

Contributions of the Media to Polarizing Perspectives

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Abstract

This research found that the general public in the United States perceive youth in foster care (YFC) to be negatively presented by the media. We conducted a demographically representative national survey (N=2487 adults) in which the majority of respondents reported that they believed YFC are at least somewhat accurately portrayed as 1) Victims, 2) Survivors, 3) Criminals, and 4) Drug Addicts. The small group of respondents who identified previous life experience in foster care (N=245) were less likely to select Victim and Drug Addict, and similarly likely to select Criminal and Survivor, as compared to those without prior foster care experience. Respondents with higher consumption levels of certain media types (such as news channels or newspapers, network channels, and streaming channels) and of particular media genres (such as news and dramas) were more likely to select the negative media portrayals of Victim and Criminal for YFC. Media type and to a lesser extent, media genre, also influenced respondent's perceptions about the typical childhood experiences of YFC. There were no meaningful demographic (race, gender, age) patterns that influenced the association between the type or genre of media consumed and the perceptions of YFC. Therefore, the media is an important source of information in creating negative perceptions about YFC for all ages, genders, and races in the United States.

Keywords: Foster Care, Perception, Media

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Introduction

The stories of origin for fictional superhero characters typically involve a family tragedy in which they are left alone to fend for themselves in a dark and dangerous world. Many of these characters have a positive relationship with a caregiver such as an aunt, butler, or group home leader. They overcome the loss of their biological parents by identifying superhuman strengths within themselves and using their power to help others. Despite the multi-billion-dollar media industry for superhero movies, comic books, and television shows, through which people become familiar with these origin stories, our earlier research discovered that the public doesn't associate these positive narratives with the real lives of youth in foster care (YFC) (Ponciano, Abioye, and Gayle, 2020). We found that only 5% of a demographically representative group of approximately 2500 adults in Los Angeles reported that the media portrays YFC as heroes. However, the respondents selected the portrayals of Victim, Survivor, Criminal, and Drug Addict by very large margins as compared to the other more positive options in addition to Hero (such as Role Model, Mentor/Guide, Working Professional, and Loving Child/Parent). While Victim and Survivor, two of the four most frequent media portrayal selections, appear to be benign on their surface, they reflect a traumatic past that people from foster care are assumed to have experienced.

In this original study of YFC, approximately 35% of the respondents had either personal or professional experience with YFC. This subgroup of respondents was less likely to select Victim and Survivor but just as likely (personal experience) or significantly more likely (professional experience) to select Criminal as a media portrayal. The likelihood for the general public, as well as people who have direct experience with YFC, to select Criminal inspired the next phase of research to better understand the source of this perception.

Our results demanded that we expand our research questions to include the following: 1) Were these results specific to Los Angeles or representative of the United States? 2) Did levels of consumption or particular types or genres of media contribute to the negative perceptions of YFC? 3) What contributes to negative perceptions about YFC for those who identify as having a lived experience in foster care?

Los Angeles is both the hub of media production and the county with the highest levels of YFC in the United States. The possibility exists that the demographically representative sample of adults in Los Angeles were affiliated with the production of movies and television in Hollywood, the production of apps and software in "Silicon Beach," and the production of entertainment and sports news. Furthermore, Los Angeles County has reported approximately 30,000 children with open child welfare cases at any given point in time (Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services, 2021). This exceeds the number of open cases in other counties across the United States as well as the total numbers of entire countries. The potentially higher exposure to media production and to people in foster care in Los Angeles introduces the possibility that the respondents might have different perceptions than those in other parts of the country. Distribution of the survey to all regions of the United States would help to answer the first research question.

The original 2018 survey provided evidence that the media is a source of information that the public utilizes when forming perceptions about YFC and that these mental models negatively influence expectations for the real-life outcomes of YFC (Ponciano, Abioye, and Gayle, 2020). We hypothesized that a variation of stories might be told in different types and genres of media and that depending on levels of consumption, the public might be exposed to

negative stories in certain media formats. Therefore, media consumption questions were needed to answer the second research question.

We were puzzled by the likelihood of negative perceptions for those who had direct personal or professional experience with YFC as well as why so few people who responded to our survey recognized that Heroes often have a foster care story of origin. We conducted a series of informal social experiments during which we met virtually with a variety of stakeholder groups such as educators and administrators in a K-12 school district, social workers, and child development specialists. We presented pictures of superheroes and asked the stakeholders to describe them. They used words like strong, hero, and brave. Then we shared the origin stories of each of the superheroes and explained how they all had a lived experience in foster care. Immediately after this discussion, we asked them to select from the same list of media portrayals and identify those that they associated with YFC.

Despite the priming of the superhero origin stories and the fact that these stakeholders had direct experience with YFC, Hero was selected by 5% or fewer of the members of each group. The majority of every group selected Victim, Survivor, Criminal and Drug Addict. The negative mental model about YFC was so entrenched that priming about superheroes had no impact. Moreover, our social experiment participants were deeply unaware of their negative mental model about YFC and the influence this may have on their expectations for the future life outcomes of YFC.

The social experiments only deepened our interest in clarifying the role of media in the development of negative mental models for YFC. While the superhero stories provide strong counter narratives to negative media stories, there was a consistent disassociation for our social experiment respondents. Therefore, to expand on our findings from the first survey we had to collect more data to better understand the media's influence on public perceptions.

Methods

Measure. In 2020, we redesigned our original 2018 survey to ask participants questions about their own lives (i.e., gender, age, race, regional location, foster care experiences), the media they consume, and their perceptions of YFC. There were five demographic questions that determined racial identity, gender identity, age group, level of education and current US state of residence. We also asked a series of four questions, with skip logic, that explored respondents' personal experiences with foster care. The remainder of the questions were a mix of matrix tables, multiple choice, and rank order that asked respondents about their personal consumption of media and their perceptions of YFC.

Participants. The sample of 2487 adults from across the United States were demographically diverse with a slight majority of female participants (54% to 45% male). A small subset (10%) of participants identified as YFC (during their childhoods). However, when provided with a list of foster care-like experiences (group care, primary care by a non-parent relative, primary care by a non-relative adult, emancipated, runaway), 29% of the sample reported that one or more had occurred during their childhoods. It was unclear why those with a foster care-like experience did not self-identify as YFC; therefore, all analyses reported here will only include those who identified as YFC during childhood.

The sample was mostly educated with 10% reporting an associate degree, 25% a bachelor's degree, 18% a master's degree, and 5% a doctorate. An additional 10% had completed some

college, 3% had attended a trade or technical school, and 5% had completed some post-graduate work. Only 18% had ended their education at high school graduation or before.

Tables 1 - 3 below describe the racial, age, and regional distribution of the sample:

	White	Asian/Pacific Islander	Hispanic/Latino	African American	Biracial	Native American
Survey Sample	65%	6%	9%	14%	6%\$	0%
US Census*	60.1%	6.1%	18.5%	13.5%	2.8%	1.3%

Table 1. Racial Demographics Comparison.

*<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045219>

18*-24 years	25-34 years	35-44 years	45-54 years	55-64 years	65+ years
11%	14%	16%	14%	15%	31%

Table 2. Age Distribution of Sample.

*Anyone under the age of 18 was dropped from the analysis.

Regional area	# of States	% of total sample	% of US population*
South	14	36.3	38.3
Midwest	12	18.1	20.8
Northeast	11	18.5	17.1
West	13	22.7	23.9

Table 3. Regional Distribution of the Sample.

*https://www.census.gov/popclock/data_tables.php?component=growth

Results

The first research question sought to confirm the Los Angeles County results with a national survey. Participants were provided with 12 media portrayal options and asked to rank the top 5 most likely media portrayals for YFC. Negative media portrayals included Criminal, Victim, Abuser, Sociopath, Sex Worker/Pimp, and Drug Addict and positive media portrayals included Hero, Mentor/Guide, Role Model, Working Professional, Loving Child/Parent, and Survivor. We combined the rankings into frequency counts to illustrate how often the portrayals were ranked in the top 5 selections. Mirroring the Los Angeles County sample, the demographically diverse adult respondents from across the country (Table 4) were most likely to report that YFC are portrayed by the media as Victims (66%), Survivors (61%), Criminals (53%), and Drug Addicts (51%).

There were some notable differences between the samples. More than half of the national sample selected each of the four top selections while only one media portrayal (Victim) was selected by more than half of the Los Angeles sample. With the exception of Survivor, all of the positive portrayals were selected by less than 20% of the Los Angeles sample and by more than 20% of the national sample. Therefore, it appears that the perceptions of the Los Angeles sample were more negative than the national sample.

Although participants ranked the media portrayal of Survivor high, it is meaningful to note that Victim received the most selections as a media portrayal for YFC for both samples. On a 5-point Likert Scale, only 14% of the 2020 participants reported that media portrayals are not at all accurate while the remaining 86% chose one of the four other options indicating that they believed the portrayals to be slightly (25%), moderately (43%), very (11%), or extremely (7%) accurate.

	Victim	Survivor	Criminal	Drug Addict	Abuser	Loving Child or Parent
United States (N=2487)	66%	60.8%	52.9%	50.9%	34.8%	30.6%
Los Angeles (N=2488)	72%	41%	40%	30%	13.5%	5.3%
	Sex worker or Pimp	Sociopath	Role Model	Mentor/ Guide	Working Professional	Hero
United States (N=2487)	29.3%	29%	28.5%	28.4%	24.5%	23.8%
Los Angeles (N=2488)	14.8%	13%	3.9%	4.4%	2.9%	5.4%

Table 4. Comparison of Media Portrayal Frequencies in the Top 5 Rankings for LA And US.

The second research question examined the influence of media type and media genre on perceptions about YFC. The survey asked about 9 media types including newspapers/news channels, non-news magazine articles, online information channels, social media, TV/movie streaming services, network channels, cable TV shows, books, and other. The most frequently selected types of media consumed were network channels (72%), newspapers or news channels (62%), TV/movie streaming services (57%), and social media (54%). Respondents also reported about their consumption of 12 genres of media including drama, memes, animation/anime, sports, comedy, horror, action/adventure, news, documentaries/docuseries, foreign language/independent, science fiction, and other. The most frequently selected genres of media consumed were drama (63%), sports (62%), news (62%), and action/adventure (57%). Our analyses found main effects for media type (Table 5) in the prediction of some media portrayals. When the various types of media were combined, the respondents with self-reported higher levels of consumption predicted the media portrayal selections of Hero, Victim, Abuser, Sociopath, Survivor, Sex Worker/Pimp, Drug Addict, and Loving Child/Parent.

Portrayal	Effect	DFn	DFd	F	p	Sig	η^2G
Hero	Media Type	8	4721	5.59	0.000	***	0.005
Victim	Media Type	8	4721	8.50	0.000	***	0.008
Abuser	Media Type	8	4721	5.52	0.000	***	0.005
Sociopath	Media Type	8	4721	7.92	0.000	***	0.008
Survivor	Media Type	8	4721	9.48	0.000	***	0.009
Sex Worker or Pimp	Media Type	8	4721	9.00	0.000	***	0.009
Drug Addict	Media Type	8	4721	2.98	0.002	**	0.003
Loving Child or Parent	Media Type	8	4721	5.19	0.000	***	0.005

Table 5. The Significant Main Effects for Media Type Predicting Media Portrayals. ***p<.001, **p<.01, *p<.05

Similarly, when all genres of media were combined (Table 6), the respondents with self-reported higher levels of consumption predicted the media portrayal selections of Criminal, Hero, Victim, Abuser, Sociopath, Survivor, Sex Worker/Pimp, and Loving Child/Parent. It would appear that media type drives the perception that YFC are portrayed as Drug Addicts in the media and that media genre has a similar influence on the perception that YFC are portrayed as Criminals in the media. Neither media type nor media genre predicted the positive portrayals of Mentor/Guide, Role Model, or Working Professional.

Portrayal	Effect	DFn	DFd	F	p	Sig	η^2G
Criminal	Media Genre	11	4672	1.86	0.040	*	0.002
Hero	Media Genre	11	4672	5.03	0.000	***	0.007
Victim	Media Genre	11	4672	7.04	0.000	***	0.009
Abuser	Media Genre	11	4672	4.12	0.000	***	0.006
Sociopath	Media Genre	11	4672	8.81	0.000	***	0.012
Survivor	Media Genre	11	4672	11.78	0.000	***	0.016
Sex Worker or Pimp	Media Genre	11	4672	10.30	0.000	***	0.014
Loving Child or Parent	Media Genre	11	4672	5.60	0.000	***	0.007

Table 6. The Significant Main Effects for Media Genre Predicting Media Portrayals.

*** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

An examination of the individual media types and media genres revealed significant differences for people who were exposed to higher levels of *news* and *drama* (genres) from *newspapers/news channels*, *network channels*, and *streaming services* (types). Higher consumption rates were significantly positively associated with selections of Criminal, Drug Addict, and Victim and significantly negatively associated with selections of Loving Child/Parent, Mentor/Guide, Role Model, and Working Professional. These analyses did not reveal any meaningful patterns when examining the relationship of demographic groups (age, race, gender) with media type and media genre in association with perceptions of YFC.

However, media type and media genre did reveal interesting results for a new survey question about typical childhood experiences in foster care. Respondents were asked to select one or more options from a list of 16 that included financial security in the home, emotional support, adult love and guidance, educational support, discipline, frequent moves/routine disruptions, religious affiliation, therapeutic interventions/prescribed psychotropic medications, nurturing of dreams/aspirations, positive reinforcement, enduring connections/trusted relationships, social isolation, exposure to diverse career opportunities, negative interactions with law enforcement, preparation for independent living, and conflict. The most frequently selected typical experiences for YFC included religious affiliation (49%), preparation for independent living (45%), educational support (44%), and discipline (44%).

With all media types combined, higher consumption levels significantly predicted 10 of the 16 experiences that the respondents selected as typical for YFC during childhood (Table 7). In other words, consumption of media type influenced respondents' perceptions about the following experiences of YFC: financial security, emotional support, adult love/guidance, educational support (the third most popular selection), discipline, and social isolation (the fourth most popular selection). Additionally, media type influences expectations that YFC will experience frequent moves/disruptions, negative interactions with law enforcement, preparation for independent living (the second most popular selection), and conflict.

Childhood Experience	Effect	DFn	DFd	F	p	Sig	η^2G
Financial security	Media Type	8	4721	3.069	0.002	**	0.003
Emotional support	Media Type	8	4721	2.850	0.004	**	0.003
Adult love, guidance	Media Type	8	4721	5.110	0.000	***	0.006
Educational support	Media Type	8	4721	3.379	0.001	***	0.004
Discipline	Media Type	8	4721	3.151	0.001	***	0.004
Frequent moves, disruptions	Media Type	8	4721	2.195	0.025	*	0.002
Social isolation	Media Type	8	4721	4.971	0.000	***	0.005
Neg interactions w/law enforcement	Media Type	8	4721	2.054	0.037	*	0.002
Prep for independent living	Media Type	8	4721	2.059	0.036	*	0.002
Conflict	Media Type	8	4721	3.082	0.002	**	0.003

Table 7. The Significant Main Effects for Media Type Predicting Childhood Experiences. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

Similarly, higher consumption of the combined media genres significantly predicted perceptions about 9 typical YFC childhood experiences (Table 8). In addition to predicting the selections of financial security, emotional support, adult love/guidance, educational support (the third most popular selection), discipline, and social isolation (the fourth most popular selection), media genre also influenced perceptions about the presence of positive reinforcement, enduring connections/trusting relationships, and exposure to diverse career opportunities.

Childhood Experience	Effect	DFn	DFd	F	p	Sig	η^2G
Financial security	Media Genre	11	4672	4.444	0.000	***	0.007
Emotional support	Media Genre	11	4672	2.939	0.001	***	0.005
Adult love, guidance	Media Genre	11	4672	4.405	0.000	***	0.007
Educational support	Media Genre	11	4672	3.490	0.000	***	0.005
Discipline	Media Genre	11	4672	3.606	0.000	***	0.006
Positive reinforcement	Media Genre	11	4672	2.686	0.002	**	0.004
Enduring connections, trust	Media Genre	11	4672	1.831	0.044	*	0.003
Social isolation	Media Genre	11	4672	2.867	0.001	***	0.004
Exposure to diverse career opportunities	Media Genre	11	4672	2.017	0.023	*	0.003

Table 8. The Significant Main Effects for Media Genre Predicting Childhood Experiences. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

Neither media type nor media genre predicted religious affiliation (the most popular selection), therapeutic interventions/prescribed psychotropic medications, or nurturing of dreams/aspirations. Additionally, media type did not predict positive reinforcement or enduring connections/trusted relationships and media genre did not predict frequent moves/routine disruptions, negative interactions with law enforcement, preparation for independent living, or conflict. The combined types of media seemed to have a greater influence over the most popular perceptions of typical childhood experiences for YFC as compared to media genre.

Lastly, the third research question examined the extent to which a personal lived experience in foster care influenced the selections of media portrayals and life outcomes for YFC. A

comparison between those who identified themselves as in foster care (IDFC) during childhood (N=245) and those who did not (N=2242) on their selections for media portrayals for YFC revealed some overlap as well as some differences. There was a large difference in the group sizes and Table 9 demonstrates how those without a foster care experience skewed the overall results.

PORTRAYALS	No ID as FC (N=2242)	IDFC during childhood (N=245)	Entire sample (N=2487)
Criminal	54%	43%	53%
Hero	23%	31%	24%
Victim	69%	41%	66%
Abuser	35%	37%	35%
Sociopath	28%	33%	29%
Mentor/guide	28%	34%	28%
Survivor	63%	40%	61%
Sex Worker/Pimp	28%	45%	29%
Drug Addict	52%	37%	51%
Role Model	28%	36%	29%
Working Professional	23%	39%	25%
Loving Child/Parent	30%	32%	31%

Table 9. Selections of Media Portrayals for IDFC.

A review of Table 9 suggests that the IDFC group were less likely to select the portrayals of Criminal, Victim, Survivor, and Drug Addict than those who did not have an experience in foster care and were more likely to select the portrayals of Hero, Sociopath, Mentor/Guide, Sex Worker/Pimp, Role Model, and Working Professional. The correlation between IDFC and the rankings of media portrayals ($r = .17, p < .05$) revealed a weak but significant relationship; therefore, we thought it was likely that other factors were also important to enter into the model.

Regression models including the genre or type of media consumed, the age groups of respondents, their racial identification, and IDFC status suggested small impacts of the included factors; however, there were no cross-model trends. Significant main effects included IDFC with the media portrayals of Victim ($F(1,4721)=551.08, P < .001, R^2=.05$) and Drug Addict ($F(1,4721)=271.72, P < .001, R^2=.03$). In other words, IDFC were less likely to select the media portrayals of Victim and Drug Addict but were as likely as those without experience in foster care to select Survivor and Criminal. Individual differences related to age, gender, and racial identity were not consistent predictors of media portrayals.

Conclusions and Discussion

These findings suggest that the general public, particularly those who have little to no direct experience with foster care, report that the media portrays YFC in a negative manner. Our analyses concluded that these results of the national survey confirm the results of the earlier Los Angeles County survey. The same negative media portrayals were chosen by both samples. However, a more nuanced picture emerged when examining the influences of particular media types and media genres.

Although the group size was small, the IDFC group was only slightly less likely to select the negative media portrayals that dominated the results of both the 2018 and 2020 surveys. Therefore, it appears that those who have lived the experience of foster care are as influenced by media portrayals as those who have no personal knowledge. YFC are not immune to the negative media depictions. It seems nearly inevitable for them to accept these narratives as truth and succumb to society's perceptions. In this way, consistently biased messaging tying foster care to victimhood and criminality becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Media depictions arguably have real life consequences for many marginalized youths. These depictions can also encourage a sense of shame and fear of exposure. Since our data found most respondents believe that the negative media portrayals of YFC are at least somewhat accurate, people from foster care must reconcile their real lives with the fictional and typical media portrayals.

Only 10% of the sample identified as having a foster care experience; however, 29% reported having one or more foster care-like experiences. We considered two possible explanations: 1) in some circumstances, people may have experienced an informal foster care-like experience without notification to the social services or family court, and 2) perhaps people with personal experience in foster care during childhood who achieve success begin to externalize the typical experience of YFC and disassociate themselves. If they no longer see their stories as representative of the foster care journey and consider themselves to be the exception or an exclusion from the traditional media identity, identification with foster care becomes complex. This sense of being abnormal and atypical to the traditional childhood experience can cause people to hide from their past. Unfortunately, if those with successful outcomes are unwilling to be "outed," the public is deprived of the opportunity to experience real counter-narrative examples that challenge media depictions. This "hiding" from identity starts early for YFC. For example, consider the context that exists for YFC when the teacher asks students to have a parent sign a field trip permission slip. While this feels like a benign statement, to YFC who do not live with their parents, it is a reminder of their atypical experience.

Without the exposure to counter-narratives, most in the public see only the definition of foster care as depicted in the media. Unfortunately, disassociation compounds the complexity of the issue as there have been many prominent public figures in the media who have not openly owned or celebrated their foster care experience. By not acknowledging their connection to the foster care journey, the public does not see many examples of former foster youth to dispel the myths. If an environment existed in which people felt compelled and inspired to share their foster care histories, this could have two important effects: 1) the public would discover that many different members of their community have had foster care experiences and 2) children in foster care would begin to have more real-life examples that could lessen the desire to hide their experiences.

To exemplify this point, consider the following list of public figures: Marilyn Monroe, Willie Nelson, Steve Jobs, Larry Ellison, Malcom X, Bill Clinton, Maya Angelou, Oprah Winfrey, Eddie Murphy, Tiffany Haddish, Barack Obama, Colin Kaepernick, Dave Thomas, Cher, and Louis Armstrong. They were raised by adults other than their biological parents; however, there is little press coverage identifying them as YFC during childhood. Even though many know their background stories, they aren't associated with foster care because few on the list have claimed it. If President Obama had labeled being raised by his grandparents as a foster care experience, he could have served as a similar inspiration for YFC as he did for black children seeing the first black president.

Challenging the ideas behind the narratives which render people in foster care as not just damaged, but likely to perpetrate harm, involves creating nuanced counter-narratives that expand the conversation. Content creators must become aware of how their depictions may directly affect children across the country. Instead of using the foster care narrative as an explanation for victimization, criminalization, drug addiction and survivorship, creators can explore nuanced contributing factors. Efforts that were made with media portrayals of the LGBTQ+ community have resulted in the representation of the diverse experiences that exist for people who share this identity. This has, in part, been informed by advocates from the LGBTQ+ community who have established a standard for media depictions and who publicly questioned stereotypical narratives. These advocates have also served as consultants on media projects and inform newsrooms and producers about appropriate language. This should be a similar approach for the foster care community through their own network of advocates to celebrate positive portrayals and discredit caricatures and stereotypical images.

It is easy to lean into the data and say that the media portrayals are accurate. Statistically, YFC are victims of parental misconduct and are overrepresented in criminal justice systems. However, given the pervasiveness of the negative media portrayals about YFC, these statistical outcomes may be related to self-fulfilling prophecies messaged to YFC through media and society's perception of their likely failure. For instance, many think physical and sexual abuse are leading causes for youth to enter the foster care system. Thus, the media portrayal of YFC as victims feels reasonable. The truth is that most youth enter the foster care system due to neglect, not physical or sexual abuse. General neglect was the reason for foster care placement referral in 63% of the cases in 2019 (United States Census Bureau, n.d.), and this is important because of the direct link to poverty, rather than abuse. It is less accurate to assume victimization when placement is more likely due to a parent's inability to financially care for a child. However, while sensationalized stories of horrific abuse may increase viewership, they also perpetuate a negative mental model that defines YFC as victims.

The consumption of particular media types and genres predicted the selection of negative media portrayals for YFC regardless of demographics. This is concerning as it highlights the influence media has on the perceptions of disparate groups. Given that both newspapers and news channels within media type and news within media genre significantly influenced perceptions, further research is needed on the association of news stories and the development of implicit biases about YFC. Expanding the body of literature on media bias toward people with lived foster care experience is imperative to framing the issue and intentionally countering bias. Segmenting and stereotyping young people who have likely been subjected to institutional systems that are notorious for failing to achieve their stated goals of "safety, permanency, and well-being" has significant ramifications for individuals and our collective society. Growing the literature in this space means establishing points of

entry into humane discourse that positively transforms how citizens and practitioners recognize diverse narratives about various mechanisms of care.

The lack of well-established public examples means that people who choose to directly work with YFC, may be doing so with an implicit negative mental model. If the professionals who interact with YFC, project negative expectations, then these youth are more apt to exemplify those characteristics. This research is important in that it is the first of its kind to inform those who interact with YFC about how they may have been influenced by the media. The educators, social workers and caregivers are on the front lines and must become aware of the need to challenge old ideas and shift their perceptions. These biases are pervasive and yet, they are rarely recognized or considered. Training programs and tools are needed to advance new perceptions, even while the media is learning to shift their approaches. While their biases are hidden, even from themselves, the harm that they cause is real. There must be a commitment to understand these triggers more fully and plan to minimize and eradicate them.

Collectively, we must all challenge assumptions about YFC and be mindful of the media we consume. We must hold the media accountable when they share negative stories that inaccurately influence public perception and write to the networks and producers who have not traditionally been challenged on these ideas in the journalism and writing rooms. We should explore our own biases and consider how the media is influencing our perceptions of YFC. When we are in spaces where we work or engage with children, can we use language that considers someone from foster care may be in our midst? If we use the word caregiver, when referencing our parents, it signals to others the recognition of the diverse childhood experiences that exist in our country. It is a simple change to recognize that YFC are members of our communities. In doing this, YFC will see their experiences becoming normalized and then the media and the public will follow suit.

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