

In fiction, young people choose traditional love and gender stereotypes

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Fictional television series can have an influence on the construction of young people's identities and values. In relation to the depiction of love in television series, young people express a preference for traditional gender stereotypes, reveals a study conducted to identify gender and love stereotypes displayed by young people compared to those they prefer in

fictional television series in three Iberian-American countries: Colombia, Spain and Venezuela.

Maria-Jose Masanet and Rafael Ventura, researchers with the Department of Communication at UPF, and Maddalena Fedele, a researcher at Ramon Llull University, published it on 1 February in the journal *Masculinities and Social Change*.

The main goal of this study was to identify stereotypes and models related to gender and the relationships that [young people](#) claim to have and compare them with those they consume in their favourite fictional series, i.e., those that have the potential to influence their conceptions and values unconsciously and emotionally. The research was conducted from an interdisciplinary perspective, combining cultural and audience study methods along with contributions from the fields of sociology and psychology. It consisted of a survey of 485 first-year university students and qualitative analysis of the participants' favourite media depictions.

From the [survey results](#), among the respondents, the authors identify a gap between the cognitive and the emotional sphere. In the surveys, the young respondents distance themselves from stereotypical, heteronormative and patriarchal models, but the media representations they choose coincide precisely with these models and with the traditional gender stereotypes.

"The data show that the ideal amorous [relationship](#) between young people belongs to Stenberg's (2000) concept of romantic [love](#) and fosters the myths that this implies. Young people value aspects based on intimacy and passion above those that are based on commitment," state the authors of the work.

Young people also show preferences for "amor ludens," love that is based on enjoyment and the present time. Sharing and enjoying time

together, emotional involvement and support for the partner are among the most important aspects for young people who participated in the survey. "Amor ludens" is a concept coined by the authors based on the results of their research.

By countries, the most notable differences are that young Spaniards are furthest from the ideal of romantic love and identify rather with "amor ludens"; young Colombians tend toward falling in love; Venezuelans value commitment and identify more with [romantic love](#). In addition, the study reveals gender differences in the understanding of love. Men emphasize elements related to passion and physical and sexual values, and therefore, values corresponding to heteronormative and patriarchal stereotypes. However, women give more importance to intimacy and the romantic ideal, and therefore feelings. Thus, it is shown that the romantic ideal and associated myths do not permeate both sexes in the same way, since men tend less to associate romantic relationships with emotions.

The authors infer that the different conceptions of love between men and women observed in the study could lead to a situation in which women were more willing to be subordinate and passive in their relationships, with men being more active and dominant. "It is clear that traditional gender stereotypes, including those related to 'machismo,' are still active in the younger generations around Iberian-American setting," the authors write.

Healthier, more equitable amorous relations

This is also reflected in the preferences in serialized fiction. While men prefer series based on violence, sex or drugs and alcohol, women prefer plots based on personal relationships, love or friendship. Again, stereotypes are observed that associate men with violence and action, and women with more intimate and emotional aspects.

This study shows that fiction series are widely consumed by young people and have great potential to become useful educational and transformational tools to help promote models based on equality and affect the attitudes of young people in their current and future amorous relationships. "The potential for [series](#) to influence youth could facilitate discussions aimed at challenging [gender](#) stereotypes and help them to create healthier, more equitable amorous relationships," the authors conclude.

More information: Maddalena Fedele et al, Negotiating Love and Gender Stereotypes among Young People: Prevalence of "Amor Ludens" and Television Preferences Rooted in Hegemonic Masculinity, *Masculinities & Social Change* (2019). [DOI: 10.17583/MCS.2019.3742](https://doi.org/10.17583/MCS.2019.3742)

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