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SOAP OPERAS AND TEEN DRAMAS

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1. INTRODUCTION

Since soap operas peaked in popularity in the eighties, there has been a steady decline in ratings. While there are many reasons and possibilities as to why soap operas have dramatically dropped in popularity and while many scholars attribute soap opera decline in the mid-nineties to the OJ Simpson trial, soap operas ratings took another hit in the late nineties (Ford, *As the World Turns in a Convergence Culture*, 43). There are many possibilities for this decline; for the purposes for this paper, I would like to closely examine one of the reasons that may have caused the decline of the U.S. soap opera is the rise of the teen drama.

Soaps have often had an unproportionally large teenage fan base. In the mid-1990s over 17% of soap fans were between 18-24 years olds, even though this demographic is only around 13% of the general population (Liccardo, *Who Really Watches the Daytime Soap?*). According to books like Harrington and Bielby's *Soap Fans*, when soap opera fans are asked when they started watching soap operas, many of them responded that they became hooked as teenagers and have been following characters ever since on their favorite soaps (10). This did not resonate with me because, as a teenager in the late nineties, I did not watch soap operas, nor did any of my friends. We preferred shows on the WB like their "New Tuesday" lineup with *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Dawson's Creek*. Every Tuesday night, friends would come over,

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and we would watch episodes together. As I started watching *As the World Turns* for my MIT soap opera class, I noticed certain elements of soap operas that were similar to teen dramas. I could imagine watching soap operas with my friends; we would have had the same number of gorgeous men to lust over and have had some of the same story lines to discuss. My thirteen-year-old self would have probably become a big fan of soap operas, if I only watched them.

Since the rise of the WB and the teen drama, teenage viewers have chosen to embrace teen dramas instead of starting their path as longtime viewers of soap operas. If my personal experience with teen dramas was repeated on a larger scale in the late nineties, and teenagers were essentially replacing soap operas with teen dramas as their show of choice, this could potentially explain the drop in popularity of the soap operas and could prove to have even larger implications in the future.

In this study, I would like to give a basic introduction to soap operas and why network executives would prefer to target the female teenage demographic. The second part will then address the rise of the WB and the CW and how it managed to corner the teenaged demographic, and the third portion of the essay will address the two types of dramas that are found on the CW. The fourth section will compare and contrast soap opera plot lines with those in the teen dramas, and the conclusion will address which soap operas and teen dramas have “crossed over” borrowing elements from each other, and what lessons can be learned from each of these cross over attempts. While not all of these hybrid story-telling styles have been successful, there are several instances where certain storytelling techniques and plot devices have been used and readily accepted by audiences. By looking at different plot devices and which crossovers worked between soap operas and teen dramas, writers and executives can use these techniques to capture an even larger audience. For

fans of these shows, they may even be able to find other shows that use the same techniques and discover a new show to enjoy.

2. SOAP OPERAS

Since their creation in the 1930s soap operas have captured the imaginations of people of all ages and all walks of life. People watch soap operas for diverse reasons. Some like the daily serialized story telling; others enjoy the family dynamics; yet other viewers grew up with the characters on an ongoing soap and have developed a strong bond with many of the residents of their favorite soap opera. Soap operas often have “an emphasis on family life, personal relationships, sexual dramas, emotional and moral conflicts; some coverage of topical issues; set in familiar domestic interiors with only occasional excursions into new locations (Bowles, 119). While soap operas have managed to attract a diverse group of people, most soap operas do have a target audience. Traditionally soap operas have targeted stay at home wives and mothers, who were able to watch soap operas during the afternoon timeslot (Liccardo, “Who Really Watched Daytime Soap Operas” 37), but executives have tried to expand viewership while not alienating longtime viewers.

One way to expand is by targeting the teenage girl market. This is viable group to target, not only because they are home when soap operas traditionally air, but also because they are old enough to understand the nuances of the plotlines. Therefore, it is understandable that soap operas have increased the number of younger cast members and increased storylines that have teens in them to really try and attract teen girls in hopes that, once they start watching the program for a particular story, they would then become addicted and a lifelong viewer. While the model worked in the eighties and early nineties for the short term and increased the number of soap

viewers, what many executives did not expect was the creation of more programming that targeted strictly this demographic.

3. CREATION OF THE WB

The WB was created in 1995 as a television network that would run popular syndicated television programs from the eighties and early nineties such as *Baywatch* and *Star Trek*. As time went on, sitcoms were introduced, along with kids programming that became known as the Kids WB. In 1997, the WB had its first original family drama, *7th Heaven*, and its moderate success, the WB was encouraged to produce more original dramas. In March 1997, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* was introduced, and the network experienced the highest ratings in the WB's history with a new crowd tuning in to watch the shows. With that, the WB started to target the teen market. In 1998, *Dawson's Creek* was introduced to the network the WB became a more permanent fixture in the television choices for teens across America.

Other networks, originally known to have teen dramas such as Fox with *Beverly Hills: 90210* started to feel the pressure of the WB and gradually shifted programming to target older audiences, investing heavily in shows like *Ally McBeal*. The WB cornered the teen market and, in the following years would create more programs like *Roswell*, *Charmed* and *Felicity*. From 2000-2003, the WB added several other shows like *Smallville* and *Gilmore Girls* and tried to attract different viewers by targeting men and expanding the age range of its fan base. However, several of the shows that premiered strongly had difficult sophomore seasons, and hit shows like *Buffy* were dropping in ratings. By 2006, the WB had experienced extensive failures and decided to merge with UPN, a similar network, to create the CW. The CW combined

the resources from both of the networks to create the most popular line-up to target teen audiences.

4. TEEN DRAMAS

To get an accurate picture of teen dramas, they should be categorized into two types. The first type is the supernatural teen dramas; these shows were the most popular ones in the late nineties and have been a staple CW programming. These shows often have supernatural elements, whether it was monsters, demons or spells, and this supernatural programming quickly captured the attention of the teenage demographic. Shows like the wiccan-themed *Charmed*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Smallville*, and *Supernatural* are all considered part this group and while each episode contained a certain supernatural element that needed to be destroyed or vanquished, there would also be more mundane drama surrounding the story like romantic interests or family disputes. For example, in each episode of *Charmed*, a show about three witches with powers, there would be a main plotline where there is always some sort of evil that has to be taken care of by the end of the episode, but there is also personal drama surrounding each of the characters. Whether it is trying to keep their secret powers hidden from the outside world, or dealing with the scary stalker, or dealing with a difficult break-up, these issues surround the main plotline and give the audience an intimate look inside the lives of all the characters.

The second type of teen drama is even more similar to the daytime soap opera genre. This type puts teenage characters in difficult situations, and the show depicts them trying to deal and come to terms with these problems. These show some of the most prevalent problems all teenagers face, from self-identity and fitting in with the crowd to dealing with family problems. *Felicity*, *One Tree Hill*, *Everwood*, *Gilmore*

Girls, and *Gossip Girls* are shows that use the problems of everyday life like going to high school and dealing with the stress of being a teenager as their main plotline, instead of having them battle demons and evils symbolizing the difficulties of growing up.

5. COMPARING TEEN DRAMAS TO SOAP OPERAS

When trying to compare teen dramas with soap operas, it is worth noting the most important differences at the outset. Soap operas traditionally follow several families with approximately 40 characters on a show at any one time. In teen dramas, the number is usually around 10, with the number of main characters usually staying under 6. Also, teen dramas have a strong focus on the teenagers; in soap operas, parents and characters in their 20s and 30s are often the focus of most of the drama. Parents in the earliest teen dramas do not have storylines of their own and show up only to ground or get into arguments with the teen characters. Parents and adults did not even appear in all the episodes of the teen dramas, while soap opera children and teenagers are the characters that are often placed on the back burner for the sake of the plot.

Another difference between soap operas and teen dramas is that teen dramas is dedicated to the characters trying to deal with their own self-image and self-identity. For example, in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Buffy spends much of her time fighting demons and vampires, but she is also trying to deal with problems in her social life. As a newcomer to the high school, she is trying to not get in the same type of trouble she was known for at her last high school while trying to fit in. Not only is she trying to find a group of friends that will accept her, but she is also trying to come to terms with her fate as the one girl who has the power to keep evil from

taking over the world. While soap opera characters might be misguided or have some troubles, the main characters have a strong support system. Every character has a best friend they can count on and, because the main characters are incredibly close to each other, and most of them have stopped trying to “fit in or “be cool. In soap operas, there might be a rich crowd, but usually there is not a distinct in-crowd or an outcast- someone who is socially unaccepted by everyone.

In teen dramas, the struggle is often for the outsider to gain the acceptance of the in crowd. For example, for the entire first season of *Smallville*, a drama about a teenaged Superman, Clark Kent tried to gain acceptance of the in-crowd and win the affections of Lana Lang, the most popular girl in school. Clark's father was aware of his abilities, and afraid his son would risk exposure playing football, he prevented him from joining the football team. Because Clark was unable to play, he was known as the awkward kid that got teased and even was hung as a scarecrow as a high school hazing ritual. As the first season progresses, the most important social development is when Lana realizes that she enjoys his company. They become unlikely friends who are always there for each other.

Another interesting difference between soap operas and teen dramas is the way the two genres view sex. While soap operas are known for their sex and suffering plotlines, they focus more on the relationships that lead to sex and the suffering that comes after it, instead of the act of sex itself. Sex is often a major turning point in soap operas, especially if the character is committing an act of infidelity. This marks a definite breaking point in the relationship of two people. The character would then have to suffer the consequences of the affair, like guilt, the end of a relationship, and oftentimes an unwanted pregnancy.

In teen dramas, there is just as much or even more preoccupation with the sex as the relationships. Proctor and Gamble, the only soap company that still creates soap operas, originally took a very active role in the creation of *Dawson's Creek*. However, when they received a script full of references to sex and masturbation, they immediately withdrew support for the show. While in soap operas, most characters have to deal with the awkwardness and the secrets and poor judgment surrounding sex, the obsession with the act of sex itself is less prominent. In *Gossip Girl*, a show about the romances of teenage Upper-east Siders, one of the major plotlines is about Blair and her decision to try and find the perfect time to lose her virginity to her boyfriend Nate. In a group of oversexed teenagers, she tries to make her first sexual encounter with her boyfriend special and there is a mention of this in just about every episode. Somehow, all of her attempts have been foiled, either because of interruptions or poor timing, but, as she gradually realizes that Nate isn't the right person for her, she breaks up with him. In a moment of weakness, she sleeps with Nate's best friend Chuck and has to deal with the social and emotional consequences of her actions. The first half the season deals with Blair deciding on whether or not she wants to lose her virginity to Nate, while the rest of the season deals with the social consequences of sleeping with Chuck.

The most obvious differences between soap operas and teen dramas are the similarities that teen dramas share with other primetime shows. Teen dramas air once a week, whereas soap operas air five times a week. Not only is there a difference in the production costs, there are differences in how stories are told, too. There is much more of a chance for viewers to actually become involved in the lives of the characters in soap operas, whereas, in teen dramas, the audience only sees the characters

for forty-five minutes a week for 20 weeks, creating less of a connection between the audience and the characters.

Soap opera action also tends to be slower than primetime shows where every minute counts. In a show like *Veronica Mars*, a show about a teenage private detective, important turning point, and clues are dropped all the time that are critical to understanding and solving the mystery. Thus the level of involvement for the audience is extremely high. Missing a couple of minutes in a teen drama could mean not understanding the entire episode, while missing a couple of minutes of a soap opera would do little or nothing to understanding the situation. If soap operas demanded the full attention of viewers, it would be difficult for the audience to fully devote 5 hours a week for soap opera watching. Since people are often busy, soap operas have been designed for people to be able to multi-task while watching, and still get a fairly full soap opera experience.

Finally, soap operas end on cliffhangers every episode and a typically larger cliffhanger for the Friday episode to ensure viewers tune in next week, which are more rare primetime. Most teen drama episodes manage to have a resolution, even if the main story arc for the season is far from being over. The main problem in the episode is solved, giving the audience some sense of resolution. In fact, many dramas have a standard way of wrapping up each episode. In every episode of *Gossip Girl* the show starts with an omnipresent narrator who runs a gossip blog and has unlimited access to the lives of the show's six main characters. Each episode also ends with the same narrator giving advice and foreshadowing the upcoming difficulties for all the characters. The episodes always end with the same line, "xoxo Gossip Girl. In *Felicity*, a show about a college student who turns down Stanford to follow a boy she likes to New York University, each episode starts with her narrating a story about her life in college

and recording it on a tape recorder to send to her friend Sarah. At the end of each episode, Felicity listens to Sarah's responding tape. Each one of these examples give the viewers a sense of a resolution, unlike the soap opera.

Soap operas and teen drama have subtle differences with their storytelling techniques and content, but each of the differences evolved mostly because these techniques are effective for each type of show. Given the time constraints, teen dramas cleverly package the drama-filled storyline in 45 minutes that forces the audience to pay constant attention to the show to understand the plot. Soap operas, on the other hand, have more time to tell the story. Since the action is much slower, creators insert cliffhangers to ensure that the viewers continue to watch. Both genres have managed to cleverly package itself in ways that would most entice the viewer and keep them coming back for more.

6. SIMILAR THEMES IN SOAP OPERAS AND TEEN DRAMAS

Soap operas and teen dramas may be quite different, but there are many reoccurring themes that the two genres share not found in other primetime shows. Since what is believable in soap operas is also believable for teen dramas, it would make sense that much of the content and some of the plot twists are similar.

6.1. Dying But Not Dying Over and Over Again. It is fascinating to see how many soap opera characters actually die and then come back to life only to die again and come back to life, especially if they are a soap opera villain. The number of times that James Steinbeck of *As the World Turns* was presumed dead makes him the luckiest person in the world, only to allow him to make more trouble for the residents of Oakdale. He was shown falling from a cargo plane, shot at Ruxton Hills,

in helicopter that was shot down, shot by his son Paul Ryan , and involved in a cabin fire.

In teen dramas like *Charmed* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* characters' lives are risked in every episode and every once and a while, a character dies only to discover that there is some cosmic loophole that allows them to come back to life. In *Charmed*, the sisters have managed to die and come back to life several times. They have drunk potions to turn themselves into ghosts; their future selves have been executed; they've been shot; and yet they have managed to survive each of these incidents.

Aside from the supernatural teen drama example, there is the case of Dan Scott from *One Tree Hill*. The father of both of the male lead characters in the show, Dan manages to survive a heart attack after his wife hands him divorce papers in season one, and then manages to get poisoned by his ex-wife as he is in his dealership, which goes up in flames. In season 4, he wrongfully kills his brother for poisoning him and setting his car dealership in flame. When he realizes his brother had a daughter, Dan is so shocked that he tries to hang himself in the prison. Finally, in season 5, he finds out that he has a mysterious heart disease and only has 6 months left to live.

6.2. Symbolic or Literal Evil Twins. One of the most stereotypical plot twists in soap operas is the evil twin plot twist. When the main character is living his or her life with no problems, an evil twin comes in and manages to create problems for the character. Often, no one believes or even knows that the evil twin exists. While this is actually quite an outlandish plot, this is somehow acceptable in both the worlds of teen drama and soap operas. Lily in *As the World Turns* manages to find herself in this predicament when she is left with Simon on a deserted island by his crazy sister Celia. Lily develops a case of Stockholm syndrome and starts to fall in love with Simon. Rose, Lily's twin sister, manages to come to Oakdale in her

place and, after she was convinced Lily was not coming back, settled into her life and fell in love with Holden. Lily comes back just in time to save her relationship with Holden, and it is revealed that Rose is Lily's twin sister and that their mother Iva was drugged after their birth. Lily and Rose eventually make up and become friends before Rose's untimely death a few years later.

In *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, there are several instances where evil twins have come to create difficulties. In one episode, a robot that looked identical to Buffy was created to hurt others. Buffy realizes the ploy and ends up fighting the robot herself and destroying it. Another more symbolic example of the evil twin problem is when Buffy dies in the first season and is resuscitated; another slayer was chosen to take her place. This slayer, named Kendra, has different beliefs namely that all monsters and vampires needed to be killed, no matter if they were inherently good. Kendra imprisoned Angel, Buffy's boyfriend at the time a good vampire, and repeatedly tried to kill him. In Buffy's fight with Kendra, she not only was trying to save her boyfriend, but she was also trying to prove that her job wasn't as simple as drawing a line and killing all the non-human beings.

A less symbolic version of the evil twin is oftentimes used in shows like *Charmed* where a demon abducted one of the sisters, shape-shifted to appear as, and attempted to corrupt the other sisters to help her take over the demon underground. In *Supernatural*, a show about demon-hunting brothers, and *Roswell*, a show about four aliens growing up in a small town in Nevada, shape-shifting capabilities were used as ruses by evil forces in the show to try and deceive the main characters. These schemes only brought the main characters closer together, teaching them that they must know each other better if their lives depend on each other.

6.3. Supercouples and People to Break them Up. Supercouples intrigue audiences beyond expectations and are often described as high-profile, culturally significant, and nearly perfect romances that influence our expectations of what a great love story should be (The Power of Cinematic Love: Tribute to the Super Couple, Arcieri). Supercouples in soap operas are often best associated with Luke Spencer and Laura Webber from *General Hospital*. After trial and tribulations dealing with the mob and denying their love for each other, the couple was finally married in November 16, 1981, and more than 30 million viewers tuned in to watch their marriage. This landed the pair a spot as the most iconic supercouple in the world of daytime. Other supercouples in present-day soap operas include Tom and Margo Hughes in *As the World Turns*, Sonny and Carly in *General Hospital*, and Ethan and Theresa, and Luis and Sheridan, from *Passions*.

In *Passions*, Luis and Theresa are a brother and sister from a less wealthy family in Harmony, and both start relationships with Sheridan and Ethan from the Crane family, the wealthiest inhabitants in town. Their unlikely relationships suffer through amnesia, lies, schemes, and family interventions. The soap opera does a fairly good job setting up the premise that these two couples are meant to be together. From a young age, Theresa, the housekeeper's daughter, develops a crush on Ethan Crane and becomes convinced that she is meant to be with Ethan. She begins to win his heart and even though, Ethan begins to realize how much he truly loves her, he marries a woman named Gwen. Sheridan, Ethan's aunt, comes back from Europe and gets trapped with a conspiracy of men who tries to kill her. Luis, a police officer, is assigned to protect her and is immediately frustrated with her selfish, rich-girl ways. Her head-strong personality and kindness towards others eventually wins over Luis

and he falls for her. Sheridan's family is immediately up in arms and intervenes in their relationship, plotting against them to keep the two apart.

In the case of teen dramas, there are several examples of supercouples. One of the most iconic couples in teen dramas is Buffy and Angel. Their romance was forbidden and their constant struggle to be together gave them a spot as one of television's most famous tragic love stories. Their relationship was a modern day Romeo and Juliet story of two people that love each other but cannot be together because they manage to find each other on opposite sides too often. Their long fight to be together ended in tragedy when she realizes that being with him literally means bringing about the end of the world, and she finally kills him at the end of the show's second finale.

A similar situation occurred in *Charmed*. One of the sisters fell for a whitelighter named Leo, a guardian for witches, and even though their relationship was forbidden, they were married. Even though the relationship was against the rules and always under strain, he continued to climb the supernatural ladder of success which gave him duties that took him away from her. They always fought to stay together and eventually had two sons that would continue to save the world. The other example of a supercouple in *Charmed* is the love between a sister named Pheobe and a powerful-half demon sent to kill the sisters named Cole. Cole used Pheobe's attraction to him as a way to gain her trust and a way to trap the sisters. After realizing that he was starting to fall for her, Cole tried repeatedly to call things off, so he could remain loyal to the evil side; however, he found his love for Pheobe too strong to resist. One night, after an argument with her sisters, Pheobe turns to Cole for comfort. Cole tries to kill her but cannot and instead warns her about the danger her sisters face. Pheobe eventually realizes that Cole is actually the demon trying to kill her sisters and tries to kill him, only to find that she cannot. After she realizes that he needs

to be destroyed, the sisters vanquish him, and he is sent to a parallel plane where he is forced to live out his life.

6.4. ***Passions: The Soap Opera for Teenagers.*** In 1999, one of the most innovative writers in soaps, James E. Reilly began writing his own soap opera calling it *Passions*. This soap was targeted at teenagers and had a young cast and a very innovative storyline. By including a supernatural twist with the usual mix of love and relationships, he wanted to reach out to a new audience. Implementing storylines that have been immensely popular for teen dramas like witchcraft and superpowers, they created a soap opera about the townspeople of Harmony.

Reilly took elements from popular culture and placed them into the soap opera turning them into a parody. By including the various supernatural elements, the soap opera parodied paranormal television shows like *Charmed*. They also did a parody of *Chicago* where several of the characters did 'Cell Block Tango' in a dream. There was another fantasy sequence where the characters did a complex Bollywood dance sequence depicting Ethan and Gwen's life if they lived in India. One of the characters, Endora, a small witchling with special powers, is said to be the child of Darrin and Samantha of *Bewitched*. Other popular parodies were *Titanic*, *Brokeback Mountain*, *Pirates of the Caribbean*, *Wizard of Oz*, *The Da Vinci Code*, and *The Little Mermaid*.

Another interesting aspect of *Passions* is the breaking down of the fourth wall, by making fun of themselves and reminding the audience that the show is a work of fiction. For example, characters are oftentimes shown watching *Passions* and references are made to the show as the 'crazy show that comes on after *Days of Our Lives*.' Another example is the multiple references that are made to Jesse Metcalfe the actor who played Miguel, who ended up as a gardener on *Desperate Housewives*.

When Theresa tried to look for her brother Miguel, she said that his last known job was as a gardener on Wisteria Lane. Another joke was when Theresa was looking for a qualified assistant, she made a joke that working for her would not be like working for an NBC serial and would actually require skills. She could not hire someone just because he looked like Jesse Metcalfe. Other popular gags were directed at the choice to move *Passions* from NBC to DirecTV. When one of the characters moved away, she commented that she had DirecTV all hooked up, and would keep up on things in Harmony that way. Other jokes were directed at NBC's decision to extend the *Today Show* after *Passions* move. One of the characters is even said to be watching the sixth hour of the *Today Show* after the decision was announced.

Since *Passions* was a soap opera that targeted teens, they would continuously ramp up the summer storylines, calling it the Summer Extravaganza. This would take the cast overseas to exotic locales like Mexico or Rome and try and resolve major storyarcs during the summer, in an effort attract more school-aged viewers. The writers hoped that when kids had more free time, they would watch the show and then continue to watch during the school year once they were 'addicted.'

As innovative as the show is, it didn't catch on with some of the more traditional viewers of traditional soap operas. This constantly caused *Passions* to have low ratings because, while they attracted a young demographic, they alienated much of the older, more committed serial watchers. Teenagers would often treat the soap opera as a teen drama and would stop watching after story arcs were played out. The creators also created textitPassions as a continual parody, which made finding longterm viewers even more difficult. This caused the show to consistantly have low ratings, and the show will thus wrap up its last season in August.

7. *Gilmore Girls, Veronica Mars, and Dawsons Creek*: THE TEEN DRAMA FOR ADULTS

Through the years, teen dramas have been slowly changing and adapting to try and capture and attract as large of an audience as possible. One of the adaptations is to have the teen characters address more mature problems or give the characters more mature dialogue. For example, *Veronica Mars* struck a chord with an older audience because of the mature content of the show. Shot in a neo-noir fashion, the show is about a once popular girl turned outcast high school sleuth who spends her time helping her father solve mysteries. The show was described as having a hard-boiled dialogue comes from its teen protagonist's mouth in a way that stabs any potential cutesiness in the heart with an ice pick and that the show never soft-peddles the timeless, fundamental truth that high school is hell by LA Weekly. She handles affairs and murders, all while dealing with high school. Her snarky persistence and off-beat humor attracted older viewers while younger teens struggled to catch on. The show was deemed one of the six best dramas on television, but because of the poor ratings among the teen demographic, *Veronica Mars* was cancelled.

Dawson's Creek was another show that was known for its witty references. Even though much of the conversation was surrounding sex, references were often times made to things in past that teenagers would not understand. Dawson often refers to his parents as Rob and Laura Petrie and uses "the Leni Riefenstahl approach to filmmaking" to describe the principals request for a film glorifying the football team. Another character, Jen, says her parents followed "the Ho Chi Minh school of parenting." One of the actresses even confessed that she had to consult the dictionary to understand the scripts. Due to the need for escapism because of the constant coverage of the Monica Lewinsky scandal on other networks, adults started to watch *Dawson's*

Creek and found the dialogue surprisingly refreshing, and continued to watch even after coverage of the scandal ended (The Museum for Broadcast Communications).

The other possibility to broaden viewership is to have storylines that involve the parents. In *Gilmore Girls*, Lorelai, the mother of teenage Rory, splits the screen time with her daughter. She is just as active in the show as her daughter as she gets into and out of relationships, makes mistakes, and fixes them. She deals with her overbearing and overprotective mother who is still bitter about Lorelai's unexpected teenage pregnancy with Rory and tries to manage her relationship with her while trying to make her proud. Lorelai acts as a mother and her daughter's best friend trying to stop her daughter from making the same mistakes she did, while still being sensitive to Rory's desires. Her life and interactions with other characters caught on with old and young audiences alike, and the show quickly became one of the most popular programs on the WB.

8. CONCLUSION

While there are many differences between traditional teen dramas and soap operas, the shows are still evolving in their own ways. Teen dramas are slowly becoming more like soap operas, leaving the supernatural twists and symbolism and more literally depicting teen life to attract and keep teenagers interested. With the increasing exposure of teenagers to other dramas either through network television or cable tv, it is difficult to maintain teen drama in its original form. Therefore, dialogue and storylines are changing to attract teenage audiences, who suddenly have more choices presented to them. While these same storylines are used in soap operas and can easily attract an older audience, executives are oftentimes so focused about marketing these dramas to teenagers, they have forgone much of the chance to expand viewership.

Shows like *Dawson's Creek* only became popular by chance with older audiences because there were no other more mature dramas on television during that time. For other shows like *Veronica Mars*, the CW's unwillingness to expand their viewership and to try and target older viewers caused low ratings for a show that should have done well with older more mature audiences. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, the CW has lost more than 28 percent of viewers in recent years, and continue to lose even more viewers even though *Gossip Girl* is one of the most controversial and talked about television dramas today. Even the ratings for their hit shows have been dropping dramatically, forcing the CW to reevaluate its target audience and how it reaches them.

Even though the incredibly innovative *Passions*, the one major crossover into the realm of teen dramas, did poorly, many lessons were learned. Soap opera writers have to be careful when targeting teen audiences to not dumb down the plot lines or make the dialogue and characters less sophisticated. Much of the entertainment of soap operas comes from character development, while the draw of teen dramas is oftentimes the action. *Passions* made the mistake of being too much of a teen drama. The soap was incredibly action-driven with supernatural elements and plot twists, so that the focus was taken away from character development. This attracted teenagers that strictly viewed the soap opera as a teen drama and were incapable of developing a relationship with the characters. This move also alienated many older viewers who could have become loyal long-term viewers if they were given the level of character involvement they were used to in other soaps. The trick is to target new viewers without alienating older, more loyal viewers. Soaps like *As the World Turns* and *Days of Our Lives* have substantially large teenage casts to try and attract school-age viewers, and they have been able to maintain old loyal viewers.

Both teen dramas and soap operas are two genres that seem to be struggling in the world of entertainment. With the extreme sink or swim attitude in the entertainment industry, both are feeling pressures to expand their audiences. With precocious teenagers and teen dramas that are already attractive to older audiences and soap operas with younger cast members, the elements are in place to move aggressively to bridge the age gap. Since many teen dramas and soap operas have plot devices that are similar, it would only make sense that these two genres continue to borrow heavily from each other and gradually evolve into the tastes of the target audience. Even with my points about the different storytelling techniques and plots, the most important factor for both of these shows might be surprising. Teen dramas that have tried to act too precocious and too mature, with the main characters too wise beyond their years, have found themselves trapped between teenagers who cannot understand the show and older audiences that opt for something more mature. Soap operas that have managed to borrow too heavily from teen dramas have found themselves trapped between a teen audience who watches the soap opera like a teen drama with very little loyalty to the characters and the show and an older, more loyal fan base turned off by the immature dialogue and lack of character development. To many television executives, it may seem like they are trying to strike an impossible balance juggling the viewing preferences of different groups... but maybe it is just like high school. "The most important thing is just to be yourself."

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