

How watching TV and their relationship to Mom affects teenagers' sexual attitudes

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Can teenagers' relationship with their mother protect them from the negative effects that television has on their sexual attitudes? It depends on their gender, according to a new study by Laura Vandebosch and Steven Eggermont, from Katholieke Universiteit Leuven in Belgium. For girls, a good relationship with mom is protective. For boys, however, a strong attachment to mom increases the likelihood that they will have stereotypical sexual attitudes, as portrayed on television. The work is published online in Springer's journal *Sex Roles*.

Research to date has shown that adolescents' mothers have been found to socialize their children towards sexual responsibility and mainstream [sexual attitudes](#). Vandebosch and Eggermont's study looks at whether maternal attachment can buffer television viewing's negative effect on adolescents' sexual attitudes, and more specifically whether maternal attachment has the same effect for both [boys](#) and girls.

The researchers surveyed 1,026 16-year-olds from nine schools in Belgium. They examined their recreational attitudes towards sex, for example commitment to partner or views on [casual sex](#); their attitudes towards traditional gender role norms; the amount of television they viewed over a week; and their level of attachment to their mother.

On average, teenagers watched over 23 hours of television a week, or more than three hours a day. Overall, boys and girls said they were rather satisfied with the relationship with their mother. As predicted, the higher the level of television viewing, the more boys in particular endorsed a

recreational sexual attitude and agreed with [stereotypes](#) concerning males' sexual needs and dominance.

Overall, maternal attachment had a positive influence on adolescents' sexual attitudes. The more attached an adolescent was to his/her mother, the less he or she had a recreational or stereotypical sexual attitude.

When the influences of television viewing and maternal attachment were combined, maternal attachment had a different effect on the link between television viewing and sexual attitudes for boys and girls. On the one hand, maternal attachment acted as a buffer against the effects of television viewing among girls: girls who were more securely attached to their mothers appeared to be less susceptible to the negative influence of television viewing on recreational attitudes towards sex and on attitudes towards male sexual obsession. On the other hand, if boys had a strong attachment to their mothers, they were more susceptible to the negative influence television viewing had on these recreational attitudes towards sex and on attitudes towards male sexual obsession.

The authors conclude: "Our work provides initial insights into the interaction effect between television viewing, maternal attachment and gender and suggests that the influence of attachment to the mother on associations between [television viewing](#) and sexual attitudes appears to be risk-increasing for boys and risk-decreasing for girls."

More information: Vandebosch L & Eggermont S (2011). Maternal attachment, television viewing in adolescents' sexual socialization: differential associations across gender. *Sex Roles*. [DOI 10.1007/s11199-011-0075-5](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-011-0075-5)

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