

Copyright

by

Lauren Elizabeth Wilks

2019

**The Thesis Committee for Lauren Elizabeth Wilks
Certifies that this is the approved version of the following Thesis:**

**Teens of Color on TV: Charting Shifts in Sensibility and Approaches to
Portrayals of Black Characters in American Serialized Teen Dramas**

**APPROVED BY
SUPERVISING COMMITTEE:**

Mary Beltrán, Supervisor

Alisa Perren

**Teens of Color on TV: Charting Shifts in Sensibility and Approaches to
Portrayals of Black Characters in American Serialized Teen Dramas**

by

Lauren Elizabeth Wilks

Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Arts

The University of Texas at Austin

May 2019

Abstract

Teens of Color on TV: Charting Shifts in Sensibility and Approaches to Portrayals of Black Characters in American Serialized Teen Dramas

Lauren Elizabeth Wilks, MA

The University of Texas at Austin, 2019

Supervisor: Mary Beltrán

Over the past several decades, the serialized teen drama genre on television has moved through a series of cycles. The genre, which began with the arrival of *Beverly Hills, 90210* (1990) on Fox Broadcasting Network, focuses on portrayals of different subsets of teenagers in their school, family and interpersonal lives. Sometimes called the “teen soap opera,” the genre is subject to the scrutiny and dismissiveness often reserved for media located in the realm of women’s entertainment. Through comparative discourse and textual analysis bounded in socio-cultural consideration of each temporal cycle, this thesis asserts that close attention to this genre can valuably articulate approaches to racial representational strategies. By using two specific case studies, *Felicity* (The WB, 1998-2002) and *Gossip Girl* (The CW, 2007-2012), and engaging with a critical media studies framework, this project considers how key decision-makers constructed race through analysis of interviews, promotional materials, paratexts, the programs themselves, as well as the networks that produced them. Drawing from work in media industries studies, television studies, and race studies, this thesis argues that the two cycles had different

approaches to race and representation, with a decrease in attention to what A.J. Christian (2018) calls “racial specificity” as the U.S. moved toward a more postracial, “colorblind” sensibility during the Obama presidency.

Table of Contents

List of Illustrations.....	viii
Chapter One: Contextualizing the Cycles of the Teen Drama Genre.....	1
Establishing the Network for Teens.....	6
Identifying a Shift in Network Sensibility.....	10
Female Sexuality, Gender Roles, and Blind Spots in Teen Drama Scholarship	14
Method.....	21
Chapter Two: Capturing Millennials: Industrial Considerations of Race and Ethnicity in Serialized Teen Dramas	28
Critical Media Industry Studies Framework and Discourse Analysis.....	31
Historical Context of the Development of the Teen Drama Genre	34
Programming Trends and Conceptualizing the Imagined Teen Audience	39
The Making of: <i>Felicity</i>	47
Marketing <i>Felicity</i>	51
The Making of: <i>Gossip Girl</i>	56
Marketing <i>Gossip Girl</i>	62
Discussion.....	66
Chapter Three: “But you’re not <i>Black</i> Black”: Racialized Identities over Time in Teen Dramas	70
Popular Points of Analysis in Teen Television and Useful Additions	74
<i>Felicity</i> and <i>Gossip Girl</i> Overview: Contextualizing Elena Tyler and Vanessa Abrams.....	78
Elena Tyler on <i>Felicity</i>	81
Vanessa Abrams on <i>Gossip Girl</i>	91
Discussion.....	100

Conclusion: New Possibilities for Blackness in Teen Dramas	106
Bibliography	113

List of Illustrations

Illustration A:	Programming schedule for The WB's Fall 1998 season.	52
Illustration B:	Elena Tyler in the 1999 WB promo (0:27)	56
Illustration C:	Programming schedule for The CW's Fall 2007 season.	62
Illustration D:	Season 1 poster featuring Blair, Nate, Serena, Dan, Chuck, Jenny.	66
Illustration E:	Season 3 poster, with more polished aesthetic, featuring the addition of Vanessa on the far right.	66

Chapter One: Contextualizing the Cycles of the Teen Drama Genre

“Well, you’re definitely not a Serena, that’s for sure. She’s tall, blonde... you *could* be a Blair though. She’s a brunette, like you!”

When thinking through which of the characters from *Gossip Girl* (The CW, 2007-2012), we most identified with, my classmates stalled when they started to think about who I best aligned with out of the main characters. I became aware that everyone could easily see elements of themselves in these characters, while I struggled a bit with figuring out which I could identify with. My classmates suggested that I was a Blair (a character played by a brunette Leighton Meester), meaning that, even though I could potentially exist as a main character, I was definitely not going to be compared with the more glamorous, aspirational, primary lead of the show, Serena Van der Woodsen (Blake Lively). My external, non-White appearance precluded any possibility of my friends seeing me as such. Knowing from experience, even early in the show’s time on air, that it would likely not provide the opportunity for me to see myself in any of the characters of color—simply because it would not focus on making them into more complete characters, I accepted the comparison to Blair as breezily as possible and moved the conversation along.

I had spent a lifetime already accepting that I would not see characters who looked like me on screen, and this was just another instance of the same phenomenon. The characters who have been traditionally centered in popular teen programming are White and have predominantly White social circles. The concerns of people of color do not register as potential storylines because of this centering, and as a result, over the course of the history of the teen drama on television, I had never seen a character who I truly

identified with. In order to better determine whether my experience translated to trends across the genre more broadly, historical analysis of it, both in terms of the content itself and the making of the programs, is necessary.

Over the past several decades, the serialized teen drama genre on television has moved through a series of cycles. Generally recognized as beginning with the arrival of *Beverly Hills, 90210* (1990) on Fox network, the genre focuses on portrayals of different subsets of teenagers in their school, family, and interpersonal lives. Sometimes called the “teen soap opera” (Cooper, 2015; Magee, 2014; Rasminsky, 1994; Sachs, 2008), the genre also follows plotlines commonly associated with soaps, including an emphasis on personal relationships, romantic and sexual drama, and an increased focus on emotions and moral quandaries.

As a direct descendant of the soap opera, teen dramas are subject to the same type of scrutiny and dismissiveness as media texts located in the realm of women’s entertainment. As observed by McRobbie and Garber (1977) and Radway (1983), among others, entertainment targeting female audiences historically has been discounted and overlooked. This phenomenon intensifies when considering media targeting young female audiences, as observed by Banet-Weiser in her work about Nickelodeon and child consumers (2007). The teen drama tends to be seen in much the same manner as the soap: as a frivolous, vapid and popular form of entertainment. Despite reticence by critical and scholarly observers to recognize the teen drama as an important cultural product, the enthusiasm from audiences that developed around popular shows emblematic of the genre, including *Beverly Hills, 90210* (Fox, 1990-2000), *Dawson’s Creek* (The WB, 1998-2003), *The O.C.* (Fox, 2003-2007), and *Gossip Girl* (The CW, 2007-2012), *Pretty Little Liars* (ABC Family/Freeform, 2010-2017), and *Riverdale* (The CW, 2017-), merits consideration. The shows that comprise this genre have succeeded at attracting many

members of its targeted (primarily female, teen and young adult) audience in addition to unexpected audiences outside of the target group. This suggests that the genre resonates with the generations who came of age engaging with these shows, as well as generations beyond this group; in turn it requires deeper consideration than is typically afforded this and adjacent genres. Over the course of this thesis, I will demonstrate that teen dramas are particularly useful in considering how race operates in popular media.

The genre is not monolithic in its approach to representing teen life, and over the course of its prominence in popular culture, it has experienced tonal and thematic shifts in emphasis, which here are interpreted as cycles of the teen drama genre (Klein, 2011). In her book *American Film Cycles: Reframing Genres, Screening Social Problems, and Defining Subcultures*, Klein uses the term cycle to identify groups of films produced during a particular time period that feature many of the same narrative and visual elements. Although the teen drama genre has not been analyzed in this manner before, the delineation between cycle and genre is useful because it facilitates analyzing media products temporally and identifies through-lines that can transcend the specifics of genre: teen dramas on television can be also be understood as moving through cycles that are linked to cultural shifts as well as generic shifts. Over the course of this project, I identify traits of the two cycles being analyzed here. I focus on the first cycle of primetime teen dramas following *Beverly Hills, 90210*, including *My So-Called Life* (ABC, 1994-1995), *Dawson's Creek* (The WB, 1998-2003), *Felicity* (The WB, 1998-2002) and *Freaks and Geeks* (NBC, 1999-2000), which is marked by a misfits-centered approach that worked toward a degree of verisimilitude and relatability. In the aughts, a shift, marked by a new cycle, occurred toward telling the stories of teenagers who were more conventionally popular, wealthy, or had problems that were less relatable to the majority of the viewing audience [*The O.C.* (Fox, 2003-2007), *One Tree Hill* (The WB/The CW, 2003-2012), *Gossip Girl* (The CW,

2007-2012), *Pretty Little Liars* (ABC Family/Freeform, 2010-2017)]. I compare these two cycles over the course of this thesis. Although there are clearly elements that define and unify the genre across these cycles, the marked shift is quite possibly tied to external cultural, industrial, or economic factors, which I will explore in the following sections, not unlike the case for films. As scholars including Wee (2010) and Stein (2008) have observed, what teen programs focus on is influenced by a number of factors, including efforts to “walk a difficult line between ‘quality’ and ‘popular’” (Stein, 225), as well as the mandates of the networks that produced the programs.

Academic writing related to television teen drama did – and has continued to – meaningfully explore and analyze female identity and sexuality within these narratives (Berridge, 2013; Early, 2001; McKinley, 1997; Rios, 2015; Ryalls, 2016). However, race and sexuality, and specifically analysis of representation through an intersectional lens, have not been the subject of as much scholarly or popular analysis to date. Discussions related to gender in the teen drama lean toward feminist analysis of White, female characters and frequently focus on potential degrees of resistance demonstrated by those characters; in these studies, although Whiteness is typically unnamed. This blind spot is mirrored in journalistic and trade writing about the same programs—there is an undeniable correlation between themes explored by these media studies scholars and journalists at the time. This correlation resulted in a limited conceptualization of what issues teen dramas could address; the undervaluing of the genre broadly in journalistic spaces (again, in large part due to its connection with feminine-aligned media products coupled with the dominance of male television critics) was reproduced in academic spaces.

Although previous studies of the primetime teen drama genre have considered feminist viewpoints and concerns, they typically center a non-intersectional feminism that is notably focused on female heterosexuality, and often focused on White characters

(although these hegemonic characteristics are typically unexamined). In contrast, this study is interested in exploring ways in which people of color operate within the genre. It is also particularly concerned with determining whether representation of these types of characters has changed over time, and what that says about the industrial and cultural conditions of the time periods in which the characters and their storylines were created and developed.

Specifically, this thesis will explore what two different cycles of the teen drama genre reveal about the evolution of identity and representation with specific attention to race and ethnicity in these spaces over the time period analyzed. This exploration will identify approaches to representations of racialized identity in teen dramas, from both a textual and an industrial perspective. More specifically, it is a comparative study of the teen television drama on networks particularly interested in targeting and depicting the teen audience; it aims to illuminate shifts in portrayals that occurred between the late 1990s and the early 2010s through the examination of two case studies. How do teen dramas *Felicity* (The WB, 1998-2002) and *Gossip Girl* (The CW, 2007-2012) demonstrate how The WB and The CW respectively hailed their target audiences over time, and how does non-White representation factor into the networks' and producers' approaches to hailing those audiences? Through media industry analysis focused on the two networks, their marketing strategies and the media coverage surround *Felicity* and *Gossip Girl*, along with intersectional feminist textual analysis of each television series, this study examines characters of color in each program to assess whether their network's approach to hailing and conceptualizing of its teen audience changed or evolved across these cycles. In addition to identifying the characteristics of these changes, this thesis aims to consider what the implications of such changes might be.

I focus in this study specifically on The WB, which self-identified as the network for teens during the 1990s, and its evolution into successor network The CW, which shifted

its focus slightly from the 12-34 demographic sought by The WB to the 18-34 female demographic (before shifting its focus even further toward male and female viewers in the age group). In the process, this study examines how the youth audience (comprised of younger members of generation X and the majority of the millennial generation) was hailed while it was coming of age between the late 1990s and early 2010s. *Felicity*, which was one of the network's top three teen shows during the late 1990s, exemplifies the network's approach to portraying and hailing its target audience during this time period. *Gossip Girl*, which was the flagship show of The CW (born out of the merger between CBS-owned UPN and Warner Bros. Entertainment's WB), demonstrates a shift in tone and subject matter during the 2000s.

ESTABLISHING THE NETWORK FOR TEENS

During the 1990s, The WB television network was established amidst a diversifying landscape. When The WB launched in 1992, parent company Warner Bros. brought on Jamie Kellner, who had overseen the establishment of the Fox television network less than a decade prior. Kellner advocated for narrowcasting as the best way forward in establishing this new network, since it seemed unlikely that it could compete with the already-established broadcasting networks, NBC, ABC and CBS (Wee, 2008). In this context, The WB targeted a more narrowly defined audience than the one targeted by the big four networks—this new network decided to commit to creating shows that would attract 12-to-34-year-olds of both sexes (Wee, 2008). Notably, following the model designed by Fox, the network also incorporated another target audience by developing Black-led sitcoms during the same period. This dual programming strategy

speaks to a dichotomy in audience targeting that evolved throughout the existence of The WB.

Around this time, the children of the Baby Boomers began to enter their teenaged years and twenties, creating the largest cohort of teens and young adults since their parents' generation. Now recognized as Millennials, this cohort (born between roughly 1980 and 1996) was then called the "echo-boom" or Generation Y. They came of age during a time of economic growth in the U.S., which meant that their spending power was significant enough for advertisers and media industries to begin to target them (Leung, 2004). This ultimately validated The WB's decision to focus on the 12-34-year-old demographic, because the broadcast network became the first that staked its branding on a promise to deliver a connection to this historically hard-to-reach group.

Considerations of race in journalistic analyses of the new target demographic seem limited to acknowledgement of the increased diversity (and presumed corresponding tolerance of diversity) of this generation over previous ones. As Leung observed in 2004, this demographic is "the most diverse generation ever: 35 percent are non-White, and the most tolerant, believing everyone should be part of the community" (CBS News).

In order to establish itself as the network for teens and set itself apart from its primary competitor in the teen market, MTV [characterized by shows like *The Real World*, (1992-), *Beverly Hills 90210* (1993-2011), and the network's annual Spring Break special (1986-)], The WB worked to create earnest programming about teenagers who were coming of age, just like the target audience, who displayed a relatable "blend of intelligence, sensitivity and knowing sarcasm" (Wee, 2008). The network also

acknowledged the tendency of the (White) teen audience to be notably literate in media and cultural texts and touchstones and incorporated this awareness into the sensibilities of this programming, seen especially in *Dawson's Creek* dialogue. It also had the models of preceding teen shows like the widely popular *Beverly Hills, 90210* and critically acclaimed *My So-Called Life*, as well as quality television shows from the 1980s including *Hill Street Blues* (NBC, 1981-1987) and *St. Elsewhere* (NBC, 1982-1988) from which to select the best blend of characteristics (Hills, 2004).

Felicity, which premiered during the 1998-1999 television season, following the successful premieres of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (The WB/The CW, 1997-2003), and *Dawson's Creek* in the preceding seasons, adopted many of the characteristics outlined above and became one of the top three teen shows on The WB in terms of ratings. Both *Dawson's Creek* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* were successful at tapping into the constructed teen audience, and each program focused on a group of almost exclusively White friends in almost exclusively White environments. *Felicity*, perhaps in part because it was set in New York City, started with a non-White character, Elena Tyler (Tangi Miller), as a series regular. The program, created by Matt Reeves and J.J. Abrams, follows the titular character, Felicity Porter (Keri Russell), as she moves across the country from California to New York City to start college at a school based on New York University. Usually a pragmatic, forward-thinking student, Felicity had already committed to study pre-med at Stanford University, but spontaneously decides to change her plans after speaking to and learning that her crush, Ben Covington (Scott Speedman),

is going to school in New York. The show follows Felicity as she develops relationships (romantic and otherwise) and navigates college life in Manhattan.

Another aspect of The WB's programming for teens worth noting is that the protagonists of this cycle of shows (including *Dawson's Creek*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Roswell*, *Charmed* and *Felicity*) were predominantly White and heterosexual. That, combined with the fact that the preexisting African American-led content on the network was grouped on a separate, less popular night of programming, seems indicative of a decision by the network to focus on a less diverse audience generally (PR Newswire, 1995). Advertising campaigns on the network echoed this tendency to other Blackness, which I will examine in more detail in the next chapter ("WB Promo – 1999 – Faces"; WB "My Generation" Image Campaign, 2001). The Black-led content included "top Nielson-rated show among teens" *Sister, Sister* (1995-1999) which starred teenage twins Tia and Tamera Mowry and correspondingly qualifies as teen-led television. This positioning decision is echoed when the network merges with UPN and the shows that were African-American led became even less of a priority on the new network (Gray, 2006).

The WB network captured the teen market successfully enough for advertisers to remain committed. In so doing, they reinforced the validity of a narrowcasting strategy. However, once competitor broadcast network UPN started targeting a similar demographic, parent companies Warner Bros. Entertainment and CBS recognized that the niche group was not able to support two competing networks and merged their properties to create The CW in 2006. The CW, led by Dawn Ostroff, who previously had served as

president of UPN Entertainment, committed to attracting the young, predominantly White, female audience at the expense of UPN's African-American audience courted through Black-led programming. The new network phased out UPN's popular Black-led sitcoms including *Everybody Hates Chris*, *Girlfriends*, and *The Game* (Wee, 2008). In this environment, *Gossip Girl* was created and promoted heavily as it became the first native-born hit of the new network, embodying the image the network intended to cultivate (Herman, 2017). The show, based on a young adult book series, which follows the lives of several wealthy, Manhattan-based private school attending teenagers, revolves around the dramatic events of their lives. It is narrated by a gossip blogger who documents the aforementioned events.

IDENTIFYING A SHIFT IN NETWORK SENSIBILITY

In addition to factors that stem from the overarching network merger between UPN and The WB, there are socio-cultural, political, economic, and technological dynamics that influenced the programs in the different cycles of the serialized teen drama. In this section, I explore the scholarly literature that recognizes a shift in tone and approach to television programming during the two windows of time analyzed here, with attention to broader changes in the social, political, economic and cultural dynamics of the U.S. This context is designed to illuminate nationwide factors that may have had an impact on the television series being created in the two time periods analyzed in this project.

In working to identify characteristics of the teen dramas of the 1990s and comparing them with those that aired into the early 2010s, a broad shift toward escapism, where characters' troubles are more melodramatic in nature and less relatable, and away from the realism of the earlier period becomes pronounced. This section will explore possible social, political, and historic factors that may have contributed to the shift toward more escapist content. In tandem with this shift, The CW, the network that evolved from the merger between UPN and The WB, focused less on its slate of Black comedies and marketed its White, affluent teen-centered shows more aggressively than before. This move indicates that the network underwent a shift in strategy about who it was prioritizing and how it intended to cater to its ideal audience (Ross, 2008). Defining the exact reasons for this shift is complex, but the socio-cultural, political and economic backdrop is worth examining for its influence on the types of content created.

During the aughts—with the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Great Recession, and the election of the nation's first non-White president—national tragedies, challenges, and triumphs became a backdrop that affected the American public and its media. These socio-historical occurrences, coupled with concurrent technological advancements impacting how audiences consumed media, meant that the industries supporting and developing mediated cultural objects needed to either affirm or reestablish stable positions during this transitional period. As observed by Spigel (2004) in her analysis of ways in which television genres worked to “channel the national back to normalcy” (239) after the events of 9/11, traditional forms of entertainment “had to reinvent their place in U.S. life and culture” and determine whether

they would work toward representing the world as is, or contribute to escapist goals (235). In her article, Spigel analyzes a range of different media texts and explores how they responded to and worked to move forward from the events of 9/11. She highlights the challenges facing an industry charged with both providing levity to reassure audiences as well as serving in a public service-based informational and connective role. Although in many ways, television and its programming had “returned to normal” a few years after the 2001 attacks, the memory of and reactions to the events lingered in ways that challenged the push-and-pull inherent in television’s role as informer and entertainer (262). With this tension as a backdrop, networks targeting teens and developing teen dramas for television needed to find their place once more. Were the shows of the genre going to continue to have as tangible an interest in realism as they did in the 1990s (complete with “Very Special Episodes” addressing difficult topics facing its audience) or were they going to move to a space potentially less fraught and more focused on unrealistic or less relatable conflicts for the purpose of entertainment above all else?

In “‘Teens Win’: Purveying Fantasies of Effortless Economic Mobility & Social Attainment on Rich Teen Soaps,” Cooper (2015) explicates possible elements of the appeal of the genre across its entire history while also incorporating consideration of the Great Recession and broader socio-economic concerns in the U.S during the time period. He focuses on four shows, one of which is before the cycle of WB shows focused on in this study, the rest of which aired in the latter part of the period being analyzed here [*Beverly Hills, 90210* (1990-2000), *The O.C.* (2003-2007), *Gossip Girl* (2007-2012), and *90210* (2008-2013)], identified as a subset of the broader teen drama genre, the “rich teen

soaps.” Cooper asserts that the specific traits that appeal to the primary audience of the genre in this period (late Generation Xers and early Millennials) are related to economic mobility and social attainment, as well as the portrayal of the main characters as equal to or independent from their (usually morally corrupt or otherwise lacking) parents. To substantiate these assertions, Cooper references research analyzing audiences by generations, eventually suggesting that the identified cohort of viewers is drawn to the genre’s “ability to allay anxieties about social mobility and parental dependence by wedding the ‘teens win’ ethos to a meritocratic spirit that denies any sense of economic or social limitations” (739). Although Spigel’s study focuses on the role of television specifically following 9/11, elements of her analysis seem consistent with traits Cooper identifies in his piece on rich teen soaps. This suggests that there likely are some correlative elements that have to do with the socio-cultural and political periods during which programs, including those produced for teens, are produced. As “quality television” targeting adult audiences was becoming darker and a space for anxieties to play out on screen with shows like *The Sopranos* (HBO, 1999-2007), *The Wire* (HBO, 2002-2008), and *Deadwood* (HBO, 2004-2006) (O’Neal, 2017), teen television, which was notably not typically conceived of as quality, was becoming decreasingly tethered to realistic concerns and its protagonists were increasingly secure and self-reliant.

The social, cultural, political and economic factors that framed production and consumption of teen shows across the time period also shifted dynamically. This context, combined with the text-based shifts in portrayals of teens and subject matter more broadly, suggest the composition of a new sensibility (one that influenced both producers

and consumers). I believe this points to the arrival of a new cycle in the teen drama genre. The first cycle, following *Beverly Hills, 90210*, began with an emphasis on earnest, realistic portrayals of teen concerns in the late 1990s during the rise of The WB. By the mid-aughts, the genre began to show elements of a new cycle, moving toward reducing anxiety and stress in its content through escapism and a newfound self-reliance in its protagonists. For example, in an episode of *The O.C.* (“The Escape,” 2003), main characters Marissa Cooper (Mischa Barton) and her best friend, Summer Roberts (Rachel Bilson) plan an unsupervised trip to Tijuana, Mexico to unwind from the social stresses in their lives, and when trouble arises, fellow teens Ryan Atwood (Ben McKenzie) and Seth Cohen (Adam Brody), without consulting parents, get Marissa the help she needs following a drug overdose. Questions about actual logistics of getting to Tijuana are scarcely addressed. Money is not an issue, and Summer is even charged with running an errand to acquire anti-anxiety medicine for her stepmother. In this sense, she is responsible for providing for the adult in her life. The teenage group of friends is in control of their own circumstances; when parents try to support Marissa, in the next episode, they are narrativized as meddling in counterproductive ways (“The Rescue,” 2003).

FEMALE SEXUALITY, GENDER ROLES, AND BLIND SPOTS IN TEEN DRAMA SCHOLARSHIP

The teen drama has drawn attention and analysis from those seeking to illuminate how gender and sexuality are represented in shows of the genre. The genre has been the subject of analyses working to assess (both qualitatively and quantitatively) how gender

plays out in shows such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *One Tree Hill*, and others. Often, this analysis centers White female sexuality as it is depicted and acted upon in the show's narrative. Analyses of this nature range from complimentary and cautiously optimistic to concerned about media messages targeting teens. For example, Frances Early (2001) analyzed *Buffy, the Vampire Slayer* in order to assess Buffy's representation as an "indomitable tough woman" who challenges "patriarchal values and institutions in society" (11-12). She argues, within the theoretical context of MacDonald's "open image," which notes that "imagery is by no means a purely superficial phenomenon [but is rather] the means through which we articulate and define the social order and nature" (as quoted in Early, 12), that *Buffy, the Vampire Slayer* is a transgressive narrative that works to challenge the gendered social order. Many scholars have analyzed *Buffy, the Vampire Slayer* and other serialized teen dramas to similar, cautiously optimistic ends, mostly focusing on the White, cisgender, and heterosexual female leads of the programs as subjects of analysis. Relatedly, in 2010, Van Damme suggests that while female characters in teen shows *One Tree Hill* (The WB/The CW, 2003-2012) and *Gossip Girl* are given agency in sexual situations, which could indicate that the established gendered social order in sexuality is being shifted to an extent, there is also "sexual degradation" of female characters that casts this shift in "a more negative light" (13). While these analyses are productive and seriously consider the teen drama genre as an object worthy of (often feminist) study, the authors do not consider girls of color, nor the Whiteness of the girls they do focus on, throughout their close looks at the media texts. Over the history of the teen drama genre up to the end of the cycles examined here, diverse

representation in terms of race and sexuality has been limited, and recurring characters who fall outside of Whiteness and heteronormativity are scarce. Typically, these types of characters are introduced after the show establishes main (usually White and straight) characters; they are often an addition to established plot lines (new romantic interests, new kids in town, etc.). It seems that blind spots of the shows themselves, which did not prioritize including storylines for characters of color or casting actors of color, are replicated in the scholarly literature.

Susan Berridge (2013) is less optimistic about the transgressive potential of the genre but suggests that it has the potential to productively engage with gender with more dedicated effort. She writes about what she dubs the teen heroine television genre, another sub-genre within the teen drama, in an exploratory analysis of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Veronica Mars* (The CW, 2004-2007), and *Life Unexpected* (The CW, 2010-2011). The characters in each of these programs are predominantly White, and the characters centered in the analysis are the White, heterosexual female protagonists of each—again, Whiteness is not interrogated or engaged with by the author. Berridge finds, through analysis of portrayals of sexual violence targeting each show's lead character and, in some cases, additional characters, that the genre creates a space where “multiple perspectives on sexual violence are enabled, depending on individual narrative and programme” (494). Berridge's article is particularly useful because it engages with and identifies the trend in feminist television scholarship assessing the degrees of feminism and feminist identification in main characters of this genre. She seeks to add a specific

focus on sexual violence and identifies narrative arcs of the White female protagonists through which she can assess both areas of interest in each show.

Berridge's work is part of a larger discussion [as scholars like Sarah Banet-Weiser (2018) and Rosalind Gill (2007) have expanded conversations precipitated by Radway (1984) and Julie D'Acci (1994) about the roles of feminism in popular spaces] related to how feminism is activated in popular culture and television specifically. She ultimately finds that White, female-fronted teen dramas are prone to containing, rather than expanding or "enlarg[ing]" discussions about gender, sexuality and power," although they have the potential (certainly more potential than male-fronted or ensemble-cast generic equals) to push toward enabling a "feminist understanding of sexual violence" (482). This throughline—consideration of the teen drama as a space to consider depictions and representations of feminist thought—is common in analyses of shows or characters produced in the genre. Again, while this work is generative and presents an important claiming of female-oriented cultural objects as worthy of study, many of these types of analyses avoid intersectional consideration of characters and centrally focus on White, cisgender, heterosexual female leads without interrogating those unmarked hegemonic norms.

Although race has largely been excluded from scholarly (and popular) consideration of primetime teen dramas, some scholars have incorporated consideration of a different intersection of identity: class. Ryalls (2016), for example, conducts a textual analysis of *Gossip Girl*, assessing the presence and degrees of millennial postfeminist discourse on the show. She bases the discussion in socio-political and economic

considerations that frame the world outside of the show's boundaries. Specifically, Ryalls conducts a textual analysis of the show's treatment and characterization of Jenny Humphrey, a White female series regular character for the first three seasons. Jenny is depicted as generally middle-class (one could challenge this characterization; however, because of the Humphreys' home, assets, and geographic location, Jenny is distinctly less wealthy than her classmates, which is the basis of her class depiction) and attempts to socially climb into the ranks of her one-percenter peers. Ryalls emphasizes the show's tendency to depict Jenny as a character who cannot excel outside of the boundaries of her socio-economic status; although the upper-class girls are depicted with qualities like "empowerment, independence, and agency, Jenny is seen as depraved, immoral, and at risk when she enacts these [characteristics]" (203) and tries to move outside of her classed position. In the problems she faces, often related to wanting to fit in with the popular girls but being boxed out because she has less money and, correspondingly, decreased ability to operate in the world of other characters, Jenny is a character who seems more directly descended from the teens of *The WB* in the late 1990s. However, as her character develops, in the ways in which she addresses her challenges, she represents a significant departure from the steadily earnest, ultimately self-assured and well-meaning nature of the characters in *Dawson's Creek* and *Felicity*. The narrative arcs about Jenny often present hard work (she is an aspiring fashion designer) as a potential method of earning the respect of her peers in a manner that characters from the earlier shows would. However, Jenny resists growing into these more steadfast characteristics that align more closely with the teens from the preceding cycle. Instead, she repeatedly

attempts to find shortcuts to acceptance through imitating behaviors of the mean girls she attempts to win over. Her difficulties are often narratively contained to her individual experience; her challenges are presented as shortcomings that are inconsistent with anyone else's experiences. In this way, she is unable to succeed, and the show does not universalize her struggles in the ways that the teen shows from preceding cycles did.

While Ryalls' analysis works toward intersectionality in its consideration of class, it does not address race or sexuality, which is consistent with the preceding scholarly analyses of teen dramas. The predominance of analyses of White female characters and their sexuality in teen drama is noteworthy—the group of characters most analyzed mirror the conceptualized and prioritized White, teenage audience for the shows. This prioritization demonstrates a nearly myopic focus on this group at the expense of considering how other demographic groups might operate on the programs or how these other groups might respond to the series.

The existing scholarly literature related to the teen drama genre on television focuses predominantly on genre, gender (specifically the representation of women and their sexuality), and what such programs articulate about the cultural moment in which they are being produced. Additionally, even within the feminist research on the genre, the scholarship to date is not particularly intersectional in its consideration of identity and representation on the shows, which suggests that more attention to the representation of race is sorely needed. For example, Whiteness is infrequently engaged with as a concept, although many of the characters analyzed are White, suggesting a tendency toward reading this type of media text through the lens of the dominant femininity. More active

consideration of LGBTQIA+ themes and characters could be fruitful for new findings related to the genre as well. These omissions are reproductions of blind spots in popular culture and in trade and popular media coverage of this programming, which suggests that industry and television scholarship can be strongly influenced by thematic emphases determined by journalists. Additional research considering the shift between the different time periods—from both an industrial perspective and a textual one—that also meaningfully integrates intersectional considerations of race and sexuality is crucial in order to continue to document this popular genre and its evolution. It follows that journalistic entities should also diversify cultural perspectives to attain a fuller understanding of this and related cultural objects.¹

Although often disparaged as a cultural object, the teen drama reaches and influences a wide range of audience members, is reflective of the environment in which it is created and is – at least potentially – instrumental in informing perspectives about marginalized identities. This study intends to contribute to the literature on the serialized teen drama genre by centering consideration of race and ethnicity in a close, comparative analysis of primetime teen dramas in two time periods. It does so by considering how these media texts interact with the period in which they are created. I will also look for potential differences in each cycle of the genre through examination of production,

¹ While there was a period wherein it seemed as though digital journalism might provide the space in the journalistic landscape for writers to be hired for their unique perspectives and attention to issues related to intersections of identity, at the start of 2019, amidst the latest big wave of journalistic layoffs [during which legacy media outlets and digital outlets including Mic Network, Vice Media, HuffPost and BuzzFeed experienced layoffs and hiring freezes (Dwyer, 2019)], it seems less likely that digital media entities will lead the charge toward a broader shift in prioritization.

casting, marketing, and positioning decisions. In this way, I will further demonstrate the status of the teen television drama as a cultural object worth considering, particularly when attention to race and ethnicity is infused into analysis. Drawing attention to the representations of and relative scarcity of diverse characters in popular programming has the potential to further illuminate the importance of improving visibility of marginalized populations.

METHOD

This study will survey the teen television landscape starting with the genesis of the genre in the 1990s. It then will dive deeply into the period in the mid- to late-1990s where The WB created a suite of programming targeting teens before traversing into the genre's next cycle, which ended in the early 2010s. In this study, I will analyze one case study from each of the cycles identified earlier. Importantly, while I may be able to extrapolate some findings about the respective cycles through careful contextual analysis of each case, in no way is this study meant to encapsulate all aspects of the entire genre's progression. I am particularly interested in examining the role of race and ethnicity in terms of how these markers of difference from the hegemonic norm are activated and utilized in teen television over time. In this thesis, I explore whether difference from Whiteness is acknowledged within these shows, and whether there is a shift in the approach to engaging with multiculturalism (Ross, 2008), imbued with post-racial and postfeminist sensibilities, from the mid-1990s to the early 2010s in this genre on The WB and The CW.

The case studies analyzed in the following chapters are teen dramas on The WB and its successor, The CW, to assess differences in how the generation X young adult and millennial teen audience was hailed over the period of their adolescence and beyond. The two timeframes referenced above constitute the parameters used to select shows: each selected show had to air during either of the two cycles. In the earlier period, *Felicity* begins in the late 1990s and continues into the early 2000s (as do contemporaries on The WB including *Dawson's Creek* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*).

The shows selected for this thesis aired on The WB and The CW. Since the related networks, through programming decisions, displayed a consistent interest in maintaining some amount of the teen audience during the entirety of the time period being studied, they are related literally and figuratively. The goal is to track the shift specifically on these related networks in order to provide a sense of how this leader in teen programming conceived of and sought to connect with its audience over time.

To determine which shows during each time period to utilize for each case study, I identified which were the most popular on the selected network; from the top three, I selected which of the shows might be most fruitful for intersectional consideration based on the extended presence of storylines that center a non-White character (either as a romantic interest, friend or primary individual in the storyline). Additionally, selecting one of the most popular and promoted shows as representative of the general strategies during each given time period is supported by the stated intentions of the network. As noted by Lew Goldstein, co-executive vice-president of marketing at The WB during the first period of study, its teen shows were marketed as a set—he asserted that, even though

the shows had differences, they “take on the same impression. [...] They belong together,” (quoted in Friedman, 1999).

In order to examine how The WB and The CW targeted the millennial audience as it was coming of age, specifically in terms of how the network imagined and hailed that audience as well as the viewers’ relationship with non-White characters between the late 1990s and the 2010s, I completed a comparative analysis. It focused on the case studies of *Felicity* (The WB, 1998-2002) from the late 1990s and *Gossip Girl* (The CW, 2007-2012), which ended in the early 2010s. Through a close look at media discourse identified through a Nexis Uni search of contemporaneously published coverage about the networks, the programs, and the showrunners and actors, and the texts themselves, this analysis evaluated both shows and how their networks hailed the emerging teen audience that came to be known as the millennials. It also considered how teen dramas more generally articulated marginalized identities in these two time periods. In my study, I specifically examined how race and ethnicity factored into those emphases. In order to assess the shift on a broader scale, this study employs Havens, Lotz and Tinic’s (2009) critical media industry studies framework as I conducted discourse analysis of how their producers discussed each series, and how critics responded. This analysis occurs in chapter two.

Located in chapter three, the textual analysis utilized an intersectional feminist lens. In terms of organization, the analysis focused on specific narrative arcs in each show. The selected arcs specifically centered the progression of a recurring character of color through the show. For *Felicity*, I focused on Elena Tyler, a Black woman Felicity

meets in one of her pre-med classes. In *Gossip Girl*, I analyzed the role of Vanessa Abrams, a biracial woman who is the longtime friend of one of the main characters, Dan Humphrey. The episode arcs selected to analyze include: the introduction arc about the selected character, an arc related to the show's engagement with the character's non-hegemonic characteristic, and an arc about the character's conclusion within the context of the show. The inclusion of three arcs sheds light on the depictions over time of each of these characters, ideally illuminating the sensibility or approach to diversity on each series.

I argue that the genre's movement away from verisimilitude corresponds with even less racial specificity for the characters of color in the show selected from the second cycle. Each case study focuses on one show; however, there are comparisons with contemporaneously airing shows that gesture toward broader trends in the genre's cycle. Intermediary questions that developed alongside the textual analysis include consideration of the types of plot lines characters of color are given. Are they interacting with main characters, and, if so, how do those interactions play out? At what point in the show is the intersectionally representative character introduced to the plot?

To contextualize the textual analysis of the selected episodes, the discourse analysis of select trade publications featuring coverage and interviews related to the production of each show helps provide an understanding of how the makers and key spokespeople position these characters with respect to gender, race and sexuality. The sample here is comprised of secondary sources, including producer and executive interviews given in the press, articles focused on character and narrative arcs, and

network statements related to top-level content and programming decisions. Additionally, I examine the two shows' marketing campaigns to illuminate thematic positioning goals for each program.

The discourse analysis portion of the study is guided by the following questions: how might the plotlines be related to the socio-cultural backdrop of the narrative arc? How do showrunners or spokespersons of the show(s) discuss current events in interviews in trade publications? Do they acknowledge any relation between what they discuss in connection to current events and what the show is addressing? How do creatives and executives talk about representation on screen in their show—and are they comparing their version of representation with that of their contemporaries or predecessors? Do the showrunners or spokespersons reference influence from audience members or fans?

As observed in critical media industry studies, flows of information are more complex than simply moving from creator to audience in a one-way manner, and this part of the study will seek to determine how the flows of information move in the teen drama on television. Throughout my study, I take into consideration ways in which the shows might be in conversation with socio-cultural, economic, political, and technological conditions and advancements of the time period in which they are being created. In each case study, as relevant, I incorporate a discussion of key events to situate the show in its respective social context.

In order to meaningfully assess ways in which difference from hegemonic norms are presented on serialized teen dramas, this study focuses on programs that actually

feature recurring non-White characters. This is to determine whether the programs are more interested in engaging with a relatively shallow multiculturalism (Ross, 2008), characterized by initiatives like “colorblind casting” (Warner, 2015), or in representing characters who embody culturally specific qualities of the characters outside of the White, heterosexual norm. *Felicity* featured two series regulars who were non-White or non-straight over the course of its four seasons (Elena Tyler, played by Tangi Miller, and Javier Quintana, played by Ian Gomez); *Gossip Girl* featured a non-straight character and a non-White character (Eric Van der Woodsen, played by Connor Paolo, and Vanessa Abrams, played by Jessica Szohr) as recurring characters over the course of the show. Although they were not all series regulars during the entirety of the programs, they were included in storylines that allow for meaningful textual analysis.

The storylines pertaining to the selected characters from each show will be analyzed textually from an intersectional feminist perspective throughout the three narrative arcs outlined above (their introduction, a moment dealing directly with their difference from the hegemonic norm, and their conclusion). Due to limitations related to the length of this project, my research will focus on one character per show, analyzing non-White character representation specifically.

Within the discourse analysis portion of my study, interviews or statements about either show featuring the showrunner and/or producers, as well as statements in trade publications more broadly regarding network decisions about the target audience, will help provide context about producers’ attitudes regarding the audience and representation. Using Havens, Lotz, and Tinic’s (2009) critical media industry studies

research framework, I incorporate an understanding of the “ways in which economic, regulatory and institutional forces influence cultural output” (234). In this way, I aim to be able to take both the media text and the circumstances under which it was created into consideration.

Through the inductive textual analysis of the television programs and their narrative arcs, as well as critical media industry studies-infused discourse analysis focused on production and network perspectives, this research assesses and attempts to define industrial and network-based qualities of the sensibility (in regard to diverse representation) of the 1990s. It then compares those qualities with the sensibility operating during the cycle of the early 2010s. This study promises to reveal information about how the socio-cultural, political, economic, and technological backdrop of popular media can influence areas of creative and representational focus. More specifically, I center consideration of race and ethnicity in order to examine what strategic shifts have occurred and what the implications of those shifts might be.

Chapter Two: Capturing Millennials: Industrial Considerations of Race and Ethnicity in Serialized Teen Dramas

In order to address the questions outlined in my introduction, and in particular those related to the different cycles that have existed in the serialized teen drama genre on television, here I survey the teen television landscape starting with the genesis of the genre in the 1990s and continuing through the early 2010s. This will entail comparing two cycles of television programs. This chapter specifically centers on The WB, which evolved into the self-identified network for teens during the mid- to late-1990s, and The CW, the literal and figurative successor to The WB. Industrial analyses of the evolution of The WB and The CW have been conducted over the years (Wee, 2008); however, studies focused specifically on how race and ethnicity factor into this evolution have not yet been conducted.

This chapter also works to fill in this gap and broaden existing literature through a close examination of the role of race and ethnicity representationally, focusing in particular on how these markers of difference from the hegemonic norm are activated and utilized in the teen television space over time. I explore whether difference from Whiteness is engaged with in a more nuanced manner than is exemplified by the discursive practices outlined by Gray in his work on television representations of Blackness in the late 1980s through the mid-1990s (2004), and whether there is a shift in approach to engaging with diverse representations from the mid-1990s to the early 2010s in this genre on The WB and The CW. I demonstrate how, in the transition that occurred

when UPN and The WB merged, thereby creating The CW, a shift in attitudes more broadly toward inclusion without racial specificity occurred.

In order to examine how The WB and The CW each targeted the millennial audience (and the younger members of Generation X) as it was coming of age, specifically in terms of both how the network imagined and hailed that audience as well as the network's relationship with non-White characters between the late 1990s and the 2010s, I conducted an analysis focused on comparative case studies of *Felicity* (The WB, 1998-2002) from the 1990s and *Gossip Girl* from the aughts and into the early 2010s (The CW, 2007-2012). As noted above, between the 1990s and the 2010s, shows in this genre seem to have moved into a new cycle less focused on realism or relatability and more focused on escapism. I suggest in this thesis that this shift correlates with a move away from more comprehensive renderings of the interior lives of marginalized people and movement toward a post-racial sensibility. In order to assess the shift on a broader scale, this chapter will employ Havens, Lotz and Tinic's (2009) critical media industry studies framework. In the next chapter, this contextual work will then be complemented by textual analysis, once again focusing on race and ethnicity.

The "mid-range" approach of critical media industry studies, wherein a focus on the producer-level decisions is supported, is generative for this project because it can provide greater insight through discourse analysis and consideration of the producers of content. This chapter will be comprised primarily of sociohistorical contextualization of the evolution of both networks and the genre, along with analysis of the networks' construction of the imagined teen audience. It also includes critical media industry

studies-informed analysis of the production teams of each program alongside discourse analysis of the promotional materials and interviews – especially as these are connected to issues of race and representation. During my research, I found that much of the discourse dealing directly with these issues as they related to teen dramas on television in this period stemmed from a moment in 1999 when the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), along with the Multi-Ethnic Coalition, released a report finding that a “virtual Whitewash in programming” had occurred across primetime television (Haynes, et. al, 1999). This report was a highly visible manifestation of the efforts of a broader coalition of minority advocacy groups engaging in a “major series of attempts made over the period 1992-2002 to pressure the US television entertainment industry into more varied and richer presentation of people of color” (Beltrán, et. al 2005). That the patterns observed in the report existed in the teen drama genre, when the report served as an invocation to producers of primetime television across genres, demonstrates how the genre is connected with broader industrywide trends. This mounting pressure, the NAACP report, and a review of the report a decade after its release, forced spokespeople and key decision-makers across the industry to speak on issues related to race and representation. This chapter will contextualize the landscape that allowed for the NAACP report to gain visibility, analyze the media discourse about the NAACP report, and examine the media discourse that pointedly reframes or avoids engaging with issues related to representation altogether.

The research questions framing this chapter include: how did teen dramas *Felicity* and *Gossip Girl* demonstrate the ways that The WB and The CW respectively hailed their

target audiences over time? In what ways did non-White identities factor into branding and programming efforts? I will examine how the shows' plotlines might be related to the socio-cultural backdrop of the central narrative arc, as well as how showrunners or spokespersons of the show(s) discussed current events in interviews in trade publications. This area of focus aims to explore the extent to which the socio-historical backdrop correlates with an increased interest in postracial approaches to representation. To what extent, if at all, did creatives and network representatives acknowledge or identify links between current events and what the shows' storylines themselves addressed? How did they specifically talk about representation on screen in their shows (and did they compare their version of representation with that of their contemporaries or predecessors)? Do the showrunners or spokespersons acknowledge input or influence from their imagined audience? How might observations about trends in these shows be extrapolated from to understand broader issues on television during these moments? As observed in critical media industry studies, flows of information are more complex than simply moving from creator to audience in a one-way manner, and this chapter will seek to determine how that has played out in the teen drama on television.

CRITICAL MEDIA INDUSTRY STUDIES FRAMEWORK AND DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Havens, Lotz and Tinic (2009) discuss Julie D'Acci's (1994) *Defining Women: The Case of Cagney and Lacey* as an important predecessor to the CMIS model. Specifically, they point to the idea that "meaning can, in fact, never be guaranteed—neither in the construction of media texts nor in their reception," and the idea that

constant “ideological negotiation and discursive struggle” takes place in the production process (2009). This ethos makes critical media industry studies an optimal research approach for this chapter, because in a media object like a teen drama on television, where the intended audience is possibly supervised by older generations who will likely interpret the content of the media text differently than the intended audience, there are several different directions from which meaning and power can be drawn and exerted. Additionally, in this genre, the creators are typically older and slightly removed from the target audience (*Felicity* creators J.J. Abrams and Matt Reeves were both 32 when the show first aired, and *Gossip Girl* creators Stephanie Savage and Josh Schwartz were about 38 and 31 respectively when the show aired), and the networks exert pressure on showrunners and writers to authentically connect with the intended audience.

The critical media industry studies model accounts for the potential for discursive struggle and ideological negotiation through its “helicopter-level” approach to assessing cultural production. Such a framework denies the probability of absolute or consistent control from one specific source and enables addressing both structure and agency. The CMIS-influenced discourse analysis I will engage in over the course of this chapter also bakes in a consideration of television as a “contradictory” institution that “is both a site of artistic and social expression as well as a business concerned with the maximization of markets and profits.” Further, this framework encourages consideration of how those contradictions work in practice, and what the implication of the resulting practice is “in terms of larger social and cultural processes of representation and power” (Havens, Lotz, and Tinic, 2009).

Scholarship analyzing race and the media industries together is a growing sub-field under the rapidly evolving umbrella of media industries. Anamik Saha (2018) argues that the cultural industries have a superficial and limited understanding of diversity, which is why his text, *Race and the Cultural Industries*, serves as an essential intervention. Saha states that, in order to build an understanding of the relationship between race and the cultural industries, analysis of representation is essential alongside analysis of what he terms the “cultural politics of production,” which incorporates an intersectional analysis of which factors impact those representations and the careers of the people working behind the scenes. Aymar Jean Christian (2018), meanwhile, asserts that non-legacy television is a fruitful place for analysis of race and television in part due to the ways in which legacy television has obscured and excluded representation of people from different marginalized identities; throughout his book, he centers the rise of web television as a useful starting place to foster equity in representation and impactful diversity. Neither of these scholars focus their studies on widely consumed cultural products, at least partially because of the way that they see difference from hegemonic norms as not often articulated in those spaces.

In contrast, in her book on colorblind casting, Kristen Warner (2015) writes about *Grey’s Anatomy* (ABC, 2005-present), *Vampire Diaries* (The CW, 2009-2017), and *The Wire* (HBO, 2002-2008), all decidedly more popular entities, and builds an argument forwarding colorblindness as an essential “way of seeing” operating for television professionals. Specifically, Warner articulates ways in which understanding colorblindness as a “mode of production in casting primetime television” provides a

method of examining “small and subtle methods” of perpetuating the damaging nature of seeing the world through a normative mode of Whiteness (xiii). This concept is particularly relevant to this comparative project and is expanded upon in greater detail below, as *Felicity* and *Gossip Girl* aired on either side of the advent of this industrial trend. Saha, Christian, and Warner collectively build on the work of scholars working at the intersections of media and representation like Herman Gray and Stuart Hall, but also yoke together scholars writing on either side of those intersections to create scaffolding for their projects. This thesis aims to build on these and other scholarly works attempting to foster more connection between different disciplines, including race and ethnicity studies, and gender studies, in order to further extend the body of work centering race and representation in media industries.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE TEEN DRAMA GENRE

Television has developed in relation to genre; Jason Mittell’s (2001) television genre theory is a useful approach to consider the evolution of the teen drama genre. As genres tend to develop within “interrelated sites of audience, industrial, and cultural practices,” the teen drama on television needs to be situated with respect to those discursive factors to be understood fully in terms of its position in broader cultural hierarchies. This section seeks to contextualize the cultural position of *Felicity* and *Gossip Girl* as representatives of the teen drama genre in the 1990s and 2000s.

During the 1990s, following the launch of Fox Broadcasting Company in 1986 and the creation of an increasing number of cable channels, the “big three” broadcast

networks, ABC, NBC, and CBS experienced true competition beyond each other for the first time. This competition was facilitated in part by vertical re-integration initiated first by Fox Broadcasting and later by The WB and UPN. The fin/syn rules were weakened by their exemption in the 1980s and early 1990s; later the rules were abolished altogether in 1995, making vertical integration a more feasible and attractive model for the big networks. As observed by Alisa Perren (2003), this trend spurred the movement toward market fragmentation at a faster pace than ever (107). Fox Broadcasting Network, led by Jamie Kellner (who went on to help launch The WB in 1995), established a successful pattern for launching new broadcast networks to compete for audiences: under Kellner's oversight, the network emphasized narrowcasting for specific or niche audiences. Fox stands out as a relevant case study when considering the evolution of The WB because of its pivot to an emphasis on original primetime programming. Another strength of Fox's model was built into the integration of production and distribution; Warner Bros. and Paramount (owned by Viacom) recognized this strategy as potentially replicable when they created The WB and UPN, respectively, in 1993 (Wee, 2008). The WB and UPN were both billed as "netlets," which was the term created to refer to an entity less developed than a network. During this period, trade publications closely covered the ways in which these newer entities were pushing boundaries by experimenting with seeking new audiences and making programming decisions that broke with established norms, determined to assess whether this new strategy was the way forward for television as an industry.

When Fox Broadcasting started out, leadership at the network positioned it as an alternative to the traditional broadcast networks; part of the implementation of this strategy included creating content that specifically targeted teen audiences and African-American viewers (Perren, 109). As articulated by Zook (1999), in the 1980s and into the 1990s, while middle-class white audiences started increasing their cable subscriptions and buying videocassette recorders, thereby disrupting viewing trends. However, “working-class African American and Latino audiences [...] did not yet have access to these technologies and continued to rely on the ‘free’ networks—NBC, CBS, and ABC” (3). This made the so-called “urban” audiences a key demographic that needed to be targeted alongside the “mainstream” audiences, which contributed to development of “narrowcasting” as a favored strategy by new broadcasters. Once “narrowcasting” proved viable in broadcasting for Fox, and teen audiences became another demographic group deemed worth pursuing, there was a strategy in place to hail them. Aaron Spelling’s *Beverly Hills 90210*, typically recognized as the first true teen drama on television, was launched on Fox as part of this strategy. The show, which in structure followed the success of *Dynasty* and other primetime soap operas (except this one told the stories of wealthy teens), garnered ardent appointment viewing from young women ranging from middle school to college-age (McKinley, 1997: 2).

In addition, shows like *In Living Color* (1990-1994), *Roc* (1991-1994), and *Martin* (1992-1997) were popular components of the suite of shows on Fox targeting Black audiences at the time. By the mid-1990s however, Fox had essentially ceased with the strategy of targeting these two groups and left vacancies in the television market,

repositioning itself as a network targeting young professionals (Perren, 111). UPN picked up where Fox left off with Black-led programming, notably creating *Moesha* (1996-2001). Meanwhile, The WB, led by new president Jamie Kellner (previously involved with the creation of Fox), targeted teens, creating *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), *Dawson's Creek* (1998-2003) and *Felicity* (1998-2002). The WB's programming for teens was predominantly led by White, heterosexual, and commercially attractive actors, all embodying White-dominated physical ideals. Although *Moesha* (1996-2001) technically centered on a teen and told stories not unlike those featured on the teen drama suite of The WB, the show was grouped with Black-led programming more often than not, demonstrating a tendency in the media industry to consider Blackness as its own niche, irreconcilable with other niche characteristics. This tendency is echoed throughout contemporary genres and is not unique to the teen drama genre during this period.

When considered within the historical context of the genre, the narrative elements that became associated with The WB programs have visible influences from serialized soaps and drama. The genre has similarities with serialized dramatic television broadly, at least in part because of perceptions about its targeted female-leaning teen and young adult audience and the types of entertainment to which they respond. As noted by Newman and Levine (2012), narratives in the serialized teen drama are often driven by concerns very common in soap opera: those that are "romantic and familial" in nature (99). In relation to this structural similarity, the denigration often reserved for women's entertainment carries into the teen drama space. The fact that it is located in a genre for youth audiences means double the derision. As Ross and Stein (2008) have argued, the

association with youth culture, which is perceived as “commercialized and conformist,” coupled with the ways that the “adult world tends to devalue that which is associated with the young” (Newman and Levine, 2012: 99), result in the genre being perceived as frivolous and less worthy of cultural consideration.

In order to provide more gravitas to its contributions to the genre, The WB began enlisting filmmakers and screenwriters with proven success to head up production and writing for its shows targeting teens. Kevin Williamson (*Dawson’s Creek*) had successfully tapped into the teen market with his films *Scream* (1996) and *I Know What You Did Last Summer* (1997); Joss Whedon (*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*) had created the film that inspired the show in 1992 and had success co-writing *Toy Story* (1995); J.J. Abrams had written *Armageddon* (1998). The intention was to create television programs with a more cinematic feel (Wee, 2008). This trend has historical foundations in the “quality” television of the 1970s, exemplified by shows like *Hill Street Blues* and *M*A*S*H*. While the teen shows of the 1990s were not exactly the same in terms of stylistic choices, they did embrace key cinematic elements like utilizing the single-camera format and making the decision to shoot on film (Wee, 2008). The shows also continued the movement toward generic blending seen during the “quality TV” period of the 1970s and ‘80s.

The programming strategy, championed by Kellner and the executive team at The WB – emphasizing narrowcasting and “thoughtful” programming – proved successful in its time; in the 1997-98 season The WB was the “only network that saw its audience grow from year to year, increasing their audience share by 25 percent” (Wee, 2008). As

television reviewer Kay McFadden (1998) remarked at the time, the focus of the network was on creating “quality [programming] – and it [was] starting to pay off.” This steady growth was attractive to advertisers, and the fact that The WB promised a connection to the difficult to attain 12-34 year-old market made spending advertising dollars on the netlet an even more sound strategy. However, the network saw stagnation in its growth in the following years. By the mid-2000s, executives at Warner Bros. and CBS Corporation (which, when Viacom split into two companies, received UPN) believed that they were further dividing their already niche audiences (a mixture of teen and African-American viewers). Heightened cable competition further pulled viewers away. As such, they decided to merge the two netlets into a new entity: The CW, which was founded in early 2006.

At the network level, the preference for targeting the 12-34 year-old segment over the African-American segment of the national audience continued during the merger, as the successful Black-led shows of the moment (*Everybody Hates Chris*, *Girlfriends*, and *The Game*) were moved to a less prominent programming night and eventually phased out (see illustration C). Meanwhile, The CW doubled down on the shows that fit into the network’s conception of what the highly desired White, affluent teenage audience would watch.

PROGRAMMING TRENDS AND CONCEPTUALIZING THE IMAGINED TEEN AUDIENCE

During the 1990s, executives at Fox, and then at The WB, believed that they understood what teenage, mostly female, viewers wanted to watch. This time period saw

a “commercialized version of ‘girl power’” working as a driving force in programming targeting young, White, female viewers, resulting in simultaneous naturalization of elements of feminism and the commodification of feminism (Tasker & Negra, 2007, as referenced in Lausch, 2012). The presence of marketable post-feminism across different elements of popular culture during this period—wherein teens were being prioritized as a market with significant purchasing power—meant that The WB invested in and built programming slates around the empowered feminist consumer. The allure, from the network perspective, of this conception of the imagined audience was evident: young women could assert girl power through purchasing products and watching shows that embodied post-feminist ideals, so networks worked to create content that both affirmed and capitalized on this type of female empowerment. However, this discursive thrust was short-lived: as noted by Kayti Lausch (2012), by the mid- to late-aughts, the appeal of “‘girl power’ as a marketing strategy had faded and no clear narrative for what women ‘wanted’ replaced it.”

In a move that echoes The WB’s strategy of seeking out products and individuals that previously had success with the teen audience, The CW acquired *Gossip Girl*, a Josh Schwartz and Stephanie Savage (fresh off the success of *The O.C.*) television adaptation of a popular young adult fiction series by Cecily von Ziegesar. The network, then led by Dawn Ostroff (the president of UPN prior to taking the helm of the new network as it launched in 2007), identified *Gossip Girl* in the press as a flagship CW show to help publicly distinguish and define the tone and identity of the new network. The show, which featured attractive, wealthy, and predominantly White characters, no longer

focused on the “sweet center” that was embodied by the earlier teen shows of The WB (Lausch, 2012). *Gossip Girl* and The CW’s next few shows targeting the audience that The WB successfully attracted in the late 1990s demonstrated a specific conception of the imagined audience: young women who would eventually be conceived of as later millennials, perceived as interested in White-dominated glamour, sex, and effortless wealth; they were also seemingly imagined as particularly nostalgic. As Lausch points out, the shows all attempted to tap into nostalgia through rebooting successful female-led shows of the 1990s (*90210*, *Melrose Place*), creating related spinoffs (*The Carrie Diaries*), or acquiring shows led by beloved leads from that time period such as *Ringer*, fronted by Sarah Michelle Gellar of *Buffy, the Vampire Slayer* fame, and *Hart of Dixie*, led by Rachel Bilson from *The O.C.* This cycle of programs experienced a range of responses, most ultimately canceled after a season or two. None re-captured the dedicated viewership that was attained by the suite of teen shows that started in the late 1990s.

The question of how race and ethnicity factored into audience-hailing strategies has been explored little in relation to this genre or television programming more broadly in media industries. In his analysis of the announcement of the merger between UPN and The WB, Jonathan Gray (2006) begins to explore this topic. As Gray considers the implications of the impending merger, he (correctly) predicts that The CW will likely prioritize the successful shows geared toward White teens over the successful shows geared toward African-Americans. As noted by Brittney Cooper and Aymar Jean Christian, networks have a tendency to “pimp the ‘urban demographic’ for ratings and money” mainly when they are struggling (Cooper, 2013). Channels as diverse as Fox,

HBO, VH1, and Showtime have produced content that generates buzz by telling stories of non-White, non-heterosexual, non-middle- or upper-class characters – at least until their budgets broadened. Then they typically shifted to “development slates for ‘higher quality’ programs” (Christian, 2013). This trend, which seems to have declined somewhat in the 2010s alongside the advent of investment in prestige programming led by Black creatives (Donald Glover’s *Atlanta* on FX and Issa Rae’s *Insecure* on HBO, for example), was embodied on a network programming level by the decisions made during the merger between UPN and WB.

It is worth noting that during this period, The CW also began to tap into a slightly different millennial market that was interested in superhero portrayals (once Ostroff was succeeded by Mark Pedowitz, he declared that the network was broadening from targeting women, 18-34 to all adults between the ages 18 and 34). To date, this genre (anchored by *Arrow*, which premiered in 2012, and its associated shows) is where The CW has found more steady footing. Significantly, in any of these public declarations framing programming pivots, race is almost never alluded to directly. Notable exceptions occurred when the NAACP and other social advocacy organizations applied pressure (and garnered media coverage for said pressure) to the networks, a topic that I will return to shortly. Relatedly, it is relevant to note that during the aughts, the shift toward multicultural, colorblind casting began to build momentum. Network spokespeople were quoted about making a diversity push, expressing sentiments like “we’ve gone out of our way in almost every show to ensure there’s a non-White presence,” saying that it is the “right thing to do, not just as broadcasters but as human beings” (Litvack, executive vice

president of current programming and scheduling at The WB, quoted in Long, 2002). Here, Litvack suggests that increasing diversity across The WB's programming is a priority, although he is referring mostly to casting practices to ensure visually diverse representation on programs.

To fully understand how Whiteness operated as the naturalized mode in the serialized teen drama genre being analyzed here, awareness of the colorblind casting phenomenon that picked up in prominence during the mid-aughts is crucial. As noted above Warner (2015) generatively considers hailing strategies and the implications of colorblind casting in this era. While The CW floundered trying to understand how to reach its imagined audience—and during this floundering, the network's leadership decidedly favored White-led programming over more diverse programming—ABC (and most visibly, Shonda Rhimes) identified and popularized a method of attracting women in the coveted 18-34 demographic and incorporating more racially diverse characters: colorblind casting. Through the popularity and success of *Grey's Anatomy* (ABC, 2005-), the network received verifiable proof of the viability of this strategy.

Warner utilizes production cultures-focused analysis of *Grey's Anatomy* and The CW's *The Vampire Diaries* (2009-2017) to illustrate how the phenomenon of colorblind casting works and how it became more prominent in the television industry during this period. As Warner illustrates, network executives conceived of shows that starred people of color as potential successes if they possessed characters who, “despite their [racial or ethnic identity], can still resonate with White viewers” (35). This essential characteristic of the practice of colorblind casting or blindcasting can be seen in shows of the aughts

explicitly targeting teens as well, notably those on The CW. While it can increase visual diversity on screen, colorblind casting does not necessarily present multi-dimensional characters of color who experience life with attention paid to nuances and particularities of actual, lived experiences of members of the race or ethnicity group they represent. The way colorblind casting is implemented, with an emphasis on physical representation of diversity and perhaps, in some cases, a consideration of whether the actor's lived experiences correlate with the character they are representing, results in decreased racial specificity (a more recent term used by Aymar Jean Christian in his 2018 book, *Open TV*) and authenticity. This means that, even if characters are played by actors outside of White-dominated hegemonic ideals, the portrayals are often shallow or lack nuance. Norms associated with White life still dominate storylines and central concerns of characters, while discussions of racially specific experiences that might resonate with non-White individuals are absent. This practice is pertinent to the comparison between *Felicity* and *Gossip Girl*, especially since, as noted above, the difference in air dates means that *Felicity* was created before colorblind casting was an industrial trend.

To better understand what strategies were being implemented in the late 1990s, during the time that *Felicity* premiered, below I include quotes from a profile on the co-presidents of marketing at The WB at the time. Bob Bibb and Lew Goldstein, who were heralded at the time (Stanley, 1999) for having a unique ability to understand how to capture the attention of the hard-to-reach 12-34-year-old audience. In their discussion of key elements of their strategy, race is never explicitly discussed. The duo had worked alongside Jamie Kellner at Fox during the launch of that network, and they joined

Kellner, who later moved to The WB to help replicate the success of creating a new network to compete with the traditional ones. The central feature of their success was identified as the creation of a “sense of place and personality,” or a core brand identity that appealed to their target audience (Stanley, 1999). Shortly, I will analyze marketing materials for these programs to understand what the sense of place and personality reveal about how these executives believed they could best attract and retain the imagined, White, affluent, and young audience. Key tactics of their strategy included a recognition that young people responded more to “sex appeal” than sex (something the duo believed while at Fox), presenting the “emotional core” of a show in the marketing materials, and the recognition that they could break with established industrial tendencies and create new trends by using music by original artists, instead of using “sound-alikes,” (Stanley, 1999). By the time The WB petered out and merged with UPN to create The CW, its parent companies were hoping that slight changes in strategy, supported by the pre-existing audiences from each network, would carry the new network to the previous heights of success experienced when the networks were new.

The transition from The WB and UPN to The CW proved less than straightforward. Executive leadership at the newly formed CW network struggled to be seen as a successful venture by market analysts and commentators (Consoli, 2007; Hibberd, 2007; Krukowski, 2008). *Gossip Girl* explicitly targeted young, affluent women and succeeded in cementing its position in the cultural zeitgeist, despite being plagued by negative coverage in trade publications that expressed skepticism and doubt about the show’s racy marketing campaigns, content, and relatively low ratings even in the face of

prominent, buzzy media coverage. Ratings were consistently lower than shows airing at the same time [in 2009, *Gossip Girl* was averaging 2.4 million total viewers during its Monday-night time slot, compared with *One Tree Hill* which fluctuated between 2.8 and 4.3 million viewers during its three years on The WB (before it was carried over to The CW), and compared with the 20 million who watched ABC's *Dancing with the Stars* and the 6 million who watched NBC's *Chuck* (Hampp, 2009)]. During the time period, Nielsen ratings did not yet fully take into account viewing methods beyond traditional appointment viewing; while *Gossip Girl* "hover[ed] around No. 100 in terms of its broadcast TV viewership [...]," when multiplatform viewing was taken into consideration, it ranked fifteenth, according to an Optimedia survey (Hampp, 2009). Due in part to this disconnect between traditional ranking methods and the ways in which the show was successfully influencing and connecting with its target audience, it was constantly scrutinized in the trades (Moore, 2008; Garvin, 2009; Hibberd, 2008) perceived as representative of The CW's failure to authentically capture the young, female audience it previously was able to capture in its former life as The WB. Commentators observed that at The WB, part of the success seemed to result from its focus on creating relatable storylines that tied to specific experiences members of the target audience could connect with; this was believed to be missing from The CW's flagship teen show. If the availability of relatable content for the imagined, White audience decreased, the existence of relatable portrayals of non-White characters disappeared almost entirely.

To more fully understand each program from a critical media industry studies perspective, in the following section I will more closely analyze interviews and coverage focused on the voices of executive leadership at the networks and on the specific shows. This will provide insight on which perspectives, specifically with regard to race and gender but also in relation to broader socio-cultural trends, were privileged in the production of each program.

THE MAKING OF: FELICITY

The co-creators of *Felicity*, J.J. Abrams and Matt Reeves, were supported by Imagine Entertainment's television department, headed up at the time by Ron Howard, Tony Krantz, and Brian Grazer. The resulting executive production team at the start of the first season of the show was comprised of White, heterosexual, cisgender men, many of whom had been in the entertainment industry for a not-insignificant period of time. That said, several of the actors have commented that the co-creators' relative youth made them more approachable, accessible, and open to suggestions (Dixon, 1999). In the third season, a woman, Jennifer Levin, who had been part of the writing staff since the start of the show, was promoted to executive producer status alongside this group, partially as a response to Abrams' attention being drawn to other projects (specifically *Alias*, which premiered on ABC during the Fall 2001 television season). For the most part, the lead creatives on the show were homogenous and lacked diverse perspectives.

Although the co-creators and creative leadership of *Felicity* never publicly commented on the role of race or ethnicity either behind-the-scenes or within the diegesis

of the program, toward the start of the show, the topic was broached in trade publications and interviews in more consumer-oriented publications. In mainstream media this was, at least in part, precipitated by a spotlight shed by a range of minority-ethnic advocacy groups, who deployed different strategies to advocate for more diverse representation on screen, vacillating from “publicly strident” to publicly laudatory in tone. Their strategies included channel boycotts and media campaigns, designed to signal to media and advertising industry professionals the importance of making “significant moves to reassure their minority-ethnic viewers” (Beltrán, et. al, 2005). As observed by Beltrán, Park, Puente, Ross, and Downing, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) has “held a dominant role [in advocacy efforts], both as the oldest such group, the largest, and as the single African American advocacy group” (151).² In 1999, the NAACP engaged in one of the more combative approaches to this advocacy work, releasing a “denunciatory monitoring report” drawing attention to the fact that a “virtual Whitewash in programming” occurred across the fall broadcast lineup (Haynes, et. al, 1999). The NAACP threatened, for the first time since protesting *Amos ‘n’ Andy* in 1966, to sue the major networks and boycott their advertisers unless more prominent representation was achieved.

Zondra Hughes, in *Ebony* (2000), addressed the trend that the NAACP report identified as Whitewashing in the 2000 fall season of television, specifically calling out

² This is interesting to note because, in 1999, although the Hispanic population in the U.S. was officially the second fastest growing demographic after the Asian and Pacific Islander population, (United States Census Bureau, 1999) the NAACP was still perceived to be the group that required public-facing responses in the media. This is possibly because of the group’s dominance and visibility established over time; another possible factor is the group’s “publicly strident” tactics.

ABC, CBS, NBC and Fox. Hughes commented that the fall season lineup included more Black representation than had been evident in 1999, but highlighted a tendency of both networks and cable channels to include people of color on-screen without increasing the number of diverse perspectives responsible for the production of the shows. During this period, a sense of trepidation about diversifying casts on-screen was supported by widespread industry beliefs in segregated viewing habits and fears of “adding too much color [potentially] poison[ing] the formula” of widely successful shows (examples included *Seinfeld*, *Friends*, and *Frasier*) (Hughes, 2000). Yvette Lee Bowser, executive producer and creator of The WB’s *For Your Love*, a Black-led sitcom about three couples and their relationships, highlighted the importance of having people of color in leadership positions at the network level:

“When network executives sit down in the programming room and select the programs that will be put on the air, there are very few African-American, Asian, or Latino faces in those rooms with actual power to influence decisions. The people they choose, the positions they put them in and the amount of power that they have is still very limited” (as quoted in Hughes).

Another contemporary observer, Darnell Hunt, who led the research in the NAACP report that precipitated the boycott threat pressuring the industry to diversify its onscreen representation in the 2000 season, commented that these types of changes tended to be cyclical. He maintained that the networks “get criticized and make a few token changes. [...] When everyone forgets [the diversity issue], the networks go back to

business as usual.” This was the backdrop for the decisions that determined how *Felicity* operated in regard to diversity-related subjects.

Due to the fact that the creative leadership of *Felicity* did not publicly comment on considerations of diversity, it is particularly worthwhile to examine comments made by other pertinent executive leadership who could have affected the show’s outcomes. Jamie Kellner, the CEO of The WB at the time, and Suzanne Daniels, the network’s entertainment president, stated in response to the NAACP report and threatened boycott that the network has “done a great job,” citing “key minority roles in such shows as *Felicity*” (Kellner, as quoted in Huff, 1999). Additionally, they stated that the network “has increased its number of minorities on the air and has more such shows planned” (Huff, 1999). By the 2001 season, however, the network’s lineup only had “one show with a predominantly [B]lack cast, down from four last fall” (Levin, 2001). Daniels commented, in response to the NAACP report findings, that the network as a whole “made a huge, concerted effort [...] to cast every show in a multiethnic fashion” (Levin, 2001).

It would seem that Hunt’s concern about networks’ de-prioritizing inclusivity was proven accurate within a year of the NAACP report. Although the report meant that network executives were faced with more questions from reporters related to race and representation on screen, it seems as though showrunners and lead creatives at The WB were shielded from similar pressures. However, questions about the role of race or ethnicity did make their way to someone involved with *Felicity* creatively: these inquiries seem to have fallen to Tangi Miller, the actress who plays the only non-White series

regular (best friend to Felicity and pre-med student Elena Tyler) over the course of the show. The fact that members of the media were interested in questions related to race is noteworthy, as is the fact that these types of questions were directed toward someone with relatively little power in terms of casting and story development. This points to consistency, within the media, toward placing responsibility for questions related to diversity on people whose identities are marginalized.

MARKETING *FELICITY*

The WB leadership envisioned *Felicity* as a logical extension of their successful programming to date, specifically *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Dawson's Creek*. The network invested in promotion of the show with that vision in mind. Focus groups and industry analysts were fans and optimists about the show's trajectory when previewing the pilot, and the lead programming and advertising executives decided to invest heavily in an advertising campaign, "bombarding city dwellers with closer to \$5-million worth of billboards, subway posters, and the sides of buses" (Rochlin, 1998). The series was identified by Paul Schulman, a respected television ad buyer at the time, as worthy of early endorsement which "ignite[d] The WB's promotion campaign" (Carter, 1998). Schulman is quoted in *The New York Times* endorsing the show, based on his preview of the pilot episode and his impression of series lead, Keri Russell. He was noted as contacting several of his clients—Ralston Purina, Gap, and Pier One—and successfully pitching them all on becoming sponsors of the series (Carter, 1998).

Series co-creator Abrams was quoted at the time, saying “the one thing I regret is that there’s not a chance of having people discover *Felicity* for themselves. Having said that, I understand the realities of marketing. [...] But if people get sick of it before they’ve even seen it, I’ll be upset,” (Abrams in Rochlin, 1998). In addition to marketing the show as standalone must-see television, The WB’s teen shows were marketed as a set—Goldstein, one of the co-presidents of marketing at the network, asserted that, even though the shows had differences, they “take on the same impression. [...] They belong together,” (quoted in *Ad Age*, 1999). One unnamed element of this impression is Whiteness. In order to determine how non-Whiteness existed or operated in these White spaces, I focused on the video campaigns to find moments where Blackness appeared. Through the limited and scattered inclusions of Black actors, a pattern wherein they are othered while simultaneously mined for the potential profit of cultivating a “multicultural” aesthetic became visible.

	7 p.m.	7:30 p.m.	8 p.m.	8:30 p.m.	9 p.m.	9:30 p.m.
Sunday	<i>7th Heaven</i>	<i>7th Heaven</i>	<i>Sister, Sister</i>	<i>Smart Guy</i>	<i>Unhappily Ever After</i>	<i>The Army Show</i>
Monday	<i>7th Heaven</i>	<i>7th Heaven</i>	<i>Hyperion Bay</i>	<i>Hyperion Bay</i>	Local	Local
Tuesday	<i>Buffy the Vampire Slayer</i>	<i>Buffy the Vampire Slayer</i>	<i>Felicity</i>	<i>Felicity</i>	Local	Local
Wednesday	<i>Dawson’s Creek</i>	<i>Dawson’s Creek</i>	<i>Charmed</i>	<i>Charmed</i>	Local	Local
Thursday			<i>The Wayans Bros.</i>	<i>The Jamie Foxx Show</i>	<i>The Steve Harvey Show</i>	<i>For Your Love</i>

Illustration A: Programming schedule for The WB’s Fall 1998 season.

The 1999 fall season promotional video, “Faces of The WB,” demonstrates and embodies the network’s conception of its shows (and the stars of each show) as parts of a cohesive whole. In the promo, the young stars of *Dawson’s Creek*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *7th Heaven*, *Charmed*, *Felicity*, and *The Jamie Foxx Show* (which was part of the Black programming block) all pose and dance around a studio setting, with many of the actors interacting with cast members of other shows (Katie Holmes from *Dawson’s Creek* and Barry Watson from *7th Heaven* embrace, for example). The only actors from *Felicity* included are Keri Russell, Scott Foley, and Scott Speedman; this is on par with the number of actors included from each of the shows, but it is worth noting that Tangi Miller is not included and that the only person of color in the promo is Jamie Foxx. He does not interact with any of the other stars of the network’s shows, either, which suggests that in creating the promo, he and his program, perhaps, were not conceived of as “tak[ing] on the same impression” in the way that Goldstein described. In an extended version of the promo, Black characters from the network’s shows are shown interacting exclusively amongst themselves; Tangi Miller appears in this promotional video toward the start for just under a second but does not appear again (see still in illustration A; “WB Promo – 1999 – Faces”). This reaffirms that, although the overarching network strategy for promoting these shows leaned on aesthetic cohesion and a sense that the characters and programs all fit together, non-White characters do not fully fit into this vision of cohesion—it applies specifically to White characters and White-led shows. At the same time, the network highlights through a surface-level inclusion the presence of non-White

actors, thereby emphasizing a non-specific sense of diversity while avoiding racial specificity.

The separation between White and non-White characters carried into the 2000 “The Night is Young” promotional campaign and the extended 2001 “My Generation” promotional campaign, where Miller is on screen for one second (which, again, is in keeping with the appearances of other series’ regulars; however, many of her White counterparts are revisited in additional shots) and Steve Harvey, titular lead of *The Steve Harvey Show*, one of the network’s anchor comedies, makes an appearance through a peep hole nearly two minutes in (Vlada, 2010). He is clearly separated from the rest of the stars, which likely had to do with his age (and possibly the difference in genre for his show; his is the only comedy represented), but also was likely affected by the fact that he is Black, and does not gel with the overarching, predominantly White, WB vision. The fact that he was included despite his difference in age and genre from the rest of the actors included in the promo again speaks to the netlet’s aforementioned interest in appearing to be “multicultural”—in order to include more non-White actors to present diversity, actors outside of the broader cohesive conception of The WB’s suite of shows were included. In the shorter, more widely distributed version, neither Miller nor any Black stars appear in the promo (WB “My Generation” Image Campaign, 2001).

As noted above, the marketing of *Felicity* was primarily conducted through a large, \$5 million advertising spend inclusive of “outdoor boards, print campaigns, and television spots” leading up to its premiere. This echoed the successful strategy employed promoting the network’s first big hit, *Dawson’s Creek*, and reinforced the idea that the

program is one piece of the broader, cohesive suite of teen programs of The WB. The marketing campaigns centering *Felicity* specifically do not feature Tangi Miller, and focus instead on the series lead, Keri Russell, and her two love interests, played by Scott Speedman and Scott Foley. Whiteness became the unmarked norm in the campaigns specifically for the show, as well as in the broader video campaigns that feature actors from all of The WB's teen shows airing during this cycle of the genre.

Analysis of these promotional materials illuminated ways in which Blackness is not integrated with attention to any sort of specificity. Gray's analysis of discursive practices and representations of Blackness is useful to engage with to tease this out further: a representational philosophy that hybridizes his pluralist discourse with an assimilationist discourse – that is, the Black characters are operating in much the same way as the White characters with their Blackness muted, *and* they are portrayed as separated from everyone else – is operating here. Although this does not seem indicative of an environment wherein comprehensive rendering of the interiority of Black people can occur, I argue in the coming pages that there is more space for specificity in this cycle of the teen drama than there is in the following one.



Illustration B: Elena Tyler in the 1999 WB promo (0:27)

THE MAKING OF: *GOSSIP GIRL*

Dawn Ostroff, president of The CW when it launched, was notably involved in acquiring *Gossip Girl* for the network's first pilot season. She, Rick Haskins (CW executive vice president of marketing and digital programs), and other key executive leadership recognized the book series as authentically tapping into the digital audience and capturing "how people talk about each other" (Bruce & Rose, 2012). The ability exhibited by *Gossip Girl* to tap into the digital audience with a multiplatform approach is echoed by the network's larger structure, which Ostroff described as a "benefit of being a two-year-old network" (Smith, 2008). They also noted its potential as the heir apparent to the "sexy teen soap" genre. Once Josh Schwartz and Stephanie Savage, fresh off of the success of *The O.C.* (Fox, 2003-2007), signed on as executive producers, CW's executive

team felt confident that they had identified their flagship show targeting the 18-34 demographic.

The writing team was assembled after the cast was secured; online blogs called for Blake Lively to be cast as Serena Van der Woodsen, while Leighton Meester dyed her naturally blond hair brown for the role of Blair Waldorf. The relatively inexperienced Chace Crawford had to read over 30 times to convince casting executives that he was the right person for the role of Nate Archibald, while Ed Westwick was the only person executive producers Savage and Schwartz were willing to have play Chuck Bass. These stories of casting decisions are well-known by fans of the show. Stories that were less widely circulated relate to whether showrunners or network executives considered questions of inclusivity while designing their new flagship program.

In a 2017 retrospective on *Gossip Girl* in *Vulture*, executive producers Savage and Schwartz were joined by executive producer Josh Safran to look back on the show. One of the few regrets they shared was the predominantly-White cast, although when the topic was broached, Safran's tongue-in-cheek statement was as follows:

“When I look back on *Gossip Girl*, the only things I regret were not as much representation for people of color and gay story lines,” said Safran. “Those are the two things I think we probably could have delved into more deeply, but other than that, I only regret things like not showing Chuck finger Blair and the dildos and other sexual stuff.” – Safran, in *Vulture*.

Even with the benefit of hindsight, consideration of racial, ethnic and non-heterosexual character development is made light of and notably shallow. When the show

was being promoted during its first season and prior, the casting stories that dominated trade publications focused on which White, attractive, and heterosexual celebrities were being courted to take on the roles—neither showrunners nor network spokespersons generally spoke to the trades or consumer-oriented press about considerations of diversity in the program’s casting.

According to Warner’s (2015) ethnographic study of casting processes, although casting teams comprised of talent agents, producers, and casting directors do much of the legwork regarding talent acquisition, executive producers, or showrunners, have final say on the “overall look of the series as well as the casting of the lead actors,” which is to say that, even if other producers have more direct influence over supporting parts, the overall vision of the show and approach to representation comes from executive leadership (40). That the show’s executive leadership, even in their later reflections about the show, are not overly disappointed that they did not make more diverse casting decisions, and network executives were simultaneously decreasingly interested in actively attracting and retaining their so-called “urban” audience (by which they mean Black and non-White, viewers) together suggests a general disregard for inclusive casting practices. This is echoed by aforementioned broader “colorblind” casting trends on other networks, described by Warner as a practice wherein racial specificity is not determined when writing for a character. In the case of *Gossip Girl*, it seems that without racial specificity baked into conceptions of characters, diverse racial representation did not happen.

The showrunners, Savage and Schwartz, both White and heterosexual, come from middle- to upper-class backgrounds (Savage’s character, Seth Cohen from *The O.C.*, was

inspired by his own experiences). They were joined by four White, heterosexual men in their executive production of the show: Bob Levy and Leslie Morgenstein of Alloy Entertainment, John Stephens, and the aforementioned Joshua Safran. A lack of diversity at the executive leadership level can diminish consideration of racial specificity and authentic inclusivity and lead to a homogenization of ideas broadly (Henderson, 2011). Additionally, the writing staff over the course of the show did not consist of many people with diverse backgrounds. As pointed out by Henderson, who actually wrote for *Gossip Girl*, each writers' room is unique because it is heavily influenced by the voices in the room, and specifically by the more powerful writers in the room. Power in this space is determined by a range of factors, but most often correlates with executive producer status (Henderson, 2011).

This information, taken with knowledge of the executive creative team overseeing the development and writing of *Gossip Girl*, suggests that the worldviews that would have dominated in the writers' room were predominately framed by the experiences of White, affluent, cisgender and heterosexual people. Henderson discusses the challenges presented when, for example, a "series with a predominantly White cast decides to introduce a Black character, and there is a Black writer on the writing staff," which often results in the Black writer being asked to "write that particular script in a political dance in which the head writer/executive producer avoids discussion of why such an assignment was made" (151). The challenge presented to the Black writer in such a situation centers around consideration of whether or not they will accept the task. If they do not accept, they run the risk of being labeled as someone who is "too sensitive about race" while if

they do, they might be “pigeonholed as a writer who can only write Black characters” or “Black material” (152). Additionally, Henderson sheds light on the tendency during the mid- to late-aughts for networks to rely on “‘multicultural’ hiring,” which often results in inclusion based “more on visual difference than on cultural difference,” which is consistent with findings in Warner’s book (152). It follows that, because the ultimate decisions related to the direction of shows and specific characters needed approval from executive producers or head writers, writers of color have the additional challenge of attempting to infuse racial authenticity or specificity and convincing lead writers that diversity beyond visual representation is necessary.

Since neither the network’s executive leadership nor the executive producers of the show commented publicly on the diversity of the cast of *Gossip Girl* during its time on the air, a consideration of how the network more broadly approached racial and ethnic representation is a useful way to illuminate how the creators and decision-makers involved with the show were approaching related questions. Generally, the fact that none of the key decision-makers were commenting on the Whiteness of the world created in the show, despite the show’s geo-specificity (New York City is the most racially and ethnically diverse city in the country), suggests either an active disinterest in or, potentially just an ambivalence about, racial and ethnic diversity.

As observed by a few television writers, as the network matured after its first full season, Black-centered shows were systematically excised from the lineup (*St. Petersburg Times*, 2008), with *Everybody Hates Chris* (2005-9) and *Girlfriends*’ spin-off *The Game* (2006-9) continuing as the only Black-led shows until the end of the 2008-

2009 season. During their final season, those shows were also moved to the notoriously tough Friday night programming slot. In a 2008 report, a follow-up to the 1999 findings, the NAACP announced findings declaring that major networks “stalled in their efforts to further ethnic diversity on-screen and off” (Associated Press). In the report, NAACP president at the time, Benjamin Todd Jealous, pointed to the “course charted by The CW,” saying that “UPN and WB provided an opportunity for young talent of color in this town.... They merged into a network which appears to have systematically cut programming targeted to communities of color” (Jealous, as quoted by the Associated Press). This is a particularly noteworthy inclusion, as in the earlier NAACP report, The WB did not receive a specific call-out: this suggests that The CW’s practices stood out more prominently and problematically than the network’s predecessor. Although The CW declined to comment on any of these findings, Ostroff and CW spokespersons in other spaces talked about the importance of the “urban” focused programming, about how the sitcom broadly was experiencing decline in viewership, and that the network was simply following trends in eliminating said programs. Ostroff also is quoted denying that The CW was moving away from “urban” comedies (Garvin, 2009; Hinckley, 2008)³.

³ Notably, The CW unceremoniously canceled eight-year, Black-led, comedic series *Girlfriends* immediately following the 2007-08 Writers Guild of America strike without a proper series finale because it would be “too expensive” (TV Series Finale). Viewership declined after the series, which originally aired Monday nights on UPN, was moved to Sunday nights on The CW in the block of Black-led programming. The CW moved Black-led shows back to Mondays in October 2006, but ratings remained lower.

	7 p.m.	7:30 p.m.	8 p.m.	8:30 p.m.	9 p.m.	9:30 p.m.
Sunday	<i>CW Now</i>	<i>Online Nation</i>	<i>Life is Wild</i>	<i>Life is Wild</i>	<i>America's Next Top Model (reruns)</i>	<i>America's Next Top Model (reruns)</i>
Monday	<i>Everybody Hates Chris</i>	<i>Aliens in America</i>	<i>Girlfriends</i>	<i>The Game</i>	Local	Local
Tuesday	<i>Beauty and the Geek</i>	<i>Beauty and the Geek</i>	<i>Reaper</i>	<i>Reaper</i>	Local	Local
Wednesday	<i>America's Next Top Model</i>	<i>America's Next Top Model</i>	<i>Gossip Girl</i>	<i>Gossip Girl</i>	Local	Local
Thursday			<i>Smallville</i>	<i>Smallville</i>	<i>Supernatural</i>	<i>Supernatural</i>
Friday	<i>WWE Friday Night Smackdown!</i>	<i>WWE Friday Night Smackdown!</i>	<i>WWE Friday Night Smackdown!</i>	<i>WWE Friday Night Smackdown!</i>	<i>WWE Friday Night Smackdown!</i>	<i>WWE Friday Night Smackdown!</i>

Illustration C: Programming schedule for The CW's Fall 2007 season.

MARKETING *GOSSIP GIRL*

Early in The CW's history, network executives decided to invest in promoting *Gossip Girl* as a flagship show. Rick Haskin, executive vice president of marketing and brand strategy at CW, talked about The CW shows thematically being linked as "TV to talk about." However, *Gossip Girl* was marketed as an individual show more often than it was connected to the rest of the network's programming (Elliott, et. al, 2009). In promotional efforts, during upfronts and other appearances toward the start of the show, the four main actors, the adult characters, and the showrunners, Josh Schwartz and Stephanie Savage, were the primary spokespersons for the show. At The CW upfronts in 2007, in addition to the all-White leads of the show, Nicole Fiscella, an actress of Indian and St. Lucian descent (who plays a small, albeit recurring, part as one of Blair's

sidekicks, Isabel) were doing press interviews and representing the show. However, the fact that her character has hardly any lines over the course of the show compared with the other actors makes it seem plausible that her appearance was about diversifying the look of the cast in promotional settings. Although she is integrated into the larger group, unlike Tangi Miller in The WB promos analyzed above, Fiscella did not play a main character, which made her presence almost superfluous to promotion of the show's contents; her inclusion appears based on promoting an appearance of diversity. Her character also briefly appears in the promotional trailer for the first season, making her one of three non-White people in the trailer (she is joined by another of Blair's sidekicks and an actor playing a doorman). The universe being put forth by the show during its debut is mostly White, attractive, clearly affluent, and distinctly aspirational. This atmosphere intensifies in the poster campaigns. The tone of this marketing campaign, when compared with the doe-eyed and fresh-faced emphases of the campaign built around Keri Russell's *Felicity*, projected more confidence, assertiveness, wealth, and sex appeal. It still represented Whiteness as the dominant mode but in a flashier and more class-conscious manner.

The first two seasons' poster campaigns (see illustrations D and E) center the attractiveness and attractions between the four main Upper East Side-dwelling characters, Blair (Leighton Meester), Serena (Blake Lively), Chuck (Ed Westwick), and Nate (Chace Crawford); they also include Dan (Penn Badgley) and Jenny Humphrey (Taylor Momsen), the show's relatively down-to-earth Brooklyn dwellers. Although Jessica Szohr, the actress who played Vanessa Abrams, was added as a series regular by the

midpoint of the first season and could have been incorporated in promotional materials as early as the mid-season break during season 1, the biracial actress is not included in the poster campaigns until the third season. It is also during the third season that the poster campaigns change from being sexual in nature to an even more “glamorous and enviable aesthetic” (Ivie, 2017). This was conveyed through a wider shot of the characters in the same room, all dressed as they would be for a high society event in the program itself, in highly fashionable clothing with opulent accessories. That Szohr is included in the third season, once the emphasis of the ads is that the characters are “living a life most others wished they had,” (Haskins, as quoted in Ivie, 2017), sublimates her distinctiveness from the other characters. Narratively, Szohr’s character is based in Brooklyn and is presented as a counterbalance to the opulent wealth of the Upper East siders who comprise the majority of the cast. Although there is limited racial specificity imbued in her characterization (which I will explore further through textual analysis in chapter 3), she is represented as markedly different from her White co-leads in ways that center her personality and her class status. The ad campaign de-emphasizes her differences and styles her in a manner that fits with the rest of the characters, even though her character is not typically invited to the types of high society events that would require such fashion-forward clothing. The season four campaign follows suit.

While she was incorporated into the world of her White costars, Szohr was styled to fit in with the overall expensive, high fashion, and unattainable aesthetic of her peers. This is the case even though a precedent exists in the promotional campaigns to disrupt the cohesion of the “one percent of the one percent” (Ivie, 2017) aesthetic. Previously,

accommodations for character specificity were made in styling another of the show's leads, Momsen, who was decreasingly interested in acting and increasingly committed to constructing her image as the frontwoman in her band, The Pretty Reckless. However, Szohr's character is not imbued with any specificity that would suggest she operates differently than the Upper East Siders with whom she leads the show. Further, her edgier, less expensive aesthetic preferences on the show itself are erased in these campaigns so that she can fit in with the dominant mode of affluent Whiteness. This marketing decision echoes the evasion of racial specificity that exists in her character's development over the course of the show, as I describe in the next chapter. This decision coincides temporally with and is emblematic of the larger industrial trend highlighted by Warner (2015), that of colorblind casting, which is a departure from The WB's approach to representation. That Szohr's character Vanessa was White in the book series by von Ziegesar and reimagined as a biracial woman in the show compounds the influence of the larger socio-cultural post-racial moment to which Warner refers.



Illustration D: Season 1 poster featuring Blair, Nate, Serena, Dan, Chuck, Jenny.

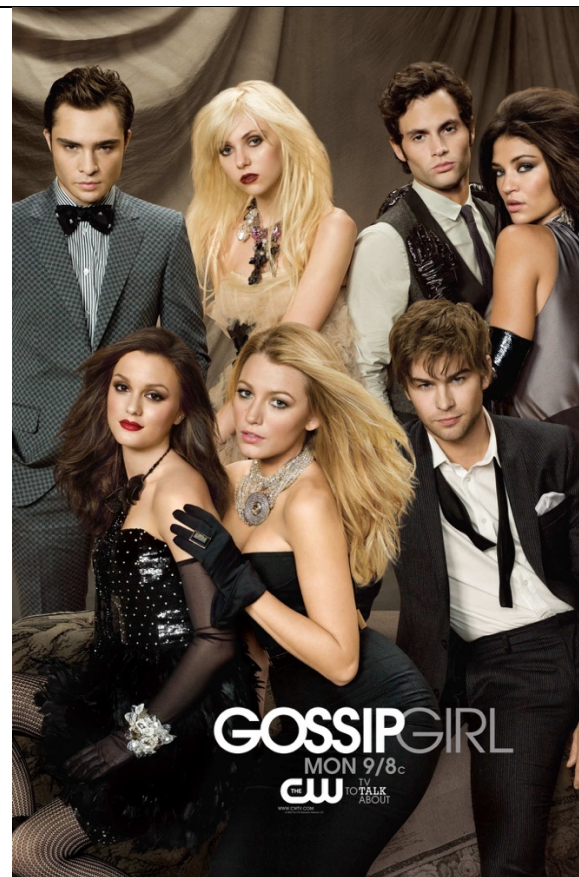


Illustration E: Season 3 poster, with more polished aesthetic, featuring the addition of Vanessa on the far right.

DISCUSSION

The preceding analysis of The WB and The CW's approach to the inclusion of race and ethnicity in flagship programs, with the goal of attracting both teen and young adult audiences, seeks to address the question of whether the networks, working to attract a teen audience between the late 1990s and the early 2010s, demonstrated a shift in

approach over that period. In general, it seems as though The WB was cognizant of racial difference and interested in maintaining the appearance of making space for non-White characters. However, non-White characters were often segmented in promotional materials and represented as only interacting with each other. Tangi Miller's character was the only non-White series regular on *Felicity*, yet her appearances in network promotional materials keep her isolated from her White co-stars and the stars of the other programs. The effect of the promos is the normalization of Whiteness as dominant and preferred, with non-Whiteness commodified through the courtship of Black audiences but separated out in promotional materials. Although Miller references that the writers and showrunners incorporated her suggestions about Elena's character at different points (Dixon, 1999; Murphy, 2018), the dominant racial identity in the writers' room was White. This suggests that it was more likely that Miller's opinion would be crucial if there was any interest in adding racial specificity to her character. Additionally, Miller was often burdened with the responsibility of addressing concerns about the relative lack of diversity on *Felicity* while showrunners were not asked the same questions in the press, and network representatives worked to sidestep questions related to the role of diversity in their programming. When they did address such questions, they dealt with them by gesturing toward the network's Black-led shows—despite the fact that they were often placed on difficult programming nights and grouped together on one night separate from the more highly prioritized teen-centered shows (until their eventual cancellations, that is).

The transition that occurred when UPN and The WB merged, creating The CW, coincides with a shift in attitudes more broadly toward inclusion without racial specificity. While the Black-led shows on The WB demonstrated more authentic, or at least, specific representation of Black characters, non-White characters were included on The CW through characters who were incorporated in a way that most closely aligns with Herman Gray's discourse of invisibility or assimilation (2004), wherein "shows [...] integrate individual [B]lack characters into hegemonic White worlds void of any hint of African-American traditions, social struggle, racial conflicts, and cultural difference" (85). Although Gray is speaking about discourses of visibility in television narratives specifically, the same principle applies to the network's "multicultural" approach to casting described by Dawn Ostroff, which undoubtedly influenced *Gossip Girl*. Warner's study on colorblind casting is illuminating in understanding the approach: as she effectively articulates (2010), colorblindness "is inherently seductive in a well-intentioned society full of liberal guilt" (6).

Ostroff and other CW executives were faced with more questions about the decreasing racial diversity on the network than The WB executives were during the late 1990s, despite the mounting pressure applied by race and ethnicity advocacy groups during the earlier period. This was as a result of the implementation of multicultural and, in cases like the casting of Vanessa on *Gossip Girl*, colorblind casting practices, which allowed for the appearance of attention to racial diversity without actually incorporating racial specificity or authenticity, thus reinscribing hegemonic Whiteness as the implicit norm or baseline culture. While The WB attempted to incorporate racial specificity at

different moments (albeit in small ways that largely only included Black and White representations, without significant additional ethnic diversity) over the course of its existence, The CW and its coinciding cycle of serialized teen television did not seem as concerned with these issues during this time period. There appeared to be less concern broadly with the inclusion of racial and ethnic diversity beyond the surface level. The notion that there still needs to be struggle over ideological hegemony in the production of culture seems less prominent a preoccupation during the more recent cycle of teen television as it manifested on The CW in the early 2010s as nationally, an increase in post-racial conceptions of equality were expressed.

Chapter Three: “But you’re not *Black Black*”: Racialized Identities over Time in Teen Dramas

Vanessa Abrams: So, tell me, what makes you better than me?

Blair Waldorf: Do you really want to know?

Vanessa: Yeah.

Blair: *Everything*. Generations of breeding and wealth had to come together to produce me. I have more in common with Marie Antoinette than with you. And granted, you may be popular at some step-Ivy safety school, but the fact is the rabble is still rabble and they need a queen.

The above exchange is excerpted from a *Gossip Girl*, season 3 episode 6, entitled “Enough About Eve.” In it, Black character Vanessa Abrams (whose race, interestingly, is never identified over the course of the show) has tricked Blair Waldorf into giving one of her trademark elitist rants into a hidden microphone. Blair Waldorf, one of the series’ main characters, often details the ways in which she is better than others, but her vitriol exhibited toward the one recurring non-White character on the show appears more consistently than it does for other characters. Narratively, Blair’s disdain for Vanessa stems from the latter’s inability to conform to the standards of Upper East Side living, replete with extreme wealth, trappings of membership of the highest socio-economic class in the U.S., and a general skill at playing by the rules implicitly understood by people born into Blair’s preferred echelon of society. Although it is never identified as an additional source of tension between the characters, the unnamed but visual dominance of Whiteness in these spaces (fostered by casting and production decisions behind the

scenes) means that Vanessa's inability to fit in is even more visible (and offensive) to Blair. I begin my third chapter with this scene to demonstrate how race is narratively elided but still present in the second cycle of teen dramas on television. I will return to this scene later in the chapter to further examine how *Gossip Girl* engages with topics related to race while never explicitly naming it.

Broadly, this thesis aims to center consideration of race in the serialized teen drama on television in the 1990s and 2000s in order to add to the existing literature. It analyzes programs emblematic of the genre with attention to intersectional identity representation, specifically considering race and ethnicity as they are represented in these spaces. Although, as alluded to above and in the preceding chapters, the genre elides direct thematic engagement with racial difference from the hegemonic norm, when analyzed for racial implications, scenes like the one above reveal authorial perspectives about how race operates in a space determined to identify as post-racial. Post-racial ideologies, in a vein similar to post-feminist lines of thought, are deeply invested in the notion that race and tensions related to racial and ethnic concerns were resolved in the past and have little to no bearing on contemporary society and its formations.

As acknowledged in chapter one, in order to assess whether there has been any shift or progression in the ways in which race is engaged with, I selected two case studies, one from each network. The cases selected for this project, *Felicity* (The WB, 1998-2002) and *Gossip Girl* (The CW, 2007-2012) begin approximately a decade apart and span the majority of the period during which millennials were coming of age. My previous chapter posits that there was a shift in hailing strategies in teen programming

that incorporated decreased racial specificity alongside broadly multi-cultural representation tactics between the two cycles analyzed in this thesis. This chapter seeks to examine the programs themselves to see how race and ethnicity are utilized in the narrative and in decisions made by writers and producers. *Felicity* and *Gossip Girl* were both top shows for the teen audience during their respective air dates (*Entertainment Weekly*, 1999; *ABC Medianet*, 2008) and were prominently featured in much of each network's promotional materials, suggesting that they were central to the positioning of the network as geared toward America's teens. This chapter of my thesis seeks to determine how race and ethnicity are engaged with in the shows themselves to create a fuller understanding of how the networks sought to target their imagined audiences.

Although these shows, like many of their contemporaries, starred predominantly White casts, they each feature a person of color as a series regular. In *Felicity*, as discussed previously, that is Elena Tyler (Tangi Miller), a Black student who the titular character meets in her freshman year dormitory and builds a friendship with while they are both undertaking pre-medical studies. She quickly becomes one of Felicity's closest friends on the show. In *Gossip Girl*, the non-White regular character is Vanessa Abrams (Jessica Szohr), the childhood best friend of Dan Humphrey who critiques his new Upper East Side friends for their obscene wealth and corresponding elitism.

To analyze these shows, I engage in textual analysis of narrative arcs of these two characters. As noted above, over the history of the teen drama genre, diverse representation in terms of race and sexuality have been limited, and recurring characters who fall outside of Whiteness and heteronormativity are scarce. Typically, these types of

characters are introduced after the show establishes main (usually White and straight) characters; they are often an addition to established plot lines (new romantic interests, new kids in town, etc.). In the case of Vanessa, for example, the character was originally intended as a guest star until she was added as a series regular in episode 14 of the first season. The storylines pertaining to the selected characters, Elena and Vanessa, will be analyzed textually from an intersectional feminist perspective throughout three narrative arcs: their introduction, a moment dealing directly with their difference from the hegemonic norm, and their conclusion on the show. The questions I am seeking to answer include: how did The WB and its successor network, The CW, through the programs themselves, hail the emerging teen audience that came to be known as the millennials, and how does the articulation of non-White identities on-screen interact with the networks' conception of that audience? Between the 1990s and the 2010s, as shows in this genre experienced a shift from focusing on depicting a degree of verisimilitude or at least, relatability, toward an emphasized depiction of escapism, how does race factor into those considerations?

Although previous studies of the teen television genre have considered feminist viewpoints and concerns, they typically center a non-intersectional feminism that is notably focused on White female heterosexuality. In this study, I focus on exploring ways in which people of color operate within the genre. I am also particularly concerned with determining whether representation of these types of characters has changed over time and aim to interrogate what that implies regarding the time periods in which the characters and their storylines were created.

In order to address these questions, I focused on six episodes; three *Felicity* episodes and three *Gossip Girl* episodes. In order to get a sense of how each program framed the characters and non-Whiteness over time, the *Felicity* episodes are from seasons one and four; the *Gossip Girl* episodes are from seasons one, three, and four. The episodes from *Felicity* that are analyzed are “Hot Objects,” (Abrams & Silberling, 1998), “Drawing the Line (Part 1),” (Abrams & Pressman, 1998), and “Ben Don’t Leave” (Winer, McCarthy & Taub, 2002), and the episodes selected for further analysis from *Gossip Girl* are “The Handmaiden’s Tale,” (Queller & Buckley, 2007), “Enough About Eve,” (Stephens & Coburn, 2009), and “The Wrong Goodbye,” (Safran & Norris, 2011). These episodes highlight Elena and Vanessa’s entries into and departures from the worlds of their respective programs. I analyze each through an intersectional feminist lens, in order to determine how the show incorporates racialized identity in a recurring main character. Additionally, these episodes gesture toward each character’s broader arcs over the course of their time on the show.

POPULAR POINTS OF ANALYSIS IN TEEN TELEVISION AND USEFUL ADDITIONS

In part due to its alignment with the arena of women’s entertainment, which has historically been denigrated as frivolous and not worthy of serious consideration, teen television is considered a lower form of entertainment and has often been understudied in academic spaces. However, there are several scholars who have worked in this space, analyzing teen television as an important part of popular culture. Frequently, in discussing such programs, scholars have focused on audience or fan engagement, how

gender plays out in the genre (qualitatively and quantitatively), and specifically how female characters are represented. Often, this analysis centers female sexuality as it is depicted and acted upon in the narrative of each show. Analyses of this nature range from complimentary and cautiously optimistic to concerned about media messages targeting teens.

As explored in my introductory chapter, Ryalls' (2016) "Ambivalent aspirationalism in millennial postfeminist culture on *Gossip Girl*," analyzes socio-economic striving and postfeminist depictions through the lens of Jenny Humphrey (Taylor Momsen), a series regular for the first three seasons of the program. The article centers consideration of Jenny's relative innocence, which is narratively connected with her "sexual purity." This analysis combines two interlocking elements of societal hegemonic structures and examines their effect on the character. Ryalls asserts that the show depicts Jenny's value being primarily as her sexual virginity or White feminine innocence and demonstrates ways in which the show posits her "sexual purity" as different than that of her Upper East Side classmates. This ultimately suggests that White middle-class femininity is based in maintaining sexual purity and performing docility.

Ryalls' analysis importantly incorporates a degree of intersectional consideration in its discussion of postfeminist valuations of status; however, many of the writings focused on teen television focus primarily on assessing whether or not feminist messages or discourses can be discerned without necessarily engaging with interlocking identity factors. For example, Gamber's (2008) piece analyzing *Gilmore Girls* (The WB, 2000-2006), uses different waves of feminist theory as a focal point through which to analyze

the show's narrative arcs and character development. As scholars work to recuperate media objects considered to be less valuable because of their association with women viewers, they sometimes focus on gendered analysis that incidentally overlooks racial consideration. This tendency to overlook race and prioritize gender is an area of scholarship that the present paper aims to improve upon.

In order to understand some of the elements of how race manifests on-screen, scholarly analyses of other television genres are illuminating. Herman Gray's (2004) discourses of visibility are useful as a starting place. Gray names and articulates trends in discursive practices and representations of Blackness in his book *Watching Race: Television and the Struggle for Blackness*. He first foregrounds this analysis in a sociological history of African-Americans on broadcast television, ultimately arguing that the contemporary moment (which was then the early to mid-1990s) "continues to be shaped discursively by representations of race and ethnicity that began in the formative years of television" (74). Through this contextualization, Gray outlines three primary types of shows featuring African American characters with respect to their discursive practices: assimilation and the discourse of invisibility, pluralist or "separate-but-equal" discourses, and multiculturalism or diversity discourses. Assimilation is marked by a narrative tendency of shows to "integrate [B]lack characters into hegemonic [W]hite worlds void of any hint of African-American traditions, social struggle, racial conflicts, and cultural difference" (85). Pluralist discourses present Black characters who live in a homogenous and monolithic Black world and face similar conflicts to those in White shows. Multiculturalist discourses are shows that Gray suggests seldom, if ever, adjust

their perspectives to accommodate the idealized White middle-class gaze. Shows in this category are the ones he identifies as most authentically engaging with racial specificity in their portrayals of Blackness. The term “multicultural” was used in a different way by industry executives. For example, Dawn Ostroff, CW’s president of entertainment while *Gossip Girl* was on air, often discussed the network’s “concerted effort to program for a multicultural audience” in a way that essentially meant that non-White people were included in a visual capacity. In this sense, based on the network’s shows (for example, *Everybody Hates Chris*, which featured a predominantly Black cast, and *Veronica Mars*, which included a recurring Black character who did not have storylines about cultural differences), pluralist and assimilationist discourses were more dominant strategies.

Molina-Guzman’s (2010) discussion of the notion of sublimation of racial identity, which uses *Ugly Betty* (ABC, 2006-2010) as a case study, adds nuance: she identifies ways in which liberalism, which constructs society as “defined by fair competition and individual rights,” manifests as a “foundational and continually dominant” ideology in the United States (120). Since liberalism imagines that everyone has essentially the same opportunities to compete in the United States, “success is determined by how hard someone works and not by their economic class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, or race,” which results in ethnic and racial difference being sublimated so it becomes more palatable for broad reproduction and dissemination (121). The notion of sublimation that exists in a neoliberal televisual landscape alongside the different discourses of representation inform my analysis.

Another instructive mode of considering diverse representation of race and ethnicity on screen relevant to this thesis is the narrative implementation of the “magical Negro” (Gabbard, 2004). In his book *Black Magic: White Hollywood and African American Culture*, Gabbard analyzes the presence of Blackness in films he identifies as “written by, directed by, produced by, and starring white people,” determining that African American inclusion in these media texts was constructed as ethereal, and was ultimately both consumed and erased. Gabbard analyzes *The Bridges of Madison County* (1995) and *The Green Mile* (1999) to highlight how Blackness is presented as a magical presence that ultimately supports the growth and development of White main characters. In 2009, building on Gabbard’s formalization of the term, Glenn and Cunningham outline how constructions of Black characters across eight films center on relationships with White characters and how the particularly gifted Black characters focus most of their abilities on helping their White counterparts. Glenn and Cunningham argue that the relegation of Black character to this type of role ultimately helps to reify and uphold traditional Black stereotypes of “mammy, jezebel, and Uncle Tom” (135). This construction of Black characters also resonates when considering the assimilationist and potentially “diverse” depictions of non-White characters on *Felicity* and *Gossip Girl*.

***FELICITY AND GOSSIP GIRL* OVERVIEW: CONTEXTUALIZING ELENA TYLER AND VANESSA ABRAMS**

In order to fully contextualize the positionalities of the characters, this thesis frames the discussion of *Felicity* and *Gossip Girl* in the narrative universes of each. *Felicity*, a WB show that premiered in 1998 and concluded in 2002, told the story of a

college student at the fictional University of New York (UNY for short, loosely based on New York University) and her group of friends as they moved into young adulthood. Felicity Porter (Keri Russell) develops friendships with people from her dorm, her classes, and her job, and the narrative follows her and those friends, with each of the four seasons corresponding to an academic school year. *Gossip Girl*, a CW show that started in 2007 and ended in 2012, also takes place in New York City but its ensemble cast is in high school at the start of the show. The main characters, Serena Van der Woodsen (Blake Lively) and Blair Waldorf (Leighton Meester), are often targeted by *Gossip Girl*, a gossip blog that follows the most popular members of the Upper East Side preparatory school circuit and generally reveals the details of their “scandalous lives.” Although both shows take place in New York—a city where immigrants are approximately 36% of its population (New York City Department of City Planning, 2005), over 25% of the population is made up of Black diasporic people, 27.5% are Latinx-identifying people, and Asian Americans make up 11.8% of the population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010)—characters of color are scarce over the course of each program. Of course, locating the primary action of each show in the Upper East Side and at private high schools and colleges helps to explain away the lack of diversity to an extent, although the lack of diversity when the characters are outside of these spaces is still notable. This tendency toward Whiteness is consistent with the rest of the genre; however, many of the teen shows that were contemporaries of *Felicity* (*Dawson’s Creek*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Roswell*) were set in areas that were less urban and more believably (although still problematically) could be imagined as places with fewer non-White people.

Felicity aired the year after *Dawson's Creek* premiered, and, as referenced in chapter two, it was intended to help add to The WB's group of shows targeting the teen audience. The WB was "coming off a record-breaking season" during which it beat the existing six broadcast networks in ratings growth in households and key demographics under 50 (*The Business Wire*, 1998). As referenced in chapter two, the network marketed the show to the point that co-creator J.J. Abrams (post-*Armageddon*, but in his first foray into television) remarked that he would "be upset" if potential viewers got sick of the show before actually seeing it (Rochlin, 1998). In the heavy promotion of the show, television critics were very complimentary, suggesting that it represented "a rare item in prime-time TV these days: a character-based drama meant to stimulate heavy thinking in its young audience," (Winslow, 1998), was likely the "only sure hit of an otherwise unpredictable fall season," (Rochlin, 1998), and was "a well-crafted drama poised to become a pop-culture phenomenon" (Deggans, 1998). *Gossip Girl* was similarly prioritized by The CW and developed a great deal of buzz as well; however, the reviews were decidedly different in tone. With headlines like "The CW's 'Gossip Girl' Should Be Talk of the Teens," (Owen, 2007), "'Gossip Girl' Gets Full Season Order: You know you love her. Well, so does The CW" (Zap2It, 2007), and "It's great to be a 'Gossip'" (Pierce, 2007) in a wide range of publications, the show was being discussed at the same rate as *Felicity*, but the writers were less smitten with the content. This suggests that it was drawing attention for its attractive young people and drama, for successfully following a formula, and for employing a more improbable but exciting approach to alcohol, sex and

relationships (Maynard, 2007). Despite these critiques, The CW committed to promoting *Gossip Girl* as the flagship series of their new network.

ELENA TYLER ON *FELICITY*

When *Felicity* first aired on The WB, it was identified as “the freshest new drama” of its season, and a “fitting companion to WB’s tasty, teen-targeted *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Dawson’s Creek*” (Littlefield, 1998). At the same time, it was also identified as a “shamelessly imitative” effort to re-create the appeal of shows like *My So-Called Life* and *Ally McBeal* (Richmond, 1998). Television critics of the time do not identify the imitative qualities as inherently negative; instead, they recognize that the show could stand as the 1998 Fall season’s *Dawson’s Creek*, which is to say that they recognized its potentially wide appeal to the hard-to-attract and retain teen audience. Although the coverage generally refers to the show as entertaining and well-written, in many cases even a singular bright spot in a season of sub-par television, it is also often knocked for being soapy or “sudsy,” which connotes, to these writers, that it is not to be taken as seriously as other types of programs (Richmond, 1998). Amidst the buzz, mainstream television writers were not writing about diversity, even when writers themselves were part of minority groups (Eric Deggans, cited earlier, for example, was Black). The only types of diversity addressed focused on the consideration that the show was connecting with teenaged and young adult female demographics; most coverage centered Keri Russell’s hair and natural star presence, the co-creators’ backgrounds in film, and The WB’s place in the larger broadcast landscape.

Despite the emphases of industry coverage at the time, this thesis focuses on the absence of diversity in conversations about the program as well as how non-White representation happens in the show itself. In this chapter, I textually analyze the presentation of Elena Tyler, not only because she is a character that exists at the nexus of a few marginalized identity points (Elena is an African-American, a woman, and is represented as being in a lower economic class than her peers), but also because she is the primary recurring character of color on the show for the majority of it. Javier Quintata (Ian Gomez), Felicity's eventual boss at Dean & Deluca, is a Latino, gay character that recurs over time, but he is not a series regular (he appears in 45 episodes compared with Elena's 75). His portrayal is also worth examining and could fruitfully nuance an understanding of how intersectionality operates in this space; however, this project focuses on Elena because there is more content from which to draw. Through analysis of Elena's first appearance on the show, a storyline reckoning with her difference from the hegemonic norm, and her final storyline on the show, I will assess how Elena is racialized in the text, as well as how the program activates and interacts with her difference from the dominant mode of existence in its fictional universe.

The first episode of *Felicity* selected for analysis, "Hot Objects" (Abrams & Silberling, 1998), was the third episode of the first season of the show, and the first in which Elena (Tangi Miller), was introduced. A few characters of color existed in the background of the earlier episodes (notably Felicity's guidance counselor, who serves as a sounding board for Felicity as she considers whether or not she should stay in New York or return to California to follow the plan set out for her by her overbearing parents).

However, this was the first time where a non-White character was presented as someone viewers could potentially identify with or recognize in their own lives.

Elena first appears in Felicity's chemistry class, although she does not have a speaking role in this scene. Felicity is having a difficult time acquiring a copy of the required textbook, and the professor asks the rest of the class whether or not they also had trouble finding the book through a hand-raising exercise. No one else had difficulty, so Felicity is understood to be underprepared; Elena is one of the prepared students. She is a dark-skinned, Black woman with braids who is taller than Felicity and conventionally attractive. The first time Elena speaks to Felicity is during a party at their dormitory—she asks Felicity, without preamble, “What’s wrong with you?” In addition to the classroom conflict, Felicity is experiencing conflict with her first college friend, Julie (Amy Jo Johnson), as they vie for the attention of Ben Covington (Scott Speedman), the freshman Felicity moved to New York to follow. Elena continues, saying that she hates parties like this one, because they are “full of junior high insecurities.” Then she officially introduces herself. Elena's first lines are direct, unapologetic, and confident, which is a starkly different personality from the nervous, sincere, and wordy titular character. But she is also presented as someone who is interested in helping Felicity work through whatever her present issue is: she is a secondary character placed in a helping role, which is often how Black characters are incorporated into White-dominated programs in the spirit of Gabbard's “magical Negro.” In this first episode, Elena is integrated into a predominantly White space without much cultural specificity, which is most closely aligned with Gray's discourse of assimilation. However, she is also presented as a foil to Felicity, which

suggests potential for her to be a unique character, different than the heroine in personality (although this is the only indicator of difference, outside of physical appearance, at this point—there are no references to the cultural specificity or social struggle alluded to by Gray). She is not prominently featured in the rest of her debut episode, although she was quickly slated to be a season one regular. Over the course of the next few episodes, she becomes more prominent as she and Felicity get to know each other through pre-med classes, but she does not get her own storyline until “Drawing the Line (part 1), which is episode seven of the first season.

In “Drawing the Line (part 1),” Elena is introduced early in the episode with financial aid pamphlets spread across her bed. She has learned that her scholarship to the privately-funded university fell through, and she does not know if she can find another scholarship she wants to apply for because she wants to “get in on merit,” not because she “is Black and [is] underprivileged” (Abrams & Pressman, 1998). The show presents Blackness and socio-economic standing as potential challenges for Elena to overcome, but the ways in which her character engages with these interlocking elements of identity ultimately suggests that they are not what she wants to be defined by. The episode still explores ways to allude to her Blackness without making it the primary defining figure, potentially so that it can use her difference from the hegemonic norm to demonstrate an interest in the “multicultural” representation shows were receiving increasing amounts of pressure to incorporate (as illustrated by the NAACP report that is detailed in chapter two).

Initially, Elena tries to hide that she is having trouble with financial aid, until her boyfriend Blair pressures Felicity, who works in the admissions office, into looking at Elena's file to figure out what the source of her financial troubles could be. Elena initially lies about the reasons she has been stressed and distant, but Blair interrupts her and explains what he learned from Felicity: Elena's father is a single parent who does not make enough money to help Elena pay for college but makes enough so that she cannot benefit from a full array of scholarship opportunities. He begins to explain that there are scholarships she is uniquely qualified for, highlighting one that is for "African American women from moderate- to low-income households studying pre-med in the New York City-New Jersey area" which frustrates Elena immediately. The descriptor Elena latches on to as particularly frustrating is "moderate- to low-income household" status; it seems in this instance that the marker of difference from the hegemonic norm established in the *Felicity* reality that the writers are comfortable highlighting is the socio-economic standing. In this sense, the neoliberal structures Molina-Guzman (2010) suggests contribute to the sublimation of racial difference are operating in the construction of the narrative.

In the next scene, after convincing Blair to tell her who shared her private admissions information, Elena confronts Felicity about her involvement in the incident, asking whether she found the information on the scholarship in "the ghetto file," explaining that she would rather leave UNY than get a scholarship because she is Black or because she comes from a lower-income family, ultimately saying "thanks for your handout, but no thanks" and storming out. Her character is frustrated at the potential of

being categorized by her appearance or her familial background since she believes those things are out of her control, and she specifically sought a merit-based scholarship, which situates her character's perspective in an individualist mindset, following the trend Gray (2004) observes when he talks about ways in which television shows worked to show "enlightened approach[es] to racial difference" (79). However, the fact that her Blackness is directly addressed within the program is a break with the trends of "relevant" programs of the 1970s and 1980s where Blackness tended to be "unmarked."

Elena's stated views assert that the success she wants to achieve has nothing to do with the color of her skin. This again aligns with the notion that Molina-Guzman (2010) frames as the social setting of what she terms postracial television: that a liberal sense of meritocracy is the best and fairest way to operate in the United States. As the episode continues, Noel (Scott Foley), the hall's resident advisor⁴ and romantic interest to Felicity, reveals to Elena that he applied to a wide range of scholarships to be able to attend UNY, and acknowledges that he "has not been through the same thing as [Elena], but "if there was a scholarship for White, Irish-Catholic kids with preppy clothes and web pages, I would grab it. No humility, no shame" (Abrams & Pressman, 1998). Through the intervention of a White character, Elena begins to feel differently about the situation and how identity factors into questions about affirmative action.

⁴ Through scenes with Noel consulting with his fellow RAs, characters of color are given speaking roles; although the characters are not introduced by name and are primarily a sounding board for Noel as he sorts how to deal with his feelings for Felicity. Still, there are undoubtedly more speaking extras of color in *Felicity* than in *Gossip Girl*.

The views expressed in this scene, while acknowledging class status as potentially prohibitive and worth considering in terms of access to education, frame racial difference from the hegemonic norm as secondary. Since there is a scholarship that is interested in supporting Elena based on her Blackness, she is luckier than Noel, who cannot find a scholarship based on supporting his Whiteness. Although as a character, Noel is encouraging about the availability of a scholarship that suits Elena, class status is portrayed as a true equalizer: Noel and Elena are on similar footing, except that affirmative action gives Elena an opportunity that Noel cannot access. Conversations about affirmative action in the episode do not engage with questions around structural limitations that created the need for it in the first place; there is not even mention of the phrase affirmative action.

There is a moment of potential resistance or, at least, racial specificity, when Elena begins researching the scholarship and puts on a record by jazz musician Ben Webster that her romantic interest brought her earlier in the episode. Jazz music has historically been tied to African American identity; with Elena playing this record as she takes the scholarship application out of the trash to reconsider asserting her Blackness through applying to the scholarship potentially celebrates this part of her identity. However, another possible reading has to do with her hesitation to accept help from anyone over the course of the episode: Elena initially says she cannot accept the gift of the record and record player from Blair, but ultimately decides she can accept help. Racial specificity is sublimated again to de-emphasize Black authenticity and broaden potential appeal.

Ultimately, Elena tells Felicity that she “decided it was pretty stupid to turn down something without figuring out what it was all about,” and that she reached out to the donor responsible for the scholarship. The donor who created the scholarship turned out to be one of the first Black women to graduate from medical school in New York. Elena shares that she told the donor she intended to pay her back, which the donor refused, saying that she wanted Elena to pay it forward by creating a similar scholarship once she becomes a doctor. By framing racial difference in these individualistic terms, alongside other interlocking considerations (and through the prioritization of class as the main factor in determining whether or not characters in the program can attend UNY), the portrayal contains Blackness in individual terms instead of acknowledging institutional, structural limitations placed on Black bodies in spaces dominated by Whiteness. Universities are historically spaces where elitism of race, class, and gender dominate. When compounded by the Whiteness of the universe presented in *Felicity* and on The WB network more broadly, this means Elena’s presence in the space embodies some of the tensions around Douglas’s notion of containment (2011): even though the character was always intended to be part of the series, her presence in the White space still potentially represents an unanticipated, and potentially unwelcome, presence in the form of female Blackness.

Elena continues on as a main character throughout the series, although as the series progresses and Felicity switches her major from pre-medical studies to art, her position as a close friend of Felicity becomes less clearly articulated. The final episode on

the show where Elena is central to a plotline is in season four, episode sixteen, “Ben Don’t Leave,” (Winer, McCarthy, & Taub, 2002).

Over the course of the episode, Richard (Rob Benedict), a White character whose presence throughout the show is primarily comedic, asks Elena to attend a party with him, which he initially tells her is to make someone he has a crush on jealous. It is later revealed that his goal is to impress his crush by proving how openminded he is when he says “man, is she gonna be impressed. With me, showing up with a Black chick? Doesn’t get more ‘PC’ than that. Man of the people, like Bono” (Winer, McCarthy, & Taub, 2002). Elena is angry, punches Richard in the face, and walks out. Richard comes to explain himself later in the episode. She lets him in to talk it over and apologizes for hitting him. Richard says it is okay, then accuses Elena of having anger issues, at which point she tells him that he is racist for what he did. This exchange happens quickly, which I believe intentionally works to create the sense that the characters are caught up in the moment, not necessarily attentive to the implications of their words. Immediately, Richard says “that’s low, you take that back,” to which Elena responds by further explaining that it was racist of Richard to use her based on her skin color. The disagreement escalates as Richard adds that Elena is “not *really* Black,” doubling down and adding caricature-like gang signs to illustrate what he means by Black:

“I mean, you’re Black, but you’re not (hand signals) *Black*. You don’t have Black friends, you are dating a White guy, you don’t like Spike Lee movies...”

Elena pushes him out of the dorm, shouting at him to get out. This storyline does not intersect with any of the other characters, which serves to continue the trend toward

containment of racial difference on the show. The two resolve the conflict through a final conversation about the incident, wherein Richard acknowledges that what he did was racist and apologizes. However, Elena has to compromise and reflect on her own position as well: “What you said... It made me think. All my friends are White, it must mean something. I guess, even after all this time, I’m still trying to prove I’m not different.”

Richard responds incredulously, saying “are you kidding? All I want is to be different. I’m just a White boy. That’s why I’m so into *Star Wars*. [...] Those conventions are like my African American house. It makes me feel like I’m part of something.” While the show requires that Richard acknowledge that his action was racist, the language around the reconciliation carefully demonstrates that it was only in this one isolated instance he was racist. Additionally, Richard is a character who constantly makes social faux pas and offends for comedic effect, which serves to contain this further as an individual instance of racism. The show also continues to affirm that Blackness is ultimately positive and that, in a specific way, Elena is luckier than Richard to belong to a non-White, non-dominant identity group. Whenever the writers on *Felicity* highlights Blackness, it is acknowledged as different but potentially enviable for its White characters.

Although she does not have a significant role in it, Elena is still on the show for episode 17 of the season. The episode, which was originally slated to be the finale, features a group goodbye between Felicity and her two non-White friends, Javier and Elena. The group goodbye scene does not illustrate Felicity’s relationship with Elena as any deeper than the relationship she has with her boss-turned-friend. In the final five

episodes, which were the result of a late-season additional request from the network, Elena's character is killed off, which serves as the reason to get all of the remaining characters together again. The fact that Elena is constructed as a character that is important enough to the other main characters to bring them all together through her sudden death, while simultaneously being removed from the show at the narrative level, reifies that her character was ultimately disposable to writers and producers in their efforts to resolve preferred storylines. That her final living storyline is one where she is paired with a secondary character of color is demonstrative of the overall trend of the program to acknowledge racial difference while also containing it as a problem to be specifically addressed in one-on-one situations. This limits the potential for extrapolation about the role race plays in the lives of these characters. Instead, race explicitly operates as a B-plot on a handful of episodes of the program over its four-year run.

VANESSA ABRAMS ON *GOSSIP GIRL*

While the writing team on *Felicity* tended to simultaneously incorporate and sublimate racial specificity over the course of the show's four seasons, *Gossip Girl* does not name racial difference directly at all over its six-season run. Although Vanessa Abrams (Jessica Szohr) is a Black woman, repeatedly characterized as political, the show never directly names her racial difference from the exceptionally wealthy White private school students who comprise the majority of the ensemble cast. A dark-haired, lighter-skinned woman with green-blue eyes, Jessica Szohr said in an interview that she is "Hungarian and a quarter Black, so [...] a mutt" (*People*, 2010). It is worth noting that, in

the novels by Cecily von Ziegesar that the TV series was based on, Vanessa was White with a shaved head. Vanessa is the only character von Ziegesar publicly commented on being different than what she envisioned; the author said that Vanessa is “one character they ruined” because in the books, Vanessa was “kick-ass and has a shaved head and wears a lot of black [...]” (*People*, 2008). Although she does not comment on the racial difference as a point of contention, the fact that the one character for whom the show’s creative team cast a person of color is the one von Ziegesar points out as being less authentic to the original vision is relevant to questions about limitations of a post-racial conception of diversity and inclusion.

Vanessa was not originally conceived of as one of the series regulars for *Gossip Girl*. Her character first appears in season one, episode six, “The Handmaiden’s Tale” (Queller & Buckley 2007). An old friend of Dan Humphrey (Penn Badgley), Vanessa explains how she convinced her parents to let her move back to Brooklyn from Vermont. She is now going to live with her older sister. Her parents are hardly ever referenced over the course of the show, while her sister, who she lives with is never portrayed as a character. Further, her mother (played by Gina Torres, an Afro-Latina actress) only appears in two episodes in season three. The show avoids portraying Vanessa as possessing ties to communities of color; in so doing, writers and producers avoid being narratively required to engage more directly with racial specificity. Through the erasure of kinship connections, *Gossip Girl* sidesteps the issue by making her a character without demonstrable ties to her Blackness.

Vanessa's arrival almost directly correlates with a narrative need to create conflict between Dan and his new girlfriend, Serena (Blake Lively). Dan feels uncomfortable about Vanessa's return to New York, at least in part because the last time they saw each other, Dan confessed that he had romantic feelings for her. Over the course of the episode, Dan tries to keep Vanessa and Serena from finding out about each other. Vanessa expresses disdain for the Upper East Side "over-privileged rich kids" that Dan goes to school with and serves as a proxy for the audience to understand how Dan used to feel about his classmates before he started spending time with Serena. Her character is used to create conflict between two main characters, both romantically and ideologically.

In conversations with Dan's sister, Jenny (Taylor Momsen), Vanessa repeatedly expresses skepticism about elitism in upper socio-economic classes. When she finds out that Jenny has been doing unpaid favors for Blair (Leighton Meester) and that it has been framed as the work handmaidens⁵ do for their queens, she tells Jenny that "handmaiden is Jane Austen for slave," and that she will work to "deprogram" Jenny from aspiring to be part of the Upper East Side social scene. She also is stated to be "completely morally opposed to society events," although reasoning for her stance is not provided. In general, these denouncements of aspects of the wealthy main characters' lives are not central to the plot but are not invalidated. Vanessa is presented as a relatable outsider with whom

⁵ Other recurring non-White characters in *Gossip Girl* are present as handmaidens or "minions" to Blair. Kati Farkas (Nan Zhang), Penelope Shafai (Amanda Setton), Isabel Coates (Nicole Fiscella) and Nelly Yuki (Yin Chang) are non-White recurring characters, although it is important to note that they are consistently subjugated by Blair and have no storylines independent of her. She envisions herself as a queen and enlists a select few of her classmates to serve as her assistants. She positions their work as an honor she is bestowing upon them since she is at the top of the Upper East Side private school social order.

viewers can align to observe the trappings of high society with some incredulity. These critiques, particularly those comparing the work Jenny is tasked with doing for Blair with slavery, are difficult to divorce from racial connotations, but the show avoids introducing race as a through line for Vanessa's skepticism.

Vanessa and Dan get into a fight during the episode, but Vanessa forgives him quickly and is shown to be more down-to-earth and reasonable than the rest of the main characters. This sense is narratively reinforced through her interest in honesty, art and intellectual pursuits, her willingness to help each of the Humphrey characters whenever they need it, and more broadly, her alignment with the Humphrey family, who the show's writers intended to be explicitly relatable through their middle-class status.

By episode fourteen of season one, Vanessa is upgraded to a series regular and begins to exist in storylines independent of Dan and the Humphreys. It becomes clear over the course of the show that Vanessa operates most effectively when she is not trying to exist in the Upper East Side world; she often becomes uncharacteristically insecure and subject to manipulation when she attempts to navigate the space occupied by the wealthy main characters. This trend is consistent with what Ryalls (2016) observes about how White, blonde Jenny, who attends the same private school that the majority of the main characters do, moves through the world of the moneyed elite depicted in *Gossip Girl*. The fact that their failings when they attempt to navigate the world of their wealthier classmates are depicted in similar ways suggests that Vanessa and Jenny are aligned in portrayal. This indicates that the biggest challenge for the characters to overcome is their difference from the socio-economic norms embodied by the rest of the

characters. Vanessa specifically often fails by disappointing Dan, Jenny or her eventual romantic interest, Nate, when she attempts to scheme in the ways that the rest of the main characters do (although, again, parallels to Jenny's failures through disappointing her brother, Vanessa, and romantic interests are notable). The result of this alignment echoes the sublimation of race resulting from neoliberal frameworks in *Felicity*. However, while there are moments where Elena is compared with White counterparts (like with Noel, for example), she is never aligned with them in portrayal to the extent that Vanessa is—Elena's racial difference, although sublimated, is present and acknowledged.

Vanessa begins to be portrayed as particularly successful (in ways that are legible to the other main characters) around season three once the show makes the transition from high school to college, and she, Dan, and Blair attend New York University. In season three, episode six, "Enough About Eve," (Coburn & Stephens, 2009), Vanessa is recognized in the university newspaper for her activism and for being a standout freshman student. The episode revolves around an event where one freshman student is selected to give a speech at a dinner; Blair decides that she wants the recognition, but Vanessa is the likely selection. When Blair turns the acquisition of the honor into one of her trademark competitive schemes, Vanessa attempts to manipulate and scheme to secure the spot as well.

Even while highlighting her success at the college level, the episode explores Vanessa's difference from the hegemonic norm, to an extent—her parents do not approve of her attending NYU. Despite the university's reputation, the fact that it is a private university is untenable to her parents who believe that "education shouldn't be for sale."

To help her parents understand why she believes NYU is a good fit for her, Vanessa invites her parents to attend the freshman dinner. She is frustrated that her parents care more about their principles (which are anti-capitalist and skeptical of the wealth of the majority of the main characters on the show) than about recognizing her accomplishments. This narrative inclusion marks the first time Vanessa is linked to any semblance of a network of non-White people.

With her mother (Gina Torres) in attendance, Vanessa ends up competing with Blair at the dinner itself, baiting Blair into one of her elitist tirades against Vanessa. Although Blair does not comment on Vanessa's race, she emphasizes that she will always be better than Vanessa because "some people are simply better than others," due to her "generations of breeding and wealth" that come together to make her more similar to famous French royal Marie Antoinette than Vanessa (Coburn & Stephens, 2009). The primary source of difference for Vanessa once again is implied to be her socio-economic background, and even when a character explicitly condescends to Vanessa and identifies her as fundamentally inferior, the critiques are tied to class. However, this particular speech can easily be interpreted to have racist overtones due to the reference to "generations of breeding and wealth." Yet Vanessa does not directly confront Blair about the content of her speech, despite her preestablished political, anti-establishment characterization. Once again becoming insecure in her efforts to compete with Blair, Vanessa sneaks a microphone into the room where Blair insults her and plays the speech over the loudspeaker. Vanessa's scheme ultimately backfires, and her mother overhears her speaking negatively about her parents, causing her mother to ultimately express

extreme disappointment in Vanessa and concern about who she is becoming. This storyline, when put into conversation with the storyline about Elena and her scholarship, is illustrative of differences between the programs' approaches to race. Here, class status is understood to be the most defining difference between Vanessa and Blair. Elena is similarly framed as separate from her peers because of class status, but race is named as a factor that modifies her experience, whereas in *Gossip Girl*, race looms as an unnamed specter separating Vanessa from the other main characters.

It is clear that when Vanessa abandons her principles tied to honesty and humility, she is unable to thrive in the world of *Gossip Girl*, especially when she engages in direct competition with peers who use wealth and the influence that it brings to help manage their problems. Her primary source of failure is implied to stem from her belonging to the wrong socio-economic background. Another critical element of this episode that gestures toward the narrative approach to incorporation of difference from hegemonic norms comes from Blair's speech. Although the language in her speech can be extrapolated to have racist connotations, the show does not provide a critique of Blair's elitist worldview—it is treated primarily as a negative personality trait of an individual who continues to be constructed as a sympathetic main character.

The last episode that Vanessa appears in as a series regular is the season four finale, "The Wrong Goodbye" (Safran & Norris, 2011).⁶ The central characters work

⁶ It is interesting to note that during season four, two recurring Black characters, father and daughter Russell and Raina Thorpe, were integrated into the cast for approximately half-season arcs. They are incorporated into larger, long-term storylines as well as romantic storylines, but also lack cultural specificity that connotes Blackness; they are in essence portrayed as business professionals based in Chicago who are not accustomed to doing business in the same way that the New Yorker business

together to track down a newer character, Serena's cousin Charlie (Kaylee DeFer), before she potentially harms herself. Although they never found a way to become friends because of their disparate views about the Upper East Side and their mutual romantic interest in Dan, Vanessa and Serena are teamed up throughout parts of the episode. A recurring villainous character, Georgina Sparks (Michelle Trachtenberg), comments when she sees Vanessa operating as part of the core group: "I'm sorry — she's a part of the game, but I'm not?" Vanessa's outsider status is repeatedly emphasized over the course of the show, even when she is engaged in the same activities as the other main characters. Although they do not explicitly state why Vanessa is treated as an outsider, over the course of her final episode she interacts with fewer and fewer main characters, until she is back at the Humphreys' loft in Brooklyn, where she first appeared on the show. Vanessa volunteered to wait at the Humphreys' home in case Charlie appeared there, but while she is alone at the loft, she finds the book Dan has secretly been working on over the course of the show, a thinly-veiled, barely fictionalized tell-all novel about Manhattan's elite that is essentially about the main characters of the show, many of whom he worked to win over during the course of the series.

Vanessa reads the book and calls Dan to tell him that he has to submit it. They get into an argument wherein Vanessa aligns herself with classical anti-bourgeois artistic ideals, ultimately getting frustrated and telling Dan that he was "a better person before [he] started dating Serena Van der Woodsen." Dan responds, asking, "when are you

professionals who comprise the main cast are accustomed to doing business. They leave after the end of the fourth season and are not referenced again.

gonna realize my life was better before you climbed up my fire escape four years ago?” This fight represents one of the biggest disagreements the two have had over the course of the show, and Vanessa again serves as a proxy that signals to viewers how much Dan has changed. She decides to submit the book for him anonymously, posing as his agent, and says that she is moving to Barcelona since there “is nothing left for her [in New York].” Even in her final act on the show, when she is fighting with Dan, her character is used to move Dan’s plot forward and to help him learn more about himself and his relationship with his new status. In this way, Vanessa embodies the trope of the magical Negro: she was introduced as a sidekick whose ultimate role is improving the White character, she is the closest to over the course of the show. The primary recurring person of color in the *Gossip Girl* universe exits the show with an act that, on the surface, is ostensibly defiant. However, her action ultimately moves the plot forward for everyone else and leaves her behind. This is similar to Elena’s departure on *Felicity*: each character’s narrative conclusion serves as a plot device for the rest of the characters.

Throughout her tenure on the show, Vanessa is represented as someone who is too direct and skeptical about the trappings of wealth to fit into the world of the other main characters. Her primary axes of difference are often officially tethered to her Brooklyn address and her middle-class status. However, in the supremely White landscape of the fictionalized Upper East Side, the fact that the show never directly addresses race as a potential reason for her inability to fit in becomes glaring. The next section highlights the most salient points of comparison between *Felicity*’s Elena and Vanessa on *Gossip Girl*.

DISCUSSION

In both *Felicity* and *Gossip Girl*, the Black characters are compared with people in their socio-economic class in order to bridge connections across racial difference, ultimately highlighting socio-economic class standing as the most important and potentially limiting signifier of identity in each program. However, because the characters are also often the only people of color in the show, the fact that they carry the burden of being the representative members of lower socio-economic classes in worlds where money is not an acknowledged problem until presented by them, the non-White characters, racial difference is implied and distinctly tethered to socio-economic status. This seems to be in conversation with a broader trend in primetime dramas of introducing non-White characters as representative of more than one of the intersecting challenges for people outside of U.S. hegemonic norms—Vanessa and Elena are both Black and from a relatively low socio-economic class, a character in *One Tree Hill* had an introduction emphasizing her Latinidad and eventually revealed her bisexuality, a character on *Grey's Anatomy* is similarly presented as Latina and eventually learns that she is bisexual. Characters who are not White in primetime programs airing during either of the cycles analyzed here are often presented as “more than” just Black or Latinx, a phenomenon that Alfred J. Martin (2011) noted in his essay on *GREEK* (ABC Family, 2007-2011), which highlights ways that a Black, gay character (Calvin Owens) on the teen show operated. Martin observes that in situations where his gayness is emphasized, Calvin's Blackness is subdued, and vice versa; this standard is consistent with Vanessa's portrayal in the contemporaneously airing show.

Vanessa and Elena are both thin and commercially attractive (which, in the U.S., connotes a White-centric marketability), although Elena represents a less common depiction of a Black character on-screen. She is dark-skinned, she often wears her hair in natural and protective hairstyles, and although she is the only recurring Black character on the show, there are moments that anchor her character to a broader Black social network (this occurs through the inclusion of her father and her friends from before she started at the fictional UNY). These moments and other aspects of her portrayal complicate the understanding of Elena's characterization as representative of a sublimated racial specificity. Vanessa, by comparison, almost exclusively interacts with the White main characters until brief storylines in seasons three and four, is light-skinned with light eyes, and never references her race. In this sense, the writers and key decision-makers behind production of the show almost play off of the actress's self-characterization as a "mutt," in their depiction of her character as not belonging to any specific racial group. This correlates with a post-racial sensibility invested in supporting the notion that racism is a problem of the past.

Additionally, each of the characters operates differently than the rest of the main characters: Elena is direct, confident and focused on achieving her goal of being a doctor, and Vanessa is also direct, honest and committed to her activist causes. Both characters are confident in what they want to achieve in ways that the rest of the main characters are not (over the course of *Felicity*, the titular character fluctuates between wanting to be an artist and a doctor; over the course of *Gossip Girl*, Serena, Blair and Nate change their visions of what they want to do as adults countless times). The characters are not given

the same amount of space to mess up or become unfocused as their White counterparts are: every time Vanessa attempts to comport herself in a manner that aligns with how Blair or Serena operates, she fails and is ostracized by the community. Her failings are not tolerated by the world constructed in *Gossip Girl*. Elena's primary mistakes over the course of the show are related to her romantic life, but they do not often affect her interactions with characters outside of the relationship—she is flawed, but not any more flawed than her peers and not in ways that affect primary storylines. She is imbued with a sameness with the sympathetic main characters that Vanessa is usually denied: even in an instance, as in “Enough About Eve,” where Vanessa is aligned with Blair and her scheming behavior, she is still presented as more of an outsider than Blair.

Simultaneously, comparisons that reaffirm commonalities between Vanessa and Jenny, or Elena and Noel are repeatedly drawn, underscoring through dialogue that the primary axis of structural challenge in each show is economic standing or class status.

Although race is not explicitly addressed at all in *Gossip Girl* and is only addressed a handful of times in *Felicity*, racism or potential racism is featured, even when it is not directly expressed. These moments are engaged with as temporary character flaws of characters who are otherwise sympathetic or entertaining. In the case of Elena, it seems that a more race-conscious approach is engaged, since race is also narratively highlighted as possibly being beneficial to her advancement in school or enriching in her life more broadly. This is interesting and potentially resistant to dominant understandings of non-hegemonic character incorporation, but the fact that it is often only engaged with as positive is limiting in terms of the discourse it could foster. Engaging with race in

these manners ultimately works to contain narratives of racial difference in palatable ways that seem to suggest that the imagined viewer would be uncomfortable with discussions of race that are more direct or explicit, or perhaps would view such an approach as racist in and of itself. These trends in representation extend across the rest of each of the programs.

Intersections of identity are not often engaged directly by *Felicity* or *Gossip Girl*, but they exist through the representational decisions made by writers and showrunners. The incorporation of non-White characters is marked differently in each program. In *Felicity*, which ran from 1998-2002, racial difference from the hegemonic norm and potential implications of that racial difference are acknowledged and reckoned with (ultimately in ways that center the perspective of the imagined White viewer) to an extent. By contrast, *Gossip Girl*, which ran from 2007-2012, does not directly engage the concept of racial difference at all, and centers socio-economic status as the most salient difference for those attempting to succeed in its narrative universe.

Gossip Girl's shift from the strategy employed by *Felicity* writers is consistent with a broader national sense of having entered a heightened post-racial national space by the mid-aughts alluded to in the preceding chapters, also observed by Molina-Guzman (2010) and Beltrán (2013). This post-racial national mindset was signaled in the industry by the rise of a colorblind approach to casting, publicly touted as a liberal advancement and made famous through profiles on Shonda Rhimes. The way that Rhimes' approach to casting *Grey's Anatomy* (ABC, 2005-present) was framed in interviews suggested that the world of her show was a "frenetic, multicultural hub where racial issues take a back

seat to the more pressing problems of hospital life: surgery, competition, exhaustion and – no surprise – sex” (Fogel, 2005). Rhimes was quoted as saying that she and her friends, all in their early 30s, “don’t sit around and discuss race. [They’re] post-civil rights, post-feminist babies, and [they] take it for granted [that they] live in a diverse world” (Fogel, 2005). This postfeminist perspective to representation exists in both *Felicity* and *Gossip Girl*, though to different degrees. A.J. Christian (2018) points to “racial sincerity” (121), which he identifies as “personal, political, and contextual, a level of complexity that legacy networks find hard to present,” as something audiences respond favorably to; this is useful to consider in conjunction with historic discourses of racial representation. There is no effort to provide racial sincerity in *Gossip Girl* while there is some effort, albeit in side-plots, in *Felicity* to authentically present this personal, political, and contextual specificity. This difference points to a fundamental shift in approach toward racial representation from one flagship teen television show to one from the next cycle, suggesting that even traditionally denigrated genres can provide insights about broader sentiments about larger social or cultural issues that extend beyond the scope of the screen.

While The WB’s *Felicity* tapped into a racial specificity through its inclusion of storylines engaging directly with Elena’s Blackness, the next cycle of teen television, here exemplified by *Gossip Girl*, diligently and thoroughly elides lending any attention to the on-screen cultivation of cultural specificity inherent to Blackness, even while it engages with racially-implicated tropes like the magical Negro in its development of the one non-White series regular character. Through these comparative case studies, it

becomes clear that the second cycle of teen television subconsciously reinforced understandings about stereotypical limitations on Black bodies operating in White-dominated spaces while suggesting that, because of the dominant neoliberal socio-economic structure, racial difference is not a marker of difference that means anything significant about a person's experience. The preceding cycle flirts with presenting Blackness as more culturally specific and worthy of consideration as a site of standalone focus, but ultimately contains racial difference and suggests that it is more of a benefit than a detriment in contemporary society. Shows from both cycles ultimately reify and underscore Whiteness as a dominant mode of the genre.

Conclusion: New Possibilities for Blackness in Teen Dramas

In the preceding chapters, I examine the teen drama genre on television through comparative case studies of The WB's *Felicity* and The CW's *Gossip Girl*. Through my analysis, I intended to demonstrate grounding for three primary findings: firstly, over the course of the relatively young teen drama genre, two of the primary cycles experience a shift from an interest in verisimilitude marked by sincerity and relatability in subject matter—characteristics which were outlined by previous scholars writing about the genre, notably Valerie Wee (2008)—to what I suggest is a focus on escapism, marked by a certain untouchability and self-sufficiency of its characters. Secondly, race and ethnicity operate differently, both industrially and textually, in each of these cycles, which I contend has to do with a vested interest in portraying lives that are less complicated in relatable, sweeping, and societally-tied ways and more complicated by unrealistic and adult social intrigue. Finally, the teen drama genre, although often considered (particularly during the period analyzed here) a low object less worthy of serious consideration, can articulate key insights related to larger social or cultural issues that extend beyond the scope of the screen.

My findings confirmed my impression, which stemmed from my time as a viewer of both series, that a specific Whiteness, tied to other hegemonic norms related to middle- to upper-class status and heterosexuality, is the unnamed organizing mode of social and cultural structures existent in each of the fictional worlds of the programs I analyzed. Because the genre, starting with *Beverly Hills, 90210*, was defined by narratives built around the lives of conventionally attractive, upwardly mobile, White teenaged bodies

(with a few notable deviations, though those are usually tied to a specific character and his or her development amidst the backdrop cultivated in Whiteness—Ricky in ABC’s *My So-Called Life*, for example), I believe that the cycle of the genre that occurred post-*Gossip Girl* is still dominated by Whiteness, as it seems to be the essential marker of the genre. As referenced in chapter two, Lew Goldstein, co-executive vice-president of marketing at The WB during the period wherein the genre became legible to many (and replicable, to an extent), remarked, even when the shows that constitute the genre have differences, they “take on the same impression. [...] They belong together,” (quoted in Friedman, 1999). Although Goldstein was talking about The WB’s teen dramas specifically, upon completion of my analysis, I believe that the teen drama genre has developed a certain collective impression that is constituted in large part by the unnamed Whiteness that frames the perspectives, storytelling, and marketing materials around each show.

To complicate this impression, it is worth noting that a new cycle of teen drama started since the end of *Gossip Girl*. More recent shows that center comparable teen narratives, including *East Los High* (Hulu, 2013-2017) and *On My Block* (Netflix, 2018-), represent what appears to be an intentional break with this unnamed mode of operation. *East Los High*, a web-based television series, was produced and distributed by Hulu and is the online distributor’s first show with an all-Latinx cast and crew. Its main characters were teenage cousins Jessie and Maya, who are depicted growing up in East Los Angeles and end up in a love triangle with a popular football player. *On My Block*, another web-based television series, was produced and distributed by Netflix and feature a

predominantly Latinx and Black cast. *On My Block*, about four teenage friends of color also growing up in Los Angeles, was billed by Netflix as a half-hour coming-of-age comedy, a move that works to distinguish it from the teen drama genre. Despite this framing decision, the program engages with many of the themes that have come to be characteristic of the genre. This discursive framing move is particularly interesting when considered in the context of the historic legacy of Black shows starring teens like *Everybody Hates Chris* (UPN/The CW, 2005-2009) and *Sister, Sister* (ABC/The WB, 1994-99) being framed in a parallel manner; it is possible that Netflix and *On My Block* executive decision-makers sought to subtly draw this comparison since the coming-of-age comedy genre was one of the last spaces where a comparable program centering the stories of teens of color was successful. Additionally, genre hybridity is much more common in the post-network era of television, and teen television has also experienced this shift. It is also noteworthy that each of these shows developed on streaming services; this characteristic is consistent with A.J. Christian's observation that more intersectionally-minded representational decisions can occur in television being created specifically in the context of this newer distribution model. These are exciting potential areas for future research on programming for teens.

Returning to the preceding analysis in my previous chapters, it seems that a small but significant shift between the two cycles occurred with respect to how racialized identities are constructed and operate against the backdrop defined by Whiteness. There is no effort to provide racial sincerity in the latter cycle, apart from that which occurs in the context of Whiteness. There is some effort, albeit in side-plots, to authentically

present this personal, political, and contextual specificity, in *Felicity*. Both shows utilize some form of difference for plot points. However, *Felicity* and its cohort of teen shows (which leaned more on cultivating earnest relatability for the imagined audience) created more space for deeper engagement with questions of race. The earlier cycle, represented here by *Felicity*, provided this space by raising questions about what someone with a non-White identity operating in a historically White space (in *Felicity*, constituted by a university) might look like, and what concerns they might have that would be different than those of the rest of the main characters. Despite the promise indicated by the narrative choices to engage with racial difference as a plot line on more than one occasion, it was still contained through relegation to B-plot lines. Additionally, comparisons across racial lines in the show suggested that other interlocking aspects of identity were potentially more limiting. Further, *Felicity* routinely provided neat conclusions wherein characters' problems related to race were handled over the course of one episode. This is to say that, although an interest in verisimilitude afforded some consideration of racial difference from Whiteness, there nonetheless were limitations to how explorations of this subject matter could be extended. This resulted in part from the dominant Whiteness that originated from producer and writer perspectives and was replicated in the program itself.

About a decade later, *Gossip Girl* and the creative team behind the program abandoned relatability as a leading strategy, replacing it with aspirational and unflappable resourcefulness for its characters (including characters of color, albeit primarily as background characters), who because of their privilege and the wealthy world they

existed in, were essentially self-sufficient and relatively guarded from or able to overcome difficulties that faced the majority of its imagined teen audience. An unanticipated finding related to my identification of characteristics of the cycles was the tendency for media coverage and academic research to exhibit more trepidation about the more escapist, less substantive, later cycle of teen television. Skepticism and concern about what media messages the show was presenting to teens about sexuality (hypersexuality in particular), among other issues related to the perceived bad behavior of the characters, were recurring themes of concern. The overwhelming Whiteness of the program was less central to the critiques, although it was alluded to by the press over its run (Ryalls, 2011). When advocacy groups highlighted trends toward an overrepresentation of Whiteness or underrepresentation of non-White characters, network executives were required to comment on diversity in their shows. Unfortunately, it seems that typically, they avoided commenting on race-related issues, an omission that subliminally influenced media coverage to reify the omission.

In the preceding chapters, I also argue that, even though industry discourse, interviews with showrunners and producers, and the narratives presented by the shows themselves often ignored or actively worked to avoid engaging with race directly, much can be learned about attitudes related to race and ethnicity by centering the strategic language deployed to touch on race in media settings, especially when analyzing what is omitted. An understanding of strategic inclusions and omissions in each of the sources analyzed revealed that race was present throughout. The picture of racial diversity was commoditized to help strengthen the appeal of networks like The WB and The CW to

younger demographic groups who were themselves more “multicultural” than preceding generations (and were conceptualized to be more tolerant of and interested in diversity as a result). Over the course of the 1990s and into the aughts, visual diversity on screen was also used to signal an interest in contemporary concerns. However, visual diversity has its limitations: as noted by Sarah Banet-Weiser in her essay “What’s Your Flava?” (2003), increased onscreen diversity in contemporary landscapes motivated by “good business,” in the sense that it “no longer makes commercial sense to ignore girls or people of color as important characters,” has its limits (203). In a post-race and post-feminist socio-cultural environment, that diversity is important is acknowledged, but only insofar as it is potentially detrimental not to engage with the growing diverse groups: there is merely an interest in appearing concerned with inclusivity without an interest in cultural specificity. Herman Gray’s categorization of television series guided by assimilation discourse is particularly relevant here: if cultural specificity is removed in order to make Black characters more palatable for imagined White audiences, then the removal of racial specificity becomes standardized. This reaffirms Whiteness as the most immediate and effective lens through which to understand all people, even those who do not physically embody markers associated with the hegemonic ideal.

I am curious about the resistant potential of the next cycle of the teen drama genre, represented by shows like *East Los High* and *On My Block*, which, as referenced above, appear to intentionally rupture the established mode of framing, along with shows on more conventional networks including *Pretty Little Liars* (ABC Family/Freeform, 2010-2017), *The Fosters* (ABC Family/Freeform, 2013-2018), and *Riverdale* (The CW,

2017-). It began in the early 2010s as *Gossip Girl* was coming to an end. Consideration of this next cycle, along with the socio-cultural, political, technological, and industrial factors that might have affected it, would throw into even more relief certain elements of how Whiteness and difference from aspects of the hegemonic norm operate across the genre over time. My general sense is that a new approach to engaging with Blackness and other markers of difference from the hegemonic norm has been presented in newer programs in the genre, although some trends will inevitably continue. An exploration of the extent to which the newer shows attempt to break with, or at least push the boundaries on, the defining Whiteness of the genre would be an interesting area to explore in future research. It would also be important to consider these attempts within the context of the limitations of the genre that have been identified here, namely the inclination toward containment of racialized difference through isolation of characters of color from larger communities of color, emphasis on the benefits over the detriments of being part of a marginalized racial group, and the tendency of programs' decision-makers and spokespeople to avoid commenting on race, whether simply identifying Whiteness or actually discussing non-White experiences with attention to racial sincerity.

Bibliography

- ABC Television Network. (May 25, 2008). "Press Release: Season Program Rankings (Through 5/25)." Retrieved from https://web.archive.org/web/20100413172935/http://abcmedianet.com/web/dnr/dispDNR.aspx?id=052808_06.
- Business Wire*. (March 6, 2001). "AOL Time Warner to Create New TV Networks Group Under Turner Broadcasting Umbrella, Including Basic Cable Networks and The WB Broadcast Network." <https://advance-lexis-com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:42HC-J8V0-010G-0326-00000-00&context=1516831>.
- Ang, I. (1985). *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination*. London: Routledge.
- Aslinger, B (2008). Rocking Prime Time: Gender, The WB and Teen Culture. In Ross, S. M. and L. E. Stein (Eds.), *Teen Television: Essays on Programming and Fandom*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland.
- Banet-Weiser, S. (2007). *Kids Rule! Nickelodeon and Consumer Citizenship*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Banet-Weiser, S. (2007). What's Your Flava? Race and Postfeminism in Media Culture. In Tasker, Y. and D. Negra (Eds.), *Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. 201-226.
- Bauder, D. (February 6, 2000). "Did Felicity's Haircut Doom The WB?." *Associated Press Online*. (Sunday). <https://advance-lexis-com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:3YHC-9P50-00BT-N4TK-00000-00&context=1516831>.
- Beck, M. & S. J. Smith. (October 20, 1998). "DUVALL, GIRLFRIEND READY TO TANGO." *The Daily News of Los Angeles*. (October 20, 1998, VALLEY EDITION). [https://advance-lexis-](https://advance-lexis-com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:3YHC-9P50-00BT-N4TK-00000-00&context=1516831)

com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:3TX9-M550-00D6-M1RM-00000-00&context=1516831.

Beltrán, M. (2013). "SNL's 'Fauxbama' debate: facing off over millennial (mixed-)racial impersonation". In Marx, Nick, Matt Sienkiewicz, & Ron Becker (Eds.), *Saturday Night Live & American TV*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Beltrán, M., J. Park, H. Puente, S. Ross, and J. Downing, "Pressurizing the Media Industry." (2005). In John D.H. Downing and Charles Husband, *Representing 'Race': Racisms, Ethnicity, and the Media*, 160-193. London: Sage.

Berridge, S. (2013). Teen Heroine TV: narrative complexity and sexual violence in female-fronted teen drama series. *New Review of Film and Television Studies*. Vol. 11 (no. 4). 477-496.

Bierbaum, T. (1999). "Dramas pull ratings with edgier fare." *Variety*. (October 4, 1999 - October 10, 1999). <https://advance-lexis-com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:3XJD-7H30-0006-73SY-00000-00&context=1516831>.

Bierbaum, T. (1998). "The WB's getting the girls." *Variety*. (November 2, 1998 - November 8, 1998). <https://advance-lexis-com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:c:3V13-3C40-0006-73PT-00000-00&context=1516831>.

Braithwaite, A. (2008). "That girl of yours—she's pretty hardboiled, huh?": Detecting Feminism in *Veronica Mars*. In Ross, S. M. and L. E. Stein (Eds.), *Teen Television: Essays on Programming and Fandom*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland.

Bruce, L. & L. Rose. (January 30, 2012). "'Gossip Girl' Cast and Producers Reflect on The CW Drama's Road to 100 Episodes." *The Hollywood Reporter*. (January 30, 2012 Monday). <https://advance-lexis-com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:m:54VF-7BG1-DYRM-W4XH-00000-00&context=1516831>.

Carter, B. (October 12, 1998). "The Making Of an 'It' Girl; WB Network Hyped 'Felicity' But Still Seeks the Right Viewers". *The New York Times*. (Monday,

- Late Edition – Final). <https://advance-lexis-com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:3TVD-0HF0-007F-G287-00000-00&context=1516831>.
- Christian, A.J. (August 27, 2013). “The Black TV Crisis and the Next Generation.” *Flow Journal*. https://www.flowjournal.org/2013/08/the-Black-tv-crisis/#identifier_6_19785
- Christian, A.J. (2018). *Open TV: Innovation Beyond Hollywood and the Rise of Web Television*. New York: New York University Press.
- Ciuk, D. J. (2015). “Americans’ Value Preferences Pre- and Post-9/11.” *Social Science Quarterly* 97. 407-417.
- Consoli, J. (October 10, 2007). “CW Sticking With Struggling 'Gossip Girl.'” *mediaweek.com*. <https://advance-lexis-com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:4PW0-W3M0-TX2Y-3020-00000-00&context=1516831>.
- Cooper, B. (2013). “Tyler Perry Hates Black Women: 5 Thoughts on The Haves and Have Nots.” *Crunk Feminist Collective*. <http://www.crunkfeministcollective.com/2013/05/29/tyler-perry-hates-Black-women-5-thoughts-on-the-haves-and-have-nots/>.
- Cooper, E. (2015). “‘Teens Win’: Purveying Fantasies of Effortless Economic Mobility and Social Attainment on Rich Teen Soaps.” *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 48, no. 4. 731-746.
- “CW's New Series Pickups Leave One Question: Where are the Black Centered Shows?” (March 3, 2008). *St Petersburg Times Blogs (The Feed)*. <https://advance-lexis-com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:5323-4P01-JBRN-H1BV-00000-00&context=1516831>.
- Danielsen, S. (August 5, 1999). “Evolution of pay TV / ON TELEVISION.” *The Australian*. (Thursday). Retrieved from Nexis Uni. [https://advance-lexis-](https://advance-lexis-com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:5323-4P01-JBRN-H1BV-00000-00&context=1516831)

- com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:4580-5MD0-0197-50KY-00000-00&context=1516831.
- Deggans, E. (September 13, 1998). TUESDAY // 'Felicity' could spell happiness for WB. *St. Petersburg Times (Florida)*. (Sunday). Retrieved from Nexis Uni.
- Douglas, D. D. (2011). "Venus, Serena, and the Inconspicuous Consumption of Blackness: A Commentary on Surveillance, Race Talk, and New Racism(s)." *Journal of Black Studies*. 43 no. 2. 127-145.
- "DEMO DERBY; FELICITOUS FRESHMAN." (1998). *Variety*, (October 5, 1998 - October 11, 1998). <https://advance-lexis-com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:3TX9-RK00-0006-739S-00000-00&context=1516831>.
- Dixon, B. (October 24, 1999). "Tangi's on fast track to fame." *Sunday Mail (Queensland, Australia)*. (Sunday). <https://advance-lexis-com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:4587-32K0-0197-F14D-00000-00&context=1516831>.
- Dwyer, C. (January 24, 2019). "'Upsetting and Disappointing': BuzzFeed to Cut 15 Percent of its Workforce." *NPR*. <https://www.npr.org/2019/01/24/688130195/upsetting-and-disappointing-buzzfeed-to-cut-15-percent-of-its-workforce>.
- Early, F. H. (2001). "Staking Her Claim: *Buffy, the Vampire Slayer* as Transgressive Woman Warrior." *Journal of Popular Culture*. 35, no. 3. 11-27.
- Elliott, S, Stelter, B. & E. Wyatt. (May 21, 2009). "CW Adds Shows to Text About." *The New York Times*.
- "Exclusive: Felicity's Tangi Miller on Playing Minority Student & Affirmative Action." (2017, August 21). <https://leekycrowder.com/2017/08/21/exclusive-felicitys-tangi-miller-on-playing-minority-student-affirmative-action/>

“Event-Like Promos Build Loyal Young Core for WB.” (February 1, 1999). *Ad Age*.

<https://adage.com/article/news/event-promos-build-loyal-young-core-wb/63667/>

Feasey, R. (2012). Absent, Ineffectual and Intoxicated Mothers: Representing the maternal in teen television. *Feminist Media Studies*. 12 no. 1. 155-159.

Feasey, R. (2006). Charmed: Why Teen Television Appeals to Women. *Journal of Popular Film and Television*. 34 no. 1. 2-9.

“*Felicity*: They’re Back!” (March 8, 2005). *People*.

<https://people.com/celebrity/felicity-theyre-back/>

“‘Felicity’ Fans -- and Some Cast Members -- Hold a Rally Outside The WB Network to Show Their Support for the Show.” (May 10, 2000). *Business Wire*. (Wednesday). [https://advance-lexis-com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:m:407D-8XR0-00RH-443W-00000-00&context=1516831](https://advance.lexis-com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:m:407D-8XR0-00RH-443W-00000-00&context=1516831).

Felicity. October 13, 1998. “Hot Objects.” Episode 1-3. The WB. Directed by Brad Silberling, written by J. J. Abrams.

Felicity. November 10, 1998. “Drawing the Line (Part 1).” Episode 1-7. The WB. Directed by Ellen Pressman, written by J.J. Abrams.

Felicity. November 17, 1998. “Drawing the Line (Part 2).” Episode 1-8. The WB. Directed by Michael Fields, written by Riley Weston.

Fogel, M. (2005). “Grey’s Anatomy” Goes Colorblind. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/05/08/arts/television/greys-anatomy-goes-colorblind.html>.

Friedman, W. (February 1, 1999). “Event-like Promos build Loyal Young Core for WB.” *Advertising Age*, S1.

Gamber, F. (2008). Riding the Third Wave: The Multiple Feminisms of *Gilmore Girls*. In Ross, S. M. and L. E. Stein (Eds.), *Teen Television: Essays on Programming and Fandom*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland.

- Glenn, C. L., and L. J. Cunningham. (2009). "The Power of Black Magic: The Magical Negro and White Salvation in Film." *Journal of Black Studies* 40, no. 2: 135-52. <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/stable/40282626>.
- Garvin, G. (2009). "Bloodsuckers and biyotches at The CW." *Glenn Garvin's Changing Channels*. (Thursday). <https://advance-lexis-com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:7VRR-56K0-YB00-H1XS-00000-00&context=1516831>.
- Gill, R. (2007). "Postfeminist media culture: Elements of a sensibility." *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 10 no. 2. 147-166.
- Gipson, B. (2013, March 5). "25 Token Black Characters From '90s TV Shows, and What Happened to Them." *Complex*. <https://www.complex.com/pop-culture/2013/03/25-token-Black-characters-from-90s-tv-shows-and-what-happened-to-them/>
- "*Girlfriends*: Cancelled, Proper Series Finale Too Expensive." (February 14, 2008). *TV Series Finale*. <http://tvseriesfinale.com/articles/girlfriends-cancelled-proper-series-finale-too-expensive/>
- "Gossip Girl – CW Upfronts," YouTube video, 5:25, "subtletybleighton," November 15, 2008, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t3wNKke-1vA>.
- Gossip Girl*. October 24, 2007. "The Handmaiden's Tale." Episode 1-6. The CW. Directed by Norman Buckley, written by Jessica Queller.
- Gossip Girl*. October 19, 2009. "Enough About Eve." Episode 3-6. The CW. Directed by John Stephens, written by Jake Coburn.
- Gossip Girl*. May 16, 2011. "The Wrong Goodbye." Episode 4-22. The CW. Directed by Patrick Norris, written by Joshua Safran.
- Gray, H. (2004). *Watching Race: Television and the Struggle for Blackness* (2nd ed.). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

- Gray, J. (February 10, 2006). "Merging with Diversity, or, Got MLK?" *Flow Journal*, 3 no. 11. <https://www.flowjournal.org/2006/02/merging-with-diversity-or-got-mlk-2/>
- Hampp, A. (May 18, 2009). "3 "Gossip Girl" Rick Haskins; OMFG! A show with few TV viewers is still a hit". *Advertising Age*. <https://advance-lexis-com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:7VRK-RPM0-Y99S-P00H-00000-00&context=1516831>.
- Havens, T., Lotz, A. D. & S. Tinic. (2009). "Critical Media Industry Studies: A Research Approach." *Communication, Culture & Critique*. 2. 234-253.
- Haynes, V. D; Johnson, A.; Dretzka, G. & S. Johnson. (July 13, 1999). "Bashing TV 'Whitewash,' NAACP Threatens to Sue." *Chicago Tribune*. <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-1999-07-13-9907130059-story.html>
- Henderson, F. D. (2011). "The Culture behind Closed Doors: Issues of Gender and Race in the Writers' Room." *Cinema Journal*, Vol. 50(2). 145-152.
- Herman, A. (September 19, 2017). "How 'Gossip Girl' Shaped The CW." *The Ringer*. <https://www.theringer.com/tv/2017/9/19/16335168/gossip-girl-cw-ten-year-anniversary>
- Hibberd, J. (October 22, 2007). "Sophomore Slump at CW; Promising New Series Weak in Ratings." *Television Week*. <https://advance-lexis-com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:4R0D-9B40-TWSV-S0GP-00000-00&context=1516831>.
- Hills, M. Dawson's Creek: "'Quality Teen TV' and 'Mainstream Cult'". In G. Davis, & K. Dickinson (Eds.), *Teen TV: Genre, Consumption and Identity*. (First ed.). BFI Publishing. 2004.
- Hinckley, D. (July 23, 2008). "CW FAVORS HOT 'GOSSIP.'" *Daily News (New York)*. <https://advance-lexis-com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:4T25-RSN0-TWCR-4046-00000-00&context=1516831>.

- Hontz, J. and D. Cox. (1998). "IMAGINE REVS TWIN ENGINES." *Variety*. (July 13, 1998 - July 19, 1998). <https://advance-lexis-com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:3T56-CPR0-0006-705T-00000-00&context=1516831>.
- Hontz, J. (1998). "Peacock likely Ancier-fancier." *Variety*. (December 14, 1998 - December 20, 1998). <https://advance-lexis-com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:3VB2-40N0-0006-7505-00000-00&context=1516831>.
- Huff, R. (April 4, 2000). "FANS FIGHT FOR 'FELICITY.'" *Daily News (New York)*. <https://advance-lexis-com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:3YYM-6YM0-00T0-G1GB-00000-00&context=1516831>.
- Hughes, Z. (October 2000). "The New TV Season; WHAT'S NEW, WHAT'S BLACK, WHAT'S BACK." *Ebony*. <https://advance-lexis-com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:4165-P150-006G-12RY-00000-00&context=1516831>.
- Ivie, D. (September 22, 2017). "What 6 Seasons of *Gossip Girl* Posters Tell Us About the Show." *Vulture*. <https://www.vulture.com/2017/09/gossip-girl-posters-explained.html>
- Johnson, K. V. (June 20, 2000). "Viewers teach 'Felicity' lessons After sophomore slump, relationship returns." *USA TODAY*. <https://advance-lexis-com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:40J1-SF50-00C6-D380-00000-00&context=1516831>.
- "Jordan Levin Elevated to Number Two in Programming; Two Other Top Programming Executives - John Litvack, Senior VP Current Programming and Kathleen Letterie, Senior VP, Talent - Sign Long-Term Contracts; Garth Ancier Named Executive Consultant and Announces He Will Leave the Network When His Contract Expires This Coming May." (December 7, 1998). PR Newswire. [https://advance-lexis-](https://advance-lexis-com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:40J1-SF50-00C6-D380-00000-00&context=1516831)

- com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:3V8H-F600-007D-S4MC-00000-00&context=1516831.
- Kaplan, D. (October 2, 2000). "FUTURE DIMS FOR ONCE-BRIGHT FELICITY". *The New York Post*. <https://advance-lexis-com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:41B6-5T90-008R-F2Y9-00000-00&context=1516831>.
- Kissell, R. (February 16, 2009). Young CW puts brand into focus. *Variety*. Vol. 413 no. 13. 14-15.
- Klein, A. A. (2011). *American Film Cycles: Reframing Genres, Screening Social Problems, and Defining Subcultures*. Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press.
- Krukowski, A. (April 21, 2008). "The Quest for Youth Spurs TV Experiment; Will 'Gossip Girl' Test Lure Key Demo to TV?". *Television Week*. Retrieved from Nexis Uni.
- Lausch, K. (July 2012). "The Carrie Diaries, The Television Reboot, and The CW's Programming Strategies." *Flow Journal*.
https://www.flowjournal.org/2012/07/the-cws-programming-strategies/#footnote_0_14661.
- Liner, E. & T. Blade. (May 24, 2001). "Diverse women's roles on TV draw audiences". *Windsor Star (Ontario)*. (Thursday Final Edition). Retrieved from Nexis Uni.
- Littlefield, K. (September 29, 1998). "All the elements of a teen dream; REVIEW: The new WB drama 'Felicity' charms despite a sometimes cleverly calculated feel." *Orange County Register*. Retrieved from Nexis Uni.
- Littleton, C. (June 8, 2001). "Levin inks with Touchstone ". *The Hollywood Reporter*. <https://advance-lexis-com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:4378-BN60-006P-R2MG-00000-00&context=1516831>.

- Long, T. (April 14, 2002). "TV sets goal of diversity; Prime time features more ethnic minorities; network executives vow it's only first step". *The Detroit News*. (Sunday Edition). <https://advance-lexis-com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:4776-SRY0-01CY-M0GH-00000-00&context=1516831>.
- Leung, R. (October 1, 2004). The Echo Boomers: Reports on the Children of the Baby Boomers. *CBS News*. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/the-echo-boomers-01-10-2004/>
- Madden T. M. (May 22, 2009). ""Headline Not Available"". *The Detroit News (Michigan)*. <https://advance-lexis-com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:7VS0-M0J0-Y9DV-8085-00000-00&context=1516831>.
- Magee, S. (2014). "High School is Hell: The TV Legacy of *Beverly Hills, 90210*, and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*." *The Journal of Popular Culture*. 47 no. 4. 877-894.
- Martin, A. L. (2011). TV in Black and Gay: Examining Constructions of Gay Blackness and Gay Crossracial Dating on GREEK. *The Spectator*. 31 no 2. 63-69.
- Maynard, J. (September 19, 2007). On The CW, 'Gossip Girl' and the Vicious Circle. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from Nexis Uni.
- McFadden, K (December 1, 1998). "At WB, focus is on quality -- and it's starting to off". *Tulsa World (Oklahoma)*. <https://advance-lexis-com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:3V7H-Y4P0-0093-M3MK-00000-00&context=1516831>.
- McKinley, E. G. (1997). *Beverly Hills, 90210: Television, Gender, and Identity*. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press.

- McRobbie, A. & J. Garber. (1977). "Girls and Subcultures." In Stuart Hall & Tony Jefferson (Eds.), *Resistance through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain*. London, England: Routledge.
- Mifflin, L. (March 17, 1999). "TV Notes; A Rival Gains on *Felicity*." *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/1999/03/17/arts/tv-notes-a-rival-gains-on-felicity.html>
- Mittell, J. (2001). "A Cultural Approach to Television Genre Theory." *Cinema Journal* 40, No. 3.
- Meyer, M. D. E. (2009). "'I'm Just Trying to Find my Way Like Most Kids': Bisexuality, Adolescence and the Drama of *One Tree Hill*." *Sexuality & Culture*. 13 no. 4. 237-251.
- Meyer, M. D. E and M. M. Wood. (2013). Sexuality and Teen Television: Emerging Adults Respond to Representations of Queer Identity on *Glee*. *Sexuality & Culture*. 17 no. 3. 434-448.
- Molina-Guzman, I. (2010). "'Ugly' America Dreams the American Dream," in *Dangerous Curves: Latina Bodies and the Media*. New York: NYU Press. 119-150.
- Moore, F. (July 26, 2008). "Are promos too much?; 'Gossip Girl' television series will launch new racy promos". *The Times & Transcript (New Brunswick)*. [https://advance-lexis-com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:m:4T32-1YD0-TXKD-X107-00000-00&context=1516831](https://advance.lexis-com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:m:4T32-1YD0-TXKD-X107-00000-00&context=1516831).
- Murphy, K. (February 26, 2018). "From 'Dawson's Creek' to 'Buffy' to 'Frasier' to 'Seinfeld' – what happened to those lone 'token' Black actors?" *The Undeclared*. <https://theundefeated.com/features/90s-token-Black-actors-phil-morris-bianca-lawson-kim-coles/>
- Newman, M. Z. and E. Levine. (2012). *Legitimizing Television: Media Convergence and Cultural Studies*. New York, NY: Routledge.

- New York City Department of City Planning (2005). "The Newest New Yorkers: 2000." Retrieved from https://web.archive.org/web/20090329053958/http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/census/nny_briefing_booklet.pdf.
- Nordyke, K. (July 18, 2006). "CW has designs on 'Model' start". *The Hollywood Reporter*. [https://advance-lexis-com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:4KG9-TP10-TX2Y-F33Y-00000-00&context=1516831](https://advance.lexis-com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:4KG9-TP10-TX2Y-F33Y-00000-00&context=1516831).
- O'Neal, S. (September 11, 2017). "All our 9/11 anxieties ended up on HBO." *AV Club*. <https://www.avclub.com/all-our-9-11-anxieties-ended-up-on-hbo-1802751805>.
- Omi, M. & H. Winant. (2014). *Racial Formation in the United States*. London: Routledge.
- "One Tree Hill's Anna Finds Courage – and Romance?" (2005, April 18). <https://www.afterellen.com/tv/4438-one-tree-hills-anna-finds-courage-and-romance>
- Owen, R. (September 19, 2007). THE CW'S 'GOSSIP GIRL' SHOULD BE TALK OF THE TEENS. *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* (Pennsylvania). Retrieved from Nexis Uni.
- People* staff. (October 16, 2008). "Gossip Girl Author Loves the Show, Hates Vanessa." *People*. <https://people.com/tv/gossip-girl-author-loves-the-show-hates-vanessa/>.
- People* staff. (April 27, 2010). "World's Most Beautiful 2010!" *People*. (April 27, 2010). <https://people.com/celebrity/worlds-most-beautiful-2010/#jessica-szohr>.
- Perren, A. (2003). "New U.S. Networks in the 1990s." In Hilmes, M. (Ed.), *The Television History Book*. London England: BFI. 107-112.

- Pierce, S. D. (October 31, 2007). "It's great to be a 'Gossip'." *Deseret Morning News* (Salt Lake City). Retrieved from Nexis Uni.
- Porter, R. (February 24, 2002). "Felicity' is graduating off The WB." *Tulsa World (Oklahoma)*. <https://advance-lexis-com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:4570-4760-0093-M0Y3-00000-00&context=1516831>.
- Radway, J. A. (1984). "Women Read the Romance: The Interaction of Text and Context." *Feminist Studies*. 9 no. 1. 53-78.
- Rasminsky, J. S. (March 15, 1994). "On the Dumping of a '90210' Role Model." *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved from ProQuest Historical Newspapers.
- "RATINGS ANALYSIS - Back of the nets". *Broadcast*. July 30, 1999. <https://advance-lexis-com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:7XGD-V860-YC46-Y16G-00000-00&context=1516831>.
- Richmond, R. (1998). "Felicity". *Variety*. (September 28, 1998 - October 4, 1998). <https://advance-lexis-com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:3TRM-9DT0-0006-72D5-00000-00&context=1516831>.
- Rios, S. (2015). Joey Potter: Final Girl Next Door. *Journal of Popular Film and Television*. 43 no. 3. 136-147.
- Rochlin, M. (October 3, 1998). *New York Times Service*. Broadcaster looks beyond the tube for its audience – THIS LITTLE SERIES WENT TO MARKETING – How does a TV network that no one watches promote the hottest new show of the season? Without other hit shows to market Felicity around, WB is relying instead on a carefully-planned advertising campaign to make it a hit. *The Globe and Mail* (Canada). Retrieved from Nexis Uni.
- Ross, S. M. (2004). "Dormant Dormitory Friendships: Race and gender in *Felicity*." In Ross, S. M. and L. E. Stein (Eds.), *Teen Television: Essays on Programming and Fandom*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland.

- Ross, S. M. (2008). "Defining Teen Culture: The N Network." In Ross, S. M. and L. E. Stein (Eds.), *Teen Television: Essays on Programming and Fandom*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland.
- Rudolph, A. (1999). "GAGA FOR GOTHAM". *Variety*. (November 15, 1999 - November 21, 1999). [https://advance-lexis-com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:3XWJ-CWS0-0006-7526-00000-00&context=1516831](https://advance.lexis-com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:3XWJ-CWS0-0006-7526-00000-00&context=1516831).
- Ryalls, E. D. (2016). Ambivalent aspirationalism in millennial postfeminist culture on *Gossip Girl*. *Communication & Critical/Cultural Studies*. 13 no. 2. 198-213.
- Sachs, A. (September 18, 2008). "90210 it's reality, not just TV; Remake of teen classic spurs new generation of celebrity spotters." *Washington Post*. Retrieved from Nexis Uni.
- Schmidt, B. & J. Winters. (2002). "Anxiety After 9/11." *Psychology Today*. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/articles/200201/anxiety-after-911>.
- Schneider, M. (June 15, 1998). "THE HOT LIST: KERI RUSSELL: MEDIA BUYERS SAY SHE'S THE ONE TO WATCH". *Electronic Media*. Retrieved from Nexis Uni.
- Schneider, M. & S. Ault. (April 2000). "TEENY-BOP CROP GOES PLOP". *Variety*. (April 17, 2000 - April 23, 2000). Retrieved from Nexis Uni.
- Shimpach, S. (2010). *Television in Transition: The Life and Afterlife of the Narrative Action Hero*. Chichester, England: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Smith, S. D. (December 9, 2008). "Passion Play". *Women's Wear Daily (WWD)*. Retrieved from Nexis Uni.
- Spigel, L. (2004). "Entertainment Wars: Television Culture after 9/11." *American Quarterly*. 52 no. 2. 235-270.
- Stanley, T.L. (October 11, 1999). "Net Gains: Bob Bibb & Lew Goldstein". *AdWeek* (East). Retrieved from Nexis Uni.

- Stearns, P. N. (September 8, 2016). "9/11 Struck Fear in Americans for more than the Obvious Reasons." *History News Network*.
<https://historynewsnetwork.org/article/163801>.
- Tasker, Yvonne and Diane Negra. (2007). "Introduction: Feminist Politics and Postfeminist Culture." *Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture*. Eds. Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra. Durham: Duke University Press. 1-26. Print.
- "TELEVISION SHOWS LIKE "FELICITY" AND "DAWSON'S CREEK" AND THEIR PORTRAYALS OF TEEN-AGE SEX". (April 24, 1999). *National Public Radio (NPR)*. Retrieved from Nexis Uni..
- "The WB Selects Sunday for Second Night Launch with Steven Spielberg Animation, Kirk Cameron Show, Television's Only Hispanic Situation Comedy and Surprise Pickup of ABC's Popular 'Sister, Sister'; New Network Expands Programming Targeting Children, Teens and Young Families". (May 22, 1995). PR Newswire. Retrieved from Nexis Uni.
- "The WB Sets 1998-99 Schedule -- New Night To Be Thursday, With Five Nights Set For A Fall Launch." *Business Wire*. May 19, 1998, Tuesday. Retrieved from Nexis Uni.
- Turnbull, S. (2008). "They Stole Me": The O.C., Masculinity, and the Strategies of Teen TV. In Ross, S. M. and L. E. Stein (Eds.), *Teen Television: Essays on Programming and Fandom*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland.
- "TV Winners & Losers: Numbers Racket a Final Tally of the Season's Shows." (June 4, 1998). *Entertainment Weekly*. Retrieved from
<http://www.oocities.org/hollywood/4616/ew0604.html>.
- U.S. Census Bureau (2010). Profile of General Population and Housing Characteristics: 2010. Retrieved from
<https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=CF>.

- U.S. Census Bureau (2016). Place of Birth by Nativity and Citizenship Status: Total population 2012-2016 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates. Retrieved from <https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=CF>.
- Van Damme, E. (2010). "Gender and sexual scripts in popular US teen series: A study on the gendered discourses in *One Tree Hill* and *Gossip Girl*." 2 no. 1. 77-92.
- Vlada. (May 12, 2010). "WB Wednesday: Faces of The WB," *Staying In* (blog) , <https://stayingin.wordpress.com/2010/05/12/wb-wednesday-faces-of-the-wb/>.
- Warner, K. J. (2015). *The Cultural Politics of Colorblind Casting*. New York: Routledge.
- Warner, K. (2017). "In the Time of Plastic Representation." *Film Quarterly*. 71 no. 2. <https://filmquarterly.org/2017/12/04/in-the-time-of-plastic-representation/>
- "WB Image Campaign 1999 Faces of The WB 1," (October 4, 2016). YouTube video, 1:02, "Buffy & Angel – Original promo trailers archive," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xQ3PHRmgF90>.
- "WB 'My Generation' Image Campaign (2001)," YouTube video, 1:02, "Riverstreet Productions," October 12, 2017.
- "WB Promo – 1999 – Faces," YouTube video, 3:16, "Jack McPhee," May 29, 2006, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ctu9s0lsmKQ>.
- Wee, V. (2008). Teen Television and The WB Television Network. In Ross, S. M. and L. E. Stein (Eds.), *Teen Television: Essays on Programming and Fandom*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland.
- Winslow, H. (December 19, 1998). "Felicity's hype hasn't paid off in viewers: The fledgling WB network spent a lot of money promoting Felicity, a coming-of-age drama about a college freshman, but its ratings haven't equalled those high hopes." *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from Nexis Uni.

'Gossip Girl' Gets Full Season Order: You know you love her. Well, so does The CW.

(October 9, 2007). Zap2it. Retrieved from Nexis Uni.

Zook, K. B. (1999). *Color By Fox: The Fox Network and the Revolution in Black Television*. New York: Oxford University Press. Print.