

AARP Movies for Grownups Spotlight

Bridging the Gap: The Path to More Authentic Portrayals of Black Adults in Movies and TV

An AARP survey of 1,801 Black adults age 18 and older explored how they perceive their portrayal in movies and TV, identifying where representation resonates and where opportunities for improvement remain.

KEY FINDINGS

Black audiences represent one of the entertainment industry's most influential consumer segments.

Black adults attend movies and consume television and streaming content at higher rates than the general U.S. population.^{1,2} They also represent approximately \$2 trillion in buying power.³ As a result, authentic representation in media is increasingly recognized as both a cultural responsibility and a business opportunity.

Black adults watch 46+ hours of television per week.¹

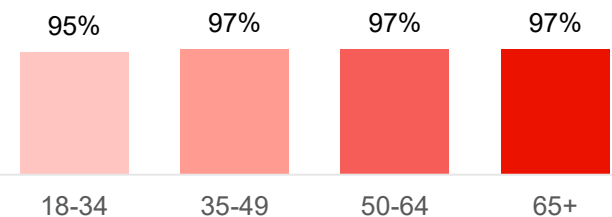
Broader age representation can expand audience appeal.

Across the ages, the vast majority believe it is important to show actors of different generations together on screen. Importantly, the desire for broader age representation does not rest with older audiences alone. Nearly nine in ten adults ages 18–34 (87%) also say it is important to see actors

age 50 and older represented in today's television shows and movies. All of this suggests that authentic, multigenerational storytelling has broad appeal.

Importance of Intergenerational Representation

Percent indicating somewhat or very important by age



There is also evidence that Black adults have a positive disposition toward how their age is portrayed in movies and TV. More than half say they often see characters their age, with 53% saying they are inspired by how Black characters their age are represented.

Friendship and romance storylines are an untapped opportunity.

However, nearly half of Black adults indicate they feel underrepresented in certain storylines. The most common ones involve family dynamics (characterized by blended families, single parenting, raising grandchildren, etc.), friendship and social connection, and romantic relationships.

¹ <https://www.nielsen.com/news-center/2025/engaging-black-audiences/>

² <https://www.nielsen.com/insights/2025/black-audiences-blockbuster-hit-movies-cinema-streaming>

³ <https://www.nielsen.com/insights/2025/connecting-black-america>

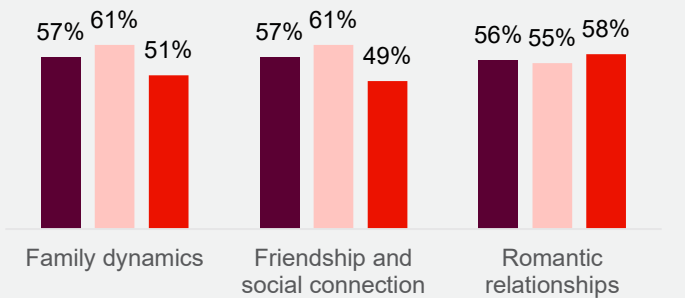
Being left out of stories involving family dynamics is especially felt by those ages 18-34 (65%), whereas friendship and romance are more noticeable exclusions for women than men; 60% each vs. 53% and 51%, respectively.

The major themes in movies and TV shows featuring Black characters that adults would like to see more of are: love and romance, favored more so among women than men (68% vs 52%), and a hero's journey of overcoming adversity – creating equal interest across men and women (~60%) and of specific interest to those 65-plus (69%). Listening to this audience and expanding storylines may unlock richer, more relatable narratives.

Storyline Gaps

Among total Black adults by age

■ Total ■ 18-49 ■ 50+



Authenticity is key to developing trust and creating connections on screen.

While characters of all ages and genders have a place on TV and in movies, the influence of Black women age 50-plus is undeniable. Regardless of age or gender, the vast majority of Black adults (95%) feel it is important to have Black women age 50 and older represented. However, only a quarter of this viewing audience believe that today's portrayal of Black women is very accurate. Authentic portrayals not only allow older women to

feel seen for who they really are, but it deepens trust among the broader audience when they can relate to the characters they see on screen.

How current portrayals miss the mark:

“A lot of African American women are portrayed as aggressive... [They] need to be seen as nurturers, as hard working, as loyal, and not just survivors.”

Older Black women are influencing how aging is perceived.

The consensus is that what is seen in movies and TV does influence how society views getting older, with 87% agreeing. Older Black women, in particular, are seen as having significant influence on how aging is portrayed in media. While this may seem like responsibility, it also represents an important opportunity. Currently, more than half of Black adults (54%) say seeing older Black women in movies or TV has made them feel more positive about getting older. This places older Black female characters in the unique position to amplify the cultural leadership role audiences already recognize, while helping to redefine perceptions of aging.

46% believe Black women age 50 and older have a great deal of influence in shaping how aging is portrayed in movies and TV.

Methodology

Interviews were conducted June 1-15, 2026 among 1,801 Black adults age 18-plus through RepData's online panel. Nested quota sampling was employed to ensure the sample resembled the U.S. population of Black adults age 18 and older.



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