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Portrayals of Characters of Color in Teen Media

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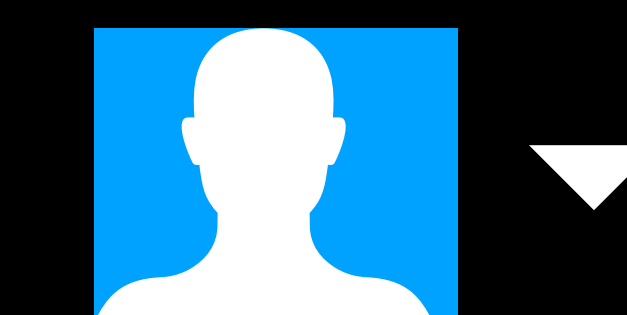
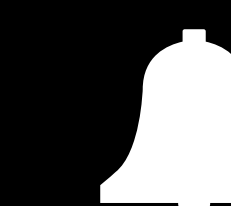
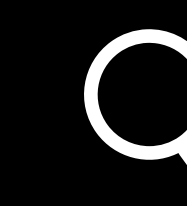
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Key Terms ▼

Colorblind racial attitudes: The denial of White privilege, and the tendency to discount race, racism, and the realities that people of color face (Apfelbaum et al., 2012; Neville et al., 2000).

Color consciousness: The acknowledgement of White privilege, race, racism, and the realities that people of color face (Ullucci & Battey, 2011).

Research Background ▼

- Streaming television is a popular and common form of media consumed by teens (Rideout & Robb, 2019).
- Television displays stereotypes regarding race and racism (Dill-Shackelford, 2009).
- Depictions of race and racism can influence views of how the world works and how individuals should behave (Dill-Shackelford, 2009; Signorielli, 2012).
- While it is known that television often portrays racial stereotypes, scholars have yet to examine how race and racism are depicted in teen-focused television shows.

Research Question ▼

How do teen television shows depict issues related to race and racism?

Methods ▼

The content analysis included the following steps:

1. Selected four popular streaming television shows available on Netflix and designed for teen (ages 13-18) audiences.
 - Two of the selected shows (*Ginny & Georgia* and *Never Have I Ever*) actively address race and racism.
 - Two of the selected shows (*Riverdale* and *Stranger Things*) do not actively address race and racism.
 2. The research team watched the shows to generate a codebook (see Walsh & Leaper, 2020).
 3. The research team watched three randomly selected episodes from each show and used time sampling to code each selected episode.
- Any disagreements were settled through dialogue and a general agreement.

Results ▼

Theme	Description of Theme	Frequency	
		<i>Ginny & Georgia</i>	<i>Never Have I Ever</i>
Ethnic-racial Identity	The television show references a character's development of ethnic-racial identity.	7	12
Struggle	A character of color expresses struggle such as difficulty solidifying their ethnic-racial identity.	7	10
Empowerment	A character of color expresses empowerment related to their ethnic-racial identity such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achievement solidifying their ethnic-racial identity • Pride in their ethnic-racial identity 	0	2
Peers	The television show depicts interactions characters of color have with their peers.	13	5
Racism	Characters of color experience explicit forms of racism or discrimination such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Racial slurs • Stereotypical comments 	0	0
Tension	Characters of color experience tension with their peers such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Color-blind ideologies • A sense of not belonging • Microaggressions 	9	3
Support	Characters of color feel comfortable around their peers because: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Color-consciousness ideologies • Peers offer comfort and support after a character of color experiences racial discrimination • Peers work together to protest racial inequality 	4	2
Community	The television show mentions how the community impacts a character of color.	4	2
Positive	Community provides a sense of well-being and safety for characters of color.	1	0
Negative	Community invokes feelings of danger and anxiety for characters of color.	3	2

Examples of Codes ▼

- **Ethnic-racial Identity — Struggle:** In *Never Have I Ever*, the protagonist, Devi, feels that in some situations she is "too Indian" or "not Indian enough." (S1 E4, 18:30)
- **Ethnic-racial Identity — Empowerment:** In *Never Have I Ever*, Paxton tells Devi she has the beauty of Priyanka Chopra, an Indian actress, and Devi blushes at the compliment. (S1, E2, 1:00)
- **Peers — Tension:** In *Ginny & Georgia*, Hunter says his classmate never acknowledges him as Taiwanese, just "Asian." (S2 E7, 33:00)
- **Peers — Tension:** In *Never Have I Ever*, Devi's classmates confuse her with Aneesa, another Indian classmate. (S2, E5 20:00, 26:00)
- **Peers — Support:** In *Ginny & Georgia*, Hunter calls out and apologizes to Ginny for his friend's stereotypical comments about her hair and body. (S1 E7, 32:30)
- **Community — Negative:** In *Never Have I Ever*, at a local coffee shop, a community member asks Devi if she is Princess Jasmine. (S1 E4, 1:30)
- **Community — Negative:** In *Ginny & Georgia*, Ginny and Hunter talk about being multiracial and discuss the negative feelings that arise when others in the community ask, "What are you?" (S1 E7, 33:30)

Conclusion ▼

- Some teen television shows are actively addressing race and racism.
- Teen television shows are highlighting the development of ethnic-racial identity. This is promising considering scholars label the development of ethnic-racial identity to be an essential product of the development of older children and adolescents (Syed & Azmitia, 2008, Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014).
- Teen television shows are emphasizing factors in a person of colors' community or interactions with peers that may influence their overall well-being. This is encouraging considering research suggests that hearing stories from individuals of various backgrounds can help individuals better recognize systems of oppression and discrimination (Freire, 1995).
- Future research should continue to explore how race and racism are depicted in teen television.

References ▼

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tinyurl.com/pccteenmedia

