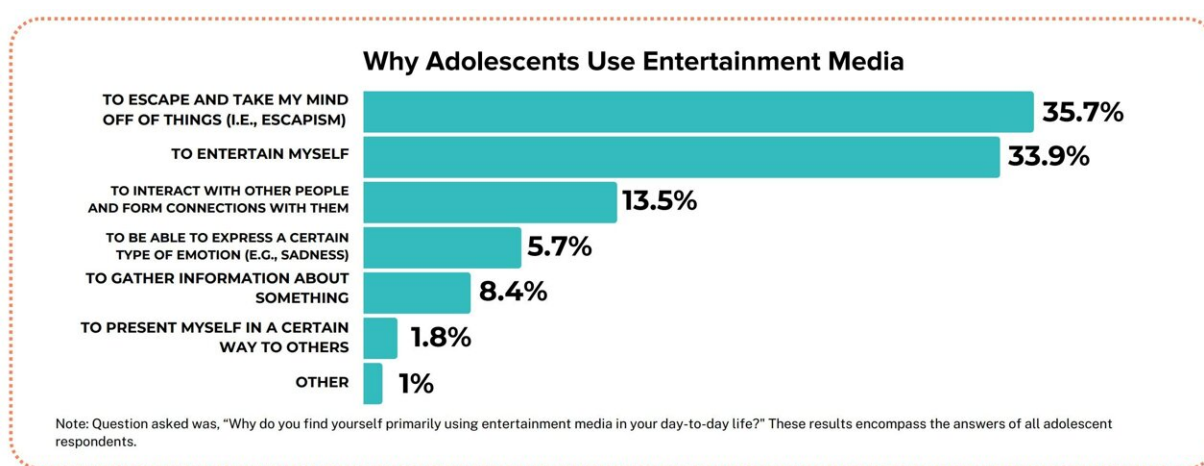


Romance or nomance? Adolescents prefer to see less sex, more friendships, platonic relationships on screen, says report

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The majority of adolescents said that the most important reason they choose the entertainment media that they use is to escape and take their mind off of things (35.7%). *Teens & Screens 2023 Report* (2023).

This year's [Teens & Screens report](#) from UCLA's Center for Scholars & Storytellers, or CSS, found that teens—plus the 18- to 24-year-old demographic that advertisers typically target—think sex and romance are too prominent in TV shows and movies, preferring to see more friendships and platonic relationships.

Almost half of [adolescents](#) 13–24 felt that romance is overused in media

(44.3%) and sex is unnecessary for the plot of most TV shows and movies (47.5%). A majority (51.5%) want to see more content focused on friendships and platonic relationships, with 39% seeking more aromantic and/or asexual characters (ace/aro) on screen.

"While it's true that adolescents want less sex on TV and in movies, what the survey is really saying is that they want more and different kinds of relationships reflected in the media they watch," said Dr. Yalda T. Uhls, founder and director of CSS, co-author of the study, and adjunct professor in UCLA's psychology department.

On a list of adolescents' most disliked stereotypes, romantic tropes ranked fourth, which included storylines about how relationships are necessary for happiness, male and female leads always must end up together romantically, and love triangles. While the popularity of "Twilight" and "The Hunger Games" supercharged the love triangle trope, what once was novel has become commonplace, and teens appear to have soured on those storylines.

"We know that young people are suffering an epidemic of loneliness and they're seeking modeling in the art they consume. 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," Uhls said, adding that recent studies show that young people are having less sex than their parents did at their age and many prefer to stay single.

The report, a comprehensive annual portrait of adolescence and media, surveyed 1,500 people ages 10–24 (reflecting the ages of adolescence defined by the National Academy of Sciences) in August, with 100 young people from each age bracket participating. Respondents closely reflected the U.S. 2020 census in race and gender. The survey was supported by the collection of Funders for Adolescent Science

Translation.

In viewing habits, 50.5% of adolescent respondents expressed a strong or slight preference for binge-watching shows all at once, while 25.5% preferred seeing weekly drops of episodes.

Adolescents also showed a strong preference for [original content](#), with 56% choosing original movies and TV shows over remakes, franchises or those based on pre-existing intellectual property like a book, comic or graphic novel.

Adolescents' media preferences in 2023 leaned toward the familiar. In 2022, the topic adolescents most wanted to see on screen was "lives unlike my own" but in 2023, that fell to position No. 9 and "lives like my own" rose to No. 2. Despite their penchant for original stories, superheroes still ranked fourth among the topics they most want to watch.

Today's adolescents chose "White Man" as the preferred hypothetical hero of their stories, whereas in 2022, "Black Man" was the top answer. This year, older adolescents (18–24) chose "Black Woman" as their hero. "White Man" also remains the choice of most young people when asked to cast the villain.

"As a member of Gen Z myself, I wasn't surprised by some of what we're seeing this year," said Stephanie Rivas-Lara, youth engagement manager at CSS and first author of the study. "There has been a wide-ranging discourse among young people about the meaning of community in the aftermath of COVID-19 and the isolation that came with it."

"Adolescents are looking to media as a 'third place' where they can connect and have a sense of belonging—and with frightening headlines about [climate change](#), pandemics and global destabilization, it makes

sense they are gravitating towards what's most familiar in those spaces," said Rivas-Lara, who holds a bachelor's degree in psychology and is working towards a master's in social work from UCLA.

Adolescents desire authenticity, too. This year, Mr. Beast's YouTube channel came in No. 1 for most authentic media, followed by episodic programming and movies including "Stranger Things," "Heartstopper," "Barbie" and "The Summer I Turned Pretty." As the most authentic media platform, [young people](#) overwhelmingly chose TikTok.

More information: Report: [Teens & Screens](#)

Provided by University of California, Los Angeles

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