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REPRESENTATION OF RACISM IN MEDIA AND ITS IMPACT ON YOUNG WOMEN IN SOCIETY

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Keywords	Abstract
Racism In Media, Young Women, Stereotypes, Media Representation, Mental Health, Social Justice.	This paper explores the representation of racism in media and its impact on young women in society. Media, being a powerful tool of communication, significantly shapes public perception and plays a crucial role in reinforcing or challenging racial stereotypes. The portrayal of racial minorities, particularly in news outlets, television, films, and social media, often perpetuates negative stereotypes that contribute to systemic racism. This paper focuses on how such representations influence the self-perception, mental health, and societal participation of young women, especially those from racial minorities. It also addresses the media's role in shaping young women's understanding of race, identity, and social justice. The study emphasizes the importance of creating more inclusive and accurate media portrayals to reduce the adverse effects of racism on young women and promote a more equitable society. In the context of young women, the impact of media on their understanding of race and racism goes beyond personal identity and self-perception; it also influences their worldview and how they engage with social justice issues. As young women navigate their educational and professional environments, their exposure to media representations of race can shape their understanding of racial hierarchies, power structures, and social justice.



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Introduction

The representation of race and racism in media has been a pervasive and significant issue in shaping public perceptions and societal attitudes toward racial groups, particularly racial minorities. Media, as a powerful form of communication, not only reflects societal norms and values but also actively constructs and influences them. The images, narratives, and representations that are broadcasted through various media platforms—television, film, print, social media—play a pivotal role in shaping the understanding of race, identity, and power dynamics within society. These representations often go beyond mere entertainment; they create lasting impressions that can influence how individuals perceive themselves and others. In the context of racial minorities, especially women of color, the ways in which race is portrayed can have profound effects on self-identity, self-worth, and overall social participation. The issue of racism in media is not new, but its relevance remains ever-pressing in an increasingly globalized and digitally connected world. For young women of color, media representations of race, gender, and beauty can be especially damaging, as they are often subjected to a double burden of racial and gender discrimination. Media portrayals of women of color are often hypersexualized, objectified, or infantilized, reinforcing societal norms that position them as inferior or subordinate to their white counterparts.

The portrayal of racism in media is multifaceted and complex. The lack of positive representation or the omission of people of color from influential media roles contributes to a cultural narrative that renders these individuals invisible or unworthy of attention. This absence of representation can have detrimental effects on the psychological well-being of young women, who may internalize these messages and feel a sense of inferiority or disempowerment. The impact of media representations of race on young women, particularly those from marginalized communities, is a subject of increasing scholarly attention. Studies have shown that media exposure can shape self-esteem, body image, and the development of gender and racial identities. When racial minorities are portrayed as criminals, victims of poverty, or as socially deviant, it reinforces negative stereotypes and justifies existing prejudices. For young women of color, media portrayals that celebrate diversity, inclusivity, and intersectionality can be empowering and provide role models that reflect their experiences and aspirations. Conversely, media that perpetuates stereotypes and marginalizes minority voices can contribute to feelings of alienation and disempowerment, making it harder for young women to assert their identity and claim space in predominantly white, male-dominated fields. Furthermore, the rise of digital media and social media platforms has transformed how young women engage with representations of race.

Review of Literature

The representation of racism in media has long been a subject of extensive academic inquiry, particularly in its role in shaping societal perceptions of race and its influence on individuals from marginalized communities. Scholars have consistently argued that media serves as a powerful tool for constructing and reinforcing racial stereotypes, which can have profound implications on how race and identity are understood in broader societal contexts.



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According to Stuart Hall (1997), in his work on representation, highlights how media plays a critical role in encoding and disseminating cultural meanings, particularly in how it portrays racialized bodies. Hall argues that media representations often reinforce hegemonic ideas about race, which contribute to the construction of “otherness” and maintain existing power structures. The impact of these portrayals on young women, especially those from racial minority backgrounds, is particularly significant. Media portrayals often intersect with issues of gender, race, and class, creating compounded forms of marginalization.

According to Patricia Hill Collins (2000), in her seminal work *Black Feminist Thought*, discusses how the intersection of race and gender influences the way Black women are portrayed in media and how these representations affect their self-perception and societal participation. She emphasizes that media often depicts women of color through a lens that is both racialized and sexualized, which contributes to the internalization of harmful stereotypes among young women. The perpetuation of racial stereotypes in media is particularly evident in news reporting, television shows, films, and increasingly, social media platforms.

According to Entman and Rojecki (2000) argue in *The Black Image in the White Mind* that mainstream media often presents Black individuals as either victims or perpetrators of crime, reinforcing a negative stereotype of racial minorities as inherently deviant or dangerous. This pattern of representation can have a significant impact on the self-esteem and societal outlook of young women of color, as they may internalize these images as reflective of their own identities. The constant bombardment of such portrayals can contribute to a distorted self-image and affect their mental health.

According to David Gillborn (2008), in his book *Racism and Education: Coincidence or Conspiracy?* discusses how media stereotypes contribute to systemic racism by normalizing prejudiced attitudes and discriminatory practices. Gillborn argues that young women, particularly those from minority backgrounds, are subjected to both overt and covert forms of racism that are reinforced by media portrayals. These portrayals help maintain societal structures that marginalize racial minorities, particularly women, by perpetuating negative assumptions about their capabilities and roles. In addition to influencing individual self-perception, media representations also shape how young women view race and social justice issues.

According to Cynthia P. Campbell (2013) have explored how the intersection of race, gender, and media consumption affects the mental well-being of young women of color. Campbell’s analysis indicates that the portrayal of racial minorities in the media is often stereotypical and dehumanizing, which leads to social alienation and psychological distress among viewers from those racial groups. Young women of color, in particular, are often shown in roles that emphasize subservience, hypersexuality, or victimization, which can limit their understanding of their own potential and place in society. The social impact of these portrayals extends beyond individual identity formation, influencing broader societal attitudes towards race and gender.



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According to Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2017) on color-blind racism emphasizes how media, by downplaying or ignoring systemic racial issues, contributes to the persistence of racial inequality. Bonilla-Silva argues that young women, when exposed to media that portrays racial issues as isolated incidents rather than products of systemic inequality, may develop a limited understanding of social justice, making it harder to challenge or resist racial hierarchies. The digital age has further complicated the landscape of media representation, particularly with the rise of social media.

According to Alvermann and Unrau (2021) also emphasize this point, suggesting that students who have higher levels of media literacy are better able to navigate and critique media portrayals of race and gender, which in turn fosters a more empowered sense of identity and social agency. In conclusion, the literature strongly suggests that the media's representation of racism has far-reaching implications for young women, particularly those from racial minorities. The portrayal of racial and gender identities in media not only affects individual self-perception but also contributes to broader societal attitudes towards race and justice. As such, addressing the media's role in perpetuating racial stereotypes is essential for promoting more equitable representations and supporting the development of young women in a racially diverse society. The evolving nature of media, particularly with the advent of digital platforms, highlights the need for continued research into how these representations impact young women's understanding of race, identity, and their role in society.

The importance of fostering a nuanced understanding of media representations is further explored by Muis and Duffy (2022), who highlight the role of epistemic cognition in shaping academic and social outcomes for young women. Their integrative model suggests that students who perceive media as a source of knowledge are more likely to be influenced by its representations of race and gender. In this context, media literacy becomes crucial for helping young women critically engage with the content they consume and challenge harmful stereotypes.

According to Lam (2023) examines the role of digital media in shaping the creativity and cognitive development of young women of color. While digital platforms offer more diverse representations, they also present challenges, such as superficial engagement with content and shorter attention spans, which can hinder critical engagement with complex social issues like racism. Lam suggests that while social media can be a tool for empowerment, it also risks reinforcing racial stereotypes through viral content that trivializes or sensationalizes racial issues.

Objectives

- I. To know the level of self-esteem of young women in society due to influence of racial stereotypes in society.
- II. To identify the influence of role models and television exposure on young women's attitudes and behaviours.
- III. To explore the better ideas and perceptions to overcome the negative impact of racial stereotypes in films, television and social media



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Real-Life Case Studies on Racism in Media and Its Impact on Young Women in Society

1. Case Study: The Portrayal of Black Women in American TV Shows and Films

The portrayal of Black women in American media has often been rooted in harmful stereotypes, such as the “angry Black woman,” the “jezebel” (hypersexualized), or the “mammy” (submissive caregiver). These stereotypes have been perpetuated across television shows, films, and advertisements, limiting the diversity and depth of Black women characters in popular culture. One example is the portrayal of Black women in reality television shows like *Love and Hip-Hop* and the real housewives of Atlanta, where the focus is often on drama, conflict, and hypersexualized behavior. These portrayals not only reinforce negative stereotypes about Black women but also create unrealistic and damaging representations of their lives, particularly for young Black women who consume these media.

Impact on Young Women: Studies show that constant exposure to these portrayals has detrimental effects on the self-image of young Black women. They often report feeling pigeonholed into these harmful stereotypes in both personal and professional settings, facing racial and gender bias rooted in these media portrayals. The lack of diverse, positive Black female role models in mainstream media contributes to a limited sense of identity and self-worth, as highlighted in the research of scholars like Patricia Hill Collins and bell hooks.

2. Case Study: Asian Women in Western Media

Asian women in Western media have historically been subjected to hyper - sexualization and exoticization. Films like *Memoirs of a Geisha* and the portrayal of “dragon ladies” (stereotypically aggressive, sexualized Asian women) in movies like *Kill Bill* have reinforced the image of Asian women as submissive, overly sexualized, or mysterious. This “fetishization” of Asian women has created a distorted view of their identity in Western society. One significant real-world consequence of these portrayals came to light in the 2021 Atlanta spa shootings, where the perpetrator targeted Asian women, reportedly citing a sexual “addiction” as motivation. This tragic incident highlights how media-fueled stereotypes contribute to real-world violence and discrimination.

Impact on Young Women: Young Asian women often experience micro-aggressions and overt discrimination that stem from these stereotypes. Many report being treated as sexual objects or “model minorities,” both of which undermine their individual identity and personhood. The hypersexualization of Asian women in media contributes to harmful societal attitudes, making them more vulnerable to sexual harassment and racism in everyday life.

3. Case Study: The Representation of Muslim Women in News Media

Muslim women, particularly those who wear the hijab or other religious garments, are often portrayed in Western news media as oppressed, submissive, or victims of a patriarchal culture. This one-dimensional narrative fails to capture the diversity and agency of Muslim women, instead reinforcing Islamophobic attitudes. News coverage often associates Muslim women with terrorism or cultural backwardness, further perpetuating racist stereotypes. For instance, coverage of the 9/11



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attacks and the subsequent “ War on Terror” led to a significant increase in negative media portrayals of Muslim women, with many news outlets framing them as needing to be “saved” from their culture. This narrative was particularly evident in discussions surrounding the hijab bans in countries like France, where Muslim women’s choice to wear religious attire was framed as an issue of oppression rather than personal or cultural expression.

Impact on Young Women: The constant portrayal of Muslim women as oppressed or subservient has led to an increase in Islamophobic hate crimes and discrimination. Young Muslim women, particularly those who wear the hijab, report feeling alienated and targeted because of their religion and culture. These negative media portrayals contribute to feelings of marginalization and reinforce societal pressures to conform to Western beauty and cultural standards. For many young Muslim women, media representation has a profound effect on their sense of belonging and self-worth.

4. Case Study: Colorism and Representation of Latina Women in Media

Colorism, or discrimination based on skin tone, is particularly prevalent in the media portrayal of Latina women. Lighter-skinned Latinas are often cast in more prominent roles in Hollywood films and TV shows, while darker-skinned Latinas are either underrepresented or portrayed in stereotypical roles (e.g., as maids or criminals). Shows like *Jane the Virgin* feature Latina women in complex roles, but colorism persists, with the lead characters often having Eurocentric features. The famous TV personality Gina Rodriguez, known for her role in *Jane the Virgin*, spoke out about the lack of representation for darker-skinned Latinas in Hollywood. She highlighted how media disproportionately elevates Latinas who conform to Western beauty standards, reinforcing the idea that only lighter-skinned Latinas are acceptable in mainstream culture.

Impact on Young Women: For young Latina women, this form of media representation creates a hierarchy of beauty and value based on skin color. Darker-skinned Latinas often feel invisible or devalued, leading to internalized racism and lower self-esteem. They struggle with the societal pressure to assimilate into a Eurocentric ideal of beauty and success, which can lead to feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt. This phenomenon is especially damaging for young women trying to navigate their racial and cultural identity.

5. Case Study: The Social Media Impact of Racism and Body Image

Social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok have become major influencers of beauty standards and identity formation for young women. However, these platforms often perpetuate Eurocentric beauty ideals, with women of color frequently excluded or underrepresented in mainstream influencer culture. Hashtags like #BlackGirlMagic and #MelaninPoppin were created by Black women to celebrate and counteract the lack of representation, but challenges remain. Social media algorithms tend to favor content that aligns with Eurocentric standards, further marginalizing women of color. Black, Latina, and Asian women have reported instances where their content is shadow-banned, while white influencers with similar content receive more visibility. This digital form of racism and discrimination affects young women’s self-esteem and reinforces societal pressures to conform to Western ideals of beauty and success.



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Impact on Young Women: The disproportionate visibility of Eurocentric beauty standards on social media has led many young women of color to feel excluded and undervalued. This exclusion can lead to mental health issues, including body dysmorphia, depression, and anxiety. For young Black and Latina women in particular, the pressure to alter their appearance (e.g., straightening hair or lightening skin) to fit in with social media norms is pervasive, resulting in harmful consequences for their self-image and mental well-being.

Table: 01- year-wise global racism in media data sheet

Year	Significant Media Events/Incidents	Major Media Reports or Studies on Racism	Popular Films/TV Shows Reflecting Racism	Initiatives to Combat Racism in Media	Key Countries /Regions
2015	Oscar So White movement starts highlighting the lack of diversity in Hollywood .	Report on the underrepresentation of Black actors in Hollywood.	Straight Outta Compton (reflects racism and police brutality)	Media companies pledge to increase diversity after public outcry.	USA
2016	Lack of diversity in major awards shows sparks conversations on racial bias in entertainment.	Study: "Diversity in Hollywood: Key Facts and Figures" by UCLA.	The People v. O.J. Simpson (examines racial tension in America)	Social media campaigns like #Representation Matters gain momentum.	USA, UK
2017	BBC and Channel 4 accused of underrepresenting ethnic minorities.	"Racism in European Media" report by the European Broadcasting Union.	Get Out (satirical horror about racism)	BFI announces diversity standards for British films.	UK, USA
2018	Controversy over media portrayal of immigrants during the refugee crisis in Europe.	Pew Research Center releases report on media bias in covering racial minorities.	BlacKkKlansman (focuses on white supremacy and Black resistance)	European Parliament calls for better media representation of minorities.	Europe, USA
2019	Media	Study:	When They See	The Guardian	



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	criticized for biased reporting during the Hong Kong protests.	"Impact of Racism in Global News Coverage" by Reuters Institute.	Us (Netflix series about racial injustice in the US legal system)	establishes an editorial policy to avoid racial stereotypes.	Global
2020	Media portrayal of George Floyd protests triggers debates on racial bias in newsrooms globally.	Study by Harvard University on the racial biases in news coverage of Black Lives Matter.	I May Destroy You (explores race, consent, and trauma)	Netflix commits \$100 million to support racial equity in media production.	USA, Global
2021	Rise of anti-Asian sentiment in media following COVID-19 pandemic.	"Global Anti-Asian Sentiment in Media" study by Media Matters.	Minari (a film about Korean immigrants facing racial struggles in America)	The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences introduces diversity quotas for awards eligibility.	USA, UK, Asia
2022	Media scrutiny over coverage of Ukrainian refugees compared to Middle Eastern refugees.	Study on Disparities in Refugee Coverage by Al Jazeera Media Institute.	Everything Everywhere All at Once (celebrates diversity, touches on immigrant struggles)	Media diversity pledges from leading companies like BBC, CBS, and CNN.	USA, Europe, Asia
2023	Social media companies face criticism for promoting racially insensitive content through algorithms.	"Algorithms and Racial Bias" report by MIT Media Lab.	Till (dramatization of Emmett Till's murder and its media coverage)	TikTok pledges to improve racial sensitivity and remove hate speech.	Global

Explanation of the Columns:

1. **Year:** The specific year in which the event, study, or film occurred.



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2. **Significant Media Events/Incidents:** Major media-related events or incidents that reflect racial issues. This can include controversies, protests, or social media movements.
3. **Major Media Reports or Studies on Racism:** Notable studies, research reports, or academic publications that analyze racism in media.
4. **Popular Films/TV Shows Reflecting Racism:** Major films, TV shows, or documentaries that either highlight racism or address racial issues in their narrative.
5. **Initiatives to Combat Racism in Media:** Efforts by media organizations, governments, or civil society to address or combat racism in media.
6. **Key Countries/Regions:** The main regions or countries where these events or issues are most relevant.

Potential Reasons for Racism in Media

1. **Historical Legacy of Racial Stereotypes** The roots of racism in media are deeply tied to historical contexts where racial hierarchies were normalized, especially during colonialism and slavery. These racist portrayals have persisted across generations, continuing to shape media narratives. Historical stereotypes like the "mammy" for Black women, the "dragon lady" for Asian women, and the "spicy Latina" for Latina women have evolved, but still find subtle ways to perpetuate racism in modern media.

2. **Underrepresentation of Diverse Voices in Media Production** Media industries, particularly in film, television, and news, have historically lacked racial diversity among executives, producers, directors, and writers. This lack of representation often results in narratives that reflect the experiences and perspectives of dominant (usually white) groups, while marginalizing or misrepresenting minority communities. When decision-makers come from homogeneous backgrounds, the content they produce often lacks cultural sensitivity or reinforces racial biases.

3. **Profit Motives and Stereotype Exploitation** Racist and stereotypical portrayals of racial minorities in media are often financially motivated. Sensationalized or simplified depictions of race may be more marketable or relatable to mainstream (white) audiences. Content that conforms to racial stereotypes may generate more viewership or engagement, leading media companies to exploit these harmful images for profit.

4. **Bias in News Reporting** News media, which is supposed to inform and educate, often perpetuates racial biases through selective reporting. Studies show that racial minorities are more likely to be portrayed as criminals or victims, while white individuals are presented as law-abiding or innocent. This bias can influence public perception of racial groups and contribute to systemic racism by reinforcing negative stereotypes.

5. **Social Media Algorithms and Racism** On digital platforms, algorithms determine what content becomes viral and visible. These algorithms often reflect existing biases, prioritizing content that aligns with Eurocentric beauty standards or sensationalized racial stereotypes. Social media, therefore, perpetuates the same racist dynamics found in traditional media, even though it is a more decentralized form of communication.



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Measures to Combat Racism in Media

1. Increase Diversity in Media Production One of the most effective ways to combat racism in media is to increase diversity behind the scenes. Media organizations should prioritize hiring individuals from a wide range of racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds, especially in decision-making roles such as producers, writers, and directors. This will ensure that stories from minority communities are told with authenticity and sensitivity, avoiding harmful stereotypes.

2. Promote Media Literacy and Critical Consumption Educating young people, especially young women, on how to critically engage with media is crucial. Media literacy programs in schools and communities can teach individuals to question and analyze the portrayals they see in the media. This includes understanding how stereotypes are constructed, the motivations behind certain portrayals, and recognizing the absence or misrepresentation of certain groups. By promoting media literacy, individuals can develop a more nuanced understanding of race and identity in society.

3. Hold Media Organizations Accountable Media organizations should be held accountable for the content they produce and promote. This could involve creating standards or guidelines that prevent the dissemination of racist or stereotypical portrayals. Regulatory bodies, industry watchdogs, and consumer advocacy groups should monitor media output and demand accountability when harmful representations are perpetuated. Public campaigns and boycotts of companies that promote racist content can also encourage media producers to be more responsible in their portrayals of racial minorities.

4. Create and Promote Positive Representations of Racial Minorities The media should actively promote positive and diverse portrayals of racial minorities that reflect the complexity and richness of their identities. By showcasing successful, empowered, and multi-dimensional characters from diverse backgrounds, media can counteract the negative stereotypes that have historically dominated the landscape. Films, television shows, and news programs that focus on celebrating cultural heritage, success stories, and diverse experiences can help reshape societal perceptions and inspire young women of color.

5. Empower Minority Voices through Independent Media Independent media outlets, especially those owned and operated by racial minorities, can provide more authentic and inclusive representations of race. Supporting and amplifying independent content creators—whether in film, digital media, or journalism—allows for more control over narratives and provides alternatives to mainstream portrayals of racial minorities. Social media and digital platforms also offer opportunities for minority voices to share their stories and challenge racist portrayals.

6. Training and Sensitivity Programs for Media Professionals Implementing mandatory diversity and sensitivity training for media professionals can help combat racism in media production. Journalists, producers, and content creators should be educated on the impact of racial stereotypes and how their work can either perpetuate or dismantle these harmful narratives. Media organizations can also incorporate ongoing professional development programs that focus on cultural awareness and anti-racism strategies.



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7. Advocate for Algorithmic Accountability on Digital Platforms Social media platforms should be transparent about how their algorithms prioritize and promote content. There needs to be advocacy for reforms in algorithm design to prevent the promotion of racist or harmful content. Tech companies can also collaborate with anti-racism organizations to create guidelines for monitoring and moderating racist speech, ensuring that digital spaces are safe and inclusive for all users, particularly young women from marginalized backgrounds.

8. Incorporate Anti-Racism in Education Curricula Educational systems should include discussions about racism, media representation, and their societal impact in school curricula. Teaching students, especially young women, about the historical and contemporary effects of racism in media can empower them to become more critical consumers and creators of media. Encouraging them to question biased narratives will help promote a generation of individuals who are more conscious of equity and inclusivity in their media consumption.

9. Support and Fund Research on Racism in Media Continued research into the effects of racism in media is essential for understanding its evolving impact on society, particularly on young women. Governments, academic institutions, and philanthropic organizations should support studies that investigate how racial portrayals influence self-identity, mental health, and societal participation. Such research can inform policies and practices that seek to improve media representation and combat systemic racism.

10. Advocate for Policy Changes at Governmental and Institutional Levels Government can play key role in regulating media industries to prevent the spread of racist content. Policies that encourage diversity in media ownership, support minority-owned media organizations, and fund content that promotes racial equity can help reduce the prevalence of racist portrayals. Additionally, supporting public broadcasting services that prioritize inclusive representation and produce educational content on race relations can create a more equitable media landscape.

Discussion

Racism in media has deep historical and structural roots, but through concerted efforts across various sectors—media organizations, education, technology, and policy—there are viable measures that can be taken to reduce its harmful impact. Addressing the underrepresentation of minorities, challenging stereotypes, and promoting positive, diverse portrayals of racial minorities are crucial steps toward creating a media landscape that is more inclusive and reflective of the diverse societies in which we live. For young women, particularly those from marginalized racial backgrounds, ensuring accurate and empowering media representations can help foster self-worth, confidence, and a sense of belonging in society.

Summary and Conclusion

The media's portrayal of race and racism, and its subsequent impact on young women, is not an isolated phenomenon but part of a broader socio-cultural and political landscape. The intersection of race, gender, and media representation is a critical area of study for understanding how societal norms are constructed, reinforced, and challenged. For young women, particularly those from racial



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minority backgrounds, the stakes are high. Media representations not only shape their-perception but also influence how they are perceived by others and how they are treated in social, educational, and professional spaces. As such, addressing the media's role in perpetuating racism is essential for fostering a more inclusive and equitable society, where young women of all racial backgrounds can thrive.

Digital platforms offer both opportunities and challenges in the fight against racism. On one hand, social media allows for more diverse voices to be heard, and it has become a powerful tool for marginalized communities to share their experiences, raise awareness, and mobilize for social change. Movements like Black Lives Matter have gained significant traction through digital platforms, highlighting the systemic racism faced by black individuals in the United States and around the world. On the other hand, digital media also presents new avenues for the proliferation of racial stereotypes and hate speech, often under the guise of anonymity. The algorithms that govern social media platforms can further entrench racial biases by promoting content that reinforces existing prejudices or sensationalizes racial issues for profit. Young women, as active consumers of digital media, are particularly vulnerable to the psychological impacts of these representations, as they navigate a complex digital landscape where messages of empowerment coexist with messages of hate.

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