



Daniel W. Duffy

Surgeon general warns: Teen Spirit causes cancer

Open up the TV guide this fall and you'll be run over by the teen drama bandwagon and turned into "family values" roadkill.

"Beverly Hills, 90210-Senior Year," "Melrose Place," "The Heights," "2000 Malibu Road," and "Freshman Dorm" are trivializing what it's like to be a teenager by creating nice, neat moralistic one-hour packages. The Surgeon General warns watching these shows can cause throat polyps, yellow fingernails and a loss of IQ points. I'd rather smoke two packs of Camel non-filters a day than inhale teen spirit.

If memory serves, teenage existence is a living hell. Shallow cliques, peers solely judging you on what you look like or the car you drive doesn't sound like the barrel o' monkeys portrayed on television. It sounds more like life at UNLV.

The first season of "90210" was actually pretty good as far as its realistic depictions of the situations and emotions teens go through. Episodes involving drunken driving, young

lust, drug addiction and teen pregnancy portrayed teen life in a realistic, not-overly moralistic light.

The problem with "90210" was, it became popular — a virtual overnight teen phenomenon. It turned parents' heads in a way not seen since the days of David Cassidy shakin' his groove thang on the "Partridge Family."

Following an episode where two of the characters from "90210" had sex on prom night, the overprotective and overly - paternalistic parents across this great country of ours started writing needless letters to "90210's" producers concerning the show's content. It didn't stop there though; these parents also wrote advertisers, threatening to boycott their products if they advertised on a show with such immoral content. When leaned on by the advertisers, the producers subsequently lost their artistic balls and turned the show into one big public service announcement.

Now each episode of "90210" follows the same "sugar-coated" formula. Brandon (1/2 of our wonder-twins protagonists), is totally open-minded and never does anything wrong. He must have a charity case each and every episode as well. Dylan (California's only surf punk who doesn't smoke grass) and Brenda (the obnoxious and self-centered other half of the wonder twins) must fight with Brenda's parents. Sex is not allowed in any way shape or form, because teenagers don't have sex, and so forth and so on.

Instead of discussing the show's content with their own family, these parents shun it like the plague as opposed to just dismissing it as not appropriate for their family. This indirect form of censorship is so typical of our PC times. It's not censorship for the rags to write-in, it's needless self-censorship by the advertisers.

Why doesn't anyone stand up to these unreasonable parents and tell them if they don't like the show, don't watch it? Or even better, if it's not right for their kids, don't let them watch it, but don't ruin it for the rest of America who want to see quality programming instead of homogenized bullshit like "The Waltons."

If I had any juice, I'd unleash a write-in campaign protesting the changes made in "90210's" format. I'd recommend they show Dylan smokin' a fat joint every once and a while to stay as relaxed as he does. Because he is a self-assured independent individual, Dylan should also dump that whiny bitch Brenda faster than you can say mutton chops.

All kidding aside, the whole host of new teen melodramas this fall have followed "90210's" homogenized suit. They are outright preposterous depictions of what its like to be a young person today.

"Melrose Place" is as bland as a rice cake. The characters are one-dimensional glamorized shells of human beings.

"2000 Malibu Road," is more stylized than the others, with filmmaker Joel Schumacher (*The Lost Boys*, *Flatliners*) at the helm and a cast that boasts film stars like Drew Barrymore and Jennifer Beals, but its still a rich-bitch yawner.

I had high hopes for "The Heights" because not everyone on the show is a model, nor are all the characters rich. "The Heights" also looked like it was going to have a more ethnically diverse cast, but just like "Melrose," the show seems to only have a token member of any non-white group. And that theme song, "How do you talk to

an angel?" A better question might be, "Where can I get some singing lessons?" "Freshman Dorm" is so sorry, it isn't even worth mentioning.

All I want is for entertainment to more realistically reflect life. A constant reference for me is the black-humored cult classic, *Heathers*.

Heathers is both tragic and hilarious, not unlike many plays by a man named William "Bill" Shakespeare. Did "concerned" parents write letters to whoever published Bill's plays, threatening to boycott his works because they disagreed with the content? Incest, betrayal, greed and murder are all topics that are prevalent in Bill's work, but that doesn't mean he advocates such things. His plays are regarded as masterpieces because of a long forgotten art called individual interpretation.

Individual interpretation teaches us to think for ourselves and question what we read or watch and not take everything at face value. Today, there is no room for individual interpretation because people are lazy and don't want to take the time to form their own opinion. We want everything spelled out for us because we're in a hurry and not conditioned to think for ourselves. We're taught "if our opinion doesn't jive with the masses, keep it to yourself."

The dark side of life needs to be shown on TV as well its brighter moments. Life for a teenager is often humiliating and sad. Of course, this is never shown on television. At the end of every episode of each and every TV show, life is as cheery as "Leave It To Beaver."



by Peter Joya

TEMPEST

Editor
Kimberley McGee

Associate Editor
Daniel W. Duffy

Photo Editor
Rob Weidenfeld

Production
Ched Whitney
M. Ray Carrigan

The Writin' Crew
Jonathan Weber
Dionne Drabek
Tricia Romano
Mark Goodman
and Jared Dean
as Dr. "Bones" McCoy