

# Foul-mouthed characters in teen books have it all, study finds

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Bestselling authors of teen literature portray their more foul-mouthed characters as rich, attractive and popular, a new study finds. Brigham Young University professor Sarah Coyne analyzed the use of profanity in 40 books on an adolescent bestsellers list. On average, teen novels contain 38 instances of profanity between the covers. That translates to almost seven instances of profanity per hour spent reading.

Coyne was intrigued not just by how much swearing happens in [teen](#) lit, but who was swearing: Those with higher social status, better looks and more [money](#).

"From a social learning standpoint, this is really important because adolescents are more likely to imitate media characters portrayed in positive, desirable ways," Coyne said.

Coyne's study will be published May 18 in the journal [Mass Communication and Society](#).

While profanity in TV and movies has been studied extensively, this research is the first to examine it in the realm of [books](#) aimed at teens. Thirty-five of the 40 books – or 88 percent – contained at least one instance of profanity (one of them contained nearly 500).

That's a far higher rate than what's found in video games rated T (Teen), of which only 34 percent contain profanity. In a way, that's comparing apples to oranges because books contain more words –also known as

"opportunities to swear" in the academic literature.

The "darkness" in current teen fiction was recently debated on the opinion pages of the Wall Street Journal. And the medical journal Pediatrics published research by Coyne in October that found a link between profanity in media and teen aggression.

"Unlike almost every other type of media, there are no content warnings or any indication if there is extremely high levels of profanity in [adolescent](#) novels," Coyne said. "Parents should talk with their children about the books they are reading."

Provided by Brigham Young University

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