
Common Sense on Battling Stereotypes

What media teaches our kids about types

While many argue that it's just human nature to make sweeping generalizations about people, the media certainly take an active role in reinforcing them. Help undo the damage these generalizations can cause by taking a critical look at what they mean, how they paint so many people unfairly, and, most important, how they may misinform our kids about the world around them.

Some facts

In video games, male characters are more likely to be heroes and main characters with big muscles, great power, and lots of abilities. Female characters are more often supplemental characters and likely to be shown as sexy, innocent, and frequently wearing revealing clothing (*Miller and Summers, 2007*).

In G-rated films there are three male characters to every female character (*Dads & Daughters and USC, 2006*).

Non-white male characters are almost twice as likely to be portrayed as physically aggressive in G-rated movies (*Dads & Daughters and USC, 2006*).

What are stereotypes in media?

Media are full of economic, gender, and ethnic stereotypes, from the roles of good guys and bad guys in video games to the animated films our youngest children enjoy. White male heroes far outnumber both women and minorities in media portrayals. And, although women have come a long way in how popular culture reflects their status, statistics show that women are still most often relegated to roles of love interest, sex object, or selfless saint.

Why they matter

The images our kids see powerfully inform their sense of what is "normal." When kids see the same class, racial, and sexual relations portrayed over and over, it reinforces class, race, and gender stereotypes. The characters kids see can become role models — and kids may want to imitate the behavior they see. They may also form judgments about others based on portrayals in video games, in stories, and on TV.

Parent tips for all kids

- » **Start counting.** When you're watching TV with your kids or playing games with them, keep a tally of the characters. How many are female? How many are male? How many are white? Do you see any correlation between the characters' race and gender and how they are portrayed? Talk about these observations with your children. These sorts of questions will help your kids build awareness — and provide you with opportunities to further discuss stereotypes.
- » **Find alternatives.** Common Sense Media can help you find movies, books, and video games that run counter to these portrayals. Check our recommendations for Best Smart Movie Girls or Best Mexican Stories.
- » **Don't buy it.** Game makers and movie studios keep making products with unfair portrayals because we keep buying them. Remember that you can vote with your dollars. Even better, contact media companies and let them know how you feel about gender or racial stereotypes in their products. When you write or call, company representatives assume there are many other folks who feel the same way you do. This means that when you speak up, you're speaking for both yourself and for many others.
- » **Start discussing.** Ask your kids about their values. What do they think about gender, racial, and economic equality? Then ask what they think of action heroes, sports heroes, and video game and movie villains. What about popular culture's portrayals reflects their values? What doesn't?