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Research Article

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A social cognitive approach for using racially diverse entertainment media to improve children's intergroup socialization

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Abstract

Ethnic-racial socialization plays a crucial role in shaping children's attitudes and behaviors regarding race and intergroup interactions. However, socialization practices greatly vary across families, potentially leading to prejudice and intergroup anxiety. Utilizing Social Cognitive Theory and Anti-Bias Education as frameworks, I present the Model of Parental Media Strategies for Intergroup Socialization and argue that racially diverse entertainment media offers multiple benefits for families seeking to improve their intergroup ERS practices if utilized with key media strategies. This paper additionally addresses the unique challenges faced by White, interracial, and minoritized families in providing adequate intergroup ERS to their children and offers tailored strategies based on the presented model for each family type to leverage entertainment media effectively.

Keywords: race, socialization, entertainment, media, intergroup, co-viewing, mediation

Despite what many parents might believe, children's conception and understanding of race starts young. Previous research has found that the percentage of children who believe that prejudice against other groups is "not okay" increases from 31% to 74% from the age of 5 to 7 years (Spence et al., 2024) and that children and adolescents often seek their parents more than other interpersonal sources to discuss racial inequity (Kneeskern & Elenbaas, 2023). As adults often underestimate the age at which children can conceptualize race by an average of 4 years, parents leave their children vulnerable to negative influences and misunderstanding by neglecting conversation about race until children are deemed age-appropriate (Sullivan et al., 2021). Moreover, as children grow older, their parents' influence on their socialization decreases (Chen & Shi, 2019). Thus, the information on race that parents provide to their children not only starts early but is also essential to provide, lest parents will be satisfied with the information their children may seek elsewhere.

As the world diversifies, the ways parents socialize their children requires more nuance and complexity. Ethnic-racial socialization (ERS) refers to how parents (and other influencing adults) intentionally or unintentionally instill in their children verbal and nonverbal messages of race and diversity (Hughes et al., 2006, 2009). Traditionally, ERS research examines parents' influence on four dimensions (i.e., cultural socialization, preparation for bias, promotion of mistrust, and egalitarianism), which vary in salience and frequency for families of different racial backgrounds (Hughes et al., 2006, 2009; Mares et al., 2024). While some recent research has explored how children may also influence their parents' understanding of race and diversity (e.g., Mares et al., 2024), parent-to-child socialization is still necessary to examine, especially since there seem to be discrepancies for how parents socialize their children about race which may then influence children's attitudes and behavior regarding intergroup interactions. Parents must help their children navigate through complex topics such as racial dynamics (Song, 2019), yet socialization regarding others' backgrounds and possible intergroup contact has been traditionally limited in both content and frequency (Lei et al., 2023; Priest et al., 2014; Wu et al., 2022). Without proper intergroup ERS (i.e., how families socialize their children about other ethnic or racial groups; Degner & Dalege, 2013), children might develop negative intergroup attitudes and behaviors such as prejudice or intergroup anxiety (i.e., the negative affective, cognitive, and physiological state an individual may experience when they perceive the anticipation or engagement of intergroup interactions to be negative; Stephan, 2014). Though parents are not the only informers of their children's understanding of race and intergroup dynamics, they are greatly responsible for their children's socialization of race.

Using Social Cognitive Theory (SCT; Bandura, 1999, 2001) and Anti-Bias Education (ABE; Derman-Sparks et al., 2020) as guiding frameworks, I propose the Model of Parental Media Strategies for Intergroup Socialization (PMSIS; see Figure 1) that explains how families may utilize key media strategies (i.e., foreground co-viewing and active mediation) to improve their children's learning from media content which will lead to increased intergroup ERS and subsequently more positive intergroup outcomes. Though many forms of indirect intergroup contact may improve intergroup attitudes and behaviors (see White et al., 2021) and some models have explained how audiences learn from media content (e.g., Moyer-Gusé, 2008; Schiappa et al., 2005), the PMSIS model extends theory by accounting for parental influence in strengthening children's intergroup socialization (used interchangeably with intergroup ERS). I additionally provide practical recommendations based on this model for

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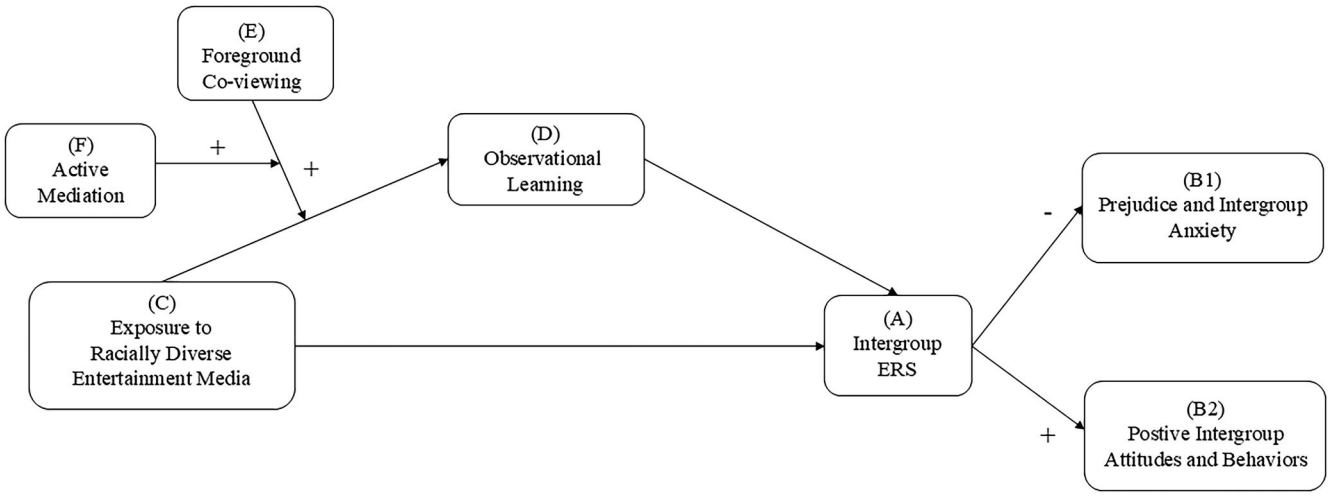


Figure 1. Model of parental media strategies for intergroup socialization (PMSIS).

Note. Letters F and E refer to parental media strategies, while all other letters are focused on children's media consumption and intergroup socialization. This model may apply more broadly to other adults (e.g., uncles, aunts, older siblings, teachers) who seek to improve their children's intergroup ERS.

how families (e.g., White, interracial, minoritized) may maximize their use of racially diverse entertainment media based on their backgrounds and needs.

The need for intergroup socialization

According to SCT, humans are not passive reactors in the world but rather active agents who are creative and proactive in the behaviors they produce in the world (Bandura, 1999, 2001). For example, children can and often do play an active role in their intergroup socialization, such as seeking information (e.g., stories) that favor their groups even when an unbiased account is available (Over et al., 2018). This reflects children's agency to participate in their environment with behaviors they select.

However, this agentic process may be obstructed by parents who may have underestimated their children's understanding of race and ethnicity and, as a result, hinder their children's intergroup ERS. Unfortunately, despite their parents' likely positive intentions, the denial of their children's agency and ability to learn about the complexity of race leaves children vulnerable to outside, unfiltered information, which may then increase negative intergroup consequences such as prejudice and intergroup anxiety. Though the motivation varies, as explained below, parents of all backgrounds may hinder their children's intergroup ERS.

White families

For many White parents, the discussion of race is a contentious topic they try to avoid. White parents' ERS messages typically lack depth and frequency, as they tend to provide their children with less ERS than parents of minoritized backgrounds (Priest et al., 2014). Although many White parents acknowledge the importance of discussing race-related topics, they often take a colorblind approach, such that the messages provided preach similarity and equal treatment without discussing any nuance or referring to any ongoing problems (Abaied & Perry, 2021; Cox et al., 2022; Vittrup, 2018; Zucker & Patterson, 2018). Even when racial bias is clear and salient, White parents are reluctant to discuss race and racism in their children with clear and explicit terms (Zucker & Patterson, 2018). And when prompted to have more detailed racial discussions, White parents often resist or choose to emphasize colorblind messages instead (Vittrup & Holden, 2011).

One reason this may occur is that White parents often underestimate how young children are when they begin to conceptualize race, and thus, neglect important conversations as their children begin to consolidate their understanding of race (Sullivan et al., 2021). This underestimation is worsened by White parents' susceptibility to many myths such as "talking about race will make White children racist," "White children are too young to talk about race," and "race and racism are irrelevant to White children's lives," which then limits White parent's ability to provide adequate intergroup ERS to their children (Wu et al., 2022). Because White parents have built an expectation that their children do not need to understand race (whether it is their own or of others), many White parents remain passive when their children do come "of age," either still finding racial conversations unnecessary or wanting to shield their children from discomfort (Abaied & Perry, 2021; Freeman et al., 2022; Wu et al., 2022). As a result of White parents' inadequate intergroup ERS, White children then have an incomplete sense of the world and are then left susceptible to negative external influences and unprepared for intergroup interactions.

Interracial families

Not only does poor intergroup ERS affect White children but also mixed-race children who have a White parent. Interracial families can be made of any possible combination; however, many mixed-race families are those made of one White parent, one minoritized parent, and their mixed-race children. It is important to consider their context as the growth of multiracial children is on the rise in Western countries (Livingston, 2017). For example, the mixed-race population in the United States occupied 12.8% in the 2020 Census (approximately 42.7 million people; U.S. Census Bureau, 2023). In the United Kingdom, mixed-race individuals occupied 2.9% (approximately 1.7 million) of the population, a 40% increase from the prior decade (Garlick, 2022). Interracial families are immensely complicated by the racial hierarchy within Western cultures and the colonization of

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several other countries in the world, which may then influence how interracial couples raise their mixed-race children.

Kim-Breunig and Vittrup (2024) have found evidence that many interracial families raised their mixed-race children in a colorblind way similar to monoracial White families, such that some parents perceive their mixed-race children to be too young to perceive race and minimally discuss the topic of race with their children if at all. If they do socialize their children about race, parents of mixed-race children tend to emphasize cultural information and often use a colorblind approach (Priest et al., 2014). Exposure to racial diversity within families is not necessarily the same as providing explicit race-conscious messaging (Atkin et al., 2022), so interracial parents may do a disservice to their mixed-race children by not providing more salient messages about race.

Additionally, the physical appearance of the child and the socioeconomic status of the family also influence the socialization process (Stone & Dolbin-MacNab, 2017). Many multiracial adults often perceive their experiences of discrimination to be tied in with how others perceive them racially, including their socialization from parents and families (Horowitz & Budiman, 2020). However, families who perceived their mixed-race children as White or closer to White reported having fewer discussions about race compared to families who identify their children as mixed or of their minoritized ethnicity (e.g., Black) and thus cannot afford to avoid conversations of race for the protection of their children (Csizmadia et al., 2014). The perception of a mixed-race child's race and what kind of ERS they receive highlights the privilege of White identification to ignore race.

Moreover, a systematic review of ERS for multiracial Americans found that most caregivers do not provide socialization that (1) acknowledges their unique experiences or (2) facilitates their multiracial identity (Atkin & Yoo, 2019). Robinson-Wood et al. (2021) argue that the lack of explicit ERS is a sign of White fragility from parents and guardians because rather than preparing their mixed-race children for the potential harm they would face, many parents tried to whiten, or erase the negative sides of, their children's racial experience. In some cases where interracial parents provided ERS for their children, preparation for bias socialization messages were paired with contradictory information from their parents' words and actions, which may nullify or confuse the impact of these messages (Atkin et al., 2022). Indeed, many mixed-race adults recalled that their parents did not delve into the complications of race, resulting in feelings of loneliness and being unable to process their racial/ethnic identity or the discrimination they were feeling (Robinson-Wood et al., 2021). Like how White parents believe misconceptions about racial discussions with their children (see Wu et al., 2022), parents of mixed-race children might believe similar misconceptions that deny the experiences that mixed-race children face, subsequently leading to harm.

Minoritized families

Though parents of minoritized backgrounds are more likely than White and interracial parents to socialize their children about race, these families are not a monolith, and some families may emphasize certain types of ERS over others (Priest et al., 2014). Literature on ERS has examined the extent that minoritized families socialize their children on the four dimensions and have generally found that many minoritized families tend to socialize their children about their cultural traditions and history (i.e., cultural socialization), but Black families additionally emphasize the possibility of their children experiencing discrimination from others (i.e., preparation for bias; Hughes et al., 2009; Priest et al., 2014).

However, one thing in common between these families is that their ERS tends to be limited and neglectful of other racial groups (Lei et al., 2023). The topic of how minoritized families socialize their children of other racial groups is severely understudied, but recently, research has found evidence of mistrust toward Whites and other minoritized groups. For example, historical tension between Black and Asian communities has been exacerbated by the model minority myth that stereotypes Asians as good and docile minorities while also implying that other minorities are ungrateful and dangerous (Bonilla-Silva, 2004; Lei et al., 2023). Thus, it is possible that ERS conversations may be treated as one's race background versus all others and that minoritized families may subscribe to similar beliefs to their White counterparts that perpetuate racial inequity and harm against other minoritized groups. For example, Atkin and Ahn (2022) examine how Asian American ERS may contribute to anti-Black racial attitudes such that those with colorblind socialization were more likely to also have anti-Black biases. However, there is a dearth of research regarding how parents socialize their children of racial information beyond their own. Do minoritized families socialize their children with other minorities, and if so, what are the messages they are instilling? Understanding how families socialize their children regarding other racial groups may elucidate why tension exists in the first place and what needs to be done to improve these relationships.

Nevertheless, Lei et al. (2023) argue that parents of minoritized backgrounds must make their ERS more comprehensive of multiple racial groups. More specifically, Lei et al. (2023) emphasize the need for collective racial socialization where one's racial experiences are related to others' racial experiences. Rather than focusing on what traits each group possesses and how that makes them better than one another, minoritized groups must realize that their status is dictated by a system that has placed White individuals above all other groups (Bonilla-Silva, 2004; Lei et al., 2023; Zou & Cheryan, 2017). The promotion of minority solidarity may help to increase positive intergroup attitudes and behaviors, but parents of minoritized backgrounds may be hindering their children's knowledge of other racial groups and preventing such growth.

Synthesis

Altogether, children are active agents of socialization, yet parents often have a restrictive view of their children's abilities to understand race and may unfortunately hinder their children's intergroup ERS. Children may then seek out other sources if their parents are not willing to provide information, and if information about race is unmonitored, then children can learn about social hierarchies and begin to feel superior or inferior based on what they perceive theirs and others' social standings are (Derman-Sparks et al., 2020). Thus, the lack of intergroup ERS amongst families may lead to the development of prejudice toward outgroups and anxiety regarding intergroup contact (Stephan, 2014).

Not only can increasing intergroup ERS mitigate these harms but it can also promote positive outcomes for children's sense of self and their interactions with others. According to ABE (Derman-Sparks et al., 2020), parents

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should facilitate their children's learning by guiding them toward four Anti-Bias goals: (1) develop children's stronger sense of self, (2) increase children's support diversity, (3) increase children's understanding of harmful attitudes and behaviors, and (4) have children grow to participate in making the world a better place. This can create an inclusive worldview so that children's self-worth can be fostered without harming others through discriminatory beliefs and actions (Derman-Sparks et al., 2020). Intergroup ERS can increase critical consciousness of one's privilege, which is associated with anti-racist attitudes and other positive benefits (Curran et al., 2023). Altogether, previous research supports the following proposition:

> **Proposition 1:** Increases in intergroup ethnic-racial socialization for children (A) can reduce prejudice and intergroup anxiety (B1) as well as promote positive intergroup attitudes and behaviors (B2).

Abstract modeling and observational learning

Previously, I established the need for parents (and other influential adults) to increase their children's intergroup ERS to facilitate positive benefits. However, not all parents are appropriate models for positive intergroup attitudes and behaviors. Despite some parents' best efforts to try to teach their children more egalitarian messages, their true attitudes and behaviors toward racial topics will present themselves to their children (Degner & Dalege, 2013; Odenweller & Harris, 2018; Priest et al., 2014). In this case, parents should utilize additional models as they grow to be better models themselves. In this section, I discuss how and why parents of different backgrounds might not be the best model for their children's intergroup socialization and then propose how racially diverse entertainment media may be another source of abstract modeling for children to learn from.

White families

Many White parents believe that socializing their children with explicit racial messages will lead to harmful consequences (Wu et al., 2022) but rarely do they consider the harmful consequences of avoiding racial topics. Many White parents and guardians are likely to instill problematic behaviors through unintentional modeling, as children may replicate their parents' discomfort and disposition toward race (Odenweller & Harris, 2018). Even positive relationships with outgroup members can be neglected by parents and therefore unseen by children. For example, many White children had assumed their parents had no Black friends because their parents never explicitly said so, which then influences their potential friendships with outgroup members (Vittrup & Holden, 2011). As Derman-Sparks et al. (2020) argue, "silence is a powerful teacher. What [parents] don't say carries messages that are as strong as what [parents] do say," (p. 179).

One consequence of this unintended modeling is that when White children grow older and continue to experience their parents' reluctance toward racial topics, they learn that they should avoid discussions about race, even if it is beneficial (Apfelbaum et al., 2008). Another consequence of seeing their parents' discomfort in discussing race is that White children may seek information from other sources that are less regulated and more polarizing (Vittrup, 2018; Zucker & Patterson, 2018). White families have the privilege of discussing race when they choose, unlike most minoritized families who often must provide racial socialization messages to their children early on (Abaied & Perry, 2021). If White families do not discuss race with their children, children may seek information from others in person, in media, and online without the guidance of their parents, which may lead to harmful attitudes and behaviors that parents do not endorse.

Interracial families

Though it may seem that mixed-race individuals have the benefit of seeing their parents' interracial relationship as an example of positive intergroup contact, this is not necessarily always the case. There has been evidence that parents of mixed-race children, unintentionally or not, can socialize negative information about their child's racial composition through verbal words or nonverbal actions (i.e., negative socialization; Atkin et al., 2022). In other words, some multiracial children have experienced direct and indirect forms of prejudice and racism from what their parents and other family members express and model. Moreover, exposure to interracial relationships, just like being mixed race in itself, does not guarantee race-conscious messaging, positive intergroup modeling, or the establishment of egalitarian norms (Atkin et al., 2022). Raising mixed-race children requires intentionality, and thus, parents cannot be colorblind to the racial composition of their children nor the racial reality of their environment (Stone & Dolbin-MacNab, 2017).

Minoritized families

Within the ERS literature, Asian and Latine families tended to emphasize cultural information, whereas Black families tended to emphasize preparation for bias (Priest et al., 2014). However, ethnic-racial socialization is a broad topic in which studies can be divided by racial group (e.g., Black, White, Asian) and dimensions (i.e., cultural socialization, preparation for bias, promotion of mistrust, and egalitarianism; Hughes et al., 2006, 2009), making it difficult to examine the full scope of socialization for these groups even before intergroup dynamics are included. Intergroup dynamics have been traditionally examined with majority versus minority perspectives but rarely between minoritized groups (White et al., 2006), indicating a dearth of research regarding how families of minoritized backgrounds may provide negative intergroup information and socialize prejudice against other groups (Lei et al., 2023).

Historically in Western cultures, many minoritized groups have been socialized to view each other as competition and ignore the larger system that places them below White people (Bonilla-Silva, 2004). White and Langer (1999) define this as horizontal hostility or the prejudice shown by members of a minoritized group toward another minoritized group that is perceived as more mainstream or favorable. However, horizontal hostility is context-based and may change depending on one's country and other factors (White et al., 2006). Using Zou's and Cheryan's axis of subordination (2017), one example is that Asian Americans may enact horizontal hostility against Black Americans for being perceived as more American, yet Black Americans might enact horizontal hostility against Asian Americans for being perceived as more "superior" or favored by White Americans. Taken together, it is likely possible that families of minoritized backgrounds

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have modeled negative behaviors toward other minorities, which their children have observed and integrated as normative rules.

Entertainment media for abstract modeling and observational learning

Unfortunately, parents, regardless of background, may not necessarily be the best or most appropriate models for their children to learn positive intergroup attitudes and behaviors, which may lead to negative consequences for intergroup socialization. Parents should improve their intergroup attitudes and behaviors, but they should not wait for their own improvements before instilling better attitudes and behaviors within their children.

Many scholars have argued that increased intergroup contact can increase more positive attitudes and behaviors toward outgroups. Allport (1954) argues in his Contact Hypothesis that increased intergroup contact also increases the exchange of more accurate and thorough information between different groups. Indeed, direct intergroup contact has been found to be negatively associated with prejudice across different groups (Lim et al., 2024; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Though direct intergroup contact may be beneficial for some, Harwood (2021) posits that there are also more risks associated with direct intergroup contact, such as high levels of intergroup anxiety, the threat of physical harm, disproportionate burdens on marginalized groups, and even disappointment after lackluster intergroup interactions. Allport's (1954) four key conditions of intergroup contact that are theorized to facilitate positive effects (i.e., equal status, common goals, intergroup cooperation, and authoritative support) are difficult to achieve and some individuals might avoid intergroup interactions regardless of optimal conditions, undermining the feasibility of direct intergroup contact (Pettigrew, 1998, 2021). Consider then the difficulties of increasing direct intergroup contact for families seeking to improve their children's socialization, especially for those in low-diverse areas or who may be resistant because of intergroup anxiety. Taken altogether, direct intergroup contact may not be the most viable method to improve intergroup relationships for families.

Another potential solution is to increase indirect forms of intergroup contact for intergroup socialization. There are many forms of indirect contact, such as mediated intergroup contact or the exposure to different outgroups via media content, which has the possibility of improving perceptions about various social groups (Park, 2012). It is through these indirect modes of experiences that many previous scholars believe entertainment media may supplement direct intergroup contact and be used to promote positive intergroup attitudes and behaviors, as it mitigates several of the risks of direct contact (Harwood, 2021; Joyce & Harwood, 2020). In fact, some scholars have argued that mediated or indirect intergroup contact may have greater reach and efficacy in reducing prejudice and promoting intergroup harmony (Pettigrew, 2021; White et al., 2021). Children have multiple influences when learning about race and racial dynamics that all play vital roles in promoting racial justice (Wilton et al., 2024), but entertainment media, which is one source overlooked in ERS research (Ward & Bridgewater, 2023), is a major factor of consideration.

Parents can facilitate intergroup socialization for their children by utilizing racially diverse entertainment media as a form of mediated intergroup contact, which allows for greater exposure to outgroup media characters (Park, 2012). Coyne et al. (2014) found that media is a big part of many families, with 11% of families using media as a catalyst to talk about serious topics. In other words, entertainment media is already an avenue through which parents can discuss important racial topics with their children and can be an effective tool for increasing intergroup ERS if implemented more broadly.

> **Proposition 2:** Exposure to racially diverse entertainment media (C) can increase intergroup ethnic-racial socialization (A).

Diversifying the ways that people can engage in intergroup contact, such as mediated intergroup contact, can then provide more opportunities to reduce prejudice and intergroup anxiety and increase positive intergroup outcomes (Harwood, 2021; Park, 2012). The process of how children may learn about intergroup attitudes and behaviors from media content can be explained by abstract modeling, or how people monitor behaviors to integrate rules for enacting or modifying that behavior for future use (Bandura, 1999, 2001). Based on these rules learned from media content (or other sources), people may utilize them for new behaviors in new contexts, thus expanding beyond what was initially modeled. Bandura (2001) further posits that "depending on their quality and coexistence of other determinants, media influences may be subordinate to, equal to, or outweigh nonmedia influences," (p. 284). SCT underscores the following four subfunctions to explain how audiences learn from abstract modeling and observation: attention, retention, production, and motivation (Bandura, 2001). Of the four subfunctions, I focus on attention, retention, and motivation concerning mediated intergroup contact and the potential increase of intergroup ERS.

Attention refers to audiences observing the attitude or behavior of relevance (Bandura, 2001). Mediated intergroup contact may be one way to increase attention toward intergroup interactions, as media can display positive intergroup interactions for viewers to emulate (Mazziotta et al., 2011), thus making them more salient for audiences like children. Increased attention can subsequently lead to easier integration of positive attitudes and behaviors regarding intergroup interactions. For example, children exposed to multicultural media perceived greater similarities with mixed-ethnicity groups compared to children who were exposed to traditional all-White media (Durkin et al., 2012). Mediated intergroup is particularly beneficial for families who live in low-diverse or isolated areas as it allows them to bring forth media examples that can socialize their children with important ethnic-racial information.

Retention refers to the information about the attitude and behavior that can be symbolically reconstructed in one's memory (Bandura, 2001). Abstract modeling refines the retention process as it allows for the creation of rules for certain patterns or behaviors to be enacted in future usage (Bandura, 2001). In this case, what audiences are perceiving is retained as pieces of information to be utilized. For example, Li-Vollmer (2002) found that in children's commercials, Whites were depicted in a wide variety of occupations, whereas racial minorities were often depicted infrequently or stereotypically. Children can then retain this information and

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use it as a reference for the norms of ingroups and outgroups, which may then lead to feelings of superiority or inferiority (Derman-Sparks et al., 2020). Furthermore, this retention of information may be exacerbated by the frequency of depiction or how often it occurs, which may reinforce perceptions of groups. Thus, it is key for parents to facilitate the retention process so that children do not integrate information that perpetuates harmful beliefs.

Motivation informs why or under what context certain behaviors should be enacted once they are learned (Bandura, 2001). Mediated intergroup contact can thus inform audiences of the different contexts for which appropriate actions can be taken. For example, seeing the positive consequences of intergroup interactions within media content may increase positive intergroup affect and willingness to have direct contact with outgroup members (Mazziotta et al., 2011). This modeling of positive intergroup behavior can then lead to a more malleable understanding of intergroup relationships, which was found to be related to positive reframing of different intergroup interactions as all opportunities to learn (Murrar & Brauer, 2019; Pauker et al., 2022). Such can be seen in children who believed that prejudice could change and be diminished (as opposed to being natural and fixed), thereby having more interest in interracial interactions (Pauker et al., 2022). This could then inform children's understanding of harmful behaviors and promote their participation in more positive intergroup behaviors, which are two goals of ABE (Derman-Sparks et al., 2020). In essence, media content can display the positive consequences of intergroup interactions, which inspires the audiences to take similar actions in real life.

Altogether, racially diverse entertainment media allows parents to introduce an indirect and mediated form of intergroup contact, which may then increase intergroup ERS and lead to more positive socialization outcomes. Through observational learning, the growing selection of diverse entertainment media provides the potential for audiences to see a wide array of intergroup experiences, examples, and lessons to be supplemented beyond direct intergroup contact. These three subfunctions (now labeled observational learning) are mediators for the effect of racially diverse entertainment media on intergroup ERS, which then leads to the production of more positive intergroup outcomes (see Figure 1).

> **Proposition 3:** Racially diverse entertainment media (C) increases the attention, retention, and motivation aspects of observational learning (D), which subsequently increases intergroup ERS (A).

Parental media strategies for children's mediated intergroup socialization

There has been a growth of research that supports how mediated intergroup contact can facilitate positive intergroup outcomes. Extending Allport's (1954) Contact Hypothesis, Schiappa et al. (2005) developed the Parasocial Contact Hypothesis to explain how audiences can develop a one-sided interpersonal connection with a person (real or fictional) through a mediated channel, which eventually causes audiences to reappraise their original attitudes about an outgroup (to which the object of the parasocial object belongs) into something more positive. Additionally, Moyer-Gusé's (2008) Entertainment Overcoming Resistance Model explains how entertainment-education, or prosocial messages embedded within popular entertainment media content, can increase prosocial behaviors through different mechanisms that connect the audiences to the characters and facilitate the integration of more positive attitudes and behaviors.

However, the previous models emphasize mechanisms for individuals to integrate information from media content, which may result in inconsistent results for children who often have difficulty interpreting media messages (Mares & Acosta, 2008; Skouteris & Kelly, 2006). Indeed, parents should not assume that consuming racially diverse media content is enough to facilitate increased intergroup socialization. Rather, all families can use media-based socialization strategies to enhance their children's socialization (Mares et al., 2024), thereby increasing intergroup ERS with entertainment media. As children believe their parents to be experts on race (Abaied & Perry, 2021; Kneeskern & Elenbaas, 2023), parents must engage with their children's questions, comments, and behaviors regarding race and ethnicity, as well as ensure these discussions still take place even if unprompted by children (Derman-Sparks et al., 2020). More specifically, parents can utilize media strategies such as foreground co-viewing and active mediation to create an environment that reinforces the importance of intergroup ERS, increasing positive intergroup outcomes.

Foreground co-viewing

The first way that parents may maximize entertainment media is through foreground co-viewing. Co-viewing refers to families consuming media content together, but foreground co-viewing centers on families consuming content geared toward children, whereas background co-viewing centers on content geared toward adults (Anderson & Hanson, 2017). In contrast to background co-viewing, where topics may be too advanced or nuanced for children to understand, foreground co-viewing allows parents to become aware of the content their children are consuming and have necessary conversations in a timely and organic manner (Anderson & Hanson, 2017). Furthermore, foreground co-viewing also has other benefits, such as increasing positive media use among adolescents, as parents' involvement with their children's media consumption reinforces that parents are interested in what their children do (Coyne et al., 2014).

Foreground co-viewing, thus, can be utilized proactively by parents to plan out racial conversations and give parents time to prepare for these conversations. Dore and Zimmermann (2020) advocate that parents must be more intentional about their children's media and technology usage and highlight what information should be learned and how media plays a role in their children's lives. Planning family activities such as foreground co-viewing allows parents to monitor their children's media patterns and promote healthy media consumption while also establishing an environment that promotes intergroup ERS. In other words, parents' foreground co-viewing can thus increase aspects of observational learning for their children by increasing attention and retention of more positive intergroup attitudes and behaviors.

> **Proposition 4:** Foreground co-viewing (E) moderates the effect on the relationship between racially diverse entertainment media (C) and observational learning (D), which subsequently increases the effect on intergroup ERS (A).

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Foreground co-viewing is an opportunity for parents to introduce necessary topics to their children and promote learning and facilitation. However, co-viewing alone does not necessarily increase children's comprehension of media content (Skouteris & Kelly, 2006). One issue regarding using media content with young children is that media messaging may be too abstract or vague for children to integrate (Mares & Acosta, 2008; Vittrup & Holden, 2011). Many pieces of media utilize allegories to represent prejudice and discrimination, and more, yet some researchers have suggested there exists a disconnect between this metaphorical content and some audiences' perception of real-world prejudice. For example, children ages five to six often had difficulty interpreting the moral message of narratives and instead were likely to interpret a face-value message as the moral lesson of the story (Mares & Acosta, 2008). Fantasy narratives may be even more elusive for young children to interpret (Richert et al., 2009) such that the metaphors presented of ostracized groups (e.g., predators in Zootopia or mutants in X-men) may be interpreted literally and thus rendered null for real-life marginalized outgroups. Altogether, previous research underscores the need for parents to guide their children to the correct interpretation of media content (Mares & Acosta, 2008; Richert et al., 2009), to which active mediation can additionally assist.

Active mediation

Active mediation (also known as prearming) is defined as a parental strategy that promotes and encourages parent/child discussion of questionable topics in media, which subsequently helps children become critical thinkers (Padilla-Walker & Coyne, 2011). In contrast, restrictive mediation (or cocooning) refers to parents' efforts to restrict media and avoid certain media based on what they believe is appropriate. Both are independent of co-viewing and should also not be mistaken for high regulation. High regulation is associated with both active and restrictive mediation (Padilla-Walker & Coyne, 2011), but parents' autonomy-supported regulation of children's media behavior, whether it is restrictive or active mediation, is positively related to prosocial behavior and negatively related to antisocial behavior (Meeus et al., 2018). Both active and restrictive mediation are tools for families to manage their children's media consumption.

However, active mediation of racially diverse entertainment media serves more benefits for families than restrictive mediation. Restrictive mediation was related to a decreased amount of media use but was unrelated to positive media usage (Chen & Shi, 2019). Moreover, restrictive mediation can backfire, as children and adolescents may secretly consume undesirable media content that subsequently leads to increased undesirable behaviors (Uhls & Robb, 2017). Just like how avoiding conversations about race may incidentally lead to children being biased or having an incomplete understanding of race (Vittrup, 2018; Wu et al., 2022; Zucker & Patterson, 2018), avoiding racial content in entertainment media can lead to children having a skewed reality of the world and be ill-prepared for intergroup interactions.

On the other hand, active mediation emphasizes positive behaviors rather than avoidance. Indeed, parents openly discussing media content with their children has positive benefits, such as increasing children's autonomy and critical thinking development and reducing negative behaviors (Collier et al., 2016). Active mediation was also associated with children's positive media usage, which is beneficial when socialization decreases during the adolescent years (Chen & Shi, 2019). Parents utilizing active mediation in their children's earlier years build the foundations for children to think critically about their media consumption as adolescents and adults (Uhls & Robb, 2017). Thus, active mediation emphasizes autonomy and allows parents to instill proper skills with meaningful intent regarding media usage, all while allowing children to become critical thinkers.

Collier et al. (2016) discuss three types of active mediation. The first is positive active mediation, or when parents endorse or praise the media content, which reinforces integration of the attitudes and behaviors from this particular content. The second is negative active mediation, where parents refute and condemn the content, thereby decreasing integration. Last is neutral active mediation, where parents engage in the content without endorsing or condemning the topics. Though the three types of active mediations are understudied, parents should utilize these different active mediation strategies to promote positive attitudes and behaviors rather than restricting content. Parents' active mediation strengthens foreground co-viewing's effects on observational learning, as it increases children's attention and retention of media content and increases their motivation to behave in ways that are aligned with anti-bias messages as guided by the parents.

Proposition 5: Active meditation (F) additionally moderates the moderation effect that foreground co-viewing (E) has on the relationship between racially diverse entertainment media (C) and observational learning (D), which subsequently increases the effect on intergroup ERS (A).

Model of parental media strategies for intergroup socialization

Traditionally, parents utilize co-viewing and restrictive mediation while the children are young and stop co-viewing and mediation strategies as their children grow older (Uhls & Robb, 2017). However, I argue that parents should utilize foreground co-viewing and active mediation while their children are young to foster more positive media usage and increase intergroup ERS. For example, parents may plan to co-view a movie with their children and use this experience as an opportunity to discuss racial information. During co-viewing, children may prompt questions and comments, but parents can also prompt discussion points and use the different forms of active mediation to address the media content. Parents can use positive active mediation to highlight positive attitudes and behaviors that parents would like to endorse, while negative active mediation can ensure that children do not integrate negative information.

Foreground co-viewing allows parents to expose their children to racial content and provide models for positive intergroup attitudes and behaviors (Anderson & Hanson, 2017; Coyne et al., 2014). Active mediation further enhances foreground co-viewing as it allows parents to ensure careful and thoughtful messages of intergroup ERS are integrated, thereby increasing their children's critical thinking skills and positive media usage while also decreasing possible negative behaviors (Chen & Shi, 2019; Collier et al., 2016; Padilla-Walker & Coyne, 2011). Taken together, the combination of

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foreground co-viewing and active mediation can help parents enhance their children's intergroup ERS, as seen in Figure 1.

Recommendations for families based on PMSIS model

Many families may be uncomfortable with discussing race, but neglecting racial conversations may prove to be more detrimental, as seen above. Using entertainment media as a form of mediated contact can benefit all families as it increases exposure to outgroups with fewer risks than direct intergroup contact and provides additional models of intergroup attitudes and behaviors (Harwood, 2021; Park, 2012; White et al., 2021).

Though many positives exist for using racially diverse entertainment media to develop intergroup ERS, not all entertainment media is created equally. Most depict marginalized groups negatively, and these negative portrayals often reinforce stereotypical attitudes and elicit detrimental consequences (Dill-Shackleford et al., 2017; Dixon, 2019; Ramasubramanian, 2013; Riles et al., 2022). Because entertainment media is not uniform in its depictions of different racial groups, families' utilization of racially diverse entertainment media will differ. The next section provides more information on how families of different backgrounds can maximize their usage of racially diverse entertainment media based on the PMSIS model.

White families

Racially diverse entertainment media may provide some initial challenges for some White families as it may challenge their worldviews and privileges. To some White viewers, particularly those higher in colorblindness, entertainment media with a racially diverse cast may be seen as inappropriate or unappealing (Weaver, 2011; Weaver & Frampton, 2019), thus leading to lower consumption. However, with a more critical lens, this assumption is likely driven by those with higher colorblindness who "don't see racial differences" as important yet are ignorant of their own biases and tend to favor a majority White cast. This is no different than what many White parents believe of racial topics in general as many White parents assume that avoiding conversations about race is beneficial to their children but in reality, can lead their children to be biased or have an incomplete understanding of race (Vittrup, 2018; Wu et al., 2022; Zucker & Patterson, 2018). Thus, avoiding or neglecting racially diverse entertainment media for "lack of appeal" can be detrimental.

Moreover, White consumers tend to be less mindful of race in entertainment media than ethnic minorities (Knobloch-Westerwick et al., 2008), which may lead to neglecting problems that outgroup members face or even exacerbate intergroup conflict by perpetuating White fragility and ignorance. For example, privileged consumers can co-opt/appropriate the marginalization in these allegorical depictions and simultaneously not develop empathy for the people who experience these marginalizations in the real world (Betz, 2022; Shyminsky, 2006). White consumers have even actively ignored race, as seen in one controversy in The Hunger Games (2012). In this example, some White audiences had protested the casting of the character, Rue, because they believed she was White and should not be played by a Black actress. This belief is likely rooted in Rue being described by the main character, Katniss, as similar to her younger sister, Prim Rose, with regard to their age and innocence. However, these audiences have ignored that the physical descriptions of Rue and Prim Rose are different (with Rue being described as Black and Prim Rose having fair skin and blue eyes) and have falsely attributed Rue as White because of her association with Prim Rose. This exemplifies the privilege that White consumers have in being able to ignore race in media without critical consumption (Moore & Coleman, 2015).

Using foreground co-viewing and active mediation together allows White parents to maximize racially diverse entertainment media for their children's intergroup ERS. Foreground co-viewing allows White parents to emphasize diverse experiences by providing media samples for their children to model, such as seen previously with the Black Panther (2017), Wonder Woman (2018), and The Little Mermaid (2023) being used as films to prompt discussion of inequality (Behm-Morawitz et al., 2022; Bonilla-del-Río & Vizcaíno-Verdú, 2023). More specifically, White children who consume media content with a racially diverse cast and displays of interracial friendship had more positive intergroup attitudes than those who didn't (Vittrup & Holden, 2011). Additionally, children exposed to multicultural media where outgroup members are not seen as threatening had greater perceived similarity to outgroup members and greater liking of racially diverse groups (Durkin et al., 2012). In sum, White parents can co-view racially diverse entertainment media with their children to ensure exposure to diverse models of intergroup attitudes and behaviors.

White parents additionally need to be prepared and be proactive regarding discussions of racial topics prompted by media co-viewing. Active mediation ensures that the right messages are integrated and can help increase positive media usage (Collier et al., 2016), but White parents should be careful not to tokenize minorities as they teach their children about other cultures because it can lead to overgeneralization and misrepresentation (Derman-Sparks et al., 2020). Rather, messages about race should be explicit and clear. For example, Perry et al. (2023) found that guided discussions that were color-conscious indeed reduced children's pro-White bias, especially if they were discussing subtle forms of racism with explicit and specific examples. This facilitation of media content can be done using positive active mediation when the content is egalitarian and negative active mediation when the content is harmful. Not only does this explicitly lay out what attitudes and behaviors parents endorse, but it acts as an enhancement of modeling by bringing attention to the behaviors, helping children to retain the appropriate information, and motivating them to participate in those behaviors. In sum, amongst White families, racially diverse entertainment media can provide a sense of egalitarian norms and promote positive intergroup attitudes and behaviors, but parents are the ones who facilitate the integration of these norms.

Interracial families

There is a dearth of research regarding mixed-race representation in media, but paralleling their unique socialization, there may be unique elements in entertainment media that parents must consider. Parents of mixed-race children must navigate the limited representation of their children and of other groups to increase mediated intergroup contact. For example, Davis (2017) found that among young adult titles centering on one or more diverse protagonists, biracial and

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multiracial characters were the most common (25% of the protagonists), yet their mixed-race identities typically are not prominent elements in these stories. Nishime (2017) argues that mixed-race representation is never designed to be equal, and the ambiguous looks of mixed-race people allow audiences to ascribe any identity to them without media creators doing any work to promote or explore these identities within their stories. In other words, the representation of mixed-race characters benefited predominantly White Hollywood more than the people they were meant to represent. This is best encapsulated by the unfortunate history of mixed-race characters in Hollywood as those "not intended to exist" and thus were often treated as exotic and tragic characters (Mills, 2019). Mimicking monoracism (e.g., discrimination for being multiracial; Atkin et al., 2022), there may be limited explicit opportunities for mixed-race children to see themselves in entertainment media, limiting the potential of mediated intergroup contact, and thus, parents must be creative in their approach.

Difficulties in finding appropriate role models for mixed-race children can contribute to negative consequences for mixed-race individuals (Townsend et al., 2009). To compensate for the lack of similar models in real life and in media content, parents may have to make the mixed-race identity of the character or actor more salient to their children during foreground co-viewing, as well as actively mediate messages of mixed-race identity to not integrate harmful lingering stereotypes. Unfortunately, there is little research examining the influences of mixed-race characters on a mixed-race audience, especially in media effects scholarship. I thus provide a case study as an example. Big Hero 6 (2014) is one of the first prominent animated movies featuring a *suspected* biracial protagonist, Hiro Hamada, as described by James Potter, the biracial White-Asian American actor who voiced the character for the film (News, 2014). However, the narrative of this movie does not elaborate on the character's background or history. Indeed, the characters seem to be racially diverse, yet there is little of the characters that explicitly or implicitly suggest their different cultures uniquely affect them.

However, parents can mitigate this issue by highlighting the mixed-race status of the characters and the actors through discussion and highlighting their intergroup interactions. Foreground co-viewing allows parents to bring up the character's background, bring attention to the information, and allow their children to see themselves as similar to the protagonist. Parents can also enhance this information using the different active mediation strategies and bring up information about mixed-race identity and connections to other racial groups. Similar to the guided discussion of color-conscious messages as seen in Perry and colleagues' (2023) work, prepared discussions can help mixed-race children feel more seen in media while also promoting positive intergroup attitudes and behaviors. Though subtle, mixed-race children can grow to be excited about their mixed-race identity and intergroup dynamics if interracial parents are using appropriate strategies to integrate these media examples into their ERS discussions.

However, one complication to consider is the types of messages provided to mixed-race children. Many mixed-race children will be composed of White + minoritized backgrounds, thus experiencing different privileges and marginalizations from their monoracial counterparts and other mixed-race children. As many White consumers tend to ignore the dynamics of race in entertainment media (Knobloch-Westerwick et al., 2008), interracial parents of mixed-race children must also be careful not to undermine other groups' struggles of representation, or else it may exacerbate conflicts with monoracial groups. This is similar to White parents needing to avoid tokenization and overgeneralization (Derman-Sparks et al., 2020). Those of minoritized backgrounds, including mixed-race individuals, often share experiences of marginalization (Lei et al., 2023), and while interracial parents may be well-intentioned in highlighting their children's experiences of race, they may unintentionally do so while undermining other groups. Rather, interracial parents need to emphasize solidarity with their intergroup ERS messages, and diverse entertainment media can aid in showing the complexity of marginalized experiences.

Minoritized families

Entertainment media has already been considered an important factor for minoritized families' ERS. For example, Walsh and Azmitia (2022) examined how families of Mexican heritage utilized *Coco* (2017) to reflect on the cultural elements seen in the movie. Likewise, viewing Black Panther (2018) was empowering for Black American youths and can lead to further exploration of their racial identity (González-Velázquez et al., 2020). Additionally, many Black and Latine families expressed enjoyment of the representation in Disney's The Little Mermaid (2018), which positively reaffirms the viewer's (and in particular, the young children's) identity (Bonilla-del-Río & Vizcaíno-Verdú, 2023). Positive media representations thus help viewers to feel good about themselves and their group (Harwood, 1997, 1999). Parents of minoritized backgrounds can use media content to improve their children's ERS.

Positive mediation intergroup interactions can also have a positive influence on outgroup audiences (Harwood, 2021; Park, 2012). For example, increased exposure to one marginalized group can be used to improve attitudes toward another marginalized group (Kim & Harwood, 2020), and parents can ensure this integration by using positive active mediation to reinforce what they are co-viewing with their children to other outgroups. According to Mares et al. (2024), Black families provide the most media-based discussion, followed by Hispanic and Indigenous families, and then Asian families. Additionally, the same study found that families differed in mediation frequency such that Black families had more parent-predominant mediations than Hispanics, followed by Indigenous and Asian families. Families can increase their media-based discussion by using active mediation to prompt their children to reflect on the media content and expand what they see in media content to other outgroups. This not only increases intergroup ERS but also collective racial socialization where minoritized groups reflect on their shared experiences to better foster minority solidarity (Lei et al., 2023).

However, parents of minoritized backgrounds additionally have the difficulty of helping their children navigate both negative representations and lack of representation of their own groups, never mind that of others. Children of minoritized backgrounds may be more susceptible to media messages of their relative status as signified by the lack of representation and thereby internalize that they and others are not socially valued (Klein & Shiffman, 2009; Li-Vollmer, 2002). Indeed, minorities are severely unrepresented in children's media, even in comparison to anthropomorphic animals, muppets,

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or objects (Hamlen & Imbesi, 2020). Martins et al. (2024) found that Asian, Hispanic, and Indigenous youths perceive a lack of media representation for their group and that Black and Hispanic youths feel their media representations are often negative. Youths are particularly susceptible to the harmful effects of negative media representations, as they are developing their sense of identity and self (Ramasubramanian & Sousa, 2019).

Nevertheless, exposing children to both good and bad representations and having a mindful discussion is more beneficial in the long run. Showing negative depictions of one's ingroup can have its benefits, such as using negative depictions to discuss issues of racial bias and instill racial pride (McClain & Mares, 2021). Negative depictions of outgroups can also be used as examples for collective racial socialization. For example, Riggs et al. (2023) found that those who internalized stereotypes of Asians were also likely to say that media stereotypes about Asians resembled real life. Likewise, Ramasubramanian (2013) found that when one's primary source of information about Black Americans is from mass media rather than interpersonal sources, there was also higher negative stereotyping and prejudicial feelings. However, parents can use negative activation media to address these media depictions as unrepresentative of these groups, ensuring greater empathy and understanding. Thus, parents do not have to rely on a one-on-one model for intergroup interactions but can broadly discuss intergroup harmony. As children age and become increasingly vulnerable to racial biases outside of the home, parents can utilize media representation to enhance their understanding of the world and establish key norms.

Conclusion and future research

Parents are responsible for their children's upbringing, including ERS. No different than parents preparing and learning to teach their children to be prosocial and kind, all families must provide proper ERS messages to their children, including intergroup ERS messages, as these can reduce prejudice and intergroup anxiety while also promoting positive intergroup attitudes and behaviors. Using SCT (Bandura, 1999, 2001) and ABE (Derman-Sparks et al., 2020) as guiding frameworks, I present the Model of PMSIS, which argues that racially diverse entertainment media provide multiple benefits for families who are seeking to increase their intergroup ERS. This model extends theory and previous research by capturing the interpersonal relationship in families and how parents may moderate their children's intergroup socialization using entertainment media and key media strategies. Recommendations based on this model are given for White, interracial, and minoritized families who may need to tailor their socialization practices based on available media content. However, all families can use entertainment media to improve their children's intergroup socialization.

Future research should examine how intergroup information is socialized within families and how it may relate to future outcomes regarding intergroup attitudes and behaviors, especially in minoritized families. Additionally, the model presented here should be empirically tested for different families to see its viability. Nevertheless, parents are responsible for helping their children navigate through complex terrain like race and preparing them for the future (Song, 2019), so it is necessary to know how families of all backgrounds discuss race beyond their own and if there are areas of improvement to increase positive intergroup attitudes and behaviors.

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The author reports there are no competing interests to declare.

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