THE INCLUSION IMPERATIVE:
WHY MEDIA REPRESENTATION MATTERS
FOR KIDS' ETHNIC-RACIAL DEVELOPMENT

common sense®

A LETTER FROM OUR FOUNDER

Media plays a critical role in shaping how we understand and make sense of ourselves, our identities, and the world around us. It can perpetuate stereotypes and biases, exacerbating injustice and inequities. But it also presents an opportunity to reduce bias, end division, and be a gateway to a more inclusive future.

Common Sense was founded on that principle nearly 20 years ago, and today, the entertainment industry is taking the necessary steps toward creating media to meet that lofty goal. We designed our two most recent pieces of research to understand how far they still have to go. The first half of this report shares the findings of both an extensive review of today's media landscape and its role in kids' ethnic-racial development (ERD). The second half includes a survey of parents' responses when asked how they perceive the media that their children are exposed to, and what they want to see.

Kids' ethnic-racial development shapes how they think about, make sense of, and evaluate their own ethnicity-race as well as the ethnicity-race of others. Understanding how they develop these perspectives at different ages can help us identify and disrupt problematic messages and stereotypes, and also steer kids to quality media that can support their healthy development. Our research is among the first to explore the connection between ERD and media in depth.

What we found is kids' screen media today overwhelmingly features White faces and stories, and people of color are often stereotyped or, in some cases, absent altogether. For example, despite being 18% of the population, Latinos only make up 5% of speaking film roles. Meanwhile White people, who make up only 60% of the population, occupy 76% of lead roles on both streaming and network TV shows.

This reality around today's screen media matters because parents see media as a tool to help their kids' ethnic-racial development. Two in three (67%) parents believe that the media has a big impact on how their kids treat others and on the information they get about other races and cultures (63%). More than 80% of parents say it is important that the content their children are exposed to teaches them to be accepting of people who don't look like them and their families. And the impact of media is even stronger in families of color: Among Black parents, 75% say it's important for their children to see people of their own ethnicity-race in the media they consume.

It's clear that parents understand the power media wields in shaping their kids' worldview. They want realistic, nonstereotypical representations of their own culture. They want stories that are inspirational and aspirational. They want diversity because it teaches acceptance and inclusion. But they believe what they see today is still rife with stereotypes, and their choices for positive, empowering media for their kids are limited. Simply put, parents want more from media.

Common Sense is committed to ensuring that our media ratings and advice to parents reflect, resonate, and serve diverse audiences. Research has powered our ratings and reviews since the beginning, and this research is the backbone of our new diversity and representation ratings. Designed to meet parents' need to identify content that features positive diverse representations, these new ratings continue our founding mission to harness media's potential for good.

It also serves as a call to action for content creators everywhere, encouraging them to respond to parents' requests for media that is not only made by diverse content creators behind the screen, but also better at helping kids everywhere feel included and celebrated.

James P. Steyer, founder and CEO

Credits for Part I—Why Media Representation Matters for Kids' Ethnic-Racial Development

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1. Children's experiences with media should be understood in relation to their ethnic-racial development (ERD), which shapes how children think about, make sense of, and evaluate their own ethnicity-race as well as the ethnicity-race of others.

This is especially important given the limited research available on the effects of media on children's understanding of ethnicity and race. Content creators and consumers should be aware of ERD at different ages so they can identify and disrupt the problematic ethnic-racial messages and stereotypes that may be present in media, rather than to passively reinforce and consume them.

2. Exposure to negative media depictions of their own ethnic-racial groups can undermine children's sense of self.

Studies examining how media use influences Black children and adolescents found that exposure to stereotypic media representations was related to lower self-esteem, satisfaction with one's appearance, confidence in one's own ability, feelings about one's ethnic-racial group, and academic performance. Among Latino high school students, frequent exposure to Latino stereotypes is associated with less satisfaction with one's appearance and greater concern about how they are viewed by others. Among Native American high schoolers, seeing the stereotypical images of Native Americans presented across the media landscape undermines self-esteem and views of community worth. Exposure to negative characterizations of ethnic-racial groups can also negatively influence the future professional aspirations of young adults.

3. Among young people of color, watching favorable depictions of their own ethnic-racial group can have a positive impact on self-perceptions and views about their ethnic-racial group.

For example, among Black elementary school girls, exposure to Black TV characters is associated with more positive feelings about their own status, appearance, and happiness.

4. Stereotypical portrayals of people of color can promote harmful views about and responses to people of color among White audiences.

For example, heavy exposure to the stereotypic portrayals of Latinos on entertainment television is associated with increased belief that these representations are accurate reflections of Latinos in society. Similarly, increased exposure to the overrepresentation of Black people as criminals in the news is associated with perceptions that Black people in society are violent and a threat. Exposure to negative and stereotypical portrayals of ethnic-racial minoritized groups among White audiences can lead to the development of stereotypes of people of color, increase fear and anxiety around interracial contact, and influence support for policies that affect people of color (e.g., immigration, policing, and affirmative action).

5. People of color are underrepresented in movie and TV roles across media platforms, networks, and services.

For example, Latinos are underrepresented in every form of media and across all leading roles. Native Americans are essentially invisible across the media landscape. Latinos are also underrepresented. Despite being 18% of the population, Latinos only make up 5 percent of speaking film roles. Middle Easterners, Arabs, and Muslims are rarely distinguished from one another, blurring the ability to determine who is represented. Asian and Black Americans are present at rates representative of their overall size of the U.S. population across some, but not all, media platforms, networks, and services.

6. When people from Asian, Black, Latino, Middle Eastern, or Native American groups are represented across media platforms, they are commonly stereotyped.

For example, characters of color in shows most watched by children age 2 to 13 are more likely to be depicted as violent, and women of all ethnic-racial groups in adult programming are more likely to appear in sexualized roles.

7. White people are overrepresented across all media platforms and roles, including in children's TV shows, in top-grossing films, and in lead roles on network, cable, and streaming television.

Recent studies have found that White people occupy 76 percent of lead roles on streaming and network TV shows, even though they represent only 60% of the population. The overrepresentation of White people may contribute to children developing an inaccurate understanding of the social world.

8. High-quality children's media can promote positive ethnic-racial attitudes and interactions.

Studies going back decades have shown that programs like *Sesame Street* and *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* can have positive effects on children's feelings about their own ethnic-racial group and on interracial relationships.

9. Media created for even the youngest children should consider inclusiveness and representativeness.

Infants pay attention to and gather information about ethnicity-race, starting from the first few months of life. By the preschool years (age 3 to 5), children have a working understanding of ethnic-racial groups and are forming their ethnic-racial attitudes and identities.

THERE IS LITTLE DOUBT that the media has a meaningful influence on how we view and treat people, including people from our own and other ethnic-racial groups. We also know that factors ranging from the amount of time one spends with media, to the number and quality of portrayals of different groups across media, to one's own experiences and values can contribute to ethnic-racial relations at the individual and societal levels.

Decades of research examining ethnic-racial representation in the media have shown that media can communicate who is considered "normal" and desirable, and who is considered different and deviant. Specifically, White people are significantly overrepresented in the media, and people of color are overwhelmingly underrepresented (see Mastro & Stamps, 2018 for summary). Studies that examine how characters are portrayed in the media over the years have shown that White characters are routinely presented in diverse roles, whereas people of color are commonly portrayed in stereotypical roles. These ethnic-racial stereotypes can range from narrow and limiting to explicitly negative and derogatory.

Many studies, primarily with adults, show that these representations have real consequences for people in the real world (see Mastro & Stamps, 2018 for review). Specifically, exposure to negative and narrow media representations of ethnic-racial groups can contribute to the development of stereotypes, prompt bias, encourage prejudice and discrimination, and even undermine how people feel about themselves and their own ethnic-racial group. Alternatively, seeing constructive depictions of ethnic-racial groups may reduce stereotyping and encourage more favorable interracial and interethnic relations.

Though the effects of media use on audiences may be considered small relative to other influences, even a small effect can have a considerable impact in the real world. Like interest in a bank account, small media deposits are compounded across multiple exposures throughout the day, over a lifetime, and across the vast population of media users in society. These deposits begin early in life and occur throughout development. For children, media representations may be particularly meaningful as they look to cues in their social environment to develop and shape their understanding of ethnic-racial groups.

Unfortunately, the research on ethnic-racial representations in children's media is limited, as is our understanding of when, what, and how children learn about ethnicity-race from the media. However, we know that children consume and engage with media regularly (Rideout & Robb, 2019; Rideout & Robb, 2020) and that children can (and do) learn many concepts from the media, from numbers and letters to empathy and science, that influence their behaviors and knowledge about the real world (Aladé & Nathanson, 2016; Lauricella et al., 2011; Richards & Calvert, 2017). We also know that infants begin to gather social information related to ethnicity-race in the first few months of life (Kelly et al., 2005) and form a working understanding of ethnic-racial groups by the time they start preschool (Katz & Kofkin, 1997; Perszyk et al., 2019).

This report uses the existing evidence to chart a path toward understanding the media as an important influence on children's ethnic-racial development. We describe the content and development of children's ethnic-racial development from infancy through adolescence, and review ethnic-racial representation in the media that may impact children's ethnic and racial development. We conclude with general considerations for parents, media content developers, and researchers.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Ethnicity-Race	***Ethnicity.*** Shared ancestry, culture, country, and customs; people who share language, cuisine, holidays as well as similarities in phenotype (skin color, facial features, hair texture) or physical appearance (e.g., Cokely, 2005; Quintana et al., 2006; Umana-Taylor et al., 2014).
	Race. A social and political construct used to organize and stratify individuals within a society on the basis of phenotype (e.g., Cokely, 2005; Smedley & Smedley, 2005; Umana-Taylor et al., 2014).
	Racism. A system of advantage and disadvantage that is based on race (e.g., Tatum, 2017).
Media	***Media.*** In this report, we refer to entertainment screen media, specifically: television, movies, and video games; we do not include print media (books, magazines) or music.
	Media representation. Who (which people) is shown on-screen or in text and what images and messages are presented about them. Media representation examines which ethnic-racial groups are most likely to be depicted on-screen as well as what kinds of roles are played by people from various ethnic-racial groups.
Representation	***Underrepresentation.*** Numeric representation in the media below the group's percent of the U.S. population.
	Overrepresentation. Numeric representation in the media above the group's percent of the U.S. population.

ETHNICITY-RACE AND WHY IT MATTERS

To better understand the interconnections between race, ethnicity, media, and child development, it is critical to understand the importance and meaning of race. Race, specifically within the United States, is a social category that organizes people based on physical appearance, or phenotype. Phenotype refers to observable features such as skin color, facial structure (eyes, nose), and hair texture (straight, curly, kinky) (Cokely, 2005). Racial phenotype was, and continues to be, used to infer biological, social, and moral information (Smedley & Smedley, 2005). This means racial differences on the surface are treated as if they result from differences below the surface.

But race was "made" and is used for social and political purposes, with no real biological basis (Molina, 2014). Racial categories do not (and cannot) tell us about the nature or abilities of any person or group of people (Smedley & Smedley, 2005). Nonetheless, the making of racial groups created a hierarchy (Molina, 2014), in which people labeled racially as "White" are positioned as superior and fully human whereas persons categorized as "non-White" are positioned as inferior and less than human (Molina, 2014; Kteily & Bruneau, 2017; Wilkerson, 2020).

This racial hierarchy has been central to the United States from its beginning (Kendi, 2016). People in the United States receive direct and indirect messages, that "whiteness" (light skin) is considered superior, safe, and good, whereas "blackness" (dark skin) is assumed to be inferior, dangerous, and bad (Kendi, 2016; Kteily & Bruneau, 2017; Saad, 2020; Wilderson, 2015). In short, race does not have to matter, but because of racism, it unequivocally *does*.

Ethnicity refers to shared ancestry, culture, country and customs; people who share language, cuisine, and holidays as well as similarities in phenotype or physical appearance (Cokely, 2005; Quintana et al., 2006). Ethnicity and race are not the same, but they often connote similar social experiences in the United States because ethnic groups are also *racialized*, or grouped into the racial hierarchy (Molina, 2014; Omi & Winant, 1994). For example, a Russian American, Irish American, Nigerian American, and Filipino American each have their own respective ethnic group histories and customs, but in the United States, they are also racialized. Specifically, while the Russian and Irish immigrants have unique ethnicities, both are treated as if they are "White," have access to the racial status afforded to whiteness in the racial hierarchy, and thus have a shared a racial experience in the United States. The Nigerian and Filipino immigrants are also racialized but into marginalized racial positions in society. For this reason, people of color, across ethnicities, share the experience of racial marginalization in the United States (Molina, 2014; Tatum, 2017; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). The term "ethnic-racial" is used in this report to acknowledge both the shared and unique experiences of ethnicity and race (Cokley, 2005; Quintana, 2007; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014).

CHILDREN'S ETHNIC-RACIAL DEVELOPMENT

IN ORDER TO UNDERSTAND how media may affect what children know and understand about ethnicity and race, it is essential to first understand what's happening developmentally. Ethnic-racial development (ERD)[1] includes five interconnected dimensions that work together to shape how children think about, make sense of, and evaluate their own ethnicity-race as well as the ethnicity-race of others. As children grow up and have diverse experiences in the world, these dimensions of ERD become more complex and integrated. Grounding the media effects research in an ERD framework allows us to move toward better approaches to creating and consuming media, even as we push for additional research.

The five dimensions of ERD

Awareness. When and what children notice about ethnic-racial phenotypes (e.g., skin color) and recognition of social patterns based on ethnicity-race.

Self-related processes. What children know about their own ethnicity-race, their attitudes, evaluations, and feelings about their ethnic-racial group.

Other-related processes. The ways that children use ethnic-racial information to make categorizations and evaluations of, and comparisons to others.

Knowledge. The information children have about ethnic-racial groups, such as racial and ethnic labels ("Black," "Asian" or "White"), holidays and customs, and history (e.g., Native lands, the Chinese Exclusion Act, the civil rights movement). Knowledge also includes social information such as stereotypes.

Racism. What children know about the social significance and economic consequences of ethnicity-race; their recognition of social status, inequalities, and disadvantages in society.

It is useful to delineate the five dimensions of ERD, but also necessary to recognize how they work together. Before children can think about or evaluate their own ethnic-racial group (*self-related processes*), categorize another person's ethnicity-race (*other-related processes*), or acquire and organize information about ethnicity-race (*knowledge*) and its social consequences (*racism*), they first notice skin color (*awareness*) and, because of its social relevance, begin to use it to organize social information and experiences. It should be noted that most studies about ERD focus on monoracial young people; studies on multiracial tweens and teens are limited, so even though multiracial young people represent a significant portion of the population that is younger than 18, they are mostly absent from the ERD research literature (Rogers, Kiang et al., 2020). Below we describe the varied ways that each of these ERD dimensions show up across childhood and adolescence.

ERD from infancy to adolescence

Just as race itself is not biologically determined, what children know and understand about ethnicity-race does not depend strictly on age but also on their social and cultural environments, including families, schools, friendships, and communities.

A child's own ethnic-racial group or position within society's racial hierarchy also makes a difference. In general, those who are marginalized in the ethnic-racial hierarchy, namely, Asian, Black, Indigenous, Latino, Middle Eastern, and other people of color have different ethnic-racial experiences than White people in the United States (Neblette et al., 2012; Quintana et al., 2006; Rivas-Drake et al., 2014; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014; Yip et al., 2019).

Specifically, young people of color are likely to:

- Become aware of and learn about ethnicity-race at earlier ages.

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1. The term "ethnic-racial development" (ERD) is used to refer to the vast collection of research on the multiple measures and dimensions of how children think about and make sense of ethnicity and race. The term is broad to capture the many complex subtopics that are relevant in this area of developmental scholarship (e.g., categorization, identity, group attitudes and evaluations, prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination). (Aboud, 1988; Brown, 2017; Bigler & Liben, 2007; Byrd, 2012; Killen et al., 2017; Nesdale, 2017; Quintana, 1998; Slaughter-De-Foe, 2012; Spencer, 1988; Umana-Taylor et al., 2014; Williams et al., 2020).

- Have more frequent experiences related to ethnicity, race, and racism.

- Face negative consequences of racism in ways that White young people will not.

- Benefit directly from forming a clear and positive ethnic-racial identity.

The early years (age 0 to 2)

Babies are born with an interest in people and pay close attention to the patterns and behaviors of the people (especially the faces!) around them. Rapidly increasing cognitive and perceptual abilities allow infants to observe patterns and differences in the many objects, sounds, and people that make up their immediate environment.

Babies are born with an interest in people, and they pay close attention to the patterns and behaviors of the people (especially the faces) around them.

Awareness. Babies attend to and learn from the ethnic-racial information in their environment. By the time they are 3 months old, babies can differentiate between pictures of faces from different ethnic-racial groups (e.g., a picture of a White face versus a Black face) and begin to show preferences for ethnic-racial faces that are familiar to them (Bar-Haim et al., 2006; Kelly et al., 2005, 2007). Infants experience what is called "perceptual narrowing" in the first year of life, where they become more attentive to and comfortable with the social and ethnic-racial stimuli that are frequent and familiar in their environment (Scott et al., 2007). A similar process happens for language, as babies focus their attention on the speech sounds that are frequent and familiar (Kuhl, 2004).

Self-related processes. Infants do not have the capacity to think about themselves until the second year of life when the idea of the *self* emerges. However, toddlers have an early idea that they are distinct from others; that they have particular features, traits, and preferences that make them their own person. For example, by 18 months, toddlers can identify their own gender ("me = girl"), and they frequently use this as a social label (Ruble et al., 2007). This suggests that toddlers can form and use social categories to make sense of themselves and the social world around them.

Other-related processes. In terms of relating to others, by 6 months old, babies may show preference for faces that align with their own ethnic-racial group (Anzures et al., 2013). Nine-month-olds are quicker to recognize faces that share their ethnicity-race but slower to recognize faces that are from other ethnic-racial groups that are unfamiliar to them (Kelly et al., 2007; Timeo et al., 2007).

All these patterns suggest that babies are receiving, noticing, and organizing information relevant to ethnicity-race very early. Very importantly, what babies learn (or don't learn) from these observations depends on the environment (Bar-Haim et al., 2006; Kelly et al., 2005). Specifically, the ethnic-racial characteristics of the faces that babies see on a regular basis are the faces they are likely to prefer, recognize, and show positivity toward (Kelly et al., 2009; Timeo et al., 2007; Xiao et al., 2018); this is social, not biological. There is some evidence that intentional exposure to other ethnic-racial faces in infancy can help babies retain their ability to recognize ethnic-race faces that differ from their own (Gaither et al., 2012; Hernon-Delany et al., 2011).

Thus, it is not that babies automatically develop preference for faces of a particular, or even singular, ethnicity-race. Instead, the ethnic-racial makeup of the people babies interact with on a regular basis shapes how they are beginning to see, learn, and organize the social world.

Early childhood (age 3 to 6)

By age 3, many children in the United States attend preschools or child care settings where they are routinely exposed to new peers and adults, broadening their social worlds. They also have greater cognitive and language skills to process and organize social information.

By age 3, many children in the United States attend preschools or child care settings where they are routinely exposed to new peers and adults, broadening their social worlds.

Awareness. Children are aware of visible ethnic-racial physical characteristics, specifically skin color. They may notice, ask about, or refer to others by describing them as "brown" or "dark" or "peach," for example (Katz & Kofkin, 1997; Quintana, 1994).

While few children know ethnic-racial labels, like "Asian" or "Black" (*knowledge*), they notice some physical features that differentiate people.

Self-related processes. Self-descriptions increase during early childhood. As children become more aware of their own traits and characteristics (Spencer, 1988), they can use concrete ethnic-racial descriptors to describe themselves: "*I am brown*," "*I am peachy*," and "*I speak Spanish*" (using language to define ethnic-racial group; Quintana, 1998). Feeling positively or negatively about one's self-characteristics also surfaces at this age. In general, these feelings are very positive. For example, children will use positive language and express happiness about their skin color (Derlan et al., 2017; McAdoo, 1977; Semaj, 1985; Spencer, 1982; Williams et al., 2020). Still, children do not yet think of ethnicity-race as something that is a stable part of who they are. In fact, young children often explain that if their skin color browns due to a suntan, their ethnic-racial group will also change (Aboud & Skerry, 1983; Byrd, 2012; Quintana, 1998).

Other-related processes. When prompted, children can categorize people based on skin color. For example, when researchers asked children to sort images of people with different skin colors, about half will explain that they sorted based on phenotype, like the "brown" people go together (Pauker et al., 2015). The "doll tests" by Kenneth and Mamie Clark also found that young children can assign positive and negative labels to racial groups. When Black and White children were given two baby dolls—one Black and the other White—the majority of children assigned more of the positive descriptions ("nice," "looks good") to the White doll and more negative ones ("looks bad") to the Black doll (Clark & Clark, 1947). This study has been repeated many times since then, and newer studies measuring subtle ethnic-racial biases (Perszyk et al., 2019; Qian et al., 2019) also show a general pattern: Young children will attribute positive and negative evaluations to White and Black individuals, but the favoritism toward whiteness remains. This pattern suggests how society's ethnic-racial hierarchy shapes early ethnic-racial categorization (Aboud, 1988; Nesdale, 2017; Roberts et al., 2017).

Knowledge. In early childhood, most of what children know about ethnicity-race and ethnic-racial groups is concrete, defined by physical appearance (skin color) and some observable behaviors, such as language (Quintana, 1994, 1998). With more language, categorization skills, and general familiarity with social labels (e.g., baby/child/adult, boy/girl), a child can also learn ethnic-racial labels (Katz & Kofkin, 1997; Quintana, 1994).

We can also observe children's social knowledge of ethnicity-race through play, which shows that young children have knowledge of who belongs in which groups and that those groups can be socially meaningful (e.g., MacNoughton & Davis, 2009). For instance, a classic study showed that children age 3 to 5 readily used ethnic-racial information (skin color, language) to structure their free play and to exclude peers on the basis of ethnic-racial markers (Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001). In one example, a multiracial White and Latina preschooler excluded a Chinese American girl from a game on the playground because she did not speak Spanish (Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001). They described another conversation where preschoolers told a biracial classmate they could not celebrate Kwanzaa because only Black people celebrate Kwanzaa (Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001).

These examples show how children tend to think about ethnicity-race as an essentialized group with very distinct boundaries ("*we are **not** them*")(Chao et al., 2013; Hirschfeld, 1995). Essentialism assumes that people in the same group are similar to each other (and different from people in another group), and that the information about that group is true of *all* people in the group (Gelman & Roberts, 2017; Quintana et al., 2017; Roberts et al., 2017).

Thus, children's early knowledge of ethnicity-race is somewhat limited but may be rigidly applied to establish clear boundaries around ethnic-racial groups.

Racism. Young children are not yet able to understand abstract notions of time or history, but they do learn social status cues from others. A recent study showed that young children "catch bias" from adults, modeling the bias toward another similar individual and generalizing it to a group (Skinner et al., 2017; Skinner et al., 2020). Likewise, the doll tests (Clark & Clark, 1947) and examples of preschoolers using ethnic-racial markers to exclude peers, as discussed above, show the ways young children observe and apply generalized biases based on ethnicity-race (MacNoughton & Davis, 2009).

Middle childhood (age 7 to 11)

The transition to elementary school brings growth in children's social and cognitive skills that expands the scope, depth, and variation in ERD.

Awareness. Children's awareness of ethnic-racial groups and categorizations based on phenotype (skin color, hair texture) expands to include ethnic-racial behaviors, language, and cultural and religious practices (clothing, holidays, food) (Bernal et al., 1990; Quintana, 1994). They are also becoming more aware of which groups are visible and invisible in society; for example, children are aware of the race (and gender) of past presidents (Bigler et al., 2008).

Self-related processes. By age 6 or 7, children begin to figure out how important ethnicity-race is to them, how it matters, and how they feel about it (Aboud & Doyle, 1993; Quintana, 1994; Rogers et al., 2012; Williams et al., 2020). Overall, ethnicity-race is not an important self-descriptor at this age. Children rarely mention ethnicity-race spontaneously when asked to describe themselves, and when asked directly, ethnicity-race is often the *least* important social group for children (Akiba et al., 2004; Rogers et al., 2012; Rogers & Meltzoff, 2017; Turner & Brown, 2007).

Even though ethnicity-race does not rank very high in terms of importance, there is still variation across children. Some say ethnicity-race is highly important, but others report not all. In particular, White children consistently rate ethnicity-race as less important than Black, Asian, Latino, and children of immigrant backgrounds (Akiba et al., 2004; Rogers & Meltzoff, 2017).

Other-related processes. *Social identity* emerges in middle childhood, which marks a shift in identity from "me" and "I" questions to "we" and "us" questions (Bennett & Sani, 2004; Ruble et al., 2004). Children can use ethnic-racial group membership to infer information, make decisions, and draw conclusions about others (Brown & Bigler, 2005; Killen et al., 2017; Nesdale, 2017; Roberts et al., 2017).

Research suggests that, on the whole, children will demonstrate favoritism and are more generous toward those who share their group, are more likely to befriend peers from their own ethnic-racial group, and recognize when others are excluded because of ethnicity-race (Abrams et al., 2017; Bigler & Liben, 2007; Brown, 2008; Killen et al., 2017; Nesdale, 2017).

Knowledge. Children have acquired quite a bit of knowledge and information about ethnic-racial groups from history lessons and school curriculum, family conversations and socialization messages, and their own observations of the social world (Apfelbaum et al., 2008; Derlan et al., 2017; Priest et al., 2014; Quintana & Vera, 1999; Williams et al., 2020). Children often learn about the history of slavery, segregation, and civil rights icons, such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks, and César Chávez, in school. They also learn information that links ethnicity-race to countries of origin and family lineage; for example, knowing that a person of Asian decent is from or has family lineage in a country in Asia, or that someone from Mexico likely speaks or knows the Spanish language (Bernal et al., 1990; Rogers et al., 2012; Quintana, 1994).

Because ethnicity and race are social constructs, children not only learn factual information, but also stereotypes, or the stories that are frequently told about people of different ethnic-racial groups (Aboud, 1988; Aboud & Doyle, 1993; Brown, 2011; Dunham, 2017). Because children often view ethnic-racial groups as *essentialized*, or necessarily distinct, they may also interpret group stereotypes as evidence of biological (or fixed) differences, which can reinforce ethnic-racial stereotyping (Pauker, Ambady, & Apfelbaum, 2010; Quintana, 2007; Roberts et al., 2017).

Even though children have more information about ethnicity-race, they also learn at this time that talking about race is a social taboo. Research suggests that between age 9 and 10, children, and especially White children, will make concerted efforts *not to talk about race*, even when it is relevant or appropriate to do so (Apfelbaum et al., 2008; Pauker et al., 2015; Rogers et al., 2021). Not talking about race is linked to social desirability—in other words, children learn they are not supposed to talk about it. This suggests that children may know more about ethnicity-race than they readily share or discuss.

Racism. With greater knowledge and ability to think about how the past is related to the present, children can understand that inequality among ethnic-racial groups can be attributed to historical injustices. That is, because of events in the past (e.g.,

slavery, immigration exclusion laws), certain ethnic-racial groups may have more money and status in society, and certain ethnic-racial groups may be treated unfairly even today (Brown, 2011, 2017a; Elenbaas & Killen, 2017; Hazelbaker et al., 2017; Herberle et al., 2020; Olson et al., 2011; Rogers & Meltzoff, 2017). For example, in a study of over 400 children (age 7 to 11), about 12% of children explained ethnicity-race in terms of different economic opportunities (jobs, money; Rogers et al., 2012).

We also see children's awareness of racism in their efforts to question racial inequality or correct it (Olson et al., 2011; Rogers et al., 2021). For example, in a cookie-sharing task, Olson and colleagues (2011) showed that, on occasion, 7- to 10-year-old children would choose to distribute more cookies to Black children and fewer to White children to address inequalities.

Young teens (age 12 to 14)

The transition to early adolescence and middle school brings more independence and often more diverse settings. As young people negotiate their changing pubescent bodies, dynamic friendships, and increasing academic and social demands, they are particularly aware of who they are and how they are seen by others.

The transition to early adolescence and middle school brings more independence and often more diverse settings.

Awareness. Young people notice patterns based on ethnic-racial characteristics (skin color, language) and recognize how these patterns differ based on gender and social class as well (Ghavami & Mistry, 2019; Ghavami & Peplau, 2018; Rogers & Syed, 2021). They are also attentive to which groups are (in)visible (Bigler et al., 2008); for example, the ethnic-racial demographics of politicians, various career paths, media icons, and professional athletes, or that teachers in the schools are mostly White (and female).

Young people's capacity for abstract thinking means that they can see how others who look like them (share their ethnic-racial group) are treated by others, and can extract from such observations how they are likely to be treated (McKown & Weinstein, 2003; Way et al., 2013). These observations influence what young people believe is possible for who they can become and the kinds of futures they imagine for themselves, and the mis/

under/overrepresentation of ethnic-racial groups in society plays an important role in their own identities and future aspirations (Debrosse et al., 2020; McKown & Weinstein, 2003; Oyserman et al., 2004; Oyserman et al., 2015; Patterson et al., 2013).

Self-related processes. The question "*who am I?*" is central during this time. Young people may be considering a variety of questions related to ethnicity-race, such as:

- How do I feel about my ethnic-racial group?

- Is ethnicity-race important to me, to others?

- How does ethnicity-race influence my choices or opportunities for friendships, interests, and even preferences for music or clothing?

- Do certain behaviors, interests, friendships, or activities appear to be "off limits" because of my ethnicity-race?

Such questions are not necessarily conscious, and young people may answer them in very different ways; there is no single way that young people form an ethnic-racial identity (Chavous et al., 2003; Hoffman et al., 2020; Quintana, 2007; Rivas-Drake et al., 2017; Williams et al., 2020; Yip et al., 2006). For young people of color in particular, ethnic-racial identity becomes increasingly relevant as they face stereotypes about their own ethnic-racial groups and experience ethnic-racial discrimination (Brown, 2017a; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014; Way et al., 2013). They also recognize how ethnicity-race may shape their futures and who they can become (Debrosse et al., 2020; Oyserman et al., 2004; Rogers, 2020).

While there is less research overall on ethnicity-race among White tweens and teens, ethnic-racial identity processes are relevant (Douglass & Umaña-Taylor, 2017; Rogers & Syed, 2021; Williams et al., 2020). A common finding is that ethnicity-race is not as important or significant to White young people; they spend less time exploring their ethnic-racial backgrounds, and often describe being White, in particular, as "meaningless" or "just normal" (Perry, 2001; Rogers & Meltzoff, 2017; Way et al., 2013). However, White young people also navigate social expectations about *who they should be* because they are White (e.g., Rogers & Syed, 2021; Way et al., 2013).

Other-related processes. Social groups, including ethnicity-race, provide a sense of belonging and clarity about who is "in" and who is "out," which can both support a sense of security as well

as foster conflict between groups (Abrams & Hogg, 2006; Nesdale, 2017; Niwa et al., 2014; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Group boundaries feel especially useful for young people as they figure out where they are supposed to fit and thus what they are (and are not) supposed to do. During this period, we observe ethnic-racial prejudice and stereotyping, even among peers and friends (Dunham, 2017; Greene et al., 2006; Niwa et al., 2014; Spears Brown, 2017), as well as a decline in cross-racial friendships (Echols & Graham, 2016; Jugert & Feddes, 2017).

At the same time, diverse ethnic-racial groups are opportunities for learning that can promote positive attitudes and interactions across ethnic-racial groups (e.g., Whitehead et al., 2009). In particular, intergroup dialogue programs, where young people participate in classes that teach about diversity across groups together, increase awareness of racism (Aldana et al., 2012).

All this points to the influence of ethnicity-race on young people's interactions with and perceptions of others.

Knowledge. What young people know about ethnicity-race increases at this stage, especially when given opportunities to learn about and discuss their own ethnic-racial backgrounds (Aldana et al., 2012; Huguley et al., 2019; Umaña-Taylor, 2016). Young people may also learn more about the history of ethnic-racial groups (including their cultures, customs, and religions) through parent socialization, their own interest and exploration, media exposure, and educational experiences. Young people gain more knowledge of stereotypes, even if they do not believe or endorse those stereotypes personally (Nasir et al., 2017; Rogers & Way, 2016; Way et al., 2013).

Thus, knowledge can include realizing that stereotypes are *not true* and the ways that they can reject them (Rogers & Way, 2016; Way et al., 2013; Way et al., 2008).

Racism. By early adolescence, young people can recognize ethnic-racial inequalities and report experiencing ethnic-racial discrimination from multiple sources, including peers, teachers, other adults, and even online (Brown, 2017; English et al., 2020; Tynes et al., 2020). This means they are aware of, knowledgeable about, and able to identify what racism looks and feels like.

There is less research on ethnic-racial privilege, but there is some evidence from a study in the United States that by seventh or eighth grade, White tweens and teens can discuss notions of "white privilege" and recognize the benefits they receive from it

(Thomann & Suyemoto, 2018; Rogers & Syed, 2021; Way et al., 2013). Explicit instruction seems to play a meaningful role in helping young people understand and to explain inequalities in society beyond explanations that are solely based on individual effort and responsibility (Aldana et al., 2012; Seider et al., 2020; Thomann & Suyemoto, 2018).

Late teens (age 15 to 18)

As young people transition to high school, opportunities for ethnic-racial development expand. Young people of color in particular experience the frequent and often violent consequences of racism (English et al., 2020; Kiang et al., 2019; Stein et al., 2014; Tynes, 2015; Umaña-Taylor, 2016). The range of individual experiences is also more pronounced based on young people's identities, experiences, and social environments (Umaña-Tayor, 2016; Williams et al., 2020).

> As young people transition to high school, opportunities for ethnic-racial development expand.

Awareness. Ethnic-racial phenotype (skin color, facial features, hair textures) remains relevant, and is combined with perceptual cues related to other social information, such as, gender, social class, immigrant status, and sexuality (Ghavami et al., 2016). (Ghavmi & Mistry, 2019; Hoffman et al., 2020; Rogers & Syed, 2021). With greater awareness of the multidimensionality of ethnicity-race, the diverse representations of a given ethnic-racial group may be more important. Access to imagery and role models that represent the range of possible selves within and across ethnicity-race becomes more relevant and influential. For example, representations of Black people in the media is one layer, but young people will also notice (and benefit from) varied types of representations of Black people and families—across phenotype and diverse social class, genders, and sexualities.

Self-related processes. The focus on identity and questions about the self are at the forefront of young people's minds as they are "becoming adults," planning their futures (careers, college), and recognizing potential barriers they face because of ethnicity-race (Debrosse et al., 2020; Rogers, 2020; Rogers & Way, 2016; Oyserman & Lewis, 2017). For young people of color, exploring ethnic-racial identity, learning more about one's group histories, and thinking more intentionally about the meaning of

ethnicity-race as part of their overall sense of self is more salient during the high school years (Rivas-Drake & Umaña-Taylor, 2019; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014; Yip et al., 2019; Williams et al., 2020).

Young people's identities are also complex and intersectional, as they work out not only what it means to be Chinese American, for example, but what it means to be a Chinese American girl, or what it means to be a gay Latino boy, or a Black immigrant, bisexual female from a working-class family (Ghavami et al., 2016; Ghavami & Peplau, 2018; Kiang et al., 2008; Rogers & Syed, 2021).

Other-related processes. The social boundaries between ethnic-racial groups also influence social interactions and cross-racial friendships largely disappear during this time (Barr, 2014; Ghavami et al., 2020; Jugert & Feddes, 2017). Academic and activity pathways also follow ethnic-racial lines in many contexts, with advanced academic courses in schools, for example, being largely occupied by White students, so that even in diverse schools there are racialized pathways and experiences for students (Graham, 2018; Lewis & Diamond, 2015). These structured ethnic-racial divisions reinforce attitudes, stereotypes, and evaluations about members of other ethnic-racial groups. As such, intentional opportunities for interaction across ethnic-racial groups can make a positive difference (Aldana et al., 2012; Whitehead et al., 2009).

Knowledge. At this age, what young people know about ethnicity-race depends heavily on what they have been exposed to and taught over the years (Pinetta et al., 2020; Priest et al., 2014; Sladek et al., 2020; Umaña-Taylor & Hill, 2020). Some young people know a lot about slavery and the history of race, for example, but very little about present-day race and racism. Others have learned a lot about ethnic-racial histories and present-day inequalities, such as those in education, or employment and salary inequalities, or ethnic-racial disparities in policing and judicial systems.

What young people understand about ethnicity-race, depends on what they are taught and experience, who they are around, whether they have opportunities to question, explore, and discover ethnic-racial knowledge in school, through media, or with family members or other resources (Aldana et al., 2012; Douglass & Umaña-Taylor, 2017; Patterson et al., 2019).

Racism. Like in the knowledge domain, young people vary considerably in what they know and believe about systems of racism, whether and how they understand or interpret racial oppression and privilege in society. For example, they may or may not be aware that poor people, women, and people of color have fewer chances to get ahead or to receive quality education (Deimer & Li, 2011). Young people also vary in how they understand or interpret these inequalities, like whether they are due to individual effort and ability or to unfair practices and unequal opportunities (Aldana et al., 2012; Deimer et al., 2016; Herbele et al., 2020).

While we know more about perceptions of oppression than perceptions of privilege (Rogers, 2019; Spencer, 2017), explicit instruction seems to support all young people in making sense of racial privilege and inequality as structural realities rather than solely individual choices and solutions (Aldana et al., 2012; Godfrey & Graymen, 2014; Grossman & Charmaraman, 2009; Seider et al., 2020).

ETHNIC-RACIAL PRESENTATION IN THE MEDIA AND EFFECTS ON ETHNIC AND RACIAL PROCESSES

ACROSS CHILDHOOD, YOUNG PEOPLE are receiving, organizing, integrating, and interpreting information about ethnicity-race from the world around them. And, from a very young age, most American children are consuming hours of media content every day, the majority of which is television and online videos on sites like YouTube (Rideout & Robb, 2019; Rideout & Robb, 2020). Consequently, ethnic-racial representation in the media is meaningful to ethnic-racial development. Patterns of visibility or invisibility tend to reflect and reinforce societal perceptions of a group's value and importance in the broader culture, signaling who is respected and influential, and who is not.

Determining how and how often ethnic-racial groups are depicted in the media is critical, as understanding these portrayals provides the first step in studying the effects of media use on ethnic-racial processes and outcomes, such as children's ethnic-racial identity development. To systematically document these representations, content analyses are used to count the frequency and characteristics of ethnic-racial portrayals in media, such as in movies, primetime TV programs, or news. Surveys and experiments can then be used to test the effects of exposure to these depictions on audiences.

In this section, we draw upon this media literature, which has been built, almost exclusively, on analyses of adult media content and studies that involve adult participants. However, these studies offer building blocks for understanding the types of messages about ethnicity and race that children may pick up from the media and their impact.

Awareness and media exposure

As discussed above, the ERD concept of *awareness* involves what children notice about ethnicity-race, including increasing recognition of representation patterns based on ethnicity-race. In other words, as children age, they move from basic understandings of different skin colors or facial features among the people in their lives to more nuanced and multifaceted understandings of ethnic-racial groups and the particular kinds of roles (president, criminal, housekeeper, scientist, etc.) or social behaviors (studious, aggressive, friendly, etc.) that are likely to represented for people of different ethnic-racial backgrounds.

Over time, repeated portrayals (or lack thereof) form patterns from which children may make judgments about other ethnic-racial groups or their own. In this way, the media can serve as one of the influences that shape children's awareness of ethnic-racial groups. Table 1 (page 16) provides a snapshot of the frequency of ethnic-racial representations across roles and platforms within the last decade, and shows that:

- Representations continue to privilege Whites, who are over-represented across all platforms and roles.

- For some forms of media, Asian and Black Americans are represented at rates representative of their overall size of the U.S. population.

- Latinos are underrepresented in every form of media and across all leading roles.

- Middle Easterners, Arabs, and Muslims are rarely distinguished from one another, blurring the ability to determine who is represented. As a result, we often have no choice but to look at these distinct groups altogether, rather than individually.

- Native Americans face the most extreme form of erasure, as they are essentially invisible across the media landscape.

Although these percentages primarily reflect media content targeted for adults, they are still meaningful for understanding possible impacts on children. Children, from infancy, pay attention to who is present and absent in their environments, and use that information to build an understanding of the social world (see Mastro & Stamps, 2018, for review). Overall, research documenting portrayals in content designed for adults indicates that:

- Leading roles predominately feature Whites.

- Women of all ethnic-racial groups frequently appear in sexualized roles.

- Stereotypes of all ethnic-racial groups of color are common.

- Positive portrayals of people of color also are present.

What about children's content?

While it is critical to examine the frequency and quality of ethnic-racial representations in children's media, very little research has done so, especially as compared to research on adult-targeted media. The available research is summarized below.

In children's television programming, not all characters are human; many shows feature animated animals, puppets, and other undefined creatures. Among human characters, the vast majority are White (see Table 1), appearing at a rate that exceeds their proportion of the population (Lemish & Russo Johnson,

2019; McDade-et al., 2017; Robinson et al., 2007). For example, in shows most watched by children age 2 to 13, Whites make up nearly three-fourths of all characters, followed by Black characters (15%), Latinos (8%), and Asians (4%). Less than 1% of characters are Middle Eastern or Native American (Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media, 2020).

In these shows, characters of color are more likely to be depicted as violent than White characters, but White characters are depicted as less intelligent than other ethnic-racial groups. However, there are no differences across groups based on economic status, work ethic, criminality, employment, or romantic/sexual relationships.

However, an analysis of children's STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) programming targeting children age 3 to 6, suggests a departure from the norm. Human characters with identifiable ethnic-racial identities are predominantly White (52%), but at a rate below their proportion of the population. This is followed by Black characters (19%), Latinos (4%), and Asians

TABLE 1. Numeric representation of American ethnic-racial groups across platforms and roles

Relationship to U.S. population:

🟥 5%+ *below*   🟨 Approximately equivalent   🟩 5%+ *above*   ⬜ Absent in the media

	U.S. population		Film roles			Series/streaming roles						Video Games	
	All	**< 18**	**Top-grossing**	**Speaking**	**Co/Lead Netflix***	**Co/Lead Netflix***	**TV**	**Lead network**	**Lead cable**	**Lead streaming**	**Children's sitcoms**	**Covers**	**Ads**
Asian	6%	4%	5%	8%	4%	1%	4%	2%	3%	2%	1%	5%	7%
Black	12%	14%	16%	17%	18%	9%	16%	12%	14%	5%	22%	7%	8%
Latino	19%	23%	5%	5%	6%	≈3.5%	6%	7%	5.5%	6%	3%	0%	1%
Middle Eastern, Arab, Muslim	≈1–2%*		1%	1.5%	1.5%	1%	1.5%	<1%	<1%	3%			
Native American	1%	1%	<1%	<1%	0%	0%	0.8%	0%	0%	0%			2%
White	62%	54%	67%	64%	64%	77%	63%	76%	65%	76%	71%	78%	82%
Sources:	U.S. Census Bureau, 2021; *Pew, 2014, 2017		Hunt & Ramón, 2020a	Smith et al., 2019	Smith et al., 2021		Hunt & Ramón, 2020b				Robinson et al., 2007	Burgess, et al., 2011	Behm-Morawitz, 2017

*Table built off of available research. Information on other specific platforms was not available to researchers.

Note: A blank cell means unknown or not measured.

(4%), with no Native American or Middle Eastern characters identified (Aladé, et al., 2020). In these STEM shows, the centrality of characters in the story did not vary based on the ethnic-racial group. In other words, White characters were no more integral to the story than characters of other ethnic-racial backgrounds. Additionally, there were no differences in engagement in learning across ethnic-racial child characters. However, White adult characters were shown more actively engaged in learning than ethnic-racial adult characters in these children's shows.

In short, though limited, we have evidence that the ethnic-racial representation of characters in children's media directly mirrors in some ways the patterns in the adult content, suggesting that children are also being exposed to biased representations of ethnic-racial groups in the media they are likely to watch.

Self-related processes and media exposure

Research examining the implications of exposure to media depictions of ethnic-racial groups has largely explored *negative* effects on audiences. This includes examining the effects of media use on those whose ethnic-racial groups commonly receive unfavorable treatment in the media (i.e., audiences of color) as well those who are consistently privileged in media's content (i.e., White audiences). For people of color, the focus has primarily been on determining if exposure to the often stereotypical characterizations of people who share their ethnicity-race has a negative impact on views about self (e.g., self-esteem), one's ethnic-racial group, or broader race-relations in society (the ERD concept of *self-related processes*).

For example, studies examining the influence of media use on Black children and adolescents found that exposure to stereotypic media representations was related to lower self-esteem, satisfaction with one's appearance, confidence in one's own ability, feelings about one's ethnic-racial group, and academic performance (e.g., Gordon, 2015; Martins & Harrison, 2012; Ward, 2004). Similar findings have emerged in research with Latino as well as with Native American children and young people. For example, among Latino high school students, frequent viewing of television (and the Latino stereotypes presented in its content) is associated with less satisfaction with one's appearance and greater concern about how one is viewed by others (Rivadeneyra et al., 2007). Among Native American high

schoolers, seeing the stereotypical images of Native Americans presented across the media landscape (i.e., Disney's *Pocahontas* and the Cleveland Indians' former mascot Chief Wahoo), undermines self-esteem and views of community worth (Fryberg, et al., 2008).

At the same time, research shows that watching favorable depictions of one's ethnic-racial group can have a positive impact on children's self-perceptions and views about their ethnic-racial group (McDermott & Greenberg, 1984). Among Black elementary school girls, for example, exposure to Black TV characters is associated with more positive self-concept (e.g., feelings about their own status, appearance, and happiness) (Stroman, 1986). Similarly, among Black high school students, identification with Black characters also has been found to be associated with greater satisfaction with one's own appearance (Ward, 2004).

Other-related processes/knowledge/ racism and media exposure

Much of the media research offering insights into other-related processes (what children know and feel about other ethnic-racial groups), knowledge (how children understand what defines ethnicity-race), and racism (what children recognize about ethnic-racial inequalities in society) dimensions of ERD has focused on White adult audiences. This work has examined if and when exposure to stereotypic media portrayals of people of color promotes harmful views about and responses to these groups among White audiences. Results from this research (see Mastro & Stamps, 2018 for summary) indicate that White audiences' exposure to negative and stereotypical portrayals of ethnic-racial minoritized groups can:

- Lead to the development of stereotypes about ethnic-racial people of color.

- Promote the use of stereotypes in judging ethnic-racial people of color.

- Increase fear and anxiety about interracial contact.

- Discourage constructive behaviors toward ethnic-racial people of color.

- Influence support for policies that affect ethnic-racial people of color (e.g., immigration policy, policing policy, and affirmative action policies).

Effects of media exposure on ethnic-racial children of color

Quality of representation matters.

Exposure to **negative or narrow** depictions of your own ethnic-racial group may **harm**:

- Self-esteem
- Career and future aspirations
- Belief in one's own abilities and life opportunities
- Views about one's group in society

Exposure to **positive** and **well-rounded** depictions of your ethnic-racial group may **benefit**:

- Self-esteem
- Views about self and ability
- Views about one's group in society

Whereas the comparison of negative to positive portrayals is more intuitive, narrow compared to well-rounded portrayals may be less obvious.

A **negative** portrayal is one that explicitly shows an ethnic-racial group in a poor, bad, or derogatory manner or in deviant roles. For example, portraying Mexicans as gang members and drug dealers.

A **narrow** portrayal, in contrast, may not be negative on its face but is a caricature or stereotype that diminishes the fullness of an ethnic-racial group. For example, the portrayal of Native Americans in historical settings and traditional dress is a narrow representation of what it is to be Native American. Likewise, the portrayal of Black boys as highly successful athletes is a narrow representation of Black boys. Neither portrayal is clearly, or even intended to be, negative or derogatory.

In fact, the portrayals of the successful Black male athlete or the exceptional Asian student, are positive on their face; these are desirable and aspirational characters. However, such narrow portrayals can serve as problematic stereotypes and limiting perspectives of ethnic-racial groups, particularly when representation of ethnic-racial groups is already scarce.

Attention to **positive** and **well-rounded** portrayals of people from diverse ethnic-racial backgrounds moves us beyond static or even stereotypic positivity to a more genuine metric of ethnic-racial diversity and inclusion.

The findings from this body of scholarship offer consistent evidence indicating that the representations of ethnic-racial groups in the media are consequential. Both long-term media use and even a single exposure to negative stereotypes of people of color can encourage unsympathetic and harmful responses from White audiences (see Mastro & Stamps, 2018, for review). For example, heavy exposure to the stereotypic portrayals of Latinos on entertainment television is associated with increased belief that these representations—including those depicting Latinos as criminals, uneducated, and lazy—are accurate reflections of Latinos in society (Mastro et al., 2007).

Similarly, increased exposure to the persistent overrepresentation of Black people as criminals in the news is associated with perceptions that Black people in society are violent and a threat (Dixon, 2008). For children, exposure to these misrepresentations may be particularly meaningful as they are in the process of forming and solidifying their own views on ethnicity and race.

However, media can also be used to promote positive ethnic-racial attitudes and interactions. For example, studies of *Sesame Street* and *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* show positive short-term impacts on children's feelings about their own ethnic-racial group and on interracial relationships (e.g., Brown Graves, 1999; Lovelace et al., 1994; Mares & Pan, 2013).

GUIDANCE AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR PARENTS, EDUCATORS, AND MEDIA CONTENT DEVELOPERS

A MAJOR FACTOR SHAPING what children know and understand about ethnicity-race is growing up in a society that is organized around race and pervaded with racism. Children observe and learn about ethnicity-race from many sources of information, such as parents, peers (Hughes et al., 2006; Priest et al., 2019), broader sociopolitical events (e.g., the election of President Barack Obama in 2008 and the Black Lives Matter movement) (Patterson et al., 2019; Rogers, Rosario et al., 2021), and the media (Grace & Henward, 2013; Tobin, 2000).

For parents, educators, and content developers looking for ways to promote more positive and inclusive ethnic-racial development among young people, and in society more broadly, we offer three key points of consideration:

Exposure to diversity, equity, and inclusion

What is the diversity, equity, and inclusion of ethnic-racial representation in children's media? Who is represented, who is missing, and how do these representations support (or undermine) racial equity in society?

The diversity, equity, and inclusion of the spaces that children grow up in matters (Rivas-Drake & UmañaTaylor, 2019; Williams et al., 2020). Most schools, neighborhoods, families, friend groups, and communities in the United States are homogenous in terms of race and ethnicity. With little access to diversity or few opportunities to interact with people from varied ethnic-racial backgrounds, children may understand ethnicity-race more slowly and less fully, or learn more stereotyped information that is based on unfamiliarity or racist beliefs.

Even in diverse settings, racism and inequality often persist and limit positive cross-racial and cross-ethnic interactions (Brown, 2017b; Graham, 2018; Tatum, 2017). For Black, Indigenous, and young people of color, this often means exposure to racism, discrimination, and exclusion, even in diverse settings. Thus, numerical diversity alone is often not sufficient to address racism, but it can create opportunities for intentional conversations about ethnicity-race and racism that are promotive of ERD (Aldana et al., 2012).

Exposure to diversity, equity, and inclusion in the media can be facilitated by paying attention to which ethnic-racial groups are represented and in what roles, especially in the media that young people regularly consume (Aladé et al., 2020). In other words, being present in the media is meaningful, but quantity must be coupled with *quality* representations. Attending to these patterns in ethnic-racial representation is relevant for both media content developers and for consumers, as the messages subtly or explicitly portrayed in this content can affect young audience's ERD.

Many parents clearly want to see characters that represent their own ethnic and racial group; one survey found that Black parents wanted their children to see Black characters the same age as their own children much more frequently, and to showcase more diversity within the Black community as well, with respect to skin tone and hair (McClain & Mares, 2020). There is even financial incentive for media creators to provide content with more diverse representation; studies of film box-office totals have revealed that viewers appear to prefer films with diverse casts (Hunt & Ramón, 2020a), especially when characters and stories genuinely reflect diverse cultures and backgrounds (Higginbotham, Zheng, & Uhls, 2020).

What we know

- High-quality children's media, such as *Sesame Street*, can be used to promote positive ethnic-racial attitudes and interactions.

- Children's programs (e.g., *Molly of Denali*, *Elena of Avalor*, *Craig of the Creek*, *Dora the Explorer*) are useful for broadening the ethnic-racial representations in children's media.

- Studies of box office totals reveal that U.S. audiences increasingly prefer films with more diverse casts.

Helpful guideposts

- Pay attention to *who is* and *who is not* represented in children's media:

  - Who is consistently present and persistently missing on-screen?

  - Whose stories (backgrounds, cultures, traditions) are represented?

- Acknowledge and discuss how ethnicity-race is represented:

  - Do the characters reinforce stereotypes? For example, who is often the "lead," who is the "troublemaker," who has a single mom, who is wealthy or poor, who is the "good" student, who is the athlete?

  - Do characters of different ethnic-racial backgrounds interact with each other, and if so, how do they interact?

- Prioritize ethnic-racial diversity in the development of media content:

  - Be intentional about creating content that represents diverse experiences and backgrounds of ethnically and racially diverse characters.

  - Explicitly discuss race and racial information.

  - Highlight commonly shared beliefs, such as strong family values and work ethic, to reduce reliance on stereotypes and improve views about diverse ethnic-racial groups.

  - Listen to and learn from writers and content developers with diverse ethnic-racial backgrounds and experiences.

Example. Black-ish is an example of high-quality media content with valuable diverse representation, which offers a range of representations of Black people, directly challenges stereotypes, and explicitly discusses race and racial information.

Ethnic-racial socialization

What kinds of socialization messages about ethnicity-race are communicated in the media? Is ethnicity-race being discussed, and if so, do messages communicate pride and cultural information, or do they downplay and dismiss ethnicity-race?

The ethnic-racial messages that young people receive about ethnic-racial groups through the images and stories offered by the media can be impactful information sources. The media can also serve as a springboard for conversations about ethnicity-race. Discussions of this kind can be prompted based on exposure to events in the news or from entertainment storylines featuring important issues or representations. Research shows that what parents say (and don't say) about ethnicity-race and how often they discuss the topic, influences children's ERD in a variety of ways (Derlan et al., 2017; Hughes et al., 2006; Priest et al., 2019).

Though many parents, particularly White parents, avoid talking about race at all (Pahlke et al., 2012; Perry et al., 2020), among those who do discuss the topic with their children, there are a range of messages: from colorblind messages ("*Race doesn't matter*") to pride and cultural messages ("*Being Mexican is important and special*") to explicit cautions and preparations for racial bias and discrimination ("*People will treat you badly because of your race*"). The frequency and content of these messages are related to children's own ethnic-racial knowledge, self- and other-related processes as well as racism, discrimination, and biases across development (Williams et al., 2020; Umaña-Taylor & Hill, 2020).

In addition, diverse books, TV shows, music, and the like can offer opportunities to learn about one's own ethnic-racial background as well as the diverse cultures, practices, and communities around the globe. At the same time, because media content may perpetuate stereotypes, it can also necessitate explicit conversations about racism and bias, and ways to critique and deconstruct the ethnic-racial stereotypes and misrepresentations that are presented.

What we know

- Most children's media, like children's literature, is not likely to mention ethnicity or race or to discuss the topic explicitly.

- Many parents, particularly White parents, are not likely to discuss race with their children, even if it is relevant in a story.

- When White parents do discuss race and ethnicity, it is often using colorblind messages ("*We are all the same*" and "*Color doesn't matter*"). These messages are not shown to be effective to support children's ethnic-racial development.

- Children's books (print media) have been used as resource for socialization in this regard, providing children with self-affirming narratives (*self-related processes*) and information (*knowledge*) about ethnic and racial labels and terminology as well as an understanding of ethnic-racial groups, histories, cultures, and traditions (Fontanella-Nothom, 2019; Hazelbaker, 2017; Monobe, 2016).

Helpful guideposts

- Recognize that the media is a source of ethnic-racial socialization.

- Consider media as a starting point for conversations about race and ethnic-racial backgrounds.

- Speak up—avoid denying, dismissing, or downplaying ethnicity-race in children's media. Identify and discuss the ethnic-racial representations in children's media.

- Develop media content that is designed to prompt ethnic-racial conversations. Children's media has excelled in using the interactive method, asking the audience questions with a built-in pause for a response (e.g., *Dora The Explorer*, *Blue's Clues*, etc.). Such designs could be leveraged for learning content relevant to ethnicity-race.

Language

How is language being used to reference ethnicity-race, and in what ways does it contribute to or help to disrupt ethnic-racial stereotypes? Are there accurate and appropriate ethnic-racial terms? Do they refer to individuals rather than groups?

Language is a powerful tool for developing social categories, including ethnic-racial groups. When adults use language to label or group objects, it helps even babies to learn categories (Ferguson & Waxman, 2017; Fulkerson & Waxman, 2007). When it comes to ethnicity-race, generalities in language can also facilitate stereotyped thinking and rigid boundaries, especially when children are younger (Gelman & Roberts, 2017; Roberts et al., 2017).

For example, if there is a single person playing basketball and we say, "*That person is good at basketball*," we communicate information about that individual person. If we instead say, of the same single basketball player, "*Those people are good at basketball*," we are using language ("those people") to create a group and inferring that people who look like that person are good at basketball by nature of being "that kind of person." Thus, language is a powerful contributor to ERD and specifically the other-related processes and knowledge of ethnic-racial groups.

Experimental evidence reveals that even subtle differences in the ways that ethnic-racial groups of color are talked about and talked to in the media can prompt stereotyping and influence views about the individual and the group they belong to (Mastro et al., 2014). Take, for example, the following statements: "*Adrian hit Julian*" versus "*Adrian is aggressive.*" Although both could describe the same event, the former is more objective and tied to a specific situation, whereas the latter describes the disposition of the individual, tied to the qualities of the person. Language is particularly relevant for news creators and entertainment media content developers when formulating how ethnic-racial groups are referenced and constructed in scripts and storylines.

What we know

- Children are very sensitive to and learn from the language that is used to describe people and social categories.

- How we refer to ethnic-racial groups shapes children's understanding of the ethnic-racial categories and the information (or stereotypes) that fill them.

- Describing characters in terms of general dispositions can contribute to stereotypes.

Helpful guideposts

- Be intentional about how people of different ethnic-racial backgrounds and ethnic-racial groups are referenced in children's media.

- Be intentional with the language used to describe ethnic-racial groups—describe actions or behaviors rather than characteristics ("*Michelle did not share her toy*" versus "*Michelle is selfish*") and refer to individuals rather than groups. ("*He does not like playing with dolls*" versus "*Boys do not like playing with dolls.*")

- Use media to teach and use appropriate names and labels for ethnic-racial groups when relevant, and describe them so children have access to appropriate language and terminology (e.g., *"My skin is brown,"* or *"Claudia is Latina—that means her family is from a Latin country, like Colombia, Mexico, and Peru."*).

The media is a tool and platform for learning about the self and others, and this includes learning information about ethnicity-race. Certain factors—diversity, equity, and inclusion; ethnic-racial socialization; and language—can serve as guideposts and considerations in creating and selecting children's media. For parents and their children, we hope that media is a source of entertainment and togetherness for families. Considering these factors in advance of media use can help safeguard media experiences, providing a healthier source for family enjoyment. For content developers, these questions can inspire media content that is better aligned with anti-racist principles and that is more representative, inclusive, and appreciative of all ethnic-racial groups and cultures in the United States and beyond.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

FROM THEIR EARLIEST DAYS, babies are taking in ethnic-racial information from the people, images, and social interactions around them. Decades of research shows that people, including babies and children, learn about themselves and others from the media. Regrettably, the ethnic-racial information offered in the media can be inaccurate and exclusive in ways that reinforce stereotypes and racism. The ethnic-racial demographics of who is represented and how they are portrayed across media platforms often reinforce a false story about ethnicity-race in which White people are presented more frequently and more positively than people of color, including those who are Asian, Black, Latino, Native American, Muslim, and Arab. These representations matter and influence how we collectively feel about, evaluate, and understand ourselves and each other.

Given young people's vast exposure to and engagement with media during their formative years, this report summarizes how media, as one of many relevant factors, can influence children's ERD—what they think, feel, and know about ethnicity-race. It is our hope that this report offers information and guidance to parents, educators, and media content creators to identify and disrupt the problematic ethnic-racial messages and stereotypes that may be present in media rather than to passively reinforce and consume them. Unfortunately, research investigating what children actually learn about race and ethnicity from the media is still largely unexplored.

Further, the limited research on media effects among teens has focused on a narrow set of self-related processes (mostly self-esteem and group evaluation) but not on other aspects of ERD, such as knowledge or racism. At the same time, it is important to note that social media and user-generated media content assume an ever-increasing proportion of young people's time with screens. Yet little is known about what is contained in this user-curated and platform-determined content (e.g., personalized based on search history, etc.) and how the distinct features (e.g., like, share) and interactive nature of these different apps (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, TikTok) may uniquely affect children and adolescents' ERD. There is also scarce research on the effect of video games on children's ERD, a major limitation given their prominence in many children's media diets.

Still, it is safe to assume that awareness of how and how often ethnic-racial groups appear in this content, and who is endorsing or refuting the messages offered, remain critical for parents to monitor and discuss with their children. There is a wide gulf waiting to be filled by researchers on more specific effects of media on children, but in the meantime, we can use our knowledge of ERD to guide the kinds of media we want to create and deliver to children.

To this point, we hope this report inspires intentional and critical media consumers. The information herein can be used both to critique the ethnic-racial messages and images in existing media content, and to inspire the creation of media content that is more diverse, representative, and inclusive of human experiences.

TABLE A1. ERD and media exposure, the early years (age 0 to 2)

Awareness	Self-related processes	Other-related processes	Knowledge	Racism
When and what do children notice about ethnicity-race?	*What do children know and feel about their own ethnicity-race?*	*What do children know and feel about other ethnic-racial groups and interactions?*	*How do children understand what defines ethnicity-race?*	*What do children recognize about ethnic-racial inequalities in society?*
• By age 3 to 5 months, can differentiate faces based on skin color. • Aware of which ethnic-racial faces are familiar vs. unfamiliar (and similar vs. dissimilar). • Awareness depends on the infant's close social environment (family, caretakers).	• By 18 to 20 months, recognize the self as distinct from others with traits, characteristics, and appearances. • By 18 months, can use gender as a social category for themselves (and others). • Aware of who is similar (and dissimilar) to them based on skin color.	Between 6 and 9 months, show preference for and are faster at recognizing faces that are ethnically-racially familiar to them.	Not yet relevant	Not yet relevant

What should media do?

• Focus on positive behavior and positive role models that are diverse in racial-ethnic cues (e.g., skin color and hair), rather than representing characters of a single ethnic-racial background or using negative representations.

• Feature simple words, songs, and images that are inclusive and representative of several racial-ethnic groups.

TABLE A2. ERD and media exposure, early childhood (age 3 to 6)

Awareness	Self-related processes	Other-related processes	Knowledge	Racism
When and what do children notice about ethnicity-race?	*What do children know and feel about their own ethnicity-race?*	*What do children know and feel about other ethnic-racial groups and interactions?*	*How do children understand what defines ethnicity-race?*	*What do children recognize about ethnic-racial inequalities in society?*
• Aware of differences in skin color and facial features. • May ask about or describe own or others' skin colors.	• Can use concrete descriptors, like skin color, to describe self (e.g., "*I am brown*," or "*I am peachy*"). • Feel positively about own skin color. • Believe that skin color is changeable not fixed (e.g., suntan).	• May ask about or describe the skin color of others. • Can categorize others based on skin color. • Understand and will reinforce boundaries of ethnicity-race groups using concrete cues (e.g., skin color, food, language, holidays, clothing). • Will exclude peers on the basis of ethnic-racial cues (skin color, language). • Evidence of racial bias, with more positive evaluations of or preferences for White people.	• Know skin color and concrete ethnic-racial cues. • Think that ethnicity-race changes if observables change (e.g., you are Spanish if you learn Spanish). • Think about ethnic-racial groups as distinct, nonoverlapping categories. • May interpret observable cues of ethnicity-race as evidence of differences in kind (e.g., a Black person is "a different kind of person" than a White person because of their skin color).	• Do not yet understand abstract concepts like history and inequality. • Pick up cues of social status and power. • May model and mirror biases of others and use ethnic-racial group membership to organize games and play.

What should media do?

• Repeatedly show positive behavior and positive role models that are diverse in racial-ethnic cues (e.g., skin color, language, hair texture and styles).

• Use many different examples of real people (rather than animals) to teach lessons about race-ethnicity.

• Give equal value to different racial-ethnic groups.

• Emphasize positive, nonstereotypical attributes of characters.

• Show children of different racial-ethnic groups engaging in a range of positive, nonstereotypical roles, activities, and behaviors.

• Demonstrate lessons, such as inclusive play, with visual behaviors (e.g., sharing), rather than just dialogue between characters.

• Avoid negative and stereotypic representations, stories, or events, especially for kids age 3 and 4. For older children, negative behavior (e.g., excluding others by race-ethnicity) should be met with explicit, negative consequences for the perpetrator and resolved quickly.

• Make concrete connections between ethnic-racial lessons (e.g., about culture, about friendships) to real-life situations, rather than using metaphors (e.g., cats and mice playing together).

• Feature positive friendships across racial-ethnic groups.

• Show teachable moments about race-ethnicity that parents can model in their behavior, conversations, or songs.

TABLE A3. ERD and media exposure, middle childhood (age 7 to 11)

Awareness	Self-related processes	Other-related processes	Knowledge	Racism
When and what do children notice about ethnicity-race?	*What do children know and feel about their own ethnicity-race?*	*What do children know and feel about other ethnic-racial groups and interactions?*	*How do children understand what defines ethnicity-race?*	*What do children recognize about ethnic-racial inequalities in society?*
• Aware of skin color and other concrete ethnic-racial cues (e.g., hair, facial features, language, food). • Observe patterns in representation based on ethnicity-race (e.g., who is likely to be president).	• Will use concrete descriptors ("*I am brown*") and social labels ("*I am Mexican*") to describe self. • Social identity develops, meaning the "we" part of the self (e.g., "we" = Asian kids). • Can explain the meaning and importance of ethnicity-race as part of the self. • Feel positively about own ethnicity-race but also recognize (and experience) negative views from others. • Ethnicity-race is not an important self-descriptor (however, it's more important among children of color).	• Social identities and group boundaries become clearer ("us" vs. "them"), which can highlight ethnic-racial differences. • Will exclude peers on the basis of ethnic-racial cues and social norms. • Demonstrate some favoritism toward their own group members. • Evidence of racial bias, with more positive evaluations of or preferences for White people.	• Know observable (skin color, language) and nonobservable features of ethnicity-race (heredity). • Clearer about stability of ethnic-racial group membership (e.g., learning Spanish does not mean you are Spanish). • Understand ethnicity-race as connected to family and place (e.g., country of origin, family background). • Learn historical ethnic-racial events and icons (e.g., segregation, César Chávez). • Know widely held ethnic-racial stereotypes (e.g., "Black kids are athletic").	• Understand that ethnicity-race can impact how people are treated. • Can connect history to the present (e.g., slavery and racial inequality). • Able to report experiencing and/or witnessing ethnic-racial discrimination. • May attempt to correct, question, or challenge racial injustice or racism. • More awareness and knowledge among children of color.

What should media do?

• Repeatedly show positive behavior and positive role models of older children that are diverse in racial-ethnic cues (e.g., skin color and hair).

• Negative behavior, such as excluding by race-ethnicity, should be met with explicit, negative consequences for the perpetrator and resolved quickly.

• Make concrete connections between ethnic-racial lessons (e.g., about culture and friendships) to real-life situations, rather than using metaphors—for example, feature positive friendships and inclusive social behavior across racial-ethnic groups.

• Show role models of different race-ethnicity groups who engage in counter-stereotypical behaviors and interests without ridicule from other characters.

• Show nonsexualized women (e.g., realistic body types, avoidance of signifiers such as cleavage, unrealistically long legs), particularly for women of color.

• Show nonaggressive men who resolve conflict without resorting to violence, particularly for men of color.

• Introduce children to great historical figures, athletes, or media stars of diverse racial-ethnic groups.

• Call out instances of racial injustices (e.g., calling a racial slur "racist" rather than "mean").

• Model civic responsibility, including recognizing and taking action against instances of racial discrimination and inequality.

• Include stories about people of color that are not just about racial bias, systemic disadvantage, and trauma.

• When showing systemic disadvantage, racism, and retellings of events centered on ethnicity and race, be clear about the role of White people.

TABLE A4. ERD and media exposure, young teens (age 12 to 14)

Awareness	Self-related processes	Other-related processes	Knowledge	Racism
When and what do children notice about ethnicity-race?	*What do children know and feel about their own ethnicity-race?*	*What do children know and feel about other ethnic-racial groups and interactions?*	*How do children understand what defines ethnicity-race?*	*What do children recognize about ethnic-racial inequalities in society?*
• Aware of phenotypic cues for ethnicity-race (e.g., skin color, hair, facial features). • Observe more patterns in representation based on ethnicity-race (e.g., which students get into trouble, who is likely to be a doctor vs. an athlete). • May notice greater differentiation within ethnic-racial groups based on phenotype, gender, social class, etc. • Aware and/or experience differential treatment based on ethnicity-race.	• Ethnic-racial identity becomes more important and relevant. • May question assumed labels or select alternative labels for self (e.g., Asian American vs. Chinese). • Young people of color may spontaneously describe self in ethnic-racial terms. • White tweens and teens may identify with ethnic/religious heritage (e.g., Jewish, Italian) but not "White." • Recognize thier multiple self-identities (e.g., immigrant, boy, gay). • Compare self to others and social expectations (e.g., "*I'm not like other Dominican kids*").	• Social groups and boundaries become more important and influence identity development. • Young people of color report ethnic-racial discrimination and stereotyping from peers and adults. • Cross-ethnic/racial friendships generally decline. • Diverse peer groups can support positive cross-group interactions and attitudes.	• Understand varied and diverse aspects of ethnic-race, including abstract connections to history and social status. • Stereotypes of ethnic-racial group are more nuanced with positive and negative characterizations (e.g., "*Latinos are poor, have big families and a strong culture*"). • Stereotypes about ethnic-race also connect to stereotypes about other identities like gender, social class, sexuality (e.g., "*Black girls are loud*").	• Can understand that ethnicity-race is a social and political construct that can impact how people are treated by others. • May recognize that ethnicity-race can impact opportunities (e.g., education, jobs, housing). • More likely to recognize systemic disadvantages. • Young people of color report experiencing and/or witnessing ethnic-racial discrimination from peers, teachers, other adults, and even online. • Young people of color are more likely to understand and recognize racism than White young people.

What should media do?

- Explicitly feature a summary of a lesson, especially if there was moral ambuigity or gray areas about race-ethnicity, such as discrimination or injustice.
- Show characters of diverse ethnic-racial backgrounds discussing topics of ethnicity-race in meaningful, informative, and genuine ways.
- Show examples of positive, supportive, and fulfilling friendships and relationships across racial-ethnic groups.
- Show role models of different race-ethnicity groups who engage in counter-stereotypical behaviors and interests.
- Show examples of fully realized characters of color who experience both ups and downs, and are accepted and supported by their peers and communities.
- Introduce children to great historical figures, athletes, or media stars of diverse backgrounds.
- Highlight stories of characters' positive racial-ethnic identity development.
- Call out instances of systemic racial-ethnic injustices (e.g., calling a racial slur "racist" rather than "mean").
- Model civic responsibility, including recognizing and taking action against systemic racial discrimination and inequality.
- Include stories about people of color that are not just about racial bias, systemic disadvantage, and trauma.
- When showing systemic disadvantage, racism, and retellings of events centered on ethnicity and race, be clear about the role of White people.

TABLE A5. ERD and media exposure, late teens (age 15 to 18)

Awareness	Self-related processes	Other-related processes	Knowledge	Racism
When and what do children notice about ethnicity-race?	*What do children know and feel about their own ethnicity-race?*	*What do children know and feel about other ethnic-racial groups and interactions?*	*How do children understand what defines ethnicity-race?*	*What do children recognize about ethnic-racial inequalities in society?*
• Aware of phenotypic cues for ethnicity-race (e.g., skin color, hair, facial features). • Observe more patterns in representation based on ethnicity-race (e.g., which students get into trouble, who is likely to be a doctor vs. an athlete). • May notice greater differentiation within ethnic-racial groups based on phenotype, gender, appearance, social class, etc. • Aware of and/or experience differential treatment based on ethnicity-race.	• Ethnic-racial identity becomes more important. • May question assumed labels or select alternative labels (e.g., "*I'm Asian American*" or "*I'm Chinese*"). • Young people of color may spontaneously describe self in ethnic-racial terms. • White young people may identify with ethnic/religious heritage (e.g., Jewish, Italian) but not "White." • Recognize their multiple self-identities (e.g., immigrant, boy, gay). • Compare self to others (e.g., "*I'm not like other Dominican kids*"). • Self-labeling may be more fluid, based on context (e.g., school vs. home).	• Social groups and boundaries become more important and influence identity development. • Young people of color report ethnic-racial discrimination and stereotyping from peers and adults. • Cross-ethnic/racial friendships generally decline, even in diverse settings. • Diverse peer groups can support positive cross-group interactions and attitudes.	• Understand the varied and diverse aspects of ethnic-racial groups, including abstract connections to history and social status. • Stereotypes of ethnic-racial group are more nuanced with positive and negative characterizations (e.g., "*Latinos are poor, have big families and a strong culture*" means being an immigrant, getting into trouble, but also having big families"). • Stereotypes about ethnic-race connect to stereotypes about other identities like gender (e.g., "*Black girls are loud*").	• Can understand that ethnicity-race is a social and political construct that can impact people's treatment. • May recognize that ethnicity-race can impact opportunities (e.g., jobs). • More likely to recognize systemic disadvantages (rather than individuals). • More aware of multiple sources of inequality (e.g., ethnicity-race, sexuality). • Young people of color experience and/or witness offline and online ethnic-racial discrimination from peers, teachers, and other adults. • Young people of color are more likely to understand and recognize racism than White adolescents.

What should media do?

• Show examples of complex, supportive, and fulfilling friendships and relationships across racial-ethnic groups.

• Show characters of diverse ethnic-racial backgrounds discussing topics of ethnicity-race in meaningful, informative, and genuine ways.

• Show role models of different race-ethnicity groups who engage in counter-stereotypical behaviors and career/academic interests.

• Show examples of fully realized characters of color who experience both ups and downs, and are accepted and supported by their peers and communities.

• Introduce children to great historical figures, athletes, or media stars of diverse racial-ethnic groups.

• Model civic responsibility, including recognizing and taking action against systemic racial discrimination and inequality.

• Highlight stories of positive racial-ethnic identity development, delving into the nuances of intersectionality (e.g., race-ethnicity, gender, class, ability).

• Include stories about people of color that are not just about racial bias, systemic disadvantage, and trauma.

• When showing systemic disadvantage, racism, and retellings of events centered on ethnicity and race, be clear about the role of White people.

• Call out instances of systemic racial-ethnic injustices (e.g., calling a racial slur "racist" rather than "mean").

Resources

For additional information on children, media, and diversity, check out these resources:

- Annenberg Inclusion Initiative
  https://annenberg.usc.edu/research/aii

- Center for Media & Social Impact
  https://cmsimpact.org/

- The Center for Scholars & Storytellers
  https://www.scholarsandstorytellers.com/

- EmbraceRace
  https://www.embracerace.org/

- Facing History and Ourselves
  https://www.facinghistory.org/

- Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media
  https://seejane.org/

- Institute for Learning & Brain Sciences
  (University of Washington) learning modules
  - Part 1
    https://modules.ilabs.uw.edu/module/race-today-what-kids-know-as-they-grow/
  - Part 2
    https://modules.ilabs.uw.edu/module/racing-towards-equality-why-talking-to-your-kids-about-race-is-good-for-everyone/

- RespectAbility
  https://www.respectability.org/

- Think Tank for Inclusion & Equity
  https://www.writeinclusion.org/

- We Need Diverse Books
  https://diversebooks.org/

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PARENTS' VIEWS ON DIVERSE REPRESENTATIONS IN KIDS' MEDIA

FROM A VERY YOUNG age, most American children are consuming hours of media content every day. Research suggests that the media we consume has a meaningful influence on how we view and treat people, including people from our own and other ethnic-racial groups. Common Sense wanted to find out more about how parents perceive the media that their children are exposed to, how it does and does not reflect their own backgrounds, and what they want from media. To accomplish this, Common Sense fielded a nationally representative survey in June 2021 with 1,143 parents and caregivers of children from 2 to 12 years old.

1. Representation is important to parents, and it means more than just seeing their ethnicity-race in the media: It's also about being culturally and linguistically inclusive.

- Of all parents surveyed, 70% say it is important that their children are exposed to content that helps them learn more about their own culture, religion, or lifestyle (see Figure 1).

- About six in 10 parents (57%) say it is important for their children to see people of their own ethnicity-race in the media they consume. This is most important to Black parents, with 75% saying it is important, followed by multiracial parents (65%), Asian parents (61%), Hispanic/Latino parents (59%), and White parents (52%).

FIGURE 1. Parents who say the following characteristics are important in the media their children use

Rating*: ■ 5 ■ 4

Is safe
71% | 17% | **88%**

Is educational
65% | 23% | **88%**

Teaches children about how to get along with others
66% | 21% | **87%**

Is entertaining
54% | 32% | **86%**

Teaches children acceptance of people who might not look like their family
60% | 24% | **84%**

Exposes children to cultures/religions/lifestyles different than their own
44% | 30% | **74%**

Has characters with a wide range of body types, shapes, and sizes
44% | 28% | **72%**

Exposes children to more about their family's culture/religion/lifestyle
40% | 30% | **70%**

Has characters from a range of socioeconomic levels
38% | 32% | **70%**

Has characters in it who are of a different race/ethnicity as child
41% | 27% | **68%**

Has characters with physical, neurological, and/or learning disabilities
36% | 28% | **64%**

Teaches other languages
33% | 25% | **58%**

Has characters in it who are the same race/ethnicity as child
31% | 26% | **57%**

Has LGBTQIA+ characters
17% | 17% | **34%**

*Ratings on a five-point scale: "not at all important" (1) to "very important" (5)

2. Parents believe there is room for improvement in terms of how diverse communities are represented in children's media.

- Asian, Black, and Hispanic/Latino parents are more likely to say there isn't enough content with characters who are the same ethnicity-race as their child; roughly one in three say there isn't enough, compared to 9% of White parents who say there isn't enough (see Figure 2).

- Most parents feel that White people are often portrayed in a positive light in the media their children are exposed to; one in four believe that portrayals of Black, Hispanic/Latino, and LGBTQIA+ people are more likely to be negative.

- Almost half of parents believe that Black representation in children's media is often stereotypical; four in 10 believe Asian, Hispanic/Latino, Middle Eastern, and LGBTQIA+ representation is often also stereotypical.

- Having content that is inclusive of LGBTQIA+ people is important to one in three parents. Relatedly, fewer than three in 10 parents feel comfortable if their child were exposed to topics related to sexual orientation, and only four in 10 feel that they are very well prepared to discuss the topic with their children. Given shifting conceptions about gender fluidity, sexual orientation, and nonconforming lifestyles among younger generations of Americans, this finding underscores the importance of LGBTQIA+ inclusive content that will help educate children and parents, and encourage acceptance.

3. Parents find it very important for their children to be exposed to media content that encourages acceptance of others.

- Two in three parents believe that the media has a big impact on how their kids treat others (67%) and on the information they get about other races/cultures (63%).

- As such, over 80% of parents say it is important that the content their children are exposed to teaches them to be accepting of people who don't look like them as well as their families.

- Three in four parents (74%) want their children to be exposed to media that teaches them about cultures, religions, and lifestyles that are different from their own, underscoring the importance of narratives and storylines that reinforce the idea of a multicultural America.

- There is also demand for the media content their children consume to be inclusive of other kinds of diversity; more than over one in three parents (35%) feel that there is not enough content portraying people with physical, neurological, or learning disabilities, and one in four (24%) would like to see more people with a wide range of body types and from different socioeconomic levels (25%).

- Hispanic/Latino (69%), Black (66%), and Asian (63%) parents are more likely to find it important that their children be exposed to media that helps them learn other languages than White parents (52%); one in three parents believe there is not enough content for kids that teaches other languages.

FIGURE 2. Parents who believe there is "not enough" media with characters who are the same ethnicity-race as their child

Asian (n = 206)	Black (n = 219)	Hispanic/Latino (n = 225)	White (n = 296)
32%	32%	31%	9%
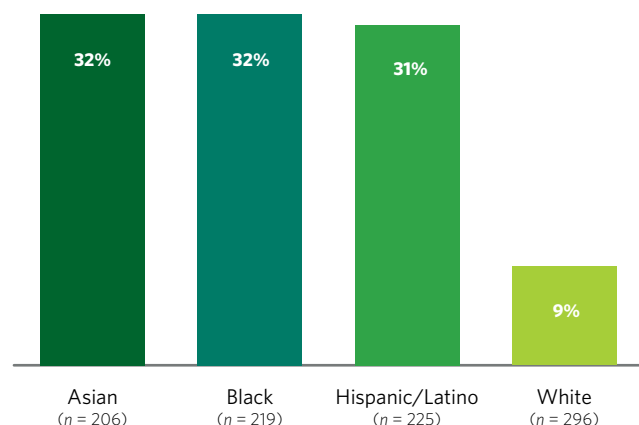
4. Parents want to see more nuanced, sophisticated representations of BIPOC people and communities that provide positive role models and dispel damaging mythologies about these groups.

- Almost three in 10 parents (27%) would like to see BIPOC people and communities portrayed with more respect.

- Two in 10 parents (21%) would like to see more content that showcases the positive and unique aspects of BIPOC communities and people.

5. About two in three parents (65%) feel that media has a big impact on their children's professional aspirations, underscoring the importance of providing positive role models for BIPOC children.

- In addition, 62% feel that media has an impact on how well their child does in school.

- Sixty-three percent of parents believe that media has an impact on the information children have about people of other races, ethnicities, religions, and cultures.

6. Almost six in 10 (57%) parents say that the media their child consumes has prompted conversations about diversity.

- Children's media is an opportunity to model cultural and racial acceptance, not just for kids but for their parents.

7. Almost three in four parents (74%) say that their children enjoy media content with diverse characters, higher than those who say their child favors content that features characters that mirror their own lives (48%).

- Black parents (57%) are more likely than White (47%) and Asian (46%) parents to think that their children favor media content that portrays families that look like them.

8. *Sesame Street* and *Dora the Explorer* are the examples parents gave the most often for shows that have positive and nuanced representation of different groups; YouTube and Grand Theft Auto are often cited as the worst.

- **Top examples provided of media content with positive/ nuanced representation of different groups:** *Sesame Street, Dora the Explorer, Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood, Cocomelon, Doc McStuffins, Paw Patrol,* and *Black-ish.*

- **Top examples provided of media content with negative representations of different groups:** YouTube, Grand Theft Auto, *Family Guy,* and the Disney Channel.

Parents' Views on Diverse Representations in Children's Media

Representation in media is important to parents.

Percent of parents who say it is important for media to:

84% Teach children to be accepting of people who don't look like their family does.

74% Expose children to other cultures, religions, and their lifestyles.

72% Have characters with a wide range of body types, shapes, and sizes.

68% Have characters of a different ethnicity-race than their children.

57% Have characters of the same ethnicity-race as their children.

*Black parents are more likely to want media with characters from different ethnicities/races **and** from the same ethnicities/races as their children.*

Percent of parents who want media with characters from different ethnicities-races than their own:

BLACK *	79%
MULTIRACIAL	69%
WHITE	67%
HISPANIC/LATINO	64%
ASIAN	64%
NATIVE AMERICAN*	57%
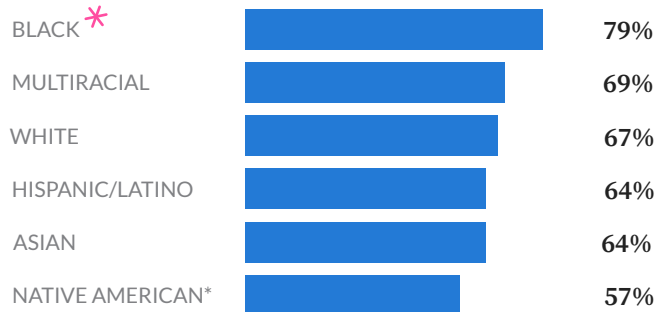
Percent of parents who want media with characters from their own ethnicity-race:

BLACK *	75%
MULTIRACIAL	65%
ASIAN	61%
HISPANIC/LATINO	59%
WHITE	52%
NATIVE AMERICAN*	40%
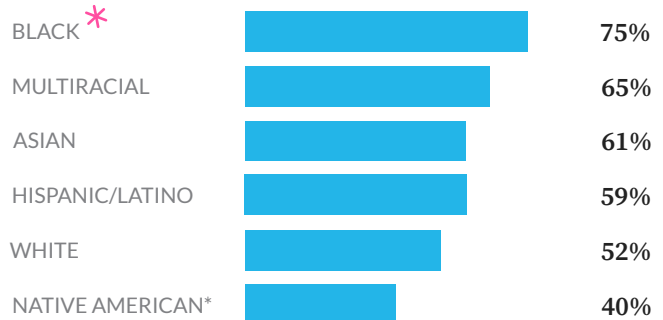
*Small sample – interpret with caution.

Media spurs important conversations about race.

6 in 10 parents say that media has prompted conversations about diversity with their children.

Many parents are comfortable having their children exposed to tricky topics from the media:

54%	52%	49%	48%	30%	28%
TREATMENT OF WOMEN / WOMEN'S EQUALITY	DISABILITIES	ECONOMIC CLASS	RACISM	POLICE BRUTALITY	SEXUAL ORIENTATION
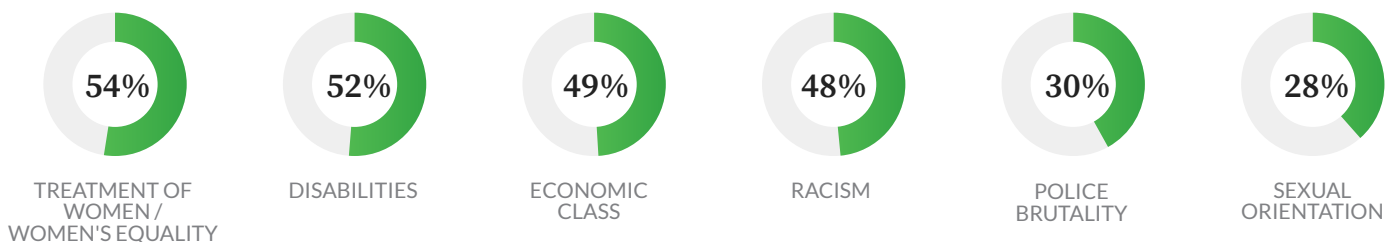
Children are often exposed to stereotypes and negative depictions of ethnic-racial groups.

Asian, Black, and Hispanic/Latino parents are much more likely to feel that the representation of their own ethnic-racial group in media is stereotypical.

64%
BLACK

54%
HISPANIC/LATINO

52%
ASIAN

32%
WHITE

Parent-provided examples of media content with positive or nuanced representations*:

Sesame Street
Dora the Explorer
Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood
CoComelon • Doc McStuffins
black-ish • Elmo's World
The Loud House
iCarly • Bubble Guppies • PJ Masks
Modern Family • Full House • Jessie
Peppa Pig • SpongeBob

Parent-provided examples of media content with negative representations*:

YouTube
Grand Theft Auto
Family Guy
Disney • SpongeBob
Peppa Pig • Roblox
The Loud House • Fortnite
Cartoon Network • Dumbo
Dora the Explorer • Paw Patrol
The Simpsons • South Park

*Open-ended responses from parents; includes media with at least five mentions

When it comes to race and representation, parents want more from media.

65% Parents feel that children's media has a big impact on their children's professional aspirations.

74% Parents say their children enjoy media with diverse characters

48% Parents favor media with characters that look like their family does.

Black parents are more likely than other parents to say their children favor media with characters that look like them.

Black, Asian, and Hispanic/Latino parents are more likely to say there is "not enough" media with characters who are the same ethnicity-race as their children.

32%
BLACK

32%
ASIAN

31%
HISPANIC/LATINO

9%
WHITE
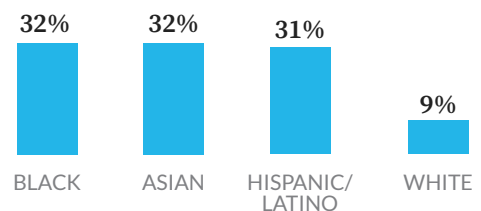
THE GOAL OF THE research was to assess parents' views on the quantity and quality of racial and cultural representations in children's media content among parents and caregivers. The survey was conducted in June 2021 with 1,143 participants in a nationally representative sample of parents and caregivers (age 18+) of children from 2 to 12 years old. Demographic quotas were set within each ethnic-racial group to ensure proper representation. The data was ultimately weighted by actual ethnic-racial representation in the United States to make the total aggregated data representative. The survey was offered both in English and Spanish.

TABLE 1. Demographic profile of parents, by ethnicity-race

	TOTAL (N = 1,143)	Asian (n = 206)	Black (n = 219)	Hispanic/ Latino (n = 225)	Multiracial (n = 132)	Native American (n = 35)	White (n = 296)
Age of parents							
• 18 to 34	41%	39%	33%	57%	36%	71%	38%
• 35 to 44	42%	50%	39%	38%	39%	17%	43%
• 45+	17%	11%	27%	5%	24%	12%	19%
Gender							
• Male	42%	38%	46%	36%	38%	20%	43%
• Female	58%	61%	54%	64%	61%	77%	57%
Household (HH) income							
• < $50,000	36%	25%	42%	45%	48%	49%	34%
• $50,000 to $99,999	33%	43%	29%	36%	26%	34%	31%
• $100,000+	31%	30%	28%	17%	24%	9%	35%
• Mean HH income	$89,000	$94,000	$88,000	$72,000	$70,000	$57,000	$94,000
Age of children							
• 2 to 4	29%	29%	15%	33%	14%	33%	14%
• 5 to 8	37%	37%	41%	36%	42%	45%	32%
• 9 to 12	34%	34%	44%	31%	43%	22%	54%

TABLE B1. Importance of race/culture/lifestyle attributes in media the child consumes, by parents' ethnicity-race

Ratings of 4 or 5 on a five-point scale of "not at all important" (1) to "very important" (5)	Total (N = 1,143)	White (n = 296)	Hispanic/ Latino (n = 225)	Black (n = 219)	Asian (n = 206)	Multiracial (n = 132)	Native American (n = 35)*
Is safe	88%	88%	83%	90%	89%	87%	89%
Is educational	88%	88%	88%	91%	89%	87%	89%
Teaches children how to get along with others	87%	84%	88%	90%	92%	83%	89%
Is entertaining	86%	86%	85%	84%	85%	82%	89%
Teaches children to be accepting of people who might not look like their family	84%	84%	80%	88%	84%	77%	74%
Exposes children to cultures, religions, and lifestyles that are different than their own	74%	72%	72%	80%	78%	82%	66%
Has characters with a wide range of body types, shapes, and sizes	72%	70%	68%	80%	70%	70%	66%
Exposes children to more about their family's culture, religion, and/or lifestyle	70%	68%	69%	78%	76%	74%	60%
Has characters from a range of socioeconomic levels	70%	70%	64%	73%	67%	70%	60%
Has characters of a different ethnicity-race as child	68%	67%	64%	79%	64%	69%	57%
Has characters with physical, neurological, and/or learning disabilities	64%	66%	60%	63%	58%	59%	51%
Teaches other languages	58%	52%	69%	66%	63%	61%	54%
Has characters who are the same ethnicity-race as child	57%	52%	59%	75%	61%	65%	40%
Has LGBTQIA+ characters	34%	35%	31%	38%	30%	36%	20%

*Small base – interpret with caution

TABLE B2. Perception of "not enough" representation of race/culture/lifestyle attributes in media content child consumes, by parents' ethnicity-race

	Total (N = 1,143)	White (n = 296)	Hispanic/ Latino (n = 225)	Black (n = 219)	Asian (n = 206)	Multiracial (n = 132)	Native American (n = 35)*
Teaches other languages	35%	31%	43%	37%	38%	50%	46%
Has characters with physical, neurological, and/or learning disabilities	35%	33%	44%	30%	28%	44%	57%
Exposes children to cultures, religions, and lifestyles different than their own	29%	27%	33%	33%	27%	40%	43%
Teaches children to be accepting of people who might not look like their family	27%	25%	34%	31%	22%	36%	40%
Has LGBTQIA+ characters	26%	26%	31%	17%	25%	32%	40%
Exposes children to more about their family's culture, religion, and/or lifestyle	25%	18%	36%	32%	31%	42%	40%
Has characters from a range of socioeconomic levels	25%	20%	32%	30%	22%	35%	37%
Has characters with a wide range of body types, shapes, and sizes	24%	21%	29%	25%	22%	33%	34%
Is educational	23%	21%	30%	19%	23%	31%	31%
Teaches children how to get along with others	23%	22%	27%	25%	21%	30%	37%
Has characters of a different ethnicity-race as child	20%	16%	29%	24%	21%	33%	26%
Is safe	19%	16%	28%	19%	19%	30%	31%
Has characters who are the same ethnicity-race as child	18%	9%	31%	32%	32%	36%	40%
Is entertaining	7%	6%	7%	9%	5%	11%	20%

*Small base – interpret with caution

TABLE B3. Perception of negative portrayals of different groups, by parents' ethnicity-race

Ratings of 1 or 2 on a five-point scale of "always/almost always negative" (1) to "always/almost always positive" (5) portrayals of ...	Total (N = 1,143)	White (n = 296)	Hispanic/ Latino (n = 225)	Black (n = 219)	Asian (n = 206)	Multiracial (n = 132)	Native American (n = 35)*
Black/African Americans	25%	22%	27%	33%	28%	33%	31%
Hispanic/Latinos	23%	22%	25%	26%	16%	31%	37%
LGBTQIA+ people	23%	22%	25%	23%	23%	23%	40%
Middle Eastern/Northern Africans	22%	18%	28%	24%	25%	30%	34%
People from a range of socioeconomic levels	17%	15%	23%	19%	16%	19%	29%
Native American/American Indians	16%	14%	17%	20%	17%	28%	34%
People with physical, neurological, and/or learning disabilities	16%	17%	12%	18%	17%	23%	29%
Asian/Asian Americans	14%	12%	16%	17%	19%	16%	17%
Multiracial people	14%	13%	17%	15%	14%	20%	26%
White, non-Hispanics	7%	6%	11%	10%	8%	14%	23%

*Small base – interpret with caution

TABLE B4. Perception of stereotypical portrayals of different groups in children's media, by parents' ethnicity-race

Ratings of 1 or 2 on a five-point scale of "always" (1) to "never" (5) stereotypical portrayals of ...	Total (N = 1,143)	White (n = 296)	Hispanic/ Latino (n = 225)	Black (n = 219)	Asian (n = 206)	Multiracial (n = 132)	Native American (n = 35)*
Black/African Americans	47%	42%	52%	64%	45%	57%	51%
Hispanic/Latinos	41%	37%	54%	46%	41%	48%	46%
Middle Eastern/Northern Africans	41%	39%	41%	47%	44%	50%	31%
LGBTQIA+ people	41%	38%	43%	49%	33%	48%	71%
Asian/Asian Americans	39%	36%	38%	42%	52%	48%	43%
Native American/American Indians	36%	34%	38%	40%	38%	48%	51%
People from a range of socioeconomic levels	35%	34%	36%	37%	36%	37%	37%
People with physical, neurological, and/or learning disabilities	33%	33%	29%	36%	30%	33%	43%
Multiracial people	31%	30%	33%	34%	32%	34%	43%
White, non-Hispanics	30%	32%	25%	28%	25%	27%	40%

*Small base – interpret with caution

TABLE B5. Statements describing child's behavior related to media content, by parents' ethnicity-race

Ratings of 4 or 5 on a five-point scale of "does not describe at all" (1) to "describes very well" (5)	Total (*N* = 1,143)	White (*n* = 296)	Hispanic/ Latino (*n* = 225)	Black (*n* = 219)	Asian (*n* = 206)	Multiracial (*n* = 132)	Native American (*n* = 35)*
My child tends to favor media with characters and storylines that portray families that look like ours from a racial, ethnic, and/or cultural perspective.	49%	47%	50%	57%	46%	39%	26%
My child enjoys consuming media that has diverse characters.	74%	73%	74%	78%	73%	61%	60%
Media that my child has consumed has prompted conversations with family and friends about diversity.	57%	57%	54%	59%	56%	47%	43%

*Small base – interpret with caution

TABLE B6. Perceived impact of media content on children's behavior, by parents' ethnicity-race

Ratings of 4 or 5 on a five-point scale of "does not have an impact at all" (1) to "has a big impact" (5) on ...	Total (*N* = 1,143)	White (*n* = 296)	Hispanic/ Latino (*n* = 225)	Black (*n* = 219)	Asian (*n* = 206)	Multiracial (*n* = 132)	Native American (*n* = 35)*
How child treats/gets along with others	67%	65%	72%	68%	74%	54%	69%
What child aspires to be professionally	65%	66%	62%	64%	67%	59%	57%
Child's language abilities	65%	64%	69%	63%	69%	53%	51%
Information child has about other races, ethnicities, religions, and/or cultures	63%	63%	60%	67%	66%	54%	49%
How child feels about people of other races or ethnicities	63%	63%	59%	64%	65%	55%	43%
How well child does in school	62%	65%	58%	58%	60%	46%	46%
How well/badly child behaves with parents and other authority figures	61%	61%	62%	64%	63%	49%	49%
How child feels about their race or ethnicity	57%	56%	58%	60%	62%	49%	40%

*Small base – interpret with caution

TABLE B7. Perception of appropriate age, on average, for discussing different topics with child, by parents' ethnicity-race

Appropriate age to discuss …	Total (N = 1,143)	White (n = 296)	Hispanic/ Latino (n = 225)	Black (n = 219)	Asian (n = 206)	Multiracial (n = 132)	Native American (n = 35)*
Disabilities	6.6	6.6	6.4	6.8	7.2	6.3	5.9
Racism	7.1	7.0	7.0	7.1	7.6	6.9	6.3
Treatment of women/women's equality	7.7	7.7	7.1	8.1	8.0	7.3	8.1
Economic classes	8.8	8.7	8.8	8.8	9.0	8.3	8.1
Police brutality	8.8	9.0	8.6	8.0	8.9	7.9	8.0
Substance use and abuse	8.9	8.8	9.1	8.7	9.2	9.2	9.0
Sexual orientation	9.0	9.1	9.2	8.4	9.3	8.9	9.4
Sexual consent	9.3	9.4	9.2	8.8	10.1	8.8	9.0
Sex education	9.6	9.5	9.6	9.5	10.3	9.4	10.5
Politics	9.9	9.9	10.0	9.5	10.1	9.8	9.6

*Small base – interpret with caution

TABLE B8. Perception of preparedness of parents to discuss different topics with child, by parents' ethnicity

Ratings of 1 or 2 on a five-point scale of "not prepared at all" (1) to "very well prepared" (5) to discuss …	Total (N = 1,143)	White (n = 296)	Hispanic/ Latino (n = 225)	Black (n = 219)	Asian (n = 206)	Multiracial (n = 132)	Native American (n = 35)*
Politics	19%	18%	24%	16%	20%	20%	26%
Police brutality	14%	13%	19%	7%	18%	8%	20%
Sex education	14%	12%	19%	14%	25%	14%	23%
Sexual consent	12%	8%	17%	12%	28%	15%	20%
Sexual orientation	11%	8%	15%	11%	24%	14%	11%
Substance use and abuse	9%	7%	17%	8%	14%	10%	6%
Economic classes	9%	8%	12%	8%	13%	13%	11%
Disabilities	7%	7%	7%	8%	13%	7%	6%
Racism	6%	5%	8%	5%	8%	5%	6%
Treatment of women/women's equality	6%	6%	8%	6%	9%	11%	11%

*Small base – interpret with caution

TABLE B9. Topics parents would be comfortable with if child were exposed to them in the media, by parents' ethnicity-race

	Total (N = 1,143)	White (n = 296)	Hispanic/ Latino (n = 225)	Black (n = 219)	Asian (n = 206)	Multiracial (n = 132)	Native American (n = 35)*
Treatment of women/women's equality	54%	54%	55%	47%	53%	58%	60%
Disabilities	52%	52%	55%	45%	49%	56%	69%
Economic classes	49%	50%	47%	47%	48%	48%	46%
Racism	48%	49%	44%	48%	47%	52%	31%
Substance use and abuse	32%	34%	29%	32%	25%	32%	11%
Politics	32%	36%	23%	30%	22%	35%	17%
Police brutality	30%	31%	22%	41%	19%	35%	14%
Sexual orientation	28%	30%	22%	24%	19%	27%	17%
Sexual consent	26%	28%	20%	25%	17%	20%	14%
Sex education	25%	27%	20%	24%	19%	18%	—

*Small base – interpret with caution

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