

# TV accentuates traditional women's roles at expense of their needs

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Credit: George Hodan/public domain

College women who frequently watch television or who believe that the content is real, tend to endorse the gender roles that are portrayed often on TV, says a University of Michigan researcher.

Media portrayals teach [women](#) to be passive participants in their relationships and prioritize the desires of others—particularly

men—instead of prioritizing their own desires, says Rita Seabrook, a U-M doctoral student in psychology and women's studies. In addition, women learn that they are valued for their appearance and sex appeal,

Seabrook says that endorsement of these roles—which are called gendered sexual scripts—results in some women having less confidence about using condoms and more shameful feelings about their sexual experience.

Being confident and proud of one's sexual experiences "conflicts with gendered expectations that women should abstain from sex except in limited circumstances," she said.

The study sampled 415 [undergraduate women](#) who described themselves as sexually active heterosexuals. They indicated the number of hours of TV (live or online) and reality TV watched weekly, and disclosed if they believed the programming reflected daily life.

Questions also focused on relationships, attitudes towards women, sexual beliefs, gender roles and how participants rated their emotions.

Overall, the women in the study watched 11 hours of mainstream TV and four hours of reality TV. They reported low to moderate levels of being sexual assertive and feeling shame sexually.

Despite the negative association of adhering to gendered sexual scripts, why do women endorse them?

"Women who reject traditional gender norms face backlash for failing to adhere to the culture's expectations for them," Seabrook said. "Thus, adhering to gendered sexual scripts may protect women from perceived and actual judgment at the expense of their sexual satisfaction and sexual well-being."

Not all TV portrayals of women, Seabrook says, are negative or disempowering, but the broader media landscape—TV programs, commercials, music videos—does not promote positive images. She says that women should be encouraged to challenge this negative discourse, which in turn can improve their confidence about sex and women's roles.

The findings appear in the recent *Psychology of Women Quarterly*.

Provided by University of Michigan

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