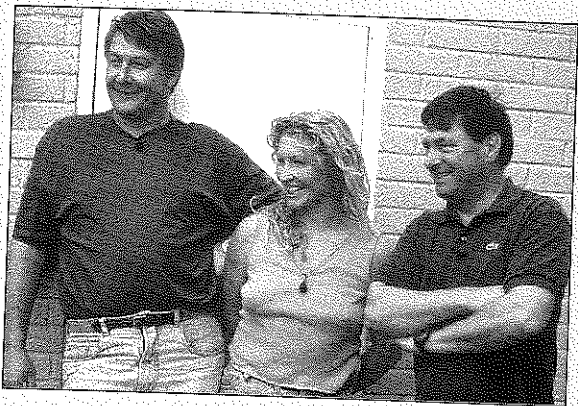


## MAKEOVER SHOWS

The makeover show was perhaps the most popular and successful format of the prime-time factual entertainment programming that dominated British terrestrial television from the mid-1990s. These are programmes which feature the transformation of a person (e.g. *Style Challenge*), a room or home (e.g. *Changing Rooms*, in which the contestants, with the help of an expert, make over a room in each other's homes in two days), or garden (*Ground Force*, in which a family member and a team of experts make over a garden in the absence of their loved one). The central generic marker of the makeover show is 'the reveal' at the end of the programme, in which the person/room/garden transformed is revealed to the contestant and the audience at home, their reaction visually foregrounded through the use of the close-up. The majority of instances of the makeover show in the 1990s have been on BBC television with independent production company Bazal featuring significantly, although ITV also attempted to work up this format with shows like *Carol Vorderman's Better Homes*.

The rise of the makeover show and the consequent 'daytime-isation' of the prime-time schedules can be traced to the use of the fashion and/or home makeover in daytime mag-



*Ground Force*: makeover shows go gardening

azine programmes, and subsequently in daytime shows such as *Style Challenge* and *Real Rooms*. The makeover has always been a central feature of feminine popular culture, from the transformation structure central to fairytales like 'Cinderella', women's films such as *Now Voyager* (Irving Rapper, 1942) and *Pretty Woman* (Garry Marshall, 1990), to the 'before and after' format common to hair and beauty product advertising and also beloved of fashion and beauty features in women's magazines. The gendered character of the makeover as a genre, then, is partially responsible for the conception of British terrestrial prime-time schedules as increasingly 'feminised' by the growing emphasis on factual entertainment in the 1990s.

Interestingly, in terms of representation, the rise to prominence of the makeover format has opened up traditionally 'feminine' genres, spaces and concerns on television to a new audience of men (fashion and beauty, interior decorating), and vice-versa (DIY and the use of power tools). This occurs despite the fact that the shows often also reinforce traditional divisions of labour – the female presenter of *Changing Rooms*, Carol Smillie, for instance is most frequently seen operating a sewing machine.

Brunsdon (2001, pp. 54–6) has argued that the use of the close-up in the makeover show represents a shift in the visual grammar of the television DIY programme, from an interest in showing the detail of the skill being demonstrated and learned to an emphasis on the reaction of the ordinary person featured in the programme in contemporary instances. This moment highlights the increasing presence and importance of 'the ordinary person' on British television in the 1990s. Its excess of ordinariness is both a source of pleasure and engagement for the audience, exploiting television's potential for intimacy and immediacy in its apparent offer of an authentic moment of genuine emotion (see Moseley, 2000), but also, as Karen Lury (1995) has suggested, serving as a potential source of anxiety and discomfort for the viewer. This dynamic frequently makes the shows rather uncomfortable to watch.

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identity, society and culture in terms of class, sexuality and ethnicity (see Medhurst, 1999; Brunsdon *et al.*, 2001). Through this democratisation of an old public service discourse (Bondebjerg, 1996) and its attendant shift in understandings of what constitutes the public sphere, we can observe the 'working through' that, as John Ellis has recently argued, opens up possibilities for formulating a new definition of public service broadcasting to serve the new television environment (Ellis, 2000, p. 86).

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changes. Yet it might be argued that there is more at stake in these programmes than a simple indication of the extent to which British television culture has 'dumbed down'. Stuart Jefferies, in a book itself indicative of the mood of TV nostalgia prominent in the 1990s, has discussed this mode of television as an instance of 'public service broadcasting in the age of anxiety' (2000, p. 316). More importantly, these are trends in which we can see demonstrated the regendering of television genres and the articulation of changing understandings of the constitution of British

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## New US Networks in the 1990s

The emergence of new broadcast networks and cable channels in the United States during the 1980s and 90s hastened the tendency towards market fragmentation begun by the 'big three' during the 1970s. If 'quality' was the mantra uttered by industry executives during the 1970s, the buzzwords in the 1980s and 90s were 'niche marketing', 'brand identities', and 'developing synergies'. The impulses towards pursuing specific demographic groups and lifestyle niches – begun tentatively with the networks' pursuit of the quality audience in the late 1960s and early 1970s – developed into an art form as the 1980s and 90s progressed and a number of new cable and broadcast channels appeared. Fox provided one model for how to do business in a multi-channel universe, using a number of marketing, scheduling and programming techniques that would become standard in both broadcasting and cable in the ensuing years. Cable channels that included MTV, Nickelodeon, BET and Lifetime, as well as two newly formed broadcast 'netlets', WB and UPN, subsequently continued the move towards narrowcasting by targeting particular age and ethnic groups with their shows. As these nascent cable and broadcast entities successfully increased their viewership – often attracting the audiences most valued by advertisers – they

forced NBC, CBS and ABC to reconceptualise their own images and programming strategies.

The development of both cable channels and new networks was a much more gradual process than had been anticipated by either government regulators or the media industries. Although the technological mechanisms were in place for several years, a series of complicated FCC regulations as well as limited resources hindered the development of new cable channels. A turning point came in the mid-1970s when HBO hooked up to the SATCOM I satellite and began airing programming nationwide. Soon after HBO's debut, a number of additional stations appeared, including CBN (Christian Broadcasting Network, launched 1977), USA (1977), Showtime (1978), Nickelodeon (1979), CNN (1980), MTV (1981) and The Nashville Network (1983). At the same time, a select number of local channels including WTBS and WOR connected via satellite to become 'superstations', airing nationally.

In spite of the creation of all these new channels, there was very little original programming available throughout the early and mid-1980s. Instead, cable channels initially relied on sports, old movies and broadcast television reruns (Mullen, 2003, pp. 132–8). The 'fresh' programming available included news, religious sermons, music videos, instructional programming, and public access shows in select localities. Given the limited reach of cable during this time, few networks were willing to fund new shows, and the shows they did fund had very limited budgets and low production values. The Nashville Network was one of the earliest cable networks to generate original programming. Most of its shows, however, were low-cost travelogues (*Country Sportsman*), talent shows (*You Can Be a Star*), musical showcases (*Grand Ole Opry*) and instructional programmes (*The Bassmasters*). Children's and family-oriented programming proved the exception to the low-budget rule. *Fraggle Rock* (HBO, 1983–8), *Faerie Tale Theater* (Showtime, 1982–7), *The New Leave It to Beaver* (Disney, 1985–6) and *The Campbells* (CBN, 1986–9) were among the more ambitious programmes targeted to youth or the family. While this audience proved a viable niche for a number of cable channels, programmers found other niches more elusive. In fact, a number of cable channels had to revamp their schedules or merge with other channels in order to broaden their audience reach. Such was the case with the ARTS Channel and the Entertainment Channel, which joined to form A&E in 1984. In the same year, the Daytime Channel and the Cable Health Network joined to form Lifetime. In both instances, these channels found their narrowcasting strategy to be too narrow for the

time (Mullen, 2003, p. 116). In their newly combined forms, however, both networks began funding original series: A&E met with success with the stand-up comedy show, *Evening at the Improv* (1985–95) as well as the long-running documentary series, *Biography* (1987–); Lifetime had an early hit with advice from sexual therapist *Dr Ruth Westheimer* (1984–91).

Even as cable networks continued to struggle to establish themselves during the mid-1980s, a new competitor came along in the form of the Fox network. As the first attempt at a fourth network since DuMont in the 1950s – and one appearing at a time when the ‘big three’ were struggling to hold onto their audience – many doubted Fox could succeed. However, it benefited from the deep pockets of media mogul Rupert Murdoch, who was ready to sink millions of dollars into creating a fourth broadcast network designed to air original programming (Block, 1991, p. 140). Further, Murdoch was willing to let programmers develop the schedule gradually, with one new evening of prime time being unveiled every six to twelve months. Also, Fox executives felt less pressure because of the decision to schedule programmes for only two hours a night, as opposed to the three prime-time hours scheduled on the other networks.

It was fortunate that Murdoch was prepared to be patient with his new network as Fox got off to a rocky start in both late night and prime time. Fox began its venture into the network business in October 1986 with a five-night-a-week, late-night talk show starring former *Tonight Show* guest host Joan Rivers. Rivers’ *The Late Show* proved to be a disaster; ratings remained low and the press attacked the programme as well as the new network. Within eight months, Rivers was out, replaced by a series of rotating guests including Suzanne Somers, Robert Townsend and Arsenio Hall. Fox tried to revamp late night in December 1987 with a comedy/news magazine hybrid, *The Wilton North Report*, but it was pulled after running for less than a month. One last attempt at late night with *The Chevy Chase Show* (1993) became a public relations nightmare. Chase’s jokes bombed, the interviews were tedious. Emergency reworking efforts failed, and the show was off the air less than a month after its premiere.

Prime time proved equally bumpy at first, in part because executives lacked a clear vision about the direction the network should take. Programmers relied on a sitcom-heavy schedule during the network’s first few years. Among the sitcoms that came and went in Fox’s first year in prime time were: *Down and Out in Beverly Hills* (1987), a TV version of the popular motion picture; *Mr President* (1987–8), George C. Scott’s return to television after several years in

the role of chief executive; and *Duet* (1987–9), a generic comedy about the lives of two couples. Dramas proved equally troublesome; *Werewolf* (1987–8) failed to attract viewers in spite of its unique promotional gimmick of providing an 800 number for viewers who spotted werewolves in their communities. Meanwhile, Fox’s early cancellation of *The Dirty Dozen* (1988, based on the film) led to a very public battle between the network and its production company, MGM.

Although Fox certainly had its share of missteps in its early years, programmers slowly began to develop a clearer sense of what Fox programming should be. They were aided in developing Fox’s identity as the ‘upstart’ network by the success of two of its earliest shows: *Married . . . with Children* (1987–97) and *The Tracey Ullman Show* (1987–90). Each was crucial to the development of Fox as a brand name but in different ways: *Married . . . with Children* helped Fox corner the market on ‘alternative sitcoms’ – programmes specialising in raunchy humour and testing the boundaries of good taste in both subject matter and dialogue. While NBC celebrated the traditional family and middle-class virtues in *Family Ties* and *The Cosby Show*, several Fox comedies of the late 1980s and early 1990s – led, of course, by *Married . . . with Children* – rejected all such values. Once the Bundy family began to garner media attention and controversy, the sky was the limit for Fox sitcom content. First there was *Women in Prison* (1987–8) about a group of female inmates in a Wisconsin jail, then came *Babes* (1990–1), about three heavy-set sisters living together in New York City, followed by *Whoops!* (1992), a comedy about six Midwestern kids living in a post-apocalyptic society.

*The Tracey Ullman Show*, meanwhile, helped attract critical attention to the network as well as demonstrating to the creative community and the public that Fox could be a haven for quality programming. This comedy-variety show, which featured the multitalented British comedienne, brought Fox its first Emmy nomination. More importantly, it introduced an animated family into American consciousness through a series of shorts placed between Ullman’s skits. This family, *The Simpsons* (1989–), proved to be Fox’s first bona fide ratings success – even as it garnered praise from critics for its witty satirising of American life and its parodies of popular culture.

*The Simpsons* and *Married . . . with Children* became two of the signature shows enabling Fox to differentiate itself and its content from CBS, ABC and NBC. These shows also solidified the target demographic for the network – adults aged eighteen to thirty-four. Using this age range as well as its image as the ‘alternative network’ as the

barometer, Fox began to specialise in four specific types of shows. In addition to the sitcoms described above, the network also started generating a large number of reality programmes including *Cops* (1989–), *America’s Most Wanted* (1988–) and *Totally Hidden Video* (1989–92). These programmes regularly earned high ratings while offsetting some of the expenses borne by Fox as a start-up enterprise. In an effort to further diversify and explore new niches, Fox produced serialised dramas targeted at teenagers and young adults. Arguing that this was a market currently being overlooked by the other networks, Fox commissioned seasoned producers such as Stephen J. Cannell (*Night Rider*, *Hunter*) and Aaron Spelling (*Charlie’s Angels*, *The Love Boat*) to develop youth-centred, hour-long dramas. Cannell developed *21 Jump Street* (1987–90), a show about cops who pose undercover as high-school students to fight crime in schools. The show made stars of actors Johnny Depp and Richard Grieco (who got his own short-lived spin-off, *Booker*, 1989–90). Spelling, meanwhile, transferred the successful *Dynasty* formula of sexual temptation and a fascination with the lives of the wealthy into a winning teenage version with *Beverly Hills 90210* (1990–2000). These shows helped spark a ‘teen craze’ that would overtake television in the 1990s, attracting adolescent viewers to Fox (and later, the WB) even as they turned away from the established networks.

Fox did not just pursue the young adult audience during its early years. In addition to this niche, Fox also sought out African-American viewers. Although the ‘big three’ had not altogether ignored African-American-centred shows, Fox programmers felt the urban middle- and lower-class, African-American communities were being under-served. NBC’s *The Cosby Show* (1984–92) and *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* (1990–6), for example, focused on suburban, upper-middle-class African-Americans. Consequently, during the early 1990s Fox aggressively tried to attract what they perceived to be a neglected audience through the airing of such sitcoms as *In Living Color* (1990–4), *Roc* (1991–4), *Martin* (1992–7) and *The Sinbad Show* (1993–4). Fox chose to ‘counter-programme’ *The Sinbad Show* and *In Living Color* against NBC’s ‘must-see TV’ Thursday-night line-up of *Wings* and *Seinfeld* (Zook, 1999, pp. 3–5).

As the 1980s progressed, a number of cable channels similarly increased their viewership by showing what the traditional broadcast networks did not – or could not. Premium pay cable networks such as Showtime and HBO began airing more original programming, much of which featured explicit language, sexuality and violence that wouldn’t get past the networks’ Standards and Practices div-

isions. *First and Ten* (HBO, 1984–91), *Russell Simmons’ Def Comedy Jam* (HBO, 1992–7) and *The Red Shoe Diaries* (Showtime, 1992–8) all took advantage of their presence on commercial-free, uncensored channels. HBO and Showtime also took on controversial subjects through their made-for-television movies: *And the Band Played on* (HBO, 1993) focused on the AIDS epidemic; *If These Walls Could Talk* (HBO, 1996) dealt with abortion; *Bastard out of Carolina* (Showtime, 1996) depicted child molestation and abuse.

Basic cable networks also slowly raised their output of movies-of-the-week and series programming as the 1990s progressed. A much wider breadth of shows appeared as these cable networks began to acquire more viewers and new corporate owners with deep pockets. As had been the case with Fox, original programming became a means for many cable channels to carve out their market niches and establish clear brand identities with viewers. Nickelodeon invested heavily in new series by the early 1990s, supporting child-oriented sitcoms (*Clarissa Explains It All*, 1991–4), cartoons (*Rugrats*, 1991–4; 1997–), magazine shows (*U to U*, 1994–6), game shows (*Legend of the Hidden Temple*, 1993–5) and dramas (*Fifteen*, 1991–3). These shows enabled Nickelodeon to establish itself as the premier children’s programmer. MTV, meanwhile, provided a similar array of programming geared to teenagers: game shows (*Remote Control*, 1987–90), talk shows (*The Jon Stewart Show*, 1993–4), reality programming (*The Real World*, 1992–) and cartoons (*Beavis and Butthead*, 1993–6) all featured youthful characters, fast editing, the latest music and popular culture references in their bid to win over twelve- to twenty-four-year-olds.

USA, in turn, quickly defined itself as a purveyor of B-level genre product with the foreign intrigue programme *Counterstrike* (1990–3), the science-fiction series *Swamp Thing* (1990–3) and the adventure show *Renegade* (1992–7). In addition, it picked up programming rejected by the networks. *Silk Stalkings*, for example, began its life running concurrently on CBS’s late-night schedule and on USA. However, even after CBS cancelled the show, USA continued running it for several more years. Such a practice indicated a shift in cable programming strategy initiated in the early 1990s: whereas previously cable channels had predominantly recycled and reconfigured old television product, programmers now began experimenting with repurposing and multiplexing. These tactics would become even more prevalent as consolidation in the media industries continued. Thus by the late 1990s, USA’s investment in the *Law and Order* franchise enabled it to strike a deal with NBC whereby it reran new episodes of *Law and Order: Special Victims Unit* (1999–) within a week of their broad-

### MARRIED . . . WITH CHILDREN (APRIL 1987–JULY 1997, FOX)

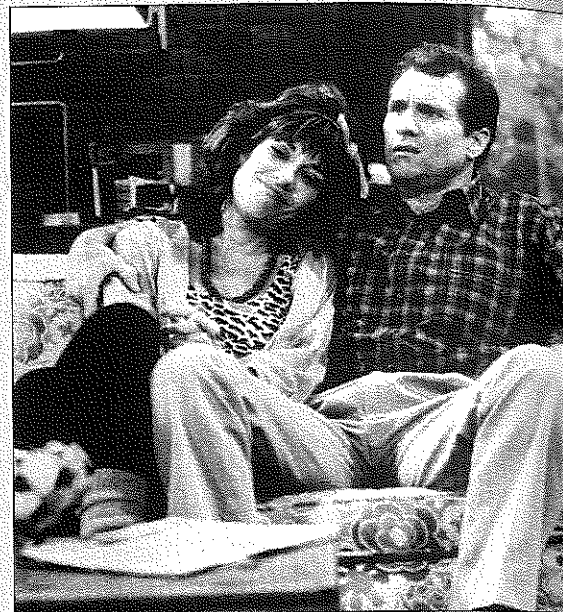
When Ron Leavitt and Michael Moyer created one of Fox's first television programmes, they sought to combat the saccharine-sweet sitcom trend sweeping television during the 1980s. The family they created, the Bundys, had little in common with the Keatons (NBC, *Family Ties*, 1982–9) or the Weavers (ABC, *Growing Pains*, 1985–92). And they certainly were 'Not the Cosbys' – the initial working title for *Married . . . with Children*.

Al (Ed O'Neill) was inadequate as a shoe salesman, a lover and a father. Peggy (Katey Sagal) refused to cook or clean, but she did efficiently spend all of the family's monthly income on clothes, manicures and hairstyling. Semi-literate daughter Kelly's (Christina Applegate) only apparent skill was in the bedroom. And son Bud (David Faustino) couldn't catch a woman – unless she was at least thirty years his senior (or in prison).

If, as Nina Liebman observes, the standard domestic comedy contains 'qualities such as warmth, familial relationships, moral growth and audience inclusiveness' (1997, p. 404), *Married . . . with Children* subverted all the characteristics of the genre. There seemed to be absolutely no warmth or moral development displayed by the Bundys. Instead, a standard episode involved at least one family member – and often all of them – proving to be incompetent in their respective familial roles: Al's dreams of a peaceful family vacation are destroyed when they end up in an interminable traffic jam (just a few blocks from home). Peg's promise to only spend money on groceries is broken when she purchases a gaudy sculpture for \$5,000. Kelly's attempt at monogamy ends when she finds out she's become engaged to a philanderer. Bud risks his life when he skydives at the behest of a girl – only to be dumped when she falls for the class's instructor.

In place of the tidy moral lessons provided in most domestic-based sitcoms stretching from *Leave It to Beaver* (CBS, 1957–8; ABC, 1958–63) to *Full House* (ABC, 1987–95), *Married . . . with Children*'s writers concluded each episode showing the Bundy family reaching new personal and moral lows. Thus did it become one of the most irreverent shows to appear on television since *All in the Family*'s (CBS, 1971–9) debut. For eleven seasons, *Married . . . with Children* regularly and effectively parodied Reagan-era family values as well as network television's traditional construction of the nuclear family. The programme generated this satire predominantly through dialogue, plot and *mise en scène*, while retaining traditional sitcom conventions in its editing and camerawork.

*Married . . . with Children* had an impact with critics and viewers almost immediately. Critics generally commended – if not praised – the show's writers for trying to develop some-



*Married . . . with Children*: no tidy moral lessons

thing different than that produced by the 'big three'. Viewer response, meanwhile, was split between celebration of the show's distinctiveness and denunciation of its raunchiness. The controversy surrounding the programme peaked in 1989, when suburban mother Terry Rakolta began a letter-writing campaign to forty-five of the show's advertisers, accusing them of 'helping to feed our kids a steady diet of gratuitous sex and violence' (*New York Times*, 2 March 1989, A1). Rakolta's crusade drew heavy media coverage and compelled a number of businesses, including Procter & Gamble and McDonald's, to temporarily halt their sponsorship of the show. More press, however, ultimately brought more viewers: *Married . . . with Children* subsequently broke into the Nielsen top twenty and experienced an increase in sponsorship (Goldberg, 1989).

The show's cultural and industrial impact continued to resonate long after the Rakolta controversy declined. It was the first in a wave of bawdy blue-collar comedies; *Roseanne* (ABC, 1988–7), *Grace Under Fire* (ABC, 1993–8) and *The Simpsons* (1989–) were just a few of the shows that appeared in the wake of *Married . . . with Children*'s success. In perhaps the most obvious act of imitation, one of the WB's earliest programmes was the Ron Leavitt-produced *Married . . . with Children* clone, *Unhappily Ever After* (1995–9). Such attempts to reproduce the Bundys further demonstrate the substantial influence the show had in redefining the domestic comedy of the 1980s and 90s.

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cast. Such a move provided USA with recent network programming (replete with its high production values) which nonetheless conformed to this specific cable channel's pursuit of Middle America through the airing of genre-oriented product.

If USA was one of the earliest channels to acquire rejected broadcast properties, Fox reversed the trend by reformatting popular cable programmes and bringing them to network viewers. *It's Garry Shandling's Show* (HBO, 1986–90; Fox, 1988–90) re-aired on Fox after Showtime initially aired original episodes; similarly, *Dream on* (HBO, 1990–6; Fox 1995) and *Tales from the Crypt* (HBO, 1989–96; Fox, 1994–5) had short runs on Fox after they ran first on HBO. Although this strategy was used a few times in the 1990s, as the network continued to develop a broader audience than its cable counterparts, newer programmes more frequently flowed from broadcast to cable. In Fox's case, its parent company News Corporation created F/X in 1994 as a means of more fully exploiting Fox-produced programming. Subsequently, F/X became a virtual clearing house for Fox shows, airing *In Living Color*, *Married . . . with Children* and *Beverly Hills 90210* several times a week. The creation of F/X also coincided with a shifting programming strategy on the part of the Fox network. In the mid-1990s, Murdoch encouraged Fox executives to expand the network's reach from its former eighteen- to thirty-four base to eighteen- to forty-eight-year-olds. This not only motivated a move away from the more narrowly defined niches of teenagers and African-Americans to which Fox had previously catered, but also involved developing more 'mainstream' programming.

Fox's first attempt to expand its audience took place when it outbid CBS for NFL football rights in 1993; this move was followed by *The X-Files*' (1993–2002) high ratings and critical success. The network subsequently attempted to acquire more hour-long suspense shows and science-fiction programmes; *The Visitor* (1997–8), *413 Hope Street* (1997–8) and *Millennium* (1996–9) all represented Fox's effort to reinvent itself as a network catering to young professionals. This proved a tenuous strategy, in part because this market was already being successfully pursued by the self-proclaimed 'quality network', NBC, with such shows as *Homicide: Life on the Street* (1993–9), *The Pretender* (1996–2000) and *Profiler* (1996–2000). Fox's move towards the mainstream thus met with only marginal success, as one series after another bombed and the role of Head of Programming became a game of musical chairs. Thus, the late 1990s marked a tumultuous time for America's fourth network, as the more explicitly niche-oriented programmes of earlier years (*The Simpsons*,

*Beverly Hills 90210*, *Married . . . with Children*) continued to bring in some of the highest ratings.

Fox's shifting programming strategy also had broader ramifications in the network landscape. Following Murdoch's mandate to broaden Fox's audience base, a number of top executives departed. Within months, these same executives resurfaced at two newly created netlets, the WB (including head Jamie Kellner) and UPN (including head Lucie Salhany). Both networks, which premiered in 1995, directly modelled their programming on Fox's early years: the WB went young, pursuing twelve- to thirty-four-year-olds, especially females, with such hour-long dramas as *7th Heaven* (1996–), *Dawson's Creek* (1998–) and the Spelling-produced *Charmed* (1998–); UPN, meanwhile, sought the African-American audience seemingly abandoned by Fox. In addition to acquiring the cancelled Fox programme *Between Brothers* (1997–9), UPN picked up a number of additional African-American-centred programmes, including *The Hughleys* (1998–2002) and *Moesha* (1996–2001). The new network also pursued young male viewers with satisfying ratings results via two *Star Trek* iterations, *Voyager* (1995–2001) and *Enterprise* (2001–). Both *Star Treks* functioned as flagship programmes for UPN.

The exploitation of these *Star Trek* enterprises indicates the direction taken by cable and netlet programming in the late 1990s and early 2000s. As large conglomerates purchased and created network and cable channels, there were increased efforts to develop synergies between television content and other corporate holdings. Thus would Nickelodeon's *Hey Arnold!* afternoon cartoon (1996–) morph into a motion picture in 2002 and the Fox-produced, UPN-based *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997–2002) evolve from a feature-length film into a profitable television series (as well as DVD and video collection) for Twentieth Television. Each of these shows was targeted to an identifiable niche (twentysomething males, children, teen females). These shows reveal how cable and netlet-based, niche-targeted television programmes have become economic drivers in a manner similar to the way that motion picture franchises have driven the entertainment industry since the 1970s. Thus in recent years – accompanying Fin-Syn's repeal, the growth of cable, and the continuing merger and acquisition craze – there has been a transition from the 1980s' cable practices of recycling and reconfiguring old shows to such tactics as re-purposing content, branding networks and synergising programming across divisions within media conglomerates.

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## Satellite and Cable Programmes in the UK

The growth of satellite and cable television provision in the UK from the 1980s onwards plays a significant role in the shifting and reshaping debates about British television culture. Indeed, satellite technology, with its associated technical apparatus has even changed the landscape of television viewing in the UK in a material way with satellite dishes forming external marks on the physical/architectural landscape of the nation. The number of UK homes opting to access satellite and cable broadcasting systems (now also including access to digital formats) has been growing slowly but steadily since the end of the twentieth century. This trend has certain implications for the ways that television viewing will be conceptualised in the twenty-first century, both on the level of 'the national' and also more widely, in terms of the changing relationship between television technologies and television audiences.

To the viewer, one of the key attractions of acquiring satellite or cable television is the ability to receive many more television channels than traditional terrestrial analogue broadcasting permitted. Access to a greater choice of channels including both general and specialist programming has been a major selling point. For instance it becomes possible to receive a wide range of channels e.g. adult-rated channels such as Playboy, Television X, children's channels such as Nickelodeon and Disney Channel, film channels such as Sky MovieMax and TCM, sports channels such as Sky Sports1 and Eurosport and channels with specialist international/overseas programmes such as Asianet. In the British context, the decision to pay extra to become a satel-

lite or cable subscriber and to take that step beyond the general television licence has special meaning. In addition to the regular, and sometimes substantial, financial commitment signed up to by the subscriber, depending on the choice of channel viewing package, the decision to sign up for satellite and cable television can also bring 'moral' dilemmas over subscribers' complicity in eroding social and cultural standards. In particular, many households in Britain have been faced with decisions about whether to acquire (at additional cost to a basic subscription package) additional sports channels in order to ensure the right to view certain events such as regular live coverage of English Premier League football matches, thus perhaps helping to drive major sports events off public channels. In the development of their marketing strategies, such as pay-per-view TV (requiring the payment of a one-off fee usually for a particular high-profile sports or musical event), satellite and cable companies have attempted to target niche or enthusiast audiences in order to exploit as many commercial opportunities as possible. The fact that satellite and cable provision is an obvious business enterprise and free from notions of public service has been blatantly clear from the start. This distinction provides an important framework for understanding the ways that cable and satellite technologies have been perceived in academic discussions.

From the outset, British television has been shaped by a public service ethos and has been considered a matter for regulation. As the heightened debates surrounding the 1990 Broadcasting Act illustrate, real anxieties existed about the proliferation of terrestrial channels. The potential for proliferation was, of course, even greater as satellite and cable systems became more accessible and more widespread in the UK. In addition to concerns about the breakdown of common systems of regulation (e.g. Sky channels observe an 8pm, not a 9pm watershed, the time after which more adult content is allowed to air), one of the main fears articulated was that with increasing access to many more television programmes, 'more might actually equal less' in terms of programme quality. In other words, more repeats and a rise in poor production values may result because of the necessity to make cheap programmes to fill increasing broadcast space. It comes as no surprise that it was also during the 1990s that the British media became progressively more pre-occupied with an associated fear linked to proliferation and quality, that of 'dumbing down'. What lies at the core of all these expressions of anxiety, and what is not usually voiced explicitly, is an underlying fear about the nature of television itself, namely that television is too seductive, and that once it starts to proliferate it becomes both excessive and dangerous for the consumer. In discussions of television, there