WATCHING GENDER

How Stereotypes in Movies and on TV Impact Kids' Development

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Common Sense is committed to making kids the nation's top priority. We are a trusted guide for the families, educators, and advocates who help kids thrive. We provide resources to harness the power of media, technology, and public policy to improve the well-being of every child.

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WATCHING GENDER:

How Stereotypes in Movies and on TV Impact Kids' Development

INTRODUCTION

By JAMES P. STEYER and AMY GUGGENHEIM SHENKAN

Decades of research, outlined in this report, demonstrate the power of media to shape how children learn about gender, including how boys and girls look, think, and behave. Depictions of gender roles in the media affect kids at all stages of their development, from preschool all the way through high school and beyond. These media messages shape our children's sense of self, of their and others' value, of how relationships should work, and of career aspirations.

Tragically, that influence has served to perpetuate notions that boys have more value than girls. Gender stereotypes riddle our movies, TV shows, online videos, games, and more, telling our boys that it's OK to use aggression to solve problems and our girls that their self-worth is tied to their appearance. These images are so deeply ingrained and pervasive that many of us don't even notice the bias, making it more insidious because we don't even realize we're exposing our children to it.

This matters because these rigid stereotypes are holding us back — politically, economically, and socially. As the gender bias projected on the silver and digital screens bleeds into real life, it robs our economy of talent and productivity. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) estimated last year that gender discrimination costs the global economy up to $12 trillion annually in wasted potential.

The repercussions aren't limited to girls. They reach boys as well, with particularly corrosive consequences. Masculine ideals, the type shown in abundance in movies, on TV shows, and in games, are associated with high-risk-taking behaviors in young men, including alcohol and drug use and driving at excessive speeds, according to researchers from the University of Michigan and Western Washington University. They also constrain how boys view gender, steering them away from values such as nurturance and compassion.

We at Common Sense view this moment in time as an opportunity to break the cycle beginning with this generation of children. Luckily, our own kids are showing that they are willing, if not eager, to break down barriers and create a new world for themselves. As a mother, Amy has taught her daughter how to evaluate everything she sees and reads with a critical eye. Now, her daughter continually points out gender bias in places that even Amy overlooks because she's become so inured to them in the decades she's spent in male-dominated corporate settings and consuming media.

Everyone can and must play a role in countering gender bias. Parents can choose media that show a diversity of male and female characters in nontraditional roles contributing equally to the storylines. They can help their children identify and reject the stereotypes they encounter in movies, on TV shows, and elsewhere. Our children can, in turn, point out the bias that our own eyes have missed. And content creators can abandon gender tropes and create characters that fascinate us with their richness and complexity. This takes thought and attention as well as more diversity within the very institutions that create this content.

James P. Steyer
Founder and CEO

Amy Guggenheim Shenkan
President and
Chief Operating Officer

At Common Sense, we believe our role is threefold. **First, we want to give parents tools to evaluate gender bias in children's media.** This report is only the beginning. The findings will be used to inform our media evaluation and review process and further train Common Sense editors on how gender portrayals affect children at each stage of their development. We'll also refresh our Parent Concerns section to include facts and tips on gender bias in the media and give parents resources to have informed, compassionate conversations with their children on the topic.

Second, we want to encourage children's content creators to reject gender stereotypes and portray caregiving as valuable work that's performed by both men and women, as well as present counter-stereotypes. To advance this goal, this report includes specific recommendations for media producers interested in portraying diverse gender roles based on the developmental stages of their target audiences.

And, finally, through our Common Sense Kids Action arm, we will advocate for broad policy changes such as child care benefits, paid sick days, family and medical leave, and higher wages for child care providers to enhance the value of caregiving by both men and women. When media shows caregiving as feminine work and devalues that work, it undermines political and cultural support for paid family leave and affordable quality child care. Policymakers need to step up and let parents of both genders be caregivers.

Stories play a powerful part in shaping how kids understand the world and their roles in it. For our children to achieve their full potential, free of stereotypes that hold them back, each of us needs to consciously weed out gender bias. Parents can help children think critically about gender roles in the media. Content creators can be mindful of the messages they project. And each of us can be an activist working to promote gender equality everywhere. We can start by creating better role models — among ourselves and in our media.

James P. Steyer
Founder and Chief Executive Officer
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

WHY GENDER EQUITY IS COMMON SENSE

By OLIVIA MORGAN and CLAIRE SHIPMAN

The time has come to tackle gender equity in media. Despite expanding public awareness of the need for both girls and boys to be able to navigate their lives free of rigid gender rules, content producers have been slow to change their fare for kids. Instead of helping to push boundaries by creating aspirational, nonstereotypical characters, mainstream media too often falls back on tired gender tropes.

This is unhealthy. **Our comprehensive research review shows that children who are fed gender stereotypes may internalize those roles, shaping their behavior for years to come.** The effects on children of gendered media include: girls' focus on their appearance and value as sexual objects; more tolerant views of sexual harassment; the establishment of gendered behaviors in romantic and sexual relationships; riskier behavior in boys; and career choices limited by gender norms.

For decades, sociologists such as Carol Gilligan have noted a break in the healthy emotional development of girls beginning in adolescence and have studied social factors responsible for a marked decline in their confidence beginning around age 9. For example, six out of 10 girls stop doing something they love during adolescence because of anxiety over their appearance, according to a global study commissioned by the Dove Self-Esteem Project. By age 14, girls drop out of competitive sports at twice the rate of boys because they lack positive role models and because of a gender-related social stigma, according to the Women's Sports Foundation.

Our report shows that girls aren't alone in their struggles with restrictive identity norms. One study cited in this report shows that young men feel society expects them to behave in stereotypical ways — aggressive, dominant, always ready for sex — but that they don't agree with those standards of manhood. Another recent study reveals that many adolescent boys are highly concerned about their weight and physique, and their anxiety is correlated with depression, binge drinking, and drug use. Movies and magazines display men with six-pack abs. Male action figures tied to film or TV properties explode with an unrealistic amount of muscle. As clinical psychologist Raymond Lemberg expressed in a 2014 *Atlantic* magazine article on body image, "The media has become … an equal opportunity discriminator. Men's bodies are not good enough anymore either."

Our research review also finds that, **when it comes to media representations, children of color face additional challenges unique to the intersections among race, ethnicity, and gender**. Studies show that some media content oriented toward African-American youth, for example, contain higher-than-average levels of sexually objectifying portrayals of women.

Gender stereotypes reinforced by the media have economic, as well as social, consequences. Limiting how children see themselves professionally hurts us all economically. As our report shows, **there is a relationship between the media kids watch and the careers to which they aspire**.

According to a 2016 report from the National Center for Education Statistics, despite women graduating from college at higher rates, men still earn more than women on average in the 10 largest occupation groups. Why does it matter if women are paid less than men? For one thing, most lower-income families depend primarily on a female breadwinner. At the same time, the job sectors predicted to grow most over the next decade — nursing, health care, retail, and customer and food service — are currently dominated by women. Those fields are also underpaid, meaning more and more families will struggle to get by in those professions. U.S. males have higher unemployment than females, and their entry into a job sector tends to raise wages. If more males enter caregiving and service sectors, our economy and our families benefit.

We believe gender equity is common sense; so our Gender Equity Is Common Sense initiative is a step toward concrete change. Using the resources developed for this report, parents can choose media that encourages kids — regardless of gender — to find their unique strengths and boost their confidence in who they are. Educators can share curricula that open students' eyes to stereotypes and their effects. And content creators can see how their work affects the kids who watch it, so they can embrace positive gender representations and present counter-stereotypes.

For our initiative, we listened to many voices. We began by conducting a survey of our users, the results of which show that parents care deeply about how gender is portrayed in the media their children consume. Ninety percent of our users believe the way movies and TV portray girls and women and boys and men influence how children see themselves and their genders. Eighty percent consider such gender portrayals when choosing media for their children.

We followed up our user survey with deep-dive interviews with parents across the political spectrum about how they raise their children, the lessons and values they hope to instill, and the role models they look for on TV and in movies. Here's a sample of what they shared with us:

BROOKE, a conservative mother and school teacher, said:

"I do wish they showed more women being more empowered than I think they are portrayed. I think that would be great. I wish they would show more men taking care of their family and doing those girly jobs like changing diapers and taking the kids to school."

DIEGO, a moderate single father who works as a translator, feels media messages sometimes undermine his efforts to instill gender equity in his two children.

"My son was watching a show that said he's supposed to be treating his sister like he's the one in charge. I told him that's not right."

DEBORAH, a liberal academic administrator, is heartbroken over what watching television means for her son.

"Every time he sees a black male on television, they're going to jail, are a drug dealer or basketball player. That's contradictory of what I'm trying to instill in him. I see very little news about black boys doing something positive."

We then combined the findings from our survey of users with insights from these interviews to form the foundation for a national survey of approximately 1,000 parents to explore their attitudes toward gender as it is reflected on television and in movies. We are excited to present findings from that

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survey in the infographic in this report, including these highlights:

Parents believe media have great influence on children, particularly girls. About 75 percent say girls are "very" or "extremely" influenced by TV shows and movies when it comes to "how they look," versus 45 percent for boys. When it comes to "how to act in a romantic relationship," 56 percent of parents say TV shows and movies are "very" or "extremely" influential for girls, versus 43 percent for boys.

Parents are very concerned about their children being exposed to violence and sex in TV and movie content. About 68 percent of parents are "very" or "extremely" concerned when media portrayals of women and girls involve violence. About 59 percent are "very" or "extremely" concerned when males are portrayed as "hyper-violent, aggressive or predatory."

Parents are dissatisfied with how the media portrays gender, race, ethnicity, and sexuality. One in three parents say they are unhappy with the way the media portrays African-Americans, Hispanics, and LGBTQ people. Half agree there is a lack of nonwhite role models in the media for both boys and girls. And slightly more than half are concerned when minorities are portrayed in negative ways.

And while most parents believe children today will grow up with equal opportunities, over a quarter think boys will have better opportunities in life. Moms, especially, believe sons have brighter futures: Thirty-one percent of moms think boys will have more opportunities, compared with only 6 percent who say the same about girls.

At the same time, parents are unsettled by gender straying too far from norms in today's culture. More than a third of parents surveyed say they are concerned about boys acting in "girly" ways; about 28 percent say the same about girls acting in "boyish" ways. And while four out of five parents say they understand what it means to be transgender, many of the parents we interviewed raised it as a topic of confusion. As Brooke said, "I get what it is, but I don't get why."

Over only a few generations, we have witnessed a sea change in gender roles. By creating characters who accurately portray the spectrum of today's children and tomorrow's leaders, media can lead the way in what can seem confusing times. By normalizing what is already happening in and around families, media can offer a vision of a healthy, equitable way forward for all kids.

This report combines our national survey results with a comprehensive overview of decades of research on media's role in gender socialization and presents 10 key findings gleaned from our analysis of more than 150 academic journal articles and numerous press articles. The research confirms many of the concerns parents articulated in our surveys and interviews. For example:

- Higher levels of TV viewing are associated with 4-year-olds being more likely to believe others think boys and men are better than girls and women.

- Media use among early adolescents is associated with more tolerant views of sexual harassment and acceptance of dating violence.

- Television exposure may be related to children's career aspirations, with girls who watch more clips showing female stereotypes expressing less interest in STEM careers than those who are shown footage featuring female scientists.

The good news is that we also found ways to effectively combat harmful stereotypes and promote positive gender representations. Working with media and gender experts, we synthesized these findings into a single grid with practical applications for both content creators and parents. It distills what we know about gender development by age group and provides concrete recommendations for parents about selecting media for their children, as well as how content creators can present healthy, balanced, and more diverse gender portrayals.

Using this grid, we're also training our reviewers on a new set of media-evaluation criteria that incorporates ways to evaluate media representations of gender roles. We hope those reviews will help parents find

media that reflect their values about gender and find healthy, inspiring role models for their children.

What do Americans want for their kids in terms of role models? From our survey, parents say the top five qualities in female role models are intelligence, confidence, kindness, skill at communicating, and leadership. For male role models, parents want them to be intelligent, confident, kind, humble, and good at communicating. In other words, the ideal role model looks much the same, regardless of gender or ethnicity.

Content creators need to respond by creating role models imbued with these common characteristics. They can break ground by portraying complex characters that are free of stereotypes that inhibit. How about a nurturing boy who also happens to be the cool kid? Or a girl who eschews makeup and likes rugby as the compelling lead of a show? Content creators have the power to make it easier for children and their parents to imagine something different and to grow in different ways, without fear of being labelled an outcast.

This report, which examines the effects of film and television content on gender behaviors and perceptions, is a step toward making this a reality. But much work remains to be done in other media, including video games and social media, both of which make up a significant portion of kids' media diets.

Parents are clearly concerned about media portrayals of gender, and many are hungry for characters that are more complex, more diverse, and nonstereotypical. Both research and common sense tell us that there is power in positive media representations. It's time that content creators step up with role models that inspire our next generation to reach their fullest potential, free of gender constraints.

Why Numbers Matter

By GEENA DAVIS

About 26 years ago, I co-starred in a movie that really struck a nerve. *Thelma & Louise* sparked a reaction that none of us making the movie could have imagined. The press lost no time in announcing that "this changes everything." Surely, this would open the floodgates to many more movies starring female characters doing extraordinary things. My next movie, *A League of Their Own*, also caused the media to predict big changes for women in film. Neither prediction proved true.

A quarter century after *Thelma & Louise*, women and girls continue to be sidelined in most media, particularly children's media. That matters, because what our sons and daughters see on-screen shapes their beliefs about the world and themselves. For 10 years, the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media has commissioned in-depth analyses of family-rated films and children's TV. Our research shows that there are profoundly more male characters than female characters in what's aimed at children — and that the female characters that do exist are often underdeveloped, sidelined, uninspiring, or simply eye candy. Armed with the research, I work closely with the entertainment industry to encourage a dramatic change in the way female characters are portrayed to children.

Recently, we were able to expand the breadth of our analysis. In collaboration with Google and the University of Southern California Viterbi School of Engineering, we developed a software tool that uses machine learning to analyze media. Using the tool, we found that among the top 100 films of 2015, female lead characters got three times less on-screen and speaking time than their male counterparts — even though films with female leads made nearly 16 percent more at the box office in 2015 than those led by men.

Surely we should be able to show kids that boys and girls are capable of sharing the sandbox equally! I am not talking about adding a message; kids' movies and TV shows are meant to entertain, not preach. I'm asking content creators to take out the message that women and girls are less important than men and boys. It's just common sense that we stop creating a problem today that we'll need to fix tomorrow. Let's not make one more movie or TV show that trains kids to see girls as "less than." We can create the future now.

Geena Davis is founder and chair of the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media. An Academy Award-winning actor, Davis has portrayed a surgeon on *Grey's Anatomy*, a professional baseball player in *A League of Their Own*, and a U.S. president on *Commander in Chief*, among her many roles. She also serves as special envoy for women and girls in information and communication technologies for the United Nations' Telecommunication Union.

GEENA DAVIS

Spotlight on Gender

By EUN YANG

I once received a letter from a male viewer who wrote to give me some advice: "Lay off the rouge. You look like a clown." At least he took the time to send a handwritten message.

Now, in the age of social media and always-on viewer engagement, such observations about my appearance arrive faster and are more plentiful. They come with no signature or return address. Some are actually very sweet, while others are NSFW. You develop thick skin in this business.

I get it. I'm on TV every day. It's a visual medium. My appearance matters. But sometimes even I am surprised at how much feedback I receive about the way I look. I get more questions about where I buy my clothes and who cuts my hair than the stories I cover. Maybe that just means I'm such a good reporter that my stories cover every possible angle. But, somehow, I doubt it.

In one case, some viewers became fixated on a green blouse I used to wear. It was something you might wear to an office Christmas party or your kid's school holiday concert. I loved that blouse, and I wore it ... a lot. People noticed. "Oh, there's your green blouse." "You're wearing your green blouse again." "Hey, didn't you just wear that blouse?" It became its own entity. It took over the conversation. So I had to retire it. It's still hanging in my closet, whispering to me, "Don't let them shame you!"

The irony is that I've been told the ideal "look" is one that isn't distracting. A journalist is supposed to report on the story, not become the story. And that has always held true for me. It is a great privilege to be invited into viewers' homes each morning to deliver news and information that could have an impact on their lives. I help people get their mornings started and get them ready to take on the rest of the day. I don't take that responsibility lightly. The attention of viewers is a precious commodity, and I want to keep earning that privilege with high-quality work. But I have enough experience to know that viewer comments are part of the deal.

I also have enough faith to believe that people are noticing my curiosity and humor, along with my Zara dress. I hope they can see how hard I've worked to get where I am and how much I love my job. I especially want my daughter and two sons to understand how important it is to look beyond appearance. I'm a role model for them and others. I hope to inspire them by example to pursue their passions and to care deeply about the quality of their contributions. And if they feel like wearing an old green shirt or blouse while they're doing it, I'm all for it.

EUN YANG

Eun Yang is an Emmy Award-winning anchor for NBCUniversal's *News4 Today*, the top-rated newscast in Washington, D.C. Yang joined *News4 Today* in 2002 as a general assignment reporter specializing in covering breaking news. Before joining *News4 Today*, Yang was one of the first reporters hired by the National Geographic Channel in Washington, D.C.
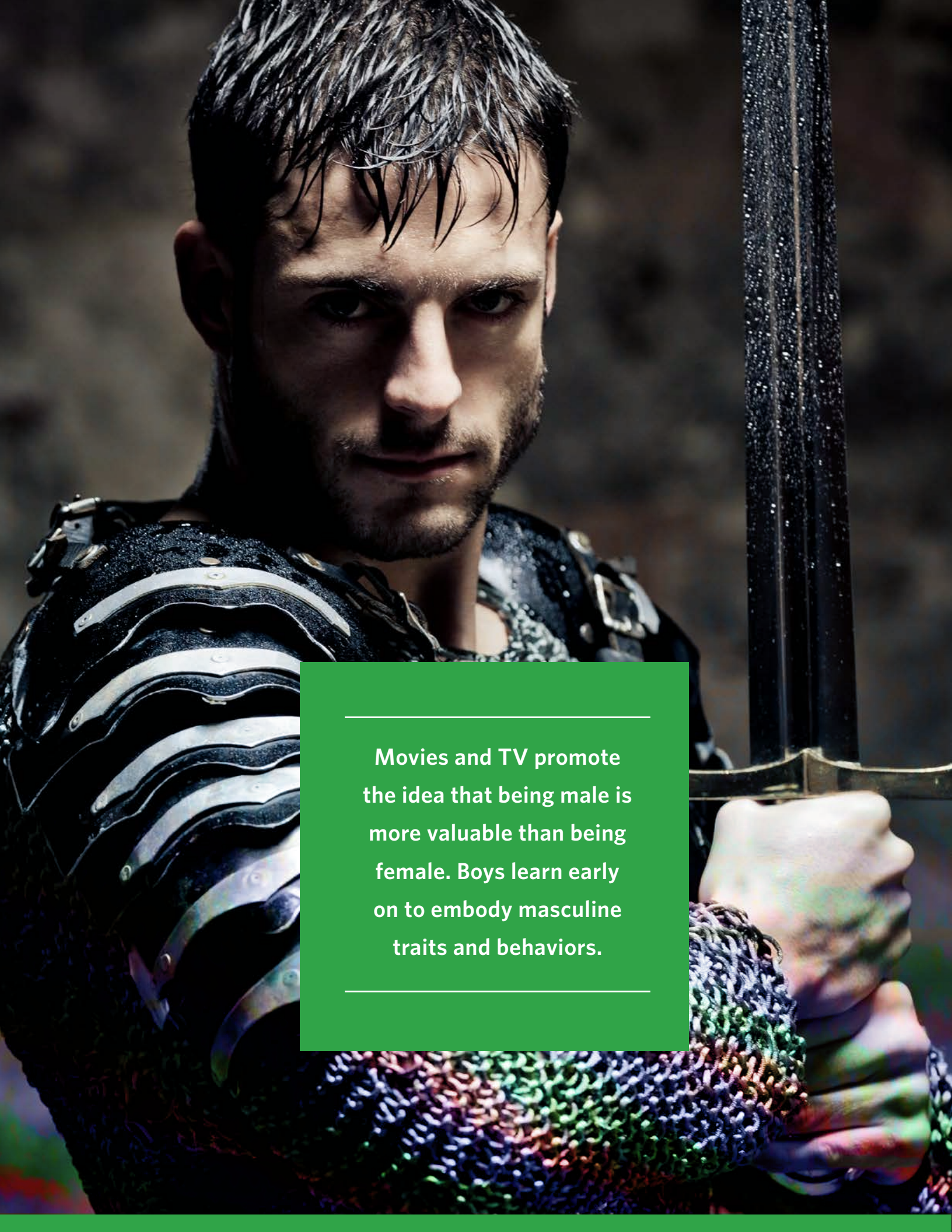
KEY FINDINGS

1 Media* reinforce the idea that masculine traits and behaviors are more valued than feminine traits and behaviors, and boys who consume these media messages are more likely to exhibit masculine behaviors and beliefs.

Adherence to gender stereotypes in early childhood tends to be more pronounced in and rewarded for boys than girls (Bussey & Bandura, 1992; Slaby & Frey, 1975). Higher levels of TV viewing are associated with 4-year-olds being more likely to believe that others think boys and men are better than girls and women (Halim, Ruble, & Tamis-LeMonda, 2013). Boys are attracted to masculine role models to learn how to behave in masculine ways, and they are less interested in media featuring feminine role models (Luecke-Aleksa, Anderson, Collins, & Schmitt, 1995; Slaby & Frey, 1975). In children's films and on children's television (e.g., superhero shows) and in media favored by older adolescents (e.g., reality shows, sports programming), masculinity is illustrated by characteristics such as aggression, power, dominance, status seeking, emotional restraint, heterosexuality, and risk taking (Baker & Raney, 2007; Coyne, Callister, & Robinson, 2010; Stern, 2005). Moreover, research has suggested that media exposure affects masculine attitudes and behaviors. For example, preschool boys who are frequent viewers of television programs about superheroes tend to engage in more male-stereotyped toy play and more weapon play (Coyne, Lindner, Rasmussen, Nelson, & Collier, 2014). Among older male adolescents, sports TV viewing and reality TV viewing are associated with stronger conformity with masculine beliefs (Giaccardi, Ward, Seabrook, Manago, & Lippman, 2016).

This research brief draws on our backgrounds in the fields of psychology and communication and on our professional expertise exploring the intersections of child development, media, and gender. In this brief we review scientific evidence examining how media use contributes to children's understanding of gender roles, including their assumptions about how girls and boys look, think, and behave. Our analysis of media focuses primarily on television and movies viewed on a variety of platforms. We also examine the developmental trajectory of gender typing across four key developmental phases of gender socialization: early childhood, middle childhood, early adolescence, and later adolescence. This brief considers more than 150 journal articles, press articles, interviews, and books and prioritizes research that has been published since 2000. We believe this work is critical to helping parents, educators, media creators, and others support positive gender development, push back on unhelpful stereotypes and portrayals, and help children develop their full potential.

L. Monique Ward, Ph.D.   Jennifer Stevens Aubrey, Ph.D.

View the full research report at:
commonsense.org/gender-research

> Movies and TV promote the idea that being male is more valuable than being female. Boys learn early on to embody masculine traits and behaviors.

*For the purposes of this report, "media" means primarily television shows and movies viewed on a variety of platforms.

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2 Media promote the notion that girls should be concerned about their appearance and should treat their bodies as sexual objects for others' consumption.

The lesson that girls should be concerned with their appearance and sexiness is communicated in media targeting youth, beginning in early childhood (Baker & Raney, 2007; Hentges & Case, 2013; Smith, Choueiti, Prescott, & Pieper, 2013). There is evidence that exposure to appearance-focused TV content increases body dissatisfaction among 5- to 8-year-old girls (Dohnt & Tiggemann, 2006), and by early adolescence, media exposure is predictive of the internalization of media-based appearance ideals for both girls and boys (Trekels & Eggermont, 2017). Media messages teach girls that looking sexy is often preferred or expected and is equated with popularity and romantic success. One consequence is self-objectification — i.e., viewing oneself as an object whose external appearance matters more than internal qualities (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Self-objectification is associated with many negative outcomes, including diminished academic performance (Pacilli, Tomasetto, & Cadinu, 2016), lowered body esteem, increased anxiety, lowered confidence in math ability (Grabe & Hyde, 2009), body shame, and depressive symptoms (Tiggemann & Slater, 2015).

3 In adolescence, media use is associated with more tolerant views of sexual harassment and more support for the belief that women are at least partially responsible for their own sexual assaults.

In early adolescent audiences, some evidence suggests that youth media promote sexist beliefs, including the tolerance of sexual harassment, acceptance of dating violence, and the endorsement of rape myths, a set of beliefs suggesting that women's behavior and choices are to blame for rape (Driesmans, Vandenbosch, & Eggermont, 2015; Johnson, Adams, Ashburn, & Reed, 1995; Strouse, Goodwin, & Roscoe, 1994). This research is important to consider in adolescence because sexist attitudes are a risk factor for sexist behavior and violence against women in adult life (Martín, Vergeles, Acevedo, Sánchez, & Visa, 2005; Russell & Trigg, 2004).

4 Heavier viewing of gender-traditional television content is associated with children's gender-typed career aspirations.

Not only does media content show children what society expects of men and women, but also TV exposure is related to children's career aspirations. Girls who consume more traditional TV programs express more interest in certain traditional careers for women (Wroblewski & Huston, 1987). Also, media are often children's chief source of information for what scientists look like (Steinke, Lapinski, Crocker, Zietsman-Thomas, Williams, Evergreen, & Kuchibhotla, 2007). Girls who are shown TV clips that feature stereotypes of women's behavior (e.g., talking about their outfits) express less interest in STEM careers (e.g, scientist, architect) than girls who are shown no content or who are shown clips featuring female scientists (Bond, 2016).

5 The television programs and films that children and adolescents watch reinforce traditional gender stereotypes.

Research indicates that female and male characters adhere to disparate gender roles. For example, female characters are less active, less knowledgeable, less dominant, and more deferential than their male counterparts (Browne, 1998). Male characters are more physically aggressive (Leaper, Breed, Hoffman, & Perlman, 2002) and more obsessed with sex (Kim, Sorsoli, Collins, Zylbergold, Schooler, & Tolman, 2007; Ward, 1995); meanwhile, female characters are obsessed with their appearance and sexiness (Gerding & Signorielli, 2014; Stern & Mastro, 2004).

Girls are taught that their bodies exist to be objectified, sexualized, and consumed by others. Teens who are heavier media users are more likely to believe that women are partially responsible for their own sexual assaults.
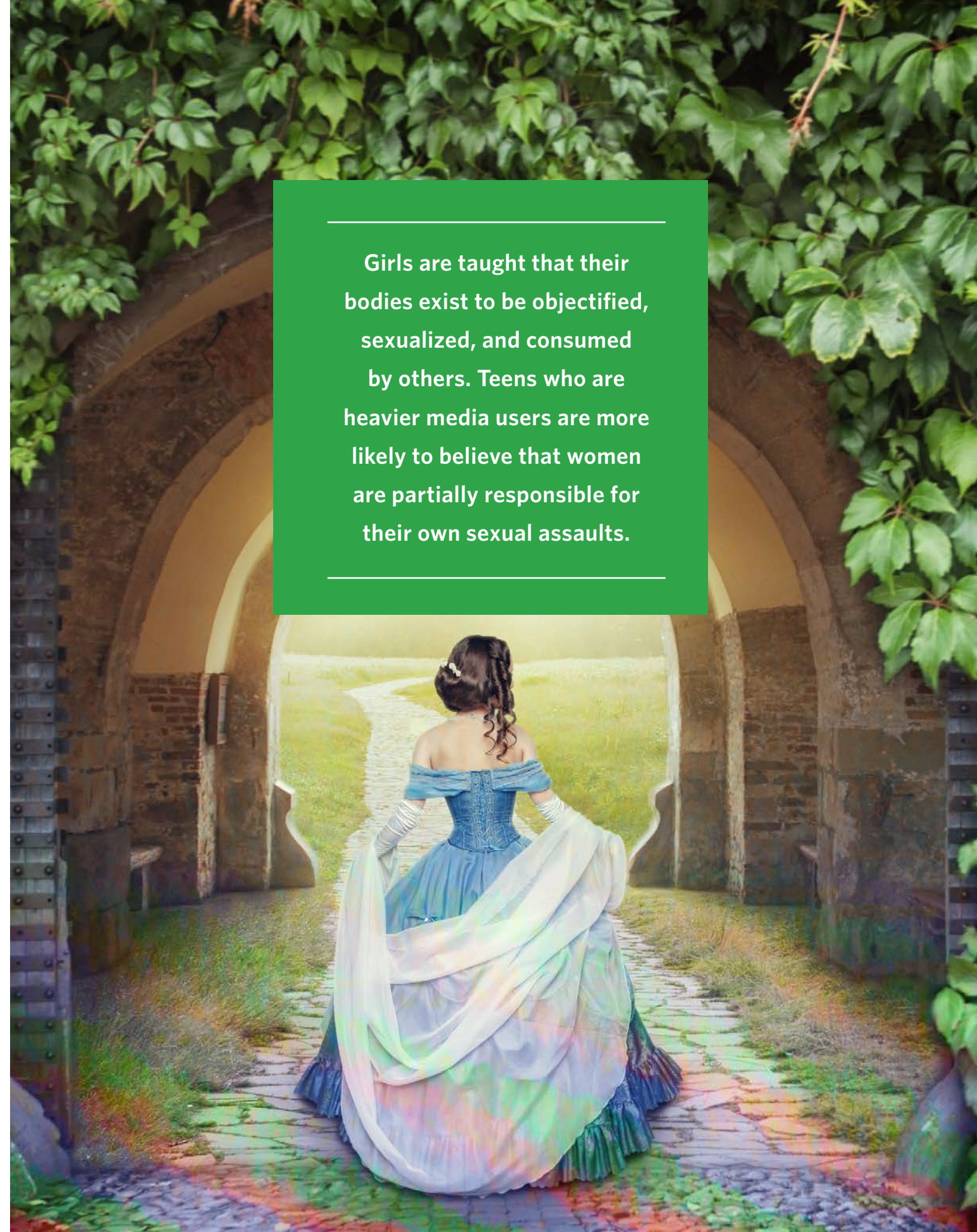
6 Youth of color may be particularly vulnerable to the effects of media use on gender-role development.

African-American and Latino youth often confront unique gendered stereotypes of their ethnic groups. Emerging data suggest that African-American and Latino youth do notice these stereotypes in the media (e.g., Adams-Bass, Bentley-Edwards, & Stevenson, 2014) and that exposure to them may affect their beliefs about gender roles and sexual relationships (Jerald, Ward, Moss, Thomas, & Fletcher, in press). Having a stronger ethnic identity may be a protective factor (e.g., Schooler, Ward, Merriwether, & Caruthers, 2004). Findings also indicate that African-American and Latino youth consume media at higher levels than white youth (Common Sense Media, 2015) and that some media targeted at these populations, such as rap and hip-hop music videos, are especially high in sexually objectifying images of women (e.g., Aubrey & Frisby, 2011; Turner, 2011).

7 Heavier viewing of gender-traditional TV and film content is linked to the expression of more rigid beliefs about what men and women do and are and how they behave.

Children learn from the culture and people around them about the activities, toys, occupations, and traits linked with one gender over another. Research indicates that gender-typed television portrayals help teach some of these associations. Heavier viewing of gender-traditional TV content is associated with the expression of more rigid stereotypes about: adult activities and occupations (Nathanson, Wilson, McGee, & Sebastian, 2002), household chores (Morgan & Rothschild, 1983; Signorielli & Lears, 1992), motherhood (Ex, Janssens, & Korzilius, 2002), and the attributes that boys and girls should have (Aubrey & Harrison, 2004; Ward, Hansbrough, & Walker, 2005). Frequent TV viewing is also linked to the holding of more traditional attitudes about gender roles in general (Rivadeneyra & Ward, 2005).

8 Accepting rigid stereotypes about the roles and attributes of women and men has consequences for development in childhood, adolescence, and adulthood.

Although conforming to society's gender-role expectations may offer comfort or validation for some, it also may put children into narrow boxes and keep some from experiencing their full intellectual and professional potential. For example, gender stereotypes are a prominent source of the gender disparity in participation in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields (Puchner, Markowitz, & Hedley, 2015). Indeed, from an early age, children associate brilliance more with boys than girls (Bian, Leslie, & Cimpian, 2017). In addition, accepting stereotypes that highlight beauty and sexiness for girls and danger, risk, and power for boys is associated with young men's greater participation both in risk-taking behavior (Giaccardi, Ward, Seabrook, & Lippman, 2017) and in dating violence and sexual violence (e.g., Murnen, Wright, & Kaluzny, 2002); with boys' having problems with anger and acting out (O'Neil, Challenger, Renzulli, Crasper, & Webster, 2013; O'Neil & Lujan, 2009); and with body-image concerns and mental health disorders such as depression among girls (American Psychological Association, 2007).

> **TV and movies that children watch reinforce stereotypical gender roles, from everyday behavior to career aspirations to expectations about sex and romantic relationships. Youth of color may be particularly vulnerable to the effects of gender typing in the media.**

9 As children enter adolescence, media provide lessons on how they are expected to behave in romantic and sexual situations, and these lessons are strongly gendered.

Early adolescents place value in idealized conceptions of romantic relationships, and evidence suggests that movies with idealized romantic themes amplify early beliefs in idealized romantic concepts, such as love at first sight (Driesmans, Vandenbosch, & Eggermont, 2016). Adolescents also are eager to understand what is expected of them sexually. Media provide different sexual lessons based on gender: Men are expected to actively pursue sexual relationships, treat women as sexual objects, and avoid commitment and emotional attachment. Women are expected to set and enforce sexual limits, use their looks to attract men, prioritize relational commitment, and act sexually passive (Kim et al., 2007). Evidence suggests that older adolescents learn these gender-based sexual scripts from a variety of media sources, including television (Ward & Friedman, 2006; Vandenbosch & Eggermont, 2012a), music, and other sexually explicit media (ter Bogt, Engels, Bogers, & Kloosterman, 2010).

10 There are several ways to combat gender stereotypes and promote positive gender representations, including presenting counter-stereotypes, talking to children about media content, and providing media-literacy education.

Counter-stereotypical content tries to challenge gender stereotypes — for example, by presenting strong and capable female characters who are not obsessed with their appearance and with attracting males, who initiate and lead, and who enjoy outdoor activities, sports, science, and technology. They also present male characters who collaborate with girls, respect them as equals, demonstrate empathy and emotions, and resolve conflict in nonaggressive ways (Lemish, 2010). Additionally, children who hear comments from parents that counter stereotypes express greater acceptance of nontraditional gender roles (Nathanson et al., 2002). Lastly, media-literacy education can be used to activate and improve children's critical-thinking skills so they can be better prepared to analyze and challenge media messages. Research studies testing the effectiveness of several media-literacy programs have found participation to be linked with a weaker internalization of media ideals, increased awareness of discrimination in the workplace, a greater ability to identify sexism in the media, and an improved ability to respond to peers' sexist comments (Pahlke, Bigler, & Martin, 2014; Puchner et al., 2015; Wade, Wilksch, Paxton, Byrne, & Austin, 2017).

> **Children can learn positive lessons from stories that challenge existing gender stereotypes. Media literacy is vital to children's ability to be savvy media consumers.**
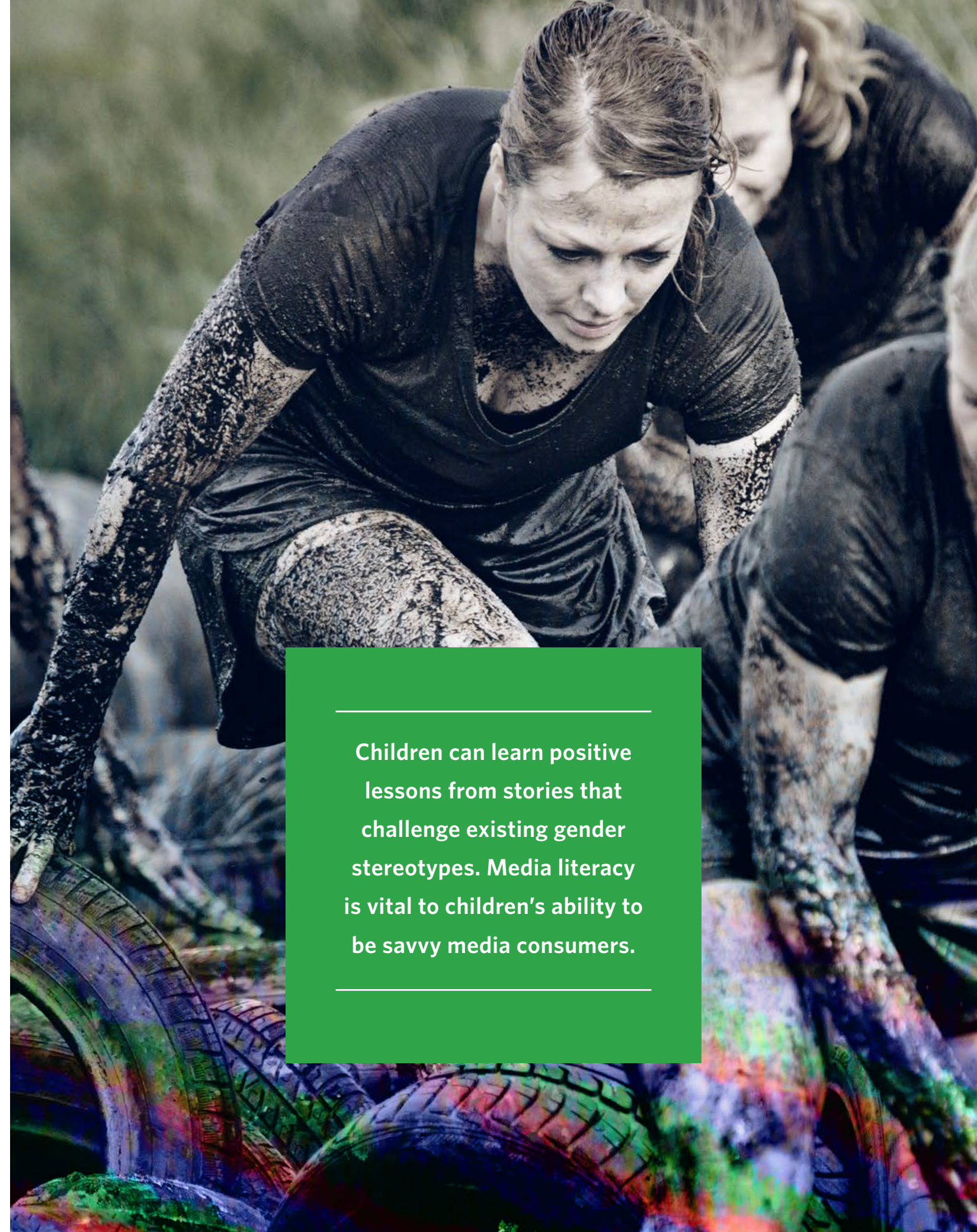
GENDER EQUITY GUIDELINES FOR CONTENT CREATORS:

Recommendations for developing positive gender representations in movies and on TV

common sense®

	EARLY CHILDHOOD **Age 2-6**	MIDDLE CHILDHOOD **Age 7-10**	EARLY ADOLESCENCE **Age 11-13**	LATER ADOLESCENCE **Age 14-17**
What Kids Are Learning About Gender	• Learn that they are boys or girls (gender identity) • Learn stereotypes about activities, traits, toys, and skills associated with each gender • Develop and strengthen gender-typed play and activity preferences • Adhere to rigid stereotypes for themselves and others; intolerant of gender-role transgressions • Show preferences for playing with children of own gender (gender segregation)	• Draw psychological distinctions between women (e.g., more emotional, affectionate) and men (e.g., more ambitious, aggressive) • Learn associations of occupations and academic subjects with each gender • Own gender stereotyping becomes more flexible • Gender segregation strengthens	• Physical changes of puberty create appearance concerns and self-consciousness • Intensified need to conform to cultural gender norms (gender intensification), coinciding with puberty • With gender intensification comes renewed intolerance of cross-gender mannerisms and behaviors • Concerns about dating potential	• Gender segregation diminishes • Gender stereotyping again becomes more flexible • Ideas about careers, occupational roles, and work become salient; can be based in gender stereotypes • While romantic and dating experiences accumulate, develop an increased need to learn gender-based expectations for how to behave in romantic and sexual situations • Appearance concerns continue
Goals for Media Content	• Show children with diverse attributes to show that there is more than one way to do gender • Show portrayals that equally value boys and girls, masculine and feminine behaviors and characteristics • Show children engaged in a range of activities, including counter-stereotypical activities • Show girls and boys interacting in healthy and egalitarian cross-gender friendships • Show girls and boys of diverse races, body/facial/hair types, clothes • Use more gender-neutral color palette • Diversify camera filters, editing techniques, sound effects, and music to avoid segregating the worlds of boys and girls	• Show role models who participate in both feminine and masculine behaviors and roles without ridicule from other characters (particularly important for male characters) • Show role models who are instrumental (focused on doing things) based on content and context rather than gender (especially important for female characters) • Show role models who are expressive (display emotions and sensitivity) based on content and context rather than gender (especially important for male characters) • Show adult women and men in both traditional and nontraditional occupations, including women as professionals and men as caretakers • Show nonsexualized female characters (e.g., realistic body types, diverse clothing styles, avoidance of signifiers such as red lips, long lashes, cleavage, unrealistically long legs and flowing hair, etc.) and nonaggressive male characters who resolve conflict without resorting to violence	• Show messages that emphasize that worth and happiness do not come from appearance (especially important for female characters) or from physical strength (especially important for male characters) • Show role models who participate in dating and relationships in addition to, not in lieu of, hobbies and other instrumental activities • Show examples of positive, supportive, and fulfilling cross-gender friendships and relationships • Show role models who display both feminine and masculine mannerisms, behavior, and career/academic interests without ridicule from other characters (particularly important for male characters) • Show examples of fully realized transgender characters who experience both ups and downs and are accepted and supported by their peers and communities	• Show portrayals that feature boys and men expressing their emotions in constructive ways, having diverse interests (not only sex), and being accepting of nonheterosexual characters • Show portrayals that steer away from gender-based racial stereotypes • Show teen characters who have non-gender-stereotypical professional aspirations (girls who want to be scientists and boys who want to be nurses) and adult characters who are successful and fulfilled in both traditional and nontraditional professions • Show diverse dating scripts that are not steeped in gender stereotypes (boys always making the first move, girls being passive and acquiescent) • Show sexual scenarios in which gender is not the driving force behind how sexual partners behave and in which both partners have agency • Show female characters who set sexual boundaries and who are comfortable voicing their needs • Show cross-gender relationships that are based on nonromantic or nonsexual friendship and trust

Breaking Out of the Man Box

By GARY BARKER

What does it mean to be a man? If you look at much of mainstream media, the answer is that they should use aggression to solve problems (*The Fate of the Furious*), repress their emotions (*Star Trek*), and isolate themselves (*The Dark Knight Rises*).

These media messages place pressure on boys and young men to behave according to a rigid construct of outdated ideals — a "Man Box," if you will. And that pressure is having a devastating effect on the health and relationships of our male population.

In a survey we conducted this year of more than 3,600 young men in the U.S., Mexico, and the U.K., those who felt this pressure were almost 2.5 times more likely to have had suicidal thoughts; six or seven times more likely to have bullied someone;

and six times more likely to have reported sexually harassing women. In other words, we're feeding young men and boys a media diet that has the potential to cause great harm — to themselves and to others around them.

The good news is that young men aren't buying all of these messages. For example, 63 percent of U.S. respondents said that society and the media tell them that a "real man" would never say no to sex, but only 28 percent actually agreed with that statement. This break — between some of the messages guys receive and the ones they internalize — means the media should stop sending them altogether.

While the media has played a role in creating the Man Box, it also can play a critical role in helping us break out of it by changing the way masculinity is defined and projected. Media creators should feature male characters that actually reflect their audience: young men and boys who are capable of caring, connecting, and having healthy relationships. If we can make this change, we'll be able to support a whole generation of boys who live outside the confines of the Man Box.

GARY BARKER is president and CEO of Promundo. He has done extensive global research and program development around engaging men and boys in gender equality and violence prevention and is a leading voice for the worldwide effort to establish positive, healthy dynamics between men and women.

GARY BARKER

Diversity: Why It Matters

By KEVIN CLARK

Gender issues are complex. Factors such as race, religion, income, geography, and education all intertwine with gender to affect young viewers differently.

Research, for example, has shown that white females, African-American males, and African-American females tend to feel worse about themselves after watching TV, playing video games, or consuming other sorts of electronic media. Meanwhile, white males feel the opposite: Their self-confidence increases after consuming the same media (Martins & Harrison, 2011).

Children of color consume far more media than their white counterparts (Common Sense Media, 2015). And much of that media project stereotypes that reinforce bias. This is unfortunate, because exposure to these images and portrayals is how young people develop perceptions and attitudes about themselves and the world around them (Williams, Martins, Consalvo, & Ivory, 2009; Berry & Asamen, 1993). For some people, their exposure to diverse populations is limited to media portrayals and superficial interactions.

This makes it even more critical for the media to put forth the most authentic, representative, and balanced portrayals of women and people of color.

With only 22 percent of children's books (Horning, 2016) and 19 percent of video games (Williams et al., 2009) having characters of color, and only 28 percent of characters with dialogue in film and television being characters of color (Smith, Choueiti, & Pieper, 2016), there is clearly much work to be done.

Not only should producers of media be proactive and deliberate about diversifying their teams, but also diverse content creators may want to broaden the distribution of their content through the internet and streaming services to reach wider audiences. In the meantime, parents and children should become critical and savvy consumers of media.

KEVIN CLARK

KEVIN CLARK is the director of the Center for Digital Media Innovation and Diversity and full professor in the Learning Technologies Division of the College of Education and Human Development at George Mason University. Dr. Clark has been honored by the White House as a STEM Access Champion of Change and was a fellow for the Television Academy Foundation Faculty Seminar.
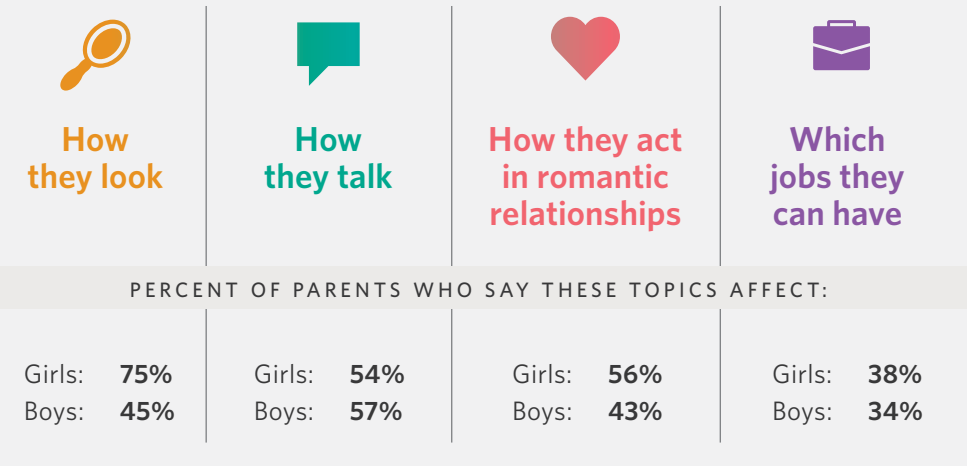
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WATCHING GENDER: HOW STEREOTYPES IN MOVIES AND ON TV IMPACT KIDS' DEVELOPMENT

common sense®

Parents say movies and TV heavily influence their children's ideas about ...

How they look

How they talk

How they act in romantic relationships

Which jobs they can have

PERCENT OF PARENTS WHO SAY THESE TOPICS AFFECT:

Girls:	75%	Girls:	54%	Girls:	56%	Girls:	38%
Boys:	45%	Boys:	57%	Boys:	43%	Boys:	34%

Parents, and especially mothers, are most concerned about their children seeing ...

Sexualization

Sexualization of girls or women — **64%** Overall
Mothers: 71% | Fathers: 57%

Boys or men shown as sex-obsessed — **57%** Overall
Mothers: 60% | Fathers: 54%

Violence

Violence against girls or women — **68%** Overall
Mothers: 72% | Fathers: 63%

Boys or men shown as hyperviolent, aggressive, or predatory — **59%** Overall
Mothers: 63% | Fathers: 55%
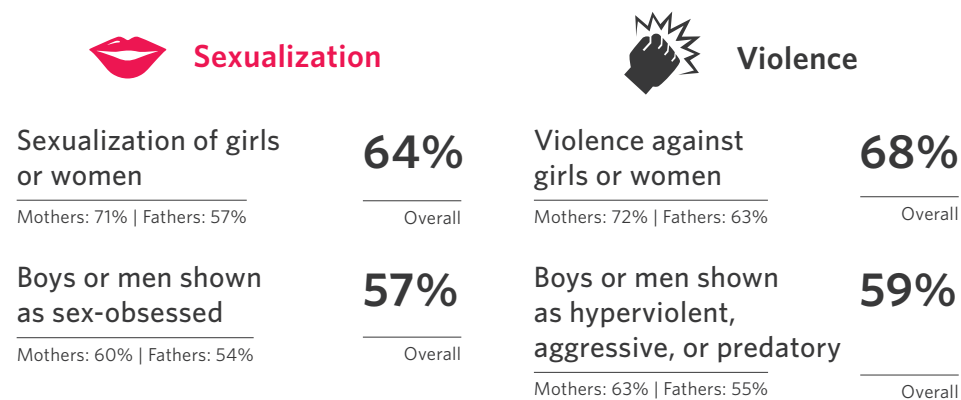
Nearly a third of moms think an 8-year-old boy today has a brighter future than an 8-year-old girl.

Who has a brighter future? Moms say:

Boys **31%**
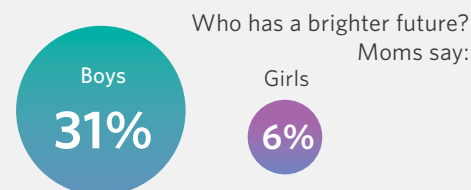
Girls **6%**

Over 25% of all parents say boys will have better opportunities than girls.

METHODOLOGY: This report examines parents' attitudes toward gender as it is reflected on television and in movies and uses data from a probability-based online survey of 933 parents of children age 2 to 17 living in the United States; it was administered by SSRS from March 28 to April 18, 2017. www.ssrs.com
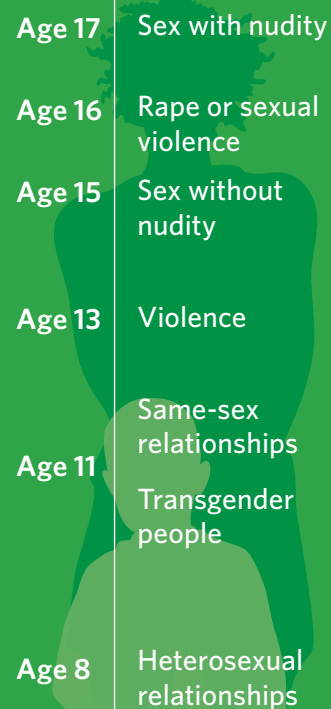
What's the right age for kids to see these topics on TV and in movies?

PARENTS SAY:

Age	Topic
Age 17	Sex with nudity
Age 16	Rape or sexual violence
Age 15	Sex without nudity
Age 13	Violence
Age 11	Same-sex relationships
Age 11	Transgender people
Age 8	Heterosexual relationships

Parents are dissatisfied with the way that gender, race, ethnicity, and sexuality are portrayed on-screen.
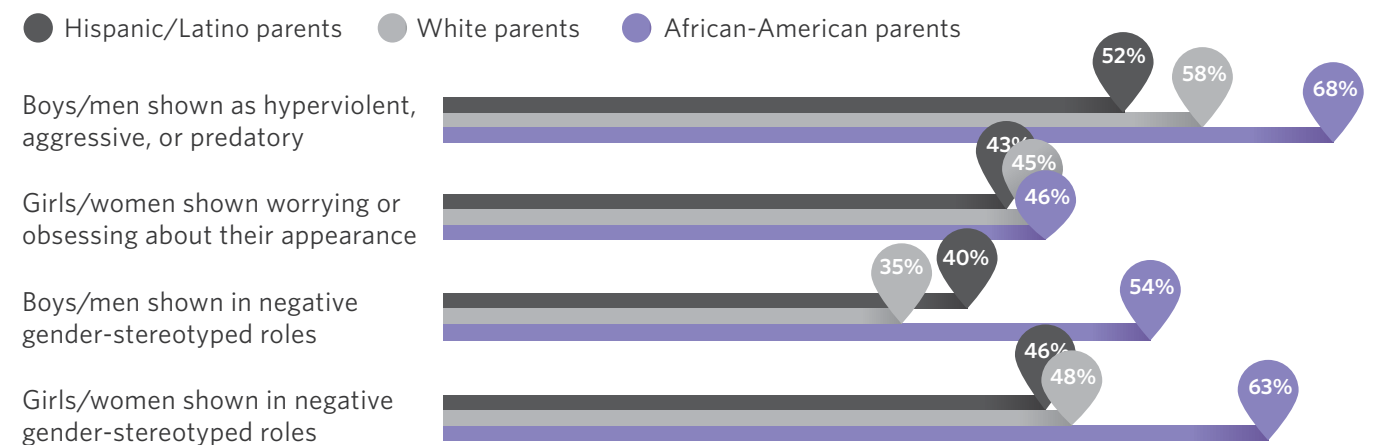
ABOUT 1/3 of all parents are "extremely" or "very" dissatisfied with how Hispanic/Latino, African-American, gay, and transgender men and women are portrayed on TV and in movies.

OVER 1/2 of all parents say there is a lack of nonwhite role models on TV and in movies for both boys and girls.

African-American and Hispanic/Latino parents have higher dissatisfaction with the media's portrayal of their minority groups.

African-American parents are generally more concerned than parents of other races/ethnicities about what their children see on TV or in movies.

Percent of parents who are "extremely" or "very" concerned about their children seeing the following:

● Hispanic/Latino parents ● White parents ● African-American parents

Boys/men shown as hyperviolent, aggressive, or predatory — 52% / 58% / 68%

Girls/women shown worrying or obsessing about their appearance — 43% / 45% / 46%

Boys/men shown in negative gender-stereotyped roles — 35% / 40% / 54%

Girls/women shown in negative gender-stereotyped roles — 46% / 48% / 63%

Top Qualities That Parents Want in TV/Movie Role Models

Regardless of gender, parents generally want to instill the same character qualities in their children and want to see characters that reflect these traits.

GOOD COMMUNICATOR KIND HUMBLE INTELLIGENT BRAVE EFFECTIVE LEADER CONFIDENT

● Boys ● Girls ● Both

Media and Politics: The 2008 Clinton Campaign

By DAVID PLOUFFE

During the 2016 presidential election, I was struck by how — even though in many ways we are making progress toward a more equitable society — the media directed a shocking degree of sexism at Hillary Clinton. That media gender bias undoubtedly added to her struggle in winning the presidency. I can say this with some degree of confidence because I saw close-up how it worked against her when I was on the other side, running Barack Obama's presidential campaign in 2008.

Throughout the 2008 campaign, Clinton had to deal with media commentators comparing her to the Glenn Close character in *Fatal Attraction*, opining about her necklines, and saying that the tone of her voice was received by men as her nagging them to take out the garbage — not to mention the near-constant commentary on her pantsuits, ankles, hairstyles, make-up choices, and a myriad of other appearance-related issues male candidates have never had to deal with.

The attacks on Hillary Clinton have been such a constant that, in looking back at some of the comments made about her in 2008, I found myself not recalling many of them. I, too, had become inured to them, subconsciously assuming that was just the extra baggage she would have to carry.

Will this ever change? Eventually, yes. But that will require a media that's more mindful of the messages consciously or subconsciously perpetuated in news coverage. Editors will have to be more cognizant of their biases in choosing which angles to pursue. They also will need to be vigilant about calling out negative gender stereotypes, not playing into them.

I have hope that we can achieve this. Two days after the 2008 election, my daughter was born. Now 8 years old, she plans to be president when she grows up. I tell her she can be anything she wants to be, and I mean it. And my 12-year-old son? He says he will be her campaign manager.

DAVID PLOUFFE is the president of policy and advocacy at the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative. He was the campaign manager for Barack Obama's 2008 presidential campaign.

Identity and Educational Success

By REVETA BOWERS

Over my 45-year career as an educator and administrator, I have witnessed many changes but perhaps none so transformational as the proliferation of digital media. While traditional media have existed for decades, technology has opened the floodgates for a torrent of unfiltered media. Having watched kids learn as a classroom teacher, I am especially sensitive to the corrosive effects of negative and stereotyped gender and racial images.

Younger children naturally see goodness and ability in people. And it's not that children don't see difference. But difference in their young worlds invites curiosity and creates a desire to make friends. Negative media stereotypes, however, destroy that openness in young minds.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to shield our students from exposure to media. So let's instead harness the power of media for it to be the compelling teaching tool for good that we know it can be. Our children need media that inspire gender pride, self-confidence, inclusion, curiosity, and the determination to change the world.

Just recently, I witnessed just how powerful media can be. I attended a screening of the movie *Hidden Figures* alongside 10,000 middle school-aged girls on the University of Southern California campus. As they watched the film, the girls sat up straighter and became more focused on the incredible achievements of the three women in the story. Then they began to spontaneously cheer at every victory documented in the movie. As the film concluded, they swelled to their feet chanting, "Yes, we CAN!" Over and over again.

Think how much more we could all achieve if that message — "Yes, THEY can!" — were woven into our movies, TV shows, YouTube videos, games, and more. That would be a change I would very much welcome in my long career as an educator.

REVETA BOWERS served as administrator and head of school for the Center for Early Education in Los Angeles for 32 years and is associated with educational organizations across the country. Bowers is chair of the board of Common Sense.

RESOURCES

Common Sense Media

Sex, Gender, and Body Image Resource Center. Offers parents answers to their questions about how media messages play a role in shaping kids' gender norms, ideas about sex, and body satisfaction.

www.commonsensemedia.org/
sex-gender-and-body-image

Girls, Boys, and Media: A Gender and Digital Life Toolkit for Schools. Use this toolkit to help students reflect on gender stereotypes: where they come from, how we learn them, and how they can shape the media we consume and create.

www.commonsensemedia.org/educators/gender

Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media

Research Informs & Empowers. Research from the institute and updates on the Geena Davis Inclusion Quotient (GD-IQ).

https://seejane.org/research-informs-empowers/

Kids' Inclusive and Diverse Media Action Project (KIDMAP)

KIDMAP. Coalition of media creators, producers, researchers, educators, and parents committed to putting all kids on the digital media map through the creation of equitable children's media.

www.joinkidmap.org

The Diverse and Inclusive Growth (DIG) Checklist. Can be used to identify and rate children's digital media that is high-quality, inclusive, and diverse.

www.joinkidmap.org/digchecklist/

Let It Ripple

50/50. Short film that gives the 10,000-year history of women and power, from setbacks and uprisings to the bigger context of where we are today.

www.letitripple.org/films/50-50/

PFLAG

Our Trans Loved Ones: Questions and Answers for Parents, Families, and Friends of People Who Are Transgender and Gender Expansive. Guide with information, first-person stories, and expert input for those who have a loved one who has come out as transgender or gender-expansive.

www.pflag.org/ourtranslovedones

Producers Guild of America Women's Impact Network/Women and Hollywood

The Ms. Factor: The Power of Female Driven Content. Toolkit with current data and trends for producers and filmmakers to support female-driven content.

http://msfactortoolkit.com/

Promundo

The Man Box: A Study on Being a Young Man in the US, UK, and Mexico. Study on young men's attitudes, behaviors, and understandings of manhood.

www.promundoglobal.org/man-box

The Representation Project

Miss Representation. Film examining how mainstream media and culture contribute to the underrepresentation of women in positions of power and influence in America (includes discussion guide for educators).

therepresentationproject.org/film/
miss-representation/school-resources/

The Mask You Live In. Film following boys and young men as they struggle to stay true to themselves while negotiating America's narrow definition of masculinity (includes discussion guide for educators).

therepresentationproject.org/film/
the-mask-you-live-in/school-screening-curriculum/

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