**Blog 3: “Child-rearing in color”**

*Parents can teach their children things about topics like ethnicity and discrimination. This process is known as color-conscious child-rearing. Raising a child in a color-conscious way contributes to children’s knowledge about ethnicity and about differences between people. Different ethnic groups approach color-conscious child-rearing in their own way. In this blog we explain what color-conscious child-rearing looks like in different ethnic groups.*American studies show that it is mostly [parents of color](https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12622) who discuss ethnic identity and diversity with their children, whereas [White parents](https://doi.org/10.1037/cdp0000454) hardly ever discuss these topics. Many parents of color want their children to develop positive views about their own ethnic group, despite the negative ethnic stereotypes they are confronted with. Color-conscious child-rearing consists of [different aspects](https://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.42.5.747), such as cultural socialization, multiculturalism and preparedness against discrimination. Cultural socialization points to what parents teach their children about the history and culture of their own group. Multiculturalism in child-rearing is about becoming aware of ethnic diversity and the importance of equality. Prepareding against discrimination is a way in which parents can teach their children to deal with discrimination.

Parents approach color-conscious child-rearing in [different ways](https://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.42.5.747). For example, they can have talks about important people and events from the history of their own ethnic group (cultural socialization) or other ethnic groups (multiculturalism). In addition to talking about these topics, parents can read books to their children or watch video clips together with them. Parents of color who want to prepare their children against discrimination usually do it by having talks. One way is to explain to their children that they have to be better in order to get the same results, or that they may be treated unfairly because of their ethnic background. Color-conscious child-rearing can also be done in [more subtle](https://doi.org/10.1177/0095798402028001003) ways, for instance by having objects and clothing related to an ethnic group, portraits of important historical figures or national flags at home.

In three different studies we investigated whether and how color-conscious child-rearing manifests in the Netherlands among mothers of children between ages 6 and 10. Each study was aimed at one single ethnic group.
In the first study, [138 White Dutch mothers](https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.13784) completed a questionnaire about how often in the last year they addressed multiculturalism in their children’s upbringing. We also observed how they read to their child a picture book with characters from different ethnic backgrounds and with different cultural festivities and traditions. With this task we measured how often mothers talk about ethnic characteristics with their children when reading the book to them. Results showed that the mothers can be classified into two groups. One group of mothers paid more attention to multiculturalism in their children’s upbringing, and listed more ethnic characteristics of characters. The other group of mothers paid less attention to multiculturalism in their children’s upbringing, and listed fewer ethnic characteristics of characters. These results show that what mothers indicated in the questionnaires can in turn be seen in how they communicate when reading the picture book out loud.

In the second study, 66 Turkish-Dutch mothers\* completed questionnaires about how often in the last year they addressed cultural socialization and multiculturalism in their children’s upbringing. Just like in the previous study, the mothers read a picture book to their child. The results based on the questionnaires showed that cultural socialization and multiculturalism in child-rearing are very common among Turkish-Dutch mothers. Multiculturalism in child-rearing is even more common than cultural socialization. When reading the picture book to their children, these mothers described the characteristics of characters of color more often than those of White characters.

In the third study, 45 Afro-Dutch mothers\* completed questionnaires about how often in the last year they addressed cultural socialization and preparing against discrimination. Just like in the previous two studies, the mothers read a picture book to their child. Last, in interviews we asked mothers how they integrate cultural diversity into the upbringing of their children. The results based on the questionnaires show that cultural socialization and preparing against discrimination are very common. Among Afro-Dutch mothers, cultural socialization as part of child-rearing is even more common than preparing against discrimination. Just like the Turkish-Dutch mothers, these mothers described the ethnic characteristics of characters of color more often than those of White characters. These results also evidenced that the mothers and their children can be classified into two groups. One group of mothers paid more attention to cultural socialization, preparing against discrimination and listed more ethnic characteristics of the Black characters. The other group of mothers paid less attention to cultural socialization, preparing against discrimination and listed fewer ethnic characteristics of the Black characters. The children from the first group of mothers were positive about their own group, the children of the second group of mothers were actually less positive about their own group. Additionally, from the interviews two child-rearing goals came up that mothers consider important: being proud of one’s own ethnic background and respecting other ethnic groups and cultures.

Together, all these studies show how mothers from different ethnic groups raise their children in different color-conscious ways. In each group we found unique patterns of color-conscious child-rearing, but it is clear that many mothers try to convey knowledge about differences between people. Do you want practical tips about color-conscious child-rearing? Follow our series to find out more!

\* The articles on these studies are not publicly available yet, as they are still in the publication process.

*This blogpost is part of a series presenting the results of the Leiden University study* [*“Children in Society”*](http://www.kinderenindesamenleving.nl)*. This blogpost is the third in the series “Children in multicultural society”. Click here for the first blogpost “Are children colorblind?”. Click here for the second blogpost “Discussing ethnic differences or avoiding the topic altogether?”. Click here for the fourth blogpost “Making color and racism discussable: how do you do that?”.*

*Members of the research team “Children in Society” are Prof. Judi Mesman, Dr. Rosanneke Emmen, Dr. Ymke de Bruijn, Fadime Pektas MSc, Daudi van Veen MSc, and Yiran Yang MSc.*

*This blogpost was written by Daudi van Veen and Fadime Pektas.*