They're not hated, they're just complex... and blonde

By NICOLE GEMMATI
Staff Writer

Every hero needs a villain, and because of that, there's usually one in every show — only it's not who you'd expect.

While teen dramas are known for their soap opera-esque villains, it's usually teenage girls who get the brunt of the hate. But is it really deserved?

"One Tree Hill" is among many teen dramas in the early 2000s, and is one of the few mentioned to have a continuous villain throughout all nine seasons. Though it's not Peyton Sawyer (Hilarie Burton) like the fans would have you believe.

Only 16 years old at the start of the show, Peyton is the opposite of the stereotypical cheerleader. Blaming herself for her mother's death, Peyton retracts further into herself, closing others off with sarcastic remarks.

Though this subversion of the trope leads to an interesting character, the hate comes towards her thanks to her feelings for her best friend's boyfriend, Lucas (Chad Micahel Murray). Though she initially hides her feelings towards him, a rare moment of vulnerability causes her to kiss him… in two separate seasons. Though these actions aren't excusable, they're explainable.

What makes it harder to like her is that she constantly lies to her best friend about it, and in the first season, continues to see Lucas behind her back. After the time jump in season five, Peyton continues to bully Lucas' fiance, behavior that would be more understandable if she was still in high school.

Boy drama aside, Peyton deals with way more traumatic events than she should at her age. By the time she's graduated high school, she's dealt with finding out she's adopted, getting injured in a school shooting, her biological mom dying, her biological dad wanting nothing to do with her and her believed biological brother stalking, assaulting and holding her captive.

Peyton was often used as the writer's scapegoat, a decision that may have been caused by the show's creator Mark Schwahn's ill intentions towards her. Burton, who left the show early to avoid him, believes that Peyton's stalker served as a "self insert" for Schwahn.

Fans have expressed longing for the season one version of Peyton, and have pointed out how her actions deviate from the initial version of the character.

While some were happy to see Peyton leave, others were glad that she at least got away from the drama. Marissa Cooper (Mischa Barton) of "The OC" however, did not get off so lucky.

"The OC" is another teen drama from the Y2K era, and though Marissa is initially portrayed as the stereotypical girl next door, the pilot episode reveals that she's so much more than that.

Many have chastised the character for her self-destructive behavior and hero complex. A central flaw of Marissa's is her trust, which often leads her into danger time and time again.

Marissa often dates certain boys that she knows will provoke disappointment from her mom. Though this seems like typical teenager behavior, their tumultuous relationship is heavily touched on throughout the seasons.

While the relationship with her dad may have been enough, Marissa learns early on that he's not a good person, and he abandons her twice in three years. Marissa is blackmailed by her stepfather to live with her mom, despite her mother sleeping with Marissa's first boyfriend.

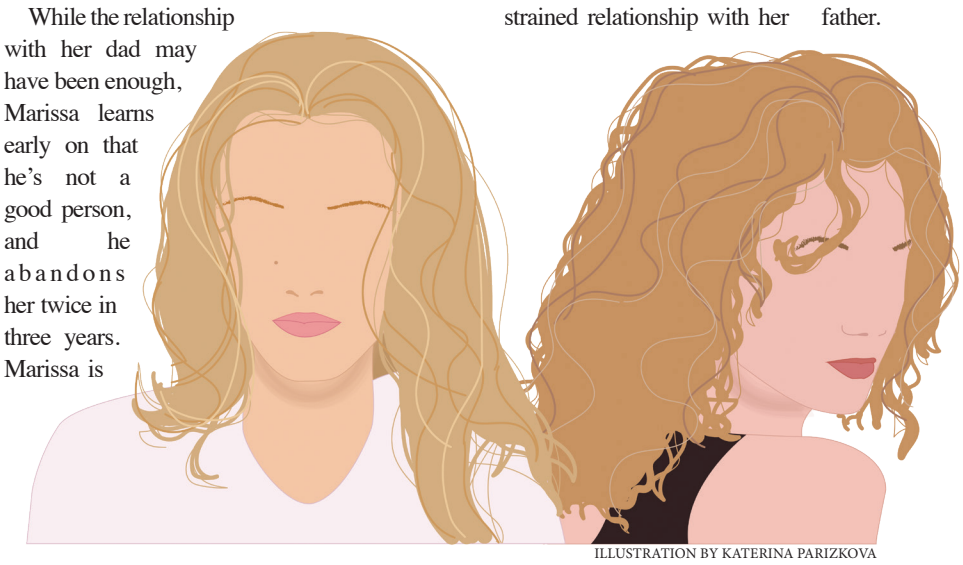


ILLUSTRATION BY KATERINA PARIZKOVA

Along with that, Marissa deals with an overdose, shooting someone, getting assaulted and an alcohol addiction, among many other issues. Just when she's about to have her happy ending in the season three finale, fate comes in and ruins it for her.

Following the wealthy teenager pipeline is "Gossip Girl," which has the same amount of drama in a different city. While everyone in-universe seems to love it-girl Serena van der Woodsen (Blake Lively), they seem to change their minds once they actually get to know her.

Serena follows in Peyton's footsteps by kissing her best friend's boyfriend, only the couple has been together since kindergarten and the only thing to serve as an excuse is one too many drinks.

In Serena's defense, she exiles herself to preserve her friends' relationship, although she claims she wants to become a better person, she still keeps it hidden from her, with no intention of ever coming clean. Though Serena is chastised for only caring about boys, this may stem from her strained relationship with her father.

One TikTok user points out that Serena may suffer from identity diffusion, as her personality often changes to reflect those she's hanging out with. The Upper East Side validates social image, with those in her social circle often admiring her for her looks alone. Since she never had to work for anything, she never learned how to be truly herself, and instead learned to be what everyone else wanted from her.

Serena deals with more traumatic events than a 16 year old should, but deals with them how a girl her age would. Though many think she was born with a silver spoon in her mouth, it's simply not enough to replace the parental attention she so desperately craves, causing her to find it in the beds of boys.

These characters may be fun to hate in theory, but if we take into account all their trauma, their wrongdoings pale in comparison to everything that's been done to them. Many of them act how a typical teenage girl would in this situation, a factor that is hardly taken into account since they look older.

Viewers expect these characters to be emotionally mature beyond their years, but unnecessary drama they've had to deal with most likely stunts them. Parental figures are also scarce in these types of shows, which means they have less trusted figures to turn to for comfort.

Villains in the shows are hardly as hated as the teenage girls that they terrorize, and though they don't stick around enough to remain memorable to viewers, it is a harsh glimpse into reality, leaving viewers to take a hard look in the mirror, and a step into the character's shoes.

Teenage girlhood is a unique experience filled with perils. Since beauty is pain, these characters are thrown struggles in order to be painted as the damsel in distress. With all these shows being primarily written by men, they are hardly given the opportunity to come to terms with their hardships.

How cancel culture has begun to suppress creativity

By SOPHIE MURRAY
Staff Writer

In today's digital landscape, it is increasingly common to see public figures, artists and influencers face intense backlash over a comment, opinion or decision. Known as cancel culture, this phenomenon has been a defining feature of internet discourse.

While many see it as a way to hold people accountable, it has become so prominent that we are starting to suppress open dialogue and creativity.

So, is cancel culture simply about holding people accountable? Or has it evolved into something more restrictive? And if so, how do we know when we are taking it too far?

There have certainly been many high profile cases where public backlash led to meaningful consequences. Take author J.K. Rowling, for example. Best known for her "Harry Potter" series, Rowling first came under fire after posting a series of controversial tweets about the transgender community. This caused a public outcry, especially from "Harry Potter" fans and those in the LGBTQ+ community. Because of her actions, some fans boycotted her work, and several cast members distanced themselves. In this case, cancel culture acted as a form of social accountability.

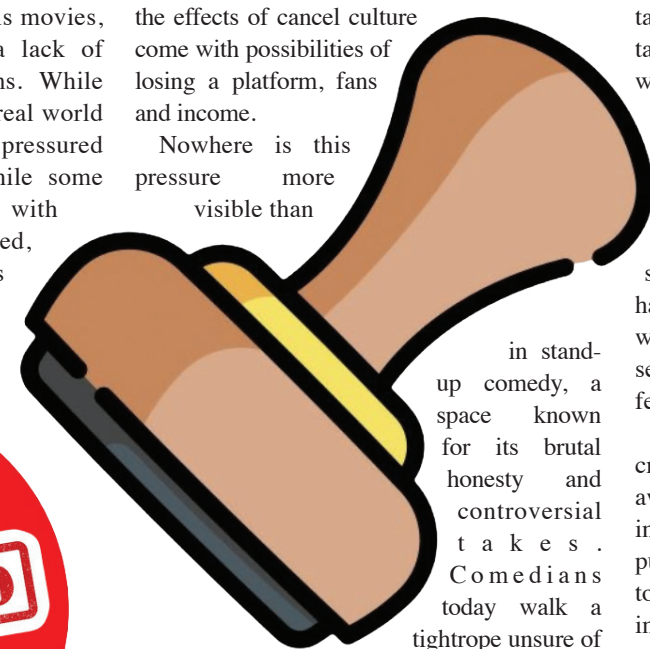
But not every case is so clear-cut.

Take American filmmaker Quentin Tarantino. Known for his violent and controversial films, he received years of criticism for racial slurs used in his movies, his depiction of violence and a lack of morality highlighted in his films. While some appreciate how he portrays real world ugliness, some audiences have pressured him to "tone things down." While some audiences may be uncomfortable with how certain topics are portrayed, undermining a creative path is suppressing artistic vision.

While there are ups and downs to the effects and purpose of cancel culture, artists have become more cautious with their artistic vision to avoid the possibility of being canceled. This does not necessarily mean their views have changed, but the effects of cancel culture come with possibilities of losing a platform, fans and income.



ILLUSTRATION BY SOPHIE MURRAY



Nowhere is this pressure more visible than in stand-up comedy, a space known for its brutal honesty and controversial takes. Comedians today walk a tightrope unsure of what will be seen as offensive or not.

"I don't play colleges, but I hear a lot of people tell me, Don't go near colleges. They're so PC. They just want to use these words. That's racist. That's sexist. That's prejudice. They don't even know what they're talking about," comedian Jerry Seinfeld said.

With comedians now feeling pressure to tame themselves, the art form becomes safer, tamer and less provocative, losing the edge of what makes good comedy.

Even in songwriting, many artists are revisiting old work or editing new material to avoid backlash. Taylor Swift changed lyrics in her re-recording of "Better than Revenge," due to being criticized for slut-shaming. Artists like Beyonce and Lizzo have both altered songs after public outcry as well. While some see this as progress, others see this as creativity being filtered through fear of offense.

So what does this mean for the future of creativity? Cancel culture is in no way going away and will most likely probably get more intense in the future. While it is important for public figures, just as any average person, to be held accountable when needed, it is important to know when it turns into limiting creativity. In a world where we thrive off of relatable music, books and comedy, it is important to not undermine different types of artistic views and standpoints.