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Watching Women: Surveillance and Spectatorship in Women's Television

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Abstract

This dissertation considers how women's spectatorship—how women are imagined as viewing subjects, and what are defined as feminine ways of watching—is transformed by digital technologies, and what it reveals about the shifting nature of privacy and visibility. It maps the contours of our current configuration of gendered looking relations by analyzing a constellation of television technologies that embody new norms of surveillance and spectatorship, and television texts that grapple with those changes. Women's television, I argue, is at the forefront of confronting the gendered stakes of such changes, revealing the complex, gendered processes of negotiation necessitated by data and visual surveillance technology that blurs the distinction between watching and being watched. The series I analyze do so by integrating surveillance and technology into their storytelling formally and narratively; their embrace of what I call surveillance aesthetics constitutes their address to a feminine spectator, as she is reimagined in the digital age. By examining the relationship between representations of surveillance in women's television and how television technology itself shapes the dynamics of women's spectatorship, this dissertation demonstrates that television's current imbrication with surveillance changes how viewers are imagined and addressed. I explore how women's television series enact modes of address that construct a feminine spectator who is constantly negotiating unstable subject positions and frames of reference created by new forms of visibility. Analyzing those modes of address alongside the television technology that imbricates watching and being watched reveals how surveillance is deployed as a form of gendered power, while treating women not as objects of the gaze, but as subjects.

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Introduction

In a final-season episode of *The Good Wife* (CBS, 2009-2016), titular lawyer-protagonist Alicia Florrick (Julianna Margulies) defends a client who has created a multi-platform application called Spoiler. A relationship-mapping app, Spoiler predicts television narratives based on a series' pilot episode. The app's creator suggests it will predict plot developments "like who will sleep with who and who will get killed off," a seeming nod to fan outrage over the unexpected death of Alicia's primary love interest in *The Good Wife*'s fifth-season. While Alicia seems to suspect the app's surveillant potential, the client asserts, "It's a stupid little program. It's not for surveillance." However, a disgraced former National Security Agency employee described as a "poor-man's Snowden" confirms the NSA's interest, telling Alicia:

> "Spoiler has been one of the NSA's most exciting civilian acquisitions, and although it was created for rather banal reasons, the same infrastructure lends itself well to processing other forms of data, like understanding conversations between potential terrorists and predicting their future plots. You know, like if one terrorist is going to get into a love triangle with another terrorist's wife. Just kidding. Sort of."

The NSA agent's tongue-in-cheek account conflates the "banal" enjoyment of television (and perhaps television romance specifically) with practices of state surveillance that rely on ever-increasing access to private life. Surveillance and television spectatorship are built from the same code, if only "sort of" performing the same function.

The Good Wife offers one of many examples of contemporary television grappling with how technology is rapidly transforming dynamics of visibility and privacy. Not only might the

NSA be listening in to personal conversations, but smartphones might be doing the same. Corporations track data collected from every networked interaction, as more and more of our communication, consumption, learning, and labor takes place online. Social media platforms encourage and monetize the exposure of everyday life. Tactics meant to preserve privacy in the face of this culture of publicity, such as the practice of creating "finstas" or "fake Instagrams" accessible only to select users, may limit exposure but simultaneously create more data for platforms to track and sell. Screens and cameras proliferate at home, in public, and even on our bodies creating new ways of being watched, at the same time that they produce new ways of watching.

For most, television may not be the first technology that comes to mind when considering these new surveillance dynamics. However, the transformation of earlier broadcast- and cable-based TV to digital and internet-based TV has meant that television technology now incorporates those new affordances referenced above. Television, in its convergence with other technologies and media forms through Smart TV sets and streaming platforms, thus constitutes one important way that surveillance is unobtrusively integrated into everyday life. Viewers/users can consume streaming media on any internet-connected device, while streaming platforms use data surveillance and algorithmically targeted marketing to curate individualized recommendations that autoplay without even a click. Smart TVs can provide visual access to the home through networked security systems, so that the feed from a front-door camera plays picture-in-picture with prime time television. Viewers and users must develop strategies to navigate these new and unstable dynamics of visibility, in which being a viewing subject always entails being an object of surveillance.

As feminist scholars and activists have long demonstrated, women have always had to negotiate the dynamics of seeing and being seen in intensified ways, and cultural expectations around the boundary between public and private are central to the enforcement of racial, gender, and sexual norms. If modernity was characterized by a marked binary division into gendered private and public spheres, it was equally characterized by women's increased visibility—in urban working life, department store shopping, and in the mass media.[1] Anxiety about these shifting boundaries often manifested as concern about women as viewing subjects, of cinema and later, television.[2] While the gains of the feminist movement have altered the norms of women's place in public, many feminist critics who characterize our present conjuncture as postfeminist have contended that cultural visibility for women has been offered in place of a radical feminist politics—visibility *as* empowerment.[3] The digital culture and surveillance regimes that continue to encourage, enforce, police, and monetize women's visibility very often reinscribe patriarchal dynamics that objectify women in public and circumscribe modes of feminine and feminist

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[1] Rita Felski, *Doing Time: Feminist Theory and Postmodern Culture* (New York: New York UP, 2000); Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1995); Kathy Lee Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in New York City, 1880 to 1920* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1986); Ben Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and Its Contexts* (New York: Columbia UP, 2001); Shelley Stamp, *Movie-Struck Girls: Women and Motion Picture Culture after the Nickelodeon* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2000).

[2] Mary Ann Doane, *The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940s* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1987); Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1991); Lynne Joyrich, *Re-Viewing Reception: Television, Gender, and Postmodern Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1996); Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America* (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1992).

[3] Angela McRobbie, *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 2009); Sarah Banet-Weiser, *Empowered: Popular Feminism and Popular Misogyny* (Durham: Duke UP, 2018).

subjectivity. Nevertheless, the new forms of visibility and vision entailed by the proliferation of digital technology have the potential to unsettle and rewrite negotiations of gendered power. Women's media has always been attentive to and reflexive about these ever-shifting dynamics, and so analyzing women's media texts through this lens allows for better understanding and reimagining them.

This dissertation maps the contours of our current configuration of gendered looking relations by analyzing a constellation of television technologies that embody new norms of surveillance and spectatorship, and television texts that grapple with those changes. Women's media, I argue, is at the forefront of confronting the gendered stakes of such changes, revealing the complex, gendered processes of negotiation necessitated by data and visual surveillance technology that blurs the distinction between watching and being watched. The series I analyze do so by integrating surveillance and technology into their storytelling formally and narratively; their embrace of what I call surveillance aesthetics constitutes their address to a feminine spectator, as she is reimagined in the digital age.

By examining the relationship between representations of surveillance in women's television and how television technology itself shapes the dynamics of women's spectatorship, I demonstrate that television's current imbrication with surveillance changes how viewers are imagined and addressed. I employ textual and discourse analysis of television series, marketing material, and the popular press to map the interconnected ways that surveillance and digital technology reshape gendered subjectivity by rewriting norms of privacy that have traditionally been deployed to police women's visibility. I analyze TV series that centrally thematize both spectatorship and surveillance, and which centrally, if not exclusively, address women

audiences. I seek out storylines about surveillance and technology, as well as moments when on-screen technology shapes what we see and hear—that is, when diegetic screens frame our view. I consider how surveillance aesthetics in women's television convey ideas about women's relationship to privacy and visibility. Specifically, I analyze how those series address their imagined spectator, hailing a viewer to identify with feminine (and sometimes feminist) subjectivity. I pair this textual analysis with discourse analysis of marketing and press material that circulates around the series and around television technology itself. As television historians have demonstrated, television's place as a visual, networked technology within the home has long been a source of anxiety about its ability to violate the boundaries of the private sphere. Popular discourse about streaming platforms' and Smart TV's data surveillance and algorithmic targeting reveals a tension between a continued reliance on traditional gender norms to sell domestic surveillance and a reimagining of how audiences are constituted and addressed. By putting the textual address to women audiences in conversation with the technological address, I foreground the construction of women as subjects actively negotiating the new forms of power deployed through surveillance. Doing so enables me to seek out emergent feminist subjectivities made possible by the unfinished transformation of the public/private, subject/object binaries that circumscribe women's lives.

Television Surveillance in Context

Television technology, which now incorporates pervasive data and often visual surveillance, typifies the new contours of surveillance culture, and yet is rarely considered in such politicized terms in popular and scholarly discourse. It thus provides an especially

productive lens through which to untangle how new norms of privacy are imbricated with domestic life. Even though many people may not often consider the ramifications of their television's surveillant affordances, TV has historically been a source of real or imagined disruption to domestic privacy. This history prompts the consideration of whether and how TV poses such a disruption in the 21st century, as the meaning of privacy is rewritten by digital technologies and the corporations that produce and employ them.

From its widespread entry into the American home in the mid-twentieth century, television has been discursively and technologically entwined with surveillance, and media historians have demonstrated TV's ambivalent relationship to changing boundaries between the private and public spheres in the mid-twentieth century.[4] Specifically, television's potential to work as a tool of surveillance has been both a point of fear and anxiety and a selling point. Early discourses of TV as the "window on the world" were regularly reversed into anxieties that TV could also serve as a "window on the home,"[5] particularly in light of Cold War satellite surveillance and the military origins of TV technology. TV scholars have long analyzed "liveness" as a defining factor of the medium, and the ability to be transported to an event happening elsewhere was a large part of its consumer appeal. Television, in this construction, offered the unique ability to be both inside and outside, both private and public, simultaneously. This capacity, however, also represented a source of anxiety, and there existed the fear that the

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[4] Anna McCarthy, *Ambient Television: Visual Culture and Public Space,* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001); Jeffrey Sconce, *Haunted Media: Electronic Presence from Telegraphy to Television* (Durham: Duke UP, 2000); Spigel, *Make Room for TV*; Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (London: Routledge, 1974).
[5] Sconce, *Haunted Media*, 144.

televisual gaze could turn back on the viewer. Jeffrey Sconce notes that this surveillance anxiety was not new to television among other media, but that "period accounts of television often pondered the seemingly inevitable reversibility of the watcher and the watched presented by all telecommunications technology."[6]

Significantly, however, television's *visuality* was largely new among household technologies and so invoked fears of being seen by this new device. This fear applied both to television's imagined ability to look back into the home, as well as to the TV cameras that could film and broadcast previously-discreet aspects of life in public. Lynn Spigel cites a 1949 *Saturday Evening Post* article warning its readers to "Be Good! Television's Watching," asserting the Foucauldian disciplinary power of television as surveillance.[7] As in Bentham's panopticon, it does not matter whether any person is *really* watching, only that one is subject to constant visibility and so internalizes power's gaze. The *Post* specifically suggests that "TV's prying eye may well record such personal frailties as the errant husband dining with his secretary."[8] The imagined scenario implies that television strips men of the privilege to keep their public and domestic lives separate. This mediated disruption of the separation of spheres posits a now-visually-empowered wife as the spectator-subject of surveillance (and of television) and her husband as the unwilling object. Women's television *spectatorship* thus becomes a problem in itself, and Spigel describes the ways that images of women watching TV in advertisements were very carefully constructed so that women were never shown solely enjoying

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[6] Sconce, *Haunted Media*, 144-145
[7] Spigel, *Make Room for TV*, 118.
[8] Spigel, *Make Room for TV*, 118.

television, but also doing housework or entertaining guests. Women's behavior, however, posed a problem on either end of television's surveillant gaze. Early episodes of the dystopian anthology series *The Window* and *Outer Limits*, for instance, depict the opposite scenario to the *Post*, in which a wife's infidelity is uncovered by the mysterious surveillant workings of television or similar technology, broadcasting private life outward and disrupting normative gender dynamics.

Such fears of gendered disruption (or disruption to gender) are historically entangled with the notion of privacy itself. Scholar of media and law Eden Osucha suggests that the legal doctrine that citizens had a "right to privacy" developed out of late nineteenth and early twentieth century discourses of media technology and publicity, "especially popular anxieties about the commodification and exposure of women in visual culture."[9] Industrialization and urbanization were making the past distinction between public and private spheres increasingly difficult to enforce, just as photography and published mass media were enabling new kinds of exposure. Social norms were not enough to keep these kinds of public exposure out of the private home—either by broadcasting private life outward, or providing content inappropriate for domestic consumption—and so the discourse of separate spheres shifted to one of publicity and privacy tied to mass media culture in order to reinforce gender and racial boundaries. Privacy was rewritten as a property right, the right to one's own likeness (or, to own one's likeness), with white femininity as "iconic both for the individual ideal of privacy and for the wounding of that

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[9] Eden Osucha, "The Whiteness of Privacy: Race, Media, Law," *Camera Obscura* 24, no. 1 (May 2009): 70.

ideal through uses of publicity."[10] Publicity was framed as a violation and dispossession of the individual subject through commodification, though significantly only for white people, as people of color were not culturally granted such self-possession or property rights in the first place.

With this historical context in mind, it makes sense that in response to television's threat to disturb the already-tenuous division between public and private life, TV technology was developed and sold to secure that same division. Instead of television's surveillance capability posing a source of fear, the TV industry developed surveillance technology meant to secure the domestic space. In her work on the integration of closed circuit television (CCTV) into the home in the 1960s through the 1980s, Hannah Spaulding argues that domestic CCTV functioned as a tool of what George Lipsitz calls the "white spatial imaginary," "enforcing the boundaries of the private home."[11] CCTV was sometimes used to network rooms of the house together, allowing women to visually monitor their cooking or their children from another room—uses of the TV set that would likely preclude women's viewership of regular television programming. As CCTV was increasingly adopted in urban housing, however, it functioned to police who was and was not allowed to occupy certain private or public spaces. Spaulding suggests that urban-dwelling white women, forced to use public elevators and laundry facilities, were seen as those most in need of protection by racializing CCTV surveillance, and thus the rationalization for its expansion. Simultaneously, they were also often the ones in charge of monitoring the visual

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[10] Osucha, "The Whiteness of Privacy," 72.
[11] Hannah Spaulding, "Reinventing Television and Family Life, 1960-1990," (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 2018), 300.

feeds that ensure the safety of the home, making white women both subject and object of the televisual gaze, both empowered and protected by surveillance.

Such deployments of CCTV reveal some of the complex nature of privacy as a domestic value both threatened and affirmed by TV surveillance. As Osucha suggests, the nature of publicity, or mediated visibility, is distinctly racialized; the commodification of Black citizens through photography was not deemed harmful because they were not granted individuality or self-possession in the first place, culturally and politically speaking. CCTV cameras in urban apartments similarly racialize by *generalizing*, constructing Blackness as a threat to white femininity. This function of residential CCTV reveals that surveillance is often not dominantly imagined as violating privacy rights when privacy is equated with private property, an equation intimately tied up with whiteness and gender norms. In other words, certain forms of surveillance may be compatible with "privacy" when it affirms racial and gender hierarchies.

The arrival of cable in American homes in the late 1970s and 80s, however, alters such dynamics in ways important to understanding contemporary TV surveillance. Thinking particularly of CCTV in the private home, whether directed towards the baby or the stove, or monitoring the front door, closed circuit technology puts individual consumers in charge of surveillance. Even in an apartment building, surveillance footage theoretically circulates only within the private property. As Spaulding writes, CCTV "transformed TV watching into an act of surveillance and thus required human labor in the system's constant operation."[12] Cable, however, took control away from the consumer by automating home security. Cable enabled

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[12] Spaulding, "Reinventing Television," 310-311.

two-way communication and constant data collection. It outsourced the process of monitoring to computers and corporations. While this form of TV surveillance is similarly sold as securing the private home, it becomes perhaps harder to reconcile with the value of privacy. A 1981 article in Broadcasting Magazine, in fact, argued that the deregulation of telecommunications corporations as domestic technologies converge through cable posed a serious threat to consumer privacy.[13] The article presciently observed that the explicit surveillance capabilities of cable-based home security systems work alongside practices of data collection and interactivity, and found it all "a touch Orwellian."[14] Domestic technologies all merging into a single "home information center" allows corporations to "compile a dossier-like profile on every subscriber," including what consumers watch and buy.[15] Significantly, the article noted that the primary threat was not "the danger of an unauthorized person's breaking a system's security lock and obtaining information from the computer;" instead, the threat lay in how the system is *supposed* to function, in a system built on unregulated corporate data access.[16] In 1981, many of these fears likely seemed hyperbolic. Many of the interactive features enabled by cable never took off with American consumers, and it was not until the widespread adoption of the internet that such data collection practices were possible at the level the article predicts. Now, however, these predictions seem almost quaint, as Smart TVs networked to other domestic technologies through wireless internet quite literally rewire the domestic sphere, remapping the relationship between spectatorship, surveillance, and privacy.

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[13] "2001 Policy," *Broadcasting (Archive: 1957-1993)*, October 12, 1981.
[14] "2001 Policy," 261.
[15] "2001 Policy," 268.
[16] "2001 Policy," 268.

The current imbrication of television and Web 2.0 technology reshapes these historical configurations of surveillance, spectatorship, and power. Smart TVs turn television sets not into a transparent window visually exposing the home, but a computer window, an interface delimited by networked protocols that connect and collect users' online actions. This shift in television technology coincides with new technological affordances for and new understandings of surveillance, from Patriot Act-era state surveillance and NSA whistleblowing to ubiquitous discourse of corporate Big Data and the self-exposure of social media culture. This is a junction as yet undertheorized in media studies. Scholars of digital media and computing often dismiss television as old media—a screen that does not invite interaction, without a politicized protocol, disconnected from the digital networks with which our lives are now so thoroughly imbricated. But as media historians have demonstrated, transforming dynamics of visibility have long been at the center of television discourse, and in our current juncture, in which the distinction between television and computer barely registers for many viewers, TV continues to provide a critical lens through which to map emerging modes of watching and being watched. Television programming reflects processes of technological convergence, theorizing itself through the integration of technology into aesthetics and narrative. As *The Good Wife*'s Spoiler app storyline proposes, the way we watch television and the ways that we are watched (and tracked, predicted, controlled) operate through the same code.

Television scholars have already begun to consider the digital transformation of television into something that requires new critical approaches, as evidenced by collection titles

like *Television After TV*[17] and *Television Studies After TV*.[18] Much of this work takes an industrial orientation, considering how Hollywood has adapted their strategies of consumer address to the new convergent media landscape.[19] Scholars also emphasize the fragmentation of television's mass audience in the broadcast era into niche groups targeted by personalized advertising, landing somewhere on the spectrum between democratization through interactivity and participation, and entrapment within a "digital enclosure" in which all user action is commodified.[20] The latter term is coined by Mark Andrejevic, whose work most explicitly addresses the imbrication of television's changing form with surveillance. In his work on reality television and digital media more broadly, Andrejevic forecloses the egalitarian promise of interactivity, suggesting that media sells "submission to comprehensive forms of monitoring as a form of self-empowerment and self-expression."[21] Television, in this conception, produces a viewing subject rather helplessly complicit in her own objectification by capital.

My interest lies with the feminine, and perhaps feminist, subject constructed by women's television when spectatorship and surveillance converge, which is somewhere in between the participant-spectator of convergence culture and the consumer-prisoner of Andrejevic's "super-panopticon." Raymond Williams argues that broadcast television mediated the contradictory

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[17] Jan Olsson and Lynn Spigel, eds., *Television After TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition* (Durham: Duke UP, 2004).
[18] Graeme Turner and Jinna Tay, eds., *Television Studies After TV: Understanding Television in the Post-Broadcast Era* (London: Routledge, 2009).
[19] Jennifer Holt and Kevin Sanson, eds., *Connected Viewing: Selling, Streaming, and Sharing Media in the Digital Age* (London: Routledge, 2014).
[20] James Bennett and Niki Strange, eds., *Television as Digital Media* (Durham: Duke UP, 2011).
[21] Mark Andrejevic, *Reality TV: The Work of Being Watched* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003).

pressures of industrialization in the post-War era through mobile privatization—simultaneous connection and privacy.[22] Flow, which Williams identifies as American broadcasting's defining characteristic, had been harnessed by the interests of capital to create a particular kind of consumer, but it also produced a subject entwined with the social world whose potential exceeded her commodification. Williams demonstrated a commitment to understanding the political potential of the subject(s) produced by the commercial cultural form of television. If the particular cultural and economic contradictions mediated by broadcast flow have changed, what might our new kind of flow—content that moves seamlessly from laptop to tablet to phone, for instance—resolve? How does it produce a subject who navigates privacy and connection as their relationship has been transformed in the digital age? While Andrejevic's capitalist digital enclosure may often prevail in our postfeminist media landscape, this dissertation discerns an emergent feminist politics in the feminine address of women's television through its engagement of surveillance aesthetics.

Women's Spectatorship and Feminist Media Theory

This dissertation considers how women's spectatorship—how women are imagined as viewing subjects, and what are defined as feminine ways of watching—is transformed by digital technologies, and what it reveals about the shifting nature of privacy and visibility. By putting

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[22] Williams, *Television*. Here I invoke Williams' specific approach to analyzing television through his concept of "flow," but for a more expansive account of how flow has variously been taken up in television cultural studies and political economic global media studies, see Mimi White, "Flow and Other Close Encounters with Television," in *Planet TV: A Global Television Reader*, eds. Lisa Parks and Shanti Kumar (New York: NYU Press, 2003), 94-110.

television's textual address to women audiences in conversation with its technological address, I foreground the construction of women as subjects actively negotiating new forms of power deployed through surveillance. In doing so, I build on bodies of scholarship in feminist spectatorship theory, women's genres, and feminist media studies more broadly. Women's spectatorship has often been theorized in terms of dispersed, negotiated, mobile, or multiple subject positions, in contrast to the unitary masculine subject position constructed by classical Hollywood cinema. It has also been associated with "exceeding the frames" imposed by patriarchal and capitalist institutions to limit women's power as viewing subjects.

Within cinema studies, media historians have considered the relationship between women's spectatorship and modernity's challenge to the separation of private and public spheres. Miriam Hansen argues that by granting women and other marginalized groups access to this new form of public life, the cinema provided a space for the formation of alternative and unpredictable publics whose potential could exceed their commodification by the film industry.[23] Writing specifically about the avid fan subculture that formed around Rudolph Valentino, Hansen suggests that while his stardom was certainly fostered by the heavily institutionalized star system of early Hollywood, "the Valentino cult seemed to exceed that framework."[24] This riotous (and literally rioting) alternative public sphere evoked particular anxiety in its challenge to "the sexual economy of the relations of representation and reception" on two fronts; it both

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[23] Hansen, *Babel and Babylon*
[24] Hansen, *Babel and Babylon*, 260.

"temporarily derailed the consumerist appropriation of female desire" and destabilized sexual identity by turning Valentino into an eroticized spectacle styled for the female gaze.[25]

The communal formation of actual women audiences was paired with, and perhaps fostered by, what Hansen and others describe as an open and intertextual mode of address in early films, which had yet to develop an institutionalized cinematic language and which made room for multiple reading strategies.[26] The development of classical modes of cinematic narration and address was thus an anxious response to the heterogeneity of diverse viewing publics. Hansen notes "the seeming paradox between the industry's increasing catering to female audiences and the structural masculinization of the spectator position attributed to classical cinema," and suggests that the cinematic scopic regime articulated most famously by Laura Mulvey worked to counter the agency female viewers might have found in their increased access to public life.[27]

Mary Ann Doane takes up this paradox in psychoanalytic terms by addressing the 1940s woman's film and the feminine spectator it constructs.[28] The genre of the woman's film is

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[25] Hansen, *Babel and Babylon*, 18.
[26] In addition to Hansen, see Stamp, *Movie-Struck Girls.* Shelley Stamp makes a similar argument about serial-queen films, whose self-reflexivity and promotional tie-ins encouraged intertextual reading strategies that granted female fans agency in how the story was to be consumed.
[27] Hansen, *Babel and Babylon*, 57.
[28] Doane, *The Desire to Desire*. Doane does not address the collective viewing public of Hansen's work or the social subject who buys a movie ticket and sits in a theater, but investigates "the representation of female subjectivity" in women's films (9). Her work thus enables analysis less of actual women's appearance in public life than about what their appearance in representation is made to signify. For an alternative perspective on the woman's film not rooted in psychoanalytic theory, see Jeanine Basinger, *How Hollywood Spoke to Women, 1930-1960* (Hanover: Wesleyan UP, 1995). While psychoanalysis fundamentally circumscribes the

directed toward a female audience and interrogates women's subjectivity and desire. However, women's representation within traditional representational structures is unable to account for women's agency as desiring subjects because those structures are built on their objectification as spectacles or their passivity and narcissism as consumers, and attempts to do so "produce perturbations and contradictions within the narrative economy."[29] Providing an important foundation for this dissertation, Doane specifically analyzes films in which the female protagonists are depicted as spectators, yet simultaneously experience an overwhelming "sense of surveillance, of constantly being watched—even as she herself watches."[30] The woman's constant reduction to an image circumscribes her subjectivity and ability to look. The position of mastery ascribed to the masculine spectator-subject of cinema relies on the distance and difference between subject and object of desire to which women do not, in this calculation, have access. Doane thus posits a patriarchal representational schema in which women's visual appearance disallows feminine desire as anything other than narcissism, and the cinematic image is merely "a trap whereby [woman's] subjectivity becomes synonymous with her objectification."[31] While she only briefly acknowledges that this entrapment is never total, as women's spectatorship continues to exceed its imposed limitations, this dissertation builds from the idea that being the object of surveillance (or media representation) can never fully circumscribe women's desire, spectatorship, or subjectivity.

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possibility of women as desiring subjects, Basinger focuses on how women's films do express the ambivalent and contradicting desires of women, and provide an outlet for feminine emotion.

[29] Doane, *The Desire to Desire*, 13.

[30] Doane, *The Desire to Desire*, 156.

[31] Doane, *The Desire to Desire*, 33.

While Doane provides a foundational analysis of the potential limits of women's spectatorship and visibility in classical Hollywood cinema through a psychoanalytic lens, television scholars have long identified alternative dynamics of address in TV. If the imagined spectator of cinema is masculine, television spectatorship has historically been conceived as feminine or feminizing, characterized by consumption and passivity.[32] At the same time, scholars have described television in terms of its multivocality and dispersed, multiple subject positions.[33] Women's genres, in particular, have been theorized to exemplify this characterization, from soap opera[34] to daytime variety and game shows,[35] to makeover TV.[36] Much early work in feminist television criticism was directed toward defending women's genres, and particularly soap opera, in the face of gendered taste hierarchies. As Charlotte Brunsdon suggests, this was a defense on two fronts, as feminists often dismissed soap opera as patriarchal propaganda while dominant culture simply wrote it off as feminine trash.[37] In the late seventies and eighties, scholars such as Brunsdon, Dorothy Hobson, Tania Modleski, Ellen Seiter, and Christine Geraghty, among others employed various methodologies from ethnography to psychoanalytic textual analysis to argue for the value of studying women's genres, in part through arguing for their textual complexity or the complex reading strategies employed by their women viewers. Attention to the complexity of

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[32] Joyrich, *Re-Viewing Reception*; Spigel, *Make Room for TV*.
[33] Mimi White, *Tele-Advising: Therapeutic Discourse in American Television* (Chapel Hill, NC: UNC Press, 1992); Lynn Joyrich, *Re-Viewing Reception*.
[34] Tania Modleski, *Loving with a Vengeance: Mass-produced Fantasies for Women*, second ed. (London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2007).
[35] Marsha F. Cassidy, *What Women Watched: Daytime Television in the 1950s* (Austin: U of Texas Press, 2005).
[36] Brenda Weber, *Makeover TV: Selfhood, Citizenship, and Celebrity* (Durham: Duke UP, 2009).
[37] Charlotte Brunsdon, *Screen Tastes: Soap Opera to Satellite Dishes* (London: Routledge, 1997).

women's spectatorial pleasure—whether that experienced by actual viewers or that constructed by the text—prompted further exploration of the hegemonic negotiations enacted by television targeted to women.

It has, however, become more difficult to talk about "women's television" or "women's genres" in the way that those who took up soap opera's defense once did, and not only because "women's" most often referred largely to white middle-class women (as many of the scholars mentioned above acknowledge). Television technology, industry, and form have incorporated new modes of address. Certainly much scholarship has addressed the shift from broadcasting to cable's ostensible narrowcasting, which often serves to reinforce divisions between raced and gendered groups even as it purports to cater to them.[38] But as streaming continues to expand, and broadcast and cable networks build their own online platforms, the structure of streaming subscription and the affordances of micro-targeting online change the relationship between the industry and the viewer. Streaming companies claim not to be interested in demographics per se, but in individuals based on interest and behavior as tracked through online interaction. The difference is certainly questionable, but it may also serve to destabilize or expand what it means to be the "feminine" viewer to whom a show attempts to speak. And as the genres and forms of television respond to these technological and industrial changes, it is crucial to ask how the textual address changes with it, and thus the feminine spectator it constructs.

Even as what constitutes "women's television" becomes increasingly difficult to discern, the traditionally-feminine melodramatic mode proliferates across genres, and this dissertation

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[38] Amanda Lotz, *Redesigning Women: Television After the Network Era* (Champaign, IL: U of Illinois Press, 2006).

argues that the distinction of "women's television" still holds industrial and theoretical value. The series I foreground in this dissertation—*The Good Wife, The Good Fight, You, UnREAL,* and multiple teen series including *Riverdale, Pretty Little Liars*, and *Sex Education*—together (and often, individually) traverse broadcast, cable, and streaming. As Lynn Joyrich has suggested of all television, they are multivocal, speaking to many audiences at once, whether they are imagined to have "niche" or "mass" appeal. However, through women-driven production teams, women protagonists, and narratives driven by women's romantic, sexual, and professional desire, they perform a feminine address, hailing a viewer to identify with feminine (and sometimes feminist) subjectivity.

This dissertation argues that the integration of surveillance and technology into the aesthetics of women's television is central to what constitutes feminine spectatorship in the age of streaming. Lauren Berlant argues that women's genres "claim to reflect a kernel of common experience and provide frames for encountering the impacts of living as a woman in the world."[39] Taking a cue from Berlant, this dissertation considers the multiple valences of "framing" when computer monitors, television screens, and camera viewfinders frame our televisual views. The integration of technology into the aesthetics of women's television produces a feminized spectatorial negotiation of these multivalent frames. While Berlant ascribes these qualities to women's intimate public from its 19th century formation, I ask what happens to women's experiences in our current digital conjuncture, when frames for watching and being watched proliferate through new televisual modes of storytelling.

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[39] Lauren Berlant, *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2008), x.

In order to begin to answer this question, I put feminist television studies and spectatorship theory in conversation with theories of digital media. Accounts in digital media scholarship of the networked subject, who is always both an active user and an object of surveillance, are often universalized or (implicitly or explicitly) masculinized. Theorizing the networked subject in and through the feminized television spectator has the potential to discern women's experience of the radical instability of the distinction between watching and being watched, challenging binaristic patriarchal constructions of subjectivity and objectification. Feminist digital media studies, in particular, provides productive tools for approaching how digital media transform binary patriarchal notions of subject and object, and privacy and publicity. Lisa Nakamura, for instance, examines "how the mediation of digital user and object identity as citizens, women, and commodities on the Internet is regulated and conditioned by types of interfaces used to classify, frame, and link them."[40] Significantly, she suggests that the function of surveillance technology "is to police the division between subject/object relations," and thus the imbrication of surveillance with television technology and programming prompts a rethinking of women's spectatorship and the subject's relationship to the potentially-interactive image.[41] Throughout her work, Wendy Hui Kyong Chun has argued that understanding the workings of technology can reconfigure our notions of (and attachments to) privacy, security, and freedom in politically radical ways.[42] Instead of fighting to protect a conception of privacy

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[40] Lisa Nakamura, *Digitizing Race: Visual Cultures of the Internet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 27.
[41] Nakamura, *Digitizing Race*, 27.
[42] Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, *Control and Freedom: Power and Paranoia in the Age of Fiber Optics* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005).

built on the protection of white women's chastity and incongruous with technology's inherent leakiness, she suggests, we should assert the right to be in public.[43] Her feminist politics grow out of networked digital technology's radical potential to transform traditional structures; as television formally incorporates that technology into its narrative and aesthetic form, it may also incorporate its incipient feminism. If earlier feminist media scholarship such Doane's posited the structural contradiction of female spectatorship—the confusions and convolutions of overidentification with the image—feminist digital media studies' investments in the nonsovereignty of the networked user and the potential of radical publicity offer an alternative orientation toward the structural conflation of watching and being watched.

Focusing on the act of women watching provides a vital perspective for understanding how the proliferation of screens, monitors, windows, and other modes of seeing and being seen reshape processes of identification and enacting agency. In doing so, I explore how women's television series enact modes of address that construct a feminine spectator who is constantly negotiating unstable subject positions and frames of reference, a feminine practice that Berlant refers to as "living shiftingly."[44] Analyzing those modes of address alongside the television technology that collapses the distinction between watching and being watched, I uncover the specific ways that surveillance is deployed as a form of gendered power while treating women not as objects of the gaze, but as subjects.

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[43] Wendy Hui Kyong Chun and Sarah Friedland, "Habits of Leaking: Of Sluts and Network Cards," *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 26.2 (2015).
[44] Berlant, *The Female Complaint*, 10.

Surveillance Aesthetics

All of these intersecting bodies of feminist media scholarship prompt careful examination of the power dynamics of people's relationship to media technology, and aesthetics play a crucial role in constructing that relationship. While this dissertation accounts for the kinds of stories popular media tells about women and surveillance, it also focuses on *how* those stories are told—the visual and narrational dynamics that I am calling surveillance aesthetics. In "Why Media Aesthetics?" Miriam Hansen urges media critics to return to a critical consideration of aesthetics specifically because they train people in a particular relationship to technology.[45] As technologies rapidly proliferate, media aesthetics illuminate how we imagine that changing relationship. She notes both the dystopian and utopian sides of media's potential to "establish equilibrium" between humans and technology at our present moment of technological proliferation; digital media possess expanded powers of control, but have also "opened up new modes of publicness that already enact a different, and potentially alternative, engagement with technology."[46] Those "new modes of publicness" speak to rewriting the gendered and racialized norms of visibility that are established and enforced by surveillance regimes and media representation in tandem. Media aesthetics have the potential to imagine and negotiate our relationship to surveillance in hegemonic or subversive terms; our "training" might be in complacency, resistance, and everything in between.

Patrick Jagoda's *Network Aesthetics* adopts a similar orientation, taking up Jacques Ranciere's suggestion that aesthetics map "the distribution of the sensible," creating "new modes

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[45] Miriam Hansen, "Why Media Aesthetics?" *Critical Inquiry* 30, no. 2 (Winter 2004): 391-395.
[46] Hansen, "Why Media Aesthetics?" 393-394.

of sense perception and [inducing] novel forms of political subjectivity."[47] Jagoda posits a "network aesthetic" that spans media forms and works to "defamiliarize and make networks sensible."[48] While networks are material and figurative structures that certainly predate our contemporary world of ubiquitous, always-on digital technology, the sense of connectedness that many people experience "as a common affective state, a default condition" is deeply imbricated with mediated networks to which we are often quite literally attached.[49] Jagoda eschews the binary poles of control or sovereignty so often posited as the dystopian or utopian potentials of the network, and suggests that artworks engaging a network aesthetic "heighten sensitivities to and encourage layered reflection on everyday embeddedness in networks."[50]

Jagoda understands network aesthetics as fundamentally political. Drawing on Ranciere, he defines politics as "a field of sensibility in which certain ways of being or particular lives—for instance, women, unarmed black men, or precarious populations living outside of first-world digital networks—might be only distantly detectable or wholly unrecognizable."[51] This claim is foundational for my understanding of the stakes of analyzing media representation and aesthetics, but significantly, it is one of the only times that Jagoda makes reference to the specific ways that power functions. Like many new media scholars, he acknowledges the imbrication of power and network form, without letting the specific valences of that power drive his analysis. This dissertation engages an intersectional feminist approach in an effort to challenge the

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[47] Jacques Ranciere, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London: Continuum, 2004), 9.
[48] Patrick Jagoda, *Network Aesthetics* (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 2016), 5.
[49] Jagoda, *Network Aesthetics*, 2.
[50] Jagoda, *Network Aesthetics*, 5.
[51] Jagoda, *Network Aesthetics*, 19.

universalized digital media user whose experience of networked connection is abstracted from the specific oppressions of white heteropatriarchy.

I adapt Jagoda's approach to account for the political dimensions of the aesthetic dynamics I trace. If Jagoda's network aesthetic "makes sensible associations among its featured social actors and the networks they form," my use of "surveillance aesthetics" specifies that the associations made sensible are, in fact, constituted by surveillance technology.[52] Surveillance has always been studied as an exercise of power, but recent interventions in the field of surveillance studies have insisted on and illuminated its violently differential deployment. *Feminist Surveillance Studies* edited by Rachel Dubrofsky and Shoshana Amielle Magnet[53] and *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness* by Simone Browne[54] radically challenge surveillance studies' elision of race, gender, and other politicized identity categories as determining factors in one's relationship to surveillance, technology, and network form. Specifying surveillance as the lens through which I approach televisual aesthetics invokes these recent and necessary interventions, amending the abstract "politics" of much new media theory through a feminist politics attentive to difference.

Chapter Breakdown

The four chapters of this dissertation address specific new forms of visibility and vision engendered by digital technology. My first two chapters explore, respectively, surveillance in the

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[52] Jagoda, *Network Aesthetics*, 106.
[53] Rachel E. Dubrofsky and Shoshana Amielle Magnet, eds., *Feminist Surveillance Studies* (Durham: Duke UP, 2015).
[54] Simone Browne, *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness* (Durham: Duke UP, 2015).

private and public spheres. In chapter one, "Be the Boss: Smart TV Surveillance, Parental Controls, and the Maternal Gaze," I explore television's convergence with surveillance in the home through Smart TV and parental control technology, arguing that the complex domestic dynamics between mothers and daughters are central to the changing nature of privacy within the home. By analyzing the gendered discourses of privacy found in consumer marketing material, privacy policies, and the popular press, I argue that various forms of parental control are sold to consumers as a way to secure the boundaries—and traditional gendered power dynamics—of the nuclear family. Considering the parental controls allowing parents to monitor and limit their children's media consumption alongside other forms of familial and corporate surveillance in the home reveals a larger cultural investment in notions of domestic privacy built on property and propriety, more so than freedom from surveillance. I thus explore "parental controls" that operate by visually monitoring what children do and algorithmically monitoring what children see, both of which conflate surveillance with the caring maternal gaze. While advertisements for new technologies present grown women as autonomous agents in charge of their technology as well as their families, they often offer up girls as the justification for multiple modes of surveillance. Visual forms of parental control are employed, particularly by moms, with an eye toward policing gendered propriety. Similarly, parental controls directed toward what children watch are marketed through a gendered discourse of "media effects." In ads for these technologies, moms become the "boss" of media consumption and young girls its primary victim. As long-standing moral panics about media effects tie girl viewers' consumption of inappropriate content to inappropriate sexual behavior, corporate and parental surveillance is enlisted to enforce a traditional form of domestic privacy based in the invisibility of young women's sexuality. This

chapter probes the power dynamics of surveilling spectatorship, when Smart TV parental control technologies invite the gaze of corporations engaging in consumer surveillance into the home.

Moving from the private sphere to the public, chapter two, "'Women Aren't Just One Thing': Network(ed) Publics and State Surveillance in *The Good Wife* and *The Good Fight*," analyzes representations of state surveillance to consider how the transition from broadcast networks to subscription streaming platforms entails a reimagining of the national public sphere. Comparing CBS series *The Good Wife* to its CBS All Access streaming spin-off *The Good Fight* (2017-present), I show how the former is concerned primarily with the state's access to the intimate details of private life, while the latter asks what happens to feminist public action when the public, and what it means to *be* public, have been reshaped by multiple modes of surveillance. These differences ultimately align the two shows with alternate models of television distribution; the two series grapple with what it means to move away from broadcast, in which television speaks to an imagined national public, and one in which TV addresses an individual user targeted algorithmically. Understanding these models of television spectatorship provides an important angle for approaching the consequences of surveillance culture, as it complicates the meaning of citizenship and public life for women.

Building on my attention to modes of distribution and audience address, chapter three, "Remediating Romance: Digital Spectatorship and Women's Genres from *Lifetime* to Streaming," asks how women's genres, and the spectator they construct, are reimagined for the streaming era. I analyze two series that premiered on the cable network Lifetime but subsequently became Netflix and Hulu "originals," *You* (2018-present) and *UnREAL* (2015-2018). Both series consider how media and technology shape women's relationships to romance,

through intertextual reference to older modalities of women's genres—namely, the reality TV romance and romantic comedy. I argue that each series' complex narrative address productively sheds light on how streaming platforms imagine and construct their spectators, offering a model of women's spectatorship for the streaming era. *UnREAL* is Lifetime's fictional behind-the-scenes drama about a reality TV series modeled on *The Bachelor* (ABC, 2002-present). It features two women producers adept at constructing the hypermediated world of reality television romance, even as they become embroiled in the on-screen drama they produce. The series frequently integrates screens, cameras, monitors, and other diegetic frames into its view, and so the *UnREAL* viewer must navigate constantly shifting levels of mediation. In doing so, it enacts experiences of interactivity and mediated visibility that characterize the contemporary digital media landscape. *You* similarly reveals the constructedness of the romance plot, telling the story of a violent stalker who believes he is just doing what it takes to get the girl. The series' use of a second-person narration that addresses the protagonist's love interest as "you" gestures toward the individualized address of algorithms which target users based on their behavior. *You* critiques and undermines algorithmic address by constructing a feminized spectator constantly negotiating the various roles in which she is cast, by patriarchy and technology alike. By integrating digital technology into their storytelling narratively and aesthetically, the two series address a feminine spectator shifting constantly between frames of reference, revealing a complex negotiation between viewers and the subject position constructed by digital media.

While *You* and *UnREAL* thematize the complex experience of shifting between subject and object positions, the teen TV series featured in chapter four disrupt that binary altogether. The final chapter, "Worst Case Scenario: Sexual Selfies and Everyday Exposure in Teen TV,"

considers how digital social media fundamentally undermine traditional gendered norms of privacy, through the lens of the women's subgenre teen television. I analyze narratives of girls' sexting and nude photo leaks, phenomena that embody multiple ways that technology disrupts public/private and subject/object binaries. I argue that teen TV, while still sometimes engaging a language of scandal and "ruin" for girls who are exposed, aesthetically incorporates the exposure and vulnerability built into everyday technological interactions, what Chun and Sarah Friedland term the "leakiness" of networked technologies.[55] In doing so, teen TV actively grapples with technology's complicated dynamics of consent and privacy, and with how new forms of technological self-imaging and exposure shape and are shaped by young women's sexual subjectivity. Teen series thus shed light on the ways young women navigate and negotiate the conflicts that arise between traditional gender norms and the alternative logics produced by new technologies.

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[55] Chun and Friedland, *Habits of Leaking*.

Chapter One

Be the Boss: Smart TV Surveillance, Parental Controls, and the Maternal Gaze

A 2017 television commercial for streaming device Amazon Fire opens with footage from the 2015 horror film *The Witch*.[1] The scene may be familiar from trailers of that movie—a young woman plays peekaboo with a baby, who suddenly disappears in a moment when the woman's face is covered. As the shot-reverse-shot sequence reveals the newly empty baby basket, a man's voice from outside the horror film's diegesis cuts in: "Nope, don't like that." A woman gasps dramatically, and the man commands, "Alexa, pause." The film on screen pauses and the Amazon Fire TV logo appears at the top of the screen. From offscreen, the woman playfully berates him for choosing this film, and herself commands, "Alexa, show me the baby room camera." The screen cuts to black-and-white footage of a baby sleeping peacefully, indicating that the stream has switched seamlessly from the film to a home security system, both necessarily wired to the same internet network. The woman breathes an audible sigh of relief, as the man tells her, "See? She's fine." A peaceful lullaby plays and the text on screen reads, "Can your TV do that?" The text then promises, "All your favorite TV and movies *plus Alexa*," as the man requests, "Alexa, find comedies."

In a 2020 TV spot for Samsung's SmartThings, a service that networks together all of your household devices and security systems, a middle-aged Black couple sits close together on

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[1] Amazon Fire TV, "Peekaboo," video, 0:28, November 27, 2017, https://www.ispot.tv/ad/wNNN/amazon-fire-tv-the-witch-and-alexa.

the couch, laughing in the warm glow of the TV light.[2] A reverse shot reveals them to be watching *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*, complete with the printed title and Prime Video logo at the bottom right corner. As Midge Maisel delivers her stand-up routine, a small window pops up at the top of the couple's TV screen. The camera cuts in closer to the pop-up window, and the commercial viewer can briefly identify a SmartThings logo, and the label "Front Porch Camera." A high angle security camera view displays a young man and woman arriving at the house. The ad cuts to the porch, where the girl tells the boy, "I had a great time tonight," as they turn to face each other in front of the door. Back inside on the TV, the boy responds, "yeah, me too." Dad is not pleased—the man on the couch looks at his wife, lets out a surly "uh-uh," and begins to get up from the couch, presumably to interrupt the end of his daughter's date. His wife gently pulls on his shoulder, keeping him on the couch—she has a better idea. She brings the remote control to her mouth, and commands "turn on the porch lights." The ad cuts quickly to the TV screen displaying the text of her command as she speaks, and then to the porch, where bright, fluorescent lights interrupt what is about to be a kiss. The young man stammers an "uh-oh," and hastily announces his departure. As the ad cuts back to the security camera view on the couple's TV, the daughter, clearly disappointed, turns to look into the security camera: "Seriously?" Back in the living room, Mom and Dad laugh, and Dad pulls Mom in closer, saying "that's why I love you." The tagline "Smart Made Easy" appears over them, and the narrator declares, "Control your smart devices with SmartThings and Samsung Smart TV."

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[2] Samsung US, "Samsung Smart TV: Monitor Security Cameras From Your TV," video, 0:30, January 3, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jUXvsy-ADDo&feature=youtu.be.

Finally, a 2013 Samsung Smart TV commercial features a teenaged boy streaming media from his tablet to his living room television, as his parents relax around him.[3] As in the ad above, their home signals upper-middle-class suburbia—an open concept layout decorated in polished creams and pastels. The family here, featured in a series of Samsung Smart TV ads, is mixed-race; the father reads as white and the mother as Asian. The commercial begins with a close-up of the son's tablet streaming loud, animated explosions, and cuts to the TV screen displaying the same feed, as his mom leans over from the kitchen counter to gently command, "Okay honey, that's enough TV." "It's not TV, it's from my tablet," he calmly retorts. She counters, "looks like TV to me." To get around her restriction, the son tries Youtube ("But it's Youtube.") then Netflix ("What? It's Netflix."), the commercial variously framing his tablet with a window open that looks like a remote control, and the TV screen where he browses apps and contents. But Mom will not be sidelined. She reaches for her smartphone, and a closeup reveals that her phone also has the same remote controls as his tablet. "That's enough TV," she firmly repeats as she clicks the power button and turns off the TV set. Dad, who has stayed quiet in the debate so far, decides to chime in: "You know, technically, it's not TV." Mom shakes her head, as the tagline text reads "TV has never been better," and a voiceover announces, "More ways to watch and control your TV."

These three commercials evoke the complex interplay of television spectatorship and surveillance that characterizes domestic life and leisure in the era of "Smart" technology. In each, the convergence of TV and surveillance technologies shapes the dynamics of the domestic

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[3] Samsung Smart TV, "It's Not TV," video, 0:28, September 30, 2013, https://www.ispot.tv/ad/72Fr/samsung-smart-tv-its-not-tv.

scene, as Mom in particular monitors her children for safe and proper behavior, including appropriate media consumption. Internet-connected television blends the experience of watching for entertainment with exerting digital control over the private sphere, so that consuming on-demand content seems to pair naturally with domestic security. However, these advertisements, and more like them which sell surveillance as a convenient perk of Smart TV ownership, reveal a tension around privacy as a traditional core value of domestic life. The capabilities advertised rely on a network of interconnected devices, including security cameras, and data collection practices that open our private lives to technological and corporate access. Alexa listens for her name, the Samsung security camera watches for someone to arrive, the smartphone registers and controls the actions on multiple other devices. The boundaries of the private home may exclude the boy next door or violent media content, but Amazon, Samsung, and countless other corporations are welcomed in, paradoxically, in the name of security. And as these ads suggest, mothers and daughters play a central role in realigning the value of privacy with corporate access.

This chapter asks how the increasing convergence of television and surveillance technologies reconfigures the roles of women's and girls' spectatorship in the home. It explores how popular and corporate discourses instrumentalize familial dynamics, particularly between mothers and daughters, to obscure the tension between the domestic sphere as that of "private" life, and domestic technology built on a logic of exposure and publicity. Television has always played a role in marking the gendered boundaries of public and private, and debates about TV's place in the home have often revolved around its ability to violate that boundary, whether by exposing private life or intrusively broadcasting the ills of the outside world for our consumption. As television technology has drastically changed in recent years, and the television

spectator once imagined as passive has been discursively transformed into an active user of digital technology, the gendered meaning and value of privacy in the domestic sphere has shifted in tandem.

Smart TVs fold spectatorship and surveillance into one another; not only does the horror movie turn into the baby monitor video feed, but everything the viewer watches is monitored and tracked. As consumers become more wary of ubiquitous data surveillance on all of their interconnected devices, the marketing and industrial discourses surrounding Smart technologies must obfuscate or justify such surveillance practices. They do so largely by falling back onto the promise of traditional values of private life—a secure home and family under control. In aligning surveillance with the maternal gaze, parental control technologies become a key justification for the constant surveillance of television viewership, with daughters in particular as the imagined victim of inappropriate content and mothers the "boss" of the remote control. As moral panics about media effects tie the consumption of inappropriate content to inappropriate sexual behavior on the part of vulnerable girl viewers, the exposure entailed by television's data surveillance practices becomes a tool to enforce the privacy, or invisibility, of young women's sexuality. Technology companies that profit off of technological convergence in the home thus enlist girls' and women's spectatorship to domesticate surveillance, normalizing certain forms of exposure of private life in the name of normativity.

This chapter considers how anxieties around issues of domestic surveillance, girls' sexuality, and feminine spectatorship circulate in popular discourse, specifically about Smart TV and parental control technologies. Building on the history of television surveillance offered in the introduction to this dissertation, I first explore television's role in domestic technological convergence by analyzing discourses around Smart TV in the popular press. As television's

capabilities increasingly entail corporate data surveillance, corporate marketing discourses and popular press coverage frame the benefits of Smart TV through gendered discourses of control which align domestic surveillance with the caring maternal gaze. Corporations, through privacy policies and marketing materials, tend to suggest that ever-expanding data surveillance similarly provides a form of service or care to improve domestic life. When popular discourse does acknowledge Smart TV surveillance as a potential privacy violation, it frames that violation in terms of a feminized vulnerability in the home, reinforcing the same kinds of problems domestic surveillance is paradoxically meant to solve. To explore the construction of that feminized vulnerability, the chapter finally turns to parental control technologies, sold as empowering mothers to protect their children. While advertisements thus present grown women as autonomous agents in charge of their technology as well as their families, they offer up girls as the justification for widespread data surveillance.

Selling Smart TV Surveillance: Gender, Privacy, and the Domestic Sphere

Television technology has historically played an important role in constructing the domestic landscape as compatible with technological convergence and the corporate access it allows. Discourse around Smart TV technology in particular frames the TV spectator as an active user empowered by greater control over their viewing and their household. The concept of "Smart" or "intelligent" TV arose in the mid-1990s amidst the promises of cable to offer more channels and more interactivity to consumers, and the simultaneous proliferation of the internet and personal computers in private homes. As both television and new media scholars have written, digital technology and the early internet promised to turn "couch potatoes" into active users. Lynn Spigel contrasts the "sedentary watchers' gaze" of TV and the "active corporeal

involvement" entailed by digital technology,[4] while new media theorist Wendy Chun suggests that the internet user was "popularly understood as a couch-potato-turned-anonymous superagent."[5] Discourse around Smart TV thus had to negotiate and counter this promise by offering television viewers more "choice, control, and convenience."[6] Cable-based "Intelligent TV," for instance, offered remote-controlled Pay-Per-View, the ability to add specific channels to your cable package, as well as an "interactive" menu that provided information on available programming.[7] Skipping right over "smart," the internet-based "Genius Theater" television conceptualized by RCA allowed viewers to "switch between on-line programs and television, game playing and watching a movie brought down by satellite."[8] The New York Times reported that TV sets like this "will even play reviewer, 'suggesting' which shows you would like, based on past preferences."[9] The mid-90s popular press largely presented this coming convergence as a boon to consumers looking to play a more active role in their television consumption.

However, the press grappled with the role of the television set as distinct from the personal computer. Senior Vice President of Sony's television division told the New York Times in 1996 that "the uses of the television in the family room and the PC monitor in the home

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[4] Lynn Spigel, "Designing the Smart House: Posthuman Domesticity and Conspicuous Production," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 8, no. 4 (November 2005): 414. doi:10.1177/1367549405057826.
[5] Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, *Control and Freedom: Power and Paranoia in the Age of Fiber Optics* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006): 59.
[6] Gary Dretzka, "Tuning in Viewer Choice: Will 'smart' TV, More Channels Pass Consumer Testing?" *Chicago Tribune (1963-1996)*, January 23, 1995, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, 1.
[7] Dretzka, "Tuning in Viewer Choice."
[8] Lawrence Johnson, "Television Grows a Brain: Television Grows a Brain at Last," *New York Times*, May 16, 1996, Proquest Historical Newspapers, C2.
[9] Johnson, "Television Grows a Brain," C1.

office" will remain distinct.[10] Similarly, a 1995 Wall Street Journal article presciently argues that the PC will become the central hub of interactivity in the home, such as remote shopping, long before TV achieves that widespread capability, and that Video On Demand (VOD) will be the most significant feature of television's technological advancements.[11] Through the early 2000s and 2010s, tech journalists were still skeptical about how "smart" TV could and should get. Articles with headlines such as "What Convergence? TV's Hesitant March to the Net"[12] and "Samsung's Smart TV Isn't As Smart As It Thinks It Is"[13] expressed skepticism about TV's attempts to offer the same forms of interactivity as the internet. At that time, Smart TV sets may have had widgets for an internet browser as well as social media sites, but they were clumsy and difficult to navigate. The features that seemed most successful—and the ones that journalists thought users were most likely to take advantage of—were applications for video content, such as YouTube or Netflix.

Perhaps the smoother side of TV/internet convergence concerns the consumption of "television" content on other devices. A 2011 article on the "TV-internet marriage" discusses the concept of "TV Everywhere," in which cable companies started to make their live programming available on the internet.[14] Contradicting earlier industry assertions, one Time Warner executive

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[10] Johnson, "Television Grows a Brain," C2.
[11] G. Christian Hill, "The Myth of Multimedia: In the Smart Home, Not All Roads Will Lead to the Television," *Wall Street Journal (1923 - Current File)*, June 19, 1995, Proquest Historical Newspapers.
[12] Matt Richtel, "What Convergence? TV's Hesitant March to the Net," *New York Times*, February 16, 2009, Proquest Historical Newspapers.
[13] Walter S. Mossberg, "Samsung's Smart TV Isn't As Smart As It Thinks It Is," *Wall Street Journal, Eastern Edition*, August 29, 2012, Proquest Digitized Newspapers.
[14] Brian Stelter, "The TV-Internet Nuptials: Distributors Ponder Their Roles in a Time Of Transition." *New York Times*, January 10, 2011, Proquest Historical Newspapers.

suggests that "people don't see PCs and phones and tablets and TVs as different things. They are all just video display devices."[15] Significantly, then, full internet functionality never quite found a home on the living room TV set (I do not browse Facebook or search Google on my Smart TV, though I may be able to), but TV and other audiovisual content rather seamlessly made its way to myriad internet-connected devices, including the Smart TV set. Instead of turning the couch potato into a super agent, perhaps TV-internet convergence merely gave the couch potato more screens.

This emphasis on spectatorship empowered by convergence continues to shape the discourse around integrating surveillance technology into domestic life through television. If "Smart TV" no longer necessarily entails the ability to surf the web or make purchases through your TV, what does characterize this nebulous constellation of technologies? While cable technologies originally contended for the "intelligent" moniker, today, Smart TV necessarily implies internet connection. Because TV sets connect to a home's internet network, usually wirelessly, they are also connected to other devices that use the same network, such as smartphones, laptops, and tablets. Like older television sets, they are able to connect to a cable service, either through the internet or a cable box, or access live channels through a digital antenna. Uniquely, though, they access non-linear streaming services through widgets or applications. "Dumb" TVs, or TVs that do not offer internet connectivity, are increasingly rare in 2022, but casting devices like Roku, Apple TV, or Amazon Fire can essentially upgrade any TV to "smart" or "smarter" capabilities; they function as the computer to your TV set's monitor. Particularly with brands like Apple, Amazon, or Google, using devices of the same brand

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[15] Stelter, "The TV-Internet Nuptials," 5.

enables a high level of domestic technological convergence. Similarly, users are likely to be logged into the same Netflix or Hulu account on multiple devices, of any brand, and so can pick up any episode where they left off on any device. These various forms of convergence with internet technology significantly enable new forms and levels of data surveillance, as one's user profile travels across devices and through various structures of corporate ownership (i.e. both Apple and Netflix might collect viewing data when you watch the streaming platform on your AppleTV). All of these capacities, including surveillance, are sold to consumers as providing greater control over spectatorship, a tenet that has driven the shift to interactive television for decades.

Expanded user/viewer control in particular is instrumentalized to sell Smart TV surveillance as suitable and even necessary for the normative functioning of the domestic sphere, and it is key to how Smart TVs reconfigure the meaning and value of privacy at home. While there used to be anxiety about television's surveillance capabilities coming into the home, popular media now largely frame those affordances as innocuous and useful, in part by linking the "empowerment" they offer to traditional gender norms. The control offered by television's surveillance capabilities is sold in deeply gendered terms that specifically reinforce traditional (i.e. dated) notions of separate spheres. The most explicitly masculine ads, for instance, feature action heroes using the power of high-tech TV to master...something. A 2016 Super Bowl commercial for an LG Oled Television titled "Man from the Future" features Liam Neeson as the mysterious titular character.[16] Dressed in a sleek suit at an equally sleek bar, he encounters a

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[16] LG Televisions, "LG Super Bowl 2016 TV Spot, 'Man From the Future' Featuring Liam Neeson," video, 0:56, February 7, 2016, https://www.ispot.tv/ad/AO8A/lg-super-bowl-2016-man-from-the-future-featuring-liam-neeson

young man and tells him, “There is a revolution coming… The future is staring back at us like a perfect picture on glass. And this future, it must be protected.” Accompanied by fast-paced, futuristic music, the young man becomes the action hero in a dystopian digital maze, protecting a briefcase from unidentified pursuers that, according to Neeson’s dramatic voiceover, “want to stop it… because the future belongs to us.” As the young man outraces them on a motorcycle, he opens the briefcase, and releases a cloud of pixels that form a flat-screen TV identified as the LG Oled. Hinting that he is the young man’s future self, Neeson repeats, “The future is staring back at you.” The ad does not specifically reference any particular feature of the LG Oled TV, though the image emphasizes its sleek appearance and the tagline on screen reads “The Future Begins.” It does, however, take the notion that your TV is looking back at you, which has historically been a source of fear, and turn it into something desirable. Here, the valence of television’s ability to look back is about mastering the future, looking outward, not inward. The LG Oled TV becomes a public-facing sign of luxury and high-tech mastery.

A similar 2012 ad for the Sony Bravia TV takes up the issue of surveillance more explicitly.[17] A model-esque white woman stands in front of a wall of television screens depicting surveillance footage. The camera cuts quickly between closeups of the woman’s face, her smart phone displaying tracking radar, and the individual TV screens as she appears to track a man across them. On one TV screen, the man fights someone at a shadowy gate, when a shutter sound plays and the image freezes. Graphics appear on screen that crop out a closer, enhanced image of his face, and data appears on the side with vague headings like “Unit Infrared Processing” and

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[17] Sony Televisions, “Sony Bravia TV Commercial Featuring Faniel Craig,” video, 0:28, October 22, 2012, https://www.ispot.tv/ad/7Y00/sony-bravia-featuring-daniel-craig#

"Build Data." The ad quickly cuts to the same image on the woman's Sony tablet, showing the "display" window where she has the option to choose whether to view on her Bravia TV or her mobile device. Just as her many devices begin to enhance the image until his face becomes identifiable, Daniel Craig as James Bond appears in her doorway to a climactic Bond soundtrack stinger, and asks her "Looking for someone?" The ad ends listing the names of Sony's TV, tablet, and other devices, as well as the Bond film *Skyfall*. The emphasis here is on convergence, at multiple levels—between devices but also between technology and content, indicating a different form of corporate convergence. Being able to stream content across devices allows the woman a kind of mastery, only beatable by Bond himself, who demonstrates his own mastery of the technology by outsmarting it. Again, Smart TV technology, and its ability to see and surveil, become integral to a world of high-tech, future-oriented luxury. From this hyper-masculine perspective, TV technology offers a kind of public-facing control and power.

These ads offer a useful point of contrast for considering how these same technologies and features are made to belong in the domestic sphere. As in the commercials described at the opening of this chapter, commercials for Smart TV's surveillance features that focus on domestic life feature a surveillant gaze turned inward at the family itself. The technology is not associated with the thrilling masculine power of James Bond, but the maternal power to network the family together as a form of care. As Spigel suggests, such ads provide "the blueprint for our sense of home in the digital age," and thus convey the place of technology and privacy in familial power dynamics.[18] Consider the Amazon Fire ad in which two parents use Amazon's digital assistant

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[18] Spigel, "Designing the Smart House," 414.

Alexa to check on their baby's monitor during a particularly traumatizing horror movie.[19] The commercial engages what sociologists Margaret Nelson and Anita Garey describe as the "dynamic interplay between care and control" that characterizes familial surveillance.[20] While surveillance is often conceived, especially in film and media studies, in terms of a controlling masculine gaze and voyeuristic power, the Amazon Fire ad operationalizes a maternal gaze aligned closely with care but still offering a form of technological, spectatorial, and familial control. As in other commercials, Amazon here emphasizes technological convergence that implies a fully networked (and perhaps fully "Amazon"-branded) home. The consumer watches a film available on streaming service Amazon Prime, uses an Alexa-enabled baby monitor, and engages Alexa to facilitate their easy movement between them. Because the commercial only shows the couple's television screen, it particularly emphasizes the act of spectatorship. The commercial viewer sits in the position of the couple—their screen is our screen. The ad thus highlights the continuity between the film and the baby monitor footage, and so that maternal gaze characterizes both media consumption and surveillance to control the safety of the family. Even when watching a film for leisure, the woman's way of watching contains a kind of productive, domestic instinct, facilitated and empowered by corporate technological convergence.

The baby monitor itself might seem fairly innocuous as far as familial surveillance dynamics go. Its playful juxtaposition with the horror movie emphasizes the monitor as merely a convenient tool to reassure an overly worrisome parent. But the ease of access sold here also

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[19] Amazon Fire TV, "Peekaboo."
[20] Margaret K. Nelson and Anita Ilta Garey, eds., *Who's Watching?: Daily Practices of Surveillance among Contemporary Families* (Nashville: Vanderbilt UP, 2009), 7.

serves to *create* the anxiety Alexa is purported to assuage. As Nelson's work on baby monitors suggests, the technological capacity for constant surveillance, whether through a video feed or a heartbeat monitor, fosters the perceived need to use it.[21] Ultimately, Nelson argues, the practice of monitoring babies "is linked to a vision of a child as being at risk... [or] a child as being out of control."[22] The increasing reliance on baby monitoring technology ultimately conditions parents to use surveillance technology later in their children's lives that "invade personal space and bodily privacy."[23] The Samsung SmartThings commercial, in which two parents stop their daughter from kissing her date on the front step, plays out such a dynamic.[24] Again, surveillance footage is directly juxtaposed with entertainment content—this time Amazon Prime series *Mrs. Maisel*, about a rebellious woman shirking her traditional role—making the act of surveillance feel as innocent as television spectatorship. It doesn't even have to interrupt your leisure, as *Mrs. Maisel* plays quietly throughout the parents' interaction. While the commercial treats this moment of familial surveillance playfully—the daughter's intended kiss is innocent enough, and Mom and Dad laugh the incident off—it gestures toward the way that surveillance is deployed against girls, who are regularly conceived as both "at risk" and "out of control." The violation of the girl's personal privacy upholds the traditional gender dynamics and ideals of private property that, as Eden Osucha asserts, inform the "right to privacy" from its inception.[25] The scene thus

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[21] Margaret K. Nelson, "Watching Children: Describing the Use of Baby Monitors on Epinions.com," in *Who's Watching?: Daily Practices of Surveillance among Contemporary Families*, eds. Margaret K. Nelson and Anita Ilta Garey (Nashville: Vanderbilt UP, 2009), 219-238.
[22] Nelson, "Watching Children," 221.
[23] Nelson, "Watching Children," 234.
[24] Samsung US, "Samsung Smart TV."
[25] Eden Osucha, "The Whiteness of Privacy: Race, Media, Law," *Camera Obscura* 24, no. 1 (May 2009).

illuminates one contradiction at the heart of domestic surveillance. The family sacrifices certain forms of privacy (i.e. the girl's sexual privacy) to enforce others (i.e. the girl's body as private property). Significantly, the ad makes a joke of the overprotective father's patriarchal instinct. The more clever, rational mother instead takes over the job of securing the appropriate borders of the family, and she does so not by exercising overt control as the father seemed inclined to do, but by deploying surveillance technology to dissuade or preclude the daughter's sexual act. Surveillance, figured through the feminized act of television spectatorship, is thus enlisted as a tool of maternal care.

In these advertisements, the Smart TV represents one important central hub of a larger Smart Home, in which all domestic technologies converge. Since its entrance into private homes, television technology has been enlisted to enable new forms of gendered labor, allowing women to multitask through surveillance.[26] As early as the 1950s, the RCA "TV Eye," for instance, offered a camera on a closed circuit that could function as a baby monitor accessible on the television. Ads promised it would function as an "alert watchman" for the home.[27] These kinds of promises accelerate with digital technology that creates "new forms of social interaction among people and their things," or what Spigel calls "posthuman domesticity."[28] Technologies that monitor the children or the cooking "virtually become the housewife, as they perform the managerial and caretaking roles previously ascribed to women."[29] Scholars such as Golden

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[26] Hannah Spaulding, "Reinventing Television and Family Life, 1960-1990," (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 2018).
[27] Radio Corporation of America, "Tireless 'TV Eye,'" Popular Science, August 1953, https://www.earlytelevision.org/rca_tv_eye.html.
[28] Spigel, "Designing the Smart House," 405.
[29] Spigel, "Designing the Smart House," 408.

Owens and Jamie Steele argue that, in fact, virtual assistants can instead fulfill the racialized role of domestic servants.[30] Users learn a language of command ("Alexa, find comedies"), for instance, and virtual assistants are expected to be invisible until called. Significantly, the racial implications of this dynamic are elided when Black actors or other actors of color are cast in television advertisements, but thinking of user-technology dynamics in these terms reasserts the white spatial imaginary that equates privacy with control over private property. The corporate website for Samsung SmartThings supports this view and places television at its center, with advertising copy reading "From activating porch lights to monitoring the thermostat, alerts stream right to your Smart TV, so you can have a complete view of your house at a moment's notice."[31] Specifically, this "complete view" relates directly to ensuring that everything is networked and everything is normal, or perhaps normative. The website copy continues: "SmartThings brings alerts right to the TV when there's unexpected activity. See who's at the front door or check on a noise in the backyard without ever having to leave the couch." The copy here implies safety from intruders, but paired with the advertisement, embedded just above these words on the website, "unexpected" might also imply "unwelcome." The couple's daughter is certainly *expected* home, but her activity is not welcome or appropriate. Samsung SmartThings promises a level of surveillance and control over private property that only networked digital

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[30] Golden Owens, ""Alexa, Siri and Aunt Jemima: How Black Women's Labor Haunts AI Assistants" (paper presented at the School of Communication Graduate Student Symposium, Northwestern University, February 26, 2022); Jamie Steele, "The Subjectivity of Domestic Objects, or: Who Needs Women, Anyway?" (paper presented at The Society for Social Studies of Science Annual Meeting, New Orleans, LA, September 7, 2019).

[31] Samsung SmartThings, "Smart TV," accessed October 20, 2020, https://www.samsung.com/us/tvs/smart-tv/highlights/.

technologies can offer, creating entirely new forms of visibility as it enables new forms of vision. Articulating those new forms of vision to the maternal gaze assuages the threat those new forms of visibility might pose to the privacy of the home.

Significantly, the new forms of vision that Smart TV technology enables in fact rely on new forms of visibility that consumers, corporations, and the government are all actively grappling with. More specifically, Smart technologies function by collecting data about individual users and households as part of a process of "mass customization."[32] Corporations sell such data surveillance to users through a language of care and service that complements the alignment of visual surveillance with the maternal gaze, while obscuring the capitalist gains of these practices. In other words, while corporations benefit financially by selling or trading on their data stores, they sell their data surveillance to users in the form of services. Even privacy policies, corporate documents meant to protect corporations from liability for accessing and sharing user information, adopt the language of service in order to encourage users to share as much information as possible. In the sections of Samsung's privacy policy on Voice and Facial recognition, for instance, the company emphasizes that the microphone or camera "enables certain advanced features."[33] They allow that "the camera can be covered and disabled at any time, but be aware that these advanced services will not be available if the camera is disabled." The privacy policy, which is arguably meant to inform and protect the user in addition to the corporation, thus serves as marketing for the company's own data collection programs. These

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[32] Spigel, "Designing the Smart House;" Amanda Lotz, *Portals: A Treatise on Internet-Distributed Television* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Library, 2017).
[33] "Privacy," Samsung, accessed October 20, 2020, https://www.samsung.com/sg/info/privacy/.

technologies and the language that markets them become part of remapping traditional notions of privacy to incorporate corporations and the surveillance practices they "offer."

Samsung and other technology companies insist that the more access to personal information you grant them, the more control you will have over your home, your relationships, and even your body. The language in their corporate documents emphasize the user's active role throughout this process. Under the heading of "Fitness Services," Samsung's privacy policy asserts that "SmartTV services *enable you* to create a profile that contains certain basic information about yourself, including your height, weight and date of birth" in order to receive personalized fitness recommendations. According to Samsung's logic, providing the corporation with such personal information thus empowers *you,* the user, to better control your own body. The "optimum user experience" Samsung's "Customization Service" purports to offer, however, is predicated on offloading agency onto devices and the corporations that make them run.[34] Specifically, the policy claims that the technology serves you by "predicting your desires and needs in a smart and intelligent manner" and "offering hints and information customized for you." Examples include "remembering music you used to listen to on rainy days and recommending it later" and remembering the command "Remind me to buy a bottle of water when I am almost home." Such hints and predictions might seem innocent enough (if rather bizarre), but they prompt us to consider the ways that data collection and algorithmic memory reinforce particular moods, behaviors, consumption patterns, and ways of being.

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[34] "Privacy Notice for Customization Service," Account, Samsung, accessed June 29, 2022, https://account.samsung.com/mobile/account/CustomizedServiceContentOAuth2.do (emphasis added).

Corporations also tend to rely on many different forms of data, such as GPS location in order to know what "almost home" means or whether it is raining, and thus justify expansive data collection with language that confuses who such collection is *for*. In response to the question "What types of information may the Customization Service collect about you?" Samsung states, "The more the Customization Service understands and learns about you, the faster and more accurately it can provide you with customized content and information. The Customization Service is designed *to help understand* your interests, preferences, and location, and collects and analyzes information about you in various ways."[35] As that final sentence begins, as a reader, I am expecting it to declare that the Customization Service is designed to help *you*, the user, but, in fact, there is no direct object of "help." The Customization Service perhaps helps *Samsung*, or the Customization Service itself, to understand you. A similar slippage occurs in the policy statement under "Contacts and Communications Data": "The Customization Service may access your contact list and may collect and analyze your incoming/outgoing call and text message history to provide you with services, such as to determine your relationships with others (e.g., your family and friends)." The language bizarrely proposes that, as a service to me, Samsung will determine my relationship with my family and friends by tracking my communications. It is difficult to imagine a scenario in which I need my devices to *determine* my relationships, but by couching their data collection practices in a language of service, Samsung obfuscates their own capitalistic drive to expand surveillance indefinitely. As the privacy policy states outright, "the optimum user experience can only be ensured when you permit the Customization Service access to all information."

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[35] "Privacy Notice for Customization Service" (emphasis added).

This corporate privacy policy significantly applies broadly across Samsung devices, but examining these dynamics with Smart TVs as a focal point illuminates how spectatorship is enlisted in the process of domesticating surveillance. Smart TV marketing discourse works to alleviate the contradictions that arise between digital technology practices and traditional notions of privacy and property in the home. The ads and policies considered above assert the user's control over technology that enables greater security and control over the home, the family, and the self. Even as domestic networked technologies upend any clear division between the public and private worlds, they are imagined and advertised as securing those traditional "middle-class ideals of property and privacy" through surveillance.[36] Fundamentally, however, and at a technological level, networked digital technology simply does not abide by such ideals. According to Chun, there is a "constant, nonvolitional exchange of information that drives the internet."[37] Software interfaces, and the features highlighted in advertisements and corporate documents, give users a sense of control over their navigation, but in fact, "this control compensates for, if not screens, the lack of control they have over their data's path."[38] Our internet-connected devices, Chun explains, function "promiscuously," breaching the boundaries of our device or home networks in order to work at all. Networked connection necessarily entails contact and vulnerability that our interfaces and hardware obscure, allowing users to imagine or believe that technology is protecting "the dream of a gated community writ large."[39] Chun's metaphor of the gated community aligns with Osucha's assertion that the right to privacy is

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[36] Spigel, "Designing the Smart House," 408.
[37] Chun, *Control and Freedom*, 5.
[38] Chun, *Control and Freedom*, 46.
[39] Chun, *Control and Freedom*, 2.

based in white, middle-class privilege and its ideal of ownership. Privacy, from this perspective, is equated merely with the security of private property, including the reproduction of one's image. This value in particular is complicated by networked technologies and the nature of digital data. Chun argues, "Rather than simply allowing people to exercise what Walter Benjamin once called their 'legitimate claim to be reproduced,' the Internet circulates their 'reproductions' without their consent and knowledge."[40] Internet-connected technology, and the data collection practices it employs, thus fundamentally undermines privacy and the notion of private property even as it is paradoxically sold and enlisted to secure those values.

Users often have more of a sense of these dynamics when it comes to personal computers or smartphones. They might put a sticky note over their webcam and use password protection services. Young people are warned not to take or keep inappropriate photos on their phones or store them in the cloud. Even if these are contingent tactics that merely obscure the more fundamental dynamics of publicity and contact entailed by internet connection, they reveal an understanding of technological and personal vulnerability. Televisions, however, as well as our use of streaming services on other devices, are less likely to fall into categories of risk and vulnerability in the popular imagination. In its association with the family circle and domestic leisure, TV still belongs squarely in the home. As the ads described above reflect, television's surveillance capabilities are articulated to a maternal gaze, technologically securing the privacy of the family.

However, when popular discourse does acknowledge Smart TV as a threat to privacy, the specific construction of that threat illuminates the changing meaning and boundaries of domestic

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[40] Chun, *Control and Freedom*, 4.

privacy in the era of Smart technology. Specifically, the uncertainty around how to make sense of the nature or consequences of data surveillance leads to popular discourse diverting attention back to more recognizable threats tied to the vulnerability of the family, and young white femininity in particular. Demonstrating this discursive process, in November of 2019, a Portland field office of the FBI posted a press release on their blog entitled "Securing Smart TVs."[41] While it is unlikely that local FBI blogs receive an overwhelming amount of web traffic, the article was picked up by numerous tech websites, spawning dozens of articles rehashing the FBI's claims in more readily accessible publications such as PCmag.com and Business Insider. The original FBI post recognizes the TV as an unlikely source of privacy paranoia, emphasizing its everydayness. It opens, "Welcome to the Oregon FBI's Tech Tuesday segment. Today: building a digital defense with your TV. Yes, I said your TV. Specifically your smart TV… the one that is sitting in your living room right now. Or, that you plan to buy on super sale on Black Friday." The task of the user here is to *defend* the technological borders of the home with the TV, even though the TV poses the risk in the first place. While television has historically been celebrated as a window on the world, or feared as a window on the home, the articles that take up the FBI blog post frame Smart TV as "a window to your network."[42] The metaphor of the window conveys the sense that the television is allowing some kind of public access to a private space; the FBI likens the TV to a "backdoor."[43] This framing conveys the riskier, if more banal,

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[41] Beth Anne Steele, "Oregon FBI Tech Tuesday: Securing Smart TVs — FBI,"December 2019, accessed January 19, 2021, https://www.fbi.gov/contact-us/field-offices/portland/news/press-releases/tech-tuesdaysmart-tvs.
[42] Lance Whitney, "How to Stop Smart TVs From Snooping on You," PCMag, April 27, 2020, accessed January 19, 2021, https://www.pcmag.com/how-to/how-to-stop-smart-tvs-from-snooping-on-you.
[43] Steele, "Oregon FBI Tech Tuesday."

side of convergence compared to the masculine advertisements featuring James Bond and celebrating high-tech luxury. While the ads emphasize increased control and mastery, from the perspective of cyber-security, they do make clear that convergence and the ubiquity of Smart technologies in the home vastly increases vulnerability to exposure.

However, the specific nature of this "exposure" is murky in the press coverage. Specifically, they grapple with two forms of potential privacy violation: the "exceptional," such as the lone hacker who individually finds vulnerabilities to exploit, and the "foundational," or the pervasive forms of surveillance by which the technology functions in a capitalist system. The FBI and the journalists covering its blog post regularly center the exceptional violations, either quickly writing off the foundational surveillance or very hesitantly proposing "solutions." The original post begins by listing the conveniences of Smart TV surveillance; cameras, for instance, "are used for facial recognition so the TV knows who is watching and can suggest programming appropriately" and can "allow you to video chat with grandma in 42" glory."[44] Before delving into corporate surveillance practices at all, the article jumps right ahead to the exceptional violations: "Beyond the risk that your TV manufacturer and app developers may be listening and watching you [sic], that television can also be a gateway for hackers to come into your home." PCMag even more explicitly hierarchizes these two forms of surveillance, writing "The FBI noted that TV manufacturers and app developers have the ability to listen to and watch you. But a potentially more serious threat comes from bad actors who gain access to your unsecured television and take control."[45] A 2018 Consumer Report similarly opens by highlighting, and

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[44] Steele, "Oregon FBI Tech Tuesday."
[45] Whitney, "How to Stop Smart TVs."

featuring in the headline, that "Smart TVs can be controlled by hackers exploiting easy-to-find security flaws," even though the majority of the report in fact addresses privacy concerns brought on by corporate data collection practices.[46] These publications and others foreground exceptional risks to cybersecurity over the foundational forms of surveillance that make Smart TVs function.

The advice given by these publications about how to deal with corporate data surveillance and collection reveal an impasse for user privacy. In fact, many articles explicitly arrive at the conclusion that data collection is inevitable if the consumer wants to watch television at all. While the FBI does recommend turning off data collection if possible, other articles note that many brands do not allow for that. Consumer Reports suggests paying close attention during setup, when "you can agree to the basic privacy policy and terms of service—which still triggers a significant amount of data collection—while declining ACR [Automatic Content Recognition]." Tom's Guide, a platform for tech reviews and support, expresses defeat.[47] While many articles recommend reading privacy policies simply to learn what data companies collect and what they do with it, Tom's Guide acknowledges, "In practical terms, it's usually impossible to understand those policies unless you have a law degree." For users who want to do more than understand the corporate data surveillance taking place, it seems the best option is simply not to use your TV. In their article on Smart TV privacy risks, cybersecurity

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[46] Consumer Reports, "Samsung and Roku Smart TVs Vulnerable to Hacking, Consumer Reports Finds," Consumer Reports, February 7, 2018, accessed January 22, 2021, https://www.consumerreports.org/televisions/samsung-roku-smart-tvs-vulnerable-to-hacking-consumer-reports-finds/.

[47] Paul Wagenseil, "5 Essential Smart TV Security Tips to Protect Your Privacy," Tom's Guide, December 8, 2019, https://www.tomsguide.com/reference/smart-tv-security-tips.

company Norton asks and answers, "What's the simplest way to make sure that your smart TV isn't spying on you? Disconnect it from your home network."[48] Norton acknowledges that doing so might preclude "access to some of the perks of smart technology," downplaying that those "perks" include use of all streaming services, which have their own data collection practices.

While press coverage essentially resigns users to pervasive corporate surveillance in exchange for the convenience of Smart technology, it sensationalizes the "exceptional" surveillance of individual bad actors with the potential to hack into a user's personal network. While the concrete consequences of data surveillance remain obfuscated, hackers, in this framing, explicitly threaten the visual privacy of the home, producing a feminized vulnerability at the heart of notions of domestic privacy. The FBI, for instance, frames its recommendations in terms of the question "How can you protect your family?"[49] The two major threats from which the family must be protected fall into the categories of what the user sees, and who sees or hears the user. First, there is the risk that a hacker will "gain access to your unsecured television and take control by changing channels, adjusting volume levels, and even showing inappropriate content to children."[50] Norton Security similarly mentions that hackers could open "disturbing or explicit content,"[51] while Consumer Reports describes the sensation of someone else remotely controlling your content as "creepy, as though an intruder were lurking nearby or spying on you through the set."[52] That final phrase explicitly links the experience of someone controlling what

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[48] Nadia Kovacs, "What Is a Smart TV and the Privacy Risks of a Smart TV," Norton, accessed January 22, 2021, https://us.norton.com/internetsecurity-iot-smart-tvs-and-risk.html.
[49] Steele, "Oregon FBI Tech Tuesday."
[50] Whitney, "How to Stop Smart TVs."
[51] Kovacs, "What Is a Smart TV."
[52] Consumer Reports, "Samsung and Roku Smart TVs."

you watch with that of someone watching you, and thus inversely aligns controlling what you watch with privacy within the home.

Certainly, visual access to you and your domestic space poses the second and greater risk of exceptional surveillance and technological vulnerability. The FBI describes the "worst-case scenario" as hackers being able to "turn on your bedroom TV's camera and microphone and silently cyberstalk you."[53] Femininity, and the threat of women exposed, constitutes a crux of this particular fear. As Osucha argues, in the discourse of media privacy, "feminity is iconic both for the individual ideal of privacy and for the wounding of that ideal through uses of publicity."[54] Norton Security illustrates this threat more explicitly using an example of personal computer hacking. They write, "Cassidy Wolf, a Miss Teen USA contestant was targeted by hackers for blackmail after they used remote administration software to take photos of her in her bedroom, through her own computer. That problem could now be headed to your living room TV."[55] The article adds that "the threat isn't just being seen in your unmentionables," and suggests that hackers could use a television's webcam in preparation for a robbery, but their invocation of Wolf's story illustrates exactly Osucha's assertion. Norton invokes "the sympathetic spectacle of wounded white femininity" to convey the severity of the violation and the necessity of domestic privacy—which includes the necessity that women's bodies remain private.[56] The article demonstrates that the popular imagination of privacy violation is limited to, or at least focused on, experiences of visual objectification or commodification that look like individual strangers

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[53] Steele, "Oregon FBI Tech Tuesday."
[54] Osucha, "The Whiteness of Privacy," 72.
[55] Kovacs, "What Is a Smart TV."
[56] Osucha, "The Whiteness of Privacy," 71.

getting off on the exposure of young women's bodies and the more literal taking of private property; and private property is one foundation for traditional understandings of privacy. Data, however, behaves "in ways that defy, rather than support, private property," and so the far more pervasive experience of commodification through data surveillance is often obscured by exceptional forms of surveillance that work within traditional white patriarchal frameworks of property, privacy, and violation.[57] As argued above, corporations in fact sell data surveillance as a tool of securing those particular formations of privacy and domestic life. More specifically, young women's vulnerability to violation serves to justify data surveillance in the form of parental control technologies which entangle girls' exposure and girls' spectatorship. The next section of this chapter explores the gender dynamics of TV parental control technologies and the role of girls' television spectatorship in the link between privacy and normative femininity.

"It's better that they don't know": Parental Controls and Girls' TV Spectatorship

A significant feature of networked television sold to parents is the ability to control what their children watch. In marketing discourse, moms become the "boss" of media consumption and young girls the primary victim of harmful media effects. These gendered dynamics of the surveillance of spectatorship reinforce notions of domestic privacy built on property and propriety, such that data surveillance does not constitute a violation. In recounting the history of privacy as a legal right, Osucha explains that the motivation to protect white women from having their image reproduced beyond their control in advertising was related to the possibility of their image circulating in public spaces where "respectable" white women would not go themselves,

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[57] Chun, *Control and Freedom*, 4.

such as a bar. She writes, "The doctrine of media privacy… seeks to contain the circulation of women both as objects of representation and as consumers of media."[58] Surveillance and spectatorship in tandem thus become tools to enforce a version of privacy based in gender normativity. Smart TV surveillance is sold in many forms as a tool to secure the borders of the home and family. Samsung's SmartThings, for instance, specifically promises to do so by giving parents control over what their daughters *do*. This section focuses specifically on what it means to control what children *watch*. Spectatorship is part of the process by which girls' privacy is constructed not as something to be protected, but as something to be enforced, paradoxically, through surveillance. While I do not mean to suggest that children should be allowed to consume any content or that parental controls are inherently regressive, I do mean to probe the power dynamics of surveilling spectatorship, particularly when parental surveillance is necessarily coterminous with corporate surveillance through the use of television parental control technologies.

Children specifically have always been central to moral panics centering around television and media consumption. Protecting children from "harmful" content is a driving force behind censorship and regulation in broadcast. According to the Supreme Court ruling in FCC v. Pacifica in 1978, "the pervasiveness of television, and its easy accessibility to children" justified content restrictions.[59] Because children can stumble across broadcast content, which "'invades' the home" without intent (children's or their parents'), "broadcast receives the least First

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[58] Osucha, "The Whiteness of Privacy," 71.
[59] Drew Clark, "TV Has Grown Up. Shouldn't FCC Rules?" *The Washington Post (1974-Current File)*, May 16, 2004, Proquest Historical Newspapers, B4.

Amendment protection" among domestic media technologies.[60] New technologies, however, have further threatened to expose children to inappropriate content, requiring new forms of parental and institutional control and surveillance. Video and satellite, Laura Mulvey suggests, were "seen in terms of a sexual threat to the integrity of the home" and "have been associated with an influx of pornography."[61] Parental control technologies mandated by the state preclude greater censorship while suggesting that families are empowered to "keep material that runs contrary to their tastes or beliefs from being viewed by their children."[62] At the behest of the Clinton administration, television broadcasters began voluntarily to provide content ratings for all of their programming beginning in 1997.[63] Ratings refer both to age or age group (TV-PG suggests parental guidance for children; TV-14 suggests audience of 14 and up) and to specific content (ratings for profanity, violence, sex, etc.). In 1999, years before Smart TVs and streaming services offered their own forms of parental controls, the FCC required that all television sets be manufactured with a V-Chip, a technology that would allow parents to block TV content according to broadcasters' rating system as well as to block entire channels.[64] Reporting from the decade following the V-Chips implementation suggest that the technology was too complicated for most viewers, leading to low adoption rates.[65] However, subsequent

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[60] Chun, *Control and Freedom*, 109.
[61] Laura Mulvey, "Melodrama inside and outside the home," in *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1989), 76.
[62] Matt Lake, "Boxed In: The Television V-Chip Puts Up Electronic Fences," *New York Times*, November 4, 1999, Proquest Historical Newspapers, G13.
[63] *Los Angeles Times* Editorial, "A Good Step Toward Parental TV Control: Industry Agrees to Rate Programs for Sex, Violence," *Los Angeles Times (1996-Current)*, March 4, 1996, Proquest Historical Newspapers, B4.
[64] Lake, "Boxed In," G13.
[65] Catherine Greenman, "The V-Chip Arrives With a Thud: Program-Blocking Device Is in TV's, but Few Consumers Are Aware of It V-Chip Technology Is Now in TV's, But Few Consumers

parental control technologies from TiVo to Netflix have followed a similar model of blocking content based on ratings and titles, while introducing the potential to curate a menu of age-appropriate content.[66]

All of these technological services and methods are meant to protect children from "harm," a presumed universal effect of violent or sexual content on kids despite evidence that children make complex judgments of such content.[67] According to Maureen Mauk in her work on Netflix parental controls, "public scripts on media effects" create anxiety in parents about how to negotiate appropriate media consumption, which ultimately reflects on the quality of the family.[68] Implicit in these discourses of children as passive consumers of content that acts on them in harmful ways is the idea that children will, in fact, act based on the media they consume. Underscoring that parental controls are not exclusively driven by a desire to protect children from harm, one mom tells the New York Times in 1999 why a V-Chip is inadequate to her needs as a parent: "*Rugrats* is rated for kids but they show them how to throw food and be disobedient to their parents."[69] The media *effect* at issue here is not a child's emotional or psychological

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Know About It," *New York Times*, November 4, 1999, Proquest Historical Newspapers; Clark, "TV Has Grown Up."

[66] Saul Hansell, "TiVo to Offer Tighter Rein on Children's Viewing," *New York Times*, March 2, 2006, Proquest Historical Newspapers.

[67] Monroe E. Price, Stefaan Verhulst, Dee H. Andrews, and Harold F. O'Neil, *Parental Control of Television Broadcasting* (Mahwah, N.J.: Routledge, 2002); Sue Jackson, Sarah Goddard, and Sophie Cossens, "The Importance of [Not] Being Miley: Girls Making Sense of Miley Cyrus," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 19, no. 6 (2016): 547–64, https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549416632008.

[68] Maureen Mauk, "Think of the Parents: Parental Controls in Digital TV and Family Implications," in *Young Children's Rights in a Digital World: Play, Design, and Practice*, eds. Donell Holloway, Michele Willson, Karen Murcia, Catherine Archer, and Francesca Stocco (New York: Springer, 2021).

[69] Greenman, "The V-Chip Arrives With a Thud," G8.

wellbeing, but the inappropriate behavior demonstrated by a children's cartoon and imitated in a one-to-one correlation by the child. What she sees is what she will do, according to such simplified perspectives.

Significantly, such concerns are distinctly gendered. While boys might be seen as particularly susceptible to the effects of violent media (especially video games, which incorporate more direct forms of interaction), "the pre-teen girl-audience has been brought into the limelight via mediated 'moral panics' about the contaminating sexual influence of 'sexualised' media."[70] Sue Jackson, Sarah Goddard, and Sophie Cossens argue specifically that "the female celebrity has been to the fore in these panics through her construction as a 'role model', assumed to encourage girls to emulate her performances and dress codes borrowed from pornography."[71] The connection between this particular fear and issues of television censorship is evident in the aftermath of the 2004 Super Bowl halftime show, during which Justin Timberlake momentarily revealed Janet Jackson's breast. The "wardrobe malfunction" led to an investigation and massive fines by the FCC, and public outrage. Conservative media watchdog group the Parents Television Council called the incident "offensive," "filth," and an "insult to every parent, every woman and every child in America."[72] They counter the argument that parents should simply "turn the channel" from content they find unseemly, asking, "Does this mean that parents shouldn't allow their children to watch football games anymore?" My specific

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[70] Jackson et al., "The Importance of [Not] Being Miley," 548.
[71] Jackson et al., "The Importance of [Not] Being Miley," 548.
[72] Parents Television Council, "PTC Outraged with CBS' Raunchy Super Bowl," Parents Television Council, February 2, 2004, https://web.archive.org/web/20061210233301/http://www.parentstv.org/ptc/publications/release/2004/0202.asp

concern is not precisely with issues of the emulation of sexualised female celebrity, but with the central role of female sexuality in justifying regimes of censorship, surveillance, and control. In this case, the exposure of a woman's body is contrasted with the wholesome display of American masculinity that is appropriate for all audiences, and punishing the broadcasters responsible would redress the harm done to the most vulnerable audiences. Ultimately, women's and children's spectatorship is enlisted to construct women's sexuality as a *problem*, and the control of what young women watch is part of the solution.

While such media effects discourses make the unsubstantiated leap that watching "inappropriate" content will lead to "inappropriate" behavior, the interactivity of the internet complicates and reinforces these dynamics in the era of streaming and internet TV, and creates new possibilities for the surveillance of spectatorship. According to Chun, the rise of the internet produced the "sex panic" of the 1990s, in which the computer-savvy child became the figure "for anxiety over the jacked-in computer's breaching of the home."[73] Many wanted the internet to be regulated or censored like television, in order to protect children from exposure to sexual content. Like cable and satellite, the internet threatened traditional family values: "Online pornography intrudes into the home, circumventing the normal family disciplinary structure, subjecting children and threatening to create deviant subjects."[74] Chun's play on "subject" here points to the way that the internet combines spectatorship and action perhaps more directly than TV. Not only will children be subject to inappropriate content, they may also have inappropriate *contact*, and that contact entails the user's own outward breach of the private home. They will be

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[73] Chun, *Control and Freedom*, 28.
[74] Chun, *Control and Freedom*, 87.

exposed *to,* but they will also themselves be exposed. Moral panics around digital (and older) technologies regularly center young women in terms that confuse when girls themselves are violated, and when they have violated a norm of sexual privacy and virtue.[75] From this perspective, internet connection (and the connections enabled by the internet) collapses spectatorship and user action in such a way that girlhood sexual innocence becomes a linchpin for enforcing limits on girls' relationship to technology and media content.

The risk that girls will violate the feminine norms of sexual privacy—or in Chun's terminology, that they will "leak"—frequently justifies regimes of surveillance that violate their privacy.[76] Internet technologies enable new forms of parental control that allow for more than simple rating- or title-based blocking—and when much of young people's television consumption occurs through streaming services, TV and internet parental controls converge along with the media themselves. As early as 2003, parents could "engage in keystroke-by-keystroke online surveillance" of their children.[77] A Wall Street Journal article from that year notes that software companies had begun adapting surveillance programs sold to corporations for the home computer market, indicating an important philosophical and technical overlap between corporate data surveillance and collection and parental control technologies.[78] Significantly,

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[75] Justine Cassell and Meg Cramer, "High Tech or High Risk: Moral Panics about Girls Online," in *Digital Youth, Innovation, and the Unexpected*, ed. Tara McPherson (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2008), 53-76; Amy Adele Hasinoff, *Sexting Panic: Rethinking Criminalization, Privacy, and Consent*. (Urbana, IL: U of Illinois Press, 2015); Wendy Hui Kyong Chun and Sarah Friedland, "Habits of Leaking: Of Sluts and Network Cards," *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 26, no. 2 (2015).
[76] Chun and Friedland, "Habits of Leaking."
[77] Michelle Higgins, "How to Spy on Your Kids: New Tools Let Parents Engage in Keystroke-by-Keystroke Online Surveillance," *Wall Street Journal (1923 - Current File)*, January 9, 2003, Proquest Historical Newspapers, D1.
[78] Higgins, "How to Spy on Your Kids."

many of these surveillance programs operate in "stealth mode," so that users do not know when their online actions are being recorded, creating a drastic power imbalance between user and surveiller (whether that be a parent or a corporation). And while there are legal limits on corporate surveillance without the consent of the user (regardless of the obfuscation used to acquire it), there are none on how a parent might surveil their child's internet use.

Surveillance functions as parents' tool to control the boundary of what comes into the home, and what leaves it—even as internet surveillance technology itself incorporates the corporate gaze into the process. And while what children consume is one major category of parental monitoring,[79] as more and more of our lives are conducted on the internet, parental control technologies are enlisted to police teens' public lives. One father tells the Wall Street Journal that he "discovered that his teenage son was using marijuana" and that "one friend of his teenage daughter was e-mailing around inappropriate photos of herself."[80] He talked to his children and "put that kind of behavior to an end."[81] The anecdote speaks to another degree of Chun's concept of "leakiness." While the daughter's friend was the one conducting "inappropriate" behavior—making her sexualized body public—her actions seem to "leak" to the daughter, who is rather inexplicably held accountable. The crime of exposure is perhaps so threatening that it cannot be contained—contact with such exposure necessarily implicates all

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[79] Demie Kurz, "'I Trust Them But I Don't Trust Them': Issues and Dilemmas in Monitoring Teenagers," in *Who's Watching?: Daily Practices of Surveillance among Contemporary Families*, eds. Margaret K. Nelson and Anita Ilta Garey (Nashville: Vanderbilt UP, 2009), 260-276.
[80] Higgins, "How to Spy on Your Kids," D1.
[81] Higgins, "How to Spy on Your Kids," D4.

girls, again justifying a regime of surveillance that constructs girls' sexual privacy as something to be enforced rather than protected.

These gendered dynamics subtly inform how television parental controls are marketed in the age of Smart TV, reinforcing a maternal surveillant gaze as rightfully omniscient and a gender binary in which girls are simultaneously most at risk of exposure *to* harmful content and of their own deviant exposure. While children are explicitly presented as passive victims of inappropriate media in ads, parents, and particularly mothers, are presented as using technology to exert active, productive control over their families. Multiple commercials explicitly designate mom as "boss," using the language of workplace authority to legitimate domestic control. A series of ads for TheTVBoss.org, an online resource to teach parents how to use TV parental controls, adopts the slogan "Be the boss of what your kids watch."[82] In these ads, white, cardigan-clad moms in what look like suburban single family homes lecture characters from violent TV shows (generic mobsters, a bloody chainsaw murderer) for being overly violent and giving their children nightmares. She tells the characters that they will now be "blocked;" she is, in essence, firing them, but in a maternal disciplinary tone. The language of the "boss" negotiates contemporary commercials' continued reliance on the trope of the housewife or stay-at-home mother with the 21st century economic and social reality of working motherhood. The ads emphasize the role of parental control technologies in securing the mother's authority over the domestic sphere through capitalistic vocabulary.

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[82] Ad Boss, "Ad Council TV Spot, "Boss: Vinny's Watch,'" video, 0:28, March 6, 2013, https://www.ispot.tv/ad/7Ila/ad-council-boss-vinnys-watch; Ad Boss, "Ad Council TV Spot, "Blocked: Chainsaw,'" video, 0:28, March 5, 2013, https://www.ispot.tv/ad/7IpU/ad-council-blocked-chainsaw.

The explicitly active nature of parental control technology use contrasts with the more complex passivity of the child viewer. Over and over in advertisements for parental control technology, parents are commanded to "take control." Spectrum TV tells parents simply to "take control with parental controls,"[83] while Xfinity more gently assures them, "You're always in control of what your kids watch."[84] Parents and technology work together in these scenarios to surveil the children and exert power over their viewing. In a different Xfinity ad, Today show host Natalie Morales tells parents, "you're always in control of what your kids *see,*" and this slight rhetorical shift indicates an orientation toward children as passive receivers of televisual imagery.[85] When kids "watch," they may be active viewers who have sought out a particular show or film; when they "see," they may have accidentally come across a violent or sexual image that will traumatize them or lead them astray (i.e. if they "see" pornography, perhaps next time they will want to "watch" it).

The issue of children's active role in choosing the media they consume is distinctly gendered in advertisements for parental controls. Like their fathers, boys in commercials demonstrate pleasure in and mastery of technological advancements, and their confident use of technology translates often to choosing what to watch. In the Samsung Smart TV commercial described in the opening to this chapter, a young boy tries to outwit his mother by playing with

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[83] Spectrum, "Spectrum TV Spot, 'Parental Controls,'" video, 0:30, June 1, 2018, https://www.ispot.tv/ad/dAiV/spectrum-parental-controls#.
[84] Comcast/XFINITY, "Xfinity TV Spot, 'Parental Control,'" video, 0:28, October 28, 2013, https://www.ispot.tv/ad/718_/xfinity-parental-control#.
[85] Comcast/XFINITY, "Xfinity TV Spot, 'Parental Controls' Featuring Natalie Morales," video, 0:28, April 22, 2013, https://www.ispot.tv/ad/7ZVL/xfinity-parental-controls-featuring-natalie-morales# (emphasis added).

the nebulous definition of "TV" in the streaming era.[86] He lounges on the couch streaming footage of an explosion from his tablet to the family's large flatscreen living room television. When she tells him, "Alright, honey, that's enough TV," he retorts, "it's not TV, it's from my tablet." As she presses him to stop, his rejoinders continue: "But it's YouTube," "What? It's Netflix." The camera repeatedly frames closeups of the tablet and television screens, highlighting the boy's deft movement between media technologies, platforms, and content, both rhetorically and technologically. The mom finally wins this minor battle by using her smartphone as a remote control to turn off the TV set and repeating herself, "that's enough TV," signaling her domestic authority. But Dad, now lounged on the couch parallel to his son, chimes in, "technically it's not TV, per se." While the audience is perhaps meant to shake their heads in exasperation along with the mother, the ad produces a sense that while the mother may be practically in charge here, the son is the more advanced media *user*, in control of his viewing choices.

The same family appears in other Samsung Smart TV advertisements that reinforce these dynamics. Notably, the family is multiracial—the mother is Asian and the father white, their children presumably and believably mixed—signaling their status as modern and progressive, even as they embrace the traditional gender roles of the stereotypical nuclear family. A daughter appears in another advertisement in which the family has just thrown out their old television and replaced it with a Samsung Smart TV.[87] She sits on the other end of the couch from her brother, passively absorbed by her smartphone. The two teens roll their eyes at their father's excitement over the new technology. The son wields the remote, and when the dad tells him to "hit the

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[86] Samsung Smart TV, "It's Not TV."
[87] Samsung Smart TV, "Meet the Family," video, 0:56, August 12, 2013, https://www.ispot.tv/ad/7qBM/samsung-smart-tv-meet-the-family.

button" to turn it on, the son confidently speaks into the remote: "Hi, TV." While Dad feigns knowledge of how it works, Mom expresses her surprise, even asking "Is this Hulu-from-the-computer Hulu?" as the boy scrolls through the Smart TV apps. The teen girl clearly knows her way around technology as well ("It's Hulu Plus," she tells her mom), but she remains stereotypically glued to her phone, with her brother in control of what the family watches.

The two teens in the Samsung Smart TV family embody familiar adolescent stereotypes, but gendered power dynamics exist even in earlier childhood. In an aforementioned Comcast Xfinity commercial, a young brother and sister, also legibly mixed-race, sit side by side on the couch watching *King Kong*, as the titular gorilla fights a T-Rex.[88] The boy excitedly clutches his two dinosaur stuffed animals, while the girl looks visibly frightened and hides her face behind her hands. Their white mom arrives to set parental controls based on rating and channel (two settings that may or may not actually identify *King Kong* as inappropriate for children), and the TV switches to the animated baby dinosaurs of an *Ice Age* film. While both of the children were certainly "watching," the boy was clearly the more active viewer who chose this content, while his sister may be the one to breathe a sigh of relief to be free from the violence on screen. The narrative reinforces the idea voiced by Spectrum TV Parental Controls, "Not everything is meant for everyone," illuminating its gendered ramifications. The live-action children sit in a digitally rendered home that appears to be all windows. King Kong can be seen reflected in the window behind the children on the couch, and from the living room we can see into other areas of the house. The transparent walls evoke the front parlor placement of the TV described by Mulvey[89]

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[88] Comcast/XFINITY, "Xfinity TV Spot, 'Parental Control.'"
[89] Mulvey, "Melodrama inside and outside the home," 76.

and the picture windows described by Spigel; they create the sense that what children watch is somehow visible or public. The ad does not explicitly invoke the specter of public judgment that Mauk argues causes anxiety in parents, but it conveys a sense of children exposed at the same time that they are exposed *to* potentially harmful content, with the young girl as the primary object of concern.

Girls are similarly constructed as the potential "victims" of TV by a "social video series" from Xfinity featuring young girls narrating the plots of age-inappropriate films.[90] In the first video, a little girl seats herself on an oversized comfy chair placed on a pink backdrop. The image is juxtaposed with an ominous swelling tone reminiscent of a horror film or police procedural audio trope, and text reading: "Xfinity presents *Silence of the Lambs*, According to Liyah age 6." In close-up, she very adorably narrates that the film is "about lambs that are super spies that have to be quiet." A playful orchestration plays as the text announces: "It's better that they don't know," and a cut back to a wide shot emphasizes her small size. The following two ads in the series depict eight-year-old Rumi, shot against a pastel purple background, explaining *Fifty Shades of Gray* and *Saw II* (about "white gray, dark gray, big gray, tiny gray" and "a person who sees two things, like if there's one cat in front of them, they see two cats"). The commercials are playful, making light of the juxtaposition between these girls' presumed innocence with films about sexual and gender deviance and graphic violence. But the playfulness masks a somewhat more sinister threat—what if these girls *did* see (or "watch" or "be exposed to") these films? The threat that their innocence would be tarnished by *knowing* underlies the

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[90] "Xfinity Parental Controls," video, 0:17, August 2019, https://goodbysilverstein.com/work/xfinity-parental-controls-4.

assertion of the ad. Part of what makes these ads effective is that they feature such obviously inappropriate films (these are not *King Kong*). It is perhaps obviously "better" that young children do not "know" about Hannibal Lecter's predilection for human liver and Chianti, and by putting pressure on this logic I certainly do not mean to suggest that children should be free to watch any content. But to extend the logic is to justify a surveillance regime in which parents enlist technology to limit what girls can *know* through spectatorship in order to protect feminine innocence and normativity. If girls were to see too much, and therefore *do* too much, they might threaten a breach—a "leak"—of the appropriate boundaries of the home.

These advertisements bring together parental control technology and pervasive corporate data collection as forms of surveillance that bolster each other to secure the normative boundaries of the family. They demonstrate how discourses of media effects construct girls' spectatorship as a problem to be addressed through forms of surveillance that produce a version of privacy as something to be selectively enforced rather than protected. Not all forms of parental controls on content consumption necessarily feel like a violation of privacy, and certainly it makes sense that parents restrict their children from access to certain titles or ratings, and that they do so with the very genuine intention of protecting their children from harm. It is simultaneously true that determinations of "harmful" content, whether by parents, ratings boards, or streaming services, are informed by gendered and racialized expectations and norms. Ratings systems like the Motion Picture Association of America, for instance, will rate depictions of women's sexual pleasure more restrictively than men's, or a parent may decide that a boy can handle more violence than a girl based on expectations of sensitivity. But what changes when these impulses and systems are paired with pervasive data surveillance and the holistic, algorithmic content curation offered by streaming services and Smart TV? Not only are certain

titles restricted, but others are explicitly and algorithmically promoted. Mauk reports that "Netflix Kids Content Taggers are employed to tag and classify content to account and measure for various themes and cultural sensitivities which helps the company better categorise its own content and make recommendations based on its various themes, tone, storyline and characters to harmonise with viewer preferences."[91] Katherine Sender has identified progressive potential in this dynamic—algorithms respond to what the user *does*, not their given identity.[92] A young white boy who binges series about girls of color will potentially have his tastes reinforced, not shifted to content that aligns more normatively with his gender or racial identity. But by reinforcing taste, and courting demand for more of the same, algorithmic surveillance simultaneously limits the kinds of identifications one might experience through spectatorship. The algorithms of Netflix and other streaming services do not know what their viewers are finding in their content. Streaming services might curate and promote content free of overtly "inappropriate" material, but their algorithms may fail to see the myriad ways that users relate to media. This failure is perhaps simultaneously a limit and an opening for the user. Algorithmic parental controls and content curation might stop a girl from seeing a wide range of things she might one day experience, including violence and sex. But she also might be drawn to an imagined queer relationship between characters, or turned off by subtle misogyny or racism she senses but is so far unable to name. Centering what and how girls see, and acknowledging that there is no way of predetermining what they will *do* based on the content they consume,

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[91] Mauk, "Think of the Parents," 5.
[92] Katherine Sender, "The Gay Market is Dead, Long Live the Gay Market: From Identity to Algorithm in Predicting Consumer Behavior," *Advertising and Society Quarterly* 18, no. 4 (2018), doi:10.1353/asr.2018.0001.

undermines the power and efficacy of parental controls. Surveillance may be adopted in the domestic sphere to enforce the normative boundaries of private life, but centering young women's spectatorship can fundamentally disrupt the systems that construct and enforce normative femininity.

Conclusion

This chapter suggests the figures of the mother and daughter play a key role in realigning the value of domestic privacy with expansive data surveillance and corporate access enabled by technological convergence. The mothers and daughters of corporate marketing discourse convey that the surveillance of spectatorship will knit the family closer together by protecting its normative boundaries. The empowered maternal gaze and the vulnerable daughter work together to make surveillance feel more helpful and more necessary. Coverage in the popular press and the linguistic contortions of corporate privacy policies reflect a larger cultural grappling with the nature of data surveillance, particularly in the home. Domestic life, and certainly television spectatorship, are increasingly entwined with Smart and internet-based technologies that, industrially, rely on data collection sold to consumers as a service and a benefit. The technologically-empowered mother found in contemporary commercials updates without truly transforming older tropes, and the embrace of surveillance as an expression and enactment of maternal care ultimately aligns with notions of privacy based in whiteness, private property, and the policing of women's visibility. But, as this dissertation will further explore, digital technology and data surveillance does not abide by traditional rules of privacy, property, or visibility. Even as women's and girls' spectatorship is constructed and enlisted to consolidate the

domestic side of surveillance capitalism, they have the potential to exceed those limitations, expose new forms of gendered power, and imagine alternative ways of looking.

Chapter Two

"Women Aren't Just One Thing": Network(ed) Publics and State Surveillance in *The Good Wife* and *The Good Fight*

In "Targets," a season seven episode of *The Good Wife* (CBS, 2009-2016), lawyer Alicia Florrick (Julianna Margulies) and the ruggedly handsome private investigator who works at her law firm, Jason (Jeffrey Dean Morgan) sit across from each other in her glass-walled office. She smoothly convinces him that they should, in fact, continue sleeping together, despite the fact that she is married to the Governor of Illinois. Tight over-the-shoulder shots build the sexual tension, and it is a tension the fans have been anticipating for seasons, ever since the series devastatingly killed off her primary will-they-won't-they love interest. In a sultry alto, she tells him, "I want you again. Don't you want it?" He leans in, but when his answer—"I want it" —finally comes, the viewers do not see him say it, or see Alicia react. Instead, the audience is suddenly taken to the offices of the NSA, a familiar setting for regular viewers of the show. Due to her many political entanglements and the dysfunctional bureaucracy of the series' NSA, Alicia Florrick has been wiretapped, her phone activated as a hot mic, so agents can listen in even when she is not using the phone. This time, one of the agents most invested in Alicia's personal life from afar leans back in his cubicle, eyes closed, with one headphone pressed against his ear. His animated eyebrows and eagerly half-open mouth mimic that of the invested television viewer. On his computer screen beside him, an audio file plays, a sound wave spiking as Alicia begins to respond: "Would you like me to tell you exactly what I'm going to…" But alas, the agent's boss interrupts him, and he rushes to close the audio file window on the computer, as if he has been

caught watching pornography. He and I, the NSA and the television viewer, are thwarted in our desire to see, or at the very least hear, everything.

This scene of state surveillance reflects *The Good Wife*'s larger investment in the dynamics of women's exposure and publicity, as well as its broader incorporation of surveillance into its narrative and form. The series is initially framed around Alicia's public role as the wife of a disgraced politician, standing by her cheating husband when he is convicted for corruption. The public nature of her personal life, as well as her desire for privacy, shapes her romantic relationships and professional growth, which constitute the major serial arc of the series. *The Good Wife* largely takes the form of a legal procedural, and the cases-of-the-week also often entail the surveillance work of private detectives, defending or prosecuting major technology corporations, or, as described above, the NSA. Both critics and scholars alike have noted the series' fundamental incorporation of technology into its storytelling. *New Yorker* television critic Emily Nussbaum called *The Good Wife* "the first great series about technology," and analogizes it "to the digital debate as *The Wire* is to the drug war."[1] ("Net Gain"); television scholar Hunter Hargraves analyzes the centrality of technology on the series through what he calls its "smartphone storytelling."[2] As epitomized by the NSA storylines, surveillance aesthetics permeate the series, providing a foundation for the series' reflexivity on the nature of women's visibility, as well as their spectatorship.

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[1] Emily Nussbaum, "Net Gain," *The New Yorker*, March 5, 2012, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/03/05/net-gain.

[2] Hunter Hargraves, "To Trust in Strange Habits and Last Calls: *The Good Wife's* Smartphone Storytelling," *Television and New Media* 18, no. 2 (2017):114-130.

The Good Fight, the CBS All Access spinoff of *The Good Wife*, takes this preoccupation even further. The series opens with Diane Lockhart (Christine Baranski), Alicia Florrick's older former colleague, watching Donald Trump's 2017 inauguration as President of the United States, aghast. Diane struggles to maintain her sanity as the world seems to descend into madness, and much of that madness is characterized within the series by its relationship to digital and internet technologies. *The Good Fight* represents ubiquitous surveillance as characterizing the present dystopian world, and centrally explores nefarious micro-targeted ads and alt-right internet discourse. It simultaneously acknowledges surveillance as a tool of power that can be wielded by those on both "sides," not only by the state or corporations. FitBit data may be used to exonerate an innocent man accused of sexual assault, for instance, and security camera footage may help convict police officers committing racial violence. As the state under Trump becomes a kind of enemy of the people in *The Good Fight,* the series is more explicit about the political and politicized nature of surveillance; when Diane gets the NSA's attention, it is for being part of a radical political group trying to bring down the government, not for sleeping with a coworker. But in line with the dysfunctional workings of the government, the surveillance inherent to micro-targeted content and filter bubbles serves to disintegrate civil discourse and the functioning national public the series longs for. *The Good Fight* asserts that when mass media becomes mass customization, all hell breaks loose.

Such a position is complicated by *The Good Fight's* place on broadcast streaming platform CBS All Access, which relies on just the kind of technological affordances the series excoriates. *The Good Wife* represents an older broadcast model, and was often celebrated by critics and scholars as a melding of contemporary "quality" or "prestige" television with the 22-episode-season procedural form that continues to dominate contemporary hour-long broadcast

drama. The two series embody two distinct modes of distribution and thus of spectatorship, even as both series traverse multiple media forms (with *The Good Wife* available to stream, and the first season of *The Good Fight* airing on CBS in 2019). The winking reflexivity of both series entails attention to these alternative conceptions of the television audience within their storytelling. Specifically, their representations of how surveillance functions as a tool of power over women variously complement and contrast how CBS and CBS All Access use networked surveillance to value their viewers; and both surveillance and spectatorship matter for how we understand women's relationship to public life.

Understanding these models of television spectatorship provides an important angle for approaching the consequences of surveillance culture, as it complicates the meaning of citizenship and public life for women. This chapter analyzes narratives of surveillance in *The Good Wife* and *The Good Fight* to consider how they differently imagine and construct feminized spectators, as individuals or members of a collective public. I consider their representations of state surveillance and women's visibility in conversation with their industrial and technological models that also construct a vision of an American public under surveillance. Together, these two series present multiple visions of the entanglement of privacy and power, and what it means for feminine subjectivity in the public sphere. I argue that *The Good Wife* largely identifies the *problem* of state surveillance in the exposure of one's private, personal life. Resistance, too, is largely reduced to personal and individualized retaliation meant to restore the boundary between private and public life. *The Good Fight*, however, identifies a problem beyond the invasion of domestic privacy, which is the way that an algorithmic logic of surveillance rewrites entirely what it means to be a member of a public. Internet dynamics of exposure,

visibility, and anonymity certainly do not operate according to older norms of privacy,[3] but more significantly, ways of participating in and changing public life have been newly contained by these technological structures. This shift in perspective prompts us to consider resistance and progress not as a restoration of the line between private and public spheres, but as a reimagining of the means by which people form publics. As our models of spectatorship and of surveillance become increasingly intertwined, we must consider how they shape our complex relations to one another, to our complex and collective identities, and to our collective public actions.

Television scholars have long argued that TV's potential to help elucidate dynamics of visibility, privacy, and citizenship extends beyond its aesthetic and narrative representation to its technological and industrial context. The first chapter of this dissertation explained how TV technology plays a part in mapping women's place in the private sphere, and this chapter now turns outward to consider how television can provide a lens through which to understand women's place in the public sphere. As Michele Hilmes has suggested, the mechanism of broadcast, beginning with radio and extending to television, helped build an imagined community of the nation, in part by papering over the many differences that nation contained to create a unified American identity.[4] And certainly, the broadcast era of the mid-20th century embraced what Anna McCarthy calls "the 'cozy functionalist fantasy' equating the television audience and the nation."[5] Television viewership was imagined as a mechanism to cultivate

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[3] Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, *Control and Freedom: Power and Paranoia in the Age of Fiber Optics* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006).
[4] Michele Hilmes, "Radio and the Imagined Community," in *The Sound Studies Reader*, ed. Jonathan Sterne (New York: Routledge, 2012), 351-362.
[5] Anna McCarthy, *The Citizen Machine: Governing by Television in 1950s America* (New York: The New Press, 2010), 9.

proper forms of citizenship. Perhaps only public forms of television have maintained such an ideology in any explicit way,[6] but scholars continue to approach television viewership as an exercise of or training ground for citizenship and national identity.[7]

Many of these accounts, however, are based on a traditional model of television, whether broadcast or cable. As television and web technology become increasingly indistinguishable, the model of citizenship TV invokes changes along with its model of spectatorship. In the traditional model, the national public imagined as the TV audience, engaged in civil discourse through the cultural forum of broadcast, was unified by a "public interest." The public interest standard of broadcast television—the idea that broadcast uses public airwaves and so must operate in the public interest, convenience, and necessity—has only been very loosely interpreted and enforced for much of television history. There are ongoing debates about its applicability to internet content, but in 1996, it was established that the standard would still apply to digital television. However vague or theoretical, the public interest implies the presence of a *public* addressed by network television, a collective body to be collectively engaged. But what happens to this public when television adopts a streaming model of individualized experience and address, enabled by the surveillance of its users?

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[6] Laurie Ouellette, "TV Viewing as Good Citizenship? Political Rationality, Enlightened Democracy and PBS," *Cultural Studies* 13, no. 1 (1999): 62-90.
[7] Toby Miller, *Cultural Citizenship: Cosmopolitanism, Consumerism, and Television in a Neoliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2007); Sylvia Harvey and Marko Ala-Fossi, "Eroding the Assets of Citizenship? From Broadcast to Broadband," *International Communication Gazette* 78, no. 4 (2016): 294-310; Rebecca Jurisz, "Citizenship, Gender, and Intimacy: First Ladies in the Television Age" (PhD Diss., U of Minnesota, 2017); John Hartley, "Television, Nation, and Indigenous Media," *Television & New Media* 5, no. 1 (2004): 7-25; Jingsi Christina Wu, "Cultural Citizenship at the Intersection of Television and New Media," *Television & New Media* 14, no. 5 (2013): 402-420.

Certainly shifts in broadcast and cable marketing have long segmented the imagined public audience over time, but what Amanda Lotz terms "mass customization" entails a revaluation of the television viewer specifically through individualized surveillance, with meaningful ramifications for popular notions of citizenship.[8] Not only is content time-shifted in the mass customization model, but different viewers have different experiences of a streaming portal or subscription service, as ads and recommendations are tailored to each individual user. Ostensibly, demographics—like income and other identity factors—matter much more in the traditional ad-supported broadcast or cable model, because upscale viewers are more desirable to advertisers. Any one viewer is as good as the next in a subscription model, the argument goes, as long as they can afford to subscribe. Thus, instead of identity factors defining viewers, streaming portals often say that *interests* are what matter, as TV audiences theoretically shift from members of a demographic group sold to advertisers to individual users grouped and micro-targeted by interest. The data surveillance afforded by streaming allows those "interests" to be meticulously and individually tracked, through clicks, views, likes, purchases, or retweets. The extent to which this focus on "interests" truly ends up valuing users differently than traditional advertiser-based models is an unanswered question at stake in this chapter, but in theory, it means that media must address a group of individuals connected by shared interests rather than a mass brought together by a shared identity. Individual interests thus come to replace the notion of the *public* interest. And according to the popular rhetoric of America's filter bubbles, extreme partisanship, and lack

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[8] Amanda Lotz, *Portals: A Treatise on Internet-Distributed Television* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Library, 2017), 9.

of civil discourse, the U.S. seems to have lost any imagination of a functioning national public altogether.

Building on this foundation, this chapter compares how the surveillance aesthetics of women's television manifest differently across broadcast and streaming to reveal differences in their conceptions of national, and specifically women's, publics. In its tongue-in-cheek approach to state surveillance, *The Good Wife* imagines television spectatorship entangled in the same network logics as state surveillance. The series addresses itself to the audience as nation, a mass of citizens, networked together by both broadcast and surveillance technology—a national public *made* public by surveillance and spectatorship at once. *The Good Wife* critiques this state of affairs, but minimizes surveillance as an exercise of power, in part because it has no vision of collective politics. As such, even when Alicia or others resist the unwanted intrusion of state surveillance, that resistance remains personal or individual. The series' broadcast network address thus imagines its audience as an American public networked by state surveillance, but erases the operation of institutional power at play in that public, severely limiting the feminist political potential of the feminine subjectivity whose privacy is at stake within the series.

Alternatively, *The Good Fight* looks nostalgically back on that imagined audience-as-nation and bemoans that individual interests have replaced the public interest that broadcast historically (and ostensibly) served. Its deep ambivalence toward streaming technology reveals the contradictions of liberal feminism, as the show attempts to grapple with power and difference, but ultimately turns its gaze backward toward a fantasy of traditional broadcast's American public. *The Good Fight*'s feminism, then, remains trapped between a fantasy of audience-as-nation that always served as an excuse to ignore and erase the complex differences that public contained, and the dystopia of ubiquitous algorithms creating divisions we cannot see

past. Together, these series do not offer any coherent understanding of how surveillance culture alters women's place in the public sphere, but they delineate contradictions and ambivalences about how women approach their own public visibility and potential for collective action. The dynamics and aesthetics of surveillance in women's television thus help us explore the contradictions of our dysfunctional national public, and perhaps begin to rewrite those norms of privacy and citizenship that have always been mobilized to exclude and marginalize.

NSA Surveillance and Neoliberal Networks on *The Good Wife*

The recurring storyline from the final three seasons of *The Good Wife* in which the NSA wiretaps Alicia Florrick encapsulates the series' deployment of surveillance aesthetics and complicates its construction of the broadcast television spectator. Early in season five, the audience discovers that the NSA has been wiretapping Alicia and her colleague Diane Lockhart (Baranski) ever since their legal defense of a suspected terrorist sympathizer in the third season. Over the course of six episodes in which NSA agents and offices appear, spread out over seasons five and seven, a group of bumbling young, male NSA contractors occasionally play a role in the main action of the series, but more often than not they remain in their sterile cubicles simply listening to, commenting on, and (over-)investing in those developments of Alicia's personal and professional life that unfold over cellular phones. As Hargraves points out in his article on *The Good Wife*'s mode of "smartphone storytelling," phones do in fact function as a bridge between personal and professional spheres and are used to "[manage] the emotional relationships between characters."[9] NSA agents listening in, therefore, appear to follow Alicia's story almost as well as

[9] Hargraves, "To Trust in Strange Habits," 115.

the habitual television viewers do (although perhaps they miss an episode here and there), and thus their emotional investment in the audio drama to which they have access mirrors that of the show's imagined audience. *The Good Wife*'s surveillance aesthetics in this storyline create a dual alignment for viewers with both the series' protagonists and those who surveil them. By doing so, *The Good Wife* imagines broadcast television spectatorship as entangled in the same network logics as state surveillance.

The alignment of the viewer with the NSA contractors works to configure surveillance as merely a form of spectatorship rather than an exercise of power. The NSA contractors following the wiretap on Alicia grow increasingly invested in her life (i.e. the driving narrative of *The Good Wife*) throughout their intermittent appearances on the series, mirroring the presumed attachment of television audiences, and in particular, that of the stereotypically overinvested feminine spectator. Although they are limited to audio access to phone conversations, in the episode "Parallel Construction, Bitches," one contractor Dev Jain (Maulik Pancholy) tells his coworker, "Wow, it's almost fun to watch" as Diane and fellow law partner Will Gardner (Josh Charles) debate whether or not they are being surveilled by the NSA. Jain cannot, of course, *watch* anything except the frequencies of the audio file on his computer so often displayed for the *The Good Wife* audience, but he himself understands his experience of the narrative in terms of some kind of proscribed spectatorship. In response to the conversation between Will and Diane, NSA contractor and Alicia's most avid listener Tyler Hopkins (Tobias Segal) tells Jain that he thinks the two lawyers "end up getting it on." Jain responds, "You're crazy" and tells him, "That is not sexual attraction. You need a life." Jain engages in the same kind of fan speculation as Hopkins when he suggests that he hears something other than sexual attraction in the conversation between Will and Diane, but simultaneously and hypocritically condemns such

overinvestment. In part, the humor lies in the television audience's far greater knowledge of Will and Diane's relationship—it is unlikely that *The Good Wife* fans detect any sexual chemistry in their conversation. Viewers can revel, then, in their relative omniscience. At the same time, however, the NSA agents' exchange pokes fun at audience investment in the personal lives of fictional characters.

In their collective listening, the NSA contractors mark many of the pleasures of serial television spectatorship and fandom, including a careful attention to character development, as well as its frustrations and limitations. In the episode "All Tapped Out," Hopkins and Jeff Dellinger (Zach Woods), the only NSA contractor to fully and physically "cross over" from the NSA offices into the lives of the show's protagonists, listen to lawyer Cary Agos (Matt Czuchry) confidently assert himself on the phone to former boss Diane. Dellinger notes that Cary "sounds different… Wow." Hopkins agrees: "Yeah, he's kicking ass." In this scene, Dellinger sports an *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia* t-shirt, signaling his commitment to that cable comedy and his status as millennial television fan. The two men seem to observe (aurally) Cary coming into his own, revealing their deep past knowledge of his character. However, the scene also highlights the constructed limits to the audience's knowledge and experience of television texts. For much of the conversation between Cary and Diane, the camera remains fixed on the NSA computer screen that displays a wealth of data to the contractors, including who is speaking to whom, the length of the call, and the audio frequency, and Dellinger and Hopkins listening. The viewers see little of Cary himself during the call, and so are left to judge Cary's growth without the usual visual stream of information. They are reminded that, like the NSA contractors, their information is restricted by the limitations of the technology they use, whether that be a wiretap or a television.

The analogy between NSA surveillance and television spectatorship extends beyond the metaphorical through the introduction of the Spoiler app, described in the introduction to this dissertation. In the seventh-season episode "Lies," Alicia defends a client who invented a multi-platform relationship-mapping application that predicts television narratives based on a show's pilot episode. According to the app's creator, Spoiler predicts plot developments "like who will sleep with who and who will get killed off." Considering *The Good Wife*'s fifth-season surprise offing of protagonist Will Gardner, her comment nods to fan outrage over his unexpected death. The client insists, "It's a stupid little program. It's not for surveillance," but Alicia suspects that there might be government interest in the app's code. Dellinger, now hiding in Reykjavik as a "poor-man's Snowden," confirms Alicia's suspicion:

> Spoiler has been one of the NSA's most exciting civilian acquisitions, and although it was created for rather banal reasons, the same infrastructure lends itself well to processing other forms of data. Like understanding conversations between potential terrorists and predicting their future plots. You know, like if one terrorist is going to get into a love triangle with another terrorist's wife. Just kidding. Sort of.

Dellinger simultaneously affirms the complexity of contemporary television as similar to that of global terrorist networks, and trivializes terrorist activity (at least that activity detectable by the NSA) as conventional soap opera fare. TV fans engage in forms of watching that mirror state surveillance, and the NSA is further reduced to a group of feminized TV spectators. The app's adoption by the NSA conflates surveillance and spectatorship as built from the same code.

The Good Wife's account of the Spoiler app articulates a network logic in which surveillance and spectatorship are entangled. The series visualizes and makes audible this logic through its depiction of the NSA offices and technologies. Each transition from Alicia talking on

the phone to the NSA offices is marked by a sonic cue of a vaguely Middle-Eastern-sounding musical theme and a visual cut to a computer screen with a track displaying the audio frequency of the call. The voices on the phone suddenly sound faded and a little grainy as the viewer switches from observing them directly to hearing them ostensibly through the phone, aurally signaling spatial distance both between Alicia and the person on the other end of the phone, and between the callers and their surveillers. Digital surveillance technology forms the link between nodes in the social network, in which NSA agents are as thoroughly imbricated as those speaking directly to each other. Frequently, the camera may zoom out to show the other details the NSA computers monitor and record, including a visual map of callers and those called. Writing on *The Wire,* Catherine Zimmer suggests that "the task of audio surveillance is not simply to record all conversations and make sense of them, but to analyze patterns of who is calling whom, process times and lengths of calls, and interpret conversations."[10] Here, too, the task of surveillance (and thus also of the NSA agents' "spectatorship" of the unfolding drama) is to construct a network out of data collected. When they first appear, the NSA contractors have a "two-hop warrant" on Alicia and Diane, meaning that they can track people up to two degrees of telephonic separation from the targets, and they later extend it to a three-hop warrant. The map depicts those relationships, displaying Alicia's name connected by a line to whomever she is calling. Frequently, she calls someone whose phone number has already been identified, such as one of the other major characters on the series. Occasionally, however, a number will show up as "unknown." For instance, when Alicia and her colleagues discover they are being wiretapped, she quickly switches to another phone line for a sensitive call to Eli Gold (Alan Cumming). The

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[10] Catherine Zimmer, *Surveillance Cinema* (New York: New York UP, 2015), 1.

NSA contractors quickly realize Alicia's discovery and when Eli, who has already been identified as part of Alicia's network, pops up on their map speaking to an "unknown" number, they immediately label it as Alicia's new number. By displaying the NSA computer screens so prominently in these scenes, *The Good Wife* emphasizes the social reality of digital networks and their ability to interpellate individuals based on networked social connections. Surveillance, then, both maps the social networks developed in the show's main narrative and materially constitutes their connections.

By offering the overinvested NSA contractors as analogues for *The Good Wife*'s audience, the series implicates television viewers in the surveillant and social networks constructed on the series. Significantly, television spectatorship has long been imagined as networked, in ways variously ideological and material. Patrick Jagoda notes that as early as the 1960s, "Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore already treat television as the preeminent medium (rivaled only by computers) that puts people in touch with a collective and global life based on interconnection."[11] Television spectatorship, then, is deeply enmeshed in our "sense of belonging to a network imaginary."[12] Jagoda suggests that this "sense" is expressed formally and narratively through the "network aesthetics" of a series like *The Wire*, whose "sustained world-building… bears greater resemblance, in some respects, to contemporary interactive digital environments than to cinema."[13] *The Good Wife* may embrace a similar aesthetic, but my interest in the series lies more specifically in its reflexivity about how television spectatorship is entangled with the surveillant aspect of such digital environments. *The Good Wife* illuminates

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[11] Patrick Jagoda, *Network Aesthetics* (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 2016), 104.
[12] Patrick Jagoda, "Network Ambivalence," *Contemporaneity* 4, no. 1 (2015): 109.
[13] Jagoda, *Network Aesthetics*, 105.

not only how television spectatorship produces a sense of networked interconnection, but how those interconnections are constituted by surveillance. In doing so, the series has the potential to expose and undermine the power dynamics of state and other forms of surveillance, as well as to neutralize those same dynamics by reducing surveillance to an act of spectatorship.

To be sure, *The Good Wife* certainly does level a critique at the NSA's deployment of surveillance of U.S. citizens, exposing its hypocrisy and ineffectuality. Satirizing patriotic rhetoric, Charles Froines (Michael Kostroff), NSA Systems Administrator and a superior to the contractors most featured on the series, is frequently depicted aggrandizing the agency to other government officials by invoking the War on Terror. He belittles the drug war being executed by the Drug Enforcement Administration by telling one of its agents, "A drug war didn't bring down the Twin Towers." The DEA agent responds with a scoff, "Oh god, do you guys love pulling that out." When an ethics investigator seeks wiretap information to help in a case of state-level political corruption, Froines tells him disdainfully, "You know we're trying to fight terrorists here." The practices of the NSA in the series, however, reveal his self-righteous invocation of the War on Terror as hypocritical. In order to justify expanding the NSA warrant on Alicia, Froines tells his contractors they "need a more recent terrorist connection." Although the contractors originally approach him to inquire about the legality of wiretapping her at all, Froines automatically assumes the goal is to expand the scope of their surveillance. The contractors, already "getting interested" in Alicia's story, are excited to find in the metadata that a Somali national and Hamas sympathizer has been repeatedly calling Alicia's house. Although the only content of the call recordings is someone crying—and the audience knows it is the Somali ex-girlfriend of Alicia's teenage son—the metadata is connection enough. Froines tells his contractors simply, "Good job. Good catch," implying some kind of successful find in service

of the War on Terror. They have not, of course, discovered anything but the pitiful practices of a brokenhearted teenage girl, and Froines' praise inadvertently exposes the purpose of NSA surveillance as the perpetual expansion of their own power and scope.

The contractors' effort to locate a terrorist connection to Alicia in order to continue surveilling her exposes the dubious negotiation of legality at the NSA. In demanding further evidence, Froines tells the contractors to "thank Edward Snowden. Everybody's cracking down now." Perhaps before the inner workings of the NSA were revealed by the infamous whistleblower, the series suggests, surveillance tactics did not have to be legally justified. *The Good Wife* repeatedly exposes the absurdity and disingenuousness of the justifications provided, even post-Snowden. When contractors Stephen Dinovera (Michael Urie) and Hopkins are listening for a high-level terrorist connection in order to resume their warrant on Alicia, Dinovera excitedly tells Hopkins that Alicia said "Snowden" in conversation. Hopkins asks the context, and having heard Alicia on the phone leading up to that utterance, the television audience knows it to have been an offhanded reference signaling no connection. But Dinovera tells him simply, "It doesn't matter the context. She said it…. That's our second connection. We can start listening to her again." Both contractors are overjoyed to resume their listenership of the drama of Alicia's life. Dinovera, in keeping with the quirky habits *The Good Wife* ascribes to these childish men, sends Hopkins an online video of goats bleating along to Whitney Houston's "I Will Always Love You." The camera zooms in on Hopkins' computer playing the video until his screen takes up our entire view. The exchange links the digital network logics of meme culture, themselves based largely in absurdity, with the legal logic of the NSA. And as their screen becomes the viewer's, the audience becomes implicated in their viewing (or listening) habits and the logics that justify them.

Such flexible legal logics are certainly not unfamiliar on a legal drama whose lawyer protagonists' driving principle is to vigorously defend their clients, innocent or guilty. Much of the fun of the series' procedural, case-of-the-week element lies in seeing how Alicia and her colleagues will bend the law, just up to the point of breaking, to their own ends. The series formally represents the shared logic of both worlds—private law firm and government—in one transition between characters' phone conversation and the NSA offices. With Alicia out of commission after Will's death, Cary debates with a colleague what kind of action he can take on behalf of their shared Florrick/Agos law firm. The colleague encourages him to make business decisions without her, saying, "In her absence, it's within your rights." On the words "within your rights," the scene cuts to the audio file on the now-familiar (to habitual viewers) NSA computer. The juxtaposition of the lawyer's words and the (ostensibly legal) invasion of privacy represented by the computer display illuminates the crux of the matter. While many might view the NSA as violating constitutional rights of U.S. citizens in their surveillance practices, *The Good Wife* constructs a storyworld and operates under a logic in which the NSA is technically, if dubiously, within their rights to perform massive and perpetually-expanding surveillance on Americans. Again, the series critiques this logic, exposes its hypocrisy and absurdity. However, when that same logic extends beyond the NSA to the entire storyworld of the series, from public sector to private—or perhaps more accurately, from private sector to public—the series forecloses possibilities for existence outside of or alternative to it.

Alicia's interactions with the NSA convey an ambivalent complacency about this state of affairs, embodying a white, neoliberal feminism that emphasizes self-improvement and individual female empowerment within a privatized world in lieu of any larger challenge to the present regime. Throughout its run, the series addresses the gendered consequences of media

publicity that make women uniquely vulnerable to surveillance, and Alicia is certainly uniquely sensitive to the realities and consequences of technological mediation. Embodying Lauren Berlant's conception of the "intimate public sphere," in which one's personal life constitutes the primary avenue for political participation, *The Good Wife* begins with Alicia in a televised press conference, standing by her State's Attorney husband who has been caught in a prostitution and corruption scandal.[14] This experience shapes her attunement to the dynamics of privacy and publicity, and Alicia is the first of her colleagues to suspect that they are being wiretapped by the NSA. When whistleblowing NSA agent Dellinger seeks legal counsel from Florrick/Agos in "All Tapped Out," Alicia sees through his suspicious requests that nobody mention his name in any technological communication simply because emails and calls get stored for future use. Unlike Cary or their male colleague on the case, she rightly worries that they are in fact already being targeted, a sensitivity seemingly related to her gendered experience of technological publicity.

While Alicia is certainly not happy about this discovery, the sense of individual empowerment she ultimately gains from her knowledge of the wiretap obscures any larger social consequences to unchecked state surveillance. Alicia works to improve her situation within the system, not to change the system altogether, embodying the "neoliberal feminist subject" described by Catherine Rottenberg and others. Rottenberg describes the subject of contemporary neoliberal feminism as one who "accepts full responsibility for her own well-being and self-care, which is increasingly predicated on crafting a felicitous work–family balance.... The neoliberal feminist subject is thus mobilized to convert continued gender inequality from a structural

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[14] Lauren Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship* (Durham: Duke UP, 1997).

problem into an individual affair."[15] She is also the ideal citizen of the intimate public sphere, approaching her role in the nation through a successful (and normative) personal and professional life, as opposed to through collective political action.

The Good Wife highlights Alicia's ability to play with and personally benefit from a system that victimizes her. Soon after learning about the wiretap, Alicia receives a call from long-term professional rival Louis Canning (Michael J. Fox). Throughout "All Tapped Out," the viewer sees Alicia pick up her phone hesitantly, careful of every word she utters. She demonstrates the same attentiveness at the beginning of Canning's call, but an idea quickly occurs to her. She asks him purposefully, "What do you think of Al-Qaeda?" He provides a generic response about being a terrorist organization and she continues on by asking him his thoughts on the NSA and other matters of national security. The episode cuts back to the NSA offices where Dinovera announces that he just "got five alerts on one call." Canning appears as "unknown" on their computer screens and Dinovera describes him as "someone new." The viewer gets the sense that Canning's name could now easily be added to a list of targets, and he is certainly identified as a member of Alicia's already-targeted network. As opposed to subverting the NSA's surveillance, Alicia in fact expands its scope for her own purposes.

While Alicia begins "All Tapped Out" debilitated by grief at losing Will, her newfound awareness of NSA practices ultimately results in individual personal and professional empowerment. Early in the episode, Alicia struggles in her legal defense of a friend, in part because his actions may be implicated in Will's death, and she considers dropping the case. At

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[15] Catherine Rottenberg, "The Rise of Neoliberal Feminism," *Cultural Studies* 28, no. 3 (2014): 420.

the end, however, after her discovery of the wiretaps, she returns to court all fired up and uses personal texts sent by the opposing client as evidence that wins her the case. Her client notices the change from her earlier performance, and asks, "You woke up, didn't you?" She tells him, "Oh yeah, It's time to kick some ass." Not only did her knowledge of the NSA surveillance perhaps inspire her to use the opposing client's digital communication against him for professional success, it seems to have prompted her personal self-improvement as well. Again, her privileged knowledge of the system allows her to succeed within it, not to undermine or change it. She thus embodies the neoliberal feminism that frames women's liberation "in extremely individualistic terms, consequently ceasing to raise the spectre of social or collective justice."[16] *The Good Wife* itself seems to follow a similarly neoliberal logic, offering a sense of justice to Alicia as an individual character in this scene without attention to collective public action or consequences.

In many ways, however, the series does in fact attend to women's unique vulnerability to technologically-imposed exposure, arguably gesturing toward a larger system of structural inequality in surveillance in its focus on publicized sexual scandals. It does so, in part, by critiquing the policing of women's sexuality through media technology. Suzanne Leonard writes about the technological mediation of sexual experience on the series, suggesting that *The Good Wife* "acknowledges sexuality and its disciplinary apparatuses as public processes dependent on technologies such as television, computers, and cell phones."[17] Citing examples throughout the series that refuse the voyeuristic impulse and, in some sense, respect the privacy of the characters

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[16] Rottenberg, "The Rise of Neoliberal Feminism," 419.
[17] Suzanne Leonard, "Sexuality, Technology, and Sexual Scandal in The Good Wife," *Feminist Media Studies* 14, no. 6 (2014), 945.

in intimate moments, Leonard argues that the series negotiates the tension between the inevitable publicity of sexuality and "uses silence as a strategy of power rather than compliance. Preserving secrets is hence a feminist stance."[18] A key moment of NSA surveillance on the series described in the opening to this chapter, however, complicates Leonard's argument. In "Targets," Alicia shares a sexually charged exchange in her office with her law firm's investigator and her new love interest Jason Crouse. Having recently slept together, she asks him insinuatingly, "Don't you want it again?" As Jason responds, "I want it," the scene cuts directly to Hopkins in the NSA office, listening through headphones with his eyes closed. When Hopkins' boss interrupts him over Alicia's suggestive "Would you like me to tell you exactly…", he jumps in surprise and pulls the headphones away from his ears, cutting off our access to the audio feed as well. He rushes to close the audio file window on the computer, collapsing the distance between audio and visual data. The scene certainly constitutes one of the moments Leonard describes, in which Alicia and Jason's intimate moment is allowed to remain (somewhat) private. However, by fully aligning the television audience with the listening NSA contractor in this moment, the series neutralizes the power dynamics of state surveillance. The audience likely identifies with Hopkins' disappointment at being interrupted right at the best part, and the series thus pokes fun at its own frustration of audience desire. Viewers are not only pleasurably complicit, then, with the NSA surveillance; they are put in the position of being frustrated by its failure of omniscience and wanting its perpetual expansion. The obvious reflexivity of the moment may, in fact, call attention to their own voyeuristic desires and its complicity with regimes of surveillance, but always with a winking tone. The series thus embodies a version of neoliberal

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[18] Leonard, "Sexuality, Technology, and Sexual Scandal," 955.

feminism that fosters complacency within networks of surveillance in which all parties are necessarily and inescapably entangled.

The difference between *The Good Wife*'s ambivalently complacent stance toward state-controlled, audio surveillance of Alicia's sexual encounter and its more overtly critical approach toward mediated publicity of sexual scandals perhaps sheds light on what I consider the distinctly white neoliberal feminism permeating the series and characterizing its vision of the imagined national public addressed by broadcast television. Highly mediated, public sex scandals often involve affluent white women, whose bodies are considered worthy of visual attention and whose sins and sufferings are seen as most shocking. Those same women, however, are perhaps least vulnerable to government surveillance. They are the ones for whom the intimate public sphere works best, those least in need (among women) for a vision of collective public life. *The Good Wife* can and does trivialize the NSA's recording of Alicia's sexually intimate conversation because, in all likelihood, the surveillance will have little material consequence for Alicia's life. Alicia has the power to call her governor husband to intercede and stop the wiretap, and even when the contractors are able to renew the warrant for her surveillance, their interest in her is largely based on entertainment value. Women of color and women without Alicia's economic and social power may experience state surveillance and control in vastly different measures.

By focusing on the (lack of) consequences of state surveillance on an affluent white woman, *The Good Wife* racially depoliticizes surveillance, even as it subtly acknowledges realities of racial difference. When Cary Agos and a colleague try to negotiate with the NSA to protect contractor Jeff Dellinger from being terminated, for instance, they urge him to identify himself as part Cherokee in order to claim discrimination. The episode thus commodifies racial

difference, simultaneously invoking a reality of racial discrimination and positing legal protections as eminently exploitable—merely the butt of a joke. Along similar lines, once Alicia's husband finds out the name of Charles Froines, the NSA administrator in charge of the warrant for Alicia, Froines suddenly starts receiving numerous calls at work inquiring about a car for sale. The camera cuts from the NSA office to an announcement bulletin board where someone has posted a flier advertising a car for sale. The camera zooms out to reveal that the flier is posted outside of a mosque, and multiple stereotypically identifiable Muslim men pull a tab with Froines' number. When the camera cuts back to the NSA, in a short succession of scenes, Froines takes a lie detector test and is put on administrative leave. Presumably referencing one of the anonymous callers, his superior asks him, "Who is Bilal al-Dawoodi?" The scene again acknowledges racial difference, relying on audience understanding that Muslims are overtly targeted by the NSA and government surveillance. However, the only "victim" of this racialized surveillance is Froines, a white man working for the government. The Muslims calling him are reduced to pawns in a game between the government and the economically and socially powerful white elite, represented by Alicia and her family, whose only recourse seems to be a personal attack against an NSA employee. Such moments epitomize the white neoliberal perspective of *The Good Wife*. The series neutralizes and normalizes regimes of surveillance by embracing their network logics; and through its surveillance aesthetics, *The Good Wife* implicates its audience in such a worldview.

The NSA storyline works to align the broadcast audience of *The Good Wife* with these neoliberal networks of surveillance, and this approach characterizes the representation of surveillance on much of the series. But *The Good Wife* does invoke other orientations toward the power dynamics of surveillance. In the episode "Lies," the storyline of the Spoiler app is intercut

with that of a young Black, female lawyer named Monica Timmons (Nikki M. James) interviewing at the law firm where Diane and Cary now work. In her interviews, the lawyer protagonists superficially claim to value diversity, make assumptions about her urban background, and throw around stereotypical white liberal language that acknowledges, commodifies, and obfuscates racial difference. They ultimately reject Monica for the job and take on three white male associates. After Diane brings Monica in to apologize and offer "help" (but no job), drawing a parallel between Monica's experience and Diane's own as a white woman in the legal world, Monica castigates her for being condescending and equating their experiences of discrimination and inequality. Monica then publicly releases a video, presumably filmed surreptitiously from a phone or other mobile device, of all of the micro-aggressions our beloved protagonists committed against her during their interviews. The canted angle and low resolution of the video, as well as its content, perhaps signal an alternative potential for television's surveillance aesthetics, a mapping of inclusion and exclusion from the perspective of a Black woman in which liberal racism is suddenly visibly legible through surveillance technology. Monica's storyline offers an example of marginalized groups being able to use digital media to expose structural racism——an exercise of citizenship that speaks back, publicly, to institutional power. This version of citizenship, however, is the exception to the rule on the series. Watching *The Good Wife* entangles its spectators in ubiquitous networks of surveillance that make private life public, and our political life intimate—and like those overinvested NSA contractors, we just want to see more.

Network Nostalgia and Public Interests in *The Good Fight*

Three years after the NSA contractors last appeared on *The Good Wife,* and three seasons into its streaming spin-off *The Good Fight*, CBS All Access subscribers encounter the same voyeuristic nerds once again. In 2019, however, they are in a very different political and televisual landscape than in early 2016, when the original series ended. *The Good Fight* centers this changed landscape, as it follows crossover character Diane Lockhart's descent into madness brought on by the election of Donald Trump and the havoc he wreaks on the nation. If *The Good Wife* elided the possibility of collective political action in favor of private, personal resistance during the Obama years, *The Good Fight* is much more inclined to the necessity of radical change in and to the public sphere. Thus, the NSA's appearance on this series is prompted by Diane's call to a member of a radical women's organization calling itself The Resistance, trying to bring down Trump's administration through covert, digital means. The public nature of their actions politicizes the NSA's surveillance; its tracking of U.S. citizens is an exercise of political power in a way it was not when the object of their interest was merely interpersonal drama.

The politicization of the NSA's "spectatorship" practices on this series parallels its take on media consumption more generally, a position complicated by the series' place on the "gated community"[19] of CBS All Access. *The Good Fight* suggests that the nation's cultural and political descent into chaos is based in a rapidly changing media landscape characterized by ubiquitous data surveillance, the anonymity of the internet, and the isolation characteristic of digital spectatorship. This landscape, however, has been wholeheartedly embraced by CBS. To

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[19] Emily Nussbaum, "The Incendiary Verve of *The Good Fight*," *The New Yorker,* May 28, 2018, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/06/04/the-incendiary-verve-of-the-good-fight.

compete in the streaming marketplace, CBS became the first broadcast network to launch its own "studio portal," a vertically-integrated distribution platform that only streams proprietary content.[20] While the service launched in 2014, it did not begin streaming original, streaming-only content until 2017, with *The Good Fight* as its flagship series. When the platform was first announced, CBS emphasized its new "direct-to-consumer" relationship.[21] In contrast to CBS's traditional strategies of mass address, online data surveillance allows the network to engage in mass customization, tailoring recommendations and advertisements to the individual user. *The Good Fight* implies that it is exactly such micro-targeting practices that have disintegrated U.S. society's ability to engage in civil discourse as members of a shared national public. Surveillance, then, has *power* in the world of *The Good Fight*, whether engaged in by the state, corporations (like ViacomCBS), or the lawyers working (sometimes) for justice. The ways that viewers are made public by surveillance, whether in their actions as spectators or as citizens, have ramifications for the nation. *The Good Fight* actively grapples with these workings of power from a feminine, and ostensibly feminist, perspective, and in the process exposes how difference and intersectional thinking get lost in the impasse between nostalgia for the broadcast world of a shared "public interest" and a future defined by micro-targeted "interests."

The representation of the NSA on *The Good Fight* captures the series' liberal perspective on how the world has shifted from Obama's administration to Trump's, and reveals a new investment in citizenship as public action, not as merely a "good" personal life. In the episode

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[20] Lotz, *Portals*.
[21] "CBS Brings Programming Direct to Consumers with New Multi-Platform Digital Subscription Service," ViacomCBS, 2014, accessed March 2, 2020, https://www.viacomcbspressexpress.com/cbs-all-access/releases/view?id=40966.

"The One Where Diane Joins the Resistance," Diane speaks on her cell phone to the leader of the radical underground women's organization she has recently joined. They are plotting to bring down a pro-Trump troll farm, and Diane tells her, "The Resistance needs to use their techniques against them." The scene cuts from Diane alone in her office to a computer screen reading "NSA" across the top, and "Subject: D. Lockhart Source: Cell Phone" in a window open on the desktop. Another window contains coordinates below her name, likely identifying her location. She continues to speak, though now her voice is grainy, coming through the computer, and her words appear on the computer: "It's like 'Pizzagate.' Trump lives by fake news, he dies by fake news. Let's help them die." Most of the text is green, but certain words appear in red: resistance, Pizzagate, Trump, fake news, dies. From the computer screen, the scene cuts to a hand reaching for a bag of potato chips from a desk littered in crumbs. The chips sail across an empty aisle between cubicles in a sterile office building, and they land on the desk of familiar NSA contractor Jain who pulls his hands back from his keyboard in surprise. He is surrounded by three computer monitors, displaying maps of Illinois, code script, and audio file data. He rolls his desk chair across the aisle, and the series of quick cuts between these actions creates a lively, playful tone. The camera cuts back to his fellow contractor Stephen Dinovera, who tells Jain, "she just used five target words in one sentence." He explains that she used words marked as code "red," implying a special gravity. His pointing signals a cut to a list of words tacked to the side of his cubicle, red words on the left, with orange and yellow columns beside it. Other words on the red list include "assassinate," "president," "slay," and "illuminati." Words on the other lists include "impeach," "guppy," "badger," "cheeto," and "Colbert." As Dinovera enumerates Diane's code red words, Jain looks intrigued. "Wow," he responds. "That is like domestic terrorism bingo." They banter about who Diane might be talking to, and as they use their

surveillance technology to identify her within seconds, Jain says, “I’m sending it upstairs. They love conspiracies.” This NSA is certainly familiar to viewers of *The Good Wife*. The quippy dialogue and playful cutaways make light of these individual contractors and the work of the NSA. The list of words makes fun of an administration concerned only about it’s own reputation, not actual terrorist activity (the word “cheeto,” for instance, is likely to turn up casual detractors of the president’s orange hue, as opposed to threats to national security). The work of the NSA’s surveillance, then, appears to be protecting the President, not the American public, and as in *The Good Wife*, their absurd logics posit all Americans as potential threats requiring observation.

On *The Good Fight*, however, “observation” poses more danger than just an invasion of personal privacy, and the series emphasizes the serious threat posed by those absurdist logics. As Diane works on her laptop in her bedroom with the television playing in the background, a news broadcast grabs her attention. Jared Kushner has been “tasked with overhauling the nation’s circus entertainment,” rolling back protections for elephants and limits on the number of clowns allowed in a vehicle. Such newscasts appear frequently on the series, conveying the liberal perspective that the nation and its media have lost all reason. It is followed by a report on a riot in Chicago caused, unbeknownst to the reporter, by the Resistance. Diane excitedly picks up the phone to call the organization’s leader, but the number appears to have been permanently disconnected. As she listens to the automated message, the camera cuts back to Dinovera’s computer screen at the NSA offices, hearing the message play again on his computer speakers. Low, ominous music plays as Dinovera expresses concern: “Well, that’s too bad for Diane.” Jain asks, “You think it’s upstairs?” They speculate about whether reporting the previous conversation resulted in the leader of the Resistance disappearing. Dinovera worries, “I don’t want Diane to end up at some black site.” Jain rebuts, “No, they don’t do black sites anymore.

They do, um, sweet little bed-and-breakfasts in Costa Rica or something." Then he pivots the conversation: "Hey, I sent you something." Turning back to his computer to investigate, Dinovera asks, "It's not another clown video is it?" Jain responds, "Why would I send you another clown video?" as Dinovera opens a new window on his computer. Over his shoulder, a half-obscured close-up of an evil clown laughing maniacally is visible. A cut takes the viewer over his shoulder so that his two computer screens take up our view; the transcript of the automated message on Diane's call sits next to a window containing the clown's face shrouded in darkness, both sitting on top of the seal for the NSA. A final cut moves into an extreme closeup of only the clown's face, with no markers of the computer window or monitor at all, as his cackle becomes more and more distorted and inhuman.

The clown's presentation on the series recalls the bleating goats passed between *The Good Wife*'s NSA employees. On *The Good Fight*, however, the meme logic satirized as absurd on the original series takes on a much more sinister valence. Before, the goal of filling in all the networked connections around Alicia Florrick seemed to be to expand surveillance perpetually. The more targets you can legally monitor, the better; total transparency was the goal, and its main consequence was the violation of citizens' privacy. But now those infinitely networked connections and communications are sent "upstairs" to an administration enamored with conspiracies. If before the NSA could bend the law to contain the surveillance of U.S. citizens' private lives, now the government can simply lie about where its detainees are sent. Legal logic, however flawed, has gone out the window entirely. And now our networked connections do not even provide the pleasure of adorable goats singing pop classics, but only the absurd terror of evil clowns, on our computer screens and in the White House.

The NSA contractors themselves debate and negotiate this distinction. They appear for a final time in the episode "The One Where Diane Joins the Resistance" as Diane is meeting with the Resistance to discuss the disappearance of their leader. Other members have suggested that the government might be behind it, and Diane acts as the voice of reason: "Let's not let paranoia eat away at us. We're not in a banana republic here." As the camera pans up and out from their meeting, a distorted growl of a sound bridge transitions the viewer to the NSA offices. The evil clown holds a human head, as Dinovera watches the video on his computer through his fingers, shielding his face from the gruesome sight. Certainly the clown's growling laughter mocks Diane's assertion that the U.S. is currently functioning more ethically or logically than a country exploited and corrupted by U.S. economic interests. Dinovera is distracted from the video by Diane sending a text message, which appears on his screen as she types. They discover that she is texting Jay Dipersia, her law firm's private investigator who viewers of the show know was an undocumented immigrant who only recently secured legal documentation. Jain immediately goes to flag Jay in the system, saying with satisfaction, "There we go, there's a new name." Jain still subscribes to the mentality that perpetual expansion of surveillance is the goal of the NSA's legal framework.

Dinovera, however, starts to demonstrate some critical hesitance. "Well, don't add him in!" he exclaims to stop Jain from typing. Jain responds, "Why not? It sounds foreign," implying perhaps that Jay will more readily "earn" a warrant to continue surveillance. (Significantly, Maulik Pauncholy, the actor portraying Jain, is of South Asian descent, which may downplay the white supremacist xenophobia underlying U.S. surveillance. More than once this series puts racist sentiments in the mouths of people of color, resulting in a failure to call out whiteness as the source of the problem.) Dinovera tells him it "makes me feel like we're the bad guys." Jain

argues, “We’re not the bad guys. We’re just doing our job. We’re just… observers.” But Dinovera insists, “I don’t think we are.” Jain dismissively accuses him of “getting philosophical,” and admonishes him, “Don’t fall in love.” Even if Jain’s retort continues to frame surveillance in terms of personal emotional investment, their argument acknowledges that state surveillance is never *just* observation—never just spectatorship—but an exercise of power. By framing this conversation about the tagging of someone whose legal residence in the U.S. is precarious, the show emphasizes the unequal ways that power might be (and most often is) deployed. This NSA is not just a group of bumbling melodrama fans, but, possibly, the “bad guys.” They do not just use surveillance to monitor salacious private lives, but to control the functioning of the public sphere—to ensure that citizens behave in the ways desired by the state.

The series depiction of state surveillance thus constructs some version of a public sphere in which citizens like Diane can take meaningful public action. The state’s access to her private life certainly may be troubling, but primarily because it could be used to police her more public existence. Significantly, Diane’s exercise of citizenship here—her attempts to shape the state of the nation—consists of undermining the Trump administration. These dysfunctional guerilla tactics are only necessary, the series suggests, in a world where all normal civil discourse has disintegrated. The functioning of the state according to sinister meme logics, in congress with a fractured news media and isolating and anonymizing internet infrastructure, has completely eradicated any possibility of a functioning national public. If *The Good Wife* posited that citizenship was networked, this series suggests that the proliferation of digital networks in daily life has made it impossible to participate in anything like functional citizenship. The series thus critiques the network logics that individualize, that transform citizens into internet users—the same logics which turn CBS into CBS All Access.

The series narratively and aesthetically draws connections between state surveillance practices, internet communication, and today's digital television culture, all of which *The Good Fight* frames as contributing to the eradication of civil discourse, and thus of functional practices of citizenship. The NSA's list of target words recalls an algorithmic logic that tags users according to clicks and other digital actions—a different kind of surveillance and visibility than that most often dramatized in mainstream television. Corporations similarly use such algorithms to value and control speech and actions—including streaming television viewership—in a way that atomizes meaning and identity. *The Good Fight*'s season one episode "Social Media and its Discontents" poses its own theorization of the limits of algorithmic logic, conveying how the internet's atomizing and anonymizing algorithms contribute to the breakdown of the nation. In the episode, the CEO of the show's Google-stand-in called ChumHum asks the law firm to figure out a way to police vitriolic content on its websites that themselves are stand-ins for Facebook and Reddit. To start developing a code to police offensive posts, the lawyers try to categorize them manually. Law partner Adrian Boseman (Delroy Lindo) suggests starting with the categories of "racist," "anti-semitic," and "threatening" posts. Skimming over the posts, Diane quickly announces that they will need another pile. She begins to read a printed post: "I would love to see you—" The scene cuts abruptly to an unidentified white man standing against a bold orange background, and he narrates the rest of the post: "...dead. Not because you're a feminist, but because you're an enormous fucking bitch." They create a pile for "misogynistic" posts, as well.

The Good Fight focuses on a fictional Black-owned law firm, and the racial dynamics of the firm are a frequent topic of discussion (often staging a meta-commentary about the addition of white actors to the cast). Despite the presence of diverse Black perspectives throughout the

series, this conversation in "Social Media and its Discontents" exposes a kind of limit to naming harassment, language, and violence as intersectional. However, their conversation reflects not only a weakness of the series (evident in other moments as well, though the series develops its own radical consciousness over time), but a failure of algorithmic logic itself. Along similar lines, the lawyers realize in the course of their debates that flagging specific words may not be an effective way to enforce a certain kind of online participation—something the NSA seems *not* to have realized. Banning the "N-word" or "slut," for instance, would turn up "every rap lyric on the planet," or women discussing the practice of "slut-shaming," because such an algorithm divorces a word from its context. The identities and language that can be targeted or labeled by algorithms are atomized and stripped of their contextual and relational meanings. Data surveillance thus creates and reinforces differences and meanings that can only be seen or addressed in single file. Identities as well as oppressions are reduced to tags, which allow for users to be blocked, certainly, but also to be marketed to by corporations mining data.

The lawyers struggle to develop an algorithmic code that could effectively enforce civil discourse online, in part because they are balancing the legal freedom of speech and a corporation's right to police its own content. Because they want their code to be legally enforceable, they debate what qualifies as protected speech. One online comment, delivered again by an anonymous troll directly toward the camera, reads: "You're such a hypocrite. You chop up baby parts and drop them in dumpsters. Why don't you think we wouldn't chop you up, too, and do the same?" The one conservative lawyer at the firm, Julius Cain (Michael Boatman) argues, "That's politics. That's a political point of view," because it takes liberal political thinking "to its logical conclusion." Others argue that it qualifies as a threat, so they must debate

what kind of hate speech people have the right to post online. Diane offers another example: "If *The Purge* were real, who would you set out to rape? For me it'd be Zendaya." While another female partner asserts that language as a threat, her male counterpart insists they distinguish between a "real threat" and a "crude, misogynistic comment." According to him, the comment "I want to rape you" is still protected speech, and only the language "I am going to rape you" qualifies as a threat. The female partner points to another example of a troll who has directed multiple violent posts toward a single user. This time, the troll delivers the comment to the camera once again, but is cut off right at the most gruesome part of his description of what he "wants" to do to this female user. A series of jump cuts take us back to the same troll delivering new violent comments, as the camera pushes to a tighter closeup each time. The comments layer on top of each other, blending together, heightening in intensity. Throughout these recitations, the women in the room convey varying levels of hardening, defensiveness, and anger; they seem to experience the conversation with more weight than the men. Such overtly violent, sexualized harassment is presented here in the context of what *is* legally protected speech (though certainly not the speech that would be allowed on traditional CBS). There is a sense that this is what the freedom of citizenship looks like, at least for women on the internet.

The lawyers' increasingly heated discussion of increasingly violent comments reveals how the reliance on an algorithmic logic of policing evacuates the spirit of the law, making it unable to protect its citizens from hate speech. Later in the episode, viewers learn that the alt-right trolls have figured out the restrictions the law firm has put in place, and they personally target Diane with legally acceptable language like, "I do not intend to rape you myself, but…." In the end, the lawyers essentially reach the conclusion that policing trolling behavior is not feasible, legally or practically. One of the trolls turns out to be the show's stand-in for Milo

Yiannopoulos, the controversial former Breitbart editor who was himself banned from Twitter in 2016 for targeted harassment. The character presents his trolling as patriotism, telling the lawyers, "I believe in America." He goes on to tell Diane, "You're upset because I'm the embodiment of free speech." She dryly responds, "No, but you are what we have to tolerate." Diane, the show's voice of beleaguered reason, expresses the liberal sentiment that there is an ideal embodiment of citizenship that does not look like internet vitriol, that the law *represents* something better than what is presently fostered by the anonymous isolation of internet use. However, the trolls represent the version of citizenship bred by the anonymity of the internet, which puts you in networked connection with others but without the accountability that a different form of visibility imposes.

The series represents the conditions for these forms of citizenship aesthetically as well as narratively. The choice to show specific, embodied men delivering the vitriolic comments of internet trolls serves as a reminder that there are real people choosing to express such sentiments, holding the men they represent accountable in some sense. However, the head-on medium close-ups, isolating and decontextualizing them, also illustrate a specific mode of address fostered by but not limited to internet interactions. Simultaneously, they speak out to no one in particular—hate speech yelled out into a void, and directly at the television viewer. They are visible, public, in a sense, as all internet communication is, but they do not exist as part of *a* public. Michael Warner suggests that a public "exists *by virtue of being addressed*."[22] Publics come into being "in relation to texts and their circulation,"[23] "as the end for which books are published, shows

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[22] Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2005), 67 (original emphasis).
[23] Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 66.

broadcast, Web sites posted."[24] But as a member of a public, one must experience public speech as "addressed to us and as addressed to strangers… Our subjectivity is understood as having resonance with others."[25] This conception aligns easily with the imagined national public of traditional broadcast television, and (in 2005) Warner extends the idea of a public to web content as well. *The Good Fight*, however, aesthetically conveys the nature of internet communication in contrast to that which produces a public. Instead, it is fundamentally isolating and individualizing. The isolation of the internet trolls helps to produce a discourse in which the subjectivity of others, and its resonance with one's own, is completely denied.

The series makes frequent use of this aesthetic device, regularly framing arguing characters head-on in medium close-up, extending the consequences of internet communication to "real-world" debate. Instead of a traditional shot-reverse-shot dialogue, this kind of sequence conveys that people are not really speaking to each other, but, like the internet trolls, confrontationally shouting opinions into a void—a void occupied by us, the streaming television viewers. In an episode that features a case resembling the story of Aziz Ansari's sexual misconduct, the camera cuts back and forth between characters looking into the camera yelling about whether it was just a bad date or something more sinister. The editing makes clear that no one is listening to each other. There are no reaction shots. There is no civil discourse. They do not exist as part of a public.

The series explicitly ties this version of (mis)communication to television culture. In the season two episode "Day 443," Adrian Boseman, one of the lead characters on the show and a

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[24] Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 67.
[25] Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 77.

partner at the central law firm, is a guest on a news talk show, appearing as a talking head via satellite. The episode opens on a shot of an empty room into which Adrian walks to film his part of the show. He sits down and the camera cuts between a medium closeup of him in front of a green screen and a reverse closeup on the camera lens that faces him. The viewer knows he is looking at nothing except the camera, not knowing who he is speaking to. They see the whole interview only hearing Adrian's side, hearing his responses to questions being broadcast into his earpiece, but not the questions themselves. The segment all unfolds in a decontextualized rush, and only later does the viewer learn that his interview has gone viral, being taken up in ways he never anticipated. Television itself is thus contributing to this isolating mode of address. Visually, Adrian's TV interview looks just like the internet trolls' comments, even if the content of their speech is different.

The mirror image of Adrian alone in a room filming half of a TV interview is the individualized television spectator, consuming media on her mobile screen. The series emphasizes the dangerous effects of the individual targeting and consumption of digital media on multiple fronts. In one episode, opposing lawyers defending a racist police officer manipulate a jury with micro-targeted ads. The firm's young, hip investigator explains to her older colleagues that while those using microtargeting technology cannot exactly target those twelve specific jurors, "they can target people with the same characteristics as the jurors." She draws a diagram, a closeup of which functions didactically for the television audience as much as for the characters, explaining how microtargeting narrows down a population group by interest and behavior. The tags ascribed to a user on Facebook based on their online activity, for instance, thus allow the legal system to be manipulated by content that isolates, by playing on one's individualized vulnerabilities. In this depiction, the series explicates the complicated form of

visibility entailed by internet technologies, and how it enables and threatens varying forms of citizenship.

As television shifts away from its mass broadcast model and embraces online delivery, it, too, contributes to this landscape of microtargeted content and isolated consumption, a dynamic the series regularly takes up and critiques. Throughout the series, viewers frequently see Diane watching television alone, in her darkened bedroom with a glass of wine, or at work on her laptop screen. At home, Diane flips from channel to channel, unable to escape the chaos of America's political and entertainment systems. In one instance, she flips from news that Trump has tweeted something childish at a Middle Eastern leader, to warning for Tropical Storm Don Jr., to a nature documentary identifying a plant as covfefe originalis—a reference to one of Trump's most notoriously incomprehensible tweets. She later has to ask coworkers if they heard the news about the pot-bellied pig Trump is keeping in the oval office, checking whether or not she has literally gone insane. Her inability to tell what is real and what is not comes from the fact that she is watching alone, with no guarantee that anyone else is watching the same thing. She has no sense of being part of a public addressed by the same text. Similarly, micro-targeted content, based on pervasive data surveillance, reaches only those people it may be able to convince, and so my experience of CBS All-Access might be totally different from my neighbor's. We may be digitally networked together by our access to the streaming platform, but with no common media ground, the series suggests, we do not exist in the same public. The nation addressed by CBS, the broadcast network, has disintegrated into individuals, defined and divided by our data, rather than by a shared experience of spectatorship.

The series recognizes the particular consequences of this media landscape for women on multiple fronts. Since *The Good Wife*, series creators the Kings have expressed deep skepticism

of the hypermasculinization of "prestige TV," fostered by the proliferation of cable channels and, by the time of *The Good Fight*, streaming platforms. On *The Good Wife*, Alicia Florrick watched, at first skeptically and later avidly, a fictional series called *Darkness at Noon*, which TV critics have identified as a parody of the short-lived AMC series *Low Winter Sun*. New Yorker TV critic Emily Nussbaum quotes a clip from the show-within-the-show in one of her reviews:

> "'People just think there are black hats and white hats, but there are black hats with white linings. And white hats with black linings,' the show's existentialist hero droned, to a mutilated female corpse. 'And there are hats that change back and forth between white and black. And there are striped hats.' Alicia takes in the cable show with glazed, binge-watching eyes, drinking deeply from her perpetual goblet of red wine."[26]

The CBS series mocks the faux-depth and darkness performed by masculine cable dramas, as well as the mindlessness that seems to be the primary mode of spectatorship in a binge-watching landscape.

Another "mutilated female corpse" is also the first image of *Darkness at Noon* viewers encounter in *The Good Fight*. Amidst news clips of Trump's nonsensical actions, Diane flips to a behind-the-scenes interview of the *Darkness at Noon* executive producer discussing his inspiration for a prequel series. A clip from the detective drama shows a young woman's bloody dead body being covered, as a tough-looking cop tells his partner, "When you're a detective you can do anything. Grab 'em by the pussy. Anything." The producer then says in a talking-head

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[26] Emily Nussbaum, "Shedding Her Skin," *The New Yorker,* October 13, 2014, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/10/13/shedding-skin.

interview, "A lot of people think it's about Trump, but it's really about a certain mindset." In a shaky, handheld style that conveys gritty realism, the detective in the series proceeds to shoot a criminal in the face, which graphically explodes, then lick the blood from the corpse and howl at the moon. This depiction of masculine prestige television is certainly a comedic exaggeration, but it ties the kinds of gendered and sexual violence rampant on mainstream television (including many procedurals on CBS[27]) to a larger political and social culture. This interlude of television spectatorship occurs in an episode of *The Good Fight* centered around the sexual assault of a reality TV star that occurred on camera. Producers claim that though the young, flirtatious performer was visibly inebriated, the sex that occurred was consensual. The lawyers watch unaired footage of the cameraman encouraging her to give the audience something to see: "You give a good soundbite, honey, but TV is a visual medium." It is ultimately revealed that the woman was passed out when the producer dragged her into the hot tub to be raped by her also-inebriated co-star. Significantly, the woman is suing the reality show, not the individual who assaulted her. *The Good Fight* seems to argue in this episode that televisuality in particular—the forms of visuality engendered and embraced by television—puts women in danger, fostering a misogyny that leads to a Trump presidency.

While the series explores these forms of televisual misogyny that predate the rise of internet television (though they are still tied to a post-broadcast TV landscape), it is also attuned to the specificities of digital interfaces in changing the spectatorial experience of such forms of

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[27] Linda Bloodworth Thomason, "'Designing Women' Creator Goes Public with Les Moonves War: Not All Harassment Is Sexual (Guest Column)," *Hollywood Reporter*, September 12, 2018, https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/general-news/designing-women-creator-les-moonves-not-all-harassment-is-sexual-1142448/.

gendered violence. In a later episode, Diane sits slouched in a chair in the dark, no longer flipping through cable channels, but scrolling through the offerings of a streaming platform modeled after Netflix's interface. Series listed include "The Killing Bridge," "Killing Ingrid Anderson," and "Random Danger," and when her husband asks what she is doing, Diane deadpans, "Figuring out whether to watch a German series about serial killers or a Scandinavian series about serial killers." The beep of each click continues as she scrolls endlessly. The proliferation of streaming television induces a kind of stupor, providing only more of the same.

But this version of proliferation exists quite literally alongside another, more overtly sinister one. In the same episode, the characters and the viewers repeatedly watch a video interview of a woman describing her sexual assault at the hands of her long-term boss, the lawyer who started the series' central law firm. She appears in medium close-up on a small video player window on various characters' laptop screens. The shot of her looks no different than a reality show confessional or a news show talking head, and the characters' consume the content no differently. The video player has a visible control bar allowing users to play, pause, forward, or rewind, resembling the Netflix player controls. Just as when one scrolls through twitter to encounter disturbing political news, cute baby animals, casual misogyny, and pop culture memes in rapid succession, one's laptop screen becomes the exhibitor for a proliferation of radically diverse content that ultimately collapses into one, meaningless flow. As one character tells another, "everything is TV," and we sit in our spectatorial stupor scrolling through stories of assault like we do TV shows about serial killers. The practices of spectatorship fostered by internet television, *The Good Fight* suggests, hinder viewers' ability to know what is real, and to discern what matters and how. The algorithmic logic that organizes our access to and experience

of digital content atomizes it, stripping it of context and obscuring its position in any kind of coherent system of meaning.

The Good Fight explores how this digital landscape shapes exercises of feminist citizenship; in other words, it asks what happens to feminist public action when the public, and what it means to *be* public, have been reshaped by these particular technological and social dynamics. The series frequently engages the #MeToo movement and its mediation by technologies, and late in the show's second season, the law firm works to take down a website called Assholes to Avoid, which publishes sexual "misconduct allegations and rumors" as warnings to other women. Diane and the other female lawyers insist on their feminist credentials in spite of their side in the case, but it devolves into a debate between what is here identified as second-wave and millennial feminisms. The website represents a feminist appropriation of technology embraced by trolls and doxxers, using "the social media tools that we already have to exercise forms of countersurveillance that are noncoercive in nature."[28] The millennial feminists behind the website see power in these online strategies and dynamics of exposure—the millennial enactment of that feminist mantra, "the personal is political." The episode, however, revolves around how the website, as a stand-in for the onslaught of accusations brought on by the #MeToo movement, curbs effective communication and ultimately fails to bring about the kind of change it seeks.

As described above, various law firm employees debate the efficacy of the website, delivering their perspectives head-on to the camera, unable to engage in meaningful debate. The

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[28] Lisa Nakamura, "Blaming, Shaming, and the Feminization of Social Media," in *Feminist Surveillance Studies,* eds. Rachel E. Dubrofsky and Shoshana Amielle Magnet (Durham: Duke UP, 2015), 225.

specific case discussed in the episode entails a young woman who wrote about an unwanted sexual experience with a man (resembling the real-life case of Aziz Ansari), which results in the man being fired. The employees talk over each other about whether it is merely "revenge porn," whether the man should have lost his job over this, and whether the woman should have confronted him directly. Their conversation represents a larger issue of what it means to use the internet to expose "misconduct," without the burden of proof or standards of what constitutes misconduct in the first place. One of the law firm partners expresses her exasperation at the chaotic arguments, saying, "We represent murderers and embezzlers, but it's always this stuff." Feminism is, as it always has been, a space of public contestation, but particularly when it adopts internet logics of visibility, exposure, anonymity, and communication, collective public action falls short of producing change.

Significantly, the conversation twice halts precisely at the moment that the debate turns to the issue of race. As the lawyers debate, one of the Black male associates chimes in, "a lot of these men are Black," seemingly in opposition to the Assholes to Avoid project. A Black woman associate responds in exasperation, "Oh Jesus, don't make it a racial thing," as the dialogue devolves into incomprehensibility. Of course, the history of sexual assault accusations and retribution *is* undeniably racialized in the United States, with Black men most often constructed as a dangerous threat to the presumed purity of white women. But the woman makes race into a detrimental complication of a movement presumed to be purely about gender. Later, Adrian Boseman and fellow partner at the firm Liz Reddick (Audra McDonald) stage a similar debate. He considers, "Maybe #MeToo has gone too far, Liz…. Good causes start out being good and end up becoming mobs." She retorts, "Like Black Lives Matter?... Women join together and all of a sudden men all over the world are worried about mobs or witch hunts. But you don't have

the same worry about Black Lives Matter hurting white people's reputations." Again, the conversation swiftly devolves, with the two parties unable to engage in meaningful civil discourse. Certainly many (white) people *do* worry about that potential effect of the Black Lives Matter movement, and I would imagine that opposition to one movement overlaps significantly with opposition to the other. But it matters that these two hashtag movements are rhetorically positioned in opposition to each other. For Liz, they are perhaps *parallel* movements, one addressing gender and one addressing race, and both are categories that this series, to its credit, understands as vectors of oppression. However, both conversations demonstrate how the two movements, and the two identity categories, can only be seen and spoken about as separate, not intersecting. This inability to think and speak in intersectional terms speaks, in part, to the shortcomings of the series' aging liberalism (though I believe its ability to do so has progressed over the seasons). As Emily Nussbaum puts it, "at certain junctures, [*The Good Fight*] feels like something that was cooked up during a pissed-off boomer book group on the Upper West Side."[29] But perhaps this dialogic limit is also a shortcoming of algorithmic logics, the ones that place hate speech into piles of racist versus misogynistic, atomizing and decontextualizing identities and actions.

The series grapples with the shortcomings of this internet version of feminist public action, but one of the primary critiques Diane launches at the owner of the website reveals the series itself grappling with what the internet *does* to publics. Diane asserts that the young woman is generalizing and condensing the category of "women." She asks angrily, "So we should all just march behind you, right? Because only you know what's best for all women?" She later

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[29] Nussbaum, "The Incendiary Verve."

asks, “Everything is tribal with you, right? Men versus women….” The woman defends herself against these accusations by taunting the failures and accommodations of second-wave feminists. The debate being staged between them is one largely unfamiliar to me in popular/millennial/#MeToo feminism. It is difficult to make out the “sides” or how they follow specifically from the work of this kind of website (which is not to say nobody holds these individual views). Instead the argument seems to struggle with identifying a way forward for feminism in the internet age. Diane ultimately tells her in rather explicit terms: “You know what your problem is?... Women aren’t just one thing and you don’t get to determine what we are. Next time, hire a lawyer and do your list right.” In her admonition for “next time,” Diane calls for the rationality of the law over the chaos of the internet, simultaneously insisting on a feminist praxis that can see differences between women.

Her rebuke complicates the series’ nostalgia for an older broadcast era, in which (theoretically) it was possible for facts to exist and rationality to reign, as well as its particular critique of algorithmic culture. Older models of advertiser-based broadcast and cable television relied, and continue to rely, on demographic markets. In her work on the construction of the “gay market,” for instance, Katherine Sender argues that “identity-based target markets that were refined in the 20th century offered a way for marketers, advertisers, and media producers to imagine and appeal to specific groups of consumers based on an assumption of shared desires and consumer needs.”[30] In terms of the “gay market,” that meant constructing white gay men with disposable income as a lucrative demographic to sell to advertisers, and thus those were the

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[30] Katherine Sender, “The Gay Market is Dead, Long Live the Gay Market: From Identity to Algorithm in Predicting Consumer Behavior,” *Advertising and Society Quarterly* 18, no. 4 (2018), doi:10.1353/asr.2018.0001.

men incorporated into mainstream representation. Such representations then become "resources for identity work," shaping, at least as much as reflecting, the identity category of "gay."[31] This process is one of the ways that television contributes to the consolidation of identity categories such as "gay," "woman," or "Black."

Algorithmic micro-targeting presents a very different mode of address. Sender writes that in 2009, two years after Netflix and one year before Hulu began streaming content, a new marketing discourse developed that shifted away from the language of identity-based markets. As the technology to monitor and track online activity became more sophisticated, marketers began segmenting audiences by behavior and interests. Users may still be identified with the tag of "gay," but, under this model, " what constitutes being 'gay' has less and less to do with self-identification and more to do with continuities in behaviors, choices, and connections."[32] Sender identifies political potential in this shift away from the idea of identity as a stable category, leaving room for performance and play. Marketers "are moving away from essentialist models of identity-based target markets and toward an ontology of the person based on discourse—here the discourse of the algorithm."[33] Sender identifies a flexibility in algorithmic discourse which might do just what Diane asks: address women as more than "just one thing." The algorithm, from this perspective, corrects the generalization of demographic identity-based address. If CBS addressed a mass audience of women, CBS All Access can address them each according to their unique behavioral profile.

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[31] Sender, "The Gay Market is Dead."
[32] Sender, "The Gay Market is Dead."
[33] Sender, "The Gay Market is Dead."

The Good Fight, however, vocally rejects this proposition. Sender finds the most value in the excesses of identity, that which cannot be captured or contained by the algorithm. But *The Good Fight* sees that which cannot be captured by the algorithm as an obstacle, a limit to discourse altogether, because *everything* seems to be algorithmic these days. Identity is not set free, not finally seen in all its complexity and dynamism, but reduced, decontextualized, atomized. We may be able to see the differences within "women," but now, we cannot see past them. From this perspective, when we lose an audience of "women," we also lose the collective public that identity had the potential to mobilize. *The Good Fight* thus finds itself at an impasse grappling with what it means to move away from a model in which television speaks to a national public and one in which TV addresses an individual user. That fantasy of audience-as-nation, however, always served as an excuse to ignore and erase the complex differences that nation contained—a sort of inverse to the problem of algorithms creating divisions we cannot see past. *The Good Fight* may not offer a way out or past these alternative models of spectatorship and surveillance, but it illuminates how surveillance transforms television spectatorship, and what it means for the ability to see oneself as part of a public.

Conclusion

The Good Wife and *The Good Fight* demonstrate, both aesthetically and industrially, many of the ways that spectatorship and surveillance are increasingly intertwined. They reflect critically on how that relationship shapes the nature of citizenship and political action. As a regular viewer of both series, I have often felt that I am watching creators Robert and Michelle King actively working through their own politics. In many ways, *The Good Fight* grapples with the failure of the neoliberal politics largely embraced in *The Good Wife*, as the Trump presidency

created new exigences for political action—at least, exigences suddenly felt by wealthy white people. The two series in conversation present the process of realizing the need for some form of radical political change and new forms of political participation, even if *The Good Fight* still often espouses the idea of a "return to normalcy."

Central to this process is women's experience of exposure through surveillance. The shows create a throughline between regimes of state surveillance characterized by the invasion of personal privacy and a drive to perpetual expansion, and authoritarian government that polices private speech about the state. They align the gaze of state surveillance with broadcast television spectatorship, and draw a connection between watching streaming television algorithmically targeted to the individual through data surveillance and the larger failure to develop intersectional coalitions and undertake collective political action. Together, they identify that television spectatorship has a role to play in the formation of meaningful publics. As opposed to offering merely the restoration of the division between public and private as a way forward, *The Good Wife* and *The Good Fight* convey the value of forms of spectatorship that do not isolate and individualize, but that let us see each other in all of our complexity.

Chapter Three

Remediating Romance: Digital Spectatorship and Women's Genres from *Lifetime* to Streaming

In the winter of 2019, I overheard two of my male undergraduate students chatting about the new series they were watching on Netflix, *You* (2018-present). I had watched the first season of the series on Lifetime (or more accurately, the Lifetime app on my Smart TV), and I wondered what drew these stereotypically straight-presenting "film bros" to such "Television for Women"—a motto I still associated with Lifetime despite the network no longer advertising it. Did they *know* they were watching a Lifetime series? Would they know what Lifetime was, and would they care? I thought of how my own viewing experience was shaped by the idea that I was watching a "women's genre," my interest in the series' subversion and embrace of the romance plot. What frames of reference were my students using to encounter this text, quickly labeled only as a "Netflix Original"? Was I the spectator imagined by the show, or were they?

This chapter takes up *You* and another Lifetime-turned-streaming "Original" *UnREAL* (2015-2018) to argue that each series' complex narrative address productively sheds light on how streaming platforms imagine and construct their spectators, offering a model of women's spectatorship for the streaming era. By integrating digital technology into their storytelling narratively and aesthetically, the two series address a feminine spectator shifting constantly between frames of reference and levels of mediation, revealing a complex negotiation between viewers and the subject position constructed by digital media. *UnREAL* is Lifetime's fictional behind-the-scenes drama about a reality TV series modeled on *The Bachelor*. It centers two women producers adept at constructing the hypermediated world of reality television romance,

even as they become embroiled in the on-screen drama they produce. As the series frequently integrates screens, cameras, monitors, and other diegetic frames into its view, the *UnREAL* viewer must similarly navigate constantly shifting levels of mediation that complicate the division between the subject and object of the gaze, enacting experiences of interactivity and mediated visibility that characterize our contemporary digital media landscape. *You* similarly reveals the constructedness of the romance plot, telling the story of a violent stalker who believes he is just doing what it takes to get the girl. The series' use of a second-person narration that addresses the protagonist's love interest as "you" gestures toward the individualized address of algorithms which target users based on their trackable behavior. *You* critiques and undermines algorithmic address by constructing a feminized spectator constantly negotiating the various roles in which one is cast, by patriarchy and technology alike.

These series and this chapter build on a long history of feminist media scholarship that theorizes women's spectatorship as entailing complex negotiations and movement between subject positions. Within cinema studies, scholars have challenged theories of the cinematic apparatus based in psychoanalysis that suppose a single, unitary subject position constructed by the film text and its apparatus. Anne Friedberg and Miriam Hansen, for instance, take into account the conditions of spectatorship for women in modernity, as window-shoppers and cinema-goers, that created opportunities for "trying on identities"[1] and the creation of alternative and unpredictable publics.[2] Psychoanalytic theories of fantasy have also been taken up by

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[1] Anne Friedberg, "Cinema and the Postmodern Condition," in *Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film,* ed. Linda Williams (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1995), 65.
[2] Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1991).

feminist scholars as a model for understanding the mobility of spectatorial identification, as the subject oscillates between multiple stagings of desire.[3] While much of this work implicitly or explicitly centers white women and racially-unspecific constructions of spectatorship, bell hooks argues that Black women enact an oppositional gaze that actively resists identification with representational schemas that erase and suppress Black women.[4] Christine Gledhill's conception of "negotiation" offers a productive way of approaching the relationship between the feminine spectator constructed by a media text and women audiences shaped by social forces like race, class, gender, and sexuality. She writes that meaning "arises out of a struggle or negotiation between competing frames of reference."[5] Approaching spectatorship as a process "suggests flux, discontinuities, digressions, rather than fixed positions. It suggests that a range of positions of identification may exist within any text; and that, within the social situation of their viewing, audiences may shift subject positions as they interact with the text."[6] I aim to consider how new digital technologies produce and enable particular forms of feminized spectatorial negotiation.

While much spectatorship theory addresses the apparatus, culture, and texts of cinema, feminist theorists of television have long argued that the aesthetic forms and generic conventions of TV construct a feminized spectator characterized by dispersed and multiple subject positions.[7] While this argument extends across TV genres, many have analyzed how women's genres

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[3] Judith Mayne, *Cinema and Spectatorship* (London: Routledge, 1993).
[4] bell hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators," in *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 115-131.
[5] Christine Gledhill, "Pleasurable Negotiations," in *Feminist Film Theory: A Reader*, ed. Sue Thornham (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 169.
[6] Gledhill, "Pleasurable Negotiations," 174.
[7] Mimi White, *Tele-Advising: Therapeutic Discourse in American Television* (Chapel Hill, NC: UNC Press, 1992); Lynne Joyrich, *Re-Viewing Reception: Television, Gender, and Postmodern Culture* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1996).

exemplify such forms of address. Tania Modleski's foundational writing on soap operas argues that the genre produces an experience of multiple identifications with its many characters, offering an outlet for feminine (and *potentially* feminist) pleasure and anger.[8] Brenda Weber suggests that the "multiple modalities of seeing and being-seen built into" the genre of makeover TV "allow for multiple viewing positions."[9] Unlike the contestants on the shows, the makeover TV viewer can take pleasure in the experience of cycling "back and forth between Before- and After- states, somehow comforted that neither position is fully totalizing."[10] Women's television genres respond to, incorporate, and produce complex ways of watching that have been theorized as feminine, in contrast to the unitary, masculine spectator theorized through classical Hollywood cinema.

However, streaming and algorithmic television has complicated the delineation of "women's television" or "women's genres." Gendered divisions in broadcast are often marked by airtime (i.e. daytime soap operas, daytime talk shows), or by "narrowcast" brand identity in cable (Lifetime or Oxygen).[11] But streaming platforms—characterized by the subscription model and micro-targeted recommendations and advertisements—alter the relationships between industry, content, and viewer. On my own Netflix and Hulu accounts, sections devoted to "Teen Romance," "Love and Dating TV," and "Women Behind the Camera" are displayed amongst others like "Exciting Movies," "Familiar Favorites," and "Powerful TV Characters." What would

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[8] Tania Modleski, *Loving with a Vengeance: Mass-produced Fantasies for Women*, second ed. (London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2007).
[9] Brenda Weber, *Makeover TV: Selfhood, Citizenship, and Celebrity* (Durham: Duke UP, 2009), 82.
[10] Weber, *Makeover TV*, 262.
[11] Amanda Lotz, *Redesigning Women: Television After the Network Era* (Champaign, IL: U of Illinois Press, 2006).

traditionally be considered "women's media" is mixed into all of these categories—at least on my individualized profile. Streaming companies tend to distance themselves from the idea of identity-based demographic marketing. Instead, they track individual online behaviors, which ostensibly leads to hailing their subscribers as individuals, characterized by their interests rather than their identity. The potential access that streaming platforms have to information about their subscribers' identities calls this distinction into question, but these technological and industrial changes may serve to destabilize or expand what it means to embody (or not) the "feminine" viewer traditionally hailed by "women's genres." The textual address of television responds to and grapples with these changes, and so does the feminine spectator it constructs.

UnREAL and *You*, as series that bridge the divide between narrowcast cable and streaming, are particularly attuned to the ways that spectatorship is being reimagined in our 21st century technological landscape characterized by proliferating forms of visibility and vision, by interactivity and individualized address. They are in conversation with older modalities of women's genres—namely, the reality TV romance and romantic comedy—but tell stories fundamentally shaped by a technological milieu that rewrites the nature of subject/object binaries, and what it means to move between the two. As such, they construct a feminized spectator negotiating the new dynamics of visibility engendered by digital technology that is reshaping both television and everyday life.

"Living Shiftingly": Screens, Frames, and the Fantasy of Participation in *UnREAL*

In the season three premiere of *UnREAL*, a young woman walks into the control room where hyper-competent producer-protagonist Quinn King (Constance Zimmer) sits among the crew. The woman is marked as a too-young, dumb blonde brought to set by the sleazy,

incompetent male executive producer of the reality show *Everlasting*. As she looks around the editing bay, she remarks vapidly, “There are just, like, so many screens in here, I don’t even know where to look.” She stands in front of a wall of monitors displaying live feeds from the set, blocking Quinn’s view. Quinn’s disdain for her is evident in their brief interaction and the short sequence ends (as it began) with a shot of the back of Quinn’s head in front of the monitor, as she continues to watch her live footage with a vengeance. Unlike the blonde, our eminently brunette protagonist knows exactly where to look.

This brief encounter gestures toward the series’ gendered approach toward the proliferation of screens that troubles distinctions between fantasy, reality, and mediation. Here, the bad feminine subject, the woman accepting of her role as sexual object, cannot navigate the hypermediated landscape of ubiquitous screens. As the successful producer of a reality romance show, Quinn’s great strength is navigating screens and, quite literally, choosing which one should be looked at, as she assembles a broadcast out of footage from multiple cameras. Co-producer and co-protagonist Rachel Goldberg (Shiri Appleby) is similarly equipped; her reputation as a producer is built on her ability to manipulate the participants of the show to create the raw material to be technologically mediated into the fantasy of romance and its discontents offered by *Everlasting* and its real-life models. As a self-conscious series about the making of a reality show, *UnREAL* constantly enacts a kind of slippage between planes of mediation. As in the scene described above, the viewer frequently watches producers and crew members watching footage on screens or through camera monitors. The viewer also watches from the point of view of *Everlasting*’s cameramen, unsure how to distinguish between that view and that of the more omniscient camera of *UnREAL*. Rachel, constantly on the brink of a psychotic break, performs for the contestants she manipulates into filling the role of the “villain” or the “wifey” (those

white, traditional women the producers think might actually win the competition and marry the Suitor); the viewer never quite knows when she is being "real." But even as it prompts the viewer to wonder at what level Rachel (or Appleby) is performing, *UnREAL* evacuates the notion of reality altogether in its ambivalent embrace of mediation. Everything is screened, and only those able to navigate—ambivalently—the multiple frames of mediation can control the narrative, even if it drives them crazy.

I contend that this negotiation with technology—this slippery constellation of screens, frames, fantasy, and reality—constitutes the series' feminine address. *UnREAL* operates in what Lauren Berlant describes as the mode of the female complaint, which foregrounds "women's disappointment in the tenuous relation of romantic fantasy to lived intimacy."[12] Texts in this mode are both critical and sentimental, and so, ambivalent. Many critics have pointed out how *UnREAL*'s narrative provides all the same melodramatic romance and scandal of the reality shows it satirizes; it simultaneously engages critique and sentiment in relation to the fantasy that *Everlasting* or *The Bachelor* purport to affirm. As Rachel begins to fall for the Suitor, or Quinn finds her married executive-producer boyfriend receiving fellatio from an intern, the series centers women, as Berlant suggests, always bargaining with desire and power, in an ambivalent relationship to fantasies of the good life built on heteronormative love. Women, those on the series and those who consume it, shift between registers of attachment, critique, and disappointment in relation to the institutional fantasies that often ultimately prove disabling.

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[12] Lauren Berlant, *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2008), 1-2.

Berlant argues that women's genres "claim to reflect a kernel of common experience and provide frames for encountering the impacts of living as a woman in the world."[13] Here, I aim to consider the multiple valences of "framing" that *UnREAL* engages. Camera viewfinders, television screens, and computer monitors frame our views, mediating what the viewer sees. The integration of technology into the aesthetics of women's television produces a feminized spectatorial negotiation of these multivalent frames. As Berlant suggests of women's genres more generally, *UnReal* depicts the feminine practice of "living shiftingly," offering frames for dynamically bargaining with the ambivalent experiences inherent to identifying as a woman in a patriarchal world.[14] The series captures how digital technology is imbricated with the female complaint, shaping and shading women's relationship to romantic fantasy. Accounts of the technologized hyperreal and the groundlessness of the digitized world are often universalized or (implicitly or explicitly) masculinized. But I argue for the critical value of understanding the experience and navigation of technological mediation and the changing dynamics of privacy, publicity, and visuality through the feminine.

Rachel, Quinn's manipulative co-producer, is the character who moves most freely and whom the series follows most closely between planes of mediation, levels of reality and fantasy. And she, *Everlasting* contestants, and *UnREAL* viewers are all implicated in this complex negotiation when, in season one, Rachel begins to fall for the Suitor (i.e. Bachelor), Adam (Freddie Stroma). A scene between the two of them in the season's fourth episode captures much of the slippage between the various screens, cameras, and gazes that constitute the series and our

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[13] Berlant, *Female Complaint*, x.
[14] Berlant, *Female Complaint*, 10.

relationship to it. After Adam invites potential investors in his new business venture to the set without permission, Rachel pulls him aside to try to use his negotiations as leverage to get him to kiss, passionately, one of the contestants—what the *Everlasting* viewers presumably want. A detailed investigation of the formal construction of the scene reveals the incredibly layered mediation of a fantasy viewers are invited to embrace and critique simultaneously.

As Rachel and Adam walk away from the main area of the set, bustling with crew members and contestants, the *UnREAL* camera follows behind them. A cut to a medium wide shot from the opposite direction reveals the *Everlasting* cameraman, Jeremy (Josh Kelly), Rachel's former lover, following behind them and recording with a steadicam. He is in the position from which the previous shot was filmed, making it unclear whose view the *UnREAL* viewer was taking on. In the reverse shot of Rachel and Adam, the angle is perhaps just off from where Jeremy now stands filming them, but even upon careful viewing, it is not entirely clear—this could be the gaze of his camera or it may not. From this angle, Rachel and Adam appear framed by trees, and the space in which they stand close to each other looks secluded. A close-up shot-reverse-shot sequence begins of Rachel berating Adam, and Adam begging Rachel to let him pursue his business efforts. In each close-up, everything is out of focus behind them. As the physical and affective intimacy of the sequence grows, the viewer may forget about Jeremy's proximity to the scene. Jeremy's stationary backstage camera in medium or long shot could never provide the intimacy of these closeups, the sexual tension that builds in the tight suture of their faces. In this sequence, the viewer accesses something that feels almost unmediated, at least, for the set of a reality show. Rachel's voice gets low and conspiratorial as she whispers, "If I do this for you…" In his closeup, Adam assents: "Yeah, anything." As she tells him simply, "I need a kiss on this date," she binds him in a bargain of business for some amalgam of love, sex,

and fantasy (also, of course, a business). The shot-reverse-shot sequence binds them to each other, and the viewer to them. Rachel leans in closer: "I don't care who it's with but do it in front of the other girls." He replies, unsure, "Is that really what you want?" Back to her: "It's what I really, *really* want." Rachel desires a kiss—visible to women who wish it were them being kissed. *Everlasting* viewers will experience two registers of identification; they will identify with the fantasy of being kissed and with the disappointment of not being chosen. But for *UnReal*'s viewers, Rachel's increasingly close close-ups also identify them with the desire and ability to participate in and manipulate these registers of fantasy, identification, and mediation.

A brief medium two-shot interrupts the sequence of close-ups, and there is only the grove of trees behind them and no trace of the TV set. Adam leans slightly over her to ask "Tongue or no tongue?" She looks up at him and begins to take a step towards him, saying, "I want you to sell it." Here, again, the viewer sees something close to the perspective of Jeremy's almost-forgotten camera, although there is no marker of the moment's diegetic recording. The viewer is invited to ask: what am I watching? What level of mediation am I experiencing? Am I watching the deconstruction of the fantasy offered by reality television or its reinstantiation? In this case, it is almost certainly both.

The subsequent shot-reverse-shot close-up sequence, however, invites us to forget (almost) those questions once again. She looks up at him as she finishes, "I want you to sell it. I want dripping panties. I want sweaty palms. I want it intense. I want it hot." Are they her own desires or desires for the viewers? Her syntax suggests both. A tight reverse close-up of Adam as she tells him what she wants, builds the tension of increased proximity between them. When she finishes speaking, Adam leans in. The camera focuses on Rachel as Adam kisses her slowly on the side of the mouth. The back of his head and her face split and fill the frame, but the camera

holds on her close-up for the duration of the kiss. Her eyes flutter but never fully close, and she looks up at him as he slowly pulls away. Even as the viewer is well aware this is a moment of manipulation and economic bargaining between them, the shot composition and performances pull the viewer (quite willingly, to speak personally) into a moment of sexual chemistry that feels as unmediated as anything can be on a show that undermines that very possibility.

But this time, the interruption of the shot-reverse-shot sequence is far more jarring. The intimacy created by their close-ups is cut short by a shot of Jeremy, the cameraman. Jeremy watches the kiss not directly, but on his camera's small viewfinder. Any sense the viewer may have had of Adam and Rachel's unmediated privacy disappears as quickly as it came. But they are not only reminded that Jeremy has been watching; viewers are reminded that *they* have been watching. Jeremy may not have had the same intimate view of the encounter—he was not sutured into the fantasy by close-ups and fluttering eyelids—-but his screen granted him access to the moment, just as the viewer's has.

When Adam walks away from her, Rachel is left alone in the frame, though Jeremy still watches her from the sidelines. The last reverse shot of Rachel is a wide shot of her alone, in which lawn equipment and the side of a house are visible. The intimate privacy of the close-ups was, itself, only a mediation, an editing-out of sets and props. This perspective is closer to the view of Jeremy's camera once again, and Rachel's placement in relation to his camera (the *Everlasting* camera) and the series camera (the *UnREAL* camera) demonstrates her shifting positions in relation to fantasy. She demands a kiss for one of the contestants, and receives it herself. She asks for dripping panties for the *Everlasting* viewers, and, if those fluttering eyelids are any indication, experiences such arousal herself. She moves between positions in relation to fantasy—its constructor, its actor, its spectator—or perhaps collapses the distinction between

them. *UnREAL*'s formal construction of Rachel as "living shiftingly" in this way encapsulates the various registers in which new media scholars imagine the digital subject, and brings an element of control and interactivity to the way feminist theorists conceive of women's spectatorship in film and TV. Rachel thus brings together modes of engaging with television and interactive digital media through the female complaint whose relationship to generic mediation and fantasy is always ambivalent.

As the scene continues, Rachel's relationship to the camera conveys the sense that mediation validates, or realizes, her. Rachel tries to follow Jeremy away from the grove, and catches up to him on another part of the set as he fiddles with his camera. He does not look at her, only at his camera, as he apologizes for filming the kiss. As she makes excuses that she was just "producing" Adam, the term they use for manipulating contestants into the desired performances, she walks around in front of his camera. Jeremy remains focused on the camera in this short shot-reverse-shot sequence between the two of them, but the camera, at least, looks at her. The camera is off, but she still seems to be performing for it, demanding its gaze. As he begins to walk away from her again, the camera rig over his shoulder, she calls his attention back to her by confessing that she hadn't done him a favor she promised. He turns, and his camera turns with him. She leans in closer, looking for forgiveness, but he angrily turns away again and leaves. Just as his camera turns fully away from Rachel, she is left alone in a medium shot, zooming out to a wide shot, that emphasizes her isolation. She is alone here, just as she was when Adam walked out of the frame, though this time, the diegetic camera has walked away, too; this is perhaps the most alone the viewer has seen her. Momentarily, she holds the gaze of the series camera, but as the music swells and suddenly goes out, it cuts to black. Rachel cannot exist without some level of mediation.

In this final shot of the scene, Rachel is most alone at the moment when there are the fewest cameras trained on her, the fewest gazes seeing her. The series certainly problematizes what the gaze of reality television does to women made visible for and by it; contestants police their own bodies through eating disorders, go off their life-saving medications to better perform desirability, and viciously tear each other down in their quest for the fantasy of heterosexual romance. Berlant suggests, however, that "the texts of women's intimate public worry about what it means to live within the institutions of intimacy, across all kinds of domestic, laboring, cosmopolitan, rural, and political spaces, but they worry even more about what it would mean *not to be framed by them*."[15] Rachel's psychic disintegration throughout the series is closely tied to her ability to manipulate people through their relationship to a fantasy of heteronormative love, as well as to her own *inability* to achieve that fantasy. She constantly works to contain her contestants within the generic frame in which marriage constitutes the surest form of the good life for women; or, simultaneously, she works to reframe their experiences and relationships so that they conform to generic conventionality—they become the villain or the "wifey" of reality TV. Her manipulation of others in terms of these frames positions her, if not entirely outside of them, liminally; she is untethered from the genres that she uses to contain the contestants.

But just as her relationship with Adam complicates her exclusion from such frames, so too the formal composition of the series works to *reframe* her. In the series pilot, Rachel first appears framed by a limousine sunroof, the camera looking down on the car from above and she lying on its floor looking up. The rectangular frame isolates her, as the female contestants in the limo pass a photo of the Suitor over her face. The series repeats this visual trope of Rachel being

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[15] Berlant, *Female Complaint*, 27 (emphasis added).

framed by windows and doorways throughout, conveying not only a sense of imposed isolation, but of entrapment within the frame of a television screen. When Adam gives a heartfelt apology to the contestants for not being fully committed to their collective quest for love, Rachel watches through the metal bars of a fence. She is trapped and isolated from the action, certainly, but she is also framed, contained by a different, but no less generic or conventional, form of mediation. If Rachel's mental illness (and professional success) does seem tied to the anxiety of living outside the conventional frames of feminine fantasy, the series ambivalently reasserts that there is no outside to mediation; there is only living shiftingly between its different registers.

Mediation in the digital age, however, is not just passive exposure or technological visibility; and it is not just playing a role in the narrativized fantasy. The series engages, complicates, and updates any simplified notion of the feminized, overinvested television spectator by challenging the distinction between television passively consumed and the interactivity of newer networked media. Mark Andrejevic argues that the aesthetics of reality television are tied to the 21st-century landscape of digital media through the "promise of interactivity."[16] Like the internet, reality TV promises "to collapse the distance that separates those on either side of the screen."[17] *UnREAL* literalizes that promise in moments when Rachel encounters video of herself on screen. The very short final scene of the episode in which Rachel and Adam kiss enacts a slippage between computer monitors, television screens, and cameras; between editing, spectating, and surveilling; between user, actor, and spectator. Rachel has retrieved the tape of her and Adam's kiss and retreated to the editing bay alone at night. The

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[16] Mark Andrejevic, *Reality TV: The Work of Being Watched* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003), 2.
[17] Andrejevic, *Reality TV*, 9.

short sequence begins with an extreme close-up of a finger pressing a keyboard. The buzzing of a tape fast-forwarding cues the next shot of a monitor with a familiar moving image; this is the same feed from before, of Adam and Rachel walking away from set into the grove. The sound of another click freezes the action just as the on-screen Rachel turns to face Adam (again). The *UnREAL* camera cuts back to Rachel sitting alone at the editing bay, zooming slowly in on her. There are screens, wires, sound boards all around her. One of the monitors behind her displays nighttime surveillance footage from the *Everlasting* set. A cut back to the main monitor that Rachel watches intently shows a medium close-up, filmed by Jeremy, of Rachel looking up at Adam—a wider shot than the close-ups in which the *UnREAL* viewer first saw the exchange. On-screen Rachel's mouth moves but the video feed is silent; the viewer is prompted to remember for themselves what was being said (or forget it and anticipate only the climactic kiss). The monitor on which Rachel watches herself sits on a wire shelf next to another, smaller monitor displaying a high angle shot of a bed- or living room—presumably live surveillance footage from the *Everlasting* house. The following shot is a reverse shot of Rachel, this time in a head-on close-up, her eyes wide, mouth open. The camera, now placed in the position of the monitor Rachel watches, glides slightly and smoothly over her face.

This begins a short shot-reverse-shot sequence between Rachel and the monitor. In the next shot, the monitor now takes up the whole screen, and without even the borders of the monitor, the *UnREAL* viewer's screen and Rachel's screen are indistinguishable. As Adam leans in to kiss Rachel, from the same medium-close over-the-shoulder shot as before (but not as close as when the viewer witnessed it "first-hand" earlier in the episode), Jeremy's camera zooms in slightly toward the kiss and Rachel's half-smile. The sound of a keyboard click marks the pause, and the image freezes just as Adam starts to pull away. The reverse shot finds Rachel watching

raptly, entranced. She blinks and looks down, unsure. A quick cutaway of her finger hitting a key on the keyboard precedes another head-on shot of the screen, as the image of the kiss is suddenly replaced by the message "Media Deleted." The final shot of the episode is the reverse head-on close-up of Rachel again; she looks back up at the camera, at her screen and the viewer's, and at the viewer.

In one register, the sequence indicates the monitor as a fairly straightforward point-of-view shot; it cuts from Rachel's face to the object she looks at. But this simple subject/object, spectator/image-actor dichotomy is troubled by a number of the sequence's formal elements. For one, Rachel is watching herself on the screen; she is simultaneously subject and object, spectator and image. The head-on angles of the shots of Rachel and the computer monitor further suggest that it watches her back; the computer is the source of the viewer's gaze on her. The category of spectator itself is complicated by the slippage between computer screen and television screen. Rachel watches on a computer monitor at an editing bay; the close-ups of her finger on the keyboard, the sounds of the clicks and the fast-forward, and the text of "Media Deleted" all reveal the power she has to control the narrative. In this version, the kiss will not end with Rachel left alone in wide shot. She will be perpetually kissed—pause—until the moment she rejects the fantasy altogether—delete. She is an active computer user, not a passive television spectator, as they have been so imagined. But as her computer screen becomes the viewer's television screen (or significantly, the computer screen or smartphone or tablet on which the viewer may be watching), the viewer becomes a user, too. And like Rachel's, my screens are also cameras. The tiny lens above my laptop screen looks back at me just as Rachel's monitor looks at her; with one click, I could watch myself just as she does. I use my smartphone as a mirror and a television screen within the span of a few minutes; I exist, visibly, on the same screen as the

characters of *UnREAL*, and as the contestants of *Everlasting*. Like Rachel, I shift ambivalently between registers of visibility, visuality, and vision through some combination of technology and fantasy.

While the series certainly centers the ambivalence of the female complaint in the interactive digital age, in part through its formal conventions that integrate screens and frames, *UnREAL* also explicitly pathologizes women's relationship to mediation, embracing tropes of feminine narcissism in the social media era. The season one episode "Truth" opens on the filming of *Everlasting*, with the host declaring, "Here at *Everlasting*, chivalry is not dead," as he introduces the Suitor's trip home with one of the contestants. The camera cuts to Rachel's trailer and a slow, fluid tracking shot leads the viewer behind the curtain that hides her bed, accompanied by a low buzzing sound. The buzzing continues as the camera tracks across her blanket—apparently a packing blanket that would be found among the equipment of a television crew turned into a comforter—her body writhing underneath. She holds a smartphone in one hand and wears large headphones as she masturbates under the blanket. Her ambiguous facial expression settles into frustration and disappointment when she fails to reach orgasm. On her phone screen, bondage pornography plays—a woman with a gag in her mouth moans as she is penetrated from behind. The buzzing of the vibrator finally stops as Rachel visibly gives up on her orgasm, while the woman on the phone goes on being fucked. The immediate cut back to the set of *Everlasting*, with the clean-cut Suitor choosing from among his contestants, emphasizes the difference between Rachel's sexual experience and the romantic narrative unfolding on the show. Of course, the series emphatically deconstructs the fantasy romance offered by *Everlasting*, but perhaps simultaneously gestures toward the problem of seeking satisfaction in media (arguably) geared toward a masculinized sexual fantasy based in women's submission.

During the episode, Rachel reconnects and almost has sex with her ex-boyfriend and is sexually pursued by the Suitor Adam, who she turns down. She ends up in her trailer alone, and this time as the camera zooms into the curtain blocking her bed, the buzzing of her vibrator is accompanied by moaning. Before showing Rachel masturbating, the camera frames the smartphone she is again watching. This time, though, instead of porn, Rachel is watching a selfie video of herself and Jeremy playfully posing for the camera, Jeremy leaning in to kiss Rachel's ear as she looks into the camera (at the *UnREAL* viewer and at herself). The camera then cuts to a shot mimicking the one from the opening scene, panning up her writhing blanket toward her face. This time, her face conveys unambiguous pleasure, while quick, rhythmic jump cuts between closeups of her face signal her reaching orgasm. As Rachel comes down, she serenely watches the video, in which Jeremy asks, "Where are you going to be in a year." On the beach from off-screen, she answers "I'm going to be writing my novel. Where are you gonna be?" Rachel's video then takes over the full screen—it is no longer visibly framed by the phone in Rachel's hand. In a shaky handheld medium shot, Jeremy answers, "I'll just be married to you." Within the video, Rachel playfully retorts, "Oh really? You don't say," as the camera perfectly (by selfie video standards) frames them passionately kissing. Rachel, in her trailer, wistfully listens to the end of the video with her flushed face turned away. Media scholar Kristen Warner suggests that the moment embodies the series' metacommentary on processes of "identificatory suture." She states in a roundtable discussion on *UnREAL*, "as a viewer watching [Rachel] watch a fantastical version of herself be happy, how different is that from reading the romance novel or

watching a soap opera and suturing yourself into it? Not really much difference at all."[18] The fantasy with which Rachel identifies is, as in many romance novels or soap opera storylines, one of marriage and feminine normativity. It is also a fantasy of her own creative fulfillment coexisting alongside heteronormative romantic love. And *UnREAL* is certainly critical of the kinds of fantasies offered by reality TV romance. In this scene, however, that critique extends beyond the fantasy itself, as the series invites the viewer to critique and even pathologize the experience of identificatory suture fostered by the mediation of the self made ubiquitous by digital media.

The soundtrack and subsequent sequence belie the peacefulness of the satisfaction Rachel seems to have reached in contrast to her opening attempts at self-pleasure; the lyrics "Cause I'm just holding on for tonight" play from Sia's "Chandelier," as the *Everlasting* contestant Mary (Ashley Scott) drinks alone in her room and dances in her underwear in front of her mirror. Mary is the oldest contestant in her late thirties, a single mother and domestic violence survivor with bipolar disorder. In an attempt to get Mary to break out of her shell, one of the *Everlasting* producers replaces Mary's bipolar medication without Mary's knowledge. While *UnREAL* centers the unethical lines crossed in every aspect of reality TV production, it does offer this example as someone going too far. Closeups of Mary's wine glass as she brings it to her lips emphasize that she is losing control due to the manipulation of the show, as she is not supposed to drink on her medication and declined to until she was pressured. But Mary's loss of control is primarily expressed through her vanity or narcissism in this scene. The camera pans up Mary's

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[18] Jason Mittell, "AnTENNA, UnREAL: Romance and Pedagogy," *Antenna*, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Aug 19, 2015. https://blog.commarts.wisc.edu/2015/08/19/antenna-unreal-romance-and-pedagogy/.

body as she opens up her delicate robe, revealing black lingerie. When it reaches her face, Mary is staring fixedly straight ahead. A cut to a wider shot reveals that we are looking at her reflection in a full-length mirror as she seemingly dances along to Sia's track. While the camera repeatedly pans up her thin and toned torso, Mary's eyes seem to maintain unblinking eye contact with those of her reflection. She says to herself in a sultry voice, "Mama's still got it. Bitches beware." All of this behavior conveys a stark change in Mary's personality from earlier episodes, in which she is much more shy and kind, and signals a descent into mental illness that will ultimately lead to Mary's accidental death. This scene of Mary's nascent yet fatal narcissism frames the meaning of Rachel's masturbation scene. While Mary dances sensuously in the mirror, Rachel literally gets off to her own image.

As the series progresses, *UnREAL* increasingly pathologizes Rachel's desire to put herself in the narrative of *Everlasting*—to, herself, become the unofficial Suitress and find a husband from among the contestants. Earlier seasons focus on Rachel's misguided and dangerous desire to use her mass medium of broadcast television to do good: she almost outs one lesbian contestant, and calls the police on the first Black suitor in an attempt to stage a dramatic confrontation, resulting in the Suitor's friend being shot. The best word I can think of to describe how the series handles such storylines, particularly when they involve people of color, is *messy*, but certainly Rachel's white feminism is meant to be an object of critique. In later seasons, however, *UnREAL* (also messily) primarily entwines Rachel's borderline personality disorder diagnosis, her history of sexual trauma, and her misguided attempts to live the *Everlasting* fantasy. Dying her hair blonde, wearing makeup, and manipulatively flirting and sleeping with the men in the *Everlasting* cast signal her declining mental health. From my perspective, many of these story elements undermine the far more interesting and engaging ambivalence and aesthetic

play of the series' first season. Rachel, as well as most other characters, fits more squarely into the trope of the anti-heroine, and the viewer is mostly encouraged to judge and despise the machinations of reality TV romance. This shift aligns with the marketing strategies analyzed by media scholar Kathleen Battles, who argues that marketing discourse around the series in its first season emphasized how unlike other Lifetime programming *UnREAL* was, and "worked to *delimit the intertextual frames* for viewing the show."[19] Battles suggests that Lifetime and those marketing the show minimized *UnREAL*'s "relationship to feminized cultural forms" like soap opera and promoted its connection to "quality" anti-hero dramas, working to limit the ways that viewers relate to and experience the show.[20] Formally, however, the series *insists* on the need and the skill to negotiate between multiple frames at once. While the central narratives in later seasons might join the marketing efforts in devaluing feminized media and its over-invested spectators, at its best *UnREAL* invokes the ambivalent negotiation of feminized spectator-users in the digital age.

Logged in to You: Negotiating Algorithmic Address in *You*

If you were a fan of the series *You* sharing your interest online in the winter of 2019, you might have received a 240-character lecture from its star, Penn Badgley. As many entertainment news outlets reported at the time, Badgley took to Twitter to respond to fans expressing their love for his character, Joe Goldberg, insisting that women's apparent attraction to a murderous

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[19] Kathleen Battles, "This Is UnREAL: Discourses of Quality, Antiheroes, and the Erasure of the Femininized Popular Culture in 'Television for Women,'" *Feminist Media Studies* 20, no.8 (2020): 1281. https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2019.1668450 (emphasis added).
[20] Battles, "This Is UnREAL," 1281.

stalker reflected some larger cultural problem. When one fan tweeted, "Okay but @PennBadgley was sexy as Dan [Badgley's character on *Gossip Girl*] but lord Joe is a whole new level" (@capricornyyy, January 9, 2019), Badgley responded, "...of problems, right?" (@PennBadgley, January 9, 2019). Another woman posted, "@PennBadgley, kidnap me pls," presumably referring to the kind of thing Joe might do, but also engaging the social media convention of young women asking their celebrity crushes to commit violence against them as an expression of lust. Badgley's response: "No thx" (@PennBadgley, January 19, 2019). In response to one of his tweets expressing fear at how many people "romanticize" Joe, one user posted, "I'm telling u it's ur face that does it. Ur gorgeous. I can see past that crazy shit lol" (@rose_barbie_, January 19, 2019). For Badgley, what she "sees" misses the point: "But you're supposed to see past my face TO the crazy shit! It's the other way! The other wayyyyyyyyyyyyyyyhhyyyyggg :)" (@PennBadgley, January 9, 2019).

Although Badgley later describes his tweets as "tongue-in-cheek," his initial reaction certainly implies that these women viewers are watching *You* in the wrong way.[21] Their particular configuration of identification and desire constitutes a pathologized form of spectatorship, masochistic in its attachment to a "bad guy." In pinpointing the problem of what viewers see *past* or *to*, Badgley acknowledges the multilayered nature of the show's address, but prescribes a specific directionality to the viewer's gaze. His reaction seems to me a fundamental misreading of how women's genres traditionally address their viewers, as well as how women's

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[21] Claire Stern, "Penn Badgley Swears It's a Coincidence That He Always Plays the Social Media Creep," *InStyle*, January 14, 2020. https://www.instyle.com/celebrity/penn-badgley-you-interview-social-media-creep.

spectatorship is shaped by digital technology. Traditionally women's television genres in particular have been theorized to produce a more dispersed subject position, able to hold multiple viewing positions. Digital technology proliferates modes of seeing and being seen, further multiplying viewing positions and fostering the practice of shifting constantly between frames of reference. As digital technology is integrated both narratively and aesthetically into the storytelling of women's genres, those practices of "living shiftingly" rise to the surface, consciously shaping the romance plot and women's relationship to it.

And despite Badgley's protestations, *You* is a romance. Showrunner Sera Gamble and author of the book on which the series is based Caroline Kepnes describe it as inspired by the romantic comedies of Nora Ephron. While the series certainly plays on the darker implications of those films (such as Tom Hanks's chain book store magnate putting his love interest Meg Ryan's independent shop out of business in *You've Got Mail*), Gamble tells the New York Times, "The story only works if it's also a real romantic comedy that you can root for."[22] By design, viewers, like those on Twitter, might find themselves rooting for Joe to get the girl, Beck, and reform his murderous, manipulative ways (in whichever order). *You* invites and pokes fun at that stereotypical "I can fix him" energy. At the same time, it exposes certain romantic comedy tropes as troubling and dangerous: when Joe almost gets caught breaking into Beck's apartment and hides in her shower, he narrates, "I'm not worried, I've seen enough romantic comedies to know that guys like me are always getting in jams like this." As Judy Berman at the New York Times notes, "*You* implies, in a culture shaped by stories where obsession and manipulation are

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[22] Judy Berman, "The Women Behind 'You' on Creating This Fall's Darkest, and Most Timely, Romance," *The New York Times*, September 7, 2018. https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/07/arts/you-lifetime-sera-gamble-caroline-kepnes.html.

framed as the height of romance, the line between cute and terrifying is thin."[23] The series guides the viewer to oscillate between the two affective states—to see past Joe's craziness to his cuteness, and back again.

Given this concept, *You* may actually seem quite at home on *Lifetime*, a network now characterized by reality TV romances like "Married at First Sight" and "Bride and Prejudice," and original films with titles like "A Date with Danger" and "Lethal Love Letter." When the series first aired on *Lifetime* in the fall of 2018, however, its ratings were dismal, with fewer than a million people watching each episode.[24] The cable network, whose earlier motto was "Television for Women," cancelled *You* in December shortly after airing the first season finale. The series, however, found its fanbase on Netflix, which was already signed on as the streaming partner for the series and released the first season in late December of that year. The streaming platform is notorious for its specious ratings calculations when it releases viewership numbers at all, but claimed that *You* "was on track to be watched by 40 million households within its first four weeks on the service."[25] Netflix quickly committed to producing and streaming *You*'s second season, and the series was branded a "Netflix original."

Describing the experience of finding a new home for their series, Gamble's co-producer Greg Berlanti jokes, "If Joe is a man who is simply just searching for love, well, then, our show finally found the right partner."[26] While the comparison may not withstand much critical scrutiny, it prompts a consideration of why, in fact, Netflix is the right partner for a former

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[23] Berman, "The Women Behind 'You.'"
[24] John Koblin, "What Made the TV Show 'You' a Hit? Netflix," *The New York Times*, January 21, 2019. https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/21/business/media/netflix-you-ratings.html.
[25] Koblin, "What Made the TV Show 'You' a Hit? Netflix."
[26] Koblin, "What Made the TV Show 'You' a Hit? Netflix,"

Lifetime series. And what does Joe's particular search for love reveal about the new pairing? Like *UnREAL, You* engages a complex narrative address that illuminates how streaming platforms imagine and construct feminine spectatorship. Just as Joe stalks the object of his obsession and dangerously personalizes his courtship to his singular "you," Netflix and other streaming services use algorithms that personally address *you*, the user, based on past and predicted behavior. And in the case of *You*, they seem to have done so successfully. *You*, however, foregrounds the dynamic difference between the imagined and constructed "you" and the actual person it hails. The show's feminine spectatorial address produces an experience of negotiating multiple frames of reference at once, creating a revealing tension with the algorithmic address of Netflix. Examining the dynamics of women's spectatorship through *You* reveals the complex negotiation between viewers and the subject position constructed by digital media.

The series sets up the gendered power dynamics of its narrational address from its opening moments. The pilot episode opens on a young woman walking into a bookshop in New York City, signaled by a close-up of the bells at the top of the door followed by a shot of her boots and a slow pan up her legs and torso. A male narrator's quiet voice joins the simultaneously soothing and unsettling tone of the score: "Well, hello there. Who are you?" The camera cuts before reaching the woman's face, to a shot from over the shoulder of a man watching her move through the store. Though her face is still out of focus, she is now identifiably white and blonde. The camera follows the cue of the narrator as he comments on her appearance, with closeups of her clothing and accessories. Her loose blouse conveys to him that "you are not here to be ogled" but her jangling bracelets reveal "you like a little attention." Suggesting that he is responding to her desire, he says "Okay, I bite," as he takes a closer look at

what she's looking for. The camera wanders placidly, catching glimpses of her through the space between bookshelves and office blinds, or following behind her. As she browses the fiction section, he misogynistically observes, "you are not the standard insecure nymph hunting for Faulkner you'll never finish," and when she apologizes for bumping into someone, he reads her as "embarrassed to be a good girl." While the cinematography framing Beck, breaking her into pieces and lingering on her body, is quite conventional for mainstream media, Joe's narration draws attention to the role of the male gaze in shaping what the viewer sees. This is not simply the omniscient camera with which the viewer is straightforwardly aligned, but a viewpoint with a particular—and particularly misogynistic—psychology. Hinting that Joe's visual and figurative framing of Beck is determined and limited by what he desires to be true, Joe interprets Beck using her credit card to pay for a book as evidence that "You want me to know your name."

Of course, Beck may well be using a credit card because that is the dominant form of payment for an urban millennial, but Joe sees only permission to pursue more and more information about Beck. Specifically, his use of technology to do so aligns him with the forms of data collection on which individualized algorithmic address relies. Joe begins his pursuit with a basic Google search, which quickly turns up Beck's social media profiles. He observes, "Every account set to public. You want to be seen, heard, known. Of course, I obliged." Through social media, Joe maps her family tree and socioeconomic background, fills in the details of her social life through her friends' profiles, and locates her address. *You* both visually and narratively conveys an ambiguous distinction between the digital information and the real world. A closeup on Joe's computer screen and the "street view" of Beck's house morphs into a direct shot of her house, as Joe arrives to watch her through the window. As Joe is looking at a video of Beck's friends on her social media, the camera pulls back to reveal a smartphone framing the shot, and a

reverse shot of Beck checking the video on her phone. When Joe steals Beck's phone after they have another encounter and discovers that it is still logged in to the cloud, he remarks "that means I'm still logged in to you." *You* insists on the real-world consequences of Joe's digital surveillance, creating tension around the initially-ambiguous threat Joe poses to Beck.

Joe, of course, sees his surveillance as a form of care, enabling him to anticipate and fulfill Beck's needs. And like any good targeting algorithm, Joe's surveillance gets it right sometimes: he offers a trip to shop for furniture just when she is in need of a new bed frame, as Instagram knows just when I need a new pair of sunglasses. Joe also frames himself as protecting Beck from bad actors and her own bad choices. He observes, "you fall for bad men," and sets out to offer himself as their replacement. When he watches her changing from outside her window he complains, "it's like you've never seen a horror movie or the news." As he explores her stolen phone, he asserts, "I will always make sure you password-protect your devices." He promises to cook for her and make the bed after breaking into her house to learn more about her while she is out. He worries, "What if some sicko had followed you down here?" when he encounters her drunk in a subway station after following her to a bar. The irony of Joe posing the threat he proclaims to want to protect her from is presented without subtlety. But perhaps more subtly, this irony evokes the contradiction of relying on digital security tools to protect oneself from security breaches. Those same services that offer to protect privacy rely on its violation.

Even as the series takes seriously the material effects of surveillance, it complicates the nature of the "reality" to which surveillance grants access. As Joe clicks through and scans the web to assemble his own personal profile of Beck, the camera engages an aesthetic of hypermediacy, representing Joe's own hypermediated experience. In *Remediation*, David Bolter and Richard Grusin argue that one of the ways that "old" media incorporates the logic and

aesthetic of new media is through hypermediacy. They write, "the logic of hypermediacy acknowledges multiple acts of representation and makes them visible… Contemporary hypermediacy offers a heterogeneous space, in which representation is conceived of not as a window on to the world, but rather as 'windowed' itself—with windows that open on to other representations or other media."[27] *You* frequently engages a hypermediated aesthetic, and here, Joe's computer screen fills the Netflix viewer's screen. The camera scans Beck's social media profiles, implying Joe's point of view; as the feed scrolls and stops, the camera zooms in on particular details, and digital annotations appear over certain words or images, as Joe mentally circles a name and labels it as "sister," for instance. An extreme closeup of Joe's eye reflecting the screen constitutes the reverse shot to the computer, and when the camera cuts to a wider profile shot of Joe sitting at his desk, a faded image of his computer screen appears above him. No matter which way the camera turns, Joe's active digital navigation dominates our view.

What Joe finds in his social media stalking session evokes Bolter and Grusin's description of windows that open on to other representations. While surveilling Beck does grant Joe a dangerous level of access to her life, the series simultaneously questions what exactly Joe is seeing. As he scans her photo feed, the camera lingering here and there on an ice cream closeup or yoga pose, Joe narrates, "Your online life isn't real. It's a collage. You paste this Beck up, this together, cute, lovable, bendy, creature." Joe accesses a representation of Beck, a persona she has created, not the person herself. At first he is dismayed to find that she did not mention him in her post about the book he recommended to her, but quickly decides that *not* posting

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[27] David Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), 33-34.

about him means that their connection is more *real*. Joe insists on the inauthenticity of social media and online life, and the authenticity of their connection.

But Joe is not satisfied by the realization of multiple Becks, and becomes obsessed with knowing and coaxing out the "real," most "authentic" Beck. He says that he finds Beck's commitment to social media to be "the least appealing thing" about her, and it seems that only he is capable of recognizing and loving the real her. Observing her in-person, he claims, "Your social media's a liar. It says you're a happy-go-lucky dilettante. But underneath it all, you seem like the genuine article." His dismissive and hostile attitude toward her social media presence reflects a broader misogyny toward women's self-presentation practices, deemed narcissistic or self-objectifying—a misogyny that claims to be progressive for judging women who submit to patriarchal norms of self-presentation. Joe uses this belief that there is more to Beck than what can be seen online to justify his bad behavior. He breaks into her home, saying "I just need to know who you really are," to protect himself from falling in love with someone who is not worth it. His commitment to bringing out the "real" Beck includes murdering her friends who represent, for Joe, the forces that trap her in a particular classed and gendered persona. When Joe has Beck's ex-boyfriend Benji trapped in his basement cage, Benji tells him, "She's branded the living shit out of herself across the internet… That's her thing." Joe then wonders, "Which Beck are you? The one I see or the one Benji does?" Spending time with Beck convinces Joe that he is right about the authentic her, which prompts Joe to kill Benji as he accuses him, "You cast her in a role that isn't her, and you trap her in it."

Of course, the series implies, that is exactly what Joe does, too. The version of Beck that Joe deems the "real" one may represent some facets of her, but it is also a fantasy constructed by Joe to exclude those facets he deems unappealing. Joe wants Beck only to be one thing, that is

fully accessible to him, rather than many things at once. His framing of this conflict reveals a tension in what digital surveillance can provide. He both uses digital surveillance to know her, and critiques the inauthenticity of digital representation. But he uses information about her gathered through surveillance to coax her into consistently performing his ideal version of her. His insistence on Beck being her "real" self is actually an insistence on a "static," predictable self. In *The Burden of Choice: Recommendations, Subversion, and Algorithmic Culture*, Jonathan Cohn argues that recommendation algorithms create a feeling of choice while actually limiting choices, working to make users more static and predictable.[28] Algorithmic surveillance produces recommendations that encourage users to make choices that "better fit in with those the system recognizes as being like them."[29] Like Joe, tech companies might insist that surveillance-based recommendations offer ways to become a better version of yourself, but in fact they offer ways to be accessible and appealing to corporations.[30] Cohn writes, "As a disciplinary tool of interpellation, recommendation technologies encourage users to adopt a lifestyle built on a static sense of self that is practiced through unchanging patterns in their daily lives."[31] Joe similarly wants complete access to Beck. Joe might proclaim to want to see the "real" beneath the hypermediated performance, but his alignment with the tactics of individualized, digital surveillance reveal his true investment to be in unlimited access and control. Joe aims to align the real woman Beck with the version of Beck he has concocted as a fantasy by eradicating all the many versions of her that exist.

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[28] Jonathan Cohn, *The Burden of Choice: Recommendations, Subversion, and Algorithmic Culture* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2019), 70.
[29] Cohn, *The Burden of Choice*, 7.
[30] Cohn, *The Burden of Choice*, 21.
[31] Cohn, *The Burden of Choice*, 67.

Beyond Joe's misguided and misogynistic desires, the series further complicates whether there is any meaningful distinction between a hypermediated image or performance and reality. Significantly, the existence of multiple Becks is directly related to the strategies Beck uses to negotiate the multiple frames of reference imposed on her, often by men with various forms of power. Those particular frames and her tactics of negotiation are shaped by her identity as a conventionally-attractive, young, white woman. The terms of her visibility would be markedly different if she faced interlocking oppressions, though the need to negotiate would very likely persist and heighten. An early scene in which Beck anxiously pleads with her older male MFA advisor to keep her funding formally demonstrates the kind of shifts Beck uses to negotiate how others view her. The scene begins in a traditional shot/reverse-shot sequence across her professor's desk as she explains that she has been working too much to turn in the twenty pages of writing she owes him. He suggests going down to part time if she cannot handle the workload, but she explains that she would no longer qualify for her teaching assistantship, and promises with desperation in her voice that she will get him the pages by the end of the week. He tells her that he would be happy to discuss further "after class some evening." The camera is on Beck's face as he starts to say "If we're going to seriously discuss poetry it should be over a drink…." A piano note marks the introduction of a low, ominous score, signaling her recognition of a change in the nature of their conversation. When the camera cuts back to the reverse-shot of the advisor, the angle and lens has changed to a wider angle and shallow focus, the rest of the office behind him out of focus. The subsequent reverse-shot close-up of Beck mirrors the changes—both images now distorted from the more traditionally realist style of the earlier part of the conversation. The framing conveys a new, unsettling dynamic in the conversation. Beck maintains a friendly smile throughout, though her gentle mention of his wife reveals her attempt

to steer the conversation away from a private meeting. Her eventual cheerful assent demonstrates Beck actively calibrating her performance of the role he has cast her in. She negotiates her own need to protect her career by protecting his ego, while keeping herself safe. Her performance of femininity in this encounter may be "inauthentic," but her ability to create and shift between particular versions of herself becomes a feminine tactic of negotiation of patriarchal power.

The series also explicitly links the affordances of social media to feminist resistance. Out at drinks with her professor, Beck lightly flirts her way through conversation though actress Lail conveys the discomfort underlying her performance. However, when the professor touches her leg beneath the table while suggesting that they "acknowledge what there is here," she violently jumps from her seat and tells him angrily, "Don't touch me." He quickly switches gears, letting his own performative veneer fall, and hissingly tells her "You invited me… you flirt brazenly, you wear clothes so sheer I can see your nipples." Despite her protestations, he continues, "If you want to stay on the safe side of the plausible deniability zone, cover your tits, stop the blowjob eyes, and write better," and tells her he is pulling her teaching assistantship. His hostile reaction reveals the misogyny just beneath the surface of his attraction, just as her panicked response reveals the fear shaping her own negotiation of the situation. Beck later goes to his office to plead with him to reconsider. When he refuses, she goes to the door of his office, closing it instead of leaving. Still facing the door, she breathily says, "I guess I'm realizing I have no choice…." It seems at first that she is going to give in to his advances, to leverage her sexuality to maintain her financial position. But she turns around, as an ominous tone in the music signals a new dynamic to the scene, and continues, "...but to share this." She holds up her phone displaying a short amount of text. The professor asks what it is, and she responds, "Well it can fit in one Tweet. A list of six women who have a story about you… What's the term again?

Harassment or misconduct?" She explains that they did not want to come forward initially but realized that "it's harder to dismiss seven women with the same story." He calls her a liar and insists that she will ruin her career by falsely accusing him, but she responds confidently, "You're trying to call my bluff, but I'm not bluffing." Her emphasis on the length of a Tweet speaks to its disproportionate reach and influence. The spreadability of a social media post constitutes the threat to the professor's position of power. She says that the women were "not hard to find," likely indicating social media's role in bringing together their shared stories, that become harder to ignore when joined together. The reference to bluffing brings to the surface the roles they have been performing with each other, and social media has played a role in producing her "authentic" act of resistance.

The series thus depicts social media as one tool in the processes of negotiating the various roles in which women are cast. The series builds on the threat posed by Beck's professor in the pilot episode, and ultimately, in the series finale, Joe's attempt to contain Beck within a role becomes literal, and Beck must negotiate the box that Joe has put her in. After Beck discovers Joe's many crimes, Joe traps her in a glass cage while he decides what to do. Her survival depends on convincing him that she authentically fits the fantasy he has created of her, that she can appreciate all of the things (i.e. stalking and murdering) he has done for her. Even providing him with an alternative version of events that exonerates him, she performs the version of "you" that Joe has been "seeing" all along. When Joe arrives back in the basement where he has imprisoned Beck, she shows him pages she has written on the typewriter he provided her. She desperately implores him to read, though he hesitates when he sees that it is about her affair with her therapist. He asks what it is, and she answers manically, "It's the story of everything that happened, once I started having an affair with my therapist." She crafts a narrative that

explains all the murders, offering a plan to frame her therapist for all of Joe's crimes. She offers this reframing as Joe's "way out."

While the viewer understands that Beck is pleading for her life, looking for any way out alive, she convincingly performs a change of heart. She tells him, "I get it now." "What?" he asks. She responds pleadingly, "You. You did everything… for me. No one has ever loved me the way that you love me. I mean, you gave me everything. Let me give this to you." At first in this shot/reverse-shot exchange, the closeups of Joe frame him off-center, on the left side of the screen. Beck is centered, more traditionally, in her shots, indicating a disconnect between them. The viewer may still understand that the two are looking at each other, but something is off-balance or out of step. He begins to walk over to her as she continues to emphasize her newfound understanding and appreciation for him, and even for the "time to think" provided by being locked in his cage. As he approaches the glass, the shots of Joe become over-the-shoulder shots; he has entered her frame just as he has been taken in by her constructed frame of reference, her framing of their love story. She tells him, "You take care of me. And no one has ever taken care of me before," and he responds "That's all I've ever wanted to do." His response reveals the extent to which Beck has learned the framing through which *Joe* has been seeing her, himself, and their relationship. He seems fully taken in when she finally concludes, "I know I am better with you than without you, as he whispers her name and leans in to the glass. She lets out a brief soft and sensuous moan, and tells him "If you were in here, this would be our moment to kiss, as like the music swells and everything."

It is in this moment that Beck reveals that she understands Joe's framing of their relationship to be that provided by the romance genre. Just as he saw getting stuck in the shower while breaking-and-entering into her apartment as a comedic mishap characteristic of a romantic

comedy, this moment is the romantic climax in which the couple can finally reveal the truth of who they are, and love overcomes any silly deceptions along the way. On the soundtrack, a quiet solo violin plays a melancholic melody that hints at the possibility of a soaring climax to come. Beck gently reassures Joe, "I know you don't trust me enough yet," as she moves away from the glass. But she seems to pull him with her, as he slowly moves toward the door of the cage, enraptured, and he goes inside for a triumphant kiss. The music, however, quickly signals that the romance genre is not the right framing for this moment, as the melody turns sinister. This romance is a horror film.

Their climactic end unfolds quickly, as Joe notices that Beck has removed a key from her typewriter, that she surreptitiously takes from her pocket and the long sharp end of which she uses to stab Joe in the side. As the viewer likely suspected, Beck was performing the version of herself that Joe had constructed, in order to save her life. After stabbing him, she quickly rushes from the cage, and locks him inside with the keys he left in the lock. As she hurries to the stairs out of the basement, he pleads with her to stay: "I know you're angry." His claim sets something off in her, as she turns around angrily and yells, "You have no idea what I am." Significantly, what incites her to stay is Joe's misidentification of her and her need to insist on his error. She proceeds to berate him for the insanity of his justification of his actions, to explain how wrong he has been. Specifically, she identifies the dangerous misogyny of his frame for understanding their relationship, that extends beyond her. She tells him, "You know what I think? I think that this was all just an excuse. An excuse to justify creeping into girls' lives and violating the shit out of them. I think you love it. The power." She immediately understands his imposed framing to be based in a larger attachment to gendered power, and that is the framing she has been forced

to negotiate. The series depicts Beck's tactics of shifting between selves as a feminine practice of survival under patriarchy—even if they don't always succeed.

You is not only attentive to these practices in its narrative, but constructs a spectatorial practice of negotiation and shifting in and out of subject positions through the formal address it enacts. And this practice is particularly aligned with the algorithmic address of streaming media. Media scholars have pointed to *House of Cards* (2013-2018), Netflix's first original series, as emblematic of streaming's individually targeted approach. In addition to creating advertising geared toward specific demographics (some trailers featured female lead Robin Wright more heavily to appeal to women viewers), the series features Kevin Spacey as the lead character speaking directly to the camera, or in other words, to the viewer. In *What Algorithms Want*, Ed Finn argues that *House of Cards* embodies the algorithmic "ideal of personalization" through the lead character's fourth-wall-breaking narration.[32] He suggests that, "Like Netflix itself, [the protagonist's] core audience is you, the individual viewer with whom he makes regular eye contact."[33] In *You,* Joe, of course, also speaks to "you" in his narration, but significantly, Joe's "you" is not addressing me—it is addressing Beck. From the opening moments in which Joe's voice speaks to "you," I, the viewer, have to work to identify with his idea of Beck, if and when I want to. Joe's "you" never quite fits me, just as it never quite fits Beck. While *House of Cards* may embody the *ideal* of algorithmic address, *You* reveals more about its imperfect reality. That algorithmic "you" will never *quite* fit.

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[32] Ed Finn, *What Algorithms Want: Imagination in the Age of Computing* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2017), 107.
[33] Finn, 106.

The series plays with the flexibility of the second person "you" address, highlighting the complex ways that viewers move in and out of identifications. Multiple times in the season, Beck speaks in the second person, in a voiceover of her internal monologue and in the poetry and writing that she diegetically narrates. In the pilot episode, Beck rather mortifyingly reads aloud a poem at an open-mic night. It begins, "One day, you won't need love anymore," and her reading concludes, "You loved him the way fragile kids love gorgeous bullies. You wrote poems about him. You still write poems about him. You're writing one right now." A heckler interrupts, and the discomfort of the crowd causes Joe, who has secretly followed Beck to this bar, to leave. He thinks on his way out, "It's obvious what you are. You're blind with love. And what you love—writing, this city, your friends, most of all, men like Benji—what all those have in common is they will never love you back." The specific nature of the kind of shifting "you" can do is complicated here. Both her and his uses of "you" refer to Beck, but there is a kind of multiplicity to the referent. Beck's use of second person in the poem comes across as a personal reflection—talking to herself—that puts the listener (or television viewer) in her place. The viewer is asked to imagine the feeling of Beck's experience, even as we recognize that it is an act of self-reflection. The quick switch to Joe's use of "you" in his narration heightens the feeling of having to navigate and negotiate the shifting nature of these forms of address. Primarily, it is immediately evident that Joe is speaking in cliches. While Beck's poem may have some of its own cliches, the scene conveys both her sincerity and her creative potential in spite of the awkwardness of any open mic night. Joe, on the other hand, reduces her poetry and her performance to a problem that only he can solve, by providing the love she really seeks. Within this scene, the viewer is hailed to shift into and out of not quite different subject positions, but

different versions of the same subject position, causing her to feel the difference in fit between them.

This effect is heightened in the opening of the fourth episode of the season, "The Captain," when the viewer is surprised by Beck's inner monologue taking over narrational duties from Joe. The episode opens just as Joe has reached orgasm eight seconds into their first sexual encounter. He rolls off of her, and the two of them stare awkwardly up at the ceiling. As she narrates her discomfort, she strikingly speaks to herself in the second person, as in the poem, simultaneously contrasting and aligning with Joe's narration. Trying to motivate herself to break the uncomfortable silence, she says in voiceover, "Say something. Say, 'Happens all the time. NBD.' No, you'll sound like a slut." Here her use of "you" to refer to herself emphasizes her active negotiation of how Joe perceives her and the potential distance between her internal self and what she does and how she appears externally. Although Joe's narration takes back over the episode about halfway through, flashing back to the beginning of the episode but from his perspective, getting to be inside Beck's mind highlights the differences between Joe's perception of Beck's experience and the far more complex version she narrates.

Beck's use of the second person to refer to herself in her narration marks a pointed difference between her and Joe that carries a gendered connotation. In the season finale, when Beck is trapped in Joe's cage with a typewriter, she turns to writing to deal with the traumatic crisis she is facing. As her voiceover narrates her words, she writes in the second person about learning fairy tales of men's violence and love—"the corpses of Bluebeard's wives" and "Prince Charming" placing a glass slipper on your foot. She narrates realizing that, because of her lower class status, she cannot be the princess in the fairy tales, but nevertheless, "The stories were in you, deep as poison." She describes her lingering desire for Prince Charming to save her, but her

longing for him is only answered with quotidian forms of misogyny: “The sneer on Stevie Smith’s face when he called you a fat cow. Uncle Jeff’s hand squeezing your ass in the Thanksgiving kitchen. The accusation in your father’s eyes when you told him what happened.” As she reflects on the violent form of salvation that Joe has offered—Bluebeard and Prince Charming at once—she asks, “Didn’t you ask for it?” again and again. This question echoes the common accusation thrown at women who are victims of men’s violence. Her use of “you” in this near-final scene interpellates all women who experience gendered violation and violence, and who negotiate their own experiences with the stories they have been told. In contrast to Joe’s use of “you” to limit the person whom he addresses, to contain her within the profile that suits his own desires, Beck’s “you” referring to herself in fact reaches outward to create empathy for shared experiences. This moment of Beck’s writing and narration is only a short sequence within an episode dominated by Joe’s narration and violent assault on her. The series is, of course, *about* masculine violence and objectification through technological surveillance and control. But it gestures toward alternative forms of address that center feminized ways of looking while producing a spectatorial experience of confronting multiple and sometimes contradicting subject positions. *You* thus simultaneously embraces and undermines the nature of algorithmic address by mobilizing a feminine spectatorial practice of negotiation. I shift in and out of those “you” positions—Joe’s, Beck’s and Netflix’s—and my identifications, desires, and resistance are not limited to any one direction or contained by any singular profile. By incorporating that dynamic, contemporary women’s television grapples with the new forms of power deployed by streaming technology that blurs the distinction between watching and being watched.

Conclusion

During the brief period when Joe and Beck are happily dating, Joe appears despondent while hanging out with Beck's group of friends. He narrates what their life together is like, saying sarcastically, "For some reason, we share our nights with your friends and appointment viewing like *The Bachelor.* How can self-respecting women tolerate this crap? Sometimes I swear I'm the only real feminist you know." He sits apart from the group of women, watching them, as they happily drink wine and chat about finding a happy medium between brazilian and "full bush." In the context of Joe's stalking and murdering, his claim to be a feminist is, genuinely, laughable. The series draws the viewer's attention to his misidentification of the politics of his viewing habits. But *You* is also having fun with the idea that the viewer might *agree* with Joe. We, the Lifetime or Netflix viewers, might, too, have had a moment of judging young women (these or others) for loving *The Bachelor*, or for debating their pubic grooming habits in conversation with patriarchal standards of beauty. But by putting that opinion in Joe's voice, the series calls out that view without arguing its opposite. *Bachelor* fandom, and perhaps feminized spectatorship more generally, does not make *or* break a feminist—a point that *UnREAL*, at its best, also knows.

Interestingly, Joe calls attention to the specific form of *Bachelor* consumption: appointment viewing. To extrapolate from this construction, broadcast television becomes the bad object in contrast to the more intellectual, or even more feminist, model of binge watching or time-shifting. *The Bachelor* represents both outdated values and an outdated model of television spectatorship. *UnREAL* also grapples with this idea—throughout the series, new (often young, male) producers are brought in to revitalize *Everlasting*, often referring to new styles of digital storytelling or using algorithms to make programming decisions that often cater more to male audiences than the traditionally female audiences of the broadcast series. Neither series quite

develops a coherent point of view on the nature of these distinctions in distribution. But both seem to tie feminized forms of television viewership to an older, waning model of distribution and spectatorship.

While simultaneously distancing themselves from traditional women's genres like the rom-com and reality TV romance, *You* and *UnREAL* offer forms of feminized spectatorial address distinctly shaped by digital technologies. They incorporate new ways that technology users and television viewers (who are one and the same) navigate and negotiate the ubiquity of mediated visibility, interactivity, and individualized algorithmic address. Women's genres have long attended to the power dynamics of watching and being watched, and these series in particular offer frames for navigating the intersection of television and digital media in all its gendered complexity.

Chapter Four

Worst Case Scenario: Sexual Selfies and Everyday Exposure in Teen TV

In the first season of HBO's hit teen drama *Euphoria,* Jules (Hunter Schafer), a queer trans girl, meets a boy online. Jules makes a practice of using dating apps to meet men for a hook-up, but she and Tyler, or ShyGuy118, really connect. They develop an intimate relationship through texting, and Jules decides to send him nudes. She enlists her best friend Rue (Zendaya), who has a crush on Jules, to help her take photos that look like selfies, but have the aesthetic benefit of a separate photographer. She poses in her pink underwear and bra, asking Rue if she looks hot. The photoshoot is a sweet and playful moment in their relationship, charged with Rue's desire for Jules. There is a potent physical intimacy between the two girls, as Rue adjusts Jules's bra or Jules gently tackles Rue onto the bed and affectionately kisses her face in excitement over Rue's two weeks of sobriety. Taking the photos together is itself an expression of erotic intimacy enjoyed by both girls, in addition to an act of sexual intimacy with Tyler.

After exchanging photos, Jules and Tyler arrange to meet. However, Jules discovers what the audience has known all along. "Tyler" is really Nate (Jacob Elordi), a violent bully, who has been catfishing Jules after finding out that she had sex with his father, whom she met anonymously on an app. They meet at night in an empty, atmospheric park, and when Jules expresses her disgust at his deception and true identity, he aggressively threatens to turn her into the police for producing and distributing child pornography unless she keeps quiet about his family. In low-key lighting that holds much of his angular face in shadow, he tells her that he will turn the photos in to the police along with "an IP address and an account that's linked to your name." The dark, striking close-ups heighten the sense of danger he poses. She tries to

stand up for herself, but he presses forward: "You'd end up on a sex offenders list. It means no more college. It's gonna be very fucking difficult to find a job. And everywhere you go, for the rest of your life, you'll be harassed and spat at and treated like a fucking animal."

Nate paints a bleak picture of life after sexting. His almost laughably over-dramatic monologue aligns with the show's nihilistic perspective on teen life.[1] The two scenes together, however, encapsulate two competing discourses available to young women in understanding their own sexual selfies, which I refer to as the safe sexting and moral panic discourses. In the former, girls are positioned as desiring subjects consensually engaged in the production of their own eroticized image, even as it acknowledges the very-real risks. This discourse approaches young women's sexuality, and their desire and choice to participate in acts of sexual intimacy like sexting, as normal rather than scandalous, exceptional, or devaluing. It does not deny that misogyny, patriarchal norms, and other forms of oppression shape the consequences of engaging in digital (or in-person) sexual activity, but insists on not letting those systems determine or erase the possibility of everyday, consensual sexual pleasure. In moral panic discourse, young people, especially girls, sharing sexual images of themselves is a crisis, to be solved through laws and norms that prohibit youth sexting and other sexualized exposure. Whether centered around the "narcissism" of selfie culture or the potential of leaked nudes to "ruin" a girl's life, such anxieties reveal investments in traditional notions of privacy historically formed around the protection of white femininity.[2] From this perspective, girls' visible sexuality itself is a scandal

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[1] Judy Berman, "In HBO's Bleak Gen Z Drama, *Euphoria* is the Opposite of Happiness," *Time*, June 13, 2019, https://time.com/5606243/euphoria-zendaya-tv-show-review/.
[2] Eden Osucha, "The Whiteness of Privacy: Race, Media, Law," *Camera Obscura* 24, no. 1 (May 2009): 67-107.

or even a crime, and the questions of consent and privacy, and what constitutes their violation, are effaced entirely.[3] As dramatic as it sounds on *Euphoria*, Nate's account of what will happen to Jules is not that dissimilar to what young people today hear from adults, educators, and media in their lives.

These two competing discourses reflect alternative orientations toward technology's upending of norms of privacy. Sexual selfies constitute one common practice of contemporary social media culture, which encompasses shifting notions of the encouraged/enforced publicity of everyday life. But what happens when this culture of publicity collides with protectionist discourse of (certain) young women's sexuality? To what extent are girls policed and punished according to standards of privacy and publicity that are discordant with social media culture and digital technology itself? And rather than seeing both girls' sexuality and digital exposure as scandalous, what would happen if we embraced technology's logic of everyday exposure in tandem with the everydayness of young women's sexuality?[4]

This dissertation has foregrounded the idea that women's television genres incorporate and respond to new technologies that reshape the nature of privacy, surveillance, and

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[3] Amy Adele Hasinoff, *Sexting Panic: Rethinking Criminalization, Privacy, and Consent*. (Urbana, IL: U of Illinois Press, 2015).

[4] I use the terms "girls" and "young women" interchangeably throughout this chapter to refer generally to adolescent/teenage girls. I do not use the term "child" to talk about sexuality except when referring to child pornography laws applied to teen sexting, which often do not meaningfully distinguish between pre-adolescent and adolescent youth, or between consensual and non-consensual image production and distribution among adolescents. This chapter aims to discuss a particular period of life when most girls experience sexual desire but are often not legally or socially "allowed" to participate in sexual activity openly. It does not address the sexual coercion or abuse of minors of any age by adults. Focusing on adolescent girls, on whom much social anxiety is concentrated, illuminates more dramatically social norms that, to varying degrees, apply to all women.

spectatorship in tandem. This idea is especially true for the women's subgenre of teen television, which attempts to reflect young audiences' experiences of technology as well as their value systems. This chapter examines teen TV series to consider one of the ways that digital social media fundamentally undermine traditional gendered norms of privacy. I analyze how teen series formally and narratively depict girls' sexting and sexual photo leaks, phenomena that embody multiple ways that technology disrupts public/private and subject/object binaries. I argue that teen TV series negotiate moral panic and safe sexting discourse. While still sometimes engaging a language of scandal and "ruin" for girls who are exposed, teen TV fundamentally incorporates the exposure and vulnerability built into everyday technological interactions, what Wendy Chun and Sarah Friedland term the "leakiness" of networked technologies.[5] In doing so, teen TV actively grapples with technology's complicated dynamics of consent and privacy, and with how new forms of technological self-imaging and exposure shape and are shaped by young women's sexual subjectivity. In contrast to the girls invoked as passive, malleable consumers in commercials for parental control technologies discussed in Chapter One, the young women featured in this chapter are depicted as active users of technology, and often, agents in the creation of their own image. But like the series discussed throughout this dissertation, the teen TV series explored here foreground feminized experiences of visibility and technology, and thus shed light on the ways young women navigate and negotiate the conflicts that arise between traditional gender norms and the alternative logics of visibility produced by new technologies.

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[5] Wendy Hui Kyong Chun and Sarah Friedland, "Habits of Leaking: Of Sluts and Network Cards," *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 26.2 (2015).

This chapter will begin by mapping the competing discourses around sexting as they are described in digital media scholarship and as they appear in teen magazines and media coverage of photo leak scandals. I will then analyze examples of sexual photo leak narratives on popular teen television series spanning broadcast, cable, and streaming. I demonstrate that teen television largely remains trapped in the tension between the everydayness of technological exposure and the scandal of exposure of girls' sexuality, between safe sexting and moral panic discourses. While some series selectively mobilize consent and the ostensible protection of girls' privacy to reinforce normative limitations on girls' sexual exposure, others explicitly or implicitly bring to the surface the role of identity and privilege in shaping the effects of exposure. I find that most series largely elide the racial dynamics at play through colorblind storytelling, mobilizing the exposure of racially-ambiguous, "light brown" girls of color in ways that ultimately protect the hegemony of white femininity—its sexual innocence and right to privacy at once. Thus, even as teen TV creates space for the everydayness of girls' sexuality by embracing the everydayness of technological exposure, it often reproduces logics that enforce normativity. However, teen TV does begin to offer alternative discourses of young women's sexual selfies that are aligned with the social and technological realities of digital culture, and which girls can mobilize to deconstruct exclusionary norms of privacy and visibility.

Everyday Exposure and Safe Sexting Discourse

Teen TV series exist within and respond to broader cultural discourses about social media culture and girls' troublesome place within it. The integration of social media technology and practices into TV narratives incorporates what cultural sociologist Joshua Gamson describes as the "increased expectation that we are being watched, a growing willingness to offer up private

parts of the self to watchers known and unknown, and a hovering sense that perhaps the unwatched life is invalid or insufficient."[6] Self-exposure is part of the everyday worlds of teen television. Social media scholar Alice Marwick similarly emphasizes a widespread culture of publicity and self-imposed visibility. She suggests that young people in particular pursue self-presentation practices in light of an "attention economy" that assigns "value according to something's capacity to attract 'eyeballs' in a media-saturated, information-rich world."[7] Digital technology and social media interfaces further entrench the value and necessity of self-exposure: "The ability to replicate digital photographs, the integration of cameras into mobile phones, and the popularity of sites like Flickr, Imgur, Facebook, and Instagram facilitate and encourage sharing photos with others… Comments, likes, and 'shares' function as social currency and social reinforcement."[8] While the cultural and technological induction to share certainly applies to male and female users alike, self-presentation practices are distinctly gendered. One seventeen-year-old tells *Teen Vogue*, "I think there is a lot of pressure put on girls these days to show themselves off."[9] Social media culture demands and rewards feminized, female self-exposure—specifically that which affirms conformity to normative standards of racialized femininity.

As the teen series discussed below demonstrate, it is possible to acknowledge the disciplinary power of social media cultures of visibility while maintaining space for girls' selfies

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[6] Joshua Gamson, "The Unwatched Life Is Not Worth Living: The Elevation of the Ordinary in Celebrity Culture," *PMLA* 126.4 (2011): 1068.
[7] Alice Marwick, "Instafame: Luxury Selfies in the Attention Economy," *Public Culture* 27.1 (2015): 138.
[8] Marwick, "Instafame," 142.
[9] Elizabeth Kiefer, "Is Sexting Actually Sexist? New Research Says So But What Do You Think?" *Teen Vogue,* July 22, 2014, https://www.teenvogue.com/story/sexist-sexting,

as an everyday practice of digital, sexual expression in which all kinds of girls can participate enthusiastically. Progressive teen magazines, like *Rookie* and *Teen Vogue*, embrace a youth culture of self-exposure, acknowledging its risks and pleasures. From instructions on how to sext, to readers' accounts of leaked nudes, teen magazine stories frequently counter slut-shaming discourses by acknowledging sexting as a common, acceptable expression of sexuality. By asserting that public exposure itself is nothing for girls to be ashamed of, they discursively protect girls' right to privacy as well as their ability to consent to their own exposure. The safe sexting discourse in progressive teen magazines insists on setting clearer boundaries around girls' privacy and consent as part of building a culture of respect and ethical sexual interaction, rather than insisting on the invisibility of sexuality as a tactic to protect oneself from misogyny or violence.

Since the mid-twentieth century, teen girl magazines have played a major role in the construction of young women as a consumer market and in reflecting and shaping norms of femininity. Publications like *Seventeen*, which was created in 1944, were designed not to speak down to their readers, but to address them as young adults and citizens with unique needs and experiences.[10] Attention to fashion, cosmetics, and romance has always existed alongside engagement with social and political issues. Historically, such magazines have addressed and promoted white, middle-class, traditionally-feminine identity, but readerships have become more diverse over the years and content has shifted to reflect contemporary issues and politics.[11] Teen

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[10] Kelley Massoni, "'Teena Goes to Market': Seventeen Magazine and the Early Construction of the Teen Girl (as) Consumer," *The Journal of American Culture* 29, no. 1 (2006): 31-42.
[11] Kelly Schrum, "Seventeen," in *Girl Culture: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Jacqueline Reid-Walsh and Claudia Mitchell (Westport, Conn: Greenwood, 2008).

girl magazines thus constitute an important discourse available to girls to make sense of and find solidarity in their everyday lives. While more conservative values concerning girls' sexuality do persist in many mainstream publications, magazines like *Teen Vogue* (first published in 2003) and *Rookie* (2011-2018) explicitly embrace progressive and intersectional feminist politics. *Teen Vogue* has been lauded in popular press and scholarly publications for addressing young women as political activists,[12] while *Rookie* was created by then-fifteen-year-old Tavi Gevinson and featured the work of teen girl contributors.[13] Articles from these magazines offer insight into the ways that girls are equipped to negotiate the competing and contradictory value systems that shape the experience of sending sexual selfies.

Teen Vogue and *Rookie* offer an open discourse of girls' sexual selfies, embracing their everydayness without downplaying their risks. Articles on sexting offer non-judgmental instructions and advice, starting from the assumption that sexting is a basic part of young people's digital practices. A *Rookie* article titled "Sext Education" refers to sexting in playful, tongue-in-cheek internet slang.[14] The author's references to "TEEN SEXTIN'," "NUDEPIxXx," and "*sexii pix ;p*" make the practice into a casual joke, something readers have a common (and ironic) language to discuss. *Teen Vogue* titles such as "Sexting: What You Need to Know About

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[12] Jessalynn Keller, "A Politics of Snap: *Teen Vogue*'s Public Feminism," *Signs* 45, no. 4 (2020): 817-843; Natalie Coulter and Kristine Moruzi, "Woke girls: from *The Girl's Realm* to *Teen Vogue*," *Feminist Media Studies* (March 30, 2020): 1-15.
[13] Jaclyn Peiser, "Rookie Cataloged a Generation of Girlhood," *New York Times*, December 13, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/13/style/rookie-tavi-gevinson.html.
[14] Hazel Cills, "Sext Education," *Rookie,* March 31, 2015, https://www.rookiemag.com/2015/03/sext-education/.

Sending Nudes"[15] and "How to Sext: The Best Tips and Tricks"[16] similarly focus on providing information to facilitate safe sexting, not dissuading their readers from it.

Such articles not only embrace the everydayness of sexting, they highlight (without overdramatizing) the everydayness of their unintentional exposure. "Sext Education" begins, "you really don't need a study to tell you what you already know: Taking and sending nudes is common. Unfortunately, so is having them leak."[17] Emily Lindin of *Teen Vogue* tells readers worrying about pictures they have already sent, "Don't freak out. From one person who has sent nudes in the past (yup!) to another, let me tell you: It's not the end of the world. Whatever happens, even in the worst-case scenario, the only mistake you are responsible for is that you trusted the wrong person."[18] The only scandal here is when girls' consent is violated. When exposure itself does not constitute scandal, there is more room left to acknowledge girls' ability to consent and to identify what actually constitutes its violation.

The reader story presented in *Rookie*'s "Sext Education" demonstrates that treating girls' nude photos as everyday expressions of sexual agency throws into relief the complexities of consent and privacy in a social and technological culture of exposure.[19] Cills asks "what happens to you socially if your nudes become public property? Does it, in fact, RUIN YOUR LIFE AND REPUTATION FOREVER?" The dramatic capitalization implies the article's ironic approach toward such an attitude, even as it takes seriously the potential trauma of a leak. The article

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[15] Emily Lindin, "Sexting: What You Need to Know About Sending Nudes," *Teen Vogue,* July 15, 2016, https://www.teenvogue.com/story/sexting-nude-photos-slut-shaming.
[16] Lily Puckett, "How to Sext: The Best Tips and Tricks," *Teen Vogue*, April 13, 2017, https://www.teenvogue.com/story/how-to-sext.
[17] Cills, "Sext Education."
[18] Lindin, "Sexting."
[19] Cills, "Sext Education."

shares the story of Laura, whose nude photos leaked when she was 18 years old. The pictures were taken consensually "at a house party. She thought only a few people had access to them, but realized that they were being shared outside of her comfort zone." The language here emphasizes the issues of comfort and consent, not rigid boundaries of privacy. Not initially a source of humiliation, her photos were intended to be shared with a small group of people. Laura says that the source of her anger and humiliation was "being betrayed by the people I thought were my friends," and does not express regret at having taken the pictures in the first place.

Laura implicitly understands that the social and technological nature of such a leak defies any easy solution or ability to control the situation. When people suggested going to the police, she declined: "I didn't feel like it was necessary. I just felt like, because they were on the internet [and] millions of people had seen them, nothing could really be done." The passivity of her statement reflects that the interconnected nature of our technology means that users never have complete control over the spread of their digital images. But instead of extrapolating from that idea that girls should *never* take sexual photos of themselves, one can approach exposure matter-of-factly and not as something for which girls themselves can be held accountable. Laura says, "Now I'm sort of over it. I mean, it obviously still bothers me, but I know there's nothing I can do about it but I just have to laugh it off. That's all you can really do—you've just got to move on, be positive, and not let it get to you."

Laura's response does elide the larger systemic inequalities that structure a girl's ability to "laugh it off" without facing larger personal or professional consequences. As Amy Adele Hasinoff suggests, "excuses for teen girls' sexuality typically adhere best to those with class, race, and other social privileges—the girls who are somewhat protected by a presumption of

inherent innocence."[20] Laura's suggestion only addresses the parts of this experience she is most able to control, not the cultural systems and institutions that *do* punish girls for their own exposure, whether consensual or not. But without excusing the violation of Laura's privacy or ignoring the traumatic effect it may have, the story suggests that she does not have to abide by the cultural logics that would "ruin" her. The discourse mobilized in "Sext Education" offers an alternative logic that accounts for the everydayness of both sexual self-photography and its exposure, creating more space to acknowledge and protect girls' sexual agency.

While "Sext Education" still features the familiar narrative of a specific individual violating a girl's consent by sharing photos, other teen magazine articles emphasize the ways that technology fundamentally complicates the issue of consent when it comes to exposure. In an article framed around people who share sexts without permission, the author in fact begins, "Have you ever sent a sext? I know that I have — and accidentally published that sext on my Snap story for several hours. While that was my mistake, your sexts may still end up in the wrong hands — whether or not you press the right button."[21] Referring to the smartphone application Snapchat, in which users can send temporary photos and videos to friends or post them to their semi-public "story" for a limited period of time, the author reveals the ease of digital exposure. A leak need not always be a scandal of predatory privacy invasion; sometimes you just hit the wrong button.

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[20] Hasinoff, *Sexting Panic*, 11.
[21] Danielle Sinay, "Sexting: One in Four Americans Share Sexts without Permission," *Teen Vogue*, August 9, 2016, https://www.teenvogue.com/story/sexting-shared-without-permission-privacy.

While the article invokes a moment of user error, it gestures toward the fundamental "leakiness," or indeed, "promiscuity," of networked technologies.[22] Digital media, Chun and Friedland argue, does not conform to traditional divisions between public and private, as it operates infrastructurally through contact with and access to other devices, even when the user herself imagines her device as "private." The author's "user error" is not, then, exceptional, but an expression of "the endemic publicity of the Internet—which is an effect of its technological, social, and political infrastructures."[23] Chun and Friedland posit that embracing the inherent "leakiness" of the internet, as opposed to blaming individual women for violating outdated and sexist norms of privacy, can in fact promote women's right to exist in public. By discursively shifting attention away from girls' promiscuity to that of technology itself, teen magazines fundamentally disrupt notions of privacy that enforce the invisibility of girls' sexuality.

Features in *Teen Vogue* not only acknowledge the promiscuity of the internet, but they embrace girls' sexual promiscuity and the potential pleasure of sending nudes as well. In an article offering readers' opinions on the unique risks of sexting for girls, one sixteen-year-old writes, "I think sexting is totally acceptable. I've found random boys' Snapchat usernames on their Instagrams, Vine accounts, Tumblrs...long story short, I've sent nudes to six boys all across the country. Only one of the boys didn't send me one back."[24] *Teen Vogue* presents this opinion without judgment alongside other commentaries that opine sexist reactions to nude photo-sharing or express concern that sexting simply is not worth it. In the pages of these publications, the risks of sexting do not qualify as prohibition, and girls' sexual agency, as well as the digital practices

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[22] Chun and Friedland, "Habits of Leaking."
[23] Chun and Friedland, "Habits of Leaking," 3.
[24] Kiefer, "Is Sexting Actually Sexist?"

they utilize to express it, is assumed, taken for granted, even outside the confines of monogamous, heteronormative relationships. *Rookie* and *Teen Vogue* embrace sexual pleasure as a valid pursuit, even acknowledging that public exposure itself might be one of its sources.

Sexting Scandals and Moral Panic Discourse

Safe sexting discourse thus accounts for both the everydayness of digital leakiness alongside the everydayness of young women's sexuality, even as it can acknowledge the different risks faced by different girls based on their proximity to power. Moral panic discourse, on the other hand, frames exposure and sexuality itself as almost indistinguishable scandals. Concerns about girls' social media practices are part of a long history of moral panics about girls and technology that mask fears about the public expression of female sexuality. Justine Cassell and Meg Cramer cite interviews with mothers and school employees who express concern about girls sharing their own eroticized images: "Adults describe the need to protect girls from their own sexual nature—to convince them to wait until they are older before they flaunt their bodies or describe their sexuality to their friends, for example."[25] Such anxieties reveal investments in traditional notions of privacy that enforce normative femininity. In her book *Sexting Panic*, Hasinoff notes the tension between everyday practice and scandal in public discourse around sexting: "Though adults and teens alike engage in sexting, most of the anxiety and discussion about sexting is concentrated on the images that teenage girls create of themselves."[26] Such

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[25] Justine Cassell and Meg Cramer, "High Tech or High Risk: Moral Panics about Girls Online," in *Digital Youth, Innovation, and the Unexpected*, ed. Tara McPherson (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2008), 64.
[26] Hasinoff, *Sexting Panic*, 1.

discourses, she argues, are "focused on the benevolent but misplaced desire to protect the supposedly inherent sexual innocence of white middle-class girls."[27] Constructing the violation of that innocence through sexual exposure as a ruinous scandal—often with little distinction between consensual and non-consensual exposure—serves to police girls' sexual expression according to norms incompatible with an attention economy based in visibility.

Despite the progressive take of *Teen Vogue* and *Rookie,* moral panic discourse and its attendant gender and sexual dynamics still dominate much of popular discourse, including in some teen magazines. In *Seventeen Magazine,* for example, a fifteen-year-old girl writes to an advice column that she is receiving unsolicited sexual photos from an older male classmate who wants pictures in return. The girl wants him to like her but does not want to reciprocate. Anna Todd, the advice columnist, responds that the girl is "worth so much more than sending a 'cool' boy sexual pictures."[28] While Todd does identify the unsolicited nature of the photos and the boy's pressure as key problems, she certainly implies that sharing sexual photos regardless of the context would diminish a girl's value. She continues, "Sending pictures to boys can seem fun and I know you may think he will like you more, but in reality he *already* doesn't respect you. If he did, he would ask you to dinner or a movie, not to send him sexy pics." Todd's opposition between sexuality and respectability reinforces traditional notions of normative femininity and privacy that demand girls' sexual innocence and invisibility. Sending sexual pictures might *seem* fun, but they cannot *actually* be fun, she implies. The girl's sexual agency gets reduced in this

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[27] Hasinoff, *Sexting Panic*, 8.
[28] Anna Todd, "Ask Anna: The Guy I'm Talking To Wants Me to Send him Sexy Snaps," *Seventeen*, April 17, 2015, https://www.seventeen.com/life/advice/a30168/should-i-send-sexy-snaps/.

equation to a lack of self-worth, a misguided participation in her own harmful objectification. Unlike *Teen Vogue* and *Rookie, Seventeen* does not focus on navigating the practical risks of sexting, or on a girl's right to give or deny consent. Instead, it enforces the inherent value in the rigid protection and privacy of female sexuality—a logic that reifies norms of white femininity and obscures the experience of girls whose sexuality has historically not been constructed as deserving of protection.

A major celebrity photo leak in 2014 brought many of these issues into relief, and actress Jennifer Lawrence's reaction to her own exposure reveals how young women experience and internalize moral panic discourse. Lawrence was one of the highest-profile victims of a hacking scandal in which nude photos from many female stars' personal iCloud accounts were accessed and leaked. In an interview with *Vanity Fair*, Lawrence acknowledges the very material consequences that women often face in her situation, admitting, "I was just so afraid… I didn't know how this would affect my career."[29] While she most unequivocally condemns the invasion of her privacy, her own reaction seems to oscillate between the everydayness of her sexual expression and the scandal of its exposure. She says that she "started to write an apology, but I don't have anything to say I'm sorry for. I was in a loving, healthy, great relationship for four years. It was long distance, and either your boyfriend is going to look at porn or he's going to look at you." She presents sending nude selfies as a healthy expression of intimacy, yet only specifically within the context of a monogamous, heterosexual relationship and framed in terms of her boyfriend's sexual desire, not her own. Even so, she contends, "I don't care how much

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[29] Sam Kashner, "Both Huntress and Prey," *Vanity Fair,* November 2014, https://archive.vanityfair.com/article/2014/11/both-huntress-and-prey.

money I get for *The Hunger Games*. . . . I promise you, anybody given the choice of that kind of money or having to make a phone call to tell your dad that something like that has happened, it's not worth it." In addition to betraying her socioeconomic privilege, her comment reveals an investment in traditional patriarchal culture. A daughter having to tell her father about her sexual exposure (even when she is the victim of a crime) constitutes the worst thing that could happen to her, a source of great shame—despite the fact that she ostensibly has nothing to apologize for. Her comment, which rhetorically obscures the distinction between consensually taking the photos and having them non-consensually exposed, affirms a deeply classed, gendered, and racialized investment in girls' sexual innocence incongruous with contemporary digital practices of sexuality.

While, like *Rookie Magazine*'s Laura, Lawrence ultimately finds a way to laugh off her exposure, her comments reveal the degree to which feminine normativity determines the consequences of exposure. *Vanity Fair* suggests that Lawrence "can still find some humor in the situation." She tells them, "It could have been worse… At least I'm not a hermaphrodite. I could have been outed—'Jennifer Lawrence, hermaphrodite!' And there's your silver lining." Perhaps, it seems, the only thing worse than revealing your active sexuality to your father would be exposure as anything other than normal. "Luckily," nude photos of Lawrence only affirm her normativity—her blonde, white, attractive, feminine and incontrovertibly female body. The consequence of failing to conform to an outdated norm of white sexual innocence is assuaged by her conformity to normative standards of beauty, including whiteness, and (hetero)sexuality. Although we are not "supposed" to see her naked body in this way, at least she has the body she is "supposed" to. In her ironic celebration of her own privilege, Lawrence inadvertently reveals the extent to which girls embodying non-normative sexuality do not possess the same protections

that normative sexuality guarantees her. Even as much popular and girl-oriented discourse seems to be shifting toward the normalization and everydayness of girls' sexual expression, then, Lawrence's comments suggest the tenacious adaptability of racialized, sexualized gender norms by which that expression is restricted and disciplined. In attempting to rethink young female sexuality through the everydayness of technological exposure, it is vitally important to avoid reproducing logics that only allow for (and enforce) normative sexuality. And in attempting to include all kinds of young female sexual expression in the everyday, it is equally important not to eschew the unique vulnerabilities that queer and non-normative girls may face in their exposure.

"It's a slut-shaming thing": Teen TV's "light-brown" leads and leaky selfies on *Riverdale* and *Degrassi*

When teen television series tell stories about sexual selfies leaking, like *Euphoria*, they are very often pulled in two directions at once. They incorporate elements of safe sexting discourse which center young women as subjects of their own sexuality and active users of technology, as well as elements of moral panic discourse which treat exposure as a ruinous scandal. In attempting to depict a social landscape familiar to teens, many series foundationally incorporate technology, social media, and the power dynamics of exposure, both aesthetically and narratively. However, limited by the strictures of broadcast and cable television as well as the values of adult TV producers, teen TV still fairly rarely embraces sexting or sexual self-photography as common, acceptable, or pleasurable. When it does center stories on these topics, teen TV most often highlights the consequences of the non-consensual exposure of sexual or intimate photos rather than stories explicitly about consensual sexting. For instance, on

Freeform's *The Bold Type* (2017-present), one of the protagonists' nudes are hacked from her private account as part of a larger, traumatic doxing campaign, but the nudes themselves are not a source of shame. Within such storylines, there is a very wide range of ideological approaches but they all present complex and contradictory ideas that can be taken up by viewers in equally complex and contradictory ways. Untangling that complexity illuminates some of the discourse most readily available to girls confronting the mainstream rhetoric about, or erasure of, their sexuality.

Through casting practices and storytelling conventions, teen series engage the relationship between identity and the consequences of exposure both implicitly and explicitly. Many teen series adopt a colorblind approach to both casting and storytelling, ignoring or erasing the ways that experiences of exposure are shaped by race; but of course, the racial identities of the young women in teen TV signify meaning to audiences even when the colorblind approach denies the effects of difference. Belying that colorblindness, however, the large majority of the examples I have found in my research feature girls of color as the ones who experience unwanted exposure, though none of them are monoracial Black girls. Angharad Valdivia identifies the proliferation of "light Latinidad" in contemporary mainstream representations of girlhood, and asserts, referencing Gloria Anzaldua and Cherrie Moraga's foundational collection *This Bridge Called My Back*, that Latina girls often serve "as the bridge back to hegemonic whiteness as the norm."[30] Her analysis extends to other racially ambiguous and mixed-race "light brown and

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[30] Angharad N. Valdivia, "This Tween Bridge over My Latina Back: The U.S. Mainstream Negotiates Ethnicity," in *Mediated Girlhoods: New Explorations of Girls' Media Culture*, ed. Mary Celeste Kearney (New York: Peter Lang, 2011), 96.

slightly curvy" girls, whose representation very often displaces "other less malleable ethnicities," and further marginalizes Blackness.[31]

The centrality of such "light brown" girls in stories of nude photo leaks is particularly revealing of the racial dynamics of privacy and sexuality in mainstream discourse. Eden Osucha argues that the right to privacy was historically centered around preventing the public circulation of middle-class white women's likenesses, which was articulated to a patriarchal desire to prevent women themselves from circulating in public spaces.[32] Privacy, as a concept, was thus wielded as a tool to uphold racial, class, and gender difference. Such strategies persist today, evident in the intense public anxiety over the exposure of young white women in particular.[33] For white women, the right to privacy is imbricated with, or dependent on, sexual innocence, making much space for the *violation* of white women's consent if not their consensual sexual activity. Women of color (as well as some white women lacking class, heterosexual, or able-bodied privilege) do not carry the "presumption of inherent innocence," and so are more likely to be held accountable, legally and socially, for their own exposure, whether consensual or not.[34] Black girls and women in particular have historically been excluded altogether from paradigms of consent[35] and of privacy,[36] legally and culturally dispossessed of bodily autonomy as well as control over their own images. The placement of "light brown" girls at the center of photo leak narratives simultaneously denies and reifies these racist racial dynamics. It fosters the post-racial

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[31] Valdivia, "This Tween Bridge," 106.
[32] Osucha, "The Whiteness of Privacy."
[33] Chun and Friedland, "Habits of Leaking."
[34] Hasinoff, *Sexting Panic*, 11.
[35] Emily Owens, "Fantasies of Consent: Black Women's Sexual Labor in 19th Century New Orleans" (PhD. diss., Harvard University, 2015).
[36] Osucha, "The Whiteness of Privacy."

assumption that all girls will experience exposure in the same way, without undermining white girls' presumed innocence; and it only avoids invoking stereotypes of Black girls' sexual or visual availability by marginalizing Black girlhood sexuality altogether. Much teen television thus fails to challenge the hegemony of normative white femininity, using the bodies of ambiguously-raced girls of color to signal inclusion while buttressing the status quo.

Two series that engage in this racialized storytelling trope and enact the tension between safe sexting and moral panic discourses are *Degrassi* and *Riverdale*. *Degrassi,* the long-running Canadian broadcast series, provides one of the earliest examples in the 2009 episode "Shoot to Thrill," just two years after iPhones were released, facilitating sexting much more efficiently than earlier phones. *Degrassi* is known for its didacticism and issue-forward approach to storytelling, and "Shoot to Thrill" is no exception. Early in the episode, students define sexting during a teacher's lesson on portmanteaus. There may be snickering among the class, but it already appears to be an acknowledged practice among these 2009 high schoolers. The episode suggests that sexting and other social media connections are everyday forms of intimacy. One student, Alli Bhandari (Melinda Shankar), a Pakistani-Canadian girl, is frustrated by her bad boy boyfriend Johnny's (Scott Paterson) unwillingness to show public affection, especially around his tough guy friends. In an effort to engage his affection, she begins to send him topless selfies. Her plan works, until Alli publicly shares a photo she took of Johnny looking vulnerable in a school photography exhibit. In retaliation against her sharing a photo he expressly told her to keep private, he sends her naked photo to a friend. When a teacher accidentally sees the photo on a student's phone, Alli gets lectured by her principal about the dangers of sexting.

Despite its rather conservative conclusion, "Shoot to Thrill" allows for sexual selfies as a legitimate expression of sexual agency. Alli gets the idea to send nude photos to her boyfriend

Johnny from her brother, who describes how he and his girlfriend express their affection through texts as opposed to publicly in school. Cell phones are the means for intimacy, and sexting is, for Alli, only different in degree from texting pet names to each other. We see her walking confidently into a school bathroom stall as she unbuttons her shirt to prepare for the selfie, and she is incredibly pleased by the new level of public attention Johnny pays her after. It is also revealed that Alli consciously abstains from sex with Johnny, and so their sexting seems also to serve as a more casual form of sexual intimacy than intercourse. The episode does not idealize sexting or the role it plays in their relationship, but it does capture something of the ordinariness and mutual pleasure involved in sexting for this couple.

The episode explores the complicated relationship between the intimacy of sexting and the leakiness of technology, and the particularly complicated nature of cell phone privacy. Alli certainly views her sexts to Johnny as private communication, but the episode foregrounds the ease with which her image leaks. As he vocally threatens to "show the Alli I see to my friends," she reaches for the phone and begs him to stop. He seems to hit send almost without meaning to, it happens so quickly. Even though the image only directly goes to one friend, the news of Alli's sexting travels quickly throughout the school. One boy is overheard telling his friends, "If I had naked chick photos on my phone, I'd be making copies." Digital images proliferate, no matter the intention. Leaks, or a loss of control over data, are built into everyday technologies.

Chun and Friedland use highly publicized examples of slut-shaming based on girls' and young women's sexual exposure to argue that the inherent "leakiness," or in fact "sluttiness," of the internet gets blamed on young women, ultimately reasserting traditional notions of privacy that do not accord with technological reality and that police female sexuality. Such logic posits the exposure of women's sexual behavior or sexualized bodies as their "ruin," perhaps

complicating whether the sexual act or its exposure constitutes the damning promiscuity. The "sluttiness" of the technology is conflated with the "sluttiness" of the girl. *Degrassi* directly enacts how girls are blamed for technology's leakiness in a way that effaces their ability to consent and insists their sexuality remain invisible. While viewers do not see Johnny receiving any punishment for sharing Alli's pictures without her consent, they do see Alli scolded by her principal. The principal asks Alli, "What makes you think that these photos won't end up all over the internet?" Alli responds, "They were just for my boyfriend." But the principal continues, "Or that in ten years those photos might still be out there. They could cost you a job, Alli." The principal insists that Alli's intentions of privacy are meaningless, placing no emphasis on how she was violated by the person who shared her image without consent. Even after her exposure, Alli insists on the casual nature of her selfies. She says, "It was just fun. It wasn't supposed to be this big serious thing." But the principal counters: "It could be, if the police decide that you're distributing child pornography by sending them...I know this stuff is complicated, but please Alli, protect your body. You're the only one who can." Her reference to child pornography laws, ostensibly designed to protect Alli, exposes the dangerous discordance between traditional legal frameworks for approaching privacy and youth sexuality and newer logics of digital media that ultimately results in slut-shaming and misplaced criminalization. As Chun and Friedland suggest, there is also a conflation between the sexual act itself and its exposure. The principal implies that protecting Alli's body means keeping it private, invisible. Her public exposure will be her ruin and her fault, despite the fact that such exposure was built into everyday technological practices from the start.

Eight years later, on U.S. broadcast network The CW, *Riverdale* enacts very similar dynamics while more overtly claiming an anti-slut-shaming stance. In the 2017 first-season

episode "Body Double," bad girl Veronica Lodge (Camila Mendes) takes a selfie on a date with football star Chuck (Jordan Calloway). The next day, Chuck posts a photoshopped version of the selfie with a suggestive caption on social media, implying a sexual encounter between them. Veronica is furious about the slut-shaming treatment she receives from her classmates and organizes girls who had similar experiences to expose Chuck's lies.

Veronica's racialization fits neatly into Valdivia's description of the "light brown" leads of girls' media, complicating, without truly undermining, the white hegemony underlying the logics of exposure and scandal I have been describing. The very light-skinned Camila Mendes, who portrays Veronica, certainly does fulfill the role Valdivia similarly describes as "the bridge that serves to link whiteness to color."[37] Daughter of a disgraced millionaire, Veronica moves to the eponymous small, middle-class town of Riverdale from the luxuries of New York; her wealth secures many of the privileges of whiteness, coloring her urban background not as racial otherness but as exotic outsiderness. Veronica maintains close relationships with white girl-next-door Betty Cooper and white boy-next-door Archie Andrews, while frequently performing with the band Josie and the Pussycats, whose girl members in this iteration appear to be some of the only Black people in Riverdale. Significantly, Chuck is also African-American, and his perpetration of a crime threatening Veronica's reputation as chaste invokes the historical construction of Black men as a threat to white women's sexual innocence—a construction that violently upholds an oppressive Black/white binary necessary for white supremacy. While the series does not obscure Veronica's Latinidad, it also fails to narrativize her identity in any culturally-specific ways that might explicitly undermine that color line. Thus, her relationship to

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[37] Valdivia, "This Tween Bridge," 96.

visibility lies only somewhat precariously within the strictures of normative femininity even if she herself is not white.

Through a post-racial orientation, then, the scene of Veronica's self-photography demonstrates the ambiguity of consent and exposure in the age of ubiquitous social media. When the episode first cuts to Veronica's date with Chuck, the two of them are heard arguing playfully. Chuck tells her, "let me try again," and she responds, "let me see it." Only then does the camera cut to the interior of Chuck's car parked outside the local diner. Before revealing either of them directly, the camera frames Chuck's hand holding his phone up, with the two of them posed cheek-to-cheek in the self-facing camera app. He asks, "You don't trust me?" She gives him permission to take the photo, but immediately asks for "photo approval," which she gives upon carefully examining the selfie. Her need to approve the photo presumably based on her appearance in it emphasizes the curation practices of self-presentation on social media. She implicitly acknowledges the potential publicity of the photo—though such social rules are certainly nebulous. Her assenting "fine" could easily be taken for permission to post the picture online, but perhaps could be an agreement that he can enjoy the photo privately. His question as they take the photo: "don't you trust me?" plays up an important tension in social media photo sharing. In the moment, he seems only to be implying that she should trust him to make her look good online—to display her in a flattering light, literally. But his later manipulation of the photo reveals the extent to which trust determines everyday social media relationships. Vulnerability is built into all kinds of networked exposure, and *Riverdale* emphasizes the ordinariness of these social media and self-presentation dynamics.

Even as *Riverdale*'s Veronica and *Degrassi*'s Alli have different expectations of privacy for the mediated self-images they consensually produce, both series highlight the everydayness

of the uncontrolled proliferation of digital media. On *Riverdale,* what was intended to be public becomes public in a way the subject cannot control, while on *Degrassi* something intended to be private becomes public. Both emphasize the leakiness built into networked technology, which does not conform to outdated divisions between private and public. *Riverdale* marks such leakiness sonically. As Veronica recalls last night's date to her friends at school, suddenly a chorus of buzzing, chirps, and bells signals a collective notification spread around the school. Instantly, some girls passing by suggestively ask Veronica about her date. As soon as Veronica checks her phone, she sees the digitally manipulated photo of herself and Chuck, and understands that he has shared it publicly. It is unclear what exactly the sonic notification they received signified—the photo appears on something like the Instagram app which likely would not alert everyone to its posting. But the conflation of texts, public posts, and private messages speaks to exactly the inherent leakiness of digital technology. As Chun and Friedland suggest, "wireless networks call into question the distinction between the personal and the network, the directed and the broadcast."[38] Familiar with this logic, the audience understands instantly the spread of digital images without needing to know the details. It is simply part of the technological landscape.

Despite that embrace of technological leakiness, *Riverdale* simultaneously embraces the same logic of ruin through exposure as explained by the principal in *Degrassi*, even as the episode rather loudly declares itself as anti-slut-shaming. When Veronica sees the digitally manipulated photo of herself with maple syrup running down her face, her friend explains that this practice referred to euphemistically as a "Sticky Maple" is a "Riverdale thing." She snaps

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[38] Chun and Friedland, "Habits of Leaking," 4.

back, “It’s a slut-shaming thing. And I’m neither a slut nor am I going to be shamed.” When Veronica rallies other victimized girls around her anti-slut-shaming cause, another girl who was falsely accused (a word whose negative connotation already belies any anti-slut-shaming sentiment here) of engaging in sexual acts with Chuck, says, “They’re ruining our lives and to them it’s just a game.” Similarly, another girl decries the boys at school for having “zero remorse for the lives they destroy.” Veronica may call this an anti-slut-shaming mission but it is directed at protecting those who are, in fact, not sluts at all, but have been misrepresented as such. It is not their privacy or their consent that has been violated but their image of chastity. The slut consents to sexual activity—and she is not the one being protected or defended here. Chun and Friedland argue for the value of embracing sluttiness, and the figure of the slut as someone always open, unable to be ruined by exposure. They suggest that embracing leakiness and sluttiness together can unsettle the logic that enforces the privacy of chaste, white femininity and blames women for their own exposure. So by suggesting that exposure—even if it is false—has the power to destroy the girls’ lives, while entirely erasing the girl who *does* consent, Riverdale reinforces a policing logic of privacy imposed on girlhood sexuality.

“A kiss, a picture”: Queer exposure on *Pretty Little Liars*

In contrast to *Riverdale*’s universalizing approach, teen shows do have the potential to present non-normative sexuality and its digital expression as everyday, while simultaneously highlighting the identity-specific consequences girls may face. Storylines on the ABC Family/Freeform series *Pretty Little Liars* (2010-2017) reveal the disciplinary effects of surveillance culture, in which the threat of a leak always looms, without foreclosing the everydayness of queer expression. The series centers four teenage girls vindictively manipulated

through constant surveillance by an anonymous bully known as A. A's threats of personal exposure allow for the Liars to be controlled, as they do whatever it takes to keep their secrets private. They not only grapple with the potential trauma of having their actions misunderstood or losing autonomous control over their personal lives, but also with the norms of decorum and feminine conformity imposed by their suburban, upper-middle-class status.

The stakes of imposed privacy and non-consensual exposure are perhaps highest for gay protagonist Emily Fields (Shay Mitchell), who is ambiguously multiracial and the only character of color among the four leads. The role of A's surveillance in Emily's sexual self-discovery and coming-out narrative reveals the particular vulnerability of queer teens to the disciplinary power of exposure. However, the series' post-racial approach undermines the extent to which her racial identity might similarly determine her relationship to visibility and exposure. Mitchell is half-Filipina and half-Western European, and Emily's racial identity goes largely unmentioned in the series. The only time it is mentioned, Emily expresses pride in her mixed ethnic background, but insists on not letting it define her or her interests, underscoring the series' superficial embrace of multiculturalism. Like *Riverdale*'s Veronica, Emily also serves as a bridge between whiteness and Blackness, especially in early seasons when her primary love interest is Maya St. Germain (Bianca Lawson), a light-skinned African American girl. And while the series largely supports Valdivia's claim that these representational schemas reinforce white hegemony, the series' explicit engagement with queerness ultimately conveys racialized meaning about the effects of identity on the experience of exposure.

Even though the constant threat of public exposure is so foundational to the series, *Pretty Little Liars* still incorporates the pleasure of self-photography and how it may be shaped by queer desire. In the episode "To Kill A Mocking Girl," Emily attends a party with her flirty new

neighbor Maya, and they find themselves in the photo booth. The show's camera takes on the perspective of the photo booth camera, framing Emily and Maya, who share a palpable chemistry, head-on, preparing for their photos. Although the photo booth may be a more retro photographic device, the close-up on Maya primping herself with Emily in the background smiling at her own reflection on the display screen recalls the recognizable selfie curation practiced by Veronica in *Riverdale*. Looking directly into the camera, Maya says, "If this comes out decent, I'm going to cut mine out and replace the one on my driver's license." The potential publicity of all photography seems to be assumed in the social media era, even when the photo is analog. Flirtatiously discussing their driver's license photos, Emily becomes visibly uncomfortable when Maya calls her beautiful. Avoiding their sexual tension, she turns back toward the camera and asks what button to press to start the photographic process. For Emily, the performative publicity of the photo offers a relief from the private intimacy of the moment.

A series of flashes, shutter sounds, and freeze frames of recognizable selfie poses indicate the photo booth snapping their pictures. The freeze frames shift back into live action as Emily and Maya turn to kiss each other, though another flash and shutter sound indicate the moment's photographic capture. The rapid succession of images constructs the kiss as just as ordinary as a "duck-face" selfie, an everyday, playful performance for the digital camera. Simultaneously, however, the switch back to movement from freeze-frame images implies that some aspect of the moment may not be captured in the photo; its meaning exceeds the still frame. Seeing the kiss in action constructs her sexuality as *active*, and her sexual agency seems facilitated by the nature of the photo booth itself, which embodies something of the tension between privacy and publicity that influences the narrative of Emily's sexuality.

Like digital communication, the photo booth can provide a sense of privacy, autonomy, and control that exists just on the edge of publicity. Here, the photo strip prints on the outside of the booth at a crowded party, just as digital selfies always risk an unwanted viewer looking over your shoulder or a larger-scale leak. But even though a leak seems built into this analog technology just as it is into the smartphone or networked laptop, it still provides a sense of privacy conducive to everyday sexual experimentation and play. Cassell and Cramer cite a psychological study that suggests the digital world "offers a safer environment for exploring emerging sexuality than the real world, in particular for adolescent girls, who may find it easier to inhabit an authoritative, agentive, and in-control persona online."[39] The photo booth offers a similar privacy (always threatened by publicity) that allows Emily to exert more autonomy in her sexual expression and control over her body, particularly in contrast to her sexual assault by her ex-boyfriend earlier in the episode (itself, perhaps, reflecting an everyday reality of many girls' lives). Even though Emily can never fully control the leak or proliferation of her printed/digitized image, or how people will react, she can control her own sexual expression and its digital representation.

Even so, the series acknowledges the everydayness of the leak without ignoring its particular consequences for Emily. After Maya and Emily kiss, the camera cuts to outside the booth, which dispenses the photo strip, including a picture of them kissing. Immediately, an anonymous figure, visible only from the shoulders down, grabs the strip just before Emily and Maya exit the booth. As they walk out, Maya seems entirely unconcerned about the status of the photos—whether they are in her control or not. When a fretful Emily notices the photo strip is

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[39] Cassell and Cramer, "High Tech or High Risk," 67.

missing from the booth's external dispenser and asks where it is, Maya off-handedly suggests the machine "probably just ran out of paper." But Emily is concerned; possession of the photos constitutes possession of information that Emily has yet to name for herself. The missing photos threaten Emily's ability to determine how and when her sexuality is interpreted.

At the end of the episode, A's gloved hands are shown pressing a button on a printer and countless pages emerge. A lifts up one of the seemingly-blank pages to reveal copies of Emily's photo strip. The camera pans up to the wall, plastered in hundreds of reprints of the strip in various sizes. The image highlights the speed and ease with which images proliferate in the digital age. Pictures are endlessly reproducible, and this scene reveals how quickly one can lose control over photos that are perhaps intended to be private. The leak is part of the logic of the culture that invites self-exposure.

Emily and Maya's contradictory reactions reveal the disciplinary power of surveillance and social media culture as well as the potentially liberatory nature of understanding queer sexual expression as everyday. In the following episode, "Can You Hear Me Now?" Emily finds the original photo strip suspiciously placed in her science textbook and is distraught that somebody has seen them. When she anxiously shows Maya the photos, Maya happily responds, "Great, you found them… I think we look cute!" To her, "it's no big deal." In contrast, Emily experiences such a loss of control as particularly threatening. Trying to explain to Maya the problem with someone seeing the pictures, she says simply, "This is us. You and me. Kissing. Understand?" She can articulate no problem except the kiss itself and its public exposure. Maya nods quietly, hurt and offended. Emily's concern suggests that something Maya experienced positively—"You and me. Kissing"—necessitates secrecy and, perhaps, shame. When they encounter each other on a deserted street later, Maya defensively tells Emily, "I don't know what

I'm supposed to do right now. Hug you or shake hands. I mean, there might be all sorts of security cameras around." Her subtle sarcasm critiques Emily's fear of an exposure that is, in fact, ubiquitous; to worry about exposure, she suggests, is to constantly police oneself according to oppressive norms and expectations. Heterosexuality, as well as whiteness, constitutes a central aspect of the normative femininity enforced by traditional notions of privacy, and so Emily seems intent on hiding her "deviance" from the norm—a practice and mindset Maya, a Black queer woman, rejects out of hand.

Significantly, however, the series offers a reason for Emily's anxiety other than the outing of a shameful secret supposed to remain private. When Maya asks Emily if she is upset about the pictures or about the kiss itself, Emily tells her, "I liked the kiss but I don't know what the kiss means." Emily expresses her desire to self-determine before the photo leak exposes her to determination by outside forces. She wants to control the story of her own sexuality. In his work on television's queer teens, Glyn Davis argues that the "enunciation of queerness" in coming-out stories is central to the characters' self-recognition.[40] The missing photo strip, then, threatens to strip Emily of her power to enunciate her own queerness; the picture of her kissing Maya articulates a homoerotic desire that would presumably be read as gay identity, despite the fact that Emily has not yet formulated or taken on that identification herself. Her anxiety about exposure need not be read entirely as a form of self-regulation in accordance with disciplinary practices, but as based in her desire to define herself. Visibility is not inherently problematic for Emily, but she desires to control its terms.

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[40] Glyn Davis, "'Saying It Out Loud': Revealing Television's Queer Teens," in *Teen TV: Genre, Consumption and Identity,* eds. Glyn Davis and Kay Dickinson (London: British Film Institute, 2004), 131.

However, when surveillance is ubiquitous and digital exposure is inherent to digital participation, even an attachment to that level of privacy and control over one's image may be untenable. In response to Emily's assertion that she does not yet know the meaning of the kiss, Maya tells her, "You spend too much time thinking about what things mean. A kiss, a picture." Again, Maya assumes, in concert, the everydayness of sexual intimacy between girls, photographic self-representation, and its exposure. Emily's excuse that she is "just trying to figure out the right thing to do" implies her attempt to adhere to some kind of normative strictures on her identity, activity, and visibility; Maya, however, suggests a more fluid understanding of all three that accounts for their everyday exploration. Refusing to conform to restrictive notions of privacy and the normative categories they enforce would perhaps allow Emily to enjoy a kiss without reservation.

Pretty Little Liars offers the embrace of visibility and exposure as resistant practices against policing norms of privacy and sexuality, even as it respects girls' right to control the terms of that visibility. Emily asks her friend Toby Cavanaugh (Keegan Allen) if he saw the photo strip she found in her chemistry textbook, and he responds, "I don't think you wanted anybody to see them. I'm cool with that." His reaction both incorporates the inevitability of unwanted publicity and asserts her right to privacy; here, ethical responsibility lies with those who have access to non-consensually leaked photos, not those whose privacy is violated. Like Maya, Toby counsels Emily not to do things because people are watching, but because of how they make her feel. He suggests that one can never fully control the terms of one's visibility, a fact especially true for queer girls of color like Emily. He tells her, "Forget about the idiots. They're going to see what they want to see. Even if you completely changed everything, they wouldn't be happy. They don't want you to change. They want you to go away."

While the show's post-racial discourse largely erases Emily's racial difference, Toby's words carry particular weight in this regard. As a queer girl of color, Emily can never live up to the imposed standards of white, hetero-, and gender normativity; the disciplinary gaze of a white patriarchal society can only attempt to erase her. Even more restrictively than her straight teen TV counterparts on *Riverdale*, Emily is bound between a socially-prescribed invisibility and the visibility imposed and encouraged by contemporary digital practice. The resistance that Toby and Maya offer lies in accepting visibility while simply rejecting its power to police. Certainly, even as Toby acknowledges a larger, communal antipathy toward the identity Emily represents, his suggestion to "forget about the idiots" dramatically downplays the structural and systemic oppression she still faces by focusing on the prejudice of ignorant individuals. Undoing the internalization of the dominant white, heterosexist gaze that punishes girls for the exposure of their sexuality, and avoiding its material consequences, is likely not as simple as it is here made out to be. However, through Emily's struggle with the non-consensual leak of her personal photos, *Pretty Little Liars* refuses the ability of scandal and shame to displace the moment of consensual sexual pleasure. It encourages thinking outside the logic of privacy that demands the invisibility of young women's sexuality. Here, embracing the everydayness of both expressions of sexuality and their exposure constitutes a form of resistance to norms of femininity that would erase girls like Emily.

"It's My Vagina": Streaming Graphic Content in *13 Reasons Why* and *Sex Education*

The kinds of stories that many teen series tell about sexual selfies are shaped by the rather conservative norms and restrictions of broadcast and cable. Both *Riverdale* and *Pretty Little Liars*, as described above, feature stories that address sexting only obliquely, instead evoking the

same issues and ideas through relatively chaste selfies that imply sex or sexuality and which are leaked only without consent. As this dissertation has argued, however, streaming series often incorporate and reflect the changing nature of digital technology and how it shapes women's relationship to visibility. Specifically when it comes to issues like sexting, streaming teen television's ability to depict more graphic and explicit content has the potential to change storytelling conventions. Two series that have taken advantage of that freedom to drastically different ends are *13 Reasons Why* (2017-2020) and *Sex Education* (2019-present), both Netflix original series, and which can be divided rather neatly into the moral panic (the former) and safe sexting (the latter) camps. In *13 Reasons Why*, leaked photos, implying first straight and then queer sexual activity, constitute two of the thirteen reasons why the young protagonist kills herself. Taking a much more progressive, less alarmist stance on teen sexuality generally, *Sex Education* depicts girls' coming together to protect the identity of a girl whose close-up vagina photo has leaked around the school by all claiming it as their own. This section analyzes episodes and storylines from the two series that, respectively, convey intense anxiety about the power of technology to ruin girls through the exposure of their sexuality, and offer collective feminist action as an important "solution" to that very anxiety. In incorporating elements of queer sexuality, the two series alternately obscure and expose the role of identity in shaping girls' experiences of exposure.

This chapter suggests that much of the progressive potential of teen television lies in its matter-of-fact engagement of a digital logic of leakiness, publicity, and visibility that can never be fully controlled—and that does not necessarily ruin girls' lives. *13 Reasons Why,* however, begins from the assumption that exposure necessarily does cause destruction, as it is premised around the suicide of a teenage girl, Hannah (Katherine Langford), who faced non-consensual

photo leaks as well as more drastic forms of bullying and rape. Significantly, Hannah is the only unambiguously white cisgender girl who experiences a photo leak in all of the teen TV examples I have found, and she is the one whose ruin is most total, reinforcing white girls as those most vulnerable and in need of protection. The show uses the allowance offered by streaming to depict more graphic content primarily to show explicitly Hannah being raped and taking her life by slitting her wrists. These graphic depictions earned the series backlash from parents and psychologists, who expressed concern about the framing of suicide as a form of revenge and about the possibility of imitation.[41] While the series creator has stated that he depicted the suicide "in such graphic detail" in part to "make sure no one would ever wish to emulate it," Netflix added a warning video at the start of each season in 2018, and removed the suicide scene from the episode altogether in 2019.[42] The series' approach to graphic content serves to reinforce the idea that the violation of girls' consent—regarding her body as well as her image—will lead to her ruin, and even her death.

This crisis-oriented perspective aligns with the show's approach to technology. The anti-digital technology series depicts a high school landscape in which the cool boy exclusively listens to music on a cassette Walkman, and shallow girls take selfies that trivialize Hannah's suicide. The first season revolves around cassette tapes that Hannah recorded before her death, narrating the thirteen reasons why she killed herself and implicating both peers and their culture

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[41] Catherine Saint Louis, "For Families of Teens at Suicide Risk, '13 Reasons' Raises Concerns," *New York Times,* May 1, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/01/well/family/for-families-of-teens-at-suicide-risk-13-reasons-triggers-concerns.html.
[42] Alex Marshall, "Netflix Deletes '13 Reasons Why' Suicide Scene," *New York Times*, July 16, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/16/arts/television/netflix-deleted-13-reasons-why-suicide-scene.html.

of digital technology use. With the first tape she provides a hard-copy map, leaving "no chance for the interwebs to make everything worse, like it does." In a later tape, she asks, "Have you ever wondered what it would feel like to watch someone? To invade someone's privacy? Do you wonder what secrets you might uncover?" The listener should not pretend to be uncomfortable with such a proposition, she adds, because social media platforms like Facebook have "made us a society of stalkers, and we love it."

Hannah frames the problem of privacy invasion as a problem of technology. In doing so, she relies on a more traditional idea of privacy that results in the shaming and blaming of girls whose sexuality is exposed, with or without their consent. The first of the thirteen reasons why Hannah kills herself is that a boy, Justin (Brandon Flynn), uses a semi-revealing photo of Hannah from an innocent trip to the park as misleading evidence of sexual activity. The picture, which the viewer sees only briefly, depicts Hannah going down a slide, her underwear slightly visible under her skirt. In the school hall, the day after their date, Justin's friends hassle him to reveal "how far" he and Hannah went (i.e. first, second, or third "base"). Perhaps wanting to show off to his friends without explicitly lying, he says smugly, "a picture is worth a thousand words," and shows them the image on his phone. The pushiest of the friends approvingly notes "Public space, that's hot." He grabs the phone and says, "We're sending that shit around." Justin vocally objects and attempts to grab the phone out of his hands, but his friends hold him back. As in *Degrassi*, it takes only a moment for one immature boy to leak the photo.

Technological leakiness is again marked sonically by chimes and vibrations from phones around Hannah as students arrive in class. The notifications sound one after another—students seem to be sending the photo along when they receive it from a classmate. As students react to her and to Justin upon seeing the photo, Hannah becomes visibly more and more fearful and hurt.

As she explains in voiceover, what had, in reality, been only a first kiss, was reframed by the photo leak as something shameful. Significantly, the moment that the viewer sees the photo is not from Hannah's perspective, but from that of the series' protagonist, Clay (Dylan Minette), a boy who was in love with Hannah and is trying to avenge her suicide. The series is certainly, and without any nuance, blaming the people complicit in sharing the photo, but it both literally and figuratively frames her experience of exposure through the perspective of a young man for whom Hannah is the object of desire. This event is framed as the beginning of Hannah's downward spiral which the viewer knows will not be overcome. This is not just a leaky, digitized world in which exposure is a given; exposure here is a priori destructive, and girls' visible sexuality always a spectacularized scandal.

The series' aesthetic tendency to frame Hannah's sexual experiences through the perspective of others intensifies the anxiety it conveys about the power of technology to ruin girls through exposure. In particular, its framing of queer sexuality eschews alternative perspectives that might foreground Hannah's subjectivity or pleasure. When Hannah has a sexual encounter with a female friend, it is not captured in a playful photo booth selfie, but by a male stalker who vindictively spreads the photo after she rejects him. In the episode "Tape 2 Side B," Hannah and her friend Courtney (Michele Selene Ang) play truth or dare in Hannah's bedroom. The flashback scene is again framed through Clay's perspective, based on what he learns from Hannah's tapes. As he walks into her room in the present-day, Hannah and Courtney appear sitting on her bed together, as if Clay's imagination of what happened blends with the real flashback. After Courtney dares Hannah to take off her bra underneath her shirt, Hannah dares Courtney to take off her shirt. Courtney then dares Hannah to kiss her, and when she does, the camera cuts back to Clay, imagining the scene. When the scene returns to the two girls in the

bedroom, they begin kissing more genuinely and passionately. Throughout their kissing, the viewer hears a soft camera click. Hannah hears it, too, and quickly shines a light outside to reveal his identity. The camera cuts to a view from outside the window, as the bright flashlight shines directly into our view, as if the viewer is being caught as the stalker. While Hannah's voiceover narrates these events in the first person, the series repeatedly frames scenes through the perspectives of men who objectify her, reinforcing the idea that her sexual subjectivity exists only as the object of someone else's gaze or as a source of social shaming.

The results of this second non-consensual photo leak reveal an incoherent panic about young women's visibility, technology, and teen sexuality more generally. The young stalker, Tyler (Devin Druid) leaks the photo after Hannah rejects his request to hang out. Hannah's voiceover reveals that, because her and Courtney's faces are obscured in the photo of them kissing, no one actually knew who was in it. However, everyone in school saw it, and the camera cuts to Clay masturbating to the photo before he knew who was in it. Back in the present, now that he knows it is a photo of Hannah, the girl he loved, he drags his entire folder of pornographic photos into the trashbin of his desktop to atone. While deleting the photo might demonstrate respect for Hannah's privacy, deleting the folder entirely conveys a broader moral stance against sexual imagery and masturbation, tied up in his desire to protect the sexual purity of the object of his desire. When he confronts the stalker, Clay threatens him with legal action for "criminal invasion of a minor's privacy" and insists, "you ruined her." Hannah's tapes lead Clay to Tyler's bedroom window, where Clay takes a picture of Tyler's naked butt after a shower, and texts it to their classmates as revenge. Tyler is shown crying in his bedroom after seeing the picture, and knowing it has been leaked. Clay, who is white, insists he is "making his

own justice," echoing a phrase used by his Latino friend when referring to how the police do not serve his community.

Mirroring Clay's "eye-for-an-eye" tactic, in her next tape, Hannah outs Courtney, explaining that Courtney spread sexual rumours about Hannah in order to divert attention away from her own queer sexuality. Clay confronts Courtney about her behavior in the present day, and Courtney defends herself by talking about her experience of growing up with two gay fathers. She says, "Do you have any idea what that's like? Even now. I mean, what if I were [gay]? What do you think everyone would say? 'She's got two gay dads, that's why she's…' And my dads, they've taken so much crap, my whole life, for being gay, and then for being dads, and I just can't. I couldn't do that to them." Clay berates Courtney for caring more about what people think of her than about Hannah's life. Courtney, who is a queer girl of color, is framed as the villain in this scenario, through an incoherent logic that instrumentalizes gay men as the reason to shame someone else for their sexuality, even though Courtney was motivated by a desire to protect her own sexual privacy. *13 Reasons Why* thus fails to challenge the norms that make visible bodies, sex, and sexuality a source of shame, downplaying the specific vulnerability of queer teens while reifying innocent white girlhood as in need of protection. It takes advantage of streaming's content affordances only to depict graphically the ruinous consequences of sexual exposure, framing digital technology exclusively as a tool to violate privacy. There is little room left for the possibility of young women's sexual pleasure when privacy seems no longer to exist, and exposure leads directly to death.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, *Sex Education* uses the content affordances of Netflix in a way that undermines traditional gender norms that enforce the invisibility of girls' sexuality. The series is frequently credited for its progressive and sex-positive storytelling. The

New York Times describes *Sex Education* as "timely but not hamfistedly topical, feminist, with a refreshing lack of angst about its subject. Sex, in this show, isn't an 'issue' or a problem or a titillating lure: It's an aspect of health."[43] Both sex and technology are treated matter-of-factly, yet not uncritically, allowing the series to acknowledge how norms are enforced while making room to reimagine them altogether.

The fifth episode of season one opens by following "mean girl" Ruby (Mimi Keene) as she enters the school. She is sitting in the lounge making fun of her friends and classmates as usual when, as in *Riverdale* and *13 Reasons Why*, the buzzing and chiming of smartphone notifications fills the soundscape. Ruby's friend Anwar (Chaneil Kular), looking at his phone, exclaims, "Whoa, that is one rank-looking vagina." The camera cuts to a view over Ruby's shoulder of the phone in her hands, on which she looks at a close-up photo of a vagina, curly black hair framing the labia. The initial reactions reveal that part of what is so embarrassing or shameful about the picture is the aesthetic quality of the vagina itself—its adherence to norms of femininity related to personal grooming. Olivia (Simone Ashley), the third member of the "mean kid" clique, remarks, "It looks like they've got Chewbacca vag." Ruby follows up, "Yeah, if my labia looked like that, I'd, uh, kill myself." As the episode soon reveals, however, the vagina is Ruby's, so it is significant that the viewer sees the image from her point of view. While her identity is still unknown, the shot ultimately serves to align the viewer with Ruby in the experience of exposure, rather than making the viewer complicit in other people's gaze. It emphasizes her role as viewing subject at the same time that she is the object of that gaze. This

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[43] James Poniewozik, "Review: 'Sex Education,' A Sweet Teen Comedy of Modern Lust," *New York Times*, January 9, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/09/arts/television/sex-education-review-netflix.html.

literal framing aligns with the episode's framing of responsibility in issues of photo leaking. Maeve (Emma Mackey), who later helps Ruby uncover who is blackmailing her, sharply asks her boyfriend, "You didn't look at it, did you?" He admits guiltily, "For like a second, yeah. I didn't know what it was." The tone of her question and of his response convey the belief that looking at the photo is unethical when it has not been shared consensually. Actively choosing to look at the picture makes one complicit in the violation of Ruby's consent.

The episode engages many other tropes of safe sexting discourse, as well, including the idea that there are safer and riskier sexting strategies. The photo arrives with a threat: "Apologize for being a bitch in assembly tomorrow, or I reveal the photo with your face. You know who you are." The message implies that the full version of the photo contains Ruby's face as well, violating a well-known rule for safe sexting—no identifying markers, including and especially the face. While begging Maeve to help her stop the release of the full photo, Ruby laments, "I can't believe I was stupid enough to leave my face in it, but I was, you know, I'd just had my eyebrows done, and I was looking on fleek." Her explanation conveys that Ruby knew the "rules" of safe sexting, but wanted to capture how well she had styled herself "to be looked at." Her vanity led to a lapse in judgment. The image certainly is constructed to present her as an object of sexual desire but I simultaneously read into her explanation a casualness to her sexting practices. While on any other day she might have shared a vagina photo, today she was feeling particularly attractive and wanted to include her face, so she did. This reading contrasts with Maeve's explanation for why people send nudes in the first place. She tells Otis (Asa Butterfield), with whom she runs a peer sex counseling business, "It's a thrill thing. You know, when you do something you're not supposed to but somehow it makes it better… It's like not paying for a train ticket or finding a lost wallet and keeping the money. You know it's wrong but

it feels good." At the same time, Maeve adds, "Not that I've done it, obviously." The dramatic manner in which Maeve paints the practice of sending nudes while distancing herself from it feels, to me, quite different from Ruby's orientation toward her own nudes. Framing sending nudes as "wrong," in relation to minor crimes, distinguishes it from an everyday sexual act that might still be thrilling or fun in a different way. While Maeve's perspective is still far from moral panic discourse based in slut-shaming, this minor contrast between frames for understanding sending nudes reveals a kind of uncertainty and active grappling with what to think about sexting.

The episode suggests two "solutions" to the problem of the leak, one limited by its individualism and another based in a politics of solidarity and collectivism. Unable to identify who leaked the photo, as Ruby has asked him to do, Otis tries to comfort her. He says, "Worst case scenario, photo goes out, everyone in school knows it's you, and you *could* be humiliated… But only if you let yourself be. Everyone has bodies, right? It's nothing to be ashamed of. I have a funky-looking toe… Point is, whoever did this is intending to shame you, but it won't work if you don't let them." Here, Otis takes on a perspective also adopted by teen magazines engaging in safe sexting discourse. While others might attempt to shame you, *you* are in control of whether you feel shame. This view requires the understanding that both young women's sexuality and its digital representation are everyday phenomena that *should not* be a source of shame, and so young women are theoretically empowered to "ignore the haters."

However, as the episode implicitly acknowledges, the nature and extent of actual material and social consequences that cannot simply be ignored are shaped by a person's access to privilege and social power. As Hasinoff argues, girls who do not adhere to the norms of femininity are most likely to be held accountable for their own exposure, legally and socially.

Sex Education demonstrates the way that identity categories get tied up in nude photo leaks when the "mean kid" clique is debating who they think the photo (and the vagina) belong to. Anwar suggests one girl, but Olivia responds, "No way. She's fat. This isn't a fat vagina." She offers a different suggestion of a girl of color, but Anwar insists, "No, those flaps are caucasian, alright." Carefully examining the photo on his phone, Anwar adds, "What is that sticking-out bit? It looks like a micropenis." Their conversation enacts a careful policing of the female body, according to oppressive norms of body type, race, and sex. And while this vagina is deemed normative ("not fat," "caucasian") on the first two counts, the disgust Anwar expresses at the possibility of a micropenis hints at the harsher reaction that the exposure of non-normative bodies might evoke. Significantly, Kular and Ashley, who portray Anwar and Olivia, are South Asian, and Mimi Keene is racially ambiguous but light-skinned, but all three characters are very wealthy, which largely elides the relationship between whiteness and social power.

Maeve's explanation for why she wants to help Ruby solve this situation, despite her constant bullying, further gestures toward the role of social privilege in shaping the consequences of exposure, even as the episode does not make that relationship explicit. She angrily explains to Otis that when she was 14, a boy spread a rumor that she had given him a blow job and bitten his penis after she refused to kiss him. The rumor led to the persistent nickname of "cockbiter" and snowballed into general accusations and stories of sexual promiscuity that have left her ostracized by most of her peers. She says, "This kind of thing sticks. And it hurts, and no one deserves to be shamed, not even Ruby." Unlike in *Riverdale*, where Veronica's anti-slut-shaming mission is reserved for those whose sexual activity has been lied about, Maeve aligns her own experience with Ruby's, even though Ruby herself shared the image of her vagina in the first place. It is not only the "innocent" who deserve to be protected

from slut-shaming. Maeve does not, however, make an explicit connection between her own ostracization due to this rumor and her status as a class outsider to her largely wealthy peers. This episode highlights that class distinction when Maeve goes to meet her boyfriend's parents for the first time. Trying to fit into their upper-class home and family life, she lies to them about her parents being international accountants, despite the fact that she lives alone in a trailer because of her mother's drug addiction. Maeve's class status is part of why she may lack the social capital to "overcome" such rumors, regardless of her own confidence or resistance to feeling shame.

The episode further makes the connection between the policing of racialized gender norms in public and digital spaces. The B-plot to the photo leak's A-plot entails Eric (Ncuti Gatwa), the queer child of African immigrants, being harassed and assaulted while dressed in drag. Otis and Eric have plans to take the bus into town to see *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* for Eric's birthday. It is an annual tradition, and both boys dress in women's clothes, makeup, and wigs. As they are each leaving the house, Eric's father tells him to put a coat on because it's not safe to go out dressed like that, while Otis's mother, a sex therapist, tells him that he looks fabulous and to have fun. The contrast largely signals Eric's family's conservatism versus Otis's family's progressive, sex-positive attitude, but also gestures toward the different experiences they will have in public spaces due to their racial difference. When Otis is running late, Eric is left alone at the bus stop. He appears visibly nervous and uncomfortable, especially when approached by two men, who ultimately only wish him a happy birthday and compliment his appearance. Not wanting to see the movie alone, Eric decides to take the bus home again, but his bag and coat are stolen, and so he must walk. While Eric walks along the deserted country street, a car slows down alongside him, and the two men inside ask if he needs a ride, addressing him as

"miss." He responds with a "no thank you," and upon being rejected and hearing his baritone voice, the two men are emboldened. They ask, "Have you got a penis, miss? Go on, show us your dick." Eric asks politely to be left alone, arms crossed over his chest in a protective stance. They pull the car in front of him, and get out, saying "You gay fuck." He pleads with them: "Please, please. This isn't me. It's a costume. I was going to see a film with a friend. I'm not…." But they push him to the ground and spit on him.

His insistence on his outfit being a "costume," which he also asserted to his skeptical father, and his desperate "I'm not…" convey a need to distance himself from transness. It is *just* a costume, *not* an identity; merely play with gender, rather than true gender deviance. But that insistence is, of course, not enough to protect him from homophobic, transphobic violence. The episode does not, from my perspective, overdramatize the danger faced by a queer boy of color presenting non-normative gender. After the two men beat Eric up, he stumbles into an outdoor social gathering where women kindly look after him and let him borrow a phone, which he uses to call Otis's mother. As implied by the first men Eric encounters as well, not everyone participates in making public space dangerous for someone like Eric. But significantly, Otis never faces any danger even though he too spends his day in drag. While he largely interacts with friends and school peers, who may give him some skeptical looks, the contrast between the two boys' experiences is stark and is explained, at least in part, by their different racial identities. When Eric confronts him, Otis does not seem to understand the stakes of leaving Eric alone in public in drag, which could be explained by the different levels of risk they face. When Eric arrives home late at night, his father sees that he has been beaten up, and tells him, "If you're going to live like this, you have to toughen up." This command conveys the sense that public space *will* continue to be dangerous for someone who deviates from racialized gender and sexual

norms, and the only option is to steel oneself against the violence. Eric's father's perspective is likely informed by his experience as an African immigrant in the UK, rather than simple cultural conservatism. However, the conclusion of the photo leak narrative allows for other possibilities of collective, rather than individualized, protection.

Sex Education is unique among teen television in its offer of a "solution" to photo leaks based in collective action rather than personal fortitude. By the end of the episode, Maeve has uncovered that Olivia, Ruby's close friend, leaked the photo because she was tired of Ruby's bullying and "just wanted her to know how it feels," but she did not intend to release the version of the photo with Ruby's face in it. In the climactic final scene, all of the students arrive in the gym for an assembly led by their principal. The principal stands at the podium, framed in a low angle that constructs him as an imposing figure, though his demeanor signals that his imposition is merely bureaucratic. He begins, "Firstly, a very serious warning about pornographic images shared on mobile devices." A head-on reverse shot of the audience reveals bright lights pointed directly at the stage (and the camera), as well as the blank faces of dozens of indistinguishable, uninterested teenagers. He continues, "This kind of behavior is not only despicable but it has very serious consequences that may result in legal action. Now we do not know who sent the photograph in question. However, we are continuing to look into it." It is unclear whether "this kind of behavior" refers only to the person who leaked the photo, or also to the person who took and initially sent the photo. Both behaviors are likely "despicable" to this middle-aged straight white man, but this kind of slippage and ambiguity often produces the criminalization of young people's consensual sexual activity rather than the violation of their consent and privacy. A student interrupts him, calling out. "I heard it's Ruby's vagina!" Another yells, "Ruby's got big beef curtains!" The camera cuts quickly to laughing faces in the crowd, before showing Olivia,

looking around upset that she has exposed her friend to such ridicule. These outbursts draw both a contrast and a connection between the bureaucratic and parental forms of punishment and the peer-led social shaming young women face. The two forms of policing work in tandem.

The scene then cuts to a view from the back of the auditorium, the principal center frame, and the mass of students in the foreground. Toward the right edge of the frame, Olivia stands up from the crowd and shouts, "It's my vagina." The principal sternly and coldly tells her to sit down, but she insists, "No. That is my vagina in the photo." Again, a quiet "sit down." The camera racks focus from Olivia in the foreground, as Maeve pops up behind her in the auditorium crowd and says, "No it's my vagina." Aimee (Aimee Lou Wood), the kindest member of the popular clique, jumps in: "You're both wrong, it's my vagina." The principal yells in exasperation, "it cannot be all your vaginas," but another young woman adds, "I also have a vagina." Perhaps she misunderstands the template that has been established, but her statement asserts a kind of solidarity between all people who have vaginas, and counters the principal's literalist objection. The photo cannot perhaps literally be of every vagina, but the people who have vaginas can still claim it as their own. More and more students begin calling out "It's my vagina," sometimes just as off-screen voices and sometimes as faces popping out of the crowd. Maeve's boyfriend Jackson (Kedar Williams-Stirling), a cisgender boy, joins in, claiming the vagina as his own, and the principal firmly insists, "you do not have a vagina in the same way that I don't have a vagina." Witnessing all of this support, Ruby finally stands up smiling, holding hands with Olivia, and proudly announces, "It's my vagina."

This final scene enacts a kind of collective action that makes it impossible to hold one girl accountable for her own exposure. Specifically, it allows Ruby to remain anonymous—just one of many young people claiming the photo as their own. In *Habits of Leaking*, Wendy Chun

and Sarah Friedland cite Shilpa Phadke, Sameera Khan, and Shilpa Ranade writing about the need to assert women's "right to loiter" in public space, entailing risk, rather than policing women in public under the guise of keeping them safe.[44] Chun and Friedland write, "Phadke, Khan, and Ranade link the right to take risks—to enjoy oneself in public—not to familiarity, but rather to anonymity."[45] They imagine a chaotic mass of people, crossing class hierarchies and identities, that allows women to remain unidentified, and so their presence in public space cannot be policed nor can they be shamed for it. *Sex Education* enacts a small-scale version of this kind of chaotic mass, as anonymous voices sound and bodies appear from the crowd—if *everyone* asserts their own publicity at once, then no one person can be held accountable. Of course, this particular photo leak narrative allows for anonymity as a possibility because Ruby's face is not in the picture. However, the particular tactic the students enact mirrors digital tactics that can similarly protect someone who has been exposed without their consent. In 2020, *Avengers* actor Chris Evans shared on social media a screen recording from his phone on social media that accidentally revealed a nude photo on his camera roll. Although he quickly deleted the video, internet users had screenshotted the nude photo and it quickly spread. However, Insider.com reported that "fans ran to the actor's defense and began to flood social media feeds with wholesome photographs of Evans with puppies, reminding people that the nude photograph was not being shared with Evans' consent and deleting it was the right thing to do."[46] By using the hashtag #ChrisEvansLeak, fans were able to make it more difficult for other users to find and see

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[44] Chun and Friedland, *Habits of Leaking*, 17.
[45] Chun and Friedland, *Habits of Leaking*, 18.
[46] Zac Ntim, "Chris Evans Finally Responded to the Furor Around His Leaked Nude by Urging People to Go Vote," *Insider*, September 15, 2020, https://www.insider.com/chris-evans-finally-responds-to-accidental-nude-picture-leak-2020-9.

the nude photo. It is, of course, incredibly significant that Chris Evans is a straight, white, cisgender man best known for portraying Captain America. Countless women have faced similar situations without the collective protection of the internet. This strategy does, however, gesture toward the practical possibilities of Chun's argument that the way the internet works can be reimagined and redeployed to offer alternatives to the simplistic and harmful mantra repeated by many teen TV series, including Ruby in this episode of *Sex Education*: "If this picture gets released it will be on the internet for the rest of my life." In fact, individuals can engage in a "politics of forgiveness and deletion,"[47] or they can rewire a hashtag such that they rewrite the eternal "memory" of the internet. And *Sex Education* presents such tactics as a feminist practice enacted collectively to stop the policing of women's sexuality in public.

Conclusion

Twenty-year-old Elizabeth G. of Texas tells *Teen Vogue,* "Nowadays, women sext just as much as men do, but when women do it there's a negative connotation. And this connotation isn't something that's rare: It's everywhere! Even the media imposes it through TV shows and movies—instead of trying to remove this stigma, media oftentimes enforces it."[48] Elizabeth's understanding of the role of media in constructing and deconstructing stigma suggests its potential, if largely unrealized, power to offer alternatives to the sexist sexting dynamics she describes. Teen television series have, at best, an ambivalent relationship to girls' sexual self-exposure, mindful of its practical consequences even when accepting of its ordinariness. I

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[47] Chun and Friedland, *Habits of Leaking*, 19.
[48] Kiefer, "Is Sexting Actually Sexist?"

certainly do not want to imply that girls' privacy should not be respected, nor that privacy, exposure, and consent work the same way for all girls; they do not. But as Cassell and Cramer suggest, "when we investigate the kinds of statements made about the nature of the danger [posed to girls by technology], in each instance it is less the technology per se that turns out to be the culprit (or even the kinds of relationships made possible by the technology), and more about the potential sexual agency of young women, parental loss of control, and the spectre of women who manifest technological prowess."[49] Embracing technology and its logic of everyday exposure, then, has the potential to let girls' sexuality into the light of day, rather than enforcing an imposed invisibility masquerading as protection. Failing to do so, imposing traditional logics of privacy on an increasingly public culture, only reasserts that girls' sexual selfies are nothing more than a scandal. Rethinking the norms of privacy and publicity built on protecting the imagined innocence of white girls around a leakier logic makes room for the potential pleasure of sexual exposure for all girls. And centering the lens of girls' self-photography just might unsettle visual logics that assert normative white femininity as chaste, mask the specificity of the experiences of all women of color in relation to visibility, and erase Black girls' sexuality altogether. The ability to tell new stories about girls' consensual sexual selfies rests on refocusing the public gaze according to the terms on which girls choose to represent themselves.

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[49] Cassell and Cramer, "High Tech or High Risk," 70.

Conclusion

In the final weeks of writing this dissertation, the U.S. Supreme Court overruled Roe vs. Wade in Dobbs vs. Jackson Women's Health Organization, allowing states to enact laws that criminalize abortion under any circumstances. Misguidedly looking for solace on social media, I quickly came upon posts telling women and other people who menstruate to delete their period-tracking apps. Many expressed outrage and fear that people's menstruation data, which could be used to identify if someone may be pregnant or no longer pregnant, might be accessible to law enforcement. I saw people in states with legislatively-legalized abortion posting that they would host anyone traveling for an abortion. Others warned those people to go through a formal process of becoming a host through an abortion fund because posts like those invite increased surveillance. A Los Angeles Times op-ed co-written by a civil rights lawyer and the director of the Digital Defense Fund suggests that the state and others may use "common digital activity to determine if someone has searched for abortion pills, communicated with abortion providers or related services, or even if they've traveled out of state for care," and that law enforcement has already used extracted digital data in criminal cases relating to reproductive healthcare.[1] It insists, "digital autonomy and bodily autonomy are inextricably linked."

That same op-ed offers "what we watch" as the first item in a list of what our phones know about us, and historically, the law has affirmed that the surveillance and exposure of what we watch makes us vulnerable on multiple fronts. Congress passed the Video Privacy Protection Act in 1988 when the press leaked a Supreme Court nominee's video rental history. The

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[1] Cynthia Conti-Cook and Kate Bertash, "Op:Ed: The End of Row Means We'll be Criminalized for More of Our Data," *The Los Angeles Times*, May 16, 2022, https://www.latimes.com/opinion/story/2022-05-16/abortion-data-privacy-roe-surveillance.

journalist who printed it wrote, "The only way to figure out what someone is like is to examine what that someone likes."[2] The examples he provides of viewing habits that might convey something meaningful about the prospective justice include "homosexual porn," "slasher pics," and "Disney." Congress seemed to agree that video rental histories might be dangerously revealing, and so the VPPA prohibited video rental companies from disclosing rental histories or maintaining rental records beyond a year after an account closed. The law was invoked in a 2009 class-action lawsuit against Netflix, for releasing extensive viewership data as part of a public contest to create a new recommendation algorithm for the platform.[3] Specifically cited in the press, an in-the-closet lesbian woman alleged that she could be outed, because the data about her viewing of LGBTQ media content was not sufficiently anonymized.[4] After settling the lawsuit, Netflix lobbied for changes to the VPPA, and in 2013, it was amended to allow Netflix and other media platforms more freedom in what they do with users' viewing data.[5]

The overturning of Roe v. Wade is part of a larger dismantling of legal protections of privacy, a process that is particularly disconcerting considering the many new forms of publicity and visibility produced by new technologies. In a national landscape that is increasingly threatening to women, queer and trans people, people of color, and other marginalized groups, the prospect of visibility beyond one's control and even beyond one's knowledge is frightening.

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[2] Jonathan Cohn, "Online Viewer Privacy is Regulated by an Act Originally Designed to Protect Video Rentals," *The Conversation*, July 21, 2019, https://theconversation.com/online-viewer-privacy-is-regulated-by-an-act-originally-designed-to-protect-video-rentals-119515.
[3] Ryan Singel, "Netflix Cancels Recommendation Contest After Privacy Lawsuit," *Wired*, March 12, 2010, https://www.wired.com/2010/03/netflix-cancels-contest/.
[4] Ryan Singel, "Netflix Spilled Your *Brokeback Mountain* Secret, Lawsuit Claims," December 17, 2009, https://www.wired.com/2009/12/netflix-privacy-lawsuit/.
[5] Cohn, "Online Viewer Privacy."

And yet, it is difficult to imagine a scenario in which those forms of visibility are eradicated entirely. Surveillance technologies proliferate, as more and more of our lives are tied to devices which function through data collection. The government could create regulations to protect data privacy, and technology companies could fundamentally alter their business practices—both of which are extremely worth advocating for—but much of what marginalized people must do is navigate and negotiate their visibility within systems of power that would deny their subjectivity.

This dissertation has centered stories that television tells about the new forms of negotiation entailed by new forms of visibility. The series I have included all take place in some version of the "real world," but I will conclude with one final example in the science fiction genre in order to reflect on how the dynamics I have described shape speculation about the future of surveillance technology—both its power and its limits. The 2017 *Black Mirror* episode "Arkangel" (Netflix) takes up many of the anxieties circulating around issues of domestic surveillance, girls' sexuality, and feminine spectatorship explored in this dissertation. Through the genre-hybrid of the sci-fi maternal melodrama, the episode centers the complex domestic dynamics between mothers and daughters in the face of changing norms of privacy in the home. It offers a dystopian imagining of domestic surveillance technology's logical endpoint, playing out assumptions implicit in real-life popular discourse about harmful media effects and moral panics about girls' technology use: what girls see is what they will do. The episode subtly reinforces those assumptions, even as it critiques the expansion of surveillance within the family.

While television directly plays only a small role in the episode, spectatorship on the part of both mother and daughter serves as a motivating factor for surveillance, a source of its pleasure and its danger. It centrally depicts domestic surveillance technology run amok, a mother's investment in her daughter's protection gone too far, and a teen daughter out of control.

"Arkangel" does, however, offer productive ways to think about the failures of data surveillance technologies and their potential to upend traditional dynamics of spectatorship that diminish girls' subjectivity as viewers, users, and actors.

"Arkangel" features Marie (Rosemarie DeWitt), an anxious single mother, and her only daughter Sara (various actors across ages), moving episodically from Sara's birth to her teenage years. The episode opens with Sara's C-section birth, emphasizing moments of fear when Marie cannot see or hear what is going on—a curtain blocks her view of her own abdomen, and a wall of doctors shields the not-yet-crying baby. After Marie briefly loses a three-year-old Sara, who has innocently followed a cat away from the playground, she decides to sign Sara up for a new technology called Arkangel—a chip implanted in Sara's head that allows her mother to track and control her from a tablet or "parental hub." As Marie and little Sara walk through the sterile, start-up offices of the program, a promotional video plays on a large screen behind them. The words "safe," "secure," "peace of mind," and "protected" flash over idyllic images of white and multiracial families and children out in nature. If familial surveillance is characterized by "the dynamic interplay between care and control," as discussed in Chapter one, Arkangel emphasizes *care* as the driving motivation for employing such invasive technology.[6]

In fact, the elements of Arkangel most explicitly geared toward control are those which first put Marie off. To distract her from the implantation process and the grown-ups' conversation, Sara is placed in front of a tablet playing cartoons, suggesting the traditional conception of TV or technology as babysitter—spectatorship itself as a form of care. At the other

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[6] Margaret K. Nelson and Anita Ilta Garey, eds., *Who's Watching?: Daily Practices of Surveillance among Contemporary Families* (Nashville: Vanderbilt UP, 2009), 7.

side of the room, a technician explains the parental hub to Marie. She quickly clicks through familiar tablet setup windows, turning on notifications, reminders, and auto-updates as she goes. While the GPS locator and easy access to emergency services and law enforcement is predictably appealing for this middle class white mother, Marie is much more weary of the option to "relay her optic feed." As the technician taps the feed application, the camera cuts to a direct view of the tablet, on which the viewer sees *Sara's* tablet, playing cartoons. Marie (and the television audience) see what Sara sees. The technician tells Marie, "there are parental controls you can apply to that," seemingly implying the television/tablet content. Marie specifically questions, "controls?" The technician explains, "Content limitations. If she witnesses something that causes her cortisol levels to rise, like stress, it can kind of paint out whatever's triggering it." To demonstrate, she switches Sara's tablet from cartoons to a live-action female soldier wielding an automatic weapon at the screen. The technician presses the touchscreen, and the tablet announces "filter on." Suddenly, the woman on the screen is pixelated and the sound distorted beyond recognition. Marie balks, starting to say, "I'm not sure that we'll…" when the technician cuts her off with, "it's all optional."

This content limitation option, however, does not only apply to screen media content, as traditional parental control technology normally does. The program will "filter" out stress-inducing views of any kind, from a scary dog in a neighbor's yard to Sara's grandfather having a heart attack in her presence. The expansion of "content limitations" beyond media consumption speaks to our present world of ubiquitous screen technologies and social media production—everything is "content," including Sara's streaming "optic feed" itself. Sara occupies the role of spectator no more than Marie does, as Marie voraciously consumes the live feed of her daughter's life. Significantly, the first time Marie is shown watching Sara's optic feed, the two of

them are playing hide and seek. Marie laughs quietly from her closet hiding spot watching Sara roam happily around the house. She enacts the seemingly-innocent voyeuristic pleasure of parents watching their unknowing children from a baby monitor. But she is also watching Sara's *watching*. The act of *seeking* reinforces what is already true of the first-person view of the optic feed; when Marie watches her tablet, she is embodying her daughter *as spectator.* The technology exposes a tension or contradiction between Sara as *objectified* by her mother's controlling gaze, and Sara as the viewing subject.

As emphasized by the many point-of-view shots and images of screens, spectatorship is, in fact, central to how the episode conceives of Arkangel's surveillant capacity. When the viewer encounters Sarah around the age of 8, the "content limitations" are in place. Her parental control settings seem to have fostered a blankness or expressionlessness in her; visiting her grandfather's grave, Marie's tears are blurred out, indicating Sara's ignorance of the range of human emotions. She approaches a group of kids on the playground at school; they are huddled around a tablet watching a violent video of someone beating someone else. She tries to join in, but the image is just a blur for her. The other kids make fun of her for being a "chip-head;" they know about Arkangel, and her inability to participate in their group spectatorship leaves her an outsider. She relies on a description of the video, and an explanation of blood, from her peer to participate in this form of socialization, but even his voice becomes distorted. At home, she challenges her restrictions for what appears to the viewer to be the first time. She draws pictures of blood spilling from a man's head, only for it to be blurred out as well. When she uses a pencil to draw her own blood from her finger, her mother is finally prompted to retire the parental hub—a promise not to use it again, as a doctor tells her the chip itself cannot be removed. In these inciting incidents, the co-optation of Sara's *vision* becomes the turning point for the girl herself,

and for her mother. Her sight has never been her own, which restricts what she can experience as well as what she can create.

In true *Black Mirror* fashion, the episode unsubtly critiques the dehumanizing effects of this familial surveillance technology; it is unequivocally *better* that Sara be free to experience the world without such limitations on her "content" consumption. Nonetheless, *Arkangel* somewhat more subtly reinforces the idea that "inappropriate" content can have harmful, gendered effects, often based on the idea that what a child sees, they will do. When Sara arrives at school the first day free of her mom's monitoring, she encounters the same boy, Trick, who had made fun of her about the violent video. He has a bloody nose—that she can see, this time—and she explains to him that her parental controls are off now. A comedically quick cut reveals Sara sitting captivated by a tablet playing pornography. While the camera does not show what she is watching (we only watch her, head-on, as she watches), Trick narrates the video: "Okay, this is porn, like people doing it. They can't make babies that way, they have to do it different for that." The camera zooms in with a jump cut, to indicate another video: "This one's got a hacksaw." In the final cut of the sequence, a close-up depicts Sarah's horror, disgust, and inability to look away, as Trick describes a terrorist beheading someone. Emphasizing Mom's ignorance of these events, the episode cuts to Marie sending Sarah to school the next day with a simple, "be good, sweetie." The ironic juxtaposition of Sara's scandalous spectatorship and Marie's gentle admonition emphasizes the connection between *watching* and *being*, or perhaps *doing*. What Sara watches becomes a reflection of her character, and just as the meaning of "be good" is often highly gendered, so is the meaning of "good" spectatorship.

Arkangel grapples with the gendered ramifications of the connection between watching and doing. The viewer next encounters Sara as a teenager, as she begins to explore casual drug

use and sex with her peers. One night she lies to her mother in order to join her friends at a beach bonfire and later, to have sex with Trick, now a retail worker and drug messenger. When Marie finds out that Sara isn't where she said she would be and can't get in contact with her, she turns on the old Arkangel parental hub in desperation. The tablet seems to have been stored away, untouched, for years, and Marie only turns to it now out of fear. She frantically hooks it up to a charger, first locates Sara on the GPS tracker, but then quickly switches to the optic feed. A closeup of the tablet screen, placing the viewer in Marie's position, reveals Trick's face moving in and out of the frame. Sara's voice sounds from the tablet, breathlessly saying, "fuck me harder" and "please." Marie appears deeply disturbed, as the tablet continues to stream. The episode cuts to black, over which Sara's voice, with the tinny quality that indicates we are still listening through the tablet, says "Here, let me do that." Suddenly, the viewer is transported to Trick's van, where Sara is offering to re-buckle his belt. They seem comfortable, intimate, and pleased—a positive sexual interaction for both participants. He gently tells her, "You know you didn't have to talk like that." She inquires, "like what?" and he clarifies, "Like the porn stuff. I mean like, you don't have to talk like that… for me." Her pride seems only a bit damaged as she responds with a quiet "okay."

This climactic scene sets up the rapid deterioration of Marie and Sara's relationship as well as a set of complex dynamics entangling surveillance, spectatorship, and girls' sexuality. Trick's statement emphasizes the effect that watching pornography—free from her mother's parental control over her viewing—had on Sara as a young woman. She has learned a sexual vocabulary that positions women as the submissive objects of sexual interaction; he fucks her, not the other way around. Trick's rewording ("you don't have to talk like that… *for me*") allows that Sara *might* be enacting this pornographic performance for herself, but he intends to free her

of the patriarchal expectation that she do so. This dynamic elucidates the complex interplay between care and control at play when it comes to the surveillance of girls' spectatorship. In one sense, protecting girls from watching pornography, for instance, protects them from misogynistic visions of their sexuality that can lead to girls "putting themselves" in harmful and dehumanizing sexual situations. From this perspective, protecting girls from watching misogynistic content may protect them from the danger of misogyny in real life, though certainly any kind of parental controls—the *Black Mirror* version or the real-life version—would only ever block the most graphic or egregious content, not the everyday misogyny that permeates most mainstream media.

Trick's gentle admonition subtly implies this most generous reading of spectatorial surveillance, but of course, Marie's visual access to the sexual encounter reinforces Sara's experience/performance *as* pornography. Marie's horrified, visceral reaction characterizes their encounter as deviant. The subtle dynamics of Sara "fucking" versus "being fucked," or Sara's specific experience of sex, do not seem to come into play, just as dynamics of consent are frequently ignored in controversies around girls' sexting. Marie is upset at the fact of the sex itself, and importantly, at her own experience of *watching* it. If sex itself is the problem, as well as its visibility, then the problem of Sara watching pornography is likely *not* the particular ethics of the particular pornography she consumed, but the fact that she was "exposed" to such media at all as a child. That exposure to pornography has perhaps led to this moment of Sara herself being exposed, to Trick and to the gaze of the Arkangel technology.

Seeing her daughter having sex sets Marie on a downward spiral as she returns to regular use of the Arkangel parental hub, and certainly the episode is critical of the idea of further surveillance as the answer to the "problem" of Sara's sexual activity. "Arkangel" does, however, reinforce the logic underlying Marie's decisions—*seeing* will lead to *doing*. When Sara and

Trick hang out again, she begs him to show her some of the cocaine that he delivers as a drug messenger. She says, “Show me what it looks like… come on, I just want to see.” He is very resistant to showing her the drug, and when he does, the conversation instantly turns to trying it. Their dialogue—her desire and his resistance—foregrounds the act of seeing as the basis of “problematic” behavior. Had he not *shown* her the drug, she would not have tried it.

Spectatorship, however, proves to be a problem not only in Sara’s case, but in Marie’s as well. After seeing her daughter having sex, Marie becomes reliant once again on the optic feed of Arkangel’s parental hub. Her surveillance of Sara’s literal viewpoint is subsumed into a more traditional form of televisual spectatorship as the drama of Sara’s private life seems to become a melodrama in its own right. Marie flips on the feed just in time to see a line of cocaine perfectly framed as Sara tilts her head to snort it. After using footage of Trick giving Sara drugs to blackmail him into ghosting Sara, Marie watches the endless point-of-view close-ups of Sara’s smartphone screen as she desperately awaits a never-coming text message response from Trick. When Sara finally confronts Trick, Marie sees a close-up of Trick rejecting her, his hair blowing in the breeze and his smooth face beautifully lit. Like the stereotypical old-fashioned housewife and her daily soap, Marie becomes addicted to the daily drama of her daughter’s life. Surveillance figured *as* spectatorship thus feminizes the (power) dynamics of care and control at play.

The point-of-view perspective of the surveillant content Marie consumes pinpoints one major problem of spectatorship, as well as of motherhood, in overidentification—a too-close-ness between the spectator and the object of the gaze, in the terms of early psychoanalytic

feminist film theory.[7] Marie's desire for control comes from caring *too much*. By opening with Sara's cesarean birth, "Arkangel" from the beginning emphasizes the difficulty of separation for mother and daughter. Arkangel, the technology, televisually places Marie in Sara's body, as opposed to the other way around, despite Marie's efforts to use it to keep her daughter close. The episode thus pathologizes Marie's spectatorship as well as Sara's, the effect of which is "wrong" sexual behavior. In both cases, it seems, women watching pose a problem for a functioning family dynamic, reliant on normative gender and sexuality.

At the level of character and story, the climax of the episode plays out a heightened feminine melodrama. Marie learns from a medical alert on the tablet that Sara is pregnant. She purchases emergency contraception and grinds it into Sara's morning smoothie without telling her. After getting sick at school, Sara undergoes minor tests and the school nurse reports that the morning-after pill made her sick. Sara realizes what has happened, rushes home, and locates the tablet. She scrolls through images of her own memories, horrified, as she realizes the extent of what her mother has seen. When she confronts Marie, she says, "You watched me. You watched me with him." As Marie desperately tries to explain, Sara is driven into a rage by the malfunctioning machine, and she begins to beat her mother violently with the tablet. Her content limitations have been inadvertently turned back on, so the bloody mess of her mother's face is all a blur. Realizing what she's done, she runs away, leaving Marie finally, truly alone. In a final shot, Sara hitchhikes and is picked up by an unseen trucker.

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[7] Mary Ann Doane, *Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

These final plot points reinforce the somewhat familiar narrative of a mother gone too far in her attempt to control her daughter, and a teen girl finally ricocheting beyond her reach. Sex and the vulnerable body of the teen girl remain the center around which all decisions and emotions seem to pivot. Sara's accidental pregnancy is itself a cliche of televised teen girls' virginity loss, the damning consequence of sexual activity. Arkangel has led Marie to see Sara's body as an extension of her own, and ending Sara's pregnancy without her consent represents the ultimate violation of her bodily autonomy. The problem of Arkangel's surveillance, then, is not exactly Marie's objectification of Sara, but her overidentification with her. Sara's reaction reinforces Marie's surveillant spectatorship as the problem more explicitly than ending the pregnancy, as well as the deviant nature of that spectatorship. Marie has been watching many moments of Sara's life, but the one she highlights in her confrontation is Marie watching her have sex: "You watched me with him." Her tone and expression, as well as her violent response, communicate that this spectatorial act is the greatest possible violation, thus reinforcing sex as the ultimate private act. I want to emphasize here the dual nature of that claim. There is a distinct difference between a right to sexual privacy and a demand that sex remain private, or invisible. Surveillance complicates that distinction, as it makes sex visible and thus violates the normative boundaries of private and public. However, the specific dynamics of such a violation are not a given. Sara is certainly upset that her *right* to privacy has been violated. The episode, overall, however, emphasizes the taboo nature of Marie seeing Sara having sex, specifically from Sara's perspective. The viewer is repeatedly reminded of the grotesqueness of the spectatorial situation, underlining the visibility of Sara's sexual activity as pornographic. As surveillance brings her sex life into view without her consent, it becomes harder to distinguish whether the *problem* here is

the violation of Sara's privacy, or the fact of sexual visibility—itself a violation of gendered sexual norms of propriety.

If "Arkangel's" story brings to the surface the complicated power dynamics of surveillance for women, its visual style and use of point of view illuminates the disruption posed by women's spectatorship in those dynamics of privacy and surveillance. When Sara finally gets ahold of the Arkangel parental hub, she discovers her own position as object of technological surveillance. Scrolling through the images of her own memories, she simultaneously embodies the most extreme version of overidentification—she is both viewer and viewed—as well as the social media user scrolling through her own feed, a visual log of her life that she herself has assembled for both personal and public display. When Marie arrives home she turns the tablet's optic feed on to look for Sara. When Sara grabs it back from her, she looks at the tablet in her hands, and a point of view shot reveals the screen, on which a mise-en-abyme of hands and tablet unfolds—screen within screen within screen. The machine cannot handle it, unable to function when Sara is both the spectator and the surveilled. Her spectatorship fundamentally disrupts the system that is, in fact, built on her view. As Sara uses the tablet to hit her mother, it turns on her content limitations, but she violently grabs hold of her own vision, her own point of view, to fight against her surveillance. Women's spectatorship, thus, need not be reduced to a pathologized, feminine overidentification that upsets the gendered power dynamics of the family. Instead, women's spectatorship, in the context of digital technology's multiplication and dispersal of subject and object, viewing and viewed, positions, can serve as a disruption to the systems of gendered power underlying surveillance regimes.

This dissertation has foregrounded women's spectatorship in this context to shed light on the everyday consequences of a technological landscape in which the ways we watch are

increasingly entangled with the ways we are watched. It has argued that women's television—that which primarily, if not exclusively, addresses a feminized spectator—is actively grappling with surveillance as a form of gendered power. By paying careful attention to the gendered power dynamics of visibility, women's TV sheds light on feminine processes of negotiating those dynamics as they are shaped by new technologies. I argue that studying feminine spectatorship through women's genres is an important way to understand new forms of surveillance while foregrounding women's perspectives, subjectivity, and agency, especially as television technologies increasingly incorporate surveillance on multiple fronts. Many of these dynamics have long existed and been accounted for in feminist media scholarship, and this dissertation builds on that foundation. However, each chapter addresses specific new forms of visibility and vision, from domestic technological convergence to algorithmic data collection to sexual selfies, that unsettle the configuration of gendered looking relations that characterized the 20th century.

Chapter one focused on that technological convergence between television and surveillance in the home in order to explore the changing nature of domestic privacy. It argued that women's and girls' spectatorship, largely imagined through the figures of mothers and daughters, play a central role in selling domestic surveillance. The anxieties expressed by "Arkangel" play out in a somewhat less dystopian fashion in advertisements and popular discourse. While in "Arkangel" the mother's overinvested spectatorship poses a problem, advertisements for Smart TV surveillance depict mothers as confident users of digital technology, empowered to monitor and protect their families. Daughters are alternatively offered up as passive consumers of media with the potential to violate the normative boundaries of the family, which include the invisibility of girls' sexuality. The discourse explored in this chapter

provides a foundation for the rest of the dissertation in part by establishing the roles of normative femininity and normative forms of feminine spectatorship in easing anxiety around surveillance technology and the changing boundaries of privacy.

Chapter one argued that marketing discourse articulates domestic surveillance to the caring maternal gaze as part of the process of selling the expansion of corporate access to home life. Chapter two similarly picked up the idea of depicting surveillance as a form of feminized, overinvested spectatorship, neutralizing the power dynamics at play. *The Good Wife* and *The Good Fight* offer alternative perspectives on the nature of state surveillance, and how different forms of surveillance shape the possibilities for public action. While *The Good Wife* aligns the TV viewers with the NSA, eager to follow the interpersonal drama of the main characters, *The Good Fight* foregrounds surveillance as an exercise of power often deployed in ways that limit coalitional politics and collective action. In embracing a neoliberal feminist perspective on the experience of state surveillance, *The Good Wife* undermined the collective political potential of the imagined national public addressed by broadcast television. The latter series ties this regime of state surveillance to corporate data surveillance that ostensibly leads to media addressing individualized users rather than a collective public. It suggests that the algorithmic address of streaming television and other internet content limits our ability to see each other across difference as members of a shared public.

Chapter three continued to explore how spectatorship is transformed by digital media and streaming technology. In their deconstruction of the romance plot, *UnREAL* and *You* enact feminine spectatorial processes of negotiation as they are shaped by digital interactivity, mediated visibility, and algorithmic address. *UnREAL* creates an experience for the viewer of constantly shifting between different levels of mediation, and explores the consequences of

having the technological capacity to consume and control one's own image. *You*'s narrative of a dangerous stalker who envisions himself as a romantic lead expresses skepticism about the forms of data surveillance and algorithmic address enacted by streaming platforms like Netflix. It depicts the process of moving in and out of the subject/object positions one is expected to occupy as a feminine practice of survival under patriarchy. As series that transitioned from Lifetime to streaming "originals," *UnREAL* and *You* explore how the forms of spectatorial negotiation women's genres have always entailed respond to the streaming era.

This dissertation is bookended by considerations of the place of young women's spectatorship and visibility in a technological landscape that collapses experiences of watching and being watched, of subjectivity and objectification. The first chapter of this dissertation explored how marketing for parental control technologies employs girls' spectatorship as a problem to be solved through surveillance. That discourse suggests that surveillance technology can be used to enforce the appropriate boundaries of domestic privacy, which include the invisibility and containment of girls' sexuality. The final chapter offered an alternative perspective on the relationship between technology, norms of privacy, and girls' sexuality. It argued that teen television, which primarily addresses girl spectators, can illuminate the dynamics of girls' self-image creation and the agency they have in their own visibility, even in the face of larger social powers. Teen TV is one avenue to understand how young people's technology use has the potential to transform norms of privacy that have always been used to police and enforce racialized norms of femininity and sexuality. Just as the Arkangel technology used to surveil and police Sara's behavior malfunctions when she is both the subject and object of its gaze, the final chapter suggested that centering girls' subjectivity in the creation of their own images can disrupt the systems that would erase and objectify them.

In the introduction, I offered Mary Ann Doane's psychoanalytic theory as one part of the foundation of this dissertation.[8] Through her analysis of films that foreground women as spectators and objects of surveillance at once, she argues that women's subjectivity and desire is always circumscribed by their objectification. This dissertation has demonstrated that we need alternative frameworks to think beyond that circumscription, particularly when our prominent modes of spectatorship necessarily entail surveillance. I have argued that women's television can help us understand the specific dynamics of visibility engendered by digital technologies by foregrounding women as viewing subjects always negotiating new forms of visibility and new norms of privacy. Analyzing the relationship between surveillance aesthetics and feminine modes of address in television both illuminates how digital technology creates new forms of power and how women negotiate and disrupt that power. At a moment when it feels vital to reassert the right to privacy and reimagine its meaning altogether, women's television is one place to turn.

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[8] Mary Ann Doane, *The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940s* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1987).

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