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NBC Prime Time: Just Another Manic Monday

Mania – (Psychiatry) *A manifestation of bipolar disorder, characterized by profuse and rapidly changing ideas, exaggerated sexuality, gaiety, or irritability, and decreased sleep* (American Heritage Dictionary). While programming executives at NBC would not likely use the term ‘mania’ to describe their Monday prime-time schedule, that is the appropriate term to summarize the programs that make up that three-hour block of time.

NBC offers three one-hour programs in the 7:00 to 10:00 (Central) time slot: *Chuck* is billed as an action-comedy. The main character is a ‘regular-Joe’ salesman at an electronics store who is immersed in the world of international espionage. *Heroes* spins a web of intrigue surrounding a group of seemingly normal individuals, all of whom have extraordinary powers. *My Own Worst Enemy* revolves around a family-man who leads a secret life as a military operative working for a shadowy government organization. Each of the programs contains a number of consistencies that will be explored in this paper. These consistencies include the questioning one’s self-identity and the roles played in society, family behavioral norms, dysfunctional interpersonal relationships and a lot of sex and violence. When juxtaposed with the advertisements aired during these programs, a pattern begins to develop. The primary function of the programs offered on NBC’s Monday prime-time schedule

serve to destabilize the viewer's perception of reality. With this dynamic achieved, the advertisements aired during these programs then provide the viewer with a sense of reality by offering reassuring images of a familiar and desirable world view.

This paper will examine this phenomenon by analyzing each of these programs individually using various keys to media literacy as well as several cultural theories. This analysis will provide insight into the intentional unbalancing of the viewer's world view. The same analysis will also be applied to the advertising aired during these shows. This will identify the desired response of the advertisers in laying the basis for a world view that promises stability, safety and familiarity. Finally, the entire prime-time segment (programs and advertisements) will be viewed through the lens of critical, cultural studies to examine the overall text of the collective message and how that message works to shape the perceptions of those that receive it.

To understand the premise of this paper, it is incumbent to appreciate television's impact on society and culture. This is achieved by applying Critical/Cultural studies. According to Joseph Dominick, in his book, The Dynamics of Mass Communication, this approach "takes a macro-analytic outlook and examines such concepts as ideology, culture, politics, and social structure as they relate to the role of media in the society" (43). An early model of cultural studies was developed in the 1930's in the United States by a group of researchers who had emigrated from Germany. This group, the Frankfurt School, coined the term "cultural industries". The culture industries "signify the process of the industrialization of mass-produced culture and the commercial imperatives that drove the system" (Kellner). Essentially, the Frankfurt School contends that the media serves the purposes of the capitalistic, power elite to continually deliver a message that serves their own ends: to dominate

the working class by creating messages that support a culture of consumer consumption, and, therefore maintaining the status quo.

This theory drives the idea of hegemony, the concept of one group having a dominant influence over another. In the case of NBC, the theory applies in that it is in the network's best interest to drive a message of consumerism. After all, people need things and advertisers buy time on the network to offer all of the things that people need. On a larger scale, NBC is owned by General Electric (GE). GE owns multiple companies with an enormous range of interests and influence. Their website offers the following statement:

"GE has four strong businesses in the financial services, infrastructure, and media markets. We have strategically aligned our businesses to succeed in these markets today while preparing ourselves to make the most of tomorrow's emergent opportunities" (ge.com).

From a media perspective, GE owns NBC/Universal, which, according to the NBC/Universal website,

"The NBC Television Network broadcasts approximately 5,000 hours of TV programming each year, transmitting to more than 200 affiliated stations across the United States. These independently owned affiliates then broadcast the NBC signal to an estimated 99 percent of all homes in the United States with television sets" (nbcuni.com).

This does not even take into account the Universal Studios brand, Focus Features, Rogue Pictures and the digital media owned by GE. GE claimed over \$4.5 billion in profits in the 3rd quarter alone in 2008 (ge.com). With such a wide media reach and global influence, it is easy to see the relevance of the Frankfurt School's theory. To further this point, Ben Bagdikian writes in the preface to The Media Monopoly, about the "quantum leap in the power of a dominant media corporation to create and manipulate popular culture and models of behavior (or misbehavior) - and to use this power for narrow commercial and political purposes".

While this contention carries a great deal of validity, it is not without its flaws. The Frankfurt School does not take into consideration how the audience of these media messages actually interpret them. Not until the late 1950's did a theory evolve that incorporated the audience's reading of the text of a message and discussed the many influences that affect these readings. Pioneered by Stuart Hall and others at Birmingham University in Britain, this theory of cultural studies explores how texts are either accepted or rejected by the receivers. For instance, according to Daniel Chandler, Hall believed, "the mass media do tend to reproduce interpretations which serve the interests of the ruling class, but they are also 'a field of ideological struggle'". Thus, the receiver's interpretation may be contrary to the sender's intention, therefore challenging the status quo. This theory presents a real problem for the media conglomerates. How can they subvert, or side-step, the potential rejection of their intended message?

The idea is to use a surrogate. The programming on NBC's Monday night line up is not created to drive a message of consumerism, although there may be latent messages to that effect. Rather, the intent of this particular block of programming is to set the viewer's mind spinning; create an out-of-balance kilter designed to create confusion, fear, anxiety and disorientation. As we shall see, this then, sets the stage for the advertisers to ride in to save the day.

In an interview for an episode of Frontline on PBS, Ben Bagdikian spoke of how commercials are situated in various pieces of media. He points out that the main section of the newspaper is not where most of the ads are found. He states:

"Because if you look at the main section of any good newspaper, that's not where most of the ads go, because when you're in a very serious mood - your aunt has Alzheimer's and you're reading about Alzheimer's Disease or there's been a catastrophe someplace or

there's a political development that you're very interested in - a lot of the ads, especially on television, don't have much of an impact. But if you have it in the entertainment section, you are not in such a critical mood, you're having a good time. And like television commercials, they like fantasy programs. That's why even very popular, serious documentaries don't make as much money, because in the midst of a documentary on the Rwandan slaughter, the ad for Pepsi saying you'll stay young forever is laughable. But in the middle of a sitcom, which is already laughable (laugh), it's just absorbed without any critical analysis. So that if you control the media, you have control over things of this sort" (pbs.org).

It is this very concept that drives the thesis of this paper. There can be no question that media influences and shapes society and is a major contributor in the evolution of culture. Bagdikian's statement is true. The mood of the message recipient (viewer, in this case) will determine to a large extent how the message is received. However, while the placement of a Pepsi ad in a documentary on genocide in Rwanda might be 'laughable', it does provide a sense of familiarity and normalcy amongst the images of senseless death and chaos. The NBC Monday prime-time programs work to create a similar sense of bewilderment. These programs, along with the advertisements airing with them, will be analyzed individually using select keys to media literacy provided by Art Silverblatt's book, Media Literacy – Keys to Interpreting Media Messages as well as several prominent cultural studies practitioners and their theories.

The prime-time block begins with an 'action-comedy' entitled *Chuck*. The title character is male, single, white and a self-proclaimed 'geek'. He works at the "Buy More" electronics store. This has an obvious tie to Best Buy, complete with the "Nerd Herd" as opposed to the "Geek Squad". It is just this level of obviousness that permits the critical viewer to see *Chuck* for the window dressing it is. Chuck has stumbled into a situation where he must be protected by a beautiful blonde

government agent and her handler. Other characters include: Chuck's sister and her fiancée (both are medical professionals) and his co-workers, a collection of social misfits and minorities. The young female, Asian coworker appears to be taken straight from a Manga comic, with her short plaid skirt & hose, pig tails and over-applied makeup (she's also a gifted martial artist!). In this particular episode, former New York Giants defensive lineman Michael Strahan guest stars as a large, imposing African American clerk at a neighboring sporting goods store, who regularly bullies the members of the "Nerd Herd". The villain is a foppish British millionaire. The spy plot-line is filled with beautiful people driving expensive cars and living life on the edge. The reviewed episode contained two murders, two fights, and a huge, destructive explosion. Caught in the middle is Chuck and his affection for Sarah, his beautiful protector, who he can never have a 'normal' relationship with (NBC.com).

Using Silverblatt's keys to media literacy, the function of this program is to present a world of stereotypical characters behaving in ways consistent with cultural expectations. Loveable geeks work in hourly wage jobs, yet have unspoken nobility; the beautiful people are really shallow and the bullies always get what's coming to them in the end. This is the classic story of the little guy who finds himself surrounded by events that are above and beyond his capabilities, yet he somehow manages to save the day. This program reinforces cultural attitudes, values, behaviors and myths for the audience.

According to Silverblatt, how the audience interprets the message of *Chuck* can be viewed through two explanations. The hegemonic model asks the audience to assume the role, perspective or orientation of one of the characters, while the reception theory allows for the audience to negotiate its own meaning based on their

experiences and backgrounds (58). The main characters of *Chuck* provide the role of 'normal Joe everyman' and an independent, powerful, sexy woman making life and death decisions. The show's title emotes a sense of normalcy.

The audience for *Chuck* can be identified by the demographic make up of the characters and who the advertisements are targeted at. Young, white, upwardly mobile singles and recently married couples fit the profile. That is the make up of the characters of the show...no one is married, all have jobs and are management-level positions. Minorities are either secondary characters working at the Buy More or extras seen sitting in a bus station.

As for the commercials aired during *Chuck*, initially, these commercials are bright and cheery, filled with catchy music and a lighthearted feel. They represent companies we are very familiar with and feel generally friendly towards. Marshall McLuhan said of advertising, "...it stretches out toward the ultimate electronic goal of a collective consciousness" (227). In other words, advertisements reflect a worldview that strives to wholly incorporate the viewer. The values, beliefs and attitudes put forth in these commercials set the agenda for what is desirable, attainable, and ultimately normal. The commercials aired early in the *Chuck* episode generally follow the light, almost banal, cadence of the show. Examples of this are the humorous Volkswagen Routan spot featuring Brook Shields, a couple of Disney ads and one for Target Stores. This sets a mood consistent with the tone of the program. However, as the show progresses toward the 'action' plot-line, the commercials also take on a more serious tone. There are also many instances where the plot of the program moves into the commercial block.

The interaction of the program and the advertisements aired during *Chuck* provide some interesting revelations, particularly paying keen attention to the

transition period. What is happening in the program just prior to being introduced to the advertising block? Studying the transitions from a segment's final scene preceding the commercial block provides a fascinating glimpse into the collaboration between NBC/Universal and their advertisers and their efforts to influence the viewers. Many of these transitions will be discussed in general terms in the context of this paper. However, a full analysis of each of the transitions is documented in the appendix found at the conclusion of this paper.

One interesting example of the program's plot carting into the commercial block is as follows: the show's scene ends as a bomb explodes and leaves the female protagonist motionless on the street. There is a close up of her face (is she dead??)...then an ad for Allstate Insurance is aired. Another transition to commercial includes an assassin approaching the unconscious Sarah's hospital bed. The scene ends with a jump to a Verizon Wireless ad. If only someone could call Sarah and wake her up!

The dynamic in *Chuck* is the 'action/comedy mix. The program lurches from drama to comedy and back again. This serves as an unsettling experience for the viewer. The audience is left wondering if the next scene will be funny or will someone be shot? In creating this aura of uncertainty, the crafters of *Chuck* have provided a space for the advertisers to come in and provide a modicum of stability in their viewing experience. While not everyone can relate to being held hostage, everyone can relate to eating at Taco Bell or talking on a cell phone. In the mostly farcical world of *Chuck*, the ground is constantly shifting...the advertisements provide some firm ground for the viewer to stand on. The next program in the primetime lineup is *Heroes*.

Heroes is the story of ordinary people who have superhero-like powers. In the featured episode, "Angels & Monsters", the plot line centered around perceptions. The light, comedic air of *Chuck* was replaced by a pall so dense it was palpable. The production quality differed to the polar opposite. The settings were dark, shadowy places, abandoned houses, factories and underground catacombs of hallways. The characters are divided into heroes and villains, yet there is a great deal of confusion regarding where loyalties lie. One of the protagonists claims, "Am I an angel or a monster, a hero or a villain? Why can't I see the difference?" The audience is confronted with a father betraying his daughter's trust in an act that shifts from an attempted murder to a suicide. If that were not enough, a mother is discovered to have conducted experiments on her own children, who now grown, learn the depth of their mother's betrayal. Violence is ratcheted up on this program in terms of the number of deaths and its graphic portrayal. Again, the themes of self doubt and deception, alienation, second guessing and role confusion are present, but at a much higher emotional level.

One of Silverblatt's keys that is particularly salient here is in analyzing the production elements. *Heroes* is visually dark, constructing a murky environment. The used of jump cuts, speeded up effects, limited lighting and odd camera angles all lend a sense of foreboding Silverblatt addresses the use of lighting in particular, which uncovers a striking contrast between *Chuck* and *Heroes*: "...lighting has its own distinct meaning. Bright light connotes purity, delight, joy and good will, while dark lighting symbolizes death, evil something hidden and force/strength" (171).

This provides the first real evidence to support the idea that NBC's intention with these programs it to destabilize the viewer's senses: the dark, complex, brooding nature of *Heroes* is juxtaposed with the light-hearted, comedic *Chuck*. This

swing between moods is not without its effects on viewers. For instance, in reporting on the war in Iraq, columnist Charles Krauthammer, a psychiatrist, had opined in the *Washington Post*: "The media could use some lithium. Not since I studied bipolar disease 25 years ago have I seen such dramatic mood swings as in the coverage of the first week of the war...." (ajr.org). Rachel Smolkin goes on to state, "Critics charge that these media 'mood swings' magnified both expectations of an instantaneous victory and grumbles about military stumbles, resulting in schizophrenic coverage that distorted public perceptions of the military campaign" (ajr.org).

If this could be the case in news reporting, might not the 'entertainment' media adopt a similar strategy with the intent of temporarily distorting public perceptions during a three-hour time period on Monday evenings? The field of Cultural Studies has determined that the media definitely influences public perception. It appears that this knowledge is used to influence viewers toward certain products by echoing the fears associated with the programming they are interacting with and the advertising messages they are offered.

The advertising aired during *Heroes* follows a similar progression from the "feel-good" commercials of *Chuck*. Their theme is more mature and serious. The sex and violence from the program is carried over into the commercial block. The ads represent brands like Audi, TD Ameritrade, and Victoria's Secret. Also, many films such as 'The Hulk', 'Sex Drive', 'Pride & Glory' and 'Max Payne' were advertised.

The transitions in *Heroes* were much more blatant in tying the show to the commercials. Sprint purchased a great deal of air time. One commercial in particular is worth noting. The Sprint ad was shot in black and white, echoing the polarity of the show: black/white, evil/good, monster/angel. Another transition was

quite interesting. The superhero cheerleader was holding on for dear life to avoid being sucked into a vortex to oblivion. As her fingers slip, the scene ends.

Instantly, a commercial for Travelocity begins. The figurative message: Don't get sucked into a vortex to oblivion, use Travelocity instead!

Suffice to say, *Heroes* turns 180 degrees from the mood of *Chuck*. While both programs deal with characters who are not what they seem and struggle with issues of self identity and role recognition, the mode of this examination is radically different. This introduces the final program offering of the prime-time line up.

My Own Worst Enemy, starring big screen star Christian Slater sticks with the theme of split personality and identity conflict. In the premier episode entitled "Breakdown", Slater plays the character of Henry, a loving and devoted family man, and Edward, a ruthless and efficient government operative. Henry struggles with those mid-life issues society has adopted as truth: is this all there is, is this my life? Henry has a wife, two kids, a job, and a mortgage...basically your average, ho-hum suburban existence. Edward is a highly trained, lethal government agent. He drives fast cars, drinks expensive champagne and speaks six languages. He is the product of some governmental covert technology which allows a computer chip in his brain to switch back and forth between Henry and Edward, the perfect cover, since one is unaware of the other. The "Breakdown" occurs when Edward is in Moscow to assassinate a former KGB member and his program malfunctions...suddenly, Henry is there being shot at and running for his life. Henry learns that he is an experiment. He is cut loose from the program and will remain as Henry, but Russian agents track him down to his suburban home. Unknown by either the Russians or the government, Edward has reached out to Henry via a video recording and explained everything. Henry follows Edward's instructions, blows up the Russians and

insinuates himself back into the covert agency. Edward and Henry inhabit the same body, but are distinctly polar opposites. In fact, they carry out a strange love/hate, often antagonistic relationship. If Edward sleeps with a beautiful woman, does that mean Henry is cheating on his wife? In the episode, because Henry drove Edward's prized Camaro, Edward slept with Henry's wife to get back at him.

Confused? That is exactly the response NBC wants to create in its viewers. The juxtaposition that viewers experienced in the last two programs now finds it manifest in *My Own Worst Enemy*. Taken as a whole, it is as if the program *Chuck* is analogous to 'Henry' and *Heroes* is emblematic of 'Edward'.

Again, turning to Silverblatt as a guide, the framework of '*Enemy*' offers all of the conventional trappings of the spy genre: Fast, sleek cars, high tech gadgets, and secret panels. Silverblatt writes, "These trappings furnish the audience with cues about people, events, and situations in the presentation" (150). These trappings apply to the 'other side' of the Slater character as well. In fact, it is these trappings that the audience more easily relates to; cereal bowls on the kitchen counter, the minivan in the driveway, the briefcase by the front door. While these trappings serve to help us identify with the character, the premise of the story makes the viewer suspect those trappings, or utterly reject them. Who is the real person? Can what the viewer is seeing be trusted? Things are never as they seem.

The advertisements shown during *My Own Worst Enemy* continue to mirror the tone of its predecessors, and are a blend of ad types from the first two shows. The big difference is that Chevrolet sponsored the program and used the opportunity to introduce its new Traverse crossover and the newly designed Camaro. The autos are featured using a split-screen, just like the one featuring images of Henry and Edward. Of course, Edward drives the new Camaro in the show. The transitions in

this program do not seem to carry over to the extent of the previous two. In one closing scene, Henry collapses in a chair, dumbfounded after learning the true nature of the experiment that has created his split personality. The next image is a garishly dressed Asian woman riding a scooter through a landscape of cheese while a singsong melody extols \$5 foot longs from Subway. It is bright, campy and just plain weird. It does however fit in the realm of split personality and bipolar disorder. At the next commercial transition, Henry learns that Edward has slept with his wife; as a confused Henry is sitting at a table trying to understand his skewed life, the viewer is shoved into a Target ad of flying dogs, hip young people on pogo sticks, bright images and campy music. In each of these transitions, the cheery ad is followed by an ad for the Hulk on DVD or current film release, "The Changeling". Both have nothing bright or campy about them. The visual and emotional tug-of-war continues. One other ad worth mention during *My Own Worst Enemy*: a Fisher-Price ad...babies in diapers toddling around with electric guitars and microphones. This after Henry has a gun put to his throat by a Russian bad guy.

On the surface, these 'warm-fuzzy' ads seem surprising, since the body count of the show tops out at around fifteen deaths. It is akin to Bagdikian's Pepsi ad in the Rwanda documentary. However, media critic and scholar, George Gerbner had an interesting take on television violence. He wrote, "Most of the violence we have on television is what I call happy violence. It's swift, it's thrilling, it's cool, it's effective, it's painless, and it always leads to a happy ending because you have to deliver the audience to the next commercial in a receptive mood" (Gerbner).

So what is that receptive mood? The argument of this paper is that NBC provides Monday evening programming that causes the viewer to question their

commonly held cultural values by creating an environment where nothing is as it seems. Even the familiar trappings of American suburban life are put into question: store clerks are spies, cheerleaders are superheroes, mothers and fathers turn on their children, people kill their friends, men who drop the kids at school, go to work at the firm and are assassinating dictators by lunch-time. The rug is constantly being pulled out from beneath the viewer. The entire prime-time is a series of fun-house mirrors, distorting those ideals thought to be constant. This becomes acutely evident when the entire three-hour time frame is seen as a single message.

Stepping back and surveying the entire night of NBC Monday programming as a whole, some very interesting patterns develop. As discussed, each of the programs aired have some striking similarities with one another. The advertising plays along in concert with the mood of the program, yet the program offers contradictory messages to what the viewer knows to be social norms over and over and over. In this aura of confusion and contradiction, the commercials ground the viewer in that safe haven of shared values and ideology. For example, of the fifteen commercial blocks, only one did not offer a commercial for fast food and every one contained a car commercial. An interesting observation was that there was only one pharmaceutical ad during the entire three hour segment. With drug ads permeating the airways these days, that seemed surprising. However, returning to the premise of this paper, taking drugs is a modification of one's body or mind. Ads for products like Viagra or Levitra would be counter-productive to the intention of the programming. Drug ads do not provide a stable ground for the viewer, they remind

them that life is not perfect. Drug ads aired during the 'manic'-Monday of NBC would be a bit too obvious.

Professor of Communications at UMass-Amherst Sut Jhally writes, "Advertising...does not work by creating values and attitudes out of nothing, but drawing upon and rechanneling concerns that the target audience (and the culture) already shares..." (229). In an uncertain world, one still needs to eat and get from place to place, preferably at the same time judging by the number of fast food and car ads. These advertisements provide a worldview of normalcy in the midst of a series of programs that work to deconstruct the viewer's existing values and cultural attitudes.

As an analogy, the programming on NBC's Monday evening is a sea upon which the viewer is cast. The sea seems perfectly calm at first, but quickly becomes choppy. The commercials serve as ports on islands of familiar ground. To the slightly uncomfortable viewer, this is a relief. As the sea journey continues throughout the evening, the seas get rougher and blacker. The choppiness becomes tumultuous and those islands look more and more reassuring to the viewer. The old chestnut, "any port in a storm" takes on new meaning here.

Some may say that this level of sophistication between programmers and advertisers is non-existent; it is simply a matter of creating programming, researching the demographic makeup of the audience and selling that to advertisers who target that specific demographic. The airing of an insurance ad immediately after an explosion on a program is mere coincidence. William Gamson, Professor of Sociology at Boston University writes, "The need to attract advertisers induces programmers and editors to produce content that is likely to create a 'buying mood'".

What better way to create a buying mood than to develop a viewing lure in the programming that challenges socially held ideology? The program attracts the viewer, the content creates the 'value imbalance' and the advertising provides the stable worldview. Gamson goes on to write:

"Advertising is a force toward the homogenization of imagery, but not merely because the imagery is inoffensive. Advertising inevitably competes for attention with non-advertising content. Dull and predictable stories or programs make ads all the more interesting, their freshness and innovativeness standing out in contrast. Program content should not only create a proper buying mood but should avoid upstaging the advertising content that pays the bills".

Clearly the programming on NBC's Monday slate of shows is not dull or predictable, in fact, anything but. It does, however fit into Gamson's construct. The ad content is not offensive, which stands out in sharp contrast to the messages of destabilization and the images of violence and mayhem contained in the three programs. Rather than these shows upstaging the commercial messages, they use the inoffensive images to ground the viewers and reassure their (consumer-driven) worldview. The telling blow is delivered when Gamson states, "the advertising content that pays the bills". Gamson's last line is NBC's bottom line.

A final view to touch upon is that of cultivation theory. According to "Cultivation Theory" by Daniel Chandler, the theory was developed by George Gerbner and holds that mass media is a socializing agent. The idea is that television viewers come to believe the television version of reality the more they watch it. The theory also holds that "heavy" viewers are more influenced (Chandler). Anyone regularly watching all three hours of NBC's Monday primetime lineup would be considered a heavy viewer. Again, the idea is not that viewers will hold that the attitudes, beliefs and judgments in the content of *Chuck*, *Heroes* and *My Own Worst*

Enemy are the attitudes, beliefs and judgments that should be applied to the real world. These programs provide a sustained drawing on the participant's willing suspension of disbelief.

NBC/Universal creates messages that continue to support the idea that happiness can be attained by a consumer-driven, materialistic society. They continue to invent new and creative ways to deliver that message, without viewers knowing they're receiving it. A spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down. Finally, a quote by media scholar, John Fiske serves as a thoughtful, if not dire, conclusion:

"On the one hand we need to focus on the deep structure of the [popular] text in the ways that ideological, psychoanalytic analyses and structural or semiotic analyses have proved so effective and incisive in recent scholarship. These approaches reveal just how insistently and insidiously the ideological forces of domination are at work in all the products of patriarchal consumer capitalism. When allied with the work of the political economists, and the critical theorists of the Frankfurt School they expose, with terrifying clarity, the way in which the economic and ideological requirements of the system determine, and are promoted by, almost every aspect of everyday life" (105).

Fiske brings this study full circle by suggesting that the analysis of popular text be scrutinized and focused on in new and different ways. Clearly, with giant, global media corporations narrowing the field of message originators, there is a clear and present danger of these messages becoming singular in their purpose. As shown by applying a critical and cultural theory perspective and utilizing tools of media literacy to the prime-time content put forth by NBC/Universal, it is clear that the "Culture Industry" is thriving. Of the thousands of hours of television programming airing everyday, the three hours reviewed in this paper are but one example of how the culture industry works to promote the status quo, influence

behaviors and manipulate the values and ideologies of our culture. One might argue that if those beliefs and ideologies were shaped by the media in the first place, why manipulate and destabilize them by creating these types of programs? The answer is that the audience is an ever-changing entity. As people's interpretations of messages changes, so must the methods of the Culture Industry.

This paper has analyzed three programs with very similar characteristics. The explicit purpose of this programming is to provide entertainment, escape or comedic/cathartic relief to the viewers. However, as demonstrated, these programs have a much more implicit directive: to play to the common values and social norms held by society and subvert them in ways that delight, terrify and confuse. By intentionally creating this type of dynamic, commercial messages can be placed in the programming to offer a 'sanctuary of images' that reinforce the worldview desired by the corporate conglomerates.

Appendix:

Transitions from program to commercial

These commercial blocks are consistently aired at 8, 16, 27, 36 and 47 minutes into the program; with a variance of one minute either. Each block contains between five and eight commercials, excluding promotional spots and promos by the local affiliate. The charts below document the time segment which the commercials aired within the program. They discuss the initial transition from program to commercial. Information identifying all advertisements is included with comments on other relevant or interesting messages

Chuck -

Time	Program Scene	Initial Advertisement Scene & other ads
:08	Chuck's relationship with Sarah is threatened by the return of her ex. Close up of Chuck's look of panic and uncertainty	Volkswagen Routan – Brook Shields faux documentary ad about women getting pregnant just to rationalize getting a Routan, the stylish, safe, dependable family vehicle. Also, Disney (High School Musical 3), Target, Domino's, Disney Parks.
:16	Chuck confronted by Sarah looking beautiful in red evening gown. He stumbles awkwardly over himself attempting to get away to hide his unspoken affection. Sarah & ex exchange curious looks.	Luv's (Diapers) – cartoon babies, bounding about w/ hearts, rainbows to the tune of "Love One Another Right Now". Also, Honda (Fit) – a Transformers-like ad, Dr. Scholl's (gel inserts), Pizza Hut, Sonic, 1-888-Titlemax.
:27	Big explosion leaves Sarah sprawled on the pavement. Close up on her motionless face with abrasion on her forehead. Is she dead??	Allstate Insurance – Family in court to hear verdict against them in vehicular negligence case against their teenage son. Plaintiff's attorney threatens to access family's savings, college fund, etc. Also, Taco Bell, Pet Smart, Dove, Chevy (Traverse), Aquafresh (teeth whitening).
:36	Assassin enters Sarah's hospital room. Close up on Sarah's unconscious, vulnerable face.	Verizon (connect to those you love, like Sarah who is danger!). Also, Energizer, Playtex (bras), Nissan (Altima), Dodge (Journey), Hardees.
:47	Sarah fails to shoot villain holding Chuck, compromising her ability to do her job due to feelings for him.	Loreal (Hair Color) – Be the 'real' you... Also, Travelocity, Domino's, Summit Entertainment (Sex Drive movie), Audi, AT&T.

Heroes

Time	Program Scene	Initial Advertisement Scene & other ads
:08	Young, blonde cheerleader superhero shoots villain with stun gun. "Gotcha", she smiles.	Sprint – shot in black and white, this ad visually connects with the theme of the program...Angel/Monster, good/evil. Also, Universal (Hulk DVD), Yoplait (yogurt), Lucasfilm, Ltd. (Indiana Jone/Crystal Skull DVD), Nissan (Altima).
:16	Villain has cocooned a victim. Close up of grisly remains	Audi – shot of interior of classically designed and appointed home. As camera pans, the old classic style is replaced with a new modern one. The Cadillac in the driveway is replaced by an Audi – "progress is beautiful". Also, Blackberry/Verizon, TD Ameritrade, Denny's, Universal (Role Models movie), Toyota (0% APR), Obama political ad, Jeep (gas mileage).
:27	Villain open vortex to oblivion, cheerleader hold on for dear life to avoid being sucked in	Travelocity – particularly interesting. Don't get sucked into oblivion, use Travelocity and go to Cape Cod. Also, Ford (Flex)...this was produced to look exactly like the popular Cadillac ads, Sex Drive movie (again), Victoria's Secret, Pantene (volume collection shampoo), Gillette (deodorant).
:37	Woman stumbles into friend's workroom to discover grisly corpses. He discovers her presence and moves menacingly towards her.	Sprint/ <i>Heroes</i> tie in cross promo. Then repeat of black & white Sprint ad. Also, New Line Cinema (Pride & Glory movie), Pizza Hut, Hyundai (Santa Fe), Toyota (0% APR).
:48	Japanese hero kills his buddy with a sword to prove his commitment to an evil villain. Close up of dead friend.	NBC promo entitled, "Miss Something" – indicates that if viewer was unable to keep up with the show, episodes are viewable online at NBC.com. Next ad: Kohl's – babies and lovers, familiar images. Also, 20 th Century Fox (Max Payne movie), Aveeno (moisturizer), Blackberry, McDonald's, Lexus.

My Own Worst Enemy

Time	Program Scene	Initial Advertisement Scene & other ads
:08	Intro- Edward has sex with a beautiful foreign agent while in Paris. He foils her attempt on his life and casually shoots her between the eyes.	No break here. The program was sponsored by Chevy and introduced the Traverse & Camaro. These were shown by the way of split screen, mirroring the premise of the program, split personalities.
:14	Having unexplainably switched back to Henry during a shoot out. He is gunned down at close range in a dingy Russian apartment building.	Chevy (Traverse) – raining shoes spot again. Also, New Line Cinema (Pride & Glory movie), Gillette (Fusion Razor), Yoplait (Yo-plus), Wendy's, I Phone/AT&T, Progressive Insurance, Hardees.
:26	Henry learns the details of government's alteration of his brain. He is informed that he was not experimented on, put is actually the experiment. He collapses into a chair, dumbfounded.	Subway (\$5 footlongs) – Here the lead-in commercial messages turn back to happy, campy. Also, Universal (Hulk DVD), Enterprise Rent-a-Car, McDonald's (McRib), Local political ad, VSP Vision Care, Obama political ad, McDonald's (Iced Coffee).
:38	Henry learns that Edward slept with his wife.	Target – more happy/campy playful messages. Also, Universal (Changeling movie), KFC, Honda (Fit), Crest, Sprint, Met Life (Snoopy spot).
:48	Henry, mistaken as Edward, has a gun held to his throat by a Russian thug. Henry claims, "I am two people".	IPOD/AT&T – touting science and technology and how that makes our world better. Like the technology in Henry/Edward's head? Also, Plavix (Heart drug), Fisher-Price (Sing-a-long Stage) * really interesting placement. Babies playing...this ad would be seen on Sat/Sun mornings. Further, Wendy's, Degree (deodorant), Chevy (Traverse) – shoes.

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