

Does MTV 'Skins' Violate Child Porn Laws?

MTV is known for its provocative, even controversial reality TV shows. Now, some are concerned that the music television network has crossed the line into child pornography and obscenity.

At the heart of the debate is "Skins." MTV describes the new show as "a wild ride through the lives of a group of high school friends stumbling through the mine field of adolescence—and stepping on most of the mines as they go." Characters include Tony, who is attractive, witty and manipulative, Michelle, who is beautiful and clever, and the dysfunctional Cadie.

On Monday, Morality in Media called for MTV and Viacom to stop airing the show to avoid the exploitation of children and because it may violate U.S. child pornography and obscenity laws. Morality in Media's call follows a move by the Parents Television Council (PTC). The PTC petitioned the chairmen of the U.S. Senate and House Judiciary Committees and the Department of Justice to immediately open an investigation regarding child pornography on Skins.

The *New York Times* reported last week that the network itself is concerned about violating child pornography laws. In addition to the sexual content on the show involving cast members as young as 15, PTC counted 42 depictions and references to drugs and alcohol in the premiere episode. The run-time was only 41 minutes excluding commercial breaks.

"Given the allegations of sexually explicit conduct by minors that have been made in news reports and by the show's distributors, MTV and Viacom, some material may constitute child pornography under U.S. law if certain conditions are

met," says Patrick Trueman, CEO of Morality in Media. Trueman is a former Chief of the U.S. Department of Justice Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section in Washington, D.C.

"U. S. child pornography laws prohibit any visual depiction involving children under the age of 18 engaged in 'sexually explicit conduct,' which is defined under those laws as 'actual or simulated' sexual intercourse, including 'genital-genital, oral-genital' sex and a variety of other sexual acts," says Trueman, noting that according to news reports the British episodes of "Skins" do depict sexually explicit conduct with minors involved.

So far Taco Bell, Wrigley and H&R Block have yanked their advertisements from Skins. Viacom could not immediately be reached for comment.