

The Role of Media in Forming Young Adults' Views on Women and Their Romantic Relationship

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Abstract- This study explores the impact of media exposure on young adults' perceptions of gender roles, ambivalent sexism, romantic beliefs, and couple satisfaction. A cross-sectional survey of 102 participants (ages 18–35) found that media exposure strongly predicts traditional gender role beliefs (83.5% variance explained) and is significantly linked to ambivalent sexism, especially benevolent sexism. These results highlight the media's role in reinforcing gender stereotypes and underscore the need for media literacy to challenge harmful portrayals and support healthier, equitable relationships.

Index Terms: Ambivalent Sexism, Couple Satisfaction, Gender Stereotypes, Internalized Misogyny, Media Exposure, Romantic Relationships, Traditional Gender Roles, Young Adult

I. INTRODUCTION

Media plays a key role in shaping societal norms and gender attitudes, often reinforcing stereotypes of dominant men and submissive women. Repeated portrayals of misogynistic men normalize gender inequality and sexist beliefs. This study examines how such media influences young adults' attitudes toward women and relationship satisfaction.

Drawing on Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), Cultivation Theory (Gerbner & Gross, 1976), Gender Schema Theory (Bem, 1981), and Objectification Theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997), the study suggests that prolonged exposure to misogynistic media can internalize harmful gender attitudes and distort relationship dynamics. While prior research focuses on short-term effects, this study addresses the long-term impact of media on gender role beliefs, ambivalent sexism, and couple satisfaction. Findings aim to inform media literacy programs and policies promoting healthier, more equitable gender portrayals.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature consistently shows that media plays a crucial role in shaping gender norms, reinforcing traditional gender roles, and influencing young adults' romantic beliefs. Theoretical frameworks like Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) and Cultivation Theory (Gerbner & Gross, 1976) explain how continuous media exposure contributes to the normalization of patriarchal values, particularly in the Indian context where Bollywood and digital platforms frequently portray women in subordinate roles (Dasgupta & Hegde, 1988). Misogyny, deeply embedded in patriarchal systems, is perpetuated through systemic gender inequalities (Connell, 1987) and reinforced by media portrayals that simultaneously reward traditional female roles and punish those who resist them (Glick & Fiske, 1996).

Indian media often glorifies hyper-masculinity and toxic male behaviors (Katz, 1999; Chatterjee, 2017), which, as per Bandura's (2001) Social Cognitive Theory, can significantly influence young male viewers to internalize sexist attitudes (Martins & Harrison, 2012). Additionally, Objectification Theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) highlights how women are frequently depicted as objects, leading to self-objectification, low self-esteem, and unrealistic relationship expectations. These portrayals distort young adults' understanding of healthy relationships by emphasizing passion over trust and reinforcing gendered emotional labor, especially for women (Gupta & Verma, 2020).

The evidence also underscores the complex ways misogyny, through hostile and benevolent sexism, shapes relationship satisfaction. Hostile sexism is linked to controlling behaviors and lower relationship quality (Hammond & Overall, 2013), while benevolent sexism constrains women's autonomy even as it provides men with a sense of relationship satisfaction (Sibley & Tan, 2011). Together, these findings demonstrate that media not only reflects but actively sustains gender hierarchies and problematic relationship dynamics, pointing to the urgent need for more

critical media engagement and equitable representations.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study examined how exposure to misogynistic media influences young adults' views towards women, romantic beliefs, and relationship satisfaction. Media exposure (independent variable) was measured by frequency (low, moderate, high) and type, including OTT series (e.g., Sacred Games, Mirzapur), Bollywood films (e.g., Kabir Singh, Ae Dil Hai Mushkil), songs (e.g., Munni Badnaam Hui), and video games (e.g., Grand Theft Auto V), known for misogynistic portrayals.

Dependent variables included sexism, gender role beliefs, romantic beliefs (idealistic, realistic, skeptical), and relationship satisfaction, measured using self-report scales and behavioral indicators. Data were collected from 102 young adults (ages 18–35) via in-person and online surveys covering demographics, media habits, sexism, romantic beliefs, and satisfaction. Pearson's Correlation, linear regression, and ANOVA were used to assess associations, predictions, and group differences based on media exposure levels.

IV. RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Frequency of Media Exposure	102	16.275	7.178	0.000	33.000
Ambivalent Sexism Inventory	102	48.235	14.050	0.000	72.000
Gender Role Belief Scale	102	69.892	19.262	0.000	105.000
Romantic Belief Scale	102	94.020	15.807	51.000	134.000
Couples Satisfaction Index (CSI-4)	102	10.794	6.138	0.000	21.000

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for media exposure, sexism, gender role beliefs, romantic beliefs, and relationship satisfaction from 102 participants. The wide variability across these variables offers a strong basis for further analysis of how media exposure relates to sexist attitudes, gender roles, and romantic satisfaction.

Table 2 Correlation Analysis

Variable	Ambivalent Sexism	Gender Role Beliefs	Romantic Beliefs	Couples Satisfaction
Frequency of media exposure	Pearson's $r = 0.442$	Pearson's $r = 0.289$	Pearson's $r = 0.010$	Pearson's $r = 0.100$
p-value	< .001	0.002	0.924	0.841

Table 2 indicates a moderate, significant correlation between media exposure and ambivalent sexism ($r = 0.442$, $p < .001$) and a weaker but significant correlation with gender role beliefs ($r = 0.289$, $p = .003$), suggesting media's role in shaping sexist attitudes. No significant correlations were found with romantic beliefs ($r = 0.010$, $p = .924$) or couple satisfaction ($r = 0.100$, $p = .841$), implying these may be influenced by other factors. The stronger associations observed in regression analyses suggest potential mediating variables.

Table 3 Model Summary Ambivalent Sexism Linear regression

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	RMSE
M ₁	0.929	0.863	0.862	18.681

Table 3 shows a strong positive correlation

($R = 0.929$) between media exposure and ambivalent sexism, with 86.3% of variance explained (R^2). The adjusted R^2 of 0.862 confirms the model's strength, and the RMSE of 18.681 indicates room for improved precision. These results highlight media's significant role in reinforcing ambivalent sexism.

Table 4 ANOVA (Ambivalent Sexism)

ANOVA	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Regression	222008.063	1	222008.063	636.145	< .001
Residual	35247.937	101	348.989		
Total	257256.000	102			

Table 4 shows the ANOVA results, with an F-statistic of 636.145 indicating a highly significant model. The p-value (< .001) confirms that media exposure is a strong and statistically significant predictor of ambivalent sexism, with a very low chance of this result occurring randomly.

Table 5 Coefficients (Ambivalent Sexism)

Coefficients	Unstandardized	Standard Error	Standardized	t	p
Frequency of media exposure	2.625	0.104	1.341	25.222	< .001

Each unit increase in media exposure significantly raises ambivalent sexism ($\beta = 2.625$, $p < .001$). The large standardized coefficient (1.341) and high t-value (25.222, p

< .001) confirm a strong, statistically reliable association, supporting the conclusion that greater exposure to misogynistic media substantially increases sexist attitudes.

Table 6 Model Summary Gender Role Beliefs

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	RMSE
M ₁	0.914	0.835	0.833	29.575

The correlation coefficient ($R = 0.914$) shows a strong positive link between media exposure and traditional gender role beliefs. The R^2 value (0.835) indicates that 83.5% of the variance in these beliefs is explained by media exposure.

Table 7 ANOVA (Gender Role Beliefs)

ANOVA	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Regression	447389.319	1	447389.319	511.472	< .001
Residual	88345.681	101	874.710		
Total	535735.000	102			

The ANOVA results show a significant regression model with an F-value of 511.472, indicating that media exposure is a strong predictor of gender role beliefs. The p-value (< .001) further supports this, confirming the statistical significance of the model and the likelihood that media exposure significantly influences gender role beliefs. This reinforces the hypothesis that media plays a key role in shaping these beliefs.

Table 8 Coefficients (Gender Role Beliefs)

Coefficients	Unstandardized	Standard Error	Standardized	t	p
Frequency of media exposure	3.726	0.165	1.389	22.616	< .001

Each unit increase in media exposure significantly strengthens traditional gender role beliefs ($\beta = 3.726$, $p < .001$). The high standardized coefficient ($\beta = 1.389$) and t-value (22.616) confirm a strong, reliable impact of media on reinforcing gender norms.

Table 9 Model Summary Romantic Beliefs

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	RMSE
M ₁	0.904	0.817	0.815	41.004

The correlation coefficient ($R = 0.904$) indicates a strong positive association between media exposure and romantic beliefs. Media exposure accounts for 81.7% of the variance in romantic

beliefs ($R^2 = 0.817$), with the adjusted R^2 (0.815) confirming the model's robustness and predictive reliability.

Table 10 ANOVA (Romantic Beliefs)

ANOVA	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Regression	757070.674	1	757070.674	450.283	< .001
Residual	169813.326	101	1681.320		
Total	926884.000	102			

The regression sum of squares (757,070.674) shows the variance explained by the model, while the residual sum of squares (169,813.326) reflects unexplained variance.

The high F-value (450.283) indicates the model is statistically significant, confirming that media exposure meaningfully predicts romantic beliefs.

The p-value (< .001) further supports this, showing a very low chance of these results occurring randomly and affirming the significant impact of media on romantic beliefs.

Table 11 Coefficients (Romantic Beliefs)

Coefficients	Unstandardized	Standard Error	Standardized	t	p
Frequency of media exposure	4.847	0.228	2.201	21.220	< .001

Media exposure significantly increases romantic beliefs, with each unit rise leading to a 4.847-unit increase. The results are precise, strongly reliable, and statistically significant, confirming media as a key influence on romantic ideals.

Table 12 Model Summary Couple Satisfaction

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	RMSE
M ₁	0.817	0.667	0.664	7.191

Media exposure strongly predicts couple satisfaction, explaining 66.7% of its variance. The model is reliable and reasonably accurate, though other factors like attachment and communication may also influence satisfaction. Future research should explore these additional predictors.

Table 12 ANOVA (Couple Satisfaction)

ANOVA	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Regression	10465.542	1	10465.542	202.360	< .001
Residual	5223.458	101	51.717		
Total	15689.000	102			

Table 12 shows that media exposure significantly explains variance in couple satisfaction. The regression sum of squares (10,465.542) and high F-statistic (202.360, $p < .001$) confirm the model's strength, with media exposure accounting for much more variance than random error.

Table 13 Coefficients (Couple Satisfaction)

Coefficients	Unstandardized	Standard Error	Standardized	t	p
Frequency of media exposure	3.726	0.165	1.389	22.616	<.001

Table 13 shows that media exposure strongly predicts couple satisfaction. Each unit increase in media exposure leads to a 0.570-unit rise in satisfaction ($\beta = 0.570$, $SE = 0.040$), with a strong standardized effect ($\beta = 0.667$). The high t-value (14.225) and p-value ($< .001$) confirm the result's significance, underscoring media's key role in shaping relationship perceptions and the need for further research.

V. DISCUSSION

This study reveals that higher media exposure correlates with stronger traditional gender role beliefs and increased ambivalent sexism, supporting Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) and Cultivation Theory (Gerbner & Gross, 1976). Interestingly, media exposure also positively correlates with couple satisfaction, differing from prior research and suggesting that the type of media consumed may shape outcomes. Unlike Ward (2002) and Fischer & Greitemeyer (2006), who found that hyper-romanticized and aggressive media harm relationship satisfaction, this study suggests that participants exposed to more realistic, relationship-positive media reported higher satisfaction, indicating content-specific effects. While Ward (2002) warned against unrealistic portrayals, our findings align with Johnson & Holmes (2009), suggesting that realistic media focusing on communication and compromise may support relationship satisfaction. Fischer & Greitemeyer (2006) linked aggressive media to toxic behaviors, but our participants may have consumed more respectful content. The study supports Sibley & Tan (2011), showing that media reinforces traditional gender roles, perpetuating

male dominance and female passivity in relationships. Though Papacharissi & Mendelson (2007) argued that reality TV distorts relationship perceptions, our findings suggest that participants either consumed less reality TV or interpreted it differently, emphasizing the need to distinguish between media types.

Media's reinforcement of gender roles contributes to internalized misogyny, limiting women's self-perception and ambitions. The findings highlight the importance of media literacy to challenge these stereotypes. Social platforms like Instagram and TikTok amplify internalized misogyny through idealized beauty standards and competition among women. Promoting critical media engagement is essential to counteract these effects.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that media exposure significantly influences young adults' traditional gender role beliefs, ambivalent sexism, and, to a lesser degree, couple satisfaction. The findings confirm that the media is a powerful socializing force, reinforcing gender stereotypes and sexist ideologies. However, the absence of a significant link between media exposure and romantic beliefs suggests that personal and cultural factors may play a stronger role in shaping romantic ideals.

Regression and correlation analyses offered key insights, though self-report bias and the cross-sectional design limit causal conclusions. Future research should adopt longitudinal and mixed-method designs and explore diverse cultures. Media literacy programs are crucial to help young adults critically engage with harmful content and encourage more equitable gender portrayals.

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