

“YOU AIN’T NEVER HAD A FRIEND LIKE ME”: PORTRAYALS OF TEEN RELATIONSHIPS AND INTERACTIONS IN TEEN SHOWS

Hannah Mahany, Christine Madden

Psychology Department, Ithaca College

While some studies have examined the content of teen drama shows (e.g., Ortiz & Brooks, 2014), few studies have looked at portrayals of teens in teen-oriented situation comedies. The present study is a descriptive, longitudinal content analysis of 91 teen sitcom-style episodes focusing on the presence of gender messages and interactions among teens involved in different types of relationships (e.g., friends, significant others, siblings, enemies). The sample was taken from programs videotaped from 1993-2017 for the Center for Research on the Effects of Television (CRETV) archive at Ithaca College. Episodes were selected based on the presence of unrelated teen characters interacting with one another, with an emphasis on shows that took place primarily outside of the home (e.g., *Saved by the Bell*, *Zoey 101*, *Victorious*). The unit of analysis for coding each show was the presence of a teen dyad (two teenagers interacting together in two or more scenes within the episode). Characters were only coded as teenagers if they were attending middle or high school, or their age was explicitly noted as being between 12-18 years old. Working in pairs, coders tracked the relationship type, frequency of displays of affection, gender messages, and interactions reflecting the nature of the dyad (e.g., put-downs, compliments, conflicts, cooperation). Results showed that teen dyads were most often portrayed as same-gender or mixed-gender friendships, where the teens often experienced conflict resolution within the episode. In addition, teens were more likely to be portrayed as wanting to be in a relationship rather than actually dating.