

CPYU 3(D) REVIEW

TV Show: *Skins*

By Walt Mueller

Background/summary: This controversial version of the popular British teen drama series of the same name premiered on MTV on January 17, 2011. The show follows the lives, issues, and interactions of nine main characters – all teenagers – along with a growing supportive cast of family members and peers. The first season of the American version of *Skins* includes ten episodes which run on Monday nights, and are available online and On Demand around the clock. Rated TV-MA for language and sexual situations, the show immediately stirred controversy when critics called for an investigation into whether or not the show is child pornography. Within days of the show's premiere episode, numerous advertisers pulled their ads.

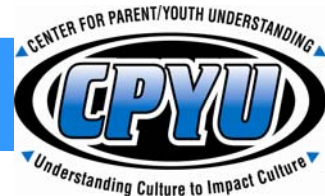
Discover: What is the message/worldview?

- The initial episode opens with Eura, a teenage girl, wandering home on a snowy, cold, Brooklyn street after a night of sneaking around and doing who-knows-what. Eura is barefoot, disheveled, and looks like she's been raped. Her older brother, 17-year-old self-confident womanizing high school senior Tony, sees her coming and creates a noisy distraction in the house (cranks up his stereo so that his dad comes in screaming) so that she can sneak back in and get ready for school undetected.
- Tony calls his best friend Stanley, an under-confident and awkward high school junior to tell him to get out of bed (covered with pornographic magazines) as this is the day he's going to lose his virginity. Tony tells Stanley that he can no longer be his friend if he doesn't lose his virginity by his 17th birthday. Tony proceeds to invite their circle of friends to embark on this mission with him, including arranging for one of the girls to make herself available to Stanley. Stanley says that it's "totally normal" to be a virgin at 16. Tony fires back saying that "No, it's embarrassing!"
- Cadie –a neurotic and unstable girl who was just released from a psych hospital - agrees to have sex with Stanley that night at a party. Because Cadie loves her drugs, Stanley agrees to secure an ounce of marijuana to exchange for sex. Tony sends Stanley to get the weed at a suburban home that turns out to be a brothel run by a dirty-old-man who says his name is Madison LeDong, PhD (which he says stands for "pretty huge d___"). He agrees to give Stanley the weed on credit, but gives Stanley 4 ounces and a threat to remove his testicles if he doesn't pay \$900 within 48 hours. The unassuming Stanley leaves in fear.
- The party is hosted by Tabitha, a rich prep school attendee who has invited all her upper-class friends to attend. When Tony and his low-brow crew crash the party, the classes collide and a fight breaks out. Stanley, who has been making out with Cadie on a trampoline outside, watches as Cadie passes out from downing too many pills. He pulls the crew together in a panic to get Cadie to the hospital. Tony's friends steal cell phones, etc. and an Escalade from the rich kids.
- After Cadie comes to before getting to the hospital, the panic subsides and the group stops in a park to smoke the weed while they sit in the stolen SUV. Unaware that the car is starting to roll, they wind up in the lake, with the car and the weed sinking to the bottom.
- The day and the episode end with Tony and Stanley laying in bed together. Stanley is still a virgin. Tony says to him, "It's embarrassing Stanley." He replies, "Yep."



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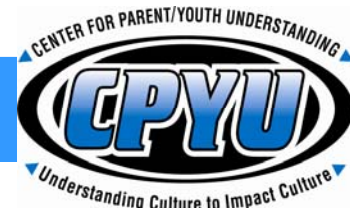
Discern: How does it stand in light of the biblical message/worldview?

- The young characters in *Skins* appear to live in a world where they have very little to rely on other than each other. We can celebrate their community and care for each other, no matter how misguided it is at times. One wonders if as the story plays out, each character's issues of abandonment will come to light, offering insight into who they are and how they got that way. With parents portrayed in the show as angry and detached, it appears that even when family is there for these kids, it is deeply wounded and broken. We must have compassion for kids who live in this world. The Scriptures reveal that the family is the backbone of a culture and the place where a child is born and should be loved, nurtured, and cared for. In Ephesians 6, the Apostle Paul lays out the responsibilities for parents to *not* exasperate their children, and for parents to nurture their children in the Lord (Eph. 6:4).
- The world of the *Skins* kids is a world void of boundaries and rules, with the exception of the boundaries and rules that they make up based on how they feel at any given moment in time. In addition, when boundaries and rules are enforced by adults, the kids choose to disrespect and do their own thing. God has given parameters for our behavior that we are to function within if we are to live an abundant life. In addition, he calls his people to obey those in authority (Romans 13:1-7), and for children to obey their parents (Eph. 6:1-3).
- While *Skins* claims to be a show that reflects the reality our teens live in today, it tries so hard to be realistic that it is very *unrealistic*. It portrays a world where kids are far more self-sufficient and developmentally mature than the average teenager. It also portrays a world where adults are totally self-consumed, disconnected, and out-of-touch. While these are indeed realities for some in today's culture, this is not the norm. The *Skins* world is an extremely crude and amoral world where dirty talk and anarchy rule. God has instilled purpose, order, and design into the world He has created. Where things are not the way they are supposed to be, change must be sought – whether it's the parents, the kids, or the script writers who are failing.

Decide: What do I do with it?

- Because *Skins* is a highly publicized show that is rapidly establishing its place on the pop culture landscape, it cannot be ignored. Youth workers should endeavor to make parents and other adults aware of *Skins* and its message, telling them that while the show doesn't accurately portray teen reality, it does portray some noteworthy aspects of the contemporary teen experience that deserve our attention.
- The *Skins* landscape will no doubt be found to be especially ugly and repulsive by those who endeavor to walk with Christ. But we cannot allow our response to principalities and powers to carry over to the human beings – many who are desperately lost and misguided – who inhabit that world. These are our neighbors, and the God we serve commands us to become Good Samaritans who give of ourselves in service and ministry, regardless of the cost or what others might think.
- The message and popularity of *Skins* reminds us of our need to teach our children to process media critically and Christianly. We can tell them what we think is redeeming or non-redeeming in *Skins* (and we should), but wouldn't it be better for us to teach them how to make those judgments with wisdom for themselves? While we don't recommend watching and discussing *Skins* with kids who have never seen it, we do recommend using our *How to Use Your Head to Guard Your Heart - 3(D) Media Evaluation Guide* (available online at cpsy.org) to teach these skills.
- There is talk that *Skins* might be cancelled. But don't believe that it will go away. Interested viewers will be able to indulge their appetite by watching the British version of the show. We believe that all the controversy has already established *Skins* as a cult favorite.

Dr. Walt Mueller is the president of the Center for Parent/Youth Understanding.



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