkin, Cerini, and Buralli (1992) conducted a study of Australian television advertisements and showed that males were portrayed to be more knowledgeable than females even in the domain of traditional female products. In another small study, in comparison to Great Britain (205 advertisements), New Zealand television advertisements ( $n = 146$ ) were found to be heavily stereotyped in terms of portraying the central roles of females as younger, and as less autonomous than their male counterparts, and as being familial figures (Furnham & Farragher, 2000). These results may be a factor of the small number of advertisements viewed. Given the founding of New Zealand as an egalitarian society, it might be hoped that there would be fewer stereotypical gender portrayals in television advertisements in that country than might be found elsewhere, rather than more.

The messages contained in advertisements appear to reinforce the stereotypes that men are prominent and independent professionals whereas women are passive and dependent caretakers (Signorielli & Kahlenberg, 2001). The stereotypical view of women shows women restricted to certain social roles and undermines the equality between the two sexes (Davies et al., 2005). Studies have shown that children who watched more television than their peers were more likely to accept gender stereotyped perceptions (Gerbner et al., 2002; Signorielli & Lears, 1992). Similarly, adults exposed to gender stereotyped television advertisements showed greater support for sexual aggression and more objection to feminism than did those who watched fewer advertisements (MacKay & Covell, 1997).

In addition, females who found the stereotype portrayed in television advertisements self-relevant have been shown to avoid tasks or occupations that were negatively associated with the female characters in the advertisements (Davies et al., 2005). Davies and colleagues (2005) assigned two groups of women to view a series of advertisements that were either gender neutral and did not feature people, or advertisements in which females were portrayed in stereotypical roles with, for example, a female with aspirations of becoming a cheer leader. Following the viewing, the groups then completed a further task in which they had to choose to become a leader or a problem solver. Those who had viewed the stereotypical advertisements were much less likely to choose to be a leader than those who had watched the gender-neutral advertisements.

### *Advertising and Minority Groups*

Hence advertising can be an effective medium for passing information to the public, but it is also a powerful means by which stereotypes are portrayed (Mastro et al., 2007). Advertisers employ the use of stereotypes in order to simplify the messages they are delivering and make them easy for viewers to understand (Courtney & Whipple, 1983). However, this allows uncontested stereotypes to influence viewers and shapes attitudes and beliefs, particularly those of children (Bang & Reece, 2003). Indeed, the portrayal of stereotypes in advertising is pervasive (Davies et al., 2005). This can be problematic because as cultivation studies have shown, when ethnic minorities are portrayed in stereotypical roles, this influences how the minority group is viewed by others as well as how its members view themselves. These stereotypes are often a reflection of the dominant group's perception of minorities and an inaccurate portrayal of the actual characteristics of the members of these minority groups can be the result (Dana & O'Sullivan, 2007; Mastro et al., 2007).

Studies that examine how various ethnic groups are presented by the media have been conducted mostly in the United States. The United States has a diverse population and yet in television advertising, Caucasian characters dominate the screen (Bang & Reece, 2003). While representations of African Americans have improved in the past years, they are rarely found in major roles (Bang & Reece,

2003; Wilkes & Valencia, 1989). Other minorities continue to be absent or, at the very least, cast in stereotypical roles and situations in advertisements directed at children and on television programs (Greenberg & Brand, 1993; Morgan & Shanahan, 2010). African Americans are overrepresented in food commercials, but underrepresented in toy advertisements for children (Bang & Reece, 2003). Further, African American males are often cast as service providers and athletes rather than as professionals in children's programming and in magazine advertisements (Bristor et al., 1995; Greenberg & Brand, 1993). While the representation of African American males as athletes can provide seemingly positive role models for children, this can be problematic distorting the reality of the infrequency of African Americans' success in sports and over-emphasizing their physical skills, while de-emphasizing other skills, such as intellect (Bristor et al., 1995). Such advertisements can also blind society to the existence of racism because African Americans do appear in advertisements as successful in one realm of society.

Similarly, portrayals of Asian Americans are limited to business settings or they are seen in conjunction with technological products (Dalisy & Tan, 2009; Taylor & Lee, 1994). The image perpetuates the stereotype of Asian Americans having an "all-work, no-play" attitude and neglects their portrayal in social and home settings. Hence, they are shown as hardworking and technically competent. In contrast, Hispanics mostly appear in community announcements (Bang & Reece, 2003) and frequently appear in large groups taking background roles (Wilkes & Valencia, 1989). Their lack of portrayal in major roles as with other minority groups suggests to those watching their powerlessness and unimportance in society (Morgan & Shanahan, 2010). Indeed, in a study of the advertisements during children's programming (Bang & Reece, 2003), the authors reported that children as young as 10 years felt minorities should be portrayed on screen more frequently, and this was seen as especially important by children from minority groups. Children believed that minorities were more likely to be negatively portrayed than were whites.

Only one study that examined ethnic representation in television advertisements in New Zealand could be located—a conference presentation (Dana & O'Sullivan, 2007). The authors reported that where Maori (the indigenous people) or Pasifika people (those from the Pacific Islands, e.g., Samoa, Tonga, Fiji) were present in advertisements, they mostly featured in government or community advertisements (71% of advertisements in this category included Maori or Pasifika actors—but there was a campaign targeting Maori at the time) with some being included in advertisements for utilities (43% of advertisements) and fewer in advertisements for building and related supplies (32%). Maori and Pasifika were frequently portrayed in stereotypical roles. Unfortunately in this study, only advertisements in prime time were included, only a simple count was made of numbers of advertisements that contained Maori and Pasifika (rather than how many actual actors there were), only Maori and Pasifika were counted, and no statistical analyses were conducted. Therefore, the meaningfulness and significance

of the findings is difficult to interpret. In order to obtain a more accurate overview of the portrayal of Maori and Pasifika, it is important to consider a large number of advertisements, to more closely examine the types of advertisements in which they are portrayed, and to provide an actual count of how frequently they appear when compared with New Zealand European and Asian actors. Because of New Zealand's image of being a nation where all people are equal and are treated equitably, we might hope that overall there would be little difference in the proportional portrayals of the various ethnic groups in television advertising.

The current study was designed to examine the proportions of male and female, and of various ethnic groups who appeared in a large number of television advertisements in New Zealand, a country which provides a unique context for such an examination given both its underlying egalitarian philosophy and its television content of much overseas programming but mostly home-grown advertisements. To our knowledge, both gender and ethnicity representations have not previously been examined in one study and this is a further feature of the current study. Exploring the portrayal of both in one study across a large number of advertisements enables a more global view of stereotypical depiction in one context. It enables us to ascertain whether stereotyping of one population characteristic (e.g., gender) exists in isolation or whether stereotyping is actually evident for both commonly researched population characteristics.

Given the findings in other countries, the small study of Furnham and Farragher (2000), and New Zealand's image as an egalitarian society, it was hypothesized that men and women would be depicted proportionally in advertisements. On the other hand, the conference presentation of Dana and O'Sullivan (2007) suggested that Maori and Pasifika did appear in some types of advertisements, although they did not expand on what those advertisements portrayed. Despite the rhetoric about egalitarianism, there is negative stereotyping of Maori, in particular, in New Zealand. Just over half of the children living in poverty in New Zealand are Maori or Pasifika (Henare, Puckey, & Nicholson, 2011); Maori make up almost 30% of school expulsions (Education Counts, n.d.); and approximately 14% receive the unemployment benefit, compared with around 7% across the population (New Zealand Department of Labour, n.d.). As with many other underprivileged, minority groups, this has led to negative stereotyping. Further, the Asian population has grown rapidly in New Zealand in recent years (Statistics New Zealand, n.d.b), so New Zealanders are only just coming to terms with a large but new population in their midst. Hence, it was hypothesized that the representation of the ethnic minority groups in television advertisements in New Zealand would fall below their representation within the population—Maori and Pasifika because of negative stereotyping, and Asian because of their newness within the population. Further, it was predicted that there may be instances of negative stereotyping of Maori and Pasifika in some advertisements.



## Method

### *Participants*

A total of 8519 actors were observed in 3025 television advertisements on the four major television channels in Auckland, New Zealand over a period of one month in 2008 and then again one year later in 2009.

### *Procedure*

The television channels included were TV1, TV2, TV3, and Prime, which were public channels that had the widest coverage in Auckland, the largest city in New Zealand. At the time of data collection these were the only public channels available to all audiences within Auckland—i.e., there were no other free-to-air channels. Channels that viewers pay to view were not included in the study. Only television advertisements that promoted an actual product, brand, organization or contained a community message were included and coded. Other types of advertisements such as movie or television program trailers were not included. A total of 162 observers (psychology students) were paired up to view and code one hour of television advertisements screened on one of the above four television channels over a one-month period in 2008, and then again one year later in 2009. A schedule was drawn up from which pairs of students chose, such that multiple sets of students were not viewing the same channel at the same time. However, the schedule did ensure that observers viewed the advertisements in line with the viewing habits of New Zealanders (New Zealand Ministry of Social Development, 2009). Hence, more pairs were assigned to view advertisements during prime time (6 p.m.–10 p.m.) (63%) than advertisements at other times of the day. Further, fewer viewers watched Prime (a small independent channel) (9%), and more pairs viewed the advertisements on TV1 (17%), on TV2 (45%) and TV3 (28%), thus reflecting the viewing habits of New Zealanders (New Zealand Ministry of Social Development, 2009). This spread of viewing reflected the patterns of advertisement viewing to which the general New Zealand public would be exposed.

Before undertaking the observation of advertisements, observers were briefed with data-recording methods and reliability-check techniques. The observers also discussed and decided upon the characteristics of different ethnic groups that would distinguish them and promote consistency of recording. Other aspects of the advertisements that observers thought might cause confusion during the coding process were also clarified. During the training session, the observers viewed six advertisements that had been previously recorded by the first author. Any difficulties and disagreements experienced in coding were discussed, and then the observers viewed a further six advertisements. This process continued until the

agreement rate among all observers exceeded 90%. This sequence of training was repeated in the second year of observations.

Following the training session, each pair of observers had a trial run together lasting approximately half an hour to determine any incongruence in their coding methods before the formal recording took place. This enabled any further potential difficulties in coding to be discussed. During the pilot observation and during the final viewing, the pairs of students were asked to seat themselves separately while they viewed the advertisements in order to ensure independent coding of the advertisements. Following the actual coding of the types of advertisements the actors participated in, reliabilities for each pair of observers was calculated. Students calculated an initial percentage agreement between coders, which was above 85%. Any anomalies were discussed and resolved, so that each pair then submitted one observation sheet. Most disagreements arose from the viewing of larger groups (more than six actors), where one student had been more able to record characteristics of all actors than was the other student. The first author randomly selected 12% of the observations and independently coded the information. An inter-rater reliability analysis using the Kappa statistic was performed to determine consistency between the first author's coding and that of the observers. The reliability coefficient was  $Kappa = .82$  ( $p < .001$ ).

### *Coding Schedule*

As part of the training session, coders were informed about definitions and methods to code gender and ethnicity of the actors, as well as the type of advertisements (such as whether the advertisements did not present people or presented large groups of people). Details of the coding are described below.

The gender of babies or young children appearing in advertisements was judged largely by hairstyle and clothing. Mostly, however, the gender of babies was clear. It was agreed that the category "European" would be used to refer to White actors, "Maori/Pasifika" included the local indigenous Maori and people from all Pacific Islands, and "Asian" consisted of people from the Far East, Southeast Asia and the Indian subcontinents. "Others" included any other ethnicity that could not be assigned to the European, Maori/Pasifika or Asian groups. The decision to include Maori and Pasifika actors in one category was made in order to decrease the chance of the observers not being able to distinguish between the two groups.

Large groups were defined as advertisements that contained 12 or more people. The observers coded such advertisements as containing a large group, but no attempt was made to determine ethnicity or gender in such advertisements, as it was not considered that counting and coding large numbers would be possible in the brief interval during which an advertisement screened. The category "no people" included television advertisements that did not have real humans,

appearing such as those using cartoons, computer-generated animals or beings, any advertisements with animated people and voice-overs.

During the observations, every individual product was identified, the actors were coded as male or female, and their respective ethnicities determined. Products were later placed into 15 categories when consolidating the data. These were alcohol, appliance/furniture/interior, automotive, banking/finance/insurance, children's products, entertainment/leisure, fashion, food/beverage, gardening/building/agriculture, government/community, grocery, health/beauty, sports/outdoor, telecommunication and others.

According to cultivation theory, repeated exposure influences perception and behavior (Gerbner, 1958; 1966; Gerbner & Gross, 1976). Thus, television advertisements that were screened more than once during the hour of observation were coded each time they were viewed, since it was considered that the cultivation of attitudes and beliefs would be compounded through greater exposure. In a random selection of a 2-hour period, 61 advertisements played and of those, 9 were repeats, so approximately 15% of advertisements were repeated.

### *Analysis*

We chose to use the proportionality criterion to analyze our data. This criterion compares the representation of particular groups in advertising to their proportion within the general population and has commonly been used in analyzing ethnic representation within media (see Bang & Reece, 2003 for one example). Hence, percentages of actors in each gender and ethnic group were calculated. These percentages were used to calculate expected numbers based on the New Zealand census data (Statistics New Zealand, n.d.a). Chi-square analyses were then carried out on expected and observed numbers to determine if the differences among observed groups and those within each product category differed significantly from the expected count. Because a large number of calculations were to be carried out on the same data, in order to avoid the increased risk of Type 1 errors occurring a Bonferroni Correction was applied, meaning that the significance level for this study was set at  $p < .0008$ .

## **Results**

### *Overall Television Advertisements*

Among the 5,977 television advertisements that met the criteria for inclusion and that were viewed and entered into the database, there were 4,922 advertisements that included people and 1,055 advertisements that did not contain people based on the criteria above (21% of the total number of advertisements). There were 421 advertisements that contained large groups of people so these were not coded further (i.e., gender and ethnicity were not recorded for these

advertisements). Hence, the gender and ethnic group numbers were coded and analyzed based on the remaining 4,501 advertisements that contained smaller groups of people (mostly 8 or less).

Products were divided into the 15 categories outlined above. It appeared that grocery ( $n = 744$ ) and food/beverage ( $n = 680$ ) products had the greatest number of advertisements during the observations; and sports/outdoor ( $n = 57$ ) and alcohol products ( $n = 48$ ) screened less than other products (see Table 1). Compared to a total number of 4,501 advertisements, there were only 23 advertisements categorized into the "other" product category. Thus, the "other" category for advertisements was excluded from the analyses. This was because numbers in this category were very low and also because the research questions related to the gendering of types of advertisements as well as whether ethnic bias was evident by category, and once the remaining few advertisements had been put into the "other" category, what they were advertising could not be determined.

### *Gender*

Based on the national resident population estimates in 2009, females constituted 51% of the total population in New Zealand (Statistics New Zealand, n.d.b). The total number of people who appeared in the coded advertisements was 8,519, of whom 49% were male and 51% were female. The chi square results comparing the differences between the number of males and females in the advertisements versus the New Zealand population were: male:  $\chi^2 (1, n = 8519) = 2.61, p > .05$ . Overall, the balance of males and females featured in advertisements reflected the percentages for the general population. Statistical analyses also showed the numbers of female or male actors who appeared in children's product, entertainment/leisure, gardening/ agriculture/ building, government/community, grocery, sports/outdoor and telecommunication product sectors of the observed television advertisements did not differ statistically from the numbers of females and males in the total population ( $p > .0008$ ) (see Table 1).

In some product categories, there were disproportionate numbers when comparing female and male actors to the expected numbers in the general population. Compared to females, males were over represented in the alcohol, automotive, banking/insurance/finance and food/beverage categories ( $p < .0001$  in all categories). On the other hand, females were over represented in the appliances/furniture/interior, fashion and health/beauty products ( $p < .0001$  in all categories) (see Table 1).

### *Ethnic Groups*

The ethnic group percentages in the national population according to the New Zealand Census data were: 68% European, 22% Maori & Pasifika, 9% Asian and

**TABLE 1. Numbers, Percentages, and Chi-Square Goodness of Fit Test for Gender in Television Advertisements (by Product Category)**

Product category	No. of television advertisements	%	No. of male actors	%	No. of female actors	%	Chi square	<i>p</i> value
Alcohol	48	1	89	74	32	26	26.85	.0001
Appliances/furniture/ interior	537	12	285	42	392	58	16.91	.0001
Automotive	258	6	361	60	241	40	23.92	.0001
Banking/insurance/ finance	397	9	445	59	309	41	24.53	.0001
Children's product	117	3	113	42	158	58	7.47	.006
Entertainment/leisure	467	10	540	55	449	45	8.37	.004
Fashion	125	3	54	19	232	81	110.78	.0001
Food/beverage	680	15	933	64	531	36	110.39	.0001
Gardening/agriculture/ building	116	3	92	55	74	45	1.95	>.05
Government/community	232	5	243	56	194	44	5.49	.02
Grocery	744	17	640	47	731	53	6.04	.01
Health/beauty	497	11	236	22	839	78	338.24	.0001
Sports/outdoor	57	1	47	69	21	31	9.94	.002
Telecommunication	203	5	107	45	131	55	2.42	>.05
Total	4478	100	4185	49	4334	51	2.61	>.05

*Note.* All percentages have been rounded to whole numbers.

1% others (Statistics New Zealand, n.d.a). The overall percentages of actors from different ethnic groups represented in the advertisements were: 87% European, 7% Maori & Pasifika, 2% Asian, and 3% Others (see Table 2). Compared to the census data, there was a statistically significant difference between the proportions of actors from different ethnic groups and the ethnic groups' representation in the general population  $\chi^2(3, n = 8519) = 2194.85, p < .0001$  (see Table 2).

A statistically significant difference was found in every product category for each ethnic group ( $p < .0001$ ), which showed that the ethnicity of the actors in the observed television advertisements failed to represent the actual proportion of the various ethnic groups found in New Zealand. In general, Europeans were over-represented in all fifteen categories, and minority groups were under-represented in most categories. In contrast to the minority groups, Europeans not only appeared more frequently in total but also more frequently in each category (see Table 2).

However, in a few product categories, a particular minority group's appearance did reflect their proportion in the population. Maori/Pasifika were represented in accordance with their proportion in the general population only in the Government/community sector category (see Table 2;  $p > .05$ ) but were significantly under-represented in all other television advertisements.

Asian actors' proportion of appearances in banking/insurance/finance products mirrored the ethnic group's numbers in the general population ( $p > .05$ ). Other than in that specific category, the Asian group's proportional representation in the observed television advertisements was significantly less than the group's actual share in the population ( $p < .0001$ ). Asian actors did not feature in any advertisements related to alcohol, gardening/building/agriculture, sports/outdoor and telecommunication (see Table 2). Actors from the "other" ethnic group were represented in line with their ethnic proportion in the population only in the fashion product sectors ( $p > .05$ ). In gardening/agriculture/building and telecommunication they were under-represented while in all other categories they were over-represented ( $p < .0001$ ; see Table 2).

Some television advertisements featured actors from different ethnic groups together. European, Asian and "other" appeared together in grocery, entertainment/leisure, and health/beauty advertisements. European, Maori and "other" were seen in entertainment/leisure and sports/outdoor product advertisements. European, Asian and Maori actors shared the screen in appliance/furniture/interior, entertainment/leisure and health/beauty advertisements. However, it is also worth noting that anecdotal evidence from the observers suggested that Europeans were more often portrayed as the main character in advertisements such as these while the minority groups played supportive or background roles.

**TABLE 2. Numbers, Percentages, and Chi-Square Goodness of Fit Test for European, Maori/Pasifika, Asian, and Other Ethnic Groups in Television Advertisements (by Product Category)**

Category	*Euro	%	*M/P	%	Asian	%	Other	%	Chi square	<i>p</i> value
Alcohol	108	90	5	4	0	0	8	7	74.59	.0001
Appliances/furniture/ interior	621	92	28	4	12	2	16	2	206.14	.0001
Automotive	556	92	13	2	10	2	23	4	244.166	.0001
Banking/insurance/finance	594	79	77	10	68	9	15	2	67.89	.0001
Children's product	243	90	17	6	1	0	10	4	91.22	.0001
Entertainment/leisure	735	74	169	17	26	3	59	6	305.12	.0001
Fashion	266	93	11	4	5	2	4	1	86.31	.0001
Food/beverage	1327	91	62	4	23	2	52	4	505.50	.0001
Gardening/agriculture/ building	149	90	17	10	0	0	0	0	38.59	.0001
Government/community	325	74	102	23	1	0	9	2	45.23	.0001
Grocery	1241	91	67	5	22	2	41	3	422.37	.0001
Health/beauty	941	88	37	3	40	4	57	5	460.89	.0001
Sports/outdoor	59	87	6	9	0	0	3	4	22.92	.0001
Telecommunication	218	92	20	8	0	0	0	0	62.29	.0001
Ethnic groups total	7383	87	631	7	208	2	297	3	2194.85	.0001

*Note.* All percentages have been rounded to whole numbers. \*Euro = European New Zealander, \*M/P = Maori or Pasifika.

## Discussion

This study was designed to examine the proportional representation of the genders and different ethnicities in advertisements within the New Zealand context—a country which has traditionally portrayed itself as being egalitarian (King, 2003). Hence within this context we might expect to find proportional representation of the gender and ethnic groups in advertisements featured on New Zealand television. Indeed, with regard to gender, as proposed in the hypotheses, the results did show that overall the proportions of men and women in advertisements did equate with their representation in the population. However, it is important to remember that, although this study concentrated on quantitative representation, the ways in which the actors are portrayed is also of note.

There was some evidence of males and females being presented in stereotypical roles, although there was also evidence of less stereotyping of males and females than has been previously reported. Nevertheless, as in other studies (e.g., Rak & McMullen, 1987; Rutherford, 1994), men were still more frequently portrayed in what some have traditionally regarded as male domains (cars, enjoying food and drinking alcohol). Furthermore, although we did not examine whether males or females played leading or supporting roles in the advertisements; nevertheless, males were more prominent in banking and finance advertisements—one of only two groupings in our categorization that could be associated with power, the other possibility being government and community. Hence, even without determining power relationships within advertisements, there is some evidence that men are being portrayed as the decision makers and those with power in business and finance—and this is despite the myths of egalitarianism in New Zealand. On the other hand, women were also depicted stereotypically. They were featured more often than men in advertisements related to health, beauty and fashion, which is in line with the traditional expectation that women should appear attractive (Furnam & Mak, 1999). The other category in which women were dominant was that associated with household appliances, furniture, and other interior household products. Hence, in terms of cultivation theory and the findings of Signorielli and Kahlenberg (2001), men were portrayed as those with power while women were more frequently portrayed as the homemakers.

However, there was some evidence of a narrowing of the gap in terms of how men and women were portrayed in some advertisements. Earlier studies showed that women were more frequently shown buying groceries than men (Kaufman, 1999), whereas in the current study, men and women were depicted equally. Similarly, whereas advertisements associated with outdoor aspects of the home (gardening, agriculture and building), with entertainment and leisure, sports and outdoors, government and community, and telecommunication have revealed more frequent representation of men (Craig, 1992; Furnam & Mak, 1999; Rutherford, 1994), in this study women were seen as often as men in roles around but outside of the house. They were also depicted in comparable proportions



in government and community advertisements. On the other hand, men were portrayed equally with women in advertisements for children's products. This suggests either that there is less stereotyping by gender in New Zealand than in other countries or that gender stereotyping is disappearing in the twenty-first Century.

There was larger differentiation in proportions when it came to ethnicity, however. White actors were over-represented in every single category in comparison to the other ethnic groups. The only category in which one group, Maori and Pasifika, was proportionally represented was in the government and community advertisements. This finding was similar to that of Dana and Sullivan (2007, November), but those authors did not comment on what the community advertisements portrayed (other than to state that the high proportion may have been due to a campaign to get Maori voters onto the Maori electoral roll). These types of advertisements mostly portray negative aspects of society, such as drink-driving, gambling, smoking, family violence, and literacy problems. When the message in these advertisements is that people should not drive drunk, gamble, smoke, or invoke violence towards family members, and that they need to read to their children, because it is Maori and Pasifika people who are often portrayed in these situations, the implicit message about how Maori and Pasifika behave is very negative. Hence, although Dana and O'Sullivan reported a high proportion of community advertisements including Maori and Pasifika, they did not mention the negativity of the portrayals. The implications of such ubiquitous portrayals of Maori and Pasifika, (as found in other studies with minority groups; e.g., Lubbers et al., 2000; Mastro et al., 2007) is that particularly for those viewers who do not have close associations with these groups, they may come to conceive of Maori and Pasifika in the stereotypical ways in which they are portrayed. This is not the egalitarian society that was the vision of the country's forebears.

Contrastingly, in advertisements in which products were being promoted and people were seen in a positive light, there was little inclusion of Maori and Pasifika. Scott (1990) provided some insight into the New Zealand advertising industry when he indicated that companies did not employ Maori or Pasifika in their advertisements because of the negative stereotypes that advertisers perceived were related to Maori and Pasifika. He stated that advertisers believed that casting both groups in professional roles would be "inappropriate" (p. 86). Although, Scott's writing appeared two decades ago it appears little has changed in terms of advertisers' attitudes towards Maori and Pasifika. It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that in a large cross-cultural study (Williams & Best, 1990) it was found that while children aged five to eight years across a wide range of countries showed a well-formed awareness of stereotypes, New Zealand children were the second highest scorers. These findings hold serious implications for all children but particularly those in New Zealand, where the ideal of egalitarianism does not appear to be translated into the viewing domain for Maori and Pasifika. This is particularly poignant given that with the same population there is evidence of a more equitable portrayal of the genders. The ethnic stereotypes portrayed teach

children that some people are considered better than others. As recently expressed by Morgan and Shanahan (2010), when discussing the influence of the media on attitudes and perceptions “. . . because it expresses social and cultural patterns, it also cultivates them” (p. 339).

Further, it would appear that the view of advertisers is that it is not appropriate to show Maori and Pasifika as leaders is also without foundation. Such beliefs appear to be based on a fear that if more ethnic minorities are included, the dominant group (Whites) will not purchase the product (Knochbloch-Westerwick, & Coates, 2006). However, such apprehensions appear to be unsubstantiated. In a study in which an Asian was seen using a particular shampoo (a non-stereotypical portrayal), both attitudes and purchase intentions of viewers were more favorable than when an Asian was shown drinking a particular brand of green tea (stereotypical portrayal). Importantly this result was evident for both White and Asian viewers (Martin, Lee, & Yang, 2004). Incorporating minority groups in a wide range of advertisements communicates to them that they are valued customers but does not appear to affect negatively the purchasing of White viewers. This is something that advertisers could consider more habitually. While it is recognized that advertisers target their audiences, perhaps there is less need to so explicitly target particular societal groups as is conceived.

It is of note that in the current study, while Maori and Pasifika were often portrayed negatively, very few Asian actors were included in any advertisements at all. They were portrayed proportionally in advertisements related to the banking and finance industry but were missing from advertisements related to leisure and family-related product categories—again, a stereotypical portrayal found in other studies (Dalisay & Tan, 2009; Taylor & Lee, 1994).

Presenting advertisements that do not contain people is one way to avoid the portrayal of negative stereotypes and indeed in the current study over a fifth of all advertisements employed a range of techniques which resulted in gender and ethnic neutral advertisements. These included using cartoon characters that did not resemble people, using animals or using voice-over. Advertisers do not need to present stereotypical portrayals in such a pervasive manner as is currently evident; they choose to do so (Davies et al., 2005).

A further way in which stereotyping can be decreased is to feature males and females and different ethnic groups together, especially when females or ethnic minorities play the leading roles. Some television advertisements did feature actors from different ethnic groups together in one advertisement. This could reduce the perceived social distance between mainstream and minority ethnic groups (Knobloch-Westerwick & Coates, 2006).

This study has some limitations. First, observations were performed by a large number of psychology students, who while carefully trained did show some level of disagreement in their observations. There was also a level of disagreement when the first author randomly coded some advertisements. This means that the portrayal of actors in some advertisements may not have been accurate. Second, only

a small percentage of advertisements were coded by the first author, and therefore, whether those selected were an accurate representation of the total is unknown. Third, students were assigned to watch television so that their viewing reflected the patterns of New Zealanders (and in accordance with cultivation theory), so more watched advertisements during peak viewing times than at other times. It is possible that advertisements in off-peak periods are more proportionally representative of societal groups than are those during peak times, and hence this could have skewed the results.

It will be interesting to continue to track the portrayal of different groups in the future as advertisers are made more aware of the biases shown in their advertisements and as society in general argues for greater equity. Recently in New Zealand a much wider variety of television channels has become available through free-to-air and digital. Already two Maori and four Asian channels have been initiated, and a Pasifika-focused channel is underway. It would be fascinating to survey these channels in the future to explore what types of advertisements are offered on the new channels and how minority groups and women are portrayed.

The current salience of stereotypical portrayals leads to particular notions of females and of minority groups. Advertising is powerful and therefore advertisers have the authority to change perceptions by presenting females and minority groups as leaders, problem solvers, initiators and creators. Such portrayals would provide positive role models for children and adults of all groups and may help to reduce and overcome the pervasive and destructive stereotyping currently evident in television advertisements.

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