Media as mirror:
The power of representation
in children's media

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My story

CMIL

CENTER FOR MEDIA
AND INFORMATION LITERACY

NAMLE

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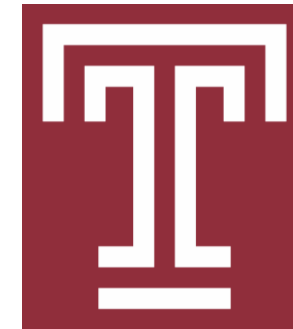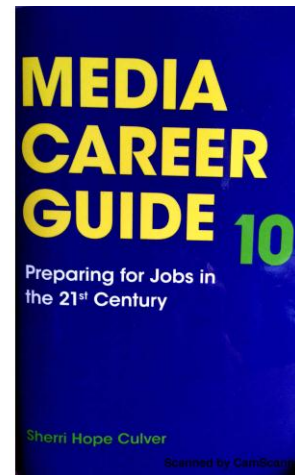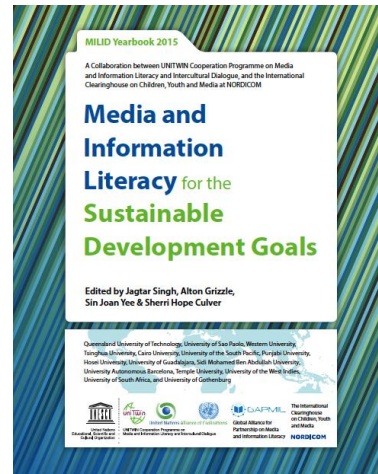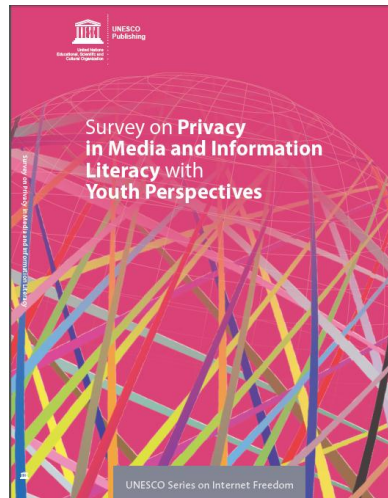United Nations Alliance of Civilizations

MEDIA INSIDE OUT

United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

UNITWIN Cooperation Programme on
Media and Information Literacy and Intercultural Dialogue

UNESCO Publishing

Survey on **Privacy
in Media and Information
Literacy** with
Youth Perspectives

UNESCO Series on Internet Freedom

MILID Yearbook 2015

A Collaboration between UNITWIN Cooperation Programme on Media
and Information Literacy and Intercultural Dialogue, and the International
Clearinghouse on Children, Youth and Media at NORDICOM

**Media and
Information
Literacy** for the
**Sustainable
Development Goals**

Edited by Jagtar Singh, Alton Grizzle,
Sin Joan Yee & Sherri Hope Culver

Queensland University of Technology, University of Sao Paolo, Western University,
Tsinghua University, Cairo University, University of the South Pacific, Punjabi University,
Hosei University, University of Guadalajara, Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdullah University,
University Autonomous Barcelona, Temple University, University of the West Indies,
University of South Africa, and University of Gothenburg

The International
Clearinghouse
on Children, Youth
and Media

Global Alliance for
Partnership on Media
and Information Literacy

NORDICOM

**MEDIA
CAREER
GUIDE 10**

Preparing for Jobs in
the 21st Century

Sherri Hope Culver

Temple University

Corporation
for Public
Broadcasting

Goals for today

- **UNDERSTANDING**

- **REFLECTION**

- **ACTION**

Have you seen this?

There's a reason this is so popular…

Children who grow
up without seeing
themselves
reflected in a place of
importance in society,
grow up thinking
they're not important
to society.

Children who grow up without seeing themselves reflected in a place of importance in society, grow up thinking they're not important to society.

Media images matter.
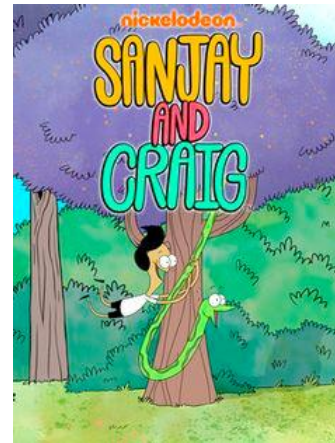
Which t-shirt is my favorite?

Who's my favorite friend?

What's my favorite food?

What's my favorite TV show?

Which character likes the things I like?

Choices are based on relevance.
Choices with relevance get repeated.

I love bread with fig jam. → **I want bread with fig jam for lunch *EVERY* day.**

Choices are based on relevance.
Choices with relevance get repeated.

Sam is my best friend.

I play with my best friend Sam, or I don't play with anyone!

Choices are based on relevance.
Choices with relevance get repeated.

Paw Patrol is my favorite television show.

→

I want to play a game (or watch a show or carry my lunch or…) with characters from Paw Patrol or I don't want anything!

Repeated connections lead to parasocial relationships

Relevance

Choices

Influence

Repetition

When kids consume media they're looking for relevance

- Do the characters live in a place that looks like where I live?
- Do the characters go to school in a place that looks like where I go to school?
- Do they play with their friends the way I play with my friends?
- Does their family eat dinner the way my family eats dinner?
- Do they get angry at the same things that make me angry?
- Do they get excited about the same things that excite me?
- Do any of the characters look like me?

**Children aren't consciously asking these questions,
but that invisible checklist in their brain either leads to
Affirmation, and more consumption,
or disconnection, and less.**

ARCS Model of Motivational Design

VALUE		EXPECTANCY	
Attention	**Relevance**	**Confidence**	**Satisfaction**
Perceptual arousal	Goal orientation	Learning requirements	Intrinsic reinforcement
Inquiry arousal	Motive Matching	Success opportunities	Extrinsic rewards
Variability	Familiarity	Personal control	Equity

Developed by John Keller

www.arcsmodel.com

RELEVANCE, **AFFIRMATION**, **and MEDIA CONSUMPTION**

How does the cultural diversity on television impact the manner in which a young child deals with cultural diversity in their life?

Does the concept of "media as mirror" hold influence once a child leaves the media environment?

Study details

- **Who was interviewed?**

  100 girls, ages 6-10, USA

  25 Caucasian, 25 African-America, 25 Hispanic, 25 Asian

- **What were they asked?** (partial list)

  Do your friends look like you?

  How do they look look like you? (or not look like you?)

  Are any of your favorite TV characters like you? How?

  Are any of your favorite TV characters not like you? How?

  Tell me about your favorite character's friends. Do they look like her? How?

  What have you learned about friendship by watching this show?

  Do your Mom's friends look like her?

  Is it ok to be friends with someone who is different than you?

  Can you think of a TV show that talked about that?

Key Findings

If kids love a character, they really, truly love that character.

Kids are passionate in their admiration for the characters that fill their favorite TV shows. They want to be like those girls. More than look like them, or dress like them, they want to act like them, have friends like them, be popular like them. And they use what they see on TV to develop themselves and their friendships.

(see slide on parasocial relationships)

Kids notice when characters don't look like them.

Kids don't necessarily stay away from shows where the characters don't look like them. But when neither the lead character, nor that character's close friends match a child's own ethnicity, they are aware of the omission.

Key Findings

However, pro-social on-screen diversity is missed without verbal recognition.

Merely including a person of color (or any other "difference") in the mix of friends in a television show is not enough to help children see the inclusion of that person as an action worth modeling, or convince them to make friends with people who don't look like them.

Kids in the study were only able to cite instances where they learned about diversity (difference) on television when the characters talked about their differences as part of the script or a specific storyline.

Subtly is too subtle for kids.

Subtle inclusion of a secondary character meant to broaden the ethnic diversity of a program, is beyond a kids awareness. Young children need clearly modeled behavior; they need to see the behavior in action, with the corresponding dialogue to support the action. They need to be told, in an entertaining way, that the information or the visual is happening. Then they need to be reminded that it happened. Repeatedly.

But media is not 1 child, 1 image

She has friends.
And those friends have friends…

And those friends have friends…

- Children notice who is
  represented in their media;
  who is represented often, and
  who is not represented.

- The repetition of that
  representation has the power to
  create "norms".

- The power to create "norms"
  may be media's most powerful
  influence.

**For example, what do you know about the moon?**

CHEESE!

Over time, through media, what norms might children come to believe about family? friends? school? food? who belongs & who does not?

Cultivation Theory

- This normalizing effect is at the core of George Gerbner's Cultivation Theory.

- Theory states that the more media one consumes the more LIKELY one's perceptions of the world will be consistent with media images and information provided by the media.

- And the more heavily one consumes media – the more likely this is.
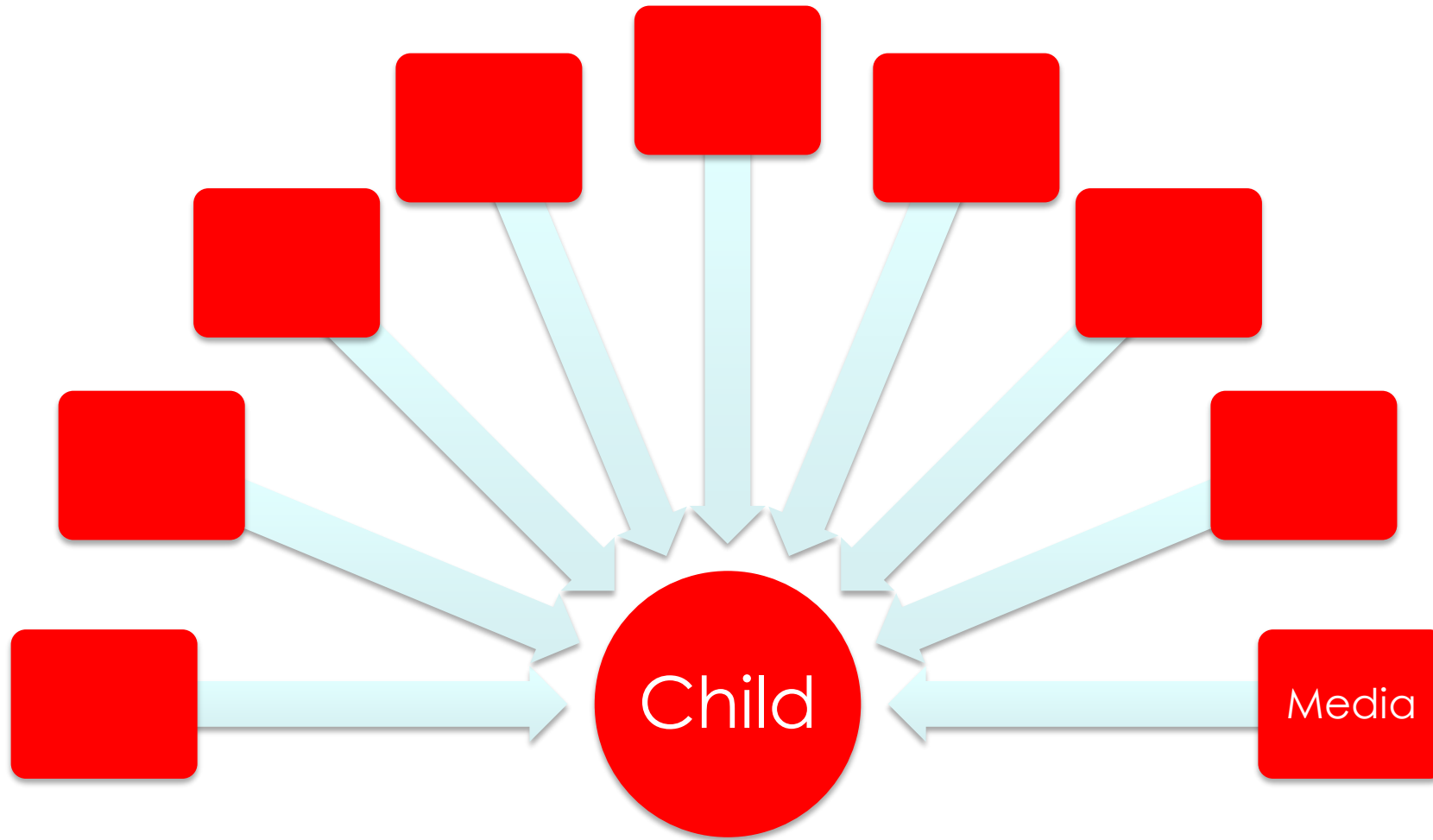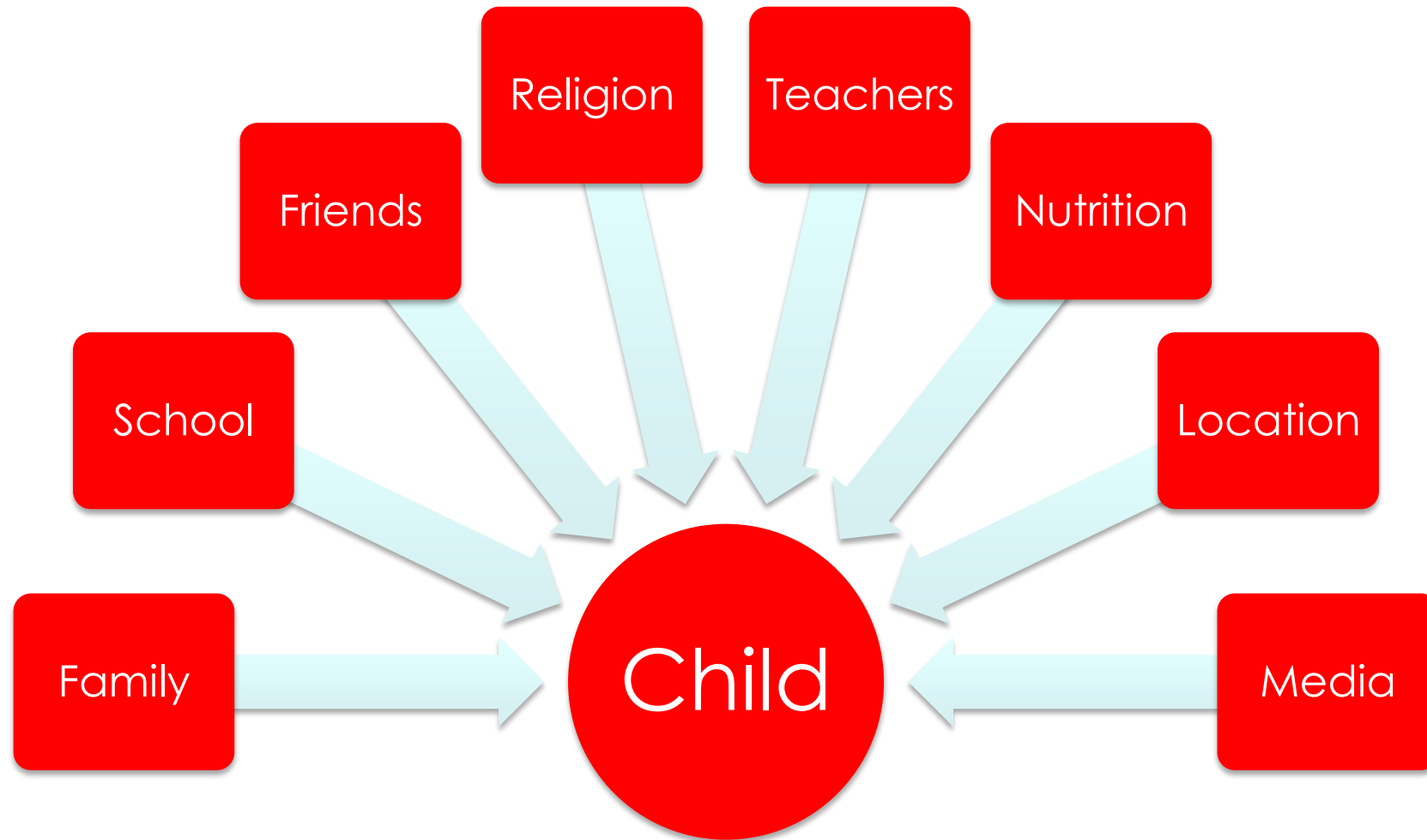
How can we help all children to see themselves reflected in the media they consume?

- Include targeted dialogue in the show, game, app, etc.
- Reflect a diverse cast, always.
- Include diversity-aware stories and plot lines
- Include diversity as a core mission of the property, show, game or app
- Provide resources for parents and caregivers on how to use the content to encourage conversation and action

- **But begin with media literacy.**

Begin with media Literacy

The ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create and act
using all forms of communications

Core concepts:

All media are constructed.

Different people interpret
messages differently.

Media messages are
produced for particular
audiences.

Media messages convey a
particular belief, value, point
of view.

The House I Live In (1943)

final thought…

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