

THE LIVING TELEVISION: ALLOY ENTERTAINMENT AND
THE BRAND NEW GIRL

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department

of English

University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

By

Brandon K. Hernsberger

May, 2014

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ABSTRACT

Alloy Entertainment has fundamentally changed the landscape of teen media (YA fiction and the television adaptation) by decentering the teenager (especially the teenage girl) and instead focusing squarely on how the teenager in media can help promote Alloy's own brand mission of advertising itself as a marketing corporation within the spaces of its products (books and television programs). Alloy does this through the semiotic marking of gender in and through its products to resemble the way that it, Alloy Entertainment, markets itself as well as through the repetition of seven brand principles (of Alloy's design) seen especially in Alloy's three most popular (and most socially shared) book to television properties: *Gossip Girl*, *The Vampire Diaries*, and *Pretty Little Liars*. These properties can be seen as three separate parts of the same thing—that is, different versions of one singular brand mission: the promotion of a real company within the fictional spaces of narrative. The Alloy girl is: (1) sexually depraved; (2) terrorized; (3) highly dependent on a male counterpart for self-actualization; (4) surveilled; (5) marked by class and/or race; (6) representative of a nationalist gender identity (a social agent); and (7) a child acting as an adult. These brand principles can all be seen in the three properties mentioned above, though not all seven are always used at the same time. Alloy Entertainment has all but taken away the possibility for the televisual teenage girl's exploration of her own liminality (this exploration was *always* possible in teenage television of the past, up until Alloy eliminated it in its first television property: *Gossip Girl*); and because of this, the teenage girl in the audience likely has a more difficult time understanding her own liminal position given how much time young people spend with various media as a way to, at least partly, learn what it looks like to grow up. There is no such thing as a teenage girl on television anymore; there is only the Alloy teenage girl, the branded teenager.

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Television has had a profound impact on who I am today and who I will be tomorrow and forever. Because of that I would be remiss not to first and foremost thank Zack Morris. Growing up I found that some of the closest relationships I had were with the people on television. I have always trusted television implicitly to provide a map for how to live, how to speak, how to find happiness. Zack Morris was the first character on television who spoke directly to me (sometimes literally, kind of) and who spoke directly to the teenage sensibilities of a generation of boys (and I assume girls as well, though I might be wrong) fraught with what seemed like immeasurably difficult problems like how to fight for the right locker or why and how a first date was the easiest thing in the world (turns out Zack was wrong on that one). Zack Morris was my best friend for a very large portion of my life, and this dissertation would not have been possible without him.

There were many people who helped guide me through the process of writing this dissertation, from finding the right books and articles stage through the never having enough books and articles and therefore greatly inhibiting the actual writing due to the overwhelmingly high stack of pages sitting next to my desk begging to be read stage through the draft upon draft upon draft and realizing that I may never finish this thing stage through the take a deep breath you can do this stage through the finally I have a completed draft ready to be read stage through this, the completed stage. Dr. Jennifer Wingard, my dissertation director, has been there through it all; and without her I could never have gotten here. Jen has been a constant inspiration and I could never imagine having gone through this process without her. Talking TV and what TV means and should mean is never better than with Jen; she challenged me to be better, to write longer or to write shorter, and always to think higher. I also must thank my dissertation committee members, Drs. Margot Backus, James Zebroski, Paul Butler, and Rachel Riedner, for their generous help and willingness to push me through when I needed it most. Dr. Elizabeth Kessler has been, for close to a decade, a kind of second mom to me, never saying no to a five minute conversation and never forgetting to let me realize how great life can be, just about every day. I need to also thank the University of Houston Department of English,

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To “A,” who helped me solve the mystery of it all.

“Love is...”
—Bo

Introduction

The Adaptation of the Transcendent American Teenager

The teenage girl on television¹ is rapidly disappearing. In her place stands a closed and fully contained byproduct of a single company's marketing mission—that mission being to brand their own company name, Alloy Entertainment, onto the gendered identity of each teenage girl² under their control to create a kind of meta-marketing business model whereby they, Alloy Entertainment, end up being what is consumed while the televisual girls that Alloy constructs, along with the real girls in the audience, become equally whitewashed. The following chapters will explore these themes in depth. *The Living Television: Alloy Entertainment and the Brand New Girl* examines in depth the words, symbols, and visual images used to construct the contemporary teen television audience's understanding of reality³. The stakes of a new kind of teenage televisual reality as constructed and controlled by a single media property are profound and far-reaching. Teenage audiences are no longer given space to test their own (real) liminality⁴ against the (fake) liminality they see on television⁵ in an attempt to come to some kind of growing understanding about what it means to be a (real) teenager within the heavily mediated spaces of (real) teenage life. Alloy Entertainment, in their new world of teenage television⁶ saturation, are limiting *what* (particularly) teenage girls are *allowed* to watch, and in so doing, in *how* teenage girls are *allowed* to understand gender. Gender on teen television has, by Alloy's design, become a marketing tool for Alloy itself. These chapters will explore that in depth.

¹ That is meant for, and marketed to, (mostly) teenage girls.

² Book and TV character(s).

³ The understanding of the word 'reality', as will be seen throughout the following chapters, is a fluid understanding. The term 'rhetoric' as I use it is defined and exemplified nicely in Christine J. Garnder's *Making Chastity Sexy*.

⁴ I will use the word liminality, throughout this and the following chapters, to designate the ambiguous understanding of how and when one should identify oneself as a child or as an adult. This ambiguity, as I make clear throughout, is a ritual that all teenagers (or at least almost all, particularly in America) must, and should, face. Liminality, as used in these chapters, is simply about how one learns to grow up.

⁵ Teenagers were, it should be noted, allowed and encouraged to find liminal space within their relationship(s) with characters on teen television of the past. This will be explored in Chapter One.

⁶ And YA book.

My project also examines specifically the micro-economic branding strategies used by Alloy Entertainment—the corporate and creative head of the design of the branded teenage girl as seen on two television networks, The CW and ABC Family, in Alloy’s attempt to construct a rhetorical reality through televisual choices, adapted from young adult novels, that work together to provide for their readers and viewers a consistent understanding of what it means to be a teenage girl in a highly privatized American youth culture industry, governed by a corporation that has complete control of the initial production of this teenage identity. At the same time, my project is firmly situated in cultural studies; so as to require a more thorough understanding of American youth culture, I will privilege the television side of things—all the while giving negotiable space to the economic production of literary texts and the resultant fandom(s) that are born from the marriage of these texts with their televisual adaptations.

Alloy Entertainment and Neoliberal Media Control

The idea of privatized control over identity is the thread that holds all of Alloy’s properties together; it is the frame around which allows Alloy to construct brand loyalty and to maintain brand equity⁷. Alloy Entertainment is a “book packaging” arm of Warner Brothers Entertainment (acquired by WB in June of 2012) that describes itself as follows:

Traditionally, AE (Alloy Entertainment) has developed its intellectual property internally, originating concepts in-house and then closely guiding the development process with writers...Our team will lend creative expertise, marketing capabilities and the AE brand to authors with solid concepts and strong voices. Acquired projects will be shaped by The Collaborative and the author together, before determining the next steps for publication. AE will retain the rights to produce each property in film, television, and new media. Authors will share in profits, across all platforms. (alloyentertainment.com/articles/the-collaborative-initiative/)

Essentially, Alloy employs a creative team to come up with ideas for potential cross-textual properties

⁷ Brand loyalty and brand equity will be discussed at length in the chapters the follow.

that get farmed out to novelists. The first step is the design of the property—what, in Alloy’s estimation, do young readers (of different types of texts) want to consume? A novelist is then employed to fictionalize the initial idea via a number of novels. Depending on the success (we can assume) of the novels, Alloy approaches TV or film companies to determine whether or not there is interest in adapting these novels to a different format, i.e. TV, film. All the while, Alloy holds the rights to the properties. If and when the properties get commissioned for television or film, Alloy Entertainment remains the owner of the property, all the while turning some creative control over to the creators, producers, and networks that now have the text. The success of this farming of properties is explored in the following chapters, most particularly in how the novels (published before the television adaptations get green-lighted) bring with them a built-in fandom, of which the television properties can, and do, very much take advantage of. A new type of production is in *The 100*, the first Alloy property that will see simultaneous publication of the first novel with an already picked up television product—the success of this strategy is yet to be determined.

My project is centered around three Alloy Properties, all of which have successfully gone through the maturation process, as it were, from idea to book series to television adaptation: *Gossip Girl* (novels written by Cecily von Ziegesar, then ghost written after novel #8), *The Vampire Diaries* (novels written by L.J. Smith originally, continue to be ghost written presently), and *Pretty Little Liars* (novels written by Sara Shepard). Two of the television shows adapted from these novels, *Gossip Girl* and *The Vampire Diaries*, appear(ed) on The CW; *Pretty Little Liars* on ABC Family—my project also focuses on the interconnection that these networks have with the parent corporation in charge of the design of the properties, Alloy Entertainment.

What Alloy has done in the construction of these texts is essentially change how television is viewed, and especially in how teenage girls are allowed to be seen on television. My project explores the ways in which Alloy Entertainment has created a new archetype of the teenage girl and, through their various properties, is containing that archetypal teenage girl inside a rhetoric of brokenness. At the same time, Alloy is couching that rhetoric within obvious privilege—oftentimes in the form of

white privilege, terror, surveillance, and highly misappropriated gender play. My project also shows how the social marketing of these shows, especially *The Vampire Diaries* and *Pretty Little Liars*, creates a relationship between the object and the subject, allowing the mostly female audience to view themselves as consumers with access to the once forbidden fourth wall of television. Audiences have taken to using Twitter, Instagram, and other social media spaces to have unprecedented access to the writers, producers, and stars of the shows. This access continues to seemingly allow viewers to form relationships with the people in charge of the narrative, creating a very specific and galvanized type of fandom that sees itself as part of the context of the art around which the fandom was first formed. The subjects, as mentioned earlier, are becoming the objects. Social media is opening up a different way to market these cross-textual artifacts; readers and viewers now have direct input, or at least they think they do, into how these books and shows are being written, all the while under the strict governance of Alloy Entertainment.

Alloy has and continues to successfully re-conceptualize how television is made and watched. Alloy is quickly moving it away from the more democratic ways of seeing that previous teen television audiences enjoyed, using obvious neoliberal strategies that give a parent corporation almost autonomous control in the construction of teenage identity—ostensibly forcing viewers to become neoliberal citizens of a community of gendered youth formulation. In “Neoliberal Citizenship and the Commercial Television Landscape in 21st Century America,” Alison D. Brzenchek writes of this turn that,

The institutional/administrative arrangements that initially sustained broadcast television are just as central [as the factors leading to commodity acquisition], even if they are conceived of and/or implemented in different ways today. The commercial television landscape, as with its initial predecessor broadcast television, is situated in a political economic context reliant upon commercial imperatives and market power. (19)

In other words, Alloy Entertainment is making it clear that, across their various media platforms, their version of the teenage girl remains consistent (aesthetically, rhetorically), a version that, as I will

explain in the following chapters, mirrors quite explicitly what Alloy as a brand means—the teenage girl of Alloy’s design *is* Alloy. The following chapters more fully explain how the neoliberal decisions that Alloy Entertainment have opened up spatial and commercial opportunities to further their own brand cross-format and cross-medium to give its audiences a singular understanding of how they are able to consume the teenager as constructed by Alloy. Neoliberal ethics assume that citizens of the private market exist almost solely for the market, making decisions for and about themselves with designs on furthering their position(s), economically and ethically, in the market—or, as Paul Treanor writes,

In personal ethics, the general neoliberal vision is that every human being is an entrepreneur managing their own life, and should act as such. Moral philosophers call this a virtue ethic, where human beings compare their actions to the way an ideal type would act—in this case the ideal entrepreneur. Individuals who choose their friends, hobbies, sports, and partners, to maximize their status with future employers, are ethically neoliberal. This attitude...is unknown in any pre-existing moral philosophy, and is absent from early liberalism. Such social actions are not necessarily monetized, but they represent an extension of the market principle into non-economic area of life—again typical for neoliberalism. (Treanor)

Alloy Entertainment, in their attempt at a redefinition of teenage identity, is creating and maintaining a lion’s share of American teenage cultural currency, in the expectation that a shared ownership of that currency is the desire of teenage audiences. This is far different than how television was governed in the past when networks and creators maintained creative control over their various projects. That creative control is what gave us the characters and shows to be discussed in what follows, and it gave teenage viewers in the 1990s and early 2000s an idea that gendered teenage identity could and should be seen through televisual representation. The subsequent chapters will show how, in a post-9/11 America, the genre of teen television has changed in large part led by Alloy Entertainment, The CW, and ABC Family. The threat of terror is always privileged in various ways; and I will show, through a discussion of the three contemporary teen shows mentioned above, how

Alloy sets up girls to be the figures of the terrorized at the *beginning* of each show. It is no coincidence that, quite literally, the first scene of the first episode of *Gossip Girl*, *The Vampire Diaries* and *Pretty Little Liars*, one of the main female protagonists is seen as broken in some way—be it sexually depraved, consistently and terroristically surveilled, made the victim of violence, or in some way exhibiting the pathology of defeated depression. The entirety of each series is contextualized by this brokenness, forcing the girls in each series to figure out a way to become fixed. As each series moves forward (usually around the end of season three), the female protagonist(s) ends up being recognized as the potential heroine of the series (a la the *Twilight Saga*), but it takes hours and hours of commitment on the part of the audience to recognize this. It is an interesting route that Alloy takes toward female empowerment; and while the route can be seen as potentially pro-woman, the ways in which audiences reach the end is through a long and drawn-out narrative of the broken teenage girl. Girls watching teen television in the 21st century are forced into a citizenship of neoliberal containment, as designed by Alloy Entertainment and perpetuated by the creative forces farmed by Alloy—writers, networks, actresses, etc.

A New Age of Choice on Television

The cross-media control and teen television market saturation that Alloy has constructed could not have happened, though, without the large-scale shift in *how* television was consumed by the onset of more channels from which to choose. Digital cable television in the 1990s was only beginning to take shape, severely limiting what non-(main) network television providers could have access to as far as audience numbers were concerned. Because of this, the television industry was shaped by the saturation of a market sameness that forced individual networks to try and come up with strategies that would allow their audiences to identify the networks based sometimes solely on their image-based differences; that is, networks were in the business of actively constructing imagined communities⁸ of viewers that recognized the networks as places of common understanding with a

⁸ In *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Benedict Anderson writes that a nation is “imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know

sense of representational ethos and pathos that in some ways gave definition to the shared traits and desires of network and audience, even if those traits were temporary and fleeting. ESPN (originating in 1979) and Lifetime (1984), outlier cable networks with built-in audience identities, are two examples of “boutique” networks that employ specialized and highly gendered programming and advertising that appeals to their viewers in a consistent way. In other words, there is little difference in the shows viewers see and the advertising that pays for those shows. In his book, *On Television*, Raymond Williams makes it clear that networks such as these employ a method of “flow,” whereby the shows work together with the advertising within the shows to create a seamless and imbedded feeling of sameness so that the audience watching will come to understand the position they hold as members of an imagined community of similar television viewers taking part in the similar act of watching specialized programming. ESPN and Lifetime, as but two examples, differ in how they set up their flow, but the result is the same—that is, these two networks, through their shows and commercials, construct an image of their viewer that is appropriate to what the individual network sees itself as *meaning*.

Boutique networks like ESPN and Lifetime are becoming more and more commonplace as audience desires continue to call for specialization insofar as that specialization is capable of giving the audience seemingly everything she/he wants. That is, the audiences of boutique networks find themselves in the position of being citizens of a constructed consumer identity as defined by the networks with their programming and advertising choices, accepted by the networks’ audience as appropriately desired within the imagined community of similarly constructed neoliberal consumer citizens. Networks are highly invested in giving their audiences everything their audiences want in the hope of creating loyalty among the citizens of these imagined communities, which in turn helps

most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (Anderson 6). Members of any imagined community (including, perhaps most explicitly, media communities) will likely never know each other in a profound or personal way, yet share profound and personal interests that get contextualized (and often governed) by the entity around which members gather. Anderson argues that imagined communities are able to thrive because of “print capitalism” and the material goods that capitalism allows to spread to and through the active members of the imagined community.

the advertisers on the networks reach more people with similar viewing and buying identities.

Boutique networks like ESPN and Lifetime can be seen as using flow to create a sense of consistency across their programming day, showing similar shows that use similar stylistic and neoliberally ethical markers that act as the ways in which viewers come to recognize themselves as fitting into the narrowly defined parameters of the particular meaning of a particular network.

MTV, the first and most successful network at taking these strategies further has, for over two decades, used highly successful branding strategies to integrate the feel and understanding of a boutique network along with the money-making opportunities inherent in any number of global brands and logos. That is, MTV was the first network that marketed itself as meaning something important as seen in the logo itself rather than on the programming the network showed. What MTV means to its viewers has come to be far more important than what MTV shows. The products MTV produces—its shows—are seen as less meaningful than the fact that the shows are being seen on MTV, the brand. The marketing of the MTV logo, it seems, has transcended the product (music) that gave that logo life, providing Alloy⁹ a televisual precedent after which to model themselves. This can be seen in the way MTV has re-branded itself as a network that no longer privileges music without having lost its hold as primary in the construction of the culture industry of cool.

Historically this was first done by soap operas, with a base market of stay-at-home women who had a desire, according to marketers of soaps (and soap as a product), to forge a bond with other women taking part in the practice of watching soaps, as well as with the women seen on the actual soap operas. Because of that, soap operas had, and still have, a visual aesthetic of close-up shots that have a way of privileging the highly-wrought emotionality inherent in the relationships between characters (Allen). This emotionality appealed, it can be inferred, to the viewers because it said something of importance about the women watching the programs. Over time, this aesthetic is what precipitated the repeated viewing of soap operas, making them sites of destination for consumers; and it made those consumers loyal to that site in a similar manner to the loyalty engendered by the

⁹ And by extension, The CW and ABC Family.

products being seen within the commercial space of the program—turning the television genre of soap-opera into a product as well as into a space of neoliberal production that allied the actual products paying for the soap opera to be shown.

This objectification of genre is seen regularly on boutique television networks that provide entertainment that is so highly specialized that it becomes what the networks *mean*, in a way. The genre of reality television has its own network (Fox Reality Channel), for example, as does the genre of the horror film (Chiller). These genres live on networks that act as destinations for viewers to understand, if only partly, *who they are* rather than merely *what they watch*. The difference between boutique networks and branded networks (ESPN versus MTV, for example), is in how those networks market themselves across various platforms. ESPN will forever be known for the stuff of the network—in its case, sports. MTV, on the other hand, is known for its logo and especially for what types of feelings that logo engenders from its viewers. In other words, MTV played an important role in the modern day understanding of what music means, whereas ESPN does not play a role in the actual meaning of individual sports, only in how those sports are seen on television. MTV is not a music network, nor is it a reality show network. MTV is MTV, and that is the only thing that seems to matter to its repeated viewers; thus, its brand.

The chapters that follow will make clear that The CW and ABC Family are following the model of MTV rather than the model of a boutique network like Lifetime. The CW and ABC Family are not merely trying to provide a certain type of programming that is consistent with all other types of programming on the networks; rather, they are trying to transcend that programming and become sites of destination in which teenagers can find meaning, not just entertainment. These networks provide genre programming that transcends the meaning of genre and turns the genre of teenage television into its own brand, consistent with the branding strategies used to mark the characters on the shows and the audiences watching those characters. Along with Alloy Entertainment, The CW and ABC Family are spatial sites of neoliberal identity formation for teenage girls, thus changing the way teenagers are seen on television and in the novels from which the shows are being adapted.

In the following chapters, I will expound upon the growing changes in how the teenage girl is seen on television. The beginning of this chapter outlined the relatively short history of the teenage girl on television drama, and the following chapters will add to that history, particularly Chapter One, in which I will trace the history of the teenage girl on television and how the teenage girl(s) of old have seen a monumental shift in such a way as to be relics when compared to teen girls on TV today, unrecognizable and irrelevant. Never before on television has so drastic a shift been seen in the representation of identity, so Chapters Two, Three, and Four will trace that shift.

In Chapter Two I will discuss *Gossip Girl*, the first property by Alloy green-lighted for television. *GG* can be seen as the bridge that takes audiences from previous teen TV to contemporary teen TV, privileging themes of being watched and terrorized by an anonymous gossip with designs on ruining seemingly the entirety of the prep school around which the show takes place, as well as the theme of white opulence and the paratextuality of Alloy Entertainment's properties, seen first in *Gossip Girl*.

In Chapter Three I will explore Alloy's oldest book property—*The Vampire Diaries*—to put to test how masculinity, masculine predation, terror, and homosociality are seen in the ongoing struggle to save the broken protagonist, Elena Gilbert, who acts as the triangulating force that brings the two main protagonists, Stefan and Damon Salvatore, together. There are other homosocial signifiers in *TVD* that are discussed in Chapter Three. That chapter also includes how *TVD* fans use social media (particularly Twitter) to communicate with the creator (Julie Plec), and how that communication helps grow the fandom in an unprecedented way.

In Chapter Four I will explore how traditional female gender roles are made severely non-traditional in *Pretty Little Liars*. In the book series and television show, four girls are regularly seen as being victimized by a carefully constructed plot to have them terrorized (at best), or potentially murdered (at worst) by an invisible terrorist who can seemingly never be caught because the web of terror is inhabited by an unending and ever evolving cast of characters. Each week (and in each book), Aria, Emily, Spencer, and Hanna are forced to figure out ways to protect themselves against

innumerable agents of evil with virtually no help from law enforcement, parents, teachers, or the town in which they live. In Chapter Four I will also discuss how Alloy Entertainment acts a similar invisible terrorist over the writers of the books, shows, and characters as well as over the fans of the property. In other words, Chapter Four will explain in detail how Alloy Entertainment = “A.” In that chapter I will also discuss at length the vast well of fan experiences that take place every week around the shared viewing of *PLL*. It is regularly seen as the most highly trending topic on Twitter each week, giving the fandom an assumed amount of control in the viewing of the show. The actresses in *PLL* are encouraged to communicate with the fans through various formats—Twitter and Instagram especially—so that the fandom can be seen as in some ways valuable to and desired by the creators and stars.

Chapter Five is, in part, a pedagogical study of my own students from two different institutions and how they, through our everyday discussion of Alloy Entertainment and Alloy’s products, became students of Alloy. In Chapter Five I will also discuss non-Alloy TV properties and how they are appropriating the seven brand principles used by Alloy to market and sustain their own footprint within the teen television marketplace. Chapter Five also includes a continued discussion of fandom, particularly in how gendered fandom(s) maintain and help grow the property that sprung their fandom(s) in the first place and in how and why female-centric fandom(s) should be taken far more seriously than they are at present.

Together, the three properties I will be discussing form in the mind of the collective viewership the appropriate ways in which teenagers (girls) are expected to act. These being the three most popular and most watched shows in this genre over the course of one generation on television, Alloy Entertainment continues to succeed in the construction of a neoliberal teenage culture industry, temporally framing the market for what comes next. Through various fields of cultural production, the teenage girl on television has seen profound changes in the past 25 years, the largest being in how audience members are able to see themselves as being representational agents of the girls on TV. In television of the past, teenage girls were seen as embodying the narrative of daily teenage life; in

television of today the teenage girl is seen through the strategically placed brandedness of meaning making. Alloy Entertainment, The CW, and ABC Family are constructing a rhetoric whereby the words, symbols, and visual images of their invention are contextualizing the contemporary teen television audience's understanding of reality.

The following chapters also discuss the ways in which branding on contemporary teenage television is being done by Alloy Entertainment, The CW, and ABC Family, working together in a way that is at odds with teenage television of the past. It is done today with a calculated nod to the industry of branding done by global corporations in their desire to transcend the products they sell and have the brand itself be the star. Global corporations have done this, as discussed earlier, by turning their brands into neoliberal sites of meaning and definition as understood by the buying public. Television networks today are highly invested in the emotional share of the teenage consumer market, as explained by Marc Gobe and others, and networks are modeling their strategies of production after the strategies first constructed by global corporations outside the realm of popular media.

What is different about TV, of course, is that its products are the actual shows starring the actual teenagers seen in them, making the teenagers part of the product. The branding of characters on television, particularly teenage television, is not new. It was, in fact, done quite brazenly in *Dawson's Creek*, where

Not only did the characters all wear J. Crew clothes, not only did the windswept, nautical set make them look as if they had stepped off the pages of a J. Crew catalog, and not only did the characters spout dialogue like, "He looks like he stepped out of a J. Crew catalog," but the cast was also featured on the cover of the January (1998) J. Crew catalog. Inside the new "freestyle magalog," the young actors are pictured in rowboats and on docks—looking as if they just stepped off the set of a *Dawson's Creek* episode. (Klein 42)

So, even with the television shows that were the impetus of our modern-day understanding of the teenage television ethos, networks and programs saw the benefit of connecting characters on their

programs to the look and especially feel of certain identifiable brands. The characters on *Dawson's Creek* (seen on The WB, now The CW), so it seems was the desire of that show's creator (Kevin Williamson), were intended to represent the understanding of the J. Crew brand and all that that understanding meant to the consumers of the show and of the brand. There was, beginning most blatantly with *Dawson's Creek*, a relationship forming between global brands and teenagers—this relationship carrying with it many opportunities beneficial to both parties, brand and network.

I contend that what is happening with branding now goes much deeper. No longer are characters *just wearing* particular brands that appeal to their audiences; rather, they are becoming *people* who are constituted by what that brand means. In other words, they are not merely wearing J. Crew, they are becoming J. Crew (or so would go the analogy). These networks and shows, in the neoliberal design of Alloy Entertainment, are beginning to transcend their product—the television program—and rather, are becoming the sites of teenage cultural identity, using similar branding strategies long employed by Nike and others, to give them, the networks and shows, a specific and specialized meaning in the consumers' collective mind. The CW and ABC Family are trying to *become* teenage culture. The result of this allows The CW and ABC Family to remain largely unconcerned with the quality of their programming in favor of being the site of teenage cultural identification. In other words, the product is secondary to what that product helps the networks do: define the contemporary teenager. I will discuss this at length in the chapters that follow, examining the implications of spin-off programming based on the primary text and its resultant fandom(s).

These neoliberal strategies of cultural definition (Alloy Entertainment creating the contained context in which teenage girls are forced to exist, without agency) are happening inside the television industry, an industry run by a group of people, male and female, with an ostensible desire to perpetuate masculinizing principles of female brokenness.

Finally, I will be discussing the various fandoms that have been, and continue to be, active members in the ongoing cultural understanding of how these properties are managed and consumed. There has been virtually no literature published on the proprietary fan communities grown from the

properties that Alloy Entertainment owns, but I will use books like Henry Jenkins' seminal book on pop culture fandom, *Textual Poachers*, which introduced readers to the strength of *Star Trek* and *Beauty and the Beast* fans, as well as the growing field of fanfic production. Camille Bacon-Smith's *Enterprising Women* is also important to my project, because it was the first book of its kind to research the relationship that women had with the cultural products of popular fiction and media. Contemporary books on fandom tend to center around the communities in and of the *Twilight Saga*, such as *Fanpires*, ed. by Gareth Schott and Kirstine Moffat, as well as *Fanpire: The Twilight Saga and the Women Who Love It*, by Tanya Erzen. These books are appropriate companions to the fandom of the series' I will cover, most especially *The Vampire Diaries*. Fandom(s) of the three book and television series' I will examine are vitally important if one is to fully understand the strength that Alloy has in the properties it will conceive in the future. The following chapters will make clear the fact that: the teenage girl on television has officially been branded.

One

The History of the Teenage Girl on Television, and Where She Went Next

*"It is often said that television has altered our world."
--Raymond Williams*

In *Emotional Branding*, Marc Gobe makes it clear that more and more global brands are following the lead of Nike and others in their desire to find a place in the emotional market share rather than in the commodity market share. According to Gobe, it is in the long-term interest of these brands to form a relationship with their consumers that means more to each party than the actual product being bought and sold. Brands now, Gobe writes, have the responsibility of not just *providing* something useful, but of *being* something useful in the understood makeup of consumer identity, as helped formed by the brands being consumed. This strategy is becoming important to television networks in the commodification of their product because of the increased product choice in the ever-expanding cable television market. Networks are coming to see the value in finding a place in the emotional understanding of what those networks mean to viewers, rather than merely what those networks show. Alloy Entertainment, in their partnership with The CW and ABC Family, are essentially taking away the choice that teenage viewers have for an exploration of media-represented identity by saturating the teen television market with a singular mission—that mission being to brand onto the bodies of teenagers¹⁰ on television Alloy's own brand identity. Alloy does this by making use of teenagers on TV through social and homosocial relationships that all point back to what Alloy does as a marketing corporation. That is, Alloy Entertainment is a company that owns and distributes products¹¹ that act as sites of destination whereby the teenagers who consume Alloy's products consume them in part simply because the products are there; the products that Alloy owns and distributes are saturating the teen marketplace to a degree that they are all teenagers have if teenagers are to find any common ground with media material. The following chapters will demonstrate how Gobe's claim about brands having a responsibility to "tap into the aspirational

¹⁰ Particularly teenage girls.

¹¹ Books and television programming.

drives that underlie human motivation” (Gobe xix) as absolutely applying to Alloy Entertainment in their brand mission of being the home of teenage identity formation on TV and in YA fiction. Alloy seamlessly creates a highly specialized¹² type of brand equity by farming their material to different media outlets—book publishers, television networks—that gives Alloy a foothold in the marketplace without precedent. This type of foothold is new to the teen marketplace, and this chapter will explain and explore the history of teenagers on television, with particular attention to how teenage girls were seen, and thus consumed, on television of the past.

Branding becoming Meaning

Alloy Entertainment is conditioning consumers to become brand loyal rather than, as in the past on teen television, constructing characters¹³ who were representative of a very specific cultural moment that epitomized what it meant to be teenager in America. Alloy is, rather, constructing characters who represent what it means to be an *Alloy teenager* in America, and Alloy is doing this through the repetition of seven brand principles¹⁴, of which will be discussed throughout the following chapters.

In *No Logo*, Naomi Klein goes on to further explain the strategies that brand managers have employed for generations when she writes,

The astronomical growth in the wealth and cultural influence of multi-national corporations over the last fifteen years can arguably be traced back to a single, seemingly innocuous idea developed by management theorists in the mid-1980s: that successful corporations must primarily produce brands, as opposed to products. (Klein 3)

Consumers have been, in other words, conditioned in the language of branding for two decades. This conditioning has made it impossible, for the most part, to separate brands from products. Klein (and other writers on branding, such as Marc Gobe, Martin Lindstrom, and Paul Temporal) make it clear

¹² In that the material is designed for, and marketed to, teenage girls with a relationship to cross-format media.

¹³ Who would act as byproducts that audiences might find some common ground with which to identify themselves in an attempt to understand teenage liminality.

¹⁴ Which I list and explain at the end of this chapter.

that corporations are now primarily concerned with the marketing of their brand image, and only secondarily concerned with the marketing of their products. “Swatch is not about watches,” Klein writes, “it is about the idea of time” (23). Branding has, in fact, become so ubiquitous that corporations are turning to different strategies to distance themselves from their similarly constructed competition. As Marc Gobe explains, corporations are well aware that *emotional* market share is as, or more, important than capital market share, and are doing everything they can to turn their brands into a lifestyle rather than just a commodity.

Branding works differently than the commonly understood practice of advertising in that branding is a practice that privileges the meaning of a particular corporation rather than the stuff of that corporation. Brand strategists are far less concerned with what a certain product does than with what a product says about the person or persons who buy the product. The Nike brand is not primarily concerned with the shoes the company makes; rather, it is most concerned with what the swoosh on the shoe means in the global understanding of the swoosh’s significance in the marketplace. As Naomi Klein makes clear, Nike does not make products—Nike *is* sports.

The saturation of brands has made it necessary for corporations to look to the people who buy their products as possible representational agents of the desired ethos and pathos of the individual corporations/brands. In other words, brands are trying to figure out ways to transcribe the meaning of the brand onto the people who represent that meaning in the wearing/owning/etc. of the brand. It is becoming less and less possible for corporations to sell just products; instead, they are having to recalibrate their marketing strategies to sell the meaning of products as well. Of Adam Arvidsson’s *Brands: Meaning and Value in Media Culture*, Sam Gimignano writes,

Brands should be understood as an institutional embodiment of the logic of a new form of informational capital—much like the factory embodied the logic of industrial capital. Brand management is a matter of putting to work the capacity of consumers (and increasingly other kinds of actors) to produce a common social world through autonomous processes of communication and interaction. (*Brands: Meaning and Value in Media Culture*, Preface)

Gimignano invokes Arvidsson as agreeing with Gobe here, explaining the imperative that corporations have in designing a consumer citizenship whereby the production of goods is seen through what those goods can say about the moral/ethical/social meaning of the consumers embodying them. Corporations are now desirous of allying the meaning of a person (their self-identity) with that of the meaning of the brand (its emotional/cultural market identity), in the Burkean sense of individual identification as process¹⁵. The familiar question, “Are you a Mac or a PC?” speaks to this, as does the assertion that “I am Tiger Woods,” (Tiger woods, who *is* (or at least was) Nike). People are, in other words, using their ability to self-identify with the identity of the brand(s) they choose to buy. “The effect,” Klein writes of these neoliberally branded sites of production, “if not always the original intent, is to nudge the hosting culture into the background and make the brand the star. It is not to sponsor culture, but to *be* culture” (Klein 30). Celia Lury agrees, writing in her book, *Brands: The Logos of the Global Economy* that,

At its most basic, the repetition of a logo—which may be a name (Nike), a graphic image (the Swoosh) or a slogan (‘Just do it’)—means that when people are asked for examples of brands, most of them are able to give some, displaying what marketers call ‘brand awareness’. But marketers argue that ‘awareness’ must be supported, if a brand is to be successful, by a second aspect: ‘*image*’. This ‘image’ is developed in the marketing practices of *brand positioning*, including product design, the promotion and positioning products in the media, and the management of the logo itself. The aim of such practices is to develop brand image as the *associations that a brand has for consumers*. (Lury 11-12)

Lury argues that brands are becoming “one of the most important vehicles of globalization,” because, among other things, they “operate as a public currency while being legally protected as private property in law.” This will be important to remember as American pop culture becomes branded to a wider and more global audience, and even more important to remember as seen within the argument I will be making in the coming chapters—that is, the American teenage girl is being appropriated by

¹⁵ Which presupposes clear identities, not commodified brands or images.

Alloy Entertainment and its constituent partners into a figure with a recognizably branded pattern and identity. The public consumption of Alloy's properties is always couched within the private ownership by the corporation and its television partners—this creates the *assumption* of a shared ownership by the public audience and the private owners, but the private ownership of the property supersedes the desire(s) of the audience, for the sole benefit of the capital market(s) in which Alloy is highly invested.

When seen in the television industry, a show/branded network's image must be seen across the width and breadth of the flow of programming so that the audience(s) of the show/network are able to easily (or perhaps subconsciously) identify the consistent space of desire around which they, the audience, will feel comfortably situated. The idea of the brand rather than the product becoming the star has opened up interesting opportunities for television networks and advertisers alike. The television industry is beginning to target certain demographics, particularly those demographics that will make them the most money, comprised of consumers who the industry can potentially benefit from for years, or even decades. In other words, when television networks and programs implement branding strategies such as those mentioned above—and I contend that networks and shows are in fact doing this—the ability to *be* a certain culture becomes very real.

The New Television Teenager

My project focuses on the culture of the American teenager as created by Alloy Entertainment and seen through Alloy's various cross-format texts, the "temporal framing of the market" as Celia Lury (64) writes. Alloy's framing of the market, as explained above, is done through an engagement with their audience(s) whereby Alloy is becoming what Naomi Klein, Marc Gobe, and Adam Arviddson would see as the branded site of teenage production and teenage identity formation. While relatively new in its execution, the representation of teenagers on television has been well documented. It is generally agreed (Ross and Stein; Bindig and Bergstrom) that teenagers began having a voice of some televisual primacy in the late 1950s with the CBS sitcom *The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis*, a show that aired from 1959-1963, adapted from a book of short stories of the same

name. *Dobie Gillis* starred Dwayne Hickman as the title character, a teenager seemingly living the typical teenage life and suffering from the typical teenage hardships of the day—lack of money, popularity, girls. The show visited and re-visited the trappings of Gillis’s life each week, while secondary and tertiary characters (Bob Denver as Maynard G. Krebs, Gillis’s friend and partner-in-crime; Warren Beatty as Milton Armitage, Gillis’s wealthy nemesis; Steve Franken as Chatsworth Osborne, Jr., Gillis’s cousin) helped the audience understand the class and cultural position that Gillis was representing. To a lesser extent, *American Bandstand* (1952-1989) is given credit (Wee; Hine; Bindig and Bergstrom) for creating a space for teenage identity formation in allowing teens to be seen for what they were rather than for what they were assumed to be. That is, *American Bandstand* placed kids front and center of the camera, dancing and flirting, generally enjoying their youth instead of demonstrating the “brash, unfinished ebullient, idealistic, crude, energetic, innocent, greedy” behavior that many adults assumed the teenager as embodying, the “noble savage in blue jeans, the future in your face” (Hine 10). Teenagers, scholars and critics write, were finally invented on television in the 1950s.

The timing is not surprising, given the fact that the word “teenager” was a new concept in America in and around the 1950s, made harder by the fact that many Americans were still having difficulty fully understanding what the concept was supposed to represent.

The word was coined during the early 1940s by some anonymous writer or editor to describe an age group that had suddenly become of great interest to marketers and social reformers. Like the Hoover Dam, the American teenager was a New Deal Project, a massive redirection of energy. The national policy was to get the young out of the workforce so that more jobs would be available to family men. For the first time, high schools were enrolling a majority of young people of high school age. During the late 1930s, Mickey Rooney provided a convincing and engaging model of arrested development. And as a final, necessary ingredient, the buildup to a wartime economy provided teenagers with pocket money. Money plays a paradoxical role for teenagers. If they are in the mainstream workforce, they’re not teenagers. But if they don’t

have any money, no youth culture emerges. (Hine 3-4)

To say that America was hard pressed in its understanding of who and what teenagers were and who they were supposed to be would be a grave understatement. Teenagers were young; teenagers were capable yet incapable; teenagers were only now being recognized as becoming educated; teenagers were male; and teenagers were beginning to add to or subtract from the American economy. Teenage identity formation was an objective attempt to understand the subjectivity of youth, and if we are to judge that attempt by the cultural artifacts provided in and around this time, the attempt was a failure. Teenagers still had no recognizable or palatable voice on television.

Subsequent to the early representation of teenagers on television, in the 1960s and 1970s teens were given minor roles and voices at best, largely seen as tools in which their parents could use to display parental authority—good and mostly bad—in an attempt to curry favor or disfavor (depending on whether or not the parent in question was constructed as good or evil) with audiences: shows like *Leave it to Beaver* (1957-1963), *Never Too Young* (1965-1966), *Love is a Many Splendored Thing* (1967), *The Brady Bunch* (1969-1974), *All My Children* (1970), *The Waltons* (1972-1981), *The Young and the Restless* (1973), *Little House on the Prairie* (1974-1982), among others. Far less research has been done on the representation of teens in media during this era of television, assumedly because there continued to be a hazy understanding by television executives and writers as to where teenagers fit in the larger spectrum of art, marketing, gender, and economics. Teenagers were paid no mind, as it were, because,

our beliefs about teenagers are deeply contradictory: They should be free to become themselves. They need many years of training and study. They know more about the future than adults do. They know hardly anything at all. They ought to know the value of a dollar. They should be protected from the world of work. They are frail, vulnerable creatures. They are children. They are sex fiends. They are the death of culture. They are the hope of us all... These qualities—the things we love, fear, and think we know about the basic nature of young people—constitute a teenage mystique: a seductive but damaging way of understanding

young people. This mystique encourages adults to see teenagers (and young people to see themselves) not as individuals but as potential problems. Such a pessimistic view of the young can easily lead adults to feel that they are powerless to help young people make better lives for themselves. Thus, the teenage mystique can serve as an excuse for elders to neglect the coming generations and, ultimately, to see their worse fears realized. (11)

The confusion that many adult Americans shared about their own growing sons and daughters was real—the newly imbedded belief that the word “teenager” represented something far more than merely the age bracket of 12-20 was indeed something quite intimidating for adults; add that to the fact that teenagers were slowly beginning to be displayed and made somewhat dynamic in the American consumption of television in the 1950s onward, and it is no wonder why the teenager was so culturally devalued—people simply did not know to handle them. The result of this devaluation was a lack of spatial terrain on television in which teenagers could have, and should have, been given negotiable room to grow. In all the above examples, one thing is quite clear—teenagers in America from the 1950s through the 1980s were seen as largely male, white, economically comfortable, suburban, existing in the space of a nuclear family, and moral. When teenagers were given roles on television with even a small amount of privilege, those teenagers could be seen embodying this identity, making clear to audiences that to be an American teenager on television was to *not* be female. Because of this, there is little to no published research on the history of the teenage girl on television, mostly due to the fact that the teenage girl on television is a particularly new invention. Even more pointedly, there is an overwhelming lack of space given to the teenage girl as being privileged in television drama—when teenage girls were given room on television (*Dobie Gillis*, *The Brady Bunch*), they were seen as comic counterparts to the privileged teenage boy or foils to the teenage boy’s licentious desire for a teenage girl’s affection. It should not go unnoticed, of course, that in the 1960s, there were a handful of television shows that featured girls as primary (or close to primary) characters: *Gidget* (1965-1966), *The Patty Duke Show* (1963-1966), *The Flying Nun* (1967-1970), *The Brady Bunch* (1969-1974) being the four most prominent. And while teenage girls were

given voice and some agency on these shows, their identities, concerns, and especially points of view *as girls* were not taken seriously. The fact that the above four shows were sitcoms could be a reason why the girls' voices were not taken seriously if not for the fact that the voices of boys on sitcoms of that era were in fact taken very seriously: *The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis*, *All in the Family* (1971-1979), *Good Times* (1974-1979), and *Happy Days* (1974-1984) to name four. These shows allowed a space (through a mixture of comedy and drama) for teenage boys to work on their growing identity formation as the adults on the show (sometimes parents, sometimes not) gave them respect and space to be young, and to be agents of youth rather than, as is happening now, agents of a brand identity.

The End of Innocence on Television: 1990 and the Suddenness of Growing Up

But to be an agent of youth meant something far different in the years before 1990. To be an agent of youth prior to 1990 meant to be, for the most part, white and to be male. And to be an agent of youth certainly did not have a recognizable televisual extension to the brand or corporation from which that agency was constructed. In other words, teenagers on television seemed to exist, prior to 1990, in a vacuum untouched by the marketing of teenagers that was seen shortly thereafter.¹⁶ Alex P. Keaton (*Family Ties*, played by Michael J. Fox), perhaps the most iconic teenager from any era of television, was seen through the run of the sitcom's life (1982-1989) fully embodying the liminality of youth. Alex P. Keaton's entire identity was that of a boy who fully recognized the global (or at least national) responsibility of the teenager to move away from the ideals of one's parents (in his case, Keaton's parents were staunch hippies, he an unapologetic Reagan Republican), all the while fully depending on one's parents to help in the ever-expanding and difficult world of actually growing up. Alex P. Keaton was a grown-up child; and after *Family Ties* went off the air in 1989, the grow-up child became not just *a* way of seeing, but *the* way of seeing the teenager on television.

Family Ties, remember, was not a drama; nor was *Family Ties* a platform for teenage girl

¹⁶ Marketing within the actual televisual space of teen media became more and more commonplace starting with *Beverly Hills, 90210*, but the marketing within shows like *90210* was far different than how Alloy uses marketing within their shows. These themes are discussed in depth in the chapters that follow.

audiences to find space of agency (of any kind). It wasn't until 1990 that an American television show (of any genre, in its case a drama) would give the teenage girl a recognizable and privileged position with any amount of strength and consistency. Darren Star's seminal and precedent-setting drama *Beverly Hills, 90210* (1990-2000) created a wave of such magnitude and momentum that the television landscape has not been the same since. Beginning in 1990, it became up to television to inform America what it actually meant to be forced to contend with the large implications of the word "teenager," particularly in how teenage girls were forced to contend with the battle of growing up and aging. This differs from teen girls on television in the past, as mentioned before, in that now girls on television were seen in largely dramatic ways rather than easy-to-dismiss subjects of a joke/jokes.

One of the most popular successors of *90210*, *Dawson's Creek*, made concrete the concept of televisual aging. In the series finale of *Dawson's Creek*, Jen Lindley (played by Michelle Williams) dies, Pacey Whitter (Joshua Jackson) owns his own business, Dawson Leery (James Van Der Beek) is a TV director, and Joey Potter (Katie Holmes) is a book editor. Each character has undergone, throughout the seasons, an appropriate amount of aging. Compare that to where each character started the series—Dawson and Joey were talking about sex in Dawson's bedroom, Pacey was fantasizing about, then acting out those fantasies with, his high school English teacher, Jen was new in town as the sultry blonde from the big city. In other words, *Dawson's Creek* gave its audience what its audience actually *was*—that is, young girls and boys trying to cope with the looming future of their growing up. Each of these main characters has a relatively equal amount of agency as the series begins, even more so as the series continues. And while the show is certainly not without its flaws (particularly in its representation of class and race), *Dawson's Creek* owes much of its success to the gender standards that *Beverly Hills, 90210* first constructed.

Set in Beverly Hills, California, *90210* was about a group of teenage boys and girls fraught with the difficulties of growing up. Similar in design to *Dobie Gillis*, *90210* saw its main characters—Brandon Walsh (played by Jason Priestly), Brenda Walsh (Shannen Doherty), Dylan McKay (Luke Perry), Kelly Taylor (Jennie Garth), Donna Martin (Tori Spelling), Steve Sanders (Ian

Ziering), David Silver (Brian Austin Green), and Andrea Zuckerman (Gabrielle Carteris)—battle their own and each other’s demons weekly, seemingly as a way for its (mostly female) audience to feel as if it was being represented in an accurate (at least by television standards) and altogether new way. The characters started young, grew up, and stood for the American mass ideal of developing out of adolescence and into adulthood. Theirs was a different kind of adulthood than was seen in previous incarnations of teenage identity on television. Rather than being forced to negotiate the terrain of wartime drafts, supporting a family with the money made from a first job (*Dobie Gillis*, *All in the Family*), learning the responsibilities of growing popularity and even fame (*The Brady Bunch*, *The Monkees*), adulthood in the 1990s and *90210* meant sexual maturity, drug use, pregnancy, and other trappings of a privileged youth. Adulthood, in other words, essentially meant *being* an adult rather than, as was seen in the TV teenagers of the past, *becoming* an adult. *90210* developed the blueprint for the teenage dramas that followed, creating the televisual flow (Williams) necessary to create an equitable teenage ethos and pathos that has existed ever since. *90210* was the first drama on television that gave the boys and girls equal footing and equal agency as they grew up together as teenagers. Unlike television shows that preceded it, *Beverly Hills*, *90210* did not marginalize the female voice; and it became quite clear as the seasons progressed that it was a show *for* and *about* teenage girls. As discussed in the Introduction, with the growing cable television market along with the rise of branded and boutique networks (MTV, ESPN, etc.), age and gender were rapidly becoming accounted for in the design of television programming.

The two male leads in *90210*, Brandon and Dylan, were regularly seen as conquests (sexual and otherwise) and potential conquests of the female leads (particularly Kelly and Brenda). There was a constant battle for the affection and attention of the boys that the girls were given privilege, and *90210* marked the beginning of an era on television whereby girls were the audience members being marketed to and marketed for. The economic viability of the teenage girl in America was becoming less about the male gaze¹⁷ and more about how girls could take the male gaze and use it to their

¹⁷ Male gaze presupposes a male-centered viewpoint, independent of whether or not the viewpoint

advantage—culturally, sexually, and economically. The indirect gaze¹⁸ of the audience, beginning with *90210*, was undergoing a turn to the direct gaze¹⁹ of the female character's control. The enormity of the switch should not go unnoticed, because now (starting with *90210*), girls were at least beginning to be in control of the narrative aesthetic.

Economics/Commodification of Gender on Teen Television

What teenage television shows were able to do, starting with *90210* and continuing through *The O.C.*, was to make (particularly female) teenage identify feel safe and to feel natural by consistently demonstrating this female-centric gaze as being what was important, and as being what was expected week-to-week. Girls were becoming the privileged gender on television; girls were now becoming the voices that mattered, the agents of televisual youth. What this led to was a natural progression in these shows from the first to the last episode where the audience could find fairly obvious signifiers in each character as to how that character was different (marked by age) from season to season. As Thomas Hine writes,

The word 'teenager' tells us only that the person described is older than twelve, younger than twenty. These seven years represent an enormous chunk of a person's life, one in which most people experience big physical, emotional, intellectual, and social changes. The word 'teenager' actually masks tremendous differences in maturity between different members of the age group, and within individuals as they pass through the teen years... The trouble with creating a distinct group defined solely by age is that we conjure up phenomena that don't really exist. Is there really an epidemic of teenage pregnancy, or are women in their teens simply participating in a larger societal trend to bear children out of wedlock? Crime,

moves the narrative to a place consistent with that viewpoint. For example, the camera position will privilege a boy/man's reaction in a sexual situation while de-privileging the girl/woman's reaction and instead focusing on a specific body part/parts of the girl. One motivation of this type of viewpoint is to focus the girl/woman being gazed as object of desire, and to (perhaps subtly) psychologically effect the audience's sympathy for the dominant boy/man.

¹⁸ The indirect gaze being what the spectator offers as a spectator (where s/he looks), as controlled by those in charge of what can be offered. (Kress and Leeuwen)

¹⁹ The direct gaze is the subject's (in this case, the girls in the televisual space) appeal to be viewed as agents with some control of how they are being gazed by the audience. (Kress and van Leeuwen)

especially drug crime, is a multigenerational industry in which people in their teens are active participants. (Hine 15)

90210 set off a whirlwind of popular American dramas on television, all of which used the model Darren Star first designed as a way to gather female audience members together in a shared experience of watching characters who were supposed to represent a somewhat imagined community of like-minded consumers with like-minded desires. In the dramas that followed, *My So-Called Life* (1994-1995), *Party of Five* (1994-2000), *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), *Dawson's Creek* (1998-2003), *Felicity* (1998-2002), and *The O.C.* (2003-2007), to name the most popular, teenage girls dominated the primetime television landscape as characters of primary importance rather than, as before, characters seen merely for their use value for the teenage boys that looked to use them. These shows shared many common tropes, perhaps the most important being that the audience was witness to the characters growing up, a natural assumption in the ongoing identification of teenage semiotics (fear, awkwardness, sexual desire, sexual repression, aggressive behavior, sadness, etc.).

Each episode of *90210* is basically a morality tale unto itself, an allegory for the “right” kind of youthful decision-making. Each episode is mostly un-connected to previous or subsequent episodes, at least insofar as to how the morality in each episode is a contained piece of culturally appropriate education. For example, in the Halloween episode of Season Two, Kelly wears a suggestive costume to a party, whereby a boy comes on strong to her and violently forces himself on Kelly. Brenda and Donna console Kelly, explaining to her that it is not her fault. Dylan then comes in and says that, “every guy has a choice,” letting the girls come to terms with Kelly’s innocence. This is not even mentioned in the next episode, nor even hinted about. The morality is used, quite explicitly, as a narrative device to further define each character’s position in the “gang.” In other words, Kelly is not constituted in any way by her singular “bad decision,” to wear such a costume. This is in direct contrast to teen television of today, which I will return to later in this chapter, but marks the first difference in how teenage girls were represented in teen television of the past (beginning with *90210*) to how they are represented today—previous teen TV suggested that girls, unless properly informed,

might be victims of sexual aggression, whereas modern teen TV makes it clear that girls are *likely* to be the victims of sexual aggression, and that this abuse will in some ways define a good amount of the victim's teenage existence.

The issue of sex in teen television is obviously important—teenagers' sexual confusion is a fact. The most appropriate way teenagers get to learn about sex has long been debated, but what cannot and does not go unnoticed is that teenagers learn a very good deal about sexual identity, sexual aggression, sexual depravity, and gendered sexual semiotics through the repeated viewing of television²⁰, or as “one teenage girl explained, ‘You can learn a lot from what [media] have to say instead of being embarrassed to ask your parents’” (Durham 29). Sex on TV (especially teen TV) is today an assumed part of the terrain, something that is bound to happen, just because. But in the early-to-late 1990s, sex on teen television was treated with deference and a good deal of timidity. For example, in the *Beverly Hills, 90210* second season episode, “Everybody's Talkin' 'Bout It,” the issue of safe sex was first brought up—this was the first episode in which sex was even mentioned, and there had already been an episode about a pregnancy scare—condoms were talked about being passed out in school, and the parents and students faced off about how to treat safe sex. The entire episode was about this issue, and no one actually knew what was the correct thing to do. And again, this issue did not have cross-episode traction; sex was situated in this episode alone, further drawing the lines about how the audience was supposed to read each character in how each character viewed sex. It was not treated as a global teen issue with far reaching social, political, or gender implications; it was treated as an issue meant for these characters alone and how these characters were read and consumed by the audience. The result of this on the audience, it can be inferred, was that girls and

²⁰ As M. Gigi Durham writes in *The Lolita Effect*, “Market research indicates that children and teenagers are major media consumers: a 2005 Kaiser Foundation study found that eight-to-eighteen year olds spend an average of six and a half hours a day with media. According to the marketing firm Teen Research Unlimited, American teenagers spend 11.2 hours a week watching TV...Both boys and girls rank MTV as their favorite cable channel, spending an average of 6 hours a week watching it....One problem with thinking about sexual content in teen media, and especially the sexualization of girls in the media, is that it often breaks down into a good/bad dichotomy: you're either *for* sex or *against* sex.” (Durham 30-32)

boys could feel spoken to; they could feel spoken for, and they could potentially get some of the answers to questions they were presently dealing with. As a comparison to the teen television of today, *90210* was generally seen as being true to life. M. Gigi Durham goes on to write that, teens *do* turn to the media for sexual information, privileging the media over parents, peers, and other sources. And, in fact, studies indicate that exposure to sexual media predicts young adolescents' sexual behavior: kids who watch highly sexualized media are about twice as likely to have sex early as kids who don't. This finding holds true across class and race. (49-50)

What *90210* was able to do, then, was give girls a kind of education about the real questions they (the girls in the audience) might have had but were unwilling to ask parents, teachers, or peers for fear that they would be judged as being *for* sex and thus, automatically *too* sexual.

Of course, as the seasons moved along, sex and teenage identity were made far more age-appropriate—unwanted pregnancies, STDs, rape, suicide, rampant drug use, divorce, and other morally uneasy televisual devices were employed to reenact the nuanced didacticism for which *90210* had long been known. When viewed separately, each episode resembles a kind of public service announcement²¹ by and for teenagers about how to properly put into context the difficulty of growing up and the difficulty that lies in the maturation process. The difficulty that some girls faced was due (at least in part, it can be surmised) to the clash of information girls were getting outside the media they watched—at school, at home—and inside the media in shows like *90210*. The growth of abstinence-only education in schools (signed into law in 1981) undoubtedly made school-aged girls desirous of consuming more and more teen media that answered the real questions they, the girls watching, had that were going unanswered by the adults that, in another time, might have helped

²¹ As context, this type of PSA can be framed by the growing movement of abstinence-only education in America, signed into federal law in 1981 by the Reagan administration. As Jessica Valenti writes in *The Purity Myth*, “A combination of forces—our media and society-driven virginity fetish, an increase in abstinence-only education, and the strategic rollback of women’s rights among the primary culprits—has created a juggernaut of unrealistic sexual expectation for young women. Unable to live up to the ideal of purity that’s forced upon them in one aspect of their lives, many young women are choosing the hypersexualized alternative that’s offered to them everywhere else as the easier—and more attractive—option.” (Valenti 9-10)

guide girls toward sexual maturity with more certainty. As Janice Irvine writes in *Talk About Sex*, Teacher training is meager as well. Most public school sexuality education takes place in health education courses, but a prospective health education teacher can finish a program without ever taking a single course on human sexuality. One study of 169 teacher-education programs in the United States found that few of them required their students to take sex education. In fact, there was so little structured opportunity for teachers to undertake sexuality education training that an interested educator would have found it extremely difficult to arrange a course of study. Such determination would be unlikely when there was so little incentive and so much risk for teaching sex education. (Irvine 189)

In other words, the public educators of sex were themselves not being properly educated on the ways in which to instruct students on the ins and outs of this type of education. That fact along with the upward trend in teens spending more and more time with media outlets meant that shows like *90210* could (and should) take on sexual situations with more certitude, largely because the audience not only needed it, but perhaps demanded it.

Sex Ed on Television

This is very important within the context of teen television because now, with the shift to a female-centric gaze on shows like *90210* along with the mixed and confused sex education that teenagers were getting in school, meant that television for teenagers could take on the added responsibility of *teaching* girls and boys about sex, the consequences of sex, etc., rather than merely *suggesting* these things. This was unprecedented on television, particularly because the maturation process in *90210* over the course of its ten-season run was clearly being seen through the eyes of Brenda, Kelly, and Donna alone. Brandon, Dylan, Steve, and David became more and more secondary in the narrative—it seemed that Darren Star and FOX were coming to terms with the fact that the bulk of their economic market was made up of girls and women, and the capitalist opportunity in that made it an imperative to privilege girlhood. Television began taking notice—girls were the ones who were dominating the teen television micro-economy. TV was about to change.

In the shows that followed *90210*, the teenage girl was privileged as being the center of the narrative, the gaze through which the audience could, at least in part, see themselves as being contributors. Another trope that each of these shows shared was the push and pull of the decision about which boy to choose to be with—*90210* had Brenda and Kelly (and to a lesser degree, Donna and Andrea) fighting each other for the affection of Brandon, Dylan, Steve, David, and other tangential boy characters. *Dawson's Creek* saw Joey and Jen determining the outcome of the plot through their desire for Dawson and Pacey; *Felicity* placed lead character Felicity Porter (played by Keri Russell) in the enviable position of being almost worshipped by Ben Covington (Scott Speedman) and Noel Crane (Scott Foley), only to choose both boys (sometimes at once); *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* gave audiences a peek into the mind of a killer who demonstrated tenacity but also romantic sensitivity in Buffy's (Sarah Michelle Gellar) relationships with vampire Angel (David Boreanaz), human Riley Finn (Marc Blucas), and vampire Spike (James Marsters); *My So-Called Life*, narrated by Angela Chase (Claire Danes) in diaristic prose, allowed audiences to see that it was an almost moral imperative to capture the boy, in this case Jordan Catalano (Jared Leto); and finally, *The O.C.*—the teen television show of old that most nearly resembles the shows of today, gave its audience two heroines, Summer Roberts (Rachel Bilson) and Marissa Cooper (Mischa Barton), collecting boys at the beginning of the series, settling down by the end (in Marissa's case, before she dies in a fiery car explosion). In all of the above shows,²² the teenage girl(s) at the center of the narrative were used as kinds of sex-education cogs that came about shortly after the abundant abstinence-education programs were signed into law, and that had, by the time *The O.C.* ended, had been in place in America for almost two decades.

All of these shows uniformly privileged girls in their attempt at negotiating the terribly dense and intimidating terrain of growing up. Girls, it was made clear starting with *90210* and ending with

²² Epitomized most explicitly in *Buffy*; when Buffy Summers enters into a physical relationship with the vampire Spike, the teenage girl was finally (and violently) matched evenly with the hyper-masculine teenage boy—creator and showrunner Joss Whedon using this relationship, perhaps, to palliate the non-sexual relationship he saddled Buffy with in her time with the vampire Angel, but also to the more passive physical relationships in shows that preceded *Buffy*.

The O.C., were now a force to be reckoned with on television, this ethos taking place in the midst of a somewhat bastardized version of grrrl power, embodied at the time most resolutely by the Spice Girls. The Spice Girls and their version of 1990s-era girl power positioned the girl as being (at least in part) in control of her own body *through* the male gaze. In other words, to be a girl in the 90s²³ was to be able to use the body as a tool of empowerment *against* the would-be gazers. But, as M. Gigi Durham writes,

No one stops to question why boys are never the objects of the gaze; why, if being on display is so empowering, males don't embrace this form of sexual expression, too. The baggy jeans and oversized T-shirts popular among boys today are designed, in fact, to conceal the body as much as possible. Boys are in the relatively comfortable position of observing and evaluating themselves being observed and evaluated. And girls are bombarded with the myth that seminudity constitutes "girl power". (Durham 79-80)

So, while female empowerment was clearly not a material reality; it was, at least on television, perceived to be such.

The Teen Girl as Consumer

The capitalist momentum in American culture was changing, and it was changing due in large part to the consumption practices in and of the watching of television and the advertising associated with it, giving girls power as the directors of the gaze on television, which then gave way, it can be surmised, to the girls in the audience feeling assured that they were intentionally being privileged by advertisers and television writers and producers as being the ones who now *mattered* in ways that there were never seen before. Girls, both within the narrative space²⁴ on television and the consumer space outside of television, could now be at least perceived to be the watcher(s) rather than the watched.

²³ The beginning of the second decade of abstinence-only education in America.

²⁴ I use this term throughout these chapters to designate what is happening physically and psychologically (de Certeau) with and to the characters inhabiting those spaces; and it is a term demonstrated nicely in Nick Couldry's "On the Set of *The Sopranos*: "Inside" a Fan's Construction of Nearness."

There were (and are), of course, many problems—social, racial, political—with the above television shows. All of them had, at their core, a governance of white and hyper-educated opulence, marginalizing quite explicitly, the voice and identity of the Other. *Beverly Hills, 90210* is the guiltiest party, being the show that invented this identity on television; the shows that succeeded it did nothing to change that fact, and for that they should be criticized, or at least tested for efficacy, lack of efficacy, or indifference. The failure to represent minority characters in any sort of socially responsible way speaks volumes about the gendered neoliberal and heteronormative politics imbedded in what seems like all of popular culture, of which I will return to shortly. But even with the acknowledgement of what these shows lacked, it was clear that teen television would never be the same starting in 1990 and continuing through the early 2000s—girls were, while not clear political or social victors or profoundly in charge of their sexual agency, certainly vehicles of capital. Girls were now the teenagers who represented the voice of material youth culture. Girls in these shows visited and re-visited what it meant to be a girl going through her teenage years. The shows consistently and (televisually) responsibly dealt with issues that most girls had to deal with in their everyday lives—all of the shows mentioned above dealt with sex, sexuality, death (and suicide), pregnancy, pregnancy scares, STDs, violence (sexual and non), parental strife, drug use, different forms of addiction, and the general hardships of relationships and growing up, all in their individualized stylings. They were teenage shows for a teenage marketplace, packaged and sold to a nuanced micro-economy made up of a mostly female audience who were in need of pop cultural emulation and transference, if for no reason other than the fact that it was now available for the first time. That is, girls, and to an extent, boys, saw themselves idealized in the American cultural economy of youth consumption. Teenagers were now being seen as a recognized force in a different kind of culture industry, that of the dramatic teenage television spectacle²⁵ that started in 1990 with Darren Star's *Beverly Hills, 90210* and all but

²⁵ I use the word 'spectacle' here to highlight the fact that, beginning with *90210*, teenage girls dominating the teenage marketplace as the privileged gender in the consumption of teen media was, for roughly forty years on television, *never* seen.

ended in 2007 with *The O.C.*²⁶

The Alloy Branded Teenager

It is important to remember that, in the shows mentioned above, the girl lead characters did not share a consistent identity—in other words, all the girls were contained as specific embodiments of the television shows on which they existed. Kelly and Donna, for all intents and purposes, did not profoundly resemble (outside of their race and class status) Marissa and Summer. Joey Potter was singular in teen television; so was Felicity Porter. The narrative tropes of the girls were similar, but the girls themselves acted as individuals specifically attuned to the American cultural moment that they found themselves. They were together but separate, equal and very unequal. Teen girls watching these separate characters were given room to pick for themselves who they thought most resembled them as people—one could be a Joey and not fear that Joey was the same as Jen, or that Jen was the same as Andrea, Andrea the same as Angela. All of the girls had individual identities, and this made for more realistic cultural and gendered mirroring. The result of this was that, for a whole generation of adolescents growing up on teen television, girls were no longer the gender that was in need of being saved by the very people that put them in harm's way to begin with, those people being boys. For over a decade, girls won. And then they didn't.

Alloy's constructed culture of the American teenager is one that acts as a space of neoliberal signification that helps give definition to the spatial allowance of an imagined community of viewers in their understanding of their individual as well as group identity. This culture differs from that of an affiliation of teenagers as a group of young people in its position as stemming from neoliberal consumerism. Alloy Entertainment has created the space whereby consumers assume a position of being an active fan audience taking part in the mutual construction (object/subject) of a dynamic text, all the while being made passive by remaining contained in the space of a pre-determined outcome of

²⁶ Because after *The O.C.*, as I will explain further in the coming chapters, teen girls on teen television were no longer given negotiable space to have clear and separate identities that allowed the teen girls in the audience to find common ground with one or more teen TV characters as a way to make sense, at least in part, of their own real teenage identity/identities, as mirrored by the teen characters they watched.

an already farmed property. Audiences, in other words, are made to believe in their activity in an open textual marketplace²⁷, all the while being made victim to the closed text with prescribed audience passivity. In other words, the texts (novels, TV adaptations of novels) under Alloy's control *always* remain closed due to the fact that the parent company controls the rights to the narrative/characters, severely limiting what the writers under Alloy's employ are able to do with the creative material they are guiding all the while under the watchful eye of Alloy. When audiences tweet back and forth with the stars of the shows, for example, there is an underlying governance of what is allowed to be said via this digital relationship. That is because Alloy, as has been mentioned throughout, has made it very clear that *they own the rights* to the narrative. And as I will discuss at length in Chapter Four, it is *only* when there is an obvious consumer desire for more material that the Alloy-controlled closed textual space becomes open; and this openness is still, as always, controlled by Alloy. Never, in other words, do the readers of an Alloy text have a say in where the Alloy text is allowed to go. Neither do the writers of those texts. It is only Alloy that does. The Alloy properties wouldn't work any other way. The creative team that farms the ideas to novelists and production companies *must* sell the ideas as being closed, otherwise Alloy Entertainment loses some of its ownership. Audiences are unaware that this happening, of course, which I will return to in later chapters.

As discussed before, teenagers are a very important demographic for advertisers—the teenage years being formative in brand decision making for years to come. Teenagers in America are beginning to look to television to help define for them what it *means* to be a teenager rather than, as in the past, watching networks and programs merely because they have teenagers playing roles with similar problems to their, the audience's, own. Teenagers are an especially appealing demographic,

²⁷ In *The Open Work*, Umberto Eco argued that “open texts” are dynamic literary works that readers understand as lacking concrete meaning (as compared to “closed texts,” that limit the reader's understanding to a single line of thought, controlled by the writer), therefore allowing the reader to fill in the narrative space with their own desire and/or personal interpretation of the textual material.

of course, due in large part to the myriad ways this group of consumers understand how to buy products and how those ways can define them as a specialized and easily recognizable group when compared to other brand-recognizable groups—namely, their parents, as well as other teenagers not taking part in these specific buying and branding practices. In other words, teenagers are hyper-aware of the “right” brands to buy as those brands speak to them as a group, the qualifier “right” being determined in a symbiotically, if subconsciously, agreed upon relationship between the teenage consumers and those who advertise to them. In fact,

According to a poll of 112,000 teenagers in thirty countries, just under half of all teenagers factor in the brand when making purchasing decisions, with Nike, Lacoste, Adidas, Sony, and Apple being the most popular among the boys, and Zara, H&M, and Roxy among the girls.

What’s more, just under half of all the teens said if there was no visible branding, they wouldn’t buy an item of clothing at all. (Lindstrom 122)

What this means is that young people have at least some desire to be associated with the brands with which they choose to ally themselves—the brands listed in the above example all have very recognizable logos that are prominently displayed on the products of their design. Teenagers are unconcerned with, it seems, what the corporation *does* (Nike and its sweatshops, for example), but solely with what the brand *means*, which is producing in the consumer a false sense of individuality through the consumers’ collective affiliation with the group. In other words, teenage consumers perceive themselves as individuals buying brands that speak to their individuality, even though their peers are taking part in these same buying and neoliberal identificatory practices. This false sense of individuality lends itself well to the corporations and brands who have a desire to be seen as speaking to the individuals within groups; the result of this being that individual consumers are conforming to pre-ordained meaning makers’ ideas about how girls and boys are *supposed* to look, *supposed* to act, all of this happening to individuals within a cultural group with consumers all doing the same thing at the same time. Adam Arvidsson goes on to write,

Not so much the hamburger as the McDonald’s hamburger, not so much the watch as the Rolex

watch, not so much the stylish handbag as the Prada handbag. It is the significance of the brand, itself articulated in a complex web of commercial intertextuality, that becomes the main use-value of the product: it allows a process positioning, or ‘negotiation’ of the self in relation to the shifting demands of everyday life. A similar importance of brands in the performance of selfhood and social relations has been noted among American high-school teenagers, particularly those who lack other qualities like athletic prowess or exceptional beauty. To the ‘slightly awkward,’ the ‘overweight or not conventionally pretty,’ savvy display of brands becomes a way of constructing a social position and a passable image. (Arvidsson 5)

Strategies of individual turned group brand identity are now being implemented, I contend, by the television industry. Two networks in particular, The CW and ABC Family, are using techniques made successful by global brands like Nike and Starbucks in order to become cultural sites of production—the spaces, in other words, where individual and group identity is formed and understood. Networks are teaching teenagers, using the branding strategies discussed above, what is definitional for them as a group, be in the way they speak, dress, interact with the opposite sex, parents and teachers, and especially in how these things constitute the teenage identity—that identity being far different for boys than for girls, which I will discuss more in the following paragraphs. In comparison to teenage television of the past, where these markers would act as the narrative of their days, if you will; these sites of definition, in contemporary teen television, contextualize the whole of (especially female) teenage identity.

The Living, Branded Television

My project argues that Alloy Entertainment and their farming of products abide by seven principal signifiers that act as guiding tropes in the three book/TV series’ mentioned above. The signifiers are consistent and somewhat constitutive in the teenage girls in the books and (more so) on TV. The teenage girl is marked as:

1. Sexually deprived—whore/virgin dichotomy, and marked as used up (with child, loss of child, raped, abused)
2. Terrorized—physically, by males or other females; or emotionally, mostly by other females. R.W. Connell writes in *Masculinities* that, “violence becomes important in gender politics among men. Most episodes of major violence are transactions among men. Terror is used as a means of drawing boundaries and making exclusions” (Connell 83).
3. Highly dependent on a male counterpart for self-actualization, largely because of #2.
4. Surveilled—as John Berger writes in *Ways of Seeing*, “*Men act and women appear*. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object—and most particularly an object of vision: sight” (Berger 47).
5. Marked by class, and to a lesser extent, by race—as compared to teenage television of the past, (particularly *Beverly Hills, 90210* and *The O.C.*) which used class opulence as part of the narrative only, whereas contemporary teen television used it as an identifier of worth.
6. Representative of a nationalist teenage gender identity based on the five above points (a social agent)—in other words, Alloy Entertainment, The CW, and ABC Family are casting the teenage girl into the representational role of *standing for* teenage identification. The representation of the teenage girl as social agent is an important way contemporary teenage television differs from early teenage television; that is, the social distance characters had from the causes they were seen as dealing with on the shows (in early teen TV) was a direct descendent of the soap-opera. Teenagers on television now are supposed to be seen as representative of the social/political cause they embody—for example, teenage fear is supposed to stand for the post-9/11 generational ethos embedded in the teenage identity of all Americans. This can be seen readily in the neo-Williamsonian flow inherent in Alloy’s cross-textual property ownership and display.

7. Children acting as adults, placed in compromisingly adult situations and expected to deal with them using the mentality that the children's parents would, without any indication that the children learned how to deal with the situations from their parents (commonly known as "growing old too soon").

It should be noted that not all seven signifiers are used on all three shows at the same time, nor are they used in each episode; but it is important to remember that *Gossip Girl*, *The Vampire Diaries*, and *Pretty Little Liars* all privilege at least one of the above seven signifiers from the beginning of each series through the subsequent season(s), more often than not using all seven of the signifiers over the course of the series' life. This is far different than teen television of the past in that the shows mentioned above all come from the same creative team—Alloy Entertainment. The purpose of the signifiers is to create brand consistency across Alloy's various properties and, over time, to create a tangible sense of brand equity and loyalty. Adam Arvidsson writes of brand equity that,

For our purposes, we can define brand equity as the productive power of the social and symbolic relations that have evolved around the brand, their ability to *add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or a service*. Recently it has been recognized that the most important aspect of brand equity is the actual standing that the brand has in the lived reality of consumers: what is known as 'Customer-based Brand Equity'. (Arvidsson 133)

In other words, Alloy Entertainment, The CW, and ABC Family are using the consistently marketed signifiers above to create a lived community comprised of market citizens who are taking part in the production of teenage identity. To develop brand equity, these entities *must* use consistent messages across their various formats in order for their consumers to equate a kind of singular message that the formats share. It is Alloy's attempt to 'Just Do It'.

From the history of the teenage girl on television I now move to the specifics of Alloy's brand identity, beginning with their first television product, *Gossip Girl*. It is a television show that started a revolution of sorts, being the first show on TV to make use of the Internet as a natural narrative extension of teenage existence. This allowed Alloy, as will be seen in all of the chapters that follow,

a way to galvanize their brand identity with the identity of the virtual watcher of the people that that watcher could then control.

Two

***Spotted: You and You and You and You and You* *Gossip Girl* and a TV Revolution**

“Governments of the Industrial World, you weary giants of flesh and steel, I come from Cyberspace, the new home of the Mind. On behalf of the future, I ask you of the past to leave me alone. You are not welcome among us. You have no sovereignty where we gather. We have no elected government, nor are we likely to have one, so I address you with no greater authority than that which liberty itself always speaks. I declare the global social space we are building to be naturally independent of the tyrannies you seek to impose on us. You have no moral right to rule us nor do you possess any methods of enforcement we have true reason to fear.”

--John Perry Barlow's Declaration of Independence of Cyberspace

In Chapter One I discussed past incarnations of teen TV as having a kind of contained fluidity in that the teenagers on television were victimized only by the cultural moment in which they were placed—that moment, after 1981, at least in part contextualized by the abstinence-only education movement firmly entrenched as public policy the United States. I also discussed how, starting with *Beverly Hills, 90210* and ending with *The O.C.*, teenagers on TV were given narrative space to grow up as the audiences themselves grew up with television teenagers often acting as guides in the expanding and uneasy world of becoming agents of their own sexuality and adulthood. As a result, past teen television seemed to carry with it a responsibility of allegorical didacticism because often it (television, as well as other media entities) was looked to for answers to real, not rhetorical, questions about gender, sex, race, class, and age. Starting with this chapter and threading through the rest of this dissertation, I will demonstrate that, beginning with *Gossip Girl* and continuing through *The Vampire Diaries* and *Pretty Little Liars*, one corporation became almost solely responsible for changing how teenagers were able to watch and read teen TV and thus almost solely responsible for creating and governing the morality (sex, class, race, etc.) to which teen television has long been home. In this chapter I will discuss how, beginning with *Gossip Girl*, the *real* questions that teenagers once asked of teen TV (how to cope with first time sexual encounters, for example) were replaced by *rhetorical* questions that were often unanswerable by the teens asking them, for the most part because the answers (and questions) were couched in the neoliberal practice of objectifying

morality in capital markets (with merchandise, girls as consumers first and teenagers second). Starting with *Gossip Girl*, the real became rhetorical; the practice of growing up became the abstraction of never having to grow up. In the following pages I will also discuss how Alloy Entertainment, toward the end of *Gossip Girl*'s fourth season, leveraged the show with *Pretty Little Liars* in theme and aesthetic, to create more audience loyalty for both shows as a way to further Alloy's control and saturation of the teenage television marketplace. During *Gossip Girl*'s fourth season, three Alloy properties could be seen on separate nights of the week on two different networks—*Pretty Little Liars* and *The Vampire Diaries* were generating huge ratings made up by two very vocal and active fan communities—and it seems that the change in the direction of *Gossip Girl* was a way for Alloy to generate a more fully recognized, and recognizable, brand equity through the consistently marked brand principles seen within the narrative spaces of each separate Alloy owned property.

Gossip Girl was, for all intents and purposes, the first teen television show to use the Internet as a primary narrative tool; and Alloy Entertainment used *Gossip Girl* as the televisual impetus to demonstrate just how productive the Internet (and other forms of surveillance) could be in creating brand consistency (seen later in *The Vampire Diaries* and *Pretty Little Liars*) that previous teen television programs did not (and could not) account for.

The Internet on Television

As Daniel J. Solove makes clear in *The Future of Reputation*, the Internet is only now entering its second decade in mainstream culture. The Internet is a teenager. So it should surprise no one that the Internet is still acting like a teenager: petulant and bullying, shallow and judgmental, an unexplored mind. What is likewise unsurprising is that American media properties in mainstream culture are still relatively young in fully recognizing how the Internet is and should be used textually. The Internet created a universe of heretofore unasked questions that made Internet users re-calibrate the importance of living a private life versus the sexiness of living a public one. *Gossip Girl*, from the very first scene of the pilot episode, made it clear that teenage self-importance would be measured

only by the public, independent of any individual's private desire or motivation about what to display or why to display it. One's digital footprint became the value of self, and that fact begs many questions. Questions like: How do Internet consumers use the Internet as extensions of their own carefully constructed realities? How do social networking sites like Twitter and Instagram make people more free, or do they at all? Do young Internet users mask their real identities behind the identities they are able to have with the Internet as their technological lipstick—that which makes people prettier, more interesting, perceptively better? Are we as Internet dependents valuing or devaluing connection; and is that because of, or in spite of the Internet? Did we only pretend to privilege our privacy because none of us were smart enough to come up the idea for Facebook; and when that idea became fully realized, was it then and only then that we could all come out of the closet and finally live in public, the place we always wanted to live? And really, is bullying that big a deal?

These are the questions that *Gossip Girl* tried to answer, or at least tried to construct the televisual equivalent to a version of an answer. It was a book and television property that was unapologetic for its part in the ambivalence of the millennial youth. *Gossip Girl* was essentially saying to its audience—you don't care, so why should we? It was boys and girls gossiping about each other because those boys and girls *wanted* to be gossiped about. They wanted to be gossiped about because in this relatively young digital age, to be gossiped about means to be talked about; and to be talked about means to be relevant; and to be relevant means everything. With *Gossip Girl*, Alloy Entertainment was able to carve out the first uniformly neoliberal space on teen television. That is, Alloy turned the stuff of personal teenage moral unease (the questions that past teen television helped answer) into a space where real, and private, morality became part of public desire and consumption. *Gossip Girl* was the first television show to demonstrate how teenagers were seemingly begging to be watched, regardless of the personal and moral destruction that resulted from such watching. The Internet age all but began on television with *Gossip Girl*, and with it came the end of private desire. Morality and desire, with *Gossip Girl*, and threading through all of Alloy's

properties, entered the domain of the public. As will be discussed in what follows, the implications of this are vast. Alloy Entertainment, as will be seen in this and the following chapters, has saturated the teen marketplace with their branded cross-textual products; products that all carry with them the stamp of Alloy's branded message—that is, the teenage girl will be surveilled; the teenage girl will dismiss this surveillance as normative; the reason the teenage girl is surveilled is because such surveillance is the only thing that will keep the teenage girl safe, because when the girl becomes a teenager, the girl is *obviously* broken; and the teenage girl will come to depend upon those who surveille her because the teenage girl has no other place to go. *Gossip Girl* helped cement Alloy Entertainment as the surveillor as well as the place around which (real) teenage girls could gather to help understand why they, the girls, were being surveilled in the first place.

The Beginning of Gossip

Gossip Girl's origin story is the story of Alloy Entertainment—the searching for, finding, and perpetuating the AE brand mission into as many formats as would be profitable, while still being somewhat televisually believable and interesting. That is, Alloy has created three²⁸ television and book properties that are separate but equal. Each property has its own aesthetic and its own micro-philosophy of teenage identity which leads to an individual fandom connected to the individual show under Alloy's control. At the same time, each property is in part contextualized by the seven brand principles I have discussed, and will continue to discuss throughout. This leads to a conflation of sorts that could act as encouragement for one fandom to become aligned with another fandom, all under the auspice of Alloy ownership.

As Crissy Calhoun explains in *Spotted*,

Gossip Girl was born in a brainstorming meeting at youth marketing and media packaging firm Alloy Entertainment in the late 90s. Cecily von Ziegesar, then an editor at the company, worked up a proposal based on a name tossed out during the meeting—"Gossip Girl." Having

²⁸ The three most profitable, and the three most popular, are the Alloy properties I am dealing with in my dissertation. Alloy has, it should be kept in mind, and which will be discussed further in Chapter Five, owned properties that were not as successful as the properties I am discussing.

grown up in New York City attending the Upper East Side private school Nightingale Bamford, von Ziegesar followed the “write what you know” adage and set the story in the world she experienced as a teenager. (Calhoun, *Spotted* 4)

It was as simple as that. Alloy’s “adage” was, beginning with *Gossip Girl* and seen again in *Pretty Little Liars* (more in Chapter Four), was to find a writer who embodied a very privileged habitus²⁹ and assumed an atypically heightened level of cultural competency likely unseen in the majority of Alloy’s audience, thus potentially turning their audience(s) into aspirational consumers who found some kind of romance, or at least desire, in the narrative(s) and the products seen therein. And in typical Alloy fashion, an employee of the company hears an idea, writes a book (von Ziegesar wrote the first novel in four months) about privileged white youth living in a world assumed by the writer and assumed by Alloy to be the normative world inhabited by the real boys and girls reading these books and thus marginalizing the boys and girls who do not inhabit that world, that marginalization is ignored, more books get written, more sold, ideas are pitched to a television network based on the sales of the books (“the initial print run of 35,000 for *Gossip Girl* was not enough copies to satisfy the ravenous YA audience,” writes Calhoun (5)), in *Gossip Girl*’s case The CW), privileged white actors get cast to play the privileged white characters in the books, more books get written to further Alloy’s brand saturation in the teen media marketplace, von Ziegesar can step down as writer and give the reigns to someone else (which happened starting with the eighth book, *Nothing Can Keep Us Together* (ghostwritten), all while Alloy Entertainment can stay hidden behind the writers, networks, actors, and audiences keeping them in business. But by the time Josh Schwartz and Stephanie Savage got ahold of the property for The CW, the *Gossip Girl* book series had a wide fandom already built in; so clearly there was an audience that was clambering for the opulence and privilege that von Ziegesar had written about in five books before the beginning of the television series. The people at Alloy and The CW were ambivalent about the over-the-top sex, drug and alcohol abuse, violence, and

²⁹ Lifestyle dictated by taste acquired through acts of cultural consumption (art, politics, etc.) made possible by class status.

general teen mayhem that littered the pages of each subsequent novel, likely because the audience was largely ambivalent. The significance of this will become more apparent as the other two Alloy properties (*The Vampire Diaries*, *Pretty Little Liars*) are discussed in the following two chapters. With *Gossip Girl*, Alloy Entertainment created a televisual ethos whereby the audience of the TV show sympathized with (at best), or even rooted for (at worst) the victimization of girls, because that victimization is what made the show(s) compelling. Von Ziegesar said that,

It's completely unrealistic to have a group of kids who are constantly reforming or who are being punished because they're 'naughty.' And I always resented that quality in books I'd read. I mean, of course I want to be the responsible mother who says, 'Oh, there are terrible repercussions if you have sex, do drugs, and have an eating disorder! But the truth is, my friends and I dabbled in all of those things. And we all went to good colleges and grew up fine.

And that's the honest thing to say. (quoted in Calhoun, *Spotted* 5)

Forgetting the fact that von Ziegesar went to an elite private school on the Upper East Side of Manhattan and likely had at her disposal all the trappings of a hyper-privileged life, she seems to be without guile in the assumption that the audience of her books went through, and were going through, the same kind of teenage life. And who can blame her, really, when her books were selling well and the rights of which were sold to a (semi) major television network?

Gossip Girl was the first script Dawn Ostroff, head of The CW at the time, acquired. It was Ostroff's goal to have *Gossip Girl* be the flagship program of this brand new network. *The O.C.* (another Schwartz and Savage project) had just concluded, and Ostroff wanted to leverage the equity of that show to give his new network a certain type of audience—the type who could potentially afford the products and objects seen on and in the lives of the boys and girls in the world first constructed by Cecily von Ziegesar. *Gossip Girl* was, for over three seasons, essentially *The O.C.* east-coast, comprised of white actors playing hyper-white characters with the problems that only privileged white teenagers could possibly have, all the while having those problems documented in real time by an anonymous blogger who knew everything about everyone and was not afraid to

publish it all on a site that seemingly every single person inhabiting this world depended upon like manna. *Gossip Girl* was a show that was very much of its time, making teenagers feel the weight of a relevant banality³⁰. It was also of its time in the relationship it had with a particular consumer market—that of the fashion industry. As was explained in previous chapters, teen television was not far afield from cross-marketing opportunities in the clothes that characters wore (this was seen in *Dawson's Creek* and *The O.C.*), or the music the characters listened to and saw (most prominent in *The O.C.*), so when *The New York Times* proclaimed in 2008 that *Gossip Girl* was the “first show to have been conceived, in part, as a fashion marketing vehicle” (La Ferla), the proclamation did not make waves. *Gossip Girl* was accepted and consumed as being progressive and consumer-centric with aspirational wealth splashed across the page and screen as if it were merely part of the narrative space of the program. The fact that real boys and girls watching the fake show could visit the real gossipgirl.net website to see what each real actor playing a fake character was wearing in each fake episode with links to the real stores and boutiques at which the clothes could be bought (or at least tried on and virally shared), it was read as a normal part of being a millennial television consumer. After all, *Gossip Girl* was a book series turned television show that *predicted* Twitter long before Twitter was the Twitter we know it to be. *Gossip Girl* beat social networking to the punch, making the girls and the boys of its Upper East Side universe feel important for doing nothing more than eating frozen yogurt on the correct corner, for doing nothing more than being seen at the right party on the right night at the right time, just drinking a drink and looking bored before skulking off at not having been recognized by enough people, for doing nothing more than kissing a boy and then pretending as if the kiss meant less than it meant—these were things that happened in all the teen television that came before *Gossip Girl*; but it was *Gossip Girl* that made the teenagers taking part in the ambivalence of youth feel that they mattered, and they felt as if they mattered because other people were paying attention to the banality of their lives. All of this is to say that the audience

³⁰ In that the readers of the *Gossip Girl* blog were reading posts about the daily happenings of life—be it going to the grocery store, walking a dog, sitting on steps.

watching *Gossip Girl* must have felt, profoundly, that this was a show that *got* them. But because it was on TV, *Gossip Girl* could make that banality look far more soapy.³¹

The Evolution of *Gossip Girl*

The first three plus seasons of *Gossip Girl* were largely comprised of hyper-real³² scenarios set in a hyper-real environment but spoke to the realest sensibilities of its (very large) real audience. It was a show about the prevalence of gossip in the lives of teenagers, and more so about how that gossip gave teenagers the ability to understand the norms set forth by those in charge of the gossip, giving privilege to the *watcher* while the watched became increasingly dependent upon an imperative to understand their real identity/identities through a virtual identity/identities largely controlled by one person/entity³³. And as I will explain further in the chapters that follow, that is precisely what Alloy Entertainment is doing as a corporation; it is in fact what gives Alloy the identity they presently have, or at least should have. *Gossip Girl* made it okay, even celebratory, to know what your neighbors and classmates were up to because to know what they were up to meant to know what was allowed. It was a new youth on TV, never before seen, and it worked. It worked because, as Joseph Epstein writes in *Gossip*,

Although this is rarely its motive, gossip can act as a potential barrier to bad behavior, and in this sense can be a useful deterrent to such behavior. Some people will be restrained from acting badly if only because they fear that their conduct will be talked about behind their backs.

Everything here depends, of course, on the quality of the community's norms. If these norms

³¹ Banality on teen television is nothing new, of course. *Beverly Hills, 90210* was the first show of its kind to introduce soap opera aesthetics to a teenage audience. In *90210*, “the outlandishness of excess” was imbedded in each relationship between main and periphery characters, but it wasn’t until Alloy Entertainment became a player in teen television when the outlandish “status of the domestic...as the site of respectability and emotional security” was reinforced, “construct[ing] danger, excitement, and thrill as degraded otherness” (Spence 192). In other words, in *Gossip Girl*, the teenager was not just a site of maudlin soapiness, but rather a site of degradation. This was Alloy’s design.

³² In the Baudrillardian understanding of the term, which will be further discussed in Chapter Four, hyperreality is the inability to distinguish reality from the simulation of reality; what is real and what is fiction become interconnected parts of the same thing.

³³ That of the watcher.

are far from admirable, gossip of this kind turns ugly. (Epstein 29)

In the world of *Gossip Girl*, though, the gossip rarely turned ugly, even though it could have, and probably should have, innumerable times. The characters on *Gossip Girl* were their own police, their own government, and the pseudonymous blogger was in large part the reason why. As long as Gossip Girl remained behind her curtain, things remained in balance. And while the world of *Gossip Girl* assumed a very high-end level of cultural competency and had seemingly limitless class divisional problems imbedded in the narrative space of the program, for some reason everything remained in balance for over three seasons. People in this world knew where they belonged, where they didn't belong, and what and where they were allowed to exist; and that is no different from the makeup of a typical high-school landscape in America. "Context for the gossip can be—usually is—crucial. Perhaps even more crucial is motive. What did the person who set the gossip loose in the world have in mind?" (30) writes Epstein. In the world of *Gossip Girl*, the motive was simple: teenage balance. Every single character (including all the adults, teachers, administration) on the program read the Gossip Girl blog every single day. They all took part in its success, and they all found themselves on its pages in salacious and non-salacious ways. So what was the harm? A sampling of what the still-anonymous Gossip Girl kept in her gossipy files (from Calhoun, *Spotted* 334):

- Neil Gabrielson's family lost all their money [to] Madoff.
- Chuck Bass thinks he killed his mother.
- Liz Edwards had to repeat the 2nd grade.
- Sarah Monteith steals her brother's Ritalin and sells it.
- Serena van der Woodsen got fake married in Spain.
- Eric van der Woodsen dyes his hair.
- Dan Humphrey wrote a tell all article about Chuck Bass's dad, Bart. It never got published but still. How rude!

- I hear Serena van der Woodsen has an unhealthy obsession with all things Harry Potter. She totally crushes on Ron Weasley. What an effing dork!

So it's not all bad. This is how teenagers, the audience is supposed to assume, act. They, the teenagers, are reduced to a base kind of existence contextualized by stereotypes, rumors, scandal, and gossip. *Gossip Girl* was giving to its audience precisely what its audience was already getting at school, which is what teenage television had long been known to do. *Beverly Hills, 90210*, *Dawson's Creek*, *My So-Called Life*, *The O.C.* all employed a similar method of teenage identity formation seen on television. *Gossip Girl* was, at least until October 11, 2010³⁴, merely an extension of what this type of art was supposed to do. "Mine are labels," wrote *Gossip Girl*, "and labels stick."

***Gossip Girl* and the New Teen**

What was new in *Gossip Girl*, though, was in how the female lead was portrayed; and not just portrayed, but *introduced*. *Gossip Girl* was the first of the Alloy Entertainment properties to employ the method of first-scene female brokenness, later mirrored in *The Vampire Diaries* and *Pretty Little Liars*. *Gossip Girl* was Alloy's first property to employ the seven branded principles outlined in Chapter One, and that was seen in the very first book, and in the very first scene of the pilot episode. What the audience would take with them throughout the run of the book series and the television program is that Serena van der Woodsen is a slut. And a murderer, maybe. She's probably had a few abortions, more than a few STDs, she's the head of a global drug smuggling ring, she's been gang-banged by multiple athletic teams from multiple schools, she's obviously addicted to cocaine, and to make it far worse, she shows up late to school all the time, probably because she's a slut. What was also new to TV at the time was that *Serena did not seem to care* that this gossip had been published. Serena was the embodiment, Alloy would have us believe, of millennial ambivalence. The gossip was out there; but there was nothing Serena or anyone else could do to stop it, so why not just play along?

Throughout the first three plus seasons, Serena (played by Blake Lively), Blair Waldorf

³⁴ I will return to this very important date shortly.

(Leighton Meester), Chuck Bass (Ed Westwick), Nate Archibald (Chace Crawford), Dan (Penn Badgley) and Jenny Humphrey (Taylor Momsen), Vanessa Abrams (Jessica Szohr), and a cast of smaller characters were all seen taking part in this gossip-verse that set out to find the answers to questions similar to “why is Serena back?” without actually caring about the answer(s) to the question(s) so long as the questions were being asked. It cannot be overstressed that Alloy Entertainment, through its initial property of *Gossip Girl* and through *The Vampire Diaries* and *Pretty Little Liars*, invented this televisual teenage gender identity, that of the broken girl. Before *Gossip Girl*, girls on teen TV were girls with the problems of typical soap-opera girls (drug use, sex), but were *never* placed in the position of fully lacking agency in the ways that Alloy made televisually normative. But again, in the world of *Gossip Girl*, this kind of gossip norming worked, likely because the girls and boys with roles in the world felt powerless to stop it; which again is not uncommon in the lives of actual teenagers. So when Serena is the victim of an attempted rape in the middle of the pilot episode (at the hands of Chuck), the audience, for the most part, already knows what’s coming. And when Jenny is the victim of an attempted rape (also at the hands of Chuck), it is met with ambivalence, largely because the *Gossip Girl* book series had at that point enough traction amongst its fandom that they, the fans, knew that the girls were able to move on from these violent episodes with something akin to a shoulder shrug. So when Blair tells Jenny that Chuck likes to brag about his “conquests, not his victims,” we the audience assume that Chuck *obviously* has done this before, and will do it again. The boys rule the Upper East Side, and the girls are just lucky to be there. When Chuck Bass makes it clear that he is going to give the tape of he and Blair having sex in the back of his limo to Gossip Girl, Blair is not only unmoved by this, she is somewhat flattered—this being her first time having sex, it should be remembered, right? And when Nate’s father asks Nate to marry Blair so that Nate’s father can cement a business deal with Blair’s mother (in episode eight, “Seventeen Candles”), the audience is placed in the position of having to accept a father pimping out his son as being normal in this Alloy created universe. When Blair, after revealing her love to Chuck, hears Chuck say to her that, “I’ll be more succinct. You held a certain fascination when you were

beautiful, delicate, and untouched. But now you're like one of the Arabians my father used to own: rode hard and put away wet. I don't want you anymore. And I can't see why anyone else would," the audience is left to wonder when Blair will beg Chuck even harder to lower himself to love her. This is business as usual on *Gossip Girl*, and not at all surprising.

Alloy's Seven Brand Principles

As I discussed in Chapter One, Alloy has, at its core, seven brand principles that govern the ways in which the teen girl is interpreted in the narrative space of programming. *Gossip Girl* was the first Alloy property to use all seven principles in the *first episode* of the series. Serena van der Woodsen (Blake Lively) is, in the first scene of the pilot episode, coming back home to New York City (from where the audience is not made aware). What the audience comes to find out is that Serena is (1) sexually depraved: She will sleep with just about any boy who desires her because at this point in her life, Serena has been sexually used to a degree that she simply does not care anymore about the body she perhaps should have been more careful with; (2) terrorized: She will be forced to (sometimes violently) contend with seemingly the entirety of the Upper East Side because, before Serena left for some unknown destination, she so angered her past friends that her past friends now feel justified in making her life miserable; (3) highly dependent on a male counterpart for self-actualization: She must depend on Chuck Bass (the boy who will become an attempted (serial) rapist in the first scene after the first commercial break of the pilot episode as well as the last scene in the pilot episode) to get the answers to the questions about why people suddenly and violently hate her; (4) surveilled: She is being watched and digitally gossiped about by an anonymous source in the first shot of the first episode (and continued throughout the entirety of the series); (5) marked by class: She is protected more than any other character in the show because of her family's wealth, and therefore her victimization shouldn't be viewed as *that* bad; (6) representative of a nationalist teenage gender identity: She is Alloy's first Girl, played by an actress who embodies a typical kind of American (male) sexual desire—blond, curvy (but not too curvy), Marilyn Monroe-esque (vapid but okay with that vapidity), a televisual Lolita; and (7) a child acting as an adult: She is lacking parents with any

investment in the complications of growing up as a girl marked by these principles.

When the female protagonist is placed in situations like these on a seemingly constant loop throughout the run of the series, the viewers are required to do three things: (1) re-calibrate how they are supposed to read the teenage girl on TV (Felicity has officially left the building, and Joey Potter is now dead), (2) make sense of the fact that these broken and depraved young girls seem to be okay with their roles in the narrative—okay enough, in fact, to remain friends and lovers with the boys who are the originators of the depravity, and (3) that Gossip Girl is watching, and reporting, every single thing that these characters do. Being watched (terroristically stalked) is normative here, so normative that the characters essentially make the majority of their decisions based solely on how they will be represented by Gossip Girl. As I will discuss in more detail in Chapter Four, this gave life to the “A-team” on *Pretty Little Liars* being read as believable, and as being normal; and it made room for, rather than only reputations being violated, *actual* harm and violence. So when Gossip Girl says that, “You can be sure Gossip Girl will stop at nothing to make sure what goes on behind closed doors definitely does not stay behind closed doors,” or “Luckily for us, on the UES, secrets always end up being revealed, whether you like it or not,” the characters on the show, and by extension the viewers at home understand that yes, being watched is the new normal, so let it be clear that to make a decision *in* private means to make a decision *for* public. When those decisions are being made by teenage girls on a show where the teenage boys on the show are given space to rape, violate, hunt, and terrorize those girls, the ways in which teenage girls on television are read inevitably change. And when those same girls on television keep coming back to the boys who hunt them, the audience is left to wonder—do the girls even care what is happening to them? Do the girls think in some ways that the terror is partly their fault?

Surveillance as Normative

The girls’ ambivalence to terror and/or the assumption of having some fault in the terror being done to them in media like *Gossip Girl* is, according to John Berger, merely an extension of gender conditioning that is a result of the normative and ideological de-privileging of gender that girls and

women must contend with in order to simply understand gender separation. As Berger writes in *Ways of Seeing*, “a woman’s presence expresses her own attitude to herself, and defines what can and cannot be done to her” (Berger 46). In other words, the decisions that a girl/woman make are decisions that are motivated by what those decisions say about the physical space of a body that, by merely the condition of *being female*, must contend with the things others can or cannot *do* to it, the body. Berger goes on to write that,

To be born a woman has been to be born with, within an allotted and confined space, into the keeping of men. This social presence of women has developed as a result of their ingenuity in living under such tutelage within such a limited space. But this has been at the cost of a woman’s self being split into two. A woman must continually watch herself. She is almost continually accompanied by her own image of herself. Whilst she is walking across a room or whilst she is weeping at the death of her father, she can scarcely avoid envisaging herself walking or weeping. From earliest childhood she has been taught and persuaded to survey herself continually. (46)

Berger is arguing here that a girl/woman is *never not* being watched, from childhood to death. Whether that watching comes from within (the girl watching herself), or without (others constantly watching the girl, and watching the girl watch herself), to be female *means* to be under constant and seemingly unending surveillance. So the fact that Serena (and basically every other teenager on *Gossip Girl*) does not seem to mind being watched, regardless of the terrible things that result from being watched, is perhaps Alloy giving girls what girls have lived with their entire lives; that is, being victims of normative surveillance. This surveillance, though, is the bridge that Alloy uses to assume the other six brand principles listed above can also be seen as normative; because if Serena is okay with one, Serena can be okay with all. As will be discussed in the following two chapters, this attitude is seen throughout the narrative spaces of Alloy’s properties, and is a far different kind of television consumption than had ever been seen before *Gossip Girl*. Co-creator Stephanie Savage said that,

We're not presenting this as a perfect world." When people say that the show glamorizes teen drinking and sex, they aren't really watching the episodes. Not all the characters drink or have sex, and when they do, it's always put in a context. Behaviors are rooted in character. There's decision-making, regret, consequences involved." (quoted in Calhoun, *Spotted* 136)

She is correct. And when Crissy Calhoun goes on to write that, "Serena's former life of promiscuity (whatever portion rumor and reality) is outdone only by Chuck's unapologetic taste for debauchery, and he's portrayed as the villain impossible not to love" (136), she sums up *Gossip Girl* succinctly. The girls on the show are *always* constituted by the mistakes they have made, and continue to make; while the boys on the show get a pass because of their charm, their lovability.

So when Serena thinks she herself is to blame when watching a friend of hers overdose on cocaine ("All About My Brother"), telling Blair and Nate that she killed someone, the audience is made to believe that Serena *actually* thinks she killed someone, because what else would she think? *That* is the reason that Serena left the Upper East Side—she left after a season of abuse because it all came to a head that Serena thought it was (at least partly) her fault that a boy died on his own accord. And with that, *Gossip Girl* was only getting started. As John Berger writes in *Ways of Seeing*,

She has to survey everything she is and everything she does because how she appears to others, and ultimately how she appears to men, is of crucial importance for what is normally thought of as the success of her life. Her own sense of being in herself is supplanted by a sense of being appreciated by another. (Berger 46).

Serena, Blair, Jenny, and the rest of the girls on *Gossip Girl* know two things to be true: they will never reach the Chuck Bass level of success, because they cannot, just because; and whatever they do, *Gossip Girl* will be watching. In the end, it turns out that *of course* *Gossip Girl* is a man (Dan Humphrey, played by Penn Badgley, in the big reveal in Season Six, which I will return to in detail soon), and that *Gossip Girl* has sociopathically been documenting what every single person in his inner and outer circle have been doing for six years, including when his little sister was the victim of attempted rape, then the willing participant in losing her virginity to her would-be rapist. Berger goes

on to write that,

Men survey women before treating them. Consequently how a woman appears to a man can determine how she will be treated. To acquire some control over this process, women must contain it and interiorize it. That part of a woman's self which is the surveyor treats the part which is the surveyed so as to demonstrate to others how her whole self would like to be treated. (46)

In other words, women (and girls) must make interior decisions before allowing those decisions to get externalized by the people in control of those externalities—that is, men (and boys). So when Dan as Gossip Girl tells his friends that Jenny *wanted* the world of the UES to know of her losing her virginity to a rapist, we believe it. When Serena tells the gang that Dan as Gossip Girl the sociopath was merely writing a “love letter” for six years, outing the most private of moments to a mass public, we the audience are forced to think that Gossip Girl was acting nobly, because that is what Serena believes. This is Alloy at its most coercive, stuffing the teenage girl into a brightly colored box that is lined with snake oil and flowers, asking the consumer to buy Alloy's vision of the future.

Passivity and Acceptance of One's Own Sexual Depravity

This kind of active coercion by Alloy that creates a passive acceptance by Alloy's girls was seen throughout the run of the series to a degree that, by the time Dan comes out as Gossip Girl, admitting with some pride to the horrific acts of the past five seasons, it is met with merely a passing moment of revulsion, or even disturbance. It is this passive acceptance, in fact, that makes the Alloy girl singular in the history of teen television—without precedent. When in Season Two (episode twenty one, “Seder Anything”), Chuck says to an obviously disturbed Jenny (the victim of Chuck's attempted rape one season before) that she should not worry if she “hears screams,” as the woman who will presumably be the screamer laughs at Chuck's violent joke, the audience is allowed to think the joke is okay because just five episodes earlier (“You've Got Yale!”) Chuck saved Lily van der Woodsen (Kelly Rutherford) from *another* attempted rape, this time at the hands of Chuck's uncle Jack. And the joke that Chuck made to Jenny happens *exactly* one season before Jenny loses her

virginity to the man who attempted to rape her two seasons earlier (Jenny and Chuck have sex in “Last Tango, Then Paris”). That is how things work in the world of *Gossip Girl*—an attempted rapist is forgiven if that attempted rapist saves a woman from getting raped (in a more violent way—this is important, because when the initial rapist stops a rape he is perhaps somewhat atoning for his own violence), then the attempted rapist can make rape jokes in front of the girl he could, in fact, rape. And when, one full season later, we think that the attempted rapist Chuck is fully reformed and in love with Blair (episode seventeen, “Inglorious Bassterds”), Chuck *literally* pimps out his girlfriend to his uncle so that he, Chuck, can regain control of The Empire Hotel³⁵, we are again asked to side with Chuck because Blair *literally* prostituted herself to Jack (Desmond Harrington) so that Chuck could get back control of the hotel that Blair thought was deservedly his. Of course they’ll be married eventually; and we want them to be, need them to be. Chuck’s love for Blair is the stuff of iconic television; and in this episode, the writers and producers of *Gossip Girl* seemed to make a conscious decision that the show would now be contextualized largely around this love story. It was becoming Chuck and Blair’s show, and the rest of the characters were secondary at best. And then something happened. Rather than being a show about two characters and the relationship they had been building for the better part of three seasons, *Gossip Girl* became a show that seemed to be there, to be on, as a way to leverage the popularity of what was becoming Alloy’s most socially popular³⁶ show, *Pretty Little Liars*, with the slowly dwindling audience numbers of *Gossip Girl*. It seemed as if, at the end of Season Four of *Gossip Girl*, Alloy Entertainment simply had it in mind to turn the show into a different version³⁷ of their newest show, *Pretty Little Liars*.

The Alloy Brand Made More Equitable

It will be important to remember throughout this and the following chapters that Alloy Entertainment is a marketing company with various media partnerships—the result of this fact is that

³⁵ This kind of homosocial/masculinist relationship between men will be discussed at length in Chapter Three.

³⁶ If not in numbers, certainly in fan activity. This will be discussed at length in Chapter Four.

³⁷ Assumedly meant for a different, probably a bit older, audience.

the marketing aspect of Alloy's business model will always be privileged over the production side of things. Brand equity, by extension³⁸, is established through the production and reproduction of a brand's mission. Alloy's brand mission is the production and reproduction of teenage identity, so it should have come as no surprise that *Gossip Girl* would eventually align itself with a more popular, and likely more profitable, Alloy-owned property. It was on October 11, 2010 that *Gossip Girl* became *Pretty Little Liars*. Interestingly enough, it was on October 3, 2006 that *Pretty Little Liars* became *Gossip Girl* (with the publication of the first novel). *Pretty Little Liars* took many cues from *Gossip Girl*: the most prominent, important, and obvious being contextualized around the digital shaming of those who commit what appear at first to be minor transgressions made huge by the shamer(s). So, it is perhaps a strange thing to think that the property that basically started it all for Alloy Entertainment (*Gossip Girl* was the company's first book to TV adaptation experiment) and for all intents and purposes gave life to *Pretty Little Liars* now found itself in a position of emulation rather than leadership; but during the fourth season of *Gossip Girl* (episode five, "Goodbye, Columbia"), it happened. And it can be surmised that that is precisely what Alloy wanted. Said co-creator Josh Schwartz, "The show is a bigger deal than the ratings are reflecting. I can honestly say I don't check the ratings after the show airs. We're more focused on the *idea of cultural permeation* (italics added)" (quoted in Calhoun, *Spotted* 14). On the episode preceding "Goodbye, Columbia," (episode four, "Touch of Eva"), it was made clear that the audience was supposed to think that Juliette (Nate Archibald's girlfriend at the time) was supposed to be Gossip Girl. In "Touch of Eva" she is keeping a lair of pictures of the people in the *Gossip Girl*-verse and how they are all connected to each other, and to all of the daily dalliances and scandals in which they all partake—a scene cut from the cloth of any number of crime-drama procedurals. In "Goodbye, Columbia," Vanessa Abrams is doing the exact same thing. Before these two episodes aired, the identity of Gossip Girl was rarely (if at all) hinted at; never was it made clear to the audience that the identity of the pseudonymous blogger was even part of the expected narrative. In fact,

³⁸ As I discussed in the Introduction.

Her identity was never revealed in the book series, with Cecily von Ziegesar commenting, “Originally, the books were going to be this unfolding mystery about figuring out who Gossip Girl is, but then the characters stories took over. And that became a behind-the-scenes mystery that didn’t really matter anymore.” [Co-creator] Stephanie Savage gave an equally vague response to that question, saying with a laugh, “We are all Gossip Girl. We all feed that chain, participating in that circle and circus of information, whether we want to admit it or not.” From the first episode of the show, it became clear that while Gossip Girl has agency in the plot and affects the lives of these characters (spreading information, encouraging characters to take action, ruining Blair’s birthday party), she’s a narrative device. Period. (169)

The above quote was written years before the actual reveal of Gossip Girl (which I will return to shortly), but it stresses the fact that Gossip Girl was a vagary, a faceless shell made full by the insecurities and fears of all the gossip girls and gossip boys that gave life to the website that turned irrelevance relevant. Until October 11, 2010, gossip on the show was read and consumed as a nebulous (yet often terrifying) abstraction, a cultural statement by the writers and producers about the state of millennial ennui in America and the ways in which technology makes being stalked feel like being free, being relevant. At the same time, *Gossip Girl* was staking the first televisual claim to representing how the Internet, smartphones, and social networking have given young people a new kind of ability to govern themselves. The show wasn’t necessarily making a social or political statement about the terrain that these digital natives (the actors, the characters, the audience) found themselves negotiating; it was merely “commenting on the voyeurism and sensationalism driving [their] culture” (quoted in Calhoun, *Spotted* 14).

A convergence of things was happening on the night of October 11, 2010. The first and most obvious thing related to *Gossip Girl* was seen in the ratings. The show had, through its first three seasons, relatively staggering audience numbers for a teen television show on a network not known for staggering numbers. Season One had an average viewership of 2.6 million, with the highest number rated (the pilot) episode pulling in 3.5 million; as Dawn Ostroff’s first acquisition at The CW,

he couldn't have picked a better property. Season Two was an even bigger success, averaging 2.8 million viewers, and regularly seeing numbers well over the three million mark. Those two seasons were *Gossip Girl* at its best: a teenage soap-opera that picked up where *The O.C.* had left off, following a group of privileged teenagers in a world inhabited by boys and girls who must have appeared to the audience to be non-natives to the regular existence lived by the audience. It was perfect TV of and for that particular millennial moment. Season Three saw a very large drop in numbers, averaging 2.0 million viewers per episode, over half of which came in well below the 2.0 million mark. So the show had to do something to get the numbers back. It was losing its hold on the minds of its viewers; and it is clear, based on what happened next, that Alloy had a plan.

In the summer of 2010, just before the premiere of Season Four of *Gossip Girl*, *Pretty Little Liars*³⁹ premiered on ABC Family. In ways very similar to *Gossip Girl*, *Pretty Little Liars* had a substantial following thanks to the success of Sara Shepard's book series, which took many pages straight from *Gossip Girl* to build a world centered around highly privileged girls being stalked and virally shamed by an anonymous source who knew everything about everyone all of the time, and who was unafraid to out the wrongs of the wrong-doers. *Pretty Little Liars*, in other words, built upon the successful brand equity that Alloy had at that time built between the different franchises of its design. The first season of *Pretty Little Liars* delivered mind-blowing audience numbers to a very small network (ABC Family) that had never in its existence seen numbers like this. ABC Family had long been known as the network that showed largely Christian-based programming, the primetime slate being bookended by Pat Robertson's *The 700 Club*. For a show like *Pretty Little Liars* to not only thrive on ABC Family, but shatter audience expectations and audience numbers was, before the show aired, almost unthinkable. Season One of the show averaged close to 3.0 million viewers with the highest rated episode (episode eleven, "Moments Later") coming in at 4.22 million viewers. Alloy took notice. At the same time, *Vampire Diaries* was then about to premiere its second season on The CW, and was generally regarded as an untouchable ratings giant, Season One averaging well

³⁹ A more thorough discussion of *Pretty Little Liars* can be seen in Chapter Four.

over 3.5 million viewers. So during the summer into the fall of 2010, Alloy Entertainment had so well leveraged their brand identity on two dissimilar networks that the success of each show could be viewed as independent successes, but it seems that Alloy was not satisfied.

The New *Gossip Girl*

To remain brand-consistent, *Gossip Girl* had to change if Alloy Entertainment was to retain a more obvious form of televisual (and literary) brand equity. If, in other words, *Gossip Girl* could not be seen as the readily recognized sister show to the two most popular teen shows on television, *Gossip Girl* would run the risk of quickly becoming irrelevant. Before *Pretty Little Liars* and *The Vampire Diaries*, *Gossip Girl* was an outlier television show with seemingly no competition for viewers. It was, in the beginning, simply the next logical step in how teenage television could and should be watched—again, it was *The O.C.* for millennials. But when its audience numbers were dropping, something clearly had to be done; so Alloy decided that that thing would be to turn *Gossip Girl* into *Pretty Little Liars* rather than allowing *GG* to remain true to what it had always been. Remember, in the book series, the identity of Gossip Girl was never revealed, never teased to be revealed later, nor ever thought to be required to be revealed. Cecily von Ziegesar, the writer of the books, as was written earlier, never had it in mind to reveal Gossip Girl because to do so would take away from the original design of the property. It was supposed to be about the people being watched by Gossip Girl, not about the identity of Gossip Girl. And for all of its myriad class and race problems, that is the show the fans seemingly wanted. Until they didn't. Until they disappeared. So it might have appeared natural for Alloy to change gears midway through the run of the series. After all, *Pretty Little Liars* and *The Vampire Diaries* were seeing audiences that dwarfed by millions the audience of *Gossip Girl*, so who would blame Alloy for turning *GG* into something different? This change would ultimately be the downfall of the show. It got canceled after a shortened sixth season due to dwindling audience numbers: Season Three averaged 2.0 million; Season Four 1.6 million; Season Five 1.2 million; Season Six, 0.9 million. But don't forget, *Gossip Girl* was never about numbers; it was about "cultural permeation." And permeate it did; *Gossip Girl*, as I've stated a

number of times, can clearly be seen as being the impetus for *Pretty Little Liars*, so Alloy could not be blamed for seeing that as a resounding victory.

So on that night, October 11, 2010, when *Pretty Little Liars* was in the middle of their Season One mid-season vacation, *Gossip Girl* became them, the pretty little liars. Alloy had reached, with the showing of “Goodbye, Columbia,” a fully recognized market saturation in ways *never* before seen on TV or in print. Alloy Entertainment owned, for all intents and purposes, how the teenager was seen on television. In these three properties, Alloy now had control of three of the highest rated shows on teen TV, and all three shows were now seen on the same week, and all (finally, to Alloy) resembled each other. Brand consistency was met. The girls on *Gossip Girl* were now being hunted rather than merely watched, precisely how the pretty little liars were hunted, precisely how Caroline and Elena were hunted by vampires (in *The Vampire Diaries*), both of which will be discussed at length in the coming chapters. What made *Gossip Girl* different was that, by the fourth season, the audience had long been in the position to assume that Serena, Blair, and Jenny were okay with their places in the world, that they were in many ways okay with the hunt. Serena became the hunter at one point (more on this later), and eventually *married the ultimate hunter* (discussed at length in what follows), confirming once and for all Alloy’s greatest victory: that of their newly designed, and forever broken, teenage girl.

The Girl as Resigned to Accepting Victimization

It bears repeating that, “In this new business atmosphere, ideas are money. Ideas are, in fact, a new kind of currency altogether—one that is more powerful than money. *One single idea—especially if it involves a great brand concept—can change a company’s entire future*” (Gobe xviii). On that October night in the fall of 2010, the idea around which Alloy was building their business model was no longer just the teenager; it was the Alloy teenager, and it was Alloy itself. This was a brand new kind of Williamsonian flow, and it had no precedent on TV or any other form of teen media. Alloy was, beginning with that seminal episode in Season Four of *Gossip Girl*, flaunting the fact that they as a corporation were becoming far less reliant upon the advertising normally seen on television, the

connection between audience and object that Raymond Williams wrote about decades before. The flow was in Alloy's own narrative spaces. The shows were becoming the same, with the same (even physical) semiotic markers imbedded in each property that in not so subtle ways began to mirror the other Alloy properties. It became even more obvious when, in Season Five, episode twenty four ("The Return of the Ring"), Nate Archibald, in an attempt to finally uncover the true identity of Gossip Girl, received CCTV footage from Diana Payne (played by Elizabeth Hurley) of what the audience was supposed to assume was *the* Gossip Girl. The identity of Gossip Girl, which was not revealed that night, was *wearing a black hoodie*, stealing a computer (Serena's) in her, Gossip Girl's, attempt to bury and bully the UES gang even further. Keep in mind that the identity of the real Gossip Girl had *never* been seen in physical form, and had never, until "Goodbye, Columbia," been assumed to matter. In "Return of the Ring," the audience got to see the hooded figure⁴⁰, the semiotics of the moment leading the average viewer to think that she was closer; closer to finding out the identity of Gossip Girl, at that point the only real reason to continue watching *Gossip Girl*.

The Need to Unmask Gossip Girl for the Future of Alloy's Teen Girl

"The Return of the Ring" aired on May 14, 2012. Meanwhile, just two months before, almost to the day, "unmAsked" was aired on ABC Family—the finale of Season Two of *Pretty Little Liars* (which was watched by 3.69 million people). "unmAsked" was the long-awaited finale in the first two-year cycle of *Pretty Little Liars* revealing to its audience the identity of "A." In "unmAsked," Mona Vanderwaal was outed as *the* prettiest little liar, the terrorist, murderer and gossipmonger. For two whole seasons of *Pretty Little Liars*, the audience was treated to mystery after mystery, tease after tease, of a figure wearing a black hoodie, every other episode (roughly) seen either carrying or

⁴⁰ The cross-textual implications to *Pretty Little Liars* will be further discussed in Chapter Four; but it needs to be remembered here that *Gossip Girl*'s hooded figure was different than what will be seen in *PLL* in that the audience of *GG* had at this point in the life of the series been promised that the identity of Gossip Girl would be revealed in a few episodes time. Not only that, there was no mistaking the fact that Gossip Girl as a figure was, relatively speaking, acting alone—the audience of the show was on the hunt for *the* Gossip Girl. In *Pretty Little Liars*, the figure of "A," as will be made clear in Chapter Four, is a figure that can be constantly changed and looped to fit the narrative direction of an individual season. Everyone is "A" in *PLL*, but there is only one Gossip Girl.

opening a laptop—precisely the move *Gossip Girl* made at the end of Season Four. With that, it became clear that the writers and producers had given up on evolving the narrative strain(s) brought to life in the first three seasons for *Gossip Girl*, devolving it into nothing more than a knockoff of the property to which it gave life, *Pretty Little Liars*. But in Alloy’s world of “cultural permeation,” that was, perhaps, the point. It must have been a resounding success for the company to have two sister-shows so mirror each other that it was difficult to tell the difference between the two. The subtle semiotics had been there all along (for example, the ways in which tertiary characters looked (racially) in relation to tertiary characters on the other show were frighteningly similar in *GG* and *PLL*), but now the Alloy-ed semiotics were quite overt, seen most especially in the figure of the terroristic blogger. But the low ratings it had seen in recent years demanded the writers make a change—the most obvious change the show could and should make, as far as Alloy was concerned, was to begin to resemble (in almost all ways) Alloy’s astoundingly successful show, *Pretty Little Liars*. That way, the fandom of one could carry over to the other, potentially, and Alloy could leverage its own already established brand equity onto to the show that was at that point failing. It was a move that only Alloy could make, because Alloy had the properties to do it, and Alloy had already temporally framed (Lury) the teen TV market to create the space for such a move. Alloy had become a brand that was now acting as a “hyper-socialized, de-territorialized factory” (Arvidsson 82).

This is abundantly clear in the episodes following “Goodbye, Columbia,” through the end of the series—the point of the show had rapidly changed from a character-driven teen soap narrative to a whodunit contextualized around the shared desire from each and every character to out the evil blogger. Until “Goodbye, Columbus,” the gang in *Gossip Girl* had, while in some ways decrying the blog, for the most part acted ambivalently (but some times celebratory) about having their private lives made public by a figure they assumed would never be revealed. In fact, *every major character* on *Gossip Girl* had sent in tips to the blogger to help her manage the world in which they all found themselves a part; and almost all of the characters (perhaps other than Vanessa, though it could be argued that she did it too) sent in *requests* to *Gossip Girl* to be on the site. Chuck Bass had made it

clear that people would, and should, pay money to be a part of the site. These were the rules, and no one seemed to care, until that October night when *Gossip Girl* turned into *Pretty Little Liars*, finally giving Alloy a fully recognized and consistent brand identity without and throughout their three most popular television properties. Alloy had at this point begun to reach market saturation with two shows, *Gossip Girl* and *Pretty Little Liars*, that in a highly specific way worked as narrative advertising spaces for each other.

The End of *Gossip Girl*

In the first three plus seasons of *Gossip Girl*, not one of the major or minor characters had been revealed as, or in any way connected to, the anonymous blogger that was seemingly in charge of all of their lives. All of the characters had, in fact, made it clear that every single decision, every single move they made in their lives was in some ways *directly* because of *Gossip Girl*'s ubiquity and power over them—Chuck had, in Season Two (episode twenty three, “Wrath of Con”), made it clear to Blair, the love of his life, that he could not be with her because to be with her meant that she would not be happy. She would not be happy if she was with Chuck *because of Gossip Girl*, or so Chuck thought. *Gossip Girl* had terroristic power over all of them—power that made them make astoundingly profound life decisions based on a desire to be somewhat in control of their own lives. But life went on for the Upper East Siders. They accepted the terror that *Gossip Girl* wrought; they never once tried to cage that terror, or even to hide from it. That is, until *Pretty Little Liars* was met with a very high level of success immediately upon its arrival on ABC Family. The shift in *Gossip Girl* was so pronounced that, over the course of the next three and a half seasons of the show, no fewer than fourteen of the show's major and minor characters were hinted at being either *the* *Gossip Girl* or as part of *Gossip Girl*'s team.⁴¹ Dan, Georgina Sparks, Georgina's husband Phil, Serena, Diana, Nate, Juliette, Vanessa, Jenny, Lola, Charlie Rhodes, Jonathan, Eric, and Dan's agent were all, at one point or another, rumored to be part of *Gossip Girl*'s team. Georgina, Phil, Serena, and Dan

⁴¹ This kind of evil tag teaming will be explored further in Chapter Four with “The A-Team” in *Pretty Little Liars*.

were all specifically indicted as *the* Gossip Girl, Dan ending up in the finale actually being Gossip Girl. That's close to 100% of the major characters being connected to the new mystery—everyone, in fact, but Chuck Bass was hinted at being Gossip Girl. This bizarre move by the show's writers and producers in no way helped with ratings; and it can be surmised that the move is what ultimately doomed the show—The CW announced in the middle of Season Five that Season Six would be *GG*'s last, the number of episodes reduced from fifteen to ten at the end of Season Five. It was clear that viewers did not care for the new look and feel of the show; and from the beginning of Season Four through the end of Season Six, nothing much of substance happened. Nothing happened because the show was trying to build the mystery of the big reveal of *the* Gossip Girl throughout the final three seasons, and they were doing that and that alone.

So when it was revealed that Georgina is *the* Gossip Girl in Season Five (episode thirteen, “G.G.”), it was met with middling critical and audience appreciation. It drew 1.39 million viewers—certainly not the number in mind when The CW had marketed the episode as “make or break” for weeks. Georgina was Gossip Girl, but it turned out that she was not the *right* Gossip Girl. Five episodes later, (“Con Heir”) Serena is revealed to be *the* Gossip Girl (after Phil became *the* Gossip Girl the episode before). Georgina, Phil, and Serena all leave the post of Gossip Girl because to be Gossip Girl means a *lot* of work, and they are just not up for it. Assumedly, the writers picked random characters to be Gossip Girl only to quit being Gossip Girl because the job was too difficult so that the audience would have a greater desire to know who this demigod like figure actually was. Unfortunately, that didn't happen. Viewership decreased drastically, critics universally lambasted the show, and *Gossip Girl* had become completely irrelevant. But really, what was happening was far more subtle than that. As I mentioned earlier, what ended up happening in the final (especially) two seasons of the show was a kind of imbedded sense of marketing for Alloy's other *Gossip Girl* themed show, *Pretty Little Liars*.

Alloy's Emotional Market Share

As Marc Gobe writes in *Emotional Branding*,

Presence, unlike *ubiquity*, is an image-management process that transcends rigorous systems of applications to focus on communication that is targeted, personal, and always relevant, without compromising the integrity of the overall identity. *Presence expresses the emotional and sensory atmosphere that surrounds a brand.* (Gobe 189)

In other words, the move that *Gossip Girl* made in anesthetizing itself in the pre-ordained success of *Pretty Little Liars* was not random, it was not contrived, but necessary; and keeping in mind that Alloy is primarily a marketing company and only secondarily a media company, it was a move that should have perhaps been expected. Alloy Entertainment had, by the fall of 2010, three of the most watched teen television shows that were seen cross-market (major network, cable network), three times per week. The three properties had by that time an immense fandom that crossed over into the other properties because each property was, aesthetically, very similar to the other properties that Alloy owned (owns). What Alloy was doing, by itself, was creating a televisual heritage for the millennial consumer. Where else did the teenager have to go, if that teenager had any desire to watch quality teen programming on television, virtually all year long? Alloy had it all. So of course they wanted to make *Gossip Girl* more palatable to the *Pretty Little Liars* and *The Vampire Diaries* audiences. As will be discussed in the following two chapters, those shows (*PLL* and *VD*) were about trying to *find and stop* the terrorist(s) that were terrorizing teen girls; *Gossip Girl* was merely about the terrorism. To create a more seamless business model, a more Williamsonian identity of televisual flow, it was imperative that *Gossip Girl* fall in line with those other shows. That way, all three shows could act as covert (and not so covert) advertisements for the other shows. Alloy didn't need advertising revenue, necessarily, because they were their own advertising. This was unprecedented on television, and that fact should not go overlooked. Here was a business with media property ownership using itself as its own thread of marketing. When Dan Humphrey is revealed in Season Six to be writing a tell-all book about his friends and enemies who inhabit the Upper East Side, slightly changing their names in a failed attempt to keep them all from finding out, the question must be asked—why? Dan is, and will come out as, *the Gossip Girl* in the same episode stream as the

unveiling of his book; so why does he need to be writing the book in the first place, and why would his friends care about being outed? After all, Dan had been at the helm of the Gossip Girl blog for six years (or more), and his audience numbers in that format were assumedly far higher than they would be in a book that would likely remain on the shelves given the type of reading that young people have been said to do on the show. So, Dan writes a book that mirrors (almost exactly) what he had been writing on Gossip Girl for the better part of a decade. What he had been writing on that blog had not only been enjoyed by the people he was now indicting in the book, they had actively tried to get onto the blog if only for their short-lived period of UES relevance. What the writers, producers, and Alloy Entertainment were doing in this brazen move was to give the audience the blueprint about their, Alloy's, business model. Dan was writing a book that mirrored his blog, written for the people who read his blog, which was directly about the people in the blog, so that they could feel as if they were accounted for by the writer and readers of the blog (which included themselves), even though the writer and readers of the blog knew the people in the blog to be largely vile, manipulative, and often depraved teenagers, but the readers of the blog kept coming back to read the blog because they were in the blog, and that's all that mattered—and now they would all be immortalized in the physical pages of a book, even though that book was almost exactly like the blog they had been reading since they were all presumably pre-teens. The cross-format story promotion that Dan is using with his book and blog is, of course, precisely what Alloy has been doing for years—promoting the same salacious material in different and cross-textual formats for the same readers who are conditioned in the consumption of media fandom. Alloy is using the Gossip Girl blog, and now Dan's Gossip Girl-centric book, to promote themselves, as a company, within the narrative space of a fictional TV universe.

The Extratextual World of Alloy Entertainment

Alloy's self-promotion within the narrative spaces of their programming creates easily recognizable signs that audiences will recognize as being distinctly Alloy. Again, these are not television teenagers in the historically typical sense of the term—these are *Alloy teenagers*. Alloy is

constructing “consistent spatial reference points” (Couldry 144) across the spectrum of their properties so that when viewers watch the other properties, the brandedness of Alloy’s teenagers would immediately be recognized because of the imbeddedness of the seven brand principles first seen in and on Serena van der Woodsen in *Gossip Girl*. This is a brand-new type of paratextual market saturation whereby Alloy itself acts an ancillary product to its already pre-consumed brand equity, setting the visual rhythms for itself within the space of each Alloy-owned property. Alloy is, in other words, selling itself as a product within their other products.

In *The O.C.: A Critical Understanding*, Lori Bindig and Andrea M. Bergstrom write that,

Paratexts and paratextuality are the variety of materials that surround a text (Gray, 2010, p. 6).

In other words, while a teen television show like *The O.C.* may be the primary text, supplementary content in the form of commercials, websites, and ancillary products function as paratexts (Butler, 2012)...although paratextuality and synergy have accompanied various media texts over the years, since the 1996 Telecommunications Act, U.S. media corporations have engaged in rampant horizontal and vertical integration, which lead to the proliferation and commodification of paratexts. (Bindig and Bergstrom 18)

While teen television has been employing the model of integrating outside media products within the natural flow of programming since at least *Beverly Hills, 90210*—musical acts like Color Me Badd and The Flaming Lips were seen regularly, throughout the run of the series—*never* had a media holding corporation so flauntingly promoted itself in the space of the company’s televisual text. The seven brand principles discussed throughout were seen reaching a head on that October night in 2010 when *Gossip Girl* suddenly changed course. It was the perfect storm for Alloy—all of its properties came together at once for a fandom that was so clearly clambering for more—so the integration of one into the other must have seemed the obvious move for the company. It was neoliberalism at its most obvious, and at its most duplicitous. To watch one Alloy-constructed depraved teenage girl was to watch *the* teenage girl on television. They were, on that October night, all the same, at the same time. Bindig and Bergstrom go on to write that,

Horizontal integration allows a corporation to gain more control over a market, lower its overhead, and increase its influence with suppliers. Horizontal integration also pushes a corporation to manufacture the product that generates the largest profit. In terms of media, horizontal integration often results in the homogenization of the media landscape. For instance, television programs and their peripheral products simply become variations of previous lucrative texts...In contrast, vertical integration is the process by which media companies produce and distribute their own content so that each step of the process remains fully situated within the parent corporation. In particular, vertical integration promotes synergy through the use of cross-promotion. (18-19)

Horizontal integration has been going on within television for decades, and particularly in teen television. When a generational program (*Beverly Hills, 90210*, for example) is successful, future shows (like *My So-Called Life*) will essentially use the model of the previous show to create a new, very similar, generational show for teenagers. That was seen in how *My So-Called Life* provided seamless recognition for *Dawson's Creek* that did the same thing for *Felicity*, which spawned *The O.C.* The horizontal integration within the rhetorics of those shows made the teen media landscape somewhat homogenized, yes, but that was okay because teen audiences (girls mostly) were only starting to be fully recognized as agents of their own bodies, and these shows helped them realize that. At first, *Gossip Girl* was merely a continuation of what *The O.C.* had done for television—that is, turned white opulence and minor crime into something celebratory and sexy—but it was surely to Alloy's benefit to turn that horizontal integration vertical so the entirety of the teen television marketplace could essentially be controlled by one company. The fact that the company in charge of it all was inventing a new kind of teenage girl from cloth using strategies to brand their teenage girl as immediately broken and used-up without a chance at self-redemption, is Alloy's greatest success. Because to be a teen girl on TV with any hope of generating a large audience is to be an Alloy teen girl. And an Alloy teen girl is not the typical (historically) teen girl on TV. An Alloy teen girl is hopeless, essentially parentless, and assumed to be fraught with an ambivalence to her role in these

things. Alloy Entertainment, through their three most popular book and TV properties, has built a business model that advertises its own business identity through the identities of the girls in their books and on their shows that not only objectifies the girls in the worst way possible, but turns that object into itself, Alloy. It is televisual hegemony never before seen. And the fact that Alloy can essentially remain in the shadows by farming their properties to other entities (all the while keeping ownership of the characters and narratives) means that Alloy is rarely indicted in how the girls are read. It is not Alloy's fault, they might say, because they are not the ones writing the books, the scripts. It is teenage morality ownership by a company that can throw its hands up and take the position as the original creative team and nothing else. Through the farming of its material to novelists, television studios, television networks, television writers, television editors, and television actors, Alloy Entertainment will likely remain invisible to the teenagers reading and watching the material, the parents of the teenagers, and the resultant consequences of that reading and watching. It is a perfect model of branded media business. They have "stripped [people] of human characteristics and protections of the neoliberal nation-state and placed [them] in service of neoliberal capital" (Wingard 9). The girls in and on Alloy's properties have symbolically annihilated a real sense of a televisually gendered self; Alloy's girls are simply mirrored versions of one another, almost solely constituted by the seven principles discussed previously. As Adam Arvidsson writes,

It is what consumers think of or do with the brand that is the source of its value; it is 'what resides in the minds of customers (Keller, 2001:14) that makes up the most important component of what the managerial discourse calls brand equity... This principle—the reliance on autonomously produced externalities as a source of surplus value and profits—makes the brand a paradigmatic embodiment of the logic of informational capitalism. (Arvidsson 7)

In Alloy's case, the autonomously produced externalities are the ways in which (mostly) girls are *allowed* to see themselves in media properties (books, TV) as being the same everywhere, that sameness extended into the real-life process of communicating with the real versions of the fake versions of Alloy's design through the multiple social networking requirements in place to give

motion to the participation in fandom. “Informational capital is a concept which asserts that information has intrinsic value which can be shared and leveraged within and between organizations. Information capital connotes that sharing information is a means of sharing power” (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Information_capital). Through their cross-format marketing of mirrored gender play means that Alloy not only controls the information capital being shared by the girls who think they have some narrative power over their representation in literature and on TV, Alloy also owns the rights to the initial construction of the information as well as how and to whom that information gets divvied. There is no power sharing, in other words—Alloy ultimately retains the rights to it all. So what is Alloy’s responsibility here?

What if, as Daniel J. Solove writes in *The Future of Reputation*, the desire to be controlled by outside forces is merely a manifestation of another generational shift in teenage consumer identity? Solove writes that,

Beyond television, people, especially high school and college students, are rushing to post a treasure trove of data about themselves online. Perhaps the emerging generation is just not that concerned about privacy. In a survey of the users of Facebook, almost 90% said that they had never read Facebook’s privacy policy. Nearly 60 percent of Facebook users said they weren’t very concerned about privacy, and only 9.7 percent saying that they were very concerned.

(Solove 197)

Are shows like *Gossip Girl* giving consumers what they already have, what they so clearly want? Do teenagers want to be watched, to be known, even when the threat of virtual (and actual) shaming is real? Is the desire to live in public worth the consequences that come with that kind of life? If Damon Salvatore⁴², the A-Team, Chuck Bass, *Gossip Girl*, and the rest of the *Gossip Girl* team can all get away with *actual* murder and rape, why do teenage consumers keep consuming those characters? Is it really Alloy’s fault? They are, of course, a corporation that is doing what good corporations should do—that is, making *a lot* of money; so is it fair to blame the company that is just

⁴² From *The Vampire Diaries*, discussed at length in Chapter Three.

acting as a company should act?

Consider the final episode of *Gossip Girl* (“New York, I Love You, XOXO”). Dan Humphrey had just sold the movie rights to his book, *Inside*, and was seen looking for a high-end apartment in New York City with Georgina Sparks (the one time Gossip Girl), while the episode prior had seen Nate punch Dan in the face for writing about the UES gang in such a salacious way, saying to Dan, “that was for all of us.” The audience was, at that point, supposed to assume that Dan was on his own (with Georgina) while the rest of the Upper East Siders were busy licking the wounds that Dan so brazenly opened in the pages of his book turned movie script. Cut to a few short scenes later where Dan is seen telling the gang that *he is the Gossip Girl*, that it had been him all along. Dan is the one who publicized his sister losing her virginity to her would-be rapist, telling them all that Jenny knew, and that Jenny wanted Dan to do it (forgetting the overwhelming and obvious trauma that she faced when that moment was published by Dan, her brother). Dan is the one who orchestrated Jack Bass returning from Australia to try and ruin Chuck once and for all by stealing back the hotel that Chuck owned at the time—Jack Bass came back *to be on Gossip Girl*, a move that ultimately would lead to Chuck’s father dying while Chuck looked on and was then implicated in the murder of his father (until he wasn’t). Dan is the one who knew, and published the story, about how Nate’s father was pimping out his son to Blair so that Blair’s mother would give Nate’s coke-head criminal father money to represent Blair’s mother’s company. Dan is the one who published Chuck’s whereabouts in Prague the night Chuck was almost murdered. Dan is the one who started the rumors about Serena *murdering* someone, about Serena possibly having an STD, about Serena maybe being pregnant and off to get an abortion, about Serena’s brother Eric being in a mental hospital, about Serena’s father poisoning Serena’s mother and making her *believe she had cancer*, about Serena’s descent back into cocaine addiction *because she and Dan had broken up*; and in one of the final scenes of *Gossip Girl*’s finale, Dan as Gossip Girl admitted to the gang that he started the blog for vengeance, because he was sick of being the outsider in a world that did not allow outsiders in. Dan started the Gossip Girl website, by his own admission, to bully the people who thought they were his friends, his lovers. Dan

as *Gossip Girl* the sociopath could have, and should have, been tried for murder. He could have, and should have, been charged with terroristic threats. If nothing else, Dan could have, and should have, never been forgiven. But in the world of *Gossip Girl*, the girl at the center of Dan's vitriolic and violent master plan told her friends, in front of the sociopath, that Dan as *Gossip Girl* was a *love letter* to all of them. Five minutes (roughly) after Dan announced that he was the sole proprietor of the blog for six years (at least), every single person that Dan had tried to destroy shrugged it off as something akin to a minor mistake, a capricious decision. And then, five years later, Dan *marries* Serena. *Gossip Girl* marries the target of his murderous life-plan, and Serena is completely fine with it; thus confirming Alloy's assumption, seen interwoven in all of its female protagonists in its three most popular properties: the teen girl *wants* this. It is for the best. The seven principles discussed throughout are not only constitutive, but desired. If a girl like Serena can not only forgive the boy who terrorized her for quite nearly half her life, what's the big deal about terror? And when that blasé attitude toward boys as terrorists (or at the very least hyper-violent predators) is seen throughout the properties that Alloy owns, and when Alloy owns basically the entirety of successful teen media properties on television, and when the victims of that terror are seen tweeting and virtually communicating with the real audiences in real time, all the while acting blasé in reality, what is a teenage girl supposed to make of her external life? Is it not nearly impossible to separate the interior from the exterior for a girl with seemingly no ability to differentiate between these alternate realities? So *of course* *Gossip Girl* was a boy. Alloy would not, could not, have it any other way.

This move is consistent with what I will discuss in the next chapter. Beginning with *Gossip Girl*, their first television property, Alloy set the framework for the reproduction of the seven brand principles I have discussed above, and will continue to discuss in the coming chapters, to give the television teenager a specialized⁴³ identity—that of the Alloy teenager. In *Gossip Girl* the privileged brand principle was that of the virtual and terroristic⁴⁴ watcher, while in the next chapter, another

⁴³ And privatized.

⁴⁴ But largely non-violent, which will change with *Pretty Little Liars*, discussed in Chapter Four.

brand principle will come to light—that of the teenage girl finding and knowing her identity *only through* the identity of the teenage boy(s) with which she has a relationship. With the move from privileging the teen girl as the site of narrative importance in *Gossip Girl* to privileging the teen boy as being the reason why teen girls were given any kind of agency or importance (with the reveal of *Gossip Girl* as a boy), the next chapter will focus on *The Vampire Diaries* and the homosocial relationship between vampire brothers Stefan and Damon Salvatore. The homosociality in *TVD* is the frame around which the boys in the show contain and consistently terrorize the teenage girl, Elena Gilbert, in their desire to control the agency she longs for but knows she will never have.

Three

For Your Own Good: Hyper-Masculinity, Homosocial Normativity and Terror In *The Vampire Diaries* and its Fandom

In Chapter One I discussed the significance of branding and the history of teenagers on television in order to put Alloy's brand mission into some context—I wrote in Chapter One that, prior to *Gossip Girl*, teenagers on television were given a recognizable amount of gendered agency that allowed the teenage audience(s) watching to find some kind of agency for themselves beside which the real teenagers watching the mediated representations of self could find common ground, while in Chapter Two I discussed how Alloy Entertainment, beginning with *Gossip Girl*, imbedded their seven brand principles onto the body of the female protagonist as a way of making the boys in the show demonstrative as the ones who control the rhetoric⁴⁵ that makes female brokenness appear normative and expected. Chapter Two also highlighted the revolutionary addition of the Internet and virtual surveillance that *Gossip Girl* brought to television, a move that will be further discussed in Chapter Four, as seen in *Pretty Little Liars*. The move that Alloy made at the end of *Gossip Girl*—making the pseudonymous blogger male—leads into the discussion that this chapter explains further. *The Vampire Diaries*, more so than any of Alloy's other properties, foregrounds the narrative within a context of a homosocial battle between vampire brothers Stefan and Damon Salvatore in their desire to own, make safe, and control the object of their desire, human (turned vampire) Elena Gilbert. In four plus seasons, *TVD* has made it clear that the boys (especially, but just about every main and periphery character) make decisions for Elena's own good, seemingly because Elena is incapable of making decisions for herself because she is the broken girl. As I explained in Chapter Two, this is similar to how Serena was seen in *Gossip Girl*—the broken girl believed to be broken because those in charge of the terroristic rhetoric told her she was broken—*The Vampire Diaries* gives a similar treatment to Elena. Stefan and Damon Salvatore are the ones in charge of fixing her normative

⁴⁵ As I wrote in the Introduction, I am using the word 'rhetoric' throughout this document to words, symbols, and visual images used to construct the contemporary teen television audience's understanding of reality. (Gardner)

brokenness, simply so that the other brother knows the brother who wins is the *right* kind of male, the hyper-male. Elena Gilbert is merely the triangulating⁴⁶ cog in the battle of masculinist identity formation, which brings to light a very important brand principle that Alloy imbeds within the narrative spaces of their programming, but most especially in *The Vampire Diaries*—that of the female protagonist recognizing her identity⁴⁷ only through her relationship with the hyper-masculine males with which she has a relationship.

This chapter will trace this brand principle in detail, discussing at length how *The Vampire Diaries* places Elena Gilbert, the female lead in the show, inside the space of homosocial masculinity identification—that space disguised as protectionism of and love for Elena that the two male leads, Stefan and Damon Salvatore, are constantly battling each other for and about. I will discuss how the homosocial space that contains Elena is the only space she is given to help her find her identity; and because of this Elena is expected to passively accept the identity that the two male leads force upon her. This brand principle is seen throughout the run of the series, now in its fifth season, and has led *The Vampire Diaries*' very vocal and active fandom to pick sides, Team Stefan or Team Damon⁴⁸, in their aligning with the *right* kind of masculinity.⁴⁹ This chapter will also discuss *The Vampire Diaries*'s fandom in detail, especially in how the fandom sees itself as being active contributors in the narrative decisions within the space of programming, all the while not knowing that that kind of activity is impossible due to the tight control Alloy has over the property.

***Twilight* and the Beginning of Contemporary Homosociality**

It should go without saying⁵⁰ that the impetus of *The Vampire Diaries*' popularity lies with it

⁴⁶ Eve Sedgwick popularized the term 'homosociality' as a way to define the bond that men share with each other in a triangular relationship whereby a woman (the third part of the triangle) acts as merely the cog of which men make use to demonstrate the non-sexual nature of the relationship with the other man. The female figure in the homosocial triangle, argues Sedgwick, is the disguise that men use to reframe the sexual (or sexually performative) desire they have toward the other man.

⁴⁷ And heroism, which will be discussed later.

⁴⁸ Never both, and never Team Elena.

⁴⁹ Which is, of course, Alloy's kind of masculinity, as represented by either Stefan or Damon, both hyper-masculine and predatory vampires.

⁵⁰ Given the title of the show.

being a show at least in part contextualized by its supernatural elements. But the *reason(s)* why *The Vampire Diaries* was perhaps given sudden entrée into the zeitgeist of teenage supernatural romance stories does call for further examination. To understand the appeal, consumption, and popularity of *The Vampire Diaries*; and by all measures, to understand the appeal, consumption, and popularity of nearly all contemporary American pop culture artifacts, one must begin with the *Twilight Saga*. In the four books (and five movie adaptations), an “almost entirely female fan base” (Greydanus) were given a new kind of heroine heretofore unseen in literature of its kind (vampire literature, to be discussed below)—that of a heroine *with agency over* the bad boy. Edward Cullen, the male protagonist in the saga, was not a typical teen media bad boy⁵¹—he was, in fact, a vampire with blood lust. Edward lusted for Bella Swan’s blood above all others (though it’s difficult to decipher why this is so), but it was Bella who allowed Edward entrée into what he craved most—without Bella’s consent, the vampire would not, and could not, feed on her blood. In “Twilight Appeal: The Cult of Edward Cullen and Vampire Love in Stephenie Meyer’s Novels and the New Film,” Steven D. Greydanus writes that,

Not only does Edward save Bella, *Bella also saves Edward*. This is part of another side to Edward’s appeal: that of the tragic, doomed hero, cut off from normal hopes and fears, isolated in despair—until Bella’s love offers him redemption. On this point the disordered and destructive side of Edward’s thirst is integral, not incidental, to his appeal: he’s the bad boy *who can be saved if only the good girl loves and trusts him enough*. He really is a romantic addict, dangerously seductive, proudly resentful, drawing Bella in with those irresistible words: *Stay away from me for your own good*. (Greydanus)

In other words, *Twilight* made the girl heroic, not the boy, through a long and perhaps far too hyperbolic journey to the realization that that could actually occur. And though the *Twilight Saga* is

⁵¹ For our purposes, James Dean should be seen as the first, and prototypical media bad boy, perpetuated on teen television (drama) by the characters of Dylan McKay (*90210*), Jordan Catalano (*My So-Called Life*), Pacey Whitter (*Dawson’s Creek*), Ben Covington (*Felicity*), and Ryan Atwood (*The O.C.*) prior to Chuck Bass (*Gossip Girl*) and Damon Salvatore (*The Vampire Diaries*).

not an Alloy Entertainment property, it changed the course of young adult entertainment in such a profound way that it allowed Alloy to benefit (commercially, rhetorically) off of *Twilight*'s new kind of young adult girl—she who controlled the hyper-masculine narrative space of the novel/film.

First published as a book series in 2005, the four young adult novels and subsequent young adult films, the saga is inarguably the most pervasive American pop culture phenomenon in the lives of multiple generations of young consumers. To date, more than 116 million copies of the books have been sold (stepheniemeyer.com), while the films have profited over \$2 billion, being called the most successful film franchise of all time (<http://hollywoodcrush.mtv.com/2010/07/06/twilight-successful/>). But that is only part of the story. The true success of the *Twilight Saga* is in its cultural currency, the way in which it has given legitimacy to a number of parasitic pop culture artifacts and its reinvention of a literary trope⁵²—the vampire⁵³—not forgetting the invention of a new genre of literature, the paranormal romance, a genre now seen as a normal part of the book buying experience. It is a story about a girl and two supernatural boys and the high-school existences with which they all must contend. For all the things *Twilight* has done to the pop culture landscape, perhaps the most

⁵² In literature, the vampire has been around since at least the 1720s and 1730s. Heinrich August Ossenfelder's poem, *Der Vampire*, was published in 1748, after what has been called the 'vampire craze' of the two decades before its publication; Sheridan le Fanu's *Carmilla* was published in 1872—the first female vampire in literature, who then gave way to the most influential vampire story ever written, Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, published in 1897. *Dracula* set off a still-evolving number of vampire narratives, which have crossed genre in such a way that there is seemingly no part of literature that has not taken advantage of the vampire trope—that trope being governed, essentially, by the vampire as manipulative blood feeder who takes advantage of his (and occasionally her) prey by demonstrating physical and emotional strength *over* the subject of desire while at the same time compelling (with his strength) the subject to *want* to be compelled by him (occasionally her). *Dracula* was the first literary (and filmic) vampire to make this kind of oppressive hyper-masculinity feel normative when embodied by a vampire. (Acocella; Gordon & Hollinger; Karg)

⁵³ In film, the vampire has been around since 1913 with Robert G. Vignola's *The Vampire*. *Dracula* was first seen in film in 1921, in the Hungarian *Dracula's Death* (or *The Death of Drakula*), though that is met with some disagreement since this film was not directly adapted from Bram Stoker's narrative (Heiss) (*Nosferatu* (1922) is also given credit as the first *Dracula* film); the most iconic film *Dracula*, played by Bela Lugosi, in 1931 with the release of *Dracula*. The character of *Dracula* is the most commonly used character in literature and/or film, adapted for page/screen over 150 times, and he is marked in all (or close to all) of his incarnations by a common thread: the hyper-masculine and monstrous figure with a sexual desire that comes from his overpowering manipulation of his female subjects (Acocella; Silver & Ursini; Karg). In "At Its Core, The *Twilight Saga* is a Story About _____", Ashley Fetters alludes to the *Twilight Saga* as an allegory for normative masculinity as first seen in the character of *Dracula*, "the power (and powerlessness) of" women, the kept heroine.

important one is in the life of the team vs. team rhetoric seen in virtually all of contemporary teen television relationship dynamics, and not far afield from how adult relationships are constructed in (particularly romance) films. It is vital to stress that *Twilight* was first in the capitalist construction of this seemingly normative way of thinking about gender order in contemporary art. Not to say that *Twilight* was the first series of books or films that gave definition to how boys and men were supposed to battle for the affections of girls and women—that type of gendered understanding has been around for as long as there have been gender players—but *Twilight* was the first to market this idea as being *about the girl taking control of the monstrous rhetoric*, to brand the saga as *standing for the battle between sexes*. It was, and remains to be, Team Edward versus Team Jacob. This picking of teams and marking yourself a part of one or the other is largely taken for granted these days, it seems, in any number of conflated shipper⁵⁴ wars in contemporary teen pop culture (explored in depth in these chapters with Team Ezria and Team Spoby, Team Dalena and Team Stelena, among others); but it was *Twilight* that started it all. It was Team Edward. It was Team Jacob. Never both. And never Team Bella.

The pervasiveness of *Twilight* is to say nothing of the fact that, without it, it could be argued that the global consumption of supernatural stories like the very adult *True Blood* and *The Walking Dead* (and the teenage *The Vampire Diaries*, explored at length in the following pages) among many others, would be far from assured. All of this is to say, of course, that the *Twilight Saga* reinvented⁵⁵

⁵⁴ “Shipping, derived from the word relationship, is the belief that two characters, fictional or non-fictional, would be interesting or believable (or are, or will be, or should be) in a romantic relationship. It is considered a general term for fans' emotional involvement with the ongoing development of romance in a work of fiction. Though technically applicable to any such involvement, it refers chiefly to various related social dynamics observable on the Internet, and is seldom used outside of that context. Shipping can involve virtually any kind of relationship – from the well-known and established, to the ambiguous or those undergoing development, and even to the highly improbable and the blatantly impossible. One rule of shipping states that if more than one person ships a couple it is a rightful ship.” (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/shipping_(fandom))

⁵⁵ On researching literary and filmic vampires, Stephenie Meyer said that, “The only time I really did any research on vampires was when the character Bella did research on vampires. Because I was

an already historically popular literary trope⁵⁶, unseen in decades before Stephenie Meyer's characters—the vampire, now targeted at teenagers, particularly teenage girls.⁵⁷ Edward Cullen and Jacob Black and Bella Swan are now firmly part of the pop culture lexicon, the mythology and symbolism of the characters befitting normative understandings of maudlin teenage identity formation. In other words, without *Twilight*, pop culture would be drastically different than it is now—a statement with a significance that cannot be overstated. *Twilight* changed the landscape of American pop culture, and with it, changed the landscape of how we understand gender roles. In “The ‘Twilight’ Effect,” Karen Valby writes that

Consider this one Mobius-strip effect: *Twilight* created a tidal wave of interest in the paranormal—vampires, werewolves, zombies, all of them with enviable cheekbones and abs which helped get shows like *The Vampire Diaries* greenlit. Meanwhile, a British woman named E.L. James (*50 Shades of Grey*) began noodling around with all of Edward and Bella's pent-up desire in *Twilight* fan fiction. Today her ubiquitous erotica trilogy is every bit the polarizing sensation as its inspiration. Simon & Schuster, sick of being a mere voyeur to all this action, shelled out a hefty amount in a two-book deal for more *Twilight* fan fiction.

creating my own world, I didn't want to find out just how many rules I was breaking.” (Meyer, *The Twilight Saga: The Official Illustrated Guide* 79)

⁵⁶ Before *Twilight*, F.W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922) was the only vampire story to significantly change the myth most commonly seen in *Dracula* and mirrored in hundreds of adaptations of it since. In *Nosferatu*, the death of a vampire could come via contact with sunlight (which would burn the vampire to death) rather than just a stake to the heart. In the *Twilight Saga*, sunlight essentially made the vampire better, more beautiful. The *Nosferatu* addition to a vampiric death is now seen as common to the trope, whereas Meyer's treatment of vampires in the sun has been commonly mocked (in *The Vampire Diaries*, the new *Fright Night*, The CW's *Supernatural*, *Vampire Academy*).

⁵⁷ In “The Emasculation of Vampires,” Jeffrey Thomas writes that, “*Dracula* was based on the Wallachian warlord Vlad Tepes, or Vlad the Impaler, who made a name for himself by impaling hundreds of his enemies when he was alive. Edward Cullen, the “vampire” in “*Twilight*” appears to be based on the moody kid in the back of the classroom who the nice girls are secretly attracted to. It began with Anne Rice's “Interview with a Vampire,” which was the beginning of a trend toward feminizing a previously masculine genre. *Dracula* was a monster not so much because he was undead and drank blood but because he has a sociopathic personality which made him indifferent to the suffering of others. The vampire in “Interview” was concerned about his need for blood and looked for ways to bypass the killing of innocents to slake his thirst. In “*Twilight*,” the vampire doesn't even have fangs and doesn't drink blood as a lifestyle choice,” perhaps giving way to what Steven D. Greydanus has called “a cultural crisis of masculinity.”

Christina Lauren's *Beautiful Bastard*, in which Edward and Bella types, here reimagined as demanding boss and his young, ambitious assistant circling each other wantonly at the workplace. (Valby)

And while it is true that *The Vampire Diaries* was a book series that was published over a decade prior to the release of the first *Twilight* novel (the first *TVD* novel first published in 1991), it cannot be argued that its success is owed almost exclusively to the success of the suddenly recognizable ordinariness of the vampires seen in *Twilight*. Without *Twilight*, there is no *The Vampire Diaries*, plain and simple; because "what's unique about *Twilight*, and consequently about *Fifty Shades of Grey*, is that the phenomenon speaks to a distinctly female fantasy...about being loved completely for who you are, not for what you look like or what you say or do" (Valby). Largely because of *Twilight*, teen girls and women were able to carve out a place of desire that was now being recognized as viable (personally; as fans) and interesting, with deep wells of commercial benefits. Because of *Twilight*, "Hollywood has come knocking a lot more aggressively" (Valby), and "now there is irrefutable evidence that young women will plunk down money for movie tickets if they're given choices other than explosions-driven blockbusters geared to their boyfriends and romantic comedies catering to their moms" (Sacks). Movies like *Warm Bodies*⁵⁸, *Beautiful Creatures*⁵⁹, and *The Mortal Instruments: City of Bones*⁶⁰ worked because of the *Twilight* principle. They are all movies that employ the Bella-model of female protagonist having to fight very hard for her agency only to have that agency, when found, be the governing force in the direction of the once male-centric narrative. Other movies (based on YA fiction, as are the above three examples) continue to use the *Twilight* principle, among them *Divergent* and *Vampire Academy*, both to be released in 2014. Suzanne Collins' dystopian trilogy, *The Hunger Games*, admits the writer of the books and producer of the first film⁶¹, used *Twilight* and its audience as a natural way in to its narrative, that of the privileging of

⁵⁸ Which made \$117 million at the box office.

⁵⁹ \$60 million.

⁶⁰ \$75 million.

⁶¹ Having earned close to \$700 million.

a once broken girl. All of this is to say that, before *Twilight*, there was little (if any) global material desire for young adult paranormal romance that made the girl (somewhat) heroic. It should not be forgotten, of course, that in all of the above examples (and in *The Vampire Diaries*, to be discussed in what follows), the heroine is largely made heroic because of her ability to manage the masculine space against which she finds herself pitted.

The Vampire Diaries as TV Twilight

As seen in the above examples, *The Twilight Saga* gave way to a litany of films adapted from YA fiction that in different ways gave space to the female protagonist to recognize her own heroism in large part because of the boys and men she must defeat, or at least attempt to defeat. But before *The Vampire Diaries*, this kind of female protagonist had never been seen on television. L.J. Smith, the writer of the first wave of *The Vampire Diaries* novels, was unaware that her books were being re-released by Alloy Entertainment following the middling success of their first wave of publications, to coincide with the enormous success of the *Twilight Saga*, saying in an interview, “I was busy nursing my mom, and I didn’t know that they had republished my books until they were telling me that the second one had debuted at number four on the *New York Times* bestseller list” (quoted Calhoun, *Love You to Death Volume I* 3). Vampires, it seems, even to the writer who had tried to make them popular once again, were now seeing a sudden resurgence, all thanks to one book series. As Crissy Calhoun continues in *Love You to Death Volume I*,

On September 10, 2009, *The Vampire Diaries* would premiere during a vampire craze that was already in full swing: 2005 saw the first *Twilight* novel, 2008 saw the film adaptation as well as the premiere of *True Blood* (adapted from Charlaine Harris’s Sookie Stackhouse novels). Add in films like *30 Days of Night* (2007), *Cirque de Freak: The Vampire’s Assistant* (2009), and *Daybreakers* (2010). Pop culture was all undead all the time. The explosion of fanged heroes didn’t surprise Melissa Rosenberg, screenwriter for the *Twilight Saga* films. “When one vampire story is successful, everyone else jumps on the bandwagon—that’s just how studios and networks operate. It all comes down to money, but it’s born out of very creative writers

reinventing a genre and reinventing the mythology. Of course, every time it's reinvented, you have a whole new generation of people for whom it's really brand new." (Calhoun, *Love You to Death Volume I* 14-15)

This reinvented⁶² vampire was, of course, antithetical to the literary vampires of old, with their bloodlust and often repulsive and monstrous appearance. Meyer's vampires were basically immortal teenagers with mortal teenage problems. *Twilight* was the first of its kind of story (the vampire story) to turn the masculinity imbedded on the body of the vampire as being *dependent upon* the girl around whom the narrative was couched. Edward Cullen and his family were just like the typical American nuclear family, only they subsisted on blood. It was a kind of character that was easily consumable for the common young adult reader—not overly scary and lacking the obvious predatory instincts that one would normally associate with the undead. Teenage readers and moviegoers consumed this material, for the most part, because they were this material. Julie Plec, co-creator of *The Vampire Diaries* television series,

counts herself as a devoted fan of the Twilight Saga, so she understands the appeal: "Edward has rejected all humanity, but he is struggling to be human. There is always the question, 'Does this person have it in him to be good, to make the right decision?' It's the theme that works like gangbusters in films and television." And for those of us wishing our next beau could be a biter, she suggests the lure is the "epic amount of knowledge and soul and spirituality and intelligence lurking behind those eyes. So in a vampire, by definition, you are getting the bad boy with the brain." (15)

⁶² The character of Dracula was made vampire because of disease, often tied to sexually transmitted diseases like syphilis. This fact is perhaps what made future writers of vampire fiction turn Dracula (and other vampires) into a symbol of disfigurement, often resulting in the shadowing (or hiding) of his face. He was supposed to represent repulsion to the reader—his repulsion was one of the reasons he had to compel his subjects to fall in love with him, or desire him at all. It was not until Anne Rice's *Vampire Chronicles* (in literature) and the stage adaption of *Dracula* (1924) when the character of Dracula was seen as sexually desirable in a normative sense. And even after the stage adaptation, Dracula and other vampires were still largely seen as repulsive in film versions; not until *Twilight* was the vampire seen as obviously desirable for a young adult audience. (Silver & Ursini; Gordon; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vampire_film; from David Skal on "When Vampires Don't Suck!," *The Vampire Diaries* Season One Special Features)

But the simple way to understand the *Twilight Saga* is to see the heroine through the eyes of the heroes: Edward Cullen (the vampire) wants to *protect* Bella Swan (the human girl) from seemingly everything and everyone; Jacob Black (the werewolf) wants to *save* Bella Swan from the vampire, and all the complications that come from a vampire's life. All of the other plot points and character relationships are ancillary to this common thread—the thread contextualized by the overt masculinity, and largely homosocial, gender play that happens in the battle for the girl.

What *Twilight* also did was give (particularly American) teenagers a place to go in which their uniform misunderstanding of identity was not only mirrored, but celebrated. It largely invented a new way that girls could see themselves as defeated but heroic, introverted yet social. The girl of old in and on teen media is gone for good, it seems (no more Joey Potter, no more Angela Chase), and the new teen girl is upon us: the weak girl turned strong by her own trumped-up chastity, the Victorian heroine. As discussed earlier, the abstinence-only movement in the American education system was by this time in full swing, and it was a movement that institutionalized gender roles to such a degree that girls (in America especially) were expected to accept a position as keeper of purity, protector of a sexual body *against* the hyper-masculine boy determined to conquer her, and her body. Steven D. Greydanus writes that,

As typically imagined, and certainly as presented in Meyer, vampirism makes a sickly, twisted metaphor for sexuality. Nothing like mutual complementarity can exist between humans and vampires—at least, not without completely rewriting vampire nature somehow. Vampires have nothing left to give and everything to take; humans have everything to lose and nothing to gain.

Humans may complete vampires, but vampires don't complete humans. (Greydanus)

This quote sums up precisely what *Twilight* started, and the monumental shift in teen media that the saga helped kick-start. That is, *Twilight* used the cultural moment of sex education (abstinence-only, for decades when *Twilight* was first published) in America along with a reinvention of a centuries-old literary trope (the vampire) to create a new kind of teen girl: the sexual cog in the battle between

predatory men, the triangulating force⁶³ in the re-definition of what determined masculinity. *Twilight*, as discussed earlier, was the first media property to *market* the marriage of vampirism as the stand-in for hyper-masculinity and the teenage girl as what gave that masculinity strength, all while couched in the assumption of abstinence-only education as being the normative way that kids learned about sex. It was a backlash against (particularly second-wave⁶⁴) feminism, and gave way to a youth-governed kind of feminism: one that said that feminism was inherently dependent upon boys and men to give it, feminism, strength and market viability. And the marketing of this type of identity has never been the same, which gave way to Alloy Entertainment and the seven brand principles that hold Alloy together as a marketing and media corporation dependent upon the reproduction of those principles in and throughout the properties under Alloy's control—the most popular⁶⁵ of which will be discussed in depth in the following paragraphs—*The Vampire Diaries*.

***The Vampire Diaries* and Female Agency**

The Vampire Diaries is a book series and television show about choice. That's what the audience is led to believe, seemingly every week, as represented by female lead Elena Gilbert (played by Nina Dobrev). More than being about choice, though, *TVD* is about perceived choice. It is a supernatural show about two supernatural brothers who have both been spurned by the same woman (and then vampire, Katherine Pierce) who turned them both into vampires over a century ago in the quaint Civil War town of Mystic Falls, Virginia (though there is some controversy about in what state the show is supposed to be set). The show opens with Elena and Stefan Salvatore, one of the vampire brothers, each reading from a diary. The set-up is that they have both been through vague tragedies but now have come to realize that that tragedy can be overcome, with the help of another—that other being Stefan for Elena, Elena for Stefan, the audience is led to presume. From the pilot episode through the various arcs of four and a half seasons, Stefan and Elena are constructed as a couple

⁶³ As mentioned earlier, first explained by Eve Sedgwick.

⁶⁴ The movement that began in the early 1960s and made room for women's sexuality in the debate about gender equality rather than just debates centered around family and workplace economics.

⁶⁵ Audience numbers-wise, at least.

destined for something, either as a love-struck couple struggling to find the right way to mix being human and non-human in a relationship with a happy ending, or, as the seasons move forward, a non-human and non-human who have gone through too much tragedy to make a relationship work. Stefan is the center of the narrative, always, with the ancillary characters maneuvered to suit his oftentimes fleeting end-game. A potential problem with this is that the (mostly) teenage audience is made to believe that *TVD* is, at its core, a show about female agency, or about the love between boy and girl, when really the show is about how female agency furthers the homosocial narrative⁶⁶ between the vampire brothers. Damon and Stefan regularly state that they are simply looking out for Elena in an attempt to allow her to make her own choice in dozens of different scenarios (the most grave being whether or not this human girl should herself become a vampire). It is sold as a somewhat simple love story with an almost incomprehensible mythology. The audience is made to believe it is one thing; while upon further examination, it is something far different.

To combat for Elena's attention is Stefan's brother Damon Salvatore, seemingly the opposite of everything Stefan is supposed to stand for. While Stefan is sold as the "good" one, Damon is the "bad." Stefan has morality, Damon has none. Stefan loves Elena, Damon loves Elena. The battle is on. And while the show, from at the latest episode six of Season One, is purportedly about Elena's choice in any number of matters; that choice is couched in the hypermasculine⁶⁷ whims of each

⁶⁶ Michael Kimmel writes that "one of the more startling things I found when I researched the history of masculinity in America was that men subscribe to these [predatory] ideals not because they want to impress women, let alone any inner drive or desire to test themselves against some abstract standards. They do it because they want to be positively evaluated by other men. American men want to be a "man among men," an Arnold Schwarzenegger-like "man's man," not a Fabio-like "ladies' man." Masculinity is largely a "homosocial" experience: performed for, and judged by, other men" (Kimmel 47). This fact is the governing principal in how Stefan and Damon compete with each other for Elena's desire, as proof that each is, in fact, the "right" kind of man with the "right" type of masculinity. It is, it should be remembered, essentially Dracula (Damon) vs. Edward Cullen (Stefan).

⁶⁷ In one of the first instances of academic studies of hypermasculinity, Donald L. Mosher writes in his article, "Measuring a Macho Personality Constellation," (1984) that, "a Hypermasculinity Inventory was developed to measure a macho personality constellation consisting of three components: (a) calloused sex attitudes toward women, (b) violence as manly, and (c) danger as exciting." Hypermasculinity is recognized as a psychological disorder seen in some men who assume that sexual and physical aggression toward women is normal, and that emotional self-control is imperative.

brother's desire. As discussed above through the characters in *Twilight*, Stefan and Damon represent different sides of the same coin—Stefan wants nothing more than to save Elena, Damon to protect her. Each vampire brother, season after season, makes that abundantly clear in how they choose to win the affection of the girl they are battling each other to consume. The audience, meanwhile, is openly asked to choose sides in this battle; the marketing of the sides is regularly seen in Team vs. Team merchandising—you are either one or the other, never both. And to its credit, *TVD* does a masterful job of making it clear that to love Stefan is to openly hate Damon, and vice versa. Stefan comes in, again and again, to save the day, to save the town, to save the girl; Damon meanwhile, is regularly seen as the ultra-violent predator who will do what it takes to protect the people he thinks need protecting, namely Elena. In the pages that follow I will discuss episode-specific examples of this.

***The Vampire Diaries* and Homosociality**

The Vampire Diaries is not about the love of boy and girl; it is about the love between brother and brother, male and male, monster versus monster. It is a homosocial experiment in the guise of a love story. Stefan and Damon Salvatore use as their vessel Elena Gilbert as a way to prove to the other one that *they* are the correct victor, because *they* are the correct kind of male. It is a move that Alloy Entertainment has been doing since the publication of *TVD* book series and remains ongoing today—that is, making their audience believe that the narrative is one thing while keeping the narrative tightly controlled through their own televisual means of hidden normative gender construction and gendered morality, all controlled by a single media entity—Alloy Entertainment.

It is the age-old gendered 'boys will be boys'⁶⁸ ethos that the audience is asked to forgive in the

⁶⁸ In *Guyland*, Michael Kimmel writes that, "By far the most sustained fusillade against feminism as the cause of boy's woes comes from Christina Hoff Sommers. In her 2000 book, *The War Against Boys*, Sommers claims that schools are an "inhospitable" environment for boys, where their natural propensities for rough and tumble play, competition, aggression, and rambunctious violence are cast as social problems in the making. Efforts to transform boys, to constrain or curtail them, threaten time-tested and beneficial elements of masculinity and run counter to nature's plan. These differences, she argues, are "natural, healthy, and, by implication, best left alone." The last four words of her book are "boys will be boys"—to my mind, the four most depressing words in

understanding that Damon *needs* to do the things he does, simply because that's how boys act. Boys are unemotional and violent and condescending and controlling, because that's simply how boys are. This can, of course, be seen in any number of teen television shows of the past. Audiences have long been conditioned to make room for questionable male gender players since the days of Dylan McKay on *Beverly Hills, 90210*, seen again in Pacey Whitter (*Dawson's Creek*), Spike (*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*), Ben Covington (*Felicity*), Jordan Catalano (*My So-Called Life*), Ryan Atwood (*The O.C.*), and more recently Chuck Bass (*Gossip Girl*), as I discussed in previous chapters. In other words, there is a seeming moral imperative for a teen TV show to semiotically mirror (and evolve) the teen boy in television if the audience of any particular show will understand what the teen boy is supposed to look like. There is (as far as I can tell) not even one example of a teen "bad" boy (who is pitted against his "good" boy nemesis) who does not carry with him the markers of normative masculinity—the type of masculinity as seen in the character of Dracula (manipulative, hyper-sexual, predatory, ambivalent to his predation). The difference with Damon Salvatore is that the audience is largely duped into believing something that simply is not there. Damon is ostensibly after the girls' affection, as is Stefan. But, as will be explored in depth below, the two brothers are simply after one thing—the other brother's admiration. Stefan has desires on saving Elena *from Damon's evil*; Damon wants to protect Elena from falling into the trap of being with a boy (Stefan) who is hiding from his true self—that true self being, of course, the predatory masculinity that Damon (and the audience) must assume is normative if the show is going to work. And the show works magnificently insofar as Damon being sold and marketed as the true hero—Alloy Entertainment, The CW, and Warner Brothers spend far more time and money exploring the merchandising possibilities in Damon than in Stefan, which can be seen with even a cursory glance at www.wbshop.com, or at your neighborhood Hot Topic. Damon is a character with masculinity at its most unwavering, its most diabolical; and that masculinity is the success of the show, and of the book series.

educational policy today. They imply such abject resignation: Boys are such wild, predatory, aggressive animals that there is simply no point in trying to control them." (Kimmel 72)

The first few episodes of Season One of *TVD* are quite instructive in how the audience is asked to choose sides between these very different versions of masculinity. In episode three (“Friday Night Bites”), Damon warns Stefan that he (Damon) will be who he needs to be in order to get things done in the manner that feels natural. Damon says to Stefan immediately following the murder of football coach Tanner, “I’ll do whatever I want to do to your little cheerleader (Elena) because *that* is what is *normal* to me.” Stefan is rightly in shock, having witnessed the entire event, and feels instinctively inclined to further save Elena from the overt warnings from his monstrous brother. In the episode following (“Family Ties”), Damon is seen using mind control (“compulsion” in the language of the show) on Caroline Forbes, raping her again and again in an attempt to make her feel loved and needed by the boy who wants control of the town and its inhabitants. Stefan, meanwhile, is moved to do what feels necessary—that is, get the people he cares for away from the evil that is his brother. Stefan is seen in episode six (“Lost Girls”) giving Elena a vervain necklace to thwart the mind control that Damon so cavalierly uses. The audience is made to think that Damon is in town to reclaim the love he lost decades ago, the love of the vampire who turned him, Katherine Pierce; and in so believing that, the audience feels the larger purpose of Damon’s presence is somehow normal.

In other words, Damon became the monster he is because he wanted to be loved by her; whatever “collateral damage” (Damon’s words) is sacrificed along the way is justified, even romantic. It should not be forgotten that *The Vampire Diaries* is a show consumed by the same (mostly female) consumers who have grown up in the age of *Twilight*, the hero of that series being a carefully constructed feminized vampire unwilling to embody normative masculinity. In other words, Damon Salvatore came along at a time when audiences were seemingly clambering for a strong, and by extension violent, superhero on television. There is no precedent for Damon Salvatore in the medium of TV, and that fact gave Alloy and The CW a lot of room to play. Add to that the globally successful marketing beast that was the *Twilight Saga*, and Team Damon was born.

This push and pull between Stefan and Damon continues through the first season with each brother intent on giving Elena the choice of *which brother she would rather resemble*. That is the

overarching message in *The Vampire Diaries*, consistent through the first four and a half seasons. Stefan thinks Elena should act as she *wants* to act, Damon thinks Elena should act as she is *supposed* to act. The most important reason that Team Damon and the Dalena shippers are ultimately the most vocal is because the words *supposed to act* seem to be what Alloy Entertainment has in mind as they continue to create properties reliant upon a new type of gender normativity *as controlled by Alloy*. In other words, Alloy seemingly needs Damon to be the hero because hypermasculinity has been a condition of youth since teenagers learned about gender; the same thing can be said for demure femininity. This has, of course, been seen on television for generations, but rarely have these gender roles been so overt and *never* have these gender roles been regulated by a single media entity. Alloy Entertainment, in the cross construction and cross marketing of the properties, is creating a new kind of consumption—that is, a consumption that is saturating the teen television marketplace. All three shows and book series’ use consistent thematic and branding techniques to make the audiences of these shows recognize the seven principals I have mentioned in previous chapters, through the consumption of each other property. In other words, to admire and openly root for Damon Salvatore (who is seen in the first season as a rapist) is to justifiably root for Chuck Bass (*Gossip Girl*), also seen as a rapist in the first season.

What is left out in the choice of Team vs. Team rhetoric is the option to choose to be on Team Female X. Alloy, The CW, and Warner Brothers *do not* have as a marketing component any room for female heroism. Choosing between repulsive and ultra-violent male characters is the only choice Alloy gives its audience. Female leads in all three of the Alloy properties I discuss are made to think they have some kind of agency, but the agency they seem to have is always governed by the male characters, often seen working in the shadows. This is, quite explicitly, Alloy’s attempt to control the rhetoric of teenage consumption across various platforms, be it TV, original novel, or companion book to the TV series. The neoliberal control of gender play leaves audiences without any recognition of what is happening, largely due to the convoluted mythology or mystery imbedded in each season of each property. If the audience is lost in the narrative, how is the audience supposed to

see what else is happening?

In episode 13 of Season One (“Brother of the Damned”), we learn that Stefan actually forced Damon into transitioning into a vampire, the result of which finds Stefan on a mission to atone for this sin. The moves that Stefan make largely reflect the guilt he feels for turning Damon into a monster, and the resultant moves that Damon makes can be seen as a circuitous route at forgiveness. In other words, the overriding theme of the show and book series is each brother hoping that the other brother can come to an understanding of the deep love they have for one another, Elena Gilbert being the object through which this love becomes manifest. Season Two ends with Damon vowing to save Stefan (now a slave to the original vampire-werewolf hybrid Klaus) after Stefan vows to save the werewolf bitten Damon from a certain death, the very reason Stefan somewhat voluntarily becomes a slave to Klaus—Klaus promising Stefan to help Stefan save Damon only if Stefan becomes Klaus’ slave. Stefan and Damon may assume the position of Elena suitor, but that position is made secondary to the position of brother savior. Elena is the vessel in which Stefan and Damon presume to be fighting for⁶⁹; but as is made more and more clear as each season progresses, the real love here is between the two brothers who seem hell-bent on proving to the other one that their type of masculinity is the right type. To thoroughly gauge the homosociality that *TVD* imbeds in every season, an exploration of Stefan and Damon’s relationship is in order to fully understand why Alloy and The CW have designs on perpetuating this type of neoliberal gender governance. To feel the gravity of difference in how masculinity is represented in *TVD* as compared to the masculinity in teen television that preceded it, one must try to first understand how audiences read the masculine character, particularly in how masculine characters relate to one another using homosocial desire. It will be important to keep in mind that *The Vampire Diaries* was Alloy Entertainment’s first cross-

⁶⁹ In *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, Eve Sedgwick wrote that desire between men could only become manifest when an invisible desire for a woman (the triangulating force between men) could be the cog around which male-male desire could revolve. Sedgwick encouraged readers to read literature (or at least to be aware that literature could be read as such) with a mindful eye toward how relationships between men could be more oppressive to women than previously thought, largely because the woman became caught within the triangle of male desire as nothing more than a body with which to serve non-existent male desire for the woman.

format property, the book series debuting in 1991 (*Gossip Girl*, Alloy's second cross-format property, was not published until 2002) as a partnership between Alloy and original writer L.J. Smith. It was the company's first attempt at market saturation, constructing for readers what was to come.

Homosociality and the Gaze in *The Vampire Diaries*

As I have mentioned throughout this chapter, *The Vampire Diaries* is a show and book series that is governed by the relationship between the two vampire brothers, Stefan and Damon Salvatore. Their relationship, though, is highly dependent upon how they can (and should, according to each) use Elena Gilbert. Elena is the triangulating force that allows Stefan and Damon to judge the efficacy of their individual versions of the 'right' kind of masculinity. Without Elena, each brother would be lost, it seems, but it should not be forgotten that Elena is in the position she is in *only* for the use and convenience of each hyper-masculine vampire. This homosocial space of masculine identity formation, while not new to literature (see footnote 69), was certainly new to teen television. *The Vampire Diaries* was the first to do it, and because of that, *The Vampire Diaries* gave Alloy Entertainment and The CW another space of what appeared to be an original television narrative⁷⁰.

As described by Heidi Hartman⁷¹, homosocial behavior between men is a practice replete with the perpetuation of dominance in a highly regulated work environment. It is an attempt by already dominant men to usurp the previously established male privilege of an opposing man, simply to further hierarchize already hierarchical male gender roles. This behavior is done, as first described by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, using females as the conduits for men to reach levels of masculinity in a triangular structure of male controlled dominance. In this "homosocial reproduction," males are in a constant fight with one another to prove that a certain type of masculinity is the correct type of masculinity, using an oftentimes unsuspecting woman as the oppositely gendered-cog in the desired result. The woman, according to Sedgwick, is immaterial to the power struggle in which both men

⁷⁰ All the while *TVD* was making repeated use of Alloy's seven brand principles, discussed throughout this dissertation, therefore the narrative wasn't necessarily original, or new.

⁷¹ From *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, p. 25.

are pitted. This struggle is simply a struggle for proof of masculinity, women being the object through which this masculinity is proven. In *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger mirrors this image of men through women, writing that,

According to usage and conventions which are at least being questioned but have by no means overcome, the social presence of a woman is different in kind from that of a man. A man's presence is dependent upon the promise of power which he embodies. If the promise is large and credible his presence is striking. If it is small or incredible, he is found to have little presence. The promised power may be moral, physical, temperamental, economic, social, sexual—but its object is always exterior to the man. A man's presence suggests that what he is capable of doing to you or for you. His presence may be fabricated, in the sense that he pretends to be capable of what he is not. But the presence is always towards a power which he exercises on others. (Berger 45-46)

This is clearly seen in the relationship between Stefan and Damon Salvatore. They are a species, vampire, that is already granted an enormous amount of power when surrounded by non-vampire characters; and when those characters are seen as being incidental to the larger game at play, the homosocial implications are profound. Elena Gilbert is in the middle of a masculine turf war between two brothers; and Alloy sells the property as being a fight for her love between the two hyper-masculine monsters, making normative the victor's choice of masculinity. That is, Damon is the natural winner here because Damon is the most qualified at being masculine. Damon, as consumed by the audience, is the only vampire who is capable of protecting the frail Elena because Damon is unafraid of tapping into his normalized well of masculine strength. Stefan never had a chance. But the game will continue, because lest we forget, Stefan is still male. Males compete with other males for the desire of the male in competition; and when that competition is for the affection of a controlled woman, the audience will consume the romance in droves.

Elena's presence in this game is largely immaterial until she herself becomes masculinized in the fourth season of *The Vampire Diaries*, a season that pits vampire versus vampire in the "correct"

way that Elena should continue her life as a vampire. As seen throughout the series, the two brothers have as an end game constructing this girl in their own image; and the fourth season is no different. What appears to be different is that Elena makes a choice in who she wants to be with (Damon), only to realize that Damon has control of that choice from the start, being the literal place Elena cannot leave because she is sired to him. What *TVD* gives, it quickly takes away. Make no mistake, every single narrative move *The Vampire Diaries* makes or attempts to make is toward the final goal of having the male lead characters reclaim every bit of control from each of the female characters that are at times purported to have some kind of agency. Not just Elena Gilbert, this can be seen in the tertiary characters as well. *TVD* makes it clear from Season One through Season Four that once the audience feels comfortable with a girl having a say in what happens to the narrative, that say is quickly taken from her and given right back to one of the male leads. In what is perhaps the most important line of the series, Elena says to Damon in Season Three, episode eight (“Ordinary People”), “I think you’re going to be the one who saves him (Stefan) from himself. It won’t be because he loves me; it’ll be because he loves you.” This is the overriding theme of *The Vampire Diaries*, first seen in Season One, on through Season Four. Stefan and Damon use the love they claim to have for Elena as a way to prove to each other the love they can’t express for one another. It an obvious nod to the homosocial normativity that has driven the show from its inception. In the same season (episode 16, “1912”), the following dialogue takes place between Stefan and Damon:

Damon: “I watched you go over the edge, and I didn’t do anything to stop you.”

Stefan: “You couldn’t have.”

Damon: “Sure, I could’ve. I just didn’t want to. But I want to now. Whenever you go too far, I will be there to pull you back up. Every second, every day, til you don’t need me.”

It has taken the better part of three seasons for the lead characters to come to grips with what it is they are after, and the audience has been led to believe that what that is has been far simpler than what it actually is. Damon and Stefan Salvatore do not crave the love of Elena Gilbert; they crave the love and acceptance from one another, the love and acceptance each brother thinks he does not deserve for

the monster each brother has been told he is. This relationship can be seen as being taken hold through the various male-male relationships seen throughout the run of the first four seasons. Through the representation of the friendship between Damon and Alaric, Stefan and Klaus, Stefan and Damon and Matt, Stefan and Damon and Jeremy, and Klaus and Elijah, *The Vampire Diaries* is very clearly a show about male homosociality and the inevitable complications that arise when that homosociality is represented by centuries-old men trapped in the bodies of teenagers. It is a not too thinly veiled allegory about the arrested development of youth, and the trappings that come along with the privilege of malehood.

Of course, in a typical Alloy move, Damon is the winner, consistent with the way in which Dan outed himself in *Gossip Girl* as being the hyper-masculine terror. Alloy Entertainment rewards emotionally closed-off, as well as predatorily normative men as being the “right” kind of men as compared to close-to the right kind of man, as embodied by Stefan (or any of the other men in and on *Gossip Girl*). Stefan is close to predatory enough, but not predatory enough for Alloy. Elena chooses Damon in her *only* true choice over the course of four whole seasons—this choice coming in the finale of Season Four. She is finally able to break the shackles of male governance (we think), and she chooses the hyper-masculine killer and sometimes rapist. The audience of *TVD* has made it clear that the Damon-Elena relationship is the proper kind, and that is, of course, within the dictates of how Alloy runs their business. *They* are the ones who control the gender roles, because *they* are the ones who made them up, *they* are the ones who market those roles cross-format; and the audiences that Alloy sells to are audiences that have been conditioned in gender play from a very early age.⁷² This wouldn’t necessarily be a problem if Alloy followed through on the promise to make the audience a willing participant in the ownership of the narrative, which will be discussed in the paragraphs below in how (especially) teen girls use social media as a place to gather to discuss the shows, as well as the

⁷² As discussed previously in how teenagers were seen on television: as boys with a single-minded goal to get girls, and as girls with a single-minded goal to be the objects of boys’ desires. This has been the consistent narrative gender marker in seemingly all of teen media since the 1940s.

place to (assume to) take part⁷³ in how the show(s) evolve narratively.

Alloy Entertainment and Imbedded Masculinity

What Alloy has done, using *TVD* as their first test-case⁷⁴, is to establish a gendered⁷⁵ teenage rhetoric whereby the audience comes to know these characters as a version of reality that in many ways mimics the masculinity imbedded in the institution of television production. In this symbolic annihilation of female agency, Alloy Entertainment and *TVD* have laid the groundwork for what will come after—that is, in subsequent Alloy Properties *Gossip Girl* and *Pretty Little Liars*. Using Raymond Williams' notion of flow on television, Alloy is now creating a new kind of marketing flow machine, each of their properties highly dependent upon the consumption of all the others in cross-format capitalism to get a full understanding of the teenager of television. And with so many properties under their control, it seems to be Alloy's design to flood the teenage media marketplace with the rhetoric of their construct—boys and men learning how to appropriately act their gender through the girls and women that the boys and men use to define their personal type(s) of masculinity.

As has been seen throughout these chapters (and will be seen in the chapters that follow), this is consistent with Alloy's various properties, and runs parallel to how they maintain tight control of the allegory of gender. It is a company that is reliant upon the neoliberal notion of corporate control of individual choice, all the while allowing audiences to assume a position of *actual* choice, which will be discussed at length at the end of this chapter.

John Berger goes on to write that,

Today the attitudes and values which informed that tradition (art) are expressed through other

⁷³ But only passively take part.

⁷⁴ *TVD* was the first book series, not the first TV series that came from a book under Alloy's control. That was *Gossip Girl*. The first book from *The Vampire Diaries* was published in 1991, while the television series started in 2009. The first *Gossip Girl* book was published in 2002, the first season of *GG* on television in 2007.

⁷⁵ As stated earlier, by rhetoric I mean the words, symbols, and visual images used to construct the contemporary teen television audience's understanding of reality (Gardner)—gendered rhetoric meaning that these words, symbols, and visual images being sectioned off as being applicable to girls in a way that is different from the rhetoric applicable to boys; that is in how boys come to understand their identity only *through their relationship(s)* to girls.

more widely diffused media—advertising, journalism, television. But the essential way of seeing women, the essential use to which their images are put, has not changed. Women are depicted in a quite different way from men—not because the feminine is different from the masculine—but because the ‘ideal’ spectator is always assumed to be male and the image of the woman is designed to flatter him. (63-64)

In other words, consistent with the ideas of homosociality, Berger is arguing here that a woman’s presence in media artifacts (and arguably in life) is solely dependent on the ways in which men engage with one another. This is seen clearly throughout the first four and a half seasons of *The Vampire Diaries*, particularly in how each season ends. As stated earlier, the ultimate success in the mind of each vampire brother is in how they are willing and potentially able to save the other one from outside destruction or outside control. Elena, meanwhile, is mired inside the bubble of this masculinizing game play, left unaware of what is happening to her. The ‘ideal’ spectator, when seen in the context of teen television, is not just the female in question as seen in the art, but also the female audience member. She in turn sees herself as being a cog in the choosing of masculine sides, the more masculine the side the better—thus, Damon wins—the grand design of Alloy Entertainment. When masculinity can be packaged and sold, it can be re-packaged and re-sold season after season. The Stefan-Elena shippers stand no chance in their desire to see the “good” brother win the girl. He is simply not masculine enough. This is consistent with how the female spectators watch the show as they learn to be female gender players through their cog-like use value to the boys and men in the middle of which the girls and women are situated.

In *Guyland*, Michael Kimmel writes of the mirroring effect that shows like *The Vampire Diaries* can have in the behavior of boys learning the ways of seeing their own masculinity when he writes,

Most young men who engage in acts of violence—or who watch them and do nothing, or who joke about them with their friends—fully subscribe to traditional ideologies of masculinity.

The problem isn’t psychological; these guys aren’t deviants. If anything, they are

overconforming to they hyperbolic expressions of masculinity that still inform American culture...It's facile to argue about whether or not young men "have" power: Some do, some don't. Some are powerful in some settings, but not in others. Besides, power isn't a possession, it's a relationship. It's about the ability to do what you want in the world. Few *people* feel that sort of power even as adults: Most of us "have to" work, we are weighted down by family and workplace obligations. But even when they feel powerless, unlike women, men feel *entitled* to power. (Kimmel 59-60)

Thus, the problem with a teen television show that privileges ultra-violent masculinity as the type of masculinity that must be chosen. Alloy Entertainment, The CW, and Warner Brothers are giving their audience a very constructed type of choice—the choice to consume what already feels natural to them, in the shape of what is natural to the supernatural. That is, masculinity as represented by hypermasculine monsters after the heart of a demure and human girl. The choice is not a choice, of course, because the victor has already been chosen in the book series. It is with this cross-format marketing that Alloy Entertainment has defined itself as a brand. In her book, *The Lolita Effect*, feminist scholar M. Gigi Durham takes exception to this type of gendered representation in the media, writing that

While the media may not cause our behaviors, they are culture mythmakers: they supply us, socially, with ideas and scripts that seep into our consciousness over time, especially when the myths are constantly recirculating in various forms. They accentuate certain aspects of social life and underplay others. They are part of a larger culture in which these myths are already at work, making it possible for the myths to find fertile ground in which to take root and flourish. They can reinforce certain social patterns and trends, and invalidate others. They can gradually and insidiously shape our ways of thinking, our notion of what is normal and what is deviant, and our acceptance of behaviors and ideas that we see normalized on television, in film, and in other forms of popular culture. The myths are sugarcoated: they are aesthetically appealing, emotionally addictive, and framed as cutting-edge and subversive. But violence against women

is neither edgy nor subversive: the violent abuse of women has been around for a long time.

It's important to recognize that media-generated sexual violence against girls highlights and perpetuates a well-established system of brutalization. (Durham 148-149)

I am not suggesting that *The Vampire Diaries* is instructive in how girls and boys act outside the context of the television set or YA novels; but the connection that the female spectator has to her own position as a gendered siphon in the construction of fictional (TV) and factual (at school, outside of school) masculinity cannot be overlooked. *The Vampire Diaries* is perhaps, then, instructive in how real-life gender play can be seen as mirroring fictional gender play. In other words, in real life as on TV, girls and women are seen similarly as the triangulating cog in normative masculinity. *The Vampire Diaries* is a property entirely reliant on the consumption of hyper-saturated gender roles—those gender roles set within the framework of brutality against women, rape, and re-configured death, seemingly every single week. It would be irresponsible to assume that a series like *The Vampire Diaries* does not in some ways seep into the consciousness of the teenage girl or boy; and with all art, it would be irresponsible to assume that it is a product that does not play some kind of role in the gendered behavior of the actual girls and boys watching the rote violence perpetuated each and every week. So what is the responsibility of Alloy Entertainment and The CW? It is hard to answer given the way neoliberal ideologies take hold in the minds of consumers. If *The Vampire Diaries* is to be seen as a test subject by which to judge the success of the parent company with the rights to the property, the marketing of this violence would seem to be necessary. The consumers are buying the image of Damon Salvatore—is this the problem of Alloy's, the problem of consumer desire, or the problem of cross-format advertising as a whole? It is hard to say, but the way Alloy has gone about marketing their product is clear.

Alloy Entertainment and Branding

As in *Gossip Girl*, it can be readily seen in *The Vampire Diaries* that Alloy Entertainment is using very calculated branding strategies to make it apparent that the consumer is not just buying the product of a television program, or the physical product of a novel; rather, Alloy's consumers are

buying the product of a *character*, with all that character's requisite attributes. In other words, Alloy Entertainment has as its goal, the branding of gender. Of branding, Naomi Klein writes,

It's worth remembering that the branding process begins with a group of people sitting around a table trying to conjure up an ideal image; they toss around words like "free," "independent," "rugged," "comfortable," "intelligent," "hip." Then they set out to find real-world ways to embody those ideas and attributes. (Klein 157)

This is precisely the format Alloy Entertainment has used to grow their company, as was first outlined in Chapters One and Two. *The Vampire Diaries*, for all intents and purposes, was the property that Alloy used to foster their brand image over the course of two decades. To re-state, Alloy has a creative team who come up with ideas for books to be farmed to writers, all while Alloy maintains ownership of the narrative and characters—the writers are ostensibly a part of the product Alloy eventually sells to further its brand image. The books, if successful, are then pitched to companies and networks as possible television or film franchises in an attempt to cross-market the property and to create marketing opportunities through the merchandising of the idea. The words "free," "independent," "intelligent," and "hip" continue to be used to describe the characters in and on *TVD*, but how free can a character be when that character is a construction of a parent company who retains all rights to where the character is allowed to go in the minds of the writers who seemingly have the space to create their own narratives? It is a clear manipulation of brand image by Alloy Entertainment to perpetuate the assumption of agency sold to the creative book and television writers caught in the web of Alloy's grand design. Alloy Entertainment is constructing a clear neoliberal space of production whereby gender and morality are tightly woven in to the capitalist notion of success. In *Branded Bodies, Rhetoric, and the Neoliberal Nation State*, Jennifer Wingard writes that,

Wendy Brown, building from Michel Foucault's famous claim that neoliberal subjects are *homo economicus* by nature (Foucault, "On Governmentality"), asserts that the logics of neoliberalism have penetrated even our most intimate spheres. "In making the individual fully responsible for her or himself, neoliberalism equates moral responsibility with rational action; it

erases the discrepancy between economic and moral behavior by configuring morality entirely as a matter of rational deliberation about costs, benefits, and consequences” (Brown 6).

According to Brown, neoliberalism removes the buffer between economics and morals, and creates a world wherein moral decisions are made through a cost-benefit analysis of what will affect the self. (Wingard 6)

In *The Vampire Diaries*, Alloy Entertainment is imbedding onto the body of Elena Gilbert, the management of the homosocial battle between Stefan and Damon as a way to privilege the (perceived) strength of Elena as a girl/woman. The cost-benefit for Alloy, then, is in how Elena is assumed to be the moral center of the narrative as the boys around her fight to be the object of her desire, all the while de-privileging Elena by giving her agency *only* if it furthers the narrative of the boys’ chosen form of masculinity. Yes, Elena gets to decide which kind of masculinity is most desirable; but Alloy Entertainment is (and will always be) in charge of how that masculinity is consumed (by Elena, and by the audience). The normative scripts of neoliberalism, as Jennifer Wingard (and by extension Wendy Brown, and Michel Foucault) argues, such as personal responsibility and free-market consumerism, are tightly controlled by the company in charge of defining and maintaining how gender looks within the narrative space of the program. What Alloy perhaps considers their primary properties, in other words, are not the books and television series; they are, rather, the characters within those entities that must be maintained by the brand if the brand is to succeed. This, in turn, creates myriad complications in how audiences consume the properties. Readers and viewers connect to the brand through the *emotional* market share that Alloy is intent on privileging. In other words, Alloy Entertainment has as its mission to market the love that their audience has for the way the properties make them feel as teenagers rather than the love the audiences have for a typical type of product that necessarily comes from the buying and selling of merchandise.

Alloy is selling feeling⁷⁶, not product. As I mentioned in Chapter One, Marc Gobe writes in

⁷⁶ How Elena Gilbert, and how Serena van der Woodsen in *Gossip Girl*, are representative of the female agency (on TV) of which girls (in real life) can feel proud. In other words, if Elena and

Emotional Branding of the changes that companies are forced to deal with in this hyper-competitive global marketplace. He makes it clear that “in this new business atmosphere, ideas are money. Ideas are, in fact, a new kind of currency altogether—one that is more powerful than money. *One single idea—especially if it involves a great brand concept—can change a company’s entire future*” (Gobe xviii). Alloy’s idea, of course, is the idea of the modern teenager. The production of Alloy’s properties is the production of teenage identity, and this production is seen and marketed across a wide range of formats, networks, and consumer space. Gobe goes one to write that

Emotional Branding provides the means and methodology for connecting products to the consumer in an emotionally profound way. It focuses on the most compelling aspect of the human character: the desire to transcend material satisfaction and experience emotional fulfillment. A brand is uniquely situated to achieve this because it can tap into the aspirational drives that underlie human motivation. (xix)

Emotional branding is commonplace in advertising today, of course—Nike, Starbucks, and Coca-Cola all being obvious examples of that—but when what is being branded is the emotional blueprint one can have to gender, complications arise. And when that gender is seen as being *necessarily* attached to predatory masculinity in order for consumers as being marked by that brand (the very point of successful branding), the complication of *how* and *why* consumers consume the brand must be addressed, as it is in the following paragraphs. *The Vampire Diaries* can be seen as Alloy’s first successful attempt at branding gender normativity across novel and TV formats, with more successful attempts to come (as will be seen in the following chapters) riding the wave of success that *TVD* continues to see.

The Vampire Diaries’ Brand

The characters in these products are all governed by one or more of the seven brand principles

Serena (and the pretty little liars, in Chapter Four) can be the keepers of the rhetoric (however fleeting), the almost entirely female audience can see *that* as being what Alloy stands for, even if the girls do not necessarily know it is Alloy they are consuming. If all three products look and feel the same (and by employing the seven brand principles I have discussed, they do look and feel the same), the female audience will undoubtedly feel that resonance and transcendence.

first mentioned in Chapter One; the most obvious example in *The Vampire Diaries* being the imbedded terror in almost every scene of the series. When this imbeddedness is so often perpetuated, the terror has a way of becoming the fabric of the property, the only way fans are allowed into the narrative. *The Vampire Diaries* has done an extraordinary job of figuring out how much violence a teen television show can get away with, and in so doing Alloy has made that precise level of violence part of their brand. From the very first scene of the pilot episode, *The Vampire Diaries* announced itself as dependent upon extreme and often terrifying acts of violence. In the initial scene of the series, a couple is riding in a car together, listening to music and talking, whereby they are suddenly forced to swerve and come to a stop because there is a figure in the middle of the road, for some unknown reason. Two minutes later, the man in the car is ejected by the shadowed figure and eaten by the shadowed figure who is now revealed to be a vampire, while the driver's girlfriend sits in the car, screaming and clearly terrorized by what she just witnessed. By the third episode of *TVD* (as was seen by the third episode of *Gossip Girl*), it became abundantly clear that the series would readily employ the seven brand principles for which Alloy would come to be known. In *The Vampire Diaries*, the girl is:

1. Sexually deprived: Caroline Forbes is regularly raped and compelled to take part (and enjoy it) by Damon Salvatore. Elena Gilbert is, in Season 3, a victim of the same treatment.
2. Terrorized: in the pilot episode Elena is *introduced* as a character who is afraid to even go outside because of the trauma she has faced, and will continue to face.
3. Highly dependent on a male counterpart for self-actualization: Stefan Salvatore repeatedly tells Elena that he is in Mystic Falls *to take care of her*, and without him Elena will not be safe. Damon repeats this to Elena, but thinks Elena is safe only in the hands of Damon, and against Stefan.
4. Surveilled: Stefan and Damon regularly watch Elena as she sleeps, as a way of protecting her against the other brother.

5. Marked by class/race: Out of all the Alloy properties, *TVD* is the only one to give a woman of color any primary narrative space. Bonnie Gilbert, an African-American witch, makes *every* decision as a way to right the wrongs that Damon Salvatore did to her family.
6. Representative of a nationalist teenage gender identity: Elena Gilbert, similarly to Bella Swan in *Twilight*, is to be consumed as the “every-girl,” the average, mostly clumsy, non-sexually desirable (while being highly sexualized by the men in the show) shell in which the audience can fill with their own personality and desire. The fact that Elena (and Bella) are terrorized (and assumed to deserve such terror, based on their gender) is important because of the role the average girl will play in the homosocial battle between boys.
7. Children acting as adults: Elena’s parents were killed before the narrative even begins, leaving Elena to fend for herself in a world filled with monsters. The periphery characters, Caroline and Bonnie, likewise have parents who are largely absent from the decision making process with which girls must contend.

These seven brand principles are the very lifeblood of the series; they are what make *The Vampire Diaries* (and *Gossip Girl*, as well as *Pretty Little Liars*) compelling. And consumers come back for it more and more, even giving life to a spin-off, *The Originals*, which premiered in the fall of 2013, proving true what Marc Gobe wrote in *Emotional Branding*:

The challenge is to move a brand forward by understanding the consumer’s level of receptivity and sensitivity to the message at a given time and point of contact. In this regard, brands need to transcend a linear, primarily ubiquity-oriented mode of expression to connect with consumers emotionally in different ways at different times during the brand experience. (Gobe 189-190)

What this means for *The Vampire Diaries*, as well as for *Gossip Girl*⁷⁷ and for *Pretty Little Liars*⁷⁸ is that Alloy is leveraging each series with the other to further saturate the teen media marketplace with

⁷⁷ As discussed in the previous chapter.

⁷⁸ Which will be discussed in the chapter that follows this one.

the seven brand principles that are consistently reproduced⁷⁹ in the narrative spaces of Alloy's media properties, giving Alloy a level of brand equity that (1) has never before been seen in teen media, and (2) transfers the identity of the brand, Alloy, onto the teenager(s) seen inside the products⁸⁰ of the brand's control. What ends up happening as a result of this, as I have mentioned throughout these chapters, is that the teenager on TV is no longer just a teenager but an *Alloy teenager*.

***The Vampire Diaries* and Gendered Fandom**

What Alloy has done, with *Gossip Girl* and *The Vampire Diaries*, is lay the framework for an Alloy-governed television heritage⁸¹ for the gendered contemporary teenage consumer. That is, the overwhelming female fandom that was already established in the decades-old consumption of the *TVD* book series gave the *TVD* television program a built-in audience. And along with the global success of the *Twilight Saga*, the modern day vampire was now in the hands of the type of company that could give it its proper life; that is, its proper marketing. *The Vampire Diaries* book fandom had been vocal before the television series was even cast, as was evident in the days and weeks leading up to Nina Dobrev being cast as a character without the requisite blond hair of the Elena Gilbert in the books. The website www.vampire-diaries.net was the unofficial official home to the fandom before the television series went into production, and remains the medium to which fandoms of each property can and do find some common ground.

It is important to recognize, though, that the fandoms see themselves as separate but equally in some control of the life of the narrative. This is, of course, the design of Alloy Entertainment and the writers of each segment of the property—the books and television show are just enough alike to keep

⁷⁹ In different but similar ways.

⁸⁰ TV programming, book series'.

⁸¹ In *Rerun Nation* Derek Kompare writes of television heritage as serving “as a base of legitimacy for television, a mechanism for locating television—series, genres, stars, policies, stations, logos, advertisements, or viewing experiences—in American history and memory; i.e., as something worthy of attention, preservation, and tribute” (Kompare 102). I make use of the term to describe Alloy's unprecedented redefinition of the teenager on television and couching that definition within their own marketing business model. In other words, the heritage on television that Alloy is constructing has, in my opinion, altered teen television forever. In so doing, Alloy has designed a new kind of teen television genre, which will be explored further in the coming pages.

each segment relatively comfortable and appeased. In *Love You to Death, Volume III*, Crissy Calhoun addresses the fandom when she quotes Julie Plec (co-creator of the TV series) as saying, “The books fans have, for two and a half years, been screaming at the top of their lungs, ‘Where’s Meredith? Where’s Meredith?’ (70), Meredith being immensely liked and important to the narrative of the book series and all but absent in the TV series. The television show *cannot* be a true adaptation of the books if Alloy has designs on, which it does, selling the books and show as both independent from, and dependent upon, the other. On “the Meredith question,” Calhoun goes on to write,

That was the question heard ‘round Vampire Diaries book fandom when the principal cast of the *TVD* pilot was announced in 2009, sans one central character from L.J. Smith’s original book series. Meredith Sulez, one of Elena Gilbert’s best friends, was cut from the pilot script in the interest of streamlining an already overwhelming roster of characters, but fans of the books couldn’t let go of their cool, practical, witty favorite, and clung tight to Julie Plec’s promise that Meredith would make her way to Mystic Falls eventually. Fans who made their entry into *Vampire Diaries* via the television series may not understand what all the fuss is about, but imagine the show without, say, Caroline or Bonnie...Meredith’s absence from our television screens has long been a glaring omission for many a book fan. Her exclusion was the one change in the page-to-screen translation that truly hurt. (quoted in Calhoun, *Love You to Death Volume III* 71)

Clearly a fan of the property, Calhoun is readily seen here as herself being part owner of the narrative, part owner of the decision making process of character inclusion. So, when Meredith Fell was introduced as a tangential and altogether unimportant character in the third season, it seems that the book fandom was appeased. They felt that the pressure they put on the creators of the show was their own success as a fan entity. Never mind that Meredith in the television series did not resemble Meredith of the books in any recognizable way; fans of the character were given validation when Julie Plec kept her promise to include a rather nebulous female shell that went by the name Meredith, perhaps assuaging an ancillary arm of the female fandom by making room for a character that didn’t

necessarily embody what is read as normative femininity.

That is, Meredith doesn't fit the mold of Alloy's televisual aim—their seven brand principles; but by merely including a character called Meredith into the body of the television program, Plec and the writers could keep a forgotten piece (in the TV show) of the fandom happy. Book fans had now made their way into the television canon of *TVD*. That is how fandom works, and that is also the very failure of fandom. That is, as Henry Jenkins writes in the seminal study of media fandom, *Textual Poachers*,

While fans display a particularly strong attachment to popular narratives, act upon them in ways which make them their own property in some senses, they are also acutely and painfully aware that those fictions do not belong to them and that someone else has the power to do things to those characters that is in direct contradiction to the fans' own cultural interests.

Sometimes, fans respond to this situation with a worshipful deference to media producers, yet, often they respond with hostility and anger against those who have the power to “retool” their narratives into something radically different from that which the audience desires. (Jenkins 24)

What Jenkins is saying here is that fandoms work as organisms that galvanize themselves around a perceived narrational input to the body of production in question. Fandoms succeed, it can be surmised, when they feel a certain level of communication between owner and consumer.

The Vampire Diaries' fandom is unprecedented in its inter-connected relationship to the show's creators and writers. There are innumerable fan sites⁸² and fan communities that are seemingly given access to where Plec and Williamson take the narrative. See the above discussion of Meredith as a character as but one example. Unlike fandoms of the past, social media machines like Facebook and Tumblr are portals through which fans of media products follow and speak directly to the people with direct access to the products in question. Also unlike fandoms of the past, *The Vampire Diaries* fandom is one made up almost entirely by girls, which allows the fandom to take on a gendered

⁸² www.vampire-diaries.net; www.vampirediariesweb.com; www.the-vampirediaries.com; www.thevampirediariesfansite.net; www.thevampirediariescanada.com; www.damonandelena.com; www.vampirediariesonline.com to name a few.

identity unregulated by the rules of fandoms past (those rules being set and governed by men). So, when those with actual access to the narrative speak back to the fandom, taking care to answer their questions and give validation to their worries, the fandom is appeased. It is how fandom works, and it is very beneficial to Alloy because the flow of rhetoric between creator and consumer is seemingly open—growing the fandom more and more and creating marketing opportunities that would not exist if not for this inter-connectivity. And as was discussed before, fan sites like www.vampire-diaries.net were established years before the television show was even an idea, so the property had a built-in fandom for Alloy and The CW to use in order to gauge the potential success of future production sites. Kimberly McMahon-Coleman goes on to write,

This kind of fandom, according to Ruthie Howard from www.vampirediaries.com, is “like no other. We have all become very close via Twitter. Also, having the connection with the cast and crew has added to our experiences in ways you can’t imagine. They make us feel a part of the show.” The writers and fans of the show include what they term “shout-outs” to fans of the books, as when they borrowed the name of Mrs. Flowers (a significant character in the novels, for the keeper of a boarding house where Katherine was staying in Mystic Falls), or in the use of one of L.J. Smith’s book titles, “The Return,” for the first episode of Season Two. These “moments” are also circulated within both the book and television branches of the fandom via Twitter. In an ironic variation of the shout-out, the characters also use modern means of technology within the show’s storylines, as when Elena uses text messaging to convey information by a means that is beyond the enhanced hearing of vampires, or when Caroline asks whether Bonnie’s description of Damon as “Older Sexy Danger Guy” is an “official Witch Twitter tweet.” (McMahon-Coleman 180)

This kind of narrative sharing is perfunctory at best; but the ways in which fandoms operate make that connection the only thing necessary to appease the large and galvanized organism with designs on becoming part of the story. It doesn’t take much; that is clear. What the fandom seems to miss, though, is that they are in no way a part of what is happening to the substance of the show.

This is by Alloy's design, it seems; their bottom-line is fans and how those fans can be worked into the marketing and merchandising of the property. This mirrors quite explicitly how the female characters are treated within the narrative space of *The Vampire Diaries*; that is, the larger institutional body (boys/men) is defined by the girls/women around which the narrative is centered. As stated before, the fandom of *TVD*, seen most actively in social media sites, is almost entirely comprised of female fans, many of whom socially gather while the show is happening, taking part in the ongoing conversation about the property. These female fans, then, are used as cogs by which Alloy can determine the success of its narrative decisions, a decidedly masculine form of media norming. If fans feel like they are even tangentially involved, Alloy can count that as a win for both media product and fans of it. Camille Bacon Smith writes of this type of fandom that, "production is shared, and members of the community of insiders involved in the industry know who is creatively responsible for its parts" (Bacon-Smith 57).

But in *The Vampire Diaries*, production is not shared. By opening up inter-connected avenues of communication, Alloy Entertainment has all but stopped the original production of material (fanfiction) because fans feel as if they are part of the show. Julie Plec regularly tweets back to fans, and there is a very busy live Twitter conversation each Thursday night when the show airs with fans and creators equally taking part. When the fandom's voice is appeased, the fandom feels as if their job is done; but when that job is revealed to be nothing more than a few "shout-outs" within the web of the series' narrative, how much say is the fandom actually having? Not much of a say at all. For Alloy, though, it doesn't seem to matter. The marketing opportunities in this kind of fan-generated communication process is precisely how a corporation creates brand-equity, the very point of a successful brand mission.

When the brand is building this equity through the assumed ownership of the property's representation of gender, masculinity, terror, etc., *with girls*, we are no longer merely dealing with a product—we are dealing with the branding of an abstraction, and that is Alloy's success: the use-value of female fans in the determination of what does and does not work, making the female fandom

believe they have some semblance of control (as Elena believes she does in *TVD*), all the while using that assumed control to *limit* the control fans (and Elena) assume they have.⁸³ The female fandom is all in because they feel they are part of the show's narrative direction. In other words, with the characters of Damon and Stefan especially, Alloy Entertainment, The CW, and Warner Brothers all mutually benefit when the branding of the male character as a body, a person, is privileged rather than the branding of the property of *The Vampire Diaries* as a whole product. Fans buy Damon, not *TVD*. Of this branding of bodies, Jennifer Wingard writes, "much like branding we see in advertising, branding of others creates an association with a "lifestyle" and corporate agenda" (Wingard 9). The "lifestyle" of its male protagonists is what Alloy is seen in the selling of *The Vampire Diaries* as a product—the corporate agenda being Alloy as a production site of normative teenage gender play seen in the cross-format marketing of Alloy's various properties. In the *TVD* universe, terroristic masculinity is the only choice the audience has in the consumption of the material—a type of masculinity that is produced with the seeming help of the fans who buy the merchandise. Wingard goes on to write that,

Brands and emotions are highly contextual and dependent on exchange. They do not have inherent value in themselves or when housed within a body. Rhetoric and branding, like emotions, gain surplus value through their specific cultural exchanges. As such, certain emotions/brands/rhetoric(s) build in value, some decrease in value, and others remain constant.

(10)

Through the mutual exchange of assumed narrational control of *The Vampire Diaries* character

⁸³ It should be noted that the kind of surveillance over the fandom maintained by Alloy is related to, but not the same as, the surveillance described in Chapter Two, and that will be described further in Chapter Four. While Alloy and their partners keep a close eye on the activity of each show's fandom, allowing and disallowing certain types of activity, the surveillance of the fans is not necessarily intended to *mark* the fans as being constituted by any kind of shared identity. The fans, meanwhile, do not necessarily even know that they are being watched and controlled by Alloy and their partners, thus the assumption that some fans have that they are active contributors to narrative decisions. The surveillance in *Gossip Girl* and as will be seen in Chapter Four with *Pretty Little Liars*, on the other hand, is absolutely used as a mechanism to mark and identity those who are being watched as constituted by a shared group of traits—the seven brand principles discussed throughout this dissertation.

placement and ownership, fans rightly feel as if their collective creativity is being validated by the owner of the material—this feeling of validation opens up marketing and merchandising opportunities for the owner, Alloy Entertainment, whereby the underlying message of the property is lost in the branding of it. In other words, *TVD* is not so much a book series or television program as it is a web of products that Alloy is asking its audience to consume, over which they assume they have more than a modicum of control. To further the cross-format marketing of the books and television series as two separate but equal artifacts, HarperTeen, writes Kimberly McMahon-Coleman,

produced and marketed a new *Vampire Diaries* sequence, *Stefan's Diaries*, in which an uncredited author rewrites the vampires' backstories in order to align them with the narrative arc within the alternative universe depicted in the TV series. L.J. Smith, Julie Plec and Kevin Williamson are cited as "consultants" on the cover, but copyright is allocated to "Alloy Entertainment and L.J. Smith." The growing disconnect between stakeholders, CW, Outerbanks Entertainment, HarperTeen, Alloy Entertainment, the fans, and Smith herself about the direction of the narrative ultimately led to Smith being dropped by HarperTeen in February 2011. Controversially, future *Vampire Diaries* novels will be written by another author, although Smith believes that some of her recent writing involving the characters will appear in the next installment. (McMahon-Coleman 181)

It is hard to keep track of who owns what, which is exactly what benefits Alloy Entertainment the most. When various writers, owners, and fans believe that their own stakes in the narrative are being addressed and made valid, the creativity amongst them will continue to thrive. R.J. Connell writes in *Masculinities*,

Together with the neo-liberal market agenda in public politics, which has hammered the remains of the postwar welfare state and re-drawn the boundaries of the public and private sectors, this has created an environment in which individualism as an ideology has performed an astonishing comeback. Regarded thirty years ago as intellectually obsolete, a celebration of the entrepreneurial individual is currently the centerpiece of Western political culture. An

individualized version of ‘equal opportunity’ not only fits with this celebration, it helps to give individualism its current legitimacy. (Connell 254)

This is precisely the concept Alloy is employing in the marketing of hyper-masculine and predatory Damon Salvatore. Alloy is essentially selling to the (mostly female) consumer the idea of success as embodied by the most individualistic character in the books and TV series—Damon is regularly seen as the outsider without the desire to have help from the other characters. He is capitalistically American, the old-West cowboy in a contemporary American high school setting. He doesn’t set the tone of the narrative, nor is the story necessarily about him alone; but what he does is give strength to the notion that to do things your way is to do them the right away. This in turn, makes the shared ownership of the narrative by writers and fans feel normalized. They root for the proud masculine individual by adding to the success of that individual through their own narrative desires.

In other words, Alloy makes Damon (as they did Dan in *Gossip Girl*) the victor because (1) they have a stake in marketing that image of a man/boy, (2) the audience in turn sees this marketing and takes part in the buying of it, because it’s there, (3) the audience feels a part of the production process because Alloy creates a space for that process through social media and inter-connected sites of media consumption.

This type of fandom continues to reproduce Alloy’s construction of gender in that the girls taking part in the socially shared sites of fandom are sharing in the consumption of morality as being written by Alloy. Girls are forced to see themselves (and thus, help in the marketing of themselves) as cogs in the machine of homosocial regulation (in the narrative), which in turn helps perpetuate the (real-life) cog-like nature that fans embody within the space of this passive fandom.⁸⁴ This, in turn, forces onto the buyer a relationship with the character being sold. When buyers mark themselves as being a part of Team Damon, for example, they are marking themselves as being part of what that team stands for—that is, being a part of the triangulating relationship that allows for domestic

⁸⁴ By passive I mean that the girls taking part in the social media-scape do not have any material control over the narrative, even though they may think they do.

violence, rape, rage, cruelty, etc.—a triangulating relationship that is, of course, highly gendered.

In the fine line Alloy has constructed between the production of art and the consumption of that art's reality on the daily imagination of the audience/perceived creator, the line between fact and fiction becomes blurred at best. Alloy Entertainment is appropriating the immorality that their marketed characters must have in order to remain fully formed into the buying minds of the consumers who think they are a part of the construction of that immoral character. The construction and perceived ownership is what matters to the fan, not the immorality. The branding of the emotion⁸⁵, not the product. In the following chapter I will further explore how Alloy employs the seven brand signifiers written about in this and the previous chapter to further their own kind of Raymond Williamsonian advertising flow across different channels and different formats to further cement Alloy's place in the televisual heritage that is the contemporary media teenager.

I now turn my attention to Alloy's most socially networked program, *Pretty Little Liars*. Chapter Four will focus on how Alloy and another cable network, ABC Family, add to what is happening presently on The CW to create "relations between things, people, images, texts and physical and informational environments," that gives Alloy the space to "embody the cross-mediality that marks informational capital in general" (Arvidsson 126). The informational capital that Alloy is generating through the shared consumption of their various properties, as will be seen in Chapter Four, is seen through the ways in which Alloy uses the seven brand principals I have discussed through the first three chapters, together in such a way as to fully form the modern-day teenagers on television as being, rather than just cogs in the triangulating relationship between men, objects and subjects of normative (and invisible) terror inflicted upon girls by almost *all* boys and by almost *all* girls, as well as by the company itself. In Chapter Four I will discuss how Alloy Entertainment has, in *Pretty Little Liars*, turned itself into the same kind of invisible terrorist that directs the fictional narrative of the show.

⁸⁵ The marketing of *feeling*, not product, as written about in this chapter.

Four

The Never Ending Math Equation Turning the Soap-Opera Into an Ellipsis of Terror One Little Liar at “A” Time

In Chapter One I discussed how Alloy Entertainment first employed their seven brand principles within and across different media formats (book to TV adaptation) to begin to build an identity within the ongoing evolution of teen television, particularly in how the teen girl is read and consumed. *Gossip Girl* was the first Alloy property to see the teen girl as marked by her brokenness and highly desirable of being fixed by the boy(s) that regularly watched, and helped guide, the teen girl’s (mostly) every move. *Gossip Girl* did this by having an anonymous watcher document every single thing that every single character in the narrative did and could do. This watching came to stand for what the characters in *Gossip Girl* (the female characters, but the peripheral male characters as well) *wanted* to do, because it turns out the characters *wanted* to be watched. *Gossip Girl* gave way to *The Vampire Diaries*, and in Chapter Two I wrote about how the broken and watched teenage girl who was desirous of such watching was inserted into the homosocial space that the boys who watched (in the guise of protection) the broken girl as a way for the boys who watched her to prove to her, the watched and broken girl, that they, the watchers, were the right kind of boy to be watching. In this chapter I will further my discussion on Alloy’s seven brand principles as seen in *Pretty Little Liars*, Alloy’s most fluid property⁸⁶, where the teen girls in the show are not just terrorized (though they are terrorized, very terrorized), but terrorized by *almost every single character on the show*, including each other. The pretty little liars on *PLL* start out broken (as in and on *GG* and *TVD*), and are forced to assume that that brokenness will be used as an excuse⁸⁷ to literally *hunt* them—the hunt of the liars is the guiding and consistent narrative line across the books and across the seasons; and it

⁸⁶ *Pretty Little Liars* is the only Alloy property that continues to publish new young adult literature by the original author (Sara Shepherd) while the television series is ongoing. As will be discussed in this chapter, this fluidity allows *PLL* a heretofore unseen saturation space in teen media—new books and new seasons of the show populate the teen marketplace almost year round.

⁸⁷ By dozens of characters in the book and on the show, children and adults included. What is perhaps most important in *PLL* is the fact that there is seemingly *no end* to the hunt. This will be discussed at length in what follows.

is the hunt of the liars that makes *PLL* as an Alloy property perhaps its most pernicious one in that the terrorism of the girls is done so cavalierly and so normatively that they themselves *become* terrorists *to protect* others from being terrorized.

This chapter will explore these themes in detail, culminating in how *Pretty Little Liars* furthers the Alloy brand and the very important extension the brand has in its relationship to fandom. This chapter will also show how Alloy the product, as well as Alloy the production parent corporation, has constructed characters in *Pretty Little Liars* in its own image; that is, the all-knowing, all-seeing eye of “A,” is allegorical to the way in which Alloy runs its company. I will demonstrate how Alloy Entertainment keeps very tight control of and governance over the property of *Pretty Little Liars* (book and TV) in a way that mirrors quite explicitly how the invisible terrorist (“A” and the “A-Team”, to be discussed throughout) in the books and show keeps control of and governance over the girls s/he terrorizes. I will also detail precisely how Alloy keeps a similar kind of control over the extratextual world of *Pretty Little Liars*—the merchandise⁸⁸ and also the fandom, extending the explanation first mentioned in Chapter Three with the fandom of *The Vampire Diaries*. With *Pretty Little Liars*, Alloy Entertainment⁸⁹ has created a new kind of teen genre on TV, one that is highly dependent upon generic and formulaic soap opera tropes and a cyclical narrative for what seems to be the express purpose of further marketing the Alloy Entertainment brand. That is, Alloy has imbedded its marketing mission⁹⁰ within the narrative of the show so that to consume the show and its ancillary products has come to mean openly rooting for the predation of the girls, and by extension openly rooting for Alloy Entertainment as a corporation. These themes will be discussed in this chapter as well.

***Pretty Little Liars* and the Birth of a Narrative Machine**

The simplicity of the *Pretty Little Liars* narrative can be seen throughout the seasons, and in just

⁸⁸ Especially in how and when the books and new TV season(s) coincide in a way that further saturates the teen marketplace with the Alloy brand, now in a year-round loop.

⁸⁹ And by extension ABC Family.

⁹⁰ By using the seven brand principles discussed throughout these chapters.

about every episode of the series. It is a hunt. The hunt leads to fear, to terror, to misery, back to terror, back to fear. The hunt that leads to the hunt for the hunter⁹¹ is what moves the episodes and seasons along to a degree that if a storyline is not directly connected to the hunt(s), that storyline immediately becomes of secondary importance.⁹² In other words, in *Pretty Little Liars*, everything is related to the terror that comes from the young girl(s) being (oftentimes violently) hunted by one or more people who will not stop hunting or watching the girl(s) until, it can be assumed, the show gets canceled⁹³--it is a machine⁹⁴ that simply works too well to stop. In Season Three of *Pretty Little Liars*, Spencer Hastings was admitted to a mental hospital because she was sad. Spencer (played by Troian Bellisario), by far the most stable and upright girl in the large stable of girls constructed by Alloy Entertainment, was sad because she saw what she thought was the dead body of her boyfriend, Toby Cavanaugh (Keegan Allen), lying face down in the woods of Rosewood, Pennsylvania. No one in town believed her, so they locked her up at Radley Sanitarium (after threatening to actually lock her up in jail for a crime the audience was left to ponder). This same sanitarium once held Mona Vanderwaal (Janel Parrish)—a girl who committed unthinkable crimes for two years (murder, kidnapping, hit-and-run, theft, terroristic threats, amongst others) against seemingly the entire town of Rosewood as the first of many “A”s, perhaps because her best friend Hanna Marin (played by Ashley Benson) wouldn’t go to the mall with her as often as Mona might have liked.

In perhaps the most telling of all quotes from the series, in Season One and again in Season Three, Spencer Hastings utters the words, “You know what I say about hope: it breeds eternal misery.” This is *Pretty Little Liars*, a teen television show not for the squeamish, based on a series of

⁹¹ The liars hunting for “A” and the “A-Team” members, all the while being violently hunted by “A,” those who could be “A,” those who definitely have been “A,” and those who might become “A” or part of “A”’s team, which includes virtually every character on the show, including the little liars themselves.

⁹² These kinds of secondary storylines can in themselves be quite predatory—I will discuss this further in what follows, particularly in relation to an episode where Aria is the victim of statutory rape by her teacher, a relationship that in future episodes and seasons will help grow and divide the fandom in a profound way.

⁹³ There is no reason to believe that the show will be canceled and/or that the writers and producers will decide that it is time to end it. I discuss why in the following pages.

⁹⁴ Narrative machine and marketing machine.

books by Sara Shepard that may not ever end, where the good girls must be bad and the bad girls must be very, very bad. Otherwise they'll all die. As I will explain in this chapter, the way in which various "A"s are constructed, repeated, and treated mirrors the business model Alloy has put in place in all their properties, most specifically *Pretty Little Liars*.

Alloy is a company that is clearly demonstrating a masculinist rhetoric⁹⁵ by imbedding an intertextual world, governed by Alloy, that depends upon an invisible and terroristic watcher⁹⁶ to give that rhetoric meaning. Inside the narrative space of the program, "A" and various members of the "A-Team" push the idea of a terroristic watcher first seen in *Gossip Girl* to, rather than just a virtual (turned material) gossipier that largely controlled the lives of teenagers, a place with actual violence with dire results. The girls in the show make every single decision in their lives based on what "A" (or the "A-Team") might do, therefore coming to depend upon "A" to, in a way, give their lives meaning⁹⁷. Outside the narrative space of the program, Alloy Entertainment uses a similar model of invisible and terroristic governance in its procedures of *Pretty Little Liars* property production. I will return to this shortly.

At the end of the first arc⁹⁸ of the television show, Season Two, Episode Twenty-Five ("UnmAsked"), the first "A" is revealed to be Mona Vanderwaal. After seeing a psychiatrist (Dr. Anne), Mona is said to suffer from living a life of hyperreality, Dr. Anne stating that hyperreality is "a state in which an individual gets satisfaction from simulating reality rather than engaging with it." In "Jean Baudrillard: Hyperreality and Implosion," Andrew Robinson discusses this type of spectacle-driven life from which Mona (and the rest of the "A"s) will forever suffer when he writes,

⁹⁵ One that normalizes violence by presenting female agency as being powerful *only* because of its masculine traits.

⁹⁶ This idea will be explored at length shortly.

⁹⁷ Due to the ubiquity of "A".

⁹⁸ The *Pretty Little Liars* book series follows a format whereby every eight books sees the introduction and revelation of a new "A" or characters acting as a part of the "A-Team," whereas *Pretty Little Liars* the television shows follows a similar format every two seasons. In the books, "A" is introduced in the first book within the arc, revealed at the end of roughly each eighth book. In the show, "A" is introduced at the beginning the first season and revealed at the end of the second season. This format is followed consistently by the property.

The media also injects people with a vaccine of unthreatening, mediated violence which keeps fatality at bay by displaying its signs. This vaccine covers up the fragility of consumerism. It restores grandeur and sublimity to the everyday by making it seem under threat. At the same time, the media encourages a sense of security. Even when it presents violence or disaster, the fact of not ‘being there’ while watching it makes it reinforce security. Through the media, we never reach the real event, but only its informational stand-in, which is open to endless interpretation... Viewers have to unconsciously decode the stories, and as a result, internalise the code. Behind the shifting images lies a conception of a world which can be seen, divided into segments, and read in signs. (Robinson)

This hyperreal media existence is precisely what Alloy has done in the branding of its image onto the bodies of its characters; and by extension, onto the bodies of its teenage audience members. The violence in *Pretty Little Liars*, for the four little liars, is seen by them to be ineffective in the possible changes they *should* be able to make with their lives. For example, if Aria was *actually* scared of being hurt because of a relationship with an older man, she would immediately break off the relationship. The shippers, though, won’t let that happen.

Viewers who value the Aria/Ezra (Ezria) relationship make it clear, through social interaction, that they value that relationship. Far be it for the writers to rock this boat, so they let the relationship continue. At the same time, Aria *acts as if* she should be terrified, so the audience members watching this acted position of terror think of it as probably real. What the audience also knows is that the Aria/Ezra dynamic is one of the more popular relationships on the show; so to continue getting its high audience numbers who love Team Ezria, the writers of the show must keep Team Ezria in place, at least insofar as the long term question of the relationship is put to order. They might break up for a moment, but they will certainly be teased as getting back together in the marketing space of the show.

It is how Alloy works. Nothing is real, it is only hyperreal. The girls on *Pretty Little Liars* know that the violence will not necessarily touch them, because they are the ones keeping the show going; they are the meta-commentary for Alloy’s success. What this allows the girls on the show to

do is take even more dangerous chances, like covering up the murder of a cop. In the outing of Mona's "A" as suffering from a hyperreal existence, Alloy Entertainment was giving its audience the blueprint, so to speak, on how the company is able to thrive in this saturated media marketplace. In the same way that a company that manufactures and sells rape whistles relies upon rapists to gauge the success of their company ("Without rapists, who's gonna buy your whistles?" Bo Burnham asks), Alloy Entertainment *must* have their audience find real common ground with the evil they see in front of them each week. Murder *must* happen for there to be a show. Audiences obviously want this show to continue, with the knowledge that murder is the imperative. Thus, we root for the murderer, because without the murderer, who's going to buy the text that privileges murder?

But when there is no other choice by which to identify oneself, what happens to the real psychology of the real girls watching the fake program while talking to the real girls who play the fake girls in this heavily-mediated landscape of fake violence—violence that must be assumed to be real violence so that the fake violence the real girls playing fake girls are pretending to take part in on the fake TV show is going to have any real meaning to the real girls watching if the real girls watching the fake violence are going to have anything to talk about with the real girls so that they'll all have something in common in the real lives they share in the mutually marketed (via tweets, re-tweets, and in-text directive teases of hash tagging) virtual relationship encouraged by the company in charge of it all? The answer seems to be simple: nothing happens. We just keep watching, because the only thing that is of importance on and in *Pretty Little Liars*, is the A-storyline: who killed Alison, who is "A"?

***Pretty Little Liars* and the Invisible Terrorist**

As mentioned previously, *Pretty Little Liars* is a media property that has, as the heart of its narrative, an anonymous watcher (or group of watchers) who go by the moniker "A." "A" is the thing/character/characters that hold the entire story together in that each character that is not "A" is (almost) entirely constituted by what "A" will inevitably do to those who are not "A." Spencer, one of the pretty little liars, in fact, becomes part of the "A-Team" in order to help the other little liars be

safe from the terror that other “A”s can and will do to them; terror is just what “A” does. The audience, as well as those who are not “A” regularly discover (within the formulaic arc of each two seasons) who “A” is, only to find out in the next season (after the arc is over) that there is another “A” lurking. There is always an “A,” and we never actually get (to this point) to the bottom of *why* “A” is motivated to hunt, because *why* is not the point. The point is the hunt, and only the hunt. The threat of the non-visible “A” is far more important than who “A” actually is as a visible threat, largely because the non-visible “A” is how Alloy has decided to market the show—using #WhoIsA? And #WorldWarA as desirable trending topics in the social fan space outside the narrative space of programming.

The privileging of a non-visible “A” is also apparent in how Alloy turns those characters who could seemingly *never* be “A” into “A” at their whim—characters who, mere episodes before, were *hunted violently* by “A”, *become* “A” for what appears to be nebulous logic.⁹⁹ The book series and television series align in the desire to figure out who “A” is, but only rarely align with who “A” is suspected to be¹⁰⁰. What this allows Alloy to do is to keep the reader and watcher separate but equal, able to differentiate the show from the books in the recognition of a different “A,” but keep the formats closely aligned by acknowledging the fact that “A” is the only thing that keeps the series going, independent of textual format (book or show). The non-“A” vs. “A” storyline becomes pervasive in the search for answers to “Who is A?”¹⁰¹, “A” being recognized as the threat that will

⁹⁹ Toby, Spencer, Mr. Montgomery, and Ezra for example, were all regularly hunted by “A” for mistakes (defined by “A”) they made in the past before they *turned into* “A” or were made to look like they were a part of the “A-Team”, sometimes only episodes later.

¹⁰⁰ For example, in the television series Toby is a profoundly important member of the “A-Team” (until he reveals he is only pretending to be part of the “A-Team”), while in the book series Toby commits suicide in book two (*Flawless*), and is ancillary to the narrative. Likewise in the television series, Ezra is revealed to be “A” (Season Four, “Now You See Me, Now You Don’t”), while in the book series Ezra is not important to the narrative after book three (*Perfect*). In the third arc of the book series, two characters never seen in the television show as of this writing are suspected to be “A”: Gayle and Kelsey. In both products, book and TV, the character of Alison is suspected of being closely connected to, or indicted as, *the* “A,” thus creating a common thread between the book and television narratives.

¹⁰¹ While keeping in mind that the unanswerability of this question is what is privileged even more.

always be the governing terroristic force in the narrative. Of the assemblage of terrorism, Jennifer Wingard writes that

The “war on terror” has been defined since September 11, 2001, as a state of ever-present non visible threat, which creates uncertainty, fear, and uneasiness within the body politic. The rhetoric of terror and the branding of threats therein create a need for citizens to be always aware of what cannot be identified or seen. In fact, this rhetoric creates a notion of a citizen who functions not only as a consumer of media, goods, and ideology, but also a citizen who consumes information about who and what they should be vigilant against. (Wingard 58)

In *Pretty Little Liars*, the citizens *within* the programming (the pretty little liars) are always, by necessity, aware of who may be “A,” who “A” was (within previous arcs), who “A” might be (in the new arc), and generally that everyone could be “A” (marketed by the show with #EveryoneIsA). The threat of “A”’s past terror, present terror, and future terror is what gets consumed, essentially, by the main and periphery characters in the show—the characters, at least, who have no association with “A,” until they do (and they almost always do). What happens because of the invisibility of a single, recognizable terrorist watcher (*one* “A”) is that everyone becomes a watcher, and everyone becomes watched, creating a terroristic rhetoric that is inescapable. “The presence of invisibility and the need that it creates to expose the enemy is important to note” (58) writes Wingard, and it is an idea applicable to *Pretty Little Liars* in that “A” as the enemy is always present yet never present, creating a need¹⁰² and desire to expose the enemy, all the while knowing the exposure of him/her/it will essentially be fruitless and never-ending because the terror is, not a single or group of actual terrorists, but rather the *rhetoric* of terrorism, the brandedness of it. As Jennifer Wingard goes on to write, “it is about protecting us all from the terrors that lurk everywhere” (92), rather than the actual terrorists committing the terror—because the terrorists are everywhere. Alloy can make it clear that

¹⁰² By the characters, as well as by the audience watching the characters.

“A”¹⁰³ is not an individual, but rather a representation of some team doing the work of an invisible (and never known) individual¹⁰⁴ and therefore less personally responsible but instead agents of a much larger (and difficult to understand, due to the size of the threat and of the team) force that seemingly controls them.

The Allying of Text, Book and Television

Sara Shepard¹⁰⁵ turned to writing fiction after working as a political journalist for years after graduating college, “until the events of 9/11 forced her to look at her life” (Spencer 11). It is no surprise, then, that *PLL* is a series of books that is heavily reliant on the internal and external terror that has been so imbedded in the consciousness of virtually every American since that fateful day. It is a book series¹⁰⁶ and television show that seems to be quite simple when viewed from afar—four

¹⁰³ As well as make it clear that they too are an invisible threat, as will be discussed in detail in the following pages.

¹⁰⁴ Because the promise is that we *will* get to the bottom of this, sometime.

¹⁰⁵ The writer of *Pretty Little Liars*, Sara Shepard, had a sister who worked for Alloy Entertainment. That’s how Sara got the job to write *Pretty Little Liars* in the winter of 2004. The story goes, as told by Liv Spencer in *Rosewood Confidential*, that Shepard crashed the Alloy Christmas party and was shortly thereafter commissioned to write a six-novel YA series about “a girl who is married into the Yakuza (the Japanese Mafia) and must train as a samurai to protect the people she loves” (Spencer 11-12). In 2008 the books were adapted into a miniseries for ABC Family—and thus, a partnership was formed. This is not to say that Shepard was not qualified to write YA fiction, or fiction of any sort—she received her MFA from Brooklyn College under the tutelage of Pulitzer Prize winning novelist Michael Cunningham (writer of *The Hours*) (Spencer)—but it certainly brings up questions about the vetting process Alloy Entertainment employs in the farming out of their properties. It bears repeating—Sara Shepard’s sister *worked for the parent company* that was now paying a writer who had very little publishing experience. In fact, the reason Alloy has cited for commissioning Shepard to pen the *Pretty Little Liars* book franchise was because of mere circumstance:

When the company discovered [Shepard] had grown up along the Pennsylvania Main Line (the towns along the train route of Philadelphia) and knew a thing or two about the lives of the east coast elite, they realized they might have a good match for a new idea they’d been developing, one they described as *Desperate Housewives* for teens. (12)

¹⁰⁶ More than any of the other Alloy properties, *Pretty Little Liars* is a book based narrative, the television adaptation (relatively) closely allying with the books’ pace and character development. Unlike *The Vampire Diaries*, *PLL* is a franchise that keeps the creators of the television show in close relationship with the creators of the book series. Sara Shepard regularly visits the set of the television series, and was seen as a character in an episode from Season One. This was not at all the case with *The Vampire Diaries*, and it creates an interesting dynamic as it relates to how the books and television series are marketed by Alloy as combined sites of production, so to speak. And while the book series, first published in 2006 with the eponymous novel *Pretty Little Liars*, garnered its fair share of fans that were marked with some of the more obvious signs of fandom as described in the

girls, Aria Montgomery, Spencer Hastings, Hanna Marin, and Emily Fields have just lost their best friend, Alison DiLaurentis, in a mysterious disappearance and assumed death (they can't find the body for a whole season/one whole book). The girls then begin to receive text messages from an anonymous source who goes by the letter "A," who threatens to reveal their deepest and most revealing secrets (think the *Saw* movie franchise with a few less severed body parts) to the whole town unless the girls promise to shape up and take responsibility for their actions. That's the story, or so it would seem. It is not what it seems. Sara Shepard has described the writing of the books as a sort of math equation of mythological and terroristic proportions, saying,

I outline each book very carefully. Usually, I think about what my aim for the book is concerning the overarching Alison DiLaurentis mystery: what we knew at the beginning, and what we'll know—or think—at the end. From there, I think about the prologue, which is always a shared memory from the past, usually a scene involving Ali. Each girl takes away something a little different from the prologue, and I want to thread this through the book and use the girl's perspective to get a little bit closer to the real truth about what happened to Ali. And then I think about the girls' front stories—often having to do with love, fractured relationships, or family troubles—and how A might use their problems to his or her best advantage. It's difficult to keep straight, but it's my favorite and most rewarding part of writing the series. (quoted in Spencer 13-14)

Difficult to keep straight is an understatement. And this is not Shepard's fault, nor is it the fault of the television writers and producers. In a conversation I had with Alloy executive Bob Levy at the

previous chapter, it will be important to remember that this is a franchise where the books depend upon the television series, and vice versa. This is readily apparent as seen in the dates of the book publications (for at least the past three years/six novels), which happen twice a year, once at the beginning of December and once at the beginning of June. The December publication date falls (roughly) three to four weeks before the beginning of the mid-season premiere of the ongoing television season; the June publication date (roughly) two weeks before the premiere of a brand new season. This is not mere coincidence; this is Alloy covering their marketing bases, saturating the market with *Pretty Little Liars* products so that the franchise can be an ongoing text throughout the entire year.

Austin, TX Television Festival and Conference in the summer of 2012, it was made very clear that *no one* knew the success this franchise would have. Levy told me (and this has gone on to become public knowledge, being cited in many different places) that Alloy commissioned Shepard to write four books—“A” would be revealed at the end of the fourth novel. The books sold so well that it was extended to eight—which is not unheard of in publishing, but an interesting forbear of things to come—whereby “A” would now be revealed in the eighth and final book. The final book of the series, *Wanted*, was to be released along with the premiere of the television series in the summer 2007. The television series took off and garnered unprecedented ratings for ABC Family, with the fandom of the book series already in place; so Alloy decided to commission Shepard to write four more novels, to bring the count to twelve. And that would be the end. This was along the same timeframe that the television series was adhering to, originally mapped out as a two-season arc. We are now in season four, and I. Marlene King, executive producer of the television show, has hinted that it might end after season five (when the girls would be going to college), but that it might be better suited for perhaps seven. Sara Shepard has now been commissioned to bring the total number of novels to twenty. So, the task is daunting, and it seems that Alloy is taking its time in ending this ratings giant.

The problem is, of course, that Shepard is placed in the role of having to come up with new stories, new “A(s)”, and a new terrifically complicated mythology that will in some ways help Marlene King and the writers of the television show figure out just what Alloy expects. It should come as no surprise that Bob Levy, by his own admission, has not read a single book in the series. In fact, at the same television festival in Austin, I had to explain to him the way the book series works, which further begs the questions: how much does Alloy know about the properties under their control, how much are they prepare to admit to knowing, and does it even matter? In other words, can Alloy be recognized as a similar (to “A”) invisible yet hypervisible threat to those who think they are in charge of writing the narrative—Sara Shepard (books) and Marlene King (show)? If Shepard was under the assumption that she would be writing a total of four, then eight, and now twenty books,

when if ever is she not under the threat of something new, something unexpected and perhaps not desired? And if Marlene King was under the assumption that there would be five seasons, but based on numbers now maybe seven, the same questions could be asked of her. Alloy Entertainment, for all intents and purposes, is a company that is very much run as a different version of “A;” they are yet another invisible yet highly visible part of some nebulous “A-Team” that seemingly has no end. As helped defined by Alloy, teen television shows are no longer merely quaint (it seems now) stories about teenage life and growing up in the body of a confused boy or girl; but rather they are shows that perpetuate the commercial viability of a marketing corporation that imbeds their own sense of market saturation onto the body of a broken and branded girl, in the guise of the company that will always own the rights to the girl. Teen TV, as evidenced by especially *Pretty Little Liars*, (but also by *Gossip Girl* and *The Vampire Diaries*) has become primarily an advertising arm of an advertising company, all on the backs of the subjects turned objects—the girls in the narrative spaces controlled by Alloy.

***Pretty Little Liars* and the Seven Alloy Principles of Branding**

The advertising method that Alloy uses—whereby the narrative(s) under Alloy’s control *are Alloy’s advertisements for Alloy*—is much easier, as I have discussed throughout these chapters, using common themes and brand principles that are produced and reproduced across platforms¹⁰⁷ and across networks¹⁰⁸ in a way that makes it easy on the audience(s) to recognize the patterning of the girls as being *distinctly* Alloy.

And as discussed at length in previous chapters, Alloy’s three principal properties make it clear that the girls on the show(s) should be recognized as different versions of the same thing: that is, the Alloy teen girl. *Gossip Girl* and *The Vampire Diaries*, as I wrote in Chapters Two and Three, imbedded onto the female lead(s) the seven branded principles that makes the Alloy girl different from any other girl seen in previous incarnations of television. As in those shows, *Pretty Little Liars*

¹⁰⁷ Books/TV seasons.

¹⁰⁸ ABC Family and The CW.

is a program that demonstrates, by the third episode of the first season, how the teen girl starts the narrative with her brokenness. What is different in *PLL* is that not only one, but all of the main characters are equally broken, not because of a rumor that was started based on something she did not do (Serena in *Gossip Girl*), or because of something that happened to her as being conditionally attached to a pathology of trauma-induced depression (Elena on *The Vampire Diaries*), but because of something the girl(s) did on their own, without provocation, that would have been seen in teen television of the past as simply part of being a teenager.

In *Pretty Little Liars*, the seven brand principles are manifest as the girl(s) being:

1. Sexually depraved: Emily is a lesbian. “A” thinks being a lesbian is evil, and so does Emily’s mom. Aria makes out with a boy, who coincidentally turns out to be her teacher (and it could be argued that, because of “A” the terror, Aria and Ezra get closer as a way to help Aria cope with the terror), eventually leading to “The Statutory Rape” episode. “A” assumes that Aria kissing Ezra in the pilot episode is a good time to tell Aria’s mother than Aria’s father cheated on Aria’s mother, eventually resulting in the dissolution of Aria’s family, and Aria’s brother seriously contemplating suicide because of it.
2. Terrorized: Allison Dilaurentis disappears in the pilot episode, assumed to have died (then outed as having died, maybe¹⁰⁹) shortly after the pretty little liars were about to start eighth grade. Subsequent to Allison’s disappearance, “A” makes his/her/its first appearance, sending threatening notes to the little liars and making it clear that they would be forever watched by “A,” leading eventually to murder, attempted murder, suicide, depression, mental hospitals, general mayhem.
3. Highly dependent on a male counterpart for self-actualization: Aria on Ezra (who becomes “A”), Emily and Spencer on Toby (who becomes “A”), Hanna on Caleb (who admitted once to being “A,” though he never was actually “A”).

¹⁰⁹ She was never dead.

4. Surveilled: “A” is the invisible threat from the second scene in the pilot episode through half of the fourth season, bookending each show with some clue that will (we think) lead to a scheme to kill one or all of the pretty little liars (which is “A”’s goal);
5. Marked by class/race: Mona (the first “A”) is, like Dan in *Gossip Girl*, gauche—giving her the only reason she needs to start terrorizing those who are above her class status; Toby (the second “A”) is the same way, as is Ezra (the third “A”).
6. Representative of a nationalist gender identity: all four of the pretty little liars, as mentioned throughout this chapter, are nothing if not the victims of the hunt. They are girls who are, from the second scene of the pilot episode, constituted only by the fear they have of the invisible threat that guides the direction of what they can and cannot do. As in *Gossip Girl* and *The Vampire Diaries*, the teenage girls in *Pretty Little Liars* are *only* and *always* scared of what *will* be done to them. All three shows are consistent in this pattern, and all three shows represent the lead and periphery female characters as being this way. In other words, there is no girl in Alloy’s televisual world that is not governed by her sense of being terrorized.
7. Acting as adults: all of the pretty little liars have parents who are either absent—Emily’s father is rarely home, because he is in the military; Hanna’s father does not live at home because he divorced Hanna’s mother) or who act themselves like children—Hanna’s mother sleeps with a police officer to get Hanna out of a ticket for stealing a pair of sunglasses (the reason Hanna becomes hunted in the first place by “A”) and who also steals tens of thousands of dollars from her place of business to pay rent; Aria’s father sleeps with one of his grad students; Spencer’s father has two illegitimate children (Alison and Jason DiLaurentis), perhaps leading Spencer to also cheat (in school, with her sister’s boyfriend)—Spencer’s cheating being the reason “A” continues to hunt her.

What all of this means is that in *Pretty Little Liars* Alloy Entertainment¹¹⁰ is again imbedding into the narrative space of programming the Alloy-version of the teenage girl. As I discussed in previous chapters, the teen girl on TV is no longer a girl with any kind of recognizable agency and no longer a girl with any kind of relationship to her own uneasy liminal space of teen-hood; rather, she is a girl part and parcel of Alloy's brand mission—that mission being to make it clear that they, Alloy Entertainment, maintain the space of teenage identity formation. If a teen girl is to find any amount of common ground within the spaces of teen media, that common ground can and will be found within the thread of Alloy's brand principles.¹¹¹

***Pretty Little Liars* and its Mathematical Soapiness**

The ways in which Alloy uses its brand principles in all of its properties, but most especially in *Pretty Little Liars*, is in part to create a sense of *expected* emotion, as generated and maintained by Alloy itself in order to further define the type of teenager with which Alloy would have their teen audiences identify. The genre of the soap opera has long depended upon the repeated emotion shared between main and secondary characters as how the genre is in part defined, giving audiences a televisual methodology that is easy to abide by as well as easy to come back to—facilitating the sometimes decade-long run of some soaps. *Pretty Little Liars*, following generic form of the soap, likewise uses emotion (directed by the terror of “A”) to connect characters. This kind of methodology further normalizes terror and normalizes the way in which audiences are allowed into the genre again and again, and allows for a kind of generic symmetry across and between different shows that employ the generic formula. *PLL*, as mentioned earlier, is extremely formulaic in how it is read; and has stuck to this formula exclusively, through three and a half seasons. *Pretty Little Liars*' normalizing formula includes all of the following:

1. Almost every episode (I would estimate close to 90%) begins with the girls (at least three, usually all four) discussing the game plan for what's coming, why they are scared, why they

¹¹⁰ And by extension ABC Family.

¹¹¹ And reproduced in the three shows/book series' I have discussed throughout these chapters.

- should be* scared, how they are tired of being terrorized and then falsely accused of being complicit in the terror of others, the ineptitude of their mission(s), and usually a quip or two about sex or the mall—to cut the tension of the murder and/or mayhem that is coming.
2. Starting with Episode Four of Season One, (“Can You Hear Me Now?”) and continuing in just about every episode thereafter, some unknown member of the growing “A-Team” ends the episode with a kind of ellipsis, what the audience might expect for the following episode. The figure is usually shown as a gloved abstraction, a red coat, or a black hoodie, sometimes drinking scotch next to a body-bag, sometimes checking into a hotel, sometimes eating popcorn as he/she watches the little liars (in real time, assumedly via some streaming video technology) get further terrorized, etc. By the following episode, though, this narrative ellipsis is never even alluded to. It is simply washed away. And the ellipsis in each episode is compelling—it is safe to assume that a good number of viewers tune into the show for that singular moment. The problem with the moment is that it means nothing to the ongoing narrative; it is merely a televisual device to further make cryptic the already cryptic mythology.
 3. Each episode, after the theme song is over, cuts to a short, no more than five minute scene, in some vague high school locale, embedding in the mind of the viewer that this is a show rooted in childhood, adolescence, or youth. These scenes never matter. They are largely used as patter for the girls to try and normalize their lives within the context of the ongoing mystery. To put this into some historical context: in shows like *Beverly Hills, 90210* and *The O.C.*, roughly 50% of the *entire life of the series* takes place in and directly around the high school seen in each show. *Pretty Little Liars* is not teen television when using any generic metric of teen television of the past. *Pretty Little Liars* is, as some have compared it, *I Know What You Did Last Summer* fused with *Gossip Girl*. It is pretty things set in the foreground of murder.

4. Each of the liars is *constituted by* the mistake she made in the pilot episode—these mistakes are the reason “A” begins haunting each girl. Aria’s unforgivable mistake: having an older boyfriend. Spencer’s: having a crush on her sister’s boyfriend. Hanna’s: stealing sunglasses. Emily’s: being gay. These sins get magnified over the life of the series, and inevitably lead the girls to make *far* bigger mistakes, all because of the seemingly innocuous mistake she made in the first fifteen-minute block of the pilot episode.
5. There is an endless amount of running that the liars do, usually in the dark from a hooded figure. This terror is the single most important part of the show’s mythos—it is its moral imperative. The girls run into, by, or through a room *that is horrifying*. Every single room, be it bedroom, kitchen, garage, storage, hospital, classroom, closet.
6. Each season either ends (Season One, Season Two) and/or begins (Season Three, Season Four) with murder.
7. The figure of “A”, or the “A-Team” is always the mathematical integer in the equation of *PLL*. “A” is the *only* thing that matters, because “A” is how the rest of the narrative gets framed. When “A” is figured out, everything is figured out. The problem with this is that “A” will *never* be figured out.

What the above seven parts¹¹² of *PLL*’s generic formula do is imbed an *expectation* and *assumption* of terror into the narrative space of each episode in a repetitive way. This kind of repetitiveness, when done so often, gives the repetition that the publishers of the book series use¹¹³ a normalizing feel. *Pretty Little Liars*, it seems, is highly dependent upon this kind of formulaic consumption, perhaps as a way to keep the invisible terror that governs the show and books (“A” and Alloy) to remain invisible and instead asking of its viewers and readers to concentrate on how and when new versions of the terror can be bought. *Pretty Little Liars* is a new kind of soap opera, one where the

¹¹² The above list of seven is different than the seven brand principles discussed earlier, and throughout these chapters.

¹¹³ A new book is released every six months, almost to the day, and (almost) two weeks exactly before the start of a new season or half-season of the television show. Again, this is Alloy using its cross-textual marketing to saturate the teen marketplace of their design.

relationships between characters are galvanized by a single emotion: that of terror.

In “On Reading Soaps,” Robert C. Allen writes of the “Codes of Soap Opera Form”:

There is another set of codes derived in large measure from the soap opera form itself although, obviously, some of them overlap with other forms of narrative as well. Included in this category would be the soap opera’s use of time and space: the prolongation of events (rather than their compression as in most other narrative forms), and the construction of a world that is for the most part an interior one. Also included would be codes of soap opera acting (a style in which facial expression carries as much semiotic weight as dialogue), the use of multiple, intersecting narratives, the use of a certain type of non-diegetic music, the use of commercials as a structuring device in each episode (a large and very important topic in itself), and a very high degree of both inter-episode and intra-episode narrative redundancy. There are certainly other soap opera codes which could be enumerated as well as these, and any one of the above could be explored much further. (from *Regarding Television* 100-101).

Pretty Little Liars is, of course, a soap opera. There is no disputing that fact, and the above quote goes to show precisely what is happening in the viewing of the weekly episodes. Audiences enter the narrative space of the program with an already (at least partially) refined idea as to what to expect.

PLL, like any soap opera, is not primarily concerned with efficient or realistic assumptions of time or space. It does not matter, when in the space of a soap opera’s running time, what day it is; nor does it matter how long the day is *supposed* to be, how much time goes by between the highly-wrought emotionality that takes place between characters. What matters is how the narrative space *looks*.

Pretty Little Liars looks like a soap opera—the characters are regularly identified by their facial expressions—expressions that act as narrative clues and unspoken dialogue between (especially) the liars. It is coded interpretation, which explains how and why each episode is constructed using the somewhat mathematical equation explained above. *PLL* is true to soap opera genre methodology, and audiences are obviously okay with that. In how viewers should read the text of the soap opera, genre theorist Jason Mittell writes that,

[A] discursive approach to genre necessitates that we decenter the text as the primary site of genre, but not to the extent we ignore television texts—media texts function as important locales of generic discourses and must be examined on par with other sites, such as audience and industrial practices. Instead of examining texts as bounded and stable objects of analysis, texts should be viewed as sites of discursive practice in which genre categories may be articulated. (Mittell 14-15)

In other words, Alloy Entertainment should *necessarily* be studied when one studies the soap operatic texts that Alloy constructs.

The Patterning of Narrative, and Marketing

As mentioned earlier, every eight (or so) books is considered a new arc in the series, with “A” revealed (or at least strongly hinted at) in either the seventh or eighth book in each arc. The main characters stay the same, and their goal of figuring out who (1) killed Alison, (2) who stole her body, (3) where her body is, (4) who killed X, Y, Z, (5) who in the world is “A,” and (6) why they are being framed for being complicit in all of the above is consistent throughout the books. This is also consistent with how the television series works, each two seasons (Seasons One and Two, Seasons Three and Four, etc.) working together as an arc. When Sara Shepard, and by extension, I. Marlene King and the writers of the television series, try to figure out the girls’ “front stories—often having to do with love, fractured relationships, or family troubles” (quoted in Spencer 13), what they have come up with are the following, a short list of some of these issues, as they have become manifest on the television series¹¹⁴, on which I will concentrate (for the most part) from here on:

Love: On *Pretty Little Liars* love is, along with seemingly everything else, largely understood as protection against the hunter(s). Characters often come together as a way to defend themselves and/or arm themselves against the imminently threatening specter of “A”. In other words, fear on the show is what drives people to have some desire to fall in love with the person who can/should protect the other. In the pilot episode (in the first seven minutes of the show), Aria meets a man, Ezra Fitz, in

¹¹⁴ And which further the seven Alloy brand principals discussed above.

a bar; they talk for a few minutes then sneak into the bathroom to take their relationship to a physical level. Ezra Fitz is then seen, two scenes later, in front of the classroom where Aria is his student at Rosewood High School. The relationship is explored in various forms throughout the first three seasons (and into Season Four), perhaps highlighted when, in Season Two, Episode 24 (“If These Dolls Could Talk”), Aria and Ezra have sex for the first time, i.e. “The Statutory Rape Episode.” Marlene King said of (what should have been) this highly controversial¹¹⁵ episode that she received, “an overwhelmingly positive response to those characters doing more than order Chinese takeout” (quoted in Spencer 260).

In *Pretty Little Liars*, love is explored in various (but similar) ways with all of the liars, but the liar with what seems to be the most to lose¹¹⁶ is Spencer. Throughout Season One, Spencer Hastings is seen as the girl who steals her sister Melissa’s (much older) boyfriends. First it was Ian, then it was Wren. Ian was also in love with Alison DiLaurentis, who was fifteen at the time of their relationship. Ian and Melissa subsequently got engaged, married, and were expecting a child (until that child was lost in some vague way) until Ian was found by Spencer and the rest of the liars in the woods, murdered. Again, on *Pretty Little Liars*, love is known and seen through tragedy, through fear. Spencer falls in love with boys, just about every single time, moments (or episodes) before something horrific, predatory, or at least in some ways threatening happens to her or to the person she has fallen in love with. This kind of emotional conditioning (love=fear) is Alloy again using coercive techniques on the audience to come to some desire to *root* for that fear, because at least that fear brings love. In other words, if Spencer is at least somewhat happy with the boy(s) she falls in love

¹¹⁵ I use the words “should have been” highly controversial because here we have a teacher taking great advantage of his student (Ezra is, it can be assumed, close to 25 years old on the show; Aria is 16 at the time they meet), yet the power he demonstrates over her got, for the most part, swept under the rug because perhaps Ezra is the man that Aria felt could protect her from what (on the show) is *far* more important—that is, the way Aria (and the rest of the liars) are being hunted, not by Ezra the sexual predator, but by a more threatening (and less visible) force—that of “A.” The ways in which Aria (and fans of the Aria/Ezra relationship) forgives Ezra were similarly seen in *Gossip Girl*, when Chuck Bass (who committed a number of sexual assaults) was quickly forgiven as well as in *The Vampire Diaries*, in how Damon Salvatore (also a serial sexual assaulter) is consumed as the vampire brother most worthy of fan adoration.

¹¹⁶ Academically, economically, familial.

with, the fear that is wrought because of that love can perhaps be forgiven.

This is what Spencer knew, and knows love to look like. Spencer then went on date and fall in love with Toby, who it turns out works for the “A-Team” as a way to protect the people he thinks are in danger (more on this later). In Season Two, we discover that Jenna Cavanaugh is in love with Garrett Reynolds, the police officer who is on the force for the sole purpose of planting evidence to cover up some kind of involvement he has in the Alison DiLaurentis murder case. He and Jenna are in love amidst the background of murder and other various crimes, which only makes their relationship steamier and more interesting in that, within the narrative space of *Pretty Little Liars*, violence like this *seems* to be what makes the people being hunted in some ways happy. The threat of violence on the show is always there; it is the constant on the show, so when that constant can bring people together¹¹⁷ in a way that allows them (or perhaps forces them) to fall in love, the violence on the show can in some ways be hidden even further than it already is. In a teen soap opera like this¹¹⁸, love is perhaps expected, it is perhaps desired, and therefore at least in some ways supersedes the ancillary consequence(s) related to the love. The problem is, in *Pretty Little Liars*, the consequences are almost always violent. But when those consequences get repeated throughout the seasons, within the books, and by various characters, the consequences become not just expected, but narratively normalized. In the books, Emily Fields is the one in love with Toby Cavanaugh, until she finds his body in the woods, dead as a result of his suicide for being misunderstood by the entire town. In the television series, Toby is viewed as a town pariah; and even when he comes to the defense of Emily as she is about to (we can assume) suffer physical harm (or rape) at the hands of her boyfriend, Toby is the one who is still to blame for being too weird for Emily to date. The violent boyfriend is still the preferred choice of Emily’s parents, and they are not timid about making this clear because, as explained above, in *Pretty Little Liars*, violence is the *expectation*, whereas weirdness and not fitting in with the expectation(s) of the show is simply unacceptable. As a pretty little liar, Emily should be,

¹¹⁷ And even more so, when that constant brings people together to have sex, as is the case with Aria and Ezra, explained earlier, the narrative is even further ramped up.

¹¹⁸ I will expand my analysis of *Pretty Little Liars* and the soap opera shortly.

it can be inferred, prepared for the violence that will inevitably come with simply being a pretty little liar, so the sexual assault that accompanies this kind of existence perhaps should not even be questioned as abnormal. It is, simply, how one is expected to live.

The violence and sexual predation/statutory rape are not just the stuff of the everyday citizens of Rosewood, though. In *Pretty Little Liars* the cops become robbers, furthering the normalization of violence and threatening behavior by seemingly every single person within the narrative. In Season Three, Officer Darren Wilden may or may not have been the father of an illegitimate baby that Alison DiLaurentis may or may not have been carrying (when she was fifteen, he at least ten years her elder, and a cop) at the time of her murder. Wilden threatens Hanna Marin and her mother Ashley to keep quiet about this illicit affair and pregnancy, lest his job and reputation be soiled. Ashley then runs him over, whereby Hanna and her friends decide to cover up the crime by pushing the cop car (that has evidence of the hit and run by the corresponding video playing on a loop) into a lake, all of which makes clear, yet again, that violence on the show tends to be the answer to *every* problem, and violence on the show is done to and by *everyone*. Fear is the overriding emotion here, and it is fear that seems to govern love, to contextualize the fractured relationships had by everyone on the show.

Fractured Relationships: On *Pretty Little Liars*¹¹⁹ relationships are, in almost all ways, dependent upon the ways in which they are fractured. In other words, the fracture is what gives the relationship(s) intrigue, and the fracture that happens within each relationship is *always* the result of some kind violence or sexual predation being done to the girl/woman in the relationship by the boy/man in the relationship or by the imminent threat of “A” or some member of the “A-team.” In other words, there are no relationships on the show (or in the books) without the fracture that either makes the relationship happen in the first place, or that sustains the relationship as a way to protect the people in the relationship from being further victimized by s/he who brought the victim(s) together.

About the relationship between teacher and student discussed before, Ezra and Aria; Mr. and

¹¹⁹ And in the books.

Mrs. Montgomery (Aria's parents) threaten to exile Ezra to New Orleans unless he stops seeing Aria. Aria then threatens back, telling her mom that she will go to the dean of Mr. Montgomery's school (he is a professor) to out the affair that he had *with one of his students*.¹²⁰ This threat breaks up the family as Mrs. Montgomery leaves Mr. Montgomery to date a man ten years younger than her, all the while Aria is blamed for the dissolution of the family. Emily is sixteen at the time, which again confirms how Alloy makes the "kids acting as adults" brand principle¹²⁰ feel seamlessly at home within the narrative space of their programming. This principle has a way, then, of giving Emily (and the other liars as well) a model of parenting that she, Emily, will likely use in the future against which to pattern her own behavior. It creates a cycle of questionable behavior by and through the characters on the show that can and will be used in the future as a way to mark¹²¹ this behavior as being what is expected on the show.

Emily Fields is encouraged throughout Season One and Season Two to become interested in boys—her parents have a profound problem with her being a lesbian, and assume that it can be fixed by the simple act of just doing it. In the book series, Emily is sent away to "straight camp" to "fix" her "problem." It doesn't work, her "problem" is not "fixed." In the television series, Emily's girlfriend Maya is sent away to this camp to fix her problem. It also doesn't work, and then she is murdered¹²².

Spencer Hastings, after dating and falling in love with Toby Cavanaugh throughout the first two seasons, discovers that he is now working for the murderous "A." Spencer is quite sad about this fact, and rather than breaking up with Toby, she joins the "A-Team" with Toby, which then leads Spencer to make the decision to kidnap the child that we later find out Ezra had with a previous woman. Spencer *kidnaps a child* because she would rather not have a fractured relationship with the

¹²⁰ To be discussed further in the coming pages.

¹²¹ In the minds' of the audience.

¹²² Which we, the audience, should expect, this being *Pretty Little Liars*, and murder being commonplace within the narrative, particularly murder as it relates to characters who have some connection to the little liars. It is they, the liars, who are the ultimate targets of the hunter, and if getting closer to them means taking the life/lives of the people closest to the liars, then so be it. It is normal, and it is seemingly okay.

boy she loves, which harkens back to the homosociality discussion in Chapter Three whereby the boys in the show find meaning largely through the use value they see in the girl(s) that surround them; this in turn allows the girl(s) to see the value in themselves by the use they can be to the boy(s) they are being used by.

Family Troubles: As in the examples above, family troubles on *Pretty Little Liars*¹²³ are contextualized by the hunt for the members of the troubled family. The hunt is what causes the trouble, and the hunt is what sustains the trouble as being continually troubling. The family troubles, then, are easily swept aside or even forgotten because the hunt, as I have written throughout, will *always* be privileged within the narrative of *Pretty Little Liars*. The result is that the family troubles can be quite troubling, but it largely doesn't matter how troubling so long as the hunt remains constant. And the hunt, as I have stated before, is nothing if not constant.

In Season Three, Episode Three ("To Kill a Mocking Girl"), it is made clear that Toby Cavanaugh has been sexually molesting his step-sister, Jenna Cavanaugh, for the better part of a decade. It is then made clear in Season One, Episode 10 ("Keep Your Friends Close") that Jenna was *forcing* Toby to touch her sexually, thus the audience is aware that Jenna Cavanaugh is a rapist (though the word is never used), meaning that, as with Ezra's statutory rape of Aria mentioned earlier, Jenna's hyper-violent rape of her step-brother is easily forgotten due to the obvious privileging of the hunt of the girls by "A." And when the hunt and subsequent hunt for the invisible hunter(s) is what sustains the flow of the narrative throughout the seasons¹²⁴, every other storyline becomes secondary at best. The secondary nature of every other storyline means that those storylines can be *hyper-violent* or *hyper-sexually* predatory as long as the mystery of "A" remains in the forefront. And in *Pretty Little Liars*, "A" is always in the forefront. Compound that with the fact that *everyone could be "A"*, and the formulaic nature of the show becomes easily consumable.

In Season One, Episode Two ("The Goodbye Look"), Ashley Marin is seen sleeping with

¹²³ And in the books.

¹²⁴ And books.

Officer Wilden as an agreement between the two that the physical trade-off would be to atone for Hanna's indiscretion of stealing a pair of sunglasses from the mall—all would be forgotten if Ashley agreed to sleep with the cop (she does, multiple times, with Hanna in the room next door). Officer Wilden then uses Ashley to get closer to Hanna so he can steal her phone and set her and the liars up *for murder*, to cover up his own illicit relationship with a fifteen-year-old girl, Ali, who may or may not have been pregnant by a man, Wilden, at least ten years older than her, again confirming what I have written throughout this chapter—that in *Pretty Little Liars*, people can, and do, get away with the most violent and most sexually predatory of crimes because what matters is the watching, the hunt, the hunters, the hunted. Everything outside of the hunt is used to make more sense of the hunt, to try and find the hunter(s).

In Season Three, Spencer Hastings' mom Veronica defends Garret Reynolds, who has been charged with murder, because Veronica Hastings feels that it is her duty to defend a man who might have had a rough upbringing, i.e. every child deserves the chance to have a mother figure in his/her life. Peter Hastings, Spencer's father, destroys a field hockey stick because he is almost sure that his other daughter, Melissa, used it to kill Alison DiLaurentis. And even if she didn't kill Alison, Mr. Hastings wants it destroyed because "Melissa is the type" to commit such a crime. The audience then finds out that one of the reasons Peter Hastings might have wanted to get rid of the weapon was because he doesn't want his family to find out that he had an affair with Alison DiLaurentis' mother and that Jason DiLaurentis (and probably Alison as well) are his children—thus, Spencer and Ali are half-siblings, something that could otherwise be of some interest to the viewers—here we have characters who, it is just discovered, are related because of an illicit affair. Further, one of the characters, Ali, has been implicated as (1) the *head of the "A-team"* on a number of occasions, and/or (2) dead at the hands of "A" or the "A-team". But instead the relationship is, for the most part, ignored; because we are still on the hunt for the hunter.

What these frameworks and consistent themes allow Alloy to do is to further normalize¹²⁵ the

¹²⁵ In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Michel Foucault writes of "idealized norms of

equity they have built across the entirety of their televisual lineup. In *Gossip Girl*, *The Vampire Diaries*, and *Pretty Little Liars*, the seven principles¹²⁶ discussed throughout these chapters are repeated, again and again, cross-episode and cross-season, to a degree that they become expected, even perhaps desired; because if they are the principles that guide the show toward a compelling end (which I argue is true), and if they are the *sole* force that holds the show(s) together (again, I argue that they are), and if that force is what is garnering the unprecedented number of viewers (logically, this would have to be true), then the brand equity created because of these seven principles is what makes Alloy's properties commercially viable—and thus, the brandedness of Alloy's programming is what Alloy has come to stand for. In *Pretty Little Liars*, more than in *Gossip Girl* or *The Vampire Diaries*, the formula of narrative expectation seems to be a requirement that the writers depend upon so that the mystery of the invisible hunter(s) can remain ongoing. In other words, the three tropes listed above *need* to be the connectors to the seven brand principles if only to make the brand principles find an easy home in which to live. *Pretty Little Liars* makes use of these three tropes again and again, it can be assumed, so that the audience can find it easier to make sense of the secondary storylines and concentrate most of their energy on the primary storyline—that of “A.” The tropes are needed, and the brand principles are expected.

The above examples are only a fraction of the imbedded mythology of the show, and it is safe to assume that the general audience does not have the time nor the desire to map out the primary,

conduct” that the power structures designed by institutions (the military, for example, or a prison) assumed that those without power would abide by as a form of social assimilation. In the television institution, normalization is seen most clearly in Raymond Williams' notion of flow. Of flow, Celia Lury writes that it “is never itself visible or legible: the flows of the brand can only be ‘seen’—made identifiable—through the intermediaries of space and movement” (Lury 89-90). Alloy Entertainment's neo-Williamsonian conception of flow is seen in the inter and extratextual semiotics imbedded in the narrative spaces of their programming. In *Pretty Little Liars*, the most commonly seen semiotic marker is that of terror wrought by the invisible terrorist(s).

¹²⁶ The above three narrative tropes (love, fractured relationships, and family troubles) are specific to *Pretty Little Liars*, and act as one of the ways in which the series (TV and book) is marked by its formulaic nature. Each episode and each season (and each book) is in part governed by one or more of these tropes, all of the time. In *Pretty Little Liars* these tropes help make the seven brand principles feel more normalized, in part because *PLL* uses more of the principles at once than do *Gossip Girl* and *The Vampire Diaries*.

secondary, and tertiary relationships on the show that all connect to one another. That is the goal of Alloy, of Sara Shepard, and of all the writers on the television show, it seems—to convolute the already convoluted narrative in such a way that it ends up not mattering. As stated earlier, all that matters is: who is “A”, and the setup of the show is very easy to follow with that in mind. As Sara Shepard does in the book series, Marlene King and the writers adhere to a relatively simple pattern when mapping out each episode. And though this pattern has never been explicitly revealed by King or anyone else connected to the show, if one is to watch a string of episodes with even a glancing critical eye, it becomes very clear what is happening, as if it were a math equation that creates the imperative that there is something the audience needs to solve. The repetition of the formula, then, gives the audience the tools it needs to solve the mystery; and when there is a new mystery for the audience to solve, along with the tools the audience has in solving the mystery, Alloy creates a kind of audience loyalty and brand equity that will keep the audience coming back. If the audience can figure out the show once, the audience can figure out the show again. This is the pattern, and the pattern is unending.

The Extratextual Work of Alloy

There is not necessarily a problem with a teenage television show using the generic methodology and patterning of soap opera aesthetics; indeed, teen television of the past employed very similar genre decisions (particularly *Beverly Hills, 90210*, *Dawson's Creek*, and *Felicity*). The problem is that *Pretty Little Liars* is a soap opera for teenagers using soap operatic generic tropes for the *sole purpose of advertising* the parent company in charge of the narrative decisions audiences must consume. The problem is, Alloy Entertainment is a faceless entity without a clear connection to what each farmed property is doing after it leaves the room in which it was first designed. Alloy farmed *PLL* to Sara Shepard and made it clear that it was now hers to own. She, in turn, allowed her (assumed) property to be adapted for television, giving some rights over to showrunner I. Marlene King. This further bastardized the original conception of Alloy's designed property in a way that now many people have their fingerprints on it while Alloy remains in the shadows, all the while *owning*

the rights to the property. This gives Alloy an out, so to speak, in the ignorance it can plead when discussing each property it will always retain. It goes to the heart of Bob Levy's stance on never having read a single *Pretty Little Liars* novel. Whether or not one believes that is a discussion for another day, but the problem remains: if Alloy Entertainment is allowed a distance from the properties it owns, how is one to question the corporation in any substantive way? Alloy publically washes its hands of its properties after the properties get farmed out. Privately, though, Alloy retains its iron-fisted control of each decision the property is allowed to make. Bob Levy has remained executive producer of *The Vampire Diaries* since its inception, the same thing with *Gossip Girl*. If an Alloy executive is the producer in charge of virtually all television production decisions, including those made by the writers and producers of *Pretty Little Liars* (which Levy is), how then can the company that executive works for not be held accountable? Somehow, Alloy has skirted this question. By being perceived as not personally responsible for the direction of the narrative, executives at Alloy Entertainment, in a way that very much mirrors how "A" runs the show in *PLL*, can remain invisible, allowing representatives of the corporation (Sara Shepard, Marlene King) to be more personally responsible for the direction of the narrative. In other words, Bob Levy and others at Alloy are always there (because they will never not own the property) and never there (because they claim to not know what is going on with the property they own). Alloy, in this way, is "A."

Soap operas have, of course, *always* been vehicles for advertising—they were, as is commonly known, simply hour-long dramas used to fill the space in between commercials for (actual) soap and other cleaning supplies that advertising firms thought appropriate for the audience of non-working women at home watching the programs. *Pretty Little Liars* is doing something far different, though. It is a soap opera with unending narrative possibilities (requirements) to work as a marketing arm of Alloy Entertainment. In other words, *PLL* is an *advertisement for their parent company*. There is no soap involved; there is only Alloy and its constituent parts (Warner Brothers, HarperTeen).

In a neo-Raymond Williamsonian designed flow, Alloy is unconcerned, it seems, with the advertising space within the program. It is only concerned with marketing itself, because without

Alloy, writers are not allowed to write. *PLL* is a commercial for the parent company in charge of the narrative. Alloy is the product, *PLL* the advertising space that gives life to the product. With obvious neoliberal vigor, Alloy Entertainment has created a franchise that, if it has its way, does not have to end (in the same way daytime soap operas have lasted for decades in this country). Alloy is the parent company that has at its disposal writers who design an unending cast of characters who can and will carry the torch of “A,” in such a way that viewers *must* end up actively rooting for the evil character or cast of characters—because without “A,” there is no show. For there to be a show (a show that is wildly popular, as will be discussed at length below), there must be evil; there must be murder; there must be terror; there must be rape; and the audience *must hope for these things to continue*, just as the pretty little liars within the body of the show must hope for “A” to continue with his/her/its terroristic watching/mayhem—the terror is the only thing in the show that allows the girls to have meaning, to have agency. The pretty little liars are only there to help give the masculinist rhetoric of “A” a place in which to situate itself. And with that, I turn to the figure of “A,” of whom Marlene King has said, “the popularity of ‘A’ greatly exceeded our expectations” (from “Pretty Little Liars and The ‘A’ Network,” Season Three DVD Special Features).

Surveillance in *Pretty Little Liars*

As I have discussed throughout this chapter, “A” is what gives *Pretty Little Liars* its meaning, its intrigue, its audience loyalty, and its longevity. “A” is what the property stands for, in a way, and the popularity of “A” that somewhat surprised Marlene King has given Alloy (and ABC Family) a significant marketing advantage that teenage TV shows of the past did not have. “A” can be networked textually and extratextually by the creators of the property as a way to make the consumers of the property value and have desire to see “A” thrive, because it is “A” that gives the property life.

In “Pretty Little Liars and the ‘A’ Network” as seen in the Special Features of the Season Three DVDs, King and almost the entirety of the principal cast of *PLL* makes it clear that every single character on the show has the potential of being “A.” Shay Mitchell, who plays Emily Fields in the show, went so far as to say that, “It’s the kindest and most innocent people that always turn out to be

the most evil.” One must keep in mind, of course, that over the course of three seasons, “A” (or someone directly connected to “A”) is responsible for murder, kidnapping, rape (statutory and non), incest, grand theft, minor theft, sexual assault, sexual relationships with minors, extortion, the covering up of potential murder, and other lesser forms of bad behavior. In three seasons of the show, there are roughly thirty main and secondary characters. The following is a list of characters (character names only) who have been specifically convicted of being “A,” connected to the “A-Team,” suspected of being connected to the “A-Team,” or recruited successfully by the “A-Team”: Mona, Alison, Hanna, Spencer, Ezra, Byron, Caleb, Toby, Jenna, Melissa, Lucas, Garrett, Paige, Jason, Officer Wilden, Noel, Ian, Ashley, Meredith, CeCe, Shana, Holden, Harold the janitor. That is twenty-three out of thirty characters possibly being murderers; or at the very least, with some potential of being murderers sometime down the line, seemingly at the whims of the writers. There are three convicted (or admitted) murderers on the show: Mona, Emily, Lyndon (once Nate). There are twelve characters who are direct suspects to murder, or accused murderers: All four pretty little liars, Jason, Ian, Byron, Garrett, Lucas, Toby, Noel, Ashley Marin; and there have been six people murdered on the show: Maya, Ian, Garrett, Alison, Wilden, Lyndon; and in the book series, a total of eight people have been murdered thus far (thirteen books having been published to date): Mona, Courtney, Alison, Ian, Jenna, Toby (suicide), Tabitha, Gayle. Out of the thirty characters seen as regulars, the people who have not yet been connected to “A” are: Ella Montgomery, Pam Fields, Colonel Fields, Veronica Hastings (lawyer to a suspected murderer), Peter Hastings (covering up a potential murder), Wren, Mike, and Pastor Ted. It is important to keep in mind too, that the above innocents can (and likely will) be connected to “A” at some point in the life of the series. When watching an episode of the show, it is not uncommon as a viewer to see any random character doing an otherwise innocent task, then thinking that task is in some ways by order of “A,” to act as a plot device to get to the ultimate (and inevitable) end—murder. What this means is that, out of thirty regular characters, the writers of the show (by Alloy’s dictate, it can be surmised) have put in place a system where *anyone on the show* can be the next “A,” and if Marlene King’s summation on the

feelings of the audience about “A,” we are all rooting for this evil person or persons to succeed. Because we have to. There is no other choice. There is no *Pretty Little Liars* without “A,” so audiences must root for the carnage to continue.

In “The Rhythms of Reception: Daytime Television and Women’s Work,” Tania Modleski writes,

As film critics have recently been pointing out, “Cinematic identification presupposes the security of the modality ‘as if.’” Soap operas tend, more than any other form, to break down the distance required for the proper working of identification. But rather than seeing these cases as pathological instances of *over*-identification, I would argue that they point to a different *kind* of relationship between spectator and characters, one which can be described in the words of [Luce] Irigaray as “nearness”—“a nearness so close that any identification of one or the other is impossible.” The viewer does not *become* the characters, but rather relates to them as intimates, as extensions of her world. (Modleski 68-69)

It is, in other words, part of the point of the soap opera to require the viewer to form some kind of semi-intimate relationship with the (female) characters on screen. This is not new. What is new is in how Alloy and *Pretty Little Liars* represent the characters as being relatable; or as Sandy Flitterman writes in “The *Real* Soap Opera,” “this is of utmost importance to anyone invested in social change, for it means that not only *what* we see on television, but *how* we see it, has important ideological consequences” (Flitterman 95). The ideological world that Alloy has set up in *Pretty Little Liars* requires that the audience (reader) see social change *only* through the immoral (or at the very least amoral) choices given to the female characters in the narrative space of the program. This psychology is very important when considering audience interpretation; as Nick Couldry writes, “...our psychological investments in narrative commodities are an essential part of how we are entrenched in capitalism’s order” (Couldry 147). Alloy Entertainment, in the narrative space of *Pretty Little Liars*, has designed their narrative commodities as four little liars and a band of terroristic misfits reliant upon the destruction of one another in 42-minute intervals, and across the

space of innumerable seasons and books.

At the same time, it is clear by now that rooting for a character on teen TV with clear ties to criminality or morally questionable behavior is not new. In teen television of the past, though, this type of behavior was clearly (and only) an extension of masculinity. Dylan McKay, the resident first bad boy character on teen television, partook in his own version of amoral shenanigans throughout the run of *Beverly Hills, 90210*; the same can be said of Ryan Atwood on *The O.C.*

In *Pretty Little Liars*, though, criminal and morally questionable behavior is ambivalent to gender¹²⁷, because everyone on the show has some tie to immorality/amorality. What is also new in *Pretty Little Liars* is in how the criminal is marketed, while at the same time making clear that each character on the marketed product has the potential of *being that criminal*. In “Pretty Little Phenom,” Tanner Stransky explains the history of *Pretty Little Liars* as the most socially marketed, and shared, television show in production today. Stransky writes,

In the beginning, the drama wasn’t as plugged into the social-media matrix as it is today.

[Marlene] King laughs when recounting how Warner Bros. issued a Twitter blackout on the Vancouver set of the *PLL* pilot. “It was like, ‘No tweeting please,’” remembers King, who now has nearly 150,000 of her own followers. “We all got reprimanded, so we stopped.” By the time the pilot aired, and the studio had lifted the on-set Twitter ban after realizing *PLL* was primed for social-media dominance for three reasons: its digital-focused premise, loads of OMG-worthy cliff-hangers, and a target demo of 14- to 34-year old women who were already busily leading their lives online. “We kind of changed Warner Brothers’ tweeting policy,” says King. Adds Alloy CEO Les Morgenstein, “There are tons of secrets, and people love to talk about them.” And they have: From the start, fans have freely tweeted the creators and stars with “Please don’t do this to the books; please don’t do that” story-line directives, says King, adding, “Twitter is a giant focus group that naturally evolves.” Today, viewers freeze-frame images of mythology-based items on the show—license plates, books, diary-pages—and post

¹²⁷ But is still seen within the frame of a masculinist rhetoric.

them online for examination. “There’s not filler in the props,” says King, citing Alison’s recently discovered diary, which fueled many story lines during the current season. The diary pages were typically only seen from afar, but everything on them was real, in case they hit the Web. “We know our fans will scrutinize every word.” (Stransky 28-33)

By maintaining such a large digital footprint that requires fans to socialize around the virtual activity happening before, during, and after the show each week, almost year round, along with the fact that *Pretty Little Liars*, as I have discussed in this chapter, privileges the mystery of “A” above all, gives the property the distinct privilege of asking of its fans to take part in the solving of the mystery. By using Twitter and other social networking opportunities, fans gather with each other to openly discuss the narrative. And when the narrative is almost entirely dependent upon *watching next week* in order to help solve the mystery, Alloy¹²⁸ benefits greatly because the very active fandom of *Pretty Little Liars*, if fans want to be a part of that active fandom, *must* watch. The mystery being privileged causes fans to talk about the mystery, and the unsolvable nature of the mystery forces fans within the active fandom to keep watching, all of which is closely watched and controlled by Alloy, the network, the producers, etc.¹²⁹—thus, the cycle of consumption that Alloy has constructed. To consume *Pretty Little Liars* is to consume Alloy.

Fandom and *Pretty Little Liars*

This type of active fandom is fine, of course, as was seen in the fandom of *The Vampire Diaries*. But Alloy, ABC Family, Warner Brothers, etc. have never acknowledged the fans as being active *contributors* to the direction of the narrative. They have all been very appreciative of the fandom, openly calling for more and more participation; but it is clear that Alloy Entertainment, still the proprietary owner of the franchise, wants to keep the fandom passive. Alloy is, though, all the while complicit in the rhetoric of calling for active fan interaction. The strongest case the fans have

¹²⁸ And ABC Family.

¹²⁹ And, don’t forget, the network, producers, etc. have *very* little control of the narrative because they are only secondary partners of the primary ownership group, Alloy Entertainment. They are the hired farm hands in Alloy’s marketing farm.

made in the changing of the TV show to align with the books is in the character of Andrew Campbell (the Meredith Fell of *PLL*). Andrew is a *major* (and beloved) character in the book series, so was (to appease the fandom, it can be assumed) introduced in the third season of the television series (seen in two episodes) as Spencer's nerdy friend and competitor in the academic decathlon. It was enough, it seems, for fans to feel heard. As was explained in Chapter Two, this is how fandom works. Once heard, fans become quiet. Alloy Entertainment is a company that *must* retain all the narrative rights to the characters of the franchise—otherwise the farming of the material does not work. If writers outside the immediate control of Alloy get control of the narrative, the narrative will fail. Fans, of course, are never made aware of this fact.

The stars of the show, particularly Shay Mitchell, Ashley Benson, and Keegan Allen, tweet the time they will be available, each Tuesday night, to live tweet with the fans of the show. These stars are also regularly seen on Instagram, posting pictures of themselves on and off the set, assumedly to create an open relational space of which the audience members can become virtual citizens. The social footprint that *Pretty Little Liars* has cannot go unnoticed. It is, in fact, having a widespread effect on the entire television industry. Stransky goes on to write of *PLL*'s title of "most social" show on television, that "*Pretty Little Liars* [was] the fifth-most-social series of 2012, with 8.7 million tweets in the calendar year. It's an impressive figure given that [the shows above it] often had double, and in some cases triple, *PLL*'s weekly viewership" (33). Season Two's finale, "unmAsked," made social television history, "generating more social media buzz than any TV show had to date, with 645,000 tweets over the hour, peaking at 32,000 tweets per minute" (Spencer 266). These are Super Bowl numbers, not cable teen drama numbers. *The Vampire Diaries* has, predictably, begun using the *Pretty Little Liars* model of social marketing; Ian Somerhalder and Nina Dobrev (Damon and Elena) now regularly taking part in live tweeting each Thursday night. So, what does this really mean in the grander scheme of the reading of the show?

It's hard to make sense of, particularly for the insulated teenage viewer who must feel special (or at least validated) in her choice as television consumer. After all, if a teenage girl can speak

directly to her teenage celebrity role-model, what does it matter the substance of that conversation? Furthermore, within the 42-minute space of the program, no fewer than six Twitter hash tags are burned onto the screen, acting as Pavlovian directives for this “active” participation. These hash tags regularly trend on Twitter during the program each week, sometimes three or more hash tags trending at once. It is a brilliant marketing campaign by the show, but what is the effect on the audience? That is not clear.

What is clear is that these hash tags give the viewer an in with other viewers, and with the actual stars on the show. When the whole imagined community of like-minded consumers is taking part in the same virtual conversation at the same time, the fandom feels as if they are heard. This represents a huge success for Alloy, because it breeds more and more of the brand equity it relies upon to generate advertising sales within its broadcasts—advertising sales that then stoke the fire of franchise production and merchandising that works as another arm of marketing to promote the parent company. It’s a circular design of meaning making for the company that seems to be making the meaning for all of popular teen television. And there is no better or more effective brand building strategy than to create a product and site of production with *no end* in site, no narrative closure. When everyone is “A,” and “A” is the sustaining factor in the growth of the brand, the brand grows and grows. But when “A” is evil, and everyone is “A,” where does the responsibility lay? With Alloy? Perhaps. With the audience? Maybe. Who’s to say when everyone seems to be happy? What is clear with *Pretty Little Liars* is that Alloy Entertainment has successfully branded their teenagers to be *normatively* evil, or at the very least obviously immoral, but perhaps even murderous. And if the audience is the character of “A” (“A” is everywhere, i.e. we are all “A”), how is the audience not complicit in the perpetually repeated murders and terror happening in the show they are consuming? As I stated before, for *PLL* to work, “A” must win; the audience must root for this figure. This figure is a murderer. We are this figure. Where is the line of fiction versus reality drawn?

Alloy Entertainment, ABC Family, and Warner Brothers are marketing *Pretty Little Liars* to the

girls who watch it and consume it by turning gendered evil on television into normative interpretation. This can be seen, as I have written about throughout this chapter, in the predatory¹³⁰ and repetitive marketing of the books to girls who by this time in the life of the property are perhaps more interested in the consumption of new material rather than on what is presented in the material being consumed.¹³¹ At the same time, they all actively encourage the stars of the show to form relationships outside the narrative space with the girls (and sometimes boys, but mostly girls) who are, at the very time of the relationship, watching evil take place in front of them. In other words, when Hanna, Aria, Emily, and Spencer are all tweeting back and forth with the fans of the show, the fans of the show are seeing these girls take part in diabolical schemes with horrific outcomes; and the fans are *cheering them on*. It is clearly Alloy's brand design to form a kind of shared partnership with the fandom, but are the teenagers watching the show equipped with the intellectual necessity of differentiating televisual fact from fiction with all of this in mind? Do the tweeters know they are tweeting with Ashley Benson and not Hanna Marin? Does it even matter? It is hard to say, but it is an assumption that Alloy is making that the audience does not care, nor should they care. As has been stressed throughout this chapter, there is a somewhat intimate relationship (insofar as virtual relationships can be intimate) between object and subject, viewer and viewed; but can we resolutely say that the subject (audience) understands that the object (character) is not real, and does not really act out the evil that their fake self acts out on the fake television show that is now happening (with live tweeting) in real life with the real people playing fake people in front of the real audience's collective eyes?

***Pretty Little Liars* and Branding**

Reality is rhetorical in the textual and extratextual world of *Pretty Little Liars*, and one would be best served to not even attempt an answer to any of the questions posed above, because the

¹³⁰ In that the (mostly) girls buying them are not aware of the marketing formula Alloy uses to saturate the literary and television marketplace(s) with consistently new material—material that the girls buying they books consume because of the terror that directs the narrative(s).

¹³¹ Because of the property's overt repetitiveness of a new "A."

rhetical nature of questions like these is the beating heart of *Pretty Little Liars*, as well as Alloy Entertainment as a company/brand. It is in Alloy's best interest to keep these questions from being asked, because their grand design would be compromised in a profound way. Alloy Entertainment is privatizing the morality and moral agency that the teenage girls watching the show are able to access, because Alloy Entertainment greatly blurs the line between what is real and what is not real; and Alloy is doing this using a carefully designed cross-format marketing campaign (with the publication of books and television premieres coinciding). The quip "A is everywhere" is not mere fodder to promote the show. It is a slogan that Alloy (and HarperTeen) must employ in order for their audience to situate itself inside the narrative space of the franchise. "A" is not only everywhere; "A" is all of us.

This is imperative if *Pretty Little Liars* is to succeed. "A" is not only seen in its characters, it is seen in its audience. It is how Alloy continues to build its brand, using neoliberal emotional branding strategies that bridge the gap between art, artist, and consumer. The branding strategy of creating a shared relationship between buyer and seller via *direct* dialogue is a fairly new one, as described in what follows by Marc Gobe when he writes,

A new oral culture driven by the Web might mean the end of capitalism as we know it and the end of commerce as we have experienced it in the past. Our society is moving from a "Space" culture built on physical bigness into a radically changed one that privileges emotional interaction, or "Time." The pendulum is swinging, and the business system and infrastructure we have known in the past will have to transform. (Gobe xxii)

This is precisely the business model that Alloy has implemented, seen most obviously in *Pretty Little Liars*. There is no property under Alloy's control that has become as socially shared as *PLL*¹³², and

¹³² The summer finale of Season Three garnered 1,701,125 Tweets, an all-time record for a scripted show. The summer finale of Season Four beat that record, with 1,973,418 Tweets by "637,000 contributors, ABC Family said in a press release. The finale episode generated 70,000 tweets per minute during the show's final seconds," with 38 separate trending topics, one of which (#EzraIsA), was still trending twelve hours after the episode ended. (huffpost.com, "'Pretty Little Liars' Summer Finale is Most-Tweeted Episode Ever," 29 August 2013)

the commodity that audiences seem to be clamoring for the most in the simple act of spending virtual time with their virtual role-models inside the space of actual viewership. When a typical teenage audience member can get one re-tweet, for example, what else is there to desire? The nature of celebrity in this country dictates that the divide between the them and the us is so far away while at the same time relatively near, meaning that when a celebrity (in this case, the actresses on the show) *acknowledges* the non-celebrity, the non-celebrity feels in some ways victorious, or at the very least appeased.

Alloy and ABC Family have put a system in place that quiets the fandom with one click of a mouse, one re-tweet. This click of the mouse ends up, when repeated week after week and with hundreds or thousands of individual fans (buyers), galvanizing the fandom in a specific, and very passive, way. It creates what Gobe calls a “personal dialogue” (Gobe xxvi) between the corporation’s employees (celebrities, writers) and the consumers the corporation is using to create brand equity for them, the corporation in control of the dialogue. Gobe writes that, “This is the opportunity social branding will provide: new products that allow people to better enjoy the medium. What brands will be included is not up to manufacturers but the people, and those in industries that dominate the landscape need to realize this” (xxv). As was made clear previously, other entities in the television industry are quickly realizing this, implementing for themselves a *Pretty Little Liars* brand of social interaction (*The Vampire Diaries*, ABC’s *Scandal*, TLC’s *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo*, and virtually every single show on MTV, to name but a few) with audiences. *Pretty Little Liars* started this social marketing trend on television—that cannot be overstressed. It is changing the industry one hash tag at a time, it seems, and doing so with no clear end in site—something Alloy undoubtedly knows, and celebrates. “Emotional Branding is a means of creating a *personal dialogue* with consumers. Consumers today expect brands to know them—intimately and individually—and to have a solid understanding of their needs and cultural orientation” (xxvi), writes Gobe, stressing once again the imperative of delimiting what can and should go on in the mutual conversation(s) between object and subject.

Knowing your Audience through a Virtual Relationship

Alloy knows its audience(s) well, that is clear. Through the TV and book properties that the company owns, Alloy markets itself as *meaning* youth to the young consumers who buy Alloy-owned products. Alloy forms relationships with networks that have a similar desire to know and represent youth to bring to screen and page a version of youth that is produced and reproduced on what seems to be a constant and year-round loop. As I have written throughout these chapters, Alloy's understanding of and concern with different forms of marketing is what makes Alloy as a company quite singular in media, and absolutely singular in teen media. The executives at Alloy, it is clear, treat the spaces of typical advertising revenue far differently than do other networks and media executives. Alloy is creating brand equity above all else, perhaps betting on the fact that the equity they are building will create actual monetary gain sometime in the future.

At the 2013 Austin, TX Television Festival and Conference, CBS Executive Bryan Seabury was confounded when presented with a question about hash tag burns within the space of programming, admitting to those in attendance that CBS's audience was largely unaware of what social networking can help do to a televisual product. It's an interesting strategy to so brazenly ignore this facet of branding, but CBS shouldn't necessarily be blamed for it. Their audience numbers are huge, comprised for the most part by a demographic outside the purview of the most aggressive arm of the advertising industry—the arm that targets youth. At the same time, CBS sometimes doubles the audience numbers of the other three major networks, and regularly pulls in five times the amount of viewers than the average prime-time cable lineup does. So the question should be asked, what is the capital gain for *PLL*'s type of social branding? Why does it even matter when it doesn't seem to register in terms of *actual* monetary reward? These teenage audiences, in other words, do not have the financial means to take part in the trade that advertisers within commercial spaces of television rely upon when agreeing to become part of the show's meaning.¹³³

¹³³ Trying to uncover the invisible and terroristic watcher, all the while taking the assumed position that this is an impossible task—because the terror is so oft repeated.

Alloy obviously recognizes this; and as I have written in this chapter (and previous chapters), Alloy has turned the tables, so to speak, on the common understanding of an advertised product within the televisual landscape. They have, in other words, carefully constructed a way to make themselves the very thing that is being advertised through the repetition of literary tropes within their varied properties.

When Alloy sticks to the seven principals outlined in this and previous chapters, and does this again and again, week after week and year after year, cross-format (book, TV) and cross-network (ABC Family, The CW), Alloy's properties have a way of becoming televisually ideological. Gobe goes on to write that,

Brands are not static; they have many facets to their personality. In order to build up and retain equity as a preferred brand in the mind of the consumer, a brand must evolve to stay connected to its target audience in its day-to-day, moment-to-moment existence. Brand presence at its best connects intimately to the consumer's lifestyle. (189)

Two phrases stick out here: "preferred brand" and "moment-to-moment existence." In the repetition of style, theme, and aesthetic (the seven principals mentioned above), Alloy is turning itself into a brand that seems to understand precisely what the teenager wants and needs as part of her or his daily and weekly television consumption. After all, *Pretty Little Liars* and *The Vampire Diaries* have garnered for their respective networks record numbers of viewers, seemingly every week. In other words, people (teenagers) are watching these Alloy products; and all the while Alloy is creating brand equity above all else.¹³⁴ That is the metric they use in order to gauge capital success.

When Alloy keeps itself in the forefront of viewers' minds, the merchandising that stems from that is immeasurable. The way in which Alloy has extended the contract of Sara Shepard in the production of more and more *PLL* novels keeps the *PLL* product viable on television, and this only bolsters the advertising revenue that Alloy sees immediately within the space of the *PLL* product on television. It also inevitably creates loyalty with the advertisers that have come to rely upon the

¹³⁴ Furthering the case I have made throughout this chapter than Alloy = "A".

Alloy name in the production of future franchises. If Shepard continues to write books, readers will keep reading. As readers keep reading, those same readers will keep watching the television product. Brand loyalty breeds advertising loyalty. Alloy wins all around. Alloy is clearly doing something right. But when does this become more than just potentially problematic? What is it that Alloy is really doing with the social marketing and branding of *Pretty Little Liars*?

The Co-optation of Feminism by the Homosocial Narrative in *Pretty Little Liars*

Soap opera as a genre, remember, was born from the marketing of a product (soap) to an audience who might buy that product (stay-at-home women) who were likely invested in the maudlin emotionality and repetitive nature of the soap opera narrative. The genre has always been situated within a female marketplace, that marketplace naturally extended by teenage girls who watch teenage soap operas like Alloy's. But when the rhetoric of the soap opera genre is usurped by a masculinist rhetoric that privileges and normalizes violence that places the girls in the narrative margins, only allowing them places of prominence when the boys in the show(s) can make use of them to give their own sense of a masculinity a place to find root¹³⁵, the soap opera genre inevitably changes to a distinctly male-centric one, one that de-privileges femininity and replaces it with a homosocial model of couched masculinity. In *Teen TV*, Sharon Marie Ross and Louisa Ellen Stein write that,

Carolyn Bolte argues that Teen TV performs cultural work originally assigned to the novel, interrogating the cultural conflicts of everyday life. Programs such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Veronica Mars* feature exiled teen protagonists and thus offer a specific focus on the experience of those who navigate the margins of society. Through close textual analysis, Bolte suggests that these shows give voice to marginalized experience and encourage viewers to engage affectively with the protagonists' experience of liminality. Buffy Summers and Veronica Mars are both able to critique the social world around them precisely because of their exiled social positions. Moreover, Bolte argues that such a focus of marginality in the texts of these programs is facilitated by the marginal positions of the smaller networks on which these

¹³⁵ Girls as triangulating cogs, as first discussed in Chapter Three.

programs air, networks that must take risks and reach beyond the mainstream in order to solidify their own niche audiences. (Ross and Stein 20)

This could also be said of Felicity Porter (*Felicity*) and Angela Chase (*My So Called Life*), teenage girls who assumed a strong position of televisual feminism, providing their female audiences a space of empathic meaning making through the marginalized voices of the girls on TV that were there almost solely to represent the cultural moment in which they existed.

Teenage girls on television of the past *could* navigate the murky waters that were (and are) moments of female liminality, because teenage girls of the past were given the space on television to *be* teenage girls. In other words, the characters mentioned above were (if this is possible) the normative representation of *actual* teenage existence in the 1990s. For as much as these shows get criticized for being artistic pap, they did provide a space of outreach for the girls watching them. These past characters were the strongest voices on teen TV; the girls were in control, and the girls were the victors in the battle between genders.

There is no liminality *at all* possible on teenage television of today, most especially in *Pretty Little Liars*. There is no “giving voice” to the marginalized on *PLL*, for there are *far* too many screams. The only marginalization happening on the show is the seen through the bullying and (probable) eventual death of the bully or the bullied. *Everyone* is evil on *Pretty Little Liars*, and the show relies upon that fact to measure its success. The more evil, the better. The more terroristic, the greater the audience numbers. If the four little liars can be shown to be complicit in the murderous schemes, the more exciting for audiences.

Marc Gobe continues,

The future of branding thus rests in listening carefully to people in order to be able to connect powerfully with them by bringing pleasurable, life-enhancing solutions to their world. In the future, traditional companies will not be able to rely on their brand history or dominance in classical distribution systems; they will have to focus on providing brands with a powerful emotional content. (Gobe xxviii)

The emotional content of *Pretty Little Liars* is obviously there—it has been called the scariest show on television, and is regular front-of-your-seat viewing. It is nothing if not emotional, so does the content of the emotion actually matter? Not to Alloy, it seems. What matters is that the emotion is there, and even more so that the emotion is *shared*—shared between viewers in their own imagined community of tweeters, and shared between that community and the stars and creators and writers of the show. If we are all scared at once, and the fandom is the very thing that sustains this emotion, where the emotion comes from and where the emotion is going does not seem to matter. *PLL* is a product that is (perceptively) mutually owned by everyone; and when Alloy can make that perception feel real, through live tweeting and re-tweeting, the collective fandom thinks to itself that that is enough. And thus, *Pretty Little Liars* continues on, with everyone seemingly satisfied.

So if, in this highly gendered female marketplace¹³⁶, girls watching girls while girls tweet the same girls all under the banner of consumable terror, and that terror is tightly controlled by a company keeping (some, but not all, at least that is the company's public stance) surveillance on each aspect of the exchange (production of objects, marketing of objects, extending life of objects), all the while the company remains largely shadowed by the girls taking part in the digital exchange as well as the artists farmed to design the narratives of terror, it is perhaps easy to forget that this entire exchange is governed by one real company that mirrors, almost exactly, the motivation of "A" and the "A-Team"—that is, highly evolved and multi-platform surveillance with little to no personal accountability for the consequences of that surveillance. The predation of this model of marketing and capital gains is obvious, and it is deceptively coercive—Alloy Entertainment, in a very homosocial way, defining themselves as a company using the bodies of the girls they are selling as being inseparable parts of the brand. That is, the symbolic annihilation of female agency that the girls might have in Alloy's properties is being done not only by the other (male and female) characters in the show(s), but by Alloy itself.

Viewers are sharing their fear (turned into happiness) with one another and with the stars of the

¹³⁶ That of the soap opera, including the teen soap opera.

show. There is a world that is being created with the social marketing of the televisual space of consumption. What happens within the space becomes secondary when the space is shared by the buying community governed by Alloy Entertainment. The affect of this shared emotion becomes what is important; what is happening in the branding of the girls as “A” (endlessly evil and murderous), and in the actual branding of “A” becomes almost meaningless. The reason why *Pretty Little Liars* is a very important arm of Alloy’s overall brand image gets forgotten within the marketing happening inside the space of shared fandom. The evil of the show, the evil of gender, and the marketing of this evil gets conveniently swept aside with one simple tweet from actress to buyer. So, when Naomi Klein writes in *No Logo* that, “What these companies produced primarily were not things, but *images* of their brands. Their real work lay not in manufacturing but in marketing” (Klein 4), she could very well be writing about Alloy’s design and marketing of *Pretty Little Liars*. It is *the* property under the most highly controlled (and least scrutinized) fist of Alloy Entertainment. The publication of the books to coincide with the premiere of a new season of television means that all of *PLL*’s bases are covered—its fandom is never without new material from which to share with one another. It could be said that *Pretty Little Liars* is *the* image of Alloy.

Marc Gobe agrees with this idea, writing that, “a brand is brought to life for consumers first and foremost by the personality of the company behind it and that company’s commitment to reaching people on an emotional level” (Gobe xix). If everyone is “A,” the most complicit part of this ‘everyone’ must be the company who first came up with the idea of “A.” Alloy is “A,” just as you and I are “A.” So what is Alloy really selling with *Pretty Little Liars*? They are selling a brand new kind of gendered understanding of youth on TV, whereby each and every member of the audience is lumped under the umbrella of the evil character(s) that run the show. Add to that the fact that *PLL*’s audience is comprised largely of teenage girls who have a direct link (or so they think) to the brain trust(s) running the show, and a new kind of girl is born. *Pretty Little Liars*, one of the most popular teen television shows of the past decade at least, relies upon the simple fact that girls must actively root for an evil team of participants, of which will never end, for the show to succeed. These girls

watching the evil in front of them are forced into an active acceptance that their favorite show *needs* them to feel as if they too are part of this “A-Team.”¹³⁷

When the stars of the *PLL*, stars who are themselves members of the “A-Team,” communicate directly with the audience members who root for those stars to win against another, more evil part of the “A-Team,” the viewers will inevitably feel a kind of kinship with their own choice of evil. And as has been the case throughout the history of real teenage girls watching fake teenage girls on television, real teenage girls look to TV for potential role models in their, the viewers’, real lives. Add to this the fact that their televisual role models are marked (and marketed) as potentially evil and even murderous, what must happen in the mind(s) of those who watch? So would this show even exist if not for the social marketing of it? It is hard to say, but it’s very possible that the answer is no. In a kind of post-TV kind of way (meaning the TV show doesn’t matter as much as the interactivity the TV show allows), *Pretty Little Liars* is owned by the fans, weirdly, but the liquid nature of the narrative does not allow full ownership. As is the case with *The Vampire Diaries*, *PLL*’s narrative liquidity is tightly governed by Alloy and to a far lesser degree, the constituent parts Alloy employs as farmed hands. In the world of *Pretty Little Liars*, the more the fans tweet, the longer the show will air; but the more that fans tweet, the more they *think* they are having a kind of intimate relationship with the writers—which is never the case—it is only passively intimate. All of this tweeting, it must be remembered, is taking place in and around the narrative space of finding oneself in the mind and body of one’s rooting interest. When that rooting interest is done, as it *always* must be on *PLL*, for the minds and bodies of the evil characters who do nothing if not take part in obvious evil, what must happen to the mind of she who roots? We just don’t know. What we do know is that this is new to teenage television, and *Pretty Little Liar* is, though not the show that did it first, the show that does it best.

And where does the company go from here? In the following chapter I will discuss the

¹³⁷ This is different than shipping in that rooting for the “A-Team” has nothing to do with romantic relationships, whereas shipping has everything to do with romantic relationships.

possibility of an end to Alloy Entertainment, brought about by their presumption of media transcendence, seen clearly in the shows that Alloy owned that failed to generate a proper audience as well as what Alloy is planning next. In the next chapter I will also discuss the reasons why we should continue studying female fandoms, particularly teenage fandoms on television as they are making their way, more and more, into the college classroom. I will discuss my own rhetorical and pedagogical histories with these shows in two different collegiate environments using two different methodologies with different types of findings and successes. If shows like *Gossip Girl*, *The Vampire Diaries*, and *Pretty Little Liars* are to continue (and they are continuing in the form of the spin-off, which I will also discuss in what follows), it is imperative that media rhetoricians understand their hegemonic influence. In the following chapter I will discuss the implications of all of this, as well as offer a proposal of what to do next.

Five

Alloy Entertainment and the Future of Gendered Fandom

While it is clear that Alloy has drastically changed and added to the legacy of teen television as a genre, what is not clear is what the changes that Alloy has helped spring will do to the future of teenagers on television, teenage consumption of cultural artifacts, teenage identity as reflected on television, and the gendered fandoms that are born from the shows, artifacts, and consumption of both. In Chapter One I discussed the history of the teenage girl on television, specifically how (especially) teenage girls were allowed into the narrative space of any number of teen television programs based on a very specific cultural moment that was, beginning with *Beverly Hills, 90210* and continuing on and through *The O.C.*, at least in part defined by the abstinence only education agenda first signed into law in 1981. That cultural moment helped contextualize the decisions that teens on TV made, making clear that the uncertainty of sexual identity was not only a universal teen problem, but an institutional problem (the institution of public education in America). The context of a specific cultural moment on teen TV seemed to abruptly change after *The O.C.* concluded, giving way to a new kind of genre of teen TV, one governed by a single media entity, Alloy Entertainment. In Chapter Two I focused on Alloy's first cross-textual property, *Gossip Girl*, and how it was the first book and show under Alloy's control to imbed the seven brand principles I have discussed throughout onto the body of the female girl in the narrative space of the program. *Gossip Girl* gave way to *The Vampire Diaries*, which I discussed in Chapter Three, specifically in how *TVD* inserted the broken girl first seen in *Gossip Girl* into a homosocial space of masculine identity formation whereby the girl (still branded by Alloy's seven principles of gender identification) was given agency only as a way to help the boys around her make sense of their own gender roles as having mastery over the girls they used in the triangular relationship they shared with another boy. And finally, in Chapter Four I discussed how the terroristic watcher, first seen in *Gossip Girl* and made monstrous (literally) in *The Vampire Diaries* was made even more monstrous (metaphorically) in *Pretty Little Liars* where the virtual gossip (as in *GG*) became an invisible terrorist while at the same time always remaining

hyper-visible by ubiquitously terrorizing and making more broken the four pretty little liars who acted as cogs within the masculinist rhetoric and narrative space controlled by “A” and the “A-Team.” In Chapter Four I also discussed how Alloy Entertainment uses a similar rhetoric of the invisible terrorist to govern the way they run their business as they keep tight control and ownership of the way in which the *Pretty Little Liars* inter and extratextual world gets consumed. In all three of these chapters, I discussed how the fandoms of each of Alloy’s properties are almost as important as the actual property from which each fandom is born in that the members of each fandom assume to have some measure of control over the narrative, even though they never do, and never will.

In this chapter I will continue my discussion of fandom by making it clear that fans are the very lifeblood of any teen television show, particularly teen television shows that are intended for and marketed to teenage girls. This discussion will open up a conversation, I hope, about the vibrancy of female-centric fandom(s) and how the vibrancy of female fandom(s) can and should delimit the ways in which male fandom(s) are given privilege over female fandom(s) as sites of academic and popular interest. In this chapter I will also investigate the future and evolution of Alloy Entertainment through a discussion of television programming that *isn’t* owned by Alloy yet is programming that make use of the Alloy model of gender identification that I have discussed throughout, which continues to give equity to the brand name of Alloy Entertainment. In this chapter I also will discuss the pedagogical history I have with this material as a way to give context to how I arrived at some of the claims I have made throughout this dissertation.

Alloy Entertainment in the Classroom

I had been studying the material of Alloy Entertainment for years prior to using Alloy in the classroom. I knew the audience numbers, I was very familiar with the fandom(s), but my familiarity was largely abstract and two-dimensional¹³⁸. So, to get a more personal and tangible feel for the people and for the demographic to whom Alloy was and is marketing, I decided to bring the

¹³⁸ Meaning I rarely had the opportunity to speak with actual people about the actual stuff of the company and how those people would react to what I was finding about the company, the material, the fandom(s), etc.

discussion to my students. In the fall of 2011 at the University of Houston I taught an Introduction to Fiction course with roughly 15 students enrolled. In it we explored the implications of Butlerian¹³⁹ gender performativity through the YA novels and television adaptations of *Gossip Girl*, *The Vampire Diaries*, and *Pretty Little Liars*. In *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*, Butler writes that

Performativity cannot be understood outside of a process of iterability, a regularized and constrained repetition of norms. And this repetition is not performed by a subject; this repetition is what enables a subject and constitutes the temporal condition for the subject. This iterability implies that ‘performance’ is not a singular ‘act’ or event, but a ritualized production, a ritual reiterated under and through constraint, under and through the force of prohibition and taboo, with the threat of ostracism and even death controlling and compelling the shape of the production, but not, I will insist, determining it fully in advance. (Butler, *Bodies that Matter* 95)

In my class I wanted to make it clear to my students that, through Alloy’s products (books, TV shows), we would be studying not *the* representation of gender but *Alloy’s* representation of gender. I wanted to see if my students could see the ways in which *Gossip Girl*, *The Vampire Diaries*, and *Pretty Little Liars* normalized a certain type of girl, and what that normalization might say about the teenage girls watching the programs and reading the books. I started with Butler because gender performance, and particularly the normalization of performativity that Butler writes about, is a good way for students who are not fully aware of theoretical writing on gender to become active participants in the conversation about how it is they understand their own gender roles as well as the gender roles they see in teen media. I wanted to show my students that, through the repeated viewing of Alloy-owned properties, a very particular type of gender player becomes apparent—the type that, as I have discussed throughout these chapters, is constituted by the seven brand principles Alloy

¹³⁹ Particularly Judith Butler’s notions of the social and cultural construction of gender and sex in *Gender Trouble*.

repeats in and around their various properties.

I began the semester with *The Vampire Diaries*¹⁴⁰, purposefully beginning with it because the majority of my students (or so I assumed) were not entirely familiar with the three Alloy properties that would contextualize the semester. The impetus of the course sprung from my desire to have students put to test the canonical literature they had thus far been reading in college to see if contemporary works of fiction not only stood up to novels of old in terms of their literary rhetorics of youth, but also to see if my students would become students of Alloy¹⁴¹ in ways that I was almost sure they would, based on how audiences can and perhaps should read the inter and extratextual world of Alloy as a company as aligning (sometimes more obviously than others) with the inter and extratextual worlds within the narrative spaces of Alloy's media properties to give the Alloy girl her own televisual heritage¹⁴² as being representative of girls as a whole¹⁴³ and the way Alloy's products presently live in the minds of teen consumers. I was not wrong.

Beginning with *The Vampire Diaries* turned out to be a good idea, it being (by far) the most riveting and well-made television of the three Alloy projects. The book series by L.J. Smith was another story—my students had a universal desire to skip the books altogether because Smith's novels read as relic literature to the majority of today's students conditioned on vampire novels like *Twilight*. The television show, though, could not have been more popular that semester; and my students regularly asked me how many episodes we would be able to watch during any given week

¹⁴⁰ This decision was based at least in part by the success of a class I had taught the semester before on the *Twilight Saga*. That class made it clear that young people continue to have vampires on the brain.

¹⁴¹ I assumed that the repeated viewing of shows that looped the seven principles discussed in these chapters in and through the different Alloy properties that we watched and read, my students would naturally recognize (without much provocation by me) the patterning within the narratives as being *distinctly* Alloy, and not merely representative of any kind of literary, televisual, or genre heritage that came before Alloy.

¹⁴² As first explained in Chapter Three, in *Rerun Nation*, Derek Kompare writes of the television heritage as an "active memory bank of images and sounds, easily communicated across the culture" (Kompare 104).

¹⁴³ Thereby naturally evolving into a discussion of how the consumption of the Alloy girl is perhaps, rather than the consumption of gender, the consumption of how gender is *repeated* (through the repetition of Alloy's seven brand principles) in and through various Alloy properties.

(the most I showed per week were three). The class ended up being a sociological experiment, of sorts, that made my own readings of the shows more material, by girls and boys within Alloy's target demographic (teenagers). Because of my class, my overall project became much more illuminated in that my students were able to see the patterns within the shows and books we watched and were able to find cross-text consistency of the patterning, thereby confirming (at least in part) that to watch an Alloy show (or read an Alloy book) is not to watch genre TV (or read genre literature), but rather to watch Alloy *as its own genre*, based on its seven principles alone. In other words, Alloy works.

Starting with *The Vampire Diaries*, we mapped the common tropes seen throughout different episodes from the first two seasons of the show—tropes that ended up being mapped as quite gender-specific, and very much in line with the seven brand principles I have outlined throughout this dissertation. After *TVD* we moved to *Pretty Little Liars*, and at this point my students were becoming more adept at figuring out exactly what the point of the course was; that is, they began to see the obvious similarities between characters in *The Vampire Diaries* with those in *Pretty Little Liars*—the most common ground being found between Caroline (*TVD*) and Hanna (*PLL*), the two most actively terrorized girls in the two shows. It was becoming more and more a study of televisual teen rhetoric as well as a study in how the parent corporation in charge of that rhetoric marketed the products to boys and girls roughly the age of my students. We made our way through four *Pretty Little Liars* novels and episodes that spanned two seasons before we moved on to *Gossip Girl*; and when we did, something I was not expecting to happen, happened. My students hated it.

They hated the books and they hated the show. I asked them why and almost universally their answer was: it's boring. Perhaps I should not have been surprised—we did not watch past Season Two of *Gossip Girl*, and it hit me that that was it; that was the problem. As I wrote in Chapter One, the first three seasons of *Gossip Girl* did not have monsters (like *The Vampire Diaries*), and they did not have a large-scale hunt for the terrorist who had been terrorizing the girls in a cat-and-mouse game of *CSI*-level mystery (like *Pretty Little Liars*). It hit me that *Gossip Girl*, before midway through Season Three, was just another television show cut from the cloth of teenage TV of old.

Gossip Girl was *The O.C.* It was *Felicity*, and it was *Beverly Hills, 90210*. And my students just did not want it.

Gossip Girl is far less salacious than the other two Alloy properties, at least insofar as how the salacious material is leveraged in and between material in the other Alloy books and shows. For students conditioned on the stuff of vampires and texting murderers, fashion shows and alcohol abuse just do not hold up. So it hit me then and there, *Gossip Girl* was not a success, really, until the night it really became an Alloy property. And it only really became an Alloy property when it could be, in a shot-by-shot comparison, mistaken for *Pretty Little Liars*. And that is the ultimate success of Alloy Entertainment. They had in the fall of 2012 three different shows that Alloy could use to market the others with no confusion to the audience(s) whatsoever. Of course *The Vampire Diaries*' audience would watch the new season of *Gossip Girl*, because the new seasons of *Gossip Girl* so resembled the new seasons of *The Vampire Diaries* in terms of how they semiotically marked the female protagonist in each. Of the logical relations between different but similar consumers within the space of production and branding, Celia Lury writes that,

Because all signs occur in time and are framed within a normative community of interpretation, a sign is by definition a sign-process, a communicative act. Because the interpretant is also another sign, it in turn 'addresses' another interpretant, in a continuing process of interpretative communication (Rochberg-Halton, 1986). (Lury 76-77)

In Alloy's case, the teenage girl acts as the sign that framed the normative community and communities that gather around different texts under Alloy's control. Since all three of Alloy's most popular and socially discussed series all share the same seven brand principles¹⁴⁴, and sometimes all at the same time¹⁴⁵, the Alloy consumer consumes the Alloy girl within the framework of the Alloy brand. The communication that audience members share that revolves around the consumption of the

¹⁴⁴ Which are used in varying degrees, in and through seasons, of all three shows—i.e. one or more of the principles is *always* used, sometimes all seven are used at once.

¹⁴⁵ As in when *Gossip Girl* made the turn to aligning with *Pretty Little Liars*, as discussed in Chapter Two.

Alloy girl, since she is not just a girl but an Alloy girl, logically evolves into the consumption of Alloy itself.¹⁴⁶

Approaching Alloy Differently, for the Benefit of Students

As a kind of experiment in preparation for this chapter, I decided, in the fall of 2013 to teach the same class, this time at Houston Community College. In order to more fully gauge how the consumption of Alloy, Alloy's products and the arrangement of inter and extratextual gendered semiotics affects the demographically appropriate consumer of Alloy, I decided to begin with *Gossip Girl*.¹⁴⁷ More of my students were familiar with *The Vampire Diaries* and *Pretty Little Liars* than they had been at UH due to the enormous success and ubiquitous marketing of those properties across the spectrum of other teen media properties; but not many of my students had seen *Gossip Girl*, because by the fall of 2013 the show had been off the air for over a year.

What I found that fall was eye opening, and a confirmation of what I had assumed to be true for years. That is, in the viewing of the episodes from the first two seasons of the show, my students *immediately* began comparing the notes sent by Gossip Girl to the notes sent by "A" in *Pretty Little Liars*. Keep in mind, the notes sent by Gossip Girl in the first two season of the show in no way hinted at the outing of the pseudonymous blogger's identity; but my students seemed to know it was coming. Or perhaps they did not know it was coming, but rather they expected the unveiling based in part (it can be surmised) on the rhetorical and semiotic conditioning that *Pretty Little Liars* has had for the better part of four years on the teenage televisual landscape. Because of *Pretty Little Liars*, at least to the thirty or so students in my Introduction to Fiction class, *Gossip Girl* was easier to predict, due for example to the shift that *Gossip Girl* went through in Season Four of the TV series when it became more in line with what *Pretty Little Liars* was doing at the same time. In other words, since many of my students at HCC had been watching *Pretty Little Liars* by the time my class started in the

¹⁴⁶ Because the Alloy girl is singular, and does not transcend genre. She was designed and remains controlled by Alloy, not by genre TV or by genre literature. Alloy's girl carries her own unique televisual heritage, which is also Alloy's heritage as a business.

¹⁴⁷ This time, because *Gossip Girl* was the first cross-textual Alloy property, I decided to go in order—because that's how Alloy did it.

fall of 2013, watching the teens in *Gossip Girl* watched in a similar fashion to how the pretty little liars were watched by “A” made *Gossip Girl* easier to understand as a distinct kind of show that related to another distinct kind of show, *Pretty Little Liars*.

This in part confirmed, yet again, that if Alloy had as a mission to consistently mark *their* teenager as something singular, they were succeeding. And not only that, my students were interested in almost nothing *except* the unveiling of *Gossip Girl*’s identity. They wanted the mystery, and they didn’t care what else was happening. They didn’t care, for example, about the attempted rapes by Chuck Bass. They didn’t care about the high-end fashion, the music. They wanted the end to come, because they wanted to help solve the mystery. The terror in-between did not matter. And thus, the business model of Alloy as lived in the brains of teenagers. The October night when *Gossip Girl* became *Pretty Little Liars* was not mere coincidence—it was, without question, by Alloy’s design. Alloy is a business that has built its reputation (at least to itself) as a media holdings corporation that is post-advertising. It is advertising in and of itself, and that is a very new idea to television, and to media of any sort. My students at HCC wanted more *Gossip Girl*, in part because many of them had already been a part of the multiple unveilings of “A” in *Pretty Little Liars*. They wanted to help solve the case in a show that had not, in their minds, been solved yet. They wanted more Alloy, and why wouldn’t they? Seems everyone does. In Alloy’s “hyper-socialized, de-territorialized factory,” (Arvidsson 82)

brands are like computer programs, [Celia] Lury argues. Like a computer program the brand consists of information deployed to produce information. Brands are complexes of information that enter into the informational flows of daily life and direct and anticipate it in particular ways...In this respect, brands are made by a kind of loop, similar to those employed in computer programming (*if you choose this brand of coffee, then this kind of experience becomes possible...*). (127)

It is clear by now that *if you choose Alloy, then you will get a girl defined by the seven brand principles employed by the company in the three properties discussed throughout this document. If*

you choose Alloy, *then* you will get the depraved, broken girl. Alloy has become, through the construction, cross-textual and cross-format emulation, and resultant consumption of *The Vampire Diaries*, *Pretty Little Liars*, and *Gossip Girl*, Starbucks: the same, wherever you go. And if audiences watching Damon Salvatore not only accept the fact that Damon is a multiple-rapist and one-time serial killer, but even *celebrate* that fact and continue to buy more and more Damon-themed merchandise, why even bother questioning motive? What we know about Alloy is that it is a company that has successfully inculcated *itself* into the products being produced—the shows, books, etc.—and that that inculcation now dominates the teen media marketplace.

So, the reason that teaching it was a good idea was that (1) my students were (and are) within the age range of Alloy's target demographic, and (2) Alloy can be seen as the dominant (perhaps hegemonic, or only) way that audiences can read the teenager on television, so teaching it is instructive to how my students are representative agents of sex and gender in media. Because of Alloy's de-territorialized factory of televisual and literary consumption, Alloy's audience becomes, largely, *the* teenage audience. No longer are there teenagers on television from which different subsets of real teenagers watching can choose to feel represented—the teenager of years past is nowhere close to the teenager of the present—the present day teenager is the Alloy teenager, and the Alloy teenager is branded. Teaching it to two different sets of classes at two different institutions was a way to introduce age-appropriate consumers to a new kind of conversation about teenage identity in art.¹⁴⁸

Alloy's Reach Into Non-Alloy Television

Alloy's influence over the heritage of the teenager on television has been discussed throughout the previous chapters, but in a new crop of shows not owned by Alloy, the Alloy effect is being felt, appropriated, and marketed—thus further extending the reach and effect that the Alloy girl has had, is having, and likely will have in future television programming. For example, in the pilot episode of

¹⁴⁸ As constructed and maintained by Alloy, the single media corporation now in charge of sexual agency on TV, morality, and rhetoric.

The CW's *Reign*, one of Mary Queen of Scots' handmaidens Lola (played by Anna Popplewell), says to Mary, "anyone who is close to you lives in constant danger," blaming Mary for the execution of Mary's would-be rapist. In all of *Reign*'s publicity leading to the premiere of the pilot episode (October 17, 2013) The CW had invoked *Gossip Girl* as a comparison. And by the look and feel of the show as of this writing, it is a teen drama cut from the cloth of Alloy. It has at the center of the narrative a hyper-privileged white teenage girl who is, in the pilot episode (midway through), seen as being irrevocably broken enough to blame an attempted rape *on her*, and she is placed in the position of having to believe that to be the truth. *Reign* is not an Alloy property, but that does not matter; it is, rather, a direct consequence of the ubiquity of the brand on the teen television landscape. *Reign* garnered close to 2.0 million viewers for its pilot episode, and has received widespread praise for its aesthetics and for its sexy interpretation of a love story on the back of historical events. *Reign* is watched, at least in part, because it is a new kind of *Gossip Girl*. *The Carrie Diaries* (with an already built-in fandom, that of *Sex and the City*, *TCD* its prequel) called "*Gossip Girl* of the 1980s," has only recently begun its second season after a very successful Season One at the hands of its creative team, *Gossip Girl*'s Josh Schwartz and Stephanie Savage. It is not an Alloy property either, but the show's marketing team has felt it necessary to compare the show to *Gossip Girl*, if only to trade on *Gossip Girl*'s aspirational buying market. It is not clear whether or not these two shows will succeed, and it is doubtful that they will; but the fact that they both felt the need to overtly compare themselves to an Alloy product says a lot about the way Alloy's products continue to live in the minds of Alloy's teenage consumers.

In terms of its own properties, Alloy is now *literally* making different versions of its own successful shows—*The Vampire Diaries* has spawned a spin-off, *The Originals*, as has *Pretty Little Liars*, with *Ravenswood*. *Ravenswood* is a show set in a town a few miles outside the town of Rosewood, PA (where *PLL* is set), close enough so that the characters from the already wildly popular *Pretty Little Liars* can visit the town that needs ratings. And in fact, the October 22, 2013 Halloween *Pretty Little Liars* special was *set* in Ravenswood and, for the most part, worked as an

hour long promotional video for the world premiere of *Ravenswood*, directly following *Pretty Little Liars* that night. In the episode, the little liars were seen visiting locales in Ravenswood (a spookier, somewhat supernatural version of Rosewood) and acting with the appropriate amount of fear, essentially (1) signing off on the show's worthiness and subtly assuring the audience that the town and show are worth investing time in, and (2) making it clear that even they, the tough little liars, are not tough enough to live there: *Ravenswood* now a show that could, and should, be watched by the audience who might be tiring of, or at least in desire of more, *Pretty Little Liars*-type shenanigans. At the same time, *Ravenswood* gives Alloy a supernatural footprint on ABC Family, leveraging their brand equity in an attempt to bring two separate markets (ABC Family soap market, The CW supernatural market) together. In other words, the opportunity to bring the audience from the already galvanized fandom of the supernatural *The Vampire Diaries* (the same audience that will help give *The Originals* the numbers it needs to succeed) to *Ravenswood*, and potentially to *Pretty Little Liars*, is an opportunity that could grow the Alloy brand even further.

Alloy, it seems, is getting less timid about hiding the fact that they are essentially only (or at least, almost only) a marketing company now. With these new shows, the Alloy name has direct control over the teen TV market with their properties—*The Originals*, *Pretty Little Liars* and *Ravenswood* (Tuesday), and *The Vampire Diaries* (Thursday), as well as with the properties that directly invoke Alloy's name in their marketing—*Reign* (directly following *The Vampire Diaries* on Thursday nights) and *The Carrie Diaries* (Friday). That is three nights per week, five hours each week, every week for at least nine months out of the year (*Pretty Little Liars* and *The Vampire Diaries* take mid-season breaks in the middle of the fall so that the second half of the season can hit both sweeps weeks in the spring). At the same time, Sara Shepard continues to write *Pretty Little Liars* novels, twice per year, to coincide with the lull in the television program. The reason that these shows can exist at the same time using branding strategies first conceived by Alloy Entertainment is that Alloy's most successful product is the Alloy teenage girl, irrespective of the show on which she is seen. One merely has to use the Alloy name to make their show a success, if that show follows the

brand management process that has governed Alloy's most popular and successful properties since 2007.

On Alloy's three most social¹⁴⁹ and watched television properties, *Gossip Girl*, *The Vampire Diaries*, and *Pretty Little Liars*, the teenage girl is constituted¹⁵⁰ by the seven brand principles I have discussed throughout these chapters. The three shows use one or more of the principles *all the time*, which establishes the teenage girl within the narrative space(s) of the program(s) as *being* one or more of the principles; and when the teenage girl that is one or more of the principles is seen across and within Alloy's narrative world, Alloy itself being to become what is traded, what is consumed. Because of Alloy's own singular heritage of the teenage girl along with how their teenage girl saturates virtually the entirety of popularly shared teen media¹⁵¹, the teenage audience watching Alloy's teenage girl has virtually no other choice than to accept that Alloy's teenage girl is *the* teenage girl on television. There is little or nothing else from which to choose.

The Necessity of a Vocal Fandom

But not all of Alloy's properties have been successful, and it is my contention that that is due to those properties not abiding by Alloy's branded identity as seen in the three properties explored herein. For example, Sara Shepard's *The Lying Game* was picked up by ABC Family after the publication of two semi-successful novels, but was canceled after one and a half very low rated TV seasons (averaging just over 1.0 million viewers). Alloy's newest property, *The 100*, is planned as a mid-season addition to The CW's primetime lineup, picked up by the network before the publication of the first novel (which has seen middling success in publication). This model of novel to television show adaptation does not follow the dictates of Alloy's most successful properties (*GG*, *TVD*, *PLL*) in that *The Lying Game* and *The 100* have not had the proper time to marinate in the minds of readers, therefore severely limiting the ability for a potential fandom to grow large enough to make the TV

¹⁴⁹ Particularly within the social space of Twitter and the shared live-tweeting spectacle that happens during the show(s) and how that shared experience galvanizes the fandom(s).

¹⁵⁰ This constitution being the entirety of each girl's meaning.

¹⁵¹ With the largest, or at least most vocal, fandom(s).

adaptation of the obviously depraved (this is Alloy, after all) teenage girl seen in both of those properties.

Without the fandom, the property cannot live. And with *The Lying Game* and *The 100* (which has not yet been canceled, but I am confident that it will be), the fandom did not exist before the show was picked up. These properties can be seen as results of the parent company a bit over its own head with self-importance. It is not, as perhaps Alloy assumed, as easy as it once was. But does that even matter anymore? Are we so far into the Alloy-centric (and partly Alloy-governed) generational shift in television and literature that it will take another generation to recover? When Naomi Klein writes that, “Even branding evangelist Tom Peters acknowledges that there is such a thing as too much brand, and impossible though it is to predict when we will reach that point, when we pass it, it will be unmistakable” (Klein 189), is the world Alloy has created too big to fail?

As I discussed in chapters three and four, an active and vocal fandom plays a very important role in the liveliness of a property, particularly when that fandom assumes it has a somewhat intimate relationship with those who have some creative control (writers, showrunners, actors) over the narrative.¹⁵² This can be seen most clearly in how Alloy treats *Pretty Little Liars* as a property with its book and TV market coming together simultaneously to create a year-round well from which consumers can purchase and watch new material. In *Enterprising Women*, Camille Bacon-Smith writes of active female fandoms like these that,

As they experiment with narrative forms, they likewise experiment with ways of relating to one another. The search for expression feeds the struggle for social organization and vice versa, but always both are founded *not* upon an ideal of how things might be if they were different, but upon how women feel right now, and how they can sanely hold on to what they are. They resist all dictates to change themselves to fit either a masculine or feminist ideal, insisting that structures should build upon the way people are, and not the reverse. They create narratives to meet current needs of communication and sharing, of community. (Bacon-Smith 294)

¹⁵² Even if that assumption is false, and the relationship is passive.

This harkens back to how my students at both institutions were asked to enter the conversation of Alloy consumerism. As Judith Butler makes clear (and Bacon-Smith reiterates above), when the consumption of gendered art is repeated across textual and narrative worlds, the repetitiveness of the consumption has a way of creating a space of performativity whereby the consumers of the art begin to normalize the performance within the gendered space of consumption. That normalization logically becomes the ideal (and ideological) kind of gender performance that the active consumer (the fandom) regenerates as the object(s) from which the fandom initially springs continue to repeat. The fact that Alloy has created properties that have themselves created fan-driven narrative spaces has led to the fandom(s), as Bacon-Smith writes, to be somewhat privileged *above* the shows that generated the fandom to begin with.

The virtual communication¹⁵³, as I have discussed in this and throughout the previous chapters, is made very active by the social spaces that give life to the communication¹⁵⁴ and made more active by the communication the fandom has with the people with some control over the properties around which the fans come together. Alloy's properties, as I have discussed throughout this dissertation, are highly gender-specific, which in turn creates the impetus within the fandom(s) to perhaps become less about the *stuff* being consumed and more about the *act of communication* around that stuff; but when the act of communication is being done by real girls consuming not TV girls but Alloy TV girls, the communication necessarily becomes communication about Alloy, and not the product. Because Alloy is the product, as I discussed at length in Chapter Four.

Too Much Branding?

The level of market saturation that Alloy has and the way that Alloy has influenced a new sect of television shows could have dire results, though. Will consumers of the Alloy girl get too much of the Alloy girl, if the Alloy girl is the only kind of girl that one is able to consume?¹⁵⁵ Of the precariousness of too much of a single brand message, Naomi Klein invokes branding guru Tom

¹⁵³ The imagined community/communities that I discussed in the Introduction.

¹⁵⁴ Live tweeting, for example.

¹⁵⁵ And especially when that girl is constituted by Alloy's seven brand principles, all bad.

Peters when she writes,

“How much is enough?” asks Peters. Nobody knows for sure. It’s pure art. Leverage is good. Too much leverage is bad. MTV founder Tom Freston, the man who made marketing history by turning a television station into a brand, admitted in June 1998 that, “you can beat a brand to death.” (Klein 189)

So the question should be asked, is the Alloy brand so ubiquitous at this point, in its own properties as well as the properties now seen invoking the names of Alloy’s properties, that the brand has transcended even itself? The girls watching the shows and reading the books are not stopping even with the knowledge they have about the complicated and problematic gendered identities of the girls on the screen and in the pages. The information capital seen in and through the properties Alloy owns is so vast, so well managed, that it perhaps seems fool’s errand to try and right Alloy’s wrong, if there even is a wrong in the first place. Alloy’s intrinsic value is in the privileging it gives to the girls it terrorizes. Alloy’s girls are, don’t forget, perceived to be at the center of the narrative, largely, in all three of the properties discussed herein; and that privilege is seen throughout the scope of Alloy’s properties. So how long will it take the typical teenage girl to think that she is the important figure here, forgetting the fact that that importance is only there to trade on each female character’s Alloy-constructed depravity? When the girl is at the center, does the terror even matter?

By staying in the shadows, by farming its originally conceived idea(s) out to more and more entities, Alloy can drastically limit the potential liability it would have if more people knew that the company was (and is) directly responsible for the continual depravity of female characters in its pages and on its screen. But by the burning of their logo at the end of each of show played each week, Alloy remains at least partly centered in the minds of its consumers. Alloy is always there, but also never. Alloy is a brand that works by “*enabling* consumers, by empowering them in particular directions” (Arvidsson 8), giving their mostly female audience the means to the end—to figure out, as is the case in all three of the properties I have discussed, how the Alloy girl can be viewed as heroic—how the victim of rape, of terror, can come out on top, if only *because* of that terror. So when Serena

van der Woodsen gets stalked and violently abused across multiple seasons of *Gossip Girl*, at least she gets to marry the man of her dreams, or so assumes Alloy (and so assumes the Alloy consumer). Is this, again, precisely what the audience wants?

This dissertation is, more than anything, a document about millennial fandom in that, as seen in all three Alloy properties discussed in previous chapters¹⁵⁶, the fandoms of the shows are central to the life of Alloy as a corporation as well as Alloy's branded girl because the Alloy girl is shared in and around the fandom by the (mostly) girls who are situated in an imagined community/communities largely governed by the corporation that has imbedded onto the body of the girls within the narrative spaces of programming, a very similarly branded corporate methodology¹⁵⁷ sprung from a very masculinist form of rhetoric that normalizes masculinist neoliberal scripts.¹⁵⁸ But why study this group of fans as they come together each week around the common interest of (what appears at first to be) simple, soapy-like fun? Until my project, an academic study of Alloy Entertainment had not been done. But why? Maybe their products are pure pap, so why bother? Are soap operas too far afield from academic or rhetorical importance or interest to ask an academic to waste her time studying them? Are teenage girls an active enough consumer market to garner the interest of marketing scholars, humanities scholars? Why study teenage fans at all, and why girls? The answers to these do not begin with the *why*, though; they begin with the *how*. How is it that girls got to a place where this type of art is not only consumed, but demanded? How much is the social experience of simply *being a girl* responsible for this cultural moment, and is Alloy just giving the girls who socialize together what they, the girls, have always wanted? After all, the media marketplace has long been owned and dominated by male-centered narratives—those that have led to the patriarchal dividend¹⁵⁹ existent in the social fabric of American cultural nationalism—so do girls *need* art like Alloy's to feel a certain kind of gendered-importance?

¹⁵⁶ Especially *The Vampire Diaries* and *Pretty Little Liars*.

¹⁵⁷ The invisible terrorist, as discussed in Chapter Four.

¹⁵⁸ Such as violence, morality, homosocial triangulation, as discussed in Chapter Three.

¹⁵⁹ A phrase first used by R.W. Connell to describe the economic, social, and political advantage men have over women based not on gender, but on masculinity.

As fandom pioneer and scholar Henry Jenkins writes in *Textual Poachers*, invoking the works of Flynn, Schweickert, and Bleich when he writes, “Men [tend] to read for authorial meaning, perceiving a ‘strong narrational voice’ shaping events, while women ‘experienced the narrative as a world’, without a particularly strong sense that this world was narrated into existence” (239) (Jenkins 108). In other words, in all art, through time, men have read the voice of the creator of the art, the creator of the world of the art, as what should be privileged. Women, on the other hand, privilege the world post-voice, post-creation. Men (and boys) read and interpret the art they consume as men read the world outside that art—they read it as male-centric, by and for males. Women (and girls) feel strongly that the world in which they are *allowed* to take place is *assumedly* constructed by men, so the construction of the world is already pre-ordained. Therefore, the externalities of the soap opera narrative space do not matter as much; the characters and emotion taking part within that space are what matters most. So the space can be comprised of depravity as long as that depravity in some ways gives the women and girls fraught with the depravity a place around which to congregate as women, as girls. Jenkins goes on to write that,

Female readers entered directly into the fictional world, focusing less on the extratextual process of its writing than on the relationship and events. Male readers acknowledged and respected the author’s authority, while women saw themselves as engaged in a “conversation” within which they could participate as active contributors. (108)

This is not just an Alloy problem, in other words, it is a problem with the limitations of female fandom and how (especially) girls are often boxed in through the condition of simply being female fans. It began long before Alloy invented girls who came into the world broken by the boys who ran that world. It is why,

if the comic fan and psychotic fan are usually portrayed as masculine, although frequently degendered, asexual, or impotent, the eroticized fan is almost always female (the shrieking woman); the feminine side of fandom is manifested in the images of screaming teenage girls. (15),

which leads directly (and indirectly) to the ambivalent attitude many scholars have to female fandom: why study the hysteric? The answer to why is: because they are there, and because they are making up a new kind of millennial feminism, coming together around the shared experience of brokenness in an attempt to come out as okay. Jenkins writes that, “These different reading strategies, of course, do not simply reflect biological differences between men and women, an essentialist position Bleich briefly suggests but does not fully embrace. Rather, these different reading strategies are grounded in social experience” (112). The Alloy girl, remember, is not part of the generic heritage of the teenage girl on TV. The Alloy girl is Alloy’s construction, and the Alloy girl assumes a singular type of Butlerian gender performativity—that one falls in line with the normalization seen as a result of Alloy’s seven brand principles discussed in this and previous chapters. Alloy’s constructed girl as seen in the fictional spaces of Alloy’s design is thus consumed by the real girls who actively contribute to the growth and vitality¹⁶⁰ of the fictional spaces, which are spaces that construct real spaces (the virtual fan communities) in and around which real girls engage with other real girls about the constructed communities of fake girls in which the real girls continue to invest real time (Alloy’s products).

Thus, the real girl is a construction partly controlled by Alloy as well. Girls gather around Alloy’s products, in other words, so that girls can feel connected to their own gendered social positions in the external world that Alloy must assume they are merely mirroring. Is a real girl assumed to be terrorized in real life? Perhaps. Is a real girl *actually* terrorized in real life? Maybe. And how much is Alloy to blame for that real, and fake, terror? The answer to that is not clear, especially when one realizes what tends to happen toward the end of Alloy’s stories. It is made clear, in all three properties discussed throughout these chapters that girls are supposed to be read as coming out as the victors; girls are the ones who, after being violently colonized by the boys in the narrative, end up being the happiest.

After being raped multiple times by Damon in *The Vampire Diaries*, Caroline Forbes

¹⁶⁰ Through varying degrees of investment in the fandom(s).

ultimately becomes the hunter (vampire) at the hands of another female hunter (Katherine Pierce), helping the male hunters on the show hunt other males. Caroline is ultimately allowed in. When after Elena Gilbert has largely been enslaved by her own hunters for the better part of three seasons, she too is allowed to take part in the male-dominated narrative space of terror along with her original hunters, Damon and Stefan Salvatore. The girls in *The Vampire Diaries*, if they wait long enough, are masculinized. Is that the ultimate victory for the girls watching? After Mona Vanderwaal is outed as the first “A” in *Pretty Little Liars*, she is said to have become the virtual (turned physical) terrorist *because she was herself terrorized*. Is that position precisely what girls watching the show embody in their daily lives? The answer is assumed to be yes, particularly when Hanna Marin is seen regularly visiting her one-time friend in the mental hospital, explaining to Mona how she, Hanna, understands why Mona felt the need to do such terrible things to the little liars. The little liars were the ones, after all, terrorizing Mona for years. Spencer Hastings joins the “A-Team” in an attempt to right the wrongs of the former “A”(s)—it is one little liar joining the ranks of the terrorists *for the good* of the terrorized. And (female) fans of *PLL* are encouraged to actively root for the terrorist(s) because the terrorists are made up mostly of other females in hopes of fixing the terrorized world into which they, the females, were born. Alloy’s properties, like the teen television before it, is merely a reflection of what is happening externally, outside the pages and television sets in which Alloy’s properties live. *That* is the problem, and *that* is the reason to explore these properties further—to test the market for the market-conceived new feminism, or at least feminism on TV that is used strictly as service to masculinity.

In “The Role of Soap Opera in the Development of Feminist Television Scholarship,” Charlotte Brunsdon writes that,

Taking soap operas seriously—and perhaps, most significantly, taking soap opera fans seriously—involved taking the skills, competencies, and pleasures of conventional femininities rather more seriously. Doing research with “real people” raises complex and difficult ethical issues. It has been partly through the exploration of this “woman’s genre” and its audiences

that some of the simplicities and blindnesses of second wave feminism have been challenged. So if feminism has been important in producing a context in which soap operas can be taken seriously, soap opera has been significant as a site in which feminism can learn to address its others with respect. (Brunsdon 62)

Shows like *Gossip Girl*, *The Vampire Diaries*, and *Pretty Little Liars* give girls a shared space around which to congregate, a shared voice, a space and voice that create a kind of celebration. If the girls in Alloy's shows can get through the days, weeks, and years of terror, then maybe so can the girls who watch—or so Alloy would have us assume, because As Camille Bacon-Smith quotes from her conversation with Leslie Fish, “our culture so thoroughly denigrates the personalities of women that women can't imagine themselves as heroic characters unless they imagine themselves as male” (Bacon-Smith 240). Thus, we have Caroline becoming *hyper*-masculine the moment she becomes a vampire (the allegory of the vampire as hyper-masculine and violent male being around for generations); thus, we have Elena going through the exact same process. We have the pretty little liars being forced into the position of male-centric terrorist for the pretty little liars to be taken seriously by the (already) female terrorist(s) terrorizing them. The fact that *Gossip Girl* was only revealed to be a boy after more than 100 episodes is not mere coincidence—because to be a terroristic female figure in a female-centered narrative, the female must act as a male acts in order to be seen, in order to be respected. The fact that Alloy flipped the script on that belief is largely responsible for *Gossip Girl*'s sudden irrelevance in the teen girl marketplace. Had *Gossip Girl* actually been a girl, the show could have, and would have, been taken as something stronger than it ended up being. *Gossip Girl* should have been a girl for the girls watching the show to feel validated by the terror.

Is this simply how art works now? Is Alloy actually *helping* girls become stronger, more capable feminists? The argument could certainly be made that that is the case. Camille Bacon-Smith continues in *Enterprising Women* that,

The women in fandom need to find ways of organizing the information about their experience structurally, according to a grammar that is aesthetically satisfying. They want narratives that

express cultural experience in forms that resonate with structures of cultural institutions within which that experience may comfortably be shared. (294)

That is, the books and shows that Alloy owns are popular for a reason. They resonate with the girls who consume them, and the girls who consume them want something with which to resonate as girls. If *Gossip Girl* (particularly) was the bridge from teen TV of old to teen TV of new, certainly what *Gossip Girl* was portraying was of and for its time. It cannot be argued that millennial girls are victims of new kinds of bullying, new kinds of public and private shaming; so what if Alloy Entertainment is merely shining a light on that lived cultural experience? What if Alloy is turning girls into heroes, rather than consciously taking heroism away from girls? Even though “soap opera isn’t quite ‘heroine television’” (Brunsdon 54), are Alloy’s soapy teen properties helping at least empower the girls consuming them? The soap opera genre has long been “attractive to feminists as an object of analysis because it was perceived to be both for and about women” (54), so if Alloy’s properties are simply soap operas for girls, the properties could be argued to be naturally falling in line with the cultural moment such soap operas demand.

Alloy’s properties are directly marketed to and consumed by a certain type of majority of girls (millennial media consumers) who, if Alloy is correct, aspire to be in the minority of de-gendered neoliberal managers (embodied by those who terrorize in Alloy’s products)—a minority position very difficult to reach in the real-world cultural moment Alloy’s consumers exist. To reiterate what Jennifer Wingard writes in *Branded Bodies*,

Branding, as a facet of advertising, is not about product placement or the product at all; rather it is about developing an identity or “lifestyle” into which groups of products then fit. In this sense, it can be understood how easily it could be shifted to realms outside of what can be seen as purely economic exchange. (Wingard 12)

So when the morality invented and owned by Alloy, seen through the products being read and watched, is virtually *the only type of morality* seen on television, it becomes less about the shared embodiment and exchange of the morality on TV and in books and more about the exchange *of the*

company with ownership of that morality, and of the lifestyle that that company perpetuates through the products the company owns. Through its products, *Gossip Girl*, *The Vampire Diaries*, and *Pretty Little Liars*, Alloy Entertainment has constructed a generational ideology of female morality, of female social space for teenagers. Alloy is the company that governs the morality, and Alloy is the company that is now being used as a marketing opportunity for other media companies that want to trade on the Alloy-owned version of morality so that their, the other companies' products, can have a chance to be successful in the market that Alloy invented in the first place. So how much blame does Alloy really deserve? They are the ones who first came up with this ideological business model, and they are the company that repeated the model time and again through their separate, and connected, media properties. Alloy is, at least in part, responsible for the generational shift being seen on television. They have so saturated the market that a generation of girls has grown up on Alloy's version of the teenage girl, to a degree that what Alloy has done cannot be undone. So what is Alloy's responsibility here? How long is the social conscience of a media corporation supposed to extend? Do shows like *Gossip Girl* and *Pretty Little Liars* merely put a mirror to the ugliness of teenage social identity, or are they shows that make that ugliness appear pretty and manageable, even desirable, so long as the girls at the heart of the ugliness find a small level of redemption at the end? What came first, the generational difference in this new teen marketplace or the media factors that are now helping define those differences? It is one thing to accept the generational differences, but quite another thing to consciously ignore the impetus from which those differences sprung. Is Alloy to blame, at least in part? And when Alloy's cross-media properties consistently propagate their own invented type of viciousness and terror, how much fire should Alloy be able to withstand before change is demanded? When are they, if ever, complicit in the generational realignment?

Much work is left to be done with these questions in mind, especially in how future generations of teenagers will consume media products constructed with teenagers in mind. Teenagers are at the forefront of consumerism; they are *the* coming target market, and the consumer choices they make will say a lot about the non-consumer choices they are afforded when placed in the external world

outside the hold of media, if that world is even possible in the first place. When a single company invents and holds the rights to the morality that teen girls are *allowed* to consume, we are left with an inevitable question: what can, and what should be done about this? If the students in my two different Introduction to Fiction classes are any indication of teenage desire, Alloy has won in a resounding way. Alloy is a company that has successfully *invented a rhetoric* of youth. This rhetoric is the contextual framework around which teenagers gather, of which they use to communicate with each other. It is unprecedented what Alloy has done to the televisual marketplace, creating and holding female fans of their own depravity. What is next for Alloy perhaps does not matter. What Alloy has already accomplished is more than enough for future scholars to understand about the present cultural moment in teenage consumption. The television landscape for teenagers is in no small part owned and operated by Alloy Entertainment. Alloy's footprint is large enough to extend for at least another half generation with Alloy's new model of spin-offs in mind. Teenagers want what Alloy has to sell, and it will be up to cultural studies scholars, marketing scholars, and rhetoric scholars, to make sense of what is happening.

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