

Sex, Drugs, and Suicide in Youth-oriented TV Series of Different Countries: Controversial Content and the Level of Acceptability for a Sensitive Audience

ABSTRACT. Rosinska Olena, *Sex, Drugs, and Suicide in Youth-oriented TV Series of Different Countries: Controversial Content and the Level of Acceptability for a Sensitive Audience*. "Images" vol. XXXVII, no. 46. Poznań 2024. Adam Mickiewicz University Press. Pp. 93–107. ISSN 1731-450X. <https://doi.org/10.14746/i.2024.37.46.6>

This article investigates the portrayals of acute problems faced by young people, a sensitive population category, in youth-oriented series available on various open media platforms, both international (such as Netflix, YouTube) and national ones (for example, Polsat Box Go, TVP, Megogo, Volia, Oll. tv, etc.). Additionally, the study aims to examine the censorship methods employed by national media platforms for media content targeting a highly sensitive youth audience. The research focuses on TV series for youth and adolescents as a specific genre of artistic and educational content that addresses significant personal and social issues while entertaining. This includes the Polish series *Sexify* (2021, 2022); the Ukrainian series *First Swallows* (2019, 2020), *Sex, Insta and ZNO* (2020), the Spanish web series *Elite* (2018); the British series *Sex Education* (2019); and the American series *13 Reasons Why* (2017–2020), all of which are intended for viewers aged 16 and over. The Ukrainian series of *The New One* (2019) is not subject to detailed analysis but is mentioned for comparison and as an example available on the Netflix platform. The research addresses such issues as differing perceptions of youth-oriented series by representatives of different generations and the provision of certain behaviour models through media content.

KEYWORDS: youth-oriented series, sex education, values, narratives, problematic, social context

The perception of youth-oriented series varies between different generations of children and parents. The younger generation is often drawn to the freedom and openness in depicting all aspects of a teenager or young adult's life. Conversely, parents are often concerned about scenes related to sex life, drug use, suicidal intentions, and other forms of risky behaviour. This dynamic creates a field of mental tension in the perception of youth-oriented film content and stimulates the need for research in this area. In some sense, a range of youth-oriented series appear as an attempt to unite expectations of these two different audiences, merging the desire of the older generation (parents) to secure children by discussing hard questions with the desire of the younger generation for their problems to be covered in the media environment, and for them to receive answers to pressing questions. In this context, the form of material provision is extremely important, as it should not be moralizing or mentoring while covering a social factor in young

people's life. Consequently, the creators of youth-oriented TV series face a complex challenge: on the one hand, they need to meet the audience's demand by showcasing the intensity of issues experienced by individuals aged 16–18; on the other, it is crucial to consider the media-psychological impact of these films on this highly sensitive audience. As noted in research by Debra Dudek, Giselle Woodley and Lelia Green, youth-oriented series must be bright, “biting” and often shocking, which may scare an adult audience. However, this approach is necessary for filmmakers targeting this age group to achieve the desired effect:

Challenging a dominant social perception of sexually explicit materials as harmful to young people, and suggesting instead that such materials may be beneficial, the series demonstrates how young people may come together to learn about themselves and each other, even as they confront the double standards of a hypersexualised society.[1]

In this regard, a very important question concerns maintenance of balance between frankness, “verisimilitude,” excitement, and the characters' behaviour that resonates with the target audience, while introducing important narratives that help prevent real problems in a teenager or young person's life, fostering a deeper understanding of their age, nature and feelings. The required balance is not always possible to achieve, as sometimes the focus is more on the problem, the tragedy of experiencing it, than on solutions or finding a positive outcome.

The content selection policies of various streaming platforms differ from those of official television channels. The latter ones tend to impose certain limitations on films that touch upon controversial topics (sexuality, drug use, etc.). It is important to understand what specific elements in youth-oriented series might cause concern and how their target audience perceives them. Additionally, we must consider how the level of content accessibility in a particular country, readiness to raise questions as a social issues, and discussions within the context of national or religious values etc. differ. This will be the focus of our attention and differentiate this research from previous studies, as youth- and teenager-oriented series have long held the attention of from different fields because “Teen series play a central role in the socialization process of young people, since they offer portrayals and models that young people can relate to, identify with, or modify and break.”[2]

Researchers emphasize the extreme importance of monitoring young people and their media consumption: “While youth is both a group of people that demands top priority in society and a sort of

[1] D. Dudek, G. Woodley, L. Green, *Own Your Narrative: Teenagers as Producers and Consumers of Porn in Netflix's Sex Education*, “Information, Communication & Society” 2022, no. 25(4), p. 505.

[2] M. Fedele, M.-J. Masanet, *The ‘Troubled Rebel Girl’ and the ‘Boy-Next-Door’: The Apparent Inversion of Gender and Love Archetypes in 13 Reasons Why, Élite and Sex Education*, “The Journal of Popular Television” 2021, no. 9(3), p. 335.

‘state’ or period with a highly valued aesthetic, lifestyle, and attitude, youth – in both of these forms – is also demonized and heavily monitored and controlled.”[3] For instance, Louisa Allen[4] suggests viewing the *Sex Education* series as an important addition to school health education courses. Lauri Nunn specifies that she saw this project as an opportunity to speak openly about sex with a younger audience[5] without moralizing and taboo. The series has also been analysed as conveying messages about the importance of sexual health, with researchers noting that these narratives prevail in all the seasons, establishing this statistically.[6] The Spanish series *Elite* was researched by Silvia Díaz-Fernández[7] and Janina Reinhardt[8] primarily with regard to the presence of heterosexuality. The Polish series *Sexify* is not sufficiently researched but publications by Angela Fabris suggest that the series found harmony between sexuality, romanticism and humour.[9] Additionally, Aurora Fortez Martínez and Rebeca Córdova Tapia[10] explored the series of *Sex Education* and *Sexify* concerning health education. The American series *13 Reasons Why* has also been studied in depth, with works by Victor Hong,[11] Jr Cooper and Michael Townsend,[12] Sansea L. Jacobson,[13] among others. Olena Rosinska[14] discussed the Ukrainian series *First Swallows*, *Sex*, *Insta* and *ZNO* in the context of our research. The researchers focus on the methods of the media representation of acute problems faced by teenagers and adolescents, the level of trauma in depicting these prob-

[3] T.L. Anderson, *Sex, Drugs, and Death: Addressing Youth Problems in American Society*, Routledge, New York and London 2012.

[4] L. Allen, *What Can the Netflix Series Sex Education Teach School-Based Sexuality Education?*, “American Journal of Sexuality Education” 2023, pp. 1–19.

[5] C. Frost, *Sex Education Creator Laurie Nunn on Transforming the Awkward Teenage Experience into a TV Masterpiece*, Royal Television Society, 7.01.2020, <https://rts.org.uk/article/sex-education-creator-laurie-nunn-transforming-awkward-teenage-experience-tv-masterpiece> (accessed: 20.12.2023).

[6] S. Tauty et al., *Sexual Health Promotion Messages for Young People in Netflix Most-watched Series Content (2015–2020): Mixed-methods Analysis Study*, “BMJ Open” 2021, no. 11(12), pp. 1–11.

[7] S. Díaz-Fernández, *Post-queer Sexualities? Exploring the (Re)definition of Male’s Heteronormativity in the Netflix Show Elite*, “Feminist Media Studies” 2023, no. 23(6), pp. 2530–2545.

[8] J. Reinhardt, *Using Series Like Élite as a Means of Making the Unspeakable Speakable*, [in:] *Taboos and Controversial Issues in Foreign Language Education: Critical Language Pedagogy in Theory, Research and Practice*, eds. Ch. Ludwig, T. Summer, Routledge, London and New York 2023.

[9] A. Fabris, *Sexify Netflix serial original*, “Seriarte. Revista científica de series televisivas y arte audiovisual” 2022, no. 2, pp. 1–4.

[10] A.F. Martínez, R.C. Tapia, *La educación sexual a través de las series de televisión para adolescentes: Sex Education y Sexify como estudio de caso*, “Oportunidades y retos para la enseñanza de las artes, la educación mediática y la ética en la era postdigital” 2021, no. 1, pp. 1410–1427.

[11] V. Hong et al., *13 Reasons Why: Viewing Patterns and Perceived Impact among Youths at Risk of Suicide*, “Psychiatric Services” 2019, no. 70(2), pp. 107–114.

[12] M.T. Cooper Jr. et al., *Suicide Attempt Admissions from a Single Children’s Hospital Before and After the Introduction of Netflix Series 13 Reasons Why*, “Journal of Adolescent Health” 2018, no. 63(6), pp. 688–693.

[13] S.L. Jacobson, *Thirteen Reasons to Be Concerned About 13 Reasons Why*, “The Brown University Child and Adolescent Behavior Letter” 2017, no. 33(6), pp. 8–24.

[14] O. Rosinska, *Life on Edge: Acute Problematics of Teen Series*, “Synopsis: text, context, media” 2023, no. 29(1), pp. 38–46; O. Rosinska, *Images of Parents in Youth-oriented Series: Narrative of Counterposing*, “Visnyk of the Lviv University. Series Journalism” 2023, pp. 52–53.

lems, the characters' relations with their parents and correspondingly, interaction scenarios. Instead, a comprehensive study of narratives of sexuality and its connections with social issues in several series from different countries has not been conducted so far.

The following is based principally on content analysis. Additionally, for two series, a simplified statistical method is used for analysing audience data (views on Netflix and YouTube as popular streaming platforms). A systemic analysis allows the presentation of narrative structures in each series chosen by their authors.

YouTube and Netflix as Transnational Environment for Transmitting Models

Youth-oriented series are demonstrated through the streaming platform Netflix, which has recently begun actively presenting films produced in Ukraine, in particular, the series titled *The New One*. Moreover, this research includes two Ukrainian series not available on the platform but with a large number of views on YouTube.

On the one hand, such selection of material will allow the specificities of national scenarios in content formation for audiences of this age to be traced, and on the other, it will help to find common scenarios presenting the sexuality of teenagers and young adults in series, identify problem issues, and specify perspectives and efficient strategies for its narrative direction.

The great popularity of the series being analysed demonstrates that such a problem-oriented direction in films is effective. Moreover, their additional promotion on Netflix, a platform with a high engagement rate among viewers in this age category, further proves their productivity. The content distributed on this streaming platform has an extremely wide global reach and consequently can influence the formation of worldviews and value systems in the younger generation, especially due to the popular youth series. Thus, consumption of the same content forms a certain international community with the same perception of problems; this occurs beyond the borders of national moral values, cultural taboos, etc., i.e. we can speak of the transitional spread of particular discourses, such as attitudes toward personal sexuality and the perception of women's sexuality, the issue of LGBTQ+ sexuality, etc. topics to which some cultures were closed until relatively recently.

Zbyszek Melosik introduces a notion of the "global teenager"[15] to describe a generalized viewer, indicating the existence of global viewers sensitive to common problems. On the other hand, the content produced in a particular country provides an opportunity to observe differences in vision, solutions and presentation of problematic issues. Researchers highlight this complexity, for example:

[15] Z. Melosik, *Kultura popularna i tożsamość młodzieży. W niewoli władzy i wolności*, Oficyna Wydawnicza "Impuls", Kraków 2013.

The complexity of the discourses regarding affect, desire and sexuality which Netflix offers in these series contributes to the dissemination – through their platform or on non-official channels via Internet – of equality and diversity, that upon occasions does not coincide with the dominant sociocultural and political-legislative order present in the countries that consume these texts.[16]

Further analysis will reveal how similar issues are presented with different levels of openness, sensitivity and societal acceptance in content from different countries.

Hence, Netflix serves as the least censored streaming platform, providing a venue for acute-problem content not broadcast on national television in many parts of the world. For example, Sylwia Szostak, analysing possibilities of the platform compared to Polish national television states: “It is not difficult to understand why such a series as *Sexify* could not appear on TVP or a significantly more liberal station TVN...”[17]

It is worth noting that while the series *13 Reasons Why*, *Elite* and *Sexify* appeared on the global streaming platform Netflix, the series *First Swallows* was released on Ukrainian television and the series *Sex, Insta and ZNO* became the first Ukrainian web-series, initially available only on the Megogo platform and later on YouTube. Before 2022, Ukraine did not actively cooperate with Netflix, which indicates potentially less stringent age censorship of television content compared to other countries, as specified by Sylwia Szostak. However, this can be understood due to varied feedback from viewers of different age categories regarding films about sex, drugs, suicide, and violence.

The issues raised in youth-oriented series are often complex, controversial, and explicit, which can lead to mixed reactions from different generations. For example, parents’ reactions to the series *Sex Education* reflect this divide: “This is pornographic in nature. I would have felt uncomfortable as hell watching this with my parents as a teen and would never allow my child to watch this period while they lived in my home”; “This is NOT for kids, not for teens, this show is all about sex! In the first thirty seconds of the first episode there is nudity. There is nudity, foul language, even full-frontal view genitalia, sexting and things kids do not need to know about!”[18] However, other viewers mentioned that they watched the series with their children and wished they had had similar resources at that age. This ambivalence reflects the diverse attitudes of the viewing audience, as noted by American media:

Problems of Youth-oriented TV Serials: Controversies, Intergenerational Viewer Conflicts, Media Reflections

[16] F.A. Zurian, F.-J. García-Ramos, L.-G. Vázquez-Rodríguez, *La difusión transnacional de discursos sobre sexualidades no normativas vía Netflix: el caso Sex Education (2019–2020)*, “Comunicación Y Sociedad” 2021, pp. 1–22 [trans. – O.R.].

[17] S. Szostak, *Serwisy streamingowe a lokalna branża audiowizualna – mapowanie wpływu Netflix*

na polski sektor produkcji, “Images. The International Journal of European Film, Performing Arts and Audiovisual Communication” 2023, no. 35(44), pp. 204–226 [trans. – O.R.].

[18] Cited from the service <https://www.common-sensemedia.org/tv-reviews/sex-education/user-reviews/adult> (accessed: 30.04.2024).

So why isn't *Sex Education* a bigger deal? The name alone is problematic for an American audience, with more conservative parents wary of the concept.”[19]

Similarly, the Spanish series *Elite* received mixed responses regarding its appropriateness for the intended age group. It caused disputes concerning its acceptability for audience of the specified age category, etc.[20]

The series *13 Reasons Why* sparked significant controversy due to its focus on suicide. A review by Monique Zizzo captures the general concern:

The show contains instances of rape, sexual assault and drunk driving. One episode even depicts Hannah's suicide in a graphic, horrific scene; her suicide was not censored, but depicted “with as much detail and accuracy as possible.” This scene in particular has caused controversy among parents, school officials and mental health experts... is it dangerous for teens to watch such raw depictions of mental illness and suicide, or is it healthy and beneficial for them to be exposed to the reality of these situations? [21]

The Ukrainian series *First Swallows* met with a similar reception, with its first season focusing on a suicide investigation and the second on a murder disguised as a suicide. Media outlets described the series as unprecedented for Ukrainian television,[22] comparing its first season with *13 Reasons Why* and the second with *Euphoria*,[23] highlighting how Ukrainian cinema must align with global trends in youth-oriented content due to the limited production of national films for this audience.

The creators of the Ukrainian series *Sex, Insta and ZNO*, which depicts the lives of modern-day teenagers, also faced censorship challenges. *Detector Media* noted: “The difficulty in implementing such material consists in the existence of mine-and-legal environment where you can easily blow yourself with the rating 16+ ... *Sex, Insta and ZNO* is a revolutionary and simultaneously experimental series that courageously goes beyond boundaries.”[24] Other reviews praised the series for its realistic portrayal of teenage life, including profane language and sex.[25]

This research aims to demonstrate that while media may highlight the provocative nature of these series, their importance lies in how

[19] A. Bundel, *Like Any Adolescent Romance, 'Sex Education' Eventually Had to End*, MSNBC, 22.09.2023, <https://www.msnbc.com/opinion/msnbc-opinion/sex-education-netflix-season-4-rcna111453> (accessed: 15.12.2023).

[20] B. Piazza, *Netflix's Spanish-Language Series 'Elite' Is a „Teen” Drama – Is It Actually Appropriate For Teens?*, Distractify, 15.04.2022, <https://www.distractify.com/p/is-elite-appropriate-for-teens> (accessed: 15.12.2023).

[21] M. Zizzo, *The 13 Reasons Why Controversy: Is It Safe for Teens to Watch?*, Inkspire, 27.07.2017, <https://inkspire.org/post/the-13-reasons-why-controversy-is-it-safe-for-teens-to-watch/-KmcYOKwTHGQPaCr-juN9> (accessed: 30.04.2024).

[22] R. Bugaychuk, “*First Swallows*”: *How Ukrainian Television Started to Speak on Social Themes Without Shame*, Vertigo, <https://vertigo.com.ua/pershi-las-tivky-serial/> (accessed: 15.12.2023).

[23] Ibidem.

[24] Y. Pidhora-Hviazdovskyi, “*Sex, Insta and ZNO*”: *A Milestone in the Ukrainian Series Production*, Detector Media, 29.11.2020, <https://detector.media/kritika/article/182927/2020-11-29-seks-insta-i-zno-etap-nyy-moment-v-ukrainskomu-serialnomu-vyrobnyst-t-vi/> (accessed: 18.12.2023).

[25] Y. Samusenko, “*Sex, Insta and ZNO*”: *Vinnitsa's Euphoria*, Moviegram, 12.04.2020, <https://moviegram.com.ua/sex-insta-zno> (accessed: 23.12.2023).

they depict acute problems faced by teenagers and young adults. This includes both the worldview they create (whether society is safe for young people and how tolerant it is of diversity) and the availability of positive scenarios for resolving difficult situations. The latter aspect is crucial from a psychological perspective, as the viewer, reader or listener who encounters media signals about problems without solutions may perceive the world as a psychologically hostile environment. This is particularly impactful for adolescents transitioning from the familiar world of the family to the independent adult world.

The majority of youth problems are often examined through the lens of sexuality because sexuality profoundly influences many aspects of a person's life. For teenagers, it represents a realm of the unknown and a critical part of their initiation into adulthood. Sexuality is an area that has historically been taboo, with adults often reluctant to provide guidance. This is a way to learn about themselves and their partner, to build social relations. Firstly, it occurs through understanding their identity. This theme has been taboo for a long time; some countries still lack appropriate sex education, and instead, this area is highly mythologized and psychologically traumatic for uneducated young people; secondly, this context is additionally attractive for the viewer.

The series analysed show that while discussions about sex and relationships are natural for teenagers, they often remain triggers for the adult generation. Teenagers in these series appear comfortable discussing sex, relationships, and accepting sexual otherness.^[26] Themes of homosexuality are prevalent, and the latest season of *Sex Education* introduces queer characters. The spectrum of depicted sexual otherness ranges from social acceptance to stigmatization.

For instance, both seasons of *First Swallows* feature gay characters, including teenagers and adults. In the first season, although the character Fedia experiences aggression from a peer, the shame of being revealed, and non-acceptance by his father, he eventually accepts himself and finds understanding. In the second season, however, homosexuality is stigmatized through humiliation, disapproval, a necessity to hide his identity, highlighted by an adult character creating a fictitious family because his way of life must exclude for him a possibility to live a good life and run business. This indicates a powerful signal about societal intolerance towards sexual otherness, which can exacerbate young people's anxiety and lead to destructive psychological practices. In the first season of *Sexify*, Paulina has concerns regarding her orientation due to a lack of joy in her relationship with her boyfriend and her admiration for a girl. However, the second season resolves her conflict by having her enter into a harmonious relationship with a boy. While

Sexuality as a Socialization Method

[26] W. Jakubowski, *Sex Education, czyli serial jako źródło wiedzy o świecie młodzieży*, "Studia Edukacyjne" 2020, no. 57, pp. 17–32.

this is a positive storyline, its perception can be ambiguous concerning societal readiness for tolerance. Angelika Kucińska writes:

First, this is an extremely normative series. All the heroes are straight people, and twins – applications *Sexify* and *Sexiguy* aim at creating a couple between women and men, other options are not mentioned. Two episodes, which are visibly compulsory, are not enough to speak about diversity and equal representation.[27]

Such stigmatization or shyness regarding sexual otherness reflects the general state of societal acceptance, with fears and avoidance indicating a lack of readiness for tolerance. For young audiences, this can prompt additional doubts, as raising these issues can also trigger anxiety in Polish or Ukrainian societies. Series creators often self-censor, shift the focus from difficult questions, and propose simple, unrealistic solutions. In Polish and Ukrainian series, a classical patriarchal society is depicted that stigmatizes otherness, rendering this painful, shameful, or even disastrous. While *Sexify* might appear to be an anthem to feminism, the second season contradicts this by showing the girls failing to succeed on their own and not receiving support from other women.[28]

Conversely, homosexual relationships in *Elite* and *Sex Education* are depicted with more complexity, addressing national and cultural taboos (*Elite*), masculine non-acceptance by fathers (*Sex Education*), religious doubts (*Sex Education*), incapability of forging relations psychologically (*Sex Education*), infidelities (*Sex Education*, *Elite*), and happy relations (*Sex Education*), as well as bisexuality (*Sex Education*, *Elite*). These series offer important narratives for young people: they need to understand themselves, they can be themselves, and speak about this. However, *Elite* has been criticized for excessively aestheticizing homosexuality, focusing more on male relationships than heterosexual ones (one Instagram user left an angry comment concerning the series: “Not every person on the planet is gay. You are trying too much”).[29]

In two out of the three series specified here, there arises a question concerning the proportions of sexuality and religion. For instance, in the series of *Sex Education* the character Eric grapples with whether his church will accept his identity, as his family has. In Season Six, this issue finds a solution in a mystic way: Eric sees a god-woman, who encourages him to become a priest to promote tolerance. In contrast, in the second season of *First Swallows*, Eva's religious family actively objects to and stigmatizes her sexuality, despising her as an individual. In the first season of *Sexify*, Paulina hides her relationship and cohabitation with her boyfriend from her parents because she is a devout

[27] A. Kucińska, *Wiecej misji, mniej cringe'u. "Sexify" już nie żenuje jak kiedyś?*, Newonce.net, 11.01.2023, <https://newonce.net/arttykul/wiecej-misji-mniej-cringe-u-sexify-juz-nie-zenuje-jak-kiedys-recenzja> (accessed: 15.12.2023).

[28] W. Jakubowski, op. cit., pp. 17–32.

[29] Cited from the resource K. Reilly, *Elite's Gay Relationship Netflix Sharing Rainbows*, Refinery29, 17.10.2018, <https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/2018/10/214264/elite-netflix-homophobia-response> (accessed: 15.12.2023).

Catholic believer. The girl lives a double life even internally, she feels discomfort and dissociation. In the first of the three series, the scenario for resolving issues related to pretending, self-rejection, and confrontation is effective. In the other two series, there is no clear resolution; instead, the solution is portrayed as a loss of self and conformity.

In the second season of *First Swallows*, religiousness is portrayed as aggressive. Within the religious family, numerous prohibitions force the heroine, Eva, to hide her interests and seek excuses for studying journalism, while any relationships are labelled as fornication. Although this theme is not fully developed, there are details that reveal this painful layer: lack of money, fear, thoughts of selling her innocence, quarrels with her mother, and offensive words from her.

In general, relationships with parents are addressed to some extent in all the series, as this is a significant issue for young audiences and often involves psychologists. Several series, such as *Sex Education*, *13 Reasons Why*, and *Elite*, deeply explore themes of how parents work on themselves, help their children, and try to build healthy relationships as their children grow up. In the series *The New One* and *Sexify*, this theme is also partially explored. However, in *First Swallows*, *Sex*, *Insta* and *ZNO*, there is considerable misunderstanding between parents and children, with parents lacking the psychological maturity to improve these relationships. This may be due to the fact that in Ukraine, the practice of professional psychological counselling and family therapy is still developing.

The Ukrainian series *Sex*, *Insta*, *ZNO* was showcased by the 1+1 channel on their official website with the following description: "About her. About him. About you. About real life. Openly and truly. Uncomfortable and non-censored. No stereotypes. *Sex*, *Insta*, *ZNO*: about the life of Generation Z in the first series for the Ukrainian platform." This highlights how the series goes beyond traditional television censorship, as indicated by the channel's statement: "Such advert stories will not be shown on TV, but we have decided to take a risk." The series was thus shown on the digital platform of the TV channel, available exclusively within Ukraine. *Sex*, *Insta* and *ZNO* is a story that aims to portray various characters and life circumstances that reflect real-life experiences. The digital format of the series enabled a comprehensive exploration of themes that are often deemed unacceptable and uncomfortable for public discussion, presenting life from different perspectives."^[30] The series has been noted for its explicit content, which some reviewers see as an advantage over other youth series. For example, Hanna Demchenko writes: "The dialogues and behaviours of the characters are closest to real teenagers, sometimes surprising by going beyond

Ukrainian Youth-oriented TV Series: The Problem of Audience Readiness for New Social Scenarios

[30] "Sex, Insta, ZNO": On 1+1 the First Youth Digital Series in Ukraine Starts on 1+1", UNIAN, 25.11.2020, <https://www.unian.ua/lite/kino/seks-ins->

[ta-i-zno-de-divitisya-onlayn-11233055.html](https://www.unian.ua/lite/kino/seks-ins-ta-i-zno-de-divitisya-onlayn-11233055.html) (accessed: 23.12.2023).

established clichés. Moreover, the series is much more explicit than previous ones – it is full of sex scenes.”[31]

In contrast, the series *The New One* falls significantly short in several areas compared to the other series analysed. The teenage characters are overly simplified and lack believability. The series appears to be more suited for a general audience rather than teenagers, adhering closely to the “soap opera” template with positive heroes, shallow storylines, and typical characters. Despite addressing themes such as drug use, teenage crime, school conflicts, and social stratification, because the heroine is a simple girl who comes to the elite school (similar to the series *Elite*), the viewership statistics on Netflix do not indicate high levels of interest. Interestingly, out of all the youth-oriented series, *The New One* was selected for presentation on the platform. Most reviews classify it as suitable for a “wide audience,” meaning it is not specifically targeted at teenagers or adolescents, unlike the other films analysed.

General Analysis of Issues in Youth-oriented TV Series

We offer a classification of the issues depicted across various youth series, identifying both constructive and destructive narratives. This approach is pertinent because the target audience is highly impressionable and benefits from narratives that highlight positive solutions to challenging situations, providing emotional support and psychological balance.

Table 1. Problems important for age-specific audiences depicted in the films

Problem	<i>Sex Education</i>	<i>Elite</i>	<i>13 Reasons Why</i>	<i>Sexify</i>	<i>First Swallows</i>	<i>Sex, Insta and ZNO</i>	<i>The New One</i>
Good relations with parents	+	+	+	+	–	–	+-
Sex education	+	+-	+-	+	–	–	–
Problem of violence	+	+	+	–	+	–	–
LGBTQ+	+	+	+	+	+	+	–
Standardized gender roles	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Non-standardized gender roles	+	+	+	+		+	–
Woman as a personality	+	+	+	+	–	+	–
Romantic love story	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Religious aspects of education	+	–	–	+		–	–
Positive characters	+	+	+-	+	–	–	+
Sex as escape from psychological problems	+	+	+	+	+	+	–
Men's domination in relations	+	+	+	+	+	+	–
Women's domination in relations	+	–	+	+	+	+	–
Cultural differences	+	+	+	–	–	–	–

Source: Author's analysis.

[31] H. Deinichenko, *Swallows and Lesbians: How Ukrainian Teen Series Speak about Gender*, Gender in details, 16.02.2021, <https://genderindetail.org>.

ua/library/mistetstvo/ukrainski-pidlitkovi-seri-aly-pro-hender.html (accessed: 15.12.2023).

Table 1 illustrates a possible range of issues relevant to the age-specific audience, touching upon sexual and social choices, gender identity, and the search for one's own identity. Notably, *Sex Education* addresses the broadest spectrum of these issues, doing so with the nuance and sensitivity of a psychotherapist. Instead, the series *The New One* covers the fewest issues, and, despite its melodramatic elements, fails to accurately portray the real lives of teenagers.

A “+–” sign indicates that while a problem was raised, it was not developed effectively, and there may be elements of exaggeration. It should be noted that Polish and Ukrainian series do not emphasize cultural differences, presenting their societies as culturally and nationally homogeneous.

Each series under discussion reveals social anomalies such as drugs, violence, and depictions of adults who negatively impact teenagers (see Table 2). Additionally, teachers often fail to understand the protagonists, exhibiting dominance or disrespect. These moments, however, can be portrayed in different ways. For instance, a film might illustrate how to overcome these destructive influences, as seen in *Sex Education*. On the other hand, a film might exaggerate or even aestheticize these issues, as observed in *First Swallows*.

Table 2. Destructive narratives indicating a dangerous world

Problem	<i>Sex Education</i>	<i>Elite</i>	<i>13 Reasons Why</i>	<i>Sexify</i>	<i>First Swallows</i>	<i>Sex, Insta and ZNO</i>	<i>The New One</i>
Destructive narratives	–	–	+	–	+	+	+
Images of destructive adults	+–	+	+	–	+	+	+
Images of destructive teachers	+–	–	–	–	+	+	+
Suicide	–	+	+	–	+	–	–
Murder	–	+	–	–	+	–	–
Drugs	+–	+	+	+–	+	–	+

Source: Author's analysis.

Sexify contains minimal destructive narratives, presenting light entertainment. Although drug use is depicted in a nightclub scene, it is not a recurring theme, none of characters uses them continuously, does not sell, etc., which is why it is marked with “+–” in the table. Similarly, *Sex Education* features occasional destructive characters (Adam's father and mother and Maeve's brother), but these individuals are portrayed with depth and multifaceted personalities. For instance, Adam's father does great internal work on self-acceptance and comes to accept his son, affording love and harmony. Maeve's mother has lived a hard life, her feelings are diverse and although she is irresponsible in general, she tries to understand her daughter's feelings. The drug use in *Sex*

Education is occasional, the harm they cause is emphasised and it is shown that it is possible to live without them.

In contrast, *First Swallows* (Season 2) highlights destructive narratives related to drug use and selling, potentially increasing young viewers' anxiety about adulthood. The narrative of domination as a way to survive and build relations refers to the images of aggressive female sexuality and male violence: Kira, a journalism lecturer who is trying to dominate others in professional and personal life to overcome her own trauma after a rape in captivity; a librarian in a university who literally thrusts herself on a student, who wants to receive information important for him, pours him alcohol. Aggression generates aggression, this system is impossible to leave, and the film does not show such an exit. To some extent, aggression is even glorified – a suit, an image of a beautiful and intelligent woman, a winner, “cool.”

First Swallows, *13 Reasons Why*, *Elite* – all these series tackle sensitive themes such as suicide; on one hand, they require discussion but these discussions are not completely safe, therefore, on the other hand, they require handling to avoid triggering vulnerable viewers. For these reasons, it is important to show positive models of solving crisis situations or tragical inevitability of such events and their consequences. The makers of the products being analysed managed to do that, although *13 Reasons Why* has sparked intense media and public debate, as discussed in our previous research.

Conclusions

The analysis of viewership statistics for youth-oriented TV series on Netflix and YouTube demonstrates the great popularity of this type of content. Although we cannot assess this empirically, we can hypothesize that the audience primarily consists of young people. Series produced in countries with a long-standing presence on Netflix are accessible to viewers worldwide, whereas the presence of Ukrainian film production is notably weaker, as the country has only recently begun to engage with the platform. Therefore, we assume that Ukrainian youth film production is primarily popular with domestic audiences at this stage. However, this audience is familiar with series produced in other countries that have already become classics. So, can we speak about a “global viewer” or a “global teenager” in this context? To some extent, yes, because the content available to mass audiences worldwide conveys certain narratives, behavioural models and worldviews, serving as an emotional and narrative foundation for young viewers during maturation. It is also noticeable that certain countries dominate this space, as their filmmakers have created bold, open content that quickly gained popularity due to its openness, trigger points, and even shocking nature. At this stage of research, it is difficult to answer whether this is generally related to the media and educational policies in these countries, as it requires a separate, step-by-step study and will become an interesting area for discussion. However, we can assume that in countries with a long tradition of democracy and the formation

of general tolerance for diversity and self-expression, there are more foundations for such reflections. In contrast, for a country that has long been under the pressure of propagandist totalitarian narratives, moving to other paradigms of perceiving human diversity is significantly more challenging. In this context, we can note that for the Ukrainian film market, youth-oriented film production from other countries becomes a necessary impetus for raising important issues. The emergence of such products in the national film market is undoubtedly an important step, and young audiences are ready for this. This, as in the case of every national film market, is an opportunity to maintain its uniqueness in the context of globalization and retain the attention of the national audience, making the need for such products undeniable.

Based on some cursory analysis, we can also assume that there is a difference between the youth-oriented content offered for general television and streaming platforms. This is quite natural, as there are certain censorship norms, often not openly declared but stimulated by state educational and media policies, channel policies, and the characteristics of the target audience, which today is predominantly adult. A more in-depth study of this difference may be promising for our research.

The youth audience needs films addressing acute problems, and filmmakers respond to this. Thus, we can assume that the emergence of such content is stimulated by audience demand and the desire to make the film both popular and profitable. The youth-oriented series analysed here are convincing examples of how one can attempt to meet the need for creating popular, profitable content while also addressing issues that are significant and relevant for young audiences. Due to the complexity of the problems and age, as well as society's social life in general, it can be difficult to find harmony between the intention to make an interesting series with an exciting plot to attract the viewer, and the need to implement narratives useful for young people without mentorship but only with a certain element of wise coaching. In the series *Sex Education*, this balance has been maximized, while in others, we see either a focus on individual problems or the absence of healthy narratives, provided there is an exciting plot available. Instead, none of the series leaves an unambiguous impression for the older viewer, thus dividing the audience into two categories: those who accept the complexity of the themes and those who want to avoid difficult questions.

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