

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Social Advertising as a Tool for Building New Narratives in Latin America: Anti-Oppressive and Anti-Racist Campaigns for Children and Young People in Mexico

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This article examines the role of social communication campaigns in disrupting oppressive narratives generated by mainstream media among children and young people in Mexico and Latin America. It is grounded in the recognition that school bullying and forms of oppression related to racism, gender, and sexual diversity constitute structural phenomena that are internalized from an early age and have significant effects on emotional development.

The study adopts a qualitative approach based on the analysis of four campaigns developed between 2011 and 2026, reflecting on their characteristics and findings, as well as on the elements that may contribute to making anti-oppressive and anti-racist campaigns aimed at young people more effective.

Keywords: Social advertising and communication for social change; anti-oppressive and anti-racist campaigns; childhood and youth in Latin America; childhood and youth and Mexico; new narratives

Introduction

Latin American children and young people have experienced, in recent decades, an increase in school violence and structural oppression, which directly affects their integral development, making it a relevant social and research problem. Among other data, the non-governmental organisation Bullying Without Borders points out that, in 2024, Mexico ranked second in the world for bullying, with 280,000 reported cases; Argentina is third with 270,000 cases, and Peru is eighth with 200,000 cases. For its part, the Pan American Health Organization (2022) estimates that, in Latin America, 58% of students have experienced some form of physical, sexual, or emotional abuse. In the Caribbean, 38% of students have participated in physical fights, and in Central America, 26%; in North America, 32% of students report bullying issues, and in South America, 30%. In Mexico, approximately 28% of the student population has reported experiences of bullying. Violence can be physical, including physical aggression and fighting, corporal punishment, and the destruction of property; psychological, which involves verbal abuse, emotional abuse, social exclusion, and harassment; and sexual, including acts of

coercion, sexual touching, rape or attempted rape, sexual comments and jokes, and discrimination on the basis of gender (Lopez De Turiso Sánchez, 2023). At an early age (5 to 11 years old), physical bullying and social exclusion predominate, while in adolescence (12 to 19 years old), verbal and psychological forms, as well as cyberbullying, increase (Nuñez-Fadda et al., 2020).

This article reflects on how children and young people experience bullying and oppression in relation to issues of gender, racism, and sexual diversity. It describes the consequences of these oppressions and the dominant media narratives affecting young people, and how anti-oppressive campaigns and strategies can challenge and interrupt these narratives, as well as prevent cases of violence and bullying. To this end, it attempts to answer research questions such as: Would it be possible to interrupt oppressive narratives effectively if this work begins at an early age? And how can more assertive anti-oppressive campaigns and strategies be developed for children and youth?

In this way, the conceptual framework of the research addresses issues such as oppressions in terms of gender, racism, and sexual diversity in childhood and youth, communication and advertising for social change, and new narratives. In this sense, oppression is understood as the set of structural, institutional, cultural, and ideological barriers that systematically constrain the possibilities of certain social groups who face limited power and systematic violence (Young, 1990). The consequences of these relate to direct effects on self-esteem, self-worth, self-image, health, security, and confidence, as well as to the pressure of stereotypes and socially expected behaviours, fostered, among other factors, by the media. Thus, with respect to gender-based oppression in childhood and youth, the following stand out, among others: symbolic violence and aesthetic pressure, especially towards women, who are required to respond to ideals of beauty that are unattainable from a young age (Vázquez, Martínez & Estrada, 2022); inequality in domestic and care work, whereby from childhood, women must prioritize the care of others over their own development (Campaña, Giménez-Nadal & Molina, 2015); the educational gap and limiting beliefs regarding the choice of possible careers for women; and gender-based violence and the normalization of unequal relationships, the figures for which in Latin America are alarming. According to ECLAC (2025), one in three women aged 15 and over in Latin America has experienced physical or sexual violence at least once in their lives. With regard to physical violence, or violence exercised by an intimate partner, one in four women between the ages of 15 and 49 has experienced this type of violence, and 21% of adolescents have experienced it before the age of 20. Regarding sexual diversity, in Latin America, children and young people from the LGBTQ+ community are prone to facing acts of family, school, and workplace violence that result in higher levels of stress, anxiety, trauma, and mental health disorders (Fuentes Carreño et al., 2024). Finally, in relation to racism, the criminalization of negatively racialized young people, in particular men living in poverty (Silva Lima & Almeida Lima, 2023); deprivations linked to structural racism, such as reduced access for children from Indigenous peoples and Afro-descendant communities to resources such as drinking water, adequate housing, and information and communication equipment (ECLAC and UNICEF, 2019); internalized racism, understood as the ability of dominant groups to obtain the consent of racially subordinate people to accept their own oppression (Moreno Figueroa & López Chávez, 2023); the reproduction of racism in educational spaces through teacher prejudices and the curriculum (Velasco, 2016); and strategies of dehumanization, objectification, folklorization, and exoticization that advertising exerts on certain groups, reinforcing through media discourses beliefs such as: (i) that 'race must be improved'; (ii) the assertion that in Mexico 'we are all mixed', which renders Indigenous peoples and Afro-descendant populations invisible under the idea of miscegenation (COPERA, 2024); (iii) the historical denial of Blackness; (iv) xenophobia; and (v) the false idea of reverse racism. In response, social advertising and anti-racist communication have sought to promote messages

that generate social change in relation to these practices. Social change is understood as any transformation observed over time that affects, in a non-ephemeral or non-provisional way, the structure and functioning of a collectivity; social advertising refers to communication that seeks to sensitize, inform, and mobilize citizens in response to social problems, promoting sustained cultural transformations (Tufte, 2017); and anti-racist communication refers to practices that analyze and identify media discourses that produce and reproduce racial categories, while proposing alternative practices to interrupt them and generate processes based on language, images, and narratives that recognize identity plurality and question hierarchies produced by structural and biopolitical racism (Essed, 1991). Thus, campaigns that seek to transform these habits, behaviours, and narratives play an important role. New narratives that challenge hegemonic discourses are defined as strategies that link personal experiences with structural political analyses and emphasize the importance of storytelling as a tool that serves not only to persuade people externally but also internally, thereby helping to build identities (Polletta, 2006). These new narratives, along with hashtag activism, allow historically marginalized communities to document and circulate their own experiences (Jackson, 2016). From the perspective of critical studies of advertising, it can be understood not only as a commercial tool but also as a cultural device that produces meanings, identities, and ideologies and constitutes a terrain of struggle where dominant discourses can be questioned and rearticulated (Hall, 1997; Kellner, 1995). Jhally (1990) argues that advertising functions as a powerful ideological apparatus that not only reflects but also shapes social norms and values and has the potential to generate counter-narratives that challenge hegemonic representations. For this reason, issues such as racism, gender, sexual diversity, advertising activism, digital surveillance, and social justice are revisited from this theoretical perspective.

That said, this article refers to four anti-racist and anti-oppressive campaigns—Ancestral Futures, The Structure Within, AfrocensoMX, and Racism in Mexico—carried out in Mexico between 2011 and 2026, which question dominant narratives imposed on children and youth by mainstream media and propose new discursive possibilities. These campaigns are in addition to others developed during this period; however, they are selected because they are specialized campaigns on the subject with innovative creative strategies that, for the most part, have received significant public recognition, and because the undersigned has directed and/or creatively participated in them and is familiar with the reflections underpinning their communication pieces. In this way, the research is developed using a qualitative approach based on the case study, which is understood as a research strategy aimed at understanding the dynamics present in specific contexts (Eisenhardt, 1989). These campaigns are analyzed by identifying the creative strategies used in response to dominant discourses, the new narratives they propose, and a comparison in this regard, as well as the challenges faced in their creation and implementation, as well as the reflections and learnings that can inform the development of more assertive future campaigns. Additionally, the research is based on a participatory methodology that enables the construction of living, situated, multidimensional, and complex knowledge and which conceives participants as active agents in the construction of knowledge (Najmanovich, 2014), using research and data collection techniques such as workshop facilitation, in-depth interviews, and participant observation. It should be noted that the qualitative approach allows for the understanding and interpretation of phenomena through the perceptions and meanings produced by participants' experiences while recognizing the researcher's positionality (Hernández Sampieri, Fernández & Baptista, 2010). In this sense, the undersigned is positioned as a white Mexican mestizo woman who has been a researcher and creator of social campaigns over the past 15 years, attentive to what Shaw (1999) expressed regarding the subjectivity of qualitative research, which views social reality as something constructed by people. Thus, the researcher cannot remain distant from the

social phenomenon of interest, adopting instead the role of an instrument for data collection, which enables engagement with phenomena and the discovery, interpretation, and understanding of the perspectives of those who participate in social reality.

Finally, the article concludes by offering concrete reflections and recommendations on how to carry out assertive anti-oppressive and anti-racist campaigns for children and youth in Mexico and Latin America that interrupt oppressions and promote collective healing processes.

Social Campaigns as Anti-Oppressive Strategies for Children and Young People

The following campaigns highlight the tension between dominant narratives and new narratives focused on preventing violence. These campaigns encompass forms of public education that translate academic research findings into accessible formats without compromising conceptual rigor.

‘Ancestral Futures’ campaign

This campaign runs in parallel with a research project of the same name that I am conducting at the Centre for Transdisciplinary Research in Psychology at the Autonomous University of the State of Morelos (2025–2029), funded by SECIHTI. The main objective is to develop anti-oppressive and anti-racist strategies aimed at Mexican children and young people, designed to counter racist, sexist, and homophobic attitudes, thereby helping to reduce school violence and bullying through the development and implementation of specialized interventions and communication materials.

The campaign is structured in three phases and is aimed at students, teaching staff, and school leaders in public primary and secondary schools in Mexico. The first phase, which has now been completed, involved delivering workshops on emotionality and oppression, creating family trees, and implementing an initiative called ‘Sowing Dreams for the Future’. The second phase, currently underway, explores in greater depth, with the educational community, the mechanisms through which oppression operates in relation to gender, racism, and sexual diversity, as well as how these are linked to the causes of school bullying and the influence of the media. This phase will result in the creation of the ‘Agreements for a School Cultivating Friendship and Equality’. The third phase involves the dissemination of these ‘Agreements’ and graphic materials containing messages derived from the research findings and in-depth interviews conducted with students, teaching staff, and school leaders within the school premises and surrounding areas.

The design of this campaign and its three phases reflects the need to view it not merely as a strategy for producing and disseminating audiovisual messages but as a means of fostering a culture of peace among the target population. The aim is for the campaign to communicate its central message and, at the same time, to activate temporary learning communities with participating children and young people through educational activities, listening circles, and activities with Mother Earth, all explicitly framed as anti-oppressive strategies.

The hypothesis underlying this approach is that it is more effective to promote anti-oppressive and anti-racist messages among children and young people who are still developing their frameworks for understanding the world than among the adult population. In this regard, during 2024 and 2025, work was carried out with 135 students: 57 children (aged 8–9) and 78 young people (aged 17–19) in two state primary schools (General Emiliano Zapata, Tepoztlan, Morelos, and Luis Donaldo Colosio, Nextipac, Jalisco), two state secondary schools (Preparatoria Quetzalcoatl in Tepoztlan, Morelos, and Preparatoria 7 in Zapopan, Jalisco), and a community organisation (La Jugarreta A.C., Tepoztlan).

During the first phase of the campaign, 15 workshops were held on emotions, oppression, and intersectionality (racism, gender, and sexual diversity) and nine workshops on Amawtic family trees and visions of a future free from oppression, which resulted in 103 drawings of trees with dreams. These materials were displayed in the schools and, subsequently, following a conference on emotions and oppression related to gender, racism, and sexual diversity with the entire educational community (500 students, 26 teachers, and three senior staff members), the dreams were planted beneath fruit trees planted on the school grounds as part of the ‘Sowing Dreams for the Future’ initiative.

One of the central insights of this campaign is that, contrary to widespread perception, schools frequently operate as spaces that perpetuate oppression and violence (Velasco, 2016). Another key message is the urgency of disrupting the processes of oppression experienced daily by Latin American youth as a necessary condition for aspiring to collective healing. This campaign thus joins efforts to prevent school violence and bullying, which, as documented, have reached alarming levels in Latin America and Mexico, and to promote a culture of peace.

Table 1 summarizes the main causes of school bullying in Latin America (Garaigordobil Landazabal et al., 2018) and their correlation with the dominant discourses promoted by various media—television, series, films, video games, literature, advertising, social media, influencers, and music—amongst children and young people (Quezada, 2014; Orozco Gómez, 2014; Duarte-Duarte, 2013).

The testimonies gathered during workshops and interviews with participating students, particularly those aged 17 to 19, corroborate the findings in **Table 1**, especially regarding bullying based on physical appearance, gender-based violence, and social interactions. In the listening circles held during the workshops on emotions and forms of oppression linked to gender, racism, and sexual diversity, students identified issues such as gender inequality in the distribution of domestic and care work; differing restrictions on physical activity between girls and boys (both aspects highlighted exclusively by female students); gender-based violence and sexual harassment; aesthetic pressure on women; homophobic attitudes in the school environment; and racist attitudes. It should be noted that issues related to sexual diversity were scarcely mentioned; a primary school teacher in Tepoztlan stated that, whilst he considered it important to address the topic, it was difficult to do so because some families considered it harmful to talk about it, a situation that did not arise with other gender-related issues. Participants did not mention teasing based on social class, poverty, migration, or xenophobia.

At the primary school in Nextipac, Jalisco, 30% of children in the Year 4 class did not know who their father was; however, 20% did know their paternal grandmother, which highlights the central role of women in care work. Regarding gender-based violence, a 19-year-old sixth-form student in Tepoztlan noted in a group interview: ‘I found myself thinking that I do pay attention to what clothes I choose to wear when travelling on public transport, and that this is because I am a woman’. In relation to the phrase ‘men don’t cry’, primary school children—unlike young men in sixth form—openly expressed their desire to be able to cry.

As for racism, a 17-year-old student said, ‘What struck me most about this workshop was the topic of racism, as talking about it allowed me to ask my family about their origins and where they came from, and about what we sow’. This approach enabled him to recognize that his relatives spoke an Indigenous language, fostering a reconnection with his Indigenous heritage. Following the family tree exercise, 30% of students asked their families about their ancestors, places of origin, and native languages, expressing an interest in exploring their roots further. Three girls who spoke Nahuatl shared words in their language with the group, receiving positive feedback; one student commented that ‘she felt happy because she had been able to say words in Nahuatl at her school’.

Table 1: Relationship between causes of school bullying and dominant discourses in the media regarding children and young people in Latin America, 2000–2025.

Causes of school bullying	Dominant discourse in the media
Bullying based on physical appearance, weight, physical features, and racism. Teasing related to disability and special educational needs.	Dominant aesthetic ideals: thinness, fair skin, and ‘beauty’. (Being thin equated with attractiveness, success, and social acceptance.)
Teasing due to social class, poverty, and material conditions. Bullying linked to migration and/or xenophobia. Bullying linked to sexual orientation and gender identity.	Self-construction through digital visibility. (Self-presentation, selfies, filters, editing, comparison on social media, ‘like’ culture, and appearance-based forms of online approval.)
Harassment based on material conditions such as exclusion, poverty, social class, physical appearance, racism, migration status, sexual orientation, and gender identity.	Success and meritocracy associated with visible physical and social markers: attractiveness, fashion or dress, popularity. (Peer acceptance and external expectations tied to public image.)
Teasing and aggression linked to expectations of masculinity or femininity. Gender-based violence and the normalization of unequal relationships.	Gender stereotypes. (Girls as caregivers and submissive; boys as leaders, strong, and emotionally silent; physical and emotional violence normalized). Hegemonic masculinity.
Teasing based on social class, poverty, and material conditions. Harassment linked to racism, ethnicity, migration, and xenophobia.	Violence in media content, victimization, and threats. Depictions of violence as a legitimate form of relating to others or resolving conflict. (Children and youth portrayed predominantly as victims of violence.) (Representation of children and adolescents as voiceless and unable to influence their surroundings.)
Gender-based violence and the normalization of unequal relationships.	Sexualized content aimed at children.

Source: Compiled by the author.

For the family tree workshop, a passport-sized photograph was taken of each student to be incorporated into their work later. When the photographs were handed out, 12 students—mostly female sixth-formers—covered their images to prevent their classmates from seeing them, which is directly linked to the aesthetic pressure placed on women and the ideals of beauty promoted by dominant media narratives.

In the activity ‘Sowing Dreams for the Future’, where students were asked to draw a tree and write their future aspirations on it to share with the group, 17% of 57 primary school pupils said they wanted to join the military, and one boy expressed a desire to be a sniper—a fact that could serve as an indicator of the prevailing values among children in contemporary

Mexican society. For 30% of students, both primary and secondary school pupils, it proved difficult to share their dreams with their peers, a fact reflected in the low volume of their voices during their contributions. In a group interview, several primary school pupils said they had particularly enjoyed the exercise of drawing the tree of dreams, learning about their classmates' aspirations, and planting a fruit tree alongside their tree of dreams at school. A primary school pupil in Tepoztlán said, 'What I liked most was that I felt my dreams really would come true, because as the tree grows, so do my dreams'.

Another significant finding from the campaign relates to the importance of creating spaces for active listening among students. Eighty per cent of participants, from both primary and secondary schools, said they lacked spaces at school to address their emotions and emotional well-being. This highlights the lack of emotional education in schools as a strategy to prevent violence, which is defined as education aimed at understanding one's own and others' emotions in order to achieve empathic understanding and emotional regulation of states such as anger, fear, anxiety, sadness, and depression, amongst others (Sánchez Alba & Escobedo Orihuela, 2019). Reflecting this shortcoming, 35% of primary school children identified getting to know previously unknown aspects of their classmates as the most valuable part of the activities. Seventy-five per cent of secondary school students stated that they do not discuss their emotions with their family, doing so only with friends, whilst 10% of boys at Secondary School No. 7 in Zapopan, Jalisco, stated that they do not discuss their emotions with anyone. Finally, regarding sexuality, 85% of young people stated that they did not discuss this topic with their family, limiting these conversations mainly to their circle of friends.

The campaign proposes the following counter-narratives for children and young people in Mexico:

1. Reframing personal and ancestral history through family trees and the recovery of traditional knowledge as an anti-oppressive strategy that enables them to move from stories of violence to narratives of hope and the future, an approach that engages with narrative therapy (Denborough, 2008), allowing them to retell their own lives from a position of agency and strength.
2. Positioning them as active builders of peace rather than passive recipients of violence.
3. Highlighting and encouraging their capacity to re-educate themselves in the face of internalized oppression and to drive social change and processes of collective healing.
4. Promoting the institutionalization of active listening and emotional education as preventive practices against school violence; and
5. Linking the care of trees and the Earth in general with a critique of oppressive logics, broadening the notion of peace towards a relational and ecological dimension.

Thus, the 'Ancestral Futures' campaign seeks to produce situated knowledge that brings together research, pedagogy, and social communication aimed at disrupting dominant narratives that reproduce violence and at co-constructing, with children and young people, stories of agency, memory, empathy, and the future, as seen in some of the campaign materials (see **Figure 1**).

'The Structure Within' campaign

This bilingual (English-Spanish) campaign is being promoted on social media in Mexico, Latin America, and the UK during 2024–2025. It was conceived by Dr Mónica Moreno Figueroa with funding from the University of Cambridge. My involvement included the creative strategy for the campaign, co-directing and co-writing the film *The Structure Within*, and co-hosting and producing the podcast of the same name.



Figure 1: Communication materials from the 'Ancestral Futures' Campaign.

Source: Compiled by the author.

(top left) Part of the educational materials addressing oppression and emotions, illustrating factors that evoke sadness and happiness in children within the school environment.

(top right) Depicts an avocado tree, beneath which the children's 'Trees of Dreams' were installed as part of a participatory project.

(bottom) An exhibition held at the school, featuring the display of the 'Trees of Dreams.'

The campaign's key insight is that we begin to internalise and reproduce oppression, such as racism, sexism, and homophobia, in childhood. These forms of oppression, as emphasized in the campaign, are exercised both consciously and unconsciously and are reproduced through laws, customs, institutional practices, and the media, generating inequalities in access to and recognition of rights and resources.

The podcast questions what oppressive structures we carry within us and invites us to recall at what point in childhood we began to internalize them and how these wounds impact adult life. Thus, it defines internalized oppression as the sociological and psychological phenomenon whereby people from an oppressed group adopt, accept, and/or incorporate negative beliefs, stereotypes, prejudices, or values of the dominant group towards their own group, with negative consequences for their self-esteem, identity, and self-image (Young, 1990). Its effects are (i) immobilization, an inability to act due to a perceived lack of alternatives, leading to feelings of powerlessness, low self-esteem, self-censorship, and resignation; (ii) disarticulation, fragmentation of identity, and a lack of collective organization; and (iii) emotional isolation, a disconnection from others who share the same oppression (Moreno Figueroa and

López Chávez, 2023). The campaign's podcast explores these effects and, over the course of nine episodes, addresses issues such as internalized oppression and racism; anti-Indigenous racism; defensiveness; mestizaje and masculinity; ableism; victimization; collective racial healing; anti-racist collaborations; and anti-racist communication. In particular, the episode on ableism analyses in detail the mechanisms that condition, limit, and disempower from childhood onwards.

Both the podcast and the film highlight that oppression is not maintained solely through force and overt repression but involves the dominant group's ability to secure the consent of the oppressed group (Pyke, 2010). Therefore, becoming aware of internalized oppressions is the first step towards disrupting behaviours and generating new narratives and individual and collective possibilities and is a central insight of the campaign. Another key message is that human beings are simultaneously oppressed and oppressors depending on the circumstances. This complicates the discussion of victims and perpetrators.

The film, whose protagonist is a girl of African descent aged around seven, shows that internalized oppressive structures stem from painful childhood experiences that make it difficult for adults to form alliances to tackle the challenges of social justice. In its communication materials, the campaign explicitly reflects on the ways in which the pain associated with experienced oppression, particularly internalized racism, is processed and on the recognition of the role as oppressors that we have all played in certain contexts (Moreno Figueroa & López Chávez, 2023).

In terms of new narratives, this campaign proposes:

1. Breaking down the simplistic dichotomy between 'oppressed' and 'oppressors' found in mainstream discourse, highlighting the relational and structural complexity of the phenomenon and challenging binary frameworks that hinder processes of collective transformation.
2. The recognition of childhood as an epistemic territory: (i) as a stage of opportunity to deconstruct structural oppressions; (ii) as a space for critical reflection on internalized social 'programming'; and (iii) as a foundational moment for the generation of critical subjects.
3. The central importance of listening, emotional release, and the collective processing of grief as essential tools for fostering the development of sustainable collaborations and alliances, particularly in the field of anti-racist and social justice activism.

This campaign positions itself as a counter-narrative to discourses that render the structural dimension of childhood oppression invisible and to adult-centred approaches that exclude children and young people as subjects capable of critical agency. It also constitutes a communicational intervention that brings together academic research, audiovisual creation, and public education, proposing a reconfiguration of the debate on racism, ableism, and internalized oppression from an intergenerational perspective.

The communication outputs of 'The Structure Within' include a podcast, a film, a website, a community of practice, and a forthcoming book authored by Dr Mónica Moreno (see **Figure 2**).

'AfrocensoMX' campaign

This campaign was undertaken by the Collective to Eliminate Racism (COPERA) and the agency 11.11 Cambio Social for the W.K. Kellogg Foundation in 2020, with the aim of emphasizing the importance of responding affirmatively to the self-identification question for Black, Afro-Mexican, or Afro-descendant people included for the first time in the



Figure 2: Communication materials from 'The Structure Within' Campaign.

Source: Compiled by the author.

(top) Taken from the campaign's podcast, which features an episode addressing adult-centrism. (below) A still from the accompanying film, illustrating how various forms of oppression begin to be internalised from childhood.

2020 Mexican Census. As campaign coordinator, the author of this text worked creatively with Mtra. Judith Bautista, a Zapotec woman, and Dr. Monica Moreno, a woman of African descent. One of the campaign's objectives was to develop intersectional messages. Based on this aim, a graphic piece was produced featuring a young Black trans woman accompanied by the empowering message: 'If you ask me if I am Black, Afro-Mexican, Afro-descendant... But of course I am!' This artwork was disseminated through buses, metro platforms, mobile billboards, posters, infographics, and large outdoor formats, including a billboard in the Port of Veracruz (see **Figure 3** below). The intention behind this message was to promote new narratives that challenge both racist oppression and oppression relating to sexual diversity.

The photographs used in the graphic materials were taken by two Afro-Mexican photographers. Alongside specific creative guidelines, this choice aligned with one of the campaign's principal goals: incorporating members of the target population into the production process (Fernández Guerra, 2021).

Another graphic piece featured a child accompanied by his parents, paired with the empowering slogan 'But of course I am!' in response to the question of whether he was Black, Afro-Mexican, or of African descent. This message underscored the participation and decision-making power of younger generations. A music video¹ was also produced featuring an Afro-Mexican child expressing the same phrase with pride, highlighting children's agency in self-identification as Afro-descendant.

The campaign likewise sought to challenge the belief that Afro-Mexican men do not express tenderness, particularly towards other men and across generations. To this end, a graphic piece was created depicting a father and son embracing affectionately in an urban setting. This artwork was executed using painted street fences in Mexico City, Veracruz, and Guerrero, ensuring that the message reached key audiences through an accessible and widely visible medium. The strategy proved highly successful (see **Figure 3** below).

Thus, 'AfrocensoMX' proposes the following counter-narratives against dominant discourses on Afro-descendant children and youth in Latin America:

1. Moving from Afro-descendant invisibilization to the affirmation of identity from childhood. It should be noted that Afro-Mexican children and youth are scarcely represented in the media and in institutional campaigns. The campaign introduces a narrative of Black pride from an early age (see **Figure 3** below).



Figure 3: Communication materials from the 'AfrocensoMX' campaign.

Source: Compiled by the author.

- (top left) Billboard advertisement in the Port of Veracruz, Mexico, featuring a trans woman from an intersectional perspective.
- (top right) Still from the campaign video showing an Afro-Mexican boy reciting the campaign slogan at the end.
- (bottom left) Infographic related to the 2020 Census depicting a boy with his parents in an empowering tone.
- (bottom right) Billboard showing an Afro-Mexican father with his son in an affectionate pose.

2. Changing the perspective of children and young people from passive subjects to social agents, introducing the idea that Afro-descendant youth have agency in relevant social processes such as self-identification in the national census.
3. Disseminating new representations of Afro-descendant masculinities based on affection and intergenerational care, expanding the frameworks of representation of these masculinities.
4. Emphasizing sexual diversity through intersectional messages that integrate categories such as race and sexual diversity as intersectional identities and positioning these messages in geographies that require them.
5. Changing the focus from representation of communities to production with communities, by promoting communicative, participatory, and self-representation processes, as in the case of the production of images by Afro-Mexican photographers; it modifies power relations in the production of public images.

These narratives contribute to reconfiguring public imaginaries about Afro-descendant children and youth, challenging hegemonic racial discourses (see **Figure 3**).

'Racism in Mexico' campaign

This campaign was proposed in 2011 to the National Council for the Prevention of Discrimination (CONAPRED) by the communications agency 11.11 Cambio Social, founded by the author. It was the first nationwide campaign to focus explicitly on racism in Mexico. One of its most significant strategic decisions was to shift the prevailing discourse away from the broad notion of 'discrimination' and to position the concept of racism directly and explicitly within the national public sphere, highlighting its historical, structural, and cultural specificity.

The campaign is structured around four communication pieces developed under a comprehensive strategy: (i) to highlight the racist language present in Mexican society through graphic art displayed in the metro systems of Mexico City, Guadalajara, and Monterrey; (ii) to expose racist practices through the one-minute film 'Racism in Mexico' and radio spots broadcast nationwide; (iii) to highlight the persistence of racialized historical references through the urban intervention 'The Return of the Green Indians'; and (iv) to raise awareness of racism unconsciously learnt from childhood through the video 'Viral Racism in Mexico', based on the so-called Doll Experiment in Mexico.

This study revisits the Clark Doll Experiment, conducted by Kenneth and Mamie Clark in the United States in the 1940s, which aimed to demonstrate the psychosocial effects of racial segregation on children of African descent attending segregated schools. In that experiment, two dolls were presented that were identical in every respect except for their eyes and skin colour—one was black and the other white—and participants were asked which they preferred and why, which they considered 'good' or 'bad' and why, and with which they identified. The Mexican version incorporates open-ended 'why' questions designed to delve more deeply into the reasons behind their choices, enabling the collection of significant qualitative data on the processes of early internalization of racism.

The campaign sparked a wide-ranging public debate in Mexican society about the existence of racism in the country. The video of the Doll Experiment reached over four million views on YouTube, becoming a media benchmark for social discussion. The article 'The Doll Experiment, Racism and YouTube' (Fernández Guerra Carillo, 2021) analyzes and discusses more than seven thousand comments posted by users in relation to this piece. Among the most frequent arguments was the attribution of the children's responses to individual factors, such as family, lack of education, the influence of the media, or racism exclusive to the participating children, highlighting the tendency to individualize the phenomenon and to overlook its structural dimension. Of all the comments analyzed, only one referred to the relationship between racism and colonialism, and none to the Mexican state. This underscores the gap between academic discourse and the reflections of YouTube commentators on the subject. Regarding the role of school and racism, a contrast in narratives emerged between those who suggested that the children reacted this way because 'they hadn't been to school...' and those who commented on racist experiences encountered in the classroom.

It is worth noting that the video of the Doll Experiment, entitled 'Viral Racism in Mexico', was made possible thanks to the participation of parents who had previously attended a workshop on racism and gave their consent for their children to be filmed after hearing their responses during the experiment carried out in a public space. Significantly, many mothers reacted to the children's responses by saying, 'I didn't bring them up like that...', an expression that reveals the normalization of structural racism and the difficulty in recognizing its social transmission beyond the family sphere. Furthermore, it was documented that the responses of other children who took part in the experiment in state and private schools matched those recorded in the video by 90%, reinforcing the hypothesis of the internalization of racism from an early age.

This piece constitutes empirical evidence of the effects of structural and internalized racism in childhood and continues to be used as teaching material to open up debate on racism in various educational and community settings, as well as on social media.

In 2025 and 2026, more than a decade after its release, the video was screened in four state schools—primary and secondary—and at a community organization in the municipalities of Tepoztlán, Morelos, and Zapopan, Jalisco (see **Figure 4** below). Among 57 children aged between 8 and 9, a reaction of astonishment was observed, accompanied by conceptual difficulties in defining what racism is and how it impacts their daily lives. They were unable

to delve into the reasons why the children in the video chose the white doll as ‘good’, and when asked why they thought they had made that choice, in several cases they replied, ‘I don’t know’. Among 43 young people aged between 17 and 19, 50% stated that the situation constituted discrimination; however, when asked about the origins and effects of racism, conceptual confusion was evident, with a tendency to equate racism with discrimination in general terms. When asked about the existence of racism in their school, 75% answered in the affirmative, indicating that it manifests itself through jokes, dark humour, or normalized practices among classmates. This reveals a shift from 2011, when the existence of racism was denied, attributing it to phenomena occurring in other countries. The publication of the Doll Experiment on social media in 2011 led to its replication in various countries across Latin America.² Even in 2026, this video continues to circulate on other social media platforms³ and generate new comments, which will be the subject of future research.

Analytically, both the survey conducted in Mexico City in 2011 for the campaign and the screening of the video in school settings in 2025 and 2026 demonstrate that the concept of racism and its structural implications remain poorly understood across broad sections of society. This conceptual confusion allows racism to continue operating as a normalized and partially invisible structure. In this sense, this campaign not only highlights this problem but also constitutes an educational intervention aimed at fostering intergenerational critical awareness.

Among the new narratives produced by this campaign in response to hegemonic media discourses that minimize or deny structural racism, the following stand out:

1. Positioning the concept of racism as a structural problem, explicitly distinguishing it from the general notion of ‘discrimination’, and highlighting the historical, colonial, and social roots that continue to influence the present day.
2. Highlighting that racism is internalized from childhood, recognizing this stage as a key period for its internalization and also for its interruption, unlearning, and deprogramming.
3. Recognizing children and young people as subjects of analysis and as agents of change, rather than as passive recipients of anti-discrimination and anti-racist policies.
4. Shifting the focus from ‘it’s just jokes or humour’ to ‘it is true that everyday language reproduces racism’, interrupting and highlighting the ways in which racism manifests itself in various spaces.
5. Calling for the construction of a society free from racism through the transformation of social imaginaries, appealing to collective responsibility rather than solely individual responsibility.

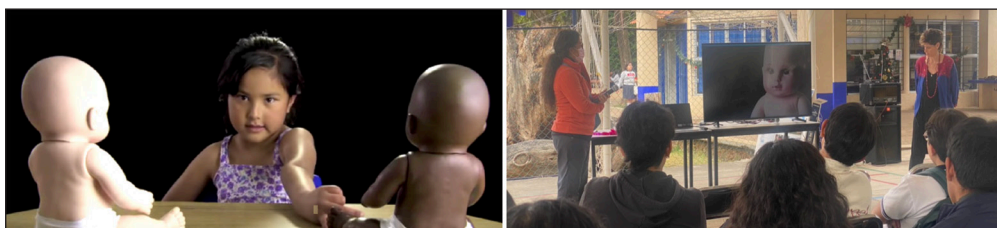


Figure 4: Materials from the ‘Racism in Mexico’ campaign.

Source: Compiled by the author.

(left) Still from the viral video ‘The Doll Experiment’, 2011; (right) Screening of the video and discussions with children and young people in state schools in Tepoztlan, Morelos, 2025.

When comparing these narratives with those of the three previous campaigns (see **Table 2** below), common elements can be observed, such as the shift from individualized explanations of oppression to a structural and intersectional understanding of the phenomenon, analyzed within historical contexts that shape subjectivities and social ties. The difficulty in expressing emotions, aesthetic pressure, and the silence surrounding sexuality, among other factors, demonstrates how oppressions also operate on an affective level. Therefore, disrupting them involves simultaneously recognizing their structural and emotional dimensions (COPERA, 2024).

In addition, drawing on the author's professional experience, an additional dimension is proposed: the transcendent dimension, defined as the ability to recognize and connect with something greater than the individual, such as ancestors, the relationship with the Earth, and ancestral wisdom. This dimension broadens the ethical and symbolic horizon of anti-oppressive interventions and fosters processes of collective healing that articulate identity, territory, and community.

Other narratives shared across the campaigns include the positioning of children and young people as active subjects and agents of change, challenging adult-centrism (James & Prout, 1997), and breaking down the simplistic dichotomy between oppressed and oppressor, thereby rendering the analysis more complex. In this regard, Moya Carrera (2023) highlights the role of emotional education and the use of tools such as drawing and storytelling, which enable children to identify their emotions and foster a dynamic form of teaching that is not exclusively victim-centred but also considers the perpetrators. This promotes the development of empathy and emotional self-regulation skills that foster a culture of peace.

Also noteworthy are narratives that foster a sense of pride in one's identity, new forms of masculinity, and a reconnection with ancestral memory among these communities. The reinterpretation of personal history through family trees, as in 'Futuros Ancestrales', demonstrates that anti-oppressive campaigns can integrate symbolic, emotional, and community-based dimensions into their intervention strategies, thereby promoting participation, shared responsibility, and collective memory.

Conclusions

The four campaigns analyzed propose various intervention models to address the issues of violence and oppression affecting children and young people. 'Racism in Mexico' prioritizes strategies for mass visibility through traditional media and social media (including underground and public interventions and YouTube); 'AfrocensoMX' aims for a strategic and intersectional representation of messages; 'The Structure Within' incorporates reflective formats (podcasts, films, communities of practice, and a book); and 'Ancestral Futures' introduces a participatory educational dimension based on workshops and the co-creation of materials, as well as a transcendent dimension that reconnects with ancestors and Mother Earth. However, it is observed that, to generate a comprehensive model of anti-oppressive communication among young people, three levels must be articulated: awareness of the structural nature of the phenomena; a commitment to the capacity for personal and subjective transformation—processing emotions and reframing the information learned; and collective and individual actions evidenced by the capacity for agency of these populations. The campaigns analyzed demonstrate that the effectiveness of their messages increases when these three levels are integrated.

In addition, the following recommendations are proposed as part of the construction of an integral model of anti-oppressive campaigns directed at children and young people:

Table 2: Comparison of new narratives proposed by the four campaigns analyzed.

Proposed new narratives	Campaigns
To highlight that racism and oppression are internalized from childhood, recognizing this stage as a key period for their internalization.	Ancestral Futures The Structure Within AfrocensoMX Racism in Mexico
Recognition of childhood and youth as an epistemic territory, and their capacity to become critical thinkers and agents of change.	Ancestral Futures The Structure Within AfrocensoMX Racism in Mexico
Position the concept of racism as a structural, rather than an individual, problem, highlighting the historical, colonial, and social roots that continue to influence the present day.	Ancestral Futures The Structure Within AfrocensoMX Racism in Mexico
Emphasize the concept of intersectionality and oppression in anti-oppressive messages.	Ancestral Futures The Structure Within AfrocensoMX
Highlight the ways in which oppression is reproduced through 'jokes or humour'.	Ancestral Futures The Structure Within Racism in Mexico
Shift the focus from representing communities to producing alongside communities, fostering participatory communication processes and self-representation.	Ancestral Futures AfrocensoMX
Promote new representations of masculinities based on affection and intergenerational care, broadening the frameworks for representing these masculinities.	Ancestral Futures AfrocensoMX
Break down the simplistic dichotomy between “the oppressed” and “the oppressors” promoted by mainstream discourse, highlighting the complexity.	Ancestral Futures The Structure Within
Understand the importance of emotional labour, active listening, emotional release, and the collective processing of grief as indispensable tools for fostering processes of building sustainable collaborations and alliances, and as preventive practices against school violence.	Ancestral Futures The Structure Within
Reframing personal and ancestral history through family trees, places of origin, and the recovery of knowledge as anti-oppressive strategies.	Ancestral Futures
Linking the care of trees and the Earth with a critique of oppressive logics, broadening the notion of peace towards a relational and ecological dimension.	Ancestral Futures

Source: Compiled by the author.

1. Generate diversified and culturally situated strategies to interrupt everyday forms of violence, including bullying, understood not as an isolated phenomenon but as a micro-social expression of broader structures of domination. One observation in the 'Ancestral Futures' campaign is the importance of socializing strategies for critical media literacy with these populations, enabling them to deconstruct and challenge dominant representations. Buckingham (2008) emphasizes that it is essential to i) identify how the media construct narratives about them as victims, threats, social problems, or consumers; ii) analyze the interests behind these narratives (political, commercial, etc.); and iii) produce alternative narratives that reflect the diversity of children's and young people's experiences, as illustrated in this article.
2. Establish creative guidelines for developing messages aimed at this demographic, shifting the perception of children and young people from immature individuals whose sphere of influence lies in the future and whose capacity for impact is confined to the private sphere to recognizing them as individuals with a maturity appropriate to their stage of life, with potential for action in the present, and whose sphere of action extends beyond the private to the public sphere (Liebel, 2023).
3. Promote messages and spaces for the expression of emotions, particularly within family and school settings. Special attention should be given to schools, which often perpetuate oppression (Velasco, 2016), and to fostering processes of collective healing within them (Hübl, 2025).
4. Reduce adult-centred narratives and recognize children and young people not only as recipients of information but also as epistemic subjects with a voice of their own, capable of developing messages and campaigns that concern them. Incorporating co-production processes alongside communities reconfigures power relations in symbolic production (Freire, 1970) and aligns with participatory approaches in communication for social change (Tufté, 2017). It is therefore important that, wherever possible, children and young people are involved and consulted in the creative processes; that participatory methodologies legitimizing their experiences and viewpoints are incorporated—ideally on a paid basis—and that these processes are not extractivist. This is particularly crucial for children and young people from Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities, who often appear in campaign narratives more as subjects of testimony than as producers of their own discourses (COPERA, 2024). In the Mexican context, the importance of considering children as active participants in community reconstruction is emphasized, including in settings marked by structural violence associated with drug trafficking.
5. Constantly re-examine perspectives and acknowledge internalized racism so as to avoid re-victimizing, folklorizing, or exoticizing these communities. This is particularly relevant for creative teams who may not have sufficient training or experience regarding structural racism and may therefore have blind spots. It is essential to pre-test messages with the target audience before launching a campaign (Fernández Guerra Carillo, 2020). Additionally, expert advisers should be consulted wherever possible.
6. Pay close attention to the tone of campaigns. Research indicates that children and young people are often portrayed as victims.⁴ Alternative approaches should be adopted that avoid exposing these groups to traumatic experiences. Empowering rather than patronizing tones, clear language, and transmedia narratives that foster emotional connection are recommended. Non-stereotypical representations rooted in everyday life contribute to normalizing diversity and dismantling symbolic violence.

7. Incorporate intersectional approaches (Crenshaw, 1989) to stimulate diverse discussions within a single social campaign, as exemplified by the 'AfrocensoMX' campaign.
8. Produce campaigns in Indigenous languages, with Spanish subtitles and sign language accessibility, to broaden communicative reach and recognize the country's epistemic diversity. These practices complement digital initiatives in which children and young people produce and disseminate content in their mother tongues, thereby strengthening language revitalization and identity affirmation. New narratives open up possibilities for listening, visibility, and recognition.
9. Pay close attention to participant identity, particularly for children, considering contexts in which it is appropriate for their faces to appear. Social media crisis management protocols should also be considered (UNICEF, 2016).
10. Ensure continuity and sequencing of campaigns. Unlike commercial advertising, which seeks to consolidate or create consumer habits, communication for social change aims to transform deeply ingrained practices and long-standing cultural structures, requiring sustained interventions. Sequencing campaigns on gender-based violence, physical appearance pressure, beauty ideals, belonging, and sexual rights is fundamental. Regarding racism, it is recommended to illustrate its impact on young people through data and figures generated over the last decade and to use simple explanatory frameworks with key concepts such as structural inequality.
11. Systematization and impact assessment of social campaigns remain unresolved challenges (McKee, 1992). The absence of clear indicators regarding message uptake, stereotype deconstruction, or transformation of social imaginaries limits measurement of socio-cultural effects. Involving young people not only in creative teams but also in evaluation and systematization strengthens ethical coherence throughout the campaign cycle and supports the generation of collective learning.

In conclusion, social campaigns can function as anti-oppressive and anti-racist mechanisms that help dismantle symbolic and structural violence, provided they incorporate co-participation, narrative justice, intersectionality, and critical reflexivity. This requires recognizing children and young people not as problems to be managed but as key actors in producing counter-narratives and actively constructing cultures of peace.

Notes

- ¹ The 'AfrocensoMX' campaign video (retrieved 14/06/2025) is available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Ap7h2sz10c&list=RD3Ap7h2sz10c&start_radio=1.
- ² Consult the following links regarding replications of the Doll Experiment in Latin America, based on the version conducted in Mexico:
 - 2012, Chile, 'Reportaje sobre la discriminación por el programa Informe especial de la TV estatal'. Disponible en internet en Chile <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hDCCaKPFZk&list=PLJX3lxxqA07N7N0RcYV0CgBlay86sEt4K&index=2> [con acceso el 26/4/2016].
 - 2013, Guatemala, 'Racismo Infantil'. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QewxP7ZvYpY> [con acceso el 26/4/2016].
 - 2013, República Dominicana, Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yWS4Z6p5fpU> [con acceso el 26/4/2016].
 - 2015, Perú; Lima. 'Experimento social sobre racismo en Lima'. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=doOoE1y8U5U> [con acceso el 26/4/2016].
- ³ As an example, see the video uploaded on Instagram by tono121oficial on the Doll Experiment, accessed on 27 January 2026, at: <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DT4CStLEdOL/?igsh=OTF1ZHlqbWZmb2ds>.

- ⁴ The UNICEF (2019) research article 'Children and Adolescents in the Media' indicates that news coverage related to childhood and adolescence is unevenly distributed according to socio-economic status, categorised as low, middle and high. It further argues that, within this framework, current affairs topics are disproportionately associated with lower socio-economic groups: 37.1% of coverage corresponds to this group, with a predominant focus on violent events. This representation is further subdivided, with 22.9% depicting children and adolescents as perpetrators of violence, 58.6% portraying them as victims of violent events, and 8.6% presenting them as heroes.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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