

# Building the Bridge Between Advertising and Social Change

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## Introduction

The Internet has increased the media's presence in the lives of Americans by way of social media and video streaming websites. As Americans continue to access endless streams of media content, they are also constantly inundated with advertisements. Whether they are tucked away on the side of a webpage, embedded in newsfeeds, or unavoidable interruptions before video clips, advertisements have become significant in the everyday lives of Americans. Not only are they significant in frequency of appearance, but more importantly, as products of media, they possess meaningful cultural value. Scholar, Douglas Kellner rightfully argues that media and advertising provide the tools for us to forge our identities; our notions of gender, class, ethnicity and race, nationality, sexuality, and of 'us' and 'them.' Media images help shape our view of the world and our deepest values...and how to conform to the dominant system of norms, values, practices, and institutions"<sup>1</sup>(Kellner, 7). Due to the significant roles that media and advertising play in individuals identity formation and worldviews, it is necessary to consider the role that ads play in reproducing or maintaining hegemony. Utilizing James Lull's definition of hegemony as "power or dominance that one social group has over others"<sup>2</sup> (Lull, 33), scholars have argued that advertisers, employed in an industry motivated by profit and once labeled as, "hidden persuaders," have worked in favor of maintaining hegemony and the dominant ideology. (For the purposes of this paper, the dominant group is considered as being comprised of White, middle to upper class men who would like to maintain a

capitalist based, patriarchal society and hegemony.) Historically, media corporations and advertising agencies have engaged in exclusive employment decisions by hiring mostly White, middle to upper-class males to fill executive positions. The business sector also has a history of being dominated by White men. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that corporations utilize the media as "tools to perpetuate their power, wealth and status"<sup>3</sup> (Lull, 33). However, despite the instinct to conclude that media corporations, belonging to and controlled by the dominant group, use their power to reproduce hegemony, recent advertisements challenge this assumption.

Advertisers have been forced to produce ads that speak to a broad audience or target frequently neglected groups of consumers. Increasingly, advertisers in the U.S. aim to target minorities and people of color who have experienced a history of misrepresentation or a lack of representation in advertisements and the entertainment industry. Historically, advertisers have encoded dominant meanings within ads with the hope that viewers decode the meanings and construct a dominant-hegemonic position of the ads<sup>4</sup> (Hall, 101). Advertisements encoded with dominant meanings tend to target White consumers and feature White actors. However, recent advertisements that feature people of color reveal that advertisers have begun to insert meanings in ads that are less straightforward. In this way, scholars should consider the potential that media corporations, traditionally regarded as working in favor of hegemony, can in fact, produce work that is counter-hegemonic and can be in service of subordinate groups.

Two ads that display this potential are the "Just Checking" and "Gracie" television ads for Cheerios cereal. Both ads feature a biracial family: a White mother, Black father, and mixed, young daughter. The ads' representation of a multiracial family can be regarded as a visual challenge to hegemony. However, closer analysis of this representation and of the other possible interpretations of the ad challenges the extent to which the ads can be considered as counter-hegemonic. An ad that features a biracial couple is counter-hegemonic but that classification is complicated by the fact that the couple never

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<sup>1</sup> Douglas Kellner, "Cultural Studies, Multiculturalism, and Media Culture," *Gender, Race, And Class In Media*, ed. Gail Dines and Jean M. Humez (California: Sage, 2011) 7.

<sup>2</sup> James Lull, "Hegemony," *Gender, Race, And Class In Media*, ed. Gail Dines and Jean M. Humez (California: Sage, 2011) 33.

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<sup>3</sup> Lull, 33.

<sup>4</sup> Stuart Hall, "Encoding, Decoding," 1977: 101.

appears together in the same frame. Despite these complications, from the ad analysis in this paper, there emerges the opportunity to form a bridge between the goals of the advertising industry and the work towards social change that is done within the social sciences.

### **Ad Analysis**

In order to analyze the extent to which the ads can be considered as counter-hegemonic, it is necessary to identify the denotative (or manifest) and connotative (or latent) signs within the ads. General Mills hired the advertising agency, Saatchi and Saatchi to produce the first ad, “Just Checking<sup>5</sup>.” The ad aired on television in 2013 and was uploaded on General Mills’ YouTube page the following day. The ad begins with the camera focused on a kitchen table where a White woman is seated. A young girl with a mixed complexion walks up to the table and places down a box of Cheerios before she checks in with her mother: “Dad told me that Cheerios is good for your heart, is that true?” Reading off the back of the Cheerios box, the mother replies, “Says here that Cheerios has whole grain oats that can help remove some cholesterol and that’s heart healthy.” The daughter smirks, grabs the Cheerios box, and runs out of the kitchen. In the next scene, the camera is focused on a Black man waking up on a couch in the living room. There is a large pile of Cheerios placed on top of the left side of his chest. As he wakes up, with a confused expression on his face, he calls out, “Jan?” A few piano notes play as the screen is replaced with the word, “Love,” in the same font style and with the same yellow background associated with the Cheerios brand.

The denotative signs of the kitchen table, mother, and little girl all have connotative meanings associated with families. The Cheerios box may signify a healthy breakfast cereal for young children. The Cheerios brand itself is often associated as a family oriented and classic American brand<sup>6</sup>. The mother’s confirmation that Cheerios is “heart healthy” hints at the potential

goal of the advertisers to target African-American consumers. Although the brand has a history of advertising the health benefits of eating Cheerios, African-Americans, in particular, have a high risk of heart disease and high blood pressure<sup>7</sup>. Saatchi and Saatchi’s strategy to target African-American consumers may have been executed by placing emphasis on the cereal as “heart healthy” along with the representation of a Black father. However, the scene of the young daughter, just checking in to confirm her father’s knowledge of Cheerios as “heart healthy” and her placement of Cheerios over his heart, work to connote meanings associated with love and family. The focus on the “family love narrative” and the health benefits of Cheerios make for a positive representation of an interracial family. The representation of an interracial family and the fact that the representation focuses on the love within the family, challenges traditional ads that feature predominantly all White families, all Black families, or ads that feature people of color but not in a positive light or portraying a loving family. In this way, the “Just Checking” ad can be classified as counter-hegemonic and powerful for people of color. In fact, many people of color praised the ad when it aired on television. Consumers who identified as “mixed” expressed gratitude over the fact that the ad was made; one commenter wrote “Many thanks for reflecting what my family looked like.”<sup>8</sup> In this way, the ad’s challenge against the lack of representation of interracial families was powerful for people who identify as “mixed.”

The second ad, “Gracie<sup>9</sup>,” aired during the 2014 Super Bowl. The ad began with Gracie and her father sitting across from each other at the same kitchen table seen in the “Just Checking” ad. There is a Cheerios box, milk jug, and banana in between them and they each have a bowl and spoon in front of them. Gracie’s father points to individual Cheerios as he explains, “Hey, Gracie. You know

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<sup>7</sup> “African-Americans and Heart Disease, Stroke,” American Heart Association, July 2015, 9 Nov. 2016  
[http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/Conditions/More/MyHeartandStrokeNews/African-Americans-and-Heart-Disease-Stroke\\_UCM\\_444863\\_Article.jsp#.WHICCWnuKkg](http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/Conditions/More/MyHeartandStrokeNews/African-Americans-and-Heart-Disease-Stroke_UCM_444863_Article.jsp#.WHICCWnuKkg)

<sup>8</sup> Braden Goyette, “Cheerios Commercial Featuring Mixed Raced Family Gets Racist Backlash,” The Huffington Post, 31 May 2015, 9 Nov. 2016  
[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/05/31/cheerios-commercial-racist-backlash\\_n\\_3363507.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/05/31/cheerios-commercial-racist-backlash_n_3363507.html)

<sup>9</sup> “Gracie,”  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QLvW77foVN4>

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<sup>5</sup> “Just Checking,”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yOmXF7Lxow>

<sup>6</sup> Robert Klara, “Why 74-Year-Old Cheerios Is Still America’s No. 1 Cereal,” Ad Week, 9 Sept. 2015, 9 Nov. 2016

<http://www.adweek.com/news/advertising-branding/why-74-year-old-cheerios-still-america-s-no-1-cereal-166715>.

how our family has daddy and mommy...” Gracie points out another Cheerio and says, “And me!” The camera zooms out to show Gracie’s mother at the counter, with a visible baby bump. Gracie’s father continues to explain, “That’s right. Pretty soon you’re going to have a baby brother.” With a sassy attitude, Gracie points out another Cheerio and claims, “And a puppy.” Gracie’s father replies, “Deal,” and glances over at his wife, who has her eyebrows raised. The scene is replaced by the same “Love” and yellow background as the “Just Checking,” ad.

The same denotative signs of the family at the kitchen table or in the kitchen, breakfast, and the addition of the banana connote healthy eating and a loving family. However, the “family love narrative” is strengthened even more so in the “Gracie” ad with the images of the mother’s baby bump and the conversation Gracie’s father has with her about her baby brother. These details connote images of a growing family and many individuals can relate to Gracie or her parents, either by recalling the memory of being told that they will soon have a sibling or recalling the memory of breaking the news to the kids. The addition of a puppy also connotes ideas about the traditional nuclear American family: mother, father, married (Gracie’s father is shown wearing a wedding ring in “Just Checking”) with one daughter, one son, a puppy, and a white picket fence. The use of Cheerios to literally draw the growing family shows how the product comes to symbolize family love. In some ways, perhaps the advertiser is implying that the consumption of Cheerios, a healthy food product, will lead to a healthy growth in family. Again, the portrayal of a loving and growing interracial family make the ad counter-hegemonic given the history of a lack of representation of interracial families.

However, a closer analysis of the representation of the multiracial family complicates just how powerful the ad is for mixed individuals. As previously mentioned, the couple never appears in the same frame. Although more advertisers are creating ads that target people of color, they may fear that White consumers are not ready to see more frequent representations of minorities in ads. Advertisers’ decision to separate the couple provides insight as to what “creative people in media think Americans want – or are ready for...this readiness has been translated according to

what television executives believe...white audiences will accept<sup>10</sup> (Squires, 97). Furthermore, it is important to consider the advertisers’ motivations behind the decision to feature an interracial family in their ad. Advertisers do not necessarily seek to produce ads that are counter-hegemonic or that will drive social change. Rather, advertisers are trying to create ads that will lead consumers to purchase a product or service. Yet, as previously mentioned, advertisers have realized that they have to speak to a broad audience, which in reality is a racially diverse audience. I consider the advertisers’ decision to cast the multiracial family as an economical decision rather than a decision driven by a desire to affect social change. The motivations behind the decision are important because they influenced how General Mills and Saatchi and Saatchi positioned the ad in the media and their positioning weakened the ads’ challenges to hegemony.

When the “Just Checking” ad was uploaded to YouTube, it received a substantial amount of racist backlash. One commenter “expressed shock that a black father would stay with his family<sup>11</sup>” while another commenter responded with claims that the “commercial is pure propaganda” and that “It’s all a part of the anti-white race mixing agenda. Apparently General Mills supports genocide<sup>12</sup>.” However, rather than stand by the ad as a rare, powerful, and positive representation of a multiracial family, General Mills and Saatchi and Saatchi chose to focus on the representation of a loving family. In an interview about “Gracie”, Camille Gibson, vice president of marketing for Cheerios, stated that “General Mills did not intend to be provocative when it introduced the first commercial, nor does the company intend that now. Rather the spots reflect that ‘there are many kinds of families and we celebrate them all.’<sup>13</sup>” In this way, General Mills engaged in “post-racial illusions in the media through a ‘celebration’ of differences” where advertisers fill spots with “multiracial people

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<sup>10</sup> Catherine R. Squires, *The Post-Racial Mystique: Media and Race in the Twenty-First Century*, (New York: UP, 2014) 97.

<sup>11</sup> Goyette, *The Huffington Post*.

<sup>12</sup> “Gracie,”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QLvW77foVN4>

<sup>13</sup> Stuart Elliott, “An American Family Returns to the Table,” *The New York Times*, 28 Jan. 2014, 9 Nov. 2016 [https://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/29/business/media/an-american-family-returns-to-the-table.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/29/business/media/an-american-family-returns-to-the-table.html?_r=0)



in particular [to] help facilitate a sense of safe diversity<sup>14</sup>” (Squires, 7). General Mills claimed that the inclusion of the interracial family was done in order to “celebrate” difference, yet, the fact that the family is racially mixed and the ad features a daughter with a light complexion, hints that the advertisers wanted to celebrate, but not too loudly. They went through a Goldilocks-like experience to find just the right level of celebration of difference that they thought White audiences could handle and that would also successfully target minorities. Advertiser may have thought that an all-Black family, a Muslim family, a Hispanic or Asian family, or a family with two mothers or two fathers, was a celebration of difference that White audiences were not prepared for. However, the representation of an interracial family was “just enough” amount of celebration. In this way, the deliberate use of an interracial family to lower the risk of alienating White consumers weakens the ads’ classification as counter-hegemonic. Furthermore, there are other dominant codes that can be identified within the ads that may have been purposefully encoded into the ads to alleviate concerns about the representation of an interracial family. For example, with the exception of two short lines in “Just Checking,” Gracie’s mother never speaks. She is always shown in the kitchen; in “Gracie,” she was shown slicing apples at the kitchen counter. Her only roles in the family seem to be to confirm her husband’s knowledge about the health benefits of Cheerios, to help prepare meals, and to have children. These signs tied to Gracie’s mother connote ideas about domesticity, femininity, and masculinity. Such ideas are hegemonic in that they promote the subordinate role of women in society and expect women to occupy a status below their husbands at home. Consider the fact that Gracie’s father is the parent who tells her that she will soon have a baby brother; her mother doesn’t say a word during the entire commercial. In fact, Gracie strikes a deal with her father to also add a puppy to the family. This conversation positions Gracie’s father as the negotiator and authoritarian of the family. In this way, although General Mills was taking a risk by featuring an interracial family in a Super Bowl ad, they embedded dominant codes about women in society that work to reproduce hegemony. The ads portrayal of the interracial couple as married and heterosexual can also be considered to follow

hegemonic ideas about marriage, family planning, and sexuality. Again, the ad does not feature an interracial homosexual un-wed couple and homosexual couples are members of the subordinated or oppressed groups in American society. Perhaps advertisers thought consumers would have considered such a representation as “too counter-hegemonic” Furthermore, it is not unreasonable to then hypothesize that the advertisers deliberately embedded dominant codes in order to shift focus off of the significance of representing an interracial family.

Echoing the statements made by General Mills, Saatchi and Saatchi also decided to focus on the family love narrative. In fact, in most interviews that dealt with “Just Checking” or “Gracie”, the advertising firm rarely acknowledged the fact that the ads even featured an interracial family. For example, the answer the ad agency provided when asked why they decided to use the same interracial family once again, and this time for a Super Bowl ad, reveals that they did so with advertising strategy in mind. Peter Moore Smith, executive creative director Saatchi and Saatchi explained, “I think being part of the big game shows how integral Cheerios is in the lives of families in America. Cheerios is one of the most-loved brands in the country and it belongs in such a big marquee venue. To me, the game is really the right place for the brand to be...”<sup>15</sup> Additionally, the data on the success of the “Just Checking,” advertisement might have been another motivation for utilizing the same interracial family, with the Super Bowl, a television event known to be viewed by a significant number of individuals, as the perfect outlet for the family’s second act. According to reports by AdWeek, “Just Checking,” spiked Cheerios’ online branding by 77%<sup>16</sup>. A content marketing firm also compared Cheerios to how often consumers were viewing the content of eight other breakfast cereal and found that Cheerios beat their average content views by 137%<sup>17</sup>.

As previously mentioned, statements such as these reveal that even more so than General Mills,

<sup>15</sup> Elliott, *The New York Times*.

<sup>16</sup> Christopher Heine, “Cheerios’ Interracial Ad Spiked Its Online Branding by 77%,” *AdWeek*, 7 June 2013, 9 Nov. 2016 <<http://www.adweek.com/news/technology/cheerios-interracial-ad-spiked-its-online-branding-77-150098>>

<sup>17</sup> Heine, *Adweek*.

<sup>14</sup> Squires, 7.

the ad firm's decision to cast an interracial family was not primarily driven by a desire to progress social change. But that is not to say that the ad firm was not aware of the significance of their casting decisions for the two Cheerios commercials. Moore Smith also stated that "When people saw a multiracial family in a Cheerios ad, that did make a difference."<sup>18</sup> Saatchi and Saatchi knew that they were successfully targeting at least some portion of minority consumers with their two Cheerios commercials. Which caused some individuals to question whether or not the ad agency was exploiting the lack of representation or issues regarding interracial couples. In other words, was the ad agency pandering to a portion of minority consumers? Again, Moore Smith focused on the family love narrative by stating that "If we're milking anything, it's this delightful little actress and a little girl's special relationship with her father"<sup>19</sup>.

Regardless of Moore Smith's defense against accusations of pandering, even Lynne Collins, a spokeswoman for the ad agency explained, "It's important for us to make sure the work reflects the people we're trying to sell products too."<sup>20</sup> This statement in particular, takes away from the power of the ad to exist as counter-hegemonic when it comes to issues of race representation. The statement positions the ad, its purpose, and the intentions behind it, to be aligned with goals to reproduce hegemonic ideas about capitalism. In order to add strength to the ad, or at least stand by it, Saatchi and Saatchi could have explained that given the history of interracial relationships in the United States, the advertising agency and General Mills decided that given Cheerios' connotation as a classic American brand, they had the privileged opportunity to help establish solidarity and increase positive representations with interracial couples and their children. In fact, here is where the bridge between the advertising agency's goals and social change begins to emerge.

## **The Bridge Between Advertising and Social Change**

Although "Just Checking" and "Gracie" aired in 2013 and 2015, the topic of interracial relationships in the United States is still considered a "hot" topic. To begin it's important to consider the controversial history of interracial relationships in the United States. Starting with slavery, White male slave owners often raped their Black female slaves, whose children still lived to experience oppression and a lack of rights. After the Civil War, D.W. Griffith's film, the *Birth of a Nation*, really popularized the notion that Black men were sexual threats to White women so much so, that the KKK used the mythical threats as justification for their acts of terrorism and violence on the Black community. Interracial marriages and relationships in the United States were illegal until 1967, when the case of *Loving v. Virginia*, legalized interracial marriage. The case overturned Virginia's Racial Integrity Act<sup>21</sup>, which had prevented the legal recognition of the marriage of Mildred and Richard Loving. Mildred was a Black woman and Richard was a White man. However, the discrimination faced by those who are part of an interracial couple or marriage, or even biracial/multiracial individuals, has not disappeared. Furthermore, the topic of interracial couples has also increasingly found itself in the media. For example, in 2016, the film, *Loving*, which portrayed the story of *Loving v. Virginia*, made its debut<sup>22</sup>. Even more significant, the insurance company, State Farm, published a tweet that included a photo of an interracial couple. In their ad, a Black man is on one knee, and proposing to a White woman. State Farm captioned the tweet, "Who said yes? Cheers to the newly engaged this holiday season! Be sure to #ProtectTheBling!"<sup>23</sup> However, the insurance company's social-media advertising received media coverage due to racist comments that were made online in response to the representation of an interracial couple. Many individuals on Twitter

<sup>21</sup> "Mildred Loving Biography," *Biography*, 7 Nov. 2016, 15 Dec. 2016 <http://www.biography.com/people/mildred-loving-5884>

<sup>22</sup> "Loving," IMDB 4 Nov. 2016, 15 Dec. 2016 <<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt4669986/>>

<sup>23</sup> Sabrina Rojas Weiss, "State Farm Ad Featuring Interracial Couple Targeted By Racist Attacks," *Refinery 29*, 26 Dec. 2016, 26 Dec. 2016 <http://www.refinery29.com/2016/12/134037/state-farm-ad-twitter-racist>

<sup>18</sup> Elliott, *The New York Times*.

<sup>19</sup> Elliott, *The New York Times*.

<sup>20</sup> Stuart Elliott, "Vitriol Online for Cheerios Ad with Interracial Family," *The New York Times*, 31 May 2015, 9 Nov. 2016 <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/01/business/media/cheerios-ad-with-interracial-family-brings-out-internet-hate.html>

tweeted at the ad with racist comments such as “This is disgusting and no one wants to see this,” or threatened to break their relationship with State Farm and switch insurance companies<sup>24</sup>. Once again, rather than focus on how tweet was a social media advertisement for insurance protection of personal valuables, State Farm could have used the media coverage of the racist backlash to their ad as an opportunity to highlight the importance of positive representations of interracial couples. The insurance company could have even issued statements in solidarity with interracial couples. Looking further ahead, they could have decided to release more ads featuring interracial couples. For example, perhaps years later, the same couple could be seen in a home with their biracial children, a home protected by State Farm insurance.

The racist backlash that continues to erupt after companies decide to release advertisements featuring racist backlash highlights just how powerful and counter-hegemonic the ads truly are. Despite the previously discussed complicated hegemonic messages that exist within these ads, the fact that the ads also maintain a lot of media coverage in the days surrounding their premiere is significant. Their media coverage means that the positive images or commercials of interracial couples are being reproduced and viewed by many individuals within those days. Even just those images or commercials featuring positive portrayals of interracial couples can make a difference.

Recent work has been done to explore an “extended contact hypothesis (ECH) framework, mass-media portrayals of interracial relationships may encourage positive attitudes towards such relationships<sup>25</sup>” (Lienemann & Stopp, 398). The results of a recent study supported an extended contact hypothesis framework and found that even though interaction with media was considered indirect contact, “extended contact with Black-White relationships via media portrayals was

associated with more positive attitudes toward interracial relationships<sup>26</sup>” (Linemann & Stopp, 411). The implications of these findings for media and advertising firms are significant. Individuals may be more willing or apt to “turn on their television, log onto the Internet, or read a magazine displaying interracial relationships than to interact with an interracial couple. Thus, the media has the potential to reach large sections of the population, which may not be possible with in-person interactions<sup>27</sup>” (Linemann & Stopp, 412). In this way, although Saatchi & Saatchi may have casted a multiracial family in their ads for the purposes of marketing to a segment of multiracial consumers, the social effects of the ads’ visual representations of a multiracial family can also serve to challenge individuals’ traditionally hegemonic or racist thinking about interracial families. In this way, scholars have begun to identify the potential for advertising agencies to drive social change. Two scholars explore this opportunity:

“...we are not claiming that viewing these images has a massive impact on Whites. [But] in pursuing public notice for its clients’ wares, it is possible that advertising agencies, which are nothing if not creative, could be stretching cultural limits, exercising a potential to nudge Whites towards racial comity. Treating Blacks and Whites equivalently, showing them in comfortable contact across and within racial groups, could both reflect and spur such progress.<sup>28</sup>”

In this way, and building off the arguments of these scholars, there is the opportunity for the media to also help drive social change when it comes to advertisements that feature interracial couples. The majority of media coverage on ads with interracial couples focuses on the racist backlash and commentary that they receive. In fact, “a fear of controversy and a cleaving to the conventional may be leading agencies to create messages that subtly reinforce the mainstream cultures racial divisions and apprehensions<sup>29</sup>,” (Entman and Rojecki, 162).

<sup>24</sup> Daniel Barn, “State Farm Ad Depicting Interracial Couple Ignites Fury of Racist Twitter Trolls,” *Complex*, 24 Dec. 2016, 26 Dec. 2016

<<http://www.complex.com/life/2016/12/state-farm-advertisement-racist-twitter-trolls>>

<sup>25</sup> Lienemann, Brianna A., and Heather T. Stopp. “The Association Between Media Exposure of Interracial Relationships and Attitudes Toward Interracial Relationships.” *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 43.52 (2013): 398.

<sup>26</sup> Linemann & Stopp, 411

<sup>27</sup> Linemann & Stopp, 412

<sup>28</sup> Robert Entman and Andrew Rojecki, “The Black Image in the White Mind: Media and Race in America,” (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000) 162.

<sup>29</sup> Entman and Rojecki, 162.

Rather than focus on the controversy, perhaps media news outlets and media commentators can use these ads as opportunities to report on the history of interracial couples in America. These ads can be used by media outlets as opportunities to educate the American public on the discrimination of faced by interracial couples in America. Perhaps social media movements can also emerge from coverage of these ads as well. For example, media outlets and commentators often ask the public to share videos or photos or use hashtags in order to express solidarity with movements or groups of individuals. (Think hashtags such as #NoDAPL, #BlackLivesMatter, or asks to share viral videos). In regard to “Just Checking”, or “Gracie,” perhaps the #IStandWithGracie or #GracieFamilyLove could have been pushed by General Mills, Saatchi and Saatchi, or media outlets along with coverage that explains the ads’ significance. A social media movement could emerge alongside the social media advertisement campaign for Cheerios. The social media campaign could prove to be successful with the widespread use of the hashtags, #IStandWithGracie or #GracieFamilyLove. Asking social media users to share the video if they support Gracie and her family could also cause the video to become viral and its constant shares would prove to be free advertising for Cheerios. Along with coverage of State Farm’s tweet for insurance for personal valuables that featured an interracial couple, media commentators and blogs or media personalities could have encouraged people in interracial relationships to share pictures of themselves, or asked individuals to re-tweet State Farms tweet to show solidarity with interracial couples. Altogether, the use of hashtags constant sharing of the advertisements would have allowed Cheerios and State Farm to get media and the public to build a social media movement out of their social media advertising campaigns. More importantly, such constant media coverage or appearance in social media of positive representations of interracial couples would have been increased the ads’ significance as counter-hegemonic in regard to race representation.

Furthermore, advertising agencies and corporations should be encouraged to produce ads that are counter-hegemonic. Media outlets, figures, and commentators should seek to bolster the power of counter-hegemonic ads by discovering ways to build social movements out of social media

advertising campaigns. More importantly, scholars should focus on the ads, particularly working to critique the accuracy of the representations within the ads, as well as their effectiveness in advancing social change. Altogether, such partnerships would build that bridge between the goals of the advertising industry and social change. Here, there opportunities for industries that traditionally work to serve hegemony to do just the opposite; exploring the nuances of race representation can in fact pay dividends for corporations. Although “the media are not only a powerful source of ideas about race. They are also one place where ideas are articulated, worked on, transformed, and elaborated<sup>30</sup>” (Hall, 82). I hope to see more scholarship devoted to taking advantage of the opportunities to advance social change as discussed in this paper.

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<sup>30</sup> Stuart Hall, “The Whites in Their Eyes: Racist Ideologies and the Media,” *Gender, Race, And Class In Media*, ed. Gail Dines and Jean M. Humez (California: Sage, 2011) 82.

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