

# Watch Out, Listen Up!



## Feminist Primetime Report Update 2000-2001

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## Introduction

In May 2000, the National Organization for Women (NOW) issued its first Feminist Primetime Report on television, part of the Watch Out, Listen Up! media activism campaign. NOW examined entertainment programming, rating the shows for gender composition/diversity, violent content, sexual exploitation and social responsibility. After the positive responses of feminist TV viewers to last year's report, NOW decided to keep watch on the broadcast networks to see if their new programs showed any progress.

For its first report NOW looked at all of the primetime programs on the four major networks: ABC, CBS, FOX and NBC. Fledgling networks UPN and The WB were not analyzed at that time due to their limited availability in many areas. With their growing viewership and the popularity of their programs with young people, NOW expanded this year's report to include UPN and The WB.

What follows is an analysis of the new fall programs and spring replacement shows on the four major networks plus the complete line-ups of the two smaller networks. Also assessed are the networks' final calls on which shows to renew for next season and which to cancel. Special presentations were not evaluated for this report.

## Analysis Process

For NOW's second Feminist Primetime Report 59 programs were viewed twice each and analyzed. These programs aired on the six broadcast networks in primetime during the November 2000, February 2001 and May 2001 ratings sweep periods.

Only the new programs were reviewed on ABC, CBS, FOX and NBC, as the complete line-ups had been analyzed in last year's report. The full schedule of programs were reviewed for UPN and The WB, since these two networks were not included in last year's report.

Analysts were asked to record data and comments for their assigned shows in each of four categories:

1. Gender Composition and Diversity: Percentage of women/girls in the cast as compared to men/boys, with deductions for negative stereotypes and bonus points for positive role models. A second score factored in the percentage of female cast members who are also women of color and/or lesbians.
2. Violence: Number and severity of violent, threatening or hostile acts.
3. Sexual Exploitation: Depiction of female characters within a range from respected/valued participants in the storyline to mere sex objects existing only to complement/seduce male characters. Taken into account were the types of roles the women filled, their intelligence/skills, their attire/appearance and the way male characters interacted with them.
4. Social Responsibility: Subject matter of the show within a range from highly responsible with true relevance to everyday people's lives to irresponsible content with no redeeming values. Taken into account were issues like economics, childcare, birth control, consequences to actions and other forms of diversity such as age, size and ability.

NOW compiled the results, ranking the programs in the above categories, producing five scores for each show, 1 being the best and 59 the worst. Ties were allowed when necessary. Each individual show's five scores were averaged for a final score and then the shows were ranked overall. With the rankings completed, observations were made about both program and network performance in each category and overall. On the following pages, when highlighting how the best and worst programs performed, NOW separated the new programs on the four major networks from the full line-up of programs on the two smaller networks for added clarification.

## General Observations on Primetime Programming and the Networks

Topping the list of the reviewed shows was The WB's *Gilmore Girls*, which centers around a young single mom and her intelligent teenage daughter. Analysts reported that the mother-daughter relationship was honest, the women characters were treated respectfully, issues of family, friends and education were handled with both humor and sensitivity, and the supporting characters were diverse in race, age and size. Many of the other top shows, like CBS's *That's Life*, performed well not just because they had women leads but because they mirrored real-life and portrayed well-rounded characters without resorting to gratuitous violence.

Surprises also emerged. *Gideon's Crossing*, which ABC touted as a racially-diverse show, performed poorly in the report mainly because the women played such subsidiary roles. And The WB's *Popstars* came in, shockingly, at number five, helped by its numerous female participants, many of whom were African American, Asian Pacific and Latina. While *Popstars* effectively communicated the hard work and disappointment involved in pursuing a singing career, it also sent the message that beauty and sex still sell.

Some shows that analysts enjoyed did not soar to the top when graded objectively. *CSI* (CBS) is a dark look at crime scene investigations. Although the show relies heavily on enacting murders and showing dead bodies, it also boasts two smart female characters who use their scientific skills to track down the perpetrators. NBC's *Ed* didn't finish very high but had many qualities to recommend it, namely the likability of its large cast of characters and its thoughtful, unique storylines.

### NOW Recommends:

Gilmore Girls	WB
Girlfriends	UPN
What About Joan	ABC
My Wife and Kids	ABC
That's Life	CBS
Buffy the Vampire Slayer	WB/UPN
Felicity	WB
Boston Public	FOX
Ed	NBC
CSI	CBS

As NOW observed last year, entertainment geared toward men is often more violent and degrading to women. Without the large percentage of theatrical and made-for-TV movies included in last year's report (NOW elected not to review specials and movies this year), violence was much lower this time around. Dramatic series still tended to be more socially aware, diverse and respectful of women. Last year NOW noted the lack of a strong place for women in comedy, and we're happy to note that several new sitcoms with positive women characters hit the air, creating more balance in this area. On the negative side, the two younger networks brought more fantasy-action shows to the mix, which also helped level the score by dumbing-down the pool of hour-long dramas.

Programs like ABC's *My Wife and Kids* or FOX's *Boston Public* demonstrated that a show did not have to revolve around a female lead in order to score well in NOW's analysis. When women in supporting roles or in ensemble casts were allowed to break out of the sex object role and portray authentic people, the whole show seemed to benefit from an expanded landscape and the increased possibilities for subject matter.

Cartoons and claymation programs offered an interesting element to this review. *Gary & Mike* and *Celebrity Deathmatch* (both on UPN), unencumbered by living actors, reveled in offensiveness and violence. At the same time, *The PJs* (UPN) and *The Oblongs* (The WB) addressed real social issues through humor—sometimes making important points about society but sometimes just making fun of their disadvantaged characters.

When looking at the broadcast networks, NOW first compared the major four—ABC, CBS, FOX and NBC—to their performances last year. NBC disappointed this year, performing much worse with its new shows than it did with its full line-up last year, sinking from number one to number three. Both CBS and ABC moved up a slot to number one and two respectively, thanks to some impressive new programs. FOX remained in the fourth position—same as last year—but did not trail nearly as much and was, in fact, right behind NBC.

The WB performed exceedingly well, which NOW found encouraging given its young audience. Many programs starring women and girls could be found on The WB and analysts felt that the majority of them offered good role models. UPN, however, was evaluated the poorest network in this review. Many of its programs sat at the bottom of each category and only a few made it into the top ranks.

The networks all have far to go, but they are clearly capable of producing entertaining women-friendly fare. And as seen on page 13, viewers *can* influence what the networks chose to support and what they reject.

## Overall Program Performances

The following are all of the programs reviewed for this report, ranked by their overall score, which was derived by averaging the five scores in each category.

<b>UPN and The WB</b>			<b>ABC, CBS, FOX and NBC</b>		
<b><u>All Shows Ranked by Average Score</u></b>			<b><u>NEW Shows Ranked by Average Score</u></b>		
1	Gilmore Girls	WB	4	What About Joan	ABC
2	Sabrina, the Teenage Witch	WB	6	Kate Brasher	CBS
3	Felicity	WB	10	Bette	CBS
5	Popstars	WB	11	That's Life	CBS
7	Girlfriends	UPN	13	My Wife and Kids	ABC
8	Star Trek: Voyager	UPN	14	Weakest Link	NBC
9	7th Heaven	WB	15	The Weber Show	NBC
12	Moesha	UPN	17	Boston Public	FOX
16	The Hughleys	UPN	24	Ed	NBC
18	The Steve Harvey Show	WB	25	Boot Camp	FOX
19	Jack & Jill	WB	28	The Geena Davis Show	ABC
20	The Parkers	UPN	29	DAG	NBC
21	Dawson's Creek	WB	29	Yes, Dear	CBS
22	Buffy the Vampire Slayer	WB	32	Three Sisters	NBC
23	Popular	WB	33	Survivor	CBS
26	All Souls	UPN	35	Grounded for Life	FOX
27	Charmed	WB	38	CSI	CBS
31	The Jamie Foxx Show	WB	38	Dark Angel	FOX
34	Roswell	WB	41	First Years	NBC
36	Grosse Pointe	WB	42	Gideon's Crossing	ABC
36	The Oblongs	WB	43	The Fugitive	CBS
40	The PJs	WB	46	The Mole	ABC
44	Angel	WB	47	The District	CBS
45	Chains of Love	UPN	48	Lone Gunmen	FOX
51	Nikki	WB	49	The Job	ABC
53	7 Days	UPN	50	Temptation Island	FOX
55	Celebrity Deathmatch	UPN	52	The Fighting Fitzgeralds	NBC
56	Gary & Mike	UPN	54	Titus	FOX
57	The XFL	UPN	57	The XFL	NBC
59	WWF Smackdown!	UPN			

## Overall Network Performances

To see how the networks stacked up, the overall scores for each network's programs were averaged together. The four major networks and the two newer ones are again listed separately due to the fact that many more programs went into the UPN and WB averages and a direct comparison would be inappropriate.

### **Overall Network Averages for ALL Shows**

WB	23.52
UPN	35.01

### **Overall Network Averages for NEW Shows**

CBS	26.70
ABC	28.53
NBC	32.20
FOX	34.94

Summary by Category

• Gender Composition and Diversity

Once the scores were tallied, it came as little surprise that many of the programs ranking high in gender composition had women's names in their titles and 17 of the top 25 had female protagonists running the show. Looking at the shows altogether, women made up nearly half the lead roles, but when supporting and guest roles were included, that percentage drops. It's a fact: men still dominate television. And because of this, it is still easier to find broad diversity among male characters.

When shows were ranked by both gender and diversity, the top 25 changed slightly. Analysts observed that the four major networks are more likely to feature racial diversity in their hour-long dramas, where the casts are large. The WB and UPN feature several situation-comedies with predominantly African American casts. Otherwise, sitcoms tend to be all-white. Lesbians were more visible than last year, although still scarce, and mostly found in dramas. Analysts commended *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (WB) for its lesbian characters.

Not all of the shows with female leads and diverse casts performed well in other categories, but a trend definitely emerged—women-led shows tended to have less sexually exploitative content and more social responsibility. Of the shows that scored well in this category, analysts made note of positive female role models on *Girlfriends* (UPN), *Gilmore Girls* (The WB), *That's Life* (CBS), *What About Joan* and *My Wife and Kids* (both on ABC).

Just having women and people of color leading the cast did not, however, exempt a show from promoting outdated and sometimes offensive stereotypes. Shows like *The Parkers* and *The Hughleys* (UPN), *Grosse Pointe* (The WB), *Three Sisters* (NBC) and *The Geena Davis Show* (ABC) all lost points for demeaning characters. And analysts reported that while the diverse group of women on The WB's *Popstars* made inspiring role models based on their talent and drive, they also promoted an overemphasis on good looks and sex appeal.

UPN and The WB

Shows with the Best Gender Composition

1	Popstars	WB
3	Sabrina, the Teenage Witch	WB
7	Gilmore Girls	WB
8	Felicity	WB
9	Girlfriends	UPN
10	Charmed	WB
12	Moesha	UPN
13	Star Trek:Voyager	UPN
14	7th Heaven	WB
15	The Hughleys	UPN
15	The Parkers	UPN
17	Jack & Jill	WB
18	Grosse Pointe	WB
18	Popular	WB
24	Buffy the Vampire Slayer	WB
25	All Souls	UPN

UPN and The WB

Shows with the Best Gender Comp/Diversity

1	Girlfriends	UPN
2	Popstars	WB
3	Moesha	UPN
7	The Parkers	UPN
8	Buffy the Vampire Slayer	WB
8	The Hughleys	UPN
8	Star Trek: Voyager	UPN
11	Sabrina, the Teenage Witch	WB
13	Gilmore Girls	WB
14	Steve Harvey Show	WB
16	The PJs	WB
17	Felicity	WB
18	Charmed	WB
19	The Jamie Foxx Show	WB
22	Grosse Pointe	WB
24	Jack & Jill	WB

ABC, CBS, FOX and NBC

NEW Shows with the Best Gender Composition

2	Bette	CBS
4	Weakest Link	NBC
5	Kate Brasher	CBS
6	What About Joan	ABC
11	That's Life	CBS
18	Boston Public	FOX
21	Three Sisters	NBC
22	Dark Angel	FOX
23	The Weber Show	NBC

ABC, CBS, FOX and NBC

NEW Shows with the Best Gender Comp/Diversity

4	My Wife and Kids	ABC
5	Bette	CBS
6	Kate Brasher	CBS
12	Dark Angel	FOX
14	Weakest Link	NBC
19	What About Joan	ABC
21	Boston Public	FOX
23	That's Life	CBS
24	Boot Camp	FOX

## Summary by Category

### • Violent Content

Viewers reported little actual violence in the shows evaluated. A long list of sitcoms, reality shows and teen dramas scored well with no violent or threatening acts. A few had only minor elements of hostility or harassment. It's not until you arrive at the bottom 14 shows in this category that truly violent content exists.

Violence tended to occur in programs aimed at male viewers. *The XFL* (on both NBC and UPN), *WWF Smackdown!* (UPN) and *Celebrity Deathmatch* (UPN) are at the very bottom of this category. Whether the violence was real, choreographed or claymation, analysts were disturbed by the celebration of violence in these shows and their lack of any apparent redeeming value. These shows existed solely to encourage and display pain and injury. UPN easily performed worst of all the networks in this category, but both CBS and FOX also introduced some of the more violent new programs to the small screen this year.

Shows such as *Dark Angel* (FOX), *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Charmed* (The WB), and *Star Trek: Voyager* (UPN) proved that women can participate, and succeed, in the typically male world of action and violence. Analysts did note, however, that all of these programs operated under the premise of good vs. evil and usually dealt responsibly with consequences and justice.

While compiling the results in this category, NOW observed that, among shows that feature violence as a central theme to the storyline, cop and courtroom shows tend to be led by men (although women are certainly present in these programs), while fantasy/science-fiction type shows are now lead mostly by women. This guns-for-the-men and magic-for-the-women dichotomy plays out in shows like *CSI* and *The District* (both on CBS) where the men are in charge in police settings and programs such as *Dark Angel* and *Charmed* where women's supernatural powers put them in control.

#### Shows with the Least Violent Content

Eighteen shows tied at #1 with no violent, hostile or threatening acts. Included among these shows were: What About Joan (ABC), Yes, Dear (CBS), Grounded for Life (FOX), The Weber Show (NBC), The Hughleys (UPN) and 7th Heaven (WB).

#### **UPN and The WB**

##### Shows with the Most Violent Content

46	Star Trek: Voyager	UPN
47	Charmed	WB
48	Angel	WB
49	7 Days	UPN
50	Buffy the Vampire Slayer	WB
55	All Souls	UPN
56	The XFL	UPN
58	WWF Smackdown!	UPN
59	Celebrity Deathmatch	UPN

#### **ABC, CBS, FOX and NBC**

##### NEW Shows with the Most Violent Content

50	Lone Gunmen	FOX
52	The District	CBS
53	CSI	CBS
54	Dark Angel	FOX
56	The XFL	NBC

#### Violence on Television: A Sample from '00-01

- **Celebrity Deathmatch (UPN)** Claymation characters representing real life celebrities perform ultra-violent actions on each other, such as slicing off body parts and ripping out internal organs. This show won't return next season but the following will...
- **WWF Smackdown! (UPN)** Analysts did their best to keep up with the action, estimating that more than 250 violent acts were perpetrated on each other by the "wrestlers."
- **Dark Angel (FOX)** Analysts compared this program to a typical male-oriented action movie—explosions, death and destruction—except with a young woman in the lead instead of a man.
- **CSI (CBS)** Although analysts approved of the smart and tough female characters in this show, it was also noted that gruesome murders were acted out over and over again in each episode.
- **The District (CBS)** While the show does address racial issues, the police chief is a white male and many of the criminals are people of color.

## Summary by Category

### • Sexual Exploitation

The shows at the top of this category demonstrate that women do not have to be sex objects to draw viewers. Kate Mulgrew as Captain Janeway on *Star Trek: Voyager* (UPN) and Joan Cusack on *What About Joan* (ABC) stand out as two actors unburdened by exploitation and therefore free to lead their shows as fully empowered characters. Shows that didn't rely on traditional storylines, such as the military-reality show *Boot Camp* (FOX) and the game show *Weakest Link* (NBC) treated women as equal participants along with the men.

Unfortunately, shows like this were unique in their portrayal of women. Analysts reported that on most shows even the intelligent female characters often dressed provocatively and used their sexual appeal in addition to their practical skills. Evaluation after evaluation commented that although the lead female characters were portrayed as smart and in control, the large majority of them were thin, conventionally attractive, young and presented in a way that highlighted their physical attributes. Shows like *Felicity*, *Dawson's Creek*, *Charmed*, *7th Heaven* and *Gilmore Girls* (all on The WB), featured compelling women and girls that nonetheless fit a very narrow cookie-cutter image of attractiveness.

A few shows, such as *Popular* (The WB), *Moesha*, *Girlfriends* (UPN), *CSI*, *That's Life* and *The District* (CBS) broadened the images of women on television somewhat, but our analysts had to look really hard to find a strong woman *not* wearing tight clothes.

The worst offenders in this category made the above women look downright revolutionary. It's no surprise that *The XFL* (NBC and UPN), with its sexualized cheerleaders, and *WWF Smackdown!* (UPN), with its degrading treatment of women, scored low. FOX's reality show *Temptation Island* was nothing but exploitation, with all of the participants existing as sexual bait to tear apart existing romantic relationships. *Chains of Love* on UPN attempted to create relationships, but ended up objectifying its participants with chains, a giant bed and pay-off money to the "losers." One analyst commented that she had never seen a program as offensive as UPN's claymation road-comedy *Gary & Mike*, which featured strippers doing things no live character could get away with on broadcast TV.

*The Hughleys* (UPN) was hurt by one episode in particular which centered around the supposed sexual differences between black and white women and how the lead character's life would have been different had he married a white woman. Meanwhile, NBC's *Three Sisters* and The WB's *Nikki* sunk to the bottom of the list based on their silly female lead characters and their highly stereotypical attitudes on sex, marriage and babies.

#### UPN and The WB

##### Shows with the Least Sexual Exploitation

1	Star Trek: Voyager	UPN
3	Felicity	WB
6	Gilmore Girls	WB
7	Sabrina, the Teenage Witch	WB
9	Roswell	WB
10	Dawson's Creek	WB
11	All Souls	UPN

#### ABC, CBS, FOX and NBC

##### NEW Shows with the Least Sexual Exploitation

2	What About Joan	ABC
4	Boot Camp	FOX
5	Weakest Link	NBC
8	My Wife and Kids	ABC
12	Gideon's Crossing	ABC
13	That's Life	CBS

#### UPN and The WB

##### Shows with the Most Sexual Exploitation

48	The PJs	WB
49	Celebrity Deathmatch	UPN
51	The Jamie Foxx Show	WB
52	7 Days	UPN
53	Nikki	WB
54	Chains of Love	UPN
55	The XFL	UPN
57	WWF Smackdown!	UPN
59	Gary & Mike	UPN

#### ABC, CBS, FOX and NBC

##### NEW Shows with the Most Sexual Exploitation

47	Titus	FOX
49	Three Sisters	NBC
55	The XFL	NBC
58	Temptation Island	FOX

## Summary by Category

### • Social Responsibility

The top-ranking programs in social responsibility covered important issues and addressed real-life situations that rarely make it onto television. Analysts reported that CBS's *That's Life* dealt with the importance of education, money concerns, family bonds and responsible sex. The WB's *Gilmore Girls* and CBS's *Kate Brasher* both depict the struggle of single moms working and trying to raise teenagers. And FOX's *Boston Public* delved into a host of issues relating to the teachers and students at a big-city public high school.

As noted earlier, many of the most responsible shows were led by women. These shows were almost always hour-long dramas, as opposed to half-hour comedies. Many sitcoms, like *Three Sisters* and *The Fighting Fitzgeralds* (both on NBC), *Nikki* (The WB), *Titus* (FOX), *The Job* (ABC) and *Yes, Dear* (CBS), fell to the bottom based on offensive portrayals of women and ethnic groups. Other comedies hovered in the middle, neither particularly offensive nor relevant. Exceptions to the comedy rule include *Girlfriends* (UPN), *What About Joan* (ABC) and *Sabrina, the Teenage Witch* (The WB), which all gave viewers something to think about. *Girlfriends* tackled the topic of how a woman working in a boys-club law firm could get her boss and co-workers to truly value her contributions. This comedy even brought up the thought-provoking issue of characters who felt they should chose their race over their gender or vice versa.

Even shows revolving around teens turned in enlightening entertainment. In dealing with the death of the lead character's mother, The WB's *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* delivered a compelling episode. And *Popular* (The WB) took on the issues of eating disorders, cancer, religion, alcoholism, honesty and personal integrity.

Many of the same shows that scored low in the other categories appeared at the bottom of this list as well. These include FOX's *Temptation Island* for its attempt to break up couples and UPN's *Gary & Mike* for its off-the-chart offensiveness. Falling far below its other scores was NBC's *Weakest Link*, marked down not only for its host's nasty demeanor, but for the contestants' mean-spirited rants after being voted off.

Analysts made note in this category that a lack of diversity in age, size and ability was something every network and virtually every show was guilty of. Again, the dramas seemed more willing to embrace actors of different sizes and ages, or to portray characters with disabilities, while in comedies characters who were "different" often existed as the targets for punchlines.

#### UPN and The WB

##### Shows with the Most Social Responsibility

2	Gilmore Girls	WB
2	Girlfriends	UPN
4	Star Trek: Voyager	UPN
5	Felicity	WB
8	Buffy the Vampire Slayer	WB
9	Sabrina, the Teenage Witch	WB
10	Popstars	WB
12	7th Heaven	WB
13	Popular	WB
15	All Souls	UPN

#### ABC, CBS, FOX and NBC

##### NEW Shows with the Most Social Responsibility

1	That's Life	CBS
5	Kate Brasher	CBS
7	What About Joan	ABC
10	CSI	CBS
13	DAG	NBC
15	Boston Public	FOX

#### UPN and The WB

##### Shows with the Least Social Responsibility

45	Grosse Pointe	WB
46	7 Days	UPN
49	Nikki	WB
54	The XFL	UPN
56	WWF Smackdown!	UPN
57	Celebrity Deathmatch	UPN
58	Chains of Love	UPN
59	Gary & Mike	UPN

#### ABC, CBS, FOX and NBC

##### NEW Shows with the Least Social Responsibility

44	Yes, Dear	CBS
47	Weakest Link	NBC
48	Three Sisters	NBC
50	The Job	ABC
51	Temptation Island	FOX
52	Titus	FOX
53	The Fighting Fitzgeralds	NBC
54	The XFL	NBC

## Network Choices: What to Keep, What to Cancel

An important part of the analysis included keeping track of cancellations and renewals on the networks. Which programs the networks gave up on quickly, which shows the networks chose to nurture, and which programs eventually made it through the year and onto next season's schedule says a lot about both broadcasters' and viewers' preferences and priorities.

### Fall Failures

Like most primetime television seasons, many of the networks' new programs for fall 2000 were gone almost as soon as they started. Seventeen new shows that premiered in the fall were pulled off the air permanently before the February 2001 sweeps period even began. Due to limited runs, most of these shows did not make it into the final Watch Out, Listen Up! analysis. However, many of the 17 were sampled and NOW was pleased to see the networks dump a number of the most offensive shows.

These short-lived series included the male-centric sitcoms *Madigan Men* and *The Trouble with Normal* (both on ABC) and *The Michael Richards Show* and *Tucker* (both on NBC), as well as the sex-obsessed *Opposite Sex* and *The Street* (FOX), *Titans* (NBC) and *Young Americans* (The WB). FOX's ill-conceived attempt to portray a mature gay male character in *Normal, Ohio* also failed promptly. Poor ratings were the cause for the demise of these programs, but what drove viewers away is up to interpretation. Perhaps viewers are growing tired of programs that represent a narrow, stereotypical world. More likely is the theory that offensive, irresponsible programming also tends to be just plain bad.

Several promising shows, however, also didn't make it—including *Bette* and *Welcome to New York* (CBS), both comedies focusing on mature, successful women. Even with the best of intentions, feminist analysts found that these shows did not live up to their potential. While FOX dropped its straight-forward look at real-life teens, *American High*, after airing only a handful of episodes, PBS wisely picked it up.

### Spring Renewal

To fill the gap left by these early exits, the networks released a number of spring replacement shows in 2001 and NOW analysts were impressed with the content in a majority of these late debuts. So, apparently, were viewers, as a number of these shows made it onto next year's fall schedules.

ABC offered *What About Joan*, starring unconventional female lead Joan Cusack, and *My Wife and Kids*, about an African American family with a strong mother and realistic teenage daughter. Both of these shows were quickly placed on next year's schedule.

Also in the spring, NBC introduced TV's first female game show host on the *Weakest Link*. Anne Robinson, who also hosted the show in Britain, struck feminist analysts as both a harsh stereotype and a tough ground breaker. The show has done well in the ratings and NBC renewed it for the fall. ABC's *The Job* will also be back, a show that ranked low because, despite trying to bring something new to comedy, much of its content involved typical cruel humor and the standard objectifying of women.

Not all of the spring shows were worth cheering about. UPN brought to life a concept NBC had considered and rejected, the show *Chains of Love*. Hosted by a woman of color (in what can only be a dubious honor), *Chains of Love* scored at the bottom of NOW's report and was not picked up for next year. The almost exclusively male cop show *Big Apple* (CBS), another young-and-sexy drama *First Years* (NBC), the Irish-American cliché-fest *The Fighting Fitzgeralds* (NBC) and a second poorly-executed sitcom about a gay male *Some of My Best Friends* (CBS) all didn't last long.

With a diverse cast and strong social content, CBS's *Kate Brasher* was one mid-season replacement that scored high in NOW's report but failed to make the cut in the end. UPN's *All Souls*, a sort-of *X-Files* meets *ER*, scored mixed results in the survey with its strong female cast but explicit violence, but didn't make the cut anyway.

(continued on next page)

## Network Choices: What to Keep, What to Cancel

(continued from previous page)

### Final Outcome

A majority of the shows that scored high with feminist analysts made it through their first full year and will return to TV next season. These include the woman-positive *That's Life* (CBS), *Girlfriends* (UPN) and *Gilmore Girls* (The WB), and the socially relevant *Boston Public* (FOX).

UPN picked up *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Roswell* from The WB, a positive move for a network that could use some more strong female characters.

Of the shows dropped at the end of this season, many of them were at the bottom of NOW's analysis. *The XFL* on both NBC and UPN, and UPN's *Celebrity Deathmatch*, *Gary & Mike* and *7 Days* did not make it to the 2001-2002 schedule.

While we can congratulate the networks for declining to lengthen the life of these offenders, several good shows also got the ax. *Gideon's Crossing*, a medical drama with a diverse cast and intriguing storylines, hung on all the way through May when ABC failed to renew it for next season. And two shows that dealt with important teen issues, *Moesha* (UPN) and *Popular* (The WB) also got pink slips.

Meanwhile, irresponsible and insubstantial fare like FOX's *Titus* and *Temptation Island*, The WB's *Nikki*, NBC's *Three Sisters* and CBS's *Yes, Dear* will be back for more. And UPN's *WWF Smackdown!* doesn't appear to be going away anytime soon.

NOW also looked at the four major networks' full schedules to see what did and didn't make it to next season. Although NOW did not analyze programs on ABC, CBS, FOX and NBC that were not new, all of those programs were reviewed for last year's report and this report would not be complete without checking to see what survived another year and what finally said good bye.

The networks dropped a number of shows that scored poorly in last year's report, including ABC's *Two Guys and a Girl* and *Norm*, CBS's *Nash Bridges* and *Walker, Texas Ranger*, FOX's *World's Wildest Police Videos* and NBC's *Third Rock from the Sun*. A few of last year's basement dwellers will return again, however—such as ABC's *The Drew Carey Show* and *Spin City* and CBS's *King of Queens*.

The majority of NOW's top rankers from last year were renewed, including CBS's *Family Law* and *Judging Amy*, ABC's *Once & Again* (which just barely made it onto next year's schedule) and *The Practice*, NBC's *ER*, *Providence*, *The West Wing* and *Law & Order*, and FOX's *Malcolm in the Middle* and *Ally McBeal*.

Several of last year's top performers never even made it to *this* season, most notably CBS's *Chicago Hope* and *City of Angels* and FOX's *Party of Five*.

## Looking Ahead: The 2001-2002 Schedules

By the end of May, the six broadcast networks had already announced their primetime schedules for the 2000-2001 season. Based only on promotional material made available by the networks, NOW evaluated the new programs and placed them into three categories: Looks Promising, Business as Usual and It All Depends.

### Looks Promising

Three respected female stars will have their own shows next season. Kim Delaney from *NYPD Blue* will star in ABC's *Philly* as a hard-working defense attorney and single mom. A former member of the *Law & Order* team, Jill Hennessy returns to NBC in *Crossing Jordan* about an unconventional medical examiner. Another female-led drama is *Alias* on ABC about a shy grad-student-turned-tough-CIA agent. Ellen Degeneres is on CBS in *The Ellen Show*, a comedy about a failed dot-com executive returning to her small hometown.

#### Fall Shows Worth a Look

Philly	ABC
Alias	ABC
The Ellen Show	CBS
The Education of Max Bickford	CBS
The Bernie Mac Show	FOX
24	FOX
Crossing Jordan	NBC
Law & Order: Criminal Intent	NBC
Star Trek: Enterprise	UPN
Maybe I'm Adopted	WB

FOX has several appealing sounding programs for the fall. *The Bernie Mac Show* is about an African American couple who suddenly end up raising three kids after Bernie's sister enters rehab. And *24* brings new life to television storytelling by presenting just one 24-hour day in the life of a team of CIA agents trying to solve an assassination attempt on the president. Over the season each episode will present one real-time hour from that day.

Feminist viewers may want to check out *Citizen Baines* and *The Education of Max Bickford* on CBS. Both dramatic series center around mature male characters questioning their place in life while surrounded by strong female casts. *Max Bickford* even includes a transgendered character as a regular.

Finally, we'll give the benefit of the doubt to NBC's *Law & Order: Criminal Intent* and UPN's *Star Trek: Enterprise*. The L&O shows have always starred strong women and people of color and have tempered any violence with keen social commentary. Ditto for the Star Trek series.

### Business as Usual

A number of comedies will recycle male stereotypes next year. ABC's *The Dad* stars Jim Belushi as a beer-drinking, football-watching husband, father and "King of the Castle." *Inside Schwartz* on NBC will bring viewers into the play-by-play colored world of a young sportscaster as he looks for love. On The WB *Men, Women & Dogs* follows four friends as they use their dogs to pick up women, while *Off Centre* features two "typical modern-day womanizers" sharing a fancy New York apartment.

Single dads are back in style on CBS's *American Wreck* and The WB's *Raising Dad*, which brings back Bob Saget as another widower who recruits male help to raise his daughters.

The WB will also add another relationship-reality show to primetime, with *Chains of Love*-clone *Elimidate Deluxe*, on which one person will go on a day-long date with four people of the opposite sex and eliminate them one by one. Meanwhile, FOX tries to revive the scandalous-rich-people genre with *Pasadena*. And CBS's *Wolf Lake* is sure to raise the violence factor with a tale of townspeople being murdered and attacked by werewolves.

Lastly, NBC's *Scrubs* appears to be another uninspired sitcom designed to fill space. This one concerns an attractive young cast playing just-out-of-med-school doctors. How exactly this show qualifies as "wildly inventive" (as NBC claims) will be demonstrated in the fall.

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## Looking Ahead: The 2001-2002 Schedules

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### It All Depends

The WB's *Maybe I'm Adopted* and *Deep in the Heart* may succeed based on their interesting female leads, or they might succumb to their cliché-filled plots and stereotypical supporting roles. FOX will try again to tap the wild world of college students in *Undeclared*, which could just be typical sex-obsessed guy humor, or it could live up to its executive producer's previous triumph—the short-lived but much-appreciated *Freaks and Geeks*.

*The Guardian* on CBS seems well-intentioned—hot-shot lawyer becomes part-time child advocate—but so far its promoted cast is all male and the money-hungry lawyer portrayal could come off as heavy-handed.

The networks always seem to have the same idea at once and this year it's special agents and spies. In addition to the two more promising entries in this field are CBS's *The Agency*, NBC's *UC: Undercover* and ABC's *Thieves*. The reality show trend has yet to slow down with *The Amazing Race* (CBS) and *Lost in the U.S.A.* (The WB) joining the pack. Depending on the roles women play in these programs, they could be winners or losers.

Jason Alexander stars in *Bob Patterson*, an ABC show that could break the standard male comedy mold by showing the insecure side of a motivational speaker, or it could be more of the same—not-so-good-looking man gets lots of gorgeous women. Real-life chef Emeril Lagasse rates his own show on NBC, *Emeril*, although it's not clear whether he can act or what other characters will join him.

On The WB *Smallville* will imagine the coming-of-age of Clark Kent before he became Superman. How the shows handles what it terms the “confrontational world of male teens” will determine how women and girl-friendly it turns out to be. In a completely different look at superheroes, FOX brings the cartoon *The Tick* to bizarre life, defying all prediction. And, unfortunately, information on UPN's *One on One* was not yet available.

Most of the networks seem balanced between shows that look promising, shows that could go either way and shows that are sure to offend. Only The WB appears to have a schedule that goes overboard with exploitative and stereotypical content.

With any luck, viewers will again reject the weakest shows early on and those shows that embrace diverse casts and responsible storylines will live long and prosper.

## Audience Participation: Talking Back, Taking Action

The purpose of NOW's Watch Out, Listen Up! campaign is to work toward a positive and diverse portrayal of women and girls in the media. With its unbeatable reach into our homes and its influence on our attitudes, television was the obvious first choice to address in this campaign. The strategy is simple—NOW reviews what television is offering its viewers and then encourages those viewers to get involved in affecting change.

The six broadcast networks transmit programming over airwaves owned by the public. The networks pay nothing for the use of this public resource, and instead make billions of dollars from the advertising they sell that inundates us. The 1934 Communications Act gave broadcasters free use of the airwaves with the requirement that they “serve the public interest, convenience and necessity.” The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and Congress do not enforce this obligation and the networks feel little pressure to live up to the deal.

Believe it or not, people do have the power to shape what they see on TV—after all, it is our viewing habits that the networks are using to make money. The true customer of broadcast television is not the viewer, it is the advertiser and we are the commodity (otherwise known as the ratings) that the networks use to sell their product to advertisers. Not only are the networks supposed to act in the public interest, but they *need* the public to turn a profit.

Not that it's easy to battle the networks when they're owned by five giant conglomerations that care most about the bottom line. But the more people understand that the airwaves are theirs and that they have a right, even a responsibility, to talk back to the networks, the more the broadcasters will have to listen and respond.

Watch Out, Listen Up! wants everyone who has ever turned on a TV to think of themselves as media activists. NOW can call for better programming from the networks and stronger regulations from the FCC and Congress, but our strength lies in the number of viewers who make their voices heard. People can do a lot to make a difference, from simple actions that take no more than five minutes to organized protests that can really stir things up.

### What Media Activists Can Do

⇒ If you see a program that offends you, write to or call both the network and your local station. Do it as soon as possible after the program airs and tell them exactly what you think. NOW's web site can help you find the contact information for the big networks and all the local stations at [www.capwiz.com/now/dbq/media/](http://www.capwiz.com/now/dbq/media/).

⇒ The next step is contacting the producer of the program—the network that runs the show is not usually the maker of the show. You can find that information on the Internet or by calling the local TV station or the network on which you saw the show. Ask for someone in the programming department—they'll know who produces the show. Tell the producer that you have already contacted your local station and the network to express your outrage.

⇒ If you're offended by an advertisement, write to the network, the local station and the maker of the product. This can work. Last year, NBC ran an ad during the Olympics that depicted a woman jogger being pursued by a chainsaw-wielding psycho. After receiving hundreds of complaints, NBC pulled the ad off the air.

⇒ Write letters to the editor and submit opinion pieces to your local newspapers about specific programs or advertisements or the state of television and the media in general. Inform your local news sources that people in your community are taking action to improve media content and responsibility.

⇒ Do all of the above for positive programs and advertisements as well. Let the networks and the manufacturers know that you appreciate strong and diverse portrayals of women and girls. Many shows have been saved from going off the air because enough fans wrote to the networks with their support.

⇒ Spread the word any way you can. Make copies of this report (or at least the last two pages!) and give it to your friends and family. Send emails to everyone you know urging them to become media activists. If you have a zine or a web site, create a section devoted to media activism and direct readers to organizations and web sites that have information about the media.

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## Audience Participation: Talking Back, Taking Action

### What Media Activists Can Do

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⇨ Form a media task force in your area. You can do this in your neighborhood, on your campus, within your local NOW chapter, or simply with a group of friends. Get together to review a night of television, critique a movie, analyze magazines or evaluate any other medium and then write letters together. Get others in your community to sign a petition and then send it in to everyone associated, including the FCC and your congress members.

⇨ Analyze other programming on television. For instance, evaluate your local stations' newscasts. How well do they cover issues of concern to you and your community? Are women experts included or are most of the talking heads male? Take a look at children's shows, sports coverage or late night programming. Have your task force write its own report and deliver it together to your local stations along with suggestions for improvement. Do the same with your local newspapers.

⇨ If something really outrages you and you get no response to your complaints, hold a protest. You can do this outside a local TV or radio station, outside a music store or newsstand, anywhere that's relevant to your demonstration. Make signs and chants. Be sure to bring flyers that will explain to people on the street why you're there and how they can join your group. And before you have your protest, send out a news release to your local newspapers, TV stations and radio stations. The media love to cover issues that relate to themselves.

⇨ Learn more about the broadcasters' requirement to serve the public interest and then set up a meeting with your Senator to lobby them for tighter regulations. More information can be found at [www.now.org/issues/media/](http://www.now.org/issues/media/).

⇨ Make your own programming! Contact your local cable provider and find out what provisions they have for assisting community members in creating their own cable access shows. You can call the Low Power Radio Coalition about how to apply for your own low power FM radio license in your area (202-661-2065). And, there are web sites (like [www.talkradio.lycos.com](http://www.talkradio.lycos.com)) that allow you to broadcast your own online radio show.

### Who to Contact

**ABC** (owned by Walt Disney)  
ABC Audience Information  
500 S. Buena Vista Street  
Burbank, CA 91521-4551  
<http://abc.go.com>  
[netaudr@abc.com](mailto:netaudr@abc.com)  
818-460-7477

**CBS** (owned by Viacom)  
CBS Audience Services  
524 W. 57th St  
New York, NY 10019  
[www.cbs.com](http://www.cbs.com)  
[audsvcs@cbs.com](mailto:audsvcs@cbs.com)  
212-975-3247

**FOX** (owned by News Corporation)  
FOX Broadcasting Company  
P.O. Box 900  
Beverly Hills, CA 90213  
[www.fox.com](http://www.fox.com)  
[askfox@foxinc.com](mailto:askfox@foxinc.com)  
310-369-1000

**NBC** (owned by General Electric)  
NBC Programming  
30 Rockefeller Plaza  
New York, NY 10112  
[www.nbc.com](http://www.nbc.com)  
[nbctv@nbc.com](mailto:nbctv@nbc.com)  
212-664-4444

**UPN** (owned by Viacom)  
United Paramount Network--Programming Dept.  
11800 Wilshire Blvd.  
Los Angeles, CA 90025  
[www.upn.com/upn.html](http://www.upn.com/upn.html)  
email address n/a  
310-575-7000

**The WB** (owned by AOL Time Warner)  
The WB Network  
4000 Warner Blvd, Building 34R  
Burbank, CA 91522  
[www.thewb.com](http://www.thewb.com)  
[standards@talk.thewb.com](mailto:standards@talk.thewb.com)  
818-977-5000

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445 12th St. SW, Washington, D.C. 20554  
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# Watch Out, Listen Up!

Media Activism Campaign



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