



SIUE's Speno Awarded Vaughnie Lindsay New Investigator Award For Study On Tween TV Programming

by Megan Wieser
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Researchers, parents and practitioners may soon be privy to interesting and revealing data related to tween television programming, specifically its portrayals of gender and race.

Southern Illinois University Edwardsville's Ashton Speno, PhD, assistant professor in the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) Department of Mass Communications, has earned the SIUE Graduate School's 2021-22 Vaughnie Lindsay New Investigator Award in support of her research on this understudied topic.

The award recognizes faculty members whose research has the promise of making significant contributions to their fields of study, their respective school/department, and to SIUE in general. Speno will receive a combined \$12,500 from the SIUE Graduate School and the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) to be used in a one-year period for her project entitled, "An Examination of the Intersection of Gender and Race in Tween Television Programming."

"I am honored and delighted to receive the Vaughnie Lindsay New Investigator Award," Speno said. "This award will provide me with the funding and time needed to do this research, while also generating momentum for future external grants. I am excited to work with undergraduate and graduate research assistants on this project."

According to Speno, tweens experience important physical, social and cognitive development during middle childhood, and television is one important source of information to consider. Research shows tweens spend nearly five hours a day with screen media.

"Given the important developmental stage that tweens occupy, and the potential for television viewing to shape gender and racial identities and perceptions of these social categories in the culture, it is critical to examine the intersections of gender and race in current tween television programming," Speno noted.

Speno will conduct a content analysis of gender and race portrayals in popular tween television programs airing on broadcast, cable and streaming services such as Netflix, Prime Video, Hulu and Disney+.

"Dr. Speno's project is timely and of great significance in the media industry," said Musonda Kapatamoyo, PhD, professor and chair of the Department of Mass Communications. "Her target age group (8-12 years) are emerging media consumers whose development ought to be studied. Young people have access to a lot more content via their personal devices than previously available."

The novel project will build on Speno's previous work. In a 2011 study on gender-role content, Speno and her co-author found that female characters were underrepresented, shown as more concerned about their appearance, were more attractive and received more comments about their looks than male characters.

Speno's internally funded project will act as a springboard for future externally-funded research that explores what tweens are actually learning about gender and race from tween television programming.

"Researchers, parents and practitioners will directly benefit from this examination as it will elucidate the programming that tweens are spending so much time with," Speno explained. "The results of this project will provide valuable data for future work exploring what children glean from these programs through a survey."

Stephen Hansen, PhD, faculty emeritus, established the Lindsay Research Professorship Endowment that funds the award in honor of Lindsay, who served as graduate dean from 1973-1986. Lindsay was responsible for creating much of the infrastructure that supports faculty research and scholarly activity at SIUE. Faculty and emeriti faculty at the time of the award's conception donated the funds to endow the award.

Those wishing to help support new investigators through the award may donate to the Graduate School section of the endowment at siue.edu/give/.

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