

As I reflect on my experiences within the media, I've realized how rare it is to find a character that carries remotely any of my features. From the kinky curls to the rich brown skin, it was difficult growing up without a role model within the media. The lack of models has impacted my emotional wellbeing because I questioned my worth, wondering if I wasn't good enough for a character to be seen that showcased my Black features. For years, I fought constantly with self-love and self-worth, questioning why I didn't get to see characters of my complexion and size. Today, I still find myself comparing my features on social media platforms and developing a pool of negative thoughts. Although, my experiences with underrepresentation and misrepresentation have shaped my interests in pursuing areas of studies at Tufts that allow me to address issues of representation and combine my interests in media, child development, and psychology.

The diversification of media representation is crucial because it showcases the number of communities that aren't being displayed nor acknowledged. During adolescence, media diversity is significant because it highlights how children quickly recognize and acknowledge these issues surrounding race, ethnicity, age, gender, and ability at an early age. Studies continue to show how the media's images that children are exposed to aren't equivalent to reality. For example, in a variety of shows, the male characters continue to outweigh the number of female characters, and people of color are constantly being showcased in limited and stereotypical roles, and some racial and ethnic groups are not being recognized at all.

During my first summer with the Laidlaw Fellowship, I will be geared towards working on research for this project to find studies and information to develop a well-rounded scope of the media's impacts. Professor Julie Dobrow and I will be partnering with the Center on Media and Child Health at Boston Children's Hospital to analyze a set of questions surrounding around

how issues of identity and inclusion impact an adolescent's mental health. From there we will work together to craft surveys that focus on media use and representation, as a means to measure social-emotional health. This allows us to examine how firsthand experiences with media representation have impacted one's self-esteem and overall upbringing. Through this research, I hope to find how many individuals felt the same way that I did as a kid, wondering where their character was. This will allow us to prompt questions and enact change around the media's representation and how it impacts one's mental state and identity.

I believe that I'm qualified to see this project come to life because this project is a part of me. Not only can I account for my own firsthand experiences with representation, but I can also help determine the best questions to ask. It's not just about examining what I already know to be true but also about what we can do differently to create a change. From this experience, I hope to gain an insight on how the media is capable of impacting one's self-esteem. I want to learn the causes and consequences of this and what can be done differently to make a difference. Through this project and overall experience with the Laidlaw Fellowship, I hope to be a part of a change that's bigger than myself. I also hope to use these experiences as steppingstones to one day, craft my own research surrounding this area of representation when conducting my research for a senior honors thesis. I will use these opportunities to develop an even stronger set of leadership skills as preparation for a career in the mental health field where I'm capable of providing guidance in areas of diversity, inclusion, and representation.