

Beverly Hills, 90210: Television, Gender, and Identity (Feminist Cultural Studies, the Media, and Political Culture)

By E. Graham McKinley




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In 1990 the fledgling Fox television network debuted its prime-time soap opera *Beverly Hills, 90210*, which was intended to appeal to viewers in their late teens and early twenties. Before long, not only did the network have a genuine hit with a large and devoted audience but the program had evolved into a cultural phenomenon as well, becoming a lens through which its youthful viewers defined much of their own sense of themselves.

By an overwhelming majority the fans were female-young women between eleven and twenty-five whose experience of the program was addictive and intensely communal. They met in small groups to watch the program, discussing its plot and characters against the backdrops of their own ongoing lives.

Wondering what this talk accomplished and what role it played in the construction of young female viewers' identities, Graham McKinley found several groups who watched the program and questioned them about the program's significance. Extracting generously from actual interviews, McKinley's investigation has the urgency of a heart-to-heart conversation, with rich anecdotal moments and revelations of self.

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Editorial Review

Review

... densely theoretical, deeply frightening, *Beverly Hills, 90210* ... isn't about the content of the show but rather the viewing experience of its audience. After conducting intense sessions of anthropological research ... McKinley has concluded that "agreement on what is appropriate beachwear is continually constructed, negotiated, and bolstered by ... media images and interpersonal talk." Whoa, Nellie. -- *Entertainment Weekly*

From the Back Cover

Graham McKinley found several groups who watched the program and questioned them about the program's significance. Her conclusions, examined in the light of cultural studies and contemporary theory, are always interesting and sometimes startling - for instance, that her informants' talk about Beverly Hills, 90210 often concerned ethical issues, but not the issues foregrounded by the show's producers. Extracting generously from actual interviews, McKinley's investigation has the urgency of a heart-to-heart conversation, with rich anecdotal moments and revelations of self. As remarkable for its intimate style as for its adroit use of theory, *Beverly Hills, 90210: Television, Gender, and Identity* illustrates the ways in which media both form and reflect cultural reality.

About the Author

E. Graham McKinley teaches journalism at Rider University.

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