

VOICES OF THE UNHEARD: IMPACTS OF MEDIA REPRESENTATION ON COLLEGE STUDENTS

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BACKGROUND

Media consumption heavily impacts how we see, understand, and treat ourselves and those around us.¹

Representation such as racial, ethnic, or gender-based representation in media is vital for children because it may impact their self-esteem and self-definition.² Media representation allows adolescents to critically analyze media content that does not broadcast diverse and inclusive characters. This research is crafted out of the limited studies that explicitly explore children's media representation today

RESEARCH QUESTION

How do instances of misrepresentation, a lack of representation, and erasure in children's media influence the social and emotional well-being of adolescents?

METHODOLOGY

This research used a 32-item Qualtrics questionnaire to inquire about Tufts students aged 18-24 (N=107) experiences with children's media and media representation. In addition to the surveys, optional and anonymous interviews (N=17) were conducted where participants could broadly expand on their attitudes and beliefs towards particular media portrayals. Even though we had a small survey sample size (N=107) we had a dynamic array of responses from students



RESULTS

WHAT STUDENTS SAW

Although most children had 5+ hours of television use (42% fell between 5-10 hours), **many individuals did not see themselves represented**

- Transgender Communities
- Latinx Communities
- Indigenous Communities
- LGBTQ+ Communities
- Jewish Communities
- Mixed Families
- Neurodivergent Communities
- Individuals with Intersectional Identities
- Black Communities

If they did find portrayals then the **characters were oftentimes depicted as comic relief** for the main characters

MANY OF THESE CHARACTERS WERE ONE DIMENSIONAL

RESULTS

HOW THEY FELT

This has led to...

- damage in levels of self-esteem
- skewed outlook on career possibilities
- desire to fit into stereotypical media portrayals
- change in wardrobe or beliefs to separate from stereotypical character representations

Through this research, we aim to have more conversations on the importance of media representation and its implications for adolescence. Students want to normalize diversity and emphasize how this issue is important to those that are not directly impacted. Some limitations of our study were the restricted gender identity options provided in the survey. Another was the narrow sample size of college students at a medium-sized liberal arts college in the Northeast

FUTURE RESEARCH

We hope that additional research will be conducted in this field where there is an extension of this study at other academic institutions, a more diverse sample size, and is inclusive of more gender identities in the survey responses

REFERENCES

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