

RACE & REPRESENTATION: BLACK PARENTS' HOPES FOR THEIR CHILDREN'S MEDIA

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We surveyed 310 Black parents of 3- to 17-year-olds, with the goal of highlighting their perspectives with regard to fictional TV and film content for their children. Below are the key findings about the types of characters, depictions, storylines, and messages they wanted their children to see, as well as the strategies for inclusion they want to see implemented in the children's media industry.

Full report available via the [Center for Communication Research](#)

KEY FINDINGS

1 On many dimensions, parents valued the same kinds of representation, regardless of child age.

Among the findings in our report, we found no statistically significant differences in the preferences of parents with children of different ages and only one significant difference between parents of boys and girls, suggesting that the parents in our study shared many of the same media aspirations for their children across demographics.

2 Parents wanted their children to see Black characters, and how those characters are depicted matters.

Parents wanted their child to see frequent same-age Black characters, as well as Black characters diverse in gender, skin color, and hair texture to ensure representation for their child. They were especially interested in high frequencies of Black characters with dark skin and natural hair. They gave lower ratings for how often they wanted their child to see Black characters with light hair and/or light eyes and lowest ratings of all for how often they wanted their child to see racially ambiguous cartoon humans.

3 Prosocial content was as desired as some forms of positive racial representation.

Parents wanted their child to see high frequencies of a wide variety of prosocial behaviors, ranging from hard work and kindness to standing up for oneself and others. Importantly, parents wanted their child to see characters of all races engaging in positive behaviors, as well as frequent storylines that emphasize both Black and interracial friendships. Prosocial content was as highly favored in frequency as positive racial representations in the form of (1) everyday depictions of Black characters, (2) depictions of Black success (i.e., Black leaders, scientists, doctors, and heroes, and (3) Black characters expressing pride about their appearances and being Black.

4**Content highlighting Black characters' everyday lives, successes, and cultures was preferred to historical content.**

Parents wanted their child to see high frequencies of Black characters experiencing everyday life at school, at work, and with their families and friends. They also wanted their child to see high frequencies of content featuring: (1) Black leaders, scientists, doctors, and heroes, (2) U.S. Black culture, and (3) African roots, civilizations, and cultures. These representations were even more desired for their child than all Black casts (which they still wanted to see often) and much more desired than casts with only a single Black character. Parents wanted their child to see frequent portrayals of the Civil Rights Movement and somewhat less frequent portrayals of slavery.

5**Parents were seeking Black characters who express pride about who they are as well as characters talking about Black history or culture.**

Parents wanted their child to see high frequencies of Black characters saying they are proud of their appearance and identity and talking about Black history and culture. They wanted their child to see characters of other races discussing Black history or culture somewhat often but wanted to see Black characters given the most talking time with these topics.

6**Regardless of child age, parents preferred content that addresses race directly.**

Parents wanted their child to often see characters explicitly saying that all races are equal. They especially preferred direct statements of racial equality over metaphors for racism (e.g., cats not liking dogs) and also over characters framing kindness as the solution to racism (e.g., if everybody is kind, racism will go away).

7**Even parents of preschoolers wanted their kids to see racism occasionally, but they wanted on-screen racism resolved.**

Regardless of child age, parents wanted their child to occasionally see subtle racism, colorblind messages, explicit verbal racism, racist physical aggression, and even police brutality. Averaged across all age groups, parents also had a clear preference for wanting their child to see depictions of contemporary racism, as opposed to racism set in the past.

8

On-screen learning and advocacy were favored approaches to addressing on-screen racism.

Regardless of their child's age, parents wanted their child to often see characters of all races advocating for racial justice; they preferred this significantly more to seeing characters (of any race) simply call out racism. When racism is depicted, parents wanted their child to often see the racist character(s) ultimately learning better - more than characters being punished and markedly more than racism that is never addressed or resolved.

9

Parents of all age groups were likely to start conversations with their children about on-screen racism.

We asked parents how likely they were (1 not at all likely, 7 very likely) to start conversations with their child about on-screen racism. Parents with children as young as 3 and as old as 17 said they would start conversations with their child about on-screen racism when their child encounters it, whether the depicted racism is brutal, violent, or otherwise explicit or is more subtle, or expressed as colorblindness. Given that parents did want occasional representation of racism, it's crucial to recognize their strong preferences about the ways it should be addressed (e.g., with on-screen learning and advocacy).

10

Black parents reported hoping to see representation and inclusion both on and off the screen.

Parents wanted more frequent hiring of Black content creators and more frequent consultations with Black parents and Black children about content. They also wanted to see children's media organizations frequently advocating for racial justice even if there is backlash, as well as public support for the Black Lives Matter Movement. The absence of any significant child age or child gender differences indicates that across the board, these values held for our sample's Black parents raising their children in this moment.

A closing note

Research should continue to monitor the goals and preferences of Black and other marginalized families with regard to media content for their children. We recommend strong partnerships and collaborations between the children's media industry and the communities they hope to serve, as well between content creators and researchers.

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