

# Many teens think sex too pervasive on TV, study finds

November 7, 2023

LOS ANGELES (BP)—A plurality of adolescents think sex and romance are overused in television shows and would like to see more platonic friendships portrayed, an annual University of California at Los Angeles study of 10- to 24-year-olds found.

Particularly, 47.5 percent of adolescents ages 13 to 24 think sex is unnecessary for most television plots, 44.3 percent think romance is overused in media, and 51.5 percent want to see more content focused on friendships and platonic relationships, UCLA found in its 2023 Teens and Screens Report released in October.

The numbers should signal Hollywood to stop marketing “explicit sexual content to teens,” the Parents Television Council said in response to the findings.

“These survey results prove that teens are tired of being saturated with sexual content,” Parents Television Council Vice President Melissa Henson said. “It’s time for a new playbook, Hollywood, and it would be a monumental and welcome change.”

Sex and romance ranked 13th among the top 19 storylines teens said they want to view, with hopeful, uplifting content about people beating the odds topping the chart, and stories featuring nonbinary and LGBTQ and related identities at the bottom of the list.

The Parents Television Council called out Hollywood for such shows as HBO’s “Euphoria,” which spotlights high school students navigating life in a world of drugs, sex, trauma and social media; Disney-owned Hulu’s

“PEN15,” a comedy with foul language that features middle school teens exploring topics including sex and drug use; and Netflix’s “Sex Education,” with teenagers exploring sexuality in a way that Movieguide has critiqued as “near pornographic.”

The survey results show teenagers want to view a fuller spectrum of relationships, and also support other recent studies showing teens are less driven by sex than were their parents and grandparents, study co-author and UCLA adjunct professor Yalda T. Uhls said.

“We know that young people are suffering an epidemic of loneliness and they’re seeking modeling in the art they consume,” Uhls said. “While some storytellers use sex and romance as a shortcut to character connection, it’s important for Hollywood to recognize that adolescents want stories that reflect the full spectrum of relationships.”

Quarantines during the COVID-19 pandemic likely contributed to views expressed in the study, the Parents Television Council believes.

Teens “were deprived of real-life time to learn about relationships during lockdowns, and now they need to see and understand how all kinds of relationships work, not just portrayals of romantic or solely sexual relationships,” Henson said.

UCLA’s 2023 report, conducted by the Center for Scholars & Storytellers, surveyed 1,500 people ages 10 to 24 in August, including 100 young people from each participating age bracket, and reflecting 2020 U.S. Census findings in race and gender.