Macho Boys and Sexy Babes on TV

How Watching Different Types of Television Content is Related to Dutch Adolescents' Hypergender Orientations

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Media effect theories and social cognitive theories of gender development posit that young people use the media to learn how to behave according to their gender. This study aimed to investigate reciprocal relationships between adolescents' television diets and their endorsement of hypergender orientations (i.e., hypermasculinity and hyperfemininity). Based on data from a short-term longitudinal survey among 1,007 Dutch adolescents (13-17 years old), this study showed that different television genres were related to hypergender orientations in different ways. The most notable finding was the relevance of *reality TV docu-soaps* for both adolescent girls' and boys' hypergender orientations. In addition, more frequent exposure to *romantic comedy movies* predicted an increased endorsement of hyperfeminine gender roles among girls, whereas more frequent exposure to *situational comedies* was associated with lower levels of girls' hyperfemininity. These findings could be used in media literacy interventions targeting the influence of specific types of television exposure on adolescents' stereotypical gender role notions.

From a young age, children learn what it means to be male or female and what the appropriate behaviors are for one's gender through messages from their social environment (Bem, 1981; Halim & Ruble, 2010). Recently, it has been observed that gender identities may become increasingly stereotypical during adolescence. For instance, girls learn that women need to be sexy and sexually available to men and that femininity is all about being physically attractive in order to gain attention from men (e.g., Tolman, 2002). Such behaviors are suggestive of a hyperfeminine gender role (Murnen & Byrne, 1991). Boys, in turn, are taught a hypermasculine gender role characterized by dominance and aggression (Mosher & Sirkin, 1984).

It has also been argued that the media reinforce earlier socialization of hypergender orientations (Mosher & Tomkins, 1988). Given that gender stereotypes are common in the media, and in particular in prime-time television (Wright, 2009), it seems likely that

the development of adolescents' stereotypical gender roles is influenced by television exposure. However, no study to date has investigated the association between television exposure and adolescents' hypermasculinity and hyperfemininity specifically. This addition to the literature is important, as these hypergendered constructs have been shown to predict adolescents' exposure to violent pornography (Vandenbosch, 2015), and emerging adults' acceptance of sexual coercion and exploitation in relationships (Hamburger, Hogben, McGowan, & Dawson, 1996). In addition, hyperfemininity has been associated with self-sexualizing behaviors among women (e.g., Nowatzki & Morry, 2009).

Content analyses have shown that stereotypical gender roles, such as male dominance and aggression and female subordination or sexualization, are frequently portrayed in media genres that are popular among adolescents, such as situational comedies (or *sitcoms*) (Birthisel & Martin, 2013; Montemurro, 2003), music videos (Wallis, 2011), soap operas, and romantic drama television series (Garcìa-Munoz & Fedele, 2011; van Damme, 2010). The same holds for non-scripted – or at least less scripted – versions of such television content, namely reality TV (Ferris, Smith, Greenberg, & Smith, 2007; Graves & Kwan, 2012).

Given the amount of gender stereotypical content on television, it can be expected that adolescents' exposure to such content is related to their hypergender orientations. Two theories have dominantly been used to explain the influence of the media on gender roles. First, *cultivation theory* posits that frequent exposure to certain images and ideas in the media cultivate similar beliefs about the real world in viewers (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1994). Second, *social cognitive theory* (Bandura, 1986) posits that gender-typed behavior and attitudes, including gender stereotypical notions, result from observing and imitating others, including television characters. Against this backdrop, there has been a substantial body of knowledge linking children's and adolescents' notions of gender roles to their media use, in particular their television exposure (e.g., Morgan, 1982; Ter Bogt et al., 2010; Ward, 2002; Ward & Friedman, 2006; Zurbriggen & Morgan, 2006).

Within this research field, scholars have increasingly focused on the relationship between gender roles and *specific* television genres that adolescents prefer (e.g., Behm-Morawitz & Mastro, 2008; Ter Bogt et al., 2010). More importantly, research has shown that adolescents' preference for specific television genres seems to be related to their gender role notions in *different* ways. For instance, Rivadeneyra and Lebo (2008) showed that exposure to romantic reality TV was associated with increased stereotypical gender role attitudes, whereas exposure to non-romantic drama series was related to holding *less* stereotypical gender role attitudes. This is in line with research on cultivation effects, which often differentiates between television genres because specific messages in particular may have a specific cultivation effect on viewers' attitudes (Shrum, 1999). Against this backdrop, the present study will focus on the following research question (RQ1): How do different types of television programs predict adolescents' endorsement of hypergender orientations?

Moreover, social cognitive theories of gender development (Bussey & Bandura, 1999) and gender schema theory (Bem, 1981) posit that children and adolescents are not passive recipients of external gender socialization, but actively seek out information to learn about appropriate gendered behavior, which further reinforces their gender role orientations (Bussey & Bandura, 1999; Halim & Ruble, 2010). It can thus be expected that adolescents' gender role orientations predispose them to select certain types of media content, which is also in line with selective exposure research (Zillmann & Bryant, 1985). However, most studies on the relationship between television content and gender role notions are cross-sectional (e.g., Rivadeneyra & Lebo, 2008; Ter Bogt et al., 2010; Zurbriggen & Morgan, 2006), with the exception of a few longitudinal (Morgan, 1982) and experimental (Ward, 2002) studies. As a result, little is known about how hypergender orientations may predispose adolescents to seek out certain media content, in addition to how they are influenced by such content. The second research question therefore reads (RQ2): Does adolescents' endorsement of hypergender orientations predict their exposure to different types of television programs?

Finally, previous research has shown that boys and girls differ in their preferences for, and susceptibility to influences of, certain television content (e.g., Rivadeneyra & Lebo, 2008; Ter Bogt et al., 2010; Tolman, Kim, Schooler, & Sorsoli, 2007). The present study therefore investigated the associations between exposure to different television programs and adolescents' hypergender orientations for boys and girls separately.

Findings from a longitudinal survey study

Over a thousand ($N = 1,007$) Dutch adolescents (13-17 years old) participated in a two-wave panel survey with a two month time interval, in which they were asked – among other things – about their television exposure and endorsement of hypergender orientations (for more information about the sample and survey measures, please see the Appendix).

Based on the data of this survey, the relationships between exposure to different types of television content (i.e., sitcoms, romantic drama series, soap operas, reality TV docu-soaps, reality TV dating shows, music videos, romantic comedy movies and romantic drama movies) and adolescents' hypergender orientations were investigated (a more elaborate description of the analyses and results can be found in the Appendix).

In response to RQ1, the results of the analysis showed that only exposure to reality TV docu-soaps increased hypergender orientations for boys. Among adolescent girls, more frequent exposure to both reality TV docu-soaps and romantic comedy movies predicted a greater hyperfeminine gender role orientation two months later. In contrast, frequent exposure to sitcoms predicted lower levels of hyperfemininity. In response to RQ2, boys' hypermasculinity predicted their exposure to reality TV docu-soaps, reality TV dating shows, and music videos. Girls' hyperfemininity predicted more frequent exposure to romantic drama TV series and reality TV dating shows.

Implications for research on television exposure and hypergender orientations

The present study showed that cultivation effects (Gerbner et al., 1994; Shrum, 1999) and social cognitive influences (Bandura, 1986; Bussey & Bandura, 1999), on adolescents' hypergender orientations differ depending on television genre. Reality TV docu-soaps were the most consistent type of television genre to predict hypergender orientations, with an influence among both boys and girls. Reality TV docu-soaps generally portray young people's behavior in everyday "real life" situations. This may make a cultivation effect, where media portrayals are seen as portraying real life, more likely. Such an explanation is in line with previous research that showed that young male viewers of reality dating shows, who find such content realistic, were more likely to hold the negative stereotypes that are frequently portrayed in such shows (Ferris et al., 2007).

The only other type of media content to positively predict hypergender orientations among girls was the romantic comedy movie genre. This suggests that many storylines in such films are promoting the idea that girls need to be sexy in order to attract men and to use their physical appearance to manipulate men, and are thus reinforcing hyperfeminine stereotypes. That this media genre does not reinforce hypermasculinity in boys suggests that aggressive and dominant male behavior is not so prevalent in this type of media content. It has even been argued that contemporary romantic comedy movies are searching for new constructions of masculinity that could counter hypermasculine stereotypes in other media genres (i.e., the 'bromance', Alberti, 2013). As of yet, not much research has focused on the role of romantic comedy movies in adolescents' gender role development. The present findings thus call for more research, and in particular content analyses, on movie content in general and romantic comedies in particular.

In contrast to romantic comedy *movies,* more frequent exposure to *sitcoms* was actually related to lower levels of girls' hyperfeminine notions. This finding seems to be in contrast with previous research that showed that heterosexual scripts and gender stereotypes are frequently portrayed in sitcoms (Birthisel & Martin, 2013; Montemurro, 2003; Ward & Rivadeneyra, 1999; Ward & Friedman, 2006). At the same time, it has been argued that sitcoms show female characters who resist or reject stereotypical gender stereotypes by relying on their intelligence and assertiveness in romantic and sexual relationships rather than their sexiness (Kim et al., 2007), which may explain the present finding. More research is needed in how portrayals of gender roles may be changing in certain media genres such as sitcoms, and how this influences gender orientations of teen audiences.

In line with selective exposure theory (Zillmann & Bryant, 1985), boys' hypermasculinity increased their exposure to reality TV docu-soaps and dating shows, as well as music videos. The latter seems to be in line with previous research that showed that music videos are a highly appealing media genre for boys (Zhang, Miller, & Harrison, 2008). Given that music videos often portray male artists and are made from a male per-

spective (Andsager & Roe, 2003), they may form a particularly relevant type of content for adolescent boys to turn to when they want to learn about gendered behavior (Zhang et al., 2008). The present study extends such findings by showing that music videos seem to appeal in particular to more hypermasculine boys. The present study suggests that the same may hold for reality TV docu-soaps, which are often targeted towards male audiences (e.g., Chrisler, Bacher, Bangali, Campagna, & McKeigue, 2012). At the same time, prime-time TV programs are said to be more appealing to girls compared to boys (Zhang et al., 2008), which seems to be in line with the present finding that a greater hypergender orientation predicted more frequent exposure to romantic drama series only among girls.

Both hypergender boys and girls were more likely to watch reality TV dating shows. This is in line with previous research showing that adolescents often turn to television content to learn about dating and relationships and that reality TV dating shows may be a particularly relevant type of content in this respect (Rivadeneyra & Lebo, 2008). This may be even more the case for hypergendered teens, given the stereotypical gender role content in reality TV dating shows (Rivadeneyra & Lebo, 2008).

In sum, the present study has extended previous research on the associations between television content and gender roles, by showing how adolescents' endorsement of hypergender roles motivate their exposure to specific television genres, and how specific television genres may reinforce but also potentially counteract such hypergender orientations over time. As such, these findings can be used in future media literacy interventions by suggesting which type of media content needs to be targeted most (i.e., reality TV), and which type of media content – such as sitcoms – can potentially be beneficial when trying to counter stereotypical gender role notions among teens.

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Appendix
Method and results

Sample

The sample was randomly drawn from an existing panel of the Dutch research agency Veldkamp that is representative of the Dutch population. Informed consent was asked from the parents of the adolescents before the adolescents were contacted, as well as from the adolescents themselves. Of those contacted by Veldkmap to participate, a total of 1,236 adolescents participated at wave 1, fielded in April 2015 (response rate 68 per cent) and 1,007 adolescents participated at wave 2, fielded in June 2015 (response rate 82 per cent). The mean age of the respondents was 15 years and 52 per cent of the respondents were male.

Survey measures

Hypergender orientation. We used a shorter version (because of space constraints in the survey) of the measure of hypergender orientation that was previously used in research among adolescents (e.g., Vandenbosch, 2015). This measure was originally based on the Hyper Femininity Scale of Murnen and Byrne (1991) and the Hyper Masculinity Index of Mosher and Sirkin (1984). Boys and girls rated four items that referred to their gender on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (= *totally disagree)* to 7 (= *totally agree).* Examples of included items for girls are "I like it when boys hunt for girls" and "You can get boys to do what you want by acting sexy." Examples of included items for boys are: "When you insult me, you better be prepared," and "I fight to win." Principal component analysis supported a one-dimensional scale structure (eigenvalue = 2.67; explained variance = 66.83%; α = .83 in wave 1; eigenvalue = 2.79; explained variance = 69.83%; α = .85 in wave 2). The variable "hypergender orientation" was obtained by averaging all items. Boys and girls did not differ in the scores for hypergender orientation in wave 1 (M = 3.27, SD = 1.40 for boys; M = 3.28, SD = 1.41 for girls) or in wave 2 (M = 3.31, SD = 1.41 for boys; M = 3.24, SD = 1.37 for girls), Wilks' Lambda = .999, $F(2, 1004)$ = .637, p = .529.

 Television content. In order to measure exposure to the different types of television content, we asked adolescents about their frequency of watching the following types of TV shows. The examples were also shown to the respondents as examples of the particular TV genre:

Sitcoms	e.g. The Big Bang Theory, How I Met Your Mother, New Girl, The Nanny
Romantic drama series	e.g. Gossip Girl, Grey's Anatomy, Divorce (Dutch),
Soap operas	e.g. Goede Tijden Slechte Tijden (Dutch), Spangas (Dutch), The Bold and the Beautiful
Reality TV docu-soaps	e.g. Project Runway, Kardashians, Geordie Shore
Reality TV dating shows	e.g. the Bachelor, Boer zoekt vrouw (Dutch)
Music videos	
Romantic comedy movies	e.g. Friends with Benefits, That Awkward Moment
Romantic drama movies	e.g. Titanic, The Great Gatsby

Respondents were asked to indicate how often, in the past two months, they had watched these types of TV programs on television, computer or smartphone. Means and standard deviations of adolescents' exposure to each type of television genre for both boys and girls in both waves are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Means and standard deviations of exposure to different TV genres, for boys and girls

| | Wave 1 | | Wave 2 | |
	Boys M (SD)	Girls M (SD)	Boys M (SD)	Girls M (SD)
Sitcoms	2.41 (1.99)	2.45 (1.95)	2.49 (2.05)	2.43 (1.92)
Romantic drama series	1.42 (1.07)	2.75 (1.87)	1.37 (0.96)	2.62 (1.72)
Soap operas	1.91 (1.72)	3.60 (2.46)	1.89 (1.68)	3.56 (2.45)
Reality TV docu-soaps	1.72 (1.45)	2.49 (1.89)	1.80 (1.49)	2.44 (1.82)
Reality TV dating shows	1.53 (1.09)	2.27 (1.60)	1.43 (0.99)	2.06 (1.45)
Music videos	4.65 (2.27)	5.08 (2.00)	4.74 (2.16)	5.01 (1.98)
Romantic drama movies	1.52 (1.03)	2.58 (1.51)	1.60 (1.15)	2.61 (1.59)
Romantic comedy movies	1.99 (1.58)	3.11 (1.69)	2.00 (1.50)	3.20 (1.73)

Note: The response categories were 1 (never), 2 (once a month), 3 (1 or 2 times a month), 4 (once a week), 5 (1 or 2 times a week), 6 (3 or 4 times a week), and 7 (almost every day or every day).

Results

The relationships between adolescents' television exposure and their hypergender orientations were tested with structural equation modeling (in AMOS 21), using autoregressive models that included levels of all the variables at both wave 1 and 2 (Cole & Maxwell, 2003). Exposure to the different types of television content were modelled as manifest items in the model. Adolescents' hypergender orientation was modelled as a latent construct, with the items measuring this construct modelled as manifest indicators of the laten construct. The fit of the model was good, χ^2 (336, N = 1,007) = 609.347, p < .001, CFI = .98, RMSEA = .028 (90% confidence interval: .025/.032). To account for the violation of the normality assumption in our variables, we used the bootstrap method in addition to the parametric tests. We estimated 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals (95 per cent BCI) of the standardized estimates on the basis of 1,000 bootstrapping samples (N = 1,007 each). When the 95 per cent BCI does not include zero, the effect can be assumed to differ significantly from zero, and thus refers to a statistically significant relationship. Regression coefficients and the 95 per cent BCIs of the tested relationships for boys and girls separately can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. Regression coefficients of the tested relationships for boys and girls

Dependent variable: Hypergender orientation (wave 2)

Predictors (wave 1):	Boys				Girls			
	B	SE	p	95% BCI	B	SE	p	95% BCI
Sitcoms	.015	.027	.576	-.049/.092	**-.089**	**.023**	**.000**	**-.213/-.080**
Romantic drama series	-.041	.061	.497	-.125/.068	.037	.026	.143	-.023/.131
Soap operas	-.004	.032	.907	-.088/.071	-.010	.018	.561	-.099/.059
Reality TV docu-soaps	**.097**	**.041**	**.017**	**.009/.205**	**.065**	**.025**	**.010**	**.019/.178**
Reality TV dating shows	.033	.054	.534	-.049/.110	-.022	.029	.451	-.105/.042
Music videos	.001	.023	.943	-.062/.084	-.011	.022	.630	-.086/.058
Romantic comedy movies	.039	.040	.332	-.101/.163	**.079**	**.035**	**.026**	**.019/.213**
Romantic drama movies	-.093	.068	.176	-.191/.051	-.035	.038	.359	-.141/.059

Predictor: Hypergender orientation (wave 1)

Dependent variables (wave 2):	Boys				Girls			
	B	SE	p	95% BCI	B	SE	p	95% BCI
Sitcoms	-.050	.054	.351	-.115/.046	.072	.059	.226	-.029/.116
Romantic drama series	.025	.030	.393	-.053/.132	**.160**	**.057**	**.005**	**.030/.186**
Soap operas	.008	.039	.829	-.065/.077	.012	.065	.859	-.063/.068
Reality TV docu-soaps	**.126**	**.041**	**.002**	**.045/.217**	**.139**	**.064**	**.029**	**-.005/.179**
Reality TV dating shows	**.075**	**.029**	**.011**	**.030/.213**	**.131**	**.052**	**.012**	**.019/.205**
Music videos	**.187**	**.064**	**.004**	**.040/.210**	.103	.068	.131	-.017/.146
Romantic comedy movies	.058	.047	.212	-.047/.159	.101	.062	.104	-.025/.158
Romantic drama movies	.057	.036	.112	-.035/.187	.081	.055	.138	-.016/.155

Note. Regression coefficients in bold font are significant in both the parametric tests and with the bootstrap method.