

# RACIALISATION AND THE CULTURAL POLITICS OF ADVERTISING

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## **Racialisation and the cultural politics of advertising**

### **Summary**

This thesis demonstrates that advertising is an important and neglected site of racialisation. It argues that advertising plays a crucial role in the cultural politics of 'race' but that, in order to examine this role, we need a more subtle understanding of the production and consumption of advertising meanings. That the relationship between advertising and racialisation remains understudied is arguably a result of traditional academic approaches to the media which have tended to focus exclusively on textual interpretations of media products by academics themselves. This project has attempted to move beyond such approaches by investigating the social relations of production and consumption of British television advertising in a number of sites, in addition to analysing the content of such advertisements. The project focuses upon young consumers; this is a group to which advertising most frequently targets racialised imagery, a group whose 'cultures' have been actively influenced by racialised minorities, and who are arguably the most 'media literate' of consumers. It employs a variety of research techniques, including content analysis, participant observation in an advertising agency, individual interviews with industry personnel and group discussions with young people in two contrasting London schools. It concludes that, in contrast to accounts of advertising that emphasise 'rational' economics, all stages of the advertising process are rife with racialised meanings.

The thesis shows how advertising is sometimes consumed in different ways from those intended by its producers, and that there are significant differences in consumption among different groups of consumers. Such differential patterns of consumption are not adequately explained by reference to traditional social categories such as 'race', gender and class; instead relational categories of difference and distinction have greater explanatory value. The thesis incorporates an attempt to provide a critical handle on the advertising industry, and draws attention to the consistent presence of relations of power in the cultural politics of advertising. It discusses the notion of 'resistance' to such relations by the young people interviewed and concludes that previous research has tended to over-simplify, and over-estimate the extent of, consumer resistance to advertising's dominant meanings.

***James Taylor***

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# 1

## Introduction

*'A variety of challenges are to be found at the intersection of geography and the media'*

David Clarke (1995)

Culture can arguably no longer be conceived of as the 'Grand Hotel' it once was, a totalisable system that somehow orchestrated all cultural production and consumption according to one master system (J. Collins, 1990; see Duncan, 1980). Social scientists have increasingly begun to recognise instead the existence of a plurality of *cultures*, which are seen to be complex, contested and broadly defined. This is the essence of cultural politics, a notion which has gained considerable currency within human geography and other social sciences in recent years. Cultural politics rejects both the idea of culture as a purely aesthetic realm, separate from economy and society and from political questions about power, inequality and oppression (Lipsitz, 1990: 16), and it resists narrow definitions of culture as the product of intellectual or artistic elites. Instead cultures are seen as 'ways of life', domains in which meanings are constructed and negotiated (Jackson, 1991a; 1993a). Cultural politics, as Jackson and Taylor (1996: 357) explain, focuses on 'the cultures and subcultures of different class fractions, genders and racialised groups... [and] explores the multiple "maps of meaning" by which we make sense of the world and the unequal social relations of power that underlie all... cultural distinctions'. From such a perspective, 'culture' assumes a highly contested nature around which ideological lines are often sharply defined (see recent debates in geography initiated by Price and Lewis, 1993; Mitchell, 1995). The nature of such cultural politics and how they are played out in the realm of advertising is the focus of this thesis. In particular, it explores the relationship between racialisation and advertising, through an investigation of both the production and consumption of British television advertising.

In drawing on the two sets of debates on racialisation and advertising, this thesis covers new ground. Examples of work that combines these twin foci are hard to find, not just in geography but right across the social sciences. In common with much of the literature on advertising in general, and to some extent 'race' and representation (see Young, 1996), those examples that do exist are predominantly American (see Taylor, 1997, for a summary). A small sub-field of marketing literature has tackled the representation of ethnic minorities in advertising, but always in the context of advertising effectiveness and the segmentation of the market, and invariably constrained by the largely quantitative research methods employed (see, for example, Wooten and Galvin, 1993; Deshpande and Stayman, 1994; Koslow *et al*, 1994). Quantitative studies have dominated social science literature in this area too, either measuring the frequency of appearance and/or the significance of the role of ethnic minority characters in advertisements (Pierce *et al*, 1977; Humphrey and Schuman, 1984; Wilkes and Valencia, 1989; Snyder *et al*, 1995), or measuring 'influence' and 'socialisation' effects (Barry and Hansen, 1973; Donohue, 1975).

The shortcomings of such quantitative studies are elucidated in the thesis, but there have been some recent notable exceptions to this trend. Craig (1991), for example, analyses African-American representation in advertising using semiotic methods, drawing attention to the apparent contradictions in ads which depict minority groups fully participating in a dominant culture that can also serve to oppress them and limit their life choices. Pieterse (1992), employs an analysis of advertisements, among other cultural products, to investigate how racialised relations of dominance are constructed and reproduced in popular culture and how stereotype and caricature function as markers of social boundaries and mechanisms of domination. He shows how racism and exoticism, themselves the legacy of centuries of colonialism, continue to be recycled in western cultures in the form of stereotypical images of non-western cultures, not least in its advertising. By drawing attention to geographical differences in the images of European and American popular culture, Pieterse demonstrates that social representations arise out of a multiplicity of geographical and historical contexts; he thus urges social scientists to explore the contexts in which such images are produced, and to ask what interests are served by particular representations. He concludes with the question: '...in

examining images of "others", one first has to ask who are the producers and consumers of these images' (10).

The same question is asked by Kern-Foxworth in *Aunt Jemima, Uncle Ben and Rastus* (1994), which traces the history of African-Americans in advertising; she claims the book to be the first of its kind, breaking ground in revealing the genealogies of particular images and discussing their impact upon the minds and consumption habits of American consumers. Both these works offer some valuable insights, revealing the extent to which contemporary advertising continues to draw on, and modify, a historically constructed reservoir of racist imagery (see Hall, 1980). However, either writer can only speculate about how these images were *actually* consumed by their audiences, and about the social and economic relations that underlay their production. Such limitations, and the accompanying calls for greater empirical attention to be given to the production and consumption of images by diverse communities, will become increasingly familiar in the course of this introduction and the literature review to follow.

By his own admission, Jackson's (1994) work on the cultural politics of masculinity in advertising is similarly limited, and he too calls for a more exhaustive interpretation of advertising images that goes beyond mere content analysis, linking the production of particular advertising images to their consumption in particular social contexts. He shows how the repositioning of the glucose drink Lucozade drew on particular representations of black masculinity, a repertoire that included associations of manliness and muscularity, sporting and sexual performance. He suggests that audiences' culturally constructed knowledge plays an active role in the 'decoding' of advertising messages, a knowledge that will vary from place to place. As well as placing his interpretations of the Lucozade campaign in the context of evolving cultural politics of 'race', gender and sexuality, Jackson's paper is important in calling not only for a more subtle cultural geography, attuned to the geographical constitution of audiences, but also a more grounded cultural politics of advertising.

Such a grounding is to some extent achieved in the inherently geographical work of anthropologist Marie Gillespie, in an impressive study of how television is implicated in the emergence of 'new ethnicities' (Hall, 1992) and broader patterns of cultural change (Gillespie, 1993; 1995). Claiming to be the first to bring together the two fields of interest of the cultural geographies of diasporic communities and those of the media, she investigates how young Punjabi Londoners negotiate their identities in everyday consumption of media products, a consumption which includes talk about TV advertising. She examines how ethnicity both shapes and is shaped by material and symbolic consumption processes in Southall. Advertising plays a crucial part in these processes, functioning as an imaginative resource in the demarcation of local hierarchies of taste and style, and contributing to local identity politics. Gillespie emphasises how this contribution is a complex one, and cannot be simply inferred from content analyses of advertising 'texts' (which she largely avoids); indeed, she makes the important point that quite different readings can be made of the same ad, as ads become selectively appropriated and transformed in very particular contexts. Her ethnography is both perceptive and refreshing, not least because it makes an empirical contribution to the literature. What Gillespie's study lacks, however, is an engagement with the production of the media products discussed. The reader is left, for example, wanting to know who some of the ads discussed were targeted at, and whether their consumption by ethnic minority youth had been considered at the creative stage.

What all four of these works have in common is a desire to use studies of advertising in order to learn more about the social world, to use it as a 'window' through which to observe other economic, political and social relations. For Pieterse and Kern-Foxworth, their studies of advertising shed light on a range of issues from colonialism and slavery to stereotyping and intergroup relations; Jackson's analysis of a particular ad campaign helps us assess wider changes in attitudes towards 'race', gender and society; Gillespie, meanwhile, demonstrates how talk about TV can provide a window onto a range of issues about local cultures and identities. This is important for my own study. Media products such as advertising need to be studied, and we need to know a lot more about how they are constructed and consumed; indeed, there is no shortage of writers who feel that advertising's ubiquitous and pervasive

presence, not to mention its influence, are reason enough to study it (Zanot, 1984; O'Donohoe, 1995). Yet I would concur with Davidson (1992) who insists that advertising should be a place to begin critiques, not to end them. Several supposedly seminal texts on advertising, discussed in greater detail in the following chapter, were not just interested in advertising *per se*, but in the light it shed on our society and our selves (Williamson, 1978; Goldman, 1992). Given that advertising stands at the intersection of industry, culture, communication and group interaction (Leiss *et al*, 1986), there is no shortage of views from the window. Several writers have shown how much even *talk* about the media can reveal about society (Taylor and Mullen, 1986; Scannel, 1991; Hermes, 1995).

My own project builds upon the strengths of these aforementioned studies, whilst taking into account their limitations. Thus, in addition to exploring the intersections of racialisation, geography and the media, this thesis raises issues of power, identity, racialised relations, and education, *as encountered through advertising*. It seeks to do this by engaging not just with the 'texts' of advertising, but also its production and its consumption, three areas of what Richard Johnson (1983) has termed the 'circuit of culture'. This useful model from cultural studies was first imported into geography by Burgess (1990), and describes the production and consumption of meaning in goods and images (see *Figure 1.1*; see Mackay, 1997, for an alternative conception). The meaning of an advertisement, for example, is transformed at different phases in the circuit: it starts with its production by advertising agency employees, working within particular economic and social constraints and subject to the brief they are given; the text, or advert itself, transforms these production processes into systems of symbols; the text is then consumed by different audiences who will produce different meanings of the same advert, according to their own social contexts; and finally the meanings are incorporated into people's daily lives, and in turn provide material for new media productions.

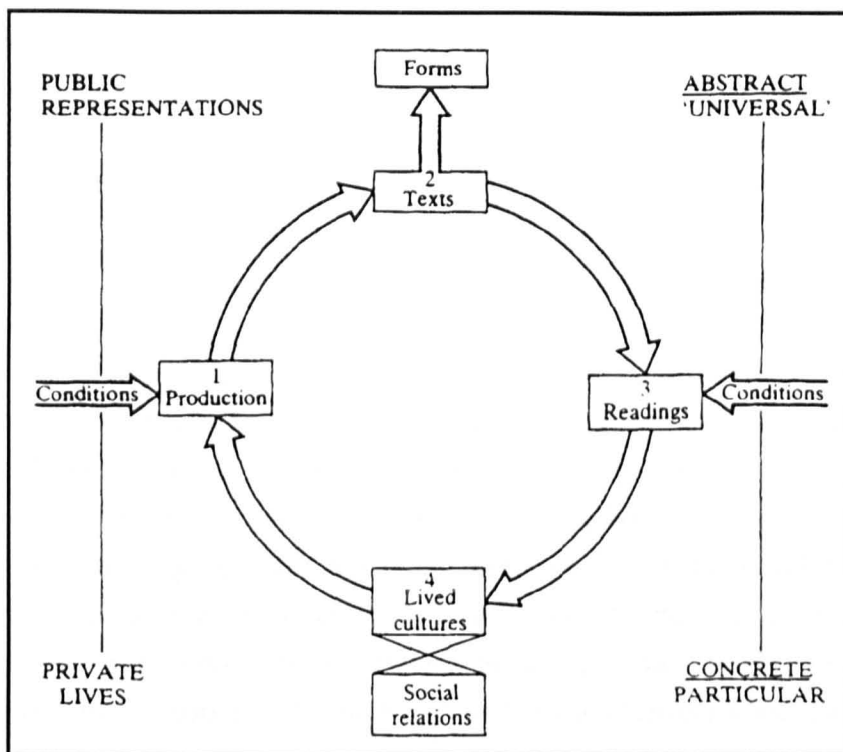


Figure 1.1: The circuit of culture (from Johnson, 1983)

Unlike earlier theorisations, such as Hall's (1973) highly influential encoding/decoding model, the essence of Johnson's (1983) argument is that the flow of meanings is not a linear one; instead they are continually constructed and reconstructed by actors at all stages of the circuit. One cannot infer what meanings exist at one phase in the circuit by looking at another; for instance, interpreting the text in isolation, according to one's own codes of interpretation, will tell us little about what is made of the text by other audiences, nor what the intended interpretations of the image producers were. We thus need to conduct research at all stages in the circuit to obtain a complete picture of the meaning surrounding media products such as advertisements.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This project investigates the first three stages of the circuit. Without a more detailed ethnographic study, it was not feasible, methodologically, to explore the fourth phase of the circuit as well - see Chapter 3.

The circuit of culture model provides the background for the research conducted in this thesis, the primary objective of which is to investigate advertising as a site of racialisation<sup>2</sup>. As stated above, there are few existing studies that have researched the production and consumption of advertising in addition to its texts, and none have done so with particular reference to issues of racialisation. One consequence of this is the need to explore more general issues of advertising consumption and production, such as the extent to which audiences can be conceived of as 'active', in order to contextualise and explain the significance of racialisation. The following chapter traces the trajectory of debates that have led me to both the circuit model and to the subject of the thesis in general. It examines the literature on racialisation, advertising and youth from human geography and other disciplines, and draws attention to a number of important lacunae which my own research attempts to focus upon. The chapter emphasises the inseparability of racialisation, advertising and youth; the thesis is about all these things, yet not exclusively about any one of them.

Chapter 3 outlines the various methodologies employed in the project. Given the breadth of the research objectives, and the desire to explore three areas of the circuit of advertising, a mixed-methods approach was adopted; this included corporate interviews, participant observation, secondary source analysis, content analysis and in-depth group discussions at two schools in the London area. The chapter closes with some reflections on the methodological framework and its application.

Chapter 4, the first of the empirical chapters, draws on material from both the content analyses and the producer research. The first half reports on the quantitative and semiotic analyses of advertising content, both of which paint a picture of a complex, but undoubtedly racialised inequality in advertising's

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<sup>2</sup> Sociological theories like those of Johnson are preferred in this thesis to psychoanalytic theories due to the former's emphasis on the social relations of power, which will be seen to be important as the thesis develops. Whilst psychoanalysis can and has contributed much to relevant debates about 'othering' (see Frosh, 1995; Sibley, 1995a; 1995b) and also the mass media (see Rodaway, 1995), my own interest lies in the social and discursive nature of media consumption and identity construction, as Chapters 5, 6 and 7 in particular demonstrate.

representations. The second half seeks to uncover some of the social relations behind such images, by relating material from producer interviews, participant observation and secondary sources. It suggests that the explanation of many in the industry for racialised advertising (an 'economic' argument about target audiences) is sophistry, and that a subtly racialised subtext is operating (consciously or unconsciously) beneath such 'rational economic' talk.

Chapter 5 begins to map the general engagement with advertising of the young people interviewed. It identifies a number of 'repertoires' which frame this particular engagement: these include the theme of advertising as 'entertainment', the notion of advertising's 'influence', and a discourse of 'unease' associated with advertising consumption. It stresses the complex and nuanced nature of advertising consumption. Such consumption is frequently characterised by ambiguity and ambivalence, which has implications for our conceptions both of the consuming subject and the nature of advertising discourse itself.

Chapter 6 explores the aforementioned unease in more detail, as it relates to the racialised and other 'secondary messages' contained in advertising<sup>3</sup>, and in the context of an exploration of the patterns of differential consumption of advertising by the young people interviewed. The chapter argues that traditional categories of difference such as 'race', gender and class are of limited utility in explaining the differences and commonalities in ad consumption. Instead it suggests that we should seek answers in the 'relational settings' in which consumers are located, and argues that broader notions of difference and distinction based on Bourdieu's concepts of 'habitus' and 'cultural capital' are of greatest explanatory value in this context. It concludes that racialised and gendered issues are important to many young people, who themselves occupy a variety of racialised and gendered subject positions (both multiple and fluid), but not necessarily in ways one might expect.

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<sup>3</sup> O'Barr (1994) distinguishes between 'primary discourse' in ads, which he defines as the sales messages about the goods and services, and 'secondary discourse', constituted by ideas about society and culture contained in the ad (in reality, of course, these are not easily disaggregated).



Chapter 7 draws together some of the principal themes from the previous three analytical chapters, spelling out some of the links between the production and consumption of advertising, based on the empirical material. Key to this chapter is the notion of 'resistance', how it can and should be defined in this context, and whether the reactions of the young people interviewed could be classified as such. Central to the discussion is a widespread acceptance of the legitimacy of advertising, evidenced in the discussion groups. This has to be taken into account when critiquing advertising (as this chapter does, in part via a 'demystification' of advertising industry practice), and when discussing the possibilities of change in the circuit of advertising. Such changes, it argues will only come about when consumers make their 'voices' heard, action which *can* be classed as resistance.

Chapter 8 offers a summary of the main findings of the thesis and some tentative conclusions. They are contextualised here in a discussion of one theme whose presence is consistent throughout the thesis, namely *power*. The mobile and shifting nature of power in the circuit of advertising is emphasised. The chapter concludes with a brief evaluation of the study and signposts some avenues for further research.

## 2

### Literature Review

#### 2.1: Introduction

The thesis brings together two areas of the theoretical literature from geography and elsewhere in the social sciences: the geographies of 'race' and racialisation, and those of the media. This chapter contextualises the thesis by exploring these two sets of literatures in more depth, highlighting the strengths of the various debates yet drawing attention to several research lacunae; it also demonstrates how the two areas of enquiry can be most productively investigated in the context of young people and the youth market. The chapter begins by tracing the discipline of geography's many encounters with issues of 'race', emphasising the frequently interdisciplinary nature of its engagements; and highlighting the current focus on processes of 'racialisation' to which this thesis contributes. The chapter continues by comparing the considerable literature on 'race' with the relative dearth of geographical engagement with the media, and in particular advertising, before detailing some exceptions to this trend. It suggests, however, that these exceptions are themselves limited by a general failure to treat advertising meaning as circulatory, a tendency which has led to a sometimes unhelpful concentration on just one particular area of Johnson's (1983) circuit of culture. This research bias has frequently focused on the textual phase of the circuit. However, this overemphasis on media texts is not unique to geographical studies; and is instead the product of a long and very particular history of media and communication theory. The trajectory of this theory is discussed below, tracing its implications for, and assumptions about, the power of the media, conceptions of media audiences and the position of the academic.

That textual studies can still be useful is confirmed through an exploration of some of the literature on representation, so-called 'images of' studies (Dyer, 1993). Many of these have dealt with issues of 'race' and racialisation, and the

contributions of geographers to related debates are discussed below. That textual studies are limited, however, is illustrated through an investigation of the burgeoning literature on consumption across the social sciences (Miller, 1995). The insights offered by this literature have sometimes been considerable, but few writers have completed the circuit of meaning by linking their studies to the production of texts. It is hoped that, during the course of this chapter, a picture emerges of the limitations of current research into the media and advertising, racialisation and young people, and that in turn suggests ways in which my own study can contribute to the literature.

## **2.2: 'Race', representation, racialisation**

The discipline of geography maintains a long-standing relationship with studies of the 'racial', given its historical role in the imperialist project (cf. Driver, 1992; Godlewska and Smith, 1994); indeed, 'racial geography' was a key area of the discipline in the early twentieth century, as Livingstone (1992) explains. The subject of 'race' was rediscovered by geographers during the 1960's and 1970's, coinciding with a growth in Britain's ethnic minority population. Alistair Bonnett has provided a useful, if slightly tendentious, review of geographical engagements with 'race' over the last three decades, identifying three contemporary approaches to the subject: empiricism, the geography of 'race' relations, and social constructionism (Bonnett, 1996). Bonnett notes that the dominance of the empiricist tradition was short-lived, with many geographers finding its assumptions and ambitions too problematic even in the mid-1970's. The majority of work in the empiricist tradition attempted to plot and map biologically defined, discrete racial groups. It employed largely quantitative techniques, ultimately inherited from the Chicago School, developing indices of segregation, spatial concentration, *etc.* (Bonnett cites examples such as Dalton and Seaman, 1973; Lee, 1977; Jones, 1978). The edited volumes by Jackson and Smith (1981), Peach *et al* (1981) and Clarke *et al* (1984) are used by Bonnett as illustrations of what he terms the 'race' relations paradigm. This tradition concentrated its efforts on exploring the social, cultural and economic interactions of different 'races' or ethnic groups. Although characterised by an openness to ideas from other disciplines, it is criticised for lacking the sophistication of some of these source disciplines (Bonnett identifies strong

essentialist tendencies, for instance), and for persistently framing studies in terms of spatial consequences (see Smith, 1989, for an exception to this trend).

This enthusiasm to look beyond the borders of the discipline has been retained by the so-called 'social constructionists', much of whose work informs this thesis. Driven by a dissatisfaction with the failure of previous work to ask questions about the meaning behind, or significance of, the racialised spatialities being observed, work such as Jackson (1987; 1989) sought to focus less on the ethnic minorities themselves, and instead on questions of power and racism (see Bourne, 1980; and Brown, 1981, who also attacks the atheoretical nature of most contemporary geographical work on 'race'). By turning attention towards the racism of the dominant society and its geographical implications, this work began to focus on processes of 'racialisation', a term whose meaning needs some clarification in the context of this thesis. It is a concept that has become increasingly common across the social sciences recently (see Carter *et al*, 1987; Green and Carter, 1988; Smith, 1989; Solomos, 1989; Mercer, 1990; Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1992; Small, 1994; Holdaway, 1996; 1997), although it entered academic discourse largely through the work of Robert Miles (1982; 1989). It is a term that moves beyond essentialised notions of distinct 'races', drawing attention instead to the processes through which some groups are 'racialised' by dominant groups. These processes involve the attachment of social significance to particular biological features, on the basis of which people possessing those characteristics are designated as a distinct collectivity and social relations between people are conducted (Miles, 1989). Extending this argument, the term becomes a useful alternative to the notion of 'racist', with its implication of intentional discrimination (Small, 1994). As this thesis explains, many social relations or media products cannot appropriately be described as 'racist' in the narrow sense of deliberate or consciously prejudicial behaviour; however, they might well possess a 'racial' content, insofar as they are exclusionary, for example. They can thus more adequately be described as 'racialised'.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Chapter 4 demonstrates, however, in relation to a Lilt advertisement, that intentionality is not necessarily a pre-requisite for producing racist imagery. It also show how white

Within geography, Jackson (1992) has employed the concept in relation to empirical work in Bradford, revealing the extent to which migrant labour was simultaneously racialised and gendered by management, unions and workers alike. Michael Keith has described the processes of racialisation operating in British cities, how parts of cities can become racialised by both police and residents, often involving forms of 'race-place' essentialism (Keith, 1987; 1993; see Smith, 1989). The inner/outer city dichotomy that so often structures such racialisation is significant for this thesis, as the next chapter explains.

Geographers have yet to explore processes of racialisation operating within the commercial media, however, which is where this project can contribute. By examining the relationship between advertising and racialisation it reveals the importance of such media as a site of cultural politics. Geographers have, however, recognised the contributions made by visual representations to the social construction of 'race'. Jackson (1989), for example, draws on the work of Stuart Hall (1980; 1984a) to emphasise the historical durability of racist ideologies in popular representations (such as those in the news magazine *Picture Post*). Jacquie Burgess (1985) has interrogated press and media discourse around the urban unrest of the early 1980's. She reveals the extent to which the disturbances were subtly racialised through their being located in a mythical geography of the inner city (and see Gilroy and Lawrence, 1988). Meanwhile, in his pioneering study of Philadelphia's black inner-city, rooted in the social constructionism of Berger and Luckmann (1967), Ley (1974) stressed the influence of external media stereotypes about the 'ghetto'.

All of the above work highlights the enthusiasm with which many geographers working in this sub-field have chosen to draw on the insights of writers from other disciplines, with the work of Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy featuring strongly.

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ethnicities can be racialised too, in relation to a Nike commercial. Employing care when using the word 'racist' also has significance for political interventions, as Chapter 4 (Section 4.3.2), citing Miles (1989), explains.

Ironically, it has been the work of such scholars in other social sciences that has highlighted how central geography is to the study of 'race' and racialisation, emphasising the geographically and historically contingent nature of racism and racialised identities. Gilroy (1993a; 1993b) and Gopinath (1995), for instance, have shown how a diverse set of localised, national and supernational processes have helped supply meaning to the political language of 'race' and ethnicity, and created spaces for new forms of racial and ethnic identities. The innovative and thorough work of Les Back in *South London* (1993a; 1994; 1996) has demonstrated how discourses about 'race' are contextualised within specific locations, confirmed in his work with John Solomos on the dynamics of racialised political mobilisation in Birmingham (Solomos and Back, 1996; see also Rex and Tomlinson, 1979; Goldberg, 1993; Keith and Pile, 1993). Writers who have tackled the notions of 'hybrid' and 'syncretic' identities have also emphasised their place-based foundation (e.g. Jeater, 1992; Dwyer, 1997a; 1997b), whilst Phil Cohen has consistently explored the cultural geographies of ethnicity and nationalism as embodied in the everyday lives of people whose agency he asserts (Cohen, 1988; 1993; 1996).

As Bonnett (1996) claims, and this thesis reiterates, the importance of geography to the study of race is not in doubt. In spite of this, Bonnett detects an 'anxiousness' among geographers in this sub-field about their own relevance and that of their discipline, with the consequence that 'the word "geography" is repeated a little too often; the truism that "space matters" arrived at a little too breathlessly' (880). He implores geographers to cast aside their 'disciplinary fetishism', insisting that 'the importance of geography... may only be made fully visible when "the geographical perspective" is finally abandoned' (881). Although Bonnett runs the risk of caricaturing geographical studies of 'race' and racialisation, and exaggerating the extent of disciplinary neurosis, his final point is a valid one. It is hoped that the importance of geography to the study of advertising and racialisation will become apparent during the course of the thesis without the need for extensive signposting.

Finally, a brief word on the language used in the thesis is necessary. The terms 'ethnic minorities' and 'racialised minorities' are used interchangeably to refer to

those groups in Britain who have been racialised by dominant discourses. The term 'black' is defined as African-Caribbean (and African-American in the US context). The debate around the use of this term as a political label has been a particularly intense one in Britain (see Jackson and Penrose, 1993, for a summary); in the light of this debate (and Modood, 1988) the term 'Asian', or 'British Asian' is used separately to refer to people of South Asian descent. None of this should be taken to imply that 'white' people are not equally racialised, though their racialisation is often much less apparent as several recent studies have shown (e.g. Dyer, 1988; Frankenberg, 1993).

### 2.3: Geography and advertising

In contrast to geography's substantial engagement with 'race' and racialisation, geographers have had much less to say about the media. During the early 1980's there were occasional attempts to engage with media research, and to analyse the content of assorted media messages (e.g. Burgess, 1982; Gould *et al*, 1983). By the time Burgess (1990) made her clarion call for more geographical research on the media, however, only her co-edited collection had made any substantial contribution to this sub-field (Burgess and Gold, 1985). Burgess argued that the media are an integral part of a complex cultural process through which various meanings are produced and consumed, and thus should not be ignored: 'Just in terms of the sheer numbers of people who consume different media products in everyday life, the general inattention given to the media by geographers is surprising' (Burgess, 1990: 140). This lack of interest might be part of a general suspicion on the part of the discipline of anything relating to popular culture and a tendency to focus on the 'high arts' of landscape painting and literature (e.g. Cosgrove and Daniels, 1988).<sup>2</sup> Whatever the reasons behind this tendency, it is perhaps not surprising that so little geographical work has tackled advertising in particular (Jackson and Taylor, 1996). This omission in the geographical literature is a little more startling,

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<sup>2</sup> Richards (1994) feels that *all* academics have tended to treat popular culture with contempt, or at best 'amused condescension', possibly an extension of a long tradition condemning entertainment as distraction and triviality - cf. Brantlinger (1985); Lowenthal (1961).

however, given the recent interest by geographers and others in the 'world of consumption' (Jackson, 1993a; Jackson and Thrift, 1995; Miller, 1995; Pred, 1995); after all, according to Sack (1992), advertising is the 'language of consumption' (107). Media and cultural studies have long concerned themselves with advertising, as later sections explain, but, despite several recent encounters with cultural studies (Bird *et al*, 1993; Carter *et al*, 1993), there has still been a relative dearth of work on the relationship between geography and advertising. This is also surprising given the discipline's strong interest in iconography and, more recently, issues of representation (Cosgrove and Daniels, 1988; Barnes and Duncan, 1992; Daniels, 1993; Duncan and Ley, 1993; Duncan and Sharp, 1993).

Even an interest in advertising on the part of scholars who have recently inspired work in cultural geography has failed to prompt much research. Henri Lefebvre, for example, rhetorically asked of advertising, 'Is it not on the way to becoming the main ideology of our time... and is it not in fact the sole and vital mediator between producer and consumer?' (Lefebvre, 1971: 55). Raymond Williams produced a number of studies of television and mass communication (Williams, 1962; 1974), including a study of advertising as a 'magic system' (Williams, 1980). John Berger's influential account of our diverse 'ways of seeing' (1972) was also illustrated with many contemporary advertisements. His work was in turn inspired by a Walter Benjamin essay (1936) and included a discussion of Thomas Gainsborough's *Mr and Mrs Andrews*, a painting that has been subsequently reworked by several geographers (e.g. Prince, 1988; Rose, 1993), none of whom, incidentally, mention the painting's signification in a recent advertising campaign for Renault cars.

Jackson and Taylor (1996) point out that the lack of any sustained geographical research into advertising is all the more remarkable given that advertising is an inherently spatial practice, playing a fundamental role in an increasingly mediated world, influencing patterns of demand across space, and striving for universality but being continually subject to local variations in meaning and interpretation. As Clarke and Bradford (1989: 140) remark, 'the practices of advertising agencies both reflect and affect the spatial distributions of particular



activities (such as consumption and retailing) and the overall nature of space'. The targeting of advertising at particular market segments and lifestyle niches often has a spatial component, while advertising also involves what Mattelart (1991) refers to as a 'privatization of public space', with the latter becoming increasingly filled with corporate messages. Moreover, as Burgess (1990) and Shurmer-Smith and Hannam (1994) remind us, advertising constantly uses place images to convey meaning by placing the advertised product in an appropriate social context, and thus constructs ways of thinking about types of places that filter back into the geographical imagination.

There are, of course, a number of exceptions to the more general absence of geographical research on advertising. Since Burgess's ground-breaking work on 'place marketing' (1982) there has been a significant growth in literature exploring the ways in which local authorities, new towns and other places are marketed to potential inward investors and tourists. This has included general theories of the ways in which places are consumed (e.g. Urry, 1995), individual case studies (e.g. Burgess and Wood, 1988; Watson, 1991; Goss, 1993a) and a number of edited collections (e.g. Ashworth and Voogd, 1990; Kearns and Philo, 1993). David Clarke has justified his own work on advertising by stressing the significance of theorising consumer culture for the discipline of geography (D. Clarke, 1991). He has examined the social and spatial organisation of the advertising industry and its methods for regulating space (Clarke and Bradford, 1989), as well as the importance of space to the functioning of the TV advertising market (Clarke, 1995). Advertising as a tool in the production of social space is a theme in the work of McHaffie (1996), who uses an analysis of advertising as a 'window' onto corporate practice and ideological constructions of globalisation.

Deborah Leslie has made some particularly significant contributions to the geographical literature on advertising. She has tended to focus on the production phase of the circuit, exploring the spatial aspects of the advertising industry through an analysis of the internationalisation of ad agencies and their production of images of globalism congruent with this expansion (Leslie, 1995a). She has examined the industry in the context of flexible specialisation,

and provided insights into the increasingly ethnographic range of techniques through which ad agencies research consumers and also regulate space (Leslie, 1995b; 1997a; 1997b - but see Chapter 7 of this thesis for a critique of her analysis in the context of a demystification of industry practice); Goss (1995), has drawn attention to the increasing use of geodemographics and similar forms of GIS with which advertisers identify different market segments. Leslie has also offered one of a small number of studies to have examined the construction of gender identities in advertising, charting the return to 'traditional' family values and femininities in ads that reflect the economic and cultural shifts associated with post-Fordism (Leslie, 1993). Similarly, Housiaux (1994) has analysed the changing representations of masculinity in contemporary beer ads. The field of marketing has also been reviewed recently by Cornish (1995), while Eyles (1987) has analysed signification in housing advertisements.

In addition to Jackson's (1994) paper described in Chapter 1, a small number of other studies have addressed the cultural politics of advertising, either implicitly or explicitly. David Sibley, for example, focuses on boundary construction by groups who consider themselves to be normal or mainstream, a group which includes advertisers. He cites examples of ads by Persil and Volkswagen to illustrate how ads can attempt to symbolise purity, particularly in the 'defiled city', with their suggestions of how we can achieve the comfort of purity through consumption (Sibley, 1995a). Roger Miller, meanwhile, has examined the role of magazine advertisements in the construction of suburban America in the early twentieth century, in a study that highlights the manipulation of class and gender relations in the marketing of consumer goods (Miller, 1991). The advertisements he chooses as illustrations, all with a very specific gender address, offer a fascinating insight into contemporary conceptions of modernity, a faith in the rationality of science, and the gradual replacement of domestic labour by household technologies. Like Friedan (1974) and Ehrenreich and English (1979) before him, he suggests that the construction of new categories of housework in these domestic technology advertisements had the effect not only of selling products, but also changing the habits and roles of American women (see also Williamson, 1986a, on the construction of 'dirt' in Hoover advertisements).

Robert Sack's (1992) book, *Place, modernity and the consumer's world*, also includes a selection of advertisements to illustrate 'the consumer's world'; this inclusion, however, serves to highlight the limitations of these and other studies of advertising in geography. As in his treatment of shopping malls as life-size advertisements (Sack, 1988), he offers little or no discussion of the (potentially diverse) actual readings of these ads by consumers. Nor does he address questions of intentionality at the production end of the circuit. Miller's (1991) work possesses the same limitations. Exclusively textual analyses of advertisements can undoubtedly be productive, drawing attention to important trends in representation that are necessarily rooted in changing economic and social formations. There are also inherent dangers and limitations in this approach, however. Not only does it privilege the interpretations of academics over those of 'ordinary consumers', but the absence of information about how these ads were actually consumed runs the risk of overestimating the influence of advertising, and underestimating the agency and reflexivity of consumers. The following section explains how geographers are not alone in privileging their own readings and placing emphasis on the power of the text. Textual analysis has long been the favoured line of research in media and communication studies too, allied as it has been to very particular ideas about the power of the image and the nature of the media audience.

#### **2.4: Academic obsessions with the text**

A great deal of recent academic work on advertising has its roots in the media theories of the Frankfurt School, and their preoccupation with notions of mass society, dominant ideology and manipulation (e.g. Marcuse, 1964; Adorno and Horkheimer, 1973). The School conceived of a mass culture produced by the so-called 'culture industries', and which existed as a monolithic and deterministic force that audiences and consumers were incapable of resisting, threatening their individuality and creativity. As Swingewood (1977) points out, their thinking was rooted in the failure of proletarian revolutions in inter-war Europe, which might go some way to explaining their despair and contempt for what they saw as the malleability and foolishness of mass society. Adorno wrote about advertising in particular, lamenting how the use-value of goods had

become obliterated by exchange value allowing advertisers to exploit the masses by attaching emotions to products (see Rose, 1978). This argument was subsequently taken up by Williams (1980) among others, whose mourning for the loss of utilitarian functionalism strikes me as being a little nostalgic (see Campbell (1987: 49); Douglas (1982: 22) on critiques of such a position, and Veblen (1899), for an early exposition of the commodity as sign and symbol).

The mass culture perspective was applied to the world of advertising most notably by Vance Packard (1957) who claimed that advertisers targeted consumers' sense of inadequacy with sophisticated methods of 'psycho-seduction' and subliminal communication in order to manipulate people into making particular purchasing decisions. There is some irony in his contention that advertising was a 'regress... for man in his long struggle to become a rational and self-guided being' (265), given the assumptions that his own theories made about (the lack of) human agency and rationality. However, the conception of the masses held by the critical theorists of the Frankfurt School was positively voluntaristic compared to that subsequently advanced by 'Screen theory'. This employed Lacanian psychoanalytical theories and contended that the subjectivity of the masses was formed by the media right down to the unconscious, and the grip of the media was so tight that there appeared to be little escape (see Walkerdine, 1995, for a summary).

Unsurprisingly, the Frankfurt School theorists have been heavily criticised for their elitism, and inability to examine actual processes of consumption which might reveal complex differentiated audience responses and uses of goods (Swingewood, 1977). As Featherstone (1990) points out, their critique of mass culture also rests on the dubious distinction between real and pseudo individuality, and real and false needs (with both the latter being created by the media, and preventing people from knowing their best interests). It is these latter distinctions, however, that in part explain why the critique has proved so popular with generations of academics: they necessarily cast the academic in the role of expert, the 'unmasker' who can awaken the masses to the *real* meaning in ads, and remind them of their *real* best interests. To some extent the work of the French theorists Baudrillard and Barthes can be similarly classified. Features of both of their respective works do set them apart from the

Frankfurt School: Barthes (1976), for instance, emphasised the role of the reader in the 'production' of meaning; Baudrillard (1988: 45), meanwhile, criticised the essentialist conception of human nature that underpinned the mass culture thesis, showing how the products of labour are not aimed at the fulfilment of fundamental needs, but instead constitute a system of signs that differentiate the population. However, both these scholars, as innovative as their work was (see Barthes, 1973), cast themselves as experts in the interpretation and demystification of these signs and symbols; and, as Walkerdine (1995: 324) notes, Baudrillard 'caught a sharp dose of Frankfurt School pessimism', repeating and extending ideas from the 1950's which conceived of consumers as an atomised mass created by media simulation.

During the 1970's and 1980's a more 'critical' approach to the media developed in media studies at large (see Hall, 1982), and attempts were made, for example, to explore popular resistances to 'dominant ideology'; much of this work originated from Birmingham's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, and offered the first signs of a more 'active' conception of audiences (see Hall, 1973; Hall *et al*, 1980). However, whilst the ideas of the mass culture theorists gradually lost their popularity in media studies in general, a number of writers have drawn attention to their continued currency in advertising studies (Cook, 1992; Nava, 1997). This durability might relate in part to the pervading view of advertising as morally the lowest of all culture industries, a view which is in turn derived from the implicit assumption that it alone acts with specific, commercial interests in mind in addition to any more general 'dominant' interests (Lury, 1994a). Nava (1997) chooses a number of recently influential books on advertising and consumer culture to illustrate her case that the Frankfurt School/Packardian model still acts as a baseline in advertising studies in the 1990s. One such example is Thomas Richards's recent work on the commodity culture of Victorian England, which blames advertising for the spread of capitalism and the rise of the commodity culture (a claim contested by specialist historians in the field such as Brewer and Porter, 1994). In a book tinged with nostalgia for an idealised, pre-capitalist past, Richards claims that advertisers 'dug their pincers deep into the flesh of late Victorian consumers... and sucked consumers, especially women, into the vortex of a master-slave dialectic' (quoted in Nava, 1997: 37). Rob Goldman's *Reading Ads Socially* (1992) is also

lambasted by Nava (1997). Goldman sees his own textual analyses of ads as offering him a window onto how commodity interests structure social relations, and he indicts advertising as being principally to blame for the ideological supremacy of commodity relations in society. Yet as Nava points out, Goldman's conclusions precede the analyses of his chosen ads, all of which are employed to confirm his Althusserian thesis about the knowingness and intentionality of producers. Not once does he actually consult any producers of ads, and, as he has acknowledged in another setting (Goldman, 1994), he has little idea about how consumers actually read these ads. Once again, his self-professed attempt to understand the 'grammar of meaning' in ads in order to reveal their 'deeper ideological significance' (Goldman, 1992: 2) casts himself in the role of privileged, and uniquely qualified expert. Over twenty years ago Sontag (1972) issued a scathing attack on the obsessive academic search for underlying meanings, but her criticisms remain largely ignored.

Sayer and Walker (1992) continue to give Packard's language an airing too, with their talk of the 'darker side' of advertising, the invasion of home and mind by product sellers on the 'unfilled spaces of personal desire'. Cook (1992), meanwhile, castigates what he sees as the arrogance of critics of advertising such as Clark (1988), Leiss *et al* (1986) and Geis (1982) who apparently see themselves as 'above the process', as 'in no way like the recipients'. Like Goldman (1992), they cast the producers of ads as villains intent on deception, whilst the consumers of the ads are seen as uneducated and easily deceived; Geis (1982: 110) insists that, 'To some degree viewers get the commercials they deserve, that is, commercials to which they respond'. The masses should thus feel fortunate that authoritative figures such as Geis exist who are *au fait* with advertising's codes. O'Barr (1994) is even more heroic in his study of otherness in advertising, insisting that he seeks to articulate a voice 'on behalf of the ordinary people who stand in a particular relationship to advertising and advertisements'; he makes the point of contrasting these 'ordinary' people with those in advertising who 'purport in one way or another to tell us how we think, how to be, and how to live our lives' (xi). Initially O'Barr places himself at an Archimedian point above these two 'sides', unless talking about advertising's producers, when he muddies his boots and joins the fight for the ranks of the ordinary.

Clearly the language and heroic self-importance of some of these writers is lamentable, but the issue at stake is rather more serious. By consistently privileging their own readings of advertisements and media products they have perpetuated a culture that militates against empirical study. Instead, it is seen as enough, in an investigation of a particular aspect of advertising's role in society, to proffer one's own interpretation of ads, with the study beginning and ending at the texts. I would not wish to denigrate the many achievements made by textual analysts, some of whose authors are discussed in the next section on representation; but many of these latter analysts acknowledge the limits of their studies, and do not make assumptions about the intention of producers or the effects on consumers. Nor would I deny for a moment the potential of advertising to influence people (see Chapters 5 and 7, for example). What I object to is the tendency for writers to draw conclusions about the power of advertising over consumers and warn of the evil intentions of producers, without ever speaking to members of either group (and there are many more examples of this - see Jhally, 1991 and Kellner, 1991 for instance)<sup>3</sup>. Even critics of this approach such as Cook (1992) rarely cite empirical evidence in their defence. It is precisely because so few writers talk to consumers, for example, that the latter's 'activity' and reflexivity have been so consistently underestimated and their passivity overemphasised.

Before examining some of the studies, from within geography and elsewhere, that have moved beyond the text or product and tackled their consumption, an elucidation of the benefits of textual studies is required in the light of the above critique. The next section thus discusses some of the *gains* achieved by textual analyses of the media and advertising .

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<sup>3</sup> As Chapter 3 details, interview material is still a discursive construct which is then interpreted by academics; but few would deny that 'textual' analysis of this kind is an advance on the textual interpretation criticised above. Chapter 3.4.4 also explains and exemplifies how the 'voices' of producers and consumers should not necessarily be taken at 'face value', and nor should we assume that consumption studies afford us access to some essential and 'true' consumer subjectivity (see also Miller, 1997a: 229).

## 2.5: Benefits of textual analyses

The previous section detailed the fascinating study of advertising and domesticity by Roger Miller (1991), and there have been many other studies that have adopted a historical approach to the study of advertising and its texts. Most have discussed advertising's representations and its ideologies and speculated about its relations to society, especially with regard to femininity and the female consumer (White, 1970; Winship, 1980; Loeb, 1994; and Richards, 1991, mentioned above). Perhaps the most influential (textual) study of advertising to tackle issues of femininity is Judith Williamson's *Decoding advertisements* (Williamson, 1978). She made use of feminist readings of psychoanalysis and structuralism in order to demonstrate, among other things, how advertising plays a crucial role in the (re)production of femininity. The study is one of the most famous of its kind due to its innovative theoretical insights, particular its illustrations of how advertising demands that viewers 'place' themselves in the ads and thus participate in the *production* of the ad's meaning (what Schwarz, 1974, has termed 'participation'). Although Williamson was aware that this production relies on 'referent systems' extrinsic to the ad (thus acknowledging the importance of what consumers bring to the ad), her view of consumers retained strong links with the Packardian perspective of passivity; she insists that they are persuaded to buy goods against their real class interests due to an inability to escape the false meanings generated by advertising. She also dismissed the need to engage with the producers of advertisements in any way. Her theorising was grounded firmly in a Marxist tradition which suggests that consumption is little more than an extension of production, and thus attention should be focused on the 'real' production of the good; this perspective still finds favour today, often part of a backlash against the textual/semiological tradition, and some examples of which will be discussed in the next section.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The extent to which Williamson has modified her position to value human agency (Williamson, 1986a) arguably lends strength to the critique of her early work.



As previously mentioned, Richard Dyer (1993) has identified a so-called 'images of' trend in textual analysis, which has burgeoned in the last twenty years. He explains that the motivation for these studies is political, springing from the feeling that how social groups are treated in cultural representation informs how they are treated in life; that discrimination is reinforced by representation; and that how groups see themselves represented affects their self-identity and their sense of citizenship. Indeed, such studies *have* drawn attention to many important issues facing minority groups in society. Among the first such studies of advertising were by feminist and marketing scholars in the early 1970's. Courtney and Lockeretz (1971), for example, examined the roles of women in magazine advertisements in a study that was replicated on numerous occasions (see Wagner and Banos, 1973; Belkaoui and Belkaoui, 1976; and Wolheter and Lammers, 1978, on the role of men in print ads), while Betty Friedan (1974) concluded that magazine ads were selling the idea of a woman's place as being in the home, through images of fulfilment in the role of housewife and mother. One of the most influential studies of women's roles in ads was by Courtney and Whipple (1983). They work from the premise (albeit unsubstantiated) that advertising stereotypes do influence men, women and children, reinforcing and shaping our views of our own roles, capabilities and achievements, although they acknowledge that it is just one influence among many. They also suggest that criticism of the industry has to be couched in the industry's language, an implicit acceptance that advertising has some kind of role to play in society (see Mort, 1995, on the similar tactics used by women fighting sexism within ad agencies). Erving Goffman (1979) studied gender roles and relations in advertising, drawing the conclusion that men take the role of parents, whilst women behave as children would be expected to. The work of Barthel (1988; 1992) and Monk-Turner (1990) suggests that studies of gender representations in ads are still proliferating.

There have been far fewer studies of images of ethnic minority groups, as Chapter 1 explained. Not only have the majority of such studies been quantitative, and primarily conducted from a marketing perspective, but they have also been predominantly American (with the exception of Ramamurthy, 1990; see also Barry, 1988, on TV in general, and Young, 1996, on film). There are undoubtedly many commonalities between the British and American

experiences both in terms of racialised relations and advertising. I have argued elsewhere (Taylor, 1997) that, in creative terms, the respective national industries are closer to one another than to anybody else, whilst London and New York constitute the backbone of many international agency networks. Small (1994: 180), meanwhile, draws out the many similarities in the lives and histories of black people in either country, similarities that come down to what he calls the 'Colour Line' (inequalities of wealth, income, employment, education, health and housing) which characterises the black experience. There are, however, major contrasts in both these areas. O'Donohoe (1995) and Lury (1994a) both insist that large differences exist between the two countries in terms of public attitudes towards advertising, as well as in its history and current status. Small (1994: 7) acknowledges 'undeniable differences' in the (varied) black experience in either country, differences which have manifested themselves in substantial variations in the images produced of ethnic minority groups in the respective nations (Pieterse, 1992; Young, 1996; Gates, 1997). In the light of these differences, the strong American bias to academic literature on racialisation and advertising is regrettable.

Where American discussion of media representation has been useful, however, is in the recent debates that have urged a more complex critical dialogue with representational processes. Stam and Spence (1985) have warned against an overemphasis on the study of images themselves, for fear of generating an essentialism and of reifying stereotypes. In particular they are concerned about studies that hinge upon the notion of 'positive' and 'negative' images or the existence of 'authentic' representations (and see Gray, 1996). hooks (1990) has also argued against the over-simplifying discourse of positive and negative images, insisting that it tends to silence more complex engagements and disguise the ways in which racial subjectivity is reconstituted in contemporary society. The reigning wisdom in critical television studies of 'race' is still that television representations of blackness work largely to legitimate and secure the terms of the dominant cultural and social order by circulating within and remaining structured by them (Gray, 1993; hooks, 1992a). But, as Gray (1996) later acknowledges, assuming such wisdom can preclude the identification of alternative, occasionally oppositional, and certainly contradictory moments in the representations of race. Winant (1993) agrees that there is no longer any

single articulating principle through which to interpret the racial dimensions of cultural projects, while West (1993: 29) feels that the aim of social scientists is now 'not simply access to representation in order to produce more positive images - though broader access remains a practical and political problem. Nor is the primary goal here the contestation of stereotypes...'

One must be careful, since it *is* clearly still possible to identify positive and negative media framings of the lives of ethnic minorities in the sense of being more or less oppressive or empowering, as Chapter 4 reveals. Yet a continued focus on 'good' or 'bad' images perpetuates the idea that media texts possess unified and singular meanings. There is no consideration of how consumers create meaning for themselves, nor what the motivations and intentions of the producers are. After all, Miles (1989) makes the crucial point that it is often erroneously assumed that the expression of racism is synonymous with the communication of racism, in which the audience comprehends and accepts the ideology that has been identified as present. As the next section details, this is not necessarily the case when the actual consumption patterns of consumers are investigated empirically. From an advertising perspective, Brierley (1995: 202) also emphasises that there is no necessary link between the ideological meanings in ads and the behavioural responses of consumers. What is thus required, as hooks (1990) reminds us, is a more comprehensive understanding of the relationships between images and society, an understanding that can only come about via empirical investigations of the social relations of production and consumption of images.

Dyer (1993: 1) suggests that the majority of representation studies are driven by an anger and despair that can often block 'real investigation'; much image analysis, he opines, 'seems only to demonstrate that everything is the same and it's all awful'. This seems a controversial statement at first sight, implying perhaps that 'angry writing' (Keith, 1992) is undesirable, but his point is that textual analysis must attempt to engage with 'the complexity and elusiveness' of representations. Indeed, he goes on to argue that texts are too complex to analyse alone, and one needs to look at how they are embedded in social relations, which is where their complexity lies; this is in part due to the fact that

cultural forms do not have single, determinate meanings, but people make sense of them in different ways according to the cultural and sub-cultural codes available to them. The only way to do this is to conduct empirical work into the consumption of images. When this approach is advocated by such a doyen of textual analysis as Dyer (see Dyer, 1981; 1986; 1988; 1992), it is perhaps time to take notice.

## 2.6: Consuming Images

*'...what texts mean to their audiences can and ought to be researched rather than imagined... there is every reason to consider what might be learned from advertisements and their audiences through empirical research... to understand how advertising reflects and constitutes the social order, we must understand what it means to audiences'*

William O'Barr (1994)

Media studies in general have moved on from the conceptions of audience passivity and media power described in section 2.2. The relevant theoretical developments are well reviewed elsewhere (Morley, 1992; Morley, 1995; Curran *et al*, 1996), but a short summary will be helpful here to contextualise some of the work in the chapters which follow. There have been two principal shifts in position, both associated with the so-called 'new revisionism' movement in media and cultural studies (see Curran, 1996b). The first is the idea that television in particular produces relatively 'open' and 'ambiguous' products, in which different audiences can find different meanings (texts are said to be 'polysemic' - see Jensen, 1990). In this view, propounded most enthusiastically by John Fiske (1987; 1989a; 1989b), the responsibility for 'production' of meaning is largely delegated to the viewer. The second, related shift was to conceive of the audience as active producers of meaning. Instead of assuming that the audience responded in prescribed ways to fixed meanings in the texts, it was argued instead that 'meaning was constructed through the interaction of text and the social and discourse positions of audiences' (Curran, 1996b: 263).

Perhaps not surprisingly, this position developed from empirical work with audiences, most notably David Morley's seminal work with viewers of the

*Nationwide* programme (Morley, 1980). He revealed how different people consumed the programme in a variety of ways according to the different 'codes' and 'competences' they possess, in turn derived from their respective social experiences and positions (see Parkin, 1971; Hall, 1973, and Morley, 1974, on the theoretical background to this). These developments had consequences for assessments of media influence, which were largely downgraded. As some academics concluded that media influence was limited, attention began to shift from what Curran (1996a) calls the 'political aesthetic' to the 'popular aesthetic', namely from the study of the political significance of media representations to the question of why the mass media were popular. This led researchers to the notion that pleasure might be inherent in the consumption of media products, and to attempt to trace the roots of this pleasure (Kippax, 1988). Others have attempted to reconcile this acknowledgement of pleasure with the supposedly ideological content of the texts; Ang (1985), for example, in an ethnographic study of the consumption of *Dallas*, suggested that viewers possess different levels of engagement, that they could still enjoy the programme content while recognising its unrealistic or oppressive content.

The complex nature of cultural politics evident in Ang's study have also been exemplified by feminist accounts of the consumption of romantic fiction and of women's magazines. In a pioneering study of women readers of romance, Radway (1987) challenges the dominant but simplified assumption that such fiction reinforces women's dependence on men and an acceptance of repressive ideologies purveyed by popular culture; the more complex picture that emerges emphasises the pleasures of reading as an escape from domestic drudgery, but how, paradoxically, romantic fiction makes desirable the very roles which women are seemingly trying to escape through reading them. Ballaster *et al* (1991) and Hermes (1995) both highlight a similar 'escape' function in the reading of women's magazines, and try to challenge the opposition in much of the literature between an analysis of the magazine as a source of pleasure (to be celebrated) and the magazine as supplier of pernicious ideology (to be condemned). In a similar vein, my own study argues for a similarly complex and dialectical conception of the cultural politics of advertising.

The work of the new revisionists generated much debate around the notion of 'audience activity': essentially, how much freedom do audiences have in extracting meaning from media texts and, by the same token, to what extent is meaning determined by what is encoded in the text by producers? I shall only abstract this debate here, since whole theses could be written about it. Chapter 7 will also engage with some of the issues raised. Suffice to say that a number of scholars have taken the idea of textual openness and audience autonomy to an extreme. Some have suggested that meanings *only* exist in their circulation and not in their texts (Fiske, 1989b), that the manipulation of dominant meanings by viewers is a routine event (cf. Budd *et al*, 1990; Evans, 1990), and that, amidst the postmodern polysemy of media products and 'semiotic democracy' (Murdock, 1989) interpretive resistance is becoming more widespread than the reproduction of dominant meanings (Corner, 1991). There are a number of objections to such a position, not least that it is driven by a romantic notion of consumer empowerment that has little empirical foundation, while others see it as a celebration of pluralist, New Right philosophies (Morley, 1992; see also Williamson, 1986a, and Morris, 1988a). Perhaps more seriously, this model justifies the neglect of any questions concerning the economic, political and social forces that act upon the construction of a text (Brunsdon, 1989) and assumes that reception is the only stage of the circuit of culture that matters (cf. Frith, 1990; Morley, 1996). This is hardly any more desirable than the aforementioned studies that focused exclusively on the textual phase.<sup>5</sup>

One problem with much of this theoretical manoeuvring, as interesting as it sometimes can be, is that so little of it refers to empirical work with consumers (and when it does it is often the *same* pieces - Morley, 1980, and Ang, 1985,

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<sup>5</sup> These notions of textual openness rarely reached the realms of advertising studies (but see P. Willis, 1990, and Nava, 1992). This may be because, more than any other medium, advertising is produced with the intention of eliciting a preferred meaning (Goldman, 1992). It may also be because there has been such a paucity of studies that have taken anything more than a superficial, quantitative approach to advertising consumption, as many of the recent cultural studies texts on advertising point out - see Schudson, 1984; Cook, 1992; Davidson, 1992).

must be the most cited works in the field). When studies with actual consumers are conducted, some interesting insights emerge, confirming that different groups sometimes read the same media texts differently according to their identity, and cultural and political backgrounds, in addition to their viewing context (see Morley, 1986). A number of studies, for example, confirm Miles's (1989) assertion that apparently oppressive messages are not *necessarily* identified as such by the groups concerned, and that the picture is far more complex. Kaplan (1978), for example, reveals how female viewers often enjoyed aspects of their representation in *film noir*. Shively (1992), meanwhile, shows how many native American viewers of Western films side with the 'good' cowboy, as the narrative instructs them to (although more politicised native American students did not do this - and see Fiske, 1991); Brown and Schultze (1990) conclude that black and white students in America made very different interpretations of two Madonna videos. Bobo (1988) describes how African-American women often created their own meanings from the mainstream film *The Color Purple*, meanings that they felt to be beneficial and empowering to them; she echoes Morley (1980) by stating that 'The viewers' position in the social structure determines, in part, what sets of discourses or interpretive strategies they will bring in their encounter with the text' (103) (and see Jhally and Lewis, 1990, on diverse reactions to the *Cosby Show*, and a seminal study by Cooper and Jahoda, 1947, on the differential consumption of anti-racist cartoons).

Whilst such evidence of differential consumption is interesting, and a positive step in the light of the influence of the Frankfurt School, we must be careful not to essentialise the qualities that determine a particular reading. Although people's experience will play an important part in determining their access to particular cultural codes, socialisation is an ongoing process, and neither the codes themselves nor people's relations to them are fixed (Giddens, 1991; Gillespie, 1995: 53). Jackson and Taylor (1996) urge researchers to move beyond a simple investigation of how interpretations vary by gender, 'race' and class and to examine how and why advertisements, for instance, are appropriated and consumed by different groups in particular places.

Jackson and Taylor (1996) are not alone among geographers calling for empirical work to complement the burgeoning theoretical attention being paid to consumption (e.g. Jackson, 1993a; Gregson, 1995; Jackson, 1995; Jackson and Thrift, 1995). In 1990, Jacquie Burgess detected a reluctance on the part of geographers to work with consumers: 'Despite increasing interest in postmodernism and the recognition that symbolic meanings are unstable, continuously shifting between images, texts, buildings and objects (Dear, 1986; Eyles, 1987; Ley and Olds, 1988) few geographers seem willing, as yet, to undertake empirical research with consumers of postmodern meanings' (Burgess, 1990: 140). Burgess's call is beginning to be heeded by a number of writers in this field (comprehensively reviewed in Jackson, 1993a, and Jackson and Thrift, 1995) but, as both these reviews emphasise, there remains a relative dearth of empirical work on consumption. Gregson (1995) is highly critical of the 'masculine gaze' she sees underpinning recent textual analyses of advertising and the shopping mall by geographers. In addressing the agency of actual consumers through empirical work, as she demands, geographers can begin to explore how structural social inequalities interplay with consumption processes including the consumption of ads.

To some extent geographers have begun to lead the way in this area through investigations of the practices and values of consumers, emphasising their role as creative agents instead of privileging the analyst's own reading of, for example, 'spaces of representation' such as shopping malls and the urban environment (Goss, 1993b; Winchester, 1992). It appears that perhaps the 'ethnographic moment' (Jackson, 1995) in geographical consumption studies has arrived, as it becomes increasingly acknowledged that consumption is a geographically constituted process. Geographers have, for example, begun to concern themselves with commodity chains (Jackson and Thrift, 1995) as Ian Cook's account of the multiple sites in the commodity chains of tropical fruit testifies (Cook, 1994; see also Cook and Crang, 1996, on 'circuits of culinary cultures' within which foods, and knowledges about them, are produced and consumed; Miller, 1997a, on soft drinks in Trinidad; and Gereffi, 1994, on the clothing industry). The 'new retail geography' has turned its attention away from dominant accounts of retail malls and assumptions about global homogeneity (Jacobs, 1984; Kowinski, 1985; Shields, 1992) and focused on the practices



and skills of retailers and consumers and the emergence of new spaces and sites of consumption. It has also endeavoured, in some cases, to articulate the links between production and consumption (Crewe and Lowe, 1995; Lowe and Wrigley, 1996). Increasing attention has been paid to the relationship between consumption and identity (Jackson and Holbrook, 1995; Crang, 1996; Pred, 1996), while Glennie and Thrift (1996) have answered their own call for more historically sophisticated studies of consumption (Glennie and Thrift, 1992). Geographers have also been at the forefront of research into alternative consumption spaces such as those of the car boot sale and teleshopping (Gregson and Crewe, 1994; Gregson and Crewe, 1997; Davies and Llewelyn, 1988).

The more general reluctance of academics to study consumption, and the consumption of advertising in particular, may have its roots in a fear of being 'seduced' by what is seen by many on the Left as such an emblem of the market and New Right philosophy. This has manifested itself in an overwhelming focus on the geographies of production, in turn predicated upon the notion of consumption as being merely an extension of production (more of this below). The idea that people are increasingly forging their identities through consumption rather than production and occupational status (Lash and Urry, 1987; Connor, 1989; Bauman, 1990; Lash and Friedman, 1992; Smee, 1997) has been a difficult one for many. As Jackson and Thrift (1995: 220) explain, this has often led many critical studies of consumption to degenerate 'into a kind of vacuous moralising, substituting indignation and denunciation for genuine analysis'. Such an approach is not only politically naive, but fails to engage with the pleasures and ironies that can give consumer culture much of its power and, as Chapter 7 explains, some of its radical potential (and see Myers, 1986). Most importantly, by investigating empirically *how* consumers actually consume, it may become apparent that triumphalist New Right accounts are not as dominant as is often presumed.

One work in particular has demonstrated this point. Via an ethnographic study of young consumers, Paul Willis's (1990) account of *Common Culture* reveals the myriad ways in which young people consume a range of popular cultural

products. Although not a conventional ethnography (the book is a synthesis of the work of several writers), Willis traces domains such as music, cultural media, fashion and hairstyles in order to highlight the 'symbolic creativity' young people frequently employ in order to acquire 'cultural capital' and 'to establish their presence, identity and meaning' (2). In resisting the temptation to produce authoritative accounts of 'whole cultures' (those of ethnic minority youth, for example), Willis describes instead how people use their own cultural backgrounds as 'frameworks for living' and as repositories for the symbolic resources through which they creatively make sense of their lives. By taking such an active view of consumption, and viewing consumption as process (see Miller, 1987), Willis suggests there is considerable oppositional potential in consumer culture, including opportunities to develop a politics of resistance in the field of consumption (Chapter 7 further discusses the realities of such claims). For a text that purports to be a reaction to the exclusions of the high arts, *Common Culture* is itself disappointingly inaccessible and obfuscatory, but it does offer a welcome counter to traditional approaches to consumer culture which have failed to shed any light on how cultural products, particularly advertisements, are *used*. Willis puts this eloquently in his introduction, insisting that we need to move away from 'understanding the everyday through popular representation... [to] understanding popular representation through and in the everyday' (6).

Although Willis's work has much to recommend it, I see within it some of the risks associated with focusing exclusively on how cultural products are used, and ignoring the nature of the products themselves and how they are produced. The principal danger is an exaggerated view of consumer sovereignty and autonomy to produce meanings, often evident in the audience activity debate detailed above. Indeed, in a response to critics in Willis (1990), he concedes that social relations do not produce all meaning, and nor should we ignore textual quality and the privileged creativity necessary for the production of cultural texts. He argues that a focus on common culture and symbolic creativity is necessary to redress the balance of the whole debate. This might well be true, but it does not make his reading any less partial. This neglect of relations of production is consistent with many recent studies of consumption, and one which has manifested itself in geographers' own difficulties in getting away from

what Jackson and Thrift (1995: 211) call the 'tyranny of the single site'. Willis's comments above serve to highlight the requirement for academics to attempt to look at the whole circuit of culture in their studies of meaning, instead of focusing on one or two areas. The following section examines in more detail work that has, to some extent, achieved this, and that which has advanced debates through the analysis of the social relations of production. In doing so it spells out a crucial distinction upon which this thesis depends, that between the production of goods and the production of advertisements for such goods.

## 2.7: Producing Images

*'Studies that examine the symbols alone can make vital contributions but take the risk of sociological irrelevance if they do not consider the intentions of the symbol makers or the meanings that the audiences actually take from the cultural products in question'*

Michael Schudson (1984)

A productionist focus on society and its goods and services has dominated academic studies for some time (see Miller, 1987, and Du Gay, 1996, two writers who have developed their work explicitly in opposition to such tendencies). This focus has often led to a neglect of consumption issues (Myers, 1986; see Lash and Urry, 1994), since consumption has been seen as unproblematically derived from production, a moment in the circulation of capital and commodities that merely ensures the reproduction of the individual and of capital: 'The individual produces an object and, by consuming it, returns to himself, but returns as a productive and self reproducing individual. Consumption thus appears as a moment of production' (Marx, 1973). Such a view has been evident in advertising studies too, most notably by Williamson (1978, but see also Winship, 1980). Williamson insists, for example, that when considering the background of advertising texts, one must look to the 'real' production, that of the commodities themselves. She dismisses the people who are behind the production of the ads she analyses: 'Obviously people invent and produce adverts, but apart from the fact that they are unknown and faceless, the ad in any case does not speak for them, it is not their speech' (Williamson, 1978: 14).

Williamson's views have been echoed by a number of writers recently who have called for studies of advertising and consumption to get back to their productionist roots (McGuigan, 1992; Fine and Leopold, 1993; Jameson, 1993; Lee, 1994). Much of this work has arisen in response to some of the excesses of textual and symbolic analyses referred to earlier. I hope it is already clear that I share some of their dissatisfaction, and would criticise Nava's (1997) somewhat indignant response to such critics for failing to acknowledge the many shortcomings of these 'cultural' approaches (although she does correctly point out that not all consumption studies deal only with the symbolic, however rare the exceptions might be). However, the productionists' 'answers' to the problem are equally unacceptable in my opinion. McGuigan (1992) and Lee (1994) in particular urge a major reconsideration of the relations of production in order to return to a critical Marxist political economy, one 'which insists upon a determinate relationship between the production and consumption of symbolic forms' (McGuigan, 1992: 5). The production they refer to, however, is that of the commodity and not the ad; like Williamson (1978), they dismiss the production of the ad as irrelevant, effectively insisting that the conditions of production (and consumption) of the ad can be inferred from those of the production of the good. Their failure to distinguish between the production and consumption of the ad and that of the commodity could, of course, be forgiven if they provided any empirical evidence for their assertions. Unfortunately, in the climate of hostility towards advertising that has traditionally existed in academia, it has become far too easy to mount unsupported attacks on the industry and its products.

A further problem with the radical political economy approach to the media is its tendency to conceive of producers and consumers as existing in parallel but separate worlds, and whose interests are starkly opposed to one another. The media are seen as an arena in which class antagonisms are fought out, with the control of the media being in the hands of the dominant classes and explicitly employed as weapons in the arsenal of class domination (Miliband, 1973). The advertising industry has always been seen as very much a part of the dominant regime, to the point of being conceived as something of a conspiracy. Packard (1957) maintained a very monolithic and conspiratorial picture of the industry, a view that survives today: Ramamurthy (1990), for example, talks of all-powerful,

identifiable groups, while Charles (1993: 271) claims advertising is a 'power propagating medium, controlled by a dominant culture which sees itself as the norm' (and see O'Barr, 1994, quoted in section 2.4). Such a conception has much in common with the Frankfurt School's notion of passive consumers being manipulated by evil producers. When researchers have undertaken work with actual media producers, however, their investigations confirm Bobo's (1988: 96) assertion that,

'Producers of mainstream media products are not aligned in a conspiracy against the audience. When they construct a work they draw on their own background, experience and social and cultural milieu. They are therefore under ideological pressure to reproduce the familiar'.

Bobo's view is very reminiscent of that of Hall (1982), who saw the news media frequently orchestrating themselves around situations and standpoints which favoured 'the hegemony of the powerful', but this was due merely to the structure of access to the media, and not to any class conspiracy. There is little utility in treating the media as a monolithic, generic category (Curran, 1990; Beharrel, 1993; Curran, 1996a).

Angela McRobbie has long demanded that academics turn their attention to the professional and organisational ideologies which underpin the production of media texts (see McRobbie, 1994a: 165), and her own work with magazine publishers serves to show how misplaced some of the political economist conceptions of the producer-consumer divide can be (McRobbie, 1996). She implores scholars to adopt a detailed study of all the culture industries, which she insists will confirm the need to abandon the idea that producers and consumers operate in such separate worlds, and that the former are monolithic (see also Nixon, 1993; Du Gay and Negus, 1994; Du Gay, 1996). She records the many commonalities between the employees of magazine publishers and their readers: staff recruitment policies require prospective employees to embody the ideal *Cosmopolitan* woman, or *Just Seventeen* girl, for example; the publishers of *The Face* consider themselves part of the readership, with a shared identity; to employ McRobbie's very geographical language, magazine producers and consumers share the same 'spaces'. These spaces are getting smaller and smaller through market research too, as knowledge of consumers

increases. Leslie (1997b) has explored this in relation to advertising, and usefully refers to the 'tightening' of the circuit of culture as a result. Hochschild (1983), meanwhile, demonstrates how the 'quality service' ethic requires workers to identify with customers with the same wants, needs and desires as themselves, a trend increasingly evident in UK retail industries (Du Gay, 1996).

McRobbie's work, together with the above examples of the political economy perspective, serves to highlight the great dearth of academic work into the production of advertising. In the introduction to their edited volume, Nava *et al* (1997) suggest this is due to a combination of advertising agencies' carelessness about their own material histories and academic disdain for the industry. Yet, as those who have experience of working in the industry insist, one cannot begin to understand advertising until one understands the background of its production, and the objectives and motivations of its producers (Lury, 1994b; Davidson, 1992; Brierley, 1995; Moeran, 1996). A number of other writers have described the folly of ignoring the production processes that structure media content, thus ignoring the organisational and economic factors influencing media texts (Morley, 1992; McRobbie, 1994a; 1996; Curran *et al*, 1996). The small amount of work that has engaged with advertising's production is evidence of the potential rewards. Deborah Leslie included agency interviews in her aforementioned papers (Leslie, 1995; 1997b), while Frank Mort and Sean Nixon have both highlighted the significance of advertising agency practice for discourses of masculinity and the structure of the images produced (Mort, 1995; Nixon, 1993; 1997). Even more enlightening have been those studies that have considered both advertising's production *and* its consumption, as well as its texts, as the work of Davidson (1992) and Miller (1994; 1997a) testifies. Indeed, Miller (1997a) believes it imperative that academics consider both production and consumption in their analyses of commerce and culture, as he does himself using ethnography, with impressive results. Although he principally explores the production and consumption of advertising separately, Miller is keen to articulate the links between the two, largely in terms of the commonalities/discrepancies between the producers' intended meanings of an advertisement and the actual meanings taken away by consumers. It is a similar approach that I adopt in Chapter 7, with the notion

of consumer 'resistance' to advertising's dominant meanings providing one of the links between the consumption and production stages of my own research.

## 2.8: Youth, racialisation and advertising

One group of consumers is of particular interest to a study examining the interplay between racialisation and advertising, and that is teenage consumers. There has been much productive work undertaken with young people which has examined media and racialisation issues separately, so this group is arguably the most appropriate for a project that brings these two fields of study together. Young people and their experiences have tended to be excluded from the geographical literature, however, in spite of the extensive attention given to children's environments, behaviour and relationships to space and place, as Valentine *et al* (1997) note in the introduction to their edited collection on youth and youth cultures. They provide a useful summary of the work conducted loosely around the term 'youth' from other disciplines,<sup>6</sup> beginning with early studies from 1950's sociology and psychology, much of which was empirically rather weak. Valentine *et al* go on to highlight a number of research lacunae in the study of youth, some of which may be partially filled by my own empirical work.

Perhaps the greatest body of work to tackle issues related to young people has been that which has focused on 'subcultures', emanating initially from the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (e.g. Cohen, 1972; Hebdige, 1974; 1979; see also Hall and Jefferson, 1976; Willis, 1977). This work was often tinged with a certain romanticism about its subjects; which led writers to celebrate traces of what they saw as 'resistance' on the part of young people, and to overlook instances of more conformist, or conservative forms of

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<sup>6</sup> Valentine *et al* (1997) elucidate the definitional problems associated with a term like youth. In my own study the young people I interviewed were between the ages of 14 and 18 years; these years were selected because it was felt that they encompassed some of the main years of socialisation (see below), yet were not likely to include large gulfs in experience. The advertising industry's classifications vary, however, as Chapter 4 explains. Chapter 6 reveals that the respondents themselves encounter these same difficulties of definition.

behaviour. (Some of these examples are critiqued in Chapter 7, which, in the light of my empirical work, engages in a discussion about the nature of 'resistance' to advertising on the part of young people). Valentine *et al* (1997: 24) argue that an academic 'neglect of... young people who conform' still pervades, an issue that is tackled in Chapters 5 and 7 below, in the light of rather less than 'resistant' advertising consumption (and see Miller (1997a: 33), on academic neglect of 'normative' social behaviour in favour of 'difference' in a consumption studies context). With such a strong emphasis on subcultures, invariably classified as 'working class' and frequently urban, there has also been a conspicuous absence of work on more privileged young people, particularly those from the 'affluent absence of being' that are the suburban neighbourhoods (Allinson, 1994: 452). The present project goes some way to addressing this problem. By examining the advertising industry's view of young people as a market (in Chapter 4), the thesis also addresses one other gap identified by Valentine *et al*, namely the role played by this group 'in production and marketing for consumption'. It shows that the under-18's in particular are the subject of feverish attention by advertisers and marketeers, which arguably makes it one of the most interesting age groups for the study of media consumption. This fact is evidenced by the aforementioned studies by Gillespie (1995) and Paul Willis (1990), in addition to work from within media and education studies (e.g. Buckingham *et al*, 1990, and Nava, 1992); these studies and others have also shown that young people are the group most frequently targeted with racialised imagery, whose 'cultures' have been actively influenced by racialised minorities (cf. Hall, 1996) and who are widely regarded as the most media literate of audiences.

Furthermore, although socialisation can be seen as an ongoing process (Giddens, 1991), there is something of a consensus in the literature that adolescence is the most important time in the consolidation of one's identity (see Shorter-Gooden and Washington, 1996; Featherstone, 1990). As Paul Willis (1990: 7) explains, 'The teenage and early adult years are important from a cultural perspective... because it is here, at least in the first-world western cultures, where people are formed most self-consciously through their own and other symbolic activities'. Shorter-Gooden and Washington (1996) emphasise the importance of ethnicity and gender in this period of identity formation, and



some very interesting insights into issues of racialisation have emerged through engagements with young people. Pearson (1976), for example, employs an autobiographical, place-based ethnography in order to shed light on the processes of stereotyping by young Accringtonians; by providing a social and economic history of the town, Pearson succeeds in placing the reactions of local youth to migrant workers in the context of the dislocation of the lives of young workers in the town. In a pioneering study, Roger Hewitt (1986) examines the social and cultural forms that have emerged through inter-racial contact in early 1980's South London. Through an investigation of inter-racial friendships, he demonstrates how ideas about identity, and about Self and Other are particularly salient among adolescents, and how this age-group are of vital interest to our understanding of how racist ideas are both reinforced and subverted.

Hewitt's study acted as something of an inspiration for the work of Les Back. Back (1996), for example, reveals how issues of social identity, the emergence of new identities among hybrid forms of cultural expression and the development of new forms of racism all manifest themselves in the lives of young people in the multi-cultural city. In particular, he invokes Hall's 'periodization' of the development of black politics in Britain, especially the second phase, marked by the end of the notion of the 'essential black subject' and the emergence of so-called 'new ethnicities' (Hall, 1992). Back explores these multiply inflected forms of social identities (and racisms) in the context in which they most frequently manifest themselves in terms of cultural expression, namely youth, providing further evidence of the potential rewards of research with this age group.

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This chapter has traced the contours of the literature on racialisation, advertising and youth, in human geography and elsewhere, and emphasised the potential interplay between them. It is not intended to be an exhaustive review, but serves to highlight the various debates that have led me to my subject matter. I have identified several research lacunae that have prompted the focus of my project. Not only has so little work on advertising examined more than one phase in the circuit of culture, and even less in relation to 'race'

and racialisation, but there is a dearth of empirical work with producers or consumers (in spite of countless *calls* for such work). This retreat from the empirical has helped to perpetuate many regrettable assumptions about the power of advertising and the media, and the nature of its audiences. It is hoped that this project can contribute in some small way by bucking this trend. It does so by addressing a number of the gaps identified in this chapter, primarily by tackling several points in the circuit of culture or multiple 'sites' (Jackson and Thrift, 1995). It engages directly with both producers *and* consumers; it looks at texts *and* how they are read; it explores the conditions and relations of production behind the advertising texts; and it compares the consumption of advertising by young people in two contrasting social and geographical contexts. In doing so it seeks to investigate advertising as a site of racialisation, and to draw conclusions about its significance in the lives of teenage consumers.

# 3

## Research methodologies

### 3.1: Implementing the research objectives

The project's intention to engage with three areas of the circuit of advertising (production, texts, readings) had obvious consequences for the choice of research design and methodologies, with a 'mixed-methods' approach the only realistic option (cf. Brannen, 1992). This chapter outlines the methodological framework, the various techniques employed, and the alternatives that were considered. It acknowledges criticisms of the techniques and discusses some of the difficulties encountered. In addition to addressing some of the ethical concerns raised, it also reflects upon my own role and position in the research process.

The methodological framework of the research included, at various stages, in-depth group discussions, corporate interviews, participant observation, secondary source analysis, and both quantitative and semiotic content analysis. Whilst Ley (1988) has expounded the virtues of a 'varied methodological arsenal', the present project could be accused of taking this to an extreme with such a plethora of techniques. However, the vast majority of guides to research methods in the social sciences insist that methodological adequacy depends solely on the objectives of the research, and the extent to which the chosen framework facilitates the fulfilment of these objectives. In this case, the objectives of the project were broad enough to demand such a range of methods, whose application will be detailed, and justified, below. Moreover, whilst a wide range of methods was employed there remained important links between them. For example, as we shall see below, I talked to producers of some of the ads whose content I 'read', and which I then showed to and discussed with selected consumers.

The field of research was carried out between July 1995 and June 1996 from a base in. The fieldwork was an iterative and reflexive process, permitting each stage of the research to inform the next. This involved staggering the work with producers and consumers throughout the year; the intention being to enable me to question producers about issues raised with consumers, and vice-versa.

### **3.2: Researching producers: participant observation**

The research into the production of advertising was designed to fulfil two related objectives. The more specific of these was to identify the immediate factors influencing the creation of racialised meaning in advertising. The second was to establish the patterns of more general advertising practice that underpinned the explicitly racialised image production. It was initially hoped that both objectives could be met through a combination of interviews with advertising agency personnel, and a regular review of the trade literature (usually a reliable barometer of industry sentiment, and which reflects and affects the industry world view - see Mort, 1995: 514; Leslie, 1997b: 3). However, some problems early on in the fieldwork prompted me to change tack somewhat. Interviews and the examination of secondary sources remained an important part of this stage of the research, but were subsumed in what became the primary research method in this phase of the research, namely participant observation.

My intention had been to arrange face-to-face interviews with agency personnel, similar to the open-ended corporate interview advocated by Schoenberger (1991), and beginning with those behind some of the campaigns selected for semiotic analysis. This strategy immediately ran into trouble at the recruitment stage. I had decided to target the account planners or account managers, but accessing them on the telephone was very difficult.<sup>1</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> For the reader who is less familiar with the often mysterious world of advertising, the fundamental players and processes involved in the development of an advertisement are detailed in Appendix 1.

problem to which I had been alerted in advance, of bypassing secretaries, was less the difficulty than the personnel rarely being at their desk. Once contacted, the first three agency employees all rejected the suggestion of a face-to-face meeting, citing the myriad demands on their time; indeed, as one account manager remarked, "I'm sorry but students are not top of my list" (Christy Stewart-Smith, J Walter Thompson). Meanwhile, I encountered problems accessing the required trade sources; local academic libraries were disappointingly unaccommodating, and the City Business Library too far away to visit regularly. I decided that my best chance of obtaining the fieldwork data I needed (both secondary sources and potential interviewees) was to gain access to an advertising agency as an employee.

I wrote speculative letters to the top 20 London 'full-service' agencies (those capable of executing a campaign from start to finish) enquiring about the possibility of part-time or temporary employment. My research intentions were not mentioned in the approach - instead I sold myself as a student in need of work. After an interview, I was taken on in December 1995 as an 'Information Analyst' at the London office of one of the world's largest agency networks. My job was to conduct secondary source research in response to requests from agency personnel from agencies in the global network, and in particular from the UK arm of the network. For research purposes, this job was perfect. Not only did it ensure I had regular contact with a huge range of personnel (from the most junior account staff to the Chairman), but most were very grateful for the assistance I provided; for this reason, many felt as if they owed me something, and were more than happy to talk to me about their work and the industry once they realised I was a student. Working in the Information Department also afforded me access to information sources that would have been totally inaccessible to anyone outside the industry. Examples included a huge cuttings archive (articles from British daily newspapers, as well as some European and American dailies, had been filed under subject headings going back five years), back issues of all the major Anglo-American trade journals (some dating back to the 1980's), on-line information databases (such as FT Profile and Register-MEAL advertising expenditure data), a library of advertising text books targeted at both academic and practitioner audiences, market research reports and

'confidential' agency research reports. I also attended an Institute of Practitioners in Advertising (IPA) conference on behalf of the agency.<sup>2</sup>

McCall and Simmons (1969) stress that participant observation is not a single method, but is instead, 'a characteristic style of research which makes use of a number of methods and techniques - observation, informant interviewing, document analysis, respondent interviewing and participation with self-analysis' (1). During the three months I spent at the agency, I engaged in most of the above techniques. Observations and the self-analysis of participation were recorded in a daily diary, with entries made during the day if necessary and possible, and at the end of each working day. This proved to be an extremely valuable resource (see Crang, 1994). Although much of it was only indirectly relevant to the thesis, it succeeded in capturing the organisational climate and flavour of life in the agency; of particular use were small details which might have seemed trivial at the time, and which might well have been forgotten had they not been recorded, but which assumed greater significance during analysis (throwaway comments by agency staff about particular campaigns, for example, that spoke volumes for their broader attitudes towards the medium - see Chapter 7, section 3).

I was given permission by my department to use their vast library resources out of office hours. Hakim (1987) notes that there are no general guidelines for analysing documentary sources. Some of my searches were systematic (investigating particular subject areas such as the youth market and advertising complaints); others were less so, consisting of the general perusal of trade literature and following up particular stories of interest. Relevant items were either copied, borrowed, or entered into my daily diary.

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<sup>2</sup> There may be some disquiet about the fact that I was engaged in full-time employment whilst in receipt of an ESRC grant. However, the ESRC permits students to work for a maximum of six hours per week over the course of the three. My three months at the advertising agency was the only work I undertook during my PhD, and totalled little more than half the permitted hours.

Interviews with agency staff were an important part of the research at the agency and took two main forms. The first was the pre-arranged interview, either with people in particular positions of authority or interest, or in one case with the account manager for one of my selected campaigns. These either took place in their office, or over lunch, with the latter being preferable since they could not then be interrupted. The more common form of 'interview', however, consisted of brief conversations whenever there was a free moment, either when I was handling requests for staff, in the agency bar after work, or even in the corridors. McCracken (1988) stresses the need to be sensitive to respondents' time constraints, and to be as unobtrusive as possible. In order for me to retain goodwill and trust with many agency employees, it was imperative that I did not become a 'nuisance', and these short snatches of conversation were all that I could expect from some staff. They often proved as productive as the more formal interviews, however, since people were noticeably less guarded ( and, like Miller (1997a), I also obtained some valuable information by 'listening in' to the interactions of other agency employees). It was not appropriate for me to take notes during either type of interview encounter, which ensured that the field notes in the daily diary assumed added significance.

Among the resources in the Information Department were details of rival agencies and their staff. These were useful in helping me track down the relevant personnel to interview about my selected campaigns. In the light of my experience of agency life, I decided that these were best conducted by telephone. I was surprised how well this medium worked, once consent to be interviewed had been obtained. There was considerable enthusiasm on the part of some employees to talk about their work - many seemed grateful to have someone showing an interest. These encounters involved me frantically taking notes by hand. One very useful source (Ann Binnie, a freelance consultant specialising in the youth market) was introduced to me over lunch by a colleague in my department, who was aware of my interest in the youth market. This epitomised the treatment I received from many at the agency, without whose help the research would have been considerably more difficult (I was

allowed to take days off from my job in order to conduct group interviews in schools, for example).

The details of the interviews I conducted are presented below in *Table 3.1*. I have decided to use pseudonyms for certain employees with whom interviews were less formal, and who were consequently less guarded than they might otherwise have been; when the employee knew exactly who I was, and my motivations, their real name has been given. Precisely what I asked the interviewees varied considerably according to their position and responsibilities, although there were kinds of questions common to all the interviews. These included enquiries about specific campaigns (the thinking behind creative briefs, target markets, how ads were received), future plans for the brand and current advertising debates.



**Table 3.1: Interviews with advertising producers**

| <b>Name</b>           | <b>Agency</b>           | <b>Position</b>   |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|
| Margaret Hewitt       | A leading Top 10 agency | Planning director |
| Larry Graham          | A leading Top 10 agency | Account planner   |
| Anne Binnie           | Freelance               | Consultant        |
| Matt Gray             | Low Howard-Spink        | Account manager   |
| Mark Sands            | HHCL                    | Account manager   |
| John Bentley          | CIA Medianetwork        | Researcher        |
| Ivor Hussein          | Low Howard-Spink        | Head of research  |
| Neil Orton            | McCann Erickson         | Account director  |
| Peter Small           | Low Howard-Spink        | Creative          |
| Christy Stewart-Smith | J Walter Thompson       | Account manager   |
| Alan Waldie           | Low Howard-Spink        | Creative director |
| Caroline Young        | McCann Erickson         | Account director  |
| Peter Bracegirdle     | Simons Palmer           | Account manager   |
| John Rocastle         | CIA Medialab            | Research director |
| Mark Baker            | Sun Alliance            | Marketing manager |
| John McDonald         | A leading Top 10 agency | Creative          |
| Tony Beresford        | TBWA                    | Creative Director |
| Tom Knotman           | A leading Top 10 agency | Creative          |
| Roger Small           | Daily Mail              | Public relations  |

### 3.2.1: Difficulties and issues in participant observation

Although I consider this stage of the research to have been successful, I still encountered a number of problems, both practical and personal/ethical. The most frustrating element was my attempt to deal with the personnel behind the campaigns I selected. Not only were they difficult to track down, but some proved impossible to contact. Two accounts (Snapple and Budweiser) had changed hands since the ads were screened, and staff at the old agency were not prepared to discuss the accounts. My attempt to contact the marketing manager responsible for the Snapple campaign was also unsuccessful. The account director of Persil was very suspicious of my request for a telephone interview, and demanded I put the questions in writing; when I did, a junior account handler replied, with incredible brevity, failing to answer several of the questions. Their reply is discussed in Chapter 4 (the written medium was considerably more successful with an executive at another agency with whom I was in regular e-mail contact, a medium which allowed the space for considered reflection).

How the researcher reconciles their role as academic with whatever position they hold in the field is often a big issue in participant observation (Crang, 1994). When I took the place at the agency I decided that my role as Information Analyst would always have to take priority over all else, for the time that I was there; they were paying me to do a job (which, as for another cash-starved PhD student, Crang (1994), ensured that the work was always more than just research), and it was my duty to fulfil my obligations to them. However, what made my dual existence easier was the blurring that occurred between the two roles: much of the research I was doing for agency staff was useful for my own project (for instance, I undertook a substantial project on the advertising industry's conception of the youth market for one account team, research which formed an important part of my own fieldwork data). Some colleagues aided the process of reconciliation too, by allowing me to pursue my research interests overtly (by going to chat to another member of staff, for example), when business was quiet at least, thus avoiding many of the tangles associated with covert research (e.g. Keith, 1992). It also meant I avoided the traumas of arrival and departure scenes that characterise much ethnography (Pratt, 1986).

On occasions I was a little more covert, however, pursuing other (academic) interests under the cover of work for the agency (much in the same way that de Certeau, 1984, describes); the freedom and autonomy I had in my agency job permitted such tactics, but they still generated flushes of guilt. Similarly, some of my interviewees were not fully aware of the details of my project. For some, I just had a broad interest in advertising; to others, I was interested in the youth market in particular; on no occasion did I explicitly mention racialisation as a research interest. I had decided, partly in the light of discussions with my supervisor, that citing such an interest could cause unwanted difficulties; interviews in which 'race' and racism had been raised demonstrated clearly that such issues were far from the minds of agency staff, and several people were uneasy talking about them. I felt that to raise them outside the context of particular campaigns would only cause confusion and perhaps suspicion about my motives. Cook and Crang (1994) point out that few, if any, researchers are completely honest when in the field. Most of those to whom I tactically omitted information about my project were not desperately interested in it anyway; if they had been, and had pressed me further, I would perhaps have revealed more. Such selective disclosure is deceitful at one level, but, like Keith (1992), I believe it to be defensible.

### **3.3: Content analysis: qualitative and quantitative approaches**

As Chapter 2 explain, content analyses from within cultural and media studies have been predominantly semiotic in their approaches in recent years (Kellner, 1991; Goldman, 1992 among many others), involving the deconstruction of selected advertisements. However, there has remained a strong trend of quantitative research from within marketing and business schools, and particularly in the United States. Fine and Leopold (1993) lament the dearth of similarly quantitative studies from within the social sciences, attacking what they see as the 'self-serving selection' of advertisements which underpins semiotic analyses. Whilst they perhaps overstate their case, I would agree that there are certainly advantages to be gained from a quantitative study, with data about the prevalence and frequency of representations, for example, able to serve as a useful platform for further enquiry (cf. Griffin *et al*, 1994). However, such

methods have many shortcomings, not least that they tell us nothing about the *quality* of representations; the latter can be achieved via more semiotic studies of advertising's content. I would therefore concur with Ley (1988) who insists that anti-positivist sentiment within geography should not preclude the use of quantitative data, and with Smith (1975) that a transcendence of the dualism should be encouraged by employing a combination of methods in content analyses (see also Abrahamson (1983) on the decision to analyse *manifest* or *latent* content). This section outlines the twin approaches I employed to analyse the content analysis of advertising images.

### 3.3.1: A quantitative study

One of the few quantitative studies to investigate the representation of minority groups was conducted in the US by Wilkes and Valencia (1989). Their study was first published in the *American Journal of Advertising* and tackles both 'strategic' and 'societal' implications of the portrayal of black and hispanic characters in advertising, implicitly targeting an audience of both practitioners and academics. They sought to build on previous studies of African-Americans and TV advertising (Dominick and Greenberg, 1970; Greenberg and Mazingo, 1976; Bush *et al*, 1977) and suggest how portrayals have changed over time (they conclude that there are now more black and hispanic characters in TV commercials than has ever been the case). Given the apparent success of their methodology, and in order to fulfill a parallel objective of a comparative study of British and American portrayals (see Taylor, 1997) it was decided to replicate part of Wilkes and Valencia's work in order to investigate the portrayal of black characters in British TV advertising<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Miller (1997a) describes how the racialised nature of advertising can be very different in different advertising media (TV vs. Press, for example), so the decision was made in this project to concentrate, where possible, on one particular medium. Television was chosen for two reasons: firstly, some of the most interesting content analyses to have dealt with minority representations analysed TV ads (see above); secondly, I was advised by a number of teachers that I would find it easier to sustain discussions with young people about television than printed matter.

Following Wilkes and Valencia's American example, the set of advertisements analysed was obtained by recording three hours of prime-time (7.00pm - 10.00pm) television broadcasting on each of the two UK commercial channels (ITV and Channel 4) for seven consecutive days. This amounted to just under 41 hours of programming and their embedded advertisements (approximately 80 minutes of broadcast were lost for technical reasons). The recordings were made by Television Services at Sheffield University, and took place between 1 and 7 July 1995 inclusive. Since ITV programming is regionally specific, the fact that the recordings were made in Sheffield might be an issue when interpreting results. For example, with ethnic minorities constituting around 20 per cent of the population in London, ads on London's Carlton Television may feature more black characters than those in Yorkshire. Whilst many advertisers will target particular TV regions, a number of advertising agency account planners have insisted that it would be very unusual for the creative work for TV advertising to be tailored to the audience of a particular region. Consequently, the above scenario of regionally differential representation was not thought to be a significant problem.

A content analysis by Stearns *et al* (1987) in the US has been criticised for using as its sample broadcasting from widely differing programming periods (i.e. weekday mornings, week nights, weekends, *etc.*). Thus, although 381 ads were analysed, the sample from any one period would have been substantially smaller. In the present study it was decided to analyse ads from a regular broadcast period, and that prime-time would be the most suitable choice. Although the ITC defines prime-time as 6.30 p.m. - 10.30 p.m. in the U.K., Wilkes and Valencia and the other American studies mentioned above all defined it as 7 p.m. - 10 p.m. Since one aim of this study was to facilitate a comparison with Wilkes and Valencia, it was their definition of prime-time that was used.

Once the programming had been recorded, all the advertisements that appeared were transferred to a master tape for each channel, ready for content analysis using the same classification specified by Wilkes and Valencia.

The three principal categories used in the study were the *frequency of appearance* of black (African-Caribbean) characters in the ads, *their perceived importance* to the ads in which they appear, and the *product advertised*.<sup>4</sup> Wilkes and Valencia justify their categories by highlighting the 'wide use' of these same categories in previous studies (e.g. Stearns, Unger and Luebke, 1987; Bush, Resnik and Stearn, 1980). Using a scale of '1' to '9 or more', the total number of people in each advertisement was classified into groups of males, females, black males and black females, with the figures for each group being compared to the total number of people in each advertisement. Whilst this thesis will refrain from interpreting these figures as measures of 'integration', as Wilkes and Valencia insist, such figures are very useful in determining certain qualities of representation. For example, one can investigate whether or not the tendency in the US for there to be more people in advertisements including black characters than in those without black characters (Bush, Solomon and Hair, 1977) applies equally to the UK. Perceived importance of the characters concerns their overall position in the commercials and was assessed through the use of three categories, as defined by Wilkes and Valencia:

*Major role* - very important to the advertisement theme or layout, shown in foreground and/or shown holding the product and/or appears to be speaking

*Minor role* - average importance to the advertisement theme or layout, does not appear to speak or handle the product

*Background role* - hard to find, not important to the advertisement theme or layout

Meanwhile, the principal product or service being advertised was coded to give an indication of whether or not black characters are concentrated in a narrow

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<sup>4</sup> African-Caribbean characters were chosen initially in order to facilitate an international comparison - see Taylor (1997). This is not to deny that parallel issues of representation exist for other groups - for example, a less systematic analysis of the recorded ads indicates that British Asian characters are underrepresented to a far greater degree than African-Caribbeans.

range of products, perhaps as a result of the perceived connotations of elements of blackness.

A total of 602 advertisements with live models were analyzed, and of these 363 were duplicates (i.e. they were the second, or more, showing of the same ad). Some might argue that these multiple insertions should not be included in any analysis for they will serve to bias the results; yet their inclusion provides a fuller picture of the actual incidence of particular characters during the stated period, and it was decided to follow Wilkes and Valencia and to include them. Any substantial differences in the results due to the exclusion of these duplicates are highlighted in the presentation of results in Chapter 4. The American study only provided data in the form of proportions of those *advertisements* which featured African-Americans. It was felt that a more complete picture could be obtained for the UK material by presenting the proportions of *characters* too, since this would present a slightly more accurate record of the incidence of black characters for the whole broadcast period. The content analysis was also conducted with the aid of a remote control, allowing the pausing and rewinding of the ads, and is thus more likely to reflect the actual incidence of black characters than a casual observer would be able to establish (it enabled the researcher to identify those characters, for example, whose role could only be described as 'so background as to be almost invisible').

### 3.3.2: A semiotic analysis of selected ads

This stage of the research fulfilled several objectives. In addition to seeking illustrative examples of some of the representational trends signposted in the quantitative study, I hoped to fill in part the research lacuna identified by Jackson and Taylor (1996) of investigating how the same ads are read by different people in different places. This required my selecting particular ads to show to respondents in two different places. I also felt there was a need for some tangible continuity that could provide a focus through the various stages of the research. By selecting ads at the 'textual' stage and analysing their content, discussing the production of these ads with advertising employees and

then screening these same ads in the consumer research, this need was satisfied.

Nine ads were 'purposively selected' (Frankenberg, 1993), with two extra ones being shown in the first two 'pilot' groups. As well as recording some of the conventions of the representation of black characters identified in the quantitative study, they were chosen because it was thought that they would raise particular questions in the consumer discussion groups. Seven of the nine ads had featured in the quantitative study, to which was added Nike Cantona (due to the subject matter of the ad, tackling racism in football) and Snapple (due to the creative acclaim that had been bestowed upon it). The issues that it was thought these selected ads might raise include (racialised) constructions of whiteness (Daily Mail, Sun Alliance), blackness (Lilt, Persil, Reebok), Asianness (Snapple), America (Budweiser) and masculinity (Nike Revolution). Stills from the ads are included in Chapter 4.3.2.

The content of these ads is analysed briefly in Chapter 4 below, from my own perspective as a white, male researcher. My objections to the tendency for many commentators to privilege their own readings of ads have been elucidated in Chapter 2, and are the reasons behind the relative brevity of the analyses. This approach can be contrasted with the often extraordinary depths to which the likes of Williamson (1978) and Goldman (1992) take their analyses, but whose detail can become prolix and obfuscatory. I have confined my analysis to a description of the narrative of each ad and its significance, including an elucidation of the racialised structures which governed each selection.

### **3.4: Targeting the consumer: In-depth group discussions**

#### **3.4.1: Choosing a field site**

Gillespie (1995) and Murdock (1989) have emphasised the importance of targeting 'sites of strategic social interaction' in studies of television and media



consumption, places in which TV is routinely talked about and its meanings negotiated (see Jackson and Holbrook, 1995, on the need to explore the social contexts of consumption). I decided to use schools as the sites of my consumption studies; not to conduct an ethnographic study of the school, as Gillespie did, but in order to access the social processes through which media meanings are constructed and consumed. The school has been identified as an important influence on young people's identities and thinking, an environment in which opinions are formed (Sefton-Green, 1990; see also Burgess *et al*, 1991). It also has a number of advantages as a research site, providing relatively easy access to potential respondents, rooms that can be adapted for interviews and audio-visual equipment; teachers can also act as 'brokers' in order to gain access to respondents.

As Chapter 2 explains, I wanted to explore the consumption of advertising in different social and geographical contexts. This suggested the need for at least two schools, a model that has been successfully adopted by a number of researchers in related fields (Barry, 1988; Buckingham *et al*, 1990; Bonnett, 1993a; Dwyer, 1997a). Given Keith's (1993) interesting observations about the racialisation of particular areas of the city, I decided to conduct research in two contrasting districts: the inner-city and the suburban commuter belt. The suburbs can be just as racialised as the inner city, albeit by different people and in different ways (Davis, 1990; Derber, 1996), but have rarely been the focus of social scientists' attention. Indeed, Savage *et al* (1992) and Crompton (1992) both lament the dearth of *any* research on the middle-classes, but this is particularly the case with respect to racialised issues. That such investigations can be productive has been demonstrated by Perrin (1988), Twine (1996) and Farough (1997).

#### 3.4.2: Choosing a strategy

My first decision was to choose between quantitative and qualitative techniques. In making such a stark choice I was arguably perpetuating an unhelpful dualism between the two approaches that has been pervasive in many of the social sciences since the anti-positivist backlash identified by Ley

(1988); indeed, as Gillespie (1995: 52-53) notes, it is a judicious *combination* of the qualitative and quantitative that can often provide the most complete picture in studies of consumption. However, in the light of my intentions to investigate three areas of the circuit of advertising, the breadth and depth of enquiry into consumption which Gillespie herself undertakes would have been out of the question, and superfluous given my research objectives. I decided that qualitative methods offered the best prospects of fulfilling these aims (and see Mackay, 1997: 11).

The relative merits of qualitative and quantitative approaches to media audience research are well rehearsed (see Morley, 1992) but are worth repeating here, since the employment of any methodological framework necessarily involves the rejection of others. Quantitative empirical study in the positivist tradition has been the favoured approach in audience research for many years, and has concentrated on isolating the effects of communication processes on different sections of the audience (largely through survey techniques). The limitations of such enquiry, which amount to little more than measurement, are manifold. Wober (1981) is particularly scathing, proclaiming that such quantitative registration of viewing-related behaviour does little to contribute to academic understanding, and consequently, 'does not constitute research or even half of research' (cited in Morley, 1992: 174). It is argued here that such quantitative studies (and this includes the quantitative content analysis described below) raise more questions than they answer by failing to engage with the *how's* and *why's* of the consumption of media products (see McCracken, 1988, on how quantitative research can never obviate the need for qualitative research). In the context of the measurement of audience size, Ang (1990) points out that quantitative studies necessarily treat the audience members as 'units of equal value'. Given that a fundamental aim of my research is to see how advertising is differentially consumed by different people, such an assumption would render my research impracticable. What quantitative approaches essentially fail to capture is the complexity of people's engagement with the media, the fact that TV consumption, for example, is inextricably linked to other areas of people's lives and identities. Given that quantitative studies of identity are also arguably too narrow and too one-dimensional for the research questions in hand (see Weinrich's Identity Structure Analysis, for instance), it

was felt that qualitative methods were the only serious option for the consumption stage of my research.

#### 3.4.3: Adopting the in-depth group discussion

Given the need to explore people's attitudes, perceptions, and identities the methodological choice was between in-depth individual interviews, some form of group interview technique, and ethnography/participant observation. There are a number of examples of ethnography having been used successfully to investigate issues of (racialised) identities among young people. Roger Hewitt (1986), for example, used ethnographic fieldwork to investigate the relationships between racial attitudes and inter-racial friendships among adolescents in two areas of South London. His work to some extent acted as a model for that of Les Back, who has published widely from his own ethnographic work in South London (Back, 1993a; 1993b; 1994; 1996). Back has used extensive participant observation to investigate the expression of gendered and racialised social identities in the urban environment, and the popular racism with which such identities are so often inflected. Given our different research foci, his on urban culture, and mine on television advertising, to replicate Back's methodological approach would have been unwise. Hobson (1982) has used participant observation in her studies of media audiences, but it is Gillespie (1995) who has employed the ethnographic model (in tandem with survey methods) with great success in a subject area similar to my own. In her study of young Punjabis in Southall, she describes how their lives and local cultures are shaped in the course of their engagement with the media, and in particular televisual narratives. Yet for Gillespie, a particular locality and its geography was the context for the study, just as it was for Back, and this made the employment of participant observation far more appropriate than it would have been for my work. Moreover, the key to the success of Gillespie's project (and any ethnography which seeks to explore identity issues - see Shaw, 1988 for example) was that it was undertaken over several years; such a time scale was just not an option for me, not to mention the practical and ethical difficulties of negotiating access to groups of young people over such an extended period.

Individual, semi-structured interviews can offer many advantages for researchers who seek to gain access to attitudinal and identity issues, with the principal benefit being the depth of enquiry that can be achieved. Indeed, they have been used successfully to investigate ethnic and racialised identities (Brah, 1978; Frankenberg, 1993), to tackle issues pertinent to adolescents (Carpenter *et al*, 1988), and in audience studies (Wren-Lewis, 1985; Jensen, 1990). However, I felt that individual interviews failed to meet the requirements of my research in one important regard. No matter how reflexive and dynamic the relationship between the researcher and researched might be, the method remains limited by the fact that this relationship remains the primary focus throughout. Whilst I was interested in how individuals consumed media to some extent, I was aware that to assume that such consumption occurred in isolation would be erroneous (see Mills, 1963). I therefore wanted to access the *social* processes through which advertising meanings are constructed and consumed, a desire which, as Chapter 2 explains, prompted the adoption of the school as a research site. I felt that only the group discussion could satisfy these particular methodological requirements.

The in-depth discussion group has become increasingly popular within the social sciences in recent years, although considerable diversity exists in its application according to the field in which it is employed and the research objectives (Lunt and Livingstone, 1996). The group interview technique has existed since the beginning of the Second World War, when it was used to determine the effectiveness of radio programmes to boost army morale (Merton, 1987; Morgan, 1988; Berg, 1995). Although initially having an impact in American sociology departments via Merton and Kendall (1946) and Merton *et al* (1956), the technique fell out of favour until being resurrected by market researchers in the 1960's, who have long used its 'focused' variety as their primary qualitative research method (see Bartos, 1986, for a history of the technique in marketing). One of the pioneers of the method, Lazarsfeld (1969), recalls how he used the fruits of his expertise in assisting market researchers in order to fund his favoured political applications of the technique. The group interview was 'rediscovered' by social scientists during the 1980's and applied within a diverse array of subject areas (see Berg, 1995, Chapter 4 for a

summary). Of particular interest here is the technique's employment within human geography and media research.

Media and communications scholars have tended to favour the focus group version of the method, defined by Krueger (1988: 2) as 'a carefully planned discussion group designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment' (see Morgan, 1988; Buckingham, 1987; Schlesinger *et al*, 1992). Often (but not always) convened on one occasion only, the participants are encouraged to discuss a narrowly defined issue in the presence of a moderator. It has proved particularly popular in studies of audiences and their engagement with specific media products (see Morley, 1980; Silverstone, 1985; Richardson and Corner, 1986; Frazer, 1987; Corner *et al*, 1990). It was introduced to human geography largely through the work of Burgess *et al* (1988a; 1988b; 1988c and continually modified for Harrison and Burgess, 1994), who chose to adhere instead to the practices of Group Analysis from psychotherapeutic studies (after Foulkes, 1948; 1967). These groups were far less focused, allowing participants to explore their individual and collective values for the environment. In Burgess *et al*'s research the group participants also met on up to six occasions. Evidence that the group discussion method has been accepted within geography can be found in a recent special issue of *Area*, dedicated to the focus group technique (*Area* 28(2), 1996). My own adaptation of the group discussion technique lies some way between the focused media studies application, and the more open-ended application of Burgess *et al*; as section 3.2.3 explains, discussion in my groups began very generally, allowing the students to raise issues that they felt to be important, but became progressively more focused around issues I hoped to cover.

According to Morgan and Spanish (1984), group discussions benefit by combining the strengths of other qualitative methods. They allow the process of interaction, like participant observation, but also enable the researcher to gain access to the perceptions and experiences of the respondents, as in in-depth individual interviewing. They work by tapping into human tendencies, such as the predisposition to form groups and engage in collective interactions,

interactions which in part help to develop our attitudes and perceptions (Foulkes, 1948; Pines, 1983; Krueger, 1988). Indeed, the main advantage of the group discussion method as I see it is that, as Morgan (1988) points out, it relies on group interaction to provide the data, insights that would be less accessible without such interaction. Brown (1993, cited in Holbrook and Jackson, 1996) emphasises how groups play a crucial role in establishing people's identities; the group discussion recognises this social context in which meanings and identities are constructed, and to some extent mirrors the communication processes implicated in such construction in the daily lives of the respondents.

This thesis argues that the consumption of media products does not terminate at the moment of reception (see Miller, 1987), but extends to the social sphere in which meanings are debated, negotiated, re-created, and in which opinions are formed (see Burgess *et al*, 1988a: 310); group discussions can afford insights for the researcher into these discursive (re)constructions of meaning. For example, Taylor and Mullan (1986) point out that TV is intended to be received in a domestic context, which is itself characterised by conversational exchanges. A similar point is taken up by Abercrombie (1996), who is adamant that the group interview is the method most suited to TV research, because watching and talking about TV is a collaborative act, and one undertaken in a range of social contexts (Burgess *et al*, 1991). Lunt and Livingstone (1996) invoke this argument in defending the validity of qualitative methods; they insist that by simulating the situations in which meaning is produced in everyday life, such methods compensate for their lack of reliability (relative to some quantitative techniques) with greater validity. Liebes and Katz (1990) are also unequivocal about the simulative element, although they do question whether people ever talk in quite such a sustained way about television as they would do in a research group. Buckingham (1987), meanwhile, sees the enthusiasm for TV talk in discussion groups as evidence of this research process mirroring everyday discussions on the same subject, something I would concur with in the light of my interviews (see Goss and Leinback, 1996, on group discussions being the preferred research method among their participants).

There are a number of other distinctive advantages that contributed to the decision to employ group discussions in this research. As Stewart and Shamdasani (1990) note, they may be one of the few research tools available for obtaining data from young people, especially those who might not be particularly literate (see below for the issues associated with mixed-ability groups).<sup>5</sup> In the less-focused variety, the group discussion allows respondents to formulate their own agenda, something that the structure of my own groups tried to facilitate (see section 3.4.3); respondents thus develop those issues which are important to them. By giving them greater freedom to set the agenda of discussions, this technique could arguably be said to be more empowering to the participants than some other research methods; respondents may be less inclined to challenge the researcher in an individual interview, for example, than in a group situation, particularly if they know the other participants. Respondents may also find the sessions beneficial and enjoyable in a number of ways, while Goss and Leinback (1996) highlight how the group discussion can provide support to, and generate confidence among, its participants.

Prior to describing my own adaptation of this research method in the field, it is worth acknowledging some traditional criticisms and limitations of the group interview technique, and perhaps answering them with examples from my own framework. The criticism most frequently levelled at the technique is that the group environment will tend to produce a false consensus among the respondents, with some group members assuming a dominant role and others perhaps feeling inhibited (Morgan, 1988; Hoijer, 1990; Stewart and Shamdasani, 1990; see Paulis, 1989, and Hartley, 1997, for explanations of the consensualising process). My experience of conducting such groups confirms that such a consensualising process is often in evidence - but to describe this as 'false' is, in my view, to ignore how opinions are formulated in society at large (namely as a result of debate and negotiation - see Mills, 1963; Fraser, 1990). In a similar vein, Farr and Moscovici (1984) argue that social representations are generated through everyday conversations and not so

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<sup>5</sup> Such respondents may also be more inclined to converse in a group of friends than in an individual interview.

much through individual cognitive processes (cited in Lunt and Livingstone, 1996). Morley (1992) agrees, accusing the 'false consensus' critics of possessing an overly individualist view of opinion formation. The consensualising process in group discussions is thus merely a reflection of the social nature of opinion formation and knowledge construction, and does not in itself lessen the utility or validity of the method; there is no discrete and authentic 'opinion' out there which group interviews are preventing us from uncovering. Similarly, there will always be people who feel inhibited in any group situation; instead of bemoaning the fact that group participants engage in discussion to different degrees, we can perhaps use an awareness of this tendency to enhance our understanding of how meanings and identities are constructed.

However, as a researcher I still felt it necessary to intervene on the odd occasion, if the dominance of one or several participants was causing visible discomfort to others for instance. This occurred during one group at School A during a debate about racism, when one respondent became marginalised; since the incident prompted me to reflect upon my own positionality and the power relations within the group, it will be detailed more fully in section 3.5. At the beginning of each group I had been keen to express my interest in the views of all participants, emphasising that I valued all their opinions. As a consequence, there were also times when I attempted to direct the discussions away from more dominant members in a bid to demonstrate this interest, and hopefully to assist in building the confidence of some quieter participants; after all, it was also clearly of benefit to the research to have as many students participating as possible. I was keen not to pressurise anybody into saying something, and there remained students who were peripheral to say the least. However, their presence was affirmed through the recording of some basic media habits in a questionnaire at the end of each session. These have been used successfully in similar studies before (e.g. Berry, 1992; Shively, 1992), and were a useful method of obtaining succinct, supplementary information about the background of each respondent (Ackroyd and Hughes, 1983, view the purpose of questionnaires as being descriptive or fact-finding, rather than analytical). They were also a convenient way of ending the group discussions



(see Whittaker, 1985, on the ethics surrounding the termination of small groups). A specimen questionnaire is included in Appendix 2.

Another traditional criticism of the small group interview concerns its use in media research, and in particular on occasions when participants are asked to view media products during the course of the interview. The problematic issue of viewing context is discussed in a paper by Lemish (1982), who insists that TV watching is done differently in public and private. Abercrombie (1996) makes a similar point when highlighting the caveats associated with adopting the group discussion method. He suggests that a group viewing cannot be seen to 'mimic' the domestic consumption context, not least because fewer and fewer people actually watch TV together now, as Chapter 5 confirms. He speculates that the nature of TV talk will also vary according to the various settings in which it takes place, that it is essentially 'context-dependent' (Eyles, 1989); he adds, however, that we know very little about this interaction in different settings.<sup>6</sup>

Corner (1991: 279) is keen to point to the risk of overstating the extent to which the removal of acts of consumption from 'the naturalized and fragmented flow of mundane use' creates an unacceptable degree of distortion in viewers' responses. 'As well as the relativities of the situation', he says, 'there are the continuities and carry-overs of formed personal identity, preferences and attitudes to take account of here as well as the signifiatory stabilities of the texts themselves'. Whilst I am happy to invoke Corner's piece for my own defence, the following section will describe how watching ads constituted only a small part of the interview sessions. Unlike Morley (1986), my aim was not to observe the nuances of *how* TV is actually viewed (whether, for example, people really are doing something else for 50 per cent of the time that the viewing figures insist they are watching television, as Morley, 1992, insists).

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<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, the idea that viewing advertisements in a qualitative research context might be different to a domestic context is still being touted as novel in some advertising circles - see Bannister, 1997. The notion that advertising industry research is not as sophisticated as some people might have us believe is floated in Chapter 7.

Instead, I sought their reactions to particular ads, in the light of the general discussions that had already taken place, and in order to use 'ad talk' as a window onto other social relations, given that the school is a natural site for such talk anyway. I did not, for example, insist that groups comment on each of the ads shown, but instead offered them the chance to talk about the ads and issues salient to them; this partly avoided the problem identified by Morley (1992: 136), and associated with audience research, of interpreting reactions to material that the respondent would not habitually pay any attention to in the domestic context.

Clearly the group discussion methodology is not perfect. I hope to have shown, however, that, whilst some traditional criticisms have to be acknowledged, others are perhaps not quite so valid given the specificities of my own methodological framework. In my view the method remains by far the most appropriate for investigating my research objectives, and the following section describes the details of its application, hopefully demonstrating that the judicious application of group discussions can be both effective and rewarding.

#### 3.4.4: Adapting the in-depth group discussion

The two study schools are superficially similar in a number of respects. Both are established mixed comprehensives with their own sixth forms; they have a similar number of pupils, and occupy approximately comparable positions in the national education league tables. They were selected, however, on the basis of the very different characteristics of the school rolls, derived in turn from the contrasting geographies of their catchment areas. The school I shall refer to, with consummate originality, as School A, is situated in a residential suburb of a town in south Hertfordshire. It draws its pupils from a very localised area, comprising only two or three census wards. The town has historically been a favoured destination for Londoners seeking to move out of the city itself, as well as for commuters who work in the capital. For this reason and others (the town is served by London buses, for instance) the town's suburbs occupy a dual role of sorts, being at once attached to the town itself and to London, at least in the minds of some of the respondents in the interview groups. It is an affluent area and, by common definitions, is predominantly middle class (the type of area that

remains understudied - see section 3.4.1); it is also predominantly white, with just over 7% of the school's catchment area comprised of ethnic minorities, according to the 1991 census. It has no explicit anti-racist education, but does have an equal opportunities code of conduct. School B, by contrast, is situated in an Inner London borough on the Thames. Its pupils come from all over London (it has a specialist music wing which attracts students, for example), although the majority of its roll come from Lambeth. Its broad catchment areas make census figures less relevant, but an interview with a deputy head teacher in advance of the groups revealed that over 50 per cent of the school's population come from ethnic minority backgrounds. Anti-racist education has a strong tradition in the school, being incorporated into the syllabuses of several subjects.

Access to both schools was gained through written requests to a deputy head teacher, having made preliminary enquiries about a number of suitable schools in both areas. Before recruiting pupils, I had hoped to present my research aims to the relevant year groups prior to asking for volunteers. This was not possible in either school, due to availability problems highlighted by the deputy heads; although I had arranged dates to conduct the interviews in advance, there was no guarantee which groups of pupils would be available, due to exam commitments, timetable uncertainties, and complicity (or lack of) from subject teachers. Instead, I had to rely on teachers at the schools to do my recruiting for me, having briefed them on the nature of the research. I had specified that I wanted volunteers, but this was apparently not a problem since, in common with Burgess (1984), the novelty of a discussion group (particularly talking about TV) was viewed as significantly more attractive than a mundane lesson.

Whilst participants obviously have to be selected on the basis of some criteria, they need not be traditional random sampling procedures<sup>7</sup> Given that results are rarely used to generalise to a wider population (although Stewart and

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<sup>7</sup> I refrain from using the term 'research subject' in this thesis due to its colonial connotations. I would concur with Spradley (1979) that 'informant' is an acceptable term, but for the sake of variety it will be used interchangeably with 'participant', 'respondent' and 'interviewee'.

Shamdasani (1990: 142) stress that, 'We would not use focus groups if they did not yield some insights about individuals beyond those who participate in the group discussions'), it is usually desirable to employ some 'purposive selection' (Frankenberg, 1993) or 'judgmental selection' (Burgess *et al*, 1988a). I had decided to interview people from years 10 and 12 (aged 14/15 and 16/17 respectively). The groups at School A were split equally between the two years, while School B offered more from year 10. Significantly, there were very few identifiable differences between the discussions with the different age groups. Consequently, the analysis chapters below will aggregate the two years, unless otherwise stated.

I also specified for the groups to be of mixed gender where possible. A number of writers have warned of the dangers of such a composition (see Templeton, 1987, on 'impression management', Smith, 1988, on 'public selves', and Carli, 1991, on the likelihood of males assuming 'expert' or 'leadership' roles in mixed groups). Previous work with mixed groups had not prompted any such difficulties, however, and I suspected that, because the students would be so accustomed to mixing with each other on a daily basis, risks associated with the 'peacock effect' (Krueger, 1988) would be reduced. This proved to be the case, and, as section 3.5 details, the only significant problems with group dynamics in fact occurred in the only single sex group (group B5). Most importantly, I had specified that I wanted each session to be comprised of friendship groups. Once again, several writers stress the need for participants to be strangers (Krueger, 1988; Burgess *et al*, 1988a; 1988b), but I would argue this depends on the research objectives. For me, the dynamics of group interaction, how a group comes together and creates its own 'unique culture' (Burgess *et al*, 1991) were not the prime focus of attention. I wanted groups of students who were already used to interacting with each other, and among whom TV is already likely to be discussed in the day-to-day school arena (partly to avoid the need for repeated 'warm-up' sessions, as in Burgess *et al*, 1991, and because I knew that my time with the students might well be limited; see Liebes and Katz, 1990 p. 23, on their preference for such selection criteria over random samples). Moreover, Jarrett (1993) argues that participants are more likely to share viewpoints and disclose personal information in the company of people with

whom they share common experiences; knowledge of such commonalities would clearly be more substantial in a friendship group than among strangers.

Opinion seems divided in the literature over the level of experience necessary to moderate a group interview. Stewart and Shamdasani (1990) and Goss and Leinback (1996) both insist that the choice of a highly trained moderator is critical, and the former even list the personality traits that the right candidate should possess. Morgan and Krueger (1993), however, assure the reader that this is a myth, and suggest, sensibly enough, that a familiarity with the project in hand, in addition to appropriate levels of sensitivity and analytical skills, is more important than group experience. Burgess (1996) and Bertrand *et al* (1992) both insist on the presence of a second researcher, to act as observer and recorder of details of group dynamics. Although their presence might be an added inhibition for some participants, I am in no doubt that such an observer would make life easier for the moderator, and improve the quality of the data; however, with my resources (and a dearth of friends sufficiently interested in my research) this was not an option.

Thirteen groups were conducted in all, although one of the seven from School B could only be described as a 'mini-group', given that examination commitments restricted the attendance to three. The other twelve groups each contained six students, as requested. Morgan (1988) is accustomed to recruiting larger groups than this; I was concerned, however, that having any more students in a group than this might render the interviews unmanageable. Furthermore, I was very keen to distinguish the sessions from conventional lessons, and as numbers grew the distinction could have become increasingly blurred. The composition of the groups is summarised in Appendix 3. Nine of the thirteen groups were one-off groups, with the other four being repeated once (either the same day, or a week later on one occasion). Some group interviewers, such as Burgess *et al* (1991) would no doubt suggest that this is undesirable, and I would concur that some issues could perhaps have been explored in more depth over time, but there were several reasons for the one-off structure. Firstly, due to the selection of friendship groups, there was no requirement for introductory sessions to allow the participants to get used to

interacting with one another. Secondly, and most importantly, I sensed that in most cases the co-operation and interest of the students was strictly conditional: in the majority of cases, they gave me their attention and contributions provided this involved no encroachment into their own free time. My suggestions that the groups continued into break-time, or that we met up again after school, were met with scorn and ridicule. The second sessions that occurred were only possible if I negotiated the pupils' release from further timetabled lessons; thus the very factor that enabled me to obtain respondents with such ease, namely that they could miss lessons, prevented me from holding follow-up sessions unless the same condition was met. Section 3.5. suggests the conditions attached to the students' co-operation was a consequence of the school-pupil structured relations within many of the groups. Such contingent co-operation also precluded the possibility of holding follow-up interviews with individuals, which could only have been conducted outside of school hours. Whilst the ethics of such interviews would have been uncertain, they might have garnered some useful additional data and reflections upon the group interview process. The duration of the majority of the groups was one hour. Burgess *et al* (1988a) stress the importance of the moderator keeping to time; never is this seemingly more important than when interviewing young people in the school environment.

The groups were all conducted in classrooms equipped with a TV and a VCR, and reserved for the purpose. All sessions were tape recorded, with the consent of participants. At the start of each session I introduced myself as a student doing a project on TV advertising, and especially interested in how young people relate to it. I emphasised that few people ever asked young people for their views and that this was a trend I was trying to reverse; I stressed that I was not there to teach, but was interested in their thoughts, part of an attempt to confer the status of experts onto the participants (McCracken, 1988). My only request to them was that only one person spoke at a time, a wish which, given the conversational dynamics of teenagers, turned out to be wholly unrealistic. The students were then asked to introduce themselves, which served the dual purposes of breaking the ice and enabling me to identify voices on the tapes during transcription; it was stressed that they did not have to give their real names if so desired, provided the names on the tape matched

those on the questionnaires they completed at the end of each session. Immediately after each session I made field notes about the group, emphasising the dynamics that would not necessarily be evident from the recordings.

The structure for the sessions is outlined in Appendix 4, a combination of questions and topics to raise for discussion. The intention to avoid direct questions about issues such as identity, or indeed racialisation, determined the phrasing of many of the questions (see Hewitt, 1986). Similarly, Buckingham *et al* (1990) warn against asking young people such apparently simple questions as 'How do you feel about that ad?'. It is important to remember that few individuals think about themselves and their lives in the language which social scientists use (Burgess, 1984; but Morley, 1992, explains how qualitative methods are capable of giving us access to the linguistic terms and categories through which respondents *do* construct their worlds). I attempted to avoid simple 'why' questions that risk generating reductionist answers (Hakim, 1987). Having given participants the opportunity to set their own agendas with earlier general questions, the questions became progressively focused around issues of racialisation and advertising. Discussions ultimately focused around nine sample TV ads that were screened in eleven of the thirteen groups.<sup>8</sup> Given the sinuous nature of the discussions, the question structure acted more as a guide for me, highlighting the issues that I would, ideally, like to cover. In reality, the order and wording of questions were sometimes different, a possibility that some of the relevant literature fails to acknowledge (e.g. Krueger, 1988); after all, a strength of group conversation is its tendency to provoke other thoughts and exchanges, also providing opportunities for serendipitous questions (Burgess *et al*, 1988a).

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<sup>8</sup> Of the two in which they were not shown, one was the first session at School B when I was still finding my feet and was reluctant to interrupt their flow; the other was the least successful group, when some of the participants were reluctant to become involved for various reasons - see below. I felt that neither this group nor the research would benefit from the screening. The second set of questions in Appendix 4 refer to the screened ads.

Before describing the analysis of the empirical material, it is worth considering some of the difficulties of using schools as field sites, for whilst schools provide relatively easy access to large numbers of potential respondents, and locations in which interviews can be carried out, there are associated problems which can affect the research. Given that access (and in my case recruitment) is usually negotiated through a member of staff, there is a risk of the discussions being treated as part of the curriculum, and the interviewer being viewed as a teacher by the interviewees (this point is elaborated upon in section 3.5). The school environment itself can also cause problems due to shortages of time, space and resources, and as a researcher one has to be flexible. Frequent room changes, temperamental equipment and background noise can make it very difficult for both interviewer and interviewees to relax. Goss and Leinback (1996) note how demanding group interviews can be for the researcher, and this is especially the case in schools; a condition of my access to School B was that I conducted all seven groups in the space of two days, a timetable that was rather too intensive for my liking. The background noise contributed to the difficulties of transcription, already something of a trial given that young people have a habit of talking at the same time. I also felt guilty for imposing further duties on the already overstretched teachers assisting me.

I found that personal antipathies among some of the participants spilled over into the group sessions and, as Chapter 5 explains, the data collected cannot be considered outside of such group dynamics. There were additional problems at School B when one subject teacher, asked to contribute volunteers for my group, took the opportunity to release several pupils she would rather not have had in her own lesson (Group B3). One of these was a boy with special needs who had trouble following the discussions at all, and whose assistant had almost to translate both questions and answers. This undoubtedly affected the quality of the session, because the group also contained others who suggested they would be 'lively' in a classroom situation, and who allowed themselves to be distracted by the special needs pupil, and to laugh at him when he spoke. I have found the methodology literature rather unhelpful in suggesting ways to handle mixed-ability groups such as this, and, more generally, how to deal with less able participants who may have a slim grasp of the issues in hand.



Having realised how long it takes to transcribe and analyse interviews, I share the surprise of Wax (1983) and Miles and Huberman (1984) that so little academic literature mentions these processes (but see Hermes, 1995). Since research reports are a product of not just the primary material, but also the researcher's own theoretical standpoint and positionality, it seems crucial that the (unique and necessarily personal) processes of analysis are made explicit (Jones, 1985; Turner, 1994). My positionality *vis à vis* the project as a whole is discussed in section 3.5, but my precise role in the analysis of the fieldwork data is outlined below. I have found it necessary to record the process of analysis in chronological terms here, but would stress that it is a continual and iterative process that cannot realistically be reduced to a set of stages (Bryman and Burgess, 1994a; 1994b; Okely, 1994). Thus when reading the account below, the reader is requested to bear in mind the *ongoing* nature of the analysis and its constant evaluation. It is also important to note that the process of understanding and making sense of the empirical material began, as the introduction suggests, *during* the fieldwork, and not just after it, as the format of the methodology chapter might imply.

I felt that it was important for me to transcribe the tapes myself (instead of employing a third party) because the very act of listening to the tapes again would give me the opportunity to recapture some of the emotional flavour of the interpersonal exchanges (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983; Cook and Crang, 1994); it would also function as a useful first stage of the analysis (Strauss and Corbin, 1990), allowing the formulation of preliminary ideas about meanings and themes that could be traced across the different groups. The transcripts, all printed with wide margins for ease of annotation, were analysed and re-analysed over a period of several months. Beginning the analysis with the transcripts themselves was a deliberate ploy on my part to develop codes which were firmly 'grounded' in the data from the groups (following the classic techniques of qualitative data analysis originally laid down by Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Analysis became an iterative process in which an 'analytic story' (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) was gradually constructed from the interview material 'upwards', progressively integrating existing literature and theory.

The first stage of the analysis was to re-read the transcript material and my field notes together, in order to sensitise myself to the data once again. This was followed by more in-depth readings and annotations of the scripts. The aim at this juncture was primarily to consider the *meaning* of much of what was said, with an eye on the context in which it was mentioned. This has been described as the 'open coding' stage of the grounded theory approach, and one in which Strauss (1987) stresses the need to resist the temptation to identify significant themes and relations, for fear of prejudicing subsequent analyses; Cook and Crang (1994: 66) are, in my experience quite rightly, sceptical about the extent to which a researcher can confront a text so 'innocently'. Inevitably, I began to formulate ideas about what would constitute important themes in the analysis, although this process began in earnest at the next stage, when the primary material was tackled again and I began to produce my secondary, coded material.

The coding process was conducted largely by hand, with a word-processing package being the only computer assistance I employed. There has been a substantial increase recently in both the availability and accessibility of 'CAQDAS', or computer-aided data analysis software, in recent years (Conrad and Reinharz, 1984; Dey, 1993; Weitzman and Miles, 1995), and its use among geographers has reflected this more general popularity (Crang *et al*, 1997). Among the many benefits of such packages are the increased speed and efficiency with which data can be coded and categorised, the software's ability to identify common codes in different areas of data, and its utility in judging the relative importance of different themes and the 'spread' of opinion. My decision not to use any of these packages was based on a number of factors. Some software packages (e.g. Nud.ist) advertise their ability to handle larger amounts of data than is possible if coding is done manually, but I did not anticipate the volume of my data being a major problem (see Richards and Richards, 1991). The identification of common keywords or phrases, particularly across different data sets (when computer search tools can be very useful) was not crucial to my analysis. Furthermore, unlike Richards and Richards (1994) I do not view the manual coding process as an unwanted clerical intrusion into the 'real' task of analysis. From experience, I knew that the very act of manual coding was a vital period for me during which ideas developed, meanings were constructed,

and connections made. I was also keen to identify relationships with material from the producer interviews and content analysis; I felt that this could only be done effectively through hand-written coding, since this enabled me to articulate these linkages and other thoughts diagrammatically. Therefore, whilst acknowledging the undoubted benefits of software packages, I decided that manual coding would be the most productive, if not necessarily the most time-efficient, method of 'building' theory.

Coding was a continual process, since the development of a particular code entailed a regular review of its appropriateness with reference to the primary material. This is made easier if what Strauss (1987) terms 'theoretical notes' are kept, the recording of various insights and ideas associated with the evolving codes, and maintained separately from the annotated transcripts. Once I had established some initial codes from the transcripts, I began to progressively reduce this primary material.<sup>9</sup> This involved the construction of my own secondary material, or 'discursive maps' (Cook and Crang, 1994; Burgess, 1996), which consisted of lists of codes as headings, under which illustrative material and cross-references were collected (a short example, based on group A1 is included in Appendix 5). I was now at the axial coding 'stage' of the grounded theory development process, beginning to speculate about the 'causal conditions' (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) of some of my invented codes, and to identify connections between them (and between the different sets of empirical material). This is where different 'dimensions' of the analysis began to emerge, and potential chapter structures took shape. For instance, I had constructed codes from the transcripts that captured the notions of advertising as entertainment and as a behavioural influence (themselves the product of lower level codes describing, for example, humorous ads or shopping habits); by reviewing the material associated with these codes, in addition to grounding the codes in theoretical literature and the material from the producer interviews, I was able to identify the potential of 'resistance' as a key dimension worth developing (see Chapter 7).

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<sup>9</sup> Although some of the codes were emic, or 'in vivo' codes, the majority were of my own creation, or 'etic' (Agar, 1980).

My own role in the construction of meaning through the analysis of data must be acknowledged. As researchers, we do not simply 'discover' and represent cultures, but reinvent and 'co-produce' them (Steier, 1991; Barnes and Duncan, 1992; Okely, 1994); we construct stories about the stories our respondents have chosen to tell us (Geertz, 1973). As Cook and Crang (1994) explain, it is impossible for us to banish our prior thoughts and expectations during interpretation, since we have constructed the research questions on the basis of our preliminary theoretical inquiries. One possible reaction to this is to work with 'emic' categories in interpretation (those constructed by the interviewees), but Cook and Crang cite Bourdieu (1990) to warn of the dangers of such a ploy, describing how the search for the motivations of respondents can serve to obscure the constructed nature of these very motivations. For example, it would have been easy for me to accept the denials of the salience of 'race' as a factor in the interpretation of media products that emanated from students at both study schools. To have done so, though, would have been to overlook the very different motivations for such denials, and indeed the racialised processes that underpinned their respective claims (see Chapter 6). In deconstructing these emic categories we can begin to consider the paradoxical and contradictory meanings that are often present in qualitative data. Attempts to understand such contradictions and ambivalences in my empirical material form an important part of the analytical chapters below.

It would be problematic, however, if a wariness about emic material was taken as a licence to let our own sentiments and theories run loose, stopping only to select an appropriate quotation which 'illustrates' our contentions. In this respect, I share Hoijer's (1990) concerns about the employment of short illustrative quotations to represent broader themes in the analysis of qualitative data. Where quotations have been used as illustrations in the group interview chapters below, I have tried to include the entire exchange in which the view was expressed. It is hoped that the additional context will not only allow the reader to construct their own interpretations, (and act as an incentive for me to avoid the type of meaning construction/fabrication that Hoijer implies), but also convey some of the complexity that characterised many of the exchanges (see

Pahl, 1989: 278). Through regular cross-referencing between my empirical material and my abstractions I have attempted to construct an analysis which is grounded thoroughly in the data, but which acknowledges my own role in constructing etic categories of interpretation.

Once all the groups had been completed, and preliminary analysis conducted, I wrote reports on the groups for each study school. Neither had requested them, but as well as considering it my duty given the help I had received, there were many issues I wanted to make the respective schools aware of. The Deputy Head at School B replied at length to my report, offering his reactions and expressing his interest and gratitude. It was rewarding for me to feel that my findings were of interest, and even use, to someone beyond the confines of my own discipline.

A final point should be made about the presentation of quotations from empirical material from both consumer and producer interviews in the chapters below. In some instances three dots appear mid-quotation (...). These should be read as a pause on the part of the speaker; meanwhile, three dots in square brackets [...] have been used to indicate when a sentence, or an interruption, has been omitted for the sake of clarity. The names of the participants given in the chapters below are those proffered by the students themselves at the beginning of the sessions and on their questionnaires, some of which could be pseudonyms.

### **3.5: Reflections on the research design and fieldwork**

In reflecting on the research procedures outlined above, this section necessarily inserts *me* into the process. I say necessarily, because many of the issues raised by the research are inherently related to my own role as researcher, and to my own positionality (Jackson, 1993b). Much social science literature in recent years has made references to 'reflexivity' and 'self-reflexivity' on the part of researchers (see Steier, 1991), sometimes in response to the various 'crises' attributed to the 'postmodern' era. Paul Willis (1980) saw the need for reflexivity

being derived from the fact that qualitative data are collected through *social relationships*; accounts of the research process which did not consider these relationships, and the researcher's role within them, would thus be thoroughly inadequate. Indeed, it is argued by many (after Said, 1978) that research tells a story as much about ourselves as it does about our research subjects.

For some geographers, the self-reflexivity provoked by such realisations has been taken too far. Keith (1992) suggests that, for many, reflexivity has descended into narcissism, a view shared by Gregson (1993), who invokes Daniels's (1991: 165) warning that, 'there is a world out there that we [geographers] are in danger of forgetting', in our proclivity to just talk to and about ourselves. This is not confined to geography, though, as sections of Nava's (1992) work on youth and consumption testify. I have some sympathy with Gregson's perspective, and for this reason have not raised the issue of my own positionality until now. However, as Kreiger (1985) suggests, efforts to deny the role of the self in research are tantamount to self-deception.

The account below begins with some autobiographical material, although I do not believe that this should constitute the full extent of addressing one's own positionality. Not only would such an approach imply that one is conscious of precisely how one's 'identity' impacts upon the research, but it would assume that there are inevitable and essential research consequences for people of a particular ethnicity, gender, *etc* (see Solomos and Back, 1996: 11). I feel that a better way to engage with positionality is to analyse specific instances where my 'identity' was an issue, where it was challenged and where I felt it was salient to the research (Keith, 1992, laments that there are so few examples of researchers discussing tangible dilemmas experienced in the field). However, a number of writers (such as McRobbie, 1994a) bemoan the fact that few academics, and in particular male researchers, record their motivations for conducting research. Thus before analysing occasions when my positionality was an issue, I provide some material which can serve as background for the reader, but also as context for the explication of my own motivations.

I actually attended School A myself, and grew up in the predominantly white, and largely middle-class suburbs around the school. It was in this environment that my interest in (what I would now describe as) racialised relations was kindled. As a nine year-old I could not comprehend why the family of an African-Caribbean friend decided to move to Florida in search of a 'better life'. It was a few years before I became aware of the contradictions and tensions that existed in relations between white and non-white boys in my district. African-Caribbean boys in particular were often revered. They were the people to hang out with, the people to have on your football team, the people whose dress codes were followed. Indeed, for a time I shared such a 'romance with difference' (so devastating for the objects of the romance, according to Fanon, 1968).

However, I became confused that the acceptance of the non-white boys by the majority was so conditional; those who expressed 'desire' towards them were equally capable of demonstrating an apparent loathing, manifested in emotional and physical abuse and exclusion that caused visible hurt among the victims. Moreover, I was unable to reconcile the tensions between prevalent racist ideas that I became aware of and my own personal relationships and friendships. Now, I realise there was no contradiction: many writers have explained how the commonsense knowledges of young whites permits positive evaluations of black people to co-exist with crude racist imagery (Polsky, 1968; Billig *et al*, 1988; Allinson, 1994; Back, 1996), particularly when these positive evaluations are themselves constructed upon stereotypes of black masculinity (Back, 1994). As a child, however, they made no sense. Nor did the arguments between mixed-origin kids about who was whitest. For whatever reason, at that age I knew that something was wrong with the situations I observed and found myself in, a 'knowledge' that has prompted my continued interest in the relations between non-white and white youth, the structures of racism, and the anti-racist project. These experiences and others contributed to my decision to choose my home district as one of my study sites.

In spite of my long-standing interest in racialisation, and my belief that what I hoped to study was indeed valuable (see Gilbert, 1994), the nature of the

subject presented me with (psychological) problems in the field, problems derived from my own racialised, gendered and classed position. At times I felt my whiteness in particular to be as much an issue for me as it was for students at either school. Much has been written about research relations between differently positioned individuals, with Gillespie (1995) suggesting that commonalities between researcher and researched can contribute to a productive rapport (see also Frankenberg, 1993; Nast, 1994; Kobayashi, 1994; Gilbert, 1994; Song and Parker, 1995). At School A I had anticipated significant 'recognition of self in other', and vice-versa (Gillespie, 1995), being from the same district as the participants. The same did not apply to the inner-city school. The likelihood of classed differentials between myself and the participants helped fuel an unease about my raising issues of racialisation, playing on insecurities about a history of 'cultural safaris' into the inner city motivated by a liberal middle-class instinct (Frankenberg, 1993). Lawrence (1981) has described the history of racism that can structure research encounters between white researchers and non-white respondents, while Mac an Ghail (1988) and Twine (1996) note how non-white students may censure topics in the presence of white researchers. Once in the field, doubts about the validity of a white researcher such as myself investigating issues of racialisation and racism, cerebrally dismissed back in my department, returned to haunt me when confronted by non-white students from the inner-city (see hooks, 1990, on 'hip racism'). I restored my confidence by reminding myself of certain points. Firstly, there is clearly a need for white researchers to investigate the structures of racism (as Rushdie (1991, quoted in Keith, 1992) remarks, 'Racism isn't our problem, it is your problem'; see also Bourne, 1980; Twitchin, 1988; hooks, 1992a); secondly, my research was *not* focusing on 'ethnic minorities' (and thus perpetuating their construction as a 'problem'), but on racialised relations in everyday life (and, as my pocket biography above emphasises, I have sensed that it was racism and racialised relations that were the problem for many years).

I have no doubt that my own ethnicity impacted greatly on the discussion groups, since all research encounters are arguably structured thus. Whether my whiteness prompted the censure of certain topics is difficult to ascertain without follow-up interviews, but the possibility that different data will be obtained by



different researchers serves to highlight the extent to which all knowledge is situated. There was little apparent reluctance to engage with issues of racialisation from many groups, and they were raised without prompting in several cases. Indeed, the most talkative and positive respondents in these debates were almost all of African-Caribbean descent, seemingly uninhibited in their vociferous engagement with issues of the media and representation.<sup>10</sup>

I felt my whiteness to be more important at School A than I had anticipated. Vehement condemnations of 'political correctness' had been made by some respondents in early groups at the school (see Chapter 6), and I was disappointed to discover that this vitriol had made me self-conscious about discussing issues of racism. My whiteness became an issue in several such debates about anti-racism and 'PC' (in Group A5). Mitali (of Bengali origin) was fighting a lone battle in denouncing stereotyping and calling for greater inclusiveness in media products amidst (rather depressing) comments about inverse racism and tokenism from her white peers. One of the most outspoken white students in the group repeatedly looked to me for support for her views. On two occasions I made the decision to intervene, in as un-didactic a way as I could by furnishing Mitali's argument, as this exchange illustrates:

Mitali: *But some people might see that [black characters advertising sports goods] as stereotypical*

Tom: *But you can't have it both ways*

Mitali: *I know, I'm just pointing out the different sides. I was just saying that some people might find that offensive, portraying black people in certain kinds of roles*

Kirsten: *It's true though, there are a lot of black people in athletics...and you say you want it to represent society [looks to me for support for her argument]*

Heather: *You have to decide what's stereotyped*

Kirsten: *Their bodies are built for it anyway, their bodies are more adapted to it*

Mitali: *Oh, come on...*

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<sup>10</sup> However, as Gillespie notes (1995: 72-3), as white researchers we can never claim immunity from racism or ethnocentrism in our research because such assumptions are part of what we take for granted. Once aware of this fact, however, we can interrogate ourselves and our research practices to try to ensure, for example, that we avoid exoticising the subject, or imposing categories or identities upon them.

Heather: *NO, they are!*

James: *No, that's very controversial - the evidence for that is pretty non-existent...*

Kirsten: *But they do seem to have adapted to athletics better than white people have*

Mitali: *I think it's too controversial to say that*

James: *Yeah, that is not necessarily down to biology [Kirsten looks sceptically at me]. There are countless social influences that could be playing a part here...*

Afterwards I even regretted that I had not been more open in my condemnation of some of the views expressed. My own position had clearly impacted upon the conversation in these cases.

I felt my maleness to be an issue in two groups in particular, one at each school. One was in the all-female group at School B (B5), during which I consistently felt there was some distance between me and the participants which I found difficult to bridge (comments about 'adults' clearly defined some of the respondents in opposition to me, as Chapter 5 details, whilst discussions about female hygiene adverts prompted huge amusement, constructed around the idea that I would not understand). The other incident occurred in A5, when an attempt was made to co-opt me by two lads, Ben and Tom, who had been making sexist comments:

Alison: *When they blatantly stereotype a woman, that really irritates me*

Kirsten: *You can't take everything as being sexist though*

Ben: *I don't mind if they're being sexist with women, but if it's men that's different*

James: *I see*

Ben: *But that works both ways, though, 'cos if you're a bird... [uproar from females in group]*

Mitali: *Er, the girls outnumber the boys here, Ben*

Ben: *Yeah, but we're about twice as tall as you, Mitali [looks at me]*

James: *Hang on, don't include me in any of this [looking at Ben]*

I tried to distance myself from these and other comments, and contributed to the anti-sexist arguments proffered by some participants in response. I cannot

be sure that such distance was successfully achieved, however, and nor can I be certain of how my gendered participation in the groups contributed to the nature of the data revealed (see Burgess, 1984; Back, 1993b).

I was keen to emphasise to the participants that I was not a teacher. I was concerned that, if viewed as a teacher, respondents would give me answers that they thought I wanted to hear (Hodge and Tripp, 1986; Harvey, 1990). I realised this would be difficult, since recruitment had been brokered by staff, but stressed heavily at the start of each session that I was not a teacher, and that what would follow was not a lesson. I also tried to ensure that my dress and my language distinguished me from the staff. I think I succeeded in convincing them, based on observations of their behaviour towards me, the questions they asked about me, and the language they used. On several occasions at School B, for instance, participants actively sought to ensure the smooth operation of the groups, by admonishing uninterested others, or by ejecting other pupils who had wandered into the study room (such interventions were most welcome, incidentally). An unexpected benefit of my non-teacher status was that pupils who would potentially be disruptive in a classroom situation merely stayed silent if they did not want to get involved; I would suggest this was because I did not represent any form of authority, and there was nothing to be gained from challenging me. There were times when some authority would have been useful, however, in insisting that only one person spoke at a time for example, but I resisted temptations to force the issue for fear of losing their co-operation (the same reason I was reluctant to reinforce an anti-racist and anti-sexist message in the groups above). My status as a non-teaching outsider also had consequences for my perception of the power relations in the group. Although I was the one setting the parameters of the discussions, I was acutely aware that the success of the groups depended on the co-operation of the students, and the fact the classroom was *their* domain and I was the one having to adjust. This perception contributed to my nerves before all the groups. Inevitably, however, the very fact that the school classroom was the fieldsite ensured that the relationship between us was still structured along teacher-pupil lines. Evidence of this was the conditional co-operation described in section 3.2, which prevented me from conducting follow-up groups in some cases.

My positionality was, of course, relevant in the producer and content analysis stages of the research too, although arguably less problematic than with youthful consumers due to the different relative power relations. My ethnicity may well have had a bearing on my selection and interpretation of case study ads, and on my judgements in the content analysis, for example.<sup>11</sup> Although I felt a little out of place at times in the ad agency, not possessing the public school accent of many of my colleagues, I felt that my access was made relatively easy by my status as a young, white, middle-class male. Given that similarly positioned people constitute the norm in most agencies, my presence was never questioned, and 'blending in' was never an issue. Overall I felt that my background placed me in a somewhat privileged position in my research. My fieldsites were arguably very different, but at no time did I feel wholly out of place, nor did I have to learn the official or 'native' language of any group I was researching (Whyte, 1955; Becker and Blanche, 1970).

\* \* \* \*

In summary, this final section has attempted to highlight my own role as researcher in the research process, and to hint at how my own positionality was negotiated by myself and, where possible to ascertain, by my respondents. Jackson and Penrose (1993: 208) remark that, 'we may not be fully aware of how the dimensions of our identities bear upon our research', but to avoid these questions altogether (by denying their pertinence, or by hiding them under some quantitative epistemology) is not only poor research, but is to miss out on the undoubted satisfactions associated with having faced up to and engaged with the complexities and 'messiness' of social science research.

Having described my research methodology in some detail, I now turn (in Chapter 4) to the discussion of my research findings, beginning with an analysis of the producers of selected advertising texts.

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<sup>11</sup> This was the one stage of the research when I did feel considerable unease about my methodology. The crude act of counting white and non-white faces is arguably offensive, ringing as it does of racist social science of the past. Although I had reservations, I felt that the method could be justified by the fact that it was being employed as a means of moving debates on to issues of racism and racialised relations.

# 4

## Entering the circuit of advertising: texts and their production

### 4.1. Introduction

According to Richard Johnson's (1983) model, introduced in Chapter 2 and employed throughout much of the thesis, the 'circuit of advertising' takes a continuous and circular form. In order to analyse various locations in the circuit, however, it is necessary to 'break in' at a particular point and analyse these areas in order. In introducing the different methodologies employed, Chapter 3 followed perhaps the most logical, 'chronological' order beginning with the producer research. It is felt that a more appropriate sequence for the analytical chapters is to begin at the textual stage and end with the consumer research (cf. Schroder, 1997; and see Miller, 1997a, on the dangers of the 'chronological' approach implying a linearity in the flow of meaning which somehow 'terminates' with the consumer). There are two principal reasons for this. Firstly, it has been with the texts that most academic analyses of the media and advertising have begun and ended (see Jackson and Thrift, 1995; Jackson and Taylor, 1996), an approach that, as argued in Chapter 2, raises as many questions as it answers. By focusing initially on the texts here, it is hoped that the questions raised can immediately be answered by the subsequent discussions of advertising's production and consumption, and in the process (re)state the need for empirical studies to engage with all these areas of the circuit of culture. Secondly, by tackling the textual analysis first, this chapter introduces the nine selected ads that form the main thread of continuity between the various stages of the research.

This chapter interprets the content analysis and producer research, opening with the results of the quantitative study which highlight a picture of racialised inequality in advertising's representations. This becomes more egregious when

the *qualities* of portrayals are considered, as they are in the content of the selected ads which are deconstructed below. Additional information about each chosen ad is provided from the producer research where relevant, in order to give an indication of the social relations that underlie the production of these ads. The social relations of production are then explored in greater depth in section 4.3, which concludes that advertising practice is often explicitly racialised. It also suggests, however, that there are factors contributing to this racialisation that are grounded in more general advertising practice. These factors are introduced in the first half of 4.3 by discussing the advertising industry's relationship to the youth market. In addition to illuminating this general practice, this discussion casts light on how the industry conceives of the very people that constituted my consumer interview groups, enabling a more detailed identification of the links between the production and consumption of advertising. The chapter concludes by explaining that, whilst some within the industry claim that they are merely obeying the logic of rational economics, there are other racialised subtexts at work which contribute to the explicit and implicit racialisation evident in the industry and its representations.

## **4.2: Content analysis**

### **4.2.1. The quantitative study**

Returning to the quantitative analysis of prime-time TV advertising introduced in section 3.3.1, the principal findings of the study are expressed in the tables below. *Table 4.1* highlights the basic counts, the foundation of the analysis, based on all 602 ads. Just over 15% of the ads in the UK study featured at least one black character, while in the US this figure stood at one quarter of all ads (for a full account of the quantitative results in the context of a comparison of British and American TV advertising, see Taylor, 1997). This table also contains various character counts that were undertaken in the UK study but not in the US.

**Table 4.1: Breakdown of all ads analysed**

|   |            |
|---|------------|
| Total number of ads                                   | 602        |
| Number of ads featuring black characters (% of total) | 91 (15%)   |
| Total number of characters                            | 2928       |
| Number of black characters                            | 203 (7%)   |
| Number of male characters                             | 2166 (74%) |
| Number of female characters                           | 762 (26%)  |

One striking statistic is that, irrespective of racialisation, there were almost three times as many male characters as female in the 602 UK ads, giving an indication of the extent to which men continue to dominate certain elements of British advertising, as well as other areas of programming (Hollis, 1995; and see Kaplan, 1987).

Further analysis was restricted to those ads which featured black characters, and the results are detailed in *Table 4.2*. The study actually yielded a slightly higher figure for the mean number of black characters per ad than did the American study, but the utility of this measure is questionable; it takes no account of the extent to which the presence of these characters might be diluted through portrayal in larger groups, for example, and hides the fact that its high value reflects the influence of one advertisement, set in the Caribbean, which featured more than nine people and was repeated twice.

**Table 4.2: Breakdown of ads which included black characters**

|  | Total = 91 |
|--|------------|
| % with black males only                          | 39 (43%)   |
| % with black females only                        | 29 (32%)   |
| Black characters only in ad                      | 3 (3%)     |
| Black characters included in group of 2-8        | 33 (36%)   |
| Black characters included in group of 9 or more  | 55 (61%)   |
| Proportion of ads featuring black characters in: |            |
| a major role                                     | 14 (15%)   |
| a minor role                                     | 20 (22%)   |
| a background role                                | 57 (63%)   |

The table displays an apparent reluctance on the part of British advertisers to present ads with an exclusively black cast, with only 3% being structured as such. Looking at the sample as a whole, ads with exclusively black characters made up only 0.4% of all ads shown in the broadcast period, a figure only as high as it was due to the presence of a single duplicated ad.

Table 4.2 also shows that a substantial proportion of ads which featured black characters in this study portrayed them in background roles (63% of ads). This was considerably higher than both Wilkes and Valencia's study (47%) and earlier American studies of this ilk, such as Dominick and Greenberg (1970) (30%) or Greenberg and Mazingo (1976) (25%). Wilkes and Valencia see this figure as a possible indication of the degree of 'window dressing', or tokenism, persistent in television commercials. Although some care must be exercised when interpreting this figure (as it is possible for all the characters in an ad to play background roles, when pictured in a football crowd, for instance), a statistic of 63% of ads in which black characters play background roles in the UK study is glaringly high.



Table 4.3 is even more revealing on this count. It records the percentage of black *characters* who play background roles, which stands at 72% (increasing to 80% when duplicate ads are removed from the analysis).

**Table 4.3: Breakdown of roles played by black characters**

| Proportion of black <i>characters</i> : |     |
|---|-----|
| in a major role                         | 13% |
| in a minor role                         | 15% |
| in a background role                    | 72% |

The justification for examining the proportion of characters in the ads, in addition to the proportion of ads themselves becomes apparent, for the two sets of figures paint quite different pictures. For example, a black character appeared in over 15% of all ads, but only made up 7% of all characters. Coupled with evidence that in over 60% of ads in which they featured they were in groups of more than nine people, this would confirm Bush *et al's* (1977) conclusion that there tend to be more people in advertisements which include black characters than in those which do not.

An issue that must be dealt with here is what some writers have referred to as the 'proportionality criterion' (Faber *et al*, 1987). This is the idea that one should expect minority groups to appear in ads with the same frequency as they appear in the population as a whole. Sceptics looking at the above findings might point out, for example, that black characters appear in 15% of British ads, yet make up less than 2% of the British population (Black African and Black Caribbean - but see Ballard, 1996, on the problematic nature of these census figures). This is where the figures begin to deceive, however, and where the benefits of a character count become more evident. While they make up 7% of all characters in ads, the reality of the portrayal of black characters becomes more apparent when the context of their appearances is taken into account. Not only are they more likely to be presented in large groups, but they are likely to

be in the background too, with nearly three-quarters of black characters playing such roles (see Table 4.3). Only 2% of all ads feature a black character in a major role, while the figure for the proportion of all ads which present an exclusively black cast is even smaller, and well below this group's incidence in the general population. A picture of inequality thus begins to emerge, and even more so when the qualities of the roles played are analysed further (see below).

The breakdown of the 91 ads in which blacks appeared according to the product advertised is as follows: entertainment (18 ads), food and drink (16), automobile related (16), public service announcements (16), services (14), personal health and hygiene (8), retail outlets (6), electronic/high tech products (4), household goods (3). Wilkes and Valencia found that the most commonly advertised products with black characters were food and drink, followed by electronic/high tech, political ads and automobiles, in that order. The high figure for entertainment ads reinforces the assertion by Kay Scolah, a UK advertising consultant, that it is only ever acceptable to the British advertising world to include black characters as children or when advertising dance music records to the youth market (Scolah, 1994). It was, indeed, the appearance of dance music ads (the majority of which were on Friday night on Channel 4) that ensured that this figure was so high. Even classifying the ads according to products advertised fails to reveal whether black characters are more commonly associated with some roles than others within ads for particular products. Moreover, this entire set of statistics arguably hides some important information about issues of advertising and representation, and it is these hidden trends that are discussed in the next section.

#### 4.2.2. Beyond the quantitative

Given the dearth of female characters recorded in the ads, it would be interesting to examine the status of these characters and the tasks they are performing. For example, how many of the 762 women characters were portrayed exclusively as housewives advertising a narrow range of products (a cursory analysis suggests a great deal)? Why do these representations persist if the majority of consumers agree that this type of advertising is insulting to

women, and that less traditional portrayals attain more favourable reactions from female consumers (Courtney and Whipple, 1983)? One oft-repeated ad for a company promoting its innovative technology and research programmes, for example, used various associations of intelligence to get the intended message across; in a cast of 20+, there was not a single female, an omission arguably reflecting, and indeed helping to perpetuate, society's traditional links between technology, intellect and maleness (Cockburn and Dilic, 1994). The issue for many groups wishing to see change in media representation thus becomes more than a matter of numbers: as Kern-Foxworth (1994: 155) explains, 'many advertisers...failed to realise that black consumers were interested in seeing more than just a black face'. Issues of stereotyping come to the fore, many of which Wilkes and Valencia, for example, overlook. The above associations with entertainment and dance, for example, can be traced to long-standing stereotypes on both sides of the Atlantic about blacks possessing 'natural rhythm' and whose lot in life was to entertain whites (Toll, 1974; S. Willis, 1990). Similarly, the tendency to cast black males as basketball players in ads for unrelated products (e.g. deodorant and breakfast cereals), as they were in a number of ads in this study, could be said to be drawing on more recent stereotypes about athleticism (Cashmore, 1982). Black characters were cast as hospital porters, nurses, bouncers, tribespeople and even as servants to two whites on a coffee plantation. It was also notable that in an ad for a bank featuring several families discussing their finances, the black family was the only one without a father.

Thomas Burrell, head of Burrell Communications, a black advertising agency in Chicago, has insisted that stereotypes can be laudatory as well as derogatory (Cassidy and Katula, 1995; see Dyer, 1993 Chapter 3). It may be true that even laudatory stereotypes can be harmful, however. Kern-Foxworth points out that 'being shown as a professional athlete is certainly... more prestigious than being shown as a train porter, but being a natural-born athlete is still stereotypical and plays a pivotal role in limiting the perceived occupations to which blacks can aspire' (136). Yet, as Chapter 2 explains, many writers have demanded that discussions of images be moved beyond the sterile oppositions upon which they have depended for many years, oppositions between 'positive' and 'negative' images (or 'positive' and 'realistic'). The challenge for cultural

producers, they say, is to go beyond the aim of countering a negative stereotype with a positive one (hooks, 1990; West, 1993; Winant, 1993; Gray, 1996; Seiter, 1995). Even if the latter was ever feasible, merely reacting to a pre-existing stereotype serves either to reinforce the original, or at least to preserve the dualistic terms of the debate, thus replicating the crude and potentially harmful media construction of black versus white. It also implies that reading is merely a 'response', an effect of the text, a view which recalls earlier media studies conceptions of audience passivity. Some writers have called instead for *challenging* images and a *diversity* of representations (Ross, 1992), in the hope that more progressive images might enable people to imagine alternatives which are currently denied in advertisements. Others, such as hooks (1990) insist that we must go beyond a focus solely on representations and begin to interrogate the social relations behind the production and consumption of such images, a challenge taken up below and in Chapters 5 and 6.

By replicating the Wilkes and Valencia research, the quantitative study detailed here deals only with representations of blackness, rather than making any engagement with whiteness in advertising. In a study of 'race', representation and children in advertising, Seiter (1995) insists that qualities such as creativity and learning associated with white children in ads, or the association of reasoned authority with white men, can be just as strong as the associations of athleticism with black men. Indeed, the qualities of dominant social groups, and their successful recognition on the part of the targeted viewer, may depend on the absence of these same qualities, or possession of contrasting qualities, on the part of the 'other'. If there are no 'other' faces in an ad, however, it may be difficult to identify the forces associating particular qualities with the dominant group. Yet, as Potter and Wetherall (1987: 31) explain, 'The absence [in a text] is as important as the presence', a fact commonly overlooked by the decoders of advertising (Fine and Leopold, 1993: 208). Thus ads with an all-white cast may still be 'racialised'. Dyer (1988), for example, shows how difficult it is to see how the norm of whiteness helps structure media representations, how it is continually presented as 'natural'. This is achieved particularly effectively in advertising, a medium with decades of experience of presenting the constructed as natural.

Recording the appearances of live models also fails to identify the more subtle ways in which blackness can appear in ads, inscribed, for example, in inanimate objects. A recent chocolate advertisement in the UK depicted a white businessman being taught to jive by a chorus line of raisins in the chocolate he had just eaten; these raisins, with their dark features and exaggerated red lips were clearly being depicted as black women. Similarly, singing and dancing flowers, or even animated models, are employed in the role of black entertainers in ways which might well be considered unacceptable if they were replaced by live models. Other ads might deny a black presence in their casting while acknowledging it through the soundtrack, including, on occasions, the voices of black singers emerging from white mouths (a 1995/6 TV campaign for Allied Dunbar, for example). Accusations of oversensitivity can be countered by a historical account of the extent of the commodification of blackness in mainstream culture, which 'has created a social context where the appropriation by non-black people of the black image [and voice] knows no boundaries' (hooks 1992a: 7). That advertisers have undoubtedly played their part in this process is confirmed by the comments of one advertising executive who created an ad for California Raisins. As in the aforementioned chocolate ad, the raisins were given a personality, and we are left in no doubt that this personality was a racialised one:

"Our original idea...was to have a bunch of raisins dance to 'I Heard It Through The Grapevine'. And then we started thinking about what the raisins would look like. We decided that we wanted the raisins to be cool and a bit intimidating... the raisins were dressed in high top sneakers with the laces untied" (quoted in Seger, 1990: 180-1).

In this instance, referents such as the high top sneakers and colour of the raisins were enough to prompt the viewer to identify the raisins as black youth - they could then draw on their 'reservoirs' of culturally constructed knowledge about black youth (structured around the desire/dread duality - Fanon, 1968) to make the required connections about the cool and intimidating personalities.

Trends of appropriation and quotation of American blackness in advertising are far from irrelevant to the UK. Not only have many American stereotypes been

employed and absorbed in Britain, but images of black Americana are often used to sell products on the British market. This is least surprising when American brands are being marketed (Reed, 1995), but this is not always the case. In recent times British television audiences have witnessed Blues in the American deep South selling us Dutch lager (Heineken), American basketball players marketing German sports shoes (Adidas), and urban black American rap being associated with a British high-street bank (Barclays). Thus caricatured images of African Americans are an integral part of the more general Americana that is imported into, and through, UK popular culture. Whilst there are well-documented cultural exchanges between the communities that constitute Gilroy's black Atlantic (Gilroy, 1993a), there are evidently parallel exchanges in the perceptions of these same communities in the minds of the white majorities. This enables advertisers to draw upon, and in the process strengthen, these associations.

#### 4.2.3. Illustrating issues of racialised representation

Jackson and Taylor (1996) identify the need to investigate how the same ads are read by different people in different places. I hoped to part-fill this lacuna in the process of researching the construction and consumption of racialised meanings in two different areas. This required me to select particular ads to show to respondents in both of my case study schools, which also served to provide some continuity through the various stages of the research. The details of the selection are contained in Chapter 3. The content of these ads is analysed below from my own perspective, facilitating a comparison of my readings with the intentions of the producers and those of the young consumers I interviewed. My interpretations are supplemented by data from interviews with the producers of some of the ads, which reveal some of the intentions of the advertisers and begin to shed light on the social relations of ads' production. Stills from the ads are provided throughout.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> To some scholars of advertising the analyses below might seem rather superficial. Whole theses could undoubtedly be written about each one of these ads. However, it is felt that for the purposes of this project, more detailed analysis is unnecessary, particularly in the light of the comments made in Chapter 2 about exclusively textual

**(i) Daily Mail (Optimedia, 1995)**

This advertisement was selected because of its reference to discourses of Englishness and whiteness. It is promoting a competition in the Daily Mail whereby readers stand a chance of winning a country cottage if they collect a certain number of tokens from the newspaper. The location for the entire ad is the cottage and garden that constitute the prize, and the various scenes and details of the competition are described by a well-spoken, 'comfortable' male voiceover. The voiceover begins, "For countless generations Old Oaks cottage has been a haven of peace and tranquillity...", an emphasis on heritage and temporal stability that is reflected in the opening scene: filmed in a Victorian sepia, the shot is a full-frontal of the thatched cottage; in its rose-filled and manicured garden a woman in an all-white Victorian dress with matching parasol stands by while her children, also dressed in white, play, the boy with a rocking horse, the girl with flowers. The scene then metamorphoses into colour and to the 1950's, overflowing with green rurality. The children are now playing with a pedal car and hula hoop respectively, while the viewers are informed that these gardens have been "designed especially for you by the Royal Horticultural Society". We are then in the present, with the children now playing croquet (evidently still able to enjoy innocent pleasures like their forebears) and a happy couple (well presented but, judging by their fashions, definitely urbanites) clinking glasses of Pimms together in celebration of the house they have apparently just won. The children are now gazing open-mouthed at the cottage's interior as the narrator informs us that "this dream home" is "in the

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analyses, and Hermes's (1995) remarks on the tendency for academic readings to 'drown out' those of consumers, even when the latter are consulted. (For more on in-depth textual analysis see Williamson, 1978; Blonsky, 1985; Goldman, 1992; Tolson, 1996). Additional information from producer interviews is included where relevant.

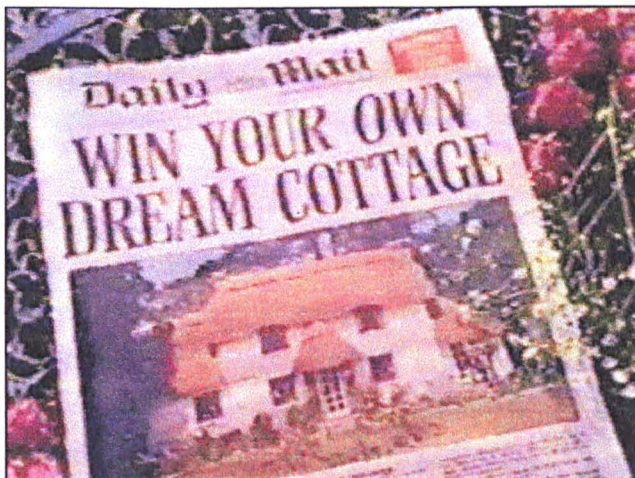


Figure 4.1: Stills from Daily Mail ad



heart of the English countryside", and "is waiting for one lucky family... will it be yours?". The classical background music that has accompanied the narrator fades away as the ad ends with a close-up shot of the newspaper on a background of pink roses.

This advertisement paints a very particular picture of its assumed readers (and those of its main rival the *Daily Express*, whose readers the promotion was designed to attract) and of the values they are deemed to possess, and in the process defines and constructs a very particular view of Englishness. The Englishness represented here is one in which simple and innocent pleasures can still be enjoyed, as they have been for generations, unchanged, and undisturbed in a rural idyll. The icons used to connote this England range from the thatched cottage itself, to the garden roses to the children's games. There are countless class markers present that the ordinary reader has the opportunity to buy into, or win. And this pleasant land that is being offered is not only green but indisputably white. It is not just the faces and the outfits that are white, but the extent to which whiteness structures the ad becomes evident when we try to imagine non-white characters being cast in the same role (Seiter, 1995). It is quite inconceivable that the conventions of advertising and representations of Englishness would permit a non-white couple to enter such a realm. These absences are affirmed by symbols which serve to exclude racialised others: the emphasis on a rooted and stable history 'for countless generations', the rurality of the scene and even the innocence of the pastimes being engaged in. An ad such as this is evidence enough that visual images do not have to have non-white faces present to be thoroughly racialised.

#### **(ii) Lilt (McCann Erickson, 1994-5)**

Advertising a 'tropical' fruit drink, this ad is apparently set in the Caribbean and a certain construction of Caribbean blackness is crucial to the meanings being attached to the product. However, a surprising (and rather derogatory) reference to whiteness is also made at the end of the ad.

It opens with a grinning man playing with a pale-skinned child on the steps of a simple one storey shack, presumably his shop or home. He is dressed in bright clothing and sports thin dreadlocks to his neck. His attention is taken immediately by a taxi driver who calls out, "Hey, Jah-man, lobsters on South beach!" J says nothing in return but grins and gives a thumbs up, as women move in the foreground carrying fresh fruit on their heads. They begin loading up a multi-coloured pick-up truck with cans of Lilt, while a head-scarfed woman sings the praises of the mango and mandarin flavour in a slow drawl. J drives off down a deserted road, through palm trees and past a man carrying baskets on his head; he passes a group of school girls in uniform who wave and, for no apparent reason, all wiggle their hips as they wave. J says nothing in return, but grins rather inanely back while rocking his head to the calypso-esque soundtrack now present. He is still grinning, rocking and saying nothing as he passes two girls in front of a bright house and brightly coloured washing on the line, the girls having a water fight in a surplus bath in the garden. Driving onto the beach among the fishing boats, he is informed that there are "lobsters over there!". The lobsters are a long line of sunburned white bodies prostrate on the beach, the numbers somehow accentuating the banality of their activity. J invites two of them over to his truck which has sprouted a huge Lilt sign from somewhere. His grinning and swaying become ever more exaggerated as more and more lobsters purchase his wares, and a strong Caribbeanised voiceover reminds the viewer of "Lilt, with the totally tropical taste".

Clearly the reference to the white holidaymakers as 'lobsters' is no great subversion of the power relations present in the ad or in the 'master and servant' relationship that structures the activities represented. Yet it does come as a bit of a surprise, offering a commentary on the images of the white foreigners held by the black locals (see hooks, 1992b), and a trace of irony in the midst of an advertisement that otherwise presents a highly caricatured and stereotypical picture of Caribbeans in their 'native environment'. The viewer is left in no doubt that these are simple people, living in a simple but colourful landscape, with very simple pleasures. Serving whites is just another element of



Figure 4.2: Stills from Lilt ad

such pleasures, which are enjoyed with happy-go-lucky, dancing-as-we-go enthusiasm. The clichés abound in this caricatured image of the Caribbean that serves to pin the above meanings to a can of fruit drink. Blackness essentially acts as the vehicle for the transport and attachment of these meanings. The commodification of blackness in the advert might be being played out a world away in the Caribbean, but we can speculate about the extent to which its influence extends across the Atlantic, being shown to a predominantly white audience at prime time, and influencing the identities and treatment of black Britons.

Bearing in mind the crucial role played by commodification in black oppression and racism (Wallace, 1990b), there is little doubt that this Lilt ad, and its successor in the campaign, are 'racist', as opposed to merely 'racialised'. Semantics aside, the interview with Caroline Young, Account Director for Lilt, reveals the extent of such commodification, and the egregiousness of the racism that informs it. As the longest and most instructive of the interviews with producers of the selected ads, I have included segments of dialogue from the interview. It began by me asking about the motivations behind Lilt's sponsoring of the Notting Hill Carnival, and gives a flavour not only of how many account people treat their product as they might their own child, but of Young's view of blackness and 'Caribbean life'. It is there to be owned, exploited, and represented in any (grossly stereotypical) way that will suit the pre-conceived image of the brand.

JT: *Why did you choose to get involved with the Carnival?*

CY: *Well, it is just perfect for Lilt, perfect about Caribbean life [...] It was a platform for legitimating Lilt. The Carnival was more authentic this year, in fact it's getting more authentic every year [...] At the Carnival we wanted to explore where Lilt could live...if it could live outside the Caribbean. The radio ads [in association with the Carnival] proved that it is the attitude that is important. The attitude travels well. It's like Rio [soft drinks] and Red Stripe [beer], they've got an authentic Caribbean as well [...] The Caribbean attitude we're looking to own is all about problem solution, how to turn a negative into a positive. You know, the Caribbeans will just say 'chill out, take it easy, look at it from another angle'.*

Young was reluctant to talk about the ad described above, saying the new ad had cast aside the "deviousness" of the former. I assumed she was referring to the objectionable portrayals of the 'locals' (as one Jamaican journalist put it, referring to Red Stripe, "They're doing a Lilt: portraying us as smiling fools lolling about in the sunshine with nothing better to do. It's no coincidence that Lilt is sponsoring this year's Notting Hill Carnival: that's how they like us, adding local colour, listening to loud music" - quoted in Jones, 1995); but far from it.

JT: *What do you mean by "deviousness"?*

CY: *Well, the stuff about lobsters, the joke about Brits not knowing how to travel, and this guy goes to a beach where there are a load of Brits getting hot and sells them Lilt [...] In the new ad we put two guys from the Caribbean in their own world, they were from there and they were cast there. Well, actually, the white guy in it was Caribbean and the black guy we brought in from California [triangular trade?], but they were both really laid back and cool [describes ad script, which concludes...] Basically, they go back to the beach, do a back high five on the beach and that's it. Real Caribbean life comes through in it.*

Young (who, incidentally, is American) continued at length about the 'legitimate', 'real', 'authentic' Caribbean Lilt were representing and trying to 'own', about what 'they' are 'really like' ("*They are such chilled out people, they really do say 'no problem, take a break'. It's this attitude we wanted to try and own. It's just right for Lilt*"). It was clear from the interview that Young really *did* believe what she was saying, that there really was this authentic Caribbean there, that she knew what it was like, and that any criticisms about the ad were merely due to their failure to portray an authentic version. I informed her of the objections to the first ad from some black students (see Chapter 6), and she replied with the more 'authentic' script of the new ad. She insisted that Lilt's market *did* include black consumers as well as white, and that "*many black consumers were involved in the discussions about the future of the brand. They do think this attitude is relevant. They definitely think it is ownable for Lilt*". Her conceptions and views might be laughable were they not held by someone with so much influence over the images of blackness circulating in popular culture. As depressing as this was to hear for me, it was nothing compared to the unease

felt by some of the students who watched this ad in the group discussions, as Chapter 6 below explains.

**(iii) Snapple (Banks Hoggins O'Shea, 1995)**

Another ad for a fruit drink, this time American, this is one of three ads in a campaign which features the managers of three stores selling Snapple. All of the ads are shot in the style of an amateur video, with associated camera wobbles and poor angles. This particular ad opens with a shot of a health food shop in a grey London high street. As a few Mr. Ordinaries wander past, an enthusiastic American voiceover introduces, "Mistry's Health Food Store, brought to you in association with the Snapple Beverage Corporation, makers of delicious fruit drinks and iced teas". We are then presented with a close-up of a fairly elderly Indian couple, presumably the proprietors, standing nervously outside their store, and grinning inanely. The gist of the ad is that they insist upon advertising their own products in spite of the best efforts of the narrator and camera operator to get them to promote the Snapple they also sell. This in itself reflects badly on the couple, suggesting that they cannot be trusted to follow orders. We follow them into the shop, accompanied by some unidentifiable Muzak, and the woman says in a strong Indian accent, "Health food is no mystery at Mistry's" and proceeds to introduce a selection of their wares. After each one ('Icelandic calp tablets', 'blue wheat tortilla chips', 'organic honey from Africa') her husband holds up the product in question and answers "Naturally", in an even stronger Indian accent, before grinning inanely. It soon becomes apparent that his wife, and the ad as a whole, are mocking the husband. As the wife introduces 'herbal eye patches' the camera pans to her husband who is wearing the patches beneath his national health glasses, still grinning inanely, and looking extremely silly. Meanwhile the camera has been struggling to focus on the Snapple adverts and bottles in the store, and continues to do so until the end shot when the Snapple copy appears. This final shot is looking up at the couple as they stand to attention outside the shop, she in sari, he in a white laboratory coat and, thanks to his stance and expression, looking somewhat 'slow'. He is left to reel off, in an excruciating Indian monotone, "Mistry's Health Food Store, 20 Station Parade, Willesden Green, North West 2".



*Figure 4.3: Stills from Snapapple ad*

This ad was chosen partly because it is one of the few to have featured British Asians recently, and the groups at both schools were likely to feature some Asian students. As explained in Chapter 3, a quantitative study that had examined the frequency of appearance of Asian characters in advertisements would almost certainly have found them to be woefully underrepresented in relation to both white and black characters. Yet the ad was also awarded a silver medal at the Designer & Art Directors Awards (D&AD), a recognition of the industry's positive assessment of it. Whilst the style is quite innovative, such recognition is both surprising and disappointing given its treatment of the two lead characters, who are there, purely and simply to be laughed at. The obscure products they choose to advertise serve to increase the oddity value of the couple themselves, as the American voiceover of authority and reason has to interrupt to ensure that they advertise Snapple as presumably instructed. With the couple struggling with the pronunciation and portrayed as "grinning picaninnies", to quote Enoch Powell, one is left with a feeling that a fundamental objective has been to make fun of these people and their intellect whilst promoting Snapple, and, in particular, to make fun of their foreignness and their otherness.<sup>2</sup>

#### **(iv) Sun Alliance (Leagas Shafron Davis, 1994-5)**

Like so many ads for insurance companies, the Sun Alliance ad constructs a number of 'nightmare' scenarios before highlighting how the company's insurance can provide peace of mind should, heaven forbid, any of these become reality for us. It opens with a dramatic, squealing soundtrack accompanying firemen as they rush into a blazing house to rescue a grateful elderly woman along with a framed picture of, we presume, her late husband. 'We insure more properties in Great Britain than anyone else', runs the copy. Next we are on a beach, surrounded by soothing water music, and watch the anguish of a wheelchair-bound father unable to join his children playing in the sea. 'An income if your career is cut short', is the copy this time. Then the music becomes more dramatic once more and the copy flashes up: 'If you're ill

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<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, it proved impossible to interview anybody connected to this advertisement.



anywhere in the world...'. This is the longest scene in the ad, and the reason why it was selected for the research. The opening shot is of a white man in a white suit lying on a primitive stretcher, being carried and surrounded by many black men, somewhere in the African savannah. A distressed white woman, presumably his wife, dressed in a cream dress and matching African-style headscarf, is leaning over him. All of a sudden the wife panics and starts thrashing around. In a symbolic move she tears the headscarf from her head, before violently pushing black men away as the pace of the music builds up. The copy '...we can bring you home' appears. The camera pans to the back of a racing pick-up truck, in which the husband is lying down with his wife mopping his brow. The wife turns to see a white executive jet on the runway and a white doctor, in white coat, rushing towards her. The next shot is of the plane soaring high above a raging waterfall and scrubland, heading back to 'civilisation'.

This whole scene is loaded with heavily racialised imagery that needs little elucidation. The imperialist referents are blatant, and the whole scene is structured around civilised/primitive and light/dark dualities which are clearly mapped onto a white/black dichotomy by the ad. Jarosz (1992) has drawn attention to the historical persistence and ideological power of the metaphor of Africa as the Dark Continent, the Heart of Darkness, and shown how a web of such dualities are imaginatively called forth through metaphor in a variety of Western cultural forms; to her list we can add advertising. The ground for the imperialist overtones is arguably laid earlier on in the ad by the reference to *Great Britain*. The associations of whiteness with civilisation are spelled out through the symbolic use of the colour white throughout the ad. The whiteness of both patient and doctor, their attire and even the aeroplane contrast with the darkness that pervaded in the earlier scene on the stretcher. Whilst the ad was set in Africa, whiteness assumes as important a role as blackness in the racialised structure of this ad.

The fact that it is set in Africa at all is interesting, because the first two scenarios (a house fire, disability) are clearly ones that many people could conceivably find themselves in, which is presumably why they have been chosen. Yet how many people in the target audience are likely to find



*Figure 4.4: Stills from Sun Alliance ad*

themselves in need of medical assistance in a barren African savannah landscape in the near future? Surely not many, which suggests that the scenario was constructed purely because it represented the archetypal holiday nightmare (and a more deep-seated 'nightmare' of the white imagination). The ad used an assumed knowledge of the stereotypes of threatening black masculinity, and of the civilised/primitive dichotomy with its roots in the British imperial conquest to achieve this (see Duncan, 1976, on how racialised stereotypes affect white perceptions of filmic events). This example (not an isolated one at that, as advertisements for Next and Lynx in the quantitative study demonstrated) goes to show how images of a particular past, of Empire, of conquering the Other, are very much a part of the present thanks to the work of some advertisers. Such an allusion to Empire also points to the importance of particular places and contexts for creating the desired associations for products. As was the case with the Lilt ad, and with Badawi's (1988) discussion of news coverage, we can ask what impact these African images might have on racialised relations in Britain.

Mark Baker, marketing manager of Sun Alliance, disagreed with the above analysis of the campaign. He insisted that the scenes depicted in the ad were ones that we could all find ourselves in at some time in our lives; indeed they were constructed merely as situations "which reflect the uncertainties of life". In disputing the suggestion of racialised content, he pointed to the fact that, as far as he knew, none of the 150 complainants that contacted the ITC about the campaign, objected to these representations (most of these complaints, and those of the Sun Alliance Action Group, were actually regarding the 'shocking' juxtaposition of imagery in another ad in the same campaign, also set in Africa - see Brooks, 1995).

#### **(v) Reebok (Lowe Howard-Spink, 1996)**

This is the hardest of the ads to describe due to the innovative nature of its production. It is clear from the start that the theme of the ad is inclusivity, and it splits the screen in two to achieve this. Using an ingenious combination of special effects and meticulously planned camera work it manages to present

two separate scenes, shot with different characters in different places, as working together in harmony. On the left-hand side of the screen is a black female athlete in a white vest crouched on the blocks; on the right-hand side is a white runner in black kit, of almost identical build. After a quick close-up of their Reebok shoes, they leave the blocks 'as one' heading for the hurdles, and their joint progress is returned to throughout the ad, until they both hit the tape, evidently having won, in the final shot. In another scene a game of football is being played by a group of women footballers in a packed stadium on the right-hand side and some young children in an inner-city school playground on the left, working together to score a goal in front of the camera. In some scenes characters move from one side of the screen to the other, even changing sex in the process. Aerobics, personal fitness, marathon running and a school sportsday are also covered, with participants of all ages, both black and white, male and female. The ad concludes, after an almost subliminal shot of the earth from space ('Planet Reebok') with the Reebok logo on a black background with the copy, 'Reebok believes in the athlete in all of us', and the stirring soundtrack draws to a close.

This appears to be a classic attempt by an advertiser to make an ad as inclusive as possible: with so many characters featuring in the ad, few people can claim not to be a part of the target audience. Although the majority of the characters are women (unusual in an ad for sportswear), the fact that the ad is for a sports company may be an important factor in facilitating this inclusivity. For a variety of reasons, some of which are discussed below by both producers and consumers, and none of which are far removed from stereotypes of black athleticism, there has long been a greater propensity to cast black characters in sports ads than for other products. Thus it is not perhaps such a radical move for a sports manufacturer to attempt to be so inclusive. Evidence that there may be processes of stereotyping at work here, either consciously or subconsciously, is arguably provided by the fact that in spite of all this inclusivity, there are no Asian characters in the ad. All the non-white characters are of African-Caribbean origin.

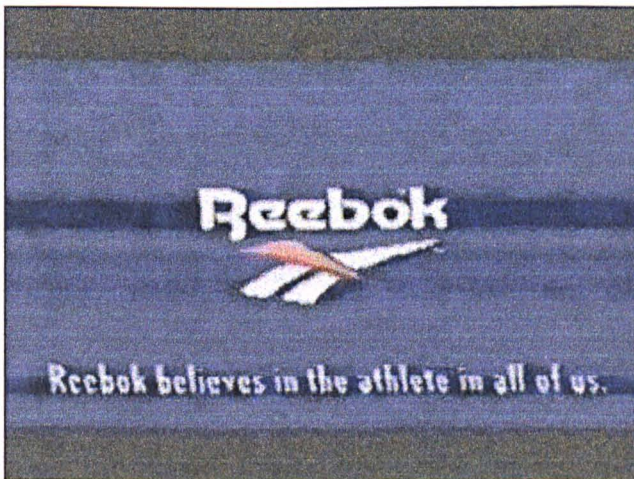


Figure 4.5: Stills from Reebok ad

Andrea Fiore, the agency account manager, confirmed that maximum inclusivity was the primary objective of the ad's representation. He insisted, however, that like any other inclusive ad, the logic behind the portrayals was purely a matter of target economics. He said that the whole campaign was initiated because a planner had noticed that in the midst of the huge growth in the fitness-wear market, Reebok were not increasing their market share; they thus set out to target women, and used black and white, and young and old characters in order to target as broad a market as possible. The ad was not portraying 'harmony' for the sake of it. Interestingly, he revealed that the creatives had distanced themselves from the ad because their initial script had been rejected for reasons of cost. They had intended some of the shots to be set in the West and others in Africa, as opposed to all in the UK; such a setting would arguably have portrayed a rather different 'racialised' message, suggesting, for example, that black athletes only had a place on 'Planet Reebok' if they live in Africa.

**(vi) Persil (J. Walter Thompson, 1995-6)**

This particular Persil ad attracted a great deal of publicity in the national newspapers for its supposedly 'progressive' casting and scripting, playing an important part in ensuring the ad's continued screening for close to a year. The basis for this media attention was the portrayal of an apparently middle-class, two-parent black family. Such a casting is a rarity in any advertising, and even more so in soap powder ads which have been structured by the desirability of 'whiteness' and for generations (McClintock, 1995; see Sibley, 1991, on advertising's promotion of whiteness, purity and domestic order).

The ad opens with a close up of a black man looking down at the camera: "To perform like Linford you've got to think like Linford...*P.M.A.!*" The camera then pans down to a confused son of 6 or 7 years old, scratching his chin. Putting his hand on the boy's shoulder, his father explains: "Positive Mental Attitude! Now, you are on the blocks in an hour. Go and check your equipment." As the boy runs off we see the setting is decidedly rural. The garden is very green, surrounded by trees, and the family house is an old cottage. As the boy searches for his kit in a spacious kitchen, surrounded by 'white goods' and

plants, he discovers that his sandwiches have soiled his white running vest. Mum then enters, sporting a despairing yet forgiving smile, but saying nothing, and attends to the vest with the help of Persil. The soothing northern tones of a voiceover inform us that, "*With one big stain, one little Linford and one chance, new generation Persil performs brilliantly*". By now we are at the race itself, seemingly a rural school sportsday, and the camera pans the competitors. We see a decidedly unathletic looking white boy, followed by a boy of possibly Asian descent, and then our hero, with his dad's words 'P.M.A.' running through his mind. When the gun sounds and the race begins, we realise that it is not a running race after all but a sack race. As our hero passes the line first, the Chariots of Fire theme tune ringing in our ears, we see mum and dad on the sidelines overflowing with pride as they celebrate. The closing shot is of the boy jumping for joy, cute smile as wide as ever. The narrator reads us the endline, now on the screen: "*Persil performs brilliantly... and it shows*".

Soap powder ads have already attracted a limited amount of academic attention. Roland Barthes, for example, deconstructed ads for Omo and highlighted how advertisers can create new insecurities among the audience by claiming that linen has 'depth', and thus requires soap powders that can clean in depth (Barthes, 1973). More recently, Mackenzie (1984) and McClintock (1995) reveal how soap came to embody the whole British colonial conquest and its values through a study of soap advertising. Fetishised notions of cleanliness and the symbolic significance of dirt are shown to have contributed to the very construction of categories of whiteness and blackness (see also Douglas, 1966), a connection that makes the casting of a black family in the Persil ad particularly interesting. Sibley (1995a), meanwhile, identifies the consumer culture's offer of a comforting state of purity which can be achieved through consumption, and uses Persil adverts to illustrate his case.

The ad in question here does represent something of a departure for advertising in general, not just soap powder advertising, through its portrayal of a two parent black family (a portrayal that merits a letter of praise, according to America's Ad Watch Committee who monitor representations of African-Americans - Kern-Foxworth, 1994). The family are clearly middle-class, which

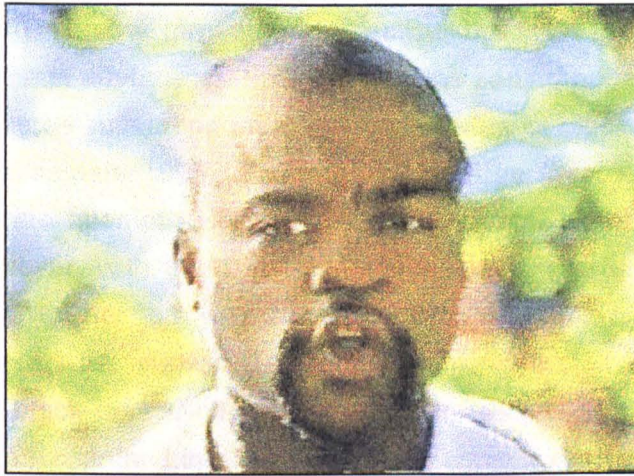


Figure 4.6: Stills from Persil ad



would make sense from a targeting perspective, but such representations are still extremely rare in advertising. Furthermore, the setting appears to be a rural one, to some degree subverting the stereotypical view of black people as being entirely urban (Kinsman, 1995). The line-up in the sack race also appears to reflect a deliberate attempt to be inclusive. The format of the ad is standard Persil fare, however, with mum in this case not saying a word, just smiling sweetly and doing her bit where only she can, namely in the kitchen. Throughout the ad the viewer is also left thinking that it is structured by associations of black masculinity and athleticism, with consistent and familiar references to the sprinter Linford Christie. To some extent the use of irony undermines this assumption, as we discover that it is a sack race that the boy is preparing for and not a sprint. But the overtones of athleticism are arguably still there. They are perhaps reinforced by the appearance of the actor playing the father, better known for his role in BBC2's *The Real McKoy* comedy programme. He looks very different in the ad, however, with his haircut and beard ensuring he bears more than a passing resemblance to the well-known British runner Kriss Akabusi. The Persil account manager, Christy Stewart-Smith, was very reluctant to answer all my questions about this ad (see Chapter 3), so we can only speculate whether or not this was intentional on the part of the advertisers; were Persil, for example, trying even to exploit these associations, encouraging some viewers to draw on their culturally constructed knowledge of Akabusi's personality and apply it to the ad in question?

The answers obtained to questions about this ad were interesting, if brief. Stewart-Smith insisted that the ad was no different from any other Persil ad, in as much as *"it aimed to reflect the world of our target consumers as accurately as possible"*, and the target audience was no different from normal. Having a black family was not even in the original brief, he insisted, but did, he suggested, provide a "contemporary edge". Stewart-Smith was strangely reticent on the subject of 'race' and casting, continually asserting its insignificance. Instead of recognising that matters of representation were relevant to his campaign and advertising in general, he declared, *"It is considered totally normal by us and our clients to put black people in advertising"*. One is inclined to ask where they are in that case. Perhaps his reaction can be seen in the context of a comment made by another interviewee

(John McDonald) who said, *"It shouldn't be the case, but if you include a non-white character in your ad you are seen to be making a statement"*. In other fora he was prepared to take the credit for the praise the ad had received for its use of a black family (Jones, 1995), but still denying that the casting was a break from convention. To have done so would be a tacit acknowledgement that Persil (and other advertisers) had ignored part of the nation's population to date. Yet, as the comments from other industry employees suggest (see section 4.3.2), the latter has very much been the case.

**(vii) Budweiser (GCI Group, 1995)**

Budweiser have used American blues to convey the desired image for their brand in the UK for many years now, and this ad continues the association. The opening shot employs a yellow filter to give a sleepy air to the quiet American street in view. The buildings are clearly metropolitan, but have seen better days. The passing of a yellow cab and a few well-timed car horns are enough for us to realise that we are in metropolitan America. As some simple blues slide guitar strikes up, the camera enters the dusty interior of one of the buildings in shot. An old black man in a 'pork pie' hat wanders onto a deserted club stage, with chairs and tables piled up all around. The stage is set in front of a huge window with yellow light pouring through it. The man's worn face glances around, the guitar speeds up, and he starts to tap dance, silhouetted against the window. The Budweiser logo then flashes up in the window, so fast as to be almost subliminal. As the dancer speeds up, a close-up of bubbly liquid spraying out of a bottleneck, screen left, covers his image. A spinning Budweiser bottle top is then superimposed above an overhead shot of the old man pirouetting, until they appear to become one. After a musical and dancing finale, we are treated to close-up of the Budweiser bottle label, framed by the words 'The Genuine Article', and a mischievous but rather worn laugh from the man himself. (This supposed authenticity is compromised somewhat, not only by the fact that the beer's name is cribbed from a Czech beer, but that the words 'Brewed in the UK' appear midway through in small print).



Figure 4.7: Stills from Budweiser ad

Clearly authenticity is a key concept with which to understand Budweiser's presentation of their brand. This ad can be placed within a long history of black folk-cultural forms (particularly music) that have been appropriated by marketers targeting white audiences (Lury, 1996). Gilroy (1993b) sees this authenticity, with its connotations of the uncommercialised and uncommodified (Ross, 1989), as being no more than the creation of romantic (white) nostalgia for an imagined past. Very little actually happens in this ad, and there are few symbolic resources for the British viewer to work with. Yet we are given enough for us to be able to make the necessary connections. We know enough about the very particular, and stereotyped view of black America being presented to be able to attach the required meanings to the beer. Production techniques like the spinning routine described above succeed in presenting this man as Budweiser personified. When the viewer consumes Budweiser he or she is consuming this man and, thanks to the symbolic baggage that he carries, effectively consuming authentic America, too. Budweiser have helped to stylise the implicit alienation of this man, and the alienation that often gave rise to this musical genre in the first instance. As Goldman (1992) explains in relation to Levi's, the advertiser is romanticising the experience of being black and in turn appropriating it for their brand.<sup>3</sup>

**(viii) Nike Revolution (Simons Palmer Clemmow Johnson, 1996)**

The final two ads selected are both for the same sportswear brand, but have been chosen for very different reasons. 'Revolution' is about basketball, but the scarcity of the references to Nike's basketball wear suggests that its primary function is brand building, cultivating an image for the brand, an objective confirmed by the ad agency. The advert was selected on the basis of its interesting mining of our commonsense knowledge of black masculinity, and American black masculinity at that.

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<sup>3</sup> It was not possible to speak to anybody connected with this particular campaign.

Five huge men in basketball kit stride towards us in the opening scene, one carrying a ball, and focusing on some unidentified object on the horizon. The camera gazes up at them to accentuate their height. Four of the players are black, and one is seemingly mixed-race. An aggressive rap soundtrack kicks in by KRS-ONE, sampling Gil Scott-Heron's 'The revolution will not be televised': *"The revolution will be led by Jason King, Jimmy Jackson, Eddie Jones, Joe Smith and Kevin Garnett"*. A close-up on each player's face follows their introduction on the soundtrack. All look very focused, very mean, almost sneering. After a fleeting glimpse of the Nike boots of one of them, they start playing basketball amongst themselves on a floodlit court surrounded by darkness. The soundtrack continues: *"But it will not be followed by post-game personal interviews, because the revolution will not be televised. The revolution will not be televised and the revolution will not fail"*. The camera cuts quickly between assorted basketball action shots; not casual lay-ups but testosterone-filled power plays. *"Because it fulfils the unfulfilled promise of Hank Gavett and Frank Wilson, the revolution is about basketball and basketball is the truth"*. At which point one of the men (curiously bare-chested all of a sudden, muscles rippling) scores with an enormous, gravity-defying dunk. Another fleetingly walks across the screen, appearing to demand a ball. 'Just Do It', implores the endline. This same player is then shown slamming the ball through the hoop, then hanging from the hoop and pouting as the soundtrack draws to a close and a simple white Nike 'tick' appears in the bottom corner of the screen.

This ad is concerned with the construction of Nike 'attitude', and it uses images of, and stereotypes of, black masculinity as building blocks. The ad attempts to tread the fine line between desire and dread in relation to black masculinity (cf. Fanon, 1968; Mailer, 1968; 1975 Ch. 3). The desire element is the rock upon which the ad is built, namely the stereotypes of black masculinity that many white males find so appealing (Back, 1994). These men are athletic, they are clearly 'hard', and their sexuality is more than just implicit. The ad positively oozes aggression. But for a (white) audience this is fine, because it is safe aggression, taken out in the 'legitimate' arena of the basketball court. Thus we can sit back, relax, and indulge our gaze, for these are model athletes performing for our benefit. The soundtrack plays a very important part in creating the desired atmosphere, but also gives clues to another achievement

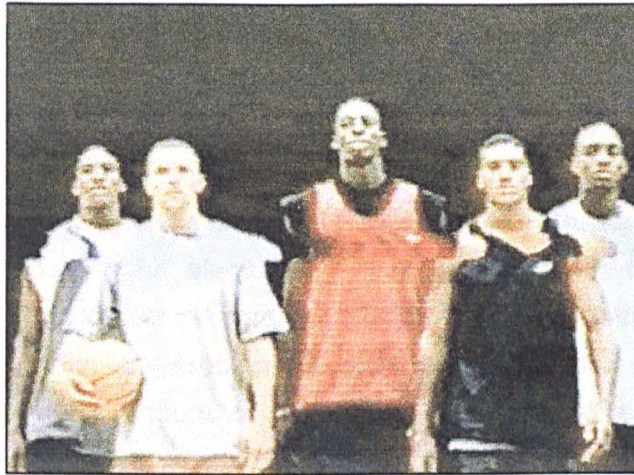


Figure 4.8: Stills from Nike Revolution ad

of the ad. By using a track by a 'traditionally subversive artist', as one (black) agency employee (who loved this ad) described KRS-ONE (see also Henderson, 1996, on KRS-ONE's album *By all means necessary*), the ad successfully appropriates the potential energy of black nationalism and revolution and claims it for itself. This is an example of advertisers effectively 'colonising' the meaningful elements of people's lives for themselves, and converting them into corporate symbols (Goldman, 1992; Astroff, 1994). Such appropriation is particularly problematic when the meaningful elements belong to relatively powerless sections of society, as the students' reactions testify in Chapters 5 and 6.

**(ix) Nike Cantona (Simons Palmer Clemmow Johnson, 1995)**

Nike Cantona represented a rather significant departure for television ads when it first appeared in 1995. Not only was there a total absence of Nike products in the ad, no such products were even referred to. In fact the only reference to Nike at all was a small logo that appeared briefly at the end of ad. The subject of the ad is instead racism, and in particular racism in football.

The format is extremely simple but effective. It is shot in black and white and against a black background. It features two footballers talking separately, but about the same subject, to the viewer. The dialogue switches rapidly from one to the other as does the camera, focusing on either their head and shoulders or even just their mouth. The two players are Eric Cantona, then of Manchester United, and Les Ferdinand, then of Queens Park Rangers. The dialogue is as follows:

EC: *What do you...*

LF: *...see? A black man?*

EC: *A Frenchman?*

EC/LF: *Or a footballer?*

EC: *Is it o.k. to shout...*

LF: *...racist abuse at me...*

EC: *...just because I am on the football pitch? Some people say...*

LF: *...we have to accept abuse as part of the game...*

LF/EC: *...WHY?*

EC: *I know that violence is not acceptable in sport...*

LF: *...so why should we accept hatred?*

EC: *Why argue about...*

LF: *...differences?*

EC: *I'd rather play football*

This is followed by a black screen. 'Just Do It' flashes up momentarily, followed by the red and white Nike badge, all in silence.

For the adwatcher, this ad has a number of curious elements. For instance, the ad was aired soon after Eric Cantona was banned from playing in the English Premier League following his assault on a Crystal Palace supporter who had been 'racially' abusing him (the ad had been scripted before this incident, but the line about EC knowing that violence was unacceptable was added afterwards). But what was this ad saying about this incident? Was it exploiting Cantona's assault, and essentially justifying it by drawing attention to the broader problem of abuse in the game? Or was it offering Cantona the medium to publicly apologise and repent for his assault? And why was Les Ferdinand chosen as Cantona's foil? Although he has since attracted huge publicity with a move to Newcastle (and to Adidas, incidentally), at the time he was a relative unknown. It seems as though Nike were not expecting the audience to draw on their culturally constructed knowledge of this particular personality, as frequently occurs when black celebrities appear in ads (Jackson, 1994). After all, Nike had the Arsenal player Ian Wright at their disposal, but he was not used. It could be that he would have generated all the wrong associations, for he has long been portrayed by the media as an aggressive hothead who cannot control himself, and thus deserves all the abuse he gets.

The ad is clearly an interesting one, however, breaking ground in Britain for its tackling of what is essentially a social issue in its advertising (see Vogel, 1989, Hunt and Grunig, 1994 and Schroder, 1997, for more on so-called 'corporate responsibility advertising', or 'advocacy' advertising). Yet in spite of this, it is highlighting racism as an issue in football only. The viewer need never know





Figure 4.9: Stills from Nike Cantona ad

that racism is a problem in society at large. It also, rather curiously, attempts to 'racialise' Frenchness. This could be read as confirmation of the suspicion that Nike are merely attempting to appropriate meaningful anti-racist sentiment as their corporate sign, a suspicion that grows in the light of an interview with the ad's producer.

According to Peter Bracegirdle, the agency account manager, the decision to tackle a social issue was made in the agency and not by the client. It was based on an assessment of relative product parity in the sportshoe market, which has made it difficult for companies to compete on a product basis alone. Instead, brand preferences can be made, he insists, on issues such as brand responsibility. The same logic was behind Nike's association with the Kick Racism Out of Football campaign, with which this ad coincided -- their involvement was intended to show Nike "at the heart of football and its big issues", Bracegirdle said. He revealed that the company were worried about the negative publicity to the campaign, given that Nike have been accused of prejudice in the US and might thus be seen to be hypocritical. Fears were allayed by consulting the Commission for Racial Equality, he said, and who concluded that "Nike as a corporation was up to it". This suggests that the anti-racist ethos is not something that comes from the corporation, but has just been adopted for superficial marketing purposes: "there is that 'cynical marketing' position, yes", Bracegirdle replied.

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The above analysis of selected racialised ads and the discussion of the more qualitative issues of representation hidden in the tables point to the limitations of a purely quantitative study of representation in advertising, in as much as our knowledge of the meaning in these ads is so partial. We need to move debates towards understanding the processes (of racialisation, for example) *behind* the trends highlighted here. However, to have conducted these debates without any analysis of the frequency of representations would have been injudicious. To begin to understand these deeper processes we must escape the confines of a text-based study and seek to explore the social relations of production.

### 4.3. The social relations of production

This section is intended to build on some of the comments of the producers in the above section. It introduces the roles of the producers of advertising in the construction of racialised discourse, based on the fieldwork methods outlined in Chapter 3. It attempts to identify the factors influencing the production of racialised work of the kind highlighted above.

To do so the second part of this section will examine the ways in which the production of advertising is explicitly racialised. However, there are other factors apparently contributing to, and underpinning, this racialisation that are rooted in more general advertising practice, and these are usefully introduced by looking at the advertising industry's relationship to the youth market. This relationship is interesting in its own right (to some extent answering Jackson and Taylor's, 1996, call for producer ethnographies and 'insider knowledge' of the industry); it also provides signposts to the critique and 'demystification' of the industry in Chapter 7. Moreover, it points to how the industry conceives of the very people that constituted my consumer interview groups, enabling a more detailed sketching of the links between the production and consumption of advertising.

#### 4.3.1. Advertising and the youth market

To say that advertising agencies' employees and market researchers are obsessed with youth would hardly be an exaggeration (the trade press, a usually reliable barometer of industry concerns, regularly churn out articles and special reports with titles such as 'Decoding Teens', 'Who has the youth has the future', 'Youth: know your market', and so on). And they are not obsessed, it would seem, without some justification. According to the 1994 Youth Target Group Index<sup>4</sup>, young people in Britain between the ages of 7 and 18 had a combined spending power of £8 billion, plus the same again in so-called 'pester

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<sup>4</sup> This is a staple of the main TGI, an annual survey of 24,000 adults by the British Market Research Bureau (BARB), and set up originally by the J. Walter Thompson advertising agency. It provides data on media and brand purchasing habits for different sections of the population, and is often a first port of call for agency researchers and planners. See Savage *et al* (1992) for an academic application of the survey

power' over parents. They thus constitute a large and lucrative market in their own right, hence the attention of advertisers. Furthermore, many advertisers who do not target youth assume that if they can register their brands with people in this age group now, they will reap the rewards when these same consumers come of age. This obsession translates into attempts through research to gain access to the cultures and minds of young consumers, to discover what values are important in their lives, what style and cultural habits and interests define their behaviour. Or, as one commentator put it, 'Because most marketers are too old to understand what makes burger-chomping, Boyzone-loving teenagers tick, they spend millions trying to map the souls of these elusive creatures' (Tungat, 1996). It is because of this elusiveness and the dynamic nature of the youth market that such mapping has become advertising's 'perennial question', according to one account planner I spoke to. It is important to remember, however, that this huge research effort is not conducted out of a genuine interest in these youth cultures. Instead, knowing more about youth cultures makes them easier to commodify; and, as we have seen in the context of Lilt and black cultural forms, commodification of culture is a major feature of advertising practice (with black youth in particular being seen by advertisers as 'style leaders' - see Gladwell, 1997). Perhaps advertisers intentions were captured most exquisitely by Charlotte Pinder, European marketing director for Pepsi, when she said: "We are always on the lookout for new ways to own youth" (quoted in Mitchell, 1994; see Miller, 1997a: 16, on advertisers constructing society through its material context alone).

Such research into the youth market has traditionally involved the use of focus groups, a method pioneered in market research, in addition to quantitative data such as TGI. Yet recently some industry employees have become concerned that they are not keeping up with this most dynamic group of consumers, and have opted for more 'participative' methods. Advertising researchers are now just as likely to be found in the nation's nightclubs, observing and interviewing the consumers in 'their' environments, as they are in the interview room. One planner (Larry Graham) remarked: "You won't understand the market just by creating a focus group... you get insights by watching people in the street, in shops, in the pub". The cynical observer might see this as a way to pay for nights out with clients' money, but many firmly believe that this 'occasion

marketing' is the way to understand their market; as Chris McDonald of HHCL asks, "If you are targeting Friday and Saturday night session drinkers, why take the [creative] work into research groups at 7 p.m. on a Tuesday evening?" (*Campaign*, 22/11/96: 21).

Several of the industry employees I spoke to remained most uncertain about the nature of the youth market. The extent of this uncertainty about consumers is outlined in Chapter 7, since it has important consequences for debates about advertising and social control, but it is perhaps not surprising that a dissonance exists between industry conceptions of youth and the lived realities of young people themselves (Research International, 1996) when a closer look is taken at the sources upon which many of these conceptions are based. The first thing to note is that so many advertising employees see themselves and their families as the norm, either consciously or unconsciously. Thus when targeting the youth market, they draw on either their own experiences of growing up, or the knowledge gleaned vicariously from their own offspring, hardly a very representative cross-section of the population. Secondly, conclusions about the market appear to be drawn from such a minimal amount of research, an issue also developed in Chapter 7 in a more wide-ranging attempt at a critique of the industry. For example, the aforementioned Research International report into the global youth market (RI, 1996) cost several hundred pounds to purchase, yet its findings were based on a total of four focus groups in each country. Meanwhile, during my participant observation, I contributed (in a very small way) to the development of a strategy for an assault on a particular section of the European youth market. This strategy was developed on the basis of two focus groups (one in the UK and one in Italy), some trade journal special reports, and several hunches.

The uncertainty which surrounds industry discussion of the youth market in particular is exemplified by a fundamentally contradictory conception of the market and its future. Many industry commentators have begun to insist in recent years that young consumers are growing more alike, that it will soon be possible to speak of an essential 'global youth'; others, meanwhile, insist that the opposite is happening, that the youth market is in fact becoming

increasingly segmented and differentiated. The former perspective tends to be held by large multinational corporations and their advertising agencies, who invoke the geographical expansion of consumer culture and supposed growth in shared sensibilities to justify their position. According to Larry McIntosh, vice-president of Pepsi-Cola International for example, "Teenagers...represent the first truly international market in history... An 18 year-old in Denmark has more in common with an 18 year-old in France than he does with his elders" (quoted in Yovovich, 1995). Leslie (1995a) insists that the notion of a 'global village' (McLuhan, 1964) is but a fantasy of the multinational 'coloniser'. Indeed, the very particular world-view of many advocates of the 'global youth' position is somewhat distasteful. One American account director with J. Walter Thompson, for example, clearly represents the 'imperial power' when offering her thoughts on the youth market: "We're finding that teenagers are teenagers everywhere and they tend to emulate U.S. teenagers...if you take a typical Indian teenager in Bombay, Delhi or Calcutta...he'd be wearing a Lacoste shirt, Wrangler jeans, Nike shoes and maybe a pair of Ray-Ban sunglasses" (*Advertising Age*, 1994). A 'typical' Indian teenager?

Other commentators are equally adamant that a rather different market exists. A recent report by the CIA Media agency echoed the sentiments of many working in the field when it concluded that the 15-24 age group should be viewed as several markets instead of a homogeneous whole. 'A diversity of demography, of needs, wants, expectations... of income, lifestyle, social activity... of attitudes and behaviour' ensure that 'not a single definition of "market" (a degree of internal cohesion and collectivity, for example) applies to 15-24's as a totality' (CIA, 1995). As the agency research director (John Rocastle) put it, "This audience is too diverse to qualify for just one label... people in this age group are just extremely different from each other. We believe that 15-24's must be treated as a series of markets, clustered more by behaviour than by any other norm". He also insists that traditional socio-economic distinctions based on class do not apply to the youth market, since "young people do not start behaving along class lines until they are well on their way to setting up their own household" (see Chapter 6 on the verity of the first half of this statement at least).

Segmenting markets such as the 15-24 age group involves the construction of a number of categories, into which consumers with 'typical' characteristics can be placed. For instance, the CIA report ascribes the label 'Bad Boys' to consumers who are 'male, 17-20, at work or studying, low income, consume lager, chewing gum, soft drinks, Levi jeans and aftershave'; 'Try Hards', meanwhile, are 'female, 21-24, full time, lower/mid income, consume all alcohol, hand-rolled tobacco, cigarettes.' This practice of labelling grew in popularity during the 1980's, giving advertisers a secure picture of their target consumers. During the course of several interviews with creatives, my attire and manner were rapidly deconstructed and I was thrust into a recognised segment of the youth market. "I know exactly what you're like", one declared, confidently, before lecturing me on the dynamics of popular culture. Consumers become little more than an aggregation of socio-economic and 'psychographic' (lifestyle) attributes and are labelled accordingly. And, as we shall see below, even ethnicity can be viewed as just another lifestyle attribute.

The homogeneous/heterogeneous debate is not the only contradiction evident in many of advertising's conceptions of the youth market. Another concerns the relative sophistication of the audience. Chapter 2 referenced an increased recognition within academic circles of audience creativity and literacy, particularly among young consumers. The advertising industry led the way in conceiving of audiences as active subjects (see Nava, 1992). According to the dominant industry view, the youth market consists of highly cynical, knowledgeable consumers, who are difficult to reach through traditional advertising (Mintel, 1995). As one planner put it, "You aren't going to connect with young people through the old-style 30 second TV ad. They are the most sophisticated consumers around" (Larry Graham). He elucidated the difficulties for advertisers: "This target have grown up within a media explosion and they have become very adept at managing and controlling their consumption of media messages. More than any other age group, their attention cannot be guaranteed. Their attention must be earned". However, this conception is by no means universally held. Whilst few in the industry seem to disagree that young consumers are at least more discerning, this does not necessarily translate into

an increased resistance to the influence of advertising. Alan Waldie, vice-chairman of Lowe Howard-Spink and, according to one colleague, "responsible for some of the greatest ads of the last twenty five years", is in no doubt: "They are all gullible suckers, totally manipulable... they are followers of fashion". To demonstrate the point he thrust a copy of *The Face* under my nose. "Take that... put a beer in one of those ads, make sure the characters are not too far ahead or behind the times, give it a streetwise image which will get a few opinion-leaders using it, then sit back and watch the sales rocket". This is exactly what has happened with Sol in the late 1980's and Stella in the 1990's, he explained. Although he conceded that it was easy to get it wrong when advertising to young people, he saw this as a problem of fashion alone. The relative susceptibility of youth to the advertising message is not open to debate: "How can you say that they are not easily manipulated when you have got them in their formulative [sic] years? They are there to be exploited".

Interestingly, Waldie could not be drawn on any subject relating to racialisation and advertising which was surprising given his verbosity on all other aspects of the industry. He did, however, allude to why there tends to be a greater proportion of black characters in ads targeted at the youth market: "The youth market is rebellious, so you need to make a point of non-conformity in ads... you must target them with ads that their parents wouldn't understand". Such a formula elucidates the fine line between youth as style and youth as problem that advertisers frequently tread when targeting young consumers, a line that is arguably racialised. By employing images of black masculinity in particular, advertisers encourage the audience to anchor to the product their culturally constructed notions of dread and desire in relation to black youth. Ads such as Nike's 'Revolution' use these discourses in order to create the 'distance' between young people and their parents that Waldie describes.

The purpose of this section is not to attempt to resolve the above contradictions and debates about the nature of the youth market, but to introduce some of the uncertainties that exist in the world of these supposedly ruthless hidden persuaders. However, there is an important further dimension to these debates that speaks a great deal about the way advertising works, about its motivations.



The debate about homogeneous and heterogeneous markets, for example, is essentially an argument around the tension between the global and the local. Turning our attention to the advocates of each of the two 'world views' we see that the logic for their respective positions is founded upon two common denominators: economics and self-justification. It is clearly in the interests of large multinationals to insist that we are all living in a global village and that we all aspire to the same consumer values. In this way they only need to produce one marketing strategy for all their markets, and only need to pay one agency (usually American) to execute the strategy. Not only are they hoping that through this approach the global market will soon develop in their image, but it saves huge amounts of money. And who are those insisting upon a recognition of the differentiated nature of markets? On the one hand they tend to be advertising agencies with an network of overseas agencies; these subsidiaries can provide the 'insider' local knowledge to ensure that the desired message reaches the local target effectively, something that a global campaign cannot do. They are thus arguing for their own existence (cf. Miller, 1997a). Closer to home, meanwhile, the more advertising agencies insist upon a differentiated market, the more dependent clients will be upon the agency to interpret these dynamic market complexities for them.

It becomes apparent that there is only one common denominator that matters in advertising, and that is economics and the pursuit of profitability. At least, that it is how it first appears. This inescapable fact should be borne in mind as the chapter turns to an explicit discussion of racialisation in the production of advertising.

#### 4.3.2. Racialised production: "This is marketing... it isn't personal"

Chapter 3 described the unease that was clearly felt by many of the advertising employees I spoke to when the subject of racialisation in advertising was raised. In some cases this was evidently because such issues had never occurred to them before, and thus had not been thought through. For others it appeared that the subject itself made them feel uncomfortable. This reticence meant that it was often difficult to extract opinions on these issues, and it has been necessary on occasions to read between the lines of what was said. Indeed, as the second part of this section will explain, much of the evidence of

racialised processes in the industry is really implicit, rooted in structures which ensure that these issues rarely become salient. However, some advertising employees were prepared to talk about what they saw as more explicit racism in the industry, although many were keen to deflect blame for it onto the clients.

One creative director at a leading London agency (TBWA) sees evidence of what he calls 'corporate racism' among some clients he deals with. He defines this as, "...when they tell you that it is strategically wrong to use a black person in one of your ads. It's utter bullshit" (interview, Tony Beresford). Tom Knotman, the art director of a creative team, agrees that such corporate racism does exist. He recalls an ad he created for Woolworth's which included five non-white characters in a cast of twenty. The client was most unhappy with this ratio, and insisted it be reduced. This mirrors an incident in 1995 when executives at Heineken expressed their anger at the number of 'Negroes' in the audience of *Hotel Babylon*, a late night programme they were sponsoring on Channel 4. On this occasion, the comments, contained in a fax, were leaked to the Press and the client suffered huge embarrassment as a result. A similar fate befell British Airways when the director of one of their campaigns alleged that senior executives were persistently racist in the casting restrictions they imposed upon him (Alderson, 1995). Blake (1997) sees such moves as reiterating, among other prejudices, the beliefs that white viewers find the presence of black characters in ads off-putting, and that black people are too low in the economic order to be defined as consumers. Meanwhile, one planner at McCann Erickson suggests that the reason many clients are not prepared to stomach more ethnically inclusive casting is because they are pandering to the supposedly racist sentiments of their target consumers: "...after all there are a lot of bigots out there with high disposable incomes... and Middle England are a traditional bunch" (interview, Neil Orton)

It is undoubtedly true that clients do exert a strong constraining influence in many cases. Larry Graham, a planner, bemoans the fact that clients are so conservative: "It is so difficult to get them to take any risks with their advertising... you have to hold their hand all the way and assure them everything will be all right". However, the advertising industry can hardly pass all

the blame for its own shortcomings onto its clients, as some employees recognise. Neil Orton believes the whole of UK industry and commerce still has a problem with racism, and is disappointed that the supposedly "maverick" advertising industry is not being more "forward-thinking" in this regard. Yet he concedes that in advertising, as in other walks of life, "...in the final analysis people are just pretty shitty towards one another" (interview). John McDonald, a creative, expressed similar sentiments: "Why is there a dearth of prominent black characters in advertising? Well, you can probably answer that for yourself. For a start, the same racism that permeates society exists within advertising... and secondly, advertising is largely populated by white, middle-class males who would never think of casting a non-white character".<sup>5</sup> Thus the social and demographic constitution of the industry is seemingly an important factor behind racialisation, just as it was in relation to the youth market, confuting Williamson's (1978) claim (cited in Chapter 2.7) that producers in no way 'speak' through their ads.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Whilst little demographic data about the industry exists, other available figures are very informative; a recent survey by *Campaign*, for example, revealed that 30% of media people believed racial prejudice to be common in the industry, whilst 40% of women and 32% of men thought sexism was widespread (Campaign Report, 1996; see Hollis, 1995, on the dearth of female creatives). The latter figures confirm Mort's (1995) assertion that the industry privileges masculine talent and traditional masculine qualities, and that this goes hand-in-hand with other axes of dominance.

<sup>6</sup> A further constraint on the possibility of creative departures from advertising's norms is the significance of 'convention' in advertising, which can apparently have the effect of stifling new thinking, even in an industry which depends so much on creativity. Much attention is paid to previously successful or legendary campaigns, which are often imitated (much to the frustration of some, such as Larry Graham); certain figures (such as Alan Waldie) are accorded legendary status, and recent graduates for instance work with them in order to 'learn the ropes', thus inheriting very particular views about what is 'good' advertising. As one account director has put it, "When I came into advertising I thought it was my chance to do something creative and different. But it doesn't work." (quoted in Rosenbaum, 1993). This is reminiscent of Hall's (1982) account of the reproduction of hegemonic viewpoints in the Press: there is pressure on subordinate groups (including junior reporters *etc.*) to situate themselves within the dominant interpretive framework in order to obtain a hearing. Thus the dominant field of discourses tends to be reproduced spontaneously by journalists and staff who, apparently, enjoy significant autonomy. I saw evidence of such pressures in the agency on graduate trainees, who, understandably, would often base their assessed projects on what they knew management would want to read.

Some employees clearly feel that explicit racism exists within the industry, manifesting itself in client/agency relations and casting decisions. Others suggest that this is merely a reflection of wider societal racism. While some advertisements are intentionally racialised, or even racist (stereotypes are frequently used to anchor meanings for the viewer, as Brierley, 1995: 150 explains), others are unwittingly racialised, with advertisers drawing on the same (ethnocentric) cultural reservoirs and racialised discourses as much of the rest of society. Miles (1989) has cautioned against employing the term 'racism' without careful consideration, for fear of over-simplification. He explains that exclusionary practices may be partially expressive of or motivated by racism, but this must always be proved and never assumed to be the case. He suggests that other potential explanatory factors (class and labour market trends, for instance) must be examined too. This argument is relevant to an engagement with advertising. Whilst it would be easy to accuse the advertising industry of persistent racism, the situation is more complex and nuanced than can be adequately captured by this term. Without wanting to contribute to a picture of an industry which seems to have 'a lot of racism but very few racists' (Blaut, 1992: 289), this is where the term 'racialisation', introduced in Chapter 2, can assist us. It describes the state of affairs that the research identified within the industry, and outlined below, where 'race' and ethnicity are simply not regarded as salient issues. It is not something that many within the industry have ever considered as being anything to do with them. It is a racialised absence. (But see Williams, 1985, for a different perspective on such institutional racism/racialisation).

When questioned about the representation of non-whites in advertising many of the people I interviewed were surprised that the subject had even been raised, and were decidedly disconcerted by it. Ann Binnie, a freelance advertising consultant specialising in the youth market, was momentarily silenced: "Erm... oh... I haven't seen any references to this... I guess... no, I can't think of any research that has looked into this..." (interview). John McDonald, creative, confessed that, "I've never really thought about that before... I'm just trying to think of ads with black families in... I can't think of any at all". This from one of

the new generation of creatives recently out of college, with an encyclopaedic knowledge of advertising history. Neil Orton, quoted above, also conceded that he was not aware of any of these issues, while other respondents just avoided the line of questioning altogether.

This silence is perhaps less surprising when racialised absences can be identified in many areas of advertising practice. None of the principal quantitative data sources that advertising researchers and planners draw on contains a reference to the ethnicity of consumers, so the possibility that different ethnic groups might possess different patterns of consumption never arises. And, as a consequence, neither does the idea of being more inclusive with respect to casting. Ann Binnie had clearly not thought about these issues before, but, once raised, the notion of differential consumption patterns seemed to have some relevance to her work: "Oh, well, the market is not much segmented along ethnic lines... although music, yes... I mean rave was a very white and Asian thing, not a... not a... an Afro thing. Also if you were looking particularly at Asian markets you would mention factors about them escaping from the constraints of their family, emerging from their culture". She suspected she knew why she had never considered ethnicity important: "Research... I can't think of any research that has looked into segmentation along ethnic lines... we tend not to, we just lump them together. It's economics... I mean, they are too much of a minority. What are they, they are 2% of the population or something... that's why". She talked elsewhere in the interview about the youth market differentiating along gender, age, class and lifestyle lines, so she clearly does not simply 'lump them all together', as claimed. With references to Asian cultural constraints and her uncertainty about the demographics, Binnie left the interviewer with a sense that stereotypes were in part forming a basis of her judgements. Her comment provides important clues in the search for a more nuanced explanation of existing patterns of racialised representation, and the possibilities of a change in this pattern in the form of more inclusive and 'progressive' portrayals. It is argued here that such an explanation lies in a complex relationship between target market economics and (racialised) perceptions of consumers. This relationship is discussed below.

Advertising planners are utterly preoccupied with target markets. Defining a target market using available data is a pre-requisite of any advertising campaign and the supposed demands of such a market guide the entire creative development and media planning of a campaign. As a consequence, advertisers use the language of economics and the market to explain almost all campaign decisions. Responding to my questions about racialisation proved no exception. The most frequently cited explanation for the dearth of ethnic minorities in TV advertisements was that they did not constitute a large enough proportion of the market to justify inclusion. Tom Knotman had to have his advertisement for Woolworth's recast after complaints from the client, but he did not object: "The client wanted us to reduce the number of non-white characters in the crowd of twenty-odd, but that was fair play, you know... I mean, the ad was going to be shown nationally, and in the Highlands of Scotland there are no black people... in Glasgow and Belfast there is about one black person... you've got to remember this is marketing, it isn't personal". This time the geography of the target audience is invoked to explain his client's decision, but there is arguably a racialised element to this explanation. After all, there is no mention of densely populated areas of the market, such as London, where 20% of the target market are from ethnic minorities.

Attempts to explain why black characters *have* appeared in ads follow the same pattern, defined by the logic of the target market. While the agency behind the Persil ad mentioned in the content analysis (JWT) refused to reveal the thinking behind the campaign casting, other agencies were prepared to speculate. Andrea Fiore, an account manager, was adamant: "There is only one reason that that cast would have been chosen and that is because a planner sat down with some kind of data, I don't know what, and thought 'Shit, we are not selling any washing powder to the black community... we are missing out on this huge market, we had better do something about it'. That is the only reason, I guarantee it... The same applies to age and sex as well - if it wasn't for planners keeping an eye on the target market we'd have ads full of guys like you and me, people who work in advertising". Some commentators suggested that the decision could have come from the client, for 'political' reasons, but even then the underlying logic would ultimately have been sales, pure and simple. Since

so little research data mentions the ethnicity of consumers, differential consumption patterns of this kind are rarely likely to be identified.

It seems as if the social and the cultural are excluded from the world-view of many inside advertising. When the creative John McDonald was asked why he thought black characters appeared so relatively frequently in ads for sports shoes, he reasoned it had nothing whatsoever to do with associations of athleticism, nor the style/problem tension mentioned earlier, but was purely a question of economics: "It is because black people buy a lot of trainers", was the matter-of-fact reply. Yet beneath all this rational talk of economics, there are arguably signs of a far-from-rational form of racialised thinking, where the cultural does shape the economic. For example, the subject of 'race' and advertising was broached with Margaret Hewitt, a planning director. Like so many of her peers, she seemed extremely uneasy talking about it, giving great thought to her choice of language. She agreed that the impetus behind the Persil ad was likely to have come from a planner noticing that the conventional ads were excluding a substantial section of the market, since "attempts to make political statements part of a brand image are very rare". Yet it was easier for a company like Persil to be inclusive like this, she said, since they might produce as many as three or four ads a year, "and can afford to try to capture those groups at the extreme ends of the market". She was herself in charge of advertising strategy for one the big high-street banks, and said she could not foresee any non-white characters appearing in ads for her client in the near future (and she was in the position to insist upon it if she thought it appropriate). This she put down to their "general socio-economic status" excluding them from the target audience. A brand like hers, she suggested, could not "afford" to try to appeal to such consumers "at the ends of the spectrum". Ethnicity would only be important, "...when considering exactly what type of people would or wouldn't buy the product... it could be the same influence as someone who plays golf, or shops at out-of-town shopping centres". Her focus was entirely in terms of target audiences and lifestyle indicators - in short, economics. However, I would argue there is more to it than this. Firstly, she sees ethnicity as nothing more than just another lifestyle indicator, a potential influence on consumption habits. Moreover, she implicitly claims to be concerned only with the money in consumers' pockets, but the language she uses to articulate this

concern is far from racially neutral. Why are non-white sections of the market described as 'extreme'? What 'spectrum' do non-white groups reside at the end of? Furthermore, she does not refer to the relative incomes of these groups, but to their "socio-economic status", which is something rather different.

The key point being made in this section is that, at first sight, an explanation for the racialised nature of advertising representation can be found in the 'economic' sphere of the advertising process; indeed, much of it can. However, there is also considerable evidence that social and cultural factors are relevant, too; beneath the logic of rational economics in decision-making, there is a racialised subtext operating which serves to exclude racialised minorities from the circuit of advertising. This suggests that to further understand racialisation in the production of advertising we need to explore the social and cultural contexts and values of the producers in addition to 'business' discourses and practices. Exploring what such minorities make of the ads that emerge from these conditions of production is crucial to a fuller understanding of the circuit of advertising, and the cultural politics contained therein. This is one of the issues tackled in Chapters 5 and 6 below, which present some of the material from my fieldwork with young consumers.



## The consumption of advertising: a pressing engagement

### 5.1: Introduction

Chapter 4 pointed to the prevalence of racialised meanings in television advertising and attempted to identify the processes operating at the production site in the circuit of advertising that give rise to this racialisation. Chapters 5 and 6 shift the focus to the consumption of advertising by young consumers.

This chapter attempts to map the general engagement with advertising of these young people and, in doing so, to identify the 'discursive repertoires' (Hermes, 1995) which frame this engagement.<sup>1</sup> It is suggested that three principal repertoires characterise the respondents' relationship to advertising (including the selected ads screened in the sessions): the theme of advertising as 'entertainment', the notion of advertising's 'influence', and the discourse of 'unease' associated with consuming ads<sup>2</sup>. Tackling these in turn, the chapter shows how advertising consumption by these young people is most likely to be framed by notions of entertainment and the potential pleasures of consumption. The chapter then attempts to retain a material link so often absent from discussion of advertising, namely that these ads are promoting *products*, and that consumption of the advertising cannot be divorced from questions of influence and, ultimately, purchasing processes. Indeed, this material

<sup>1</sup> Hermes (1995) employs the term 'repertoire' to refer to the cultural resources that respondents fall back on and refer to in their discussion about magazine consumption. Which repertoires are used, she maintains, depends upon the 'cultural capital' of the reader (Bourdieu, 1984). Ballaster *et al* (1991) also use the term to refer to the common interpretive frameworks of magazine readers, for whom 'experience is... constructed discursively and not irreducibly individual' (41-2).

<sup>2</sup> These were derived from the interplay of interview transcripts and theory described in Chapter 3.4.4.

connection is frequently a source of the entertainment outlined. Yet it also serves to ensure, on occasions, that the pleasures of adwatching generate a certain 'unease' (Jackson and Taylor, 1996) for some consumers, an unease that can underlie the differential consumption discussed in Chapter 6. Indeed, whilst Chapter 5 makes some important contributions to debates about how young people consume advertising, it also serves to contextualise the exploration of the differential consumption of advertising, and its relationship with racialisation, conducted in the following chapter.

## 5.2: Entertainment

Advertising is in a unique position among media products, according to Cook (1992), in that it is never the thing we are actually watching, or looking at, or listening to (cultural theorists excepted). It is almost an absent presence, intruding upon the real focus of our attentions. Yet, paradoxically, advertising is all around us, importunate, tenaciously demanding our attention and engagement. This pervasiveness is a key feature of advertising for a number of the young people in the study, with Andrew (B1) speaking for many others when he said, *"...ads are everywhere you look, you can't get away from them"*. Yet whilst the intrusive nature of advertising was sometimes cited as a source of annoyance, discussions were more likely to be framed by the treatment of advertising as a form of entertainment and potential source of pleasure.

The possibility of people (the young in particular) deriving pleasures from the consumption of media products is not new (see Nava, 1992, for instance), but few writers have heeded Morley's (1992) call to attempt to understand the roots of such pleasures, something he deems a research imperative in the quest for understanding how hegemony works through popular culture. Much of the work on audience pleasures has originated from a psychoanalytic perspective, from Laura Mulvey's seminal paper on visual pleasure (Mulvey, 1975) to more recent works such as Penley (1992) and Richards (1994) (see Kuhn, 1982; 1985, for an account of psychoanalysis in film studies). Both this chapter and the one that follows acknowledge how psychoanalysis might offer productive insights to certain questions raised by this research, but, as Chapter 2 has already

explained, the psychoanalytic path of investigation was not followed in this particular project. One additional word of explanation derives from Richard Dyer's (1992) investigation of 'entertainment', and the associated critique of psychoanalytic perspectives on popular culture. Dyer claims that psychoanalysis tends to privilege terms such as 'pleasure' and 'desire' over 'entertainment', a bias he attributes to entertainment's connotations with *public* discourses of enjoyment (as opposed to the private discourses favoured by psychoanalysis). This public association is crucial to the account of audience engagement proffered below, since it captures the social nature of many of the respondents' consumption of television.<sup>3</sup>

A point that immediately became apparent from all the discussions was the extent to which many of the students relished the opportunity to talk about television and advertising. In some cases the transcripts reveal long periods where the interviewer is not required to question or comment at all. Undoubtedly some of the encouragement to talk must have come from the novelty factor of missing a timetabled lesson, although it was actually the sixth form groups who were the most enthusiastic, students for whom this novelty element was perhaps least likely to be an issue. For instance, when I was out of the room, Ruth (B7) revealed to her colleagues (and the tape) that, *"I love talking about adverts. I could talk about them all day"*. Judging by the enthusiasm of some of the other respondents, she was not alone.

Similar discussions about ads had clearly been rehearsed many times during these students' day-to-day lives, and particularly in the classroom. In their account of why children watch TV, Gunter and McAleer (1990) accord great importance to TV's role as a source of conversation, describing it as 'a fertile ground of common experience' upon which many classroom interactions are based. As a consequence, those who have not seen the programmes in question will be left out, and many children selectively watch particular shows in

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<sup>3</sup> On occasions during the thesis, the words 'pleasure' and 'entertainment' are used interchangeably, both for the sake of variety and for continuity, given the use of the term 'pleasure' (in a non-psychoanalytic sense) in other works - see Jackson and Taylor (1996).

order to ensure participation in later discussions, the authors claim. The ads on television are used as currency in schoolroom exchanges in exactly the same fashion, it seems. As Emma (A6) explains: *"The catchphrases from ads become catchphrases in normal speech, don't they. Everyone at school is saying them"*. Group B7, meanwhile, would apparently wonder what was wrong with their sixth-form common room colleagues if, at 11.30 a.m., nobody declared a 'Diet Coke break', in line with a recent advert for the drink. It was most instructive to listen to the pace of this 'ad talk' and the recall ability demonstrated by some of the students during the discussions. Memorable ads from up to seven years ago were discussed, amidst much quoting, parodying and repartee. Knowledge of ads appears to act as 'cultural capital' for many of the students in the school environment (after Bourdieu, 1984). Those with poor recall were sometimes mocked in the groups, inaccurate anecdotes vociferously corrected, and the 'meaning' of ads explained to confused peers, often to the embarrassment of the latter. The school therefore appears to function as a site for the 'demarcation of competences', as Bourdieu (1984) puts it, although quite whether he would have considered 'ad talk' a legitimate competence is debatable! Nevertheless, his account of sites as markets in which the price of competences is determined can still be applied to the school classroom in this context; for it is clearly profitable in a sense to be a competent 'ad talker', and potentially costly to be incompetent, it seems, as Sara's comments below testify.

Many of these 'ad talk' interactions are not so thrilling for those who do not wish to watch adverts, and whose objections will be elucidated later. Some of these conscientious objectors are converted, however, having felt the peer pressure described above. Sara (B6) relates her position: *"The whole class used to sing these songs, and it used to drive me nuts... I never used to pay any attention [to the ads], but then I realised that all my friends did, and I never knew what anyone was talking about. So I started to pay attention to them after all..."*. Comments such as this must offer encouragement to advertising agencies everywhere. Campaigns targeting the youth market in particular are increasingly adopting strategies that will ensure that the ad itself is talked about. This was the explicit intention of recent controversial campaigns such as Tango and Gossard Wonderbra, with the latter insisting that they gained additional press

coverage worth £48 million on the back of their £500,000 'Hello Boys' campaign (Brierley, 1995). This strategic objective is not lost on these young consumers, however, as Tizzy (A4) reveals: *"Some ads have little catchphrases at the end and everybody picks it up, everybody's singing it at school... then someone says it's from an advert on the telly, so everybody watches for the advert. It's a really good way of selling it to you"*. By producing ads that lend themselves to quoting and parodying, advertisers not only benefit their own brands, but, as Sara's comments make clear, they effectively win new 'recruits' to advertising's 'discursive community'. Those consumers whose predilection is to ignore the demands placed on their attention by advertisers are encouraged by the fact that the consumption of television advertising is very much a social activity.

In his study of television viewing in the domestic sphere, David Morley (1986) posited that it might be more of a social and collective experience than previously assumed by media academics (see also Taylor and Mullan, 1986). His conclusions were based on the potential of media 'contacts' to act as materials and stimuli for conversation. This would appear to be confirmed by the questionnaire results from School B, where only six students stated that they watched TV alone (all of them male), the rest saying that the TV was viewed with family and/or friends. Meanwhile, three times this number of students in School A claimed to watch TV alone, suggesting that TV consumption is more of an isolated experience for the suburban respondents. However, there are no guarantees that because TV is watched collectively it will be discussed collectively. Two of the respondents in School B illustrate this: *"My family are in the room but I watch it alone"* (Aodhan, B2); *"I don't talk to [my parents] about advertising! 'Mmm, what do you think of that advert?' No way...!"* [derisive laughter] (Daniel, B2). However, the point here is that consuming TV ads *is* a social activity among peers if one conceives of consumption as a process that continues after the initial act of purchase or, in this case, contact with the ads (see Miller, 1987). The ads continue to be consumed and re-consumed, with meanings being remade, in classroom 'ad talk'.

To possess the cultural capital to partake in 'ad talk' respondents must clearly be advertising-literate, able to understand advertising's codes and conventions,

to make the connections demanded of them by advertisers. They must have the ability to look for meaning in ads, to understand *how* ads mean. For an ad to be entertaining it must respect the sophistication and cultural codes of its audience and encourage them to employ it when consuming the ad. Ads cited as enjoyable were frequently those that were subtle, thought-provoking, interactive, that did not patronise, or did not even look like ads (the latter quality has been exploited by advertisers who have recently disguised ads as documentaries (Lilt), chat shows (Miller Lite) and even pop videos (BT)). However, entertainment could still be gleaned from ads that failed in this respect - provided that they got it *totally* wrong. Ads for Ferrero Rocher and Gold Blend, for example, were described by several groups as being, "so bad that they're good", indicating that audiences can obtain pleasure by reading ads in ways other than those intended by the advertisers (an interview with an account manager, Andrea Fiore, who had previously worked on the Ferrero Rocher ad, confirmed that the advertiser was not intentionally working with these double meanings). It is significant that praise is heaped upon ads that conceal themselves, that almost hide their intended sales pitch. One group accorded the highest respect for an Umbro sportswear ad whose narrative they had 'bought' without noticing; in Goldman's (1994) language, they were lauding an advertiser's 'stealth bombing' that had successfully breached their defences. There is some irony in this situation where consumers *demand* that advertisers disguise the 'real meaning' in their ads, a strategy of concealment that countless self-proclaimed moral guardians from Vance Packard onwards have so abhorred and attempted to awaken us to.

Such references to the sales intentions of advertisers also show a keen awareness of commercial imperatives. The significance of the commercial connection varied greatly amongst the respondents, and the following section explores further the links between their consumption of ads (and potential to extract entertainment) and the products or services being promoted.

### 5.3: Influence

In her work on youth and consumerism, Mica Nava (1992: 174) observes that young people enjoy ads 'promoting items which they are unlikely to buy'. From this she concludes that they consume advertisements independently of the

products being marketed (see also Campbell, 1987; P. Willis, 1990; O'Donohoe, 1997). If proved to be the case, this has important consequences for advertisers and social scientists alike in their attempts to understand relations between ads and consumers. At first sight it appears that many of the exchanges among the groups interviewed here confirm Nava's thesis, as the following interaction from B6 illustrates:

Sara: *"I like all the car adverts"*

Peter: *"Yeah, car adverts, I enjoy them as well"*

Rowan (scoffing): *"Oh, those are silly...that new one with the airplane [Saab], that's really ridiculous"*

Sara: *"I know everyone hates them, but I like the scenery"*

Peter: *"Oh, I like the ones where they're going along the motorway, or going on the interstate"*

Sara: *"I don't think I really notice the cars that much, it's just the scenery around them, what's going on...but I do like the cars too..."*

[...]

Sara: *"Thinking about it, all my favourite adverts are things that I don't buy, like beer, cars, Pepsi Max... I don't buy any of them but just like the adverts"*

Whilst elements of this exchange are significant in a number of ways (Rowan's belittling of the others' taste, and Peter's reference to America, for instance) it is fairly clear that both Sara and Peter enjoy consuming ads for a product whose target market they are unlikely to be entering for some time. There were countless other examples of this trend, with ads for companies as diverse as British Gas, Lunn Poly Holidays, and Budweiser being cited as 'good' ads. This could be because, as implied earlier, the criteria employed in judging ads are seemingly indistinguishable from those used for judging other cultural products, such as films. Peter (B6) explains his interest in TV ads: *"...some of them are really well done, they're entertaining... some people spend loads of money on them, so they're really well produced"*. He could easily be describing any Hollywood blockbuster. Extending some of Bourdieu's analysis to the consumption of advertising once more, we could hail young people as constituting the advertising 'elite' in a sense, since they appear to possess the ability to 'appreciate a work independently of its content', concentrating on the style and mode of representation (Bourdieu, 1984: 53-4). The fact that so many respondents could recount ads they had enjoyed (or not) but could not recall

the name of the advertiser would appear to add further weight to Nava's claim. In addition there were examples of advertisers being mistakenly identified that would surely provoke despair in the relevant marketing departments (Reebok being mistaken for Nike, and Renault being mistaken for Peugeot). However, it is suggested here that Nava's thesis is rather too straightforward and, by the same token, its implications for youth's 'immunity' to the advertising message rather too optimistic.

If ads are consumed independently of the promoted product, this should also apply to those products for which young people *do* constitute the target market. As Nava (1992: 174) states, 'The success of any particular commercial [in terms of being entertaining] is... completely divorced from its effectivity in promoting sales'. Several respondents concurred on this point. Group A3, for example, were unanimous that, whilst they enjoyed the ads for Levi jeans, and had indeed purchased the brand on occasions, there was absolutely no connection between the two. Neil Orton (McCann Erickson) was very sceptical about this, however: "I certainly agree that enjoyment...may be achieved without the brand being relevant. But I disagree that they are not influenced by these ads...for the young in particular, if the ad... is 'liked'... then I would say that a closer affinity to that brand will be achieved, especially over time." Yet the real challenge to Nava's claims comes from the interviewees themselves, who suggest that consumption and (commercial) influence are not unrelated.

While discussions were, by and large, framed by a discourse of advertising-as-entertainment as explained above, notions of advertising's influence were never far away. In some instances 'influence' was raised as soon as the subject of advertising was introduced to the groups, as if the two are inseparable, as this exchange from A4 suggests:

James: *"So, first of all, do you pay attention to the ads on TV?"*

Aaron: *"Yeah, I like the funny ones"*

Leanne: *"Yeah... I dunno, subconsciously they probably influence me..."*

Arabelle: *"I wouldn't say they influence me"*



Whilst Aaron responds most directly to the question, although expanding in order to justify his attention, the other two respondents immediately tackle the question of influence, although there had been no mention of it by the researcher. The same scenario occurred in group B1:

James: "*What about ads then, do you watch the ads on TV?*"

Jordan: "*Well, ads are everywhere, everywhere you look there's an advert for something, so it influences what you buy and what you want*"

These responses could arguably be linked to the students' perceptions of what the researcher wants to hear, which in this case can be linked to how media issues for example have been dealt with in the respective schools (see Chapter 3, and Buckingham *et al*, 1990), but I would also suggest that the question of influence arises so easily because the majority of students are well aware of the purpose of advertising.

Effecting change in people's behaviour is advertising's *raison d'être* (JWT, 1996) and to ignore this by concentrating solely on supposed 'second order' ideological messages seems unwise. Yet there is a sense from the literature that some academics are reluctant to countenance the possibility of advertising having any commercial influence on consumers, and young people in particular, (see P. Willis, 1990, for example), and have thus overlooked the issue in their research. Richards (1994: 104) insists that, 'the point for social analysis is not... the commercial effects of the ads [but] the wider consequences of their social presence'. Whilst the latter is undeniably an important focus, the former should not be ignored. After all, as Miller (1987) explains, consumption is as much about material culture as it is about ideology, and in this case material culture means material goods. Gregson (1995) is keen for researchers to re-state the connections between the advertising image and the product being advertised, links that can only be established by actually talking to consumers, she claims.

Leanne's response above also points to an important feature of the participants' discussion of *how* they thought advertising influenced them, and one that took the researcher very much by surprise. The suggestion that advertising's

influence was 'subconscious' was expressed by respondents in almost every group. This would seem to resonate with Packardian conceptions of influence, and present an important corrective to the view expressed by advertisers and social scientists alike that all young consumers 'know the games' of advertisers (see Lury, 1994a). The following exchanges might help to illustrate the position of many of the respondents. The first is from group A2:

James: *"So you say that advertising influences you?"*

Anna: *"I never think it does but then...it just registers"*

Andrew: *"Yeah...maybe unconsciously"*

Hannah: *"Yeah, 'cos things in, like, magazines...'cos all stuff...we're all influenced by what we see aren't we... so any kind of thing is advertising, isn't it, if you know what I mean. Like, either just magazines, or other people..."*

Martin: *"Yeah, it's probably not conscious, but you probably take it in without realising"*

Gemma: *"Yeah, that's right"*

James: *"Does that bother you though, the fact that they're working unconsciously?"*

Gemma (incredulous): *"No!"*

Martin: *"Not really"*

Group B7's discussion in response to the same question also echoed many of the sentiments expressed in other sessions.

Leah: *"I think I probably buy things that have influenced me subconsciously, by watching TV"*

Ruth: *"Yeah, in an unconscious way I think... in an unconscious way you have the whole association thing"*

Toby: *"Although it might not actually make you go and buy a can of Tango, it might be lodged there without you knowing it...in being entertaining it has more or less sold its idea to you"*

The following exchange from B6 also demonstrates an awareness of both selling intentions and advertising strategies, reminding us of the viewing demands of this particular audience:

Latifa: *"They try to focus more on the surroundings and... on trying to make you watch it to start with, than actually showing you 'this is what this does, this is what that does'"*

Rowan: *"But that draws you into it"*

Leyla: *"It draws you into it then unconsciously you do take that product into your mind"*

Latifa: *"Yeah, subconsciously you'll take it into your mind, but erm, when you watch it you're not watching it because you want to see how good that (product) is, you're watching it because, you know, you want to be entertained".*

Before it is hurriedly declared that Packard was right all along, there is a crucial dimension to note: whilst the respondents suspect that advertising is a hidden persuader, *they are not unduly concerned about this*. This can amount to a challenge to the negative view of entertainment maintained by many from traditional left-wing and/or psychoanalytical backgrounds, namely that it is merely the 'sugar on the pill' of the real meaning of the cultural product in question (Dyer, 1992). In the case of advertising the 'real meaning' is the sales pitch, and the consumers are not only well aware of its presence but they are seemingly untroubled by it.<sup>4</sup>

Such an awareness extended to those who were clearer about how they thought advertising influenced them, on a more 'conscious' level. While some students insisted that the influence was indirect (*"You might be influenced by just knowing the name and just saying 'Oh, I recognise that, I'll buy it'"* Ben, A5), others were more specific and forthcoming about the effects on their purchasing patterns, as the following exchange from group A4 reveals:

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<sup>4</sup> Clearly the invocation of the 'subconscious' by some of the students to explain their engagement with advertising is interesting from a psychoanalytic perspective. What do they mean by their 'subconscious', for example? Do they *really* think advertising influences them on such a level, or have they merely internalised some of the Packardian critiques that still pervade many popular, as well as academic, discourses on advertising (see Jefford, 1997)? These questions, and others, are arguably for another project; the very fact that the students say their subconsciouses are influenced, and the significance they attach to this, is of primary concern here.

Leanne: *"I would buy Oasis (soft drink), just to try it... just because of the advert"*

Aaron: *"Yeah, I tried it 'cos it sounded nice from the advert, it sounded like a drink I wanted to try"*

Arabelle: *"I make a lot of decisions on whether I buy on whether I like the advert"*

Purchases of soft drinks and snacks were frequently cited as having been prompted by advertisements. Andrew (B1) claimed that this is because these products are "within easy reach", but Jack in the same group insisted that the success was due to targeting, that these ads were aimed at their age group and that they 'worked'. There was certainly a willingness to purchase goods on a trial basis as a result of advertising campaigns, as Aaron suggests above. This was particularly the case with magazine ads, which are seemingly more popular than television ads, and not viewed as an intrusion. Several respondents enjoyed putting ads on their bedroom walls, confirming Miller's (1987: 171) assertion that advertising is as much an appeal as editorial to the magazine reader. The specialist nature of many magazines ensured that ads would be more relevant to the reader than those on television, and for this reason there was a tendency for 'advertorials' (sponsored editorials) to be trusted, too. Some respondents openly 'bought' the line of celebrity advertisements. Claire (A1) had recently purchased Nike sports equipment and could trace her decision to the TV campaign: *"If you support the person who's advertising then you're going to go out and get them 'cos you want to perform... try to perform as good as them"*; meanwhile Natalie (B5) declared that, *"If Jamie Redknapp was selling something I'd go and buy it instantly!"*.

The key point to note here is that whilst the purchasing habits of many of the students are clearly being influenced by advertising, the students are active, knowing subjects, well aware of the processes of persuasion that are operating; there is a reflexivity present in their engagement with advertising. In addition to those who say that advertising influences them on conscious and subconscious levels, there is a third group of students who say they watch ads, but are not in the least bit influenced by them. This group was characterised by comments such as, *"I buy something 'cos I like it not 'cos it's on the television"* (Joanne,

B5), and *“Ok, you might like an ad but you wouldn’t go out and buy a product just ‘cos you like the ad”* (Alison, A2). This recalls, and would appear to consolidate, Nava’s (1992) thesis mentioned above, but certain exchanges involving people who had made such claims cast doubt on such immediate conclusions. Simon (A6) made such a declaration early on in the session, but seemed to contradict himself, and Nava’s theory, subsequently during a discussion on washing powder ads: *“No, I don’t pay any attention to them... well, I don’t buy it do I... but if I did get washing powder I’d get Ariel ‘cos it’s got colour digester in it”*. Simon conceded at this point that perhaps the Ariel ads had affected him after all. However, he was not alone in making comments that seemingly contradicted earlier remarks; in fact, such contradictions were a feature of several of the discussions, and usually took the form of someone making an initial denial about something, only to find themselves questioning their own argument later on. The denial was often a denial of advertising’s influence, but sometimes extended to watching adverts at all. Several students claimed never to pay any attention to television ads, only to recount enthusiastically examples of favourite commercials later on. Perhaps the most egregious example was provided by Zack (A6) who declared at the outset, to accusations of pretentiousness from his peers, that he was *“anti-adverts on moral grounds”* and generally ignored them. Not five minutes later he remarked:

*“Yeah, Creature Comforts (Heat Electric), they were the best. I do like all those plastic animation ones. I especially like that new Levi’s one because you can... the animators put in little subtle bits that you don’t notice first time and that’s a way of it not becoming poor”*.

The aim here is not to ‘out’ respondents who claim to be immune to the effects of advertising, but to attempt to convey the very nuanced picture that has emerged of the relationship between these young people and advertising. Not only have people had divergent views about the extent of advertising’s influence, but individuals like Simon and Zack have expressed confusing and contradictory sentiments. Indeed, Zack later resignedly admitted to being “ambivalent” about advertising. This confirms the work of several writers who have drawn attention to such an ambivalence towards advertising on the part of consumers (see Bauer and Greyser, 1968; Barnes, 1982; Tylee, 1989; Crane, 1991), and also highlights the need to move away from conceptions of a unified subject. As Ballaster *et al* (1991) explain in the light of their empirical work with

magazine readers, audience members may themselves invoke unity of consciousness, or strive for it, but they evidently hold split and fragmentary positions. The authors emphasise how texts and discourses are material factors in the construction of such fragmentary states of being; there is no doubt that advertising texts can incorporate any number of contradictions in a coherent manner, which might well contribute to the conflict experienced by some consumers. Ballaster *et al* (1991) also insist that it is the researcher's responsibility to attend to such contradiction and conflict. It is with the investigation of such fragmentary subjectivities that psychoanalysis might be able to help, as many of the chapters in Pile and Thrift (1995) testify, but, once again, this merits the attention of an entire project. The next section does, however, attempt to uncover the origins of some such ambivalence, as well as detail other instances of 'unease'.

#### **5.4: Unease**

Whilst this chapter has attempted to convey the complexity of young people's engagement with advertising, about which few generalisations can be made given the seemingly contestable nature of all aspects of advertising's consumption, it has still emphasised the confidence and even sagacity that so often characterised this engagement. Hopefully there has also been a sense that this awareness may belie a deeper unease and uncertainty about advertising and how it operates. The picture of savvy youth contentedly consuming advertising for its entertainment value and indifferent to its influence is a partial one.

In our call for a cultural politics of advertising that is capable of engaging with its 'uneasy pleasures', Jackson and Taylor (1996) propose three potential sources of such unease: the knowledge that the entertaining images being consumed are actually designed to sell; the fact that advertising masks the social relations of production of the goods and services being promoted; and the prospect of our independence as consumers being undermined by the incorporation of consumer 'resistance' into ads themselves. To some extent these anxieties were expressed by the groups in the present study, although, as we shall see

below, unease took several other forms and derived from a number of other sources.

Addressing these points in reverse order, as sophisticated as many of the respondents were in their appreciation of the strategies of advertisers, there was never any suggestion that they were aware of the incorporation of criticism into advertising of the kind Dyer (1982) describes. It is suggested here that this third source of concern is more an unease on the part of academic commentators. Indeed, there was undeniably a minority of respondents interviewed whose readings of advertising and conceptions of what advertising was, and how it operated, were anything but sophisticated. Not only did this surprise me, and highlight the imperative to avoid generalisations in this field, but it also presented some dilemmas. Examples of less sophisticated positions included the misreading of particular ads ('spoof' ads that were taken seriously, for instance) but were most evident in conceptions of the production of advertising. A number of respondents appeared to think that their favourite celebrities were *obliged* to appear in ads, and resented advertisers for "*making them look like prats on television*" (Joanne, B3); the notion of commercial endorsement was a fairly alien one, and it was clear that some students saw celebrity ads as genuine vignettes from the real lives of the stars. The screened ads for Lilt and Budweiser, meanwhile, were enjoyed by some students at School A, "*because they show what life is really like over there*" (Hannah, A2). As far as they were concerned, the purpose of the ads was as much to educate them about life "over there" as it was to sell them products, and they consumed uncritically the imagined geographies of the ads. Furthermore, in the process of comparing what students were taught about racism in school with what they saw on the television, it became clear that, extraordinarily, one Year 10 respondent at School B thought that adverts were produced by the government. This presented me with a problem since I had explicitly positioned myself throughout the discussions as a fellow student and *not* a teacher, but the distinctions blurred as I found myself under pressure to correct some of these rather extreme misconceptions (in reality, however, with discussions moving fast, and as a consequence of my desire not to jeopardise the trust of the students, I resisted these didactic urges).

Only one group of the thirteen, and perhaps the most politicised and politically aware (B1), alluded to the social relations of production disguised by advertisements, and their comments adds more weight to the argument that advertising consumption is related to the product being advertised. In the course of a discussion about American goods, one student in this group responded to a peer's claim that American companies frequently steal Far Eastern technology:

*Andrew: "That's what big firms, like... you know, like Nike... you see 'Made in Indonesia' and stuff, and they just... they try and get the products made and try and pay as least amount of money as they can to the employees. So they get people to work for hardly anything, but they can still get the products made and they can still sell it for a massive profit"*

*Joe: "...they were using child labour in another country... I think it was Marks and Spencer's... to get their products they were using child labour and that"*

During 1996 there was occasional coverage in the national newspapers of campaigns alerting the public to the use of child labour in developing world source nations; some of these focused on the sports shoe industry, and in particular a publicity-generating invitation to Nike from Reebok to join them in drawing up an employment practice code for their suppliers (for example, Dalton, 1996). Although Andrew obviously had an interest in current affairs, his raising of the issue may well have had something to do with the product in question. Sports shoes were a popular topic of 'ad talk' discussion. Ads for particular products that the respondents considered themselves to be in the market for generated a consistently high level of interest, and sports shoes were no exception (suggesting once more that, contrary to Nava's (1992) hypothesis, ad consumption *is* related to the product being advertised); presumably the same applies to other media products.

Whilst B1 were the only group to raise the social relations of production explicitly, it is possible that concerns about these relations to some extent had informed the anxiety expressed about the commercial motives behind



advertisements. As section 5.3 implies, such unease was far from typical. Indeed, in many cases the commercial connection contributed to the enjoyment of the ad, and the majority of students were largely untroubled by the commercial question. However, there was an important exception to this. Due to the screening of the Nike Cantona ad, many of the groups debated advertising's engagement with social issues such as racism, at times extremely heatedly. Key to the disputes was the notion of trust: could these advertising messages (and their producers) be trusted given that they were underlain by commercial motives? Because of the racialised nature of these debates, the majority are dealt with in Chapter 6, but one exchange in particular epitomises the tensions that arose around the right of commercial institutions to tackle essentially non-commercial issues. Once more it comes from the Year 10 students of group B1, and arose in response to the researcher's questions about whether ads ever offended. It is instructive to record the exchange in its entirety.

James: *"So have you ever found ads offensive then? Not just 'bad' ads, but have you ever been offended by an ad would you say?"*

Jordan: *"I can't think of any"*

Jack: *"Beer companies saying don't drink and drive"*

Jordan: *"That's not very offensive"*

Jack: *"Well, it's just, like, controversial, it's making it...I think it's Budweiser"*

James: *"So does that offend you?"*

Jack: *"Not, no...I don't find them offensive, but they're designed to make you, kind of react to them"*

Joe: *"Yeah, but if someone came up to you and said 'don't drink and drive', would you listen to them?"*

Andrew: *"You don't have to listen to someone else, you have your own common sense"*

Joe: *"But would you listen to them though?"*

Jack: *"Well, I guess..."*

Andrew: *"Well, no...you're either going to drink and drive or you're not going to drink and drive"*

Jordan: *"No, that's not true, you can be persuaded by people...persuaded not to drink and drive"*

Joe: *"If the beer company said it you would take more notice that if someone else..."*

Jack: "How can a beer company sell you beer, and then tell you not to drink it while you're driving?"

Joe: "Well, you'll take more notice wouldn't you...you'd take more notice of it"

Jack: "No, you wouldn't, because it's like...them...erm...tobacco advertising, I think they should ban that" (Jack suddenly changes subject)

Even without any complex discourse analysis there is much that can be said about this exchange. The ads in question (featuring comedian Denis Leary berating a drunk driver) were produced by GGT Advertising for Holsten Pils, in an attempt to "position Holsten as the beer brand with a conscience" (*Marketing*, 16/11/96); they were shown in cinemas, with billboard support, and coincided with Holsten offering free public transport on New Year's Eve (the campaign had obviously stuck in Jack's mind, raising it nearly six months later). There are three principal positions adopted here. 1: Jack introduces the campaign as one that has offended him in the past, although he soon denies that he actually finds it offensive, describing it merely as controversial. He is wrestling with what he sees as a fundamental contradiction in the message, that of a company *seemingly* asking the public to abstain from consuming its product. He undoubtedly sees drinking and driving as a serious matter, and considers a beer company's entry into the debate as the height of hypocrisy. 2: Andrew, meanwhile, adheres to the position he adopted throughout debates on influence, flying the flag for rationality and insisting that we can all think for ourselves and can (and do) make our own decisions irrespective of advertising's messages. Both positions are arguably impressive in their reflexivity and demonstration of the extent to which salient issues have been grasped. 3: The stance adopted by Joe, however, is perhaps the most interesting of all. He contends that it is precisely *because* of the commercial link that the ad will have the effect of discouraging drivers to drink; people are more likely to listen to the message in this instance than if some other body, perhaps the government or a similar 'authority', was behind the ad.

Jack's role in the discussions and his position in relation to advertising in general are interesting, and apparently confirmed that talking about advertising compounded the unease he felt when watching ads. He was one of a small number of students who were forced to take a back seat when discussions

centred on advertising-as-entertainment simply because, for various reasons, advertising was not entertaining for them. Some were strongly against advertising *per se*, citing 'moral' imperatives. It is not immediately apparent where the origins of this position might lie, although parental influence might be a possibility. Zack (A6), for example, some of whose proclamations are questioned above, mentions his father's vituperative anti-advertising stance on several occasions. Aodhan (B2) and Jack (B1) expressed assorted left-wing political views during the discussions, and seemed to adhere to traditional left-wing critiques of advertising. Both had a good understanding of the processes behind advertising. Jack's unease seemed to stem from a fear of its power, though. He was vociferous in his insistence that advertising is dangerous because it *does* influence people, and restated his case in relation to many areas of debate. He was positively suspicious of entertaining ads, arguing that, *"if you react to an ad at all then it's effective, whether it makes you laugh or whatever... even one that is supposed to be really serious and you laugh at it, you're still taking in what it is saying to you"*. Perhaps the most fascinating aspect of his critique, however, was its projective nature. He positioned himself as being outside the advertising arena; not only was advertising produced by other people, it influenced *other* people too. In calling for tobacco advertising to be banned, for instance, he insisted: *"I don't think it should be allowed... it's making so much money on its products, and a lot of it is through advertising, and especially teenagers are... very susceptible to it."*

So not all young people are uncritical consumers of advertising, although outspoken critics were in a small minority in this study. It is suggested, however, that broader critiques of advertising have been internalised by many more of the respondents, and have contributed to a guilt and unease that lie behind, among other things, the tendency to talk in projective and depersonalised terms about advertising. It is remarkable how many times a point was made about the advertising's influence in particular, and then hurriedly qualified with a remark along the lines of 'It doesn't influence me personally, but I know a lot of people (usually siblings it seems) who *are* influenced' (see Cullingford, 1984). Jodie (B5), for example, was apparently oblivious to the irony of her remarking that, *"Brand names influence some people more than others... personally I'm not bothered"*, whilst a prominent sports-fashion label was emblazoned across her

chest. Questions that asked whether respondents had ever bought anything as a direct result of an ad were frequently met with snapped responses in the negative, as if a highly personal enquiry had just been made. There are several potential explanations for such responses.

Firstly, there is a distinct male bias to these denials of influence, as if more is at stake for them in these discussions, as if the effects of advertising are something of a threat. The small group of students mentioned above who could not fully engage in discussions were all male too, and the researcher could not help but sense that, in addition to some of their moral proclamations, their words and actions were almost designed to preserve something. That something could well be their notion of rational male subjectivity. Poster (1990, Ch. 2), for example, has suggested that changes in TV advertising strategies during the twentieth century, from informative narratives appealing to the rational consumer to emotional ads appealing to the irrational consumer, have been predicated upon the notion of women (who constitute the bulk of the audience for TV ads) as irrational consumers. He identifies critiques of advertising from male commentators that implicitly blame the (irrational female) consumer, effectively displacing responsibility from producer to consumer: 'When a male watches a TV ad, his autonomy is threatened by feminine irrationality' (51) (see T. Richards, 1991 for an example of 'chivalrous' and paternalistic concern for female consumers in need of protection from advertisers, and Bernold and Ellmeier (1997) for a summary of work tackling the social identification of consumption with femininity).

It is suggested here that some such discourse is operating among the young males interviewed in this study. Note there is no intended implication here that males *are* less likely to be influenced by advertising, just as Morley (1986: 162-7) points out that, regardless of what happens in reality, men's statements about their viewing reveal the persistent belief that TV fiction is for women and that men watch more factual programmes (see Houston, 1984, on how popular discourse situates the generic 'TV viewer' as female). Some of this male denial can also be accounted for by an inability on the part of the respondents to conceive of how they themselves are influenced by advertising, and an

inarticulacy in explaining any connections made. It is perhaps useful here to employ a definition of consciousness similar to that of Toulmin (1982), namely 'articulateness' (which approximately corresponds to Giddens's (1984) concept of 'discursive consciousness'). It appears that a significant portion of advertising is consumed at the level of the 'practical consciousness', the level of social action at which, according to Giddens, actors have difficulty verbalising the conditions of their own action.

Whilst these ideas about male subjectivity and practical consciousness may well contribute to the denial and unease evidenced in the groups, some version of guilt is also playing a part, just as it did for the readers of women's magazines in Ballaster *et al's* (1991) study. It is suggested here that such feelings of guilt derive from elements of traditional critiques of advertising that have been internalised by the students. Several groups were asked how their own attitudes to advertising differed from those of their parents, and the picture generally painted of their elders was one of universal objection to advertising (in addition to one of 'visual illiteracy', ridiculed by their offspring). Their parents were likely to have grown up in a climate of hostility towards advertising in popular discourse, and may well have imparted similar sentiments which serve to induce this sense of guilt about enjoying, or being influenced, by its messages.

Guilt in the mind of the consumer is not a new phenomenon, as Coward (1984) and Richards (1994) explain (and in particular the pleasures of looking have often felt particularly illicit, in spite of the ocularcentrism (Jenks, 1995) of much of Western culture, as Nava (1997) explains). Although much of his work as a psychologist was commercially motivated, Ernest Dichter (1960; 1964) identified affluence as a source of guilt for many consumers, and advertising has tended to follow his lead by presenting products in a way that reduces the guilt associated with consuming them. On occasions it has explicitly addressed the phenomenon, as in the 1980's '*Naughty, but nice*' ad for cream cakes (also notable for the identity of its copywriter, Salman Rushdie). There did not appear to be much evidence of Dichter's contention in the present study, but guilt did extend to broader television consumption habits. There is a suspicion that this

could be traced to the same parental sources mentioned in relation to advertising and the notion that television viewing is not a valid, wholesome pastime (and also perhaps linked to negative evaluations of pleasure and entertainment)<sup>5</sup>. Evidence tended to surface during the completion of questionnaires at the end of each session, in which participants were asked to estimate how many hours of television they watched in a week, and to name their favourite programmes. Some students were embarrassed about their viewing hours (Ruth, B6: *"I do watch it quite a lot... I'm a bit bad at it"*), and even took to mocking those whose figures were higher than their own (Natalie, B5: *"Do you watch telly every night? Huh, don't you ever go anywhere?"*). Others were ashamed of their viewing choices, particularly when there was a preponderance of Australian soap operas in their questionnaire replies.

One particular source of unease associated with ad consumption is not so difficult to trace, however, and is related to the aforementioned tendency among these generally discerning adwatchers to view advertising as entertainment. There are those who do not enjoy ads simply because they think they are bad ads. There are no questions of moral responsibility involved, no questions of influence: these judgements are purely aesthetic, and the respondents were as keen to talk about ads they loathed as they were about ones they loved.<sup>6</sup> Ads were deemed to be bad for all manner of reasons: unrealistic, repetitive, corny, insulting, too clever, too simple, too factual, too long, too short.... Different criteria were used to judge ads promoting different products. For instance, Benetton ads were severely criticised for not showing the product itself, yet Tango ads were lauded for this very absence; Holsten Pils ads were praised for being straight-talking and to the point, Woodseal ads were laughed at for the same reason. Most despised of all, though, were ads that were deemed to be fake or patronising. Soap powder ads failed on both counts,

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<sup>5</sup> A more detailed ethnography that investigated the lived cultures and social relations (the fourth stage of the circuit of culture) of these young people would be required to investigate such suspicions; as has already been explained, this was not feasible in the context of this project.

<sup>6</sup> Hermes (1995) issues the timely reminder that not all texts are necessarily *meaningful* to their audiences.

and were thus universally loathed; a remark from any one of the thirteen groups could be used to illustrate the apparent strength of feeling. The unchanging and unimaginative formats of the ads were resented, but it was the comparative tests that most offended. Susie (A6) spoke for almost all the respondents when she said, *"Thirty years ago they were doing exactly the same thing. It was supposed to get your whites whiter than white, but it didn't then and it doesn't now... The comparative tests are so poor. I can't believe they're showing it to us and expecting us to actually believe it"*.

For some respondents, however, these 'whiter than white' ads were objectionable for a rather different (racialised) reason. Indeed, for some, the consumption of ads was a potentially uneasy experience for reasons that had little to do with any of the above. Instead, advertising was a reflection of, and a reminder of, their particular position in society and its consumer culture. The active reflexivity described above of so many of the students enabled them to identify and articulate these identity positions in both general 'ad talk', and in the discussions prompted by the selected ads. These articulations are investigated in Chapter 6, in an attempt to assess the importance of racialisation and various social and geographical axes of differentiation in the consumption of advertising.

## 6

### The differential consumption of advertising

*'...to ask someone their opinion of advertising in general, or of a particular ad, can be to embark upon an emotionally and ideologically charged discussion, revealing their political and social position...'*

Guy Cook (1992)

*'There is no reason to assume a priori that people with similar attributes will share common experiences of social life, let alone be moved to common forms and meanings of social action, unless they share similar narrative identities and relational settings'*

Margaret Somers (1994)

#### 6.1: Introduction

The discussion of young people's general engagement with television advertising in Chapter 5 has laid several foundations for this second chapter to focus on the differential consumption of advertising. As well as introducing the concept of an unease associated with consuming ads, and emphasising a reflexivity and awareness on the part of the young people interviewed (both issues also being woven into this second part), it has drawn attention to the differentiated and nuanced nature of this engagement. This chapter expands upon this notion of advertising being differentially consumed and explores, and attempts to explain, certain *patterns* that have emerged in this differential consumption.

Peter Saunders (1986; 1990) has argued that cleavages of class, gender and ethnicity are becoming increasingly irrelevant in the world of consumption. Baudrillard (1983b), meanwhile, has proclaimed 'the end of the social' in relation to contemporary consumer culture; in other words, he suggests that we are becoming increasingly detached from categories of inequality such as class, gender and 'race'. It has in turn been suggested that such a detachment,



generated by the mass media and the growing importance of consumption, has precipitated a 'crisis of subjectivity' for many people, who suddenly find themselves with a seemingly unlimited choice of symbolic referents against which to define themselves, instead of just the above traditional categories (Rodaway, 1995). The implication from all these writers is that substantial changes have taken place in society associated with the rise of consumer culture. This chapter agrees, in so much as it argues that patterns of differential consumption of advertising cannot (necessarily) be explained, nor predicted, with reference to traditional categories of experience such as 'race', gender and class. It suggests that influences which may map approximately onto these categories are still salient to the analysis of advertising consumption, but in ways that are both complex and unexpected.

The opening quote from Somers (1994) hints at the theoretical position that emerges during this chapter, based on my empirical material (material which is conspicuous by its absence from Somers's own work). Somers attempts to reconfigure the analysis of identity formation in the light of her dissatisfaction with existing work which she sees as too frequently predicated upon the aforementioned essentialist and singular categories such as 'race', gender and class (and which too often assume one category will over-determine other simultaneously salient categories). Her alternative 'narrative identity' framework transcends such categorical rigidities by 'emphasizing the embeddedness of identity in overlapping networks of relations that shift over time and space' (607). She does not advocate complete categorical instability, nor preclude the possibility of the 'recursive presence of particular identities', but such salience must be tested empirically and not assumed. Central to Somers's thesis, and where it is most useful for my own project, is the idea that people are not guided in their social action by their categorical positions (be they racialised, gendered, classed *etc.*), but instead by the structural and cultural *relationships* in which they are embedded, and which constitute the 'narratives' that form their identities.

The following two sections of this chapter are structured as a so-called 'Aunt Sally', in so much as they nominally tackle the issues of racialisation and

gender separately and in turn. This 'expected' structure serves to highlight the inadequacies of rigid racialised and gendered categories in explaining the consumption of advertising by young people. The sections show how narrative relationships may well have racialised and gendered components, but these are neither singular nor simple. The chapter then argues that conventional understandings of class are of little explanatory value in the context of this project; instead, broader notions of difference and distinction based on Bourdieu's notions of 'cultural capital' and 'habitus' are more significant. The construction of generational difference is also shown to be a significant factor in the consumption of advertising by young people.

## **6.2: The significance of racialised relations**

This section explores two related questions: to what extent does racialised meaning in advertising matter to the consumers of the ads? And to what degree is the consumption of advertising patterned along racialised lines? We could perhaps expect such an investigation to draw certain conclusions. For example, it would be reasonable to anticipate that racialisation in ads would matter most for non-white students in both schools; that racialisation would be a consistently irrelevant factor in the consumption of advertising by white students; that the consumption pattern of non-white students would be consistent throughout both study schools through the existence of a 'special angle of vision' through which engagement with the media is conducted (P. Collins, 1990); and that the opposition to racist and racialised representations might be graded along a certain dimension, with, at one end, groups who have not entered mainstream public discourse of ethnic stereotypes or who are less racialised in the eyes of the white majority (mixed-origin students, those with Arabic parents, *etc.*), and, at the other end, those whose identity is principally constructed in relation to popular stereotypes, as reflected in advertising representations (African Caribbean, Indian, *etc.*) (cf. Miller *et al*, 1997). As this section goes on to detail, however, every one of these assertions is highly problematic in the light of the group interviews. Instead, the relationship between racialisation and the consumption of advertising by these young people is characterised by an unexpected complexity, in which relational settings and categories of difference play important roles, and with racialised meanings frequently being inseparable

from classed and gendered meanings. Perhaps most significantly, the relationship serves to undermine any preconceptions about homogeneous cultures and identities, since ad consumption depends less on any nominal 'racial' category than the relational narratives in which the respondents are embedded. In addition it has important implications for academics, advertisers and teachers alike.

The complexity of the picture makes documenting it in a coherent manner something of a challenge; the nuances, and even contradictions, do not make for a straightforward narrative. Two groups of students can be approximately identified with corresponding dispositions: those for whom racialisation matters, and those for whom it does not matter. This section will be roughly structured around these two dispositions, beginning with for whom, and why, racialisation matters. This latter group includes some minority students, and two groups of white students, those who express some sympathy and those who are positively empathetic. Woven into this overall framework will be explorations of some of the major issues raised during the discussion of racialisation, including the consequences for intra-group relations, and accounts of the differential consumption of the screened ads.

### 6.2.1: For whom racialisation matters

A useful indication of the significance of racialisation for individual respondents was whether it was raised as an issue in the first half of discussions around general advertising issues. For instance, misrepresentation and underrepresentation were cited by several students as reasons why advertising often offended them. Daniel (B2), whose mother is Jamaican and father English (but who clearly positions himself as black in the group), raised his concerns about underrepresentation and negative portrayals early on in the discussion. His comments were particularly interesting for the way that they drew immediate support from other members of the group, both black and white. For instance, Nicola, both of whose parents are Jamaican had said next to nothing up to this point, but started to engage with issues of racialisation enthusiastically; meanwhile Jemma, Marion and Aodhan all voiced their agreement with Daniel's

views. There was a sense of this group uniting around an anti-racist perspective. Daniel's objections to representational trends as he sees them derive in part from a belief in the need to reflect diversity; interestingly, this call for more diverse casting in ads is based upon the social composition of London as Daniel and Marion see it. For them, London's social geography is something to be proud of.

Daniel: *"I'll tell you one thing, I can't remember seeing a black person in an advert... the only one I see is like the Jordan one"*

Jemma: *"Yeah, the only ones you see them in are basketball ones"*

Aodhan: *"I don't think I've seen any black people in ads"*

Daniel: *"And that's like, he [Jordan] doesn't say anything you know!"*

Nicola: *"Yeah, it's like that Frosties one with the American woman... you know, she's just there"*

Daniel: *"Yeah, she doesn't really talk in it, she's just there... it could have been anyone"*

James: *"So you do think it's important?"*

Daniel: *"Yeah, I think it is. I think you should have them mixed"*

Marion: *"Yeah, especially in London... look how mixed up it is, we've got all cultures here"*

Daniel: *"Sure have! All kinds of people..."*

It becomes apparent that Nicola and Daniel are not just resentful about underrepresentation. They both object to the fact that black people only appear in ads if they are celebrities (Daniel: *"You only get well-known black people, important sports persons on TV, rather than just normal people"*) and that *"most of the adverts with black people in are American... only a few English ones get out"*. Most important for Daniel, though, is what he perceives as the consequences of certain portrayals. He cites the example of Frank Bruno for HP Sauce to illustrate his fears that this reflects badly on *all* black people, himself included. Whilst he blames Frank Bruno for his role in the construction of his 'dumb' image that he knows is not the real man (and see McRae, 1996, for confirmation of this), he also resents those (white) conspirers behind his advertising persona:

Daniel: *"Frank Bruno, that's bad 'cos they've portrayed him as dumb and he's not really that dumb. I think he portrays himself as dumb, and that's a bad thing"*

*to do. But now people think all boxers are dumb or whatever... that all black people are dumb. And I bet that was someone else who said that would be a better image for you"*

Daniel's opinions hail a crucial difference between the views of well-intentioned white students for whom 'racialisation matters' (more of them later) and those for whom the issues are personally more pertinent: for the latter group, racialised images can have tangible consequences for their *own* self-identity and feelings of self-worth. For Natasha and Russell in B4 (whose parents are from Jamaica and Trinidad respectively) these consequences take the form of a weariness derived from a persistent disrespect of their 'culture'. They see this disrespect evident in a 'fake', commodified blackness that pervades in advertising. In fact, 'fake' was the most oft-used word in their criticisms. This is not, it seems, derived from any notion that there is an authentic black British, or Caribbean culture that ought to be represented, but from an awareness of the persistent *distance* between the images on the screen and their own lived experiences, and those of their families. A recent Red Stripe ad was the first to attract Natasha's wrath and, once again, its fakeness was what grated. It is worth recalling at this point the comments of the Lilt account director in section 4.2.3 about the 'authenticity' of representations in both Red Stripe and Lilt ads: *"It just looks so fake. I don't know a Jamaican who dresses like that for instance... commercialised, that's what it is. You can tell he's a model they've picked out the books, 'cos that's not a real accent for one, you can hear the American in it.... I hate fake Jamaican accents, I hate it."* Perhaps this loathing of the fake accent is derived in part from mickey-taking of her accent sometime in her school career, a material consequence of ad representation Bilal (A3) spells out below. Given the volunteered objections to Red Stripe, the subsequent screening of the Lilt ad was guaranteed to raise hackles further. During the screening Russell despairingly shook his head, and proclaimed the ad to be "a total joke". Although he did insist, with an incredulity one could expect from a visiting white British tourist, that his recent trip to Trinidad confirmed that people do carry baskets on their heads, he joined Natasha in lambasting the fake Jamaicanness represented. She judged the ad according to her own experiences: *"Like, it looks like it's all white people sunbathing*

*there... I went to Jamaica, and I was sunbathing, you know what I mean!"*<sup>1</sup>  
What concerned her most was the fact that the ad's narrative was supposedly structured by comedy, but for her this "disrespect" was a serious matter with serious consequences. For this reason she was aghast that Fehim was so uninterested in these matters. He had been castigated for indifference during an earlier debate on the representation of women in ads, but Natasha's challenge to him was founded upon his own ethnic minority status, and reveals the significance of these issues to her:

Fehim: *"I didn't really care about them... they're just adverts to me. I don't sit there and think 'that's totally unrealistic'"*

Natasha: *"What? So a man comes along and, like, he's really disrespecting you in particular, your race and everything, your family, and you're going to say 'oh, that's just an advert'?"*

Fehim: *"No. But the thing is, they wouldn't make an advert like that"*

Donna: *"That's why they have the ITC"*

Fehim seemed oblivious to the fact that, in Natasha and Russell's view, they already had made adverts like that. The African-Caribbean bias to the screened ads does not explain away Fehim's lack of interest, since he failed to join in criticism of the Snapple ad shown. Natasha even strategically cited examples of ads she deemed disrespectful to British Asians, but to no avail. He was just genuinely uninterested in these issues. There was little indication of the reasons behind this, but perhaps he was just fed up with being reminded that 'race' is his problem.

This is in complete contrast to Bilal from School A (A3), whose parents were also from the Indian subcontinent, and who was in no doubt why he abhorred racist portrayals of Asians on television. His objections are a crucial elucidation of why advertisers should take note of criticism about representation: racist images can have very real and material consequences for consumers. In the general ad talk he cited an RAC ad that had seriously offended him, featuring

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<sup>1</sup> Incidentally, there was little sense that Natasha and others found the act of 'resisting' the dominant encoded messages pleasurable, as Kuhn (1985) suggests.

an Asian man, *"talking in, like, not an English manner... not like I am, but in a weird way. And, like, some people laughed at him you know."* Not only was he offended that people should laugh at the character on the screen, but he recounted how he was subsequently subjected to wind-ups at school in which lines from the ad would be quoted in exaggerated Asian accents. Rowan (B6) also recalled an ad for spotted dick cake that featured similar accents and caused the Asian children in her class to suffer the humiliation of mickey-taking and imitation based directly on the advert. Gillespie (1995) records how young Punjabis in Southall also loathed such representations of Asians that emphasised their foreignness, as they were seen to further alienate them from society. Unsurprisingly, the screened Snapple ad had had the same effect, and as he watched it again Bilal could only laugh in despair: *"Ohhh, it's just taking the piss"*. Instead of directing his anger at the producers of the ad, however, he criticised the cast of the ad. Perhaps this is because he has come to expect this sort of thing from the advertising industry, but is surprised at his fellow British Asians. He implies that, once again, it will be people like him who have to suffer the (very real) consequences of such portrayals: *"It won't matter if anyone's hassling them will it, they got paid. But to us... to me... it's not right. He was making a fool of himself."*

Joe (B1) felt there was a consistent and deliberate attempt on the part of advertisers to cast non-white actors in parts that provoked laughter, as in the Snapple ad. His criticisms were interesting, because he used examples of African-Caribbean portrayals to demonstrate his case; his own background is Syrian and Irish, but these issues had clearly been considered and articulated previously. He contends that when black people are featured in ads the structure of the ads changes accordingly, and the adverts become "more stupid". He exemplifies his case by recent campaigns for Kellogg's Frosties: *"They used to do them Ok, like, but they would always have white people in it... all of a sudden they have a black person in it and the ad goes stupid. They make them act stupid."* Without seeing the campaign it is difficult to confirm his claims, but they would seem to fit into a long tradition of black people as objects of white entertainment and ridicule (see Toll, 1974, for example).

Perhaps the long tradition of racist portrayals in ads that Bilal alludes to can explain one of the most extreme examples of an ad being misinterpreted and misread by the study groups. The campaign in question is for Homepride Curry Sauces (produced by the ad agency Howell Henry Chaldecott Lury). It gained substantial acclaim in the broadsheet newspapers when it broke for its supposedly 'progressive' portrayals of British Asians (*Guardian*, 15/1/96; *Independent on Sunday*, 10/3/96). According to the director, Andy Wilson, the ad was political, an attempt by the agency and direction company "to portray British Asians as normal people, not some stupid stereotype" (*Guardian*). The ads featured families lauding the range of curry sauces over the dinner table, in a fairly standard 'Oxo family' format; the key difference was that, not only were they Asian, but they spoke in strong regional dialects (Scouse, Geordie, Glaswegian, Cockney). According to the HHCL account director, Mark Sands (interview), they were a deliberate attempt to depart from the caricatured images of India and Indians characteristic of Patak's curry ads, and all used "real people" and not actors. However, the accents in the ads (which, significantly, were inflected with the stereotypical 'Indian' ring that Bilal bemoaned) still arguably added a dimension of Orientalist exoticism to the ads.

In spite of the good intentions of the producers (Wilson, for instance, enjoyed working with HHCL because "they won't denigrate people or ignore audiences"), the ads were near universally condemned in the groups. Indeed, these ads were not screened or even mentioned by me, but were raised by other participants as examples of blatant racism in ads. There existed a huge discrepancy between the advertiser's intended meaning and the actual meanings constructed by these young people. All the objections were based on the assumption that the ads were, once again, taking the mickey out of Asians using crude stereotypes. Natasha, B4, even believed that, "*they weren't proper Indians, they were just taking the piss out of them... I thought they were white people dressed up as Indians, with all that fake make-up stuff*". Since white people 'blacking up' has long been seen as a particularly invidious exemplar of racist behaviour, Natasha's reading is about as far removed from the advertiser's intentions as is possible. It is suggested here, however, that the tradition of racist representation in advertising has such a pedigree that such portrayals have now become accepted as the norm, and to such an extent that



when people see Asians in ads they automatically assume that they are there to be laughed at (and see Gilroy, 1987, on 'impossible' hybrid identities such as 'Black Scottish' and 'English Asian'). This has obvious implications for the possibilities of improving minority portrayals in adverts.

The criticisms of the Homepride campaign from groups B3 and B4 are particularly interesting, since they provide insights into the significance of food and its consumption for young people living in a multicultural city (cf. Cook and Crang, 1996). Both groups insisted that if the advertisers wanted to confound stereotypes they should have avoided using Indian characters at all. At first sight this is perhaps an odd argument, since advertising curry with white actors might be seen to be equally controversial in some quarters, but their logic soon becomes evident. They argue that, whilst Indians eat curry, so does everybody else, a fact that should be acknowledged by advertisers. In fact, they eat food that has origins right across the world, a practice they view as symbolic for them, as this exchange from B4 illustrates:

Donna: *"If you want everybody to be equal then you've got to get away from an Indian eating curry. I mean, I love curry... my mum goes out for a curry every week. But they never show like white people, whatever, black people, eating curry...they think it should only be Indians"*

Natasha: *"Yeah, an Indian must have curry, and a black person must have dumplings or something"*

Robert: *"Yeah, and a white person beef and chips!"*

Josh: *"It's the media imposing these things on people"*

Donna: *"Cos I eat Chinese, Indian, Malaysian, you know"*

Josh: *"I don't even know what I eat! We eat a mixture of everything. My mum's South African, but she's got roots in India, and my dad's European, so all the food's mixed up. I mean, just talk about food...it's so mixed up!"* (laughter)

These students are not consuming 'exotic' food in the pursuit of cultural capital and social distinction like Stoke Newington's new cultural class of young professionals (May, 1996; see also Gronow, 1997; Bell and Valentine, 1997); such cuisine is merely part of their everyday lived experiences, a factor of living in the multicultural city they inhabit, just as 'roast beef and reggae music' were

for Jeater (1992). As the above interaction implies, this cultural exchange, this 'ignorance' of food's origin, is also something to be proud of.

\* \* \* \*

It is hoped that the above section has conveyed the extent to which racialisation does matter for so many of the students interviewed. For some, like the students at School B who were a little more difficult to place ethnically (Joe B1, Mariam B1, Josh B4, Latifa B6), it appeared that their concern was sometimes driven by moral imperatives. For others, these issues were fundamental to the way they went about their daily lives. Whilst they too were well aware of a 'reality gap' or 'distance' between the images they saw on television and their own lives, this distance could soon evaporate when these images provoked very material consequences for them, their self-respect, self-confidence and self-identity. There were, however, a number of white students in either school whose consumption of advertising indicated that some of these issues were also salient for them, and their views need analysing and deconstructing, since they have interesting implications for, among other things, anti-racist education.

The white students who were able to engage with discussions on racialisation and who were broadly sympathetic to the anti-racist cause can roughly be divided into two groups. The first consists of those students for whom racialisation has apparently not been a major issue in their lives, but who, once the subject was raised in discussions, were able to participate and who adopted a critical view of advertising's *status quo*, so to speak. The majority of such students were in School A. It would be reasonable to conclude that, in some cases, these students were articulating perspectives they thought the researcher wanted to hear; they thus said all the 'right things' in bemoaning underrepresentation and stereotyping, calling for advertisers to be more inclusive *etc.*. This possibility is discussed in Chapter 3, and there were one or two obvious signs of such a ploy. For instance, the screened Budweiser ad was often initially well received during screening but afterwards declared "stereotypical". Nobody at School B criticised this ad, and several non-white respondents praised it, indicating that some School A participants felt almost obliged to 'spot the racist ad'. Other students appeared to have more belief in the arguments, however, perhaps the result of the broadly liberal education

they received at a mixed comprehensive like School A. Their arguments would occasionally be undermined, however, by highly contradictory positions on certain issues (calling for fewer stereotypical images at one point for example, whilst later lauding an ad described by some non-white students as blatantly racist) or by the choice of language used (Thomas, A3, for instance, opined, "*I don't think the number of coloured people in adverts is a fair representation of their numbers in society*"). In the same session Jenny unwittingly constructed a huge space between herself and the two non-white members of the group by talking glibly about the foreignness of "blacks and coloureds". Kelvin was seen to roll his eyes at Bilal as Jenny spoke. It seems inconceivable that anybody at School B would have used the dated epithet 'coloured', and even more unlikely that they would not have been picked up on it by other respondents. Group B6, however, did broadly conform to this model too. The ethnic self-identity of some of these students was not always apparent to the researcher (the data from the questionnaires suggests that most were positioned at the 'least racialised' end of the dimension mentioned in 6.2.1), but all took a liberal line on representational issues. They called for an industry-wide campaign to reduce stereotypes in ads, suggesting that the "younger generation" would be more likely to be anti-racist if they grew up watching balanced, ethnically-mixed ads. However, with the exception of Mary and Latifa (both of whose parents are Moroccan), all used the screened Lilt ad as an example of a "brilliant ad" that "wasn't stereotypical at all", a choice that might not convince some of the other students of their anti-racist credentials.

There was then a small group of white respondents who were more passionate about these issues, expressing positive empathy and citing what they deemed to be racist ads in the general ad talk. Donna (B4) was very politicised around all equality issues. She was the first to mention representation in this group, criticising the tendency for ads to avoid showing close-ups of black characters or showing them holding the product (using Vauxhall and Wall's ads as her examples). She was also the only student to explicitly mention whiteness in ads; for all the other white students there was a clear sense that their whiteness was indeed invisible to them, and that they defined themselves as racially neutral. Donna directed her criticism at a Persil ad that showed a brass band playing at a football match. For her, the emphasis on 'whiteness' in the

commercial was a euphemism for white superiority. *"That is just the worst ad...you just see pure white, the person white and the clothes white. I mean, what are they trying to say? When you see them playing they're all in dazzling white clothes, and the crowd is full of pure white faces as well"*. This example demonstrates that Donna was clearly well attuned to some of the subtler issues of racialisation and the media; later on in the discussion, however, she became embroiled in a heated debate with Natasha and Russell which confused me to some extent. This was the biggest argument to erupt along racialised lines, and was prompted by Donna voicing her objection to the screened Reebok ad. Natasha and Russell praised the ad for its attempts at inclusivity: *"There were just like different ethnic minorities there, and like... Reebok could be like a white man-made company, so they're trying to say that just because they're white... doesn't mean black people can't wear them, or Asian people can't wear them. It was nice the way they did it"* (Natasha). Donna, however, felt that the anti-racist message was being forced upon her. She resented being reminded that, *"everybody is equal' when I know it already... everybody knows it"*. She said she did not need an advert to tell her and, moreover, an advert cannot make any difference anyway. Natasha was visibly appalled at her friend's objections, insisting that not everybody was of the opinion that we are all equal, while Russell felt that adverts were quite capable of changing some people's opinion. Donna's position here is confusing to an outsider, given her strident anti-racist and anti-sexist views (partly founded, as we shall see below, on a fear of the power of visual images). Perhaps a pre-existing tension in her friendship with Natasha had prompted her to be provocative. There is a suspicion, however, that her refusal to accept that advertising could change anything was derived from a feeling of helplessness about burgeoning racism in society. She mentioned *"a group of white boys who killed those Asian people"* as being beyond reach by anti-racist arguments, so perhaps her outburst can be seen as an indication of despair at the current situation.

During her earlier heartfelt calls for less stereotypical representations on television, Donna hinted at the importance of education in formulating her opinions. Approving references were made, for example, to Sociology lessons in which they had 'done gender' or 'done racism in the media'. Tizzy (A4) also felt that her sensibility about racism and the media could be traced directly to a

GCSE English project on the matter. Arabelle, in the same group, suggested that general education was a defence against racism, and that racist attitudes were more prevalent among less educated people (a view that finds some support in the literature - see Selznick and Steinberg, 1969; Schonbach, 1981). Having agreed that there are many highly educated racists around, however, she amended her position to call for more explicit anti-racist education based on her own experience. Her background and self-definition were particularly interesting, for she had a Mauritian father and an English mother but defined herself as white. This also applied to a former pupil of the school who was interviewed, and whose mother was Mauritian and father English but who was brought up by a white adoptive family. He insisted that he was frequently mystified in his school days by attempts by non-white children to include him in their gangs on the basis of his minority status. Even racist name-calling would wash over him at times, because, as far as he was concerned, he was white. As Back (1996) explains, the assertion that 'I am white' may be complex, and needs to be placed within wider frames of reference. Twine (1996), for example, has witnessed this phenomenon in suburban America, where girls who did not physically qualify for whiteness had access to a racially neutral (culturally white) identity because of their suburban residence and their purchasing power. Twine is keen not to overstate the importance of material consumption in this conferral of 'white' identity, and insists that a white identity is inextricably linked to a middle-class economic position. For Twine's respondents, self-identifying as white meant not being underprivileged or poor, which may explain the discrepancy between the self-identity of these School A students and that of, for example, Daniel at School B (who has an English father but a Jamaican mother and identifies as black).

Arabelle had attended a local primary school in the town whose roll is approximately 90% non-white. Although this figure would have been lower when she attended, she still insisted that, *"...before I came here I've always been in the minority being white. I've been to schools where there have been blacks and I've been made really aware towards racial things, always towards racism"*. She had also attended another local secondary school for a while that had a higher percentage of non-white students than School A: *"I went to Francis Osborne too, and they've got a lot of Indian and Bangladeshi people*

*there, so we were always... we always had lessons in PSE [Personal and Social Education] and that about what's to say that's racist... so when you watch adverts you are quite aware of that."* The potential implications of these and other comments about anti-racist education will be elaborated upon in Chapter 6.

### 6.2.2: When racialisation is not an issue

Possibly the most interesting case of a white student upholding anti-racist views concerned Emmie in group A6. She had been arguing with some of her white peers who felt that the inclusion of black characters in ads was an unwanted consequence of 'political correctness', only to find that Seema (whose parents are of Indian and African origin) was siding with her white peers. She thus found herself in the unusual position of propounding an anti-racist view in the face of indifference from a member of the non-white community whose interests she thought she was fighting for. The instances from School A of non-white students expressing indifference or even outright hostility towards supposedly anti-racist discourses has important implications for ideas about homogeneous identities and responses to racism. The expectation that racialised ads would be differentially consumed along normative racialised lines has been proved to be erroneous. Seema's comments were the most extreme example of this phenomenon. Not only does she claim to pay no attention to representation, but begins to argue the case for the *status quo*:

Seema: *"But do you sit there and think 'oh it's a white person'? Because I don't notice at all"*

Emmie: *"But they're just saying that white people are the norm, d'ya know what I mean? In society it's just not..."*

Anna: *"But we may think about it more than a black person, or Seema, or whatever, would..."*

Seema: *"Yeah, I think you do... you're saying that black people aren't portrayed in this, but this is England yeah, so there are more white people. You go somewhere else, like India, you won't see white people in adverts, and I can't see anyone sitting down and saying, 'oh well, I think we should have more white people in advertising'. Like Anna was saying, I think PC has gone too far".*

Seema in turn sees underrepresentation in advertising as a factor of a shortage of non-white actors putting themselves forward, and not as a factor of racism.

Kelvin (A3) adopts a similar perspective on casting: both have clearly thought about issues of underrepresentation previously, but drawn different conclusions from their School B counterparts. Kelvin also defended the position of advertisers by repeating Seema's argument that, *"...in England, they usually put white people in adverts... you go somewhere else they've got the race or colour of the majority in their adverts, so you can't just say it's England you know"*. Bilal, meanwhile, criticised the Nike Revolution ad for not featuring any white people when, *"white people do play for the Chicago Bulls or whatever, I've seen them"*.

There was hardly a hint of such indifference or opposition to anti-racist views among the non-white students at School B (with the possible exception of Fehim (B4) whose whole engagement, as we shall see below, was characterised by a certain passivity), so how can such responses from School A students be explained? Could it be that they are fed up with hearing that racism is a 'problem' in their lives? From experience of the study area, and from other sources, it is certainly not the case that their childhoods would have been devoid of contact with racist practices. Perhaps their relatively prosperous positions compared to their School B counterparts could provide some explanation; for example, maybe their relatively middle-class upbringings in an affluent area have shielded them and their families from more blatant forms of racism such as physical assault or workplace discrimination; perhaps the broadly middle-class ethos of the town and school has encouraged them to embrace a colour-blind individualism and personal and educational development, to the extent that their racialised identities have not been problematised. A more detailed ethnography would be required to answer some of these questions; however, answers might well lie in the attitudes of their peers at the school, namely the white majority, as implied below.

There is no explicit anti-racist education at School A (in PSE, for example), as there is at many schools, including School B, so racialisation and racism would not have been on the school agenda during the education of these students. As a consequence, it may be the case that the non-white students have not felt that the school is a space in which their 'racial' identities are relevant. These

feelings may have been compounded by the attitudes of their white colleagues, attitudes which manifested themselves during the ad talk sessions and which apparently determined their consumption of particular ads. With a few exceptions, the views of the white students at School A towards issues of racialisation were characterised by a general indifference and, at times, a thinly-veiled hostility to anti-racist ideas. As we shall see, this hostility or resistance did not take the form of racist abuse, in opposition to which a strong sense of 'racial' identity might be created; instead it manifested itself more as a condescending dismissal of the importance of these issues. In the face of this, at times, almost arrogant point of view, perhaps it is unsurprising that some non-white students have not adopted alternative perspectives.

Twine (1996) explains that, as well as traditionally being a site of racial neutrality, a white identity characteristically constitutes a position of indifference to racism and racialised issues. For these white students, racialisation has rarely been an issue in their lives. Comments such as "That passed me by", "I've never really thought about it", or "If something's not there you don't really think about it" were common. More outspoken opposition, meanwhile, was frequently couched in the terms of an anti-political correctness argument. 'PC', whatever that may mean (see Chapter 7), was not mentioned once at School B, but surfaced time and again at School A in discussions about gender issues and advertising, and particularly racialisation and advertising. It was used to justify attacks on more 'inclusive' ads, or even the calls for advertising to be more inclusive; these were seen to be features of 'political correctness', where PC was clearly seen as an evil construct from the start. Accusing something of being PC was immediately to strip it of any credibility. Thus PC appeared to be more of a weapon to be employed in a war on something else, not as a real object of criticism. The students were clearly aware of this, which is why many of their comments could be seen as a thinly-veiled racism of sorts. In the exchange cited above, Seema (A6) was concurring with comments made by Anna in the same group that basically any ad featuring black characters was including them just to be 'right on' (and that this was a Bad Thing). The Persil ad, whose casting received much praise at School B (even if its format did not) was cited as a case in point. The PC weapon was employed more forcefully, and disturbingly from my own point of view, however, in group A5.



In this case, Mitali (whose parents, like Seema's, were from the Indian sub-continent) was extremely outspoken about issues of racism and racialisation, raising them early on in the general discussions. What was notable about her arguments was that they were upheld in the face of vehement opposition from the other respondents, whose assaults frequently bordered on the personal. Once again, the springboard for criticism was the perceived threat of PC. (Incidentally, the nature of this threat was never spelt out; there were no considered defences of 'free speech' or other standard rallies of the anti-PC lobby (see Hughes, 1993; Wilson, 1996); PC was just bad). The thrust of the arguments then turned to denying that racism was the cause of any of Mitali's complaints in the dismissive manner described above. Kirsten, Tom and Heather, for example, aggressively asserted that underrepresentation was the "fault" of black actors. When Mitali objected, she was shouted down with 'conclusive evidence' from the school play: "*Mitali, there wasn't one coloured person in a cast of sixty!*" (Heather). 'Coloured' people were clearly naturally predisposed not to act.<sup>2</sup> Mitali turned her attentions to the preponderance of white women in ads for make-up and beauty products, objecting to dominant white constructions of beauty. On this point she was contemptuously dismissed with a peculiar argument from Heather: "*Well that's because not many companies do black make-up, so you can't use that as an example, Mits, you know you can't*". Mitali's retort that Heather had just identified the problem and that companies *should* produce make-up for black people went unheard.

Having been accused of, "*discriminating against white actors by saying you want black actors*" (Kirsten), Mitali then raised hackles further by questioning the offering from Alison that, "*You've got them in sports ads haven't you?*". On

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<sup>2</sup> The rather different reactions of the researcher to these comments should be noted, in comparison to when the same point was made by Kelvin and Seema. Why should there be any difference? The same question can be asked of David's (A1) complaints about the lack of white people in *The Cosby Show*, and Bilal's highlighting of Nike Revolution's all-black cast. What arguably distinguishes these comments is the notion of positionality. Speaking from *within* the community that is being blamed, or is underrepresented, is clearly very different from adopting accusatory tones from a position of dominance.

this occasion backed up by the researcher (see Chapter 3) Mitali then suggested that some people might not find this desirable, due to stereotypes about athleticism, only to find her argument rubbished once more, this time by a crude racial determinism characterised by Kirsten's assertion that, "*their bodies are built for it, their bodies are more adapted to it.*" Such comments further contributed to a sense that these students saw the 'racism card' as a petty defence, and one well-beneath them. The definitive statement of this kind was made by Tom (who had confessed at the start of the discussion to being unqualified to talk about TV because he did not watch it, but who suddenly felt himself qualified to pass comment on issues of racialisation and television). Having heard Mitali's arguments about underrepresentation, her complaints about the roles played by black characters once they did appear in ads were too much for him: "*Come on, Mitali, you can't have it both ways*". The issues of black celebrity athletes in ads and black athleticism demonstrate the gulf between the two study schools in their engagement with racialisation and advertising and its consequences for the differential consumption of ads such as Persil and Nike Revolution. 'Natural athleticism' was used to explain away these issues on countless occasions at School A'; not once was it mentioned at School B, where it was invariably socially constructed stereotypes that were the objects of critique. Compare, for instance, the treatment of the issues by A5 here with that of B2 above: the latter all united in condemnation of this representational bias in advertising, while the former adopted a rhetorical 'what more do you want?' approach. In this climate of dismissive hostility, is it any wonder that some non-white students at School A do not vocally consider racialisation to be a salient issue in their (school) lives? Mitali was an exception, but even she had to couch many of her arguments in the same 'depersonalised' and 'projective' language used by respondents when talking about influence: her defences frequently began with "some people might say that...", or "not everybody might agree with that".

### 6.2.3: A racialised unease

During the heated debates about racialisation in A5, Tom voiced criticism of some of Benetton's ads which he suggested, "*took the racist issue too far*". He

was registering a widely felt unease about companies tackling 'social' issues in their ads in this manner, which also lay behind the diverse reactions to the screened Nike Cantona ad. As we shall see, responses to this ad can be approximately divided along geographical and racialised lines.

The first thing to note is that, regardless of whether the ad's message and intentions were approved of, the format and production of the ad were widely praised. In this case, respondents seemed perfectly capable of appreciating the form of the ad independently of its content. Of the ads that were actually screened in the sessions, this was the one that prompted most debate, and was also the one to be most consistently 'misread'. Many of respondents overlooked the anti-racist overtones of the ad in their clamour to accuse Eric Cantona of being a hypocrite for denouncing violence in the light of his recent behaviour. The dual intention of the ad, which was to allow Cantona a public space in which to repent and to draw attention to the 'racism' that provoked him (interview, Peter Bracegirdle), was lost on many of these consumers.

The differential consumption of this ad could be said to have a geographical basis in as much as objections to the ad's message nearly all came from School A. Meanwhile, every non-white respondent who commented on the ad (which was almost everybody) was in favour of Nike's approach. Daniel (B2) spoke for others when he lauded Nike for, *"using their power and their money to make a point"*, while Bilal (A3) clearly drew on his own experiences of racism to defend Cantona's actions, challenging his peers not to feel like attacking him if he racially abused them. Many of the white students, however, were ambivalent about this new development in advertising. Some were suspicious of a corporation's attempts to benefit financially from racism in sport, others dubious about whether an advertiser was qualified to pass comment on such an issue. Some could not even form an opinion on the matter, fraught as it is with apparent contradiction: *"they're using a moral issue to sell their product...I can't work out whether that's right or wrong"* (Leanne, A4). A principal source of unease was the feeling that it should be the Government or some neutral organisation broadcasting such messages; as Zack (A6) insisted, *"advertisers shouldn't get involved in these things, it's not their job and they're not the ones*

*best qualified to do it*". However, advocates of this same position in group A3 had to concede ground to Kelvin when he pointed out that the message would have a far greater impact on the audience precisely because it was produced by Nike, a company whose brand instantly grabs the attention of many viewers. Government promotions of the same message would be "useless and ignored", he insisted. Some objections stemmed less from an unease associated with commercial connections, however, and more to do with the anti-racist message itself. Just as Donna (B4) had objected to the Reebok ad (which was otherwise universally read as per the advertiser's intentions) for 'forcing' the anti-racist message upon her, so others did with the Cantona ad. Zack and Simon (A6), for instance, objected to what they saw as the ad's accusatory tone, the implication that they, the viewer, were racist. Zack felt that he was "trying" not to be racist, and that he did not need a sportswear company to tell him what to do; Simon, meanwhile, denied the ad was appropriate to him and even his town, and he introduced an arguably racialised geographical argument to support his case: *"I don't think it's that relevant...maybe it was once in America...but round here, we don't live in a rough area do we?"*. The word 'rough' has certain racialised connotations here, in the same way that localities have been deemed to have 'gone downhill' upon the immigration of racialised minorities (see Miles, 1989, and Keith, 1993, on racialised symbolic geographies).

It is apparent from the group interviews that the relationship between racialisation and the consumption of advertising is more complex than expected. Whilst racialisation was most important for several non-white students, there is no evidence of a 'special angle of vision' through which these ads are consumed; it seems that internal divisions among particular racialised communities ensure that advertising and consumer culture do not have a homogeneous impact on minority youth. Such divisions might reflect the different narratives which structure the lives of the respondents, and the different positions such narratives place them in relation to dominant discourses (Somers, 1994). We would need to employ different research methods to probe such narratives (individual, in-depth interviews, for instance), but their existence needs to be acknowledged. Thus Bilal's reaction to the Snapple ad can be explained *not* by his categorical position, but the structural and cultural relationships within which he is embedded, and the place he holds in his

'relational setting' or 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1984); for example, he objects to the ad not so much because he is 'Asian', but because his racialised construction as such by others, based in part on the 'public' narratives and discourses propagated by advertising, has caused him to suffer<sup>3</sup>. Similarly, there was no uniform response from the white students: for some, racialisation *did* matter, up to a point, but for others it was deemed to possess such little salience as to make them openly hostile to it (the fact that the latter group was overwhelmingly concentrated in School A implies the existence of a geographical component to narrative identity and 'habitus', discussed briefly at the end of the chapter). Finally, the suggestion that concern with racialisation from non-white students would be ranged along a particular dimension of racialised identity has also proved problematic; whilst there was certainly some strong opposition from those students whose identity most closely resembled the stereotypes portrayed in advertising, they received vocal support from students who did not conform to such definitions.

The next section shows the complexity of the relationship between the consumption of advertising and the categorical definition of gender, demonstrating that such a rigid category cannot be seen as determining advertising consumption for these young people.

### **6.3: The complexity of the gendered subject position**

This section poses the same two questions of the interview material that were asked in relation to racialisation. To what extent does gendering in ads matter to young consumers? And how is the consumption of advertising gendered?

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<sup>3</sup> Somers (1994) says relatively little about what she calls 'public narratives', but her use of the term approximately equates to academic definitions of 'discourses' (i.e. narratives emanating from 'cultural and institutional formations larger than the single individual' p. 619); in this chapter the terms are used interchangeably to refer to shared frameworks and knowledges beyond the level of the individual but which are invoked (and reaffirmed) by individuals in their day-to-day lives (and ad talk).

We might expect that gendered ads would matter most to the female members of the groups, and the interviews confirm this (in fact, as we shall see below, concern about representational issues was confined to female respondents to a disappointingly high extent). However, it is far from the case that all females in the groups care equally about the gendered structuring of ads: instead the spectre of 'political correctness' emerges once more, and several females express some contempt for propositions for change. Meanwhile the consumption of advertising does appear to be gendered along some quite distinct lines (some of which have been sketched already in relation to male claims of immunity to the advertising message).

There was no attempt on the part of the researcher to raise issues of gendered representation in the groups, but the majority of the groups tackled the subject anyway. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the representation of women, and what were deemed to be sexist ads, caused considerable offence among some of the female respondents. Traditional feminist critiques of advertising have focused on the employment of women in ads as the object of the male gaze (Coward, 1984; see Chapter 2). These arguments were largely absent in the study groups. This is probably a consequence of the advertising industry having to some extent censored such images, replacing them with more subtle manifestations of sexism and contradictory definitions of womanhood (Wernick, 1991). Instead the most vehement criticisms were reserved for the persistent portrayal of women in particular roles, primarily that of subordinate homemaker. Soap powder ads were widely criticised once more, particular the tendency for women to be portrayed as washing clothes for assorted male relatives. Thus whilst the screened Persil ad was praised at School B for its casting ("*It was refreshing*" - Russell, B4), its standard structure of the silent woman in the kitchen getting the boys out of trouble was bemoaned. Donna (B4), who was vociferous on the issue of sexism in ads, cited it as another example of "*the pathetic little woman in the kitchen*" (thus demonstrating how consumers can be thoroughly ambivalent about an ad, lauding it in one respect whilst lambasting it in another, in this case the micro-geographies being portrayed). She was especially riled, she said, by the portrayal of women in ads that were targeted at men, such as Gillette shaving products. Gillespie (1995) notes how these ads had many female fans amongst young Punjabis in Southall, but not so at these

study schools, where the whiteness of the ads was heavily criticised (by Mitali, A5, and by Donna and Natasha, B4) in addition to the representation of women. Donna fumed that, *"She's always some dolled up housewife...the woman's a dumb bitch with nothing to do with her time, except what her husband says. You can't accept that as an ad 'cos it puts women down"*. It is important to note that it was the simultaneously racialised and gendered structure of this ad that caused so much offence. For Mitali, Natasha and Donna the two 'categories' of dominance could not be untangled, and the ad could not be consumed with sole reference to one or other (see Ware, 1992, on the simultaneity of racialised and gendered identities).

Donna's commitment to what she described as a feminist perspective on these issues precipitated a very heated exchange with Fehim that to some extent mirrored his aforementioned scrap about racialisation with Natasha. He insisted that the majority of people just do not think about ads like Donna does: *"I just watch those Gillette ones and don't notice all that stuff, you just watch 'em... there's nothing you can do about them anyway"*. Donna was outraged by this, less at Fehim's passivity it seemed, but at the broader trend of acceptance that his position symbolised. She was in no doubt that the second order messages in ads (those not directly related to the selling message - see O'Barr, 1994) were dangerously powerful, taken into the subconscious as they were. She implored Fehim (and the rest of society it seemed) to stop accepting such images of women unquestioningly, *"because everybody gets used to it, people start expecting you to behave like that... the media is such a powerful thing"*. Her argument was as passionate as it was sophisticated (and will be recalled in Chapter 7 in relation to 'resistance'), but we cannot help but draw out the contradiction between her conception of media power as demonstrated here and her rejection of the anti-racist ad in her aforementioned spat with Natasha over Reebok. In that dispute she refused to accept that more positive representations would achieve anything. The discrepancy shows that we cannot presume the existence of an essential and consistent subject in relation to advertising consumption. Explaining the discrepancy is tricky, however. It appears that the two respective adverts (we cannot extend this to advertising in general) have impacted differently on her gendered and racialised identities. Both the Gillette ad and the Reebok ad posed a kind of threat to her. In the first

instance this was a threat from society to her freedom as a female, so society was to blame; it is suggested that the Reebok ad, however, was a threat in as much as it implied that she, as a white person, was culpable, and this she could not countenance. Her racialised and gendered identity was being challenged here. Just as Zack (A6) rejected the Cantona ad, it may be precisely because Donna felt that she *did* care about racism that she was offended by what she inferred as being an accusatory tone in the ad. Yet this just emphasises that an individual's commitment to anti-racism can perhaps only be relied upon up to a certain (shifting) point.

Donna would undoubtedly have been outraged to have witnessed some of the very contrasting views expressed on these matters by her fellow females in B6, and then several groups at School A. With some exceptions there was clear evidence that gendered meanings in ads were not so important to the females here. The sentiments of Mary (B6) that she, "*[doesn't] really care...it happens so much you just ignore it*" not only confirm Donna's worst fears about acceptance, but mirror the views of several School A students. Anna (A6), for example, declared that she, "*used to get worked up about it, but what's the point? You can just turn over...*" (a response that is deconstructed further in Chapter 6 with reference to 'resistance'). Others failed to see any potential connections between images on their TV screens and their material reality (like Anne in A2 who said she was, "*not bothered about the adverts and that, it's only when people around you come out with 'oh, women should do that'*"), while Gemma (A1) was only concerned when the stereotypical representations were applied to people in her age group, hinting at the salience of a generational awareness that is described in section 5.5. Anti-PC voices made themselves heard in relation to gender and advertising too. Anna (A6) invoked PC once more, prior to making her tactics of resistance public above, while group A5 (with the notable exception of Mitali) largely embraced the same arguments that they had in relation to racialisation. Tom and Ben began by insisting that the (surely very occasional?) inclusion of men in domestic roles on television was an example of "*taking the feminist movement too far*" (Tom). Depressingly for the researcher, their views were seconded by the females in the group: Kirsten declared that this was "*too PC...it's gone to the other extreme*", while Heather contended that



representing men in this way *"is even more stereotypical now"* (than traditional representations of women).

What is interesting here is the conception of reality that is used to justify these 'anti-PC' stances. Clearly this group think that portrayals of gendered relations in ads have changed to such a degree that previous representational trends have been *reversed*, a claim that is patently empirically wrong. The same 'reality gap' was evident in the discussions about racialisation in this group, exemplified by Heather's assertion that representation on our TV screens was no longer an issue because *"it's now almost 50-50"* (which she attempted to justify by reciting all the names of the 'black interest' programmes on television, but was unable to recall any).

The only occasion when the females in group A5 expressed sympathy to a remotely feminist cause was in response to Ben's provocative and sexist comments about women in ads as sex objects. He repeatedly referred to the inclusion of "nice women" or "birds" in an ad as being his criteria for judging its quality, comments which constructed a huge distance between the sexes in the group (see Chapter 3 on the researcher's problematic position as a male here). This gap was crossed eventually by Mitali, however, who invoked the existence of a 'female gaze' (Gamman and Marshment, 1988) to counter the talk of the 'male gaze': *"Oh, come on, it's only fair, we go for all the fit guys in ads!"*. Several female respondents praised ads that did provide them with the opportunity to look at men sexually. The prime example cited here was a Diet Coke ad which featured a group of female office workers drooling over a topless workman outside. Ruth (B7) loved the ad: *"It's a situation you can relate to... it's just like looking at blokes and going 'oh, he's gorgeous' kind of thing, which is what we do. That was the nice thing about it, they've turned around the whole thing about men looking at women..."*. It is as if Ruth extracts pleasure from this ad because it essentially resolves a historical problem for her, namely that society has expected and accepted the dominant sexual gaze to be male, and has represented it as such, but that there has always been a female gaze and that ads like this allow women to openly employ it (see Gamman and Marshment, 1988; Nash, 1996). Interestingly, whilst there was little positive

empathy from the male respondents on gendered meanings in ads (with the brief exception of Russell in B4), some did express disgust that sex was still being used to sell products. However, instead of this being interpreted as support for feminist causes, it appears that it is merely an instance of what Mulvey (1975) describes as the male's inability to bear the burden of sexual objectification, and reluctance to gaze at his exhibitionist like. This is because the examples chosen to illustrate their case were the aforementioned Diet Coke ad and a recent execution for Galaxy chocolate, both of which explicitly position themselves as appealing to the female sexual gaze.

So far this section has detailed how ads with a more explicitly gendered framework have been consumed by different groups of respondents. There is another example where the consumption of particular ads, and indeed promoted products themselves, appears to have a gendered dimension, and that is with respect to branded goods. We first have to define this term, since, as several respondents pointed out, the notion of a branded good has two distinct meanings related to reason for purchase. The first refers to the sense of security provided by particular brands, and most commonly applied by the students to what the industry calls FMCG's ('fast moving consumer goods' such as soap powder); the second instead has connotations of *display*, in other words brands (or 'labels') that are purchased especially for their value as 'markers' (there is much literature on the use of goods to define social relationships stretching back to Thorstein Veblen's coining of the phrase 'conspicuous consumption' (Veblen, 1899), not much of which need concern us here - but see Douglas and Isherwood, 1980). While some males in the groups suggested that they would value branded soap powder were they in the market for it (see Chapter 5), it was the distinctly male bias in favour of brands for display that was particularly interesting. Their discussions were characterised by notions of "looking a fool" by wearing the wrong label at important sites of display (this includes the school), and by taking the "safe option" of a label when buying clothing. Several female respondents insisted that while a label might be taken into account when shopping for clothes, it would still have to look good. Male students at both schools adopted a different perspective, suggesting that the label would speak for itself. Daniel (B2) confirmed this by making explicit the connection between labels and financial resources: "*You get*

*some people who could look completely wrong, but if it's an expensive named brand then people can't really say nothing to them 'cos they could just say 'Even though I look wrong, my clothes cost more than your whole outfit' or whatever. That's what some people do".*

Whilst it is important not to exaggerate this pattern, since several female respondents claimed to actively seek brands when shopping (particularly jeans and sports shoes), there were very real discernible differences. The causes of these differences are difficult to define, however. The talk of 'safe options' indicates that differential shopping competencies may offer some explanation; perhaps male respondents are less skilled in the marketplace, and instead of experimenting creatively with various styles fall back on the brand name with its promise of guaranteed kudos. This suggests the female respondents have more faith in their 'taste' and competence to judge, presenting an interesting, gendered play-off between economic and cultural capital in this context. Another potential explanation can be found in the work of Ewen (1982), who places this phenomenon in the context of a crisis of masculinity precipitated by men's decreasing role in production. 'Having' (and displaying) have come to replace 'producing' as key constituents of male identity, developments which may have filtered down to young people like those interviewed. Perhaps the male preoccupation with style that Gregson (1995) alludes to in relation to consumption studies has relevance here too. Could it be that women have traditionally been forced to consider the use-value of goods, while men have had the luxury to take identity-value into account? Have women historically had a greater concern with subsistence consumption over conspicuous consumption in their capacity as homemakers that has translated into how they view labelled goods? (The literature on department stores suggests not, with the world of temptation and desire gendered female - see Bowlby, 1985) Or can the bias be attributed to males' traditionally greater freedom to move in public space, and the wider range of contexts in which they appear?

While this is all very speculative, but the bias does have consequences for how ads are consumed, as the reaction to Nike Revolution testifies. The majority of those respondents who enjoyed this ad were male. To some extent this was

because of the very masculinist narrative of the ad (described by an uninterested Claire in A1 as "*just lots of big men running around after a ball*"). Indeed, the style of the ad was debated along conventionally gendered lines in group B4: Natasha and Donna accused this, and other Nike ads, of being overtly aggressive, an assertion contested by the males in the groups who strongly defended the ad's format. It is suggested here, however, that the lack of female interest is also related to the nature of the product being advertised. Chapter 5 has clarified the link that often exists between the enjoyment of an ad and the product being advertised, and in this case it seems that branded goods like sports shoes just do not hold the same appeal for female consumers as they do for their male counterparts.

Somers (1994: 611) acknowledges that, in some instances, 'there is abundant evidence that generalization[s] could be supported', based on particular categories of identity. Certainly, the concern expressed about gendered issues in advertising had a rigidly gendered pattern to it, in as much as it mattered almost exclusively to female respondents. However, not all female respondents were bothered, with the indifferent or hostile participants being concentrated, once more, in School A. It is perhaps surprising how few respondents in either school were concerned about these issues. It was also surprising how little the consumption of ads in general varied by gender, with youth commonalities and racialised divisions (and commonalities) proving more important in most groups. Moreover, it is important to restate that gender cannot be analysed independently, as a category of experience; the consumption of ads by the females in both schools was inflected by their simultaneously gendered and racialised subject positions.

#### **6.4: Advertising unites and divides: taste, habitus and generational difference**

It has become apparent from the previous two sections that understanding social action, and in this case the consumption of advertising by young people, is not just a case of placing people in the correct social categories and then equating behaviour with the interests which keep people in such putative

categories. As Somers (1994) notes, such an exercise in categorical placement has occurred most frequently in the literature in relation to class. It has often been assumed that all members of the 'working class', for example, will share certain attributes and possess particular common interests which will ensure they act in a particular fashion. However, traditional conceptions of class and class interest are of little utility in explaining many of the remaining significant differences and commonalities observed in the consumption of advertising. One problem is the fruitlessness of attempting to assign class positions to respondents such as those in the interview groups: not only is it very debatable whether young people can be expected to take on the class positions of their parents (Murdock and McCron, 1976), but there is increasing scepticism about the whole process of identifying distinct class positions in the postmodern era (Savage *et al*, 1992). Certainly it would be impossible to define class lines either within or between the two schools, since such an exercise would assume that members of School A, for example, should all act homogeneously with their 'middle class' interests in mind, and this is patently false. Instead, the aforementioned differences and commonalities identified in the consumption of advertising cut across traditional classed, gendered and racialised lines. They reflect not class determinants, but differences in taste, cultural competence, habitus and generational awareness. These will be explored below.

A key feature of Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) work is his assertion that consumption practices can both reproduce and cut across social hierarchies (see also Bauman, 1987). Central to Bourdieu's thesis is the role of 'taste' ('the acquired disposition to differentiate and appreciate' 465), which serves simultaneously to symbolise and affirm differences and barriers between classes. The concept also has application beyond mere class differentiation (as Bourdieu employed it), to the broader 'pursuit of distinction' (281) and its role as a form of social orientation, a 'sense of one's place' (466). Both these latter functions, and other areas of Bourdieu's work, are relevant to the study groups and their consumption of advertising. The groups have demonstrated that it is a concept that has particular relevance to young people, and, like a general youth consciousness, has the ability to cut across gendered and racialised lines. Taste, it seems, has the power to both unite and divide. As Chapter 5 describes, ad talk competence can be a form of cultural capital in the site of the

classroom, and distinctions are made on this basis; it also has the power to unite and divide as we shall see below. Meanwhile, the school is also one of many important sites for the display of particular goods and objects which confer status on the beholder; nearly all the groups engaged in a discussion of branded goods and their significance for self and group identity, and the gendering of these discussions has been outlined above.

Chapter 5 highlighted how many judgements about ads were made on the basis of entertainment value, and that the young people interviewed were extremely discerning in this regard. An adjunct of this discernment was the importance attached to 'taste' in ads, which ones were defined as 'good' or 'bad', with the results dividing students within and between groups. For the most part these were light-hearted engagements, in which choices were mocked or lauded in good spirit; considerable entertainment was gleaned from the policing of boundaries of taste. In some cases, however, choices were used to discriminate against particular respondents and were clearly being employed as markers of differences being played out beyond the groups, as this exchange from B5 illustrates:

Vicki: *"Chicken Tonight, that is such an irritating advert, you switch it off as soon as it comes on the screen"*

Natalie: *"Yeah, that is so annoying"*

Karen: *"I like that advert"*

Natalie: *"Yeah, but you're annoying anyway"*

Vicki: *"You would, wouldn't you"*

Karen was also mocked for the amount of television she watched, and was often ostracised during some of the debates; in this group the consumption of TV and its ads (as well as taste in everything from yoghurts to men and football teams - *"...if you find Eric Cantona gorgeous there's something seriously wrong with your taste"*) were used as ammunition in personal wars apparently being conducted within and beyond the classroom.

Similarly, in group B2 Aodhan was widely condemned by his peers for what was perceived as arrogance in asserting his own taste judgements. During a discussion about ads for music CD's, he cited the names of a number of his favourite bands, deriding the more 'popular' offerings in the adverts; this was a classic exercise in the promotion of one's 'cultural capital', the possession of which, according to Shurmer-Smith and Hannam (1994), involves 'despising things which are easy to like' (195). In doing so Aodhan was drawing attention to a perceived mark of distinction, and in turn constructing a symbolic distance in the group. In other cases, respondents appeared to voice approval for ads or programmes in an attempt to win the affections of 'respected' members of the group or opinion leaders, or merely to feel 'part of' the group as a whole. When people emphasised that their choices were "the same as everyone else", there was a sense that they were using aesthetic judgements to ingratiate themselves to others and to stake a claim to membership of this group (albeit an ephemeral one). While some deliberately promoted their preferences as being exceptional, others even mocked their *own* tastes in a bid to fend off potential gibes and judgements.

Another major 'difference' that was clearly significant for many of the respondents, and which indeed united them across both group and school, was that of generational difference. It could be argued that the general ad talk described in Chapter 5 is something of an exercise in the creation of generational difference, with the appropriation of fragments of ad dialogue into everyday speech, and public parodying of ads *etc.* serving to both distinguish young people from their parents and provide them with a language which might be incomprehensible to their parents. However, there was more explicit evidence of such creation and maintenance of generational difference, and a sense of 'generational consciousness' (Mannheim, 1927; Murdock and McCron, 1976) in the group sessions.

On several occasions during ad talk there were signs of a preoccupation on the part of the respondents with their ambiguous status between childhood and adulthood (see James, 1986; Sibley, 1995a). This same sense of 'liminality' was evident in Gillespie's (1995) discussions about current affairs and television

news programmes with groups of young people; in the case of my project, it manifested itself primarily in the form of claims that advertisers and programme-makers alike ignore them and their peers. Several students referred to their position as the 'in-between' age, exemplified by Jack's (B1) insistence that, *"The thing is, there is nothing that caters for people of our age group... there's stuff for kids and there's stuff for adults... there's not much for us though really"*. Whilst some appeared to be quite bitter about this apparent neglect, others saw it as a function of their spending power. Andrew and Hannah (A2) agreed that people their age are never looking to buy the products advertised, and that advertisers know this, and consequently don't target them; instead ads are aimed at parents, the people with the money. They seem to conceive of themselves as the antithesis of Boorstin's (1974) 'consumption community', a disparate group of people united by their *abstention*, or exclusion, from the purchase of particular products. This feeling of neglect and exclusion is curious when placed against the view of advertisers who see this particular age group as absolutely crucial to many of their clients' fortunes, as Chapter 4 illustrates. Perhaps these sentiments are a reflection of an insecurity characteristic of people at an age when they are only beginning to establish 'the relationship between their own lived experience and wider social opinion and knowledge about it' (Hewitt, 1986: 7).

Uncertainty of this kind appears to be behind the near universal objections in the groups to how people of their age are represented in advertising. This was one issue of 'stereotyping' as many called it that united opinion in both schools, among both age groups and genders, and among students variously defining themselves as black, Asian and white. Indeed, many clearly felt very strongly about the issue, illustrated by Sara's (B6) lament: *"It's just so dreadful how they portray what they think young people are like... I get so angry when people stereotype teenagers so much, and we're supposed to do this and we're supposed to do that."* Group B2 were particularly vociferous on the issue, and were almost offended by the researcher's question about whether they saw any resemblance between their own lives and those of teenage characters on screen. They called for more input from young people into television's production:



Daniel: *"NO! No, no, no... you can't relate to hardly anything that's on there"*

Jemma: *"They're fanatical eccentrics...you can't relate to them"*

Daniel: *"You can never relate to them, you can't say 'ah, that's me'... it's because they don't know us , they don't know us... they're old generation or something!"* (laughter)

Marion: *"People who are teenagers on TV are really stupid and immature"*

Daniel: *"They're really off-key you know... it's 'cos like teenagers that get to go on don't get to give advice about what people should do, they're told what to say... they're not acting [being] themselves. I guess they should get more young advertisers or something"*

What particularly disturbed many of them was the potential consequences of the images; they were in little doubt that such portrayals were important in influencing how people perceived of young people. Emmie (A6) shuddered at the thought of what 'wrong impression' people had about teenagers as a result of televisual portrayals. Jemma (B2), meanwhile, was sure that such misrepresentations had very material consequences for her and her peers, because they influenced their treatment by teachers: *"Some ads give you a bad name, you know what I mean... like schoolteachers think if we see a model on TV we're all going to go out and get anorexia nervosa or something just because it was on TV"*. Ignoring the implication that anorexia is just another object of consumption, this quote is particularly interesting because it constructs a symbolic distance between teenagers and adults with respect to the influence of images. The suggestion is that youngsters are not passive, malleable subjects and are not affected by advertising's representations, in contrast to their teachers. Indeed, many of the respondents possessed a distinct sense of superiority when comparing their televisual 'literacy' with that of the adult population. Adults were mocked for their slim grasp of advertising's subtleties; *"they haven't grown up with it like we have"*, explained Susanna (A6). Several groups even drew the amusing conclusion that ads aimed at adults were in fact 'patronising' to young people like themselves, due to their crude simplicity!

There is an acute sense among many of the respondents that their generational differences are crucial to their engagement with television and its advertising, that there is a distinctive 'teenage' experience that they share. Other cleavages,

be they gendered or racialised, are relegated to the background relative to this common 'youth consciousness', defined in opposition to the 'old generation'. That generation is the only issue that counts for many of the respondents is most neatly illustrated by the following comment from Natalie (B5), which she made during a discussion on the importance of people's 'colour': *"See, like, my uncle Bernard, he's black but he still nags me. One night I was working at the pizza place 'til one in the morning and he walked past and had a go at me and made me go home... It's just like, adults are adults aren't they. Whatever their colour they still nag you."*

Although this chapter has attempted to destabilise some of the traditional categories used to frame sociological and geographical empirical work, it does not preclude the acknowledgement of these categories being invoked by respondents to explain their own experience. Sections 6.2 and 6.3 detailed how participants drew on their own racialised and gendered positions, and the same applied, in one group at least, to their sense of class position. During the ad talk the students defined themselves in opposition to perceived class representations in the screened ads, with the most provocative being the Daily Mail promotion. However, it is not possible to single out the references to class alone in relation to this ad. Instead, its reception by group B2 reveals the extent to which the consumption of advertising can be simultaneously classed and racialised. Once again, instead of singling out neat quotes to illustrate this point, it is more instructive to look at the exchange in its entirety.

Daniel: *"Like, you see the cottage though, I don't think they'd ever like show a black family advertising that"*

Jemma: *"NO! Not in a house like that they wouldn't, would they"*

Daniel: *"No, they'd never be in something like that"*

Jemma: *"Crap advert anyway"*

Daniel: *"Yeah"*

Aodhan: *"But then not many black people read the Daily Mail... not many sensible people"*

Jemma: *"Sorry?"*

Daniel: *"So what do black people read then?"*

Aodhan: *"I don't know, but the Daily Mail is really right-wing and fascist and"*

*stuff"*

James: *"So they're basically not appealing to a black audience?"*

Aodhan: *"No, they're all... all those adverts they like appeal to ideal white families, 2.4 children, vote Tory, that sort of stuff"*

James: *"Would you agree with that, Daniel?"*

Daniel: *"I don't... I thought it was a rubbish advert, but yeah, I think it would be appealing to some people that would want a cottage in the country, and that would be like a, you know..."*

Aodhan: *"The people who would want that cottage [Jemma mentions people from Chelsea] they're all going to be like working class people who think they're middle class, so all the middle class people are going to think they're just people who come from Peckham or something"*

Marion: *"How can you relate to the people in that commercial?"*

Daniel: *"Huh?"*

Marion: *"Working class people can't relate to the people in that commercial can they...I don't know any white working class person who would want to be like them"*

Daniel: *"Hmm, no"*

James: *"What were you saying about white middle class people?"*

Aodhan: *"You know it tends to be upper-working class people who read the Daily Mail and they aspire to be, sort of, Lords and Ladies of the realm and stuff like that, and that's like their aspirations, a sort of posh house in the country, but even if they get it they'll never be accepted because basically they're not middle class people, they're just working class"*

It was the whiteness structuring this ad that provoked Daniel in the first instance, and Jemma immediately concurred with his assertion. Aodhan seemingly agreed with this, but couched his point in the language of target audiences. Not only does his comment resemble the ad agency perspectives mentioned in Chapter 4, in as much as it depoliticises the racialised narrative through the language of economics, but it is greeted with some consternation by Daniel (whose mother is Jamaican and father English, but who defines himself as black in the discussions). Aodhan clearly adopts a critical perspective based, it seems, on a keen political awareness, but his approach creates a (racialised) distance between him and Daniel, who objects to his presumptions about the black community. Aodhan paints both a racialised and classed picture of Mail readers, but how he positions himself with respect to

class is not so clear (his definitions of class appear to be extremely rigid). It seems his primary mode of self-identification is political orientation. Marion is less ambiguous, however, and highlights the distance she feels between the images on the screen and her own life and aspirations. Not only does she define herself as working class, but she employs the epithet 'white', perhaps to emphasise that her own position is a partial one and that she is not claiming to speak for any other group:

Daniel's silence on issues of class is conspicuous in this exchange. Clearly his primary unease in consuming this ad derives from its racialised structure which serves to exclude him on the basis of his blackness; he is unable to place himself within the ad to fulfil its consumption requirements (Saunders, 1986; 1990; see also Williamson, 1978). There has been some debate in the literature about how many black people feel uncertain of their class position, and difficulties of conceptualising a link between racialised and classed positions (see Anthias, 1990), but Daniel had in fact mentioned class in the exchange that led to the Daily Mail discussion. He recalled the quip in the screened Lilt ad about 'lobsters on south beach', and speculated with amusement that *"all the rich, upper-middle class white people would have been offended by that!"*. By relishing the prospect of such offence, he defines himself in opposition to all of the above adjectives relating to economic position, class and colour. This illustrates a key point of this chapter that young people's (narrative) identity positions are implicated in their ad talk and their consumption of advertising.

That the same ads are received differently by different groups in different places is demonstrated by the reception of the Daily Mail ad at School A. The difference in reception illustrates not differences in some immutable notion of class, but arguably reflects the different social and cultural relationships in which the various students are embedded; in the language of Bourdieu, this differential consumption of advertising reflects the 'habitus' of the groups of respondents. The Daily Mail ad was universally scorned at School B too, but for different reasons. They criticised it for being so unrealistic, objecting in particular to its representation of the family. It seems nobody enjoyed seeing others "playing happy families". As Gemma (A2) put it, *"...I didn't like that at all,*

*it had the couple and they had two kids and it was like a boy and a girl, like a perfect little family, like a stereotype... it's like a little fairy tale isn't it".* Whether the representation of a nuclear family raised so many hackles because it contrasted to the reality of their own lives is difficult to say. The harmonious relations between the siblings also drew both amusement and contempt, in the process of which the School A students defined themselves in opposition to the rurality represented in the ad. They insisted that, as teenagers, moving to such a place "in the middle of nowhere" would be their worst nightmare. Their school might be set in the suburbs but they defined themselves as firmly urban.

Crucially, though, this 'nightmare' scenario was so unappealing to them precisely because they *could* picture themselves positioned within it. Unlike their School B counterparts, there were no objections to the perceived background of the characters in the ad. This would be consistent with the fact that there was absolutely no mention of class in relation to this ad, even implicitly, and the same applies to the other discussions at the school. It appears that many of the School A students were living the lives of these ads to a far greater extent than their School B counterparts; their relatively white, affluent, suburban existences often meant that the 'space' between their existences and those of the characters in the ads was, for the most part, small. For many at School B, however, the 'distance' between their lifeworlds and those represented on the screen was great, to the extent that Josh (B4) declared that, "*The media is separate...it's so behind that you separate it from real life*". Paradoxically, though, for them and some non-white respondents at School A like Bilal, this space is quickly transcended as they suffer the very material consequences of particular racialised images. This relative 'distance' was reflected in the way School A students received and talked about ads. For example, whilst ad talk at School B was primarily framed by the notion of ads-as-entertainment as Chapter 5 details, this orientation was even more prevalent at School A. It was as if the students at the latter could afford the luxury of such engagement, for their identity positions obviated the need to address the 'distance' between their own lived experiences and those on the screen in front of them, a privilege not enjoyed by many at School B.

This section goes beyond the position of Savage *et al* (1992) that any analysis of, or predicated upon, class division is necessarily a complex one and suggests that the category itself (as traditionally defined in terms of common interest) is obsolete in this context. It accepts that the respondents may themselves draw on the category for explanatory purposes, but even then it has become clear that it needs to be considered in conjunction with simultaneously, racialised identities. Instead we need to focus attention on other factors which generate and explain significant differences between and among the groups, differences which are recognised as being relationally significant by the students themselves. This is not to suggest that these differences cannot contribute to a more complex understanding and redefinition of the term 'class'. After all, notions of taste markers, of habitus and of the cultural competence described in Chapter 5 are all strongly associated with class in Bourdieu's writing. However, class must be seen as a relational category, rather than a fixed individual/group attribute or trait.

## 6.6: Summary and conclusions

As well as offering a summary of the main arguments in Chapter 6, this final section draws together a number of points from both the 'consumption chapters', thus laying the foundations for the final analytical chapter.

The key point made in the present chapter is that the differential consumption of advertising by these young people should not be seen as reducible to simple categorisations, along the lines of 'race', gender or class. These categories, or approximations to them, *can* be seen as important, but only in the sense of them being *relational* categories which need to be mapped and tested empirically. Following the work of Somers (1994), in seeking explanation for the significant differences (and commonalities) in the consumption of advertising, we must look to the relational settings in which actors are located and the narrative identities they invoke. Mapping these relational settings and their associated discourses is the challenge for researchers, and the methods employed in my own project ensure that this has only been possible to achieve at a superficial level. What both consumption chapters do confirm, though, is the utility of ad

talk for helping to trace the contours of these settings and identities. Given that we inherit some of our narrative explanations from public sources (what Somers, 1994, defines as 'public narratives', or discourses), we can begin to speculate about the role of advertising as an institution in the propagation of particular narratives; Chapter 4 has clearly highlighted the importance of advertising in the creation and maintenance of particular racialised narratives. Crucially, what kinds of narratives and discourses predominate in society depends to a large extent on the distributions of power, and this is a theme that will be taken up in the concluding Chapter 8.

Chapters 5 and 6 have, in their own way, contributed to the burgeoning literature which emphasises the instability, fluidity and multiple nature of subject positions (see Pile and Thrift, 1995). Whilst Chapter 5 has drawn attention to the ambivalence and fragmentation that characterise the subject's engagement with advertising, Chapter 6 has demonstrated how, in this context at least, the subject cannot be rigidly categorised according to conventional lines of social differentiation. Both chapters have also quietly asserted the salience of geography to the discussions. Whilst certain micro geographies, such as those of the home and domestic sphere, have been raised by respondents (in the context of soap powder ads, for example), the construction and maintenance of symbolic geographies, in the form of 'distance' and differentiation, has been a key theme of Chapter 6. Furthermore, there is undoubtedly a geographical component to the variations in 'habitus' which have been identified as underpinning a number of the differences in consumption patterns, a component which demands additional empirical attention.

Finally, I should like to make a couple of concluding points that clarify the connections between the two consumption chapters, and provide a link to Chapter 7. For example, it is suggested here that the very term 'audience activity' from media studies is unhelpful to this analysis. Chapter 5 certainly demonstrated the extent to which many of these young consumers are 'active', in as much as they are very aware of the norms and conventions of advertising and they consume it with a considerable amount of reflexivity; but the word 'activity' carries with it a substantial amount of baggage, courtesy of media

scholars, that could render it inappropriate in the light of the discussion groups. 'Audience activity' has connotations of resistance to, and interpretive freedom from, whatever messages have been encoded by the producers of a particular media product. These connotations have not, for the most part, been characteristic of the advertising consumption of those interviewed. Instead, their consumption has been conducted very much within the terms laid down by advertisers, a point that will be elucidated in the next chapter. This is the area in which the likes of Paul Willis (1990) have sometimes been wide of the mark: they have underestimated both the influence advertising retains over the buying habits of young people and the extent to which adverts are read as the advertiser intended (however approximately). The respondents might well have demonstrated an impressive reflexivity in their consumption of the ads, but rarely did this translate into a rejection of the sales message. Neither, crucially, did it lead to more politically 'progressive' interpretations of advertising's secondary messages. The blatantly racialised messages in many adverts (a product of processes of racialisation at the production end, as Chapter 4 has explained) have been internalised by many of respondents, and go unchallenged in the act of consumption. Even attempts by advertisers to change representational trends have been rejected by some as 'politically correct'. Chapter 7 below explores how such representational trends might be altered; it does so in the context of a discussion of 'resistance' to advertising, a concept which helps to articulate connections between the production and consumption of advertising, and which is crucial to ideas about influencing and critiquing advertising's dominant norms.

Perhaps this acceptance of secondary messages by many respondents is related to the trend, identified in Chapter 5, for advertising to be consumed as a source of entertainment. Susan Willis (1990) has asserted that sexism goes unnoticed in advertising precisely because consumption has become synonymous with gratification. Is the entertainment content of ads acting as the sugar-on-the-pill not of a sales message, of which most consumers are well aware (even if they still buy it), but of second order messages which may be racialised, gendered and classed?



What both chapters have confirmed is the importance of ad talk for young people, and its utility for social science researchers. For example, it is a relational process involving boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. It can act as a cultural resource for the display of attitudes and opinions, many of which might not be aired outside the arena of 'ad talk'; in this project, many identity issues have been covered, and other racialised and gendered issues accessed (like Natasha and Russell's nervousness about attending football matches, for example). It has also provided a unique access to the relational settings and narrative identities that academics need to map empirically in order to begin to understand young people and their relationships with each other and with the rest of society.

## 7

### The production and consumption of television advertising: articulating the links

*'...it is not always clear what makes a cultural practice "resistant" towards a particular ideological construction... still more difficult is the judgement of whether or not the practice contributes to transforming the oppressive relationship that the particular ideology functions to maintain'* (William Seaman, 1992)

#### 7.1: Introduction

Introducing *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau (1984) calls for the investigation of the consumption of a particular representation 'by users who are not its makers' (xiii). The objective of such enquiry, he writes, in addition to establishing how an image is creatively 'used' by consumers, is to enable us to 'gauge the similarity or difference between the production of an image and the secondary production hidden in the process of its utilization' (xiii). In fact, it is the potential difference between the two processes that concerns de Certeau. He is not alone in focusing attention on these particular 'spaces' in the circuit of culture, and what 'occurs' in these spaces, for they have often been identified as potential spaces of resistance and critique. Jackson and Thrift (1995), for example, identify the need 'to gain... purchase on the potential discrepancies between advertisers' encoded messages and their diverse decodings and to examine the effectiveness of advertising and the possibilities of its subversion' (225). The status of these spaces is discussed in this chapter. In doing so, it reflects upon the relationship between the production and consumption of advertising. The extent to which this relationship can be defined in terms of power and resistance is a major theme.

Some such spaces have already been 'mapped' in Chapters 5 and 6 (tracing the discrepancies between the producers' intentions for, and the consumers'

reception of, the Homepride Curry Sauce campaign, for instance), but others will be explored briefly here specifically in relation to the selected ads described in Chapter 4. Section 7.2 will relate a number of instances of readings that do not conform to the advertisers' preferred interpretation - but can these 'misreadings' be conceived as evidence of subversive 'resistance' on the part of these young consumers? The answers to this question are considered in detail in the context of current debates about consumer empowerment, and about the notion of resistance itself. It is suggested that debates about resistance are sometimes prone to the same exaggeration and over-optimism expressed by the advocates of extreme positions in the parallel audience activity debate critiqued in Chapter 2. Section 7.2 concludes that traditional notions of resistance as class-based opposition to a single hegemon are wholly inappropriate in this context. Instead it considers more contemporary conceptions of resistance associated with ambiguity, and the occupation of 'uneasy', 'third' and 'paradoxical' spaces, for example (Bhabha, 1990; Rose, 1993; Soja, 1996). I also suggest that, in the context of this project, 'resistance' could be defined as opposition to the dominant sales messages encoded in the ads. It discovers, however, scant evidence of young people resisting the terms of consumer culture and its advertising, although some are translating their reflexivity and critical awareness into opposition to the racialised and gendered secondary narratives contained in particular campaigns, reacting to the exclusion of themselves and others. This section also reveals how television advertising is used as a resource in the articulation of identities and desires that are in opposition to certain dominant (English) discourses. The significance of America in this process is crucial. Whichever way one defines young people's opposition to advertising, however, it could be argued that such opposition will only constitute 'resistance' when it is translated into action of some kind. The chapter ends with a discussion of the possibilities for consumers (and academics) seeking to 'voice' their complaints about advertising. In doing so, it (perhaps reluctantly) emphasises a need to accept the pervasiveness of the market and the legitimacy of advertising, and suggests that we should actively attempt to influence the development of a material culture that we can all live with.

Section 7.2 concludes by seeking to explain the existence of some of the arguably over-optimistic attitudes about consumer resistance and audience activity. Whilst expressing considerable sympathy for some such views, this section suggests that they are, to some extent, a product of the predicament that many academic commentators find themselves in, namely that it is becoming increasingly difficult to critique advertising *per se*. This is in turn derived, I suggest, from the increasing acceptance that advertising has attained as a popular cultural form, and from the blurring of the boundaries between economy and culture. Sections 7.3 and 7.4 both try to identify a space in which such a critique might take root, but conclude that power relations in the circuit of advertising are such that any attempt at an overarching, grand critique is doomed to fail. Instead, strategic interventions by consumers and academics alike offer the best chance of improving the *status quo*. However, this section still suggests that there are spaces from within which critique is possible. Section 7.3 is an attempt to open up just such a space. It does so by identifying the need to 'demystify' many of the operations of the advertising industry. For whilst this chapter tries to refute some academic claims about audience activity, it wishes to adopt a similarly irreverent stance towards the ad industry, and those who conceive of it as an omnipotent force over our lives. This section seeks to draw attention to the significant amount of uncertainty, ambivalence and insubstantiality that exists within the industry and which appears to have gone largely unrecorded in academic writing. It is hoped that by removing some of the mystique that so often surrounds the workings of the industry, a clearer understanding can be gained of the circuit of advertising, and of how one might go about trying to intervene at its various stages. Moreover, by highlighting the importance of hunches and 'irrational' emotions in advertising's decision making process, it is hoped that a demystificatory critique can also undermine the picture of economic rationality often employed to justify the racialised practices described in Chapter 4.

## **7.2: Space for resistance?**

### 7.2.1: Power and definition

All the selected racialised ads screened in the sessions were 'misread' to some degree, in as much as there were discrepancies between how some of the

students interpreted the messages within the ads and the preferred interpretations intended by the advertisers (detailed in Chapter 4). The extent and nature of these misreadings varied a great deal, however, as Chapters 5 and 6 demonstrate.<sup>1</sup> Nike Cantona, for example, was rarely consumed according to the preferred reading outlined by the advertising agency (as a noble engagement with a social issue that would reflect favourably on Nike); students consistently rejected its messages, either down to the perceived hypocrisy of its star, or due to objections about its content. Reebok, on the other hand was almost universally well-read. Apart from the vociferous objections of Donna (B4) to its anti-racist message, and Daniel's (B2) feeling that the split-screen somehow implied black and white were essentially different (his mixed-origins perhaps being a factor in his interpretation here), all the students drawn to comment on this ad praised Reebok for its attempts at inclusivity and for ensuring that nobody would feel excluded from their target market. Likewise, Budweiser elicited many comments about the desirability of the "relaxed, laid back lifestyle" portrayed, and the "cool" authenticity of the background music. The Sun Alliance ad, meanwhile, barely raised a comment. Bilal (A3) and Rowan (B7) both expressed unease at its imperialistic undertones, but the ad was greeted by others with passivity. Conversations between group members were often struck up during this ad, attentions wandered, and several students could not remember anything about it at the end of the screening; most dismissed it as "long and boring". The Lilt ad, whose objectives are explained by the account director, Caroline Young, in Chapter 4, was the most egregious instance of a 'misread'; Young's claims about an 'authentic' Caribbean that Lilt were attempting to 'own' were widely rejected, and caused considerable offence, most notably amongst the minority students at School A. In order to ascertain whether such reactions can be conceived as 'resistance', we first need to consider various theorisations and definitions of resistance, and assess some of the evidence in each case.

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<sup>1</sup> The 'misread' is not a new idea. There was an infamous heroin awareness ad in the mid-1980's that is often recalled in the trade press; it featured a teenage boy whose 'screwed up' image was supposed to act as a deterrent to potential users. Instead the ads apparently found their way onto many a teenage wall, since the model was considered sexually desirable, particularly among existing drug users.

The notion of resistance, particularly in relation to young people, has traditionally been theorised by academics in the context of 'subcultures' (see Hall and Jefferson, 1976, and Cohen, 1972, for a summary). To a large extent, 'youth' was conceived of as a fraction of a broader, subordinate working class, dialectically related to a hegemonic, dominant culture. Analyses were invariably placed within a Marxist framework of domination and subordination, with working class youth conceived as fighting 'the system'. As Cohen (1972) explains, resistance was viewed as a historically informed response mediated by the class structure of the oppressed. Hopefully the thesis has already hinted at the extent to which such conceptions are unhelpful in the present context. Firstly, Chapter 6 has demonstrated the impossibility of identifying any common, essential qualities that define 'youth', with the possible exception of a generational consciousness; the suggestion that reactions to the mass media might be determined by shared, class-based interests has been shown to be erroneous in the light of the multiple and complex subjectivities demonstrated by the respondents. Furthermore, the assumptions made by such traditional theories about the nature of the hegemon are equally problematic. In today's world it has become increasingly difficult to define a single, identifiable 'system', particularly one which could be seen as universally threatening to the interests of young people. Foucault (1980) argues that, as a result of this, we need to specify power relations in the particular contexts in which they are manifest, and to define resistance in those terms. This is in part what I attempt to do in this chapter, with the consumption of advertising by young people being the specific context in question.

Partly as a consequence of this realisation of the complexity of power relations, a number of writers have begun to explore alternative conceptions of resistance and of people's relationship to power and dominant discourses, conceptions which frequently draw upon ideas about 'paradoxical' or 'third' space, which transcend traditional dualisms of insider/outsider, Same/Other (Bhabha, 1990; 1994, Rose, 1993; hooks, 1984; 1990; see Soja, 1996, for a summary). All these works retain a clear sense of the particular hegemonic discourses being resisted, be they masculinism (Rose), colonialism (Bhabha) or racialised oppression (hooks), but these dominant discourses are specified, not assumed to be self-evident as part of a universally subordinating 'system'. These writers

describe the complexity of many people's relation to oppressive structures, relations which may not be so clear cut as either 'inside' or 'outside', or 'for' or 'against'. People may well find themselves in both camps to some degree, with ambivalent relations to authority (in what Bhabha, 1994, calls an 'interstitial space between same and other'), and perhaps simultaneously resisting and reinscribing relations of dominance. What all these writers agree on is the subversive potential of such an ambivalent, or paradoxical position. Rose, for example, imagines paradoxical space specifically in order to articulate a troubled relation to hegemonic discourses of masculinity. Hooks demonstrates how African Americans have often had unique insights and understandings of dominance by being situated at once inside and outside such discourses, and can thus use their marginality as a position of strength and of radical openness. Bhabha, meanwhile, predicts an implosion of the powerful as a result of these 'stained spaces', insisting that 'dominant discourses will collapse under the weight of their own contradictions' (Bhabha, 1994: 372).

Are such notions of resistance relevant to the consumption of advertising by these young people? Hooks (1990) sees the margins as offering a place from which to build communities of resistance that cross boundaries of binaries of race, class, gender and other oppressively othering categories, and there is undoubtedly evidence of such cross-category resistances in the groups. After all, Chapter 6 has highlighted the questionable salience of such rigid categories in many instances. Group B2, for example, united around an anti-racist perspective and resisted some racialised messages in ads. Whether such an alliance was the product of a 'collective' marginality (in the inner-city, for example), as hooks's writing would suggest, is unclear however. Although language can be a problem when attempting to articulate some of these 'new' positions, the underlying concepts are most apt for capturing some of the multiple subjectivities, ambivalences and ambiguities of engagement described in Chapters 5 and 6. Both Mitali and Kelvin at School A, for example, articulated 'troubled positions' in relation to advertising, celebrating certain conventions, yet feeling distinctly uneasy about others. Their uneasy pleasures arguably reflect the paradoxical positions of all the minority students at School A, who could be said to occupy positions at both the centre and margins of society (economically at the centre, for example, yet simultaneously relegated to the

racialised margins). The multiple power relations in which such students are enmeshed are elucidated in Chapter 8, but it is easy to see how such an inside/outside position could be employed to great effect in calling for societal change (in advertising representations, for example), should the willingness be present. Section 7.4 struggles to find such a willingness in the realm of advertising; however, we do not know enough about the day-to-day lives of these students (their 'lived cultures' and 'social relations' in Johnson's, 1983, model) to ascertain whether, and how, such students employ their paradoxical positions resistively in other arenas.

There are a number of problems associated with 'third spacing' (Soja, 1996), however, both in the theory and, more importantly, in the present application. Rose (1995) offers a convincing critique of Bhabha (1994) and a corrective to some of his optimism about the implosion of dominant discourses. Theoretically, for instance, Bhabha suggests such discourses will collapse under the weight of their own contradictions, but this then implies that there is little point to resistance or affiliative solidarities (something the final section in this chapter disputes). By the same token, if discourses produce subversion from within, then the 'social' (organised resistance around relational categories, for example) becomes irrelevant; instead Rose argues that we *need* to understand the links between the social and the textual, as this thesis has attempted to do. Bhabha also insists that it is naive to make a distinction between the powerful and the less powerful, since this perpetuates unnecessary dualisms; certainly, as Chapter 8 explains, webs of power relations are very complex, but to erase any differences in power at all is unrealistic, and is reminiscent of the arguments of media scholars who suggest an equal balance of power between media producers and consumers. In the context of my own project, the language of the third space is very useful in describing people's *positions*, but based on my empirical material I am less than convinced that it offers many insights into *resistance*. For example, the resistive action described by the Rose, Bhabha and hooks (and, likewise, de Certeau, 1984, and Scott, 1985) is all inspired by a clear conception of 'what' is being resisted (colonialism, state apparatus or whatever) and an explicit *intention* to resist (and see Lukes, 1974; 1986, on 'intention' and 'will' as crucial to the recognition and identification of 'power'). This was not always clear in the



discussion groups, even when students were exhibiting readings which did not conform to the advertisers' preferred interpretations. Cohen (1972) has insisted that for action to be defined as resistance it must be conscious, that the resisters must at least have some idea about the significance of their acts. I have some sympathy for this point of view, but it does depend upon the particular definition of resistance employed. For instance, Chen (1991) recalls Foucault's notion of resistance as being any force acting against the dominant, which clearly need not be conscious. Yet I would concur with Tetzlaff (1991) that such unconscious resistance is unlikely to be politically progressive, a point which is developed further in section 7.4. Unless further action is taken against the dominant structures acting upon a media product, in whatever form, then 'misreadings' will remain 'alternative' as opposed to 'resistive'.

It is clear that any conclusions about resistance rest upon the particular definitions employed, and on *what* is seen as the dominant discourse in question. This section now considers traditional definitions of resistance in media studies, before giving my own views on the subject, in the light of my empirical work.

The notion of resistance in the media studies literature is closely associated with debates about audience activity, interpretive freedom and the polysemy of media products (see Chapter 2 for a summary). Whether any act of engagement with a media text can be classified as resistance very much depends upon the particular definition adopted, but rarely is the term defined in the literature. Clearly the implication is that there is some *thing* that is being resisted and opposed; but much research fails to identify either the precise nature of the opposition or to specify *what* is being resisted beyond some ill-defined conception of 'hegemony' or 'dominant ideology' (see Fiske, 1986a; 1986b; 1987, for example), a vague conception which, in a more general context, Abercrombie *et al* (1980) describe as 'empirically false and theoretically unwarranted' (1) (see also McRobbie, 1994a: 159). The implication has generally been that 'dominance' is defined as the particular messages encoded in a media product by its producers. From this perspective, the examples of misreadings detailed in the consumption chapters, and which opened this

chapter, could be conceived of as resistant, particularly in the extent to which the young people opposed many of the secondary messages in the ads.

There is a strong chance that Baudrillard would also find ample evidence of resistance among the consumption habits of the young people interviewed. Indeed, the aforementioned indifference to, and failure to engage with, the screened Sun Alliance ad would be consistent with his definition of resistance (and de Certeau's (1984) resistive 'evasion'). Baudrillard insists that in our 'hyperreal' world, one in which we are bombarded with media messages, a silent failure to engage with these messages is the only form of opposition left to the masses (Baudrillard, 1983b). He sees indifference as both positive and empowering, a sign, on the part of the 'silent majority', of a 'collective retaliation and... a refusal to participate' in the recommended ideals of 'the Power' (14). Without this minimal level of participation in meaning from the masses he claims power is rendered empty. The emergence of this silent majority can be placed, he insists, 'within the entire cycle of historical resistance' to the Power (41). Certainly, there was no shortage of indifference on the part of many of the young people interviewed. However, although I would concede that we need to know more about the *meaning* attached to these silences by the students themselves (cf. Scott, 1985), I would still concur with John Clarke (1991) who questions the usefulness of such supposedly progressive opposition (see also Tetzlaff, 1991). Clarke implies that a refusal to be engaged, which he sees as a symptom of an emotional and political disinvestment engendered by postmodernism, is merely an 'alternative' reading, and not an intrinsically 'resistant' one.

Whilst advertisers have themselves expressed concern about increasingly cynical and indifferent audiences (Goldman, 1994), ignoring an ad hardly constitutes radical opposition. Indeed, as the demystificatory critique of section 7.3 explains, advertising agencies are quite adept at explaining away poor response to their advertising. Significantly, such indifference was also only extended to individual ads, such as bad ads which failed to entertain them. Instead of translating into a broader dissatisfaction with advertising and a defiance of advertising meaning, it just made the respondents hungrier for ads

that *would* engage them. Such ads were then received more enthusiastically as a consequence. In all these potential cases of 'resistance' we can ask the same question posed by Budd *et al* (1990, quoted in Morley, 1992: 30-1) in response to a growing tendency in cultural studies to uncover and celebrate traces of resistance everywhere: even if they can be identified, as above, 'we still need to ask what difference [they] make to relations of power? ... Watching television can have an oppositional kick. But it does nothing outside itself.' This same question was asked by Cohen (1972) in relation to 'resistance through ritual' (cf. Hall and Jefferson, 1976), which he saw as offering no solution to 'whatever was the problem'. It also features in Frow's (1991) critique of de Certeau. Whilst de Certeau's view of domination is criticised for being monolithic (with power held absolutely or not held at all, and flowing in one direction only), his inability to envisage power ever being challenged is also lambasted. The 'poaching' *etc.* of 'resistive' groups is seen as a subversion of power, but only on the condition that the hold of power is maintained, and that dominant discourses remain unaffected. Perhaps the language of 'transgression' (cf. Cresswell, 1996) is thus more appropriate for describing the acts de Certeau describes, and also the 'resistance' of the sexed self in Bell and Valentine (1995).

It could convincingly be suggested that it is impossible to define resistance to advertising as exterior to notions of socio-economic power due to advertising's commercial objectives; as Wernick (1991) notes, whilst there is a continual stream of second order cultural messages in ads, and there is thus an ideology behind selling, the priorities are always commercial. In addition to the misreadings mentioned earlier, there were instances where particular interpretations of the respondents implied an opposition to the *commercial intention* of an ad. The act of consuming an ad independently of the product being advertised is one such incidence. O'Donohoe (1997), for example, identifies intertextuality in advertising, and the pleasures associated with reading, as being a potential key to resistance since it enhances the possibility of this independent consumption. Yet Chapter 5 has already described how such claims of interpretive freedom are rather exaggerated, based on the empirical material in this study. It has emphasised how the consumption of advertising and commercial influence are, in many cases, closely interrelated. Furthermore, and crucially, ad consumption was accompanied by a widespread

refusal even to contemplate the rejection of the terms of advertising itself; an individual ad might suffer rejection (be it dismissed, or consumed independently of its product), but only one or two students questioned the role of advertising as an institution, as a force in society. This indifference is arguably a product of a wider societal acceptance of the terms of advertising, and one that even frames the reactions of those respondents who opposed the secondary narratives in ads, as well as those who used advertising as a resource to reject other discourses in their lives, as described in section 7.2.2. The widespread acceptance of advertising's right to exist is a central theme of this chapter. It has implications for academic conceptions of young people's consumption of popular culture, which has tended to overlook examples of the 'dominant culture' being appropriated relatively unchanged in its quest to identify moments of opposition (Cohen, 1972). It also has implications for ideas about how representational and other changes in the circuit of advertising might be initiated, and what form they might take, issues which are tackled in the final section, 7.4.

Section 7.4 also develops an important theme associated with the above discussions about resistance. There are clearly several competing and conflicting definitions of what might constitute resistance in the context of advertising consumption, some of which have been discussed above. I have hinted at my own reservations about what I see as an over-optimism expressed by many academics; I am inclined to think that if resistance is to be subversive, it can only be defined as the rejection of the terms of advertising, of its dominant selling intentions. Evidence of such sentiments have been hard to find, so I acknowledge that we need to look more closely at some other conceptions of opposition. What I would suggest, though, is that whatever definition of opposition we choose to adopt, however we view discrepant or alternative readings of ads, it is the uses to which they are put that defines whether they are subversive or not. If, for example, they are the first stage of a more substantial opposition to the dominant discourse, then they can perhaps be celebrated; in themselves, however, they remain alternative readings, and not resistant interpretations. This idea of further action is explored, using empirical material, in the final section.

The following two sections explore the aforementioned acceptance of the terms of advertising. Chapter 6 reveals how many respondents resented particular ads on the basis of their secondary narratives, a rejection which was often a factor of the consumers defining themselves in opposition to the dominant representations in the ad. It also shows that there were complex patterns to these rejections. Yet, whilst some respondents are clearly resisting a particular message in the ad, indeed a particular social identity in some cases, there is nothing in their reactions that takes advertising *per se* to task. Instead, individual ads and their producers are chastised for their misdemeanours, but consumption of advertising in general continues unabated for many of those 'excluded' by advertising. This idea is developed further in the context of advertising's employment as a resource in more general expressions of opposition. For example, it was used in the articulation of certain desires which were constructed in opposition to broader discourses such as Englishness. This was particularly the case at School B, where a fantastical view of America dominated the thoughts of several respondents as they consumed the American-set screened ads. Meanwhile, America and its perceived cultural influence was also mentioned regularly at School A, but in a manner which illustrated a sharp difference of opinion between the inner-city and outer-city respondents. The next section reflects upon the considerable significance of constructions of America in relation to advertising consumption, in the context of their employment to make 'oppositional' statements about Englishness and the respondents' own relationship to it.

7.2.2: America, land of the free (and the employed)

At the time of writing this chapter, the racially motivated murder of a black teenager, Stephen Lawrence, in South-East London in 1993 has finally received the news media coverage it always warranted but never received. The mainstream press have focused on the inadequacies of the authorities investigating the murder, and the subsequent failure to obtain criminal convictions. Some of the black press, meanwhile, have placed the incident in the broader context of black people living in Britain. One such piece in *The Voice* ('Cruel Britannia', 17/3/97 p. 4) posed the question of whether black

people should emigrate in the light of their treatment at the hands of racist Britain. Responses were predictably mixed, but for those who had contemplated leaving, the United States was a favoured destination, and clearly seen as offering a better alternative to life in Britain. This issue is mentioned here in the light of a geographical (and racialised) division of opinion over America that existed within and between the study groups, and one characterised by a reverence for an American way of life on the part of several students at School B, and in particular the minority students.

The subject of America was raised in most of the groups as a consequence of the inclusion of American settings among the selected screen ads (Budweiser and Nike Revolution). In some cases discussions were limited to arguments over the relative merits of the nations' advertisements, but in others extended to exchanges about American life and the influence of its popular culture. The following exchange from group B4 illustrates the esteem in which America is held by many of the students. They structured their debate around a comparison of Britain and the US, with the latter assuming superiority in all respects; in the process, Russell and Natasha distance themselves from what they perceive to be peculiarly English traits manifest in adverts.

Natasha: *"I think it's most of the American adverts that are the best"*

Russell: *"Yeah, but they have adverts every half a minute there, so they get more practice!"*

James: *"What do you like about them?"*

Natasha: *"They just seem more powerful than the English ones ... I mean you get some good English ones, but American ones are kicking it"*

Donna: *"Like that Pantene one, have you seen how bad that is?"*

Natasha: *"That is unreal, it's so boring"*

Russell: *"Yeah, typically English!"*

Natasha: *"Exactly! And cheap! It's like films - they say England has all the best actors but they all go to America 'cos there's no money here to make films.*

*Films and adverts here are so tacky and cheap"*

James: *"Do you find America appealing yourselves?"*

Natasha: *"Yeahhhhh! I want to move there now"*

Joe: *"Yeah, definitely, it always seems like a really good place to be, America... better than England anyway. You can see why it sells..."*

For the students in this group, America represents everything non-English, holding more appeal for them than whatever England has to offer. The discussants appear to be united by a common view of English as undesirable (as boring, cheap and tacky for instance), paralleling the tendency identified by Miller *et al* (1997) for Englishness to offer many ethnic minorities a concrete expression of otherness to which they can relate, and in opposition to which they can define themselves. The English traits identified and rejected in B4 above were strictly popular cultural in nature, as they were in most of the groups. B2 was no exception, and most of the group, white students included, joined in the lauding of American popular culture. Daniel, however, intimated that his dissatisfaction with English/British life was based on something a little more fundamental, something pertinent to a young black man growing up in London.

Daniel: *"Yeah, the American image is definitely more attractive than the British at the moment"*

James: *"What is it about it?"*

Daniel: *"I dunno, it's the way..."*

Nicola: *"Their clothes for a start"*

Daniel: *"Yeah, and the way they talk is so much better, it's more smooth...it's better than English (laughs)!"*

Marion: *"And it's got more popular sporting heroes"*

Nicola: *"They get films over there before we do here"*

Daniel: *"That's because all the best films are made in America... you don't get any good English films do you? Anyway, I'm going to go and live there...I'm going on a basketball scholarship"*

Jemma: *"Yeah, so am I"*

James: *"Why do you want to go there?"*

Daniel (incredulous): *"Why? 'Cos this country is rubbish"*

James: *"What is so bad about it?"*

Daniel: *"Well, look around. It's crowded, it's too much people and there aren't enough jobs here. What's the point in staying?"*

Jemma: *"It's just boring"*

Daniel: *"Yeah! And the weather is no good!"*

Les Back (1996) describes how there is frequently nothing in notions of Englishness that are attractive for black youth. He is at pains to point out, however, that this should not necessarily be interpreted as wanting nothing to do with Britain. For Daniel at least, the dominant offerings of England and Englishness *do* seem to be something to resist and reject. It is not hard to understand the lure of America's perceived 'good life' for a young black Brixtonian approaching school leaving age in a city with unemployment for young black males at sixty per cent (*Labour Force Survey*, in Alibhai-Brown, 1995). As a keen basketball player like Daniel, the lifestyle images of African-American males that are imported into Britain, via Nike ads and elsewhere, must seem irresistible.

Significantly, though, in these discussions and others at School B, several white students formulated similar expressions of resistance to the dominant traits of English-/Britishness, and defined them in opposition to a perceived American ideal. America was seen to be home to "the perfect lifestyle", to be "an easy life", to be "so much more lively... at least that's what the adverts say" (Peter, B6). None of the students expressing these sentiments had been to America, and acknowledged that their opinions were heavily influenced by representations in ads for Nike and, in particular, Coke. Coca-Cola ads were extremely popular at the inner London school, just as they were for Punjabi teenagers in Southall in Gillespie's (1995) study (and see Miller, 1997b). Their appeal lay both in the "colourful" and "attractive" lifestyles represented, and in the association with a respected product ("*They've been around for years, and their recipe is supposed to be a secret... everybody buys it, so they've got to make good adverts*" - Natasha, B4) Coke were never mentioned at School A, however. It seems that the multi-racial, harmonious teenage lifestyles do not hold the same appeal for them as for their inner-city peers. For the latter, though, their consumption of a mythical construction of America was simultaneously a symbol of pleasure (cf. Webster, 1988) and a symbol of resistance to their present English existence.



This popularity of America and American images fits into a longer tradition of the English working- and lower middle-classes embracing American popular culture (cf. Cohen, 1972; Worpole, 1982; J. Richards, 1984). As O'Shea (1996) explains, 'large sections of the popular classes in Britain... have looked to the USA for cultural forms which addressed their experience, and furthermore developed a hostility to English cultural production as either not meant for them or patronising them' (31). This has particularly been the case for the young, for whom the act of seeking inspiration across the Atlantic constituted an act of rebellion given the dominant anti-American sentiments that have structured dominant popular discourse since the 1950's at least. As the 'absolute beginner' of Colin MacInnes's eponymous novel, the very personification of this desire to embrace American popular culture as an alternative to Britain's drab offerings, explains: 'I'm starting up an anti-anti-American movement, because I just despise the hatred and jealousy of Yanks there is around and think it's a sure sign of defeat and weakness' (MacInnes, 1959: 52). Whilst the influence of African-American culture in the US is frequently underestimated (see Parisi, 1993), and its influence on youth cultures at the global scale is only just being recognised by the commercial world (Spike Lee and DDB Needham have recently set up an ad agency to focus on the euphemistically titled 'urban market' - see Armstrong, 1996b), it is also important to acknowledge the centrality of African-American culture in the more general Americana that is imported into Britain, just as MacInnes's flaneur does. Blake (1997), for example, suggests that African-American culture is omnipresent in the consciousness of both white and non-white Britons; much of this omnipresence can arguably be explained by the associations of black culture with everything that is cool, hip and authentic in the minds of white youth, with 'hyperreal' American versions being most desirable (Hearn and Melechi, 1992; and see Gladwell, 1997).

For instance, while only a handful of students at School A extended explicitly positive sentiments towards America. All of those who did were male, and it was an African-America they were imagining, prompted by the screening of Nike Revolution. Hearn and Melechi (1992) describe how white youth have

historically used rock 'n' roll as an imaginary space in which to appropriate blackness as a signifier of their own difference, while other writers have suggested the same processes underlie the appeal of 'gangsta' rap for many white youths (Samuels, 1991; Allinson, 1994; see Henderson, 1996, on the "modern minstrels"); in the suburbs, however, it is suggested here that basketball is the new rock 'n' roll. School A is proud of its considerable success on the basketball court, a sport still dominated by inner-city schools even in England, and several of the male respondents described American basketball stars as idols, and named basketball ads as among their favourites. It is likely that their interest in this distinctively (African) American sport, with its attendant images of black masculinity, would constitute some kind of rebellion in the aforementioned 'affluent absence of being that is suburbia' (Allinson, 1994: 452). Certainly none of the female participants shared their desires, and several of them complained about the overt 'aggressiveness' of Nike Revolution.

Whilst waxing enthusiastically about basketball and its stars, one participant, Aaron (A4), even inflected his speech with Jamaican accents and idioms, often taken to be an act of distancing oneself from mainstream (white) culture or an act of opposition to authority (Hewitt, 1986; Rampton, 1995: 37). One female respondent, meanwhile, mocked those male basketball players at the school who would talk in Americanised accents when "talking ball", and who she accused of "wanting to be American" (and black too?). The majority of respondents at School A, however, expressed views of America more consistent with the anti-Americanism characteristic of intellectuals and the middle classes extending back to Hoggart's *Uses of Literacy* (1957) and beyond (see O'Shea, 1996, and Mort, 1997, for summaries of this tendency in the cultural and commercial spheres respectively; and Brierley, 1995, on anti-advertising sentiment being rooted in anti-Americanism). Unlike their inner-city peers, several of the students had been to America, and cited examples from first-hand experience of why the country held no appeal for them (from a fear of crime, its tacky Disney culture, to "a dislike of Americans" - Tizzy, A4)). Others resented "the America worship thing" (Susie, A6), or the fact that many Britons "feel the need to have to catch up with America" (Hannah, A2). Notably, it

seemed such opinions did not stop these participants enjoying American ads, however.<sup>2</sup>

None of the non-white students at School A shared the Americanised desires of the inner-city respondents either. As Hall (1996) argues, divisions among black people in the nineties ensure that economic and social changes impact very differently upon different people. It would appear that the non-white students in the suburbs have either not experienced the same degree of exclusion, or do not face the same problems, that have prompted their inner-city counterparts to detail American fantasies, or else they articulate rather different desires in response to any such exclusion. The non-white students of School B thus seem to have more in common with their white classmates than non-white students in the outer-city in this respect, undermining any notions of homogeneous cultures and identities. Among the white students at School B, those who expressed most favourable pro-American views were often the same people who had expressed a consciousness of their own (excluded) socio-economic positions during ad talk (Jemma and Marion in B2, for instance).

The conclusion to be drawn from this section is that there was a distinct geographical division of opinion between the inner- and outer-city students towards America and its popular culture. It is suggested that the foundations for the pro-American stances of School B students are the same as those that motivated those who have embraced American culture since the 1950's, namely a desire to resist dominant constructions of Englishness which often excluded them both culturally and economically. This would explain why it was the non-white students at School B who were most vociferous in their praise for things American, suffering exclusion, as some of them do, in both cultural and economic spheres. These desires were prompted by their consumption of advertising, and ad talk in particular, with advertisements also being employed

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<sup>2</sup> The only School B pupils to express anti-American views cited political reasons for doing so, having recently studied US foreign policy in GCSE History.

to exemplify particular arguments. Such sentiments would no doubt be seen as constituting resistance by some.

It is important to note, however, that none of these students who complained about their exclusion from advertising, and who later articulated desires to go to America to 'escape', were resisting the structures of the dominant consumer culture in which they found themselves. Even though individual advertisers might exclude them, they still wanted to 'play the consumption game'. Indeed, a wish to emigrate to America does not constitute a desire to escape the sometimes exclusionary potential of consumer culture, but could arguably be interpreted as seeking a 'purer' form of consumer culture, one which is perceived to discriminate on the basis of monetary resources alone, and not relational differences (cf. Bauman, 1988). The next section briefly discusses the tendency for those people whom advertising (and the consumer culture it represents) excludes in various ways to continue playing the game in the hope of some improvement, contributing as it does to the challenges of critiquing advertising and consumer culture.

### 7.2.3: A new hand, not a new game

There are perhaps two related explanations as to why those people unable to participate fully in consumer society, for whatever reason, do not reject the terms of that society but seek instead to overcome the barriers of their exclusion. The first is concerned with definitions of freedom in contemporary society, and the second with the pleasures of consumption. Although it is the latter that has the greatest pertinence for debates about advertising, it is valuable to discuss the issue of participation at a more abstract level first, drawing largely on the work of Bauman (1987; 1988; 1990; 1992).

At the root of Bauman's thesis on consumer society is the assertion that individuals continue to desire to participate in it largely because there is no viable alternative. As he demonstrates in *Legislators and Interpreters* (1987), the only alternative to the consumer market is public provision, a reliance on the

state etc.. In this arena, he suggests, there is no symbolic currency available, only stigma, so everybody desires to buy themselves out of it. He relates this division to a sea-change in society in recent years, whereby people no longer seek meaning and identity in the area of production, power and work, but in the area of consumption (see also Ewen, 1982; Wernick, 1991). This has had consequences for notions of individual freedom, which he now sees as being irrevocably married to the market: individual freedom is now primarily constituted as freedom of the consumer (Bauman, 1988). Although the market is a form of control over people's lives, he suggests that it is so enthusiastically embraced because, 'it offers freedom to people who in other areas of their lives find only constraints, often experienced as oppression' (Bauman, 1988: 61). Not only that, but it offers certainty with those freedoms: people need not be faced with the burden of choice that may often accompany freedom because the market supplies social approval for purchase choices, for instance, comforting the consumer that they have made the right choice. The pressures that the market exacts, meanwhile (the pressure to spend, to partake in symbolic rivalries etc.) are not experienced as oppression, like so many other pressures. He invokes Bourdieu to describe how it is the *differences* between social positions that are the stakes in the world of consumption, and not the positions themselves. Thus, with no limit on positional differences, or associated status 'prizes', rivalries are conducted on a symbolic basis and not a material one. People are thus never facing conclusive defeat; they can always compete to some extent, and mere participation in the game engenders hope that their lot might soon be improved; as Hall (1984b) expounds, the market always appears as 'an expansive popular system, however excluded from it you might be', with fortune and leisure apparently lying just around the corner (quoted in Tomlinson, 1990). The excluded are thus not asking for a new card game, just to be dealt a better hand.

I find some of Bauman's language a little distasteful, since he underplays the extent to which individuals need resources to participate in the simplest of 'symbolic rivalries' (as he seems to acknowledge elsewhere). A number of other writers have strongly criticised such a view of the contemporary world as just revolving around a play of symbols and images, and that many people do not have the luxury of being able to afford to express themselves through goods,

and for whom subsistence consumption is the priority (Sivanandan, 1989; D. Clarke, 1991; Jackson, 1993a; Warde, 1994; Gregson, 1995). Where Bauman's thesis is useful, however, is in its implication that there *are* pleasures to be had from consumption even when resources are low, and that it is these pleasures that keep the excluded in the game.

The interview groups bear testimony to this, as Chapter 5 reveals, and it is suggested here that the consumption of particular advertisements acts as a substitute for the actual consumption of the product being promoted. From this perspective, watching ads becomes a form of 'window shopping' (cf. Friedberg, 1993). Taking her cue from Debord (1967), that modern consumption is not so much about definite needs but 'visual fascination', Bowlby (1985) describes the pleasures of 'window-shopping', of visiting department stores to look, fantasise and pass the time. People invest time and effort in this activity because the pleasures of 'just looking' make it worthwhile. The interview material also offers some empirical support to the cornerstone of Campbell's (1987) theoretical assertion that 'imaginative anticipation' is the key to understanding contemporary consumption, that 'wanting rather than having is the main focus of pleasure-seeking' (87; see also Lovell, 1987). Thus emotions and the imagination can be powerful sources of pleasure in themselves, a 'psychic gratification' which Campbell insists has been dismissed as trivial by academics for too long. Such a view conceives of advertisements as imaginative resources; in the above discussion of the United States, they were used by some to articulate resistances, but they were also used to construct fantasies (of the good life, for instance). As Natalie (B5) says, for example: *"I always like watching them adverts for holiday companies... I just imagine myself getting away from everything, you know what I mean... just getting away from school and everything"*. Several other respondents articulated light-hearted fantasies about being magically transported away from school (by consuming the soft drink Oasis, for instance, whose ads depicted just such a transformation), but in Natalie's case there was a tangible sense of longing to escape something in her life, and advertising presented her with the opportunity to contemplate such an escape. Although he suggests that consumers enjoy advertising images in the same manner that they enjoy a novel or a film, Campbell retains, unlike Nava (1992), a sense of the importance of the product, albeit a representation of the

product. Chapter 5 has already elucidated the relationship between the enjoyment of an ad and the prospect of consuming the product being promoted (Nike shoes, for instance).

Once again I would question Fiske's (1987) claim that such creative use of media products represents much of an empowerment on the part of the consumer (see also Hobson, 1982), since the meanings that are made have few consequences beyond making the life of an individual easier. Such a function is not to be mocked by any means, as we shall see below (and see Bobo, 1988), but it is suggested here that such interpretive freedom reflects the 'opportunities' to make meaning rather than the 'power' to do so. After all, the alternative meanings constructed by the consumers concerned are still very much along the same lines as those encoded by the advertisers. What these examples illustrate are the potential pleasures offered by advertising, even to seemingly disenfranchised and resource-less consumers. Some might argue that it is these very pleasures that preclude the possibility of people rejecting advertising's terms - a 'bread and circuses' form of argument (see Brantlinger, 1985; Simmonds, 1990; S. Willis, 1990). Whether this is valid or not, these pleasures still need to be respected, along with the dignity of people's desire for goods (see Schudson, 1984). The relationship between pleasure, entertainment and the consumption of advertising has important consequences for constructing a critique of advertising, and for formulating ideas about the potential for change in aspects of this particular medium of representation.

The last two sub-sections have criticised certain academic perspectives on media influence which, it is claimed, have made exaggerated, and often unsubstantiated claims about media influence. Evans (1990) is rather more scathing of such views, and blames many of them on a 'populist ventriloquism' on the part of middle class intellectuals, substituting their own voices for the users of popular culture (and see Morris, 1988b). Evans remarks that the wishes of intellectuals to have ideological systems resisted often manifests itself in romanticised views of the people enacting our desires. Frow (1991), meanwhile, cautions against an overly romantic interpretation of de Certeau's (1984) notions of resistance, ideas expanded upon below in the context of

power and change. I have some sympathy with this perspective, and see it as a product of a frustration that I have shared myself about the apparent impossibility of finding a space in which to critique consumer culture nowadays (and see Dyer, 1982, on the appropriation by advertising of criticism and dissent). The following sub-section elucidates these difficulties in the context of advertising.

#### 7.2.4: Finding a space for critique

There is little doubt that advertising has become increasingly accepted, and acceptable, in recent years, and it must be several decades since arguments about advertising's right to exist and to operate had any popular currency. Mattelart (1991) insists that there has in fact been an absence of intellectual criticism of advertising since the 1960's; whilst this might be a rather dubious assertion, he is right when he contends that, 'The question of advertising has long ceased to be a national question' (ix), and that, 'Advertising has achieved greater social legitimacy. The new primacy of the market, the ideas of enterprise and 'company spirit', has much to do with this' (206).<sup>3</sup> This legitimacy has been abetted in no small way by the growing media fascination with the advertising industry and its creative products, with agency politics suddenly becoming newsworthy.<sup>4</sup> Most of the broadsheet newspapers now have an 'adwatch' column in which an 'expert' deconstructs a particular campaign for the benefit of readers, or the agency staff and client behind an ad talk us through the production process. At the time of writing, the rival media sections of the *Independent* and *Guardian* newspapers are doing battle to sign up big names from the world of advertising to provide 'inside' information, some of whom have become minor celebrities. On 10 March 1997 both sections led with an embarrassingly similar feature on Trevor Beattie, the man behind ads for

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<sup>3</sup> See Wernick (1991) on the development of the market as an organising principle of social life, and the 'promotionalisation' of non-commercial spheres too. Even recent pre-election debates on education have referred to the 'value-added' to pupils by particular schools.

<sup>4</sup> Between January and March 1997, the national press ran 487 stories about advertising, covering 263 campaigns - Archer (1997).



Wonderbra and Nissan Micra, among others. Meanwhile, when Beattie ceremoniously resigned as creative director from WCRS in February 1997, it was not just the trade press who got excited - all the broadsheets carried articles announcing the 'shock' news, and Beattie himself even appeared on BBC's Newsnight. Only *Private Eye* retained a sense of perspective on the event, running the irreverent headline 'Man in braces resigns'. With many academics seemingly infected by a similar fascination (as some of the articles in Nava *et al*, 1997, testify), it is clear that attempting to criticise advertising at a scale above that of the individual campaign will be a thankless task, and one that would probably be met with derision in some quarters. This is especially the case when the audience consists of young people who, as we have seen, gain considerable pleasure from advertising consumption, and for whom ad talk possesses such currency in the classroom. As Davidson (1992) explains, these days resistance to advertising *per se* can seem particularly drab.

Section 7.4 below will elucidate these problems further in the context of a discussion on the potential for representational change in advertising, and will restate the point being made here that any critique must respect the enjoyment that many people extract from advertising, and that, as a consequence, any attempts to intervene in the advertising process must be strategic, and conducted at a micro level. However, it is hoped that the next section can offer a useful springboard for critique and intervention by attempting to sweep away some of the mystique that surrounds the advertising industry, revealing this 'hegemon' to be decidedly more fractured and fragmented than is often assumed. It is hoped that by revealing some of the uncertainty and insecurity endemic in the industry a space can be opened up which can then be exploited by the tactics of those who would like to see some change in the industry and its practices.

### 7.3: A demystificatory critique

*"Anybody who thinks they know the consumer should not be in advertising"*

Ivor Hussain, Head of Research, Lowe Howard-Spink

#### 7.3.1: The fears of academics

At the heart of Packard's (1957) thesis on advertising was a fear of 'control'. He warned that advertisers were employing sophisticated 'motivational analysts', and drawing on expert knowledge of powerful methods such as 'subliminal communication' and 'psycho seduction' in order to 'manipulate' consumers into purchasing particular products or services. As Nava (1991) notes, his view of advertisers as all-powerful slotted neatly into popular contemporary anxieties about thought control and brainwashing (themselves products of right-wing alarm about communist influence during the Korean War). It has been somewhat surprising to see close relatives of these views being expounded again more recently, and from within human geography. Underlying Deborah Leslie's (1997b) attempts to analyse the role of advertising in 'surveillance', for example, is an apparent fear of 'powerful new forms of... research' at the disposal of the advertising industry (9). These include sophisticated technologies for tracking consumer purchasing habits which Leslie frames with reference to Foucault's (1979) Panopticon, Poster's (1990) Superpanopticon and contemporary literature on the surveillance of 'prisoners'; this rather alarmist stance on the 'surveillance-information society' (Maxwell, 1996) also has Althusserian undertones, as Leslie conceives of a consumer who, 'actively participates in the disciplining of themselves (sic) as a consumer' (7). Along with more qualitative research techniques which attempt to analyse consumer subjectivities, Leslie warns that these new forms of advertising research promise more social 'control' by advertisers (see also Mattelart, 1991, on advertisers penetrating and controlling 'the secret of the black box of the consumer' p. 170; Sayer and Walker, 1992, on the 'darker side' of producer-consumer relations; and Leslie, 1997a, on advertising's 'heightened apparatus of control' p. 1017).

Significantly, though, Brierley (1995) notes how advertisers have been all too willing to accept the Packardian view of themselves as all-powerful; but that is

not to say that it is valid, or even that they really believe it. It is contended here that some commentators have accepted a very particular view of the abilities and knowledges of the advertising industry, and a view constructed by the advertising agencies themselves who have a vested interest in the maintenance of such a perception of their own powers. Instead, this sub-section paints a rather different picture. The (fractured) outlook of many of those working in the industry mirrors that of many consumers of advertising, in that it is characterised by uncertainty, ambivalence and even guilt. Furthermore, this uncertainty and insecurity extends to their knowledge about consumers, often gleaned from the most unscientific research methods which render fears about social control considerably less grounded than the above authors imply.

There are a number of reasons why it is in the interests of advertisers to promote their own abilities to influence consumers, but all revolve around self-protection. Lury and Warde (1997) speculate that an asymmetrical power relation between client and agency regarding the creative content of campaigns leaves many agencies in a comparatively weak position; in order to overcome this position they promote grand claims about their own knowledge of consumers, an understanding that is crucial to the success of campaigns, and to which only they are party.<sup>5</sup> The insecurity of agency employees is compounded by the tendency for advertising budgets to be the first to be cut in times of recession, as was the case in the early 1990's when agencies shed considerable numbers of staff. The 'hiring and firing' image of advertising apparently still has some validity today, as 'job insecurity... continues to plague those at work in the advertising and media industries' (Austin, 1996); indeed, during my period of fieldwork at the advertising agency, a number of people lost their jobs at extremely short notice, including some in very senior positions. Nowadays agencies also face a threat from management consultants in offering guidance to companies and brands, in the so-called 'advice market'

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<sup>5</sup> The very fact that Lury and Warde (1997) are speculating on what is such a fundamental relationship in the advertising process is testimony to how little empirical work has been conducted in this area.

(Smith and Carter, 1997). Agencies thus make inflated claims about their own abilities.<sup>6</sup> Such faith, however, appears to be a very public face.

### 7.3.2: The fears of advertisers

The first Lord Leverhulme, soap magnate, is alleged to have once remarked, "I know that half the money I spend on advertising is wasted. My only trouble is that I don't know which half". This quote has become rather hackneyed in advertising circles, but it was appropriated again in 1994 by a judge at the IPA Effectiveness Awards in London (the only one of myriad advertising awards to take the commercial impact of campaigns into account); he said that, regardless of whether Leverhulme ever said such a thing, 'it quite clearly sums up... the deeply troubled souls and wallets of generations of advertisers' (Bullmore, 1994). Further evidence of this uncertainty on the part of advertisers (clients) is the widespread tendency for companies to sheepishly hide advertising spend deep in annual reports, with little explanation to shareholders about the objectives or achievements of such outlay. Yet this uncertainty is not confined to the clients. A survey of industry employees by the trade newspaper *Campaign* revealed that a staggering 72 per cent of employees were not prepared to claim that advertising worked. Of advertising planners (the account strategists whose task it is to "hold the client's hand" and persuade them to take a particular creative route - see Appendix 1) only 17 per cent thought that advertising worked (Campaign Report, 1996b). Clearly not many practitioners see themselves as exercising 'social control'. *Campaign* blames this lack of faith on a communication breakdown between agencies and clients, involving a failure to discuss the objectives of particular campaigns. Significantly, they also insist that 'agencies must take the blame for exaggerating the possibilities of advertising' (Campaign, 29/11/96 p. 12). As Brierley (1995: 36) notes, clients do not want to be told that advertising is a hit and miss business, they want to be

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<sup>6</sup> Except, of course, when public debate shifts to the supposedly deleterious effects of advertising, of cigarette advertising on children for instance, in which case advertisers and agencies quickly assert the consumer's freedom of thought - see Chapman, 1986, and recent debates in the light of the Government's decision to ban tobacco advertising.

assured that if A is done, B will happen; and agencies have traditionally been happy to oblige.

Further testimony to this uncertainty about the effects of advertising is the proliferation of trade literature speculating about how advertising works (indeed whether it does at all). The trade journals regularly feature top industry figures debating the subject; the IPA Effectiveness Awards rarely pass without the issue being raised; while *Campaign* (22/11/96) reports the formation of a new company which claims to have found a gap in the market by helping companies assess the performance of their advertising. It seems quite extraordinary to me that a multi-billion pound industry is still asking these same questions about its own *raison d'être*, a century after it first emerged as an institution. It must be said that there are those within the industry who argue, rather convincingly, that the wrong questions are being asked about how advertising works. Duckworth (1995), for example, adopts an almost Wittgensteinian position by asserting that the conceptual language that the industry uses to discuss effectiveness sets a limit on how much will ever be understood. He insists that asking how advertising works is not the same as asking how a bicycle works; Newtonian conceptual structures, which conceive of advertising as a persuasive force acting on consumers and making them act, are wholly inappropriate. Citing Dostoevsky he seeks to demonstrate that, like literature, advertising creates meaning by manipulating symbols. His fundamental point is that advertising is intrinsically specific: 'As soon as we move from a set of individual instances (i.e. this advert, that campaign...) to the collective assertion (advertising is...) we are inevitably heading for tricky ground... it rapidly becomes difficult to provide meaningful generalisations about advertising' (43). Such a sober and cautionary view seems wholly sensible. The trouble is, few of his peers have heeded his advice; advertising specialises in making generalisations (as we shall see below in the context of research), and continues to deceive regarding its own capacities. It is important that, as academics, we challenge these self-interested claims.

It is also necessary, I think, to question the priorities of some of those working in agencies, and particularly whether their primary concerns are always the

addition of value to the clients' business. Incidents from the agency fieldwork, for example, suggest that advertising failing to 'work' is not necessarily a cause for concern. Firstly, whilst agencies are keen to take the credit when sales increase, there is invariably someone else to blame if they do not; failing campaigns can easily be explained away. Secondly, there is strong evidence that gaining peer approval is more of a priority than influencing consumers (and see Miller, 1997a, on how agencies respond to their rivals and not to 'the market'). Such approval usually manifests itself in the form of the sundry awards that the industry presents itself with. One account planner was not in the least bit concerned that his campaign for a draught beer "ha(d) not sold one extra pint" since it had won an industry creativity award. He also found it highly amusing that his submission report to the IPA Effectiveness Awards had been so highly praised, given the circumstances. What most surprised me during this conversation was the implicit disdain exhibited towards the client and its business. Neither was this an isolated incident; clients were frequently lambasted for all manner of 'crimes' against advertising. (See Miller, 1994, on Trinidadian advertisers motivated by a fear of competition and rival companies' 'strategies' rather than any genuine evaluation of advertising effectiveness).

It is suggested here that the proliferation of awards and the desire for peer approval is partly a factor of the lack of feedback on the effectiveness of campaigns. As Peter Bracegirdle, Nike's account director, remarked about Nike Cantona: "Well, it's very difficult to assess consumer reaction to the campaign... I mean, anecdotally, the industry reactions have been very positive". If this suggestion is valid, then advertising's research methods are clearly implicated. A demystification of such methods and the uses to which they are put follows here, in an attempt to counter the fears of Leslie and others, and to demonstrate the levels of 'irrationality' that pervade advertising's decision making process.

### 7.3.3: 'Research that would make academics blush'

For two decades now, one book has served as a bible for many advertising account planners, Hedges's *Testing to destruction: a critical look at the uses of*

*research in advertising* (1974). His principal contention is that too few advertising people are aware of the limits of research, that they do not step back and consider the background to the research. He borrows an Edward de Bono metaphor to make the point that improving one's drilling apparatus will not help one to strike oil more quickly if one is drilling in the wrong place. He urges planners to be candid enough to admit that when a campaign is successful it is in part due to luck, and that anyone demanding certainty in decision making is in the wrong business: trust your intuition, he implores. It appears that many within advertising have taken his advice to an extreme, and base all their decisions upon 'hunches'; another group, however, looks to research to guide their every move. Both positions need some clarification, since they serve to confirm how fragmented the advertising industry is, and how injudicious it can be to treat it as a monolithic 'power'.

My ethnographic work in the information department of a large agency, described in Chapter 3, offered insights into the decision making process in advertising, since employees would come to the department in order to request the research or information upon which campaign decisions were based. It soon became apparent that, in some cases, decisions had already been made when the requests arrived - the information was required merely to justify these decisions. An interview with the head of research at the agency confirmed this. He estimated that seventy per cent of his work consisted of people wanting research to prove something. He would not countenance the use of research to fulfil prejudices ("...other agencies might be happy with that, but I'm not!"), but he was fighting a losing battle in changing the culture of this particular agency. On one occasion I was asked to collect information about the European youth market for a shaver account. The planner told me in advance that she expected me to find that the market divided into five or six distinct lifestyle groups. The implication was clear, that she *wanted* me to 'discover' such a market structure.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Lury and Warde (1997) argue, with some justification, that the construction of such 'consumer types', which reify the consumer as somehow concrete, are a means through which advertising agencies overcome their insecurity and uncertainty about their target markets.

Sure enough, her presentation to the client was structured around five such consumer lifestyle types.

It is clear that, in some cases, research is simply not trusted by those in the agency, and they thus follow their own intuition; and, quite frankly, it is not surprising. In his aforementioned book, Hedges (1974) swipes at academic research for, 'its small, untypical samples that would make advertisers blush' (63). Unless research standards within advertising have fallen in the last twenty years, which is unlikely, such a claim is extraordinary in its gall; much of what passes as 'research' in advertising today is astonishing in its lack of rigour. For example, one research report I was asked to obtain claimed to offer 'a better understanding of the lifestyles of young adults around the world' through qualitative interviews with young people in 18 countries in the Western world (Research International, 1996). The report does not dwell on the details of its methodologies (one page in a seventy page report) and it is just as well. As Chapter 4 explained, conclusions were drawn about a nation's youth market on the basis of an average of *four* focus groups in each country. Meanwhile, an entire nation's youth was sometimes summarised in three lines; for instance, on the basis of four such groups the researchers felt qualified to state that, 'young Belgian adults experience insecurity and feel some pessimism with regard to the future; they avoid talking about it other than in an ironic fashion. They have adopted a 'back-to-basics' philosophy: to feel good and to be happy' (37). The youth of other nations fared little better.

Yet this report cost around £500, and was used as a basis for youth-targeting decisions in the agency in which I worked. My experience would certainly seem to confirm the comments of Sayer and Walker (1992) and Lury and Warde (1997) about the dubious quality of much advertising agency research. An amusing indictment of the lack of rigour of some agency research also comes from Simon Silvester, Planning Director of Burkitt Weinrich Bryant. He cites a recent study which estimated that 'something like 25% of focus groups in Britain were done in Buckhurst Hill, a suburb at the far eastern end of the Central Line. I don't quite know why. Presumably because the area was far enough out of London to look representative to clients, but easy enough to get home from in



time for News at Ten' (Silvester, 1994: 9). Whether this tale is apocryphal or not, it is instructive in the light it sheds on agency attitudes towards research quality. Yet it is not just the quality of research that has been criticised by industry figures recently. Martin Sorrell, head of the massive WPP group of advertising agencies, complains that there are no standard research methodologies being employed to evaluate change in the market place, and consequently even the agencies of which his group comprises have no common language in which to talk to one another, let alone to clients (*Financial Times*, 1997a).

So some agency employees follow their own intuition when it comes to campaign decisions; or, as John Murphy (Chairman of Interbrand plc, a company which advises advertisers on their brand images) puts it: 'Many managers come to make profound decisions about their brands largely on the basis of a hunch or anecdotes or on the basis of a single piece of data' (Murphy, 1994: 251). Others lack the confidence to make any decision without some research to justify it, however flimsy the research might be. A different picture emerges from the frightening one painted by Leslie, Mattelart and others. It is one in which campaign decisions are contested within agencies, and between clients and agencies (see Moeran, 1996), where levels of insecurity and uncertainty are high, and levels of 'sophistication' relatively low. Both these trends are captured neatly by a quote from Bullmore (1994), in his aforementioned speech to the IPA: "We have all comforted ourselves with words like targeting and convinced ourselves that... planning and buying are getting more sophisticated - but the truth remains that not just half our advertising money has been wasted, but maybe as much as 90%" (9). To return to Leslie's (1997b) concerns, the advertising industry's knowledge of consumers is increasing as research techniques improve; for instance, McCann (1997) reports that consumer tracking technology is able to map consumer spending habits by postcode now. However, we must not exaggerate the level of this sophistication, and the level of this knowledge of the consumer. Even the utility of such sophisticated tracking technology has been exaggerated according to some. Grayson (1997), for instance, insists that the reality about data warehousing is that the information technology industry has sold its own products and expertise rather too well; they are making vast sums of money,

and advertisers are spending vast sums of money, yet few of the latter are seeing any benefits whatsoever.

There is one other characteristic of the industry and its employees that to some extent mirrors the world of the consumer, and that is the existence of guilt. Lury (1994a), a practitioner himself, believes that many within the industry have internalised a general academic contempt for advertising and feel 'a sense of shame and conflict' about their profession. There was ample evidence of this from my fieldwork. For some employees it was clear that the undoubted pleasures they enjoyed in the industry (micro-level pleasures such as regular rewards, glamorous working conditions *etc.*) were rendered distinctly uneasy at times by their own consciences. Several people I spoke to expressed regret at their own role in tobacco campaigns, for example. These were mostly junior people, some of whom intended to leave the industry once their training was complete, but one director expressed considerable unease at a report concluding that tobacco advertising *did* have a major influence on teenagers. Others were delighted to be able to apply themselves to what they saw as 'good causes', be it Nike's anti-racism campaign, or the relaunch of the Cooperative Bank. The important point to note here, however, and this is where my conclusions differ from those of Lury (1994a), is that all these sentiments are reflections on particular campaigns and particular accounts. Nobody that I spoke to expressed any doubt about the legitimacy of advertising as an institution, merely about particular advertising instances. These practitioners did not conceive of the advertising industry as a monolithic structure by any means; they saw it as complex, fragmented and a realm of conflict. This has important consequences for our own academic conceptions of the industry, and also of the locus of power in the circuit of advertising, which will be discussed in Chapter 8. It also has implications for discussions of the possibilities of change in the circuit of advertising, an issue which is the subject of the following section.

## **7.4: Advertising, racialisation and the future**

This section seeks to bring together a number of themes from the rest of this chapter in looking to the future, and in particular making some suggestions about the potential for change in the circuit of advertising. These suggestions will necessarily be tentative, but it is felt that they have to be made. As an academic, it is arguably impossible to study a particular aspect of social, economic and cultural life without formulating opinions about what is not ideal about this situation, and what would constitute desirable change. Consequently, this section revolves around areas of dissatisfaction with the circumstances described in Chapters 4, 5 and 6. This is necessarily a personal dissatisfaction to some extent, and may involve the privileging of certain perspectives over others. It is hoped that such tendencies can be justified whenever they occur. Whilst reflecting upon earlier chapters, it will frame them within the themes from the present chapter, such as resistance, acceptance of advertising, and the relationship between producers and consumers. It discusses the notion of consumer sovereignty, and the associated possibilities of consumer pressure prompting corporations to modify their behaviour, initially in a general context and then with specific regard to advertising agencies and their clients. It shies away from making prescriptive suggestions about 'ideal' representational practices, and instead stresses the importance of consumers 'raising their voice' whenever they are unhappy with particular practices, a discussion that necessarily returns to the notion of resistance in the context of the research groups. It concludes by highlighting the crucial importance of both critical/media and anti-racist education if we are to witness the development of a more 'acceptable' form of popular culture. Firstly, however, it is necessary to clarify the theoretical and political assumptions upon which the rest of the discussion, and indeed the whole thesis, are predicated.

### **7.4.1: Advertising and legitimacy**

The relationship between business and society has preoccupied academics for decades, and many solutions to what has been perceived as a problem of excessive corporate power have been proposed (see Smith, 1990, for a summary). A great many of these have called for increased government control and regulation of business, but some have even called for an end to the market

economy itself. On a smaller scale, many critiques of advertising (usually from the 'manipulation' and 'conspiracy' school referenced regularly above) seem to be infused by a wish on the part of the writers that advertising would just disappear. The discussion below does not fall into this category. Although it does, in discussing the possibilities for representational change for example, express some pessimism about the current power of consumers, it still insists that change will only be initiated by the activities of consumers. It sees the market itself as being the most potentially productive mechanism for change in media-related fields, and in doing so it assumes a particular view of the consumer as 'sovereign'. Since the notion of consumer sovereignty and of decisions being made in the marketplace constitute a central mechanism in the operation of capitalism, there is no denying that the discussions below accept the legitimacy of capitalism. Such an acceptance might make some feel uneasy, sensing the possible contradictions between being consumers and being full or effective citizens. Such potential contradictions of employing the market as a mechanism for change in the realm of racialised disadvantage are discussed in more detail below. However, this chapter concurs with Peter Kellner (quoted in Tomlinson, 1990) that the Left needs to accept the pervasiveness of the market, and must attempt to work within its structures.

Similarly, the mechanisms for change proposed below are predicated upon an acceptance of the legitimacy of advertising, and more broadly consumer culture, as an institution (as demonstrated by the respondents). There are three principal reasons for such an acceptance here, concerned with the role played by advertising in the economy, the history of academic critiques of advertising, and a need to respect the pleasures that people derive from advertising and the positive handle which can be obtained on consumer culture. Tackling these issues in turn, advertising has existed in something like its present form for over a century now, and fulfils a very particular role in the market economy. If we lived in an economist's model of perfect competition, with firms not possessing strategies but competing on a price basis, and with unrestricted access to information for consumers, then there would be no need for marketing of any kind. Since this is not the case, advertising exists, essentially, to provide (occasionally disingenuous) information on which consumers can base their decisions in the marketplace; in turn it maintains the demand for products,

perpetuating the Keynesian principle of a virtuous circle of healthy businesses, more jobs, more money for consumers and investors, and so on. The industry might be rife with insecurity and uncertainty, but it is not going to disappear, so to call for its magical erasure today is arguably rather futile. Secondly, academic critiques of advertising have traditionally been stridently anti-advertising and anti-business in general. Indeed, academics can still be heard to voice the simplistic question 'Are you for or against advertising?'. Consequently, practitioners within the industry with the power to influence developments in advertising have tended to dismiss one and all academic contributions to advertising debates; as Davidson (1992: 153) remarks, thanks to such writing, it is no wonder that 'no adman has ever lost a wink of sleep worrying about academic censure'. With the chances of further government regulation of the industry increasingly remote (tobacco aside), it is the producers of ads that need to be targeted with complaints or calls for change. In order for them to listen, critiques need to be couched in their terms (see Mort, 1995, on the tactics of women working in advertising who were dissatisfied with some masculinist advertising practice), and the first requirement must surely be a recognition of the advertising practitioner's right to exist. Moreover, as advertising achieves increasingly widespread popular legitimacy, calls for its removal or censure are unlikely to be taken seriously in any quarters.

Finally, Chapter 5 has highlighted the considerable enjoyment that is extracted from advertising by young people in particular. As John Clarke (1991) explains, and as will be elucidated below, this is not itself unproblematic, but there is still a need to respect it, and the same applies to other aspects of material culture. Schudson (1984) implores academics to respect the dignity in people's desire for goods, while Richards (1994) argues that, whilst we may regret that the provision of symbolic materials is frequently in the hands of marketeers (and is thus tied to the pursuit of profits and the expansion of markets) we should not prejudge the 'psychic functions' which those materials may fulfil for people (and see above on advertising's employment as an imaginative resource). Stobart (1994) also invokes the psyche in highlighting the positive functions of brands for consumers, offering them, he claims, security and confidence in an increasingly complex world, as well as a 'guarantee' of quality and product satisfaction (likewise Miller, 1997a: 57). Even commodification is being seen in

something of a positive light by some, since it can offer up audiences for certain cultural forms that would otherwise remain parochial; this *could* then lead to greater understanding between different cultural groups, for instance. For others, the commodification of tradition is an essential factor in cultural survival for many groups (Vertovec, 1992; Firat, 1995). As Howes (1996: 12) explains, the 'marketization of culture' can bring international recognition and create employment opportunities for youth, thus saving many cultures from becoming 'museum items'. Sibley (1991: 34), meanwhile, suggests commodification can be positive through counteracting 'purification tendencies', 'when Afro-Caribbean cultures are incorporated in British popular culture', for instance. Essentially, consumer culture (along with its medium of representation, advertising) is not going to disappear. It is thus contended here that academics and consumers should attempt to instigate tactical changes in order to shape it into a form which more people could find acceptable.

#### 7.4.2: Playing the game - marketing changes

By employing a number of case studies of what he terms 'ethical purchase behaviour' to add to his rather dry economic theory, Smith (1990) demonstrates that the market *can* successfully ensure a measure of social responsibility in business. It might not always operate in this way, and there are many determining variables, from the nature of the market in question to the precise area under dispute, but the 'social control' of business via the market can, and has, happened. Ethical purchase behaviour is defined as consumers actively expressing their preferences on social issues through the market. This can take a number of forms, from organised boycotts of particular markets (coffee, for example), to an individual's self-prompted abstention from a particular firm's products for whatever reason. The 1980's witnessed a significant increase in the power of consumer movements, as Glennie and Thrift (1992) among many others explain. The boycott strategy in particular has a long pedigree, with notable 'successes' including the Californian grape boycott over the employment rights of workers, pressure on Barclay's Bank over its role in apartheid South Africa and the boycott of Nestlé products over baby milk. Indeed, according to the *Daily Telegraph*, around 50% of the population employed some form of product boycott during the late 1980's (cited in Nava,

1992). Although the potential strength of the boycott strategy is debatable (boycotts often have a temporary grip which weakens rapidly), they have helped many companies realise that they can no longer steer clear of politics (see Brierley, 1995). As Phil Wells, director of Fairtrade Foundation claims, "Ten years ago big companies would just have said that it was unrealistic to expect to change anything, but the world has moved on. They are realising that consumers and investors are getting interested in these issues and they can understand they can bring some leverage to bear on suppliers" (*Observer*, 1996a).

Black consumers in the United States have scored considerable successes through the use of the boycott strategy. Its potential was outlined in the 1970's by Jesse Jackson: "We have the power... just by controlling our appetites, to determine the direction of the American economy. If black people in thirty cities said simultaneously, 'General Motors, you will not sell cars in the black community unless you guarantee us a franchise here next year and help us finance it', GM would have no choice but to comply" (quoted in Vogel, 1978: 39). More recently Coke capitulated to demands from black companies for more franchises after black Americans boycotted the drink (*Observer*, 1996b), and Jackson's Rainbow/PUSH Coalition have recently set up offices on Wall Street to publicise their campaigns against corporate discrimination. As the coalition acknowledges, the direct financial impact of boycotts is questionable, but the associated publicity can be enough to prompt some companies to act, as has been the case recently with Texaco and Mitsubishi, both of whom have paid compensation and agreed to try to change their corporate cultures (*Financial Times*, 1997b). These examples of action *can* arguably be seen as effective forms of 'resistance', in as much as they have had an impact, however small, on the perceived sources of power, and prompted some desirable changes.

What tactics can be used to press for representational change in advertisements in particular, and what are the chances of success? Many of the consumer pressure groups in the 1970's had the notion of corporate 'responsibilities' at the heart of their campaigns, the idea that business had certain obligations to society to fulfil (as did some practitioners such as the

legendary Bill Bernbach - see Meyers, 1985). Indeed, the current Code of Advertising Practice insists that 'All advertisements should be prepared with a sense of responsibility to the consumer and to society' (CAP, 1988). There are echoes of this notion of responsibility in the subversive ads produced by the Canadian pressure group Adbusters, whose publication is soon to be seen in Britain, and who specialise in producing spoof ads with a twist.<sup>8</sup> Such notions of responsibility were greeted with scorn by many in the business world, however. Milton Friedman, for example, the right-wing economist and darling of Mrs Thatcher, opined that 'there is one and only one social responsibility of business - to use its resources and engage in activities designed to increase profits... so long as it engages in free and open competition, without deception or fraud' (quoted in Smith, 1990: 61).

The issue then became one of corporate 'accountability', transferring the emphasis from corporations owing society something, to them being responsive to the demands of their consumers, shareholders *etc.*. This is arguably the key to any attempt to lobby for changes within advertising. Although there are some commentators, even working within the industry, who still invoke the notion of advertising's responsibilities and debts to society (Scorah, 1994), such vagaries are unlikely to be taken very seriously by the majority of practitioners. Indeed, as Moog (1990: 16) puts it, 'Advertisers aren't in the business of making people feel better about themselves, they are in the *selling* business' (emphasis in original). Both agencies and their clients are much more likely to listen to criticisms and modify their behaviour if they think that money might be at stake; economics is the language most readily understood in the business, a fact acknowledged by Kern-Foxworth (1994) who ends her tome on the need for representational change in advertising by spelling out the financial benefits to advertisers of being more inclusive (drawing on survey results, for example, indicating that 49% of black consumers are more likely to purchase a product if

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<sup>8</sup> In a spoof Marlboro ad office workers are shown smoking and wheezing under the words 'Welcome to Marlboro country'. Meanwhile health authorities in California have adopted a similar tactic of appropriating other ads for subversive ends in their own ads: a shot of two famous Marlboro cowboys is overlain with the dialogue, "Bob, I've got emphysema" - Snowdon, 1997.



it is promoted using black models). If advertisers think they are offending a section of their audience who would otherwise be in the market for their products, they will amend their behaviour accordingly. The task then becomes one of information, letting the advertisers know that people are unhappy with their approach (a letter writing campaign by the AdWatch Committee of the Black Media Association in the United States, for example, has made steps towards reducing stereotypes of ethnic groups in advertisements (Kern-Foxworth, 1994), a tactic which agency planning director, Margaret Stuart, acknowledges can pay dividends). It is thus an approach that hinges upon dissatisfied consumers voicing a complaint, either individually or collectively.

Two concepts appropriated from Hirschman (1970) can perhaps assist us in theorising consumer responses to dissatisfaction, those of 'exit' and 'voice'. Hirschman is an economist, and employs the concepts to describe reactions to what he calls 'lapses of economic actors' (declines in a firm's performance, in terms of the quality of its goods, for instance). Bauman (1990) has speculated that the terms might be useful in a consumption context, but fails to expand on the idea; they are used here to conceptualise consumer responses to adverts. The 'exit' option is defined by Hirschman as customers ceasing to buy a firm's product, causing revenue to decline, with the consequence that 'management is impelled to search for ways and means to correct whatever faults have led to exit' (Hirschman, 1970: 4). The other option is that of 'voice', when customers express dissatisfaction directly to the management or some other authority to which management is subordinate, 'in an attempt at changing the practices, policies, and outputs of the firm from which one buys' (30). In an advertising context, it could be said the first option refers to a consumer refusing to consider purchasing a promoted product on the back of an offensive ad, for example; the second might take the form of a complaint to the advertiser or agency concerned, or to the Independent Television Commission or Advertising Standards Authority.

In the context in which he uses the terms, Hirschman privileges the first option, quoting Friedman once more who sees the voice option as "cumbersome". Yet the exit option is unlikely to achieve very much at all in an advertising context, for

reasons described in section 7.3. A campaign failing to increase sales is not always seen as a problem by advertising agencies, and the phenomenon is easily explained away. For instance, Bilal (A3) and others might refuse to purchase Snapple drink because they object to its portrayal of British Asians, but this protest will remain unproblematic for advertiser and agency if it stays at this level. If they were to voice a complaint to the ITC, or to the agency in question, however, then progress could perhaps be made, either through an ITC judgement on the complaint or just the act of making the advertiser aware of objections to a portrayal that might well have remained unquestioned. Increasingly, the very act of complaining can itself gain publicity. Some agencies deliberately court such publicity, with the aim of earning their campaigns newspaper column inches (Howell Henry Chaldecott Lury recently hired a PR agency explicitly to generate 'controversy' about a Blackcurrant Tango ad which had not provoked the desired level of outrage). However, not all such publicity is good publicity, as the old adage suggests, and some newsworthy complaints can seriously damage an advertiser's reputation. Persil, for example, were recently accused of presenting harmful racial metaphors in their soap ads; although the subsequent row inevitably raised heckles in the right-wing press about the dangers of 'political correctness', Persil did suffer as a result and the campaigns were withdrawn (see Cadwallader, 1996). With advertising becoming more newsworthy, as section 7.2.4. explains, and with the media scouting for industry-related stories, the greater are the chances of such complaints having the desired effect. Significantly, it does not take many complaints to have an impact: only 32 viewers complained about the above Persil campaign, suggesting that their 'votes', to use Nava's (1991) language, carried a weight greatly disproportionate to their number. This does not therefore parallel the theoretical and empirical situation described by Scott (1985), where only small-scale, tactical resistances (Baudrillardian silences in my own context, for example) are possible due to the sheer weight of forces acting against the resisters; consumers *do* have the freedom to voice a complaint that will be listened to by the cultural producer. As companies begin to compete more and more on the basis of 'values' (cf. Nike Cantona),

consumers will arguably become more empowered in this regard (see Jackson and Taylor, 1996).<sup>9</sup>

Consumer objections to racialised portrayals have also prompted some within the industry to think carefully about advertising's relationship to the groups represented in its ads. Adrian Holmes, for example, chairman at Lowe Howard-Spink, ruffled a few feathers in a speech to an industry audience at the British Television Advertising Awards in Monte Carlo. He acknowledged that it was not advertising's job to attempt to change society, and that it could only be expected to reflect it; but, he suggested, "Perhaps we should hold the mirror up a little differently so we reflect another facet" (Bell, 1995)<sup>10</sup> Lury (1994a), meanwhile, predicts that advertising will have to start portraying more 'real' people in its products in order to maintain desired relations with the consumer; he sees this as taking the form of fewer male, WASP characters, and greater diversity. Significantly, it is still economics and the fear of alienating sections of the market that prompted his prognosis. However, can we trust even these seemingly sensitive and dissenting voices in the industry? After all, whilst it is not necessarily a bad thing in itself, commodification is still the name of their game, and the Lilt example demonstrates how invidious it *can* be; Lilt's supposedly more 'progressive' representations were arguably even more crass and pernicious. Furthermore, in 1995 one creative director (Tony Beresford was admirably outspoken and critical about what he saw as the "corporate racism" that is pervasive among many agency clients, and which he suggested underpins many of advertising's racialised representations (see Chapter 4). A year later, however, he was behind a campaign for Virgin Interactive which was heavily criticised for 'mining a seam of xenophobia' (*Campaign*, 22/11/96); in response, the director insisted that the ad depicted "mock rampant xenophobia", and that we were all missing the delicious irony of it all. The use

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<sup>9</sup> Interestingly, both Joe (B1) and Kelvin (A3) thought that Nike Cantona's anti-racist message would attract far more attention *because* it came from Nike, and not a charity or government body; this has important implications for the role of the corporation in society which could be developed elsewhere.

<sup>10</sup>This could, of course, be interpreted as a Birtian call for self-censorship to remove any reasons for external regulating of advertising.

of such an ironic address is now common in advertising, and it has rendered criticisms of xenophobic portrayals, for instance, suddenly impotent; critics are lambasted by advertisers for failing to get the jokes. Yet the director of the Virgin campaign will know as well as anyone that many viewers will miss, or ignore, the irony too; and consequently the ad will perpetuate genuine xenophobia. As Austin-Smith (1990: 51, quoted in Hutcheon, 1994) claimed: 'irony...has...replaced patriotism as the last refuge of scoundrels, for it means never having to say you really mean it'. Irony becomes a way of disclaiming responsibility.

Not all advertising employees are this disingenuous, though, and my interviews did reveal some genuine concern about representational issues (see Chapter 4). There was some debate about where the responsibility for racialised representations might lie. Some denied personal responsibility, claiming that the structures of the industry were behind the perpetuation of such images. Viewed like this, the industry, or individual agencies, become reminiscent of the bank in Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* ('The bank is something else than men. It happens that every man in the bank hates what the bank does, and yet the bank does it. The bank is something more than men'). Aldrich (1979) has described the tendency for the social nature of organisations to ensure that employees might assume roles and make decisions very different from those they would make in other contexts; this is arguably the case with some creative decisions in agencies, with the need to conform to conventions overriding any doubts about the justice of a particular portrayal (see Chapter 4.3.2). This apportioning of blame onto the industry as a whole is merely convenient, though, and contradicts the commonly expressed view that the industry is not a monolith, and that individual campaigns and accounts should be judged on their own merits. To borrow Foucault's (1980) terminology, there is no 'headquarters of power'. It is argued here that this is precisely how challenges to the industry should be conducted, on a piecemeal basis. I believe there is enough insecurity and guilt amongst those working in the industry, as section 7.3 describes, to make complaints to individuals, about individual campaigns, effective. The strong sense of ownership that exists for people working on a campaign ensures that any objections to its content from the public will be listened to.

Micro-level, tactical 'hits' are arguably the most effective mechanism for initiating representational change in advertising.

It is thus argued here that there are spaces within which to critique the advertising industry, and to have some influence on its direction, albeit on a very micro-scale. This involves employing the mechanisms of the market itself, with the threat of lost revenues being the driving force of change. Crucially, though, as Smith (1990) remarks about ethical purchase behaviour, 'For it to take place, consumers have to be concerned, willing, and able to act in the market-place on a social issue' (282). To what degree were the young people in the two study schools prepared to exercise their options of 'exit' and 'voice'?

#### 7.4.3: 'Concerned, willing and able to act'?

*'It is... now sociologically realistic, morally fair and politically imperative to make demands upon men of power and to hold them responsible for specific courses of events'*

C. Wright Mills (1959)

The last two chapters have documented varying levels of concern on the part of the students about advertising messages, both primary and secondary. This has taken the form of objections to perceived racialised content, to gendered portrayals, and to particular sales pitches used by some advertisers. Only in a minority of cases has this discontent been translated into action of any kind, and when it has done, the action has been in the form of individual 'exit'. Although 'exit' could be taken to imply a refusal to engage with an ad, and there is plenty of evidence of this trend, it is suggested that it more appropriately describes the act of abstaining from the purchase of a particular promoted product. There were a handful of examples of this, all but one of them from School A. Aaron (A4), speaking in general terms, insisted that, *"If I disagree with something some company is doing then I won't buy that product"*. Alison (A5) said she would avoid products as a matter of principle if the advert had patronised her, for example, while Zack and Emmie in A6 both agreed that they

would avoid products promoted in stupid or offensive ads since it became a "moral issue": *"Yeah, in a lot of cases I've never bought a product because of a poor or offensive ad... but I'm probably not representative of my age group"* (Zack). Zack is apparently correct in his last assertion. He was the only one who had ever considered extending his protest to adopt Hirschman's voice option; his planned letter to an offending advertiser had never materialised, but he challenged those in the group who mocked his intention to write it. His detractors' argument was that one complaint would never make a difference, something Zack vigorously denied (curiously, Zack later objected to Nike's attempt to tackle racism on the grounds that "one advert can't make a difference"; this apparent contradiction might have arisen from his aversion to corporate co-option of social issues).

It is suggested here that for any of the students' objections to constitute resistance, they would have to have been 'voiced' in the relevant quarters, in order to make some difference to the relations of power, and 'do something outside themselves', as Budd *et al* (1990) demand in section 7.2.1. There are several potential explanations of why this had never happened. Few of the students knew who to complain to if they did object to an ad, which suggests the ITC and ASA are letting consumers down to some extent; their own advertising has drawn attention to their 'watchdog' roles, but has rarely invited complaints about ads (few of the ITC's 1000 or so annual complaints emanate from this age group). Ignorance of the advertising production process is also apparently partly to blame, with students unsure who they should target with a complaint. Meanwhile, a more general apathy seems to exist. After all, there were several students who refused to get agitated about any ad. Joe in B1, whilst expressing some objections to racialised portrayals, said his usual reaction was just to switch channel (a move he saw as quite empowering, but could arguably only be defined as such if it was part of the construction of a critical awareness, and led to a complaint being voiced in the future). Mary and Rowan in B6 concurred in a discussion about the stereotyping of women in ads: *"I just don't care really. It [complaining] is a waste of time I think, I just flick the channel"* (Mary); *"Yeah, it happens, like, so much you just ignore it"* (Rowan). In group A3, Kelvin had objected to a number of racialised representations, but admitted never had been tempted to make a complaint, and even shied away

from making any prescriptions for the future of advertising's representations: "*I reckon though, the adverts... overall they shouldn't really change anything because we'll be moaning no matter what*". There was certainly little evidence of the enthusiasm for consumer issues, and for 'voting' through the mechanism of the market, that Nava (1991) claims exists among young people.

Both Smith (1990) and Nava (1991) stress the 'democratic' nature of ethical purchase behaviour, claiming that affluence is not a determinant of one's relative 'vote' in the market. Like much of the literature on consumer empowerment, however, in making this assertion they overlook the many other resources which constitute a consumer's relative power in the market, resources which are unevenly distributed; as Miller (1987) puts it, 'some classes [for example] are consumers to a far greater extent than others' (see Bauman, 1988). For instance, it was noticeable that students at School A had a more substantial knowledge of the operations of the commercial world, including advertising, than did students at School B; they also expressed a greater enthusiasm for making complaints when dissatisfied (even though real examples of this were few and far between). We could speculate that the habitus of many of the School A students had given them greater exposure to the practices of the market and the commercial world, and notions of consumer sovereignty, which in turn made them better equipped to mount challenges via the marketplace than their inner-city counterparts. There is a glaring paradox manifest in this situation, however, namely that those consumers with the greatest resources, both economic and symbolic, are the ones most able to prompt change through resistance, but they are the ones who have the least reason to resist in the first place, since their interests are generally over-represented in advertising.

Is it possible to encourage all these students to engage more critically and more actively with media texts through education? And is such a situation desirable anyway? In the above cases, an improved knowledge of the advertising process could easily be conferred on some students through media studies lessons, including who to complain to if they were dissatisfied with an advertisement. Such a ploy is not a new idea, though, and Buckingham *et al*

(1990) are sceptical about its success in the classroom. Perhaps such an apparent lack of success in the past is due to the manner in which such issues are taught. O'Shea (1996) writes about the often problematic relationship of 'working-class' youth in particular to education, and especially to mainstream education's repudiation of popular pleasures. Media studies as a course would surely have the best chance of encouraging critical thought among its students if it acknowledged the positive elements of consumer culture and respected the undoubted pleasures that young people obtain from consuming advertisements; such an acknowledgement has been absent from the demystification approach to media teaching advocated by the influential Masterman (1980; 1985; see Buckingham, 1986, for a critique). Media education must also bear in mind the reasons why people watch television in the first place. Williamson (1986b) reminds us that most people turn on the TV to 'forget about things', to get away from oppression in the rest of their lives, and consequently they wish to avoid political issues in the course of their engagements with mass culture. However, there is certainly no reason to think that progress could not be made through education. There were a number of instances in the groups where students' critical thoughts could be traced directly back to recent lessons: Donna (B4), for example, acknowledged the importance of a recent sociology lesson on gender relations (in which media portrayals had been discussed) in helping her formulate passionate views on advertising representations; meanwhile, Aodhan's (B2) considered anti-Americanism was derived in part, he claimed, from history lessons which had tackled American foreign policy.

Whilst it is felt here that the encouragement of a critical engagement with the media is desirable, there is one important caveat, and one that has implications for anti-racist education, too. We must recall that such an 'active' engagement with advertisements sometimes took a decidedly less than progressive form at School A, when alternative readings of ads were constructed, but then used to lambaste 'political correctness'. This demonstrates the care that needs to be taken when discussing the concept of resistance. This idea is taken up by John Clarke (1991) who criticises Willis (1977) and others for celebrating 'resistance' which might be potentially regressive in character, reproducing racism, sexism and homophobia, for instance (and see Gray, 1996: 5). A similar example is



evident in the work of Fiske (1989b: 31) who celebrates the 'cheeky resistive subcultural purpose' he sees in the act of young lads jeering at a female student on campus to the tune of a contemporary ad jingle; although he might have enjoyed this advertising text being reworked, others might have viewed it as blatant sexual harassment.

Could the cynicism towards media representations of racial harmony and the like present at School A be avoided with a more formal anti-racist education policy, as existed at School B? There are signs that this might be the case. Chapter 6 described how Arabelle in A4 attributed her own awareness of, and sympathetic views towards racialised issues and the victims of racism, to the anti-racist education at her previous school. Tizzy, in the same group, cited an English project on racism and representation as behind her awareness of the issues under discussion. Meanwhile, some students at School A highlighted the stereotypes implicit in Budweiser ads which nobody at School B objected to; whilst this recognition suggested a game being played to identify the racist ad, it was clear that some knowledge of the issue of stereotyping was having a bearing on their interpretation of the ad, and that must be a step in the right direction. Several writers have argued that it is just as important to implement anti-racist education in schools with a majority of white students as it is in more ethnically mixed schools (Singh and Gill, 1987; Bonnett, 1992; 1993a; 1993b). School A is probably more mixed than many of the schools Bonnett had in mind, but the groups would still indicate a need for some form of anti-racist education there in addition to the standard equal opportunities clauses in the school constitution. The empirical material also suggests a need for anti-racist education to be tailored to the geographical specificities of the individual school. The work of Twine (1996) has suggested that it is possible for young people to 'unlearn' racial neutrality, for example, something which could have implications for anti-racist education in the suburbs; hooks (1994b) and Giroux (1994), meanwhile, have shown how critical, transgressive and free thinking *can* be taught, and have demonstrated the political possibilities of teaching.

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This chapter does not offer any prescriptions for standards of representation in advertising, no suggestions for 'better' representations. Indeed, respondents in

both schools were keen to warn of the potential pitfalls of such a move, although there was widespread enthusiasm for more 'natural' portrayals of minorities, as opposed to more 'forced', 'PC' inclusions (the difficulties advertisers face in getting this balance right were acknowledged, however). What this chapter hopes for instead is the development of a critical culture among young people in schools, which will instil in them a sense of being able to make a difference to what they see in their magazines and on their televisions, to encourage them to imagine a material culture and a society within which they would like to live, and to let others (in this case advertisers) know about it. It hopes that such an education can have an anti-racist element at its core as well, and perhaps one informed by social science, as Sibley (1995c: 138) reminds us was the lasting wish of W. E. B. Dubois.

Beginning to think about anti-racist education reminds us that there are much bigger issues at stake in society than the consumption of advertising and its relationship to racialised discourse in Britain; but a study of the latter can afford us insights into these bigger issues, such as racialised relations in society. It must be emphasised here that I do not advocate attempting to find an economic solution to the problem of racism in Britain.<sup>11</sup> Economic threats to

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<sup>11</sup> The contradictions of such an approach would be manifold, and could no doubt be the subject of an entire thesis. There would still be those who argued that attempting to tackle any racialised issue through the market is woefully misguided. After all, as Boston (1988, cited in Small, 1994: 98) proclaims, in the United States 'every major improvement in the economic status of Blacks was caused by coercive political intervention rather than by free market forces'. The logic of the free market is seen as a hindrance to goals of social justice, and advertising's romance with the free market, with external regulation anathema, means that its relationship to many disadvantaged groups is problematic. For example, it will be increasingly difficult for advertisers to continue to ignore black consumers (Kern-Foxworth, 1994; Majithia, 1994). Indeed, as Griffiths (1997) reports, American retailers are now viewing the suburban markets as relatively saturated, and are rushing to expand into parts of the 'urban market' (read African American areas). Yet does greater representation and targeting constitute a sign of 'progress', in terms of freedom from racialised discrimination? Susan Willis fears that putting more black faces in ads will mean more black people will be keen to participate in consumer society, acting as a hindrance to goals of radical black political change; as long as the hegemonic economic system is consumer culture, she suggests, it might be desirable to remain excluded (S. Willis, 1990; see also hooks, 1984 and 1990 on the

businesses might give rise to more satisfactory portrayals of ethnic minorities in the media, but neither are going to be able to change what amounts to an entire culture, the attitudes and behaviour of a nation. These actions amount to little more than the 'tactics' that de Certeau (1984) had in mind, actions which can make life more bearable, but which do little to challenge the sources of power (see Frow, 1991). For there to be any chance of achieving that we need political commitments from government (and see NBA, 1997).

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margin as a potentially radical space of resistance). Small (1994) also considers at length the potential implications of a growing black middle class in Britain for efforts at overcoming racialised hostility, fearing that many members of this (admittedly heterogeneous) group may embrace a free-market individualism whose priorities might be at odds with the majority of the black population. Hall (1996) confirms that the free market policies pursued during the Thatcher years deepened internal divisions in the black community and ensured that economic and social change today does not have homogeneous effects among black people, with internal divisions being most acutely registered among the young. Given that formal policies towards social justice are unlikely, however, and with access to society's resources increasingly measured by the level of one's participation in the consumer society, others will argue that advertising has the potential to encourage inclusion and participation, offering power to such groups who may be able to harness it in some way to fight racialised discrimination in this and other fields (see Bredin, 1996, on groups countering the forces of misrepresentation by employing modern media of communication to represent their culture and world). Advertising's capacity to persuade and to alter perceptions could also be harnessed for the benefit of disadvantaged groups, by tackling explicitly social issues, for example (this is clearly a problematic issue in itself, but one that can be debated elsewhere). I have advocated the encouragement of the use of the market merely to make one particular element of our visual material culture easier to live with.

## Summary and discussion

### 8.1: Introduction

The aims of this thesis have been twofold. Firstly, it has explored the relationship between advertising and processes of racialisation. Moreover, it has investigated three key stages of the circuit of advertising, its production, its texts and their consumption, and tried to elucidate the various social, economic and cultural relations implicated at each stage. What has hopefully become apparent in the preceding chapters is that these two research objectives are not mutually exclusive. Racialised issues are implicated at all stages of the research, while an understanding of such issues is impossible without broader insights into the production and consumption of advertising. This final chapter draws together the discursive content of the thesis and summarises some of the findings. It then contextualises some of these findings by extracting a particular theme that has implicitly been present throughout the thesis, and which stitches together the various subject areas covered in the thesis, namely the concept of 'power'. 'Power' is theorised briefly as it applies to this project, emphasising, with a few caveats, its mobile and shifting nature. A short critical evaluation of the project is also included, raising a number of issues which warrant further study.

### 8.2: Summarising and contextualising the findings

*'In thinking about cultural politics and commercial culture, I insist on keeping concerns with questions of power, inequality, domination and difference at the forefront of analysis'*

Herman Gray (1996)

What has perhaps been most clearly established is that TV advertising serves as both a *resource* and a *site* in and with which identities are constructed, circulated and articulated. The research has shown how advertising is the

product of racialised processes; it is a site in which racialised images circulate; and its consumption is informed by, and in turn informs, racialised identities. However, the thesis has demonstrated the complexity of these relationships and the absolute necessity of investigating them empirically. All manner of racialised, gendered and classed factors are at play in the circuit of advertising, but in ways that often confound our expectations. The notion of an essential racialised or gendered subject is a myth in the context of the consumption of advertising; instead attention needs to be focused on the specificities of the geographical contexts in which it is consumed.

The consumption of advertising by the young people interviewed has frequently been framed by notions of entertainment and the potential pleasures of consumption. In contrast to some recent studies of advertising, this thesis insists that consumption cannot be divorced from questions of influence and the purchasing process. In fact, this material link with specific commodities is often a major source of the pleasures generated. However, Chapter 5 has shown how such pleasures can be distinctly uneasy for some consumers, not least for those who feel, at various times, excluded from advertising.<sup>1</sup> It is suggested that the notion of 'active audiences' needs some reconceptualising in the light of the young people's engagement with advertising. The majority were very reflective and 'self-willed' (Curran, 1996a) in their consumption, demonstrating a substantial awareness of advertising's aims and conventions. They were also subject to advertising's influence, however. This conclusion to some extent combines the arguments of the main protagonists in the recent audience activity debates described in Chapter 2, since it acknowledges the 'activity' of audiences whilst still insisting on the power of the media; it also confirms the need (originally expressed in Chapter 2.6) for a more complex and dialectical conception of the cultural politics of advertising. This 'hybrid' line has potential consequences for academic work. I would certainly concur with Stuart Hall's (1995) call for a greater eclecticism of intellectual work, a selective syncretic

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<sup>1</sup> However, Chapter 4 has explained how consumer uncertainty and ambivalence is mirrored in the views of many producers, themselves part of an industry which should not be viewed as monolithic.

inclusiveness which attempts to take the best elements from a number of traditions or schools, instead of one orthodoxy superseding another. If nothing else, my project has confirmed Curran's (1996a) assertion that there is no universally acceptable model of the media.

That one conclusive model of the production and consumption of advertising is impossible to attain is evidenced further by a discussion of the theme which I see as having been significant throughout the thesis, namely 'power'. Power as a concept has arguably been relevant at all stages of the research: in Chapter 2 the thesis discussed dominant academic assessments of the power of media texts and the relative power of audiences to resist them; power relations were inevitably ever-present during the various stages of my fieldwork, described in Chapter 3; Chapter 4 described the social relations of producers whose own power of definition has been the source of much attention; Chapters 5 and 6 outlined a variety of power relations in the context of the consumption of advertising, from the relative influence of advertising's sales messages to the relations between groups of students; finally, at the heart of Chapter 7 were implicit assumptions about the relative power of media texts, about the power of producers to determine how those texts are read, and the power, and willingness, of consumers to 'resist' the dominant messages of the texts.<sup>2</sup> I should like to conclude with a brief theorisation of the concept of power in the context of this thesis; it serves to illustrate the above point that few definitive conclusions can be drawn about the circuit of advertising, and that as academics we need to be prepared to resist the temptation to search for such universal models, instead being receptive to complexity and fluidity of meanings.

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<sup>2</sup> Reasserting the centrality of power is also a useful way of insisting that 'cultural politics' are not inevitably wedded to individualistic notions of 'identity' and identity politics (cf. Hobsbawm, 1996).

### 8.2.1: Defining power

Traditional analyses of power have often treated the concept as inseparable from class analyses, themselves rooted in Marxist thinking (cf. Poulantzas, 1973). An investigation of the distribution of power was said to be an investigation of the distribution of class advantages in society, to the point where the 'power' of an individual could be ascertained by reference to their putative class position (see Parkin, 1971: 46). More recently, however, 'power' has begun to be conceived of as 'empowerment', and as more dispersed, largely through the work of feminists; it is these latter developments that are most relevant to the circuit of advertising.

The theories of power and resistance discussed in Chapter 7 (de Certeau, 1984; Scott, 1985) were largely predicated on a dichotomy between the dominant and the dominated, an opposition that, in the context of the circuit of advertising, conventionally maps onto producers and consumers. However, a number of writers have drawn attention to the implosion of the space between these two groups, as the circuit becomes 'tightened' through market research, as media owners seek to employ archetypal consumers, and as more and more people work in industries or services that are themselves governed by the logic of promotional culture (Wernick, 1991; Du Gay, 1996). However, it is apparent from this project and others (see the work of Bauman, 1987; 1988) that not all consumers are equal, and there is *no* archetypal consumer for media products; for those who are excluded from advertising's representations, for example, the aforementioned producer-consumer distance remains. What are the implications of this for conceptions of power in the circuit of advertising? The answer is something of a Foucauldian one, in so much as these power relations cannot be equated with, or explained by, social categories of class; instead power should be seen as dispersed, manifesting itself differently in different contexts, all of which need to be mapped. After all, Lukes (1986: 15) insists that 'power... lies where its benefits accrue', and in the case of advertising and its consumption, such benefits clearly do not reside exclusively with any particular group. However, there are some caveats associated with this model.

Foucauldian notions of power-as-dispersed have been introduced into media analyses primarily by John Fiske (see Fiske, 1989b: 179), perhaps the key exponent of the active audience thesis. He uses Foucault to illustrate his arguments about the power of consumers to construct meanings in and around texts, relative to the power of producers to encode them. As Chapter 7 has indicated, however, I have a number of problems with this view, particularly its most extreme manifestations which suggest that the power of consumers to construct and reinterpret meanings is equivalent to the power of media institutions to construct the texts (see Newcomb and Hirsch, 1984, cited in Morley, 1992). Sack (1992) argues that consumers are empowered merely by being links in the production-consumption chain, an assertion that ignores one's relative position in the chain. Whilst I would agree that it is now untenable to conceive of a definable 'space' between producers and consumers (and that there is a single production-consumption 'chain' as such), in the light of my own study I am in little doubt that, although some consumers are more empowered than others, power is strongly weighted towards the production end of this chain. There is clearly a difference between having power over a text and over the terms within which it is constructed and presented (Morley and Silverstone, 1990; Dyer, 1993). As Ang (1990: 247) remarks, 'it would be utterly out of perspective to cheerfully equate "active" with "powerful"'.

I am not entirely content with the Foucauldian legacy in studies of the media, if defined solely in terms of the power relationship between producers and consumers. Although it transcends the unhelpful dichotomy between the two groups, it has often been translated into a less than flexible model which makes unrealistic assumptions about consumers. However, the relationship between producers and consumers are not the only power relations in the circuit of culture and in the broader scheme of my research. A Foucauldian model can have considerable explanatory potential in this wider context. As Schirato (1993) and Sibley (1995c) note, Foucault (1972; 1976; 1980) conceived of 'webs' of power, webs which are constructed as power moves through and across social agents, and as social agents move in and out of various positions, places and sites of power (cf. Somers, 1994, on embeddedness in overlapping networks of relations). Such a flexible, fluid and mobile conception of power is extremely appropriate to the young people in my study, a point that can be



illustrated with a focus on one respondent, Daniel (B2), a young, black male from Brixton. It is apparent that he can be categorised as neither powerless nor powerful, but both *simultaneously* as he is enmeshed in a variety of webs of power relations, holding widely differing positions in each.

As he pointed out himself (see Chapter 6), Daniel feels he is excluded by the majority of advertisers on the basis of his racialised and classed position; when young, black males do appear in ads on his screen, they are portrayed in roles he doesn't recognise, or defined in ways he strongly objects to. The power of definition rests in the hands of (white) others; Daniel is relatively unempowered. To some advertisers, though, Daniel is extremely powerful, and his opinion counts. On a number of occasions, major sportswear manufacturers had visited Daniel's basketball club and tested ads on him and his peers; he described to me how researchers' were desperate to know what the boys thought, how he had the power to influence which Nike ads, for example, were seen by the rest of the nation. All of a sudden his voice counted. Yet he is also acutely aware that his position as a young, black man living in the inner-city renders him extraordinarily disadvantaged in the employment market, and his immediate post-school future does not look promising, compared with most of the students interviewed from School A, for example. However, as a talented basketball player, he has an unusually high chance of escaping such structural constraints via a scholarship to an American college. Within the group interviews, Daniel was once more in a privileged position of power. He was bright, confident and outspoken, and his peers listened to his views; he was good-looking, and clearly popular with the girls in the group; meanwhile, during discussions about racialisation his views were often privileged by white peers. His position compared to the students at School A was arguably not one of such relative powerlessness either. As Hall (1996) remarks, members of the urban black community hold a commanding position in British popular culture; their cultural choices (sartorial, musical and others) are consumed via the media by suburban youth, black and white, and frequently emulated. Daniel's symbolic creativity, and the cultural capital he possesses, place him in a powerful position with respect to the rest of the nation's youth and its popular culture.

In addition to illustrating 'the ways in which agents move in and out of various positions, places and sites of power' (Schirato, 1993: 285), what this example also demonstrates is the inappropriateness of seeking a universally applicable theory of the media, the circuit of advertising, and its relationship to racialisation. Whilst 'geometries of power' (Massey, 1993; 1994) can be seen to be evident throughout the circuit, they are multifarious, fluid and unpredictable. They need to be investigated empirically, in the particular geographical and social contexts in which they manifest themselves. This thesis has shown how such an investigation can be achieved through an encounter with advertising.

### **8.3: Evaluation and implications for further research**

It was suggested in Chapter 2 that a fundamental shortcoming of textual analyses was their tendency to raise more questions than they answered (questions about the production and consumption of images, for example). Having also investigated the production and consumption of images in this project, I realise that just as many new questions have been raised. Some of these questions have prompted me to evaluate certain decisions that took my research in particular directions and even to wish I had done things differently. Others have arisen from avenues I am glad I chose to follow, and which I remain convinced will lead to interesting and productive research in the future. Moreover, hindsight has certainly provided me with a heightened awareness of the limitations of my research.

My dissatisfaction, expressed in Chapter 2, with studies that have focused exclusively on one phase of the circuit of culture remains just as strong in the light of my research. I am convinced of the benefits of conceptualising meaning as circulatory and thus exploring several areas of the circuit in one project. I certainly feel that the consistencies and contradictions that have been revealed, as advertising meanings have been traced from producers to texts to consumers, offer an important insight into racialised, gendered and 'classed' social relations. However, in retrospect I feel that, at times, I risked treating the various phases of the circuit as rather less connected than Johnson's (1983) model supposes. Instead, I think I sometimes considered the three phases I

investigated as being decidedly separate, with the consequence that I found myself blinded to the links between them. The reason for this, I suggest, lies in the nature of the existing body of academic work. As Chapter 2 explains, very few studies in the social sciences have considered either the social relations of the production of images and cultural products, or those of their consumption. In the case of advertising in particular, such studies are virtually non-existent. As a consequence, after the textual analysis which was conducted first, I was eager to explore these two areas, but this eagerness perhaps translated into an over-concentration on these areas; it was as if we needed to learn so much about how ads were produced and consumed in general, that I had to concentrate on this before I could look at the links between them. On occasions I also found myself in danger of neglecting racialisation issues: how can I look at the relationship between racialisation and the consumption of advertising, I asked myself, when I know so little about how advertising is consumed *per se*? I possessed no heroic illusions about my own ability to fill these research lacunae, but I became aware of how my research was being influenced by existing academic literature, and not always in a way I either expected or desired.

There are other examples of the constraining influence of academic conventions that I became aware of. For instance, I adopted the broader research perspective of looking at both production and consumption as a reaction to the paralysing assumptions that many (predominantly textual) studies had made about producers and audiences. As Chapter 2 explains, these assumptions (sometimes implicit, but not always) have often been perpetuated by writers who failed to offer any empirical evidence for their contentions. Yet I soon discovered that I too had internalised certain of these myths. For example, when I interrogated some of my thinking, on occasions I found it was predicated on a mythologised opposition between producers and consumers, or on a view of advertisers as 'inherently bad', or consumers as either dupes or avid 'symbolic creators', or on the existence of an 'essential' subject. For me, this confirms the need for such a self-interrogation – we never enter the field with empty heads, as the maxim goes, but must try to ensure we do so with an open mind.

A 'level head' is arguably also a pre-requisite. Perhaps as a consequence of reading countless authors who have pontificated about 'society', or 'young people', or 'advertisers' on the basis of little or no empirical work, it is easy to lose perspective on one's research and its limitations. In my own case it has been necessary to remind myself that my research has just been concerned with the circulations of television advertisements, and, at times, only a small selection of them. It is thus imperative to avoid making any grand pronouncements about vaguely defined terms such as 'consumer culture', 'material culture' or 'youth'. I also hope to have maintained a sense of perspective about the potential implications and significance of research into racialisation and the media. Whilst I am in no doubt that systems of communication are crucial to the reproduction of racism, and can have very tangible consequences for racialised minorities as the experiences of Bilal in Chapter 6 testify, Miles (1989) is right to remind us that the discussion of stereotypes and racialised imagery is of little value in explaining the economic and political realities of housing shortages, inadequate social facilities and assault, grim realities which confront many racialised minorities on a daily basis.

By being aware of some of the limitations of the research, and by interrogating some of its assumptions, I hope to have enhanced its worth rather than detracted from it. After all, I do feel it has generated many 'positive' questions and potential avenues for research. The complexity of the relationship between young people, advertising and racialisation that this thesis has pointed to needs to be mapped further. Such a mapping needs to recognise the importance of social and geographical contexts and geographies of power, developing a more subtle cultural geography as well as a more complex cultural politics of advertising. There remains, of course, a great need for more grounded, empirical studies of both producers and consumers, including ethnographic investigations of the fourth phase in the circuit of culture (lived cultures and social relations). These cultures have been accessed here through the school-based interviews, but a wider ethnography, which might have helped further unravel some of the meanings of the 'differential consumption' mapped in Chapters 5 and 6, has remained beyond the scope of my own study (particular questions raised in this study which demand further research in this area have included whether students adopt paradoxical positions resistively in other

arenas, the origin of indifference to racialised issues among minority students at School A, and the sources of guilt about television consumption habits).

More specific questions also emerge: can, indeed should, anti-racist education be tailored to the geographical specificities of respective schools? Should critical media education be taught in schools, and what form should it take? Will the entry of increasing numbers of 'cultural' social science graduates into advertising have an impact on its organisational practices and creative output? Will the growth of freelancers and independent production companies encourage more diverse and inclusive practices in the industry? The empirical work has also suggested potential new theoretical directions. For example, it has called for a reassessment of the notion of 'audience activity' and 'resistance' to media products in the light of the consumption of ads by the young people interviewed; the concept of racialisation has been shown to be of greater theoretical utility than traditional ideas about 'race', part of the complex cultural politics of the circuit of advertising; traditional categories of gender and class must also be seen to be increasingly problematic, and of decreasing analytical utility, with more *relational* categories of difference and distinction offering greater explanatory potential; similarly, the empirical work suggests that ideas about the nature of the subject must continue to move away from categorisations based upon uniform lines of social differentiation.

The light that the study of advertising has shed on other aspects of social life has also been instructive, pointing to the need for academics to overcome the traditional reluctance of the Left to focus their attention on the world of commerce. Mort (1997) sees the late twentieth century as being characterised by the consolidation of the commercial field, and demands the mapping of its multiple histories and geographies. This project has shown that the products of the commercial world and its media *do* have an impact upon the daily lives of racialised minorities (Van Dijk's, 1987, account of the elites who influence such lives neglects to mention economic elites). Commerce and culture are so intertwined as to be frequently indistinguishable, and the commercial media in particular are increasingly the site of cultural politics. Academics cannot afford to ignore the commercial world.

However, academics do have another important role to play in this area. As Chapter 7 explains, this thesis is predicated on the idea that advertising has a role and place in the economy and society, and that an open mind needs to be retained when analysing its products, its production, and its (frequently pleasurable) reception. However, I hope that I have not, as some academic peers have suggested, been 'seduced'. Although I find such language objectionable, largely due to its affiliations with the Packardian view of advertising, I accept that it is easy to lose a critical handle on advertising. My own interest in developments in advertising and consumer culture is itself uneasy, not least in relation to the pleasures they offer, the fact that the constructions of enjoyment they propagate are necessarily so limited. Non-material pleasures are rarely mentioned. Individual needs such as personal autonomy and self-definition are translated into the need to consume material goods in the market. Advertising could arguably be said to contribute to what Giddens (1991) calls, in another context, the 'sequestration of experience', the separation of daily life from contact with experiences which raise (potentially disturbing) existential questions. Can anybody recognise non-market choices in their lives any more? It is surely becoming increasingly difficult. I would be the first to urge Left-leaning academics to begin to engage critically with consumer culture and its geographies and histories, and to accept the existence and role of advertising; but they also have an important role to play in articulating and promoting the alternative pleasures and alternative possibilities that lie beyond it.

Although the thesis highlights the importance and value of adopting an interdisciplinary approach, I would stress the central role geographers could, indeed should, adopt in the aforementioned new research directions. Once I had overcome the temptation to insert 'space' at every turn during the analysis (cf. Bonnett, 1996) I felt my disciplinary background was a help, not a hindrance, to the project. This was in part due to the fact that it *did* help to alert me to the importance of space where relevant (both grounded and metaphorical/symbolic), and to draw my attention to the variations in 'habitus' which were identified as underpinning differential consumption patterns. Perhaps most significant, however, has been the strength of the discipline's empirical tradition, which encouraged me to conduct my 'fieldwork'. I hope this tradition will be

continued and extended with further work in the field of racialisation, advertising and consumption.

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## Appendix 1: A geographer's guide to advertising

This appendix describes the key stages in the development of an advertising campaign in order to help clarify and contextualise discussion of the 'production' of advertising in the main body of the project. It is a very simplified outline, and in no way claims to be an exhaustive account of the advertising process.

The principal players are *advertisers* (also referred to as *clients*) and advertising *agencies*. Advertisers employ agencies to market their brands, products, services *etc.* The marketing process is often divided according to the communication vehicles used, into what are known as 'above-the-line' activities (television, radio, press and outdoor advertising) and 'below-the-line' activities (direct mail, promotions, sponsorship, *etc.*). A single advertising agency may be required to manage all such marketing operations for an advertiser, or different agencies may be employed to provide different services. This thesis uses the word 'advertising' to refer to above-the-line marketing only. Examples of advertisers might be Tesco or Audi, and agencies Lowe Howard-Spink or Bartle Bogle Hegarty.

Figure A.1 outlines the key stages in the development of an advertising campaign.

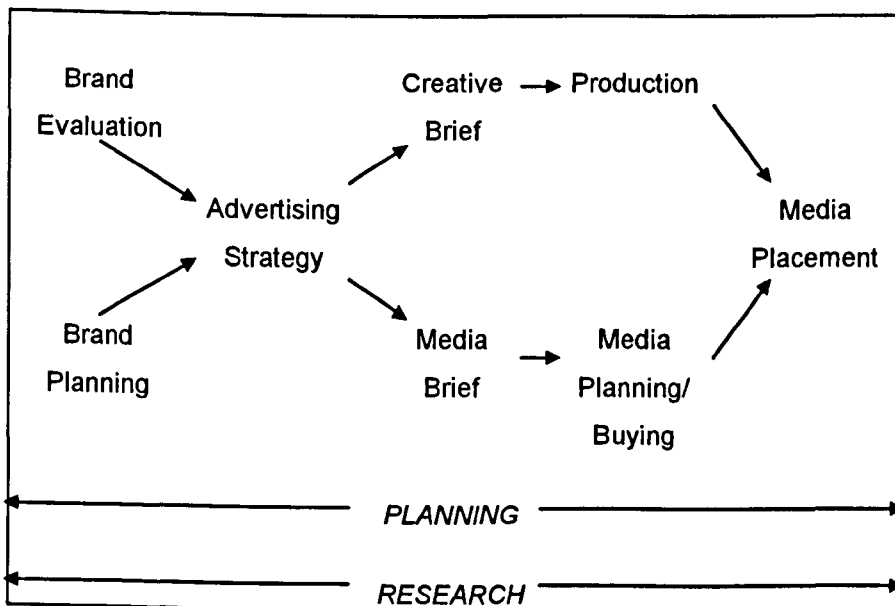


Figure A.1: stages in the development of an advertising campaign by an agency

It is at the brand planning stage that the fundamental business objectives are clarified, since these will feed into the advertising objectives. The client and the agency will come together to ask the question 'What are we trying to do?'. The answer to this question might be one or more of the following: launch a brand, encourage trial, increase sales, increase brand usage, change the image of a brand, consolidate a customer base or increase market share, regain lost customers, inform, change public attitudes, raise staff morale, and so on. Similarly, advertising may be required to work at a number different levels: at the lowest level it may provide merely a sense of familiarity, a sense that the brand is 'around'; it may seek associations with particular emotions; it may convey information, or put across rational arguments. All depend on the objectives of the campaign.

Once the aims of the campaign are established, the focus shifts to the advertising agency, although the client's approval will be required at all subsequent stages. 'Who are we going to talk to?' and 'How are we going to talk to them?' are the next questions to be asked. Out of the answers to these questions and the business objectives will emerge the creative and the media briefs. The creative brief is distributed at the creative briefing, a meeting at which the creative team is told what is required of them to solve a particular advertising task. The brief should contain all the essential elements that the creative team will need; it should inspire them, as well as providing them with clear enough guidelines for it to also function as a means of quality control (see O'Malley, 1989). Every agency will have a standard form for its briefs. These will vary somewhat from agency to agency, but will include some or all of following sections:

1. *Background to the market*

2. *Details of the target market* ('Who are we advertising to?') There are a multitude of criteria upon which a target group may be identified: class, age, personality traits, product/brand usage, those with certain attitudes to the brand already etc. There can be huge differences in the consumption and media habits of those in a seemingly homogeneous population.

3. *Advertising objectives* ('What must the advertising say?')
4. *Proposition or brand position* (for example, "Reebok make serious sports shoes for people who are serious about sport")
5. *Support for this position* ('Why should the consumer believe this?')
6. *Desired consumer response*
7. *Creative guidelines* ('What tone of voice should the advertising have?')
8. *Mandatory/requirements* ('What practical considerations should be borne in mind?')

Two examples of creative briefs are included at the end of this appendix (with kind permission of the Lowe Howard-Spink agency). The first is a full campaign brief for Reebok, which provides the guidelines for three commercials. The second is the specific brief for one such commercial, the fitness shoe ad described in Chapter 4. Both offer good illustrations of the briefing process, emphasising, among other things, the importance of the target audience and of the 'tone' of the ad.

Advertising creative teams usually work in pairs, with one tending to assume an art direction role and the other a copywriting role. They are often inseparable, and if successful will move from agency to agency as a pair. Particular teams sometimes attain near-legendary status within the industry. For example, Trevor Robinson and Al Young of Howell Henry Chaldecott Lury (HHCL), creators of the off-the-wall award-winning Tango ads among others, were known throughout the advertising world merely as 'Trev and Al', and it came as a major shock when they decided to go their separate ways. Creatives are, by their very nature, lateral thinkers and innovators. There is thus a tendency for other agency employees to write them off as care-free eccentrics and to enter dealings with them with some trepidation. The vast majority of creatives are male, the tough, laddish atmosphere and erratic hours acting as a deterrent to many women, according to some (Hollis, 1995; and see Chapter 4).

Whilst the creatives are searching for an idea for the campaign, a media brief is constructed in a similar way to the creative brief, and handed to the media department. As well as having a copy of the creative brief attached, the media brief will contain product and market background, the advertising's intended role, details of the target audience, how the campaign will be evaluated, along with practical considerations such as budget or whether creative requirements might dictate media. From this a media plan is constructed, and eventually the time/space negotiated and purchased. Media choice should also be influenced by the overall campaign objectives since the medium is at least as important as the message (as one media researcher asked me rhetorically, "What is the point in having a great ad if nobody sees it?"). Some agencies have media departments working in-house ('full-service' agencies); where this is not the case, or where a client's requirements dictate, this role will be fulfilled by an independent media company, such as TMD Carat.

Once a final creative review has been conducted and one or more ideas settled upon, the proposals will then be presented to the client for approval (or otherwise), along with estimated production costs. In the case of TV advertising, a production company and director will be selected and the process of making the ad will commence. Directors can play a very influential role, and famous names in the business such as Tony Kaye can command huge fees. Traditionally ad directors used to move into films, but some are now making the journey in the opposite direction and directing commercials as a creative option. These directors, such as Andy Wilson of Impossible Impact (an advertising production company made up of young film directors), claim to relish the challenge of having only thirty seconds or so in which to get their creative message across (see Armstrong, 1996a).

Eventually, the ad will be placed in the relevant media, with client approval having been sought at every stage of its production. When the ads finally hit the screens/pages/billboards *etc.*, then begins the process of evaluating the campaign, a task that will fall to the account planners, with the help of

researchers from within and without the agency. Account planners tend to be well-respected in agencies and are frequently seen as the brains behind campaigns. They are involved at every stage of a campaign's development and are thinkers, left in peace behind closed doors to solve problems. They dictate the direction of an entire campaign, with perhaps one of their most fundamental tasks being the positioning of a brand - 'where to put it' in its particular market. Whilst they will be in touch with both creatives and the client, their main point of contact will be with the consumer, interested in the consumers' attitudes not just to the brand and the particular market, but also to advertising and the media in general, their consumption habits and motivations, their needs and desires, how they feel about their lives, and so on. They must keep abreast of both macro trends that affect people's lives (how much they earn, what sort of places they live in, their family structures) and also short-term trends and priorities in people's lives (fashion, music, vocabulary *etc.*). As one former planner puts it, they must be 'walking around with their eyes and ears wide open' (Scorah, 1989: 10), and must bring to the advertising process a view of the world outside. Their insights will fundamentally shape the advertising objectives and conceptions of the target audience.

Planners rely to some extent on quantitative survey data from sources such as the Government/civil servants, research companies such as the Henley Centre, and media owners in order to glean information about the ways in which people live. They must then seek to understand the consumers and their attitudes in more depth, achieved increasingly through qualitative research techniques (see Leslie 1997b). In the majority of cases, planners will commission specific research for the development of a campaign. This may be at the outset in order to inform strategy, or it may be at the creative stage to test a central creative idea using rough versions of proposed ads; the research may assess the reception of finished ads, and it will almost certainly attempt to evaluate the effectiveness of a campaign after exposure. The more candid of planners will admit to the uncertainty that plagues much of the research and evaluation process. It is impossible to accurately predict the effectiveness of any particular approach in advance of exposure; it cannot be assumed that the reasons for a successful campaign are inherent in that particular approach, since context (market, brand history, competitors' approach, packaging, promotions, hearsay,

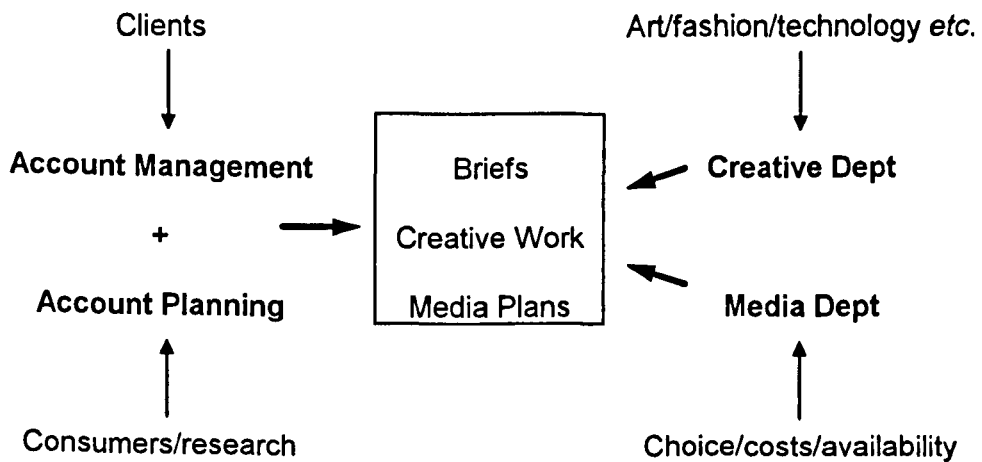
*Which?* reports etc.) is all-important. Any campaign is successful in part due to luck. Because the effects of advertising cannot be studied in isolation, and its effect on sales is difficult to measure, advertisers will sometimes launch advertising in one geographical area and endeavour to compare national sales trends with those in the test region, in the hope that any trends in promotions, packaging, competitive activity and the like will remain constant nationally. According to one seminal text on the use of research in advertising, it is essential for researchers and planners to be aware of the limits of research and to be able to rely on their intuition and suppositions when making strategic decisions (Hedges, 1974). Lessons learned from the post-exposure evaluation, however uncertain they may be, inform the development of the next campaign; thus campaign evaluation becomes the first stage of campaign development, as *Figure A.1* shows.

With so many departments and personnel having inputs into a campaign, there has to be someone co-ordinating the various exchanges and liaisons. This task falls to the account handlers and managers. Account handlers are agency employees who frequently work in this co-ordinating capacity on one (or usually more) of the agency's accounts. Theirs is the job that perhaps most conforms to the common stereotype of the 'adman' working all hours of the day and night, lunching with clients, attending glamorous shoots, yet surrounded by ringing telephones. They have the unenviable task of liaising between clients on one side and creative teams on the other, sets of people whose interests may well be at odds with each other. Creatives are the innovators, the risk-takers, who treat ads as their own creations and who might not take kindly to criticism. Clients, on the other hand, tend to be more conservative and unwilling to take risks. It is up to the account handler to 'bend over backwards' for both parties and keep everyone happy, whilst the account planner reassures the client that this is not such a risky path to take after all, and anyway, "[financial] return-to-risk is a fundamental tenet of economics", as one of them put it (Larry Graham). There is very little scope for an account handler to make creative contributions to a campaign other than perhaps demonstrating some bias when selling a number of proposed ideas to a client. As one account handler told me, "I never actually *do* anything. I never sit down and write anything... I am always on the



'phone, arranging meetings, attending meetings... but I love it... it's rock 'n' roll" (Andrea Fiore).

In summary, the departmental structure in an agency resembles that depicted in *Figure A.2*.



*Figure A.2: The basic structure of an advertising agency*

Finally, an introduction to the various organisations that regulate the creative output of the advertising industry is necessary. There are three main regulatory bodies, each performing a different function: the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA), the Independent Television Commission (ITC) and the Broadcast Advertising Clearance Centre (BACC). The ASA is a self-regulatory body which monitors all display advertising (i.e. press and posters) and is funded by a levy on all such ads. Its Committee of Advertising Practice offers advice on copy (content), while the Authority as a whole monitors a random sample of 250,000 ads per year, and responds to around 10,000 public complaints, around a third of which are upheld. Its actions are based upon a Code of Advertising Practice, drawn up in conjunction with representatives from academia, the legal profession, the media and the health service. In spite of being a voluntary organisation, the ASA can be powerful. If it decides to uphold a complaint, the first step is to ask the advertiser or agency to withdraw/amend an ad, a move which has the desired effect in the vast majority of cases. If not, the Authority asks the owners of the media themselves to withdraw the space

for the ad in question, with compliance being almost guaranteed. Very occasionally, however, the Office of Fair Trading will be asked to take out an injunction in court (this can only be done if the ad is actually misleading, as opposed to just offensive). This has only happened in a handful of instances since the Code was re-drafted in 1988 (Watkins, 1994).

The ITC, on the other hand, is funded by the Government, and, among other roles, is the watchdog for TV advertising. It is by far the most powerful of the regulatory bodies. They deal with the 1000 or so complaints that are received every year, upholding only a tiny fraction (in the 12 months to February 1997, for example, there were 820 complaints of which 11, or 1.3%, were upheld - ITC, 1997). They can either ban ads outright, or impose subtler constraints such as ordering ads to be shown only after the 9 p.m. watershed. The BACC, meanwhile, has the job of pre-vetting broadcast media commercials, and is funded by the TV operators themselves, both terrestrial and satellite. Most of their efforts are directly with the advertising agencies at the script stage of an ad, although finished ads will return for a last check to ensure that they comply with the ITC Code. It has no actual power to prevent an advertiser or broadcaster doing anything, but should any ignore the BACC's advice their ads will almost certainly not be aired. A broader system of regulation also exists for ads that are shown in more than one country (see Watkins, 1994, for details of the European Advertising Standards Alliance, for example).

Many agency personnel are ambivalent towards the regulators. Some are openly hostile. The latter are frequently creatives, who see the various codes as cramping their creativity. If these regulators did not exist, however, it is likely that some kind of external regulation would exist, and to the advertising industry such regulation is anathema. The view of many in the industry might be summed up by one creative I interviewed (Tom Knotman), who said: "The regulators are bloody annoying -- they mean that you can't lie, for a start... but I suppose that is a good thing... I suppose they are necessary".

## Appendix 2: Sample questionnaire

School: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Year: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Sex: M \_\_\_ F \_\_\_

Where do you live? \_\_\_\_\_

Where are your parents from? \_\_\_\_\_

Approximately how many hours of TV do you watch in a week? \_\_\_\_\_

What is the likely split between BBC and the commercial channels? (e.g. 50/50? 60/40?) \_\_\_\_\_

Which three programmes do you watch the most (any order)? 1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

Do you ever watch cable or satellite TV at home? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you *normally* watch TV...alone \_\_\_\_\_

...with family \_\_\_\_\_

...with friends \_\_\_\_\_ (please tick)

Do you ever talk about ads in everyday conversation? \_\_\_\_\_

If yes, give examples:

### **Appendix 3: Composition of discussion groups**

The tables below provide information on group composition at both schools, gleaned from the questionnaires that were completed by most students at the end of each session. 'Home' refers to where they live, 'Parents' to where their parents are from, 'TV/week' to an estimate of the average number of hours watched in a week, 'Progs.' to their favourite TV shows, 'Satellite' to whether they have satellite and/or cable TV at home, and 'Viewing' to whether they usually watch TV alone, with family or with friends. The prefix A or B in the group title refers to the respective school.

### Group A1, Year 10

| Name    | Sex | Home  | Parents           | TV/week | Progs.  | Satellite | Viewing                            |
|---------|-----|-------|-------------------|---------|---|-----------|------------------------------------|
| Gem     | F   | St. A | England           | 8       | Men<br>Behaving<br>Badly<br><br>X-Files<br><br>Eastenders | No        | Alone<br><br>Family<br><br>Friends |
| Lucy    | F   | St. A | Wales/<br><br>Eng | 8       | X-Files<br><br>H & A<br><br>Eastenders                    | No        | Alone<br><br>Family<br><br>Friends |
| Michael | M   | St. A | Pol/Eng           | 15      | Eastenders<br><br>X-Files<br><br>M.of Day                 | No        | Alone                              |
| Alex    | M   | St. A | England           | 15      | Eastenders<br><br>MBB<br><br>X-Files                      | No        | Family<br><br>Friends              |
| David   | M   | St. A | England           | 14      | X-Files<br><br>MBB<br><br>Simpsons                        | Yes       | Alone<br><br>Family                |
| Claire  | F   | St. A | England           | 16      | N'bours<br><br>H & A<br><br>E'enders                      | No        | Alone<br><br>Family<br><br>Friends |

### Group A2, Year 10

| Name   | Sex | Home  | Parents           | TV/week | Progs.                            | Satellite | Viewing                    |
|--------|-----|-------|-------------------|---------|-----------------------------------|-----------|----------------------------|
| Anna   | F   | St.A  | Czech/<br>England | 10      | E.R.<br>Eastenders<br>H & A       | Yes       | Alone<br>Family<br>Friends |
| Gemma  | F   | St. A | England           | 11      | Eastenders<br>H & A<br>N'bours    | No        | Alone<br>Family<br>Friends |
| Hannah | F   | St. A | England           | 10      | Friends<br>E.R.<br>Star Trek      | No        | Alone<br>Friends           |
| Andrew | M   | St. A | England           | 11      | Sport<br>Friends<br>X-Files       | No        | Alone                      |
| Jay    | M   | St. A | England           | 25      | Eastenders<br>X-Files<br>Simpsons | Yes       | Alone                      |
| Martin | M   | St. A | England           | 20      | X-Files<br>Friends<br>H & A       | No        | Family                     |

### Group A3, Year 10

| Name   | Sex | Home  | Parents                | TV/week | Progs.                             | Satellite | Viewing                    |
|--------|-----|-------|------------------------|---------|------------------------------------|-----------|----------------------------|
| Helena | F   | St. A | England                | 14      | X-Files<br>Brookside<br>TFI        | No        | Alone                      |
| Sarah  | F   | St. A | England                | 20      | -                                  | No        | Alone                      |
| Jenny  | F   | St. A | England                | 15      | X-Files<br>999<br>Neighbours       | Yes       | Family                     |
| Tom    | M   | St. A | Wales/<br>England      | 7       | X-Files<br>MBB<br>Friends          | No        | Alone<br>Family            |
| Kelvin | M   | St. A | Barbad./<br>St. Vince. | 15      | Star Trek<br>Outer Limits<br>Space | Yes       | Alone<br>Family<br>Friends |
| Bilal  | M   | St. A | Asia                   | 28      | Eastenders<br>999<br>Outer Limits  | Yes       | Family                     |

### Group A4, Year 12

| Name     | Sex | Home  | Parents             | TV/week | Progs.                             | Satellite | Viewing |
|----------|-----|-------|---------------------|---------|------------------------------------|-----------|---------|
| Aaron    | M   | St. A | England             | 18      | Friends<br>Comedy                  | Yes       | Alone   |
| Eleanor  | F   | St. A | ?                   | ?       | ?                                  | ?         | ?       |
| Tizzy    | F   | St. A | England             | 20      | Eastenders<br>Hale&Pace<br>X-Files | No        | Alone   |
| Lianne   | F   | St. A | England             | 17      | Eastenders<br>H & A<br>Neighbours  | No        | Alone   |
| Arabelle | F   | St. A | England/<br>Maurit. | 11      | Brookside<br>Eastenders<br>H & A   | No        | Alone   |



### Group A5, Year 12

| Name    | Sex | Home  | Parents            | TV/week | Progs.                                 | Satellite | Viewing         |
|---------|-----|-------|--------------------|---------|--|-----------|-----------------|
| Heather | F   | St. A | England            | 8       | E.R.<br>X-Files<br>Cartoons            | No        | Family          |
| Kirsten | F   | St. A | Wales/<br>England  | 10      | Neighbours<br>X-Files<br>Friends       | No        | Alone           |
| Alison  | F   | St. A | England            | 14      | Neighbours<br>E.R.<br>X-Files          | No        | Alone           |
| Mitali  | F   | St. A | Banglad-<br>esh    | 12      | Friends<br>X-Files<br>MBB              | No        | Alone           |
| Ben     | M   | St. A | England/<br>Neths. | 28      | Neighbours<br>CBBC<br>News             | No        | Alone           |
| Tommy   | M   | St. A | England            | 2       | Have I got...<br>T. World<br>Red Dwarf | No        | Alone<br>Family |

### Group A6, Year 13

| Name    | Sex | Home  | Parents          | TV/week | Progs.                               | Satellite | Viewing |
|---------|-----|-------|------------------|---------|--------------------------------------|-----------|---------|
| Susanna | F   | St. A | England          | 14      | Neighbours<br>H & A<br>The Bill      | Yes       | Alone   |
| Emmie   | F   | St. A | England          | 10      | Neighbours<br>H & A<br>Have I got... | No        | Family  |
| Anna    | F   | St. A | ?                | ?       | ?                                    | ?         | ?       |
| James   | M   | St. A | England          | 14      | H & A<br>Eastenders<br>X-Files       | No        | Family  |
| Simon   | M   | St. A | England          | 14      | Neighbours<br>X-Files<br>Cracker     | No        | Alone   |
| Zack    | M   | St. A | England          | 12      | X-Files<br>Have I got...<br>Cracker  | No        | Alone   |
| Seema   | F   | St. A | India/<br>Africa | 12      | Eastenders<br>The Bill<br>Neighbours | No        | Alone   |

### Group B1, Year 10

| Name    | Sex | Home       | Parents           | TV/week | Progs.                            | Satellite | Viewing         |
|---------|-----|------------|-------------------|---------|-----------------------------------|-----------|-----------------|
| Joseph  | M   | Paddington | Syria/<br>Ireland | 36      | The Bill<br>MBB<br>Eastenders     | Yes       | Alone           |
| Shamima | F   | Pimlico    | Bangladesh        | 15      | Eastenders<br>H & A<br>Neighbours | No        | Alone<br>Family |
| Jordan  | M   | Streat-ham | England           | 10      | Bottom<br>Young Ones<br>Eurotrash | No        | Alone           |
| Jack    | M   | Hackney    | England           | 7       | Bottom<br>X-Files                 | No        | Friends         |
| Andrew  | M   | Pimlico    | England           | 3       | X-Files<br>Top Gear<br>Bottom     | No        | Alone           |
| Mariam  | F   | Chelsea    | Morocco           | 5       | Eastenders<br>H & A<br>TOTP       | Yes       | Family          |

### Group B2, Year 10

| Name   | Sex | Home     | Parents             | TV/week | Progs.                                     | Satellite | Viewing                      |
|--------|-----|----------|---------------------|---------|--|-----------|------------------------------|
| Marion | F   | Waterloo | Scotland/<br>Italy  | 10      | X-Files<br>Outer Limits<br>Music           | Yes       | Family                       |
| Jemma  | F   | Pimlico  | England             | 13      | Ricky Lake<br>Blossom<br>FreshPrince       | No        | Alone<br>Family<br>Friends   |
| Nicola | F   | Dulwich  | Jamaica             | 15      | ?  | Yes       | Family                       |
| Daniel | M   | Brixton  | Jamaica/<br>England | 12      | C4 B'ball<br>Eastenders<br>Cable<br>movies | Yes       | Alone<br>Family              |
| Aodham | M   | Brixton  | Ireland/<br>England | 7       | No idea                                    | No        | Alone<br>(family<br>in room) |
| Hoshen | M   | ?        | Banglad-<br>esh     | ?       | ?  | Yes       | Alone                        |

### Group B3, Year 10

| Name    | Sex | Home       | Parents             | TV/week | Progs.                            | Satellite | Viewing                    |
|---------|-----|------------|---------------------|---------|-----------------------------------|-----------|----------------------------|
| William | M   | Pimlico    | Britain             | 20      | Cookery                           | No        | Family                     |
| Danny   | M   | Herne Hill | England             | 35      | X-Files<br>Dramas<br>Eastenders   | No        | Alone<br>Family            |
| Jo      | F   | Stockwell  | England             | 42      | Eastenders<br>H & A<br>Neighbours | No        | Family                     |
| Muna    | F   | Pimlico    | Morocco             | 35      | ?                                 | Yes       | Alone<br>Friends           |
| Aysha   | F   | Camberwell | Jamaica/<br>S.Amer. | 35      | ?                                 | Yes       | Alone<br>Family<br>Friends |
| Oscar   | M   | Camberwell | Jamaica             | 20      | Eastenders<br>Flava<br>The Bill   | No        | Alone<br>Family            |

### Group B4, Year 10

| Name    | Sex | Home       | Parents              | TV/week | Progs.                          | Satellite | Viewing           |
|---------|-----|------------|----------------------|---------|---------------------------------|-----------|-------------------|
| Natasha | F   | Peckham    | Jamaica              | Varies  | The Box<br>Eastenders<br>H & A  | Yes       | Family<br>Friends |
| Donna   | F   | Kennington | England/<br>Malaysia | Varies  | The Box<br>Eastenders           | Yes       | Friends           |
| Russell | M   | Peckham    | Trinidad             | 28      | C4 B'ball<br>Soap               | Yes       | Alone             |
| Robert  | M   | Camberwell | Scotland/<br>England | 35      | X-Files<br>Football<br>Tennis   | Yes       | Family            |
| Joe     | M   | Peckham    | England/<br>S. Afr.  | 2       | Neighbours<br>X-Files<br>News   | No        | Family            |
| Fehim   | M   | Fulham     | India                | 6       | Bugs<br>Star Trek<br>Neighbours | No        | Alone<br>Family   |

### Group B5, Year 10

| Name      | Sex | Home     | Parents            | TV/week | Progs.                            | Satellite | Viewing                    |
|-----------|-----|----------|--------------------|---------|-----------------------------------|-----------|----------------------------|
| Gabrielle | F   | Clapham  | England            | 21      | H & A<br>The Bill<br>AbFab        | No        | Family                     |
| Jodie     | F   | SE Lon   | England/<br>Switz. | 11      | Eastenders<br>Neighbours          | Yes       | Family                     |
| Karen     | F   | Pimlico  | London             | 35      | Neighbours<br>H & A<br>Friends    | No        | Alone<br>Family<br>Friends |
| Caroline  | F   | Pimlico  | England            | 11      | Neighbours<br>Eastenders<br>H & A | No        | Family                     |
| Natalie   | F   | Pimlico  | England            | 10      | Neighbours<br>H & A<br>TOTP       | Yes       | Alone<br>Friends           |
| Vicki     | F   | Victoria | England            | 9       | Neighbours<br>Eastenders<br>H & A | No        | Alone<br>Family            |

### Group B6, Year 12

| Name   | Sex | Home             | Parents            | TV/week | Progs.                          | Satellite | Viewing           |
|--------|-----|------------------|--------------------|---------|---------------------------------|-----------|-------------------|
| Peter  | M   | E. Ham           | America/<br>India  | 11      | BBC News<br>FreshPrince<br>E.R. | No        | Alone<br>Family   |
| Mary   | F   | Brixton          | Morocco            | ?       | ?                               | ?         | ?                 |
| Rowan  | F   | Brixton          | Cyprus/<br>England | 10      | News<br>Rugby<br>Comedy         | No        | Family            |
| Sara   | F   | Holland<br>Park  | Banglad-<br>esh    | ?       | ?                               | ?         | ?                 |
| Leyla  | F   | ?                | England            | ?       | ?                               | ?         | ?                 |
| Latifa | F   | Covent<br>Garden | Morocco            | 15      | Eastenders<br>News              | No        | Family<br>Friends |



**Group B7, Year 12**

| <b>Name</b> | <b>Sex</b> | <b>Home</b> | <b>Parents</b> | <b>TV/week</b> | <b>Progs.</b>                                | <b>Satellite</b> | <b>Viewing</b> |
|-------------|------------|-------------|----------------|----------------|--|------------------|----------------|
| Ruth        | F          | ?           | England?       | ?              | Neighbours<br>H & A<br>Eastenders            | ?                | ?              |
| Leah        | F          | ?           | England?       | ?              | Neighbours<br>Heartbreak<br>High<br>Murder 1 | ?                | ?              |
| Toby        | M          | ?           | England?       | ?              | TFI Friday<br>Fast Show                      | ?                | ?              |

### Summary of group composition

| Group                                    | Male      | Female    | Total number |
|--|-----------|-----------|--------------|
| A1                                       | 3         | 3         | 6            |
| A2                                       | 3         | 3         | 6            |
| A3                                       | 3         | 3         | 6            |
| A4                                       | 1         | 4         | 5            |
| A5                                       | 3         | 4         | 7            |
| A6                                       | 2         | 4         | 6            |
| B1                                       | 4         | 2         | 6            |
| B2                                       | 3         | 3         | 6            |
| B3                                       | 3         | 3         | 6            |
| B4                                       | 4         | 2         | 6            |
| B5                                       | 0         | 6         | 6            |
| B6                                       | 1         | 5         | 6            |
| B7                                       | 1         | 2         | 3            |
| <b>Total number students interviewed</b> | <b>31</b> | <b>44</b> | <b>75</b>    |

## Appendix 4: Question structure for group discussions

### Part 1

- *Talk about television first -- do you all watch TV?*
- *What are your favourite programs?*
- *Do you pay attention to the ads on TV? {why not?}*
- *How do you find watching ads? {enjoyable/not enjoyable?}*
- *What are your favourite ads? {not necessarily at the moment, whatever you can remember?}*
- *Tell me a bit about why they appeal?*
- *What, then, do you think makes a 'good' ad?*
- *What about a 'bad' ad?*
- *Do you ever find ads offensive? {Have you ever complained about one? Know where to?}*
- *Have you ever bought anything because of an ad?*
- *So what does influence you to buy something, say, clothing?*
- *How do brand names influence what you buy? {If you were to buy some trainers tomorrow, for sport or otherwise, what would influence your choice? Do brand names say sth. about the wearer? How do you feel when see someone else wearing the same gear?}*
- *How often do the characters and situations on the screen resemble you and your own lives? {are you more likely to take notice of the ad if that is the case?}*
- *So do you think that who you are influences how you watch ads?*
- *How much do you know about who makes ads?*

## Part 2

- *Do you think that, in TV advertising, non-whites are over-represented, under-represented, or it's about right?*
- *Do you think that non-white characters get the same treatment in ads as white characters? If not, how does their treatment differ?*
- *Do you think it matters how different groups are represented in ads, or in the media in general? For example, does it matter whether there are any non-white characters in ads?*

*I've got a few ads here on tape that have gained some attention, in the media and elsewhere, in relation to issues of representation in ads.*

- *Firstly, any general comments about them? Anything thought interesting?*
- *Would any of those have caught your attention if you were watching at home?*
- *Would you class any of them as good or bad ads?*
- *Would you say any of them were especially unusual?*
- *Were any of those ads aimed at you and your peers do you think? If not, who were they aimed at (say, Reebok or Lilt or Persil)?*
- *What were the advertisers trying to say about the products?*
- *Did the people shown in these ads bear any resemblance to your lives?*

*- Do you think other people would see these ads in the same way, say, your parents, or students X school? Particular values represented? Elsewhere in media/society?*

To help remind me about the discussion, could I ask you to fill in these brief questionnaires?

## Appendix 5: A 'discursive map' of secondary material based on group A1

TV - 'TOTP, same as everyone' (establishes herself as part of the group, likewise M with Tango - taste unites and divides, *Bourdieu?*)

Ads - attention contingent / claim that half ads don't give name - if he really thinks this, he has switched off well before the end, severe misread / ads for ads mentioned - up-to-date with tactics / 'Plasticene men get me to buy things' - *sophisticated* /

Entertainment - Levi's, Im Bru, Tango (weird, different) / *interactive*, ones that grab your attention & force t's on you / serialised

Bad ads - toothpaste (because boring & because '*not me who buys toothbrushes*' - product and interest not necessarily unconnected though) / *fake* - adavoiders if so / old style one person talking / MTV-esque flashing images, cf. B4 /

Male/Female - Levi for the women (*male gaze*) / *distance* (Lilets discussion, F enjoy it) / Jordan hoop x. because appeals to M and F (but *are they getting different things out of it?*) / Stereotypes, 'always the women' / M and F *attitudes to brands* needs investigating, in the display sense

Black/White - *Not bothered* whether B or W (could be +ve - B's in ads don't offend me -- or -ve, not arsed whether repd. or not) / preferences for black comedy / Cosby Show all-black -- suggests *inverse racism* accusation (but projective), cf. BILAL IN GROUP A3 and Revolution [w.'s and b.'s making the same point...]

Brands - peer opinion crucial, especially for sportswear

Influence - pay more attention if targeted (only because they attract attention - 'not me who buys the toothpaste' my parents buy the beans' - understands targeting immediately - but *not interested in non-target ads unless grabbed*) / product confusion / suggest strong sales influence ['because advrs. wouldn't do it otherwise' - *faith*] / *trials* with perfumes etc. / Lynx, liked ad, but claimed already bought - Daniel, B2 - enjoyed it because *C decs. vindicated* almost? / brand reputation / 'sports labels might improve my performance' - thought this was consciously playing along with the advrs.' intentions, but think they just bought the whole message of the advertiser (*Waldie from PRODUCER INTERVIEWS*) / irritation often = recall /

Clothing - catalogues, TV ideas and experts (agenda setting) / purchasing procs. v. diff. for clothes, because search itself is fun /

Youth - *in between age* / stereotypical representations etc. only important when they are young people - crucially aware of their *age positions* during adwatching / no resemblance to situations, 'stereotypes'

**Daily Mail** - define t's as urban kids / *unrealistic* parent-kids relations, perfection /

**Lilt** - dancing gets on nerves (nothing to do with s't or reality though, jiggling merely annoying) / stereotyping Jamaica / *offended* by lobsters gag /

**Snapple** - liked (strange, funny - altho' confusing and hard to understand voices - guilty) / confused as to why not more info on product / price reality re. purchase

**Sun Alliance** - don't believe the claims / Africa scene the only one ever mentioned, altho' Africanness not

**Reebok** - well read, altho' B&W not mentioned

**Persil** - PMA catchphrase good for recall / Linford the key name [aspirational too] / unrealistic claims as with all soap [T in A3 disagreed] / b. family good because more *real-life* [can engage with issues when raised for them] / little boy dirty again

**Budweiser** - 'association' ploy lost on them / *refs. to other ads* in talk

**Revolution** - F liked also / *Nike's existing reputation important for enjoyment* and whole brand image - same ad in Green Flashes [epitome of pisspoor shoe] would not be enjoyed / **US** has much currency already thanks to films, so can use US images and obtain same connections [sophisticated acknowl. from them?] - *ambivalent* re. appeal, like A2, due to other reality / ads as a service, telling us what life is like in US - strange *view of advg.* and its selectivity ?!

**Cantona** - enjoyed the format, subject matter not mentioned / Cantona incident oft-debated [*adtalk?*]