

ABC's 'Mistresses' Cheats the Viewing Audience

"Even happily married people have attractions without it leading anywhere." So says Joss to Savi on season 1 of *Mistresses*—except on *Mistresses*, ABC's new *Desperate Housewives*-esque drama, it typically does lead somewhere.

The show is an Americanized version of a British sitcom created by S.J. Clarkson—director of *Heroes*, *Dexter*, *Ugly Betty* and *House*—that ran from 2008 to 2010. The Lifetime Network tried to pick up the show in 2008 but ended up scrapping it. It looks like ABC was rifling through the garbage for this year's *Desperate Housewives* lookalike. Sadly, this probably would have been better left in the disposal.

K.J. Steinberg, producer and writer of *Gossip Girl*, spearheaded the American project, producing and writing a lot of it. *Mistresses* chronicles the lives of four friends—Savi (Alyssa Milano), April (Rochelle Aytes), Karen (Yunjin Kim) and Joss (Jes Macallan)—as they each are affected in some way by infidelity. Two of them are indeed mistresses, one cheats on her husband and the other was cheated on by her husband and must deal with his mistress and her young son.

In their world, one filled with lies and relative right and wrong, there is a sole value that is held above all things: Your friends come first. This is the primary condition for every drama geared towards women ages 18 to 45. Your girls are number one. Period.

In *Mistresses*, each woman acts as each other's moral compass, and they look to each other to determine the correctness of an action. This is troubling when your friends are telling you to hide your infidelity from your husband, to get out of a committed relationship because it is going through hard times

and to let go of your “traditional conservative values that never bring you any happiness”—all things that make situations worse instead of better.

While the show doesn't necessarily glorify infidelity (the audience sees instantly that the women are not happy in their choices), it doesn't promote Christian or family values either. Actually, mostly all you see are unhappy women making choices that further their dreary state of being.

For example, Joss is supposed to be the comic relief of the show, showing how much fun it is to sleep with a multitude of people. Yet from the first episode, she is shown to be dissatisfied with her current state of life. It's fine to have an episode or a story arc that deals with sadness, but when the first six episodes of a 13-episode season are 80 percent misery, it can be quite the downer.

This has to do mainly with the writing of the show, but it also has to do with the whole theme of it. It's great that you don't want to glorify mistresses, but if you still want a whole series built around them, there is pretty much a guarantee that the show will be a sad time for all.

Was it marketed as such? Of course not! It was marketed on trailers as the scandalous sex-filled path of four friends who stick together through it all, and it was marketing in writing as “a provocative yet sophisticated drama about four women and their love lives, their sex lives, their secrets, their lies, and above all, their friendship.”

But it doesn't deliver.

The show is provocative only in the sense that very little is left to the imagination during the many sex scenes, and it is sophisticated only in regard to Alyssa Milano's bun. So those who watch it for the steamy “beach read” TV show are disappointed, and the ones who wouldn't be watching it due to its premise never see the slim silver lining in the story.

Even if one were to watch it not caring about either side, its mediocre writing and predictable storyline aren't entertaining. It's a lose-lose for the audience and for *Mistresses*, which has had no more than 5.5 million viewers each episode. Compare that to *Desperate Housewives*, which had an average of 23 million viewers during season one, and it looks as if *Mistresses* and ABC will be breaking up soon.

Hopefully this flop will show ABC and the other major TV stations that their viewers are looking for more out of their evening entertainment. How about a show that inspires us to live life well, that gives us a model for living excellently? How about a show that would connect generations and that a mother could watch with her daughter without feeling all sorts of awkwardness? How about something that would inspire femininity that isn't reliant on how often or with how many different people you are currently sleeping, one that models a good marriage as a partnership that truly sticks together "for better and for worse"? Make that the standard again!

Make infidelity as unfashionable as sandals with socks or a fanny pack worn without irony. Wouldn't it be nice to not have to go into a primetime show with a bulletproof vest over your soul? Let's support those types of shows and leave *Mistresses* and the like to the landfill.