

TV categories shape how black youths view black women

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Black teens who watch more black-oriented television programs have stronger beliefs in the "strong black woman"—the idea that black women should be emotionally strong, independent and self-sacrificing, according to a new University of Michigan study.

Watching more mainstream television shows and more TV, in general, is not related to these teens' beliefs of black [women](#) as strong.

Studies have shown that the media influences how teens view [gender roles](#). These factors may be especially pronounced for black youth who consume media at higher rates than their white counterparts.

In the current study, researchers examined how black teens' TV viewing predicted their endorsement of gender roles for women in mainstream shows and black-oriented programs. About 120 black teens completed a survey that assessed their overall views of women/girls, as well as a separate scale assessing beliefs about strong black women.

Participants reported the number of hours they watched 17 predominantly white programs, including "Family Guy" and "Gossip Girl," and 12 black shows that included "Fresh Prince of Bel Air" and "106 and Park."

The study showed that the number of daily hours spent watching TV is not related to how black teens viewed women, including strong black women.

"Our findings were not consistent with (conventional wisdom) ... that the more people are exposed to television, the more likely they are to cultivate or adopt the predominant themes," said Nkemka Anyiwo, the study's lead author.

When the participants viewed mainstream programs, they had lower endorsements of mainstream gender roles, specifically for boys. The selection of mainstream shows in the survey, which included girls who challenged [gender](#) roles ("Hannah Montana," for example) may have contributed to boys thinking differently about the opposite sex.

Watching black-oriented shows was related to stronger endorsements of strong black women, the study indicated.

"Given the scarcity of black women on mainstream TV, it is likely that black youth draw from images in black popular culture to inform their beliefs about black women," said Anyiwo, a U-M doctoral candidate in social work and developmental psychology.

But some progress has been made in recent years with strong black women on several mainstream programs. Most notably, "Scandal" and "How to Get Away with Murder" feature black women in lead or prominent roles.

"In some of these shows, black women are leaders and exhibit many attributes that are consistent with the strong black woman ideal," Anyiwo said, noting that [teen](#) viewership could develop positive endorsements of strong [black women](#).

More information: Nkemka Anyiwo et al. Black Adolescents' Television Usage and Endorsement of Mainstream Gender Roles and the Strong Black Woman Schema, *Journal of Black Psychology* (2018).
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