Racial Representation in Advertising:
A Content Analysis on Alcohol Advertising during the NBA and NHL Playoffs

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Abstract

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Racial Representation and Advertising Theory: A Content Analysis on Alcohol Advertising during the NBA and NHL Playoffs

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This study is an initial attempt to investigate the relationship between alcohol advertising on television and sports programming with different racial viewership.

A content analysis on the televised alcohol advertisements that were shown during the National Basketball Association and National Hockey League playoffs was conducted in order to determine whether or not alcohol advertisements were more prevalent during sports programming with a higher Black viewership and to further dissect the roles played in those commercials by African-Americans.

It was not only concluded that there were significantly more alcohol advertisements shown during playoff games for the National Basketball Association, which had a higher Black viewership than the National Hockey League, but also that African-Americans played more important roles in those advertisements as well.
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Introduction

Understanding alcohol advertising during television programming is important because of the potential dangers alcohol consumption can cause. The TTB, which is the federal agency within the U.S. Department of Treasury that collects federal excise taxes on alcohol, has placed restrictions on alcohol advertising, but it is still a legal concept (Alcohol Beverage, 2013). Some of these restrictions include having to have specific health claims and health related statements, making sure there are no misleading or false curative therapeutic claims, and the restriction of false or misleading statements that are disparaging of a competitor's product (Alcohol Beverage, 2013).

Anderson et al.’s (2009) studies consistently suggested that exposure to commercial communications on alcohol is associated with not only the likelihood that adolescents will start to drink alcohol, but also with increased drinking amongst baseline drinkers. Moreover, Snyder et al. (2006) discovered that youth who were exposed to more alcohol advertisements on average drank more and youth in markets with more alcohol advertisements drank more as well. It is completely legal to advertise alcohol, but it is still offensive to some (Wells & Burnett, 1989).

On top of the dangers associated with alcohol advertising, Zwarun (1998, 2006) and Madden & Grube (1994) have shown that alcohol advertising is quite prevalent during sporting events. This study will be conducted to find out how, and how often, alcohol companies represent Black characters through their advertisements during the National Hockey League (NHL) and National Basketball Association (NBA) playoffs.

The NHL and NBA, while both included in the “big four” when it comes to professional sports in the United States, have completely different demographics.
According to the 2013 Racial and Gender Report Card for the NBA, Black players comprised 76.3 percent of all NBA players (Lapchick, 2013). On the other hand, the amount of NHL players with African descent is far less. There were only nine Black hockey players in the NHL in 2013 (Miller, 2013) – none of which were born in the United States. That means that for every three teams in the NHL, there is one Black player.

Thompson (2014) helps clarify the groundwork for the racial difference that is imperative for my research to take place. An analysis of the Super Bowl, NFL regular season, NBA Finals, NHL Finals, World Series, NCAA Men's Basketball Championship, MLS regular season, NCAA bowl games and PGA Tour regular season in 2013-14 showed that the NBA Finals had the highest percentage of Black viewers at 45 percent, and the NHL had the lowest percentage of Black viewers at 3 percent. The NBA Finals had a total viewership of 17.7 million people, and the NHL Stanley Cup Finals had a total viewership of 5.8 million people (Thompson, 2014). This means that if 45 percent of the NBA Finals viewership were Black, there was a total of about 7,965,000 African-Americans watching those games. Considering the study showed that only 3 percent of the 5.7 million viewers for the Stanley Cup Finals were Black, this means there were a total of about 174,000 Black viewers.

Studies have shown that alcohol advertisements on billboards are more likely to show up in areas where minorities are living (Hackbarth et al., 2001; Schooler et al., 1996), but will the same idea transfer to televised commercials? The conclusion of this study will show whether or not there is a significant difference between the frequency of
black characters shown in alcohol advertisements during the NHL and NBA playoffs. The conclusions will also show the different roles played by Black men and women in the commercials that do involve Black actors.

While there has been a plethora of prior research done on racial representation in advertising, many studies have mainly focused on the negative effects these commercials have, such as targeting our youth and connecting them to underage drinking issues (Anderson et al., 2009; Chen et al., 2005; Atkin et al., 1983). This study will look specifically into how frequently Black characters are represented in alcohol advertisements and what roles they play in those commercials during television programming with a substantially different racial viewership.

I propose this study in order to further understand how often alcohol advertising campaigns represent their product with Black characters and what roles the characters play in these ads. This study will also help us further understand how often alcohol advertisements are shown during programming with a substantially different racial viewership. The theoretical framework of this study is based on social cognitive theory, racial targeting, and overall advertising strategy.
Literature Review

Racial Targeting and Representation

A review on how Blacks have been symbolized in the past will allow a possible comparison to take place with how advertisers represent both Blacks and Whites in their commercials. This study would not be significant if only the frequency of particular races were accounted for – it is equally as important to understand the roles that these races are playing in order to understand how advertisers are attempting to portray their product to the audience.

There has been a significant amount of research on how Black men and women have been represented in different forms of media. Dill et al.'s (2005) content analysis of popular Nintendo and Sega Genesis video games found that main characters were only Black eight percent of the time. A further study showed that Blacks were indeed underrepresented in video games when compared to their population in the United States. Black characters as primary roles in video games amounted to less than 10 percent, which was a 21 percent underrepresentation compared to the amount of Blacks in the US census (Williams et al., 2009). When it came to sporting games however, the amount of Blacks increased, mainly due to the characters in the game representing real life athletes.

Williams et al. (2009) also brought up the point that a main reason for the lack of Black characters could be traced to research that discovered Blacks prefer to play as a White character because they want to play as the empowered group. This belief is important because advertisers may take a similar vision when advertising their product. For example, a beer company could very easily symbolize their beer with a luxurious
lifestyle, which would not make racial targeting a factor because they would be attempting to sell the social aspects that goes with it; however, it could also be seen as prejudice if a campaign was centered solely around rich, White men.

Research has also shown that the difference between what a White man symbolizes in comparison to a Black woman can be drastically different. “Positive, laudatory stereotypes about White men, for example, may be as persistent as pejorative stereotypes of Black women” (Seiter, 1990). Examples from television so often portray suffering children as Black and Hispanic that it has been hard for the White middle-class in the 1980s to comprehend the fact that staggering numbers of mothers and children who live in poverty are White (Seiter, 1990).

Black men and women in television advertising has increased throughout the years, but a question that arises from the research is whether their increase in appearance has also led to an increase in stereotypical roles. Throughout advertisements in general programming, Black men and women are commonly given a limited amount of roles. Some of these include the athlete, the low-wage worker and the absence of family (Bristor et al., 1995). The prominence of alcohol advertisements also has caused problems for the Black community. The abundance of alcohol ads, which were determined to be targeted toward Blacks due to their location being in neighborhoods predominantly occupied by Blacks, has led to studies proving that there is a higher crime rate and an increased chance of alcohol abuse amongst those who live in these communities (Kwate & Meyer, 2009; Alaziz, 1998).
In the late 1980s and early 1990s, television representations of Black men and women finally began to vastly rise (Gray, 1995), but does that mean that their representation has increased in commercials during the last few decades as well? Bogart (1972) showed that Blacks do indeed watch more television than Whites, a study that was reaffirmed by Hughes' (1980) conduction of a study which included the mean hours spent watching television by race. Obviously, these studies are a bit dated to rely on for this study, but the 2011 Nielsen study once again reaffirmed that Blacks do indeed watch more television than any other race (Nielsen Study, 2011).

There have been different representations of Blacks throughout fictional and nonfictional television as well. One study on the representation of Black men and women concluded that fictional Black middle-class success in television and nonfictional representations of Black, urban poverty operate intertextually in order to produce the idea that privileging individual attributes and middle-class values through displacing social factors explains Black, middle-class success (Gray, 1989). The idea of “reality” television has also sparked up a lot of debate about how minorities are represented, especially when these shows have to do with the law.

A content analysis on reality-based police shows, such as Cops, was conducted to sort out if these shows are reaffirming stereotypes and exactly how people are represented in the show. The study showed the White characters were more likely to be portrayed as police officers, and Black and Hispanic characters were more likely to be portrayed as criminal suspects (Oliver, 1994). On top of this, the police officers tended to have far
more aggressive behavior toward the criminals than vice-versa, which could inadvertently represent White privilege and power over a weaker race.

The overall concept of network news has been criticized for only focusing on negative activity in the community, but more importantly has been scrutinized for the displayed relationship between race and crime. There have been several studies done that have found evidence that there is a distorted portrayal of crime and race on local news, which reinforces the stereotype that Blacks are more likely to commit criminal behavior (Gilens, 1999; Gilliam & lyengar, 1998; Gilliam et al., 1996; Johnson et al., 1997; Oliver & Fonash, 2002; Peffley et al., 1996).

In a content analysis on the portrayal of race and crime on television network news, there were similar results to Oliver's study, which showed that Whites were more likely to appear as victims than perpetrators (Dixon et al., 2010). An interesting part about this study was that it focused more on the dearth of Blacks being represented as police officers or victims. After the research showed this to be true, it further concludes that network news does not only overrepresent Blacks in a negative light, but misrepresents them in a positive light. Black men and women are most likely going to be linked with criminality if they even appear on television at all (Valentino, 1999).

Having data showing that Blacks are still either underrepresented or represented negatively in past communication research would help us further understand the trends in commercial advertising. It would not be surprising to see that alcohol companies are under-representing Blacks in ads, especially when the programming has a predominately White audience. Another concept worth paying attention to will be to note if the roles in
which Blacks play in these commercials are similar to those stereotypical roles in past studies, or if new campaigns have found a way to integrate Blacks into roles that were more commonly played by Whites.

There has not been an abundance of prior research done on racial targeting through television, but there has been an ethical debate about targeting minorities because some view them as a vulnerable audience. Schooler et al. (1996) showed that alcohol advertisements on billboards are more likely to be shown in poorer areas with more minorities and Kreps' (2006) study says that minorities are viewed as a vulnerable audience; moreover, they are cut off from relevant health information by the digital divide and are also subject to serious disparities in health care and generally have much higher rates of morbidity and mortality because of serious health threats than the rest of the public, especially from cancers (Institute of Medicine, 1999; Kreps, 2005a, 2005b).

Appiah's (2004) analysis on the effects of ethnic identification on web browsers' attitudes toward and navigational patterns on race-targeted sites also yielded some interesting results. The study showed that only Blacks with strong ethnic identities would spend more time browsing a website and viewing each story when a site was targeted more toward Blacks than Whites. Subsequently, there appeared to be a subset of the Black population that can be reached equally well with White-targeted media as they can with Black-targeted media.

If Black men and women view a commercial depicting another Black person having a great time because of their product, they are more likely to place a positive connotation toward the advertisement; however, if they are not represented or are given a
stereotypical role, the opposite effect could be warranted. This study will help determine what roles Black men and women play in alcohol advertisements, and how often stereotypes are present throughout these ads in today's day and age.

It has been shown that alcohol advertisers attempt to target minorities with their advertising (Alaniz, 1998; Schooler et al., 1996; Moore et al., 1996; Treise et al., 1994; Altman et al., 1991). The data from this study will not only focus on the frequency Black characters appear in alcohol ads and the roles in which they play, but it will also be another study that shows how often a minority audience is shown alcohol ads compared to an audience of mainly Whites. Just because Black characters are underrepresented in commercials does not mean that alcohol companies are not attempting to target a Black audience. Having the exact number of advertisements shown during both the NBA and NHL Playoffs will allow us to answer this question.

Alcohol Advertising Strategy

Advertising strategy as a whole needs to be taken into consideration to figure out what semiotics or cultural values are common in American advertisements. In American commercials for example, it has been studied that television commercials tend to use both cultural and utilitarian views (Lin, 2001). Understanding this will make it easier to dissect commercial examples and understand exactly what views are being placed into them from the perspective of general advertising. Understanding which effects have been responded to more favorably may help gain a more general knowledge about what goes into an alcohol advertising campaign strategy. For example, advertisements which focus primarily on product qualities or send a message of legal drinking age, as opposed to
other social cues, were rated less favorably and evoked less desire to purchase the product (Chen et al., 2005).

Research on alcohol advertising on billboards has shown that alcohol advertisers will not only adjust which class they target by where the ad is located, but will also use social cues to promote positive attitudes toward drinking (Schooler et al., 1996). A Jack Daniels ad for example on the side of a Virginian highway reads “A Declaration Made With Every Pour,” and is surrounded by red, white and blue stars. The cue that this particular ad is trying to promote is that drinking Jack Daniels is patriotic and that true Americans will drink it. It is subtle additions such as six tiny red, white and blue stars, or using the word “declaration” that makes these advertisements pass off these particular messages to the audience.

Liquor companies also will endorse popular entertainers in order to further convey this message. By using these types of celebrities, companies attempt to have the name of their product make its way into popular culture. For example, having Diddy in an advertisement for Ciroc (2013) may be used to assign their product with a luxurious lifestyle.

Miller Lite ran a “man up” campaign where middle-aged men were in a middle-scale bar (Miller Lite, 2010), and Coors Lite has ran similar ads with young to middle-aged people all drinking in a common, bar setting (Coors Light, 2014). Such situations depicting every day people doing every things are the norm with beer advertisements. Moreover, in 2012, two beer companies – Anheuser-Busch and MillerCoors – cracked the top-50 in terms of spending money on advertising (The US, 2013). Some of the beers
owned by these companies include Budweiser, Busch, Miller and Coors, and all four of these have advertisements on both print and commercials that seem to target a young to middle-aged working class.

Alcohol advertising strategy has ran into many problems targeting youths and minorities, but most of the research conducted has not focused on that of television advertising. It will be interesting to see if the findings show that alcohol ads are more prominent in television programming where there are substantially more Black viewers.

There are obvious differences between billboard advertising and commercial advertising, but it would not be a surprise to see that many of the same strategies exist. Even though you cannot change the channel when viewing a billboard ad, advertising campaigns will still try to find a way to make them noticeable to the public as both are common forms of indirect marketing.

_Dangers of Alcohol Advertising_

What separates alcohol advertising from many other types of advertising is the adverse effects that the product has proven to have. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention's website lists numerous negative consequences that derive from alcohol. There are approximately 88,000 deaths each year attributable to excess alcohol consumption, about 35 percent of victims from partner violence and child maltreatment reported the offenders were under the influence of alcohol, long term risks include neurological problems, dementia, stroke, neuropathy and many types of cancer (Fact Sheets, 2014), but alcohol ads seem to be as American as apple pie.
Snyder and Blood (1992) found that alcohol advertising may have adverse effects on young adults, and while Barber et al. (1989) found that alcohol consumption could be reduced through television advertising, Mosher and Wallack (1981) determined nine years earlier that the government regulation of alcohol advertising was more interested in protecting industry profits rather than promoting the public health.

Alcohol advertising is difficult because there are so many negative aspects that go along with its activity. Advertisers need to be sure they are not encouraging an underage crowd while still assuring that those who do consume the product do so responsibility. There have been multiple advertising campaigns that have attempted to use social cognitive theory by complementing it with negative effects. The “Drink Aware” campaign for example has aimed heavily as educating people on how to drink sensibly (DrinkAware, 2014), which is rarely, if ever, focused on by alcohol advertisers. International campaigns have even taken it one step further. In South Africa for example, a controversial anti-drunk driving advertisement threatened those who do so with rape in prison (Drink-drive campaign, 2010).

There is an extensive list of studies that have been done on the relationship between alcohol advertising and its relationship to underage drinking or dangerous drinking habits (Collins et al., 2007; Atkin et al.; 1983; Smith & Foxcroft, 2009; Grube, 1993; Ellickson et al., 2005), and with so many dangers linked to alcohol consumption and alcohol advertising, the ethical nature of it in general could be questioned. The findings of this study could relay on studies such as Schooler et al.’s (2006), which
showed that alcohol companies will target poorer areas with more minorities in the community.

While it may be impossible for advertisements such as televised commercials to not be viewed by a younger audience, the problem arises when these commercials have elements making them relevant to minors. One study showed that 27 percent of kids aged 15-16 believe that alcohol advertisements are targeted toward their age group (Jones & Donovan, 2001). This strikes a serious chord because not only is it illegal, but studies have shown that those who drink underage are more likely to do something they regret, forget where they were or what they did, cause property damage, get into trouble with the police, and get hurt or injured (Wechler et al., 2002).

Not only do media alcohol portrayals influence children’s drinking through a progressive decision-making process (Austin, et al., 2006), but they also tend to link drinking with positive outcomes. “What is even more troublesome is the unavoidable conclusion that ‘lifestyle advertising' is more than simply associating the product with good times; it is promising the same good times to users of the advertised product” (Strickland, et al., 1982). It is not hard to understand why alcohol companies would want people to associate their product positively because why would someone want to buy it if they did not?

Alcohol is a commodity in social situations and many people drink in order to have a good time, but it is a huge problem that children are getting this idea and using it as a reason to begin drinking heavily underage. If children who are more aware of beer ads have more favorable beliefs toward drinking, which would influence them to drink
more as adults (Fleming et al., 2004), then we need to develop a way for these types of ads to be targeted more toward adults. The dangers of alcohol advertisements have been well documented, which makes their frequency in sports programming important to this study.

*Ethics of Advertising*

One of the central issues of this study is the ethics of advertising, as it does look into racial representation during television advertisements. As a whole, the aim of advertising is either to persuade or influence the behavior of the target audience (Hemalatha, 2013). Advertising may also come in various forms. Television commercials may be a popular form of advertising, but they can also be a sign, symbol, illustration, or message as well.

It's difficult to sum up the important of advertising ethics; however, many of the issues involved with them to translate to other aspects of the corporate world. “In today's business world, ethics is not simply a peripheral concern of executive boards or a set of supposed constraints on free enterprise. Ethics stands at the very core of our working lives and of society as a whole, defining the public image of the business community and the ways in which individual companies and people behave” (Ciulla et al., 2012).

Advertising ethics is important because within it lies the two major issues of vulnerable audiences and “truth in advertising.” Stevie Watson et. al's (2010) two experimental studies examining African Americans' perceptions and attitudes toward light-skinned and dark-skinned African American female models in print advertisements
yielded conclusions which showed a difference in viewership amongst sex. In the study, African American males evaluated light-skinned African American female models higher on physical attractiveness and more favorably than dark-skinned African American models. African American women, however, had the opposite results – they evaluated dark-skinned African American female models higher on physical attractiveness than light-skinned African American female models.

It isn't just a difference of perception by sex that lays the foundation for advertising ethics. Another issue involves how advertisements are aimed at children. Joelle Gilmore and Amy Jordan's (2012) study on race and stereotypes in food and beverage advertising aimed at children showed that African American characters were significantly more likely to be featured in commercials for sandwiches and soft than White characters; moreover, African American characters were also significantly less likely to be shown eating in their own home and more likely to be shown eating inside a fast food restaurant. The disparities in how African Americans are represented in advertisements for the food and beverage industry could likely translate over into alcohol advertisements as well.

This study will look into exactly how African Americans are represented in alcohol advertisements and the results could say a lot about the direction of advertising ethics as a whole. With multiple studies (Alaniz & Wilkes, 1998; Kwate & Meyer, 2009; Altman et al., 1991; Unger et al., 1995) findings links between African Americans and dangerous drinking habits due to exposure to alcohol advertisements, a double-edged sword is created in terms of their representation. Taylor et al.’s (1995) study discovered
that African Americans are underrepresented in magazine advertising, which is a cry for concern; however, alcohol advertisers may want to have them be underrepresented in their advertisements because previous studies have shown the dangers that are linked to their representation. So the two options for alcohol advertisers are either to have African Americans be underrepresented in their commercials, which could be perceived as being more favorable toward Whites, or they can represent African Americans equally and have to deal with the repercussions of dangerous drinking behaviors.

_African-American Stereotypes in Commercials_

Stereotypes are commonly defined as simply actions or characteristics of a particular group; however, they may also be viewed as false overgeneralizations made by socially dominant groups about socially oppressed groups (Gorham, 1999). They have been used in many different forms of media, are commonly viewed as negative, and many people actually deny any realism of the stereotypes that do circulate through society (Gorham, 1999). On top of stereotypes, there is also a fine line between stereotyping and racism – there are also two types of racism: overt racism and inferential racism.

Overt racism commonly involves explicit expression of racist attitudes. Some examples of overt racism would be that African Americans are less intelligent than Whites, or that African Americans are more likely to be criminals. Stuart Hall (2000) defines overt racism as “those many occasionas when open and favourable coverage is given to arguments, positions and spokespersons who are in the business of elaborating an openly racist argument or advancing a racist policy or view.” There are many
occasions of overt racism that exist in today's society and are most commonly associated with the beliefs of right-wing extremist arguments (Hall, 2000).

Inferential racism is a little more subtle and are more or less unspoken attitudes that have become the norm our society. Some examples of inferential racism would be that all African americans are good athletes, Asians are good at math, and that all Whites are bad dancers. Hall (2000) defines inferential racism as “those apparently naturalised representations of events and situations relating to race, whether 'factual' or 'fictional', which have racist premisses and propositions inscribed in them as a set of unquestioned assumptions. Of the two types of racism, overt racism can be politically dangerous as well as more socially offensive (Hall, 2000).

The way African-Americans have been represented in commercial advertising has been a point of concern for decades. Research from the 1970s and 1980s documented that print and broadcast media did indeed produce overt stereotypes of women and Blacks (Dines, 1995; Kellner, 1995). On top of this there has been research that assessed claims that advertising has segmented audiences by race that might reinforce social differences (Wilson & Gutierrez, 1995, Turow, 1997). As mentioned, many alcohol advertisements take place in bars, but having a Black bartender serve White guests could be seen as racial privilege and redact from having a Black audience feel that the product is being targeted toward them.

There are many different ways that the the media can communicate a racial prejudice to the public. Some of these ways are complete omission, stereotyping, and showing Blacks in a disproportionate number of low status roles (Bristor et al., 1995;
Duckitt, 1992). Bristor et al. (1990) did a study that showed out of 270 television commercials that took place in prime time television slots on network television (ABC, NBC, CBS and Fox), 208 portrayed humans and of those 208 only 94 of them employed one of more African-American characters, and when African-Americans were present their screen presence was often limited in comparison to White actors. During the NBA and NHL Playoffs, NBC has contractual rights to the NHL whereas ABC has contractual rights to the NBA.

The way Black characters appear on television is what is ultimately crucial to how they might be represented in commercials. Some studies have shown that Black male characters are shown as buffoons, menacing and unruly youths, or as hypermasculine thugs and that Black female characters are typically shown as exotic and sexually available (Gray, 1995; Hooks, 1992; Marable, 1996). Even if these characters were based off of advertisements that had a relationship between Black representation and population estimates for Blacks in that region, as suggested by Coltrane & Messineo (2000), these findings are imperative to this study, which is trying to determine if commercial advertisers are trying to identify with African-Americans during sports programming.

Black men on television may have gained symbolic access to benefits of masculinity, mainly through sport, but they are also commonly shown as aggressive and constrained by stereotyped images from experiencing reciprocal romance, gentleness, or domestic fulfillment (Coltrane & Messineo, 2000). These commercials could indeed result to the reasoning for subtle prejudice against African-Americans by exaggerating their cultural differences from Whites. “The history of media representations is not a
progression from stereotypes to truth, but a struggle to constantly articulate the meanings of people’s identities and the ways they can live those cultural categories” (Grossberg et al., 1998).

The portrayals of Blacks in contemporary television advertising has improved, but Bristor et al. (1995) argued that the potentially positive effects of including more African-Americans in advertisements are often overshadowed by subtle racist elements that suggest White superiority. Dates (1990) concluded that "Black media stereotypes are not the natural, much less harmless, products of an idealized popular culture; rather, they are more commonly socially constructed images that are selective, partial, one-dimensional and distorted in their portrayal of African-Americans." The three most common appearances of Black men and women shown in advertising is the stereotypical role of the African-American athlete, the use of African-American celebrities to endorse products, and the role of a fast food or other low wage worker often helping a White customer (Bristor et al. 1995). An interesting aspect of the study also showed that while Blacks are often shown helping Whites, there were no instances of White low wage workers helping Blacks.

Another common portrayal for African-Americans in commercials is for them to be used as the “token” character. This means that while they are present in the advertisement, their role is limited and they are often seen as a fill-in for a minor role where they are often the only African-American member of a crowd of White characters. Considering that tokenism is especially apparent in crowd-scenes (Bristor et al., 1995), this could be a theme that consistently appears in advertisements for alcohol companies.
because, as I mentioned prior, many of them take place in bars or other social situations that are related to drinking.

Understanding prior stereotypes used for African-Americans in advertising, and understanding the many ways that can be seen as prejudiced toward them will be crucial to the coding of this study. While one of the focuses will solely be on the frequency Black men and women are shown in alcohol advertisements during particular sports programming, noting their roles in the commercials is going to be just as important. Three of the main roles to be aware of are the complete omission of African-Americans, tokenism, and the marginalization of their roles.

*Alcohol Use: Social Cognitive Theory*

Focusing on how behavior is influenced, social learning theory proposes a process that is involved in both conforming and deviant behavior (Akers & Lee, 1996). Social learning theory has been used to refer to social behavioristic approaches (Bandura, 1977; Jessor and Jessor, 1977; Rotter, 1982) and prior studies have been performed to process behavioral modeling reinforcement for alcohol use. An example of social learning pertains to video game violence. Anderson and Bushman (2001) discovered significant correlations between people playing violent games and having aggressive behaviors in real life. In reference to alcohol advertising, studies have shown that a main issue with alcohol advertising is they can target an underage audience, leading to a potential increase in binge drinking and other dangerous activity (Anderson et al., 2009; Snyder et al., 2006; Ellickson et al., 2005).
Social learning and selective attention all boil down to the idea of social cognitive theory, which states that people construct outcome expectations from observing conditional relations between environmental events in the world around them and the outcomes given actions produce (Bandura, 1986); furthermore, human learning in mass communication is aimed at learning how to gain and use knowledge for future use (Bandura, 2001). The theory relates to this study because alcohol advertisers may attempt to use commercials in order to project their product in a positive manner, which could result in teaching the audience the joys that come along with their product.

There has been an abundance of research relating social learning theory to alcohol abuse, such as Abrams & Niaura's (1987) discovery that people who have abusive tendencies with alcohol are different from healthy drinkers in their ability to cope with the demands of everyday life and their view on alcohol. This relates to the many studies that have shown that people are more likely to use alcohol if they have a positive attitude toward it due to them using it as a coping mechanism. Many people may feel that alcohol is helping them handle the real world, which gives them a positive feeling over it, but social learning theory shows that it is actually quite the opposite.

There have been many explanations as to what exactly it is that causes people to drink alcohol as well. Peer and parental influence have been found to be variables in teenage drinking behavior (Akers et al., 1979), but more importantly to this particular study is how those consuming media develop an opinion on the effects of alcohol. Research has constantly found that those holding tolerant or positive attitudes toward alcohol are far more likely to use it when compared to those who hold negative attitudes.
about it (Fejer and Smart, 1973; Johnston, 1973; Jessor et al., 1973; Calhoun, 1974; Kendall, 1976). For alcohol advertisers, this is crucial because they must find a way to have their ads create a positive reflection upon those viewing them.

A tangent from social cognitive theory is incidental learning theory, which derived from the more general social learning theory by psychologist Albert Bandura in the 1960s and looks to assess the effects of the visual media that present examples of people acting out social roles and other types of behavior (DeFleur, 2010). If the research conducted displays that alcohol advertisers are attempting to showcase Black characters more during sports programming with a higher Black viewership than the theory states they will unwittingly acquire knowledge about the product, hopefully leading them to purchasing and consuming it (Bandura, 1991).

People acquire their standards for certain products through modeling, judging events and personal standards for regulating their motivation and conduct (Bandura, 1986; Rosenthal & Zimmerman, 1978). Black men and women may have a heavier motivation to buy a particular product if they are able to relate themselves to the models displayed in commercials, which would lead to an increase in their representation in advertisements during sporting events with a higher Black viewership. Kay and Bandura (1999) showed how social cognitive theory differentiates between gender, and this study could show that alcohol advertisers are attempting to differentiate an audience's cognitive abilities based on race and/or gender.

When it comes to morality, there are many processes that control moral reactions from inhumane behavior (Bandura, 1991, 1999). Alcohol advertisers may associate their
commercials with positive influences so that the consumer's moral justification is present; people will not regularly participate in reprehensible conduct until they have justified themselves to the morality of their actions and moral justification is widely used to support self-serving (Bandura, 2001). Alcohol companies would want to shine light on the positivity of their product and steer away from any negative imagery when it comes to motivational effects because others gain desired outcomes, such as attractive women or having lots of money, by viewing and can assume expectancies that function as positive incentives (Bandura, 2001).

Based on the discussion above, I propose the following research questions:

*RQ 1: What will the representation of Black characters in alcohol advertisements be when comparing the NBA and NHL Playoffs?*

*RQ 2: Will there be a significant difference in the roles of Black characters in alcohol advertisements when comparing the NBA and NHL Playoffs?*

*RQ 3: Will there be a significant difference in the frequency of alcohol advertisements when comparing the NBA and NHL Playoffs?*
Method

A content analysis was ran that showed whether or not there was a significant difference between racial representation and alcohol advertising during sports programming. The data displayed three main findings: how frequently Black characters were displayed in alcohol advertisements during the NBA and NHL playoffs, the different roles played by Black characters in these commercials, and how often alcohol advertisements in general are shown during the NBA and NHL playoffs. The data provides further research on how Black characters are represented in advertising and also determined if advertising strategists may be utilizing social cognitive theory in order to promote their product to a particular television audience. Finally, the data showed if there were more alcohol ads being shown to an audience during NBA programming, which has a substantially more amount of minority viewers in comparison to the NHL.

Zwarun (2006) found that the amount of alcohol advertisements in the form of television commercials had gone up when compared to years prior. The study found that for every hour of major sports programming, there were 2.7 minutes of commercials from alcohol companies. With each televised NBA and NHL Playoff game controlling a three hour gap in programming, unless lengthened due to overtime or some other factor within gameplay, this would mean that there should be approximately 7.1 minutes of alcohol-related commercials per three hour broadcast. Generalizing that each commercial takes up a 30-second slot, this would mean there are on average close to 14 advertisements from alcohol companies for each game; however, the collected data in this study showed
that alcohol ads during the NBA and NHL Playoffs were not as prominent as they were in Zwarun's (2006) study.

In order to make sure that the sample size was large enough to provide adequate data, the analysis consisted of 20 NHL and NBA Playoff games from the first tip-off in basketball or puck drop in hockey until the game had officially ended.

The sample was defined as a random cluster sample. In order to ensure national viewership, analyzed NBA Playoff games were only games that were broadcasted on either TNT or ABC, similarly, analyzed NHL Playoff games were only games that were broadcasted on NBC Sports or NBC. In order to ensure that the sample was random, every possible date for a playoff game was placed into an online generator. From there, 25 dates were selected. This was done twice – once for each sport. The five extra dates were there as backup in case one of the dates selected ended up not having a game (weather cancellation, scheduling change, a game-7 where the series was already determined, etc.)

If there was more than one NBA or NHL game being broadcast on the selected date, and that date was chosen, all games on that date were placed in an online generator and one was selected at random to determine which game from that date was analyzed. This ensured that the commercials analyzed were from a randomly selected sample. The reasoning for this method is to ensure that non-probability sampling does not take place because these types of techniques cannot be used to infer from the sample to the general population. All alcohol commercials – including beer, liquor and wine – that were aired during these games were coded.
Once the sample was discovered, the 20 NBA and NHL Playoff games were recorded via DVR and viewed from the time the game officially started (tip-off or puck drop) until the game officially ended. Commercials that run after the allotted time slot were analyzed if the game was yet to come to an end due to overtime. Only alcohol advertisements in the form of television commercials were analyzed, meaning any other type of ad that was showed during the games were not included.

After all the data was collected, the percentage of Black characters – which was found by dividing the amount of Black characters by the amount of total characters in alcohol ads – was determined for each game. Then, an independent-sample t-test was conducted using the percentage of Black characters as the dependent variable and sport as the independent variable in order to determine if there was a significant difference in the representation of Black characters when comparing the NHL and NBA Playoffs.

In order to determine the second research question, a table was constructed that showed how Blacks were represented during both sports in the commercials in which they were not omitted. Each Black character apparent in the commercial was defined under one of four possible roles, and coded as such. The four possible roles were extras, workers, tokens, and leads. The definitions of these roles were based on Bristor et al.'s (1995) study and were defined from least significant to most significant as:

- **Extra**: If Black men or women were present in the commercial but had no speaking role, no correlation to the overall advertisement and were viewed as “background talent,” they were coded as an extra.
• **Workers**: If Black men or women were present in the commercial in the role of an employee, such as bartender, server, dancer, etc., they were coded as a worker.

• **Token**: If Black men or women were present in the advertisement, but their role was limited and they were seen as a fill-in for a minor role where they were the only Black member of a crowd of White characters, they were coded as a token character.

• **Lead**: If a Black man or woman was present in the advertisement, had a dominant speaking role, and/or was considered a main role in the commercial, they were coded as a lead.

After all the data was collected pertaining to the roles that were played by each Black character in every alcohol advertisement during the NBA and NHL Playoffs, four independent-sample t-tests were ran in order to see if there was a significant difference in the roles played by Black characters in alcohol ads airing during the two sports. Each independent-sample t-test used one of the defined roles – lead, token, worker, and extra – as the dependent variable and sport as the independent variable. On top of this, any stereotypical role played by a Black character – no matter the importance of the role they played – was noted.

In order to determine the third research question, every alcohol advertisement shown during both the NBA and NHL playoffs was coded and an independent sample t-test was conducted in order to determine if there was a significant difference between the amount of alcohol advertisements shown during the NBA playoffs in comparison to the NHL playoffs.
The data collected as a whole allows for further understanding on how Black characters identify with the audience, whether or not racial stereotype is commonly used when an alcohol advertising campaign does decide to use Blacks in their commercials, and if there was a significant difference in the amount of alcohol advertisements shown between programming with two sets of dramatically differing racial viewership.
Findings/Results

The 20 games that were coded for the NHL Playoffs were randomly selected between April 16, 2014 and June 13, 2014, while the 20 games that were coded for the NBA Playoffs were randomly selected between April 19, 2014 and June 15, 2014. Table 1 shows the amount of commercials that were coded between the 40 games coded.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Non-Alcohol Commercials</th>
<th>Alcohol Commercials</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NBA</td>
<td>1637</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>1817</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NHL</td>
<td>1582</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>1734</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By looking at Table 1, one can see that the NBA had 83 more commercials than the NHL, which averages out to 4.15 more commercials per game. The figure also shows that the NBA Playoffs, while having more total commercials, also had 28 more alcohol commercials than the NHL Playoffs, which averages out to 1.4 more alcohol advertisements per game. An independent sample t-test was ran in order to discover if there was a significant difference in the amount of alcohol commercials shown during the NBA Playoffs and the NHL Playoffs.

After running the test, the results showed that there was a significant difference in the amount of alcohol commercials during the NBA Playoffs (M=9.00, SD=1.26) and the amount of alcohol commercials during the NHL Playoffs (M=7.60, SD=1.47) conditions; t(38)=3.243, p =0.002. These results suggest that there are substantially more alcohol
advertisements being shown during the NBA Playoff than the NHL Playoffs, which allows us to infer that there are more alcohol ads being shown to an audience with a higher Black viewership.

*Racial Representation*

Now that it has been determined that there are significantly more alcohol advertisements shown during the NBA Playoffs, further research will help determine how Black characters were represented in commercials during both the NBA and NHL Playoffs. Table 2 shows how many alcohol commercials used human actors in their advertisements.

**Table 2: Commercials Containing Human Actors vs. Commercials Containing no Human Actors**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No Human Actors</th>
<th>Human Actors</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NBA</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NHL</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In order to determine the importance of Black characters in alcohol advertisements between the NBA and NHL Playoffs, the commercials that did not involve any actors were taken out of consideration. Alcohol advertisements during the NBA Playoffs contained human actors 76.6% percent of the time (138/180), whereas the NHL Playoffs contained human actors 80.9% of the time (123/152). Table 3 and Chart 1 below shows the black representation in every alcohol commercial that contained human actors between the programming for the two sports.
Table 3: Comparing Amount of Black Representation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>With Black Representation</th>
<th>Without Black Representation</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NBA</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NHL</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chart 1: A Visual Representation of Racial Representation

By looking at the table, it was determined that alcohol commercials aired during the NHL Playoffs contained one or more Black character 49.6% of the time (61/123), while alcohol commercials airing during the NBA Playoffs contained one of more Black character 80.4% of the time. The graph gives a more visual representation of the differences that the data showed between Black representation during alcohol ads between the two sports. Table 4 and Chart 2 helps further dissect the information and shows how many Black characters were shown during the NBA and NHL Playoffs.
Table 4: Comparing the Amount of Black and Non-Black Characters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No. of Black Characters</th>
<th>No. of Non-Black Characters</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NBA</td>
<td>291</td>
<td>2152</td>
<td>2443</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NHL</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>1493</td>
<td>1598</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chart 2: A Visual Representation on the Amount of Black and Non-Black Characters

Table 4 shows that while there were more Black characters shown during the NBA Playoffs when compared to the NHL Playoffs, there were also far more total characters used in the alcohol advertisements. In fact, alcohol advertisements that contained human characters during the NHL Playoffs had an average of 12.99 total actors (1598/123), while alcohol advertisements that contained human characters during the
NBA Playoffs had an average of 17.70 total actors (2443/138). The chart gives a better visual perspective on the ratio between Black actors and non-Black actors, as well as how many more total actors and Black actors were used in alcohol advertisements during the NBA Playoffs.

In order to determine if there was a significant difference in the representation of Black characters when comparing the NHL and NBA Playoffs, an independent-sample t-test was conducted using the percentage of Black characters as the dependent variable. This way, the results will show if there is any difference in percentage representation between the playoffs of the two sports with different racial viewership.

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare percentage representation of Black characters in alcohol advertisements during the NBA and NHL Playoffs. There was a significant difference in the scores for percentage representation of Black characters in the NBA Playoffs (M=12.29, SD=3.65) and NHL Playoffs (M=6.71, SD=3.34); t(38)=5.046, p = 0.000. These results show that alcohol advertisements shown during the NBA Playoffs, which have a higher Black viewership, were more likely to contain Black characters than alcohol commercials shown during the NBA Playoffs, which have a more predominant non-Black viewership.

**Gender Representation**

The collected data will also help look at how often Black men and women were used in commercials when comparing the NBA and NHL Playoffs. Table 5 and Chart 3 show the distribution of Black men and women in alcohol ads shown between the two sports.
Table 5: Gender Breakdown of Black Characters in Alcohol Advertisements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Black Men</th>
<th>Black Women</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NBA</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>291</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NHL</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chart 3: A Visual Representation of the Gender Breakdown for Black Characters in Alcohol Advertisements

The table shows that there 136 more Black men and 50 more Black women showed in alcohol commercials that aired during the NBA Playoffs compared to the NHL Playoffs, and the chart gives a better visual representation of the differences; however, when trying to find a significant difference between gender representation, the percentage representation was used. Two independent-sample t-tests were conducted, one for Black men and one for Black women, to compare percentage representation of gender in alcohol advertisements during the NBA and NHL Playoffs.
For Black men, there was not a significant difference in the scores for percentage representation in alcohol ads for the NBA Playoffs (M=70.59, SD=6.65) and NHL Playoffs (M=65.52, SD=18.85); t(37)=1.529, p = 0.27. For Black women, there also was not a significant difference in the scores for percentage representation in alcohol ads for the NBA Playoffs (M=29.41, SD=6.65) and NHL Playoffs (M=34.48, SD=18.85); t(37)=-.713, p = 0.27. Chart 4 below gives a better look at how similar the gender percentage representation was in alcohol advertisements during the NBA and NHL Playoffs.

![Chart 4: A Percentage Representation of Gender Breakdown](chart.png)

These results suggest that there is no significant difference in gender representation when it comes to Black males and females in alcohol advertisements when comparing two sports with different racial viewership. While there is no denying that Black men and women appear more in alcohol commercials that aired during the NBA.
Playoffs in comparison to the NHL Playoffs, Chart 4 helps give a visual representation of how similar their proportionate representation was in alcohol ads during the programming for the two different sports.

*Role Representation*

The first thing that should be noted from the findings for role representation pertain to gender representation as well. First, the four roles that Black characters were coded by, from most important to least important, were lead, token, worker, and extra; however, there was never a case where a Black character coded as the lead, token, or worker was a woman. For alcohol ads that aired during both the NBA and NHL Playoffs, Black women were *only* used as extras.

There was one case where a Black woman perhaps could have been coded as a token character because she was the only Black woman in a group of friends, but she was hardly noticeable and only on camera temporarily in comparison to most of the other women, thus deeming her an extra. Had any part of the commercial been geared down her participation, she would have been coded as a token character. This philosophy went for every Black character that was coded, and there were cases where this was the case for Black men as well.

Moreover, there was *never* a case where a commercial contained any combination of the most important three roles. There were zero cases of an alcohol ad containing *both* a Black lead and token or worker, and zero cases of an alcohol ad containing *both* a Black token and Black worker; however, there were several cases of there being a Black lead
and Black extras, a Black token character and Black extras, and a Black worker and Black extras.

Table 6 below shows how every Black character was coded between both the NBA and NHL Playoffs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Lead</th>
<th>Token</th>
<th>Worker</th>
<th>Extra</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NBA</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NHL</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By looking at the table, the data shows that alcohol commercials during the NBA Playoffs used a Black character as the lead character more than three times as often as the NHL Playoffs, token character and worker more than twice as often, and the amount of extras was almost three times as often; however, an independent-sample t-test is needed in order to determine whether or not there is a significant difference in role representation.

Four separate independent-sample t-tests were ran using sport (NBA and NHL) as the independent variable, and role (lead, token, worker, extra) as the dependent variable to see if there was a significant difference in the roles of Black characters in alcohol advertisements when comparing the NBA and NHL Playoffs.
For the lead role, there was a significant difference in the scores for representation in alcohol ads for the NBA Playoffs (M=0.8, SD=0.894) and NHL Playoffs (M=0.263, SD=0.562); t(37)=2.23, p = 0.032.

For the token role, there was a significant difference in the scores for representation in alcohol ads for the NBA Playoffs (M=1.2, SD=0.768) and NHL Playoffs (M=0.53, SD=0.697); t(37)=2.865, p=0.007.

For the worker role, there was no significant difference in the scores for representation in alcohol ads for the NBA Playoffs (M=0.60, SD=0.754) and NHL Playoffs (M=0.263, SD=0.56); t(37)=1.575, p = 0.124.

For the extra role, there was a significant difference in the scores for representation in alcohol ads for the NBA Playoffs (M=11.95, SD=4.651) and NHL Playoffs (M=4.47, SD=2.568); t(37)=6.168, p=0.000.

What these tests suggest is that there was a significant difference in the representation of Black characters in three of the four roles when comparing the NBA and NHL Playoffs. To put it simply, if an alcohol advertisement played during the NBA Playoffs, there is a significantly greater chance that a Black character will play the role of the lead, token, or extra; however, there is no significant difference in the worker role – this may mainly be because of how few Black characters were coded as workers. Of the 396 Black characters who were coded in alcohol commercials during the NBA and NHL Playoffs, only 17 times were they used in a worker role (only 4.3% of the time).
Chart 5 gives a better visualization of how the lead, token, and worker roles were more prominent during alcohol advertisements that took place during the NBA Playoffs in comparison to the NHL Playoffs. In all three instances, there were more than twice as
many occurrences of each of the three roles in alcohol advertisements that took place during the NBA Playoffs. The data from Chart 6 shows the prominence of the extra role. For both samples, Black characters were coded as an extra more than 80 percent of the time.

Table 7 and Chart 7 give other perspectives on the two larger roles that were deemed significantly different in terms of how often Black characters were used as that particular role.

**Table 7: A Breakdown of the Lead Role vs. Token Role**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Lead</th>
<th>Token</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NHL</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>4.07%</td>
<td>8.13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NBA</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>11.59%</td>
<td>17.39%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Chart 7: A Visual Representation of the Lead Role vs. Token Role**
The data shows how often the two most important roles that were coded were given to Black characters in alcohol commercials that had human actors and that aired during the NBA and NHL Playoffs. As the table shows, when human characters were present, alcohol ads that aired during the NHL Playoffs only used a Black character as its lead character five times out of 123 commercials, and had a Black character as the token character 10 times out of 123 commercials. Alcohol ads, which contained human actors, that played during the NBA Playoffs on the other hand, used a Black character as the lead 16 times out of 138 commercials, and a token character 24 times out of 138 commercials.

81.8% of the Black characters coded in commercials airing during both sports were extras (324/396), and Table 8 helps give a better breakdown as to how much more often they were used in commercials that aired during the NBA Playoffs than the NHL Playoffs.

Table 8: An In Depth Look at the Extra Role

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No. of Extras</th>
<th>Extras per Alcohol Ad with Human Actors</th>
<th>Extras Per Alcohol Ad Containing Black Actors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NBA</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>1.73</td>
<td>2.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NHL</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>1.39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8 helps give a better understanding of how often Black characters appeared as extras in both alcohol commercials that used human actors and alcohol commercials in which Black characters were represented in some form. Alcohol ads during the NBA Playoffs that had Black representation had almost one more Black extra per commercial
with Black representation, which helps show that Black characters were not just used for more important roles in alcohol ads, but also had a far greater quantity of the lesser role as well.
Discussion

The main contribution of this study to advertising research lies in seeing how alcohol advertisers may be targeting Black audiences and portraying Black characters in their commercials. The results provide information about the differences in alcohol advertising when comparing two similar types of programming that have different racial viewership – one predominantly White and one that is more predominantly Black. It allows the study of racial representation on television and advertising to be discussed more thoroughly, and gives background for the audience to make their own conclusions on how Black characters are represented. The results also provide more background on the frequency of alcohol advertisements being shown on sports programming.

The results that were developed from 332 alcohol commercials showed that there is a significant difference in the percentage representation of Black characters in alcohol advertisements shown during the NBA Playoffs when compared to the NHL Playoffs. With the racial viewership differing between the two sports, the study aimed to further understand patterns in alcohol commercials during sports programming; these findings reaffirmed some of the findings from earlier studies that advertisements in general programming gave Black men and women a limited amount of roles, which included the athlete, low-wage worker, and the absence of family (Bristor et al., 1995).

Targeting Audience Neighborhoods

The finalized data also showed the frequencies of alcohol commercials during the NBA and NHL Playoffs. The reason for testing this was because the viewership of these two events was drastically different when it came to race. To reiterate the findings of
Thompson (2014), out of the Super Bowl, NFL regular season, NBA Finals, NHL Finals, World Series, NCAA Men's Basketball Championship, MLS Regular Season, NCAA bowl games, and PGA Tour regular season, the NBA Finals had the highest percentage of Black viewership at 45 percent, whereas the NHL Finals had the lowest Black viewership at just 3 percent. After running an independent-sample t-test using the amount of alcohol commercials as the dependent variable, and the sport as the independent variable, the results showed that there were significantly more alcohol advertisements shown during the NBA Playoffs than the NHL Playoffs.

Theoretically, the results to this test are similar to the findings of Hackbarth et al. (2001) and Schooler et al. (1996), where it was demonstrated that alcohol advertisements on billboards were more likely to show up in areas where minorities are living. Furthermore, Alaniz (1998) found that alcohol availability and advertising are disproportionately concentrated in Black and Hispanic areas, which also goes along with these findings that television programming with a higher amount of Black viewers has substantially more alcohol commercials when compared to television programming with a very low Black viewership percentage.

Many studies have been done in the past that have found that alcohol companies choose to target the Black community, and while perhaps not as aggressive, these findings reiterate the same findings. Hacker (1987) says that overall, Blacks consume less alcohol per capita than Whites; however, beer, wine and liquor manufacturers seek to maximize sales of their products to Blacks, even though there are public health and safety problems associated with alcoholic products.
One of the reasons why alcohol advertisements target their advertisements toward the Black community could be because they have a greater exposure to the media. Bogart (1972) and Hughes (1980) both found that Blacks watch more television than whites, and while those findings might seem a bit dated, a 2013 Nielsen study showed that Blacks not only watch more television than any other race, but they also make more shopping trips, purchase more ethnic beauty and grooming products, read more financial magazines, and spend more than twice the time at personal hosted websites than any other group (Resilient, Receptive, 2013). With the Black community directing so much of their time toward different media outlets, it is a possibility that is a reason for there being more alcohol commercials airing during a time slot with a higher black viewership.

Alcohol has also been adapted into certain parts of Black culture, which could be part of the reason for alcohol advertisers wanting to target the Black community. Looking at the hip hop community, Notorious B.I.G was telling his listeners that he was “sippin' on booze in the House of Blues” in his hit song “Going Back to Cali,” which hit as high as 26 on the Billboard Top 100 back in 1998 (Ramirez, 2014). Even nowadays, rappers and other hip hop artists consistently produce material that pertains to drinking, which could have alcohol advertisers taking note.

Advertising and Target Audience

With a significantly higher amount of Black characters being represented on programming with a higher Black viewership, social cognitive theory plays a big role. Bandura (1986) discovered that people construct outcome expectations from observing conditional relations between events in the world around them and the outcomes given
actions produce. If someone is watching sports programming, they are likely going to be subjected to alcohol commercials – the exception being if they are watching from some sort of recording device and fast forward through them – which, according to Bandura’s (1986) findings, means that they could create some sort of connection with the product being shown.

So, if a Black audience is more likely to imitate a Black character on television, then social cognitive theory, which can set up a behavioral model reinforcing alcohol use, can be used to explain the patterns that have developed (Bandura, 1977; Jessor and Jesser, 1977; Rotter, 1982). Social cognitive theory states that people learning in mass communication aims at learning how to gain and use knowledge for future use (Bandura, 2001), so in theory, members of a Black audience would be likely to gain the knowledge given to them by Black characters in alcohol advertisements. In this study, there were significantly more Black characters in alcohol advertisements that aired during the NBA Playoffs, which gives the Black audience more opportunities to gain from in comparison to watching the NHL Playoffs.

Many of the alcohol advertisements coded in research attempted to draw out some type of situation, or expectation, of what happens when purchasing or using their product. A Corona Light commercial for example includes a Black man drinking with all white friends, but there is one scene where he lifts his beer up and everyone follows him. It is as if the commercial is showing that if you drink this product, you will become the leader in your group of friends and will also be a life of the party.
As far as race relevant models are concerned, there was an abundance of commercials that were led by athletes themselves, but seemingly more so during the NBA Playoffs. For example, a common ad during the NBA Playoffs was a Kia ad that had Blake Griffin as the role character. Another commercial that played frequently during both sports' programming had Kevin Durant as the lead for a Sprint ad, where a White teenager begs his family to allow Durant to join his “framily plan.” There was statistical evidence that showed that there were significantly more Black characters used in alcohol commercials during the NBA Playoffs than the NHL Playoffs; the significant result showed that the findings from the sample could potentially be generalized to the population.

Some alcohol advertisers only commercialized their product on either the NBA or NHL Playoffs. If a company is associated with one racial group or another, it makes sense that they would only advertise during programming with a predominant audience of that race. Hennessy, for example, is a brand of liquor that is commonly represented by Hip-Hop artists and other influential members of the Black community, so it was no surprise when their commercials used a Black character for the lead role, or involved a lot of Black characters in their commercials. “Hennessy and black people have a special relationship. We love Henny and Henny loves us back. They are major contributors to the Thurgood Marshall Scholarship fund, the Tuskegee Institute, and the National Urban League. They even made a limited edition bottle for Obama’s inauguration and gave the proceeds to charity” (Butler, 2013, p. 2).
There were no Hennessy commercials during the NHL Playoffs, but there were some during the NBA Playoffs. Lin (2001) stated that American commercials tend to use both cultural and utilitarian views, which helps understand why a company like Hennessy would choose to target an audience with a higher Black representation. Stereotypes have been linked in social psychology to being effortless or having automatic social cognition when recognized (Greenwald & Benaji, 1995). When it comes to Hennessy, which is cognac, it starting becoming associated with the Black community after it began to appear in rap lyrics – the cognac industry was suffering from an image populated by geriatrics – and after Busta Rhymes and P. Diddy’s hit “Pass the Courvoisier,” sales of the brand jumped 30 percent (Mitenbuler, 2013).

Stereotypes are important because while everyone that we encounter in our everyday lives has some sort of back story that created it, alcohol advertisers can use these stereotypes as a way to target a particular audience. Hennessy may be a stereotypical type of liquor for the Black community to buy, but that doesn’t mean that the makers of it shouldn’t take advantage of an advertising opportunity where 45 percent of the viewing audience is Black. Stereotypes can be negative or positive, but they can also be a reason for racial targeting. The data in this study showed that Hennessy bought advertising space in the programming with a substantially larger Black audience, which could further explain the connection between stereotypes and racial targeting.

Role Representation and Advertising

The results of the study showed that there was a significant difference in the representation of Black characters in three of the four roles: lead, token, and extra. There
was not a significant difference in the representation of Black characters in the worker role. What these findings suggest is that when Black characters were present in an alcohol advertisement during the NBA Playoffs, they were more likely to be used in the lead role, token role, or extra role than in the NHL Playoffs. As for workers, there was not a significant difference; the reason for this may just be that the role was barely utilized at all. There were 396 Black characters coded throughout the study, and only 17 times was the character coded as a worker, which is only 4.3% of the time. In a way, this is a good sign, because the worker role could be seen as a lesser rank than the extra role to some accounts.

One of the three stereotypical Black roles that were given, according to Bristor et al. (1995), was the low-wage worker. Considering that this role was only used 4.3% of the time in the data collected for this study, it could indicate that the stereotype has faded since the study took place 19 years before these new statistics were discovered. When the Black characters were coded as workers, it was rarely a stereotypical situation where one Black bartender was serving multiple white patrons. In another ad from Hennessy, which aired only during the NBA Playoffs, a Black photographer was used as one of the workers; however, there were also many White photographers. So, it is impossible to say that the role was chosen because they wanted the photographer, or worker, to be represented by a Black man.

On top of this, the workers in the commercials were rarely a part of the plot or idea surrounding the particular advertisement. When the Black characters were coded as workers, they were usually in the background or somewhere away from where the action
was happening. In a way, the worker role was synonymous with the extra role, because while noticeable in the ad, there was hardly enough information given during the commercial that would provide evidence as a demeaning position. When this study was being designed, it was hypothesized that the collected data would affirm prior research (Bristor et al., 1995) and there would be many Black characters used as bartenders or servers, commonly servicing a White crowd; however, the data ended up revealing that the worker role was the least used role out of the four possibilities, and when it was used, it wasn’t in a demeaning or stereotypical fashion.

Stereotyping: Racial

As far as how Black characters have been represented in television commercials, it seems to only be building off of Gary's (1995) study that showed television representation of Blacks had begun to vastly rise. It was not just Black athletes being utilized in television programming, but Black celebrities as well; however, sometimes these ads flirted with stereotype. A Capital One commercial that commonly played during the NBA Playoffs featured Samuel L. Jackson discussing the benefits of the cash back silver card, but the entire time he is holding a basketball, eventually alley-hooping it to an unidentifiable Black character for a slam dunk. The question has to be asked, why was Samuel L. Jackson chosen to play this role – would it have been a different concept had a White actor been chosen? There was a noticeable difference in the amount of Black characters represented in commercials during the NBA Playoffs, and there was some flirting with racial stereotypes.
In a Southern Comfort ad, which aired during both the NBA and NHL Playoffs, there was only one character in the entire commercial. The commercial was a Black man, likely in his late-30s or early-40s, who dances for the entire length of the commercial. In the 15 second spot, there is almost zero connection between the man dancing and the brand, until the very end where they show him holding a glass with a Southern Comfort label, and a flag coming out of the glass that reads “Whatever’s Comfortable.”

In this case, even though a Black character was used as the lead character, the actions the character is doing makes it a stereotypical case. The connection between Blacks and dancing may date back to mid-1800s, when performer T.D. Rice would use blackface and imitate an old, crippled, black man dressed in rags dancing in the street (Engle, 1978). From there, other performers would imitate the act, and, at a time, a law prohibited Black people from dancing, which led to them developing a shuffling dance in which their feet never touched the ground (Green, 1999). The connection between Black men and women and dancing evolved over time, and the methods often represented them as “shuffling and drawling, cracking and dancing, wisecracking and high stepping” buffoons. (Engle, 1978; Green, 1999, p. 3).

The token Black character is almost a stereotype in itself, and personal judgment will determine the level of negative attention it should draw, but using a Black character in a lead role and in stereotypical fashion was something that the data of this study exposed.
Gender Representation: Role and Stereotyping

Perhaps the biggest ethical issue that came about with the 396 coded Black characters throughout the study had to do with gender. Out of the 396 Black characters coded, 120 were women, and women were only used as extras. Levine et al. (1999) discussed how there were issues with women being used as sexual objects for advertising, and while Wolin (2003) said that advertisements are moving toward a less stereotypical stance on stereotypical portrayals of women in advertisements, Eisend (2010) says that these types of portrayals are still prevalent in today's society. But, what about when they are hardly noticed at all?

There have been studies that have found a correlation between the frequency of alcohol advertisements and how sexist ads may increase violence against women (Woodruff, 1996), and studies that have associated exposure to alcohol advertisements with abusive drinking habits in women (Kwate & Meyer, 2009), but this study showed that when Black women are in alcohol advertisements they are shown in a very minor, and unimportant role. If Black women were given more important roles in alcohol ads, it could be detrimental considering the findings of Kwate & Meyer's (2009) study, but it could also be domineering and have an important impact on women's equality in advertising.

While Black women weren’t used in domineering roles, the frequency of their appearance almost exactly mirrors the viewership percentage between males and females during NBA and NHL programming. As mentioned earlier, 120 of the 396 Black characters were women, which is 30.3 percent, Thompson’s (2014) data showed that
women accounted for 30 percent of the demographic for the 2012-13 NBA regular season, and 32 percent of the demographic for the 2012-13 NHL regular season. While Thompson’s (2014) data is during the regular season, and the data of this study took place during the playoffs, it’s difficult to fathom that the gender demographics between the two would be that much different.

When it comes to how women were represented in alcohol commercials during the NBA and NHL playoffs, the most demeaning aspect is that they were used solely in the extras role. White women were given significant roles in alcohol ads, but Black women were commonly left in the background and without a speaking or important role. When looking at the gender viewership differences between the NBA and NHL, it showed that their appearance in alcohol ads is almost identical to their viewership percentage, but the roles they play in the ads in which they appear show that Black women are inferior to Black men.
Implications

While there have been studies that discovered more commercials for alcohol products appear during sports events than for any other beverage (Madded & Grube, 1994), the results of this study show that there is an association between Black representation in alcohol advertisements and sports programming with a higher Black viewership. For any other product, this likely wouldn’t be an issue, but with the potential dangers of alcohol consumption, especially when underage, there lies an ethical concern on whether or not something should be done to monitor how often alcohol advertisements are shown. The connection between exposure to alcohol ads and underage consumption is another aspect to this study’s findings that can’t be ignored (Collins et al., 2007).

There is a certain power that advertisers hold when determining where they want to air their content, and the results of this study showed that not only are there more alcohol ads being shown on sports programming with a significantly higher Black audience, but also a significantly higher amount of Black characters are used within those advertisements. Not only did Thompson’s (2014) demographics report that the NBA regular season had a much greater Black viewership in comparison to the NHL regular season, but there was also a disparity on income. The viewership of the professional basketball had, at average, a lower household income, which has shown that they are more vulnerable to racial targeting and exposure to alcohol advertisements (Moore et al., 1996).

This study brings up the double-edged sword that is Black representation in alcohol advertisements. On one hand, it is positive having Black characters highly
represented in advertising because it means that we have made improvement from an advertising world that used to be even more predominantly White; however, having a high amount of Black characters in alcohol advertisements would mean greater exposure of the Black community being linked to alcohol consumption. The results from the alcohol advertisements shown during NBA and NHL programming showed that when Black characters are shown in ads, they’re given a minuscule role, which may be the medium of the double-edged sword.

Television hasn’t been the only place where alcohol advertisers have tended to appeal to the Black community. Hackbarth et al.’s (1995) content analysis on billboards in Chicago showed that both the actual number and percentage of alcohol billboards were much greater in Black and Hispanic neighborhoods than in white areas of the city. Furthermore, alcohol corporations have targeted ethnic communities by becoming experts in using cultural and historical artifacts, as well as Black entertainers, for their advertisements (Alaniz & Wilkes, 1998). The data from this study has similar findings – that alcohol advertisers are using representatives of the Black community for their ads in order to compel to the niche market.

The discovery that there are significantly more alcohol advertisements being shown to an audience with a greater Black viewership only adds to the numerous concerns over it taking place in other forms of media. Previous research has demonstrated that minority populations are targeted through alcohol advertisements (Alaniz, 1998; Schooler et al., 1996), but there is likely no chance that the NBA, NHL, or any other major sports organization ever decides to part ways with alcohol advertisers because they
are common sponsors and likely help generate millions of dollars for whichever association each year.

For example, Coors Light has been the main sponsor of the NHL’s Stadium Series, which is a series of four outdoor games, since its inception into the league in 2014. The outdoor games bring in greater television ratings than an average NHL game, which means that both the alcohol advertiser and the NHL win in the long run. In 2011, the NHL received a new beer deal with MillerCoors in the United States and Molson Coors in Canada worth nearly $400 million over seven years, which was the biggest corporate sponsorship in NHL history (Sandomir, 2011). With that amount of money pouring into the pockets of the higher-ups in professional sports, it’d be almost impossible for them to ever agree to strike alcohol companies as sponsors.

As new media advances, advisers are going to find new ways to target their audience in a number of different ways — not just racially. For social media pages, having to put in information about yourself could be an automatic way for advertisers to understand your interests, which would in turn allow them to place related products in those spaces. Facebook and Twitter both already have featured advertisements, which appear on the home pages for all users, but there are more specific strategies being used as well. For example, putting into your bio that you’re affiliated with a fraternity or sorority can easy lead to your home page being bombarded with ads trying to get you to buy clothing with the affiliated Greek letters on them.

In the future, advertisers will likely look away from general advertising in order to have a more specialized take on targeted advertising. In 2009, the Network Advertising
Initiative conducted a study on target advertising and the results show proof that target advertising is more effective than “run of network” advertising. Target advertising secured an average of 2.7 times more revenue per ad as non-targeted advertising and was twice as effective at converting users who click on the ads into buyers (Beales, 2010).

The way internet content makes a profit has changed through the last decade, and no longer are popular websites and services making the majority of their profit through charging customers, but by being increasingly funded through advertisers (Beales, 2010).

With target advertising improving, this could easily lead to a spike in racial targeting as well; however, this may not be perceived as an issue ethically. Target advertising has likely been successful because it benefits both the consumer and the advertiser. Target advertising means that the ads displayed for the consumer will likely be more useful to them, which is better than having to wade through ads with no relevance to the consumer’s interests; moreover, the advertiser doesn’t have to worry about the money they’re paying for their ads being wasted because they know the preferences of the consumer will match the product’s attributes (Iyer et al., 2005).

With the education of the Black population steadily rising in the United States, advertisers may have to think up new tactics in order to appeal to a smarter, more highly-educated audience. From 1993-2012, the amount of African Americans enrolled in college went from 897,000 to 1.7 million – almost a 90 percent increase – and are in turn earning more degrees (Krogstad, 2014).

With African American’s becoming more educated, advertisers won’t be able to use basic tactics to trick them into buying their product. The targeted population will
become less vulnerable as they become more educated, which could lead to alcohol advertisers targeting their product toward a particular race no longer being an ethical issue; however, the placement of these ads is something that would remain a problem. Targeted advertising is advancement in communication, but there are still low-income areas that will suffer from being exposed to advertisements of a harmful product. The Black community may be becoming more educated as a whole, but low-income living areas are always going to be filled with the same level of people, economically. Unless low-income areas stop becoming dominated by minorities, alcohol advertisers will be testing ethical boundaries by continuing to advertise in those areas.

Targeted advertising is leaning advertisers more toward things like browsing history and online tendencies as opposed to race, which is a move in the right direction; however, that does not mean there are not still ethical issues within this movement. Alcohol advertising may need to be even more regulated online than it is with other mediums because they can pick and place where their ads are and know exactly the type of person who is looking at them. There are numerous websites that are targeted toward kids in their late teens, but would likely not be against advertising alcoholic products if it meant they were earning more money. As mentioned earlier, website's profits are coming more from advertisers and less from user-based fees in order to access content.

Hopefully a more educated Black community means that their youth will be more educated toward the dangers that have been linked toward exposure to alcohol advertisements, but it will always be problematic when a vulnerable audience is targeted – these are the instances that need to be closely monitored. For example, in July 2014,
World Wrestling Entertainment was met with heavy scrutiny after using kid-centric characters in order to market Twisted Tea – a hard ice tea with a five percent alcohol content – to the viewing audience during a segment of Monday Night Raw (Scherer, 2014). Alcohol advertisers will likely continue to use targeted advertising, and as the Black community becomes more educated, racial targeting will become less of a serious issue, but targeting toward children, especially minority children, will have to be continually monitored to make sure they are not vulnerable to developing certain drinking habits that are linked to viewing exposure of alcohol ads.
Limitations and Future Research

Limitations

This study did bring about some interesting findings, but there were also some limitations on the data that was collected – the first being the difficulty in coding every actor in a commercial correctly. In some of the alcohol advertisements coded, there were hundreds of people. Whether it was caused by a bird’s eye view, or a scene of a concert, there was always a gray area in exactly which people to code. The commercial was replayed several times – anywhere from three to 10 times – and the amount of people that you could tell for sure whether they were Black or non-Black were coded. If the only thing you could see was the top of their head, or a shadow over their arm, for example, they were excluded from the coding process. This meant that characters in the background who were blurry, or a crowd of people at a concert, were not coded. While this means that every person in every alcohol advertisement was not included in the study, the consistent nature of deciding how many people to code between both the NBA and NHL Playoffs allowed for an accurate depiction of racial tendencies among alcohol commercials – the focus was solely on distinguishable characters.

On top of this, a weakness in this study may be the subtle subjectivity of the researcher on deciding not only the amount of people to code, but the exact role played by a specific Black character. For example, the role of token character and extra was disputed a few times. If it was determined that the character made no contribution to the commercial itself, and there was never a focusing point on any of their actions, then the character was deemed an extra; however, if there were multiple shots of the person
interacting with the main group of people used in the commercial or some sort of focus on the character itself, then that character would be deemed a token character. Once again, while the coding process may have been a little subjective, the consistency of the researcher and ability to watch the commercials an unlimited amount of times to make a direct decision allowed for maximum accuracy.

As the researcher, it was impossible to put a bold line between some of the coding marks, but by being consistent throughout the coding of all 40 games in the study, the totals are as accurate as possible. The one aspect of this study that cannot be disputed is the exact amount of alcohol commercials that were shown because it was a strict yes or no option, this same philosophy goes toward whether or not there was black representation in a commercial. Despite the subjectivity involved in this study, the final data was quite convincing, which would not be changed if there were one or two minor hiccups in the coding process. With the final data showing that there were 277 percent more Black characters in alcohol advertisements that aired during the NBA Playoffs in comparison to alcohol advertisements during the NHL Playoffs, the research speaks pretty loudly for itself.

The limitations within the sample were predictable while this study was being drafted; however, the way in which alcohol commercials were discovered, and then coded, would only be incorrect if human error were involved. The commercial breaks were never fast forwarded through and then paused when a clue regarding an alcohol ad appeared. In fact, every commercial was coded, both alcohol and non-alcohol, in order to make sure that every ad was witnessed. Considering alcohol ads were either 15, 30, or 60
seconds long, it would take a fair amount of negligence on the researchers part to bypass an alcohol ad, which gives some strength to the final count.

**Future Research**

In the future, there will likely be an upward continuation of Black characters in all forms of commercials, which includes alcohol commercials, but hopefully further research will help further dissect the exact reasoning for the ways of alcohol advertisers. Future studies could stem off from alcohol commercializing and see if the same studies found here apply to another industry, such as car manufacturers or fast food joints. If it was found that commercial advertising as a whole does not have a racial preference, then it could be determined that alcohol advertisers stand out, but if it was shown that commercial advertising as a whole used more Black characters during predominately Black television, then alcohol advertisers would just be another blade of grass on the field.

Further research could also determine if there was a difference between beer and liquor commercials when it came to race. In this study, both types of commercials were filtered under alcohol, and a vast majority of the commercials shown were beer commercials. If a study could be done that took a high amount of beer commercials during programming with both predominately White and predominately Black audiences, and compared it to the same amount of liquor commercials under the same circumstances, the findings would allow us to gain more knowledge on the difference between the beer and liquor advertising industries.
Television programming is not the only type of media that can have a significantly different racial viewership. Further research could help determine whether or not alcohol advertisers are taking to other forms of media that are targeted toward the Black community. There are many different magazines and websites that have a different racial viewership, so a content analysis on alcohol ads that appear in both of those forms could help further generate information on how alcohol corporations are attempting to target the Black community.

Another way to further advance studies of how the Black community responds to commercials would be to do a few focus groups that pitted the high-educated against the low-educated. With the amount of degrees earned by African Americans continuing to rise as time moves forward, it would be interesting to see how views from a highly-educated background differed from those of a lower-educated background. By showing their responses from different alcohol advertisements, some of which could contain mostly White characters and others mostly Black characters, then a possible correlation between income and racial appearance in ads could be made. Another interesting portion of the study could see if any racial clues were discovered by the different groups. Furthermore, a similar study could take place the two groups being separated by income levels as opposed to level of education.

It’s impossible to say that race was the direct reason for there being more alcohol ads during programming that contained a higher Black viewership because the same could be said for a poorer audience. Further research could reach out to different forms of media and attempt to determine whether alcohol ads are not only using racial targeting,
but also using different methods in order to target the poor. With new innovations happening every year, and the internet developing thousands of websites per year that heavily rely on advertisers for income, it would be interesting to see if similar patterns from this study carried over to the internet.
Conclusion

The debate on the connection between race and sports has been going on for decades, and while there are still steps to be taken, we’ve come a long way as a society from when memorable racial breaking moments like Jackie Robinson taking the field for the first time were running headlines rampant. The direction of where the NBA and NHL head racially is still yet to be determined, and while it would be nice to think that the NHL will someday become more diverse, the factors that contribute to hockey’s population don’t make it seem very plausible. The NHL isn’t a league consisting of mostly White players because it has racial issues, but because most of the league consists of upper-class players from Canada and Europe, which statistically puts the Black population outside of the demographics.

The 2011 census showed that only 2.9 percent of the population in Canada is Black, and taking into consideration that over half of the NHL is Canadian, it makes sense why there are so few Black NHL players (NHS Profile, 2011). The NBA on the other hand is dominated by American-born players, and one of the reasons basketball is a far more popular sport for Black youths is because it is inexpensive, which gives children in low-income areas a chance to play. Contrary to a particular scene in *D2: The Mighty Ducks*, American ghettos aren’t filled with Black kids playing street hockey, but playing basketball. It’s simple why the player demographics are so different, basketball is openly available to Black children and hockey is not.

With disparaging differences in the racial demographics of the players, it’s no surprise that the racial viewership is just as shifted, but is that a problem? Is Michael
Jordan or Wayne Gretzky held in any different light because one is Black and one is White? The answer is no – they’re simply known as the best to ever play their particular sport. The issue does not lie within race, but a lack of understanding two complex sports. Hockey and basketball are both complicated, and if you didn’t grow up following the sport or playing it, it’s difficult to fully understand the complexities by the time you’re an adult. Would a Black NHL superstar perhaps help hockey get more attention from the Black community? Many people believe so, but P.K. Subban, who is Black, just signed a contract in July of 2014 that will make him the highest paid defenseman in the NHL (Dadoun, 2014), and it’s still unlikely the racial viewership will be adjusted.

Hockey and basketball are two sports that are culturally connected with a particular race, and that shouldn’t be looked at as a problem as long as one sport isn’t keeping another race out. It’s not just these two sports that have to deal with it, either. When running back Toby Gerhart came into the National Football League, he was consistently asked about whether being White would affect him being a tailback (Silver, 2010), which is a position dominated by African-Americans. Race is completely irrelevant when it comes to how well you can play a particular position, and while it’s an issue in sports that may be consistently improving, it will likely never be perfected.

As far as alcohol advertising is concerned, the amount of ads that appeared in the study shouldn’t be concerning. Watching sports and drinking alcohol are two activities that have been connected for decades, and with both professional sporting associations and alcohol corporations benefitting from each other, it’s very unlikely that we will ever see alcohol ads being banned during sporting events. With all the dangers that have been
discovered by drinking alcohol and all the warning labels that are forced to be placed on products, it’s nearly impossible to point solely at the advertisers and advertisements themselves and say they’re creating the problem.

Sure, it’s unsettling that there have been connections to alcohol advertisements and under age drinking, but there are many other factors that need to help make sure the negative action doesn’t take place. Families need to take responsibilities for their children and make sure that they aren’t swayed by what they’re exposed to on an everyday basis. It wouldn’t hurt for cities to implement laws that alcohol advertisements can’t be placed in particular areas, but if the alcohol companies are helping boost the local economy, it’s a difficult idea to present. Alcohol advertisements during sports programming are not going to go away, and it’s unlikely that they’ll even be reduced because of how often they are a large sponsor, which means other measures need to be taken to make sure that the adverse effects from these ads don’t happen.

One of the main ideas to take away from this study is that while Black characters were far more prominent in alcohol ads that aired during the NBA Playoffs, the lack of lead Black characters should be a bit concerning. Out of the hundreds of alcohol ads that aired during this particular sample, only a handful decided to use a Black character as the lead character for the ad, which doesn’t say a whole lot for the improving state of racial equality in commercials. Sure, other types of commercials had Black characters in the lead role, but it was almost always a famous celebrity or an athlete. The amount of how many more no-name White leads there were in comparison to Black leads was astonishing.
Alcohol advertisers may continue to focus their commercials on competing against another brand as opposed to getting consumers to drink, which would be a positive direction for them to head in terms of what it could mean for society. With drinking comes risk, but hopefully there will be even more added laws that require alcohol ads to involve the dangers in using their product. It’d be relieving to see an alcohol brand take a firm stance on an issue like drunk driving, and while they would still likely be promoting their product in some way, it could still have some positive effects. The sensitivity toward alcohol ads is understandable, but it’s not like the product is illegal – it just needs to be taken under a controlled environment by a responsible consumer.

This study was created in order to take a deeper look into alcohol advertising and the similarities and differences there would be when comparing two sports with very different demographics – both player and viewership – and the results yielded will hopefully allow us to further understand the patterns of alcohol advertising in 2014. There will always be some sort of tension between race and sports, just like there will always be some sort of connection between consuming alcohol and viewing sports, and the overall reasoning for this study wasn’t to create some sort of solution that will dissipate the problems of alcohol advertising, but to help us further understand the problems that we are facing.
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