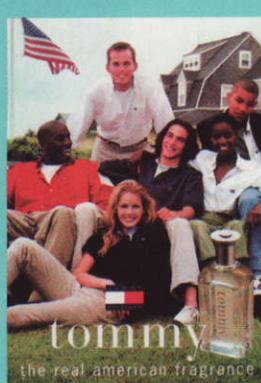
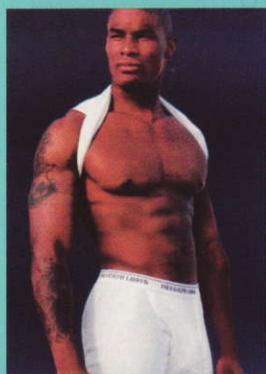
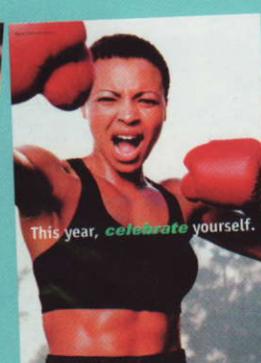
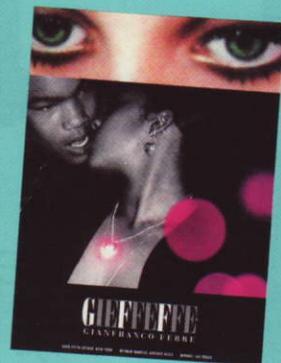


By Jill Johnson

UNITED COLORS OF MODELING



U.S. Population*

| Ethnic Group | % |
|-----------------------------------|-----|
| Caucasian | 84% |
| Black | 12% |
| Hispanic | 9% |
| Asian or Pacific Islander | 3% |
| American Indian, Eskimo, or Aleut | <1% |

Source: U.S. Bureau of Census, 1990.

Where do ethnic models fit in the picture? Absent, lingering in the background, sandwiched in among the *white bread*, filling one token spot among the colorless lot...or maybe front and center? Black model Kiara graced the July cover--front, center, and solo--of American *Vogue* last summer, unique

Sudanese Alek Wek has ascended to supermodel heights, Ralph Lauren has plastered Polo man Tyson around the globe, Roshumba--supermodel and host of Elite's Model Look contest--will soon be a familiar face on VH-1, and Siberian Eskimo Irina can't even find the time for interviews. Then again, magazine stands are covered with Caucasian faces, narrow minds confuse exotic and unusual with "primitive," and agents and models agree: ethnic models have battled their way into the big picture, and they are still fighting for their fair share of tear sheets, time

in front of the camera, and compensation.

What the Agents Are Saying

Melissa Trevedi, at Metropolitan Collections in New York, says the market for ethnic models is definitely better than it was five years ago: "Kiara being on the cover of *Vogue* has helped. And Alek Wek, because she has really black features. Clients have generally booked black girls with smaller, 'whiter' features." Metropolitan represents about six ethnic girls for runway and two or three for print. "For ethnic models, there's more work on the runway than in print," explains

Melissa, noting Marc Bouwer and Jussara Lee as two designers who have really pushed for ethnic models.

Jeffrey Kolsrud, at New York's new Q Model Management, estimates that an impressive 25 to 35 percent of their men and women are ethnic, including 21-year-old Kahshanna Evans. He concurs that filling an ethnic model's chart is more of a challenge, and Kahshanna's fine features have helped. "Clients generally want 'white black girls,'" he says, but he doesn't label anyone by ethnicity and will push Kahshanna for any job. "Even if a client requests only white girls, I will submit her and try to get them to change their minds," he adds. It must be working; Kahshanna has worked for *Glamour*, *Marie Claire*, *Self*, *Gillette*, and, in London, she booked 15 of the best shows. While New York is improving, Jeff cites London as a more open-minded market, and smaller markets--Miami, L.A., Chicago--as the most close-minded.

Stefanie Renger, who has worked as a booker with Nova in Munich and currently works for Model Management in Hamburg, has definitely seen opportunities open up for ethnic models in Germany over the past few years. While work is still slim for ethnic models in Munich, catalogs are booking more black models than they used to. "Two years ago, Heine Catalogue used Georgianna Robertson as their cover model," Stefanie notes. "For trendy German magazines, it is no problem to work with exotic-looking girls. The new magazines published in Berlin are really modern."

Cindy Wiehahn, from Cape Town's Outlaws, quotes only a two percent ratio of ethnic models on their board, but affirmative action is influencing South African work. Cindy elaborates, "For local work, one black model must be used for every white model used." However, international clients are still booking five percent ethnic models, mainly for edi-

torial. Cindy agrees that "it is a struggle for ethnic models."

What the Models Are Saying

Roshumba, supermodel and super role-model, states, "The industry has really started to wake up. Models like Kiara and Tyra Banks have changed the face of fashion and made people realize beauty is not

model mold, regardless of color, and we just really couldn't find many amazing ethnic girls." Last night was the launch of the 1998 Model Look, and three beautiful black contestants from the New York area shared the stage with Roshumba (and some 20 other hopefuls). Two made the first cut--not a bad

says that his exotic Indian look enabled him to acquire representation more quickly than expected. However, other doors have not opened quite so easily. He states, "The demand for my look will always be inferior to that of a Caucasian model, and this limited demand limits my earning potential." Singh cites the con-

What is happening: Many ads are featuring ethnic models (Levi's silver Tab ad--with a black model standing out among a WASP family--goes a step further and spells it out, "Celebrate Your Specialness"), ethnic models are landing big makeup campaigns (Alek Wek's Nars campaign, for example), catalogs--even in

"Marketing has gotten smarter as well. Put a black guy in some Ralph Lauren underwear, and all the homeboys are going to buy it!" --Roshumba

about color, it's about a certain energy and persona." Roshumba believes ethnic models were overlooked in the past, not because the industry was saying dark models weren't beautiful, but because people just weren't thinking along ethnic lines. "Someone had to say, 'Wait a minute!'" she explains, "Black women wear makeup too, we wear clothes," and once ethnic groups became more vocal, things began to change. Marketing has gotten smarter as well. Put a black guy in some Ralph Lauren underwear, and all the homeboys are going to buy it!" Roshumba recognizes that there are still some discrepancies with pay, but it's only in the past five years that ethnic models have started to be compensated equally. "It's definitely on the upswing," she says.

Roshumba, certainly one of the vocal ethnic models forging the way, is enjoying her second year as host of Elite's Model Look. I commented about the apparent lack of ethnic faces among the finalists, both last year and in previous years. "Since 1997 was my first year as host, I tended not to see color and didn't really think about it until the end," she says, "The finalists had to fit a certain

ratio. Hopefully, we'll see them at the finals in Nice. Roshumba's advice to aspiring ethnic models: "Keep yourself fresh and in shape, get rid of any chips on your shoulder (or don't develop any), be classy, and have fun!"

Tyra Banks, Roshumba's tenacious peer, has come out with a book, *Tyra's Beauty Inside & Out*, in which she recounts the negativity black models must battle. She describes her search for an agency: "...the next one said that my features were too ethnic. The next said they already had a black girl that they were concentrating on and they didn't have the time, energy, or room for another." When Tyra booked *Seventeen* magazine in 1991, the agency receptionist offered a harsh reality check: "Tyra, honey, you better wipe that cheesy grin off your face. I'll let you know that black models don't have a chance at making it in this industry. So I suggest you come off that cloud you're floating on and learn how to type. Because next year, you'll probably be applying for my job." Tyra admits that it's been tough, but she retained her strength and optimism...and she won't be learning how to type anytime soon.

Ryan Singh, a model with Irene Marie in New York,

servative attitude of the fashion industry, not other models, as his greatest competitor. "The concept of beauty is forever changing within the fashion world. The color of beauty, on the contrary, has remained predominantly white," he concludes. Michael Smith, a Thai-American model who is also represented by Irene Marie, did encounter agencies who claimed to already have their "ethnic" guy. He says, "I'm very thankful that I look different than your Average Joe, but many clients are hesitant to use someone who isn't more 'Middle-America-ish.'" Fellow *I'M* model Brent Zachery concedes that his cover opportunities are limited, but otherwise he's oozing with optimism. "I feel I can get any and all work!" he declares, adding that his earning potential is "just as much as any Caucasian model with my versatility." Tyra and Roshumba would definitely applaud his attitude!

What We Are Seeing

Most of us probably aren't very aware of what we're seeing. We're not "thinking along ethnic lines" as Roshumba mentioned. Before I began researching this story, I didn't notice how many *Tear Sheet* Market Vibers were ethnic. I didn't walk by a magazine rack and think, "Look at all those white faces." Now I notice, and I hope others will look and see what is happening and what needs to happen.

historically conservative Germany--are very conscious of booking ethnic models, and the catwalk is certainly open ground (ethnic girls have always kicked our white butts when it comes to "working it" on the runway!).

What needs to happen: More colorful covers, equal opportunity for jobs and rates, and open-minded encouragement from all sides.

"We live in a more global society," says Gail Parenteau, press agent to both Roshumba and Irina, "and as the world becomes smaller, people are becoming more open." *Tear Sheet's* Market Vibes, a microcosm reflecting modeling industry trends, affirms her statement. The first Market Vibes section, two years ago, contained no ethnic models. The last issue showcased eight ethnic models out of twenty four.

Mkt Vibes*

| Issue # | Total # of Models | Total # of Ethnic |
|---------|-------------------|-------------------|
| 3 | 6 | 0 |
| 4 | 16 | 1 |
| 5 | 16 | 1 |
| 6 | 18 | 2 |
| 7 | 24 | 7 |
| 8 | 24 | 4 |
| 9 | 24 | 2 |
| 10 | 24 | 6 |
| 11 | 24 | 8 |

*Market Vibers are selected by agencies.

Ethnic models are fitting into the little pictures. Pick up whatever tools you have at hand--your mind, your voice, your casting clout--and help create a colorful, beautiful big picture.

Face-ing Facts

| Magazines | '97 | '96 | '95 | '94 | Names |
|-----------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|--|
| American Vogue | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | (•Kiara Kabakuru •Brandi w/ two others) |
| Harper's Bazaar | 0 | 2 | 0 | 1 | (•Naomi & Christy •Whitney Houston •Naomi) |
| W | 0 | 0 | 0 | - | |