

# 'Tween' television programming promotes some stereotypical conceptions of gender roles

April 22 2014

---



Gerding found that tween viewers could potentially develop narrow conceptions about their range of possibilities in the world. Credit: MU News Bureau

The term "tween" denotes a child who is between the ages of 8 and 12 and is used to describe a preadolescent who is "in between" being a child and a teen. This demographic watches more television than any other age group and is considered to be a very lucrative market. Tween television

programming consists of two genres: "teen scene" (geared toward girls) and "action-adventure" (geared toward boys). Researchers at the University of Missouri found that these programs could lead tweens to limit their views of their potential roles in society just as they begin to shape their future.

"Tween viewers are undergoing an important developmental stage and actively seek cues about gender," said Ashton Lee Gerding, a doctoral student in the Department of Communication at MU. "Television programming can play an important role in that development, so we examined tween [television](#) programming. Overall, girls were portrayed as more attractive, more concerned about their appearance, and received more comments about their appearance than male characters. However, female and male characters were equally likely to be handy with technology and exhibit bravery. This sends the message that girls and boys can participate in and do the same things, but that girls should be attractive and work to maintain this attractiveness."

The study analyzed 49 episodes of 40 distinct American tween [television programs](#) that aired in 2011 on Disney Channel, Disney XD, Nickleodeon and the Turner Cartoon Network. Gerding and Nancy Signorielli, professor of communication at the University of Delaware, examined more than 200 characters in terms of their attractiveness, gender-related behavior and personality characteristics such as bravery or ability to handle technology.

Study results showed that gender distribution in the teen scene genre mirrors the overall male-female distribution in the U.S. population; however, males outnumbered females by more than 3 to 1 in the action-adventure genre.

"Tween television programs may help to shape the way kids think about the roles that are available for them," Gerding said. "Therefore, we

advise parents to watch these programs with their kids and talk with their tweens about their roles in society. We also advocate for media literacy programs that could mitigate some of the potential negative effects of these programs."

The study, "Gender roles in tween television programming: a content analysis of two genres," was co-written with Signorielli and was published in the journal *Sex Roles*.

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia

Citation: 'Tween' television programming promotes some stereotypical conceptions of gender roles (2014, April 22) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2014-04-tween-television-stereotypical-conceptions-gender.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--