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TV to Talk About:
The CW and Post-Network Television

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Abstract

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By Nicholas Bestor

The CW is the smallest of the American broadcast networks, but it has made the most of its marginal position by committing itself wholly to servicing a niche demographic. Understanding how The CW operates offers a useful perspective on how the industry has adjusted and continues to adjust to the realities of post-network television, where new technologies allow ever-greater amounts of viewer control. Whereas the major networks operate largely through a broadcasting model that favors mass audiences, The CW capitalizes on a narrowcasting approach. The network has forged a distinctive identity by marketing itself to a very specific slice of the viewing public: young women, 18 to 34 years old. The CW is important because it sheds light on the logic of the television industry in the post-network era; the operations of this network reflect on the whole range of television in the new millennium.

Chapter One offers a brief history of The WB and UPN, the two networks that merged to form The CW in 2006, and then examines the rhetoric of network executives as they explained the merger and defined the role of The CW. Chapter Two charts out the challenges faced by several programs during The CW's first year. Analyzing *Everybody Hates Chris*, *Veronica Mars*, and *Supernatural* on their new network shows how the corporate narrative of The CW translates into actual broadcast practices. Chapter Three illustrates several parallels between The CW and competing networks; the branding and distribution decisions made by HBO and ABC reflect on where The CW has succeeded and where it still has work to do. Chapter Four will look to the range of discourses surrounding The CW's highest-rated drama, *The Vampire Diaries*. Looking at the intersection of corporate ideology, advertising, serialization, fan engagement, discourses of quality, and new media technologies, *The Vampire Diaries* will serve as a final case study for understanding the operations of The CW, America's last-place network. The CW may not be leading the way, but the challenges and struggles that it must overcome are central to how television now operates.

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Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter One – Context	
The History and Rhetoric of The CW	5
<i>Tales of Deregulation</i>	7
<i>And Then There Were Five</i>	13
<i>Flow and Franchises</i>	17
<i>Under New Management</i>	21
<i>One-Stop Shopping</i>	23
Chapter Two – Content	
The Transitional Season, Network Priorities, and Fan Engagement	25
<i>The Abandoned Demographic</i>	26
<i>The Girl Detective</i>	37
<i>The Fan Favorite</i>	47
<i>Finding Its Voice</i>	55
Chapter Three – Competition	
Reputation, Distribution, and Other Networks	57
<i>HBO and Discourses of Quality</i>	58
<i>ABC and New Technologies</i>	72
<i>Lessons To Learn</i>	84
Chapter Four – Conclusion	
<i>The Vampire Diaries</i>, Authorship, and Women’s Television	85
<i>Credit Where Credit’s Due</i>	86
<i>Authors and Audiences</i>	98
Works Cited	106
<i>Print and Internet Sources</i>	106
<i>Television Programs</i>	111
<i>Films</i>	121

Introduction

The CW is the smallest of the American broadcast networks. By most conventional standards, not one of The CW's shows can be considered a hit, but the network has made the most of its marginal position by committing itself wholly to servicing a niche demographic. Understanding how The CW operates offers a useful perspective on how the industry has adjusted and continues to adjust to the realities of post-network television. What is "post-network television?" In the broadest definition, post-network is a stage of television history that can be dated back to the 1980s, when a series of technological and regulatory changes signaled a massive shift in the industry. Whereas once there were only a handful of stations available on American television, we can now choose from hundreds of channels; consumers not only have remarkably diverse options on what to watch, but they also have unprecedented power over how and when they will view television.

In *The Television Will Be Revolutionized*, Amanda Lotz identifies such viewer control as the defining characteristic of the post-network era. Lotz enumerates many important developments of the 1980s and 90s: technologies like the remote control and the VCR greatly increased the ability of consumers to decide how they would view television, while the emergence of new broadcast networks, cable television, and subscription channels massively increased the scope of potential content to view.¹ The post-network era has seen viewer control reach even greater heights, to the point where the act of "watching television" covers an increasing broad range of diverging modes of engagement. The viewership of the post-network era is scattered and divided, but it also

¹ Amanda Lotz, *The Television Will Be Revolutionized*, (New York: New York University Press, 2007) 12.

empowered to choose how, when, and where to view programming, taking advantage of such options as conventional broadcasts, DVR, online streaming, DVD, and iTunes.

Although the term “post-network” might suggest that networks have become obsolete, this is not the case. Lotz explains, “The post-network distinction is not meant to suggest the end or irrelevance of networks—just the erosion of their control over how and when viewers watch particular programs. ... Networks and channels have remained important sites of program aggregation, operating with distinctive identities that help viewers find content of interest.”² American viewers continue to consume television almost exclusively through networks, either by watching the broadcasted content directly or by utilizing new technologies like online streaming that remain under the network’s control. Most television content comes from two sources: either from the major broadcast networks—that is ABC, CBS, NBC, and Fox—that favor mass audiences, or from smaller niche networks, mostly found on cable, that offer a narrow range of programming sharing similar demographic aims.

The CW is an interesting specimen because it disrupts the dichotomy between the broadcast networks and niche cable channels. The CW was founded in 2006, formed from the merging of two small niche broadcast networks, The WB and UPN; the network has forged its “distinctive identity” by marketing itself to a very specific slice of the viewing public: young women, 18 to 34 years old. While the major networks compete with each other for large audiences, The CW is content to cater to its specific demographic of young women. This position as a narrowcast network situates The CW in an important place within the landscape of post-network television. The distinct house

² Lotz, *The Television Will Be Revolutionized* 15-16.

style that The CW has developed in pursuing its narrowly defined audience has had repercussions that affect both how the network has thrived in its niche and how it has been discounted by the television industry.

The following chapters will critique the operations of The CW, demonstrating the challenges it must overcome, challenges that are central to how television now operates. The network's house style has privileged homogenous programming options, which has simultaneously led The CW to neglect and eventually abandon any and all content for black and working class audiences while advancing the tastes of the young, white, middle-class women the network targets. Its relationship with its viewers and new technologies has been complicated: on the one hand, The CW's branding heavily promotes the ideal of an engaged fan community extending across various new media platforms, while on the other hand the network has taken a conservative and cautious approach to distribution through venues like online streaming and iTunes. And the programs that The CW broadcasts offer a broad range of critical responses; with entertainment for women frequently treated as culturally suspect, much of the network's content is critically neglected, while many of the shows on The CW challenge standard conceptions of television authorship, with shows being commercially and creatively influenced not only by showrunners, but also by the contexts of star image, ongoing franchises, and the pop culture zeitgeist.

The mass audiences that defined the network era have been supplanted by narrowcasting for niche viewerships, and the means of measuring success have shifted radically as consumer choices have expanded exponentially in recent years. Much that has been written on post-network television has focused on the exceptional cases,

privileging the artistic highs of contemporary television by focusing primarily on specific texts and auteurs. Such an approach is not necessarily wrong—I certainly engage in such discussions at several points throughout this project—but it is at times limiting. Television is far more than just a scattering of critically lauded programs and the creative individuals making them; I have endeavored to consider as fully as possible the whole range of industrial and commercial concerns that weigh on The CW’s operations. The CW is a valuable case study for considering the state of contemporary television because it is very much a work in progress; only six years old, we can easily chart the trajectory of the network as it works to secure its footing in an industry that is itself in a significant period of transition. The particulars of The CW’s history may be its own, but what the network faces as it adjusts to the present and future of television are issues that are absolutely central to television on all levels.

Chapter One - Context The History and Rhetoric of The CW

Like many of the characters on its shows, The CW is still working to carve out its own identity.³

The above quote comes from an article in *Variety* from September 2009; however it could just as easily have been written at any point during The CW's life. Jointly owned by CBS Corporation and Warner Bros. Entertainment,⁴ The CW is perennially in last-place among the American broadcast networks. Whereas Fox was able to successfully establish itself in the mid-1980s as a real competitor to the deeply entrenched Big Three networks—CBS, ABC, and NBC—The CW has had no such luck. Formed in 2006 from the merger of two similarly struggling networks, The WB and UPN, The CW fields a schedule of programs with highly specific niche appeal, aimed principally at young women. If one focuses only on the ratings, The CW is entirely marginal, its programming stuck at the absolute bottom of the competitive broadcast rankings. But week-by-week and year-end numbers compiled by Nielsen have never been the only meaningful metric of success; in the current landscape of post-network television, composed of endlessly segmented audiences and ever-developing technologies that radically change how television is viewed, measuring success is harder than ever. The CW's operations demonstrate the massive changes the television industry has undergone in recent year. The old metrics of success are increasingly less relevant, allowing a network like The CW to eke out existence on the fringes of broadcast television.

³ Paula Hendrickson, "CW: Three-Year-Old Network Forges Ahead with Push to Cement Brand Among Viewers," *Daily Variety*, 15 Sep. 2009: Special Report, *LexisNexis Academic*, Web, 8 Nov. 2011.

⁴ The network's name is derived from the first letter of each company.

A peculiar product of the post-network era, The CW is a hybrid network, operating in ways that borrow from the models of both the larger broadcast networks and the smaller niche cable outlets. The network's chimeric nature runs deep; formed from a merging of two networks, the majority of its programming also exhibits a strong affinity for genre hybridity, blending and blurring narrative and stylistic conventions to remap the formulas behind The CW's most successful shows. This split nature also extends to the network's relationship with new media technologies; according to executives, the experience of The CW should exist beyond the bounds of conventional television, and fans are endlessly encouraged to discuss and debate their favorite shows. The CW is not just viewed; as its tag line states, it is "TV to Talk About."

Currently in its sixth year of operation, The CW has been consistent in its efforts to find and maintain a strong identity. In many regards, the network has been extremely successful in defining itself: a frequent criticism of The CW is that its content is too homogenous. Such a consistent and recognizable house style demonstrates the identity that The CW has forged for itself. What may be surprising, though, is how frequently that identity has shifted and adjusted over the course of the network's short life. Since announcing the network in January 2006, network executives have presented at least three narratives of what The CW is and where it will be going. In the earliest phase, the emphasis was placed on the process of determining the character of the new network and how the transition from The WB and UPN would play out; The CW's desire for a compelling brand was itself a defining component of its early self-narrative. After the growing pains of the network's first years on the air, the emphasis shifted to narrowcasting, highlighting the potential for audiences—namely the young female

demographic to which The CW caters—to develop strong loyalties to the entire CW brand. Most recently, under the aegis of new leadership, The CW has begun to set its focus on stability, finding ways to expand operations to help improve their standing among the networks and fill in gaps within the schedule.

This chapter will examine how The CW presents itself in trade journals and corporate promotion in the course of its continual process of definition and redefinition. To understand The CW, we must first consider its antecedents, The WB and UPN. The first section of the chapter is a brief history of those two channels, examining the deregulatory conditions that led to their establishment, the challenges faced over their parallel eleven-year runs, and the circumstances surrounding their eventual dissolutions. The second section focuses on the announcement of the joint venture of The CW, highlighting how this merger was sold to the public and to the industry. The third and fourth sections chart the course of the network over its currently six-year existence, considering how The CW's identity has shifted and evolved as it refines its niche appeal and transitions to new executive leadership.

Tales of Deregulation:

The history of The CW begins with the establishment of The WB and UPN in the mid-90s, and the origins of these two now-defunct networks are firmly grounded in deregulation. Since the Reagan administration, regulations holding the media conglomerations in check have been made looser and looser, allowing ever greatly opportunities for corporate mergers and vertical integration. Regulatory measures taken in the 1960s and 1970s to prevent a handful of companies from exercising a monopolistic control over the industry have been modified and repealed to accommodate a free-

market, laissez-faire attitude the Federal Communications Commission has increasingly adopted. In the case of The WB and UPN, the relevant regulation was the Financial Interest and Syndication rules, or “the fin-syn rules” for short.

The dynamics of the television industry revolve around the relationship between the studios producing television programming and the networks that distribute this content. The economic model that came to dominate financing television production was deficit financing; Amanda Lotz explains:

[Deficit financing is] an arrangement in which the network pays the studio that makes the show a license fee in exchange for the right to air the show. The license fee typically allows the network to air an episode a few times (a first and rerun episode), but the studio retains ownership of the show; in effect, then, the license fee just allows the network to borrow it. This is important because the license fee does not fully cover the costs of production—hence the “deficit” of deficit financing. The studio absorbs the difference between the cost of production and the license fee, which can now amount to as much as millions of dollars for each season. If the network orders enough episodes, the studio can then resell the series in various other markets.⁵

Although the studios could reap massive financial benefits if and when they produced a hit show to sell in syndication, deficit financing ultimately helped the networks more. During the network era, CBS, ABC, and NBC maintained a virtually unchallenged hold on the television industry, allowing the networks to make deals that benefited them disproportionately. Studios were commonly forced to not only deficit finance their programs but to sign over a portion of the syndication revenues to the networks.⁶

The fin-syn rules were put in place in 1970, and were enacted to curb the power of the networks over the studios; “the rules prohibited networks from holding a stake in program ownership and having a financial stake in the syndicated programming they

⁵ Lotz, *The Television Will Be Revolutionized* 83.

⁶ Lotz, *The Television Will Be Revolutionized* 85.

aired, as well as limiting the number of hours of programming per week that they could produce.”⁷ The rules greatly benefitted smaller, independent studios; by forcing the networks to air programming not produced by commonly owned studios, broadcast content was more diverse.

In the 80s and early 90s, however, challenges to the fin-syn rules began to mount, and it became clear that they would soon be repealed. Without fin-syn, the networks could go back to favoring programs they had a financial stake in, and with the growing scope of media conglomerates it was increasingly easy to select programs made under the same corporate umbrella. This was bad news for production studios that were not owned by the corporate masters of CBS, ABC, NBC, and Fox, the fourth network, established by Rupert Murdoch in 1986. Among these studios, two took action: Warner Bros. and Paramount. The studios knew that the repeal of fin-syn would make their content less appealing to the existing networks. Both owned by vertically integrated conglomerations themselves—Time Warner and Viacom, respectively—the studios set out to establish their own networks. The WB, backed by Warner Bros. Entertainment, got out of the gate first, premiering on January 11, 1995. UPN, a joint venture between Chris-Craft Television and Viacom (and in later years owned wholly by CBS), launched a few days later on January 16.

Throughout their eleven years of operation until their eventual merger, the two networks were intimately connected, competing for fifth and sixth place among the networks. A *Variety* article on the merger highlights the similarities between the two networks: “Both UPN and the WB targeted young female viewers, but UPN skewed more

⁷ Lotz, *The Television Will Be Revolutionized* 85.

toward urban viewers with its Monday comedy block targeted at African-American viewers, while the WB skewed more suburban. Both have significant audience overlap, as well as significant challenges. Neither was profitable.”⁸ Though each network had some successes to their names—The WB hit it big in the late 1990s with teen dramas, while UPN’s greatest success came with an eclectic mix of shows in the mid-2000s—the market was unable to sustain them both.

Variety noted that “most industry insiders believe [The WB] and UPN no longer had clear brands.”⁹ Like The CW that would follow, both The WB and UPN suffered identity issues as they struggled to find a niche to occupy. Of the two networks, The WB had done the best job of establishing a prominent presence for itself; in the late 90s, the network scored a major string of hits with hour-long, teen-oriented dramas. This period saw several cult successes, including *Dawson’s Creek* (1998-2002), *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (The WB 1997-2001; UPN 2001-2003), and *Felicity* (1998-2002). By the mid-00s, however, the heyday for The WB had passed; though the network still had several shows doing moderately well, nothing came close to the earlier high-water mark.

UPN, on the other hand, had had a far more turbulent run, struggling for years to find its niche. In the early years, the network focused heavily on male-oriented sci-fi and action fare, with few successes; the network’s premiere was given over to the launch of *Star Trek: Voyager* (1995-2001), which pulled in massive numbers for its first night—21

⁸ Michael Learmonth, “Secret’s Out as Rival Nets Elope: WB, UPN Will Tie One On,” *Daily Variety*, 25 Jan. 2006: News Page 1, *LexisNexis Academic*, Web, 8 Nov. 2011.

⁹ Josef Adalian and Denise Martin, “Secret’s Out as Rival Nets Elope: Some Exex Left Jilted,” *Daily Variety*, 25 Jan. 2006: News Page 1, *LexisNexis Academic*, Web, 8 Nov. 2011.

million viewers, compared to the 3 million who watched The WB's premiere¹⁰—and slumped for the remainder of its run. Unlike The WB, which quickly settled into the teen niche, UPN never found a coherent approach, as exemplified by the diverse fare one could find night to night; UPN's programming ranged from black sitcoms to teen dramas, from animated shows to professional wrestling. The network saw its biggest critical and commercial successes in the final years of its run, including *Everybody Hates Chris* (UPN 2005-2006, The CW 2006-2009), a sitcom developed by Chris Rock; *Veronica Mars* (UPN 2004-2006, The CW 2006-2007), a neo-noir teen drama hybrid; and *America's Next Top Model* (UPN 2003-2006, The CW 2006-Present), a fashion-oriented reality show hosted by Tyra Banks. Even in their successes, the scattershot nature of UPN was quite evident.

The differences between the two networks and their identities could also be seen in the branding utilized by each. The WB explicitly played on the name recognition of its parent company; the network was always known simply as "The WB," but there was never any confusion what the letters stood for: Warner Bros. Promotional materials for the network showed its stars mingling on the Warner Bros. studio lot, and The WB took its mascot from one of the studios' most marketable commodities, *Looney Tunes*. The WB opted to use a more obscure character, Michigan J. Frog, a singing-and-dancing frog that had appeared in one animated short, Chuck Jones' *One Froggy Evening* (1955). This relative anonymity was important; he was identifiably from the *Looney Tunes* franchise, but not saddled with the well-defined personalities of Bugs Bunny or Daffy Duck. Michigan J. Frog could be anything the network needed, and he was used as a major

¹⁰ Suzanne Daniels and Cynthia Littleton, *Season Finale: The Unexpected Rise and Fall of The WB and UPN*, (New York: Harper, 2007) 76-77.

component of The WB's marketing throughout its eleven-year run. He was so important to The WB that he was the final image broadcast on the network; on September 17, 2006, the final night of operations, Michigan J. Frog "took a last quick bow but kept his head upright and eyes fixed on the viewer as he and a 'Thank you' slate faded to white."¹¹

UPN had far less luck crafting a strong brand for itself, owing largely to the complex and contentious corporate ownership behind the network. UPN was a joint effort of Paramount and Chris-Craft Industries, a corporation that had begun in boat manufacturing and owned a large number of television stations across the country. There was considerable tension and distrust between UPN's two corporate backers, and its name was one in a long series of compromises and conciliatory gestures. United Paramount Network was ultimately chosen—the "United" coming from "the United Television division within Chris-Craft that owned the top UPN affiliates"¹²—but the network was always known simply as UPN, unable to capitalize on the same name recognition enjoyed by The WB. Unfortunately for The CW, it seems to have taken its naming cues from UPN, as its name is similarly a combination of its corporate owners, CBS and Warner Bros.

As *Variety* noted, "The merger of the two entities ... is an admission that while there may be room for a fifth broadcast [network], there wasn't enough ratings mojo or advertising dollars for a sixth, especially when both were pursuing the same younger, female audiences."¹³ The WB and UPN were too similar in too many regards, forcing the two networks to remain in constant competition rather than building the resources

¹¹ Daniels and Littleton 360.

¹² Daniels and Littleton 63.

¹³ Learmonth.

necessary to be more widely relevant to the network television landscape. Folding in their operations was the right decision. Given the narrow scope of their target audiences, The WB and UPN were dividing whereas The CW could potentially conquer.

And Then There Were Five:

On January 24, 2006, Leslie Moonves, Barry Meyer, and Dennis FitzSimons, representing the corporate interests behind UPN and The WB,¹⁴ held a press conference. Together, these executives were announcing a joint venture between the two soon-to-be-defunct networks; The CW would be equally owned by CBS and Warner, and would be run by a mix of the executives and staffs of The WB and UPN, carrying on the production and broadcasting of many of the two networks' shows.

In the weeks following the merger announcement, network executives offered, in interviews, press releases, and sound bites, their perspective on The CW. Much of the discussion was focused on the past, detailing the successes and failures of UPN and The WB, and how their legacies would carry over to The CW. Not everyone was positive; rumblings of discontent and concern came principally from those who had been excluded from the deal making. News Corp., for example, owned a significant number of UPN stations but would have no role in the newly formed network. But the majority of commentary came from those who spoke highly of the merger. Leslie Moonves offered an excellent example of the claims being made: "The CW is going to be a real

¹⁴ Moonves is the president and CEO of CBS Corporation, which was formed in 2006 when the Viacom media empire split its operations between CBS and a corporation carrying on the Viacom name; CBS had inherited UPN from the defunct incarnation of Viacom. Barry Meyer, chairman CEO of Warner Bros. Entertainment, and Dennis FitzSimons, then-chairman and CEO of the Tribune Company, represented the corporate owners of The WB.

competitor—a destination for young audiences and diverse audiences and a real favorite among advertisers.”¹⁵ Moonves was trumpeting the network’s appeal across a range of industrial concerns; The CW would work because it was founded with an eye toward demographics, advertising, and affiliate contracts. The discussion around the merger announcement offers a perspective on the direction the new network would be taking and the vision executives had for the network’s place on television.

At the fore of most of these earliest discussions about The CW was the network’s need to establish a coherent and compelling brand for itself, but there was a surprising dearth of statements from executives articulating what that identity would be. Executives like Leslie Moonves and Dawn Ostroff were no strangers to such a task, having faced a similar challenge with UPN. In 2001, UPN’s position within the Viacom corporate empire shifted, with oversight moving away from Paramount and to CBS. This put the struggling network under the control of CBS president Moonves, and he hired Ostroff to run UPN. Ostroff had been with Lifetime Television since 1996, serving as Executive Vice President from 1999; at Lifetime, Ostroff had “been a pivotal member of the management team that pushed it to become the top-rated basic cable channel ... with a blend of series, original movies, and unscripted shows that connected with Lifetime’s target audience.”¹⁶ Moonves, who had worked with Ostroff while both were at 20th Century Fox in the early 1980s, was impressed with her record and felt she would help bring some order to the helter-skelter organization that had dominated UPN throughout its run. Once she had taken the reins of the network, she stated that her hope was “to broaden out the viewership (from young men) and really start to string the nights

¹⁵ Learmonth.

¹⁶ Daniels and Littleton 278.

together. The goal is to make sure UPN has its own identity.”¹⁷ Similar objectives would reemerge as Ostroff ran The CW. Over years, she and other executives would repeatedly confirm that deciding on the direction for the network was a top priority, but the message was consistently that The CW’s identity was still a work in progress.

Going forward from the merger, The CW had to decide what it would be, and looking back on the decisions made by UPN and The WB proved to be an important part of the discourse surrounding the new network. Obviously The CW would try to avoid the mistakes made by its antecedent networks. UPN had proven time and again that its lack of coherent vision was a detriment to its success. The new network stuck closer to The WB’s tact, adopting as its key demographic the young adult audience that The WB had capitalized on in its heyday. But many early statements on The CW’s guiding philosophy remained deliberately vague: as quoted above, Moonves defined The CW as “a destination for young audiences and diverse audiences and a real favorite among advertisers.”¹⁸

Of particular interest in Moonves’ quote is the emphasis placed on “diverse audiences.” A legacy of The WB and UPN, both having catered at times to “urban” demographics throughout their runs, the “diverse audience” was established early on as one of pillars of the network. Though The CW inherited a handful of UPN’s stable of black sitcoms, few survived the network’s first season and all had been cancelled by 2009; this issue will be explored further in the following chapter. The network’s focus quickly shifted toward catering exclusively to its “young audience,” and The CW further

¹⁷ Josef Adalian, “Strike Up The Brand,” *Daily Variety*, 24 Jan. 2002: News Page 7, *LexisNexis Academic*, Web, 8 Nov. 2011.

¹⁸ Learmonth.

refined that down to a narrower demographic. The network's website states this directly, self-identifying as "the only network targeting women 18-34."¹⁹ In the years following the launch of The CW, the network's principal aim was to develop programming aimed squarely at these young women.

While The CW's understanding of its core audience took time to develop, there was no such wavering over who would be financially interested in the new network. In an early statement on The CW, Ostroff states: "I think what people are going to find is all the programming appealing to this one [demographic] is now going to be under one roof. ... It's going to be one-stop shopping."²⁰ Ostroff makes explicit The CW's economic appeal: for those selling to young people, The CW was guaranteeing the consumers these advertisers wanted and needed. If any element of The CW's identity has stayed consistent from day one, it has been the value the network represented to its corporate sponsors.

More so than anything else, the network's relationship with its advertisers is key to understanding the corporate logic of The CW. Looking only at the ratings, the network has been a failure, year after year fielding a schedule of shows that are consistently the least watched primetime programs on broadcast television. But ratings are not enough to judge the network's success. The CW knows it will not and cannot produce the numbers of the other networks' hit shows, which also means that its programming is under less pressure to perform as strongly. The network's young viewers also present special challenges by increasingly viewing content through DVRs and streaming; *Variety* notes, "Ostroff admitted that it gets tougher for the CW's viewership to be accurately reflected

¹⁹ "About The CW Television Network," *The CW*, Web, 1 Apr. 2012
<<http://www.cwtv.com/thecw/about-the-cw>>.

²⁰ Learmonth.

in the ratings. ‘Our viewers are the first to migrate to other platforms. . . . There needs to be a way to measure them.’”²¹ Although ratings methodologies are developing new ways to account for non-traditional viewing practices, The CW’s audience will continue to be underrepresented by ratings. Though the network may be unable to bring in a broad audience, as long as they are able to bring in the right demographics, advertisers will continue to support the network. The CW prioritizes programming that will develop insular communities of dedicated fans, viewers who stand as potential new audiences for every show the network airs; with this relationship with its viewers and the backing of advertisers who want to reach consumers, The CW can remain stable even in last place.

Flow and Franchises:

As The CW established itself, its focus continued to narrow. Of the shows that made the transition from The WB and UPN, three hour-long dramas—*Veronica Mars*, *Gilmore Girls* (The WB, 2000-2006, The CW 2006-2007), and *7th Heaven* (The WB, 1996-2006, The CW 2006-2007)—and two half-hour sitcoms—*All of Us* (UPN, 2003-2006, The CW 2006-2007) and *Reba* (The WB 2001-2006, The CW 2006-2007)—would not survive to the new network’s second year. Sitcoms in particular were phased out of the schedule; not coincidentally, such comedies represented virtually all of The CW’s content targeting black audiences. The move toward exclusively broadcasting hour-long dramas and reality shows coincided with a substantial demographic shift. The programs that came to dominate the network—shows like *Gossip Girl* (2007-present) and

²¹ “Online Spots Bring in Revs for CW,” *Daily Variety*, 30 Jul. 2010: News; TV Page 6, *LexisNexis Academic*, Web, 8 Nov. 2011.

America's Next Top Model—clearly demonstrated The CW's appeal to the young white female demographic.

An important element of this demographic and programming shift was the explicit assumptions being made about The CW's audience in terms of class and race. The ideal viewer was not only young and female, but also white and middle class. The CW's original schedule was more diverse than what the network would come to air in later years. Alongside the network's teen dramas and black sitcoms, there were several other peculiar outliers, most significantly *Reba* and *WWE SmackDown* (UPN 1999-2006, The CW 2006-2007, MyNetworkTV 2008-2010, Syfy 2010-Present). Like the black sitcoms that would be phased out from the schedule, *Reba* and *WWE SmackDown*²² were relics of The WB and UPN, and both would quickly be dropped from The CW as it refined its focus on young women.

Reba, a sitcom starring country music star Reba McEntire, was one of a number of comedy programs that The WB aired throughout its run that appealed to lower-middle class white demographics. Other shows of this ilk tended to also be slightly lowbrow, including *Unhappily Ever After* (1995-1999), a show that borrowed heavily from *Married... With Children* (Fox, 1987-1997); *Grounded For Life* (Fox 2001-2003, The WB 2003-2005), a show about a lower-middle class Irish family from Staten Island; and *Blue Collar TV* (2004-2006), a variety show that showcased the "redneck" shticks of Jeff Foxworthy, Bill Engvall and Larry the Cable Guy. *WWE SmackDown*, World Wrestling Entertainment's flagship program, had been a long-running institution on UPN, offering the network one of its only stable programming blocks during its tumultuous run. Both

²² The program's title has been stylized several different ways throughout its run; for the sake of consistency, I will use "*WWE SmackDown*" throughout.

shows represented programming initiatives by The WB and UPN that explicitly appealed to working-class audiences, but such viewers were not a priority for The CW. *Reba* and *WWE SmackDown* were quickly replaced, making way for more of the teen dramas that dominate The CW's schedule.

Most remarkably, this lack of diversity was presented as a major selling point for the network. *Variety* emphasizes this increasing homogeneity: "The CW will go with the flow in the fall, unveiling a lineup that's both more cohesive and downsized from past years. 'We have three nights of shows that flow seamlessly from night to night,' CW Entertainment [president] Dawn Ostroff told advertisers Thursday."²³ The homogeneity of The CW manifested both culturally—the vast majority of shows having largely or wholly white casts—and generically. With sitcoms gone from the schedule, reality shows like *America's Next Top Model* were the only outliers on a network dominated by hour-long, teen-oriented soap operas and dramedies.

At the same time that Ostroff was selling The CW as a network with an impressive degree of flow among its content, the network found that it could capitalize on the success of pre-existing franchises. The network pursued revivals of *Beverly Hills 90210* (Fox, 1990-2000) and *Melrose Place* (Fox, 1992-1999), two prime-time soap operas from Aaron Spelling. Ostroff justified the remakes as an important tool for bringing in new audiences:

We've only been on the air three years, so anything we can do to give us a leg up or have brand awareness for a show is a good thing. Franchise awareness really helps us. ... If a show is right and we can do a good job remaking it, we approach it as: "We have one thing already working in our favor, so how do

²³ Michael Schneider, "CW's Theme Scheme: Fall Sked Downsized from Previous Years," *Daily Variety*, 22 May 2009: News Page 5, *LexisNexis Academic*, Web, 8 Nov. 2011.

we make an even stronger show?” If we can do that, then we’re attracting a whole new audience who has never seen the originals, and hopefully we’re bringing in viewers who used to watch the originals. It’s like double-dipping for us.²⁴

The original Fox shows had appealed to the same 18-34 female demographic, but were ratings successes far beyond anything The CW has managed. Buoyed by the interrelated forces of nostalgia and name recognition, The CW uses shows like *90210* (2008-present) to help bolster their teen television bona fides, establishing itself as the successor to the legacies of both early-90s Fox and late-90s WB programming.

Both the homogeneity of the schedule and The CW’s increasing reliance on remakes has drawn criticism, as seen in this glib appraisal of the network in 2009: “[The] CW’s biggest gamble appears to be turning itself into Fox circa 1993. Although the drama-heavy strategy makes sense, all the shows look exactly the same, blending into *The Beautiful Vampire Place Girl Diaries*.”²⁵ Brian Lowry, the *Variety* writer behind that assessment, conflates *The Beautiful Life* (2009), *The Vampire Diaries* (2009-Present), *Melrose Place* (2009-2010), and *Gossip Girl*. He may count this uniformity against the network, but it demonstrates the success of the network’s branding initiatives. The very fact that The CW has such a recognizable house style—regardless of whether that style may seem worn-out and overused to critics—shows that the network’s identity has become well established.

²⁴ Hendrickson.

²⁵ Brian Lowry, “Grading the Nets,” *Daily Variety*, 22 May 2009: News Page 4, *LexisNexis Academic*, Web, 8 Nov. 2011.

Under New Management:

2011 saw the first major corporate shake-up in The CW's history, as Dawn Ostroff retired from her position as network president to take a job with Condé Nast Publications. Her replacement, Mark Pedowitz, is a nineteen-year veteran of ABC, serving in various capacities throughout the network's corporate ladder. Most significantly, Pedowitz served as president of ABC Studios, the network's in-house production branch, from 2004 to 2009, during a time when the rival network launched a series of high-profile successes, including several popular shows that catered to similar demographics as The CW, such as *Desperate Housewives* (2004-present) and *Grey's Anatomy* (2005-present). After leaving ABC in 2009, Pedowitz headed his own production company—Pine Street Entertainment, which was affiliated with Warner Bros.—before accepting the position of president at The CW.

It is still too early to know the extent to which Pedowitz's tenure will change the identity of the network, but comments made in interviews and press releases show that he has two main objectives: on the one hand, Pedowitz indicates that he will be staying true to The CW's established branding, continuing the niche marketing that his predecessor so firmly established; on the other hand, Pedowitz is also hoping to expand the scope of the network's operations, adding programming options that will bring in more men.

Statements from Pedowitz on his vision for the network offer some intriguing insights into how he views his audience: "Our bread and butter are women 18-34, and to deny that is a mistake. ... Our goal is to service them, and then get other age groups to sample us. ... [Women] want romance. ... They want a man who looks like a man. They

want hope, and they want transparency.”²⁶ Obviously Pedowitz’s assessment of the female audience’s desires is highly reductive and more than a little insulting, but the big question is if his statement marks a shift in perspective for the network. After all, the Ostroff-era of The CW was a time of increasing homogeneity, producing content aimed at a very narrowly defined segment of the television audience. It may be that Pedowitz is laying bare the pre-existing operating logic of The CW, exposing the philosophy that Ostroff had developed but had been more tactful in addressing.

Although Pedowitz does not want to disrupt the identity that The CW established under Ostroff, he has expressed interest in widening the scope of programming options available under The CW’s banner. One direction that Pedowitz would like to expand into is bringing sitcoms back to the network’s line-up; he cites several programs premiering during the 2011-2012 season on other networks as examples of the sitcoms he wants to see on the network.²⁷ Significantly, the shows Pedowitz covets, including Fox’s *New Girl* (2011-Present) and CBS’s *2 Broke Girls* (2011-Present), star young white women, meaning that any return of the sitcom format to The CW’s schedule would maintain the network’s homogeneous demographic focus.

Pedowitz is also working to bring more men to The CW, as seen in a deal made to have action-blockbuster director Michael Bay produce a series for the network.²⁸ This would in fact be a continuation of priorities established under Ostroff’s tenure; *Variety* noted in 2010 that The CW had “appeared to adjust its message slightly, broadening its

²⁶ Susan Young, “Fall TV Preview,” *Daily Variety*, 12 Sep. 2011: Features; Fall TV Preview Page 18, *LexisNexis Academic*, Web, 8 Nov. 2011.

²⁷ Andrew Wallenstein, “CW Looks for Laughs,” *Daily Variety*, 5 Aug. 2011: Top News; TV Page 1, *LexisNexis Academic*, Web, 8 Nov. 2011.

²⁸ Stuart Levine, “CW Plying Bay Waters,” *Daily Variety*, 21 Oct. 2011: Top News; TV Page 1, *LexisNexis Academic*, Web, 8 Nov. 2011.

pitch to men and women in the 18-34 [demographic]. The CW still has a femme-centric focus, but the wording during the network's upfront presentation emphasized 'adults 18-34' rather than 'women 18-34.'"²⁹ Determining what changes Pedowitz has affected will have to wait until at least the 2012-2013 television season; the current crop of shows was shepherded by Ostroff in her final days at the network, so for now Pedowitz can only be judged on his words.

One-Stop Shopping:

This chapter has examined The CW primarily through the rhetoric of executives like Leslie Moonves, Dawn Ostroff, and Mark Pedowitz. From this, we can see how those behind the network understand the role of The CW, situating it primarily as a critical venue to service the 18-34 female demographic, and perhaps more importantly, to sell to this demographic. But what the executives say provides only a highly idealized perspective on the network; they are attempting to put a positive spin on their every business decision, rationalizing everything through a marketing perspective. The subsequent chapters will move away from the rhetoric of press releases and sound bites; what executives tell us about The CW will only ever be one part of the equation. The following chapter will chart out the challenges faced by several programs that made the transition from The WB and UPN to The CW. Examining *Everybody Hates Chris*, *Veronica Mars*, and *Supernatural* (The WB 2005-2006, The CW 2006-Present) on their new network shows how the corporate narrative of The CW translates into actual broadcast practices. The third chapter will draw comparisons between The CW and

²⁹ Michael Schneider, "CW Goes 10 for 10," *Daily Variety*, 21 May 2010: Page 1, *LexisNexis Academic*, Web. 8 Nov. 2011.

competing networks; seeing the branding and distribution decisions made by HBO and ABC demonstrates where The CW has succeeded in its mission statement and where it has dropped the ball. The final section will act as a conclusion by bringing the range of discourses surrounding The CW to bear on its highest-rated drama, *The Vampire Diaries*. Looking at the intersection of corporate ideology, advertising, serialization, fan engagement, discourses of quality, and new media technologies, *The Vampire Diaries* will serve as a final case study for understanding the operations of The CW, America's last-place network.

Chapter Two - Content **The Transitional Season, Network Priorities, and Fan Engagement**

The previous chapter followed the corporate ideology underpinning The CW, with a particular focus on the statements made by executives as they enunciated the goals and objectives of the new network. To see how this rhetoric actually functions in practice, we must look more explicitly at The CW's programming. The 2006-2007 season, the first year of operation for the new network, is an especially fruitful time to consider. With programming exported from UPN and The WB, The CW found that some shows were able to maintain their momentum while others stumbled trying to transition to their new home. This chapter focuses on three transitional shows: *Everybody Hates Chris*, *Veronica Mars*, and *Supernatural*. All three programs were in their first or second year when the merger of UPN and The WB was announced. Although all three had done well on their respective networks, the fate of each show on The CW was markedly different. *Everybody Hates Chris* limped along for a few years, never attaining the level of critical acclaim or audience appreciation it had achieved on UPN; *Veronica Mars*' ratings failed to justify further renewal, and its first season on The CW was its last. *Supernatural* has been the most successful of the three, becoming one of the longest-running programs on the network.

The CW would eventually adopt "TV to Talk About" as its tag line, and the theme of communication—both what the network had to say about its programming and what the shows had to say to its viewers—played a major role in the transition of these three shows. *Everybody Hates Chris* languished in a poorly seen and poorly advertised timeslot, a nearly forgotten relic of UPN; *Veronica Mars* was heavily promoted with a campaign that expressed a version of the show that never existed; *Supernatural* was

given time to develop its own discourse with its fandom, fostering a loyalty in its viewers that is core to The CW's mission statement. Ultimately, the successes and failures of these shows provide insight into the new network's priorities, its developing sense of identity, and what it came to value in its programming.

The Abandoned Demographic:

As discussed briefly in the previous chapter, both The WB and UPN aired a large number of sitcoms produced by and starring African-American comedians. For each of the two struggling networks, the so-called "urban" demographic played a significant role in their programming and marketing, and that legacy was in jeopardy from the moment The CW merger was announced. The CW marginalized the sitcoms they had inherited, all of which were phased out of the schedule, including the most critically acclaimed of the black sitcoms of the transitional period, *Everybody Hates Chris*. By 2009, not only were there no sitcoms aimed at African-American audiences left on The CW, but the sitcom format had been entirely excised from its schedule.

Black sitcoms were a crucial component of the identities of both The WB and UPN from the mid-90s onward. Though both would capitalize on the demographic, The WB came to the well first. In fact, the first program broadcast on The WB, on January 11, 1995, was the pilot of *The Wayan Bros.* (1995-1999), a sitcom starring Shawn and Marlon Wayans.³⁰ The debut schedule of The WB also included *The Parent 'Hood* (1995-1999), from writer/director/actor Robert Townsend. Other successful black sitcoms from this era include *Sister, Sister* (ABC 1994-1995, The WB 1995-1999), *The Jamie Foxx Show* (1996-2001), and *The Steve Harvey Show* (1996-2002). Not all of the sitcoms

³⁰ Known from their work on Fox's sketch comedy show *In Living Color* (1990-1994).

that The WB broadcast in these early years were aimed at an “urban” audience, but the network’s successes outside the African-American demographic were few and far between. *Muscle* (1995), a show about the employees of a gym, was paired alongside *The Wayan Bros.*, *The Parent ‘Hood*, and *Unhappily Ever After* and was the only program in this block not to be renewed. Other failed sitcoms included from the first years of The WB included *Kirk* (1995-1997), a vehicle for *Growing Pains* (ABC, 1985-1992) star Kirk Cameron, and *Life with Roger* (1996-1997), starring Mike O’Mailley. The only non-“urban” sitcom of this era to survive past a second season was *Unhappily Ever After*.

Whereas The WB had stepped out the gate with black sitcoms, UPN was slower to adopt the demographic as its own. Compared to The WB’s *The Wayan Bros.*, UPN’s premiere broadcast was the two-hour debut of *Star Trek: Voyager*, the fifth incarnation of Gene Roddenberry’s long-running science fiction franchise.³¹ Two sitcoms were included in the inaugural schedule—*Platypus Man* (1995) and *Pig Sty* (1995), both with principally white casts—and both were cancelled during their first season. *Star Trek: Voyager* was the only series from UPN’s first season that was not cancelled. During the 1995-96 season, UPN focused primarily on capitalizing on the *Star Trek* demographic by stocking its schedule with action/drama fare, all of which proved short lived.

The success of the mid-season *Moesha* (1996-2001), starring R&B singer Brandy Norwood, spurred the network to develop more content for the African-American demographic in the 1996-1997 season. That year saw the premiere of six sitcoms, all but one featuring an entirely or predominantly black cast. Half of these shows were short-

³¹ The franchise started with *Star Trek* (NBC, 1966-1969), followed by *Star Trek: The Animated Series* (NBC, 1973-1974), *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (syndication, 1987-1994), and *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* (syndication, 1993-1999). UPN would also air the final *Star Trek* television series, *Star Trek: Enterprise* (2001-2005).

lived: *Homeboys in Outer Space* (1996-1997) and *Goode Behavior* (1996-1997) were cancelled after their first season, and *Sparks* (1996-1998) after its second. *In The House* (NBC 1995-1996, UPN 1996-1999), *Malcolm & Eddie* (1996-2000), and *Moesha* were never as successful as the sitcoms airing on The WB, but they were among the few early UPN shows that stayed in production for several seasons.

As the two networks developed their brands, their relationship to the black sitcoms also evolved. As Michael Schneider notes in *Variety*,

Both [networks] were taking a page out of the Fox playbook: As an emerging network, one of the quickest ways to garner ratings is to target young viewers with urban-skewing comedies. (Fox did it with *In Living Color* and *Martin*.) But whereas UPN stuck with the strategy, The WB moved away from urban comedies once it got a few hit dramas on its hands.³²

During the 2005-2006 season, the final year The WB and UPN were independent networks, each had an almost equal number of sitcoms on their schedule, but the demographics of these programs were quite different. All eight sitcoms broadcast that year on UPN were black sitcoms.³³ Of the seven comedies on The WB during the same period,³⁴ none were aimed at an African-American audience. Several of UPN's comedies were among the most successful shows then on the network—of the five highest-rated programs on UPN in its final year, three were black sitcoms: *Everybody Hates Chris*, *Girlfriends*, and *All of Us* (the other top programs were *America's Next Top Model* and *WWE SmackDown*). The WB's sitcoms, on the other hand, were largely marginal

³² Michael Schneider, "Skein Scene Hinges on a New CW," *Daily Variety*, 24 Feb. 2006: Special Report 2: VPLUS: NAACP Image Awards Page B1, *LexisNexis Academic*, Web, 8 Nov. 2011.

³³ *All of Us*; *Cuts* (2005-2006); *Eve* (2003-2006); *Everybody Hates Chris*; *Girlfriends* (UPN 2000-2006, The CW 2006-2008); *Half & Half* (2002-2006); *Love, Inc.* (2005-2006); and *One on One* (2001-2006).

³⁴ *Blue Collar TV* (2004-2006); *Living With Fran* (2005-2006); *Modern Men* (2006); *Pepper Dennis* (2006); *Reba*; *Twins* (2005-2006); *What I Like About You* (2002-2006).

programs: *Reba* was its highest-rated sitcom but only ranked seventh overall on the network, and *Reba* and *What I Like About You* were the only WB sitcoms that had aired for more than two seasons. The differences between the two networks' practices were clear in the sitcoms that The CW inherited from its constituent networks. UPN contributed four—*Everybody Hates*, *All of Us*, *Girlfriends*, and *The Game*³⁵ (The CW 2006-2009, BET 2011-Present)—whereas the only WB sitcom to make the transition was *Reba*; as a show starring a country music star, *Reba* was obviously not a strong match for The CW's demographics.

Despite the potential marginalization faced by UPN's programming, executives like Leslie Moonves and Dawn Ostroff maintained that diversity would remain a priority for The CW; the network's mission statement was "to be a real competitor—a destination for young audiences and diverse audiences and a real favorite among advertisers."³⁶ Nancy Tellem, president of CBS Paramount Network Television,³⁷ offered a typical reassurance: "In all discussions so far, we are hoping to keep UPN's Monday night lineup or something similar intact. . . . We're not only looking for younger demos, but also looking at the diversity of the slate."³⁸ But despite such statements from executives, many producers of black sitcoms were (rightly) worried following the announcement of the merger. An article that appeared in *Variety* a month after The CW was announced highlighted the concerns of those working on black programming for the soon to be defunct UPN. The article quotes Vic Bullock, executive director of the Hollywood

³⁵ *The Game*, a spin-off of *Girlfriends*, premiered during the inaugural season of The CW, but it was already in development for UPN when the merger was announced. After *The Game* was cancelled, BET picked up the show, where it remains in production.

³⁶ Learmonth.

³⁷ Renamed to CBS Television Studios in 2009.

³⁸ Schneider, "Skein Scene Hinges on a New CW."

chapter of the NAACP, who noted that the merger “has caused concern among people in our community, from showrunners to craft services.”³⁹

Such concern was warranted. Five of the eight sitcoms airing on UPN in its final season—*Cuts*, *Eve*, *Half & Half*, *Love Inc.*, and *One on One*—did not make it to The CW, and the sitcoms that did make the transition had difficulty finding footing on the new network. Among The CW’s small batch of five sitcoms, both *All of Us* and *Reba* were cancelled after the inaugural 2006-2007 season; *Girlfriends* was cancelled the following year, while *Everybody Hates Chris* and *The Game* made it to the 2008-2009 season before being taken off the schedule. Outside of these five programs, only two other sitcoms have aired on the network. *Aliens in America* (2007-2008), a show about a Muslim foreign exchange student, lasted a single season, while *18 to Life* (2010-2011) was a Canadian program The CW aired six episodes of in August 2010.

Thus, with the brief exception of *18 to Life*, The CW has not had a single sitcom in its schedule for the last three broadcast seasons. As a point of comparison, ABC and CBS each currently broadcast seven sitcoms, NBC has nine, and Fox broadcasts ten, six of which are animated.⁴⁰ Like The WB, The CW transitioned away from the black sitcom

³⁹ Schneider, “Skein Scene Hinges on a New CW.”

⁴⁰ As of April 2012. ABC: *Cougar Town* (2009-Present), *The Middle* (2009-Present), *Modern Family* (2009-Present), *Happy Endings* (2011-Present), *Last Man Standing* (2011-Present), *Suburgatory* (2011-Present), and *Don’t Trust the B---- in Apartment 23* (2012-Present). CBS: *Two and a Half Men* (2003-Present), *How I Met Your Mother* (2005-Present), *The Big Bang Theory* (2007-Present), *Rules of Engagement* (2009-Present), *Mike & Molly* (2010-Present), *2 Broke Girls* (2011-Present), *Rob* (2012-Present). NBC: *The Office* (2005-Present), *30 Rock* (2006-Present), *Parks and Recreation* (2009-Present), *Community* (2009-Present), *Up All Night* (2011-Present), *Whitney* (2011-Present), *Are You There, Chelsea?* (2012-Present), *Bent* (2012-Present), and *Best Friends Forever* (2012-Present). Fox live-action: *Raising Hope* (2010-Present), *Breaking In* (2011-Present), *New Girl* (2011-Present), and *I Hate My Teenage Daughter* (2011-Present). Fox animation: *The Simpsons* (1989-Present), *Family Guy* (1999-2002, 2005-

as its schedule evolved, but there was a more dramatic demographic shift at work. The WB maintained a stable of sitcoms throughout its run, but in its later years the network's comedy programming moved toward a broader (i.e. implicitly white) audience. The WB's sitcoms aimed at white viewers covered a rather wide spectrum of gender and class sensibilities, ranging from working-class rural male to upper-middle class urban female. A shift has occurred in The CW's programming, though the elimination of black programming and sitcoms in general has left the network with programming that is generally homogenous across race, class, and gender lines. The CW's negligence toward its black sitcoms speaks to the value it placed first and foremost on an audience understood to chiefly be young, white, and female.

Everybody Hates Chris serves as an excellent case study through which to examine The CW's relationship with its sitcoms, as the show was one of the most highly visible and most critically acclaimed programs during UPN's final years. Although UPN and The WB's sitcoms were successful with audiences, few met with much critical approval. Former WB executive Susanne Daniels notes that some critics viewed the lineup of black sitcoms UPN fielded in the mid-90s as "modern-day Stepin Fetchit."⁴¹ The most controversial of UPN's early black sitcoms was *The Secret Diary of Desmond Pfeiffer* (1998), an ill-conceived sitcom starring Chi McBride as a black British nobleman who is sold into slavery and ends up working as President Lincoln's butler; the show understandably drew much criticism and protest, including condemnation from the NAACP for its trivializing depiction of slavery and the Civil War.

Present), *American Dad!* (2005-Present), *The Cleveland Show* (2009-Present), *Bob's Burgers* (2011-Present), and *Napoleon Dynamite* (2012-Present).

⁴¹ Daniels and Littleton 114.

Everybody Hates Chris demonstrates the progress UPN had made in the decade since it began developing programming for African-American audiences in 1996. The show was one of the strongest performers in UPN's history, and, alongside *Veronica Mars* and *America's Next Top Model*, played a key role in the reversing fortunes the network experienced in its final years of operation. *Everybody Hates Chris* was created by comedian Chris Rock and his writing partner Ali LeRoi, who had worked together on Rock's HBO series *The Chris Rock Show* (HBO, 1997-2000) and the films *Down to Earth* (2001) and *Head of State* (2003). Narrated by Rock, the show was billed as something of a "black *Wonder Years*,"⁴² offering a fictionalized account of Rock's experiences as a teenager in Brooklyn during the 1980s. The project was originally written for Fox, but Rock and LeRoi's script ultimately went undeveloped at that network. Soon afterward, Dawn Ostroff saw the script and secured the show once Fox's rights to the project lapsed.

UPN heavily promoted the new series. As Daniels recounts in her book,

UPN demonstrated its faith in *Chris* by boldly placing it in the Thursday 8 p.m. time slot that was once home to NBC's powerhouse hit *Friends*. *Friends* was gone by the time *Chris* arrived in the fall of 2005, but the presence of CBS' *Survivor*, Fox's *The O.C.*, and NBC's *Friends* spinoff, *Joey*, made it a tough time slot for a new show. UPN decided to uproot World Wrestling Entertainment from its six-year residency in the Thursday 8-10 p.m. block to make way for scripted comedies.⁴³

Such bold programming decisions showed the network's confidence in the new series, and UPN's tactics paid off as *Everybody Hates Chris* became one of the network's most

⁴² Daniels and Littleton 321. A similar comparison to *The Wonder Years* (ABC, 1988-1993) is also made by Michael Schneider in *Variety*: "Chris Rock meets *The Wonder Years*" (Michael Schneider, "Comedy Series: The New Breed: Everybody Hates Chris," *Daily Variety*, 14 Jun. 2006: Special Report 1: VPLUS: Emmys: Comedy Page A6, *LexisNexis Academic*, Web, 8 Nov. 2011.).

⁴³ Daniels and Littleton 322-323.

successful shows. Relative to other networks, *Everybody Hates Chris*'s 4.3 million viewers was a modest success at best—the show ranked 120th on the year-end ratings, in a field of 156 primetime network programs—but it was UPN's highest rated scripted program by a fairly large margin. *America's Next Top Model* was the network's top show, with two iterations broadcast during the 2005-2006 season each earning 5.0 million viewers; placing alongside *Everybody Hates Chris* was *WWE SmackDown*, which also earned 4.3 million viewers. The next highest rated shows on UPN were *Girlfriends* and *All of Us*, which garnered 3.4 and 3.2 million respectively.⁴⁴

Everybody Hates Chris was also a significant critical success, earning UPN wider acclaim than it had ever experienced and adding to the upswing in visibility the network experienced in its final years. Michael Schneider writes in *Variety* on the network's rising profile:

It's been a long journey from punchline to respectability, but UPN—once the network of *The Secret Diary of Desmond Pfeiffer* and *Shasta McNasty* (which did, granted, earn a People's Choice nom in 1999)—is finally reaping the fruits of a creative turnaround. In one week last month, UPN landed on the AFI list of 2005's 10 best shows (for *Veronica Mars*), and scored a Writers Guild Award nomination, as well as a Peoples Choice Award nod, for *Chris*.⁴⁵

Several other accolades were bestowed upon *Everybody Hates Chris*. In a reversal from the condemnation the network had received for *The Secret Diary of Desmond Pfeiffer*, the series received two NAACP Image Award in 2006, with Tichina Arnold, the actress playing Rock's mother, winning Outstanding Actress in a Comedy and the series earning

⁴⁴ "Series," *The Hollywood Reporter*, 26 May 2006, Web, *Internet Archive*, 12 Apr. 2012:

<http://web.archive.org/web/20080716115645/http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/hr/search/article_display.jsp?vnu_content_id=1002576393>.

⁴⁵ Michael Schneider, "Chris Puts UPN on the Board," *Daily Variety*, 13 Jan. 2006: Special Report 1: Special Supplement: The Golden Globes Page 39, *LexisNexis Academic*, Web, 8 Nov. 2011.

the award for Outstanding Comedy. The program received several other high-profile nominations in its first year, including Emmy nominations for cinematography and costume design, and a Golden Globe nomination for Best Television Comedy.

Having proven itself, *Everybody Hates Chris* was virtually guaranteed a slot on The CW's freshmen schedule, but it was clear that the show stood apart from the developing culture of programming at The CW. *Everybody Hates Chris* aired on The CW's Sunday night schedule, alongside the other black comedies inherited from UPN, *Girlfriends*, *All of Us*, and *The Game*. Like its fellow sitcom imports, the program experienced a precipitous drop in ratings; after its impressive showing in its first year with 4.3 million viewers, *Everybody Hates Chris* garnered 2.7, 2.1, and 1.7 million viewers in its three years on The CW. The accolades were also far fewer. The NAACP continued to recognize the show with numerous nominations throughout its run (including Terry Crews' 2007 win for Outstanding Actor in a Comedy Series and Ali LeRoi's 2008 win for Outstanding Writing in a Comedy Series), but the only other significant nomination *Everybody Hates Chris* received in its post-UPN run was a 2009 Emmy nomination for cinematography. Though executives had insisted that shows like *Everybody Hates Chris* would continue to have a place on the new CW, it was clear that the show was a marginal product to the network. Scheduling the network's sitcoms together as a block on Sunday—a generally weak night for primetime, dominated for much of the year by sports broadcasts—demonstrated that the programs would not be a priority. The fact that *Everybody Hates Chris* even made it to the 2008-2009 season is surprising, and likely due to the acclaim it had received while on UPN.

The loss of black sitcoms coincided with a fall in The CW's on-air diversity—supposedly one of the network's key strengths—but its promise to uphold diversity is seen elsewhere. The CW scored the highest marks among the broadcast networks in a survey by GLAAD on LGBT representation on television: “GLAAD's report noted that 33% of the CW's primetime programming hours during the survey period included LGBT images, characters or storylines.”⁴⁶ Similarly, the action series *Nikita* (2010-Present) is notable as one of the only current network programs with a non-white female lead, with Asian American Maggie Q in the title role.⁴⁷

Both of these examples work well for The CW, as they are achievements for the network on the diversity front that do not disturb the core demographic focus. The depiction of LGBT issues is not surprising, as The CW's audience of young women are statistically one of the groups most supportive of gay rights; a 2011 survey found 70% of people age 18-34 in support of gay marriage, with women age 18-49 at 65% support.⁴⁸ The issue of Maggie Q's ethnicity also works to The CW's advantage. One of the implicit assumptions underlying the black sitcoms of The WB and UPN is that programming meant to appeal to African American audiences will, conversely, *not* appeal to white audiences. If *Nikita* were to star an African American or Hispanic American actor, it might be pigeonholed as a show explicitly targeting those demographics. Maggie Q, who is of Vietnamese, Irish, and Polish descent, is comparatively neutral for white audience;

⁴⁶ “GLAAD Survey: Nets Up LGBT Storylines,” *Daily Variety*, 3 Aug. 2011: Top News; TV Page 6, *LexisNexis Academic*, Web, 8 Nov. 2011.

⁴⁷ Another show sharing this distinction has just premiered: *Scandal* (ABC, 2012-Present) stars Kerry Washington.

⁴⁸ Frank Newport, “For First Time, Majority of Americans Favor Legal Gay Marriage,” *Gallup Politics*, 20 May 2011, Web, 1 Apr. 2011 <<http://www.gallup.com/poll/147662/first-time-majority-americans-favor-legal-gay-marriage.aspx>>.

no one would see *Nikita* and assume it is aimed at Asian Americans or multiracial Americans, if for no other reason than that neither demographic is treated as a significant advertising market.⁴⁹

While Mark Pedowitz, The CW's president since Ostroff's retirement in 2011, has expressed an interest in returning sitcoms to the schedule, the kind of sitcoms he is looking to include will not much alter the network's on-air diversity. According to Andrew Wallenstein in *Variety*, "[Pedowitz] admitted that he envied some of the half-hours ordered by rival broadcasters that would have appealed to CW's core female-skewing 18-34 audience, naming CBS' *2 Broke Girls*, ABC's *Apartment 23* and Fox's *New Girl*. 'We are opening ourselves up to look at comedies this year,' said Pedowitz. 'We feel there are comedies out there that would have worked well on CW.'"⁵⁰ All three of the shows that Pedowitz cites star young white women, The CW's chief target audience—though it should be noted that in other interviews Pedowitz has emphasized his desire to expand the network's base to include more men.⁵¹

It remains to be seen whether sitcoms will make a return to The CW, but if they do, it is unlikely that they will offer the diversity that The WB and UPN once fostered. The abandonment of both black audiences and the sitcom did not have to be simultaneous; although the comedies inherited from the UPN were all black sitcoms, the demographic and the format are not inextricably connected. But as the network developed its branding, the programming targeting young female demographic was primarily hour-long dramas, and The CW stayed this course as it expanded its roster of

⁴⁹ The racial politics at play here are fascinating, but far outside the scope of this project.

⁵⁰ Wallenstein, "CW Looks for Laughs."

⁵¹ Levine.

shows. If Mark Pedowitz does schedule the kind of comedies that he is pursuing, it will likely resemble the sitcom situation in the final years of The WB: programming aimed at a largely white audience, with little evidence of the legacy of African-American comedies that has been important to all three networks.

The Girl Detective:

Everybody Hates Chris was not the only show contributing to UPN's upswing in respectability in its final years; one of UPN's other latter-day successes was *Veronica Mars*. The series follows the eponymous main character, played by Kristen Bell, as she juggles high school and college with her work as a private investigator. Veronica lives in the affluent town of Neptune, CA, and the mysteries she faces throughout the series range from small cases solved in a single episode to longer story arcs that span entire seasons. In *Veronica Mars'* first season, she works to catch her best friend's murderer; the second season has Veronica track down those responsible for a deadly bus crash; and in the third and final season, Veronica goes after a serial rapist on her college campus and later solves the murder of the school's dean.

Never the ratings success of *Everybody Hates Chris*, the show was a critical darling that spawned a significant online fandom and generated a large amount of critical and academic attention. Although *Veronica Mars* was an important property for UPN, its position on The CW was less secure. Many of The WB and UPN's shows were immediately guaranteed slots on the new network, but *Veronica Mars* received a last-minute renewal. Creator and showrunner Rob Thomas was keenly aware of the challenges facing his show as it went into its third season. Understanding that his show was in danger, he explained in interviews what he had learned from the mistakes of

previous years, and carefully laid out his plans for the third season. The CW also exercised its control over the show and its promotion, hoping to translate the positive buzz surrounding the series into improved audience figures. *Veronica Mars* struggled to meet the challenges of network dictates on how it should perform, and its ultimate failure in this endeavor illustrates the challenges The CW faces, both in fostering audience engagement in its serialized programming and in promoting stylistically disparate materials as part of a cohesive whole.

A long-running consideration for the producers and writers was how best to handle the show's mystery format. An important aspect of *Veronica Mars*' narrative style was its embrace of serialized storytelling. Although there were many episodic elements throughout the show's run, season-long storylines were a signature element of the series, with Veronica solving a murder over the course of the first season and catching the culprit behind a bus crash in the second. There were a number of practical concerns raised by these yearlong mysteries, and Thomas hoped to solve these problems going into the show's first year on The CW. For instance, in the show's first year, the murder mystery plotline proved to be overly taxing on Bell; Thomas reported that, "In year one, we almost worked that girl to death. Between being in every scene of the show and having mountains of press to do, she was just exhausted."⁵² To give Bell a less grueling production schedule, the second season was structured around two separate mysteries, with Veronica investigating the bus crash, while supporting characters solved an unrelated murder.

⁵² Jeff Jensen, "Job Insecurity," *Entertainment Weekly*, 24 Oct. 2006, Web, 1 Apr. 2012 <<http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,1549635,00.html>>.

Thomas was not entirely happy with the second season's split storylines; he felt that it made the show too difficult to follow. He hoped that in the third season, he could finally strike the right balance, producing mysteries that would satisfy fans while pulling in large enough audiences to please The CW. In another interview, he explained his plans for the third season: "We're going to do shorter unbroken arcs, which I'm really excited about. Our first mystery is going to be nine episodes. There will be no preemptions, no repeats in there. Our second mystery will be seven episodes with no preemptions or repeats. And our final mystery of the year will be six episodes with no preemptions or repeats."⁵³ A key facet of Thomas' proposed format for the third season was that it worked around the hiatuses within the broadcast year, months long breaks taken by the network with no new episodes aired. Thomas noted that such hiatuses had hurt the narrative momentum of the show in the past: "There were just too many suspects, too many clues to service, and it loses an audience, particularly when we're off the air for two months between November and January."⁵⁴ His plan for the third season would allow for shorter, self-contained storylines that would not suffer from gaps in the schedule; when the show returned from a hiatus, it would start fresh with a new story arc. Like many of Thomas' ideas for the third season, this was doubly practical, resolving a long-standing shortcoming of the series' narrative format while making the show more accessible to its audience.

Unfortunately for Thomas, The CW did not offer him the opportunity to fully execute the third season he had planned. When *Veronica Mars* was renewed and given a

⁵³ "Veronica Mars Season 3: Kristen Bell and Rob Thomas Talk," *IGN TV*, 18 Jul. 2006, Web, 1 Apr. 2012 <<http://tv.ign.com/articles/719/719359p1.html>>.

⁵⁴ Jensen.

slot on The CW's schedule, the network ordered only 13 episodes, a sign that they were tentative about the show's future success. When the show received a larger order midway through the season, it was for 20 episodes, two episodes shy of the 22 episodes Thomas had anticipated. Thomas altered the season accordingly, trimming one episode each from the second and third arcs, but even then, The CW continued to exert pressure that forced further adjustments. The planned third arc of the season was jettisoned; after the show's second hiatus, the series returned for its final episodes, but there was no mystery arc, only five stand-alone episodes.

Both of these adjustments to the format of the show—first experimenting with shorter mystery arcs, then moving to stand-alone episodes at the end of the season—were part of the effort to help the show find more viewers. While promoting the third season prior to its premiere, Thomas said he hoped to get away from the continuity heavy storytelling of prior seasons, stating that the shorter, more self-contained storylines “will also give a new audience more jumping-in points.”⁵⁵ He expressed a similar perspective on the shift to stand-alone episodes at the season's end, explaining, “One feeling is that the big mysteries keep away the casual TV viewers, and the other is that the thing that has been *least* successful since season one—meaning the things we get the most complaints about—are the big mysteries.”⁵⁶ The CW's reservations about the series, as evidenced by the initial 13-episode order and the eventual curtailed 20-episode order, indicated that it

⁵⁵ “*Veronica Mars* Season 3.”

⁵⁶ Kristin Veitch, “Exclusive! *Veronica Mars* Creator Reveals New Plan, Answers *You!*” *E! Online*, 29 Nov. 2006, Web, 1 Apr. 2012
<http://www.eonline.com/uberblog/watch_with_kristin/b12599_exclusive_veronica_mars_creator_reveals.html>. Emphasis in original.

was supportive of Thomas' efforts to adjust the show's format to be more accessible to a wider audience.

Thomas' work to find and foster an audience for *Veronica Mars* reflect the tension between episodic and serialized content in The CW's programming. Like many recent television series, *Veronica Mars* was never wholly serialized or wholly episodic, opting for a hybridized narrative approach. Jeffrey Sconce discusses this in his essay "What If? Charting Television's New Textual Boundaries," identifying a trend in television storytelling that emerged in the 1980s and 90s: "This new narrative mode balance episodic treatments of a program's story world with larger arcs of long-term narrative progression. ... [Horace] Newcomb called this mode 'cumulative' narrative, referring to the form's ability to 'accumulate' nuances of plot and character as a series matures over several seasons."⁵⁷ From the beginning, *Veronica Mars* consistently worked in the cumulative mode; even during the show's first two years, the season-long mystery was paired with a simpler case-of-the-week. While Veronica investigated the murder of her friend or the circumstance surrounding the bus crash, she would also be finding a classmate's missing dog or performing surveillance for a suspicious fiancée.⁵⁸ The show also demonstrated a strong cumulative impulse in its handling of its characters' interpersonal relationships, which played a major role as a form of "long-term narrative progression"⁵⁹ entirely apart from *Veronica Mars*' mystery storylines.

Sconce sees the cumulative mode as a key facet of modern viewing practices:

⁵⁷ Jeffrey Sconce, "What If?: Charting Television's New Textual Boundaries," *Television After TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition*, ed. Lynn Spigel and Jan Olsson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004) 98.

⁵⁸ "Hot Dogs" (1.19) and "Green-Eyed Monster" (2.4), respectively.

⁵⁹ Sconce 98.

By combining the strengths of both the episodic and serial formats, this narrative mode allows new and/or sporadic viewers to enjoy the stand-alone story of a particular episode while also rewarding more dedicated, long-term viewers for their sustained interest in the overall series. . . . The serial aspects encourage all viewers to adopt more consistent viewing habits over time as they become more engaged with a particular series, and yet all viewers can miss episodes and new viewers can find ways of becoming engaged from their very first viewing.⁶⁰

This balance between episodic and serialized storytelling has been an important element of The CW's house style, the heart of how the network works to promote its shows and expand its audience. The CW does not wish to alienate potential new viewers, but it must also keep its existing and dedicated fanbases eager to see more. One of the major shortcomings of *Veronica Mars* was the difficulty the show had in maintaining the right balance between the serial and the episodic. A new viewer coming to the show would see only a small part of an on-going investigation, and a sporadic viewer risked missing an episode that contained vital clues to understanding the months-long storylines. The series could even be punishing for those fans who were dedicated and consistent viewers, who at times had to keep careful note of a huge number of suspects and clues for fear of losing track of the plot.

Perhaps the biggest mistake *Veronica Mars* made was to put such an early emphasis on the serial aspects of its story. As Sconce notes, viewers generally become more invested in the serialized and cumulative elements as “they become more engaged with a particular series.”⁶¹ This is likely why many shows that have successfully utilized the cumulative mode start slow, establishing their characters and settings before building up to serialized storytelling. *The X-Files* (Fox, 1993-2002)—which Sconce uses as one of

⁶⁰ Sconce 98.

⁶¹ Sconce 98.

his primary examples⁶²—and *Supernatural*, which will be discussed in the following section, both began by producing mostly stand-alone episodes; it was only in later seasons, after a viewership had been established, that these shows began focusing primarily on their long-term storylines.

Viewer investment in a series and its characters takes time to develop naturally, but the payoff can be immense if a show can gather a strong and fervent fanbase. Such brand loyalty is incredibly important for The CW, a network that relies almost entirely on cult followings and positive word of mouth. *Veronica Mars* did indeed have its dedicated fans, but it was not enough for the network due to the show's insularity. It was a difficult show for neophytes, chiefly due to the story arcs that dominated the series. Rob Thomas made every effort throughout the third season to make his show more accessible to new viewers, but it was not enough to save the series. Though there were many factors involved in the production and writing of *Veronica Mars* that contributed to the series' ultimate failure, the network also struggled with how to advertise and promote the series. The CW had trouble fitting the show within the framework of the new network; the problems faced by *Veronica Mars* mirror in important ways the challenges faced by *Everybody Hates Chris* and its black sitcom peers. The CW had difficulty integrating all of its programming into a coherent schedule, as evidenced by the small number of shows that survived for long after the transition from their previous networks.

Jennifer Gillan provides an excellent analysis of the ways The CW mismanaged *Veronica Mars* and its fandom. Gillan's essay, "Fashion Sleuths and Aerie Girls: *Veronica Mars*' Fan Forums and Network Strategies of Fan Address," examines a very

⁶² Sconce 95.

specific segment of the show's online community: fans who developed an affinity for the show's fashion sense and enjoyed tracking down and purchasing the outfits worn by the cast. While discussing the show's move to its new network, Gillan explains the marketing The CW used during the third season:

For its Fall 2006, The CW decided to bundle [*Veronica Mars*], its newly acquired UPN product, with *Gilmore Girls*, its more successful former WB product, and make the latter the Tuesday night lead-in to [*Veronica Mars*], hopefully carrying over some of its audience. Marketing executives struck a deal with American Eagle and came up with Aerie Tuesdays. The commercial segment prior to the opening of both shows featured a commercial for American Eagle's new Aeries "intimates and dormwear" product line and then was followed by the first of several interstitial episodes featuring "real-life" Aerie teen customers commenting on the TV characters and story arcs, focusing especially on the off-again romances of Luke and Lorelai, and, to a lesser extent, Veronica and Logan.⁶³

These Aerie Tuesday segments were taken as insulting by many of the fans Gillan analyzes. Much of their hostility was leveled at the girls featured in the segments, "the Aerie Girls, dubbed 'Aerheads,' for their inane comments, shallow readings of *VM*, and obsession with love relationships."⁶⁴ The CW's promotional efforts also compromised the sartorial game that these fans had created for themselves. When the series aired on UPN, finding the clothes worn by Veronica involved sharing screengrabs and scouring the internet and malls for deals. The CW introduced transparency to the process: the network's website provided a section that detailed all of the fashion in the series, thereby eliminating the need for the investigatory skills that the fans had honed over the previous two years.⁶⁵

⁶³ Jennifer Gillan, "Fashion Sleuths and Aerie Girls: *Veronica Mars*' Fan Forums and Network Strategies of Fan Address," *Teen Television*, ed. Sharon Marie Ross and Louisa Ellen Stein (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2008) 202.

⁶⁴ Gillan 202.

⁶⁵ Gillan 202-203.

The frustration experienced by Gillan's "fashion sleuths" is only a facet of the audience reception to the third season of *Veronica Mars*, but it represents the shortcomings of The CW's approach to broadcasting and marketing the series. The CW was cobbling itself together from the remnants of two similar networks that frequently courted the same demographics, and the 2006-2007 schedule demonstrates the tension between the programming of the two defunct networks. Working with the material it had inherited, The CW attempted to impose an order on the schedule, pairing shows in hopes of facilitating strong flow. This logic led to the clustering of the network's four black sitcoms on Sunday nights, and led to *Gilmore Girls* being chosen as *Veronica Mars*' lead-in. It was a fundamentally flawed approach that alienated existing viewers and potentially misled prospective new fans.

Gilmore Girls and *Veronica Mars* are not an entirely mismatched pairing, but this attempt to shoehorn the two series together was detrimental to both series. Compared with its years on UPN, *Gilmore Girls* was much closer, tonally and stylistically, than the shows *Veronica Mars* had previously been paired with. In its debut year, *Veronica Mars* aired after the sitcoms *All of Us* and *Eve*, while in its second season it was shown after *America's Next Top Model*. Such seeming mismatches can be seen elsewhere in The WB and UPN's schedules from these years. In 2004, UPN paired *America's Next Top Model* with *Star Trek: Enterprise*; in 2005, The WB placed *Gilmore Girls* and *Supernatural* together.

In these examples, the differences between the series are so obvious that flow is virtually a non-issue; overlap in the audiences of *America's Next Top Model* and *Star Trek: Enterprise* is insignificant, and thus there would no effort to encourage flow

between the two shows. The differences between *Veronica Mars* and *Gilmore Girls*, however, are comparatively much more subtle; there could be quite a bit of audience overlap between the two programs, and The CW was overt in its desire to have the viewers of the more successful *Gilmore Girls* stay tuned for the struggling *Veronica Mars*. This was a worthwhile goal, but The CW's execution was lacking.

As Gillan explains, the Aerie Girls were not well-received by the viewers of *Veronica Mars* (similar sentiments likely existed among *Gilmore Girls*' audience), and a major factor in this animosity was that the segments were imposing a narrow reading on both series. Many fans were alienated by The CW explicitly portraying the shared viewership as "focusing especially on the off-again romances" of each show. In fact, the romance-oriented viewing practices extolled by Aerie Tuesday were not necessarily well suited to either series, as neither *Gilmore Girls* nor *Veronica Mars* made such storylines their primary narrative draw. Certainly Veronica's relationships were a significant component of the show's narrative throughout its run, but the Aerie Girls situated the romance between Logan and Veronica as their chief concern with the series. For an audience used to the far less hands-on approach of UPN, this heavy-handed attempt to present a preferred reading of the series was off-putting. The promotion could also backfire in terms of bringing in new viewers; taken at face value, the Aerie Girls interstitials promise a viewing experience that neither program could fully deliver.

Whereas *Everybody Hates Chris* was practically abandoned by The CW, exiled to a poorly performing and poorly marketed corner of the schedule, The CW made a significant push for *Veronica Mars*. Both shows had earned critical praise for UPN, but of the two, *Veronica Mars* better represented the identity The CW wanted to project. The

series was particularly important to Dawn Ostroff, who had helped bring the show to UPN and fought for its inclusion on The CW, but the efforts to save the show were insufficient. Rob Thomas' plans to adjust the show's narrative style were well-conceived, but it was not enough to bring in enough new viewers; that his changes to the show's storytelling conventions coincided with one of the weakest plots in the series further damaged *Veronica Mars*' fragile stature. The CW did not know how to handle the show, and the network's approach to promoting the series was heavy-handed and insulting to many long-time fans. As the following section on *Supernatural* shows, a more hands-off approach may be the best for The CW.

The Fan Favorite:

So far in this chapter, I have examined shows that failed to take root on The CW. *Everybody Hates Chris* and its black sitcom peers tell a story of neglect; despite early claims that the network would value diversity on its schedule, its actions show that The CW almost immediately began marginalizing such programming. *Everybody Hates Chris* was a top performer for UPN, but it was low priority at The CW. The failure of *Veronica Mars* is just the opposite, as the show buckled under the pressure of high expectations. The series was a critical darling that had never attracted a large audience, and the efforts made both by the show's creator and the network to draw in new viewers were ultimately fruitless. The final program I will be discussing in this chapter is *Supernatural*, and The CW's approach to the show falls somewhere in between its treatment of *Everybody Hates Chris* and *Veronica Mars*. The show was neither neglected nor pressured; The CW was more hands-off in broadcasting and promoting the series, allowing *Supernatural* to develop stylistically in ways that engendered a strong cult following. While the previous

sections have charted the network's failings, in *Supernatural* we see how The CW has turned a moderate success into one of its longest-running properties.

Supernatural premiered on The WB in 2005, and the show proved fairly successful, garnering 3.8 million viewers in its first season and finishing as the fifth highest rated show on the network. At first glance, *Supernatural* seems like an outlier on The CW. The network defines itself in terms of a young female audience, and its shows generally reflect these demographics. The archetypal CW series focuses on a largely female ensemble cast of high school or college-aged characters, set in urban or suburban settings, in a melodramatic and/or fantastical milieu—*Gossip Girl* or *The Vampire Diaries* are excellent examples. *Supernatural* stands apart: the show follows two brothers, Dean and Sam Winchester (Jensen Ackles and Jared Padalecki), in their late 20s and early 30s, as they drive across the country hunting monsters and demons. The men travel in a 1967 Chevy Impala, listening to classic rock; most of the locales are rural and working-class. One significant commonality between *Supernatural* and other shows on the network is its tendency toward the melodramatic. But despite this seeming incongruity, *Supernatural* fits on The CW and is currently, in its seventh season, the third oldest show on the network—following *America's Next Top Model* and *One Tree Hill* (The WB 2003-2006; The CW 2006-2012), which both premiered in 2003.

Why should *Supernatural* be a better show for The CW than either *Everybody Hates Chris* or *Veronica Mars*? Both of the failed shows represent the legacies of formulas that had been important to The CW's predecessors, the black sitcom and the teen genre hybrid. Ultimately black sitcoms ceased to be a priority for the new network, but teen-oriented genre hybrids have remained an important fixture for The CW, as

evidenced by its most successful current show, *The Vampire Diaries*. What legacy does *Supernatural* represent? The series paired well with one of The WB's other exports to The CW, *Smallville* (The WB 2001-2006, The CW 2006-2011), a show that detailed the growing pains of a teenaged Superman. On the surface, both programs seem like male-oriented action fare, but both developed into male melodramas with significant female followings. With *Smallville* no longer on the air, *Supernatural* stands relatively apart from the rest of the schedule. This distinctiveness has been a virtue for the series, airing on a network that prides itself on homogeneity.

Supernatural is one of the most intriguing shows broadcast on The CW precisely because it seems so out of place. On a network dominated by melodramas and reality shows aimed at young women, a series about two men in a muscle car hunting demons is one of its longest-running programs. Examining why this show fits on The CW provides a framework to understand what The CW wants from its programming. A look at *Supernatural's* storytelling practices, marked by self-conscious and playful narrative flourishes, is an important starting point. The CW produces "TV to Talk About," and *Supernatural* stands out as a show that actively and overtly engages with its own fandom; it is TV that talks back.

Supernatural is a series that routinely plays with its genre roots, and it resists categorization as any single genre. Like many of the dramas on The CW—as well as many of the most popular and successful series on its predecessors, The WB and UPN—*Supernatural* displays an extremely high degree of genre hybridity. At its most basic, *Supernatural* follows two brothers as they travel across the country hunting demons, ghosts, and monsters. The eponymous supernatural elements situate the series within a

horror context, while the emphasis on the brothers' travels and the fetishistic focus placed on Dean's Impala evoke the road movie aesthetic. The investigations undertaken by the Winchesters allow most episodes to function as mysteries, and the episodic nature of much of the series puts *Supernatural* in good company with more conventional procedurals.

The program was in fact extremely episodic in its early years, and it continues to exploit the monster-of-the-week paradigm: Sam and Dean arrive in a new town and find a monster; they leave town once the monster's dead; repeat next week. This is a narrative pattern that was similarly used in *The X-Files* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, both programs that *Supernatural* has been compared with. In later years, the show has moved toward increasing serialized and cumulative narrative, which has further widened the scope of genre tropes employed by the series. The interpersonal conflicts between Dean and Sam, and their relationships with a largely male cohort of fellow demon hunters, have allowed the show to develop into something of a male melodrama. Additionally, over the course of the series, the tone of the show has evolved: the horror elements, which originally focused on urban legends and American folklore, have become increasingly fantastical, with much of the latter half of the series dealing with an apocalyptic battle between angels and demons.

Perhaps the most important component to *Supernatural*'s hybridity is the show's sense of humor. Although the series can be quite (melo)dramatic, *Supernatural* provides consistent comic relief, and has done so most forcefully through extreme self-awareness. The show rarely takes itself seriously, and episodes very frequently contain tongue-in-cheek jabs at the series' sprawling mythology, at its reliance on well-established genre

clichés, and even at its own fandom. *Supernatural* overtly situates itself within genre discourses, putting itself into dialogue with the industrial and commercial concerns of The CW and the genre viewership of its fandom.

In his analysis of television narrative, Jeffrey Sconce notes that individual series frequently demonstrate a gradual trend toward increased cumulativeness. This is evident in the storytelling practices of *Supernatural* throughout its seven-year run, which have gone from straightforward and self-contained episodes to extended storylines that span multiple seasons. In an interview promoting the fifth season, series creator and executive producer Eric Kripke spoke about the original intent of the show: “When we started out, we were going to make a horror movie every week. It was about the monsters. [...] Honestly, in the beginning, Sam and Dean were an engine to get us in and out of different horror movies every week.”⁶⁶ This episodic format, which has the brothers in a new locale and with a new set of supporting characters every episode, eventually gave way to a more sprawling backstory and mythology, allowing the emotional turmoil and personal struggles of the main characters to take center stage.

Supernatural's narrative practices have not only gotten more ambitious, they also demonstrate what Sconce identifies as “metareflexivity.” Sconce explains that the fourth-wall effacing reflexivity seen in some films is not how reflexivity generally manifests on television. He notes that “televsual examples might more appropriately be dubbed ‘metareflexive,’ meaning they depend on the long-term viewer’s knowledge and appreciation of the modes of narration and emplotment characteristic of the series as a

⁶⁶ Maureen Ryan, “‘It’s the Fun Apocalypse:’ Creator Eric Kripke Talks *Supernatural*,” *Chicago Tribune*, 26 Aug. 2009, Web, 1 Apr. 2012
<http://featuresblogs.chicagotribune.com/entertainment_tv/2009/08/supernatural-season-5-eric-kripke-cw.html>

whole.”⁶⁷ John Caldwell, in his essay “Convergence Television: Segregating Form and Repurposing Content in the Culture of Conglomeration,” covers similar grounds in his discussion of television gimmicks, although he describes a phenomenon he calls “stunting,” high concept stylistic and narrative devices that various televisions shows have utilized to boost ratings during sweeps.⁶⁸ Examples of stunting include the live episode and the musical episode, devices employed by many series. *Supernatural* offers numerous examples of what Caldwell and Sconce observe, and also illustrates the ways that these tendencies can dramatically expand in scope. Caldwell in particular envisions his stunting within the fairly narrow context of sweeps, whereas a show like *Supernatural* has made such high concept stunts a regular component of the series structure.

Supernatural's metareflexivity is expressed in many ways. At the simplest and most common level, the series exhibits a consistent thread of self-awareness; characters will frequently make glib cracks that offer a self-deprecating assessment of the story. A more involved form of metareflexivity is seen when the show performs a pastiche of other series or genres. For example, the episode “Changing Channels” (5.08) finds the Winchester brothers trapped in a series of television scenarios, cycling through parodies of feel-good family sitcoms, Japanese game shows, *CSI: Miami* (CBS, 2002-Present), and *Grey's Anatomy*. Another episode, “Clap Your Hands If You Believe” (6.09), follows Sam and Dean investigating what appear to be alien abductions; the episode opens with a specially-made credits sequence done in the style of *The X-Files*, a show

⁶⁷ Sconce 106.

⁶⁸ John Caldwell, “Convergence Television: Aggregating Form and Repurposing Content in the Culture of Conglomeration,” *Television After TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition*, ed. Lynn Spigel and Jan Olsson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004) 61-66.

referenced frequently by *Supernatural* and on which many of *Supernatural*'s staff and actors had previously worked.⁶⁹

These and other examples demonstrate the kind of stunting in which *Supernatural* regularly engages, and unlike Caldwell's conception of the phenomenon as a ratings strategy, *Supernatural* uses stunting as a regular component of the series' style. But by far the most extreme metareflexivity seen in *Supernatural* comes from episodes where the characters directly interact with the series and its fandom. This trend begins in "The Monster at the End of This Book" (4.18), an episode where the brothers discover a book series, called *Supernatural*, that follows in detail their lives and adventures. In the course of investigating the books, they encounter several obsessive fans and discover online fan fiction that is written about them; they are both especially horrified to discover that some fans write the two brothers as a romantic couple. This diegetic fandom appears sporadically throughout the rest of the show, most significantly in "The Real Ghostbusters" (5.09), where Sam and Dean attend a *Supernatural* convention, experiencing the community that surrounds their fandom, including more insinuations of a homoerotic subtext to their relationship and cosplayers who stay in-character while dressed as the Winchester brothers.

Outside the scope of episodes dealing with the *Supernatural*-fandom-within-*Supernatural*, other episodes also engage in overt and over-the-top stunting. The best

⁶⁹ Like *Supernatural*, *The X-Files* was filmed in Vancouver, which explains much of the overlap. The most significant shared personnel is executive producer Kim Manners, who had worked on *The X-Files* and was with *Supernatural* until his death in 2009. Actors appearing on both series include Jim Beavers, Mitch Pileggi, and Mark Sheppard.

example is “The French Mistake”⁷⁰ (6.15), an episode where a magical mishap sends Sam and Dean out of their reality and into, essentially, ours. The brothers find themselves on the set of *Supernatural*, mistaken for actors Jared Padalecki and Jensen Ackles. They are appalled to discover what their actors’ lives are like—Dean is disturbed to learn Jensen worked on the soap opera *Days of Our Lives* (NBC, 1965-Present), while both are frustrated to discover they are in Vancouver. The real-life crew of the show appears in the episode (played by actors), and throughout the episode Misha Collins, who plays the angel Castiel on the show, is repeatedly seen tweeting to his fans; in a cute bit of transmedia storytelling, these messages appeared on the actor’s actual Twitter account in sync with the diegetic communications.

Comparing *Supernatural*’s approach to fan engagement with what The CW attempted with the Aerie Tuesday promotions for *Gilmore Girls* and *Veronica Mars*, it is clear that a more hands-off approach has been a better strategy. Aerie Tuesday was met with hostility for laying bare the corporate sponsorship and commercial interests of the segments, while the style of fan discourse of the Aerie Girls was seen as vacuous and contrived. Instead of asking viewers to consume *Supernatural* in a predetermined manner, The CW allowed the show to develop at its own pace, and in doing so *Supernatural* found a distinctive voice with which to communicate with its fans. Emerging organically over the course of the show’s run, *Supernatural* has used its tongue-in-cheek metareflexivity to show fans that they are a very real part of the show. This kind of investment in a product is exactly what The CW wants to foster, as it is the

⁷⁰ The title is a reference to Mel Brooks’ *Blazing Saddles* (1974). During that film’s finale, “The French Mistake” is the name of the homoerotically-charged Busby Berkley style musical that is interrupted as a Western brawl spills over out of the film’s Western setting and onto a movie studio lot.

key to their “TV to Talk About” branding. The CW fumbled with the tone-deaf Aerie Tuesday segments, but the approach taken with *Supernatural* has allowed this atypical program to become one of The CW’s longest-running shows. Developing without undue interference from the network, *Supernatural* has gathered a small and fervent cult following, and this level of commitment is exactly what The CW hopes to foster in all its programming.

Finding Its Voice:

In its first year, The CW was a chimera, stitched together from bits and pieces of the schedules of The WB and UPN, but as it moved forward its identity became more fully formed. The experiences of *Everybody Hates Chris*, *Veronica Mars*, and *Supernatural* reflect the tensions that The CW has had to contend with as it attempts to establish itself as a more successful venture than its forerunners. Airing on a network that markets itself as “TV to Talk About,” communications played a role in the fates of these programs. *Everybody Hates Chris* stands with its peers as a victim of The CW’s inconsistent commitment to diversity; this affected not only the network’s black sitcoms, but also shows like *Reba* and *WWE SmackDown*. While these shows failed to find footing on the new network, *Veronica Mars* was attempting a makeover. Creator Rob Thomas made every effort to make his show more accessible to casual audiences, while The CW aggressively marketed the show by pairing it with one of The WB’s latter-day hits and promoting it through the Aerie Tuesday campaign. *Supernatural* was saddled with the least network interference, and in the process it developed a distinct and vital voice with which to communicate with its fans.

The CW does not measure success strictly in ratings; a hit show for The CW is one that generates buzz among its young audiences, a show that people are talking about online. As the network has narrowed its focus and developed its identity, some shows found themselves well suited to the direction that The CW has taken, while others have found themselves catering to niches that the network no longer wished to pursue. The following chapter will contrast The CW with the programming practices of other networks, comparing the network's struggle for respectability with the prestige of HBO and how The CW's efforts to keep up with technological advancements have fallen behind the progress made by ABC.

Chapter Three - Competition Reputation, Distribution, and Other Networks

To understand how The CW fits within the larger context of contemporary post-network television, it is helpful to consider the network in comparison to other television brands. In earlier chapters, I have contrasted The CW with several other networks. The most obvious points of comparison have been The CW's forerunners, The WB and UPN; the legacy of the business practices of both networks can still be felt on The CW. Fox has also entered the discussion, owing to its similar use of black sitcoms in its early years. This chapter will expand this discussion with the scope widening to bring two other networks into focus, beginning with HBO. In terms of stature and acclaim, The CW and HBO could not be farther apart. The CW is the perennially last place network by a consistently wide margin; its reputation is similarly far behind the other broadcast networks. In contrast, HBO has occupied the absolute upper-echelon of television prestige since the late 1990s. HBO's privileged position brings a sophisticated and older audience, while The CW's audience of young women is a market that is lucrative to advertisers but frequently the victim of critical disdain. Despite this immense gulf between the networks' statures, there are some important parallels to be found in the practices of HBO and The CW. Considering how HBO positions itself in relation to the television industry provides an excellent counter-point to understand The CW's place in the post-network world.

The second section of this chapter will focus on ABC, a network that has a handful of hit shows that cater to the female demographic The CW targets. Shows like *Desperate Housewives* and *Grey's Anatomy* were key to the resurgence ABC experienced in the mid-2000s, just a season or two before The CW's launch. Where ABC has excelled

is in expanding its operations to new distribution technologies, striking deals that greatly broaden the availability of its content. Technologies like DVR and streaming are largely used by younger audiences, which further bolsters ABC's numbers for key demographics. Although The CW has made technology a stated priority for its growth and development, there remain many lessons that the network can take from ABC's example.

HBO and Discourses of Quality:

HBO has, over the last two decades, carved out a prominent niche for itself as one of the premiere destinations for "quality television." The channel started out primarily as a broadcaster of recently released films and sports events (and to a significant extent this remains a large part of their operations), but in the late 1990s the identity of HBO underwent a massive overhaul. Spurred by the success of series like *Oz* (1997-2003), *Sex and the City* (1998-2004) and *The Sopranos* (1999-2007), HBO came to be defined primarily by its original television programming. Tony Kelso, in his essay "And Now No Word From Our Sponsor," offers a succinct summary of the logic underlying HBO's claim to quality. According to Kelso:

The traditional argument on how HBO stands apart from the rest goes like the following: ... there is a quality divide between pay TV in general (and HBO in particular) and commercial television. Because HBO is dependent on subscribers rather than advertisers for its main source of revenue, it can take risks without fear of upsetting sponsors. ... Not only does HBO not have to worry about offending corporate backers, it can also produce plots that develop slowly instead of building mini-climaxes before commercial interruptions.⁷¹

⁷¹ Tony Kelso, "And Now No Word From Our Sponsor," *It's Not TV: Watching HBO in the Post-Network Era*, ed. Marc Levette, Brian L. Ott, and Cara Louise Buckley (New York: Routledge, 2008) 49.

By virtue of its position as a premium channel, HBO is not bound by the same industrial and business contexts of network television. There is a significant corporate component to its operations—HBO is, after all, owned by Time Warner—but the privileged position of HBO is well demonstrated in the network’s tag line, in use from 1996 to 2009, “It’s Not TV, It’s HBO.” Being apart from and above the commercial constraints of the networks has played a huge role in HBO’s identity.

John Smith’s *Branded Development: The HBO Serial and Beyond* analyzes the network’s strategic use of serialization in its branding. According to Smith, the serialized narratives employed by virtually all of HBO’s successful programs play a crucial role in fostering audience investment; Smith argues that the ultimate goal of HBO is not merely to create consumers loyal to a given show, but loyal to the entire HBO brand:

Serialization is a strategy for building relationships. It fosters an emotional investment that is meaningful for both fans and corporation. I will argue that HBO develops its brand identity most prominently *through* a strategy of developing narratives over time; and that a given serial develops brand awareness, even when the story world seems untouched by corporate interests.⁷²

To love *The Sopranos* or *The Wire* (2002-2008) is to love the institution of HBO. The aura of quality that HBO projects plays a crucial role in this process; even if their favorite shows are no longer on the air, consumers believe that the rest of HBO’s line-up contains the same caliber of programming they have come to expect.

Although The CW’s marketing is not fixated on projecting an aura of “quality,” this desire to foster strong brand loyalty among its consumers is just as evident in its programming and promotion. As a smaller network, The CW places a huge emphasis on

⁷² John Smith, *Branded Development: The HBO Serial and Beyond* (masters thesis, Emory University, 2010) 5.

its niche appeal, and one of the major tools in its arsenal is capitalizing on flow. Although flow is an important concept throughout the television industry, for the other four broadcast networks the flow they cultivate is generally localized to given nights and programs. Fox schedules all of its animated shows on Sunday night, while NBC has for decades used Thursdays for a block of sitcoms; the networks obviously feel that viewers for one show will be interested in the similar shows scheduled alongside it, but Fox does not necessarily expect that the viewers of *Family Guy* (1999-2002, 2005-Present) will be tuning in later in the week for *American Idol* (2002-Present).

The CW has taken a longer view of its broadcast flow, and thus it operates more like a niche cable channel than a broadcast network. The major networks are more concerned with reaching the broadest audiences; even when they do engage in niche programming, the majors offer a range of options that cover a wide variety of niches. The CW focuses on catering to its core demographic at all times. The network generates flow that goes beyond synergy between shows; The CW works to synergize its whole schedule: “The CW will go with the flow in the fall, unveiling a lineup that’s both more cohesive and downsized from past years. ‘We have three nights of shows that flow seamlessly from night to night,’ CW Entertainment [president] Dawn Ostroff told advertisers Thursday.”⁷³ As the only broadcast network with such a specific and narrow focus, The CW offers a high degree of homogeneity in their programs to allow as much audience overlap as possible. Like HBO, serialization plays a major role in producing committed fans of The CW’s products, as long-term narratives encourage fanbases that will watch week-to-week consistently. Both HBO and The CW rely on viewers coming to

⁷³ Schneider, “CW's Theme Scheme.”

appreciate the whole range of products they provide. Though demographically the two channels target very different segments of the viewing public, each has gone to great lengths to establish a coherent and consistent brand identity that will keep audiences tuning in.

Although HBO and The CW exist at far ends on the spectrum of television brands, there are a number of areas where their business practices are quite similar. For instance, both have relied on established successes in their efforts to produce new and better content. In the years before its reputation was well established, HBO had to actively seek out and court potential productions for its schedule; The CW does the same even now as it continues to struggle for legitimacy. Smith notes that HBO seeks out writers and producers who have already proven themselves with successful series on other networks; HBO fosters a sense that its creative personnel are auteurs. Smith cites Tom Fontana, creator of *Oz*, who worked on *St. Elsewhere* (NBC, 1982-1988) and *Homicide: Life on the Street* (NBC, 1993-1999), as an example of these hiring practices; other established creators that HBO employed included “*Sex and the City*’s Darren Starr (*Beverly Hills 90210* and *Melrose Place*) and *The Sopranos*’ David Chase (*I’ll Fly Away* and *Northern Exposure*).”⁷⁴

The CW has similarly looked to past successes to produce its series. One of the most prominent television veterans The CW has hired is Kevin Williamson, writer of the *Scream* horror film franchise (1996, 1997, 2000, 2011) and creator of *Dawson’s Creek*, one of the most important shows of The WB’s heyday. Williamson now works as executive producer on *The Vampire Diaries*—currently The CW’s highest rated drama—

⁷⁴ Smith 5.

and *The Secret Circle* (2011-present). Similarly, Josh Schwartz and Stephanie Savage, the creators and executive producers of *Gossip Girl*, previously worked together on *The O.C.* (Fox, 2003-2007). McG, director of the *Charlie's Angels* films (2000 and 2003) and executive producer on *The O.C.* and another Schwartz-produced show, *Chuck* (NBC, 2007-2012), serves as an executive producer on *Supernatural* and *Nikita*.

These producers can be strong investments for the network, as their proven track records help to secure advertising and ensure smoother productions, but Williamson and Schwartz are not always the best marketing tools. For this, The CW also capitalizes on successful franchises and actors to produce new hits. In 2008 and 2009, The CW launched remakes of two seminal primetime soaps from Fox, *Beverly Hills, 90210* and *Melrose Place*. Although The CW's take on *Melrose Place* lasted only one season, the renamed *90210* has been an important and visible commodity for the network. The CW is even borrowing from HBO: there are currently plans to produce a *Sex and the City* prequel based on a young adult novel series, *The Carrie Diaries*. A less direct way to capitalize on previous successes has been the use of recognizable actors from older teen programs. The 2011-2012 season has seen the creation of two such programs: *Hart of Dixie* (2011-present) stars Rachel Bilson, one of the stars of *The O.C.*, and *Ringer* (2011-present) is a vehicle for Sarah Michelle Gellar, star of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.

The biggest difference between the two networks is one of demographics. HBO produces television for sophisticated, older audiences; The CW produces television for young women, a viewership that does not afford much in the way of respectability. Even when the two networks are producing similar content, attitudes toward the products can vary widely. Posting on the scholarly blog *Antenna*, Kristina Busse compares her

feelings toward HBO and The CW's respective vampire series, *True Blood* (2008-present) and *The Vampire Diaries*. After noting the similarities between the programs, she writes:

And yet one is quality TV on HBO, watched by men and women alike, and names such as Alan Ball and Anna Paquin all but guarantee that it be taken seriously as an artistic engagement—even if we may just watch it for the bloodied sexual encounters and the melodrama. The other is firmly defined as teen TV, runs on the CW and its stars are more likely to appear on the cover of the online Portrait magazine than Rolling Stone. . . . [*The Vampire Diaries*] is clearly geared toward young girls with its high school protagonist and two male hunks who desire her. The high school setting and teen tropes mark the show as a typical CW show, with its melodramatic aspects foregrounded rather than hidden.⁷⁵

Busse is not judging the quality of the shows in these comments, merely addressing how the two series are perceived. In fact, she expresses her opinion that *The Vampire Diaries* is the superior program: “I enjoy the teen characters as a way to explore coming of age and adulthood anxieties via supernatural metaphors, and I like the way I can identify with the characters rather than merely observing them on their wild rides.”⁷⁶ *True Blood*, she feels, is a less engaging program, though it does more to address itself to a political context.

The comparison goes further when one considers each show's relative stature. Although both programs are currently the top-rated shows on their networks, there is a sense that *True Blood* may not be representative of HBO at its best. Jason Mittell, in responding to Busse's comments, notes: “I do think that, at least amongst TV critics, [*True Blood*] is not seen as typical ‘HBO quality,’ but rather in line with its more lurid

⁷⁵ Kristina Busse, “Vampire Shows and Gendered Quality Television,” *Antenna*, 26 Aug. 2010, Web, 3 Apr. 2012 <<http://blog.commart.wisc.edu/2010/08/26/vampire-shows-and-gendered-quality-television/>>.

⁷⁶ Busse.

side—more *Real Sex* than *Deadwood*.”⁷⁷ Several commentators have noted that HBO may be in a period of decline since many of its most important shows have finished their runs, including *Six Feet Under* in 2005, *Deadwood* in 2006, and *The Sopranos* in 2007. Tony Kelso characterizes HBO as being “in the midst of a significant slump.”⁷⁸ With the perception that the network has not found programming to wholly fill the void left by such high-prestige series as *The Sopranos* and *The Wire*, *True Blood*’s current success may be the best HBO has, not the best HBO can do. And yet, even then, the series carries with it an air of respectability that *The Vampire Diaries* could never hope to achieve.

As a comparison of *True Blood* and *The Vampire Diaries* demonstrates, there is a stark contrast between the respectability of shows on the two networks. A production on HBO carries with it a considerable amount of prestige, and HBO is frequently given the benefit of the doubt when it supports its programming. In Busse’s appraisal of *True Blood*, she cites several factors in her decision to give the show a chance. First and foremost, she explicitly foregrounds the reputation of executive producer Alan Ball, who won an Oscar for his script for *American Beauty* (1999) and went on to create *Six Feet Under*. Busse also notes that the series’ opening credits—she describes them as “amazingly artistic and political”⁷⁹—instilled in her an expectation of the subject matter and tone of *True Blood*, and so she gave the show time to reach its potential. Auster notes that such patience is something that HBO hopes to foster in its audience:

Just as significant as the money that HBO will pour into a series is the fact that the network will allow a series to find an audience, and will not cancel a series (as

⁷⁷ Jason Mittell, “Response to ‘Vampire Shows and Gendered Television,’” *Antenna*, 26 Aug. 2010, Web, Apr. 3 2012 <<http://blog.commart.wisc.edu/2010/08/26/vampire-shows-and-gendered-quality-television/>>.

⁷⁸ Kelso 55.

⁷⁹ Busse.

the broadcast networks do) if it doesn't immediately gain decent ratings. As a result, HBO has become the standard of quality in contemporary American television.⁸⁰

Ultimately, Busse sees *True Blood* as a disappointment, failing to live up to its artistic or political potential. But the time that she gave to *True Blood* to see if it could deliver is emblematic of the faith that the network is able to engender; if something is on HBO, it *must* be worthwhile, and if a program does not prove its worth initially there is an understanding that it will be given time, both by HBO and by viewers, to find its footing.

Such faith in HBO stands in contrast to the reception of The CW's programming. Nothing on The CW is given such a generous benefit of the doubt; if anything, programming must prove itself worthwhile *in spite of* being on The CW. Whereas HBO is seen to have integrity when it allows its shows to find their niches, series on The CW receive much harsher treatment. Sean O'Neal, writing for *The AV Club*, demonstrates a common level of critical disdain in the sardonically titled article "The CW Picks Up *Ringer* for a Full Season, Because It's The CW:"

If president [Mark Pedowitz] hadn't tellingly characterized The CW as a peek inside a young girl's mind, another apt comparison would be to call it the Cocoon of networks—a place where nobody ever gets any older, and everything on it won't ever die. So it's probably no surprise that The CW has issued a full-season order to *Ringer*, the Sarah Michelle Gellar-starring soap noir ... *Ringer* is on The CW, meaning Gellar will likely be able to stare at herself in conveniently placed mirrors for five or six more seasons at least.⁸¹

An article on The CW's decision to give full season orders to its other new dramas, *The Secret Circle* and *Hart of Dixie*, received a similarly sardonic treatment in another

⁸⁰ Al Auster, "HBO's Approach to Generic Transformation," *Thinking Outside the Box: A Contemporary Television Genre Reader*, ed. Gary R. Edgerton and Brian G. Rose (Lexington, KY: The University of Kentucky Press, 2005) 227.

⁸¹ Sean O'Neal, "The CW Picks Up *Ringer* for a Full Season, Because It's The CW," *The AV Club*, 12 Oct. 2011, Web, 3 Apr. 2012 <<http://www.avclub.com/articles/the-cw-picks-up-ringer-for-a-full-season-because-i,63319/>>.

O’Neal penned story, “The CW Also Picks Up Full Seasons of *Secret Circle* and *Hart Of Dixie*, Because Why Not?”⁸² All three programs O’Neal discusses were new additions to The CW’s schedule, and they have gained only minimal traction with viewers. Certainly if they were on any other network, they would have been quickly cancelled after only a few broadcasts.

O’Neal’s assessment of the network—“everything on it won’t ever die”—is far from accurate, as seen if we consider The CW’s longest running programs. There are really only four shows to which O’Neal could be alluding: *Smallville*, which ended in its tenth season in May 2011; *Supernatural*, currently in its seventh season; *One Tree Hill*, which recently ended in its ninth season; and *America’s Next Top Model*, which has produced 18 seasons since debuting in 2003. All of these series premiered on The CW’s predecessors, the first three coming from The WB with *America’s Next Top Model* from UPN. Of series that were not inherited, *The Vampire Diaries*, *90210*, and *Gossip Girl* are currently the longest running, at three, four, and five seasons respectively. A common benchmark for judging a program’s long-term success is if it reaches 100 episodes, the minimum number chosen by the industry to decide when a show had produced enough content to be viable for second-market syndication; such a standard is somewhat antiquated in the modern post-network era, particularly for The CW’s programming that is not generally run in syndication, but the 100 episode mark serves as a convenient point to judge when a show has had a respectable run. By this measure, *Gossip Girl* is the only post-merger program to reach this milestone. Contrary to O’Neal’s assertion, most shows

⁸² Sean O’Neal, “The CW Also Picks Up Full Seasons of *Secret Circle* and *Hart Of Dixie*, Because Why Not?” *The AV Club*, 12 Oct. 2011, Web, 3 Apr. 2012 <<http://www.avclub.com/articles/the-cw-also-picks-up-full-seasons-of-secret-circle,63329/>>.

on The CW have proved to be quite short-lived, surviving only a season or two before being cancelled. But for a network that lives and dies by word of mouth, how The CW is perceived is arguably more important, and O'Neal enunciates the general level of disregard that the network is often held in.

When HBO sticks by a new show that has not yet found an audience, it is a sign of their artistic integrity; the network is allowing artists to tell their stories, and HBO gives its blessing. When The CW does the same thing, it is because of desperation. And in some ways, this is true; if The CW cancels a show, it likely does not have something to fill that space, so shows like *Ringer* or *Hart of Dixie* might be kept on the air longer than they would be on another network. HBO is less concerned if it must fill a vacant timeslot, as its original programming is shown frequently in reruns and it can always use the time to show a film. As Smith notes, HBO's ability to have faith in struggling shows "is a luxury that network television does not have."⁸³ The CW is on the other side of this equation; it can keep a show with unspectacular ratings on the air, but not because of high-minded idealism. A show's meager audience is frequently sufficient in the important demographics to satisfy advertisers, and even if it is not, the network may rather keep an underperforming program on the air than not have new material for primetime.

Though these business decisions are made under different conditions and with different motives, the effect may be ultimately the same. Whether it is because HBO can afford to give a series a chance or because The CW cannot afford gaps in its schedules, the end result is that a show remains on the air, and thus has more time to establish an audience. The CW is explicit in its desire to capitalize on flow, finding ways to bring

⁸³ Smith 6.

viewers from one show to another, pairing similar series and trying to keep viewers tuning in on other nights. Smith notes that “the strategy of allowing a series to find an audience brings brand and serial together.”⁸⁴ The CW has been criticized for keeping the same shows around year after year, sticking with shows that have not proven themselves, and rehashing formulas from other successful channels. But what this does is ground the network’s branding; consistency and cohesion is what keeps The CW running.

Avi Santo, in his essay “Para-television and Discourses of Distinction: The Culture of Production at HBO,” offers a compelling critique of HBO’s famous tag line, “It’s Not TV, It’s HBO.” Santo argues that viewing HBO as something outside of television is limiting; he terms HBO’s practices as a form of “para-television,” which he defines as such:

By para-television I am referring to production practices and programming choices that are purposely situated alongside recognizable television forms in order to confer particular meanings upon them. HBO might define itself as “Not Television,” but most of the content appearing on HBO draws upon existing television forms, narratives, aesthetics, themes, and economic and institutional practices in order to articulate HBO’s difference.⁸⁵

Despite how provocative “Not TV” is from a marketing standpoint, it is clear that HBO is far from operating outside of a televisual context. Owned by Time Warner, HBO is just as much a product (in both senses of the word, as commodity and as consequence) of the corporate hegemony that dominates commercial television. Although HBO has netted some of its talent from the film world—Alan Ball being perhaps the best example—the majority of the creator-auteurs behind HBO’s most high-prestige programs have been

⁸⁴ Smith 6.

⁸⁵ Avi Santo, “Para-Television and Discourses of Distinction: The Culture of Production at HBO,” *It’s Not TV: Watching HBO in The Post-Television Era*, ed. Marc Levette, Brian L. Ott, and Cara Louise Buckley (New York: Routledge, 2008) 24.

veterans of the television industry. And no matter how cutting-edge or challenging HBO's programming may seem, virtually every one embraces or reappropriates the well-defined genre contexts of broadcast television.

HBO's engagement with genre stands apart from the genre hybridity that is central to The CW's programming. Santo's essay does not directly address "hybridity," but based on his definition—as that "which purposely relies on mimicking and tweaking existing and recognizable TV forms"⁸⁶—Santo's para-television shares many features with hybridity. The CW may not have such high-minded aspirations for its brand—compare the lofty "It's Not TV" with The CW's tag line, the more modest (and rather vague) "TV to Talk About"—but active discourse with genre forms remains a fundamental component of The CW's identity. In some ways, The CW's engagement with television genres may be further outside the mainstream than HBO's own practices.

With the "It's Not TV" branding, HBO explicitly positions itself as opposed to the standards of conventional television, but this may not be wholly accurate. In "HBO's Approach to Generic Transformation," Al Auster notes the overwhelming sameness of much network fare:

In the late nineties, the major networks' dramatic series had settled, with rare exceptions, into a routine of family-cop-doc-lawyer shows. Indeed, one of the most successful of these dramatic series, *Law & Order* (1999-[2009]), was a combination of the cop-lawyer genre. Occasionally a series such as the political drama *The West Wing* (1999-[2006]) or the supernatural series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) broke from this mold. However, by and large network programmers stayed within the safe confines of these franchise dramas. A major contribution of HBO was to move the dramatic series into new realms of experience, and even to resurrect older forms of the dramatic series genre, such as the Western.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Santo 19.

⁸⁷ Auster 239.

While Auster sees HBO as having moved away from the “routine,” Santo effectively argues that much of HBO’s most celebrated shows fit within the dominant genre discourses of the broadcast networks. For example, Santo notes that *Oz* works as a permutation or extension of the police genre: “*Oz* borrows aesthetically, generically, and thematically from its network predecessor, *Homicide*, ... but the show is set in a prison rather than a police station and focuses on the inmates’ point-of-view rather than the police officers’.”⁸⁸ *The Wire*, another show heavily indebted to the legacy of *Homicide*, is also overtly engaged with the discourse of the police genre, while *The Sopranos* melds the family drama and the broader crime genre (i.e. the dark twin of the police genre) and *Six Feet Under* can be understood as a family drama. It should be noted that these assessments are, to varying degrees, oversimplifications; the content and style of an HBO program does not necessarily fit neatly within a single genre category, but it is important that the network’s shows largely reflect the genres most valued and exploited by the major networks.

If Auster is perhaps generous in his assessment of the generic identity of HBO, how does his assessment work if reapplied to The CW? It is telling that *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*—which played a crucial role in defining The WB’s brand identity in the late 90s, an identity that has been in large part carried on by The CW—is one of Auster’s examples of exceptions to the genre complex of “family-cop-doc-lawyer” that dominates network television. In fact, these genres are not well represented on The CW at all. The network has never aired any cop or lawyer shows, and this season’s *Hart of Dixie* is its first medical drama. The family drama is the only of the core genres Auster identifies that

⁸⁸ Santo 29.

The CW has broadcast to a significant degree, but its most clear cut examples of the genre, *The Gilmore Girls* and *7th Heaven*, were imports from The WB and lasted only a single season on the new network. Otherwise, family dynamics are generally not a core focus for The CW's programming; for example, though the brotherly rivalries featured in shows like *One Tree Hill*, *Supernatural*, and *The Vampire Diaries* play a significant role in each series' narratives, they represent just one of the many genre discourses that permeate their texts. With the heavy emphasis placed on genre hybridity in its programming, it becomes almost impossible to pin down The CW's shows to any straight-forward genre categories. As just one example, *The Vampire Diaries*' genre identity must be expressed in hyphenate, as a vampire-romance-horror-fantasy-high school-soap opera.

The CW is a prime example of Santo's para-television: as television that does not work to maintain a mass audience, The CW operates separately from the major networks for which broad appeal is the top priority. Santo writes, "Para-television always maintains a murky relationship with existing forms of television and traffics in ambiguous definitions of qualitative distinction. Whereas television seeks to attract a mass audience, para-television is designed to build coalition audiences."⁸⁹ The CW's ideal and idealized audience has not necessarily been a stable construction throughout the network's run, but from the very beginning the network has been explicit in its desire to target niche demographics. Part and parcel of this strategy has been that The CW would be enticing and lucrative to the advertisers that wish to reach the young people the network attracts. HBO made its name by operating in a model without advertising; The CW does not exist

⁸⁹ Santo 30.

in a commercial vacuum, but the highly specified nature of its content allows advertisers to see it as a worthwhile investment. The CW is certainly not wholly indifferent to the ratings its shows earn, but its business model allows it to remain viable despite fielding a schedule that consistently occupies the bottom most slots of the year-end numbers.

If, as Auster claims, “HBO has made the most of its natural advantages over the broadcast networks,”⁹⁰ then perhaps The CW has used its natural disadvantages to distinguish itself. Unable to compete with the major networks at their own game, The CW instead has taken its own path. It does not pursue the prestige programming that has made HBO a major force in the industry; The CW may miss out on critical accolades and awards, but it does not need them. It has found success on its own terms and cultivated a distinct brand for itself.

ABC and New Technologies:

Operating as para-television, catering to niche audience, The CW is in most regards quite different from the Big Four networks. The narrowcast focus of The CW is not how CBS, NBC, ABC, and Fox operate, as the majority of their programming is meant to bring in (at least in theory) a wider and more diverse audience than The CW targets. Of its four broadcast “rivals” (though it should be clear by now that The CW is not truly attempting to compete with the Big Four), ABC is probably the major network to which The CW can best be compared. Such commonalities will likely only increase as The CW is now under the guidance of president Mark Pedowitz, who worked for ABC for nearly two decades.

⁹⁰ Auster 245.

In the years leading up to The CW merger, ABC found success with several new dramas, most prominently *Desperate Housewives*, *Lost* (2004-2010), and *Grey's Anatomy*. These were not solely cult shows—they garnered huge ratings that placed them among the top shows on television—but they were significant hits with many of the same young viewers The CW targeted. After several years of plummeting ratings, ABC found itself on the upswing, and the network's forward-thinking use of new distribution technologies played a major role in establishing ABC on the leading edge of broadcast television in the post-network era. Although The CW has certainly aimed to employ and exploit time shifting and streaming technologies in their efforts to reach out to its youth audience, in most regards they have found themselves behind the curve. The CW should look to ABC and follow its example.

In the early years of the 2000s, ABC found itself in a poor position after putting all its eggs in one basket. The network entered the new millennium with a major hit on its hands *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* (ABC 1999-2002, syndication 2002-present). An adaptation of a British game show format, *Millionaire* was so popular that it sparked a brief boom in network game shows. Many of the programs created to cash in on the craze were extremely short-lived, including Fox's *Greed* (1999-2000) and CBS's *Winning Lines* (2000); NBC had the most successful *Millionaire*-competitor with *The Weakest Link* (NBC, 2001-2002, syndicated 2002-2003, GSN 2006). ABC hitched its star to the game show craze, a decision that would soon put ABC at a disadvantage.

ABC made several crucial missteps in how it handled its success with *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* Most obviously, the network tried to over-capitalize on its success, leading to it becoming rapidly overexposed; for a time during 2000, *Millionaire* aired

four times a week. *Millionaire*'s momentum was also stymied by another up-and-coming import: CBS's *Survivor* (2000-present), based on a Swedish series. ABC chose to counter-program its hit game show against the then-unproven reality show; *Survivor* ended up being a huge cultural phenomenon, helping to usher in the massive expansion of reality programming over the last decade. *Millionaire*, on the other hand, was a passing fad, and ABC slipped further and further down in the ratings. ABC would reach its nadir in the 2003-2004 season, when it placed fourth among the major networks, marking the first time that Fox came out ahead of one of the original Big Three.

During the following year's 2004-2005 season, ABC's fortunes would reverse significantly, thanks to the high-profile premieres of *Lost* and *Desperate Housewives*. The following season, ABC added *Grey's Anatomy* to its schedule; all three dramas—alongside the success of ABC's first major reality hit, *Dancing with the Stars* (2005-present)—helped pull the network out of its rut. After the record lows of earlier seasons, ABC's batch of new shows garnered phenomenal ratings: for the 2005-2006 season, *Desperate Housewives* and *Grey's Anatomy* were the fourth and fifth rated shows on TV, while *Lost* came in at 15.⁹¹

These three shows premiered before The CW merger, but ABC's successes with *Desperate Housewives*, *Grey's Anatomy*, and *Lost* are relevant to considering The CW's operations for several reasons. Significantly, the shows were very popular with the audience The CW courts; all three were very successful with mass audiences, as seen in their ratings, but these shows all developed strong cult followings. An important tool for

⁹¹ "I.T.R.S. Ranking Report 01 Thru 100 (Out of 216 Programs)," *ABC Medianet*, 31 May 2006, Web, 3 Apr. 2012, <http://abcmedianet.com/web/dnr/dispDNR.aspx?id=053106_05>.

ABC in promoting its new shows and staging its comeback was the use of innovative advertisement and distribution strategies. Utilizing publicity stunts to generate buzz for the series and embracing new, digital means of distribution, ABC was on the cutting edge of many important developments in the industry.

A crucial component of the success of these programs was their novelty.

Desperate Housewives, *Lost*, and *Grey's Anatomy* were all distinctive and innovative, standing apart from the programming on other networks even when exploiting well-worn genre norms. *Desperate Housewives* follows the exploits of several women, played by Teri Hatcher, Felicity Huffman, Eva Longoria, and Marcia Cross, living on suburban Wisteria Lane. The show mixes elements of soap opera, comedy, and mystery, and drew attention, both positive and negative, for its racy content. *Lost* occupies a similarly complex genre position; the series revolves around the survivors of a plane crash on a mysterious and isolated island. *Lost's* setting was mysterious and fantastical from the beginning, but the story developed into a convoluted science fiction tale of spirituality and philosophy. *Grey's Anatomy* may seem the most conventional of ABC's hit shows, as the medical drama is one of the most exploited genres on television; the series distinguished itself with a soap opera-like focus on its character's personal lives and occupational conflicts, with special attention paid to the romantic entanglements of its medical professionals.

Novelty can sometimes be a double-edged sword for new programs, as the industry reacts best to shows that fit within predetermined molds. As Janet McCabe and Kim Akass note in the introduction to *Reading Desperate Housewives: Beyond the White Picket Fence*,

Network television is notorious for playing it safe. Reliant on advertising dollars means that it must deliver the mass audience to sponsors and alienate the fewest people possible. Once a network has found a reliable hit the formula tends to get repeated. ... [At the time] networks were commissioning procedural dramas to cash in on the immense popularity of *CSI* and *Law and Order*.⁹²

ABC took substantial risks with *Desperate Housewives*, *Lost*, and *Grey's Anatomy*, but the payoff was immense, with all three shows major hits attracting large audiences. And contrary to the standard desire to “alienate the fewest people possible,” *Desperate Housewives* in particular generated controversy and protest from some conservative social groups, who felt the show was inappropriate for broadcast television; groups like the Parents Television Council launched a large-scale boycott of the show’s sponsors.⁹³ Although ABC did lose some advertisers from the boycott, it was ultimately a net gain for the series and the network as the “negative” publicity from those condemning the show helped to increase the program’s buzz.

In addition to generating interest in new shows through such notoriety, ABC also launched several advertising gimmicks to spread awareness of their new programs. Amanda Lotz discusses viral advertising tactics in *The Television Will Be Revolutionized*, noting that “ABC is widely regarded as the instigator of this trend with its promotion of *Desperate Housewives* through dry cleaner bags printed with ‘Everyone has a little dirty laundry’ in 2004 and its promotion of *Lost* through the distribution of messages in bottles with details about the show to beach locations.”⁹⁴ Such stunts do not always make or break the chances for a new program, but such tactics are now extremely widespread as it

⁹² Janet McCabe and Kim Akass, “Introduction: Airing the Dirty Laundry,” *Reading Desperate Housewives: Beyond the White Picket Fence*, ed. Janet McCabe and Kim Akass (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) 5.

⁹³ McCabe and Akass 7.

⁹⁴ Lotz, *The Television Will Be Revolutionized* 110.

becomes increasingly clear that conventional advertising is no longer enough. A successful viral campaign can generate significant amounts of attention, particularly online, creating brand awareness that reaches potential viewers in ways that print or television advertising will not.

After the failures ABC experienced in the early years of the 2000s, they were ready to explore both unconventional programming choices and new forms of marketing. McCabe and Akass observe that, “ABC had nothing to lose and decided to take a risk with the launch of *Desperate Housewives*. The gamble paid off and found the network increasing its market share by 17 percent in the key 18-49-year-old demographic.”⁹⁵ *Lost* was similarly successful, capitalizing on its unconventional style and premise to generate significant buzz. *Variety* reported that “*Lost* [represents] the [network’s] best start for a drama in 18-49 since *Once and Again* in 1999, and in total viewers since *Murder One* in 1995.”⁹⁶ These shows did extremely well overall, but it was the popularity of *Desperate Housewives*, *Lost*, and *Grey’s Anatomy* with younger viewers that made them leading programs of ABC’s mid-00s comeback.

A key component of ABC’s success with younger audience has been its widespread adoption of new technologies, offering their programming across a wide spectrum of new media platforms and devices. ABC has been at or near the leading edge of new distribution practices; a press release from 2010 touts the numerous achievements of the network, noting that ABC was “[the first network] to offer full episodes on iTunes (October 2005), [...] to stream ad-supported full episodes online (May 2006), [...] to

⁹⁵ McCabe and Akass 4-5.

⁹⁶ Rick Kissell, “ABC, Eye Have Quite Some Night,” *Daily Variety*, 23 Sep. 2004, Web, 3 Apr. 2012 <<http://www.variety.com/article/VR1117910869?refcatid=10>>.

offer full episodes on demand on a mobile platform ([with] Sprint, May 2007), [and] to offer ad-supported full episodes on the iPad [(April 2010)].”⁹⁷ ABC’s programming has proved to be extraordinarily popular on services like iTunes and Hulu or through the network’s own website. A report in 2011 showed that ABC had three of the top five programs being viewed through DVR recordings, with *Grey’s Anatomy* at number one, *Desperate Housewives* at three, and *Lost* at five (Fox’s *American Idol* and *House* were at two and four respectively).⁹⁸

ABC clearly excelled at integrating new media technologies into their programming and promotional strategies, which helped to bring in large, young audiences for many of their shows. How then, does The CW compare in its own practices? In terms of median age of viewers, ABC in fact has the second oldest audience—CBS has the oldest at 55, followed by ABC at 51, NBC at 49, Fox at 45, and The CW the youngest at 34.⁹⁹ For a network so explicitly fixated on the youth market, embracing new technologies has been a priority, though at times The CW’s track record has been inconsistent.

On several counts, The CW has done very well in its use of new technologies. Executives have consistently emphasized the importance of understanding their audience.

⁹⁷ “Breaking News: Disney/ABC Television Group's ABC Player iPad App Downloaded More Than 212,000 Times Since the iPad's April 3rd Launch,” *The Futon Critic*, 14 Apr. 2010, Web, 3 Apr. 2012

<<http://www.thefutoncritic.com/news/2010/04/14/disney-abc-television-groups-abc-player-ipad-app-downloaded-more-than-212000-times-since-the-ipads-april-3rd-launch-35316/20100414abc02/>>.

⁹⁸ Lynette Rice, “The Most Tivo’ed Show On TV Is...,” *Entertainment Weekly*, 1 Sep. 2011, Web, 3 Apr. 2012 <<http://insidetv.ew.com/2011/09/01/top-10-most-tivoed-shows/>>.

⁹⁹ Nellie Andreeva, “Final Network Rankings for 2010-11 Season: English-Language Nets Down, Univision Up,” *Deadline Hollywood*, 26 May 2011, Web, 3 Apr. 2012 <<http://www.deadline.com/2011/05/final-network-rankings-for-2010-11-season/>>.

Dawn Ostroff explained: “We want to be the entertainment destination for young adults. ... We have to immerse ourselves in their lifestyles and their cultures, think what they think, go where they go, get involved with the things that they are involved with.”¹⁰⁰

Understanding the audience’s viewing habits is very important; for the 18-34 demographic that The CW pursues, conventional broadcast viewing is a decreasingly significant mode of engagement. This raises its own set of issues, as the methodologies used to count television audiences have been slow to fully adjust to new viewing platforms.

The numbers show that The CW’s programming does well when new technologies are taken into account. In recent years, a new metric in the ratings has become increasingly important: the Live+7 Days ratings, which combine both the audience that watches a program as it airs and those viewers that watch it via DVR within a week of its original broadcast. With the Live+7 Days numbers, The CW’s programs occasionally show large enough increases to be in the top 25, but where the network shines is in terms of percentage increases. Every week, several shows on The CW gain a significant portion of their audience through DVR viewings, with a CW show often atop this chart. In fact, during the week of January 30 to February 5, 2012, eight of the network’s shows (that is, every program other than *America’s Next Top Model*) appeared in the top 25 shows by percentage increase, ranging from *Hart of Dixie*, which increased its audience by 66.7%, to *Nikita*, by 40%.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Michael Schneider, “CW Channels Future After Rocky Start,” *Daily Variety*, 23 Jul. 2007: News Page 8, *LexisNexis Academic*, Web, 8 Nov. 2011.

¹⁰¹ Robert Seidman, “Live+7 DVR Ratings: *Glee* Tops Absolute Gains; *Grimm* Tops % Gains in Week 20,” *TVbytheNumbers*, 21 Feb. 2012, Web, 3 Apr. 2012

Although The CW's viewers are regularly viewing programming through non-traditional devices or services, the network has not always done the best job in catering to these needs. For instance, The CW was the last of the five broadcast networks to begin offering their programming online.¹⁰² At times, the network and its executives have seemed as though they do not truly understand their young audience or the emergent modes of viewing that define their engagement with television. An example of this difficulty can be seen in The CW's upfront presentation in May 2009. Such events are where networks sell ad-time to their sponsors; networks use this as an opportunity to unveil their schedules and hype their goals for the coming year. In 2009, The CW premiered their tag line, "TV to Talk About," a phrase that remains core to their branding. Throughout the upfront presentation, signs reading, "Chat. IM. Tweet. Blog. Talk." reinforced this communications theme. James Hibberd, reporting on the event for *The Hollywood Reporter*, felt however that The CW had somewhat missed the point:

But one also gets the sense the network sees tweeting and blogging and such as a form of technology-driven magic that's unique to their programming. When, really, that's how people—young people in particular—communicate. Any vaguely popular product targeted at younger demographics, whether Jonas Brothers or *90210*, results in tweets, blogs, IMs and such. If that's the measurement, the CW's "buzz" isn't really an illusive quality. It's just people talking.¹⁰³

The "TV to Talk About" branding is, in many ways, exceptionally vague, and as Hibberd points out, this extends to how Ostroff articulates The CW's relationship to new media

<<http://tvbythenumbers.zap2it.com/2012/02/21/live7-dvr-ratings-gee-tops-absolute-gains-grimm-tops-gains-in-week-20/120741/>

¹⁰² Josef Adalian, "FCC Rulings Still Cast a Chill at Nets," *Daily Variety*, 22 Jan. 2007: News Page 5, *LexisNexis Academic*, Web, 8 Nov. 2011.

¹⁰³ James Hibberd "CW Upfront Presentation Not-So-Live Blog," *The Hollywood Reporter*, 21 May 2009, Web, 3 Apr. 2012

<<http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/blogs/live-feed/cw-upfront-presentation-live-blog-51669>>.

communication. In contrast, HBO's "It's Not TV, It's HBO" evokes discourses of quality and commerciality; it asks the viewer to consider what they value in HBO and what they settle for on other networks. There is no real sense of what "talking about" The CW will accomplish, or even what will be said about it. The CW's tag line limits itself to building brand awareness among tech-savvy young people.

The CW's relationship with its viewers and technology is also evident in the following year's upfront presentation in May 2010. A major announcement during the presentation involved the advertising The CW uses for streaming episodes on its website; the network was moving away from shorter commercial messages and would now be showing longer blocks of advertisements. In effect, this would make The CW's streaming content more akin to conventional broadcasts. In explaining the initiative, Ostroff offered several insights into The CW's approach to its online presence: "'This may become a blueprint for the rest of the industry.' ... Ostroff said the CW's video player has been 'wholly embraced by the ad community.'"¹⁰⁴ Ostroff is speaking in the context of an upfront presentation, so her focus on how these changes affect the advertising side of the business is perfectly understandable. But even when Ostroff turns her attention to the audience, her statements suggest that the network does not fully understand how its viewers use this technology. A *Variety* article on the presentation notes:

Asked if the full commercial loads might scare viewers back into watching CW series on TV, Ostroff pointed out that TV viewing is still more desirable—particularly from a measurement perspective. "We know people's first choice is to watch on the TV and have that experience," she said. "Online is a convenience. It's another way to catch up on episodes." But at the same time, Ostroff said the CW's research has found that viewers are willing to sit through more commercials to watch a show online for free.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ "Online Spots Bring in Revs for CW."

¹⁰⁵ "Online Spots Bring in Revs for CW."

Ostroff makes the claim that watching television in its original broadcast is the preferred mode of viewership, but the only reason she can provide for why it is “desirable” returns once again to the issue of advertising: it is easier to count viewers if they watch conventionally.

Ostroff tries to position online viewing habits as being somehow a substitute for the “proper” experience. This is a shortsighted appraisal of what is a fundamentally different mode of engagement with television, and the research that she cites seems to support the idea that online streaming goes beyond simply being “a convenience.” The CW’s Live+7 Days numbers show that a significant portion of the audience is taking advantage of new technologies, and that is only considering time shifting; services like iTunes and Hulu provide additional means of consuming The CW’s products, and treating non-traditional viewership as a poor substitute for the real thing is not how the network should be approaching the issue.

Unlike ABC, which has consistently pursued new avenues of online distribution for its content, The CW has tended to drag its feet. For this reason, it was not until October 2011 that the network finally made deals with the two biggest streaming services, Netflix and Hulu. The CW had offered its shows streaming on its own website previously, but given the popularity of both services—especially among the network’s core demographic—it was not helping the brand to hold out. Bruce Rosenblum, president of Warner Bros. TV Group, is quoted in *Variety*, spinning The CW’s late arrival to Netflix and Hulu as a shrewd business decision: “What we discovered was there wasn’t a first-mover advantage to licensing into these platforms. ... While we didn’t move quickly, we kept our powder dry until the marketplace matured. Now we have a vast library of

content that is meaningfully more valuable now than it was three years ago because of increased distribution opportunities.”¹⁰⁶ Leslie Moonves also offered his perspective, discussing the networks under his control and their relationship to online distribution. CBS has avoided making much of its programming available through services like Netflix or Hulu, as CBS’s shows tend to be quite valuable on the syndication market; The CW, on the other hand, produces shows that do not work well in syndication. “CW [programming] is a different animal. It appeals to a much younger demographic and a lot of viewers are watching online. [...] The CW went from being a money-loser for CBS to a profitable venture.”¹⁰⁷ The wait-and-see attitudes Rosenblum and Moonves express certainly make sense from a business perspective, but the network is likely too cautious in regards to technologies like Hulu and Netflix. The youth markets The CW caters to are the fastest adopters of such services and devices, so if The CW wants to keep up with its viewers it needs to be quicker in adapting to changing markets.

It was this willingness to take risks that helped ABC make its meteoric comeback in 2004 and 2005, and The CW could learn much from ABC’s example. Thankfully, this should now come more naturally: CW’s current president, Mark Pedowitz, had previously been with ABC since 1991, serving as president of ABC Studios from 2004 until 2009. Having seen firsthand what an aggressive and technologically-driven approach can do for a network, Pedowitz may be able to lead The CW toward building a stronger online presence and customer-base: “Our needs are greater in the digital world because of our (18-34) audience ... There are great growth opportunities there. Our

¹⁰⁶ Andrew Wallenstein, “CW’s Online Bonanza: Output Pact Boosts Netlet, Netflix,” *Daily Variety*, 14 Oct. 2011, *LexisNexis Academic*, Web, 8 Nov. 2011.

¹⁰⁷ Jill Goldsmith, “Hits Help Eye Thrive in 3rd Qtr.,” *Daily Variety*, 4 Nov. 2011: Top News; TV Page 1, *LexisNexis Academic*, Web, 8 Nov. 2011.

digital convergence strategy is light years ahead of the other nets, and it's born out of necessity, which breeds great innovation."¹⁰⁸ Pedowitz took the reins from Ostroff less than a year ago, so exactly how he will influence the course of The CW, and whether he can follow through on promises of "great innovation," remains to be seen.

Lessons To Learn:

The CW does not exist in a vacuum; it must always contend with what other networks are doing. Considering practices of HBO and ABC has highlighted some of the challenge that The CW must face. The lack of respect for the network will continue to be an issue, affecting the shows it can produce, the talent it can attract, and the reactions it will generate, both among viewers and the press. And though executives like Ostroff may feel conventional viewing habits are more "desirable," new avenues of distribution will only continue to expand, and The CW must keep up with these changes, particularly if it wishes to be seen as hip and current.

How The CW will develop along these lines remains an open question. Counteracting the network's negative reputation is an on-going struggle, while recent deals have greatly expanded The CW's investment in online distribution. In the following chapter, *The Vampire Diaries* will be taken as a case study to examine how the various factors considered in the previous chapters—corporate ideology, advertising, serialization, fan engagement, discourses of quality, and new media technologies—come to bear on the network's top show.

¹⁰⁸ "Solo Topper to Drive CW Partners' Vision," *Daily Variety*, 29 Apr. 2011: Top News; TW Page 1, *LexisNexis Academic*, Web, 8 Nov. 2011.

Chapter Four - Conclusion

The Vampire Diaries, Authorship, and Women's Television

The Vampire Diaries has been The CW's most successful drama since its premiere, but outside the context of the network the program is far from gaining major traction on a broader, more mainstream scale. It may be The CW's top drama—it was the network's top show overall during the 2009-2010 season, and came in second after *America's Next Top Model* the following year—but that still leaves it as one of the lowest rated shows on television. What then does the show's success even mean? The show broke records for The CW during its premiere, which was seen by 4.91 million viewers, the biggest audience the network has ever had.¹⁰⁹ *Variety* offered an analysis of the ratings shortly after its debut:

The Vampire Diaries, CW's top new show, finishes fifth in 18-49 at 8 p.m. Thursdays. However, it beats all its timeslot competition among females 12-34, according to Nielsen. "There's tremendous value (in niche [demographics])," says CW program planning and scheduling [vice president] Kevin Levy. "Our primary target that we're looking at is women 18-34. ... It's great to be able to point to multiple shows across our network and show we've got some wins in different time periods in those [demographics]."¹¹⁰

The Vampire Diaries does not garner large audiences, but it succeeds where it matters for The CW's advertisers. This is, ideally, how the whole range of the network's programming functions. *The Vampire Diaries* might be one of The CW's most visible shows right now, but it is not exceptionally different from its peers. Operating under the same pressures as the rest of the schedule, *The Vampire Diaries* is first among peers. It

¹⁰⁹ Michael Ausiello, "Vampire Diaries Ratings: The Don't Suck!" *Entertainment Weekly*, 11 Sep. 2009, Web, 3 Apr. 2012 <<http://insidetv.ew.com/2009/09/11/vampire-diaries-ratings-they-dont-suck/>>.

¹¹⁰ Jon Weisman, "Some Skeins Score Their Riches in Niches," *Daily Variety*, 6 Dec. 2009: Page 15, *LexisNexis Academic*, Web, 11 Mar. 2012.

serves as an excellent base-line, a prototypical representative of The CW. How it operates and who views it are factors that are true for virtually everything The CW produces, and the reaction and reception the show receives are, by and large, standard for the network. *The Vampire Diaries* is shorthand for the ways The CW operates in the post-network era and how it struggles for legitimacy against profound and deep-seated cultural biases against entertainment marketed to women and young people.

Credit Where Credit's Due:

The Vampire Diaries is perfect for The CW. A cast of attractive young actors playing high school students locked in highly-charged and melodramatic storylines featuring betrayal, magic, and love-triangles; The CW could hardly ask for a program that was better suited to its specific house style. Of particular interest is how *The Vampire Diaries* demonstrates a truly multivalent authorship. Many different forces and influences exert themselves upon the show, allowing it be simultaneously the product of the popular zeitgeist, individual creative visions, and the dictates of its corporate interests. The influences and forces acting on *The Vampire Diaries* play a significant role in shaping the product's text, its role on The CW, and its position in the wider cultural context.

First and foremost, *The Vampire Diaries* is self-evidently a show about vampires, and should be read in this context. Vampire fiction is a centuries-old tradition, but for something like *The Vampire Diaries*, its most important influences are decidedly contemporary. In recent years, vampires have become one of the hottest pop culture commodities, thanks largely to the blockbuster success of the *Twilight* franchise, which first gained massive popularity as a series of young adult novels. The debut book from author Stephenie Meyer, the first *Twilight* novel was released in 2005, and was followed

by *New Moon* in 2006, *Eclipse* in 2007, and *Breaking Dawn* in 2008. The series struck a chord with much the same audience that The CW targets, appealing to the “females 12-34” demographics that *The Vampire Diaries* would also secure. The books did phenomenally well—all four books topped the *New York Times* Best Seller list after their releases, and have sold more than 100 million copies worldwide¹¹¹— and have led to the production of a series of major Hollywood adaptations: the initial film, *Twilight*, was released in November 2008, with the final installment in the series, *The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn Part 2*, due in November 2012; the four released films have had a combined worldwide box office revenue of over 2.5 billion dollars.¹¹²

The runaway success of Meyer’s series not only generated a massive fan following, but was at the forefront of a boom in vampire-related media. HBO was another significant participant in this vampire craze with *True Blood*. HBO also secured the rights to a book series, but while the *Twilight* books were a major cultural force by themselves, *True Blood* draws from a less well-known cult success. Written by Charlaine Harris, the series has alternately been known as *The Southern Vampire Mysteries* and *The Sookie Stackhouse Novels* (and are currently marketed under the *True Blood* branding); the novels predate Meyer’s series by several years, with the first book, *Dead Until Dark*, released in 2001. The program took time to develop an audience, with its premiere seen by only 1.4 million people, but has grown significantly, earning its largest audience of 5.5

¹¹¹ “Little, Brown to Publish Official *Twilight* Guide,” *Publishers Weekly*, 6 Oct. 2010, Web, 3 Apr. 2012 <<http://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/childrens/childrens-book-news/article/44733-little-brown-to-publish-official-twilight-guide.html>>.

¹¹² “Box Office History for *Twilight* Movies,” *The Numbers*, Web, 3 Apr. 2012 <<http://www.the-numbers.com/movies/series/Twilight.php>>.

million during the recent fourth season.¹¹³ *True Blood* has proven so popular that it is now HBO's second most popular show ever, after only *The Sopranos*.¹¹⁴

With *True Blood* and *Twilight* already on the scene, *The Vampire Diaries* premiered in 2009. *True Blood* had been on the air a year and the *Twilight* franchise was nearing the release of its second film; The CW seemed like it was coming late to the party with its own take on vampires. Like *True Blood*, *The Vampire Diaries* is loosely based on a moderately successful book series: L.J. Smith first wrote *The Vampire Diaries* as a trilogy of young adult novels in 1991, adding a fourth volume in 1992; after a nearly two decade hiatus, Smith began work on a new trilogy of books, the first of which was released in 2009.

The Vampire Diaries should be seen from its place in the overall context of contemporary vampire fiction, and in many ways, the show can seem purposefully derivative. Set in the small Virginia town of Mystic Falls, *The Vampire Diaries* follows protagonist Elena Gilbert (Nina Dobrev), an orphaned high school junior. Elena falls in love with the darkly brooding and sensitive Stefan Salvatore (Paul Wesley), a 162-year-old vampire attending her high school. Stefan's foil is his older brother and fellow vampire Damon (Ian Somerhalder); Damon is initially characterized as unhinged and malicious, but over time his personality softens and he develops into a competing love interest for Elena. The show also features a mix of other well-established supernatural

¹¹³ Robert Seidman, "Sunday Cable: *True Blood*, *Kardashians*, *Entourage* Lead + *Breaking Bad*, *Glee* Project & Much More," *TVbytheNumbers*, 23 Aug. 2011, Web, 3 Apr. 2012 <<http://tvbythenumbers.zap2it.com/2011/08/23/sunday-cable-true-blood-kardashians-entourage-lead-breaking-bad-glee-project-much-more/101035/>>.

¹¹⁴ Benjamin Toff, "Victories for NBC, MTV and *True Blood*," *The New York Times*, 15 Sep. 2009, Web, 3 Apr. 2012 <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/16/arts/television/16arts-VICTORIESFOR_BRF.html>.

elements, including witches, ghosts, and a centuries-old antagonism between vampires and werewolves.

The Vampire Diaries is very deliberately capitalizing on the archetypes and tropes of the now well-trod tradition of vampire romance stories. The show even shares some significant commonalities with its vampiric contemporaries: the dynamics of Elena and Stefan's relationship hit many of the same notes as the romances between *Twilight*'s Bella and Edward and *True Blood*'s Sookie and Bill, while *The Vampire Diaries*' high school milieu is evocative of *Twilight* and it shares with *True Blood* a Civil War origin for its main vampires and a love triangle between a (slightly supernatural) human female¹¹⁵ and two alternately-threatening-and-charming vampires.

Comparisons with these other popular vampire franchises were obvious and inevitable. Brian Lowry writes in *Variety* that The CW is “mining the seemingly endless pool of chick-lit exploiting women’s strange obsession with undead romance” and describes *The Vampire Diaries* as a “highly calculated construct.”¹¹⁶ The first statement, with its use of the loaded phrase “chick-lit,” demonstrates the general and casual dismissal of the value of pop culture consumed by female audiences; Lowry’s attitude is all too common in appraisals of The CW and its products. There are myriad reasons that the network is so marginalized, but cultural attitudes toward “women’s entertainment” have played a significant role.

¹¹⁵ *True Blood*'s Sookie is part faerie, which manifests as clairvoyance; *The Vampire Diaries*' Elena is a doppelganger—she is identical to Katherine, the vampire who turned Damon and Stefan—which makes her central to the magical machinations that govern the show's vampires.

¹¹⁶ Brian Lowry, “The Vampire Diaries,” *Daily Variety*, 9 Sep. 2009: Reviews Page 8, *LexisNexis Academic*, Web, 8 Nov. 2011.

Despite the harsh tone of the first quote, Lowry's assessment of the show as a "highly constructed construct" is not meant as a criticism of the program, but rather an acknowledgement of The CW's savvy; *The Vampire Diaries* is a compelling product precisely because it has been so exactly manufactured to cater to its niche. A later *Variety* article notes: "Zeitgeist works: Critics teased CW for shamelessly hopping on the vampire-drama bandwagon with *Vampire Diaries*, but really, in the long shadow of *Twilight*, *True Blood*, et al, can you blame them?"¹¹⁷ Perhaps if the program had been a failure, the late arrival of a vampire-themed program would be an embarrassment for The CW, but *The Vampire Diaries* proved itself as the network's top show and a worthwhile new product in the increasingly crowded vampire market.

The CW not only invites the comparisons to its vampiric competitors and contemporaries, it even encourages them. Explaining why she believed the show was so successful, Dawn Ostroff listed the qualities the network values in its programming: "Great writing, great casting, a topic that's in the zeitgeist and a known franchise is always what we look for. It's the perfect example of the kind of qualities we stress in every show we pick up."¹¹⁸ L.J. Smith's *The Vampire Diaries* novels may not be the most well-known commodity—written almost two decades earlier, the series did not have a cultural footprint anywhere near the size of *Twilight*'s—but any amount of name recognition is obviously important in developing and promoting a new series. Many viewers already aware of *The Vampire Diaries*' branding would likely be those who read

¹¹⁷ Cynthia Littleton, "Nets Amid Season of Thanks," *Daily Variety*, 6 Dec. 2009: Page 15, *LexisNexis Academic*, Web, 8 Nov. 2011.

¹¹⁸ Matt Richenthal, "CW President Teases *The Vampire Diaries* Spin-Off," *TV Fanatic*, 7 Mar. 2010, Web, 3 Apr. 2012 <<http://www.tvfanatic.com/2010/03/cw-president-teases-the-vampire-diaries-spin-off/>>. (Richenthal cites an Ostroff interview with *The Hollywood Reporter*; the link to the original interview is dead.)

the novels around the time of their initial release; such consumers would fall on the older side of the demographic curve The CW pursues. For the younger audiences, the so-called *Twilight* crowd, the specific source of the program would be relatively unimportant; what matters, as Ostroff notes, is the zeitgeist.

Exploiting current popular trends is not a failing on The CW's part; it is the nature of the industry. Television is, by and large, a medium of imitation and reappropriation. When one network hits on a popular format, it is almost a guarantee that the other networks will soon have similar shows in an attempt to capitalize on the original's success. This tendency in the networks is most evident in the genre cycles that dominate most broadcast networks; recall Auster's core cluster of television genres, the "family-cop-doc-lawyer shows."¹¹⁹ The CW is certainly no stranger to such imitative broadcasting, but it takes a different form by virtue of its demographics. The young women that make up its core audience are, as a general rule, not the ones who make the other network's procedurals and lawyer shows hits. They are the consumers that fuel the *Twilight* franchise (among other things), and despite the high saturation of *Twilight* and its derivatives, The CW recognized that the market could support another vampire product. It helped that *The Vampire Diaries'* main television competition, *True Blood*, is on a premium cable network that primarily targets a different class of consumer; The CW would have a vampire show that would be significantly more accessible to an audience for whom HBO's other programming may hold little appeal.

Obviously The CW should be proud of the success of *The Vampire Diaries*, but the network is not alone in deserving credit. Many creative and corporate visions went

¹¹⁹ Auster 238.

into crafting the series. On the one hand, *The Vampire Diaries* is indebted to the legacy of showrunner and executive producer Kevin Williamson; having made his name with *Dawson's Creek* on The WB and several hit teen-oriented horror films, including the *Scream* franchise and *I Know What You Did Last Summer*,¹²⁰ *The Vampire Diaries* seems like the perfect synthesis of Williamson's earlier career highlights. On the other hand, the program is also a key component of the media empire run by Alloy Media + Marketing, a company that has made its name licensing its young adult properties for film and television. The novels' original author, L.J. Smith, also deserves some recognition, but she has in fact been largely cut off from the franchise.

Having these creative and corporate visions tied to its products has been vital to The CW, which has gone out of its way to capitalize on pre-existing name- and brand-recognition in developing new material. This is standard procedure for television networks, but The CW has been especially overt in its use of franchises, actors, and producers that its audience will know. *The Vampire Diaries* successfully brought in all three of these components. Franchise-wise, the series could capitalize on both the reputation of the book series itself and the more general interest in vampire stories. Most members of the show's cast had previously worked as regulars or guest stars on either explicitly teen-oriented programs or shows with large youth audiences; the most significant television veterans are Nina Dobrev—who had been in the main cast for several seasons on *Degrassi: The Next Generation* (CTV 2001-2009, MuchMusic 2010-Present), a long-running Canadian teen drama with a sizable American audience—and Ian Somerhalder, who played a recurring character in the early years of *Smallville* and

¹²⁰ Also based on a young adult novel, written by Lois Duncan.

was a main cast member during the first season *Lost*. The biggest name attached to *The Vampire Diaries*, however, is that of its executive producer, Kevin Williamson.

Williamson made his name in the late 90s, in part from writing and producing several highly successful horror movies that targeted young audiences. He is best known for writing the four *Scream* films, all directed by Wes Craven; Williamson also received executive producer credit from *Scream 2* onward. Other horror films from Williamson include *I Know What You Did Last Summer*, directed by Jim Gillespie, and *The Faculty* (1998), directed by Robert Rodriguez. Williamson also wrote and directed *Teaching Mrs. Tingle* (1999), a dark comedy about high school students murdering a teacher, which bombed in the box office.

All of Williamson's films are overt in their appeal to teen audiences, most clearly through their casts of highly marketable young stars. Many of these actors were even specifically known for their work on teen television: *I Know What You Did Last Summer*'s Jennifer Love Hewett and the *Scream* franchise's Neve Campbell starred on Fox's *Party of Five* (1994-2000); Sarah Michelle Gellar, appearing in both *I Know What You Did Last Summer* and *Scream 2*, was the star of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*; and *Teaching Mrs. Tingle* starred Barry Watson of *7th Heaven* and Katie Holmes, of Williamson's own *Dawson's Creek*.

Dawson's Creek constitutes the other major component of Williamson's impact on late 90s pop culture. Loosely based on Williamson's own experiences growing up in North Carolina (where the show was filmed, though it was set in coastal Massachusetts), the teen melodrama details the growing pains of four high school students, played by James Van Der Beek, Joshua Jackson, Michelle Williams, and Katie Holmes. The show

was a landmark hit for The WB, and, alongside *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Felicity*, helped to solidify that network's reputation for producing quality teen television. The legacy of The WB's prime has had a huge influence on the direction The CW has taken, seen both in the surviving series from each network—The WB provided *Supernatural* and *One Tree Hill*, as well as the recently concluded *Smallville*, while the only hold-over from UPN is *America's Next Top Model*—and in the general style and aesthetics of programming the network has pursued. As *Variety* noted in 2009, “[The CW's schedule] looked a lot like how a hypothetical WB lineup might have looked.”¹²¹ Williamson, having played such a major role in defining The WB's identity in the late 90s, is helping to do the same for that network's successor.

Prior to Williamson's return to television with *The Vampire Diaries*, he made two failed attempts at launching new shows: *Glory Days* (The WB, 2002) was on the air for nine episodes, while *Hidden Palms* (The CW, 2007) last only eight. With the help of his long-time producing partner Julie Plec—she worked on *Scream 2*, *Teaching Mrs. Tingle*, *Scream 3*, and another Wes Craven/Williamson collaboration, *Cursed* (2005)—Williamson has another hit with *The Vampire Diaries*, once again demonstrating his value as a producer and writer. But Williamson-as-brand works in somewhat inconspicuous ways. In selling the show to its audience, Williamson's name is not prominently featured at all; in fact, I can find no evidence that Williamson is ever mentioned on the show's posters, billboards, or other visual promotions. Most marketing for the show has tended toward more superficial qualities, emphasizing the cast's sex

¹²¹ Schneider, “CW's Theme Scheme.”

appeal with glamour shots of Dobrev, Wesley, and Somerhalder and attracting attention with suggestive taglines like “Catch VD.”

Williamson’s role as a promotional tool has been more behind-the-scenes. He is prominently featured in the network’s press releases for the series, and his role on the series is frequently commented upon in the trade press. Williamson’s reputation is key to demonstrating The CW’s commitment to *The Vampire Diaries*; having an established writer attached to the project demonstrates to the industry and to advertisers that The CW is not just rushing a show to market to cash in on the vampire craze, but that it is serious about making *The Vampire Diaries* the flagship of its brand. The cachet of Williamson is so important that The CW tapped him to help bring another young adult series from L.J. Smith, *The Secret Circle*, to the air in 2011. Both shows air back-to-back on Thursdays, one of the most competitive nights of television with such major competition as Fox’s *American Idol* and ABC’s *Grey’s Anatomy*.

Another important player in *The Vampire Diaries*’ development is Alloy Entertainment, one of the program’s production companies. Production companies cover a wide range of responsibilities, including the budgeting, writing, shooting, marketing, and distribution of a program; some may be tied to the network, while others belong to an executive producer. *The Vampire Diaries* has four production companies attached to it. Under the terms of the 2006 merger deal, programs developed for The CW are jointly and equally owned by both Warner Bros. and CBS; like the rest of the network’s post-merger shows, *The Vampire Diaries* is attached to both Warner Bros. Television and CBS Television Studios. Kevin Williamson also has his own production company, Outerbanks

Entertainment. Alloy Entertainment is the final piece of the puzzle, handling *The Vampire Diaries*' intellectual property itself.

Such licensing deals are the crux of Alloy Entertainment's business, and it has allowed the company to develop into its own small media empire. Founded by Leslie Morgenstein, Alloy was initially known as Daniel Weiss Associates, and later 17th Street before settling on its current name. A book-packaging company, "Alloy targets the so-called millennials, or consumers in the 10-29 age range,"¹²² producing a wide range of young adult novels aimed at a female audience. Alloy Entertainment specializes in selling their book series for adaptations on film and television. In the film world, Alloy's biggest hits have been *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants* (2005) and its 2008 sequel, along with the less successful *The Clique* (2008) and *Sex Drive* (2008). It is on television that Alloy has found the biggest markets, providing the properties for numerous programs on both ABC Family—*Pretty Little Liars* (2010-Present), *Huge* (2010), *The Nine Lives of Chloe King* (2011), and *The Lying Game* (2011-Present)—and The CW; alongside *The Vampire Diaries*, Alloy is behind *Gossip Girl*, *Privileged* (2008-2009), and *The Secret Circle*. Morgenstein serves as an executive producer on all of Alloy's productions.

Alloy's operations extend out in other directions. The film and television adaptations help to spur sales for the books themselves, and Alloy works to foster this kind of synergy by "consciously timing new *Vampire Diaries* books to series premieres and sweeps, taking advantage of the concurrent marketing attention from the

¹²² Michael Schneider, "NBC Alum Melds With Alloy," *Daily Variety*, 22 Apr. 2010: Page 3, *LexisNexis Academic*, Web, 11 Mar. 2012.

networks.”¹²³ The company has also started crafting properties simultaneously for print and television; this was the intent for *Pretty Little Liars*, but “television development took so long that the eighth book in the series was coming out as the first episode came on.”¹²⁴

Alloy Entertainment is a division of Alloy Media + Marketing, which maintains a significant online presence. Alloy runs a suite of teen-oriented websites—including *teen.com*, *alloy.com*, and *channelone.com*—which, according to corporate literature, receive 60 million visitors a month.¹²⁵ Alloy also produces its own web-only content: the series *Dating Rules from My Future Self* (2012) is available on Hulu in five-to-ten minute long episodes.

Alloy does more than just reap the profits from their successful licensing deals, exercising a large amount of creative control over their properties. The author of the *Vampire Diaries* novels, L.J. Smith, has experienced this firsthand. Smith has had virtually no involvement in the production of the television series, which significantly diverges from her books in many details, and in 2011, it was reported she would no longer be writing the books, having been fired by Alloy.¹²⁶ This was possible because Smith ultimately did not own the property: “The company hires a writer to execute a series, often under a pen name. Story creation is a collaboration among executives and the writer, who cedes ownership of the results to Alloy. It’s a factorylike methodology

¹²³ Gordon Cox, “Tomes Get TV Uptick,” *Daily Variety*, 31 Mar. 2010: Page 1, *LexisNexis Academic*, Web, 11 Mar. 2012.

¹²⁴ Ari Karpel, “His Finger on the Pulse of What Girls Watch,” *The New York Times*, 25 Aug 2011, Web, 3 Apr 2012 <<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/28/arts/television/leslie-morgensteins-recipe-for-lying-game-gossip-girl.html>>.

¹²⁵ “About Us – Alloy Digital,” *Alloy Digital*, Web, 3 Apr. 2012 <<http://www.alloydigital.com/about.htm>>.

¹²⁶ Adam Whitehead, “The Author of *The Vampire Diaries* Has Been Fired From Her Own Book Series,” *io9*, 9 Feb. 2011, Web, 3 Apr. 2012 <<http://io9.com/5756378/the-author-of-the-vampire-diaries-has-been-fired-from-her-own-book-series>>.

that runs contrary to the view of a writer as a work's supreme creator."¹²⁷ A ghostwriter is currently producing a third trilogy of books.

The evidence of Alloy's involvement in its series is not always immediately apparent—the company's logo flashes by for just a moment after the closing credits—but the control Alloy exerts over *The Vampire Diaries* and its other properties is palpable. L.J. Smith may get her name on the cover and in the credits—and will continue to do so, despite no longer writing the books—but Alloy is a prime example of corporate authorship. And with three Alloy produced shows on The CW—a full third of the programming the network has on its current schedule—Alloy's authorial stamp has a profound effect on The CW's house style.

Authors and Audiences:

This multi-layered set of influences and authorships that surrounds *The Vampire Diaries* is not unique, but a common feature of The CW's content. Although the particulars of the program's development and production are distinct, it should be viewed first and foremost as representative of The CW as a whole. *The Vampire Diaries* serves as an excellent case study to examine how The CW navigates the challenges of post-network television and the ways it confronts a culture that routinely undervalues entertainment and media marketed to women.

In terms of the shows that have attracted significant critical acclaim, the post-network era has been dominated by small niche programming. This topic was explored recently by *The AV Club*, in a discussion between critics Steven Hyden and Todd VanDerWerff about NBC's cult sitcom *Community* (2009-Present); VanDerWerff writes:

¹²⁷ Karpel.

We live in a world where a show like, say, *The Office* can be considered a “hit,” even though it’s watched by less than 2 percent of the American population. Outside of *The Sopranos*, the show that kicked our current Golden Age of Television off, and *Lost*, the shows that make up the Golden Age are low-rated, niche hits, shows that have to live and die by attracting a fervent, cult audience that sticks around week after week. ... *Community* isn’t a hit under the usual means, but it’s a big fish in a new TV comedy ecosystem, one where the way you make money isn’t by attracting the largest audience, but the most passionate one. ... To a degree, insularity is the point of the new, great TV. If you’re in the tribe ... it seems self-evident that the show is the greatest thing ever. If you’re not—as many, many people are with all of these shows—the whole thing seems a little silly.¹²⁸

During his discussion, VanDerWerff only mentions The CW in an aside, never addressing its programming specifically, but his points are relevant to understanding The CW’s operations. The need to cultivate “fervent” and “insular” cult audiences is the overriding drive of the entire operation; there is no hope of attracting a mass audience (if such a thing even exists anymore), so everything must be made to appeal to the niche The CW has carved out for itself. If something does not cater to the proper demographics—as seen with *Everybody Hates Chris* or *WWE SmackDown*—it will not have a home on The CW for long.

Why then do shows from The CW so very rarely make it on to the lists critics like VanDerWerff and Hyden construct of the great shows of this era? One significant factor is authorship, as discussions of “quality television” frequently overlap with a decidedly auteurist perspective on television production. Throughout Hyden and VanDerWerff’s article, the two critics name-drop almost two dozen television programs, the majority currently or recently on the air, and almost all of them fairly universally regarded as examples of “quality television.” Such programs are seen as the work of a particular and

¹²⁸ Steven Hyden and Todd VanDerWerff, “Why Don’t You Like This? *Community*,” *The AV Club*, 15 Mar. 2012, Web, 3 Apr. 2012
<<http://www.avclub.com/articles/community,70869/>>.

individualized vision, a creator cum executive producer cum showrunner guiding their show's narrative and creative development. The two critics extensively discuss Dan Harmon, creator of *Community*; similarly, *The Sopranos* is understood to be the work of David Chase and *Lost* is (inaccurately) seen to come from J.J. Abrams.¹²⁹

As problematic as auteurism can be in the film world, it is even more so when dealing with television, with its years-long production schedules and highly collaborative nature. The showrunner may act as head writer, but there are usually a large number of additional writers contributing to the series. Only a handful of writers actually write the bulk of any given series; such exceptional cases include J. Michael Straczynski, who wrote 92 out of the 110 episodes of *Babylon 5* (PTEN 1994-1997, TNT 1998), and Aaron Sorkin, who wrote the vast majority of *Sports Night* (ABC, 1998-2000), the first four seasons of *The West Wing*, and *Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip* (NBC, 2006-2007). The auteur is as always something of a conceit; "Dan Harmon" and "David Chase" are not so much their literal personages but an understood convergence of the creative and industrial forces that guide a program.

Several shows on The CW have big name producers attached to them, including Kevin Williamson and *Gossip Girl*'s Josh Schwartz, but auteurist claims are harder to make for The CW's programming because of these numerous competing authorships operating on these shows. For a series like *The Vampire Diaries*, the overtness with which The CW and Alloy exercise a form of corporate authorship punctures the conceit of the television auteur, as one must ignore much of the show's production history to

¹²⁹ Abrams co-created *Lost* with Damon Lindelof, working from a concept initially developed by Jeffrey Lieber. Abrams directed and co-wrote the show's pilot, but had almost no involvement in the show's production afterwards. The showrunning duties were shared by Lindelof and Carlton Cuse.

claim Williamson and Plec as the sole or even primary creative forces. Williamson and Plec are, if anything, just another link in the chain of creative professionals commissioned to bring the franchise to new audiences. Like L.J. Smith, Williamson and Plec are stewards of *The Vampire Diaries*, tasked with producing a show that represents the property's corporate interests.

The CW further disrupts discourses of “quality television” by failing to produce what might be called “exceptional” television. The prestige programming of other broadcast networks is just that: the exception. Although the major networks may produce examples of unconventional programs that attract critical accolades and dedicated followings, the majority of what they broadcast is marketed to mass audience. As I have suggested elsewhere, The CW is in many ways more akin to a cable outlet than its broadcast competition, and its schedule of exclusively niche programming is the most important manifestation of this tendency. Original cable programming, both on premium networks like HBO and Showtime and basic cable channels like AMC and FX, falls more-or-less exclusively into the “quality television” tradition. The prestige programming found on cable also maintains an aura of the exceptional, as shows like *Mad Men* (2007-Present), *Breaking Bad* (2008-Present), and *The Walking Dead* (2010-Present) constitute a relatively small portion of AMC's airtime. Economically, it would make no sense to produce shows for mass audiences on cable; programming on cable is by its very nature something that one seeks out, while shows for mass audiences must be easy to find. Producing distinct and unique programming for specific niches is how cable networks distinguish themselves; The CW employs similar narrowcasting strategies in every show it produces.

If The CW is following similar programming imperatives as HBO and AMC, why does it not receive anywhere near the same level of recognition and prestige? Certainly, some of it is a matter of quality; The CW's low stature within the industry directly affects the caliber of writers and actors that it can attract. But the issue goes far deeper than quality, to a very deeply ingrained cultural bias. The biggest obstacle to The CW's wider recognition is not the quality of its products, but the very niche it has chosen to pursue. Simply put, producing content for women ensures that The CW remains culturally marginalized.

Programming aimed at women carries with it very little cultural capital. An excellent example of the attitudes against women's television can be seen in the reputation of Lifetime, a cable network that markets itself as "Television for Women." Despite being "one of the most profitable U.S. cable networks, ranking as the most watched cable network from the beginning of 2001 through the end of the first quarter of 2003,"¹³⁰ Lifetime is not afforded respect, seen more as a punch line than a serious network. Significantly, Lifetime's heyday occurred while Dawn Ostroff was with the company, prior to joining UPN in the years immediately before The CW merger.

Daytime television is a prime example of a block of programming that is both culturally undervalued and dominated by women viewers, and it is home to perhaps the most culturally maligned genre of television: the soap opera. The genre's reputation is so bad that its very name is "seen as derogatory and used pejoratively when applied to other programs like primetime dramas."¹³¹ Somewhat ironically, several iconic features of the

¹³⁰ Amanda Lotz, *Redesigning Women* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2006) 3.

¹³¹ Jason Mittell, *Genre and Television: From Cop Shows to Cartoons in American Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2004) 164.

soap opera genre—including long-form, serialized storytelling and a focus on interpersonal conflict and characterization—have become highly valued qualities for most modern prestige programming, but such rehabilitation has not necessarily extended to the programs itself. Daytime soaps continue to be low-culture.

For better or for worse, the soap opera (or its primetime equivalent) is The CW's specialty, as seen in the dramas that dominate The CW's schedule, including its most popular shows like *Gossip Girl* and *The Vampire Diaries*. The network's embrace of the genre even includes the revival of two of the most successful primetime soaps of the 1990s, *Beverly Hills 90210* and *Melrose Place*. With a schedule principally composed of heavily serialized melodramas explicitly targeting women, The CW's programming is heavily indebted to the soap opera genre.

But even within the context of women's entertainment, The CW occupies a sub-niche that is even further marginalized: entertainment for young women. The tastes of adolescent and young adult women are culturally suspect; recall Brian Lowry's insulting dismissal of *Twilight* and the vampire craze. Although the female demographic can be highly valued by advertisers, Amanda Lotz notes a domestic nature to this: "female audiences have commanded advertisers' attention because of their control of family spending (advertisers believe that women control 85 percent of personal and household-goods spending)."¹³² This impression of the spending power of women is grounded in an underlying assumption of an older and family-oriented female consumer.

The CW's position in the industry allows it to reach an important but underserved segment of the audience. Women younger than The CW's core audience, younger

¹³² Lotz, *Redesigning Women* 28.

adolescent girls and the tween audience, have several viewing options, including Nickelodeon, The Disney Channel, and ABC Family. Women beyond The CW's age range are similarly well accommodated by television: venues like Lifetime, Oxygen and daytime programming are meant to cater to these audiences, and the major networks offer numerous programs that attract the broader 18-49 demographic of female viewers. As The CW itself boasts, it is "the only network targeting women 18-34,"¹³³ which grants it a unique position as the sole outlet for its consumers. The CW has at times stumbled in its efforts, and it still has far to go to reach its potential. Its house style can be problematic, presenting a homogenously white and middle class understanding of its audience, and the network has not always known how to dealing with its audiences' viewing practices.

What sets The CW apart is not its narrow focus but its industrial position. In catering to such a specific segment of the viewing population, The CW's practices are not particularly far removed from those of any of the dozens of niche channels that pepper the cable schedule. What makes The CW exceptional is that it is operating as a broadcast network in a way unlike any other broadcast network. The post-network era of television has brought with it massive changes to how the industry is run, and the ways that CBS, ABC, NBC, and Fox function have evolved considerably from the days of the golden age of network television. But even if the Big Four operate differently from the networks of yesteryear, they are still engaged in a set of broadcasting practices that are identifiably those of the broadcast networks. The post-network era is defined by a sharp divide between broadcast television, with its appeal to mass audience, and cable television,

¹³³ "About The CW Television Network."

which produces niche content. In The CW, there is a very distinct and perhaps unique overlap between these two extremes.

The CW and its programming reflect so much of the post-network milieu precisely because it is a minor network. Having the biggest audience is certainly an important objective for the major networks, but they have become only a small part of the contemporary television industry. CBS, NBC, ABC, and Fox are just four of the providers of television content available to consumers; there are hundreds of options on the air, and the number will only rise as the television medium grows larger and more diverse thanks to new technologies. Branding is essential to distinguish oneself in such a crowded marketplace, and The CW has clearly succeeded in establishing a consistent and appealing identify for itself. The CW may not always keep pace with the latest developments within the industry, but its failings are just as important to understanding its place in the industry. Somewhat paradoxically, The CW's distinctiveness is exactly what makes it so representative of the state of post-network television. The path that The CW has charted in its six years of operations demonstrates many of the most important challenges facing television networks in the new millennium. In its own way, The CW is the post-network network.

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Television Programs (organized by network):

The CW:

18 to Life. Executive Prod. Derek Schreyer, Karen Troubetzkoy, Andrew Orenstein. Perf. Stacey Farber, Michael Seater, Peter Keleghan. 2010 to 2011. CBC and The CW.

7th Heaven. Executive Prod. Brenda Hampton, Aaron Spelling, E. Duke Vincent. Perf. Stephen Collins, Catherine Hicks, Barry Watson. 1996 to 2007. The WB and The CW.

90210. Executive Prod. Gabe Sachs, Jeff Judah, Rebecca Sinclair. Perf. Rob Estes, Shenae Grimes, Tristan Wilds, AnnaLynne McCord. 2008 to present. The CW

Aliens in America. Executive Prod. David Guarascio, Moses Port, Tim Doyle. Perf. Dan Byrd, Adhir Kalyan, Amy Pietz. 2007 to 2008. The CW.

All of Us. Executive Prod. Jada Pinkett Smith, Will Smith, Betsy Borns. Perf. Duane Martin, LisaRaye McCoy-Misick, Elise Neal. 2003 to 2007. UPN and The CW.

America's Next Top Model. Executive Prod. Tyra Banks, Ken Mok, Dana Gabrión. Perf. Tyra Banks, Jay Manuel, Nigel Barker. 2003 to present. UPN and The CW.

The Beautiful Life. Executive Prod. Ashton Kutcher, Jason Goldberg, Mike Kelley. Perf. Mischa Barton, Sara Paxton, Ben Hollingsworth. 2009. The CW.

Everybody Hates Chris. Executive Prod. Chris Rock, Ali LeRoi, Michael Rotenberg. Perf. Terry Crews, Tichina Arnold, Tyler James Williams. 2005 to 2009. UPN and The CW.

The Game. Executive Prod. Mara Brock Akil, Kelsey Grammer, Kenny Smith, Jr. Perf. Tia Mowry Hardrict, Brittany Daniel, Wendy Raquel Robinson. 2006 to 2009, 2011 to present. The CW and BET.

Gilmore Girls. Executive Prod. Amy Sherman-Palladino, David S. Rosenthal. Perf. Lauren Graham, Alexis Biedel, Mellisa McCarthy. 2000 to 2007. The WB and The CW.

Girlfriends. Executive Prod. Mara Brock Akil, Kelsey Grammer. Perf. Tracee Ellis Ross, Golden Brooks, Persia White. 2000 to 2008. UPN and The CW.

- Gossip Girl*. Executive Prod. Josh Schwartz, Stephanie Savage, Bob Levy, Leslie Morgenstein. Perf. Blake Lively, Leighton Meester, Penn Badgley. 2007 to present. The CW.
- Hart of Dixie*. Executive Prod. Leila Gerstin, Josh Schwartz, Stephanie Savage. Perf. Rachel Bilson, Jaime King, Cress Williams. 2011 to present. The CW.
- Hidden Palms*. Executive Prod. Kevin Williamson, Scott Winant. Perf. Taylor Handley, Cliff Wiatt, Amber Heard. 2007. The CW.
- Melrose Place*. Executive Producer. Todd Slavkin, Darren Swimmer, Greg Beeman. Perf. Katie Cassidy, Colin Egglesfield, Stephanie Jacobsen. 2009 to 2010. The CW.
- Nikita*. Executive Prod. Craig Silverstein, Danny Cannon, McG. Perf. Maggie Q, Shane West, Lyndsy Fonesca. 2010 to present. The CW.
- One Tree Hill*. Executive Prod. Mark Schwahn, Michael Tollin, Brian Robbins. Perf. Chad Michael Murray, James Lafferty, Hilarie Burton. 2003 to 2012. The WB and The CW.
- Privileged*. Executive Prod. Rina Mimoun, Bob Levy, Leslie Morgenstein. Perf. Joanna Garcia, Lucy Hale, Ashley Newbrough. 2008 to 2009. The CW.
- Reba*. Executive Prod. Michael Hanel, Allison M. Gibson, Reba McEntire. Perf. Reba McEntire, Christopher Rich, Joanna Garcia. 2001 to 2007. The WB and The CW.
- Ringer*. Executive Prod. Eric Charmelo, Sarah Michelle Gellar, Nicole Snyder. Perf. Sarah Michelle Gellar, Kristoffer Polaha, Ioan Gruffudd. 2011 to present. The CW.
- The Secret Circle*. Executive Prod. Kevin Williamson, Leslie Morgenstein, Andrew Miller. Perf. Britt Robertson, Thomas Dekker, Gale Harold. 2011 to present. The CW.
- Smallville*. Executive Prod. Alfred Gough, Miles Millar, Mike Tollin. Perf. Tom Wellington, Kristen Kreuk, Michael Rosenblum. 2001 to 2011. The WB and The CW.
- Supernatural*. Executive Prod. Eric Kripke, McG, Kim Manners, Sera Gamble. Perf. Jared Padalecki, Jensen Ackles, Mischa Collins. 2005 to present. The WB and The CW.
- The Vampire Diaries*. Executive Prod. Kevin Williamson, Julie Plec, Leslie Morgenstein. Perf. Nina Dobrev, Paul Wesley, Ian Somerhalder. 2009 to present. The CW.
- Veronica Mars*. Executive Prod. Rob Thomas, Joel Silver, Diane Ruggiero. Perf. Kristen Bell, Enrico Colantoni, Jason Dohring. 2004 to 2007. UPN and The CW.

WWE SmackDown. Executive Prod. Vince McMahon, Linda McMahon. 1999 to present. UPN, The CW, MyNetworkTV, and Syfy.

UPN:

Cuts. Executive Prod. David Janollari, Kenny Smith Jr., Jacque Edmonds. Perf. Shannon Elizabeth, Marques Houston, Shondrella Avery. 2005 to 2006. UPN.

Eve. Executive Prod. Bob Greenblatt, David Janollari. Perf. Eve, Jason Winston George, Ali Landry. 2003 to 2006. UPN.

Goode Behavior. Executive Prod. Bob Illes. Perf. Sherman Hemsley, Dorien Wilson, Alex Datcher. 1996 to 1997. UPN.

Half & Half. Executive Prod. Jamie Wooten. Perf. Rachel True, Essence Atkins, Chico Benymon. 2002 to 2006. UPN.

Homeboys in Outer Space. Executive Prod. Ehrich Van Lowe. Perf. Albert Alarr, Gerry Cohen, Matthew Diamond. 1996 to 1997. UPN.

In The House. Executive Prod. Winifred Hervey, Bob Burris, Gary Hardwick. Perf. LL Cool J, Debbie Allen, Lisa Arrindell Anderson. 1995 to 1999. NBC and UPN.

Love, Inc. Executive Prod. Adam Chase, Mark Burg, Oren Koules. Perf. Busy Phillips, Reagan Gomez-Preston, Holly Robinson Peete. 2005 to 2006. UPN.

Malcolm & Eddie. Executive Prod. Kim Weiskopf, David W. Duclon, Jeff Franklin. Perf. Malcolm Jamal-Warner, Eddie Griffin, Jamie Cardriche. 1996 to 2000. UPN.

Mo'Nisha. Executive Prod. Ralph Farquhar, Sara V. Finney, Vida Spears. Perf. Brandy Norwood, William Allen Young, Countress Vaughn. 1996 to 2001. UPN.

One on One. Executive Prod. Eunetta T. Boone, Robert Greenblatt, David Janollari. Perf. Flex Alexander, Kyla Pratt, Robert Ri'chard. 2001 to 2006. UPN.

Pig Sty. Executive Prod. Rob Long, Dan Staley. Perf. David Arnott, Matthew Borlenghi, Timothy Fall. 1995. UPN.

Platypus Man. Executive Prod. Barry Fanaro, Mort Nathan. Perf. Richard Jeni, Ron Orbach, Denise Miller. 1995. UPN.

The Secret Diary of Desmond Pfeiffer. Executive Prod. Barry Fanaro, Mort Nathan. Perf. Chi McBride, Dann Florek, Christine Eubank. 1998. UPN.

Shasta McNasty. Executive Prod. Jeff Eastin, Richard Guman, Neal J. Moritz. Perf. Jake Busey, Carmine Giovinazzo, Dale Godboldo. 1999 to 2000. UPN.

Sparks. Executive Prod. Ed Weinberger, Rob Dames, Bob Moloney. Perf. James Avery, Terrence Howard, Robin Givens. 1996 to 1998. UPN.

Star Trek: Enterprise. Executive Prod. Rick Berman, Brannon Braga, Manny Coto. Perf. Scott Bakula, John Billingsley, Jolene Bialock. 2001 to 2005. UPN.

Star Trek: Voyager. Executive Prod. Rick Berman, Brannon Braga, Jeri Taylor. Perf. Kate Mulgrew, Robert Beltran, Tim Russ. 1995 to 2001. UPN.

The WB:

Blue Collar TV. Executive Prod. Adam Small, Jeff Foxworthy, Fax Bahr. Perf. Jeff Foxworthy, Bill Engvall, Larry the Cable Guy. 2004 to 2006. The WB.

Buffy the Vampire Slayer. Executive Prod. Joss Whedon, David Greenwalt, Marti Noxon. Perf. Sarah Michelle Gellar, Nicholas Brendon, Alyson Hannigan. 1997 to 2003. The WB and UPN.

Dawson's Creek. Executive Prod. Kevin Williamson, Tom Kapinos, Greg Prange. Perf. James Van Der Beek, Katie Holmes, Michelle Williams, Joshua Jackson. 1998 to 2003. The WB.

Felicity. Executive Prod. J.J. Abrams, Brian Grazer, Matt Reeves. Perf. Keri Russell, Scott Speedman, Scott Foley. 1998 to 2002. The WB.

Glory Days. Executive Prod. Kevin Williamson, Bob Weinstein, Harvey Weinstein. Perf. Eddie Cahill, Poppy Montgomery, Jay R. Ferguson. 2002. The WB.

Grounded For Life. Executive Prod. Bill Martin, Mike Schiff, Marcy Carsey, Tom Werner. Perf. Donal Logue, Megyn Price, Kevin Corrigan. 2001 to 2005. Fox and The WB.

The Jamie Foxx Show. Executive Prod. Bentley Kyle Evans, Marcus King, Bennie R. Richburg, Jr. Perf. Jamie Foxx, Garcelle Beauvais, Christopher B. Duncan. 1996 to 2001. The WB.

Kirk. Executive Prod. Ross Brown, William Bickley, Michael Warren. Perf. Kirk Cameron, Chelsea Noble, Will Estes. 1995 to 1997. The WB.

Life with Roger. Executive Prod. Howard Adler, Robert Griffard. Perf. Mike O'Malley, Maurice Godin, Halie Todd. 1996 to 1997. The WB.

Living With Fran. Executive Prod. David Garrett, Jamie Kennedy, Jason Ward. Perf. Fran Drescher, Ryan McPartlin, Ben Feldman. 2005 to 2006. The WB.

Modern Men. Executive Prod. Jerry Bruckheimer, Jonathan Littman, Marsh McCall. Perf. Eric Lively, Josh Braaten, Max Greenfield. 2006. The WB.

Muscle. Prod. Robert Heath, Paul Junger Witt. Perf. Alan Ruck, Dan Gauthier, Amy Pietz. 1995. The WB.

The Parent 'Hood. Executive Prod. Robert Townsend, Andrew Nicholis, Darrell Vickers. Perf. Robert Townsend, Suzanne Douglas, Ashli Amari Adams. 1995 to 1999. The WB.

Pepper Dennis. Executive Prod. Gretchen J. Berg, Aaron Harberts, Jason Katims. Perf. Rebecca Romijn, Brooke Burns, Rider Strong. 2006. The WB.

Sister, Sister. Executive Prod. Suzanne de Passe, Suzanne Coston, Sy Rosen. Perf. Tia Mowry, Tamera Mowry, Tim Reid, Jackée Harry. 1994 to 1999. ABC and The WB.

The Steve Harvey Show. Executive Prod. Winifred Hervey, Brad Grey, Bernie Brillstein. Perf. Steve Harvey, Cedric the Entertainer, Merlin Santana. 1996 to 2002. The WB.

Twins. Executive Prod. David Kohan, Max Mutchnick. Perf. Sara Gilbert, Molly Stanton, Melanie Griffith. 2005 to 2006. The WB.

Unhappily Ever After. Executive Prod. Ron Leavitt, Arthur Silver, Sandy Sprung. Perf. Geoff Pierson, Nikki Cox, Bobcat Goldthwait. 1995 to 1999. The WB.

The Wayan Bros. Executive Prod. Billy Van Zandt, Jane Milmore, Rich Hawkins. Perf. Shawn Wayans, Marlon Wayans, John Witherspoon. 1995 to 1999. The WB.

What I Like About You. Executive Prod. Wil Calhoun, Dan Schneider, Brian Robbins. Perf. Amanda Bynes, Jennie Garth, Wesley Jonathan. 2002 to 2006. The WB.

HBO:

The Chris Rock Show. Executive Prod. Chris Rock, Nancy Geller, Michael Rotenberg. Perf. Chris Rock, Grandmaster Flash. 1997 to 2000. HBO.

Deadwood. Executive Prod. David Milch, Gregg Fienberg, Mark Tinker. Perf. Timothy Olyphant, Ian McShane, Molly Parker. 2004 to 2006. HBO.

Oz. Executive Prod. Tom Fontana, Barry Levinson, Jim Finnerty. Perf. Krik Acevedo, Adewale Akinnuoye-Agbaje, Ernie Hudson. 1997 to 2003. HBO.

Real Sex. Executive Prod. Sheila Nevins. 1990 to 2009. HBO.

Sex and the City. Executive Prod. Darren Starr, Sarah Jessica Parker, Michael Patrick King. Perf. Sarah Jessica Parker, Kim Cattrall, Kristin Davis, Cynthia Nixon. 1998 to 2004. HBO.

Six Feet Under. Executive Prod. Alan Ball, Robert Greenblatt, David Janollari. Perf. Peter Krause, Michael C. Hall, Frances Conroy. 2001 to 2005. HBO.

The Sopranos. Executive Prod. David Chase, Brad Grey, Robin Green. Perf. James Gandolfini, Edie Falco, Michael Imperioli. 1999 to 2007. HBO.

True Blood. Executive Prod. Alan Ball, Gregg Fienberg. Perf. Anna Paquin, Stephen Moyer, Alexander Skarsgård. 2008 to present. HBO.

The Wire. Executive Prod. David Simon, Robert F. Colesberry, Nina Kostroff Noble. Perf. Dominic West, Idris Elba, Andre Royo. 2002 to 2008. HBO.

ABC:

Cougar Town. Executive Prod. Bill Lawrence, Courtney Cox, David Arquette. Perf. Courtenay Cox, Christa Miller, Busy Phillips. 2009 to present. ABC.

Dancing with the Stars. Executive Prod. Conrad Green, Rob Wade, Matilda Zoltowski. Perf. Tom Bergeron, Brooke Burke Charvet. 2005 to present. ABC.

Desperate Housewives. Executive Prod. Marc Cherry, Tom Spezialy, Michael Edelstein. Perf. Teri Hatcher, Felicity Huffman, Marcia Cross, Eva Longoria. 2004 to present. ABC.

Don't Trust the B---- in Apartment 23. Executive Prod. Nahnatchka Khan, Jason Winer, David Hemingson. Perf. Krysten Ritter, Dreama Walker, James Van Der Beek. 2012 to present. ABC.

Grey's Anatomy. Executive Prod. Shonda Rhimes, Betsy Beers, Mark Gordon. Perf. Ellen Pompeo, Sandra Oh, Katherine Heigl. 2005 to present. ABC.

Growing Pains. Executive Prod. Neal Marlens, Mike Sullivan, Steve Marhsall. Perf. Alan Thicke, Joanna Kerns, Kirk Cameron. 1985 to 1992. ABC.

Happy Endings. Executive Prod. David Caspe, James Tarses, Jonathan Groff. Perf. Eliza Coupe, Elisha Cuthbert, Zachary Knighton. 2011 to present. ABC.

Last Man Standing. Executive Prod. Tim Allen, Becky Clements, Marty Adelstein. Perf. Tim Allen, Nancy Travis, Alexandra Krosney. 2011 to present. ABC.

Lost. Executive Prod. J.J. Abrams, Damon Lindelof, Carlton Cuse. Perf. Matthew Fox, Terry O'Quinn, Evangeline Lilly. 2004 to 2010. ABC.

The Middle. Executive Prod. DeAnn Heline, Eileen Heisler. Perf. Patricia Heaton, Neil Flynn, Charlie McDermott. 2009 to present. ABC.

Modern Family. Executive Prod. Christopher Lloyd, Steven Levitan. Perf. Ed O'Neill, Julie Bowen, Ty Burrell. 2009 to present. ABC.

Murder One. Executive Prod. Steven Bochco, Charles H. Eglee. Perf. Daniel Benzali, Anthony LaPaglia, Staley Tucci. 1995 to 1997. ABC.

Once and Again. Executive Prod. Ed Zwick, Marshall Herskovitz. Perf. Sela Ward, Billy Campbell, Jeffrey Nordling. 1999 to 2002. ABC.

Scandal. Executive Prod. Shonda Rhimes, Betsy Beers. Perf. Kerry Washington, Henry Ian Cusick, Columbus Short. 2012 to present. ABC.

Sports Night. Executive Prod. Aaron Sorkin, Brian Grazer, Ron Howard. Perf. Josh Charles, Peter Krause, Felicity Huffman. 1998 to 2000. ABC.

Suburgatory. Executive Prod. Emily Kapnek, Michael Fresco. Perf. Jeremy Sisto, Jane Levy, Ana Gasteyer. 2011 to present. ABC.

Who Wants to Be a Millionaire? Executive Prod. Michael Davis, Leigh Hampton. Perf. Regis Philbin, Meredith Vieira. 1999 to present. ABC and syndication.

The Wonder Years. Executive Prod. Carol Black, Neal Marlens. Perf. Fred Savage, Dan Lauria, Alley Mills. 1988 to 1993. ABC.

Fox:

American Dad! Executive Prod. Seth MacFarlane, Mike Barker, Matt Weitzman. Perf. Seth MacFarlane, Wendy Schaal, Scott Grimes. 2005 to present. Fox.

American Idol. Executive Prod. Simon Fully, Ken Warwick, Cecile Frot-Coutaz. Perf. Ryan Seacrest, Randy Jackson, Simon Cowell. 2002 to present. Fox.

Beverly Hills, 90210. Executive Prod. Darren Starr, Aaron Spelling, E. Duke Vincent. Perf. Jason Priestley, Shannen Doherty, Jennie Garth. 1990 to 2000. Fox.

Bob's Burgers. Executive Prod. Loren Bouchard, Jim Dauterive. Perf. J. Jon Benjamin, Dan Mintz, Eugene Mirman. 2011 to present. Fox.

Breaking In. Executive Prod. Adam F. Goldberg, Seth Gordon, Adam Sandler. Perf. Bret Harrison, Alphonso McAuley, Trevor Moore. 2011 to present. Fox.

The Cleveland Show. Executive Prod. Seth MacFarlane, Mike Henry, Richard Appel. Perf. Mike Henry, Sanaa Lathan, Kevin Michael Richardson. 2009 to present. Fox.

Family Guy. Executive Prod. Seth MacFarlane, David A. Goodman, Chris Sheridan. Perf. Seth MacFarlane, Alex Borstein, Seth Green, Mila Kunis. 1999 to 2002, 2005 to present. Fox.

Greed. Executive Prod. Dick Clark, Bob Boden. Perf. Chuck Woolery, Mark Thompson. 1999 to 2000. Fox.

I Hate My Teenage Daughter. Executive Prod. Sherry Bilsing, Ellen Kreamer. Perf. Jaime Pressly, Katie Finneran, Kevin Rahm. 2011 to present. Fox.

In Living Color. Executive Prod. Keenen Ivory Wayans, Greg Fields, Les Firestein. Perf. Keenan Ivory Wayans, David Allen Grier, Jim Carrey. 1990 to 1994. Fox.

Married... With Children. Executive Prod. Michael G. Moyer, Ron Leavitt, Katherine Green. Perf. Ed O'Neill, Katey Sagal, Christina Applegate. 1987 to 1997. Fox.

Martin. Executive Prod. Martin Lawrence, Topper Carew, John Bowman. Perf. Martin Lawrence, Tisha Campbell, Carl Anthony Payne II. 1992 to 1997. Fox.

Melrose Place. Executive Prod. Darren Starr, Aaron Spelling, E. Duke Vincent. Perf. Josie Bissett, Thomas Calabro, Amy Locane. 1992 to 1999. Fox.

Napoleon Dynamite. Executive Prod. Jared Hess, Jerusha Hess, Mike Scully. Perf. Jon Heder, Aaron Ruell, Efrén Ramirez. 2012 to present. Fox.

New Girl. Executive Prod. Elizabeth Meriwether, Jake Kasdan, Peter Chernin. Perf. Zooey Deschanel, Jake Johnson, Max Greenfield. 2011 to present. Fox.

The O.C. Executive Prod. Josh Schwartz, Stephanie Savage, McG. Perf. Benjamin McKenzie, Mischa Barton, Adam Brody, Rachel Bilson. 2003 to 2007. Fox.

Party of Five. Executive Prod. Christopher Keyser, Amy Lippman. Perf. Matthew Fox, Neve Campbell, Jennifer Love Hewitt. 1994 to 2000. Fox.

Raising Hope. Executive Prod. Greg Garcia. Perf. Lucas Neff, Martha Plimpton, Garret Dillahunt. 2010 to present. Fox.

The Simpsons. Executive Prod. Matt Groening, Al Jean, James L. Brooks. Perf. Dan Castellaneta, Julie Kavner, Nancy Cartwright. 1989 to present. Fox.

The X-Files. Executive Prod. Chris Carter, Howard Gordon, Kim Manners. Perf. David Duchovny, Gillian Anderson, Mitch Pileggi. 1993 to 2002. Fox.

CBS:

2 Broke Girls. Executive Prod. Michael Patrick King, Whitney Cummings. Perf. Kat Dennings, Beth Behrs, Garrett Morris. 2011 to present. CBS.

The Big Bang Theory. Executive Prod. Chuck Lorre, Bill Prady, Steven Molaro. Perf. Johnny Galecki, Jim Parsons, Kaley Cuoco. 2007 to present. CBS.

CSI: Miami. Executive Prod. Jerry Bruckheimer, Anthony E. Zulker, Carol Mendelsohn. Perf. David Caruso, Emily Procter, Khandi Alexander. 2002 to present. CBS.

How I Met Your Mother. Executive Prod. Carter Bays, Craig Thomas, Pamela Fryman. Perf. Josh Radnor, Jason Segel, Cobie Smulders. 2005 to present. CBS.

Mike & Molly. Executive Prod. Chuck Lorre, Mark Roberts, James Burrows. Perf. Billy Gardell, Melissa McCarthy, Reno Wilson. 2010 to present. CBS.

Northern Exposure. Executive Prod. Joshua Brand, John Falsey, David Chase. Perf. Rob Morrow, Barry Corbin, Janine Turner. 1990 to 1995. CBS.

Rob. Executive Prod. Rob Schneider, Lew Morton, Kim and Eric Tannenbaum. Perf. Rob Schneider, Cheech Marin, Claudia Bassols. 2012 to present. CBS.

Rules of Engagement. Executive Prod. Tom Hertz, Adam Sandler, Jack Giarraputo. Perf. Patrick Warburton, Megyn Price, David Spade. 2007 to present. CBS.

Survivor. Executive Prod. Charlie Parsons, Mark Burnett, Jeff Probst. Perf. Jeff Probst. 2000 to present. CBS.

Two and a Half Men. Executive Prod. Chuck Lorre, Lee Aronsohn, Eric and Kim Tannenbaum. Perf. Charlie Sheen, Jon Cryer, Angus T. Jones. 2003 to present. CBS.

Winning Lines. Executive Prod. David G. Stanley, Scott A. Stone, Paul Smith. Perf. Dick Clark, Chuck Riley. 2000. CBS.

NBC:

30 Rock. Executive Prod. Lorne Michaels, Tina Fey, Marci Klein. Perf. Tina Fey, Alex Baldwin, Tracy Morgan. 2006 to present. NBC.

Are You There, Chelsea? Executive Prod. Chelsea Handler, Dottie Zicklin, Julie Ann Larson. Perf. Laura Prepon, Jack McDorman, Lauren Lapkus. 2012 to present. NBC.

Bent. Executive Prod. Tad Quill. Perf. Amanda Peet, David Walton, Jeffrey Tambor. 2012 to present. NBC.

Best Friends Forever. Executive Prod. Jessica St. Clair, Lennon Parham, Scott Armstrong. Perf. Lennon Parham, Jessica St. Clair, Daija Owens. 2012 to present. NBC.

Chuck. Executive Prod. Josh Schwartz, McG. Perf. Zachary Levi, Yvonne Strahovski, Joshua Gomez. 2007 to present. NBC.

Community. Executive Prod. Dan Harmon, Gary Foster, Russ Krasnoff. Perf. Joel McHale, Gillian Jacobs, Danny Pudi. 2009 to present. NBC.

Days of Our Lives. Executive Prod. Ken Corday, Greg Meng, Lisa de Cazotte. Perf. Kristian Alfonso, Peter Reckell. 1965 to present. NBC.

Friends. Executive Prod. David Crane, Marta Kauffman, Kevin Bright. Perf. Jennifer Aniston, Courtney Cox, Matthew Perry. 1994 to 2004. NBC.

Homicide: Life on the Street. Executive Prod. Tom Fontana, Barry Levinson, Henry Bromell. Perf. Richard Belzer, Clark Johnson, Yaphet Kotto. 1993 to 1999. NBC.

I'll Fly Away. Executive Prod. Joshua Brand, John Falsey, David Chase. Perf. Sam Waterston, Regina Taylor, Jeremy London. 1991 to 1993. NBC.

Joey. Executive Prod. Kevin Bright, Shana Goldberg-Meehan, Scott Silveri. Perf. Matt LeBlanc, Andrea Anders, Paulo Costanzo. 2004 to 2006. NBC.

Law & Order. Executive Prod. Dick Wolf, Joseph Stern. Perf. Sam Waterston, Jerry Orbach, S. Epatha Merkerson. 1990 to 2010. NBC.

The Office. Executive Prod. Greg Daniels, Ricky Gervais, Stephen Merchant. Perf. Steve Carell, Rainn Wilson, John Krasinski. 2005 to present. NBC.

Parks and Recreation. Executive Prod. Greg Daniels, Michael Schur, Howard Klein. Perf. Amy Poehler, Rashida Jones, Aziz Ansari. 2009 to present. NBC.

Star Trek. Executive Prod. Gene Roddenberry. Perf. William Shatner, Leonard Nimoy, DeForest Kelley. 1966 to 1969. NBC.

Star Trek: The Animated Series. Executive Prod. Gene Roddenberry, D.C. Fontana. Perf. William Shatner, Leonard Nimoy, DeForest Kelley. 1973 to 1974. NBC.

Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip. Executive Prod. Aaron Sorkin, Thomas Schlamme. Perf. Matthew Perry, Amanda Peet, Bradley Whitford. 2006 to 2007. NBC.

Up All Night. Executive Prod. Emily Spivey, Lorne Michaels, Jon Pollack. Perf. Christina Applegate, Will Arnett, Maya Rudolph. 2011 to present. NBC.

The Weakest Link. Executive Prod. Philip Gurin, Stuart Krasnow. Perf. Anne Robinson, George Gray. 2001 to 2003. NBC and Syndication.

The West Wing. Executive Prod. Aaron Sorkin, Thomas Schlamme, John Wells. Perf. Rob Lowe, Martin Sheen, Bradley Whitford. 1999 to 2006. NBC.

Whitney. Executive Prod. Whitney Cummings, Scott Stuber, Quan Phung. Perf. Whitney Cummings, Chris D'Elia, Zoe Lister-Jones. 2011 to present. NBC.

Other:

Babylon 5. Executive Prod. J. Michael Straczynski, Douglas Netter. Perf. Bruce Boxleitner, Michael O'Hare, Claudia Christian. 1993 to 1998. PTEN and TNT.

Breaking Bad. Executive Prod. Vince Gilligan, Mark Johnson, Michelle MacLaren. Perf. Bryan Cranston, Aaron Paul, Anna Gunn. 2008 to present. AMC.

Dating Rules from My Future Self. Executive Prod. Leslie Morgenstein, Bob Levy, Joshua Bank. Perf. Shiri Appleby, Taylor Kinney, Bryce Johnson. 2012. Hulu.

Degrassi: The Next Generation. Executive Prod. Linda Schuyler, Stephen Stohn, Brendon Yorke. Perf. Miriam McDonald, Sarah Barrable-Tishauer, Shane Kippel. 2001 to present. CTV and MuchMusic.

Huge. Executive Prod. Winnie Holzman, Savannah Dooley, Leslie Morgenstein, Bob Levy. Perf. Nikki Blonsky, Zander Eckhouse, Raven Goodwin. 2010. ABC Family.

The Lying Game. Executive Prod. Charles Pratt, Jr., Leslie Morgenstein, Gina Girolamo. Perf. Alexandra Chando, Allie Gonino, Alice Greczyn. 2011 to present. ABC Family.

Mad Men. Executive Prod. Matthew Weiner, Scott Hornbacher, Andre and Maria Jacquemetton. Perf. Jon Hamm, Elizabeth Moss, Vincent Kartheiser. 2007 to present. AMC.

The Nine Lives of Chloe King. Executive Prod. Dan Berendsen, Leslie Morgenstein, Gina Girolamo. Perf. Skyler Samuels, Amy Pietz, Grey Damon. 2011. ABC Family.

Pretty Little Liars. Executive Prod. Leslie Morgenstein, Bob Levy, I. Marlene King, Oliver Goldstick. Perf. Troian Bellisario, Ashley Benson, Lucy Hale. 2010 to present. ABC Family.

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine. Executive Prod. Rick Berman, Michael Piller, Ira Steven Behr. Perf. Avery Brooks, René Auberjonois, Nana Visitor. 1993 to 1999. Syndication.

Star Trek: The Next Generation. Executive Prod. Gene Roddenberry, Rick Berman, Michael Piller. Perf. Patrick Stewart, Jonathan Frakes, Brent Spiner. 1987 to 1995. Syndication.

The Walking Dead. Executive Prod. Frank Drabont. Gala Anne Hurd, David Albert. Perf. Andrew Lincoln, Jon Bernthal, Sarah Wayne Callies. 2010 to present. AMC.

Films:

American Beauty. Dir. Sam Mendes. Writ. Alan Ball. Perf. Kevin Spacey, Annette Bening, Thora Birch. DreamWorks Pictures, 1999.

Blazing Saddles. Dir. Mel Brooks. Perf. Cleavon Little, Gene Wilder, Slim Pickens. Warner Bros., 1974.

Charlie's Angels. Dir. McG. Perf. Cameron Diaz, Drew Barrymore, Lucy Liu. Columbia Pictures, 2000.

Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle. Dir. McG. Perf. Cameron Diaz, Drew Barrymore, Lucy Liu. Columbia Pictures, 2003.

The Clique. Dir. Michael Lembeck. Perf. Elizabeth McLaughlin, Ellen Marlow, Samantha Boscarino. Warner Premiere, 2008.

Cursed. Dir. Wes Craven. Writ. Kevin Williamson. Perf. Christina Ricci, Joshua Jackson, Jesse Eisenberg. Dimension Films, 2005.

- Down to Earth*. Dir. Chris and Paul Weitz. Perf. Chris Rock, Regina King, Eugene Levy. Paramount Pictures, 2001.
- The Faculty*. Dir. Robert Rodriguez. Writ. Kevin Williamson. Perf. Josh Hartnett, Elijah Wood, Jordana Brewster. Dimension Films, 1998.
- Head of State*. Dir. Chris Rock. Perf. Chris Rock, Bernie Mac, Lynn Whitfield. DreamWorks Pictures, 2003.
- I Know What You Did Last Summer*. Dir. Jim Gillespie. Writ. Kevin Williamson. Perf. Jennifer Love Hewitt, Sarah Michelle Gellar, Ryan Phillippe. Columbia Pictures, 1997.
- One Froggy Evening*. Dir. Chuck Jones. Perf. Bill Roberts. Warner Bros., 1955.
- Scream*. Dir. Wes Craven. Writ. Kevin Williamson. Perf. David Arquette, Neve Campbell, Courtney Cox. Dimension Films, 1996.
- Scream 2*. Dir. Wes Craven. Writ. Kevin Williamson. Perf. David Arquette, Neve Campbell, Courtney Cox. Dimension Films, 1997.
- Scream 3*. Dir. Wes Craven. Writ. Kevin Williamson. Perf. David Arquette, Neve Campbell, Courtney Cox. Dimension Films, 2000.
- Scream 4*. Dir. Wes Craven. Writ. Kevin Williamson. Perf. David Arquette, Neve Campbell, Courtney Cox. Dimension Films, 2011.
- Sex Drive*. Dir. Sean Anders. Perf. Josh Zuckerman, Amanda Crew, Clark Duke. Summit Entertainment, 2008.
- The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants*. Dir. Ken Kwapis. Perf. Amber Tamblyn, Blake Lively, Alexis Biedel. Warner Bros., 2005.
- The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants 2*. Dir. Sanaa Hamri. Perf. Amber Tamblyn, Blake Lively, Alexis Biedel. Warner Bros., 2008.
- Teaching Mrs. Tingle*. Dir. Kevin Williamson. Writ. Kevin Williamson. Perf. Katie Holmes, Helen Mirren, Barry Watson. Dimension Films, 1999.
- Twilight*. Dir. Catherine Hardwicke. Perf. Kristen Stewart, Robert Pattinson, Taylor Lautner. Summit Entertainment, 2008.
- The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn Part 2*. Dir. Bill Condon. Perf. Kristen Stewart, Robert Pattinson, Taylor Lautner. Summit Entertainment, 2012.