Gender Stereotypes in Media Advertisements

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Background & Purpose

A new era of advertisement has come through **femvertising**, advertisements which promote feminist approach to advertising. Researchers have analyzed the image of women through different frameworks along with the ideals of what beauty is. With new knowledge and trying to present a more diverse group of people in advertisement. An analysis is needed of past and modern frameworks with the identities women correlated to their hairstyles. All of the advertisements used to create the database include women and showcase a variety of hair types and styles. By examining how different hair types are portrayed we expect to find a correlation between media presentation and the continuation of gender/racial stereotypes.

From a communications and advertising perspective, the purpose of this study was:

- Analyze past literature how women's hair and representation has changed throughout the years.
- From **Goffman's advertising principles** to today, to see if any new trends have arised or not.
- Exploring how historically advertising portrays women in regards to their ethnicity and hair types.
- How femvertising has shown in print advertisement today

Methods

The study was conducted through the collection of magazine advertisements showcasing various hairstyles on women. The advertisements were gathered from US Weekly and People magazines produced from 2023. The two qualifications to determine if an advertisement was relevant to the research were: the advertisement must include a woman and the woman in the advertisement must have visible hair. The advertisements were organized into an online database, grouped by magazine brand. Those that were included in the database were examined in conjunction with Goffman's six categories of representations where women appear subordinated to men:

- **Relative size** - How social weight is expressed through the size of the person, theoretically women are portrayed smaller to portray difference in status or power in advertisement
- **Feminine touch** - women frequently touching people or objects in a ritualistic manner
- **Function ranking** - men often taking the executive role when seen collaborating in the home, in public and other spaces
- **Family scenes** - parents closer to the child of the same gender, father maintain distance
- **Ritualization of subordination** - body positing demonstrating subordination
- **Licensed withdrawal** - person in advertisement lost in thought, removed

Using qualitative data analysis, Create discussion around femvertising and awareness towards more diversity in women in advertisement

Preliminary Results

The majority of women's hair color in advertisements examined was brown. It was followed by black hair in Black women and black hair in Asian/other ethnicities.

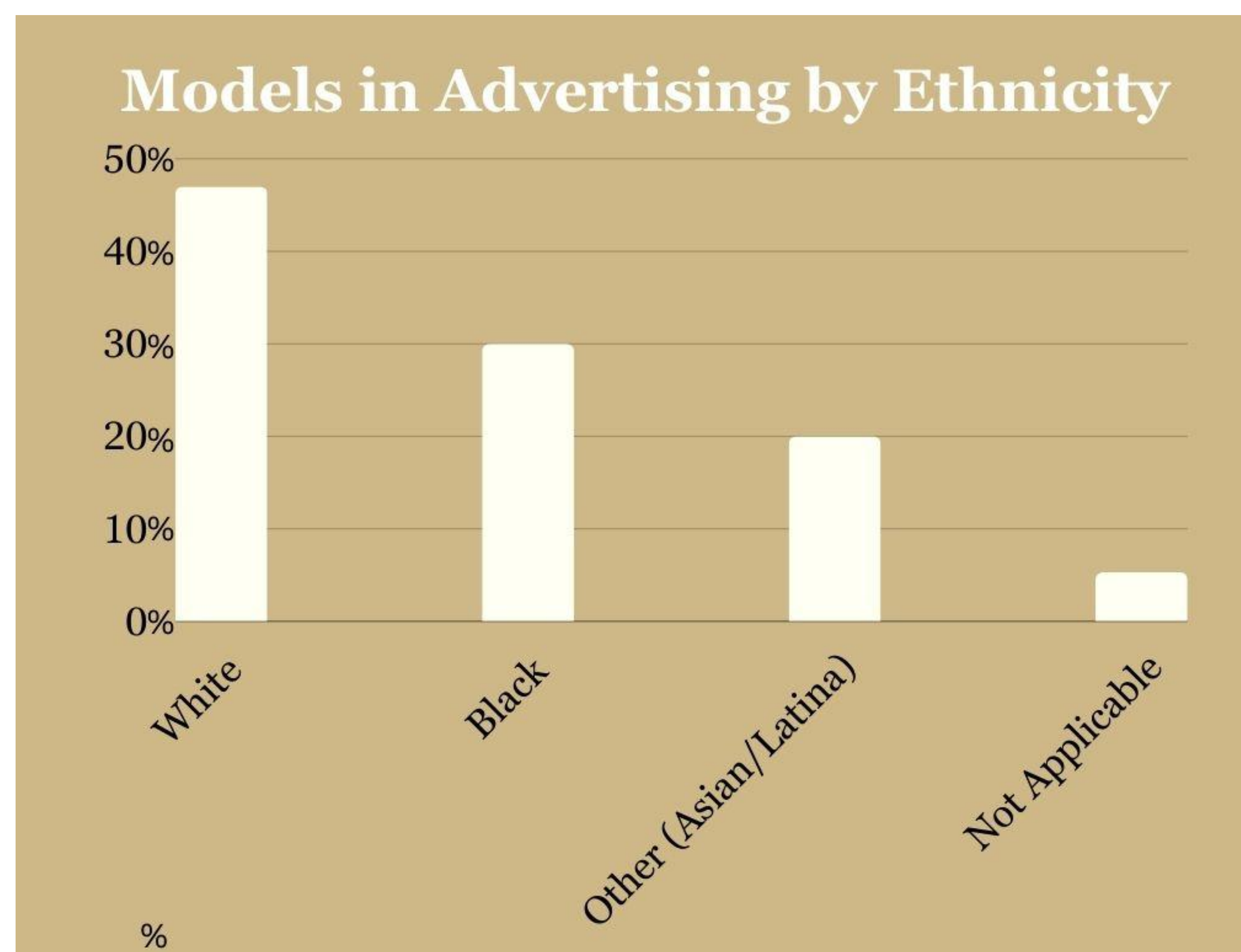**Figure 1.** People's magazine (2023)

Figure 2. Percentage of models by ethnicity in the sample

56% of white blond women were presented following Goffman's theories, the most stereotyped of all women. White brunettes were shown as the most liberated as not following the framework. Black women with natural hair were portrayed mostly in unfortunate situations and those with straight hair shown in better-off situations

Discussion

Femvertising is designed to challenge the status quo, but it needs to be analyzed if it is having the actual effect that it wants to have of embracing women and promoting feminist messages. Showing more women in general in print advertisement has a good effect towards higher levels of representation. However, analyzing how these women are portrayed:

- Goffman's gender in advertising framework is still noticeable after 40 years.
- Advertisers could analyze how the advertisement portrays women through their non-verbal attitudes, as print advertisement is mostly about body language and interactions with its surroundings.

Conclusion

There has been a more internalized view of the beauty ideal. Women's hair is malleable, so it can affect adaptive change in appearance. It shows Goffman's parameters of gendered interpretations in advertisements can still be used to analyze how women are portrayed in media. The stereotype of "dumb blonde" and other stereotypes such as the context in which black women's natural hair is "appropriate." Black women's natural hair was much more seen through the context of "low income," "working" whereas Black women with straightened hair were seen in "luxury". However, there are advancements in the terms of increase in black models within advertising and other ethnicities. Media literacy to continue with understanding how women's bodies are perceived could be done by advertisers to not fall into stereotypes while trying to do femvertising.

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References