

A COMMON SENSE
RESEARCH BRIEF



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WATCHING GENDER

How Stereotypes in Movies and on TV Impact Kids' Development

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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How Stereotypes in Movies and on TV Impact Kids' Development

COMMON SENSE IS GRATEFUL FOR THE GENEROUS SUPPORT AND UNDERWRITING THAT FUNDED THIS RESEARCH REPORT.

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**The Honorable John Delaney
and April McClain-Delaney
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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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WHY GENDER EQUITY IS COMMON SENSE

By OLIVIA MORGAN and CLAIRE SHIPMAN



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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 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.



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.

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

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

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, Vandebosch, & 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.





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.

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, 2015b) 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).

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.

INTRODUCTION

The January 2017 cover of *National Geographic* boldly suggested that we are in the midst of a “gender revolution.” Distinct from revolutions past — the sexual revolution and the women’s rights revolution in particular — the gender revolution is about changing norms and expanding ideas about what gender means from biological, psychological, and social perspectives. In a recent survey, 50 percent of 1,000 people age 18–34 (part of the so-called millennial generation) reported that gender exists on a spectrum rather than as a simple male-female binary (Rivas, 2015). Moreover, since the 1990s, U.S. young adult women have become less likely to view themselves as traditionally feminine, endorsing, instead, an androgynous self-view that is a blend of femininity and masculinity (Donnelly & Twenge, 2016).

Whereas these trends point to widening views on gender identity, public opinion on gender roles appears rather mixed. In a 2016 survey, a nationally representative sample of U.S. adults revealed a substantial gender divide when asked whether they thought society had become “too soft and feminine” (Jones & Cox, 2016). Only a slim majority of adults overall (53 percent) rejected this notion, and women (60 percent) were more likely to disagree with this idea than men (46 percent). Additionally, 55 percent of Americans rejected the idea that society is better off when men and women stick to more traditional gender roles and tasks. There was more consensus about gender discrimination; sixty-eight percent disagreed that discrimination against women is no longer a problem in the United States.

Against this backdrop of changing yet still divided views on gender and gender roles, our research brief reviews scientific evidence examining the contributions of media to how children learn about gender, including how boys and girls look, think, and behave. Our analysis of media focuses primarily on television and movies viewed on a variety of platforms. Parents are concerned about the gender messages their daughters and sons receive from popular culture and how those messages will affect multiple aspects of

their lives, from which professions girls might aspire to, to beliefs about how boys should properly express their emotions. According to a Common Sense Media poll of parents conducted in June 2016, 52 percent say that they think the ways television shows and movies portray girls and women and boys and men influence the way children see themselves and their genders “a great deal.” Another 38 percent say these media have at least “some” influence. In addition, 79 percent say they are concerned about how girls and women are shown in gender-stereotyped roles in movies and on TV, and an almost equal proportion — 80 percent — say they are concerned about how boys and men are portrayed in movies and on TV.

Indeed, if one were to base one’s beliefs about gender on media targeting children and adolescents, one might understand gender in traditional ways. 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 et al., 2002) and obsessed with sex (Kim et al., 2007; Ward, 1995); meanwhile, female characters are obsessed with their appearance and sexiness (Gerding & Signorielli, 2014; Stern & Mastro, 2004). Additionally, male characters continue to outnumber female characters on television, in advertising, and in movies at a rate of approximately 2:1 (Baker & Raney, 2007; Hentges & Case, 2013; Leaper et al., 2002; Padilla-Walker, Coyne, Fraser, & Stockdale, 2013; Smith, Choueiti, Prescott, & Pieper, 2013; Smith, Pieper, Granados, & Choueiti, 2010).

In light of these findings, we review what research tells us about how (or if) children’s and adolescents’ gender development is affected by media. Specifically, this brief looks at the effects of media on **gender typing**, which includes the development of three aspects of gender:

1. **Gender identity:** The knowledge that one is either a boy or a girl. It represents a person’s internal sense of who they are as a gendered being.

Children develop this sense over the first few years of life. One's sense of being male or female largely determines how people view themselves and provides an important basis for their interactions with others. We draw a distinction between *gender identity* and *sexual identity* (i.e., to which gender one is sexually attracted). Although sexual identity is often conflated with gender identity in popular discourse (Levitt & Ippolito, 2013), they are distinct constructs, and this report focuses on gender identity.

2. Gender-role standards: Values, motives, or categories of behavior that are considered more appropriate for one gender over another. Under this umbrella term are also **gender-role stereotypes**, which are learned associations between characteristics and behaviors and each gender (e.g., women cook and sew; men fight and fix cars).

3. Gender-typed behavior: The tendency to favor same-gender activities over those typically associated with the other gender.

Furthermore, this report examines the *developmental* trajectory of gender typing, delineating four key developmental phases of gender socialization: early childhood, middle childhood, early adolescence, and later adolescence. As such, we primarily limited our review to studies that utilized participants from these developmental phases. This brief considers more than 150 journal articles, press articles, interviews, and books, mostly with a social-scientific focus. We prioritize research that has been published since 2000. When a particular research question has been only sparsely investigated, we include relevant research published in the 1980s and 1990s. For these studies it is important to keep in mind that portrayals of gender roles may be quite different from what they are today. When possible, we draw conclusions about research consensus but also acknowledge that for some topics, the research evidence is rather sparse, especially for the early and middle childhood phases. Along with our review of research, we share relevant quotations from parents who participated in a series of in-depth interviews about gender conducted by Common Sense, in collaboration with Greenberg Inc., in January 2017. Their names have been changed.

The Development of Gender

In understanding the development of gender, we draw a distinction between biological sex and gender. Whereas one's biological sex refers to the sex assigned at birth based on sex organs, gender is an individual and social construct. Individually, a person has feelings about which gender fits their identity, and socially, people learn which roles and characteristics are appropriate for women and men.

The expectations of the male and female roles are complex and multidimensional, and they vary across culture and time. Researchers have identified the following as core aspects of femininity in the Western world: investing in appearance, purity and sexual fidelity, modesty, dependency/deference, beauty and thinness, domesticity, caretaking, being nice in relationships, and emotionality (Levant, Richmond, Cook, House, & Aupont, 2007; Mahalik et al., 2005). Conversely, the following attributes have been identified as core aspects of masculinity in the Western world: emotional restrictiveness, self-reliance, aggression, risk taking, heterosexual self-presentation, casual attitudes toward sex, anti-femininity, status seeking, competition, the primacy of work, and displays of power over women (Mahalik et al., 2003; Parent & Moradi, 2009).

Many believe that television and movies could be a prominent force in children's gender typing, because of their accessibility, the amount of time children consume television and movie content, and the large number of female and male characters as potential role models. Many researchers argue that TV exposure can activate and reinforce existing gender stereotypes, making them more accessible. The increased accessibility of particular stereotypes means that children will be more likely to attend to and interpret elements of their social worlds using these stereotypes. Thus, it is important to understand what children might learn about gender from television and movie exposure.

What About Transgender Identities?

Perhaps no issue has served as a flash point for contemporary understandings of gender as much as transgender identity and transgender rights. In April 2015, Bruce Jenner, Olympic medalist and reality show star, came out as a transgender woman, Caitlyn Jenner, sending reverberations across entertainment and sports. Then, in March 2016, a national debate about transgender rights was ignited by the signing of a controversial North Carolina state law (HB2) prohibiting persons from using bathrooms in government buildings that do not coincide with their biological sex (NC § 115-5 21.2, 2016). (Portions of the law were repealed in March 2017.)

But transgender identity is about much more than bathroom rights. “**Transgender**” is an umbrella term to describe people whose self-defined gender identity does not coincide with the combination of their biological characteristics: sex organs, chromosomes, and hormones. In other words, what they look like on the outside does not match whom they feel they are on the inside. (Transgender, or “trans,” identity contrasts with “**cisgender**,” which is having a traditional gender presentation that matches one’s biological characteristics.) Transgender individuals typically express their desired gender through a variety of means: cosmetic choices (clothing, makeup), hormone replacement, and/or surgical sex reassignment (Bond, 2017). Although gender identity is different from sexual identity, this distinction is often obscured by the linking of trans persons with lesbians, gays, and bisexuals (the “T” in LGBTQ). Indeed, the terms “gender,” “sex,” and “sexual orientation” are often conflated in popular discourse or mistakenly thought to determine one another (Levitt & Ippolito, 2014).

In an in-depth interview study, transgender people spoke of how they lacked role models when they were struggling with their gender identities (Levitt & Ippolito, 2013), including role models in the media. The representation of transgender characters is not only important for providing role models for transgender individuals; it also provides opportunities for education and understanding among cisgender people. A watershed moment in transgender representation was undoubtedly the Caitlyn Jenner interview on ABC’s *20/20*, which yielded the best ratings for the show in 15 years (Kenneally, 2015). In 2016, ABC’s popular family sitcom, *Modern Family*, featured an 8-year-old transgender boy, and the popularity and critical acclaim of adult shows with fully developed transgender main characters (e.g., Amazon Prime’s *Transparent* and Netflix’s *Orange Is the New Black*) have also gone a long way to introducing transgender identity into popular consciousness.

In addition, significant transgender representations have appeared on two television shows targeting *adolescent* audiences: *Glee* and *Degrassi* (Sandercock, 2015). Both shows depict teen trans characters — Unique on *Glee* and Adam on *Degrassi* — as undergoing both ups and downs. They experience discrimination and harassment, but they also experience romantic relationships and friendships, disrupting the notion that trans people are generally unhappy and insecure.

Research on the effects of exposure to transgender media representation is lacking (Bond, 2017), but because there are so few portrayals of transgender people, the portrayal of trans characters in the media is consequential. Research suggests that more quality, empathy-provoking representations of transgender people may promote more nuanced understandings of transgender identity. A recent content analysis revealed that after Caitlyn Jenner’s *20/20* interview, news reports about transgender issues were more likely to mention nonbinary gender discourses, acknowledge the complexity of transgender issues from the aspects of race, class, and sexual identity, differentiate transgender identity from sexual identity, and cover the issue in an in-depth way (Li, 2017).

“[Transgender identity] has been brought to light more, so we’re having greater acceptance.”

— Gwen, parent of girl

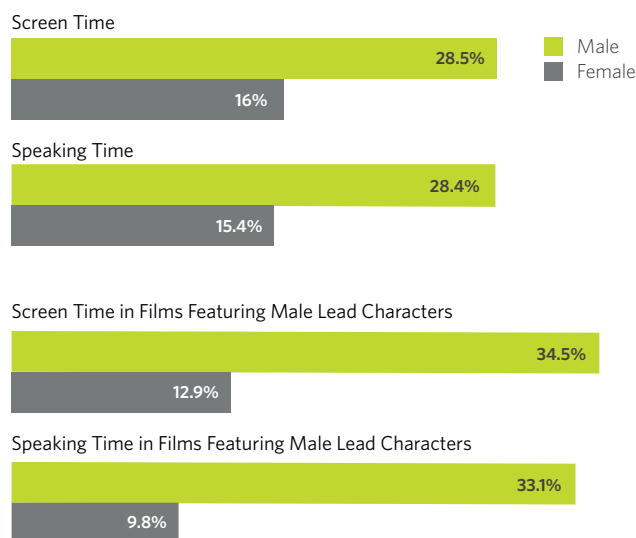
What does the attention to gender identity and transgender characters in the media mean for parents? Among other things, it provides important opportunities to talk to children about the difference between biological sex and gender identity. When the White House announced guidelines for how public schools should treat transgender students, Loretta Lynch, former attorney general of the United States, had this to say to parents:

“With all of this media attention, kids who are not [transgender] may have questions about what this issue is really about. This can sometimes be a difficult topic for parents, in part because it involves having a conversation about genitalia. ... But this is a teachable moment. We should seize the moment to discuss with our kids what gender identity is and what it means to be transgender ... and what it does *not* mean. Any time we can help our children be more knowledgeable about someone else’s life, we have the opportunity to also help them be more compassionate and empathetic” (as cited in Brown, 2016, para. 2).

HOW ARE MEN AND WOMEN PORTRAYED IN CHILDREN'S MEDIA?

One of our most consistent findings is that men and boys outnumber women and girls across the media spectrum. The Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media has conducted several important studies examining gender representations in media (Smith et al., 2010, 2013), even developing a software tool that allows researchers to track screen time and speaking time using facial- and speech-recognition technology (Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media, 2016). Using this tool in a study of the top-grossing films of 2015, researchers found that male characters had almost two times the amount of screen time as female characters (28.5 percent versus 16 percent) and male characters spoke almost two times as often as female characters (28.4 percent versus 15.4 percent). The disparity increased to the range of 3:1 when the films featured male lead characters (screen time: 34.5 percent male versus 12.9 percent female; speaking time: 33.1 percent compared with 9.8 percent) (see Figure 1).

FIGURE 1. Percent of screen time and speaking time for male and female characters in movies in 2015 (Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media, 2016).



On television shows and in movies specifically targeting children, male characters outnumber female characters by a ratio of about 2:1. Male characters are represented more frequently on U.S. children's television shows (2.6:1) (Smith et al., 2010), in an international sample of children's television programming (2:1) (Götz & Lemish, 2012), in children's programming on child-oriented cable networks (1.9:1) (Hentges & Case, 2013), in superhero cartoons (1.9:1) (Baker & Raney, 2007), and on adventure and comedy children's shows (1.9:1) (Leaper et al., 2002). Similar gender ratios have been documented in films targeting children: G-rated movies (2.6:1, Smith et al., 2010), family films (2.5:1, Smith et al., 2013), and Disney films (2.5:1, Padilla-Walker et al., 2013).

In television advertising, too, male characters are more prevalent than female characters (Maher & Childs, 2003; Stern & Mastro, 2004), and there are significantly more single-gender commercials with boy-only characters than girl-only characters (Larson, 2001). However, some evidence points to a trend of more balanced gender representation, at least in children's television advertising. Examining trends from nearly three decades (1973–2000), we found that there were fewer male characters portrayed over time, which represents more movement toward mixed gender portrayals (Maher & Childs, 2003).

Early Childhood (Age 0–6)

Even television and videos targeting infants and toddlers are replete with gender stereotypes. The adherence to disparate gender roles is demonstrated by the use of feminine appearance standards for female characters (e.g., gendered hairstyles, enlarged eyelashes, pink and purple clothing) and the portrayal of male characters in leading roles offering solutions, instructions, and leadership to other characters (Elias, Sulkin, & Lemish, in press). In G-rated movies, female characters are more likely

to have good motives, be more intelligent, and be more beautiful than male characters, whereas male characters are more likely to be physically strong and funnier than female characters (Smith et al., 2010). Additionally, male characters are more likely to be shown in traditionally masculine occupations (e.g., firefighter, U.S. president), whereas female characters are more likely to be shown in traditionally feminine occupations (e.g., dancer, seamstress). An analysis of Disney princesses and princes in nine Disney films demonstrated that princes are portrayed with more physical strength than princesses, and princesses are more likely to display affection, fear, submission, nurturing behavior, grooming behavior, and crying (England, Descartes, & Collier-Meek, 2011).

Still, preschool media provide opportunities for child viewers to see counter-stereotypical female characters as well. For example, the main characters on *Doc McStuffins* (an African-American girl) and *Dora the Explorer* (a Latina) occupy roles that are normally reserved for white, male characters in children's television (Keys, 2016). Doc and Dora are leaders and, as such, are heroic, inquisitive, and adventurous, which are attributes that counter the dominant stereotypes of female characters generally and of minority female characters more specifically.

Middle Childhood (Age 7-10)

Content analyses of media targeting children in middle childhood suggest that stereotypes about gender roles abound here as well. In children's advertising, several key themes emerge: Boys are more likely to be portrayed in major roles (Davis, 2003), they are portrayed as more adventurous and active than girls (Browne, 1998; Davis, 2003; Larson, 2001), and they are more likely to be seen in nondomestic settings such as the outdoors or occupational settings (Davis, 2003; Larson, 2001). When male characters are portrayed in domestic roles, they are "humorously inept" at household chores (Scharrer, Kim, Lin, & Liu, 2006, p. 215). Additionally, boys are depicted as more knowledgeable, more aggressive, and less deferential than girls, and boys display more nonverbal behaviors indicating dominance and control (Browne, 1998).

"I think a lot of shows are so degrading to men. It makes guys look so weak and dumb from my experience compared to when I was growing up. ... I don't want [my daughters] to have that mentality, because I'd want them to love their husbands and respect them, and nowadays the media makes men look like jokes."

— Abby, parent of three girls

In U.S. cartoons, male characters are more independent, athletic, important, technical, and responsible than female characters. In contrast, female characters are more emotional, romantic, affectionate, sensitive, frail, attractive, and domestic than male characters (Aubrey & Harrison, 2004; Thompson & Zerbinos, 1995). In children's programming spanning diverse genres, male characters are more likely to demonstrate physical aggression and to be victims of physical aggression (Leaper et al., 2002). They are less likely to be fearful or polite or to engage in romantic behaviors than female characters.

On television, when female characters appear in male-dominated contexts, they are subordinate to male characters. In superhero cartoons, female characters are more emotional than male characters, more likely to get overexcited in a crisis, more likely to ask questions, and more likely to be a part of a group (Baker & Raney, 2007). They also are more likely to be mentored than male characters, and their mentors are overwhelmingly male. On children's television science series, there are twice as many male adult scientists as female adult scientists, and the majority of female adult scientists are portrayed in secondary roles, such as lab assistants or students (Steinke & Long, 1996).

Finally, the appearance-based lessons based on gender are communicated in media targeting school-age children. An international study involving 24 countries that analyzed over 26,000 characters in over 6,000 children's fictional programs for children under 12 years old documented the prevalence of the unrealistically thin and sexualized body shape of animated girl characters and the large, muscular chest

shapes of animated boy characters (Götz & Lemish, 2012). Moreover, on U.S. children's television shows and in family films, female characters are more likely to wear sexy attire and show exposed skin (Smith et al., 2013), more likely to worry about their appearance (Baker & Raney, 2007; Hentges & Case, 2013), and thinner and more attractive than male characters (Baker & Raney, 2007; Smith et al., 2013).

It is important to keep in mind that whereas these content analyses tend to focus on instances of gender differences, there also are instances in which depictions do not differ between male and female characters. For example, in contrast to the findings of Thompson and Zerbinos' (1995) content analysis of children's cartoons, Aubrey and Harrison's (2004) study found no gender differences in characters' displays of physical aggression, verbal aggression, affection, and leadership behaviors or their demonstrations of bravery/rescue. Thus, the documentation of gender differences in children's media may be influenced by the researchers' decisions, such as which shows they choose to analyze and the time period in which the shows are selected.

Furthermore, the documented gender differences do not universally disadvantage girl or boy characters. It is worth acknowledging that the girl characters are not only associated with socially undesirable traits and nor are the portrayals of boys universally socially desirable. For example, boys are bossier and more likely to fail at a goal (Aubrey & Harrison, 2004). Also, compared with male characters, female characters are more likely to have good motives and be more intelligent (Smith et al., 2010), more likely to be inquisitive (by asking more questions) (Baker & Raney, 2007), and more likely to be polite than male characters (Leaper et al., 2002).

Early Adolescence (Age 11-13)

Although early adolescents (often referred to as "tweens") are in a distinct developmental stage for gender socialization, there is little research on media specifically targeted to them. An analysis of nine tween television programs targeting girls in particular found that close to half of the characters (46.1 percent) were female, which represents a higher proportion of female characters than previously seen in other types of children's programming (Northrup & Liebler, 2010). However, a "thin, white beauty ideal" (p. 273) was evident on these shows. This ideal was demonstrated in several ways: 1). Among female characters, white characters were overrepresented; 2). a majority of all female characters (87 percent) were below average in weight; and 3). thin female characters were the most likely to receive positive comments about their appearance.

Another study of tween shows on Disney Channel, Nickelodeon, and Cartoon Network included "teen scene" programs that targeted a female tween audience (e.g., *Hannah Montana*) and action-adventure programs that targeted a male tween audience (e.g., *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*) (Gerding & Signorielli, 2014). In this sample of shows, male characters outnumbered female characters almost 2:1 (64 percent male versus 35 percent female), but on action-adventure programs, the ratio increased to 3:1. The lesson that appearance is more valued and important for girls than for boys stood out as a primary theme on tween shows. Female characters were more attractive, more concerned about their appearance (as demonstrated by their engagement in primping behaviors), and more likely to receive comments about their looks than male characters. However, an encouraging sign of the tween shows was that male and female characters did not differ in how often they were shown demonstrating bravery or how handy they were with technology. For these behaviors, there seems to be more gender equality on television programs targeting a tween audience, in contrast to the stricter gender roles often shown on children's television.

Later Adolescence (Age 14–17)

As they move into later adolescence, individuals develop notions about gender roles that will shape their eventual adult ideas about gender. As such, content analyses of media targeting teens tend to focus on the professional, parenting, and family-related roles that male and female characters occupy. Female characters in prime-time television programming are more likely to occupy romantic, family, and friend roles than male characters, whereas male characters are more likely to be portrayed in professional roles (Lauzen, Dozier, & Horan, 2008). Further, an analysis of portrayals of work in teen films from 2000–2004 revealed that when female characters do have professional aspirations, they are mostly focused on the arts, such as becoming rock stars (e.g., *Crossroads*, *Josie and the Pussycats*), dancers (e.g., *Save the Last Dance*), or actors (e.g., *Confessions of a Teenage Drama Queen*) (Hylmö, 2006). Only in rare instances were girls portrayed as having aspirations of careers not equated with celebrity, such as journalism (*Real Women Have Curves*) or science (*A Walk to Remember*). In pursuit of their professional goals, the acquisition of substantive professional skills is generally deemphasized, and schooling is regarded as unimportant. Instead, some female characters, such as those on *Chasing Liberty* and *What a Girl Wants*, are dependent on their fathers' success and status to achieve their professional or academic aspirations.

To older adolescents, appearance-based messages are salient. In a variety of media, teen girls are reminded that their appearance is a vital criterion on which their value is based and that, in addition to attractiveness, they should also make sexiness a priority. In prime-time television advertising, teen female characters were the most attractive, the thinnest, and the most suggestively dressed among all other gender-age categories (Stern & Mastro, 2004). Music and music videos, which are popular media choices for teens, strongly convey the message that the objectification of women's bodies is normative (Bretthauer, Zimmerman, & Banning, 2006; Flynn, Craig, Anderson, & Holody, 2016; Wallis, 2011; Weitzer & Kubrin, 2009). Female artists tend to *self-sexualize* more often than female characters are sexualized by male artists (Aubrey & Frisby, 2011).

Female artists also are more likely than male artists to include references to self-objectification in their song lyrics (Flynn et al., 2016).

"I haven't watched a (music) video in five or 10 years. ... You see women and guys being something they're not. I've always told (my daughter) ... I love a woman who has their own hair, so when I see hair all the way down their back and all this crazy stuff I think someone wants to be something they're not. Thinking about that and the extra makeup and booty injections, all the stuff you can get done now — why? I'd be more in love with a woman who's her[self] compared to someone who looks good when it's lights, camera, and action but that's not the real person."

— Robert, parent of boy and girl

IS THERE ANY EVIDENCE THAT MEDIA USE AFFECTS CHILDREN'S GENDER ROLES?

Many have questioned whether regular exposure to media content could shape children's and adolescents' gender-role expectations, beliefs, and behaviors. In the sections that follow, we present key scientific evidence to help answer this question. The sections are grouped by developmental stage. In each section we first describe the developments and milestones of that stage. We then summarize findings from scientific studies conducted with youth in that age group.

Early Childhood (Age 0–6)

The process of gender typing is well underway by early childhood. Around age 2, children begin to label their own sex and that of other people and begin to categorize and sort the world by gender. With these labels and with their observations of how things occur in the world, young children start to build a richer understanding of gender and begin to associate many toys, activities, occupations, tools, household items, and even colors with one gender as opposed to the other. As early childhood progresses, children's gender-stereotyped beliefs become stronger and more rigid, used more like blanket rules rather than flexible guidelines. These rigid ideas result both from actual, persistent gender divisions in the environment and from young children's cognitive immaturity (Shaffer, 2005). It is argued that young children tend to exaggerate gender stereotypes to "get them cognitively clear."

Gender and gender-related issues are particularly important to young children. Most have firmly classified themselves as boys or girls and want to understand exactly how boys and girls are supposed to behave so they can live up to their self-images (Shaffer, 2005). Also, they do not fully understand that characteristics associated with gender, such as occupations and hairstyles, do not determine whether a person is female or male.

This rigidity is also reflected in preschoolers' toy,

activity, and playmate preferences. Research has found that gender differences in toy preferences develop very early, even before the child can correctly label various toys as "boy things" or "girl things." Indeed, preferences for stereotyped play activities (i.e., boys preferring trucks and cars, girls preferring dolls and soft toys) are regarded as one of the earliest and most pervasive manifestations of gender roles in children. Preferences for same-gender playmates are seen as early as age 2 or 3 (Shaffer, 2005).

Evidence of Media's Influence on Young Children's Gender Development

Research studies examining the role of television and movies in gender typing among preschoolers have often focused on two issues: the impact of exposure on children's own toy and activity preferences, and the impact on children's beliefs about gender.

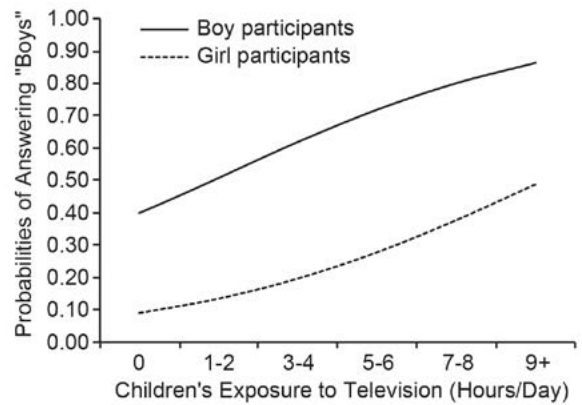
Children's own toy and activity preferences. A set of behaviors that appear to be affected by children's media exposure are their toy and activity preferences. One study tested whether preschoolers' engagement with Disney Princess media and products was associated with greater stereotypical behavior (Coyne, Lindner, Rasmussen, Nelson, & Birkbeck, 2016). At the start of the study, parents reported on their children's Disney Princess engagement, which was defined as children's frequency of viewing Disney Princess media, playing with Disney Princess toys, and identifying with individual Disney Princesses. Children also indicated their preferences for certain gender-typed toys. For both boys and girls, Disney Princess engagement was associated with higher levels of female gender-stereotypical behavior (e.g., playing house, playing with dolls or tea sets) but not male gender-stereotypical behavior (e.g., climbing, playing with action figures). One year later, parents reported on children's toy preferences, activity preferences, and characteristics. For girls and

boys, those who reported stronger princess engagement at the initial assessment exhibited more female gender-stereotypical behaviors one year later, even after taking into account initial levels of stereotypical behavior. The results suggest that engagement with princess culture, including media, can influence gender stereotypes and may contribute to a hyper-feminine culture in which specific gendered behavior is common and highly valued.

Similar findings have been reported concerning children’s exposure to superhero media. Coyne, Lindner, Rasmussen, Nelson, and Collier (2014) surveyed the parents of 134 preschool children about the frequency with which their children viewed TV programs or movies portraying superheroes, their children’s play with toy weapons, and their children’s participation in male-stereotyped activities (such as play fights or sports games). Viewing superheroes in the media was associated with higher levels of male-stereotyped play activities one year later for boys and with higher levels of weapon play one year later for boys and girls.

Children’s beliefs about gender. Another set of features that could be shaped by media exposure are children’s beliefs, expectations, and stereotypes about gender roles. For example, research shows that amount of TV viewing contributes to children’s awareness of a gender hierarchy. For example, a set of American 4-year-olds completed several tasks, judging whether other people think boys or girls are better (Halim, Ruble, & Tamis-LeMonda, 2013). Higher levels of TV viewing (as reported by their mothers) was associated with children’s being more likely to believe that others think boys and men are better than girls and women (see Figure 2). Researchers speculate that awareness of society’s higher value placed on boys and men could affect the self-evaluations and mental health of boys and girls and the occupational and academic pathways that they approach or avoid.

FIGURE 2. Predicted probabilities of an answer of “boys” to, “Who do most people think are better? Boys or girls?” by television exposure and child gender.



The more 4-year-olds watch TV, the more they say that others believe boys are better than girls (Halim, Ruble, & Tamis-LeMonda, 2013).

There is also evidence that nontraditional images matter. First- and second-graders who viewed girls playing with traditionally masculine toys (e.g., a toy airport) in TV commercials were more likely to state later that the toys depicted were OK for both sexes than were children who had seen commercials featuring only boys playing with those toys (Pike & Jennings, 2005).

Summary. In early childhood, heavier viewing of television overall, or of gender-traditional media more specifically (i.e., princess media and superhero media), has been linked with:

- more gender-stereotypical toy and activity preferences and play, concurrently and over time;
- the expression of more rigid stereotypes about toys and activities;
- and greater awareness of a gender hierarchy.

What About Media's Influence on Masculinity?

Although the media-effects research is dominated by a focus on femininity and female stereotypes, some research has suggested that media exposure affects masculine attitudes and behaviors. In children's films and on children's television (e.g., superhero media) and in media favored by older adolescents (e.g., reality television, sports programming), masculinity is illustrated by characteristics such as aggression, power and dominance, status seeking, emotional restraint, heterosexuality, and risk taking (Baker & Raney, 2007; Coyne et al., 2010; Stern, 2005).

Conformity to gender stereotypes in early childhood tends to be more pronounced and valued for boys than for girls (Bussey & Bandura, 1992). Research shows that boys are especially attracted to masculine role models to learn how to behave in these valued masculine ways and are less interested in media featuring feminine role models (Luecke-Aleksa, Anderson, Collins, & Schmitt, 1995; Slaby & Frey, 1975). Exposure to these models does appear to shape boys' future preferences and behaviors. For example, preschool boys who are heavy viewers of superhero television programs tend to engage in more male-stereotyped toy play and more weapon play (Coyne et al., 2014). Play is an important outcome to examine in early childhood because this is when children *practice* the gendered behaviors they observe from role models on television and in movies, increasing the probability that they

will behave in gender-stereotyped ways in the future (Bussey & Bandura, 1999).

Unfortunately, there is a dearth of research examining media influence on adolescent boys' masculinity, but recent research using undergraduate student samples provides clues about what is going on during adolescence. In one study, sports TV viewing and reality TV viewing were associated with stronger adherence to a set of beliefs called "masculinity ideology," which includes emotional control (e.g., "I hate it when people ask me to talk about my feelings"), being a playboy (e.g., "If I could, I would frequently change sexual partners"), and heterosexual self-presentation (e.g., "I would be furious if someone thought I was gay") (Giaccardi et al., 2016). In turn, masculinity ideology is associated with risk-taking behaviors in young men, including sexual risk taking, alcohol use, drug use, and speeding while driving (Giaccardi, Ward, Seabrook, & Lippman, 2017). Similarly, an experimental study on undergraduate men found that those who were exposed to an episode of *The Sopranos*, a television show containing both violence and hypermasculine characters, were more likely to later report agreement with two facets of hypermasculinity: danger as thrilling and violence as manly (Scharer, 2005). Thus, media lessons on masculinity may emphasize a rigid and potentially risky set of characteristics and behaviors that are nonetheless culturally reinforced.

Middle Childhood (Age 7-10)

By middle childhood, children's gender beliefs are well established and a little less rigid. Children are aware of many of the culture's stereotypes for women and men, and as their gender cognitions and personal experiences expand, they are capable of allowing more nuance. Gender segregation continues to strengthen, however, as do gender-typed toy and activity preferences, especially for boys. Girls, however, tend to develop (or retain) interest in some masculine activities. There is also an expansion in children's understanding of gender that includes stereotyping of achievement domains and

personality traits, as well as an expansion of gender identity to include perceptions of how typical one's gender preferences and traits are and feelings of contentedness with one's gender identity (Shaffer, 2005). This is also a time period of increasing media use. Exposure to media content could potentially influence children's beliefs and behaviors in areas they have been learning about for a while, such as occupations, appearance, and domestic roles, as well as newer areas, such as academic performance. Indeed, children of this age spend the day in school, and school performance and peer relations start to take on a bigger role.

Impact of Media Exposure on Beliefs About Activities, Roles, Traits, and Occupations

A few studies have examined connections between children's TV viewing and their beliefs about the activities that children do, such as playing and doing chores. Signorielli and Lears (1992) surveyed 530 fourth- and fifth-graders about their daily TV viewing hours and their beliefs about seven gender-typed chores. The authors found that children who watched more TV were more likely to say that only girls should do chores traditionally associated with women (e.g., doing dishes) and only boys should do chores traditionally associated with men (e.g., mowing the lawn). These associations held even after taking into account the child's gender, race, grade, reading level, parent education, and chores they actually did. Aubrey and Harrison (2004) examined connections between first- and second-graders' most preferred TV programs and their beliefs about which attributes were important for women and men to have. Although they did not find connections for girls, they did find connections for boys for two of the four masculine traits they tested for; holding a stronger preference for male-stereotypical TV content was associated with boys' attributing greater importance to being good at making jokes and being hardworking.

Television viewing has also been linked to children's beliefs about *adult* roles and activities, and it may be an especially prominent informant about which occupations are typical of and appropriate for each gender. In one study of children in grades K-6, those who reported watching more hours of TV each day also expressed a belief in more rigid stereotypes about activities, such as setting the table, and occupations, such as driving a truck (Nathanson et al., 2002). Working with fifth- and sixth-graders, Wroblewski and Huston (1987) examined children's viewing of 60 TV programs, including 25 programs with nontraditional gender content, and linked this exposure to children's interest in specific male-typed and female-typed occupations. The authors found that girls who watched a greater proportion of traditional programs and few nontraditional programs were *more* likely to express interest in occupations stereotyped for women on TV (e.g., secretary, model) than girls with other viewing

patterns. Girls who watched more of the nontraditional programs were *less* likely to consider female-typed occupations and more likely to consider male-typed ones. Similarly, other researchers have found that children who reported greater knowledge of the content of specific TV programs that featured nontraditional domestic roles also expressed more flexibility about some adult roles and activities (Rosenwasser, Lingenfelter, & Harrington, 1989). Although the authors did not measure television exposure directly, the findings suggest that children who more frequently view or pay greater attention to programming with nontraditional roles may also develop more accepting attitudes toward gender roles and behaviors.

Researchers are also investigating the potential of media messages to shape girls' interests and expectations in STEM fields (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics). In one study, 319 seventh-graders were asked to draw a scientist and then were asked to indicate the biggest source of their information for this impression (Steinke et al., 2007). The highest percentage of students (40 percent) named television and films as the chief source of ideas for their drawings. To examine the impact of these images, Bond (2016) assigned 60 girls age 6-9 to view 10 minutes of TV clips featuring either traditional stereotypes of women, portrayals of women in STEM careers, or no programming. Participants then indicated their confidence in their science and math skills, noted their preference for six STEM careers (e.g., scientist, architect) and six non-STEM careers (e.g., florist), and drew a picture of a scientist. Girls who had viewed the stereotyped clips were more likely to report interest in stereotypical careers than any of the other girls and were less likely to draw women as scientists (30 percent of these girls versus 75 percent of girls who had seen clips of women in STEM).

Impact of Media Exposure on Appearance Concerns and Sexualization

One core dimension of the feminine gender role is the expectation that women should be attractive, even beautiful, and should focus on their appearance. It is argued that the feminine role encourages girls to see the appearance of their bodies as a form of achievement, and this cultural expectation may make girls particularly susceptible to using media images as a guide for self-evaluation (Murnen, Smolak, Mills, & Good, 2003). There is evidence that exposure to appearance-focused TV content is related to appearance and body concerns among girls (Common Sense Media, 2015a). In one study (Dittmar, Halliwell, & Ive, 2006), girls age 5–8 were shown a picture storybook that featured either six images of Barbie (representing the ultrathin feminine ideal), six images of Emme (a full-figured feminine ideal), or no people. Young girls (age 5.5–7.5) who viewed the Barbie images expressed greater dissatisfaction with their own bodies than did young girls who had seen the other images. The older girls (age 7.5–8.5) were not affected in this way. Looking at these relations over time, Dohnt and Tiggemann (2006) found that among Australian girls age 5–8, more frequent viewing of appearance-focused TV programs, such as *Friends*, predicted less satisfaction with their appearance one year later. However, others have found little impact on children’s beliefs of a one-time laboratory exposure to specific gender content, including stereotypes linking beauty and goodness in Disney films (Bazzini, Curtin, Joslin, Regan, & Martz, 2010), or of sexualized music videos (Ey, 2016).

Responses to sexualized media. Currently, expectations for femininity include not only being beautiful but also being sexy or sexually attractive. Media messages teach girls that looking sexy is often preferred or expected and is equated with popularity and romantic success. How do children respond to these images and ideals? Do they even notice sexualized content? Evidence from four studies indicates that they do. In one of the first studies to examine these questions with children, Murnen et al. (2003) had girls in grades 1 to 5 respond to objectified images of famous women singers who represented a thin, sexy ideal and had boys respond to objectified images of male models who represented the strong,

muscular ideal. Responses by girls to the four questions asked about each picture were more consistent with and accepting of the ideals than the responses by boys. In addition, girls who had more deeply internalized the culture’s thin ideal for women were also more likely to state that they liked how the women looked, wanted to look like them, and thought it was important to look like them. Stronger preferences were demonstrated in a study by Starr and Ferguson (2012), who offered girls age 6–9 choices among sexualized and nonsexualized dolls. Girls chose the sexualized doll most often both as their ideal self (70 percent) and as the popular girl (72 percent); these findings indicate that young girls are already beginning to equate sexiness with social rewards such as popularity. Choosing the sexualized doll was especially likely among girls who both consumed a lot of media and had mothers who reported high levels of self-objectification.

“ ... Sex is everywhere. I don’t remember it being so in your face everywhere when I was growing up like it is now, even things [my son] sees online or the music he listens to or television shows and commercials he watches.”

— Diane, parent of boy

To examine children’s evaluations of these images, Stone, Brown, and Jewell (2015) presented children age 6–11 with images of sexualized and nonsexualized girls and asked questions about each picture. Approximately 73 percent of children endorsed a “sexualized girl stereotype” and saw the sexualized girl as more popular but as less athletic, less smart, and less nice than the nonsexualized girl. In their answers children suggested that the sexualized girl was not likely to be smart because she was too focused on her appearance to focus on school. Moreover, girls were more likely to express these beliefs if they were exposed to more sexualized content on their favorite TV programs. In the authors’ second study, children age 6–11 were asked to sort photographs of women who varied on several dimensions, including sexualization. Sixty-three percent

of the children, and significantly more girls than boys, sorted by sexualization. Similar evidence was reported among Australian girls age 6-11 (Jongenelis, Pettigrew, Byrne, & Biagioni, 2016). Here, 72 percent of girls accurately sorted pictures based on sexualization. Also, the sexualized girls pictured were perceived as how boys would like girls to look. Overall, these findings indicate that for children, and girls especially, sexualization is a perceptually and psychologically salient attribute.

Effects of exposure to sexualized media. Is there any evidence that regular exposure to sexualized media affects children? Findings have emerged documenting potential effects in a range of areas, including body image and academic performance. Testing 300 Australian girls age 6-9, Slater and Tiggemann (2016) found that those who reported more frequent exposure to sexualized TV were also more likely to choose more sexualized clothing as options that are desired by other girls and by boys. In addition, expressing a preference for sexier clothing as one's own ideal and as other girls' ideal was linked to greater body dissatisfaction. Looking at academic performance, Pacilli et al. (2016) demonstrated that third- through fifth-grade Italian children performed less well on math tests after viewing images of same-gender sexualized youth than did children who had viewed nonsexualized images. Further analyses indicated that the detrimental effect of these sexualized images on girls' and boys' math performance was caused by a reduction in working memory resources. The authors argue that sexualization leads individuals to focus their attention on their body and its outward appearance, thereby reducing cognitive resources available for other tasks and reducing cognitive efficiency.

Summary. Watching more TV, especially TV with gender-traditional content, is linked with:

- the holding of more rigid stereotypes about gender-typed chores;
- the expression of more interest in gender-traditional careers (among girls);
- and less appearance satisfaction (among girls).

At the same time, exposure to more gender-nontraditional TV content is linked to:

- more interest in male-oriented careers (among girls);
- and more flexibility about adult roles and activities.

In terms of media content that sexually objectifies women (or men):

- Girls and boys notice sexualized images and can sort pictures according to this dimension;
- girls express more interest than boys in attaining sexualized ideals;
- girls and boys link sexualized appearance with popularity but also perceive sexualized girls as less athletic, smart, and nice;
- frequent exposure to sexualized TV is associated with perceiving sexualized clothing as more desirable for others;
- and exposure to sexualized images produces weaker performance on math tests.

Early Adolescence (Age 11-13)

In early adolescence, individuals experience increased pressure to conform to culturally sanctioned gender roles (Hill & Lynch, 1983). With puberty come physical changes that make girls and boys look more like women and men. These changes, alongside new experiences with dating, create expectations that boys behave in more masculine ways and girls, especially, behave in more feminine ways. These **gender-intensification pressures** come from a variety of sources, including parents, peers, educators, and the media. In response to these pressures, boys and girls generally recommit themselves to gender-typical traits, behaviors, and self-presentation. Socially, this is functional for early adolescents; gender-typical individuals (i.e., boys who act/look like boys, girls who act/look like girls) garner more popularity among peers (Jewell & Brown, 2014).

Evidence of Media's Influence on Early Adolescents' Gender Development

In this section, we will examine research that has investigated the influence of media exposure on early adolescents' gender development in four domains: gender-role stereotypes, sexist beliefs, romantic beliefs, and beliefs about appearance.

Gender-role stereotypes. In a trio of classic studies, Morgan (Morgan, 1982, 1987; Morgan & Rothschild, 1983) found that early adolescents' television viewing was associated with a belief in gender-role stereotypes regarding work roles and the division of household chores. However, given that these studies were conducted more than 30 years ago, they do not allow strong inferences into what is going on with early adolescents' gender-role stereotypes today.

In a more recent (but still dated) test of the effects of television viewing on gender stereotypes, Walsh-Childers and Brown (1993) conducted a survey on a nationally representative sample of early adolescents (age 12-15), measuring both their television-viewing habits and their beliefs about male dominance and heterosexual relationships (e.g., men should make the first move). The effects of television viewing on the acceptance of gender-role stereotypes were found only among African-American adolescents and not among white adolescents. African-American

adolescents' viewing of traditionally female-oriented television (e.g., soap operas, situation comedies) was linked to more acceptance of stereotypes about male dominance and heterosexual relationships.

Clearly, the impacts of media exposure on the development of gender-role values and stereotypes in early adolescence need more research attention. Additional updated research is needed to determine whether such links hold up in light of changes in media depictions of gender and in adolescents' access to diverse media platforms and messages.

Sexist beliefs. During early adolescence, there appears to be a spike in sexist beliefs (such as that women need to be protected and violence against women can be justified) that coincides with gender-intensification pressures but that decreases as early adolescents move into later adolescence and young adulthood (Ferragut, Blanca, Ortiz-Tallo, & Bendayan, 2017). Although limited, some evidence suggests that media exposure predicts sexist beliefs, including the tolerance of sexual harassment, the tolerance of dating violence, and the endorsement of rape myths, and a set of beliefs suggesting that women's behavior and choices are to blame for rape. This research is important to consider in early adolescence because sexist attitudes have been shown to be significant precursors to sexist behavior and violence against women in adult life (Martín et al., 2005; Russell & Trigg, 2004).

In one study, Strouse et al. (1994) examined early adolescents' use of a variety of media and their tolerant attitudes about sexual harassment, which were defined as deeming sexually harassing behaviors (e.g., unwanted sexual comments) acceptable. The authors found that higher levels of television viewing were associated with tolerant attitudes about sexual harassment among boys and that listening to popular music and viewing popular music videos were associated with tolerant attitudes about sexual harassment among girls. Likewise, an experimental study showed that African-American female adolescents (age 11-16) who were shown sexualized rap music videos were more likely to report acceptance of dating violence than those who did not watch any videos at all (Johnson et al., 1995). There was no effect of video exposure on the male adolescents in the sample.

More recently, Driesmans et al. (2015) conducted an experiment to investigate whether playing a video game with a sexualized female character affects early adolescents' (age 12-15) acceptance of rape myths and tolerance of sexual harassment. For both boys and girls, greater acceptance of rape myths and sexual harassment were reported by those who played as a sexualized female character compared with those who were assigned to play a video game with a nonsexualized female character. Although this study tested video game use rather than television or movie exposure (which this brief focuses on), it suggests that the sexualized-girl stereotype prevalent in media targeting adolescents (e.g., Stern & Mastro, 2004; Wallis, 2011; Weitzer & Kubrin, 2009) could similarly be connected to sexist beliefs.

Romantic beliefs. Pubertal changes during early adolescence spur individuals to explore dating and romantic relationships to satisfy relational needs in the form of physical and psychological closeness with another (Montgomery, 2005). In these early romantic imaginations and experiences, early adolescents place value in idealized conceptions of relationships.

In light of these developmental changes, does media exposure reinforce and amplify adolescents' idealized romantic beliefs? Based on interviews with 183 8- to 17-year-olds, adolescents' romantic imaginations largely stem from the romantic media, especially television, advertising, and movies, that they consume (Bachen & Ilouz, 1996). For example, when adolescents were asked to describe couples who are in love or a couple on a first date, they used visual and narrative cues from popular media to ground their descriptions.

Because these media tend to provide romantic ideals, early adolescents who consume romantic media often also idealize romantic relationships. In an experiment in which adolescent girls (age 11-14) were assigned to watch a movie with idealized romantic themes (*High School Musical*) or a neutral movie without romantic themes (*Over the Hedge*) (Driesmans et al., 2016), young early adolescent girls endorsed more romantic beliefs after watching the romantic movie compared with older early adolescent girls. Early adolescent girls' interest in romance, combined with their comparatively lower access to romantic

media than the older girls, likely makes messages about romantic ideals particularly impactful.

Another study on this topic examined whether television exposure is related to the endorsement of romantically based sexual-initiation strategies (i.e., cuddling, watching a sunset together, dancing) (Eggermont, 2006). Among early adolescent boys, television viewing accelerated the belief in a romantic strategy for initiating sexual activity, whereas for girls, television viewing dampened the belief of a romantic strategy. To explain this seemingly counter-intuitive result, the researcher posited that television viewing gives early adolescents the "opportunity to leave the frame of mind of their own gender and to become acquainted with what (on television) seems to be preferred by the other gender" (p. 466). Thus, boys might learn that romance is the best way to initiate sex because it is the strategy that they learn from television is most preferred by girls. At the same time, girls may learn from television that boys do *not* prefer a romantic strategy.

Beliefs about appearance. Another developmental milestone in early adolescence is increasing self-consciousness, which stems from early adolescents' new capacity to imagine multiple perspectives and from a greater ability to engage in social comparison. Indeed, early adolescents believe that they are the center of other people's attention, that "an imaginary audience" is always observing them (Elkind, 1967). In addition to this self-consciousness, the onset of puberty causes an accumulation and redistribution of body fat, which for girls especially distances them from the thin ideal that is perpetuated and circulated throughout Western media (Lawler & Nixon, 2011).

By early adolescence, media exposure is predictive of the internalization of the thin ideal. For example, a study of early adolescents revealed that exposure to popular tween television programs on Nickelodeon and Disney Channel (e.g., *Big Time Rush*, *Jessie*) was related to the internalization of media-based appearance ideals (e.g., "I would like my body to look like the people who are on TV") (Trekels & Eggermont, 2017). In turn, this belief led to the adolescents' equating their self-worth with their physical appearance. There were no significant gender differences in this association, suggesting that the importance

of appearance is a concern for both girls and boys in early adolescence.

One of the consequences of media exposure, especially media exposure that sexualizes girls' and women's bodies, is the tendency to engage in **self-objectification**, viewing oneself as an attractive object whose external appearance matters more than internal qualities (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997), as well as a closely related tendency to engage in **body surveillance**, a vigilance about monitoring one's appearance (McKinley & Hyde, 1996). For example, Grabe and Hyde (2009) examined the effects of exposure to music videos on body surveillance and subsequent deleterious outcomes in early adolescent girls. The findings suggested that exposure to music videos was associated with higher levels of body surveillance, and this, in turn, was related to the girls' lowered body esteem, increased anxiety, and lowered confidence in math ability. Self-objectification is associated with other negative outcomes as well, including diminished academic performance (Pacilli, Tomasetto, & Cadinu, 2016), body shame, and depressive symptoms (Tiggemann & Slater, 2015).

One might think of women's sports media as an exception to the rule about sexualizing media, because for the most part women's athleticism is judged based on what their bodies can do rather than how they look. To test this idea, Harrison and Fredrickson (2003) distinguished between two types of women's sports: lean sports, in which women's bodies are expected to conform to the thin ideal (e.g., gymnastics, figure skating), and non-lean sports, in which women are judged based on their performance regardless of what they look like (e.g., basketball, softball). In an experiment in which early adolescent girls were assigned to view clips of lean or non-lean sports, the findings revealed an effect of exposure to the clips on girls' self-objectification, but that effect varied by race. Among white girls, exposure to lean sports produced higher self-objectification scores than exposure to the non-lean sports, whereas for girls of color, exposure to non-lean sports produced higher self-objectification scores than lean sports. In light of culturally specific body ideals, the stronger and bigger body type represented in non-lean sports may be closer to the body ideals held by adolescents of color than the thinner body type represented in

lean sports. The opposite pattern of body ideals may be operating for white early adolescents.

Summary. Based on research on early adolescents, media exposure contributes to gender socialization in four main ways:

- reinforcing stereotypes about men's and women's roles in society;
- activating sexist beliefs about sexual harassment, dating violence, and rape myths;
- constructing ideal conceptions of romance;
- and socializing both girls and boys to be concerned about their appearance, but for girls in particular emphasizing sexiness as an important criterion by which to gauge self-worth.

Later Adolescence (Age 14-17)

As adolescents move into the later period of adolescence (approximately age 14-17), they become more comfortable with their identities, allowing them again (similar to middle childhood) to become more flexible in their thinking about gender (Shaffer, 2005). Correspondingly, gender segregation in their peer groups and friendships lessens, and these expanding relationships with the opposite sex similarly broaden their views about gender roles. In addition, later adolescents are in the process of individuation, which involves differentiating themselves from their families and orienting themselves to society (e.g., Koepke & Denissen, 2012). During this time media provide especially important, external sources of social norms and expectations.

Evidence of Media's Influence on Later Adolescents' Gender Development

In this section, we will highlight research that has investigated the influence of media exposure on later adolescents' 1). gender-role stereotypes and beliefs; 2). gender-based romantic beliefs; 3). gender-based beliefs about appearance; and 4). gender-based sexual expectations and beliefs.

Gender-role stereotypes and beliefs. Given the prevalence of traditional gender roles in television and movies, we would anticipate that higher levels of media consumption would be associated with stronger traditional views of gender. In support of this expectation, Rivadeneyra and Ward (2005) investigated the links between television viewing and gender-role attitudes in a primarily Latino sample of teens. The teens' total amount of television watched per month was associated with more traditional gender-role attitudes for female participants but not for male participants. Additionally, among girls but not boys, watching television to learn about themselves and others, and perceiving television portrayals to be realistic, was associated with the expression of traditional views about gender. The authors speculated that boys might already be quite traditional in their views of gender, possibly as a result of their "accumulated gender training or of their status in the gender hierarchy" (pp. 471-472); thus, their beliefs might be less malleable than those of girls and less resistant to media influence.

Moreover, music videos on television rely on conventional gender stereotypes, likely activating and strengthening audiences' existing gender-stereotypical beliefs. Using a survey design, Ward et al. (2005) found that more frequent viewing of music videos was associated with African-American teens' traditional gender-role attitudes and with the attribution of more importance to appearance and image attributes for both men and women. Using a follow-up experimental design, Ward et al. found that participants who viewed four gender-stereotypical music videos reported the attribution of more importance to appearance and image for men and a higher endorsement of sexual stereotypes, such as that men are sex-driven, women are sex objects, and dating is a game, than those who viewed nonstereotypical music videos.

In later adolescence, ideas about careers and occupational roles become salient as teens start to prepare for adult work roles. In light of recent initiatives to encourage more women to enter STEM fields, Ziegler and Stoeger (2008) examined whether exposure to female role models as scientists or mathematicians, as portrayed in films, affects adolescents' self-reported intent to pursue math/science and their self-assessment of ability in mathematics and science. Using an experimental design, the authors assigned German high school students to view one of three films: a film that featured a female role model who conformed to typically feminine characteristics and was not talented at math/science, a film that featured a female role model who did not conform to typically feminine characteristics and was talented at math/science, and a film that featured a female character who was typically feminine and who was talented at math/science. The movie in which the female scientist was portrayed as talented *and* feminine was the most effective in promoting an interest in STEM careers among boys and girls who had a high prior interest in STEM. However, among girls who had a low prior interest in STEM, watching either film of the female scientist depressed assessments of their abilities and their intent to pursue STEM careers. Follow-up interviewing of the participants suggested that girls who did not report a prior interest in STEM also had low self-confidence in STEM. The authors reasoned that the female STEM

role models were not effective when participants deemed themselves inadequate in comparison.

In addition to conceptions of adolescents' views of work outside the home, other research has examined whether media exposure affects adolescents girls' views on motherhood.

Ex et al. (2002) examined adolescent girls' and young-adult women's exposure to sitcoms and soap operas and their ideas about motherhood. Across both age groups, watching soap operas and sitcoms was related to a traditional view of motherhood (i.e., the belief that a mother should devote herself entirely to her family and her children). Thus, adolescent girls (and young-adult women) might learn from television that portrays motherhood in a traditional way that their most important job is as a mother.

"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 should show more men taking care of their family and doing those girly jobs like changing diapers and taking the kids to school. You don't see that as much."

— Brooke, parent of boy

Gender-based romantic beliefs. Gaining confidence in romantic relationships is a significant developmental task of later adolescence. Research has examined the effects of television exposure on traditional gender-role beliefs in dating situations. The effects hinge on the types of television that later adolescents watch. Rivadeneyra and Lebo (2008) found that teens' romantic television exposure was associated with holding *more* traditional gender-role attitudes in dating situations (e.g., the belief that boys should initiate dates). However, watching nonromantic television dramas that contain more action plots rather than relationship storylines was related to having *less* traditional gender-role attitudes about dating.

Media exposure also appears to encourage older adolescents' superficial preference for good-looking romantic partners. The findings of a survey of 15- and 16-year-olds in Belgium demonstrated

that participants' television viewing was related to expectations that their romantic partners be physically attractive (Eggermont, 2004). Among adolescent girls (age 14-16), frequent viewing of romantic youth dramas, in particular, was associated with higher expectations of attractiveness for male romantic partners (Eggermont, Beullens, & Van den Bulck, 2005).

Gender-based beliefs about appearance. In late adolescence, as individuals attain more romantic and sexual experiences, concerns about appearance, especially concerns about being "hot" and "sexy," become even more established. This is especially true for teen girls and young women whose bodies are constantly monitored and evaluated (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). At the same time, one of the most consistent themes of Western media is that women are valued primarily for their bodies and that they primarily exist as sexual objects for others' sexual use (American Psychological Association, 2007). Thus, not surprisingly, older adolescents who consume media saturated with such themes tend to agree with the notion that women are sexual objects. For example, in a study of Dutch teens, Peter and Valkenburg (2007) discovered that watching sexually explicit movies was associated with the endorsement of women as sexual objects (e.g., "There's nothing wrong with a man being primarily interested in a woman's body"). The results did not differ between male and female teens.

Not only does media exposure encourage the view that women are sexual objects, but it also leads to self-objectification in both female and male adolescents. A study of Belgian teen girls found that exposure to sexually objectifying media (including prime-time television, fashion magazines, music television, and social-networking sites) predicted greater internalization of beauty ideals, which, in turn, predicted self-objectification and body surveillance (Vandenbosch & Eggermont, 2012b). Similar findings were found for Belgian teen boys; however, the types of media exposure that predicted self-objectification were different from what they were for the teen girls. For the boys, exposure to pornographic websites and sexually objectifying prime-time television predicted the internalization of appearance ideals, which, in turn, predicted self-objectification

and body surveillance (Vandenbosch & Eggermont, 2013). Pornographic websites tend to focus on male sexualized body parts, such as chests and genitals, which likely reinforces the belief that viewers should conform to similar body ideals. Likewise, sexually objectifying television reinforces the idea that men who are attractive are the most successful, romantically and otherwise. Both sets of message seem to spark the self-objectification process for boys.

African-American girls face the challenge of negotiating positive racial and gender identities, while at the same time frequently encountering negative media images of their racial-gender group (Gordon, 2008). Surveying 176 African-American female adolescents, Gordon asked questions about how much they identify with media role models and about their beliefs about the importance of appearance. The results showed that girls' identification with particular TV characters and music artists was associated with the attribution of more importance to being attractive. Likewise, stronger identification with one's favorite TV character and with sexually objectified female music artists were each associated with stronger beliefs that appearance is important for girls and women in general.

Gender-based sexual expectations and beliefs.

Another central developmental task of later adolescence is adjusting to the self as a sexual being. In confronting this novel task, adolescents look to the media for guidance (Ward & Friedman, 2006). There is a substantial amount of research that has examined media effects on teens' sexual socialization, and that research has consistently shown that exposure to sexually oriented media, including television, movies, and magazines, encourages a recreational and sexually permissive orientation to sex (Ward & Rivadeneyra, 1999; Ward & Friedman, 2006). In this section, however, we focus on the research that is focused on the gender-related expectations that later adolescents come to believe about how they and their partners are supposed to think, feel, and behave in sexual situations. Researchers call these expectations "**sexual scripts**," and they are highly gendered. A pervasive script in Western media is the "Heterosexual Script," which defines the courtship strategies, commitment orientations, and sexual goals considered appropriate for each gender (Kim et al., 2007). According to the

Heterosexual Script, men are expected to actively pursue sexual relationships, treat women as sexual objects, and avoid commitment and emotional attachment. Indeed, research on adolescents and young adults in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Mexico finds that males believe that a "real man" should always be ready for sex and that only women say no to sex (Heilman, Barker, & Harrison, 2017). Women are expected to set and enforce sexual limits, use their looks to attract men, prioritize relational commitment, and act sexually passive (Seabrook, Ward, Reed, Manago, Giaccardi, & Lippman, 2016).

Evidence suggests that older adolescents learn these gender-based sexual scripts from a variety of media sources. In documenting television effects, Ward and Friedman (2006) conducted both an experimental and a survey study on U.S. teens. In the experimental study, those who were exposed to television clips portraying the notion that women are sexual objects were more likely to endorse that stereotype than those assigned to view gender-neutral content, and moreover, they were also more likely to endorse more traditional gender-role stereotypes, such as "swearing is worse for a girl than a boy." The survey evidence suggested that talk show viewing was associated with traditional gender-role attitudes and that watching television for companionship predicted the notions that women are sexual objects and that men are sex-obsessed. Similarly, a survey study of Belgian teens demonstrated that television viewing was associated with the belief that men are obsessed with sex (e.g., "Boys are always in the mood for sex") but only among the male participants (Vandenbosch & Eggermont, 2012a). The belief that men are sex-obsessed is a view that is more in line with a male point of view, a plausible explanation for why the link with television viewing was only found among adolescent boys.

"Most images communicated through music or movies is that men have to be successful and rich and have big cars and a lot of women to be successful, or have a lot of power to be successful. Media has convinced men it doesn't pay to be an everyday worker anymore."

— Alex, parent of boy and girl

Ter Bogt and colleagues (2010) examined the use of multiple forms of media (television, music, and the internet) and sexual attitudes and gender stereotypes among adolescents in the Netherlands. Their results suggested that preference for certain music genres (hip-hop and “hard house” music) and preference for sexually explicit media were related to adolescents’ belief that men are sex-driven. Music exposure and sexually explicit media preference were also related to adolescents’ beliefs that women’s worth is based on their appearance and men should be handsome and well-built if they want to be romantically successful with women.

In addition to encouraging the endorsement and adoption of these sexual scripts, might exposure to sexual scripts be associated with how confident adolescents feel in sexual situations? In a test of the Heterosexual Script, Tolman, Kim, Schooler, and Sorsoli (2007) surveyed 703 U.S. teens and assessed their exposure to television that depicted the Heterosexual Script and their positive feelings about their sexuality (e.g., “When I am with a partner, I feel that I can always be responsible for what happens sexually”). Among girls, exposure to television that emphasized the script that female characters are sexual limit-setters was related to positive feelings about their sexuality. Thus, seeing female characters setting boundaries and resisting male characters’ sexual advances might make female adolescent viewers more comfortable voicing their own needs. On the other hand, exposure to two other scripts — in which women present themselves as sexual objects and in which male characters attempt to avoid committed relationships — were related to more negative feelings about sexuality. Exposure to these parts of the Heterosexual Script, then, might make female adolescent viewers more likely to capitulate to boys’ sexual needs and silence their own voices.

Summary. Media exposure contributes to gender socialization in later adolescents in four main ways:

- reinforcing traditional views on gender;
- cultivating traditional views on courtship and dating and the desire for good-looking romantic partners;
- socializing both girls and boys to be concerned about their appearance, to accept the notion that women are sexual objects, and to encourage self-objectification;
- and setting expectations about how adolescents should think, feel, and behave in sexual situations, based on gendered sexual scripts.

How Might Media Use and Gender Development Play Out for Youth of Color?

Speculation is often raised about how the dynamics discussed in this report play out among ethnic minority youth (i.e., African-American, Hispanic/Latinx, Asian-American/Pacific Islander, and Native American). Some argue that media effects could be **stronger** because ethnic minority youth consume media at higher levels than their white counterparts. For example, a recent survey found that African-American teens spend an average of 11 hours and 10 minutes using media each day, compared with eight hours and 27 minutes for white youth (Common Sense Media, 2015b). On the other hand, some speculate that media effects might be **weaker** because youth identify most with and are affected most by portrayals of people who look like them, and ethnic minorities are underrepresented in the media. People of color make up almost 40 percent of the U.S. population but occupy 13.6 percent of the lead roles in films (Hunt, Ramon, Tran, Sargent, & Diaz, 2017).

What do research findings say about how the media help to shape ideas about gender among minority youth? Unfortunately, research concerning the effects of media use on the gender development of ethnic minority youth has been sparse. Indeed, only a handful of the studies reviewed in this report focused on African-American or Latinx youth. However, we do have insights from research on related topics or on undergraduates, and most of these studies have focused on African-American youth.

1. Because of their viewing patterns and choices, there is some evidence that youth of color may be particularly vulnerable to the effects of media use on gender-role development.

Findings indicate that African-American youth exhibit a preference for media that feature African-American characters or artists and tend to gravitate to such content and consume it frequently (e.g., Brown & Pardun, 2004). This pattern suggests that African-American youth may therefore be especially susceptible to influence from African-American artists or characters. But research has also found that some media content oriented toward African-American youth, particularly rap, R&B, and hip-hop music videos, contains higher-than-average levels of sexually objectifying portrayals of women (e.g., Aubrey & Frisby, 2011; Frisby & Aubrey, 2012; King, Laake, & Bernard, 2006; Turner, 2011). In addition, frequent exposure to these videos has been found to affect how African-American youth feel about gender roles (e.g., Gordon, 2008) and about how to behave

in sexual relationships. In a survey of 404 African-American undergraduates, Jerald, Ward, Moss, Thomas, and Fletcher (in press) found that more frequent exposure to music videos was associated with stronger support of traditional gender roles and of the notion that women are sexual objects.

2. Media effects on gender development are likely to be broader than we anticipate because ethnic minority youth must also confront societal stereotypes about their racial-gender groups.

It is likely that media effects could be qualitatively different, not only weaker or stronger, because ethnic minority youth must also confront unique societal stereotypes of their groups that white youth do not. Through these stereotypes, men and women of color are often shown in ways that lack diversity and dimension. First, data show that children and teens notice the stereotypes. In interviews and focus group studies involving African-American adolescents, students have expressed awareness of negative media portrayals of African-American girls and women as angry, loud, violent, and hypersexual (Adams-Bass, Bentley-Edwards, & Stevenson, 2014; Muhammad & McArthur, 2015). Second, studies show that media exposure may help nurture some of these stereotypes. One survey of African-American undergraduates found that students who more frequently watch movies and music videos and who see TV content to be more realistic were also more accepting of stereotypes of African-American women as loud, angry, or argumentative; hypersexual; or strong and self-sacrificing (Jerald, Ward, Moss, Thomas, & Fletcher, in press).

3. But not all youth are equally affected. The extent of media effects on youth of color may depend on how much they identify with their ethnic group or on how important their identity is to them.

Ethnic minority audiences, like all audiences, are not homogenous, and individuals are likely to differ in their reactions to media content and in their vulnerability to its influences based on preexisting belief systems, identities, and demographic attributes. One factor that has been found to matter is one's existing ethnic identity. Undergraduate African-American women with a stronger ethnic identity show fewer media effects on their gender stereotypes (Jerald et al., in press) and body dissatisfaction (Schooler et al., 2004; Zhang, Dixon, & Conrad, 2009) than those with a weaker ethnic identity.

WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS OF THIS CONTENT FOR CHILDREN'S LIVES?

As demonstrated here, children's media use is a significant force contributing to their beliefs about femininity and masculinity and shaping their other belief systems, preferences, and decision making. The implications of these media effects are broad ranging. We outline several here.

1. Career selections. We know that among children, frequent TV viewing is linked to the holding of more stereotypes about which gender performs specific occupations (e.g., Nathanson et al., 2002). One implication concerns students' own academic and occupation choices, especially concerning careers in STEM fields. Research indicates that gender stereotypes associated with STEM professions account for much of the gender difference in levels of participation: "Women do not pursue job paths within STEM and men do not hire them because neither group perceives those jobs to be appropriate for women" (Puchner, Markowitz, & Hedley, 2015, p. 24). Where do these perceptions come from? Media portrayals consumed from childhood to adulthood are a likely contributor (Bond, 2016; Steinke et al., 2007; Ziegler & Stoeger, 2008).

2. Personal values nurtured. We have reported that media exposure is linked with children's and adolescents' beliefs about the attributes and skills associated with each sex (e.g., Aubrey & Harrison, 2004; Ward et al., 2005). One such belief we see is that children appear to associate brilliance and intellect more with boys and beauty and daintiness more with girls. These associations start early. For example, Bian, Leslie, and Cimpian (2017) found that 6- and 7-year-old girls associated brilliance (being "really, really, smart") less with their own gender than boys did and expressed less interest than boys in games for those who are "really, really smart." Also, children's beliefs about brilliance shaped their interest in these games. It appears that children come to see brilliance as a male quality at a young age. Also, research shows that adult women

who self-identify as "princesses" give up more easily on a challenging task, are less likely to want to work, and are more focused on superficial qualities (Dinella, 2013).

3. Problems with anger and acting out. Traditional masculinity expects boys to be emotionally stoic (to "suck it up") and emotionally and physically strong. Research indicates that boys' efforts to adhere to these rigid norms is stressful, produces dysfunctional behavior, and is related to lower self-esteem (O'Neil & Lujan, 2009). For boys, experiencing conflict between society's narrow male gender norms and one's personal needs is linked to problems with conduct, anger, and negative emotions (O'Neil, Challenger, Renzulli, Crasper, & Webster, 2013).

4. Body-image concerns and mental health disorders. For girls, frequent exposure to sexualized, objectified, and stereotypical media images of women contributes to their lack of self- and body-confidence and to their self-objectification. In turn, having a view of oneself as a sexual object is linked to higher levels of depression and eating disorders, diminished cognitive efficiency, diminished sexual agency, and lower self-esteem (American Psychological Association, 2007; Ward, 2016). Self-objectified individuals also see themselves as less competent, moral, and warm than nonobjectified individuals and as lacking in uniqueness (Loughnan, Baldissari, Spaccatini, & Elder, 2017).

"I don't want my daughter to think her body is not valuable and her personality is not valuable, and I also want her to know she should be valued for not just what she is on the outside."

— Alex, parent of boy and girl

5. Dating violence and sexual violence. Traditional masculinity emphasizes dominance and power over women. Findings indicate that stronger endorsement of traditional masculinity is linked with attitudes that are more supportive of dating and sexual violence and with greater perpetration of sexual aggression (Murnen, Wright, & Kaluzny, 2002; Seabrook et al., 2016). In addition, men's objectification of women is associated with greater acceptance and perpetration of sexual violence (Seabrook et al., 2016).

6. Risk-taking behavior. Traditional masculinity dictates that men be daring, fearless, and risk-taking. It should come as no surprise, then, that adolescent boys are more likely than their female counterparts to report a variety of risky behaviors, including drinking, "driving without permission," and smoking marijuana (Klein, Brown, Dykers, Childers, Oliveri, & Porter, 1993). This trend extends into young adulthood, where young men report higher rates of binge drinking than young women, as well as higher rates of crime, risky driving, accidents, and substance abuse. Findings indicate that stronger endorsement of masculinity is also linked to higher levels of risk taking and substance abuse. In a recent survey of 449 undergraduate men, greater media use was linked to stronger support of traditional masculinity, which, in turn, was linked to greater levels of sexual risk taking, greater levels of alcohol use, greater levels of drug use, and more speeding (Giaccardi et al., 2017).

How Can Parents, Schools, and Teachers Help Minimize Negative and Maximize Positive Effects?

In light of the mostly negative implications outlined here, what can parents and educators do to counteract the problematic aspects of media's portrayal of gender? Here, we outline several suggestions.

Active parental mediation. Talk to children about media content. Nathanson and colleagues tested the impact of actively critiquing gender-stereotypical TV content while watching with a group of children in grades K-6 (Nathanson et al., 2002). Some children saw the content with no comments from the adult experimenters, others heard comments that countered the stereotypes (e.g., "The show is wrong. Lots

of girls do things besides paint their nails and put on makeup"), and others watched no TV. Children who watched the show and heard the critical comments had less positive evaluations of the show and liked the characters less than children who had not heard the comments. Also, younger children who heard the comments expressed greater acceptance of nontraditional gender roles concerning male activities. The authors argue that if mediation can decrease the attractiveness of characters on a show with stereotypes, perhaps it may also prevent children from internalizing or learning from such content.

"In reading different books and watching TV, you want to educate the kid, because if they're afraid to ask me why, they'll ask social media, Facebook, Instagram, Periscope, whatever it is to get the answer, so I'd rather they get the answer from Dad than friends or media."

— Alex, parent of boy and girl

Activism among parents and children. Promote media activism by encouraging youth to question and critique narrow portrayals they see and portrayals of sexism. Parents can write emails to media producers and post information on social media that states their objections to particular sexist or otherwise offensive content.

Critical media-literacy programs. The objective of media-literacy education is to activate and improve children's critical-thinking skills so they can be better prepared to analyze and challenge media messages. Such programs need to be instituted directly into school curricula and need to directly address gender inequities and sexism. Research studies testing the effectiveness of specific programs have found participation to be linked with multiple outcomes, including 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).

Counter-Stereotypes and Positive Interventions

By DAFNA LEMISH, PH.D.

Despite the dominance of stereotypical and other unhealthy forms of gender representations in the media that children consume, it is important to note that there continue to be efforts to produce content that is counter-stereotypical and that offers children and youth characters, roles, and narratives around gender that nourish and broaden their aspirations and future prospects. The assumption behind such efforts is that exposure to content that tries, intentionally, to challenge gender stereotypes contributes to the development of attitudes fostering gender equity.

Much independent and public media, as well as some commercial companies, continue to experiment with the production of content that presents strong and capable female characters who are not obsessed with their appearance and with attracting boys; initiate and lead; and enjoy outdoor activities, sports, science, and technology. They also present male characters who collaborate with girls, respect girls as equals, demonstrate empathy and emotions, and resolve conflict in nonaggressive ways. Furthermore, some innovative creators' characters and narratives challenge the male/female binary and introduce children to gender fluidity, thus demonstrating that there is no one right way to be a boy or a girl but many ways to be human. Many of these programs have been commercially successful, attracting a variety of viewers. In doing so, they undermine the misguided assumption that children shy away from such nontraditional content (for discussion of specific examples, see Lemish, 2010, and Lemish & Götz, in press).

The evidence produced in studies of the effects of the presentation of counter-stereotypes on television suggests that the same processes of social learning, socialization, and cultivation of worldview operate here, as well. For example, one study found more positive gender-related attitudes as well as nontraditional attitudes and aspirations among adolescent viewers of programs with counter-traditional gender roles, as well as among young viewers of educational television (Durkin, 1985). In another study, girls who were shown counter-stereotypical images of women in STEM positions were more likely to draw a scientist as a woman than were girls who had seen women in stereotypical careers (see Figure 3) (Bond, 2016). Similarly, programs that present models of intersectionality of gender and other human categories contribute to developing resilience among LGBTQ youth (Craig, McInory, McCready, & Alaggia, 2015). Additionally, research suggests that preschool viewers of *Dora the Explorer* held positive views of empowered girls and

Latinas (e.g., Ryan, 2010). Much more research is needed to demonstrate the potential of television to promote gender equity among children and youth.

FIGURE 3. Examples of scientists drawn by girls age 6 to 9 (Bond, 2016)



Note: The two drawings in the left-hand column were coded as male scientists; the two drawings in the right-hand column were coded as female scientists.

CONCLUSION

Media, and specifically television and movies, are prominent forces in the gender education of American youth. They provide abundant models of expected behavior for women and men, more models than children encounter in person. Media also exposes children to what their careers and potential futures might look like. And research indicates that regular exposure to this content has consequences. Findings indicate that heavier TV viewing, especially of content that features traditional gender representations, can lead children and adolescents to hold more rigid or stereotypical beliefs about what each gender can and should do; leads to more stereotypical toy, activity, and occupation preferences; and limits children's perceptions of their own abilities and future options. For girls, this often means that they steer their focus onto their appearance, bodies, and sexiness and away from their competencies, especially in academics, science, and math. For boys, this means drawing a narrow construction of what both femininity and masculinity are and steering away from "softer" values such as nurturance, compassion, and romantic love.

Although the research literature helps us to understand the effects of media on children, a major goal of this report is to help improve the media landscape. To better achieve positive and accurate representations of children, no matter the gender, the people who create content for children should pay particular attention to children's evolving gender development. With a deeper understanding of how children are developing cognitively, socially, emotionally, and physically, they can better support accurate and positive portrayals of gender in the media children consume. To that end, we are providing recommended guidelines for content creators to promote gender equity (see page 40). These guidelines synthesize the substantial research reviewed here with implications for how media creators can address gender equity. It is not the case that a content creator has to address every issue listed on a television show

or in a movie, but taking care to pay attention to these important areas will point creators in a positive, research-supported direction.

Although we have drawn conclusions about media's influence on gender typing in this report, we acknowledge that some of the topics and developmental phases we reviewed have rather limited evidence backing them up. We call on researchers to continue to test and examine the interactions between media exposure and gender development, especially as representations of gender evolve and as the ways in which children and adolescents use media change. The portrayal of gender is clearly a pervasive concern among parents; continued research efforts can help to provide answers and suggestions to parents on what they can do to minimize potentially negative effects on gender development and to maximize the positive. Given how much time children spend consuming media, richer, more diverse, and nonstereotypical portrayals could have significant positive impacts on generations of children.

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/

GENDER EQUITY GUIDELINES FOR CONTENT CREATORS:

Recommendations for developing positive gender representations in movies and on TV



	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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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

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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.

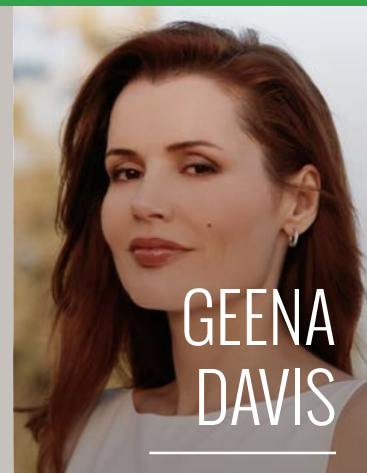
A quarter century after *Thelma & Louise*, women and girls continue to be sidelined in most media, particularly children’s media. That matters, because what our sons and daughters see on-screen shapes their beliefs about the world and themselves. For 10 years, the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media 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.



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 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.

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.

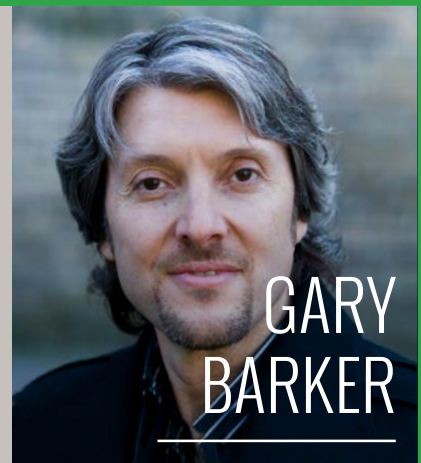
In a survey we conducted this year of more than 3,600 young men in the U.S., Mexico, and the U.K., those who felt this pressure were almost 2.5 times more likely to have had suicidal thoughts; six or seven times more likely to have bullied someone;

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.



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

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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
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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.

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