

**“It’s About All of Us”:
Discussions of Race and Racism in Children's Television Post-George Floyd**

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A senior thesis submitted to the Department of Communication and Media
at the University of Michigan in partial fulfillment of a Bachelor of Arts degree (Honors)

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April 2024

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Abstract

Through textual analysis of seven prominent kids' programs, this article examines how themes of race and racism are portrayed within children's television shows produced after the Summer of 2020. Finding that these texts identify racial injustice as a communal issue and offer a variety of potential solutions and actionable items to combat racism, this article argues that these programs largely prove to be a progressive and holistic representation of systemic racism, despite occasionally oversimplifying the subject matter. In turn, these findings reveal the types of messages that are communicated to young viewers about racial injustice as we collectively work towards a more equitable society.

Keywords: Children's Television, Race, Racism, George Floyd, Children

Introduction

The Summer of 2020 served as a major cultural reckoning for the American people as they came face to face with their nation's history of systemic racism and police brutality. Although calls for change had persisted for decades, the murder of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer in May 2020 brought these issues of injustice to the forefront of American society as millions mobilized to support the Black Lives Matter movement in some of the largest protests in the nation's history (George Floyd's Impact On The Fight For Racial Justice, 2021). As a result of this heightened awareness of systemic racism and the forces that uphold it, many media texts began to address this ongoing movement within its own subject matter and examine whether their content promoted anti-racist ideologies or reinforced existing inequalities. As demonstrated by the several US police dramas that adapted their narratives in recognition of the realities of police brutality towards people of color, it is evident that producers of American media were well aware of the calls for justice amplified by the public outcry and the need to update media content to promote a more equitable and fair society for all (Bernabo, 2022).

Children's media in particular has not shied away from portraying social issues in an educational manner that is easy for young viewers to comprehend without over-complicating the subject matter. As early as the civil rights era, television has been used to socialize and orient children towards values "deemed best for them and society," often utilizing images of a classroom on-screen to address current issues such as racism and inequity (Jenkins and Goldin, 1998). Although the predominance of classroom settings was eventually dropped for other sites of learning, such as *Sesame Street's* urban environment and the domestic sets of children's sitcoms, children's television has never ceased to face society's most pressing issues head-on,

often aiming to teach young viewers to be smarter, kinder, and more just citizens. This is certainly evidenced by the children's television content created in the wake of the Summer of 2020, which sought to address the impacts of and questions raised by the murder of George Floyd and the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement. By seeing familiar faces such as *Sesame Street's* Elmo and *Arthur's* Arthur the Aardvark discuss these issues and how they are responding to them, children are equipped the knowledge required to recognize these issues within their own communities and address them as an informed citizen.

In turn, this study explores how themes of race and racism are incorporated into the narratives of children's television shows produced after the Summer of 2020, and what these portrayals imply about systemic racism, its causes, and its potential solutions. In order to accomplish this, textual analysis is used to examine several episodes of popular children's television from across different networks and age demographics, and analyze the techniques used within each episode to communicate these themes and how these narratives are integrated into the show's diegesis. Ultimately, this study argues that children's television post-Summer of 2020 holistically addresses issues of systemic racism while offering nuanced insight into the effects and possible solutions to racial injustice, despite occasionally over-simplifying the issues at hand. Although children's television content addressing the questions raised by the Black Lives Matter movement in the Summer of 2020 will be produced after this study, this analysis looks at content released within the three years following the Summer of 2020 (June 2020 through February 2023). Further, this study models the major tendencies of modern children's television productions in creating content about systemic racism within relative recency to the Summer of 2020.

Literature Review

Importance of Children's Television and How it Has Been Studied. In order to fully comprehend the significance of children's television within our culture, we must first understand the key role that children's media plays in the socialization process. Although many children's programs are not always perceived as "educational" by both parents and children, kids still learn from all media that they consume, though the applicability of these learned lessons to real-life situations varies by program (Gee et al., 2018). One program that is demonstrated to be particularly effective in its ability to educate young viewers is Sesame Workshop's long-running series *Sesame Street*, which is often the focus of studies about children's media and its educational impacts. As demonstrated by a 1976 study by Coates and colleagues, watching television shows like *Sesame Street* and *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* can increase prosocial behaviors in preschool-age children, such as offering verbal praise to their peers and giving affectionate physical contact (Coates et al., 1976). In considering academic readiness, watching *Sesame Street* was found to be effective in preparing preschool-age children for school, and this positive effect was particularly pronounced for Black and disadvantaged children (Kearney and Levine, 2019). In turn, the significance of conducting research on children's media is further demonstrated by understanding how children's consumption of media has a demonstrated impact on their socialization and academic readiness.

More recent research on children's television has revealed the methods in which the medium promotes learning, and by extension, socialization and academic readiness. By analyzing several children's programs broadcasted by PBS, a 2010 study by Linebarger and Piotrowski determined that kids' television can be classified into one of two formats, narrative or expository, which can promote learning in different ways. Furthermore, the three major learning strategies in children's media can be defined as "rehearsing strategies," "elaborating strategies,"

and “affective strategies.” Rehearsing strategies are effective in narrative programs as they allow children the ability to “practice” life skills. Secondly, elaborating strategies are particularly effective in narratives by causing children to make connections between viewed content and their own lived experiences. Finally, affective strategies serve to increase one’s motivation to watch and engage with a program, in turn resulting in a more positive learning environment (Linebarger and Piotrowski, 2010). Ultimately, these classifications of children’s television macrostructures and strategies provide a solid framework for understanding how television is able to encourage cognitive development and socialization in young viewers.

In addition to recognizing the role of children’s television in educating young viewers, it is important to understand the history of how this content has been studied over time. Research on children’s television has existed since the medium’s origins in the 1940s, although this research was often underfunded and lacked coordination (Murray et al., 2007). Early studies on children and television consumption largely focused on the physical effects of viewing, such as bodily aches and pains associated with sitting in front of a screen for too long. By the 1950s, research began to investigate children’s television use and preferences as well as the impact of consumption on academic success, replacing the prior decade’s concerns of physical health. This trend of an increased humanistic approach continued through the 60s and 70s, when studies began to examine children’s reactions to televised scandals (i.e. the Kennedy assassination) and the impacts of viewing media violence. This led to a new understanding of children as an active audience, applying models of social learning and cognitive development theory to better understand the effects of media consumption on young viewers (Pecora, 2006).

The 80s and 90s saw further development in this field, as researchers sought to answer further questions about gender and race-based issues, as well as television’s impact on prosocial

behavior. By the turn of the millennium, questions about gender and race in children's television were still prominent in research trends, but studies on representation were dominated by gender-based concerns rather than race (Murray et al., 2007). As a result, issues of racial representation within children's media are significantly underrepresented within literature about children's television. Therefore, further research can be conducted on this topic to fill the gaps left by previous findings on children's television content.

How Media Helps Children Understand Race. Media consumption can directly expose children to racialized images, providing a space for many to explore the concept of race for the first time, better understand their individual racial identity, and learn pro-social behaviors to be utilized in intergroup settings. Despite this, there are certain developmental milestones that children must reach before they can categorize individuals by race in the images they are exposed to. By six months of age, infants are able to perceptually categorize faces as members of their same-race ingroup or other-race outgroup. At three to four years, children can identify faces as members of distinct racial groups when prompted with specific category labels. Lastly, by six to eight years old, children demonstrate the ability to categorize individuals by race (Pauker et al., 2017). However, these racial categorization skills are only applicable to children's perceptions of human characters; children are largely unable to grasp the context clues to determine the racial identities of puppet, animal, and inanimate object characters (Hamlen and Imbesi, 2019). These non-human characters seemingly ignore the concept of race in terms of skin color, which children depend on in order to differentiate individuals by racial groups (Pauker et al., 2017).

Although children are not able to fully initiate the racial categorization process for several years, joint consumption of media between parents and children, especially ethnic media

that feature that parent and child's ethnic identity, can encourage discussions about racial and ethnic identities within families (Takeuchi and Ellerbe., 2017). As a result of these conversations, ethnic minority children and children of color are able to further understand their identities. As demonstrated in a 2017 case study by Takeuchi and Ellerbe, watching Nickelodeon's *Dora the Explorer* provided families with an opportunity to discuss what it means to be Latinx, allowing children to gain an understanding of their heritage and refine their ethnic identity.

In addition, media created with the intention of addressing specific racial subgroups can help inform a child's identity. For instance, *Ebony*, a magazine created for African American readers, has had a child-oriented version of its publication since 1973, titled *Ebony Jr!* By presenting several ideological orientations about African American identities, this publication provides young readers with sufficient cultural education to formulate their own political views. In turn, *Ebony Jr!* has historically socialized its audience of Black children into a "Racial Uplift" approach by encouraging community self-esteem and racial pride. As a result, exposure to *Ebony Jr!* can construct its readers as "politicized beings," with a better understanding of their racial and political identities (Henderson, 2008). Increased self-esteem in children of color can be observed from consuming media that is not audience specific as well, although there is a positive correlation between exposure to characters in the media that match the viewer's racial identity and the self-esteem of racial minority children. Furthermore, non-white American children are more likely to consider media characters of their same race and ethnicity as role models and demonstrate a preference for television programs and characters that match their racial identity (Greenberg and Mastro, 2008).

Though interacting with certain media texts can aid children of color in achieving higher self-esteem, the inverse effect can be observed when considering media consumption irrespective

of an individual's preferences. As demonstrated by a 2012 study by Martins and Harrison, television exposure is associated with lower self-esteem in all children except white boys. This can be linked to the prominence of racial and gender stereotypes within television narratives, while narratives depicting white men are overwhelmingly positive (Martins and Harrison, 2012). In turn, the impact of television consumption on a child's self-esteem appears to be dependent on their status as a racial minority and whether the program features images and stories featuring their identity within the text.

Regardless of whether a child can actively form racial categorizations or develop an informed racial identity, exposure to race and images of racial diversity in the media are demonstrated to have a positive impact on prosocial behavior. For instance, several studies have been conducted on the impact of *Sesame Street*'s multicultural human cast on young viewers. Notably, one study found that viewing *Sesame Street* predicted white children's likelihood of choosing a playmate of color. Additionally, a second study revealed a correlation between watching *Sesame Street* and a child's willingness to play with a Black Barbie doll (Greenberg and Mastro, 2008). In turn, the inclusion of people of color as major characters within *Sesame Street* proved to have a prosocial impact on a child's behavior with regard to their racial ingroup and outgroups.

Ultimately, understanding how media, and specifically television, can help children understand race directly illustrates the significance of studying how race and racism are presented within children's television. By extension, this information can reveal the impacts of narratives of racism/race on children and how the information implied by these narratives can affect children's behavior and understanding of others in their day-to-day lives.

Social Issues in Children's Television. In order to fully understand how race and racism are presented within children's television narratives, it is important to first explore how the television medium represents social issues to its audiences more broadly. This is frequently accomplished through the concept of the "very special episode," which describes a type of television episode that attempts to tackle relevant and pressing social issues, historically to varying degrees of effectiveness. These episodes within a series have earned a reputation for being overly dramatic and simplistic but are still a very important way for the television industry to "respond to and shape social change, cultural traumas, and industrial transformations" (Cohn and Porst, 2021). Ultimately, the "very special episode" concept can be distilled into the following formal qualities: 1) the episode represents a noticeable departure from the main series text, 2) the episode utilizes characters that audiences have grown to laugh with and care for to convey a social message, 3) the episode provokes audience discussion and more active forms of spectatorship, 4) the episode attempts to address a social issue without alienating any segments of the audience, and 5) the status quo will be re-established by the next episode (Cohn and Porst, 2021).

A 2011 case study of the Disney Channel series, *That's So Raven*, by Hollis Griffin reveals the ways in which "very special episodes" can be utilized within children's television to address issues of race and racism. Within *That's So Raven*, a small number of individual episodes feature discussions of race, but the series does not make significant commentary on race relations in American culture. Two specific episodes of the show depict the titular Raven confronting racial injustice through workplace discrimination and racist beauty standards while communicating that racial difference "pre-exists the characters" and the situations they face

(Griffin, 2011). However, the series rarely makes a point out of Raven's blackness otherwise, and the show's diegesis returns to normal after the conclusion of these episodes (Griffin, 2011).

Though these episodes of *That's So Raven* represent one way in which racial discourses have manifested themselves within children's television narratives, concerns about racial inequity have been included in children's programs for decades. A prominent example of this can be found in the long-running *Sesame Street*, which has adopted anti-racist ideology since its inception. In developing the show to teach young audiences, Sesame Workshop (then called the Children's Television Workshop) asserted that the development of children's cognitive skills could bridge gaps between race and class differences in American youth (Kinder and Hendershot, 1999). From a modern point of view, this idea of cognition as a "great equalizer" is harmful because it seems to ignore actual structural inequalities that plague US society. However, *Sesame's* cognition-based approach was in truth particularly radical during the program's initial years as it directly challenged racist scholars of the 1960s and 1970s who argued that an individual's IQ was directly tied to their racial background (Kinder and Hendershot, 1999). With the "eradication of racism" as a core facet of *Sesame Street's* mission and ingrained into the show's culture, *Sesame* stands in contrast to programs like *That's So Raven*, which only seem to address racism and its impacts through the use of the "very special episode."

In addition to combatting racism through its approach to education, *Sesame Street* features several core elements on screen that further solidify the show's anti-racist ideology. For example, the show is set in an inner-city neighborhood, representing an attempt to appeal to low-income children of color in American cities (Kinder and Hendershot, 1999). Secondly, the show's diverse, upbeat human cast is utilized to uplift non-white viewers and represent the

multicultural nature of current American society, all while promoting an “equal role for all children in solving problems,” (Kinder and Hendershot, 1999).

Sesame Workshop’s deliberate approach to addressing racism within children’s television directly contrasts the mentalities and justifications for progressive content present within other networks and producers of kids’ media. For instance, Nickelodeon has historically claimed to have racial diversity as the center of its brand identity but consistently utilizes non-specific “urbanness” to connote non-white identities, therefore dodging potential questions about structural inequities at play. Even the performances of the network’s cast members of color display this “post-racial” stance, as exemplified by *Kenan & Kel* (1996-2000), whose two Black leads perform as an urban racial “other” rather than unequivocal blackness, harkening back to the harmful tradition of American minstrel shows as a performance of race (Banet-Weiser, 2008). Ultimately, this display of colorblind ideology by Nickelodeon insinuates that children are inherently “above” racial discrimination, and that racism is not a serious concern in US society, therefore reasserting systems of oppression (Banet-Weiser, 2008).

Lastly, in analyzing the way that social issues are presented in children’s television, it is important to recognize the potential impacts that this type of communication can have on young audiences (Hendershot and Banet-Weiser, 2004). For instance, presenting controversial topics on screen to children can construct their identity as citizens and serve as a form of political empowerment. As demonstrated by the 2001 *Nick News* episode “Kids, Terrorism, and American Spirit” and its discourses about children’s citizenship and what it means to be an American in the wake of the September 11th attacks, television content can construct children as citizens by emphasizing their consumer freedom and individual agency. Additionally, by insinuating that childhood is an identity created by children for other children, the citizenship of young

Americans is placed in relationship to that of adults. This oppositional dynamic reveals that Nickelodeon regards children as citizens independent of adults, therefore lending autonomy to this identity. *Nick News* presumes that children are able to become active citizens, and even addresses young viewers as citizens already, allowing the text to then further address their needs (Hendershot and Banet-Weiser, 2004). Although this process of constructing children as citizens implies that children are active players rather than passive with regard to their media consumption, this phenomenon reveals that displaying social issues and controversies to children through the media can serve as a form of political empowerment to these individuals. Ultimately, this understanding adds further context to the importance of representing “heavy” topics on screen in children’s television and how young viewers are affected.

Changes in Representations of Race on Television since the Black Lives Matter Movement.

In order to understand how representations of race and racism have changed within children’s media after the summer of 2020, it is important to explore how television more broadly has changed since this cultural reckoning. Recognizing how the television industry has adapted its on-screen narratives to address broader social understanding of racial injustice provides the framework to analyze changes within children’s television.

One major way in which television narratives have addressed the concerns of the Black Lives Matter movement is through its characterization of police officers on screen. As revealed in a 2022 study by Bernabo, the death of George Floyd represented a major shift in the type of content presented within police-focused programs (such as *Law & Order: SVU* and *Chicago P.D.*), after years of police representations positioning officers in a primarily positive manner. To begin, the narratives in these episodes released during the 2020-2021 season, which was the television season that directly followed the summer of 2020, largely portrayed police

protagonists as willing to confront racism in their work while new characters were introduced to represent racist officers. These narratives notably break the “blue wall,” a code of silence in police culture that prevents officers from calling each other out on their quality of work, as “good” cops are repeatedly portrayed as going after racist, “bad apples,” (Bernabo, 2022). Additionally, the narratives feature discourses about defunding police operations, how to manage racist officers, and what constitutes a “bad apple.” Although the trends of these narratives largely portray good cops confronting “bad apples” without solving the systemic issues at hand, these attempts to increase viewer discourses about police reform represent steps taken toward cultural progress (Bernabo, 2022).

Due to the relative recency of the Summer of 2020’s cultural upheaval, published literature about its impacts on television is limited. However, we can look to research on the Black Lives Matter movement prior to 2020 for further insight into how BLM-inspired television has affected viewers. For example, prominent American television series like *Scandal* (2012-2018) and *The Good Wife* (2009-2016) have featured “very special episodes” with narratives that mirror real-world events such as the killing of Michael Brown and Trayvon Martin by police officers. According to a 2019 study by Bernabo on the reactions of audiences on social media to these BLM-related television episodes, viewers perceived these episodes as “painful, yet necessary” ways to address these injustices. Additionally, audiences were divided on whether these topics were “timely” or not and criticized programs with predominantly white casts for their ability to authentically portray these issues on screen (Bernabo, 2019). Ultimately, this research on the reception of such episodes provides further insight into the effectiveness of BLM-inspired material in conveying these social issues to American audiences.

Finally, understanding the history of how the Black Lives Matter movement has shaped children's television lays the groundwork for future research into the ways that anti-racist ideologies have manifested themselves within these productions. To begin, the Summer of 2020 marked a unique collaboration for Sesame Street and CNN, as they coproduced a "virtual town hall" event where children and families could submit questions about racial injustice to be answered by a panel of experts and Sesame Street characters (Brown, 2020). Additionally, Nickelodeon featured several specials in their programming, including a *Nick News* episode that featured young activists speaking out about the Black Lives Matter movement and sharing anti-racism resources for children and families. More controversially, the network additionally aired an 8-minute and 46 second segment featuring the text "I can't breathe" accompanied by the sound of an individual's breath on June 1st, 2020 (Brown, 2020). Although this segment was criticized by parents for scaring young children and not addressing the root of the problem, the existence of television products like the "I can't breathe" segment, *Nick News*' BLM special, and Sesame Street's town hall represent an attempt to imbed anti-racist messaging in children's programming and increase internalization of these messages, something that had much less frequently prior to the summer of 2020's cultural reckoning.

Methods

In order to identify how children's television produced after the Summer of 2020 integrates themes of race and racism into its narratives, I conducted a textual analysis of seven major children's television programs that aired between June 2020 and February 2023. Textual analysis was chosen to fully examine the messaging being produced by these texts and their further social implications. The programs featured in this study are *Kids, Racism, and Unity: A Nick News Special* (June 29, 2020), PBS KIDS web short based on the *Arthur* television series,

“Arthur on Racism: Talk, Listen, and Act,” (August 4, 2020), *PBS KIDS Talk About: Race and Racism* (October 9, 2020), *See Us Coming Together: A Sesame Street Special* (November 25, 2021), a two-episode arc of *Raven’s Home* consisting of season 5 episode 20, “Stylin’ & Profilin’,” (October 21, 2022) and season 5 episode 21, “Big Burger, Small Fry,” (October 28, 2022) and *The Proud Family: Louder and Prouder* season 2 episode 10, “Juneteenth,” (February 1, 2023). These seven episodes or specials all specifically discuss race and racism and represent content aired by three of the most prominent children’s television networks (Nickelodeon, PBS KIDS, and Disney Channel). Additionally, these programs are all created for different intended age groups, with some addressing children approximately ages 2-6 (*Sesame Street*, *Arthur*, and *PBS KIDS Talk About: Race and Racism*) and the others addressing children ages 8 and up (*Nick News*, *Raven’s Home*, and *The Proud Family: Louder and Prouder*).

Through the use of textual analysis, I coded each episode’s dialogue, visual representations, and character actions for the following: (1) the presence of rehearsing, elaborating, or affective learning strategies; (2) what the program implies about the causes of racism/racial inequality; (3) who the program identifies as being affected by racial injustice; (4) what coping strategies the program presents for individuals affected by racism; (5) what calls to action the program makes to its viewers; (6) what the program implies as a solution to racism. By placing the coded content of these “very special episodes” into these categories, I then discuss how children’s television post-summer of 2020 addresses topics of race and racism within its narratives and the broader social implications that these portrayals have.

Analysis

Presence of rehearsing, elaborating, or affective learning strategies. Linebarger and Piotrowski’s 2010 study that defined these three learning strategies was primarily focused on

educational children's television programs; my findings are consistent with this original study, as I found that rehearsing, elaborating, and affective learning strategies were more likely to be found in programs with a larger emphasis on education and reduced focus on storytelling, such as *Sesame Street*, *Arthur*, and *Nick News*. In turn, these programs with a higher presence of learning strategies more closely resembled Linebarger and Piotrowski's model of an expository macrostructure rather than a narrative macrostructure. That is not to say that these programs were completely devoid of plot, however in the case of programs like *Sesame Street*, the plot was secondary to the episode's goals of demonstrating cultural diversity and promoting empathy for all members of one's community.

To begin, rehearsing strategies were only found in *Sesame Street* out of all the selected programs. The presence of this type of learning strategy is best demonstrated in the episode after Ji-Young, a puppet character made to represent a young Korean American girl, has an offscreen encounter with unnamed individuals who make racist remarks toward her. Alan, a human cast member on the show who is Japanese American, comforts Ji-Young and offers advice on what to do when others treat her unfairly. Alan suggests taking a deep breath before clearly demonstrating this behavior to the audience, giving young viewers the opportunity to rehearse deep breathing while viewing the program. He then instructs Ji-Young to say to herself and others that being treated unfairly "is not okay," again giving children the opportunity to practice standing up for themselves on their own. Later in the episode, the classic *Sesame* monster Elmo and Ji-Young incorporate rehearsing strategies into their performance of the song "See Us Coming Together," which includes a lyrical walkthrough of the process of making a new friend, asserting that "anyone can be friends" regardless of background. In this song, the characters repeatedly chant that making friends is as easy as asking someone "Do you want to be friends?"

and responding with, “Then let’s be friends.” The verbal repetition of these steps and clear modeling of prosocial behavior in turn allows children to rehearse making friends by following along and echoing these phrases. Additionally, this concept of repetition is directly supported by Linebarger and Piotrowski’s claim that repeated content “signals that it is important and should be attended to,” further demonstrating how *Sesame Street* is able to teach kindness and compassion (2010). Ultimately, as rehearsing strategies appeared a handful of times within a single text, discussing their presence in this study can only yield insight into how *Sesame Street* utilizes them to encourage prosocial and anti-racist behavior.

Elaborating strategies, on the other hand, can be found within two texts, with the first being the *Arthur on Racism: Talk, Listen, and Act* web short. After seeing a video online that is implied to be a recording of police brutality against a Black individual, eight-year-old Arthur and Buster consult their lunch lady, Mrs. MacGrady about racism and how to stand up for what is right. In this conversation, Mrs. MacGrady directly addresses the viewer and asks, “Imagine what it would be like if [acts of racism] happened to you or someone you love.” Thus, this serves as an elaborating strategy as it asks young viewers to draw connections between their own experiences and the onscreen content, encouraging reflection on how racism could affect the viewer and those close to them. *Sesame Street* additionally displays elaborating strategies through the use of a reworked version of the show’s classic “The People in Your Neighborhood” song, which now focuses on Asian American and Pacific Islander individuals in the Sesame neighborhood to match the theme of the *See Us Coming Together* special. In turn, by acknowledging the AAPI identities of Alan, the bus driver, and other community members, this song prompts viewers to identify and celebrate the AAPI individuals in their own lives, further encouraging children to appreciate racial and cultural diversity. Both *Arthur* and *Sesame Street*’s

use of elaborating strategies are supported by the claims of Linebarger and Piotrowski, which state that these strategies “help learners create links between new content and existing prior knowledge,” such as identifying AAPI people in one’s community, and “increase the personal relevance of the content,” like asking viewers to imagine acts of racism towards themselves/those they love (2010). Despite relatively infrequent appearances, these strategies provide some insight into how television texts can attempt to establish new cognitive associations to combat racism.

Lastly, several of the selected programs make use of affective learning strategies to increase viewers’ engagement with the show’s content. For instance, *Nick News* utilizes on-screen dictionary-style definitions of terms like audacity, privilege, and racial profiling that are displayed as the terms are mentioned in the dialogue to ensure that young viewers are able to fully understand and engage with the subjects being discussed. Similarly, *Sesame Street* presents images of traditional Asian clothing onscreen as these items are brought up by the characters, such as a Korean *hanbok* and a Chinese *cheongsam*, providing a visual aid for children to further appreciate these cultural items. These examples echo Linebarger and Piotrowski’s claims that onscreen print can encourage a favorable learning environment by increasing literal comprehension of a given subject (2010). Finally, both *Sesame Street* and the *Daniel Tiger’s Neighborhood* segment of *PBS KIDS Talk About: Race and Racism* utilize music, either through full songs as demonstrated by *Sesame*, or through the “in some ways we are different, but in so many ways, we are the same” jingle repeated in *Daniel Tiger*. The use of this music serves as an affective learning strategy by providing an entertaining way for children to increase their engagement with these programs’ themes of inclusion and appreciating diversity. Although

affective strategies appeared sparsely in these programs, they were present in the largest number of episodes and had notable variety in their implementation (i.e. text, images, and music).

Ultimately, while present in education-oriented programs like *Sesame Street*, *Arthur*, *Nick News*, and *PBS KIDS Talk About*, Linebarger and Piotrowski's three learning strategies are absent from programs like *Raven's Home* and *The Proud Family: Louder and Prouder*, which present more nuanced narratives than their expository counterparts. In addition, the presence of these strategies is more prominent in the texts intended for younger audiences, potentially indicating that these practices for teaching young viewers are less effective for navigating complex racial discourse in programs intended for older audiences. It is important to note that these three learning strategies appeared infrequently across all the examined texts, demonstrating that these programs largely utilized other undefined methods to teach anti-racism to viewers. In turn, I cannot argue that, when present, these strategies caused learning in viewers, but rather can point to how rehearsing, elaborating, and affective strategies each facilitate an environment for potential learning in their individual instances.

Implied causes of racism/racial inequity. A wide variety of causes for racism and racial inequity are implied by the seven programs that I viewed. The most prominent and most frequently reinforced "cause" throughout these texts is the implication that racism is a response to differences in physical attributes between individuals. Though this "cause" is rather indirect and ignores many historical nuances, its simplicity may have positioned it as an effective way to represent racism to young audiences and contributed to its repeated mentions in these programs. By presenting racism as inequity due to skin color, it can be assumed that the texts are able to use their runtime to promote messages of anti-racism, rather than being hindered by having explaining years of historical context. Due to the limitations of textual analysis, I am unable to

indicate if this simplistic representation is effective or not, but it is still important to examine these examples to understand how these themes are woven into the narratives of the selected texts.

For instance, in *PBS KIDS Talk About: Race and Racism*, race is primarily defined in terms of skin color, although other traits such as hair type are also used to define race. Thus, when the special states that racism is “not treating people fairly because of their skin color,” it is implied that racism is a response to one’s physical attributes. In the *Xavier Riddle and the Secret Museum* section of the special, a reenactment of Rosa Parks’ confrontation against bus segregation is presented. In this segment, Parks states that she is supposed to give up her seat on the bus to the man who asked her to get up, simply because “his skin is white,” further supporting that racial inequity is a consequence of physical differences. Lastly, *Nick News* asserts that equality can be achieved “when there’s no discrimination based on the color of your skin,” implying that racial inequalities are the result of responses to skin color. Although many social scientists may argue that race is a social construct rather than a physical measure, this notion of racism in terms of one’s attributes is consistent with the way that children understand race; as described by Pauker and colleagues, children rely on skin color in order to differentiate racial groups (2017).

Another prominent, yet vague implied cause of racial inequity in these texts is the idea that racism has just “existed” for a long time. Again, this may serve to offer a simplistic definition of racial injustice so that the text can instead focus its efforts on the larger goal of combatting of racism instead of spending time on detailed explanations. Many of these programs refuse to acknowledge America’s history of slavery and segregation, apart from *The Proud Family*, which deliberately represents racism as a lasting repercussion of slavery throughout the

episode's narrative. In contrast, *PBS KIDS Talk About* simply states that people of color have been fighting racism in America for many years, with a nonspecific mention that things have improved over time. Similarly, *Arthur on Racism* posits that there is a long history of injustice in America, though the short is speaking about Black Americans specifically rather than American people of color more broadly.

An additional, significant cause implied in these texts is the idea that racism is a consequence of unfair systems of power, specifically in relation to policing. This is directly stated in the *Raven's Home* episode, "Stylin' and Profilin'," after the character Booker, a Black teen, is pulled over by a cop while driving home for seemingly no reason besides his race. While processing this situation at home, Booker is told by his grandfather that "the system is broken," and there are "a lot of bad cops out there." Further, in *The Proud Family: Louder and Prouder*, the main cast of middle school-age children protest the construction of a new statue of their town's founder, due to his newly discovered history of being a slaveowner. Despite engaging in peaceful protest, dozens of police officers arrive on the scene donning riot gear, and when the children refuse to stop protesting, the entire cast is forcibly arrested and thrown in jail. These characterizations of police officers stand in contrast to the representations of police in other television programs that aired after the Summer of 2020. While racist police officers are portrayed as a few "bad apples" among "good" cops in other media, *Raven's Home* and *The Proud Family* assert that systems of policing are unfair as a whole, thus contributing to the perpetuation of acts of racism at the hands of law enforcement (Bernabo, 2022).

Some less prominent, but still notable implied causes of racism in these texts include complacency, individual biases, and white fragility. Complacency is specifically addressed in several programs, such as *Arthur on Racism*, where Mrs. MacGrady uses a "disease" model to

represent racism by arguing that “if left untreated, it will spread.” Similarly, *Nick News* features family therapist Dr. George James telling audiences that the perpetuation of racism is a consequence of human tendencies to avoid negativity, suggesting that inaction is to blame. Lastly, *The Proud Family* attempts to combat white complacency towards racial injustice when Barry, a descendent of the slave-owning town founder, is forced to learn that “pretending [injustice] didn’t happen doesn’t make it go away.” Furthermore, individual biases are implied to be a cause of racism in *Sesame Street* when Alan explains to Ji-Young that there are some people who believe that AAPI individuals do not belong in America. *Nick News* expands on the notion of individual biases by arguing that racism begins at home and that children as young as age 3 can possess racial biases, which is relatively consistent with the 2017 findings of Pauker and colleagues on children’s ability to categorize others by race. Finally, *The Proud Family* directly addresses white fragility as a cause of racial injustice when Barry’s husband, who is a Black man, calls out Barry’s defensiveness towards discussing race and his ancestor’s history of owning slaves. By specifically citing white fragility as a term coined by Robin DiAngelo in her book, *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism*, Barry’s husband argues that Barry is perpetuating racism through his white fragility and selfish complacency with publicly honoring a slave owner.

Who is identified as being affected by racial injustice. As could be reasonably assumed, many of these texts identified people of color as the targets of racial injustice. To begin, *Arthur on Racism* directly states that an individual within Arthur’s community was the victim of police brutality because they are Black, identifying Black people as being the victims of injustice. Another program that identifies Black people in this manner is *PBS Kids Talk About: Race and Racism*, which features several real families engaging in conversation about these topics. Some

notable moments from these segments include a child defining racism to his mother as Black and white people “not collabing” and a father telling his daughter that Black people need to be treated as fairly as everyone else. In turn, both of these interactions specifically identify Black people as being targets of racism. *Nick News* similarly gives the spotlight to real families, featuring a testimony from a Black father who describes teaching his sons how to act in the street to avoid being perceived as a threat. This poignant moment serves as concrete evidence as to how racism affects Black individuals in particular and shapes the conversations that Black parents have with their children. Despite being a work of fiction, *Raven's Home* portrays Black families having similar conversations as Booker recounts the ways that his mother told him to prepare for unjust policing while being pulled over. This program further emphasizes the ways that Black people are victims of racial injustice by portraying a Black child being treated as a criminal simply because of his race.

In addition to identifying people of color as targets of racial injustice, many of these texts assert that everyone is affected by racism. A notable example can be found in *Sesame Street*, when Elmo says to Alan that “Elmo’s not Asian” and Alan reminds him that he is a part of the neighborhood and is therefore impacted by racism towards AAPI community members. Further, several of these texts frame the impacts of racism on all individuals as a way to discuss effective allyship, such as *Nick News*, which states that being an ally means “see[ing] the fight for equality as your fight too.” *Arthur on Racism* further discusses allyship by critiquing those who believe that racism is not their problem because they are “not racist” themselves, in turn advocating for active, anti-racist behavior. Lastly, *PBS KIDS Talk About: Race and Racism* repeatedly asserts that everyone is affected by racism; the host directly addresses viewers by stating “All of us have to speak out” against racial injustice, and later in the episode, a Black

mother explains to her son that all racial groups can be affected by racism, and who is affected varies between communities across the globe. In addition, a white father is portrayed as telling his daughter that it takes confidence to stand up against racial injustice, and the special concludes with a declaration that “we are a part of the same race: the human race.” Ultimately, these claims work together to demonstrate that everyone, regardless of race, needs to join the fight against racism as this is an issue that impacts us all. By having individuals of different racial identities discuss measures for anti-racism and the importance of allyship, these texts demonstrate that racial injustice doesn't target a single group of people, but instead plagues society as a whole.

Implied coping strategies for those affected by racism. Only three programs out of those I selected implied coping strategies within their content, either through character dialogue or modeled by on-screen actions. Despite this, these three programs convey a variety of potential strategies. To begin, some of these strategies fall under the label of “self-care.” *Nick News* directly addresses self-care through its interview with family therapist Dr. George James, who emphasizes the importance of self-care for Black families and urges them that “they don't need to be a part of the fight every day.” Specific self-care strategies are offered in *Sesame Street*, in the scenes where Alan consoles Ji-Young after she experiences a racist verbal attack. Alan models self-affirmations like “we belong here and we should all be very proud of who we are and where we're from” and breathing techniques, such as taking deep breaths.

Another significant strategy implied by *Sesame Street* is standing up for oneself. Again, Alan emphasizes the need to stand up for oneself when comforting Ji-Young, telling her that when she faces injustice, she needs to say to herself and others, “That is not okay.” *Nick News* takes a similar stance on standing up for oneself, as demonstrated by host Alicia Keys' response to a testimony from a Black child who faced being called an offensive racial slur. Keys

emphasizes the importance of not tolerating such behavior, telling the child that “we can’t stand by and watch these things happen” implying that standing up for oneself is a way to cope when faced with this situation.

Additional coping strategies implied by these texts include self-expression and talking to loved ones. *Sesame Street* demonstrates how self-expression can be used as a coping strategy through the use of a guest human character, Jim. Jim is an Asian-American comic book artist who used his experiences of feeling like a racial “other” to inform his superhero book, indicating to young viewers how one’s negative lived experiences can be utilized to make something positive in the form of artistic expression. Lastly, talking to others is prominently modeled in *Raven’s Home* throughout its two-episode arc on racial profiling. In these episodes, Booker is able to process and overcome his trauma after being pulled over by a racist cop through having conversations with his mother and grandfather. After working through his frustration and confessing his fears of being pulled over with his family, Booker receives the support that he needs to feel comfortable driving again. In turn, this story arc demonstrates to young viewers how talking with loved ones can help individuals cope with being faced with racial injustice.

Calls to action made by the programs. Before I continue with my findings, I believe that it is important to distinguish the categories of “calls to action” from “solutions to racism,” which will be discussed later in my analysis. When viewing these programs, I coded dialogue that included specific, actionable language for viewers as “calls to action,” regardless of whether they were demonstrated to be effective in counteracting racism. In contrast, when coding for “solutions to racism,” I included dialogue and character actions that were demonstrated in the text to have a positive impact on one’s community in combatting racism, irrespective of whether the text instructed viewers to replicate these actions in their own lives. In turn, “calls to action” served as

deliberate attempts to address the audience and encourage their participation in the fight against racial injustice, while “solutions to racism” were behaviors that modeled how to successfully counteract racial injustice without directly addressing viewers.

To begin, one of the most prominent calls to action across these programs was the encouragement of viewers to speak out against racial injustice. Throughout *PBS KIDS Talk About: Race and Racism*, this message is repeatedly reinforced; whether it's Daniel Tiger asserting that both adults and children have a responsibility to speak out, or a real-life mixed-race family stating that racism will only continue unless individuals speak up, this special maintains that children cannot remain silent when they observe injustice. *Arthur on Racism* takes a similar approach in directly telling viewers to “act,” which the program defines as standing up for those who are experiencing racism and speaking out if someone is treated unfairly. Finally, *Nick News* furthers the call to speak out by positing that young people have a responsibility to speak the truth about injustice. This social obligation is made clear to viewers through the use of a role-playing metaphor, which asks children to see themselves as doctors whose jobs are to tell others when something is wrong and put in the work to make the situation better. Thus, by directly telling audiences to “view yourself as a doctor,” *Nick News* not only encourages the use of one's voice to make change but reinforces the need to follow through with action to improve one's community.

Another prominent call to action made in these selected texts is the need to acknowledge racism rather than ignore it. Both *PBS KIDS Talk About: Race and Racism* and *Arthur on Racism* tie this call directly to speech; *PBS KIDS* directly states that if communities do not talk about racism, then it will continue indefinitely, while *Arthur* simply argues that one of the most important things a viewer can do is talk about racism, consequently informing others about

injustice. On the other hand, *Nick News* associates the acknowledgment of racism with the Black Lives Matter movement. While interviewing the founders of the Black Lives Matter organization, host Alicia Keys asserts that individuals cannot say that “all lives matter” until society, and viewers by extension, collectively acknowledge that Black lives matter. Despite their different approaches, these texts position acknowledgment as the first step in creating change, whether that is educating others in the case of *Arthur*, making progress so that all lives truly matter as referenced by *Nick News*, or in a more general sense, stopping the perpetuation of racism as discussed by *PBS KIDS*.

Further, several of the programs encourage talking to an adult figure as a call to action for young viewers. *PBS KIDS Talk About: Race and Racism* directly tells viewers that, if they witness racial injustice against another individual, they should speak to an adult about what they observed, how it made them feel, and the next steps on how to help. While *PBS KIDS* positions talking to an adult as a reaction to one’s observations, *Arthur on Racism* encourages viewers to speak to parents and teachers about racism as an exchange of knowledge. In turn, this is implied this to be a proactive manner of educating others about racial injustice. Similarly, *Nick News* reinforces the educational power of open discussion between children and adults, adding that parents can answer their children’s questions about racism during these conversations. However, the program directly empowers children to challenge their parents as well, stating that if children notice that their parents’ views are racist, then they should talk to their parents to change their minds. *Nick News* notes that children are uniquely privileged in their likelihood of being able to impact their parents’ thought processes, therefore implying that children have agency in this situation. In contrast, programs like *PBS KIDS* and *Arthur* give the adults agency in having

conversations with children as a means of giving advice and knowledge as to what the child should do to combat racism.

Another significant call to action found within these texts is the encouragement of children to be persistent. In the *Arthur* segment of *PBS KIDS Talk About: Race and Racism*, Arthur is visited by an anthropomorphized aardvark version of Congressman John Lewis, who directly states that persistence and conviction are required to create change, as others may not hear the first time one tries to make a difference. *The Proud Family: Louder and Prouder* gives specific action items on how to be persistent in combatting racial injustice; in an in-universe livestream where she directly addresses the audience, Penny Proud tells viewers to “keep protests going” and “call [their] representatives,” encouraging persistence to win the fight against racism. *Nick News* expands on persistence through protests by stating that, once the “romanticization” of protests dies down, it is important to follow through and continue putting in the hard work to make change. Ultimately, these calls to action all emphasize that fighting injustice is not a transactional, one-time occurrence, and is instead a long-term process that requires determination to accomplish.

Other less prominent calls to action given by these programs include a generic encouragement to make sure all individuals are treated fairly. In the *Xavier Riddle* segment of *PBS KIDS Talk About*, a fictionalized version of Rosa Parks asserts the need to ensure “everyone everywhere” is equal, in turn creating a vague demand without concrete, actionable steps. *Nick News* includes a more poetic call for fairness, encouraging individuals to simply love each other as love triumphs over hate. One relevant call to action that only appeared in *Arthur on Racism* was the need to listen to the experiences of people of color, which is briefly mentioned as a way to educate oneself on racial injustice. Finally, *Nick News* includes a one-off call for viewers to

engage with local social justice organizations, encouraging young viewers to see what their community has to offer and to start organizations of their own to join the fight against racism.

Ultimately, it is important to note that these direct calls to action did not appear in every program I viewed; instead, they were more common in the less-narrative-focused, expository texts such as *Nick News*, *PBS KIDS Talk About*, and *Arthur on Racism*. This was expected as these educational programs feature direct addresses to the audience, which are less frequent in narrative-based programs such as *Raven's Home* and *The Proud Family*, which take place in contained story worlds. This is not to say that these programs did not encourage viewers to take action against racism, but rather, they were more likely to model how certain actions could serve as “solutions” to racial injustice, as will be discussed in the following section. As breaking the fourth wall to address viewers and give them specific, actionable instructions would not make sense within the diegesis of these texts, they instead indirectly communicated how to practice anti-racism through alternative methods. Thus, these “solutions to racism” are observed as the modeling of replicable behaviors that successfully create positive change within a program’s story world.

Implied solutions to racism. Due to the variety of stories told that span texts intended for different age demographics, the selected programs had very few implied “solutions” to racism in common with each other. In turn, I will be grouping these solutions into larger themes for the analysis. However, before I proceed, it is important to acknowledge the one solution that was portrayed within multiple texts: protesting.

To begin, protests are prominently featured twice in *PBS KIDS Talk About: Race and Racism*, in both the *Xavier Riddle* and *Arthur* segments. In *Xavier Riddle*, a fictionalized version of Rosa Parks as a child is portrayed as leading a protest against racial segregation on city buses,

which eventually grows in scale as more participants join her boycott of public transportation. In the end, this results in the local bus companies giving in and terminating their segregation policies. In *Arthur*, the titular protagonist leads a sit-in at his elementary school's cafeteria in support of the lunch lady, Mrs. MacGrady, who is in desperate need of an assistant, though the school refuses to hire one. Similar to *Xavier Riddle*, as more students join the sit-in, the school's principal finally relents and agrees to hire an assistant for Mrs. MacGrady. Further, in *The Proud Family: Louder and Prouder*, a group of middle schoolers lead a protest against the dedication of a statue in honor of their town's founder, who was recently discovered to be a former slave owner. This protest is not only successful in getting the statue removed but also results in the renaming of their town, which was originally named after its founder. Lastly, *Nick News* provides interviews with children and teenagers who have organized their own protests or spoken at protests, giving concrete evidence that no one is too young to protest and make an impact in their community.

Though *PBS KIDS Talk About* and *The Proud Family*'s depicted protests are fictional, they further support *Nick News*' argument as these texts portray children as leaders of their respective resistance efforts, which all are successful in creating meaningful change for the people in their communities. Therefore, these texts serve to model how one's participation in protests can aid in combatting racism, demonstrating to young viewers how they can involve themselves in the fight against injustice without the use of a direct address to the audience.

Similarly, two of these texts specifically mention the concept of getting into "good trouble" as a solution, which refers to the necessary trouble one must create to further justice. *PBS KIDS Talk About* specifically cites good trouble as the way that activists were able to change discriminatory laws during the civil rights movement. In addition, *The Proud Family* mentions

this concept in its dialogue when protest leader Maya condones getting into good trouble as a way to rally her peers to march against the dedication of the statue of their town's founder.

However, this is where many of the direct similarities in implied solutions across the texts end;

In the case of both protests and a specific focus on good trouble, it is possible that these solutions were relatively common because of their ability to provide conflict for the characters in narrative based shows like *The Proud Family* and the animated segments of *PBS KIDS Talk About*.

Further, these solutions may have been included to positively model how young viewers can take action in their own communities by standing up for what is right. Ultimately, by observing characters like Arthur and Maya take a stand against racism, children may be inspired to do the same and serve as leaders in their local fights against injustice. In turn, without directly addressing the audience, these programs demonstrate that Arthur and Maya's actions are successful and can be replicated by the viewer to make a change in their communities.

One significant category of solutions that I observed is the appreciation of diversity. In the case of *Sesame Street*, this is demonstrated by cultural celebrations as the Muppet and human cast try various foods and learn about traditional objects from various Asian and Pacific Islander cultures as a part of the street's "Neighbor Day" party. This is framed as the special's resolution, bringing all members of the *Sesame Street* community together regardless of identity, all while promoting tolerance and combatting the racism faced by Ji-Young early in the narrative. As for the *Daniel Tiger* segment of *PBS KIDS Talk About*, appreciating diversity comes in the form of learning to love each other's physical differences. In this short, Daniel's feelings of being excluded for having a tail in comparison to his human friends are assuaged by a teacher character, who reminds him and his friends that their differences are what make them special. Lastly, for *Nick News*, diversity appreciation can be demonstrated by the interview with author

Ibram X. Kendi and his denouncement of raising children to be “colorblind” with regard to race, asserting that young people should see and appreciate all skin colors to be anti-racist individuals. Despite proposing unique solutions to combat racial injustice, these texts have a similar emphasis on advocating for the acceptance of all types of people, regardless of skin color, physical attributes, or cultural background. In turn, this allows these programs to model anti-racist behaviors to indirectly encourage young viewers to be kinder and more tolerant in their own communities.

Another important category of solutions deals with accountability, both for oneself and others. In *Sesame Street*, dialogue from Alan posits that conversations about racism are difficult but that is the reason why they are necessary. As a result, this is presented as a means of keeping self-accountability by making oneself interact with and acknowledge racial injustice by engaging in discussion about it. In contrast, *PBS KIDS Talk About* demonstrates how to hold others accountable when a child identifies how they approach combatting racism within a setting of peers; This child cites a procedure of telling the perpetrator to stop, recruiting other peers to tell the perpetrator to stop, and if all else fails, reporting the perpetrator to a trusted adult. Finally, *Raven's Home* portrays holding others accountable with regards to racial profiling in policing; after his grandson is wrongfully pulled over by a racist police officer, Victor tells the officer that he will report the cop to his superior and maintains that the only way to change the system is to hold bad cops accountable. Again, despite the varying contexts in which these programs promote accountability, they share common ground in their ability to encourage young viewers to keep themselves and others accountable to combat racial injustice.

Acknowledging past histories of injustice is an additional identifiable category of solutions within these texts. *The Proud Family* directly addresses this theme when protagonist

Penny Proud states, “The only thing that needs renovating is the way that history is told,” in response to the news that the town has plans to renovate the statue of its slave-owning founder. In turn, this statement advocates for the acknowledgment of the town’s connections to and history of slave labor. Further, this episode, through its narrative, demonstrates reparations as a way of righting past wrongs. In the episode’s resolution, the statue of the town founder Christian A. Smith is replaced by the statue of Emily, a former slave, whose diary inspired the students’ protest against the statue. Additionally, the entire town is renamed Emilyville after Emily, abandoning its previous name of Smithville after Christian A. Smith. As a result, these reparations are portrayed as the town atoning for its past reverence of a slave owner and compliance with injustice. *Nick News* further emphasizes the need to acknowledge histories of racism when host Alicia Keys and the child she is interviewing discuss how Black history needs to be taught year-round in schools, and how the horrors of slavery cannot be ignored when being taught in history classes. While *Nick News* specifically addresses the education system and its role in promoting racial equality, *The Proud Family* shows how young people can, on their own, lead others to acknowledge historical injustices.

Some final implied solutions across these texts include creativity, representation, and communal action. First, creativity is demonstrated by *PBS KIDS Talk About* when a child discusses making a change in the world through art, music, and poetry as a means of advocacy through self-expression. Similarly, *Nick News* encourages young viewers to be creative in their fight against injustice, citing a real example of children making a difference in their community by making a neighborhood snack table to spread awareness about the Black Lives Matter movement. Second, *Sesame Street* briefly posits media representation as a “solution” to racism through the testimony of guest star Simi Liu, who argues that seeing people of color represented

on screen demonstrates that their stories matter. Liu mentions that, as a child, seeing AAPI individuals in movies who looked like him boosted his self-esteem. This draws an immediate connection to Greenberg and Mastro's findings that non-white children prefer media characters that match their racial identity and are more likely to consider them as role models (2008). Lastly, *Nick News* demonstrates communal action as a "solution" to racism through its interview of the Black Lives Matter movement founders, who describe how they were able to kickstart the movement by networking and leveraging their existing connections. Ultimately, these programs displayed a diverse array of implied solutions to racial injustice, with some being more easily replicable by young viewers than others.

Limits & Future Research

By utilizing textual analysis to code the content portrayed in the selected programs, this study is limited in several regards. To begin, I am unable to assess the quality of the texts I viewed based on the data I collected, in favor of simply identifying the narratives about race and racism that were present in the programs. By no means do I mean to argue that by simply addressing matters of race and racial inequity, the texts I selected are examples of good television. In fact, I would argue that some of the texts featured in this study are very flawed; notably, the *Raven's Home* episodes I analyzed were, from my perspective, undermined by the tonal inconsistencies between its classic sitcom B-plots and attempts to address unjust policing, which is evidently a shared issue with the original *That's So Raven* series (Griffin, 2011).

Further, this study is unable to assess the effectiveness of these messages about race and racism on their target audience. Without studying child subjects and their consumption of these texts, I cannot argue that any of these messages are more effective than others or evaluate whether these texts were successful in teaching anti-racist behaviors. I believe that further

research could build on my findings; after identifying the kinds of narratives that are present in post-Summer of 2020 children's television texts that address race and racism, additional studies could explore how these narratives impact young audiences, their attitudes towards race and racial injustice, and whether or not viewers display anti-racist behavior after consuming these texts. In addition, future studies could address questions raised by my research, such as what types of programs are best at conveying messages about race and racism. For instance, it could be beneficial to explore whether programs where race is an intangible concept, such as *Arthur* and its cast of all anthropomorphic animals, are as effective as programs with human casts in communicating messages about race to children. Ultimately, additional findings on the phenomenon of portraying race and racism in children's programs could be useful for television producers in identifying the best approach for communicating such important topics to young audiences.

Conclusion

This study aimed to analyze several episodes of children's television that had a specific focus on race or racial injustice and were produced after the Summer of 2020, and determine what kind of narratives were present within these texts. This was accomplished by coding seven selected programs for the presence of learning strategies, implied causes of racism, who is identified as being affected by racism, implied coping strategies for those affected by racial injustice, calls to action made to viewers, and implied solutions to racism. Ultimately, my findings can be distilled into the following conclusions: the pre-defined learning strategies were rarely present, with only some appearances in expository texts intended for young children; many texts simplified racism by presenting it as a response to physical difference, something that has existed for long amounts of time, or a consequence of unfair power systems; the programs

identified that people of color are affected by racism, but society as a whole is deeply affected by racial injustice; demonstrated coping strategies largely focused on self-care and self-confidence; young viewers were most frequently instructed to speak out, acknowledge racism, talk to adults, and be persistent; protests, appreciating diversity, creating accountability, and understanding histories of injustice often served as models for successful solutions to racism.

Despite occasionally oversimplifying the subject matter, these programs largely prove to be a progressive and holistic representation of issues of race and racism, and, when analyzed in conjunction with each other, create a multi-faceted presentation of these important topics. Understanding how these themes are portrayed reveals the kinds of messages that young viewers are receiving about race in their media consumption, which could have a significant impact on their socialization and understanding of these issues going forward. In turn, by examining what is communicated to children about race and racism, we can critically analyze whether these messages are consistent with the future we want to build as we work towards a kinder, more inclusive society for all.

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