

February 25, 2011

<http://detnews.com/article/20110225/ENT10/102250323>

## Parents protest sexy teen dramas

Groups fearing trend press advertisers to back off, with some success

*MEKEISHA MADDEN TOBY*  
*Detroit News Television Writer*

When it comes to teen dramas on TV these days, it's all about sex, drugs and acne cream. Take "Pretty Little Liars" on ABC Family, for instance. The show follows four upper-crust girls as they juggle high school, secrets and blackmail. Meanwhile, one of the main characters, Aria (Lucy Hale), has a very sexual and mature relationship with her older male teacher.

MTV's British remake "Skins" isn't much tamer. In an upcoming episode, the show's main characters hang out in the woods, get high and get to know one another better in every way possible. Similar plots can be found on The CW's "90210" and "Gossip Girl."

In case you haven't noticed, such shows and themes are becoming the norm, prompting groups such as the Parents Television Council to cry foul and pressure advertisers to drop their support.

The nudging has worked and companies such as General Motors, Taco Bell, H&R Block, Wrigley and Proactive have pulled their ads from "Skins."

"We have serious concerns about this trend," says Melissa Henson, Parents Television Council's director of communications. "These shows glamorize and normalize bad behavior with little to no consequence. Our goal is to inform parents about these shows and the risks and to appeal to advertisers and redirect the dollars backing these shows."

## Teen behavior disturbing

Elayne Rapping is a professor of women's and media studies at the State University of New York in Buffalo. She says programs such as "90210" and "Gossip Girl" sexualize and objectify teenagers, especially girls.

"The proliferation of sexy, even sexually explicit, teen dramas is disturbing," says Rapping, author of "Mediations: Forays into the Culture and Gender Wars" (South End Press, \$15). "Kids are bombarded with ideas and images that promote early and excessive sexual behavior. But what's more disturbing is TV has ceded its ground to this kind of teen programming for kids and increasingly offers little else for them to think about or imagine."

In defense of his "Pretty Little Liars," Oliver Goldstick, an executive producer, says the relationship between Aria and her teacher is implied, not shown.

"The focus is very much on romance in the show," he says. "It's not on the sexual relationship. We don't show her sleeping over there."

## Protests may backfire

It should also be noted that strong protestations against these dramas can be counterproductive, encouraging teens to watch because the content is taboo, says Lucas Ostrowski, a theater and film instructor at Bowling Green State University.

"Sex sells and many of us, regardless of age, like to follow fantasy-driven stories we don't see every day," he says.

He compares "Pretty Little Liars" and shows of that sort to "Dynasty," a popular nighttime soap from the 1980s, and says the characters are like the grandchildren of the Carringtons, the rich and morally bankrupt family "Dynasty" followed.

"The average age of women watching 'Gossip Girl' is 26 not 16, so one of the worst things parents can do is give shows like this more power and credit than they deserve," he says. "Instead of forbidding kids to watch these shows, parents should watch the shows with their kids and use them as a way to spark (dialogue) and conversation."

[mmadden@detroitnews.com](mailto:mmadden@detroitnews.com)

(313) 222-2501

## Additional Facts

On TV

---

© Copyright 2011 The Detroit News. All rights reserved.