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Coming Home Again: Television Sitcom Revivals

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COMING HOME AGAIN: TELEVISION SITCOM REVIVALS

by

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B.S. December 2022, Old Dominion University

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ABSTRACT

COMING HOME AGAIN: TELEVISION SITCOM REVIVALS

Brandon K. Hedgepeth
Old Dominion University, 2024
Director: Dr. Myles McNutt

This thesis argues that the success of television situational comedy revivals correlates with television's technological affordances as they have evolved over the past half-century. Specifically, three revival series are examined within this study, consisting of *The New Leave it to Beaver* (1983-1989), *Fuller House* (2016-2020), and *The Conners* (2018-Present). This paper uses the revival case studies to showcase their parallel relationship with the introduction of cable television and streaming media, alongside the resurgence of broadcast television to highlight the changing media landscape and the intertwined nature between technological advancement and the revival form. The study's investigation of how nostalgia intersects with the narrative patterns of the sitcom form offers a valuable historical framework for considering contemporary revivals, while simultaneously creating a foundation for analysis of future revivals.

Keywords: *The New Leave it to Beaver*, *Fuller House*, *The Conners*, technological affordances, revivals, sequel series

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I am on a mission to bring people together. As a podcaster, I have devoted the past few years to telling the stories of others. However, I have found it thrilling to explore the stories of these television sitcoms and how they can also contribute to togetherness.

This research is the culmination of years of my personal and academic research towards television and technology, and is a testament to being able to accomplish anything that you put your mind to.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Those who know me are aware that I love saying thank you. One of the biggest lessons that I have learned in graduate school is that life is a team effort. First and foremost, I would like to thank my loving and devoted family for supporting me through this process and for contributing to my education. A big thank you goes out to my parents, brother, aunt, uncle, and grandparents, alongside all my supportive relatives and cousins. I would equally like to thank my friends and community for encouraging me across every step of the way.

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An additional thank you goes to my mom for providing inspiration for this research and for proofreading my work; to my dad for his unwavering support and his dedication towards my education; my brother for always providing me a laugh; my grandparents for the pride they take in supporting me; alongside my aunt and uncle for always pushing me to go the extra mile and are always willing to take a lap with me.

It goes without saying that I am very grateful for all the opportunities that I have received to this point, and everyone I have met along the way. From my mentors to my fellow classmates and podcast guests, including the amazing people I work with, each of you inspire me to dream big and make things happen.

On my podcast, I always encourage my guests and listeners to 'go after your goals' and 'finish out strong.' Working on this research has allowed for me to do just that. I hope that this research shows the value of following your passions, always being curious, and being confident in your work.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF FIGURES	viii
Chapter	
I. INTRODUCTION “WE CAME BACK HOME”: TV TECHNOLOGY AND THE SITCOM REVIVAL FORM	1
LITERATURE REVIEW: TELEVISION REVIVALS	3
LITERATURE REVIEW: TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCES IN TELEVISION.....	7
SETTING THE RESEARCH FRAMEWORK	10
RESEARCH QUESTIONS	13
II. “TRIALS AND ADVENTURES OF GROWING UP”: <i>THE NEW LEAVE IT TO BEAVER</i> AND THE EARLY SITCOM REVIVAL	14
EARLY TELEVISION TECHNOLOGICAL AFFORDANCES	15
<i>STILL THE BEAVER</i> : REVIVAL THROUGH A TELEVISION FILM.....	18
ANALYZING <i>THE NEW LEAVE IT TO BEAVER</i> AS AN EARLY SITCOM REVIVAL	21
III. “EVERYWHERE YOU LOOK”: <i>FULLER HOUSE</i> AND THE POPULARIZATION OF THE SITCOM REVIVAL.....	29
THE EFFECTS OF CABLE SYNDICATION AND THE RISE OF STREAMING.....	29
ANALYZING <i>FULLER HOUSE</i> AS A REVIVAL	33
THE AFTERMATH OF <i>FULLER HOUSE</i>	42
IV. “KEEP ON TRUCKING”: THE REVIVAL GOES BACK TO BROADCAST WITH <i>THE CONNERS</i>	46
CONTEMPORARY BROADCASTING TECHNOLOGICAL AFFORDANCES	46
ANALYZING THE <i>ROSEANNE</i> REVIVAL.....	49
<i>ROSEANNE</i> MINUS <i>ROSEANNE</i> : RENEWAL, CANCELLATION, AND AFTERMATH.....	53
ANALYZING <i>THE CONNERS</i> PREMIERE	56
PROGRESSION OF <i>THE CONNERS</i> AND CONNECTIONS WITH <i>ROSEANNE</i>	57
MAKING THE CASE FOR <i>THE CONNERS</i>	61
V. THESIS FINALE: REMARKS AND FUTURE STUDY	64
THE WIDENING AND EVOLVING TELEVISION LANDSCAPE	64
THE CHANGES TO STORYTELLING	67
GOALS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH	69
REFERENCES	71

VITA79

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Pictures of my mom's VHS tape and associated binder entry	2
2. Opening sequence from <i>The New Leave it to Beaver</i>	19
3. <i>Roseanne</i> season ten promotional message	50

CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION “WE CAME BACK HOME”: TV TECHNOLOGY AND THE SITCOM
REVIVAL FORM

“They say you can never go back home, but we came back home” remarked *Full House* actor Dave Coulier as he prepared to return to his role in sequel series *Fuller House* (Fuller House, n.d.). Television situational comedies have been a staple of television since the advent of the medium, and many sitcoms live on in reruns for generations after their original debut due to increasing technological advancements. From broadcast syndication to streaming technology, these services allow for television series to be extended from the linear medium of analog television that once exclusively housed these series. However, these same technologies have also allowed for series to continue their prominence and legacy through newer episodes that are made to complement the original series and leverage changing technological times through the creation of television revivals.

While sitcoms are well-known as staples of American television, they have also been a staple of my own life growing up and continue to play a significant role within my life. Early on, I was obsessed with television, especially older sitcoms, and used the logics of the format to guide my life in both interests and practicality. My family oftentimes used television viewing to bond with one another, and I always took great pleasure in viewing the shows that my parents grew up watching and laughing alongside them as the episodes progressed. My love for television quickly became a catalyst for future research, allowing me to become a research enthusiast largely focused on the intersection of telecommunications and technology. Partly aiding my enthusiasm for television is my mom’s deep passion for television viewing, dating

back to her childhood, where she documented many of her viewing habits through home videocassette recordings and maintained a corresponding binder where she journaled her recording habits. It was due to these recordings that I gained a deeper understanding of the impact of television and gained further appreciation for the revival format with her tapings of the *Still the Beaver* series. Television sitcom revivals work to create a modern incarnation of an existing series, which in my personal experience allow for my family to rediscover a television series while consuming new episodes of the franchise in a contemporary setting. In its nature, this allows for multigenerational viewing of these series, though also highlights the television landscape that allowed for the series to return.

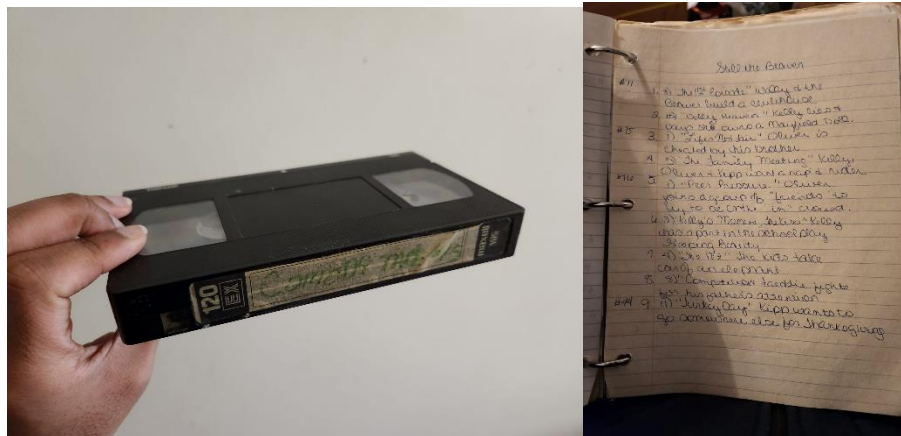


Figure 1: Pictures of my mom's VHS tape and associated binder entry

To better understand the relationship between television sitcom revivals and the changing television landscape, this research study examines three television sitcom revival case studies, arguing that we will only understand the past, present, and future of sitcom sequels and revivals if we track their development alongside the technological affordances that made that development possible. We cannot separate the origins of the revival in 1983's *The New Leave it*

to *Beaver* from the introduction of original programming on cable channels, and the modern trend toward revivals like 2016's *Fuller House* must be reckoned with alongside the impact of its streaming home, Netflix. And while the project's final case study, *The Conners*, is a broadcast series like its predecessor *Roseanne*, that revival reflects how broadcast television has been forced to evolve as a format in response to the technological change around it over the past half-century. Through their storytelling, marketing, and distribution, sitcom revivals give us a pivotal insight into broader changes across the television industry, insight that will be crucial to interpreting the future of the medium.

LITERATURE REVIEW: TELEVISION REVIVALS

In preparing this study, it is important to first examine the existing literature behind the television revival and define the central terminologies required to set a framework for this study. Defining the primary focus of this research, a television series is considered revived when a series returns for new iterations after a significant time after its original conclusion. While this same terminology may be used to describe television series that expand past their initial run, which was common practice in the 1980s (Reid, 2017), this research specifically focuses on those that occur at least a decade following the original conclusion, with the three major case studies premiering approximately twenty years following the conclusion of their original run. Television scholar Kathleen Loock (2018a) works to describe a television sitcom revival as a form of renewed interest in a series, working to ground previously ended television series in the present-day. Loock (2018a) notes that the primary challenge for a revived series is to create a “comeback that is consistent with the show's past but also manages to meaningfully ground the series revival in the present.” A television revival may work as a continuation of the previously

concluded series or may act as a sequel to the original, meaning that it occurs following the conclusion of the previous storylines.

When reviving a television sitcom, nostalgia and familiarity play a major factor in permitting a show to return. In a piece speaking about revival sequel series *Fuller House*, Kathleen Loock (2018b) describes nostalgia as “the yearning for an idealized past,” which is what works to entice potential viewers to tune into newly revived series. Research from Ronald Bishop and Maggie Fedorocko (2021) focused on nostalgia in television recreations concurs with this notion, using the term to describe longing for home, though noting that the concept is complicated and is not straight-forward. For instance, they (Bishop & Fedorocko, 2021) note that the concept may be described as reducing “past events into mere glimpses; important details and context are lost while we inhabit a dreamlike state of remembrance.” They also acknowledge that it can exist in relation to media and may be both personal and cultural. This description showcases that nostalgia can be used to showcase the longing to return to the past or a familiar time. In noting that nostalgia means that details can be lost, this also highlights that when a series returns, the focus should be oriented towards recreating a certain feeling for the audience and not necessarily in directly resuming the previous storylines.

The concept of a television revival is oftentimes mistaken as or grouped with the concept of a reboot or spin-off of the original series, other derivative television forms. A television reboot is defined as recreating an existing television series for a newer or different audience. In some cases, this may be labeled as a reimagining, which typically works to reorient shows to the modern-day. For instance, the 1975 series *One Day at a Time* was reimagined for a contemporary format and re-oriented to focus on a Cuban American family (del Río & Moran, 2020). This format does not require for the series to maintain continuity with the original series.

Meanwhile, a television spin-off is noted to “extend already established story worlds” (Loock, 2018a), noting that a primary differentiator between the concepts of reboots and spin-offs versus a revival is that the former is a new media text, a revival is instead an extension of a past text. However, this study will focus intently on television revivals. Being a revival is not an exclusive moniker, as the series *Fuller House* works as a sequel series to *Full House*, meaning that it follows its own storyline following the completion of the original, while also being a revival.

Furthering the discussion on television derivatives, existing research in the medium is focused on how nostalgia can be utilized for both new and returning audiences. In the research from Bishop and Fedorocko (2021), they focus their work on the recreation special *Live in Front of a Studio Audience*, which recreated episodes from Norman Lear’s shows from the 1970s and 1980s. The researchers note that the specials were created for the dual-purpose of both highlighting and celebrating the original televisual work of Lear and introducing a new audience to Lear’s bold storytelling methods, which continue to resonate with contemporary social movements. This logic can be applied to television revivals in that they must work to resonate with both the original audience and new viewers. Connecting this concept to nostalgia, this means that the series must offer a storyline or premise that separates it from the proceeding run. As for the Lear recreations, they offered the same scripts, though featured celebrity actors delivering the lines on live television in place of the original portrayers.

When reviewing research on television revivals and derivatives, it is notable that there is little information regarding early revivals. American television revivals have existed for sitcoms since at least the 1980s, though there is a significant lack of scholarly information or study into them. For instance, the piece from Kathleen Loock (2018a) makes note of the series *The New Leave it to Beaver*, *What’s Happening Now!!*, and *The New WKRP in Cincinnati*, mentioning

they are early revival sequel series and that their titles work to distinguish their contemporary iterations from the previous series, though falls short of describing or analyzing them. Even in popular press writing, these series gain little attention aside from being in a larger discussion. An example of this is in *Forbes* (Berman, 2023), where an article about *Leave it to Beaver* discusses the show and trivia about it and provides mention to the show's later television movie and sequel series. The article (Berman, 2023) incorrectly notes information about the original series, such as stating the series aired on NBC instead of ABC, and attributes the sequel series information to the film instead before proceeding to note the existence of the newer series as a minor piece of trivia in the closing of the article. By not providing attention to early sequel series, a narrative is created that the existence of revival series is an exclusively contemporary movement, and that the early revivals provide little value other than being a forgotten supplement to the original series.

Furthermore, it is evident that there is both a lack of proper analysis towards contemporary television revivals and the connection they have towards the evolving nature of television. While there are prominent scholarly pieces that discuss television revivals, such as Loock's (2018b) analysis of *Fuller House* and their portrayal of feminism within their first two seasons, there are not many of them, thus providing a limited perspective for an expansive topic. With the proliferation of the revival trend in the twenty-first century, it is surprising that there is little research and analysis done with this topic. A notable exception appears to be with the revival of *Roseanne* in 2018, which returned to airwaves before being infamously cancelled. However, these articles appear reactionary, and speak about the series in context of the cancellation, and not necessarily of the series itself and what it had to offer as a revival. For instance, the article "What Roseanne Barr Meant to Media Studies" (Leonard, 2020) notes that

the series revival was the highest rated television program for the ABC television network, and that the original series worked to change the narrative around progressive and feminist television yet fails to deeply engage with the series nor its continuation, *The Conners*. Thus, this warrants the creation of this study to further evaluate television revivals alongside its parallel nature to technological advancements.

LITERATURE REVIEW: TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCES IN TELEVISION

In arguing that television revivals exist parallel to the technological advancements affecting the television industry, it is important to examine the major advances of technological advancements that led to the creation of the three major case studies. With the original *Leave it to Beaver* series ending its run in 1963, that year serves as a starting point for discussing the advances in the television industry that created new opportunities for creativity. This literature review will provide a basis for understanding cable television, the growth of streaming television, and the changes broadcast television implemented in response to the fragmentation and evolution of the media space.

When the series *Leave it to Beaver* concluded, television consisted of three major broadcast networks, though in the years that followed, off-network syndication and the advent of cable television changed the dynamic of how television could be utilized. Television scholar Derek Kompare notes that “the number of independent stations doubled between 1979 and 1983 and continued to grow until 1985” (132, 2005) due to the rise of syndication. Kompare’s (139, 2005) research shows that within the early 1980s, television sitcoms were decreasing in popularity, thus greatly affecting the syndication market that relied on showing reruns of popular shows, especially sitcoms. However, by 1988, many of these stations that aired syndicated programming were oversaturated with content available, and the broadcast networks had begun

production of new sitcoms (Kompore, 141, 2005). Furthermore, Kompore (171, 2005) states that by the 1980s and 1990s, cable channels began to rise, with a prominent focus in showcasing older television. With the expansion of these new avenues to consume television, consumers were given a choice in what they wanted to watch, and it created niche audiences within the television market that would permit for television shows to return.

While television syndication and cable allowed an original platform for revivals to rise and gain an audience, the rise of streaming services, especially Netflix, helped shift the form of television. Research examined by Katerynych et al (2023) documented the usage of narrative storytelling in original series created for the Netflix streaming service. For instance, the study (Katerynych et al, 2023) noted that the service allowed for real-time storytelling, meaning that the events occur on-screen in the same narrative time permitted. The study (Katerynych et al, 2023) also noted that the streaming service actively worked to have creative and untraditional storytelling modes showcased within original content, while also promoting “brandcasting”—the merging of media content and promotional material—and binge-watching. This similarly follows the logic of Jenkins et al (2013) in *Spreadable Media*, which notes the coexistence of online communities and branding material across platforms. In research from Michael L. Wayne (2022), it is noted that the Netflix platform carries over 200 million subscribers in over 190 countries. This highlights that technological mediums can afford television revivals both an expansive audience and the chance to evolve the way that it tells a story in comparison to the original run. For instance, a series on Netflix may be adapted to promote binge-watching, with increased serial elements utilized within the series, while also being able to reach a large audience instantaneously.

Television streaming allowed for consumers to be in-control of their viewing habits, not having to rely on the primary television networks, which forced the networks to readjust as a result. Writing in *Portals: A Treatise on Internet-Distributed Television*, Amanda Lotz (2017) states that the Netflix platform recognized the value of Internet distribution, purchasing the streaming rights to numerous television properties to show on their platforms from the major networks. As a result, many broadcast networks worked to build their own services to release shows to consumers on, with Lotz (2017) using the example of CBS launching CBS All Access (now Paramount Plus) to show how the networks have worked in a reactionary manner. However, given that the primary business of the broadcast networks and cable channels are through their linear distribution platforms, this meant that they had to begin new strategies to encourage viewers to continue watching their stations or channels. Given a chance that their content may eventually end up viewable on a competitor's streaming service later, this meant they had to go beyond just advertising their content offerings.

Beyond streaming platforms, the Internet has also created new opportunities for engagement with TV through social media, which has allowed for individuals and organizations to send messages and posts directly to the public eye. By utilizing social media technology, revivals could advertise directly to potential viewers, and could be recommended to those viewers through the algorithm of the platform. Whereas television previously played a significant role in advertising brands and organizations through commercial advertisements, social media through online platforms including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter has now taken its place, with the number of social media users estimated to become 4.86 billion (McKay, 2023). Bob McKay (2023) writes in *Forbes* that marketing has adapted within the early twenty-first century to being people-first and interaction friendly, even noting that while the television may

be played more than social media is used, the former may be considered more passive. This could allow for fans of the revival series to interact directly with the show's social media pages and deepen their connection with the revival franchise. Furthermore, whereas television—especially with traditional broadcast networks—is generally geared towards a broader audience, social media can instead be personalized towards the interests of the individual users. Given that televisual content has shifted towards consumer choice over the past few decades, the advent of social media simply adds to the niche nature of contemporary television. It is arguable that social media now provides an interactive element to television viewing that was not previously possible that television revivals can take advantage of.

In summarizing the technological affordances provided to the television industry, it is important to understand how consumer choice plays a key role. Early in television history, off-network syndication and cable channels worked to allow for viewers to re-watch older shows and provided niche channels and content towards specific audiences. However, due to the rise of television streaming services, the usage of traditional television is becoming less relevant, in part due to their reactionary nature in adapting to the advent of the Internet. This then creates the contemporary media atmosphere in which the broadcast networks, and to a lesser extent cable companies, must work to retain their existing viewer base, and launch their own means of delivering content directly to consumers. The increase of these technological affordances allows for television series to be revived for more niche audiences and directed towards their target audience. For instance, select cable and streaming services may operate for specific audiences, thus providing an avenue for a series to return. Meanwhile, social media permits for users to directly interact with television revivals and those associated with them. This allows for viewers to feel more connected with the franchise and gain a deeper connection to the television revival.

SETTING THE RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

As evidenced through these dual evaluations of literature, it is understood that television revivals have been a long-standing fixture of American television, and that they exist parallel to the rise of technological affordances in television, though have received little proper and meaningful attention through both academic channels and by popular press. While nostalgia is utilized in the creation of television sitcom revivals, it is important that revivals move away from pure nostalgia to exist by itself with an extensive run. To best evaluate television sitcom revivals and their relationship to technological affordances, the revivals *The New Leave it to Beaver* (1983-1989), *Fuller House* (2016-2020), and *The Conners* (2018-Present) will be analyzed as case studies by discussing the technological advancements that led up to the revival, how the premiere episode of the revival crafted its existence, and how the series crafted its own identity in relation to the nostalgia justifying its initial creation.

While the series *Leave it to Beaver* may be well-known for having the first proper television finale for a primetime series, less recognized is that the series spawned a television film and two consecutive sequel series. The television film *Still the Beaver* released in 1983, the same-named television series released the following year, while *The New Leave it to Beaver* aired from 1986 to 1989; both sequel series are treated as a singular run under the latter's name. In evaluating the revivals, the technological affordances of off-network syndication, cable television, and home video will be examined. The discussion of *The New Leave it to Beaver* will also discuss how contemporary technological affordances have prevented the series from becoming lost media. By highlighting this revival, it will provide insight about early revivals that are overlooked when discussing the format. Given that one-hundred-one television episodes and

a film were produced as revivals to the original series, this serves as a perfect case study to begin the evaluation of revivals.

Releasing on the Netflix streaming platform, *Fuller House* serves as a sequel series to *Full House* and changed the contemporary conversation about television revivals. The new series heavily relied on nostalgia to appeal to potential viewers and utilized the technological affordances of streaming television and social media to appeal directly to consumers, without the usage of linear television. Also evaluated is how the original series grew in popularity due in part to the matured medium of cable television. Despite running five seasons and seventy-five episodes, the series only featured seven total releases throughout its revived run, due in part because of the Netflix platform's promotion of binge-viewing. The series will be evaluated through its usage of technological affordances alongside how it works to find an audience through its storytelling.

Following up on the hit-series *Roseanne* that originally ran for nine seasons, a tenth season was produced in 2018 to appeal to a divided country following the 2016 presidential election. Through the revival may have been a ratings hit, the series faced an infamous cancellation immediately following its release due to comments made by the show's star. However, the revival returned in the form of *The Conners* later that year, where it continues to release new episodes as of March 2024, where it is expected to finish the television season with over one-hundred-fifteen revived episodes. Though the situational comedy utilized technological affordances, it did so through the medium of broadcast television and worked to craft its own identity beyond the original series. Discussion includes how the revival addressed the previous *Roseanne* ending, how it navigated its cancellation, and how the series evolved in its second run on broadcast television.

Echoing the sentiment of *Full House* actor Dave Coulier in the opening of this introduction, television situational comedies have been allowed a chance to return through the concept of television revivals. Successful television revivals are made possible by the utilization of technological affordances by the series, to both enhance the original series and to allow for their return. Given the cooperative role between the television revivals and the televisual technological affordances it utilizes, the project will explore two primary research questions:

1. How have principles of consumer choice helped shape the technological affordances of television in ways that facilitated sitcom revivals?
2. How do the industrial and storytelling dynamics of the sitcom revival reflect the evolution of the television industry as a whole?

By evaluating the television revivals *The New Leave it to Beaver*, *Fuller House*, and *The Conners*, and the technological affordances associated with them, the relationship between television sitcom revivals and the wider television landscape will become more clear.

CHAPTER II

“TRIALS AND ADVENTURES OF GROWING UP”:

THE NEW LEAVE IT TO BEAVER AND THE EARLY SITCOM REVIVAL

“Sometimes it’s hard for me to believe that my boys are grown men. One minute they’re tracking mud through the living room and then all of a sudden, you’re watching them walk down the aisle” narrates Barbara Billingsley in her role as June Cleaver in the beginning of the *Still the Beaver* television film (1983). Viewers of the original *Leave it to Beaver* sitcom would recall Beaver going through childhood and needing to lean on his family for support. The revivals of the original series worked to show his personal growth as he raised his children as a single father. *The New Leave it to Beaver* is an early and overlooked example as to how a television series utilized technological affordances aimed at promoting consumer choice such as syndication, cable television, and home video to continue an established television franchise. It also showcased the role of consumers in keeping these shows available. To understand the series’ development, episodes of the revival iterations will be discussed and analyzed to show how the series was structured and advanced its storytelling from the original series. This case study chapter will conclude by sharing how the technological advancements that occurred after the show’s conclusion—which will serve as a foundation for the following chapters—worked to keep the show from becoming lost media.

To provide an outline and timeline of the franchise, the original *Leave it to Beaver* series aired from 1957 to 1963 and aired on the CBS then ABC television networks. The franchise was revived in the form of a television movie on the CBS network in 1983, titled *Still the Beaver*, which ultimately became the title of a television series that aired on The Disney Channel

premium cable channel from 1984 to 1985. While The Disney Channel did not renew the series, a separate sequel was ordered by SuperStation WTBS that aired from 1986 to 1989, titled *The New Leave it to Beaver*. Despite being separate series, they will be analyzed as a singular sequel series consisting of one-hundred-one episodes, using the title of the latter series.

EARLY TELEVISION TECHNOLOGICAL AFFORDANCES

The return of *Leave it to Beaver* in the form of a television revival was due to technological advancements created to promote consumer choice including the growth of syndication, the advent of cable television, and the home video revolution that occurred following the conclusion of the original series. These technological advances worked to showcase the shift in focus towards consumer choice and competition following television's formative years. In the decades following the completion of the original *Leave it to Beaver* series, the concept of program syndication became prominent in allowing for previously aired television series and episodes that ran on the major television networks to rerun on broadcast television. Further, the concept of first-run syndication began growing, allowing for a series to bypass the television networks all-together (Clarke, 2023). The rise of syndication in the broadcast space is highlighted in an article hosted by the Library of Congress which notes that syndication grew significantly in the 1970s, due to regulations from the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) that required for syndication services to operate separately from the networks (González, 2023). Independent television stations—those that are not affiliated with a television network such as ABC, NBC, or CBS—grew in prominence during this time, allowing for consumer independence from the major networks (González, 2023). By having additional choices for consumers, more specialized content could be created with more intentional focus towards their target audiences.

With the rise of syndication, the role of the consumer was strengthened by the 1970s and 1980s, thanks in part due to more consumer choices in how to view television such as with cable television. Cable television allowed for end-users to provide a recurring payment in exchange for access to additional channels beyond their media market. One of the earliest cable channels came from WTCG, a local station located in Atlanta, Georgia (Whittle, 2019). Owned by Ted Turner, the station—which renamed to WTBS, which is how it will be referred to throughout this selection—became the center of the Turner Broadcasting System, projecting the channel to a national level with cable television (Whittle, 2019). As a superstation—the official designation given for a station that was distributed past its media market—WTBS led the transformation towards cable television by providing content for niche audiences as opposed to the existent broadcast stations. As noted by communication lecturer Dr. Chad Whittle, predictions were made in 1967 about cable television, noting “a cable future where there would be multiple networks that would provide programming to a niche audience as opposed to broadcast networks” (Whittle, 2019).

While these cable channels provided more flexibility for consumers than was offered for broadcast television at the time, the medium expanded further with an expansion towards premium cable. Channels such as HBO and The Disney Channel occupied this space, which required an additional payment on top of cable service pricing. As noted by *The New York Times* in 1984, The Walt Disney Company invested heavily into creating original content for their namesake family entertainment premium cable channel (Knoll, 1984). Though operating at a loss, the article states that Disney was “placing its hopes for a brighter future on attracting to the home screen the sort of loyal following that seems to have deserted it at the box office” (Knoll, 1984).

Alongside the growth of cable television was the inception of the home videotape market that allowed for consumers to easily rewatch content for the first time. This meant that series such as *Leave it to Beaver* could be easily rewatched later. Prior to 1975, there was not a convenient method for consumers to easily record their favorite television programs for future viewing, thus limiting them to watching in real-time and be reliant on the major broadcast networks (Baird, 2013). However, this changed with the introduction of the cassette tape systems including the Betamax and the Video Home System (VHS) in 1975 and 1977, respectively (Baird, 2013). These allowed for videocassette recorders (VCRs) to record a television program on a magnetic tape that consumers could play back at their convenience. An article from Iain Baird notes that advertisements from the time stated ““Until now you could only fight over what TV shows to watch, now you can also fight over what TV shows to record”” (Baird, 2013). While the Betamax was phased out in favor of VHS tapes in a formatting war, they ultimately introduced a new beginning for television, prompting studios within the following decade to consider rewatch value in producing television programs. While the existing concept of syndication prompted production companies to create timeless content for future usage, the advent of the videotape pushed this urge further, requiring that future playback be considered to ensure the longevity of a television program. In the decades following the conclusion of *The New Leave it to Beaver*, viewers of the series were able to upload their home video copies of the series to online platforms such as YouTube, thus allowing for the series to continue circulating even if they were never formally released.

Prior to the resurgence of the *Leave it to Beaver* franchise, the changes of television technology in the forms of syndication, cable television, and home video helped shift the industry towards the consumers. The original series was created during the first Golden Age of

Television, the earliest years of the medium. However, as time progressed, new technologies allowed for the television industry to mature and become more competitive, allowing for consumers to have a say in their viewing habits. With syndication, television shows could be rerun and shown again years or decades following the conclusion of the show. This led to the creation of independent stations not reliant on the programming ability of the major broadcasting networks. Meanwhile, cable television allowed for subscribers to purchase additional channels beyond those they already had access to within their designated media markets. However, it was the home video that permitted television users to record and document their television shows for future viewing.

STILL THE BEAVER: REVIVAL THROUGH A TELEVISION FILM

The original *Leave it to Beaver* series may have ended first-run episodes in 1963, but its persistent presence in television syndication allowed for it to receive a television movie twenty years following the original series finale, ultimately leading to a new television series. The television film permitted a new series based on *Leave it to Beaver* to commence by laying the groundwork for a new series and testing the audience for interest. Following the growth of syndicated reruns, television movies were often created to follow-up on the television stories, allowing an opportunity to ‘catch up’ with the viewers in real-time. As addressed by Kathleen Loock (2018a), television revival films oftentimes exist out of place, as they exist in the present through ultimately follow up on events that have long ended. The *Beaver* franchise’s television movie was titled *Still the Beaver* and aired on the CBS network in 1983. The film worked to showcase the family of Theodore “Beaver” Cleaver twenty years following the series finale, and showcase that while life may have progressed, Beaver never fully matured or gained confidence

in himself, despite now being married with two sons. This ultimately leads to his impending divorce at the start of the film, which initiates the events of the revivals.

Though the television film largely follows a separate continuity from the television sequel series that followed, it is important to understand that the storyline of the movie works to catch up viewers following the end of the previous series and provides an avenue to continue the story. The film begins with photos of the Cleaver family from the original series, with the camera panning through them, leading to contemporary photos with the family, with matriarch June Cleaver (Barbara Billingsley) serving as the narrator, explaining that her children are now grown with their own lives, though notes that “I always figured that living away from home with his wife and family would help Beaver overcome his tendency to be overwhelmed by even the smallest problem, or so I thought” (Levant & Abdo, 1983). This sets the film into motion, with the Beaver (Jerry Mathers) being kicked out of his home and moving in with his mother in his childhood home. It is there he is forced to confront the passing of his father, Ward Cleaver (Hugh Beaumont), years prior in not being able to ask him advice. Beaumont had passed away prior to the start of the film, though had a presence through flashbacks to the original series at the start of the film. This start of the film works to provide a foundation for the franchise to continue, addressing the characters of the original series before proceeding to enter the premise of the film itself.



Figure 2: Opening sequence from *The New Leave it to Beaver*

The remainder of the film largely works to showcase Beaver's personal growth in getting the courage to take control of his life with the assistance of his family and childhood friends. Beaver's mother June and brother Wally are the primary characters of the film, outside of Beaver himself, though Wally's friends Eddie Haskell and Lumpy Rutherford are largely featured as well. Throughout the film, Beaver gains his confidence and receives a job offer to give himself stability. This ultimately leads to Beaver prompting his estranged wife Kimberly for custody of his children, Corey and Oliver. However, he finds out from Kimberly that she wants to give up custody of the children anyway to follow her own passions abroad, thus leaving him to raise the children. Meanwhile, Wally and his wife Mary Ellen find out that she is pregnant and expecting a boy. Thus, the film works to showcase the maturing of Beaver past his childhood years, and his acceptance of who he is. While the film largely focuses on following up the original series, even with the film title referencing that Jerry Mathers' character is "still the Beaver," it ultimately sets into place plot points that could be continued.

Though the *Still the Beaver* television movie was a standalone follow-up to the *Leave it to Beaver* television series that aired on broadcast television, it worked to set the foundation for a new television series to be created, as noted by commentary about the film. In a television review published in March of 1983, writer Arthur Unger starts his publication by stating "America has gone through enormous changes in the past 20 years, but the town of Mayfield, TV-land, remains the same. Just older" (1983). The writer notes that the movie allowed for viewers to catch up with the Cleaver family, and that the film allowed for the character of Beaver to mature surrounded by many familiar cast members. Notably, the writer concludes by stating that the CBS television network and production company Universal TV created the film under the hopes that viewers demand more, and states that "if American TV holds true to its follow-the-leader

principles, the success of this special could trigger a rash of revivals of those healthy family series of the 1950s and '60s" (Unger, 1983). This review largely highlighted that the film served as both a continuation of the original storyline, though noted that with Beaver and Wally now having to both deal with parenting by the conclusion, it works to set up future iterations of their storylines.

Though CBS ultimately passed on hosting a new series for Beaver, it established enough of a foundation that other forces within the television industry believed a new sequel series could be justified. Despite that the family is in initial disarray, the film worked to allow their characters to progress and mature on-screen. With the character of Beaver gaining custody of his children, and Wally about to have his first child, it sets up future events for them while also providing potential closure to the franchise. As showcased by the review of the film, the film was developed in hopes that it can spark a future *Beaver* iteration, and notes that a potential success may lead to other franchises returning. When CBS passed on producing the series, it was these qualities that led to a series pickup at The Disney Channel, bringing the characters to new territory.

ANALYZING *THE NEW LEAVE IT TO BEAVER* AS AN EARLY SITCOM REVIVAL

The creation of the sequel series benefited from the rise of syndication of the original series and the growth of cable television, alongside the affordances attributed to it. In the year following the *Still the Beaver* television film, a series of the same name was created for The Disney Channel, which served as a sequel series that eventually became known as *The New Leave it to Beaver*. As a pivot from the *Beaver* franchise's home on network television, the original *Still the Beaver* television sequel series aired on The Disney Channel, a premium cable channel. The Disney Channel was designed as a family-oriented entertainment channel, which

differs from the wide spanning audience of the broadcast networks. At the time of the show's debut, The Disney Channel had approximately 916,000 subscribers, which was a significantly lower audience than was available to it on the networks (Knoll, 1984). The start of the series on the premium cable medium was somewhat symbolic, given that the original series aired during the early days of broadcast television while the newer one helped to usher in another new format.

While the new series maintained the basic premise of its television film predecessor, it featured significant differences from the film. Instead of using the first episode of the sequel series to set up the series, it instead exists in an already-established continuity. The episode "Growing Pains" (S1, E1) introduces the series prior to its theme song, again through Billingsley's narration, by stating "Wally is a successful attorney, and he still lives in Mayfield with his wife, Mary Ellen, and their daughter, Kelly. For a long time, the Beaver lived out of town, but after his marriage broke up, he came home with his sons: Kip and Oliver. So, we're together again, all discovering and rediscovering the joys and pitfalls of that magical time we call childhood; and that's what our series is about." This narrative serves as the genesis of the series, providing viewers information about the program while also catching up potential viewers from the original *Leave it to Beaver*. The episode goes on to have Beaver's son Oliver feel left out in his family's activities, given his age, prompting him to want to grow up faster. In noting that childhood is the forefront of the series, this goes along with The Disney Channel's focus towards family entertainment, while also re-orienting the series around the children. Unlike the film, the television series focuses heavily on both the children themselves and the overall family. Nostalgia also kicks in by seeing the character of Beaver, who was seen in the original series during his childhood causing mischief, now having to oversee his children and niece going through similar dilemmas.

Outside of the central narrative of the sequel series, the cast and premise saw a shift from the film adaptation. In the new series, Wally's wife Mary Ellen plays a major role, with them now having a young child Kelly, and Beaver's oldest son now being Kip instead of Corey. Furthermore, *Leave it to Beaver* recurring characters Eddie and Lumpy are now also primary characters within the revival, alongside Eddie's son Freddie. Though one-off and recurring characters do exist within the story of the new series, as it typical with a situational comedy, they ultimately exist as a rarity, with the series largely sticking with its primary cast instead, treating them as an ensemble. The Disney Channel aired twenty-six episodes of the series over a year, though opted not to renew the series (Special to the New York Times, 1986). Though a reason was not provided for the cancellation, it may be shown as a disadvantage of utilizing the new technological affordance in the form of premium cable, given the limited access to an audience.

While the *Still the Beaver* television series was prompted to end following The Disney Channel's failure to renew the series, it was SuperStation WTBS that allowed for the established storylines to continue. In an "unprecedented" deal, a new series titled *The New Leave it to Beaver* was recommissioned for the superstation, moving the story again from premium cable to basic cable (Special, 1986). Though the premise remained the same from the previous revival iteration, *The New Leave it to Beaver* run started by indicating that they are "helping a new generation face the trials and adventures of growing up," noting that it is what "our series has always been about" (S2, E1). Though a minor shift away from the niche family-oriented market of The Disney Channel, it permitted the series storylines to progress forward and utilize all their major characters.

As the series grew and matured while airing on SuperStation WTBS, so did the role of June Cleaver. Following the death of her husband, June is extensively featured throughout the

series, serving as a leading member of the city council while also dating, going back to school, and being a grandmother. This contrasts the character from her image on the original series, in which she was an active homemaker while her husband, Ward, worked. The series portrays her as having an active part in the lives of both her children and grandchildren, alongside her daughter-in-law, Mary Ellen. Though she is dating and out of the house in the new series, June continues to cherish the memory of her husband Ward. In the second season of the series, the episode “Got to Get You Out of My Life” (S2, E24) shows that June held onto a portrait of Ward when she believed her house was going to burn down, with the camera panning to highlight the significance of it.

In speaking of the changing role of June Cleaver, this highlights the changes in family dynamics that occurred between the original and new *Leave it to Beaver* franchise iterations. Whereas the original series focused on a traditional nuclear family household, the new series instead focuses on an extended multigenerational family. Even for the character of Beaver, the character is now divorced, though notably is the recipient of the proceedings instead of the initiator, having been dumped in his relationship with his ex-wife alongside his children. In fact, *The New Leave it to Beaver* also broadens the definition of family by intently showing the family friends as a part of the extended family, which shows a sharper contrast to the traditional nuclear family. This works to show the changes of dynamics within the franchise in modernizing. Outside of the family dynamics, Beaver is also shown in *The New Leave it to Beaver* as a contingent worker in comparison to his father Ward in the original series, who was a core worker (Belous, 1989). This reflects the changing socioeconomic times between the late 1950s of the original series and the mid 1980s of the new one, and how the series worked to ground itself in the present in

Staying true with the intent of the series, *The New Leave it to Beaver* extensively focuses on Beaver's children Kip and Oliver as they go through childhood dilemmas. However, attention is also provided to his niece—Kelly—and her time growing up. The series was also able to grow from its time on The Disney Channel, given its presence on the more general-audience WTBS by featuring more mature topics such as leaving home without permission, dating, and skipping school. While the series establishes that each of the Cleaver children have friends, with them appearing on an intermittent basis in the series, the series greatly focuses on the main characters, with the character of Freddie Haskell being the primary source of interaction. In this sense, the series works to be self-contained, unlike the original *Leave it to Beaver* series which featured numerous recurring characters throughout its run.

In its episodic format, *The New Leave it to Beaver* series works to maintain its independence from the original series, but it also provides references to the original series as nods towards long-time viewers as opposed to highlighting the connections between series. With the original series still found in syndication, the new series was able to refer to *Leave it to Beaver* and touch on the recurring themes and characters from the original. For instance, while numerous cast members from the original series make cameo appearances throughout the duration of the series, these are not called into attention, and instead treated as traditional guest stars. In the episode "Yesterday's Gone" (S2, E27), Wally is shown to participate in a high school reunion, with former recurring cast members of the original series returning for the episode. Despite it being a reunion-based episode, the series does not draw to attention old plotlines regarding the original series, instead simply showing the character interactions and focusing on the plot of the episode. Using an Easter egg format of providing mere clues and elusions towards the original series is reflective of how the syndication of the original series made information about *Leave it*

to Beaver more widespread, though it does not provide instantaneous access to the original series. Thus, many of the callbacks to the original series are not overly specific, though instead broadly refer to the originating series.

Furthermore, *The New Leave it to Beaver* also works to be future-oriented, even when calling back to the original series in its references. Thus, the series did not work to dwell in the past, but rather look forward. An example of this playing out in the series is with the episode “Birth Announcement” (S2, E11), which featured a focus on the song *The Toy Parade*, the theme song for *Leave it to Beaver*. While the song had always been played instrumentally in both the original series and the updated version used on the sequel series, lyrics were included within the episode, paying homage to the original series. Within the moments leading up to the birth of Wally’s son, Beaver and June discuss the song, and how it was used to put Beaver to sleep when he was a child. The episode closes with the character of Wally singing the series to his newborn son, bringing the series full circle, considering Wally and Beaver were children growing up when the original series was on, which played *The Toy Parade* as its theme. This provides a sense of nostalgia for the fans, while also grounding itself in new storytelling, as opposed to dwelling within previous storylines. By doing this, the new series was able to enhance the lore of the original series while also telling its own story.

The return of the *Leave it to Beaver* franchise allowed for them to commemorate celebratory moments with the viewers directly. In the third season premiere of *The New Leave it to Beaver*, the series aired a special (S3, E1), with original actors Barbara Billingsley, Tony Dow, and Jerry Mathers speaking directly to the audience and thanking them in allowing for the franchise to reach three generations of viewers, with the episode marking thirty years since the original *Leave it to Beaver* series premiere. To commemorate it, they opted to release the full

original pilot used to shop the original series, titled “It’s a Small World.” The episode was originally considered a lost episode, though the actors explain that a copy was recently found, and thus the re-airing of the episode would be the first time it was shown since its original airing over thirty years. While the actors note that while different actors portrayed the characters of Wally and Ward, Billingsley notes that the pilot episode nevertheless shares the same “ideals, warmth, and humor” as the series that were created (S3, E1).

With the lost episode being rediscovered and re-aired as part of the sequel series, there’s an irony given that *The New Leave it to Beaver* no longer exists in a traditional manner, and is considered a lost series, whereas the pilot episode still exists. Though the impressive run of *The New Leave it to Beaver* makes the long-running show eligible for off-network syndication, it ultimately was removed from syndication following the bankruptcy of its syndicator, thus also putting the rights to the series in limbo (Earl and Peers, 1989). Using *The New Leave it to Beaver* series as a case study, it shows that it may belong with a niche audience, as opposed to a mainstream one. As of writing, the series is over thirty years old, but it has yet to resurface on broadcast or cable television officially—by comparison, the original series has remained in continuous broadcast since its conclusion of first-run episodes.

However, despite the series’ status as a lost series, it is arguable that the series is not an untold story, in part due its utilization of technological affordances. In the years prior to the launch of *The New Leave it to Beaver*, the aforementioned videotape revolution allowed for users to record television shows for future playback. As such, viewers who were interested in viewing the series later had the option to record the series and own a record of it in a physical media format. In this aspect, the series was able to continue to exist for those dedicated viewers, despite that the series had not officially been rebroadcast. Furthermore, some of those individuals have

uploaded the episodes to the YouTube platform, allowing for a new generation of viewers to consume the content. Thus, not only was the series able to use the technological affordances of its time, but also the new technology developed decades after its conclusion.

In evaluating *The New Leave It to Beaver* as an early example of a television sitcom revival, it is evident that the series not only was able to adapt to technological affordances, but that it only exists due to them. This is true in numerous aspects, as the telefilm was developed in part due to the original *Leave it to Beaver*'s increased presence in syndication. Yet, both iterations of the sequel series aired on cable networks, the new television viewing technology of the time, in both premium and basic cable formats, respectively. However, it was the videotape revolution to thank for allowing the series to continue to exist in the present-day. This emphasizes the consumer's role in television revivals, noting that while monetary value may have had a role in the creation of a new series, it was the consumers and the utilization of technology that made it last. It also serves to mention that without the series being preserved through the home video format, the series would not be accessible to analyze as a part of this larger discussion about television revivals. Thus, it serves as a warrant to further evaluate television sitcom revivals in how they use technological affordances.

CHAPTER III

“EVERYWHERE YOU LOOK”:

FULLER HOUSE AND THE POPULARIZATION OF THE SITCOM REVIVAL

“Isn’t this crazy? I wound up living back in my old bedroom. I moved in here when I was five” remarks Candace Cameron Bure as DJ Tanner in *Fuller House*, before receiving the response of “now here we are again, it’s the circle of life” from her television sister Jodie Sweden as Stephanie (*Fuller House* S1, E1). Twenty-nine years after the premiere of *Full House* on the ABC broadcast network, the series returned as sequel series *Fuller House* on the Netflix streaming service, due in part because of the audience built from the utilization of cable syndication of the original series and social media. The series *Fuller House* will be analyzed, beginning with the series premiere, through the lens of storytelling to showcase how the series chose nostalgia over progression and adjusted to the streaming formats. *Fuller House* brought significant attention to television revivals by returning through the Netflix platform, though focused on nostalgia over progress in storytelling, ultimately working to promote the offerings of Netflix and the original series more than establishing a memorable narrative in its own right.

THE EFFECTS OF CABLE SYNDICATION AND THE RISE OF STREAMING

Cable syndication of *Full House* created an audience for the *Fuller House* sequel series to return as a streaming series and utilized social media to raise awareness to the revival format. These work to showcase the role of the consumer as both cable and streaming television allows for additional televisual programming to given to consumers, while social media allows for consumers to interact with the program. By highlighting the technological affordances provided, this argues that *Fuller House*’s creation was dependent on the rise of cable syndication, and that

social media was a key tool in promoting the new series. Following the first run of *Full House*, cable channels including ABC Family and the Nick at Nite programming block began airing the show through syndication, allowing for *Full House* to meet a fresh audience in the decades following the series conclusion (Berg, 2015). Television scholar Kathleen Loock (2018b) states in her research that the series was ultimately kept alive by syndication services and newly incepted cable channels, in addition to being syndicated to numerous countries outside the United States. In an article published in *Forbes* (Berg, 2015), it notes that the syndicated reruns of the series on Nick at Nite averaged 1.5 million viewers, which was higher than the year prior for the series. Despite no longer producing episodes, the series was able to transcend its age and become a staple of the lineup. Series creator Jeff Franklin said in an interview (Hunt, 2016) that the series drew in millions of viewers per week on the programming block, showcasing a reasoning and potential demand for bringing the situational comedy back.

When the *Full House* sequel was announced, it was revealed it would premiere as a Netflix Original Series, instead of returning to the broadcast home of ABC. This worked to show a changing dynamic towards first-run television distribution towards streaming television. In speaking to the decision to have *Fuller House* on the Netflix platform, Jeff Franklin (Hunt, 2016) stated that the broadcast network passed on the series, whereas the streaming service Netflix took a chance on it. He further indicates that the Netflix executive that reached out previously worked at Nickelodeon, showcasing a direct correlation between the syndicated success of the original *Full House* series and the creation of the *Fuller House* sequel series (Hunt, 2016). At the time, the Netflix platform was known for allowing television shows to be viewed without the need of cable and broadcast television. This showcases that streaming television played a similar role for *Fuller House* that cable did for *The New Leave it to Beaver* in that both technological mediums

worked to provide consumers more freedom to choose what to watch. This is in contrast to linear broadcast television, that is posed towards a wide range of viewers. An article found in *The New York Times* (Nocera, 2016) stated that “Netflix has exposed, and taken advantage of, the limitations of conventional TV.” By removing the linear aspect from television, the service gained a reputation for being a disruptor of the television industry, taking advantage of the technological affordances of the Internet to change the trajectory of television. This shift towards streaming highlighted the changing television landscape in which programs were no longer reliant on the broadcast medium for distribution.

An item of interest during the rise of Netflix’s rise of prominence was how the streamer began to utilize social media—another technological change—to directly reach fans. The social media presence helped initiate conversations regarding the changing atmosphere of television in relation to streaming. In a separate article published in *The New York Times* (Manjoo, 2015) a year earlier, it highlights the massive expansion of television alongside its technological affordances such as digital video recorders (DVRs)—which allowed consumers to record television—created a world that was not reliant on linear television viewing. The strategy of the streamer was primarily to grow its role in television, shifting from a television on-demand service to one that also produced content. In the content that it controls, Netflix utilized social media to create conversations about shows like *Fuller House* in real-time. The rise of social media allowed for Netflix to receive direct interaction from fans, prompting anticipation to rise about the show.

To showcase how social media was utilized, Netflix began a social media campaign that highlighted the family tree of the *Fuller House* characters through Instagram (Fuller House, n.d.). In this strategy, a post was created for each of the primary cast members, showcasing a

picture of them alongside a short biography to alert viewers as to who they are. With twelve posts in total, the account introduced the series in a way that did not require the viewing of the original series. While the posts were not overly descriptive, it provided a base level understanding of the series. These posts also provided insight into the series by providing a description for each of the new characters with character traits being described as well. These posts were also strategically used to engage the anticipated audience.

Though the usage of the family tree social media campaign worked to recognize the main characters of the *Fuller House* series, it also worked to highlight an unseen character as well, that of Michelle Tanner. In the original *Full House* series, Michelle began as an infant and the youngest daughter of Danny. As the series progressed throughout its tenure, Michelle – portrayed by twin actresses Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen – gained prominence in the show. By the series finale of the *Full House*, “Michelle Rides Again” (*Full House* S8, E23-24), the show centered on her character, while the finale itself focused on her remembering the role her family played in her upbringing. In the new series, the Olsen twins opted not return to their previous role, thus making the character of Michelle unseen, though infrequently mentioned. The page for the *Fuller House* Family Tree (n.d.) notes her as being “the youngest Tanner daughter. She now lives in New York which caused her to miss picture day for the Fuller House Family Tree,” noting that her entry is the only one that does not include a picture. The description given to her worked to include her within the framework of the series, though alludes to the character not appearing. By utilizing social media for the marketing of the series, *Fuller House* was able to directly welcome new viewers and refresh *Full House* viewers about the fictional Tanner family before the series released.

By returning on a streaming platform instead of a broadcast television network, *Fuller House* utilized technological affordances provided to it, owed by the impact of cable syndication in rerunning the original series. The Netflix platform of the sequel series gained prominence in the months and years leading up to *Fuller House* being announced, and by having a former broadcast series return via the platform, it helped to showcase the power of the platform in returning nostalgia to viewers. Since Netflix directly provides content to viewers, the platform can directly counter the broadcast networks, and strengthen their place in the media market. Further, by utilizing social media as a marketing tool to create a sense of excitement and anticipation, the platform worked to initiate direct conversations with fans in sharing information regarding what the show will be about and what viewers may expect from the series.

ANALYZING *FULLER HOUSE* AS A REVIVAL

In analyzing *Fuller House*, it is evident that the series relied on nostalgia as a format, which makes it difficult for the show to escape the shadow of its predecessor. Although nostalgia plays a key factor to draw in viewers for a revival series, progression is still needed to move a series forward. The sequel series also worked to adapt the sitcom genre into a streaming format with binge culture. As it navigates these challenges, *Fuller House* mostly privileges the power of nostalgia over that of character and storyline progression. To best highlight this, the first episode of *Fuller House* will be analyzed alongside additional pivotal moments within the show to demonstrate the use—and limits—of nostalgia as a format.

Binging television, as allowed by the series existing on a streaming medium, provided a new aspect of consumption for the viewing audience – control. The audience viewing on Netflix was allowed control regarding whether to view the full season in a single sitting or over time. The audience watching *The New Leave it to Beaver* had to wait for new episodes to release

weekly, thus requiring the storylines to be memorable to encourage the viewers to continue watching. Given this affordance, each season was designed around central plotlines that continued through the series. Though, it is arguable that this changed the interpretation of the storylines away from typically episodic nature of television situational comedies. By allowing this control, Netflix freed the audience from the weekly episode releases that have defined network television. While a television network must confine to a set release schedule, and release episodes over time, Netflix instead can simply release a full season at once and make it available to its subscribers automatically. This also means that during the first release for *Fuller House*, viewers could view the entire first season at once, if they choose to, thus eliminating a primary barrier of broadcast viewing. This also meant that *Fuller House* was not allowed to adjust its tone or storytelling after audience reception, as would be afforded in a linear weekly release.

In starting the first sequel series episode “Our Very First Show, Again” (S1, E1), the original opening theme for *Full House* plays, which proceeds to cut to the present-day by showing that twenty-nine years have passed. In the opening scenes of the series, it works to re-introduce the *Full House* cast by showing only original returning cast members—minus Tommy Jr, an infant—prior to featuring any of the new characters. This first episode of *Fuller House* worked to both provide closure to the original series and the start to the new series by re-creating the premise of *Full House*. The first episode features extensive cameos from recurring cast members of the original series, alongside references to the 1990s and what the characters have been up to since the conclusion of the original series.

As it did on social media prior to the series premiere, the first episode attempted to showcase progression for the characters. The *Fuller House* series worked to provide details about how the characters have grown and matured, while also highlighting that their devotion to their

family remained the same. This is shown by featuring *Full House* patriarch Danny as remarried, establishing that Stephanie is now a disc jockey, and that DJ is now a veterinarian and only keeps intermittent contact with her best friend Kimmy, who is now a professional event planner. It is also noteworthy that the original series adult characters of Danny, Jesse, and Becky are moving to Los Angeles, while Joey has already moved to Las Vegas. This effectively writes these characters out of the sequel series, while giving them closure with this episode serving as their going away party. The episode also states that DJ is temporarily living with Danny in her childhood home, as she is now widowed following the death of her husband, Tommy Senior.

However, the series fails to create and implement deep progression for all their characters and lacks a clear purpose in bringing back characters other than to show they have returned for nostalgia factor. For instance, in the premiere episode (S1, E1) the characters of Nicky and Alex return, having been toddlers in the original series. This first episode depicts them as being lackluster college students, being portrayed within the episode without meaningful dialog. Similarly, the character of Steve Hale—DJ's on-and-off boyfriend in the original series—was shown in *Full House* as constantly hungry, given that he was an adolescent in the series. Yet, this episode showcases him in the same light, seemingly converting age-related behaviors into defining character traits. Similarly, Stephanie, who appears in both series as a primary character, is known to be a successful disc jockey, yet her personal life lacks focus.

In setting up the premise of the series, it leans into nostalgia by recreating the premise of the original *Full House* series to introduce the new one. Throughout the episode, it becomes apparent that the character of DJ has become overwhelmed with the thought of her family leaving her behind following the death of her husband, knowing she will have to raise three children on her own and find a new place to live. While the four *Full House* adults offered to

stay behind and continue to assist her, her sister Stephanie and best friend Kimmy ultimately opt to help her. This works to parallel the series to its original incarnation, in which a widowed Danny required the help of his best friend and brother-in-law to help him raise his three daughters, albeit with a gender-flip. Happening towards the end of this episode, this event triggers the start of the new series, with Danny allowing for DJ to keep his house while he moves out.

While the *Fuller House* premise worked to set up the new series as parallel to the original series, it does put in effort to differentiate the two series. The primary difference between the original *Full House* series and the start of *Fuller House* is the addition of characters in the form of Kimmy's daughter Ramona and estranged husband, Fernando. While Kimmy is shown as separated from her husband, she still appears to have a working relationship with him to parent their daughter. Throughout the course of the series, Fernando becomes a constant presence within the series as a regular character. By implementing these changes between the two series, it would allow for the sequel series to have its own identity outside of the original series. Though the initial parallels between series fulfill its purpose in utilizing nostalgia to bring in viewers, these changes allow for the series to become contemporarily grounded.

With the *Fuller House* series existing on the Netflix streaming platform, the sitcom format must adjust to the new medium. Given that the Netflix format featured all episodes releasing at once, this created overlapping storylines that encompass the seasons. Within the first season, much of the storyline is devoted to the primary adults of DJ, Stephanie, and Kimmy. DJ is shown throughout the season working to come into her own as a veterinarian, while also starting a romance with her coworker, Matt. Meanwhile, Stephanie and Kimmy are also learning to adopt to their new lifestyles, with Stephanie having to shift from being a hands-off aunt and

independent musician to being a responsible co-parent, while Kimmy rekindles her romance with her estranged husband, Fernando. Though the children of *Fuller House* are also featured extensively throughout the series, it overall is treated to an episodic lens while the adults are given a serial story. *The New Leave it to Beaver*, in comparison, can provide an effective storyline that concentrates on the children. Given that *Beaver* was presented as an episodic cable series with weekly releases, each episode worked to stand on its own. Whereas *Fuller House* coinciding with the binge-release that Netflix encourages, the storylines of the children are largely forgettable in comparison to adult-storyline focus. This works to highlight how the storytelling ability must shift when switching mediums and shows how *Fuller House* worked to adapt the sitcom genre to the binge-friendly streaming format. It is important to note that while the series ran seventy-five episodes on the Netflix platform over five seasons, it only featured seven total releases. Due to the Netflix model being that a bulk of episodes release at once, three of the five seasons were released in one sitting. Thus, those three seasons saw thirteen episodes of the sitcom releasing on the platform at once, encouraging viewers to binge the season. While the sitcom format has been traditionally episodic, bingeing privileges a serialized aspect to the series, and allowed for overarching storylines to be composed across the season.

The struggles to balance nostalgia with the sitcom format speaks to how the show's approach lacks a clear intended audience at its start. While the series was created for fans of the original and featured the return of numerous *Full House* storylines and characters, it lacked the family-oriented nature of the original during its original foray. By being on Netflix, *Fuller House* was provided the ability to have more freedom towards its content and did not have to focus on a general audience as is expected on broadcast television. Within the first two seasons, notable attention was given towards the adults of the series, and *Fuller House* featured considerably

more profanity than the original, alongside a constant presence of alcoholic beverages and sexual references. Although the original intention may have been to cater to a family audience, the premise of the show was not tonally family friendly like its predecessor. While the children gained more prominence within the second season of the series, the serial storylines of the adults continued throughout the remainder of the series, further placing the children to the backdrop of the series.

Given that *Fuller House* struggled to understand its target audience initially, the series worked to change the setting and tone of the series and solidify its demographic as it progressed. Restructuring occurred within the third season of the series, with the usage of profanity being entirely dropped and the storylines were streamlined to equally focus between the children and adult characters and fit more comfortably into Netflix's "Family" branding. While many of the serial aspects continued to primarily be catered towards the adult characters, it nevertheless allowed for the show to find its own footing. The third season focused on DJ now instead wanting to date her *Full House* beau Steve (S3, E9), Stephanie wanting to have children of her own (S3, E8), and Kimmy reconciling with her husband (S3, E1). This shift in storytelling allowed for a more powerful storyline to develop with Kimmy offering to carry Stephanie's child as a surrogate (S3, E14). This change worked to show growth in the character dynamics as the original *Full House* series highlighted the characters of Kimmy and Stephanie as simply tolerant of each other. Now, the characters had a sisterly bond, which proved a benefit of returning the series. This culminated with the season finale revealing that Kimmy was pregnant with Stephanie's child, showing that the series can become its own (S3, E18).

While nostalgia had an impact on the balance of storytelling, it was nonetheless a key part of *Fuller House*'s broader philosophy, to the point that it may have been overwhelming to

those who didn't know the original series. The series is bombarded with references to the original series, in some cases distracting from the progress the series is making in becoming its own storyline entity. The premise of the new series created a parallel with the original *Full House* series, and often reminded viewers of connections by employing a meta narrative. For instance, the first episode of *Fuller House* (S1, E1) in its closing scenes features a scene where the original cast sing a lullaby to infant Tommy Jr, in a recreation of a scene from the *Full House* series premiere. However, the series opts to do this by showing both versions of the scene in a split-screen format, showing the viewers the parallels. Though the first episode of the series exemplifies the role of nostalgia within the series, this chapter will continue to explore and showcase the show's usage of nostalgia throughout the full series run. Thanks in part to the Internet and the availability of the original *Full House* series in syndication, these connections to the original series can be justified in being catered to superfans, though the series largely struggles to allow these reference to exist concurrent to its own story—they largely overshadow and take precedence over it.

While the *Fuller House* series works to incorporate much of the *Full House* aesthetic and feel into their new show, they do so at a detriment to their own storyline, with one of the most evident ways being with having the original adult cast members return frequently within the series. For instance, the first episode of the series writes the characters out by having them move out of the house. Yet, as early as the second episode of the series (S1, E2), the character of Jesse returns to the house to pick up his guitar that he left in the house. In the following episode (S1, E3), a similar tactic is employed to retain previous cast members by having the character Joey return to the show to babysit the children for the night, despite it being established two episodes prior that he lives out of the state. This trend is continued throughout the first half of the series,

with the characters returning in six of the thirteen episodes of the first season. Without giving the return of these characters meaningful storylines, though having them consistently return, the series refuses to progress forward entirely. While the main characters work to advance within their lives, it appears that they are being held back by the past. Yet, while the episode “Here Comes the Sun” (S3, E18) showcases the characters returning to the house permanently, they seemingly appear less in the series going forward, highlighting the inconsistent nature regarding the presence of the original characters.

Another prominent aspect of the series is that it utilizes a meta narrative approach towards its storytelling, being self-aware of many of its trends and calls to nostalgia. This meta narrative approach is assisted by the rise of streaming television, with the original series now being viewable on-demand, and with the Internet permitting viewers to easily access information regarding *Full House*. When previous guests from *Full House* appear on the new show, the series works to explain the presence of them to remind viewers they should remember them. In the episode “War of the Roses” (S1, E9), Stephanie reunites with a childhood friend, explaining to the other characters that he is a childhood friend that she pretended to marry in her youth, providing recall to an earlier *Full House* episode. Similarly, the episode “Girl Talk” (S2, E7) reunites Stephanie’s childhood band, with DJ reminding viewers that her bandmate Gia attempted to prompt her to start smoking. Given that viewers can easily locate the episode of *Full House* that they reference, it works to show the advantages of having easy access to the original sitcom. This works in contrast to the approach of *The New Leave it to Beaver*, where their series makes more broad references to the original series and does not directly introduce many of their returning guest characters. This is due in part because while their original series was available in syndication, the individual episodes would not be easily accessible for the larger

viewing audience to view. Meanwhile, *Fuller House* has the advantage of the Internet, streaming, and continued cable syndication to ensure viewers understand their references to the original series.

In furthering the discussion of how the series fails to balance the roles of progression and nostalgia, the prominent inclusion of the character Steve Hale in *Fuller House* exemplifies the inadequacy of prolonged nostalgia. The character of Steve was first introduced as a guest in the fifth season of *Full House* and became a main cast member for the sixth and seventh seasons of the series, serving as the long-time boyfriend of DJ. Though they broke up, he returned for a final time in the closing scene of the series as DJ's prom date (*Full House* S8, E24). While the first episode of *Fuller House* establishes Steve as divorced, whereas DJ is recently widowed, he insists in that episode that he still wants to go out with her, establishing him in the new series as immediately interested in her and inconsiderate of her mourning (S1, E1). DJ also uses the first season to repeatedly state that she sees Steve more of an old friend than as a romantic interest. Despite DJ dating her co-worker Matt intermittently throughout the first three seasons of the *Fuller House* series, Steve is portrayed as continuing to thirst over DJ, even when he is shown as engaged and moments away from being married to another woman (S3, E9). While the first few seasons established an ongoing love triangle with DJ needing to choose between Steve and Matt, the latter is characterized and developed throughout the series while Steve is portrayed as simply the same character from *Full House* with little additional character development upfront. In DJ opting to choose Steve, with their wedding being the series finale (S5, E18), it is reflective of the series overall choosing nostalgia over progression. By opting to promote the romance of DJ and Steve throughout the run of the series as a primary ongoing storyline, it inevitably ties *Fuller House* to its predecessor series.

By showcasing the storytelling of *Fuller House*, it is evident that the series faced difficulty in finding an audience and progressing through its storytelling while being tied to the original incarnation of the series. With the series using large releases as opposed to weekly episodic release schedules, the series was not afforded the ability to correct its storytelling methods until the following season. While the season began employing its own storylines by the third season, it would inevitably return to nostalgia, utilizing it as a method of telling the story as opposed to using it as a method to promote the series. Even within the final season of the series, the characters prepare to move on with their lives, before ultimately decide to resume their previous life within the concluding scene of the series (S5, E18). While this finale may have worked to create a sense of nostalgia for longtime viewers in knowing the fictional extended family will always be together, it sacrifices the growth that the series had worked up to provide that feeling.

THE AFTERMATH OF *FULLER HOUSE*

In creating a new series, Netflix ultimately kept the *Full House* franchise relevant and helped highlight the impact of the streaming service. Hailing from streaming television, the series *Fuller House* serves as an ideal case study to understand television revivals in how they utilize technology and draw on the original series. The *Fuller House* sequel series gained significant media attention within its run, and it prompted many cultural questions at its inception, providing further incentive to explore the nature of reviving series further. For instance, an article from the CBC Television (Husser, 2016) – a major broadcasting network in Canada – notes that 2016 may be the “year of the reboot,” noting additional revivals and reboots that are on the horizon. Meanwhile, an article published in *The Guardian* (Czajkowski, 2017) notes *Fuller House* as one of the most popular series on television in an argument suggesting it

helped to lead the “triumphant” return to old-school sitcoms. Furthering the claims, a report from Symphony Advanced Media (Schneider, 2016) noted that *Fuller House* reached 14.4 million viewers among adults between eighteen to forty-nine years of age within the thirty-five days following its release. If the report is accurate, that would place the sequel series as one of the top shows of 2016.

Furthermore, an article from *Deadline* (Andreeva, 2019) notes that the series helped usher in a new wave of television revivals to include series such as *Roseanne* on ABC and *Murphy Brown* on CBS. The article (Andreeva, 2019) notes that the franchise lasted for thirteen seasons between both iterations of the series, with the latter five being on Netflix. Though the revival did not reach one-hundred episodes, the traditional threshold for broadcast syndication, it is important to note that the practice of syndication is becoming a rarity, as it is no longer required for television series to reach new audiences, given that television streaming allows for series to have an extensive afterlife. Given that many streaming services, including Netflix, reach a global audience, this provides a larger and quicker advantage for the streaming technologies over the long-time practice of syndication. Thus, the series is considered long-lasting, and automatically wide-reaching within the current television atmosphere, which makes its success noteworthy.

In creating a sequel to *Full House*, the series managed to keep the franchise alive decades after the original sitcom began. This can be evidenced by the Facebook presence of *Full House*, which regularly posts updates on its social media feed to engage with fans (Full House, n.d.). While the Facebook page (Full House, n.d.) is run by Warner Bros., the production studio of both franchise iterations, the page does not include any acknowledgement of the newer *Fuller House* series. This then argues that one of the intentions of *Fuller House* was to simply keep the

original show relevant. The continued relevancy of the original *Full House* series is evident by the existence of two official rewatch podcasts for the series being released in 2023, only three years following the conclusion of *Fuller House* (Jackson, 2023). While both podcasts go over episodes of *Full House*, there is little acknowledgement of the newer series.

As for the digital legacy of *Fuller House*, its social media pages have been repurposed into requesting for views to instead follow the pages of Netflix Family, showcasing that the series worked to highlight the strengths of the streaming service (Fuller House, n.d.). The page for Netflix Family is a comprehensive page of Netflix's family-friendly offerings, with an amalgamation of shows that it recommends. This page works to show that the Netflix streaming service has a plethora of family-oriented content available like *Fuller House*. However, the months of January and February 2024 have not featured any promotion or mention of the series, leaving a soft closing for the series' digital legacy, despite its strong introduction (Netflix Family, n.d.). This ultimately comes to show that *Fuller House* largely exists to highlight the strength of Netflix content and solidify their role in using technological affordances to further the advancement of their own platform.

By having a *Full House* sequel series created for the Netflix platform in the form of *Fuller House*, the streaming platform was able to solidify its prominence within the television industry and effectively reenergize the franchise. The Netflix platform represented a change in the television landscape towards consumer control in allowing for viewers to binge-watch the series and view it on-demand. Though the series was a long-standing staple of the Netflix streaming platform, it largely worked to highlight the family friendly content available on the streamer, becoming one of the plethora of titles available on the service. As for *Full House*, it found a resurgence in its own online presence, through the existence of its own social media

pages, alongside dedicated rewatch podcasts created by the stars of the original series. Largely, the *Fuller House* series served as an initiator for contemporary conversations around television revivals and whether they have a place within the present-day. Thus, there is no denying that *Fuller House* changed the arena when it comes to contemporary television revivals, and its legacy continues to live on in Netflix viewership and the revivals it helped inspire, even if the show itself may not have the staying power of its predecessor.

CHAPTER IV
“KEEP ON TRUCKING”: THE REVIVAL GOES BACK TO
BROADCAST WITH *THE CONNERS*

“Same cast, new episodes” was the tagline of the *Roseanne* revival promotions leading into the season premiere. The television revivals of *Roseanne* (1988-1997; 2018) worked to change the narrative around television revivals from both a technology and storytelling perspective. The original run of *Roseanne* was noted for its tackling of difficult subject matters and highlighting a blue-collar working family, not shying away from controversy. As a continuation of where *Roseanne* left off, *The Conners* (2018-Present) is representative of the ever-changing television landscape and how television shows must continue adapting towards it. By utilizing broadcast television as opposed to an alternative technological platform, the series represents the maturity of the revival concept, showing the trend going full circle. In analyzing the effects of social media on the franchise, how the rise of streaming effected broadcast, and how episodes of *The Conners* work to showcase storyline progression, it will become evident that the series represents a changing television industry. This chapter will further discuss how the distribution deals for *The Conners* work to showcase a shift away from revivals as individual projects and towards a larger media landscape.

CONTEMPORARY BROADCASTING TECHNOLOGICAL AFFORDANCES

The rise of streaming forced the ABC television network to acknowledge and adapt to the changing times of the television market. With *Fuller House* garnering a significant audience in its Netflix launch, this showcased the power of a revival becoming a turning point for the format. It also served as a signal of a changing time in television, away from the broadcast networks and

towards streaming services, given that streaming television highlighted the role of the consumer. This led to ABC leveraging its resources into ensuring the success of a revival while banking on *Roseanne* series and its namesake, Roseanne Barr. Both *Full House* and *Roseanne* were shows originally featured on the ABC television network, though the revival of the former obviously went to the streaming platform Netflix. Given the significant media attention that surrounded *Fuller House*, broadcast networks began to explore the option of bringing some of these revivals to mainstream television (Schneider, 2017). The original run of *Roseanne* was successful in both first run and syndication; by choosing *Roseanne* to return to the channel, it signaled that the concept of a revival format had matured and was now considered viable in the same format that the sitcom was born in.

With the ABC network working to bring back *Roseanne*, they embarked to rebuild name recognition for the show and have network-wide support for the series. This began with ABC crafting social media pages (Roseanne, n.d.) for the series showcasing scenes from previous episodes. These clips were strategically shared on the social media platforms to showcase the legacy and endurance of the series, alongside the perceived relatability factor with its target audience. These past clips were shown intertwined with pictures and video clips highlighting the work being put into making the new season, featuring behind-the-scenes looks at the revival. For instance, the pages (Roseanne, n.d.) posted a video of Barr's on-screen children wishing her a happy birthday in 2017. This worked to showcase that even off-screen, the television family was still close and tight-knit and would continue in the tradition of the original series. By doing this, the network crafted the illusion of continuity and fan service through its social media presence.

Being an established broadcast network, ABC was allowed the ability to promote *Roseanne* through its own newsmagazine avenues. By utilizing the benefits that come with the

series returning to the ABC television network, a special episode of the *20/20* investigative journalism newsmagazine series was commenced to celebrate the return of the *Roseanne* series to primetime (ABC News, 2018a). Additionally, a *Nightline* segment was dedicated to the series revival as well. The ABC network, *20/20* series, and *Nightline* belong to the same corporate ownership under The Walt Disney Company, and thus the special can be considered a form of the network's push to bring in viewers for the series. The *20/20* special, titled "Roseanne: The Return," worked to celebrate the history of the sitcom, alongside its namesake, Roseanne Barr. In doing this, the network worked to promote Barr and the series simultaneously, stating that she is the reason the show gained prominence within its original run. An example of this is shown within the *20/20* special (ABC News, 2018b), where the newsmagazine notes that the series was created by Matt Williams, though a feud with Barr regarding his title as creator resulted in a feud that ended in his departure from the series. Despite the controversy, the communication from ABC highlighted Barr's role within the series as a positive, and as the primary reason for its return. Originally a creative consultant at the premiere of the original run, Barr moved up to being an executive producer of the series, where she remained for the revival. The special also was intent on highlighting that the series actively worked to tackle serious issues of its time, ranging from racial prejudice to domestic abuse, though again attributed all the accomplishments to Barr herself, thus promoting her standing as a creative alongside promoting her namesake series. Despite that the controversies surrounding Barr were highly prevalent (Heuton, 1995; Stransky, 2008), the ABC network worked to control the narrative by highlighting the advantages of working with her. Not only did the marketing of *Roseanne* include social media but it incorporated a long-running television newsmagazine to reach a large spectrum of the

audience. Social media would appeal to the younger audience while the *20/20* segment would reach a separate demographic of potential viewers.

In response to the rise of streaming platforms as a primary source for television content, broadcast networks including ABC worked to retain their viewership by reviving the series *Roseanne* for a tenth season. In doing this, they utilized their network resources to ensure the success of the series including having their newsmagazine series feature episodes highlighting the return of the series. By reviving the series in response to the promise of consumer choice by streaming platforms including Netflix, the ABC network worked to speak directly to the viewers through social media avenues. Given that the original *Roseanne* run was heavily featured in cable syndication, the ABC network worked to tie the success of the series to the network, while also tethering it to Roseanne Barr. Thus, by having Roseanne Barr return to ABC for new episodes of *Roseanne*, it worked to deliver the show for consumers—and advertisers—interested in the series.



Figure 3: *Roseanne* season ten promotional message

ANALYZING THE *ROSEANNE* REVIVAL

When *Roseanne* premiered with its tenth season in March 2018, it featured nine episodes that worked to entice both current fans and potential new viewers while also dealing with the repercussions of the original series ending. This works to highlight how the series decided to use the nostalgia of the original run to draw in viewers, though disregard previous continuity to allow

for progression. While the original run of the series initially focused on the character of Roseanne Conner and her working-class life, it evolved throughout nine seasons to introduce serial aspects and speak to sensitive topic areas (ABC News, 2018b). When the ninth season aired, it opted to release the series from its blue-collar nature it previously centered on by having the characters win the lottery (S9, E2), thus becoming affluent, changing the dynamics of the characters. This was ultimately retconned – retroactive continuity, meaning altered after the fact – in the original series finale, in which the fictional Roseanne Conner character states that the whole television series to this point had been chapters in her novel, with minor adjustments made (S9, E24). She further notes that the family did not win the lottery, but instead her faithful husband Dan had passed away instead, and that her family had moved on and grown. Since the original run of *Roseanne* continued to be syndicated, the show had pressure to address the original finale that ended the original run.

In working to reestablish itself, the *Roseanne* revival returned to the dynamic of the original series, though not necessarily the continuity. The first scene of the revival (S10, E1) finds the character of Roseanne Conner waking up to find Dan asleep beside her, proclaiming that she thought he was dead, prompting him to ask, “why does everyone always think that I am dead?” This works as an acknowledgement to the original series conclusion instead of simply ignoring the previously written ending for the series. The same episode (S10, E1) has Dan noting to Roseanne that her novel “would have sold like hotcakes if only you hadn’t killed off the most interesting character.” These two factors work in retconning the series timeline, with it alleging that portions of the previous run of the series were all the character’s book, with the revival being the ‘true’ events of what is currently happening. Ultimately, the revival does not dwell into these

reveals and the implications that it causes past these two scenes, focused on beginning a new story and not rehashing previous storylines.

With the revival of *Roseanne* working to establish itself as a continued effort from the previous run, it not only featured familiar characters, but also writers and producers as well. Despite many of the writers being previously dismissed from the original run of the show, they were welcomed back to the new season, emphasizing that the show is the same one as before. For instance, Bruce Helford, a writer in the fifth season of the show, returned as the co-showrunner of the revived iteration (Rice, 2018). Similarly, while the character of Becky was recast within the original run, the revival saw the original actress return, with a new role being created for the other actress. Outside of returning preexisting characters, the series introduced new characters in the form of Roseanne's grandchildren: Harris, Mark, and Mary. Harris and Mark were the children of Roseanne's middle child, Darlene, while Mary is the daughter of her son, D.J. Each grandchild is named after a character or family from the original run, and thus provides a point of continuity. Though the original run of *Roseanne* featured the titular character's fourth son, Jerry, he is provided a single mention, stating that he is in a fishing boat without wireless reception, effectively writing him out of the series. By returning many of the key players of the series, though disregarding some previous ties to the original run, the series worked to balance series progression with providing continuity for fans.

Though the series relied primarily on episodic storytelling typical of broadcast sitcoms when *Roseanne* returned to the air in 2017, the revival also carried serial elements in the form of a loose narrative thread about Roseanne becoming addicted to pain medication. The plot is introduced in the first episode of the revival (S10, E1) and carries through the revival's finale. The storyline became important because it later served to bridge the gap between the end of

Roseanne and the beginning of *The Conners*. In the storyline, Roseanne Conner is experiencing excruciating and worsening knee pain, coincidentally occurring while Darlene moves back in with her parents. This storyline ultimately comes into play during the episode “Netflix & Pill” (S10, E8) regarding addiction. In the episode, it is revealed that some of Roseanne’s pain medication has gone missing, and she is unsure who took them. While celebrating the anniversary of Roseanne and Dan, it appears that Roseanne has become more uncontrollable than she usually is. This is revealed to the audience and later Dan that this is due to her increasing reliance on opioid pain medication. Though the start of the revival (S10, E1) noted that Roseanne was taking more pain medication due to her knee, this episode exemplifies her dependence on the drug, with her explanation being that they cannot afford the knee surgery required to stop the pain, thus requiring more drugs to stop the pain. This ultimately leads to a conversation where Dan insists to Roseanne that she needs to stop taking the drugs, with him confiscating the drugs. Similar to how *Fuller House* utilized serial elements in its time on Netflix, the revived *Roseanne* season utilized the plot-driven storytelling approach to set up a drastic change that will occur because of the removal of Roseanne Barr in its later follow-up series, *The Conners*.

Whereas *Fuller House* went through great lengths in recreating the original series, the *Roseanne* revival instead worked to recreate the feeling of its original run by returning the series to its broadcast home on ABC. Consisting of nine episodes, the revival works to update viewers on the Conner family, and ultimately decides to utilize retconning as a form of continuing the premise of the series without being innately tied to its original run and storylines. While the series features the return of the primary cast members, alongside recurring characters, it also sees the return of previously dismissed writers and crew members, truly emphasizing that the series exists as a continuation and not necessarily a new series. Benefitting from returning to a linear

format, the *Roseanne* revival also places focus on the drug usage issues regarding the Roseanne character as she prepares for knee surgery. Though only the eighth episode focuses exclusively on the titular character's problem, it will serve as the eventual framework to set up the remainder of the franchise.

ROSEANNE MINUS ROSEANNE: RENEWAL, CANCELLATION, AND AFTERMATH

While the *Roseanne* series utilized social media during the time of its revival to highlight the accomplishments of the series, the same platform also brought the vigilant downfall of the series, resulting in a continuation series being developed. In the days following the premiere night of *Roseanne* season ten, the ABC television network quickly renewed the series for an eleventh season, upping the episode count for the season as well. The show also worked to spread the word through its social media channels (Roseanne, n.d.). ABC network president Channing Dungey noted at the time that "we're thrilled that America has welcomed the Conner family back into their homes" (Bricker, 2018). It was noted (Pallotta, 2018) that the premiere episodes of the revival reached 18.2 million viewers according to the Nielsen ratings report that highlighted the first two episodes being released. The reports (Pallotta, 2018) note that *Roseanne* "scored TV's highest rating for the 18 to 49 [demographic] for any comedy telecast since 2014." Due to the innate popularity of *Roseanne*, the revival became a staple of the network's branding and promotion, with Roseanne Barr played a significant part in The Walt Disney Company's television upfront conference (Fitzgerald, 2018), where the ABC network teases the upcoming television season to press and advertisers. However, the hurrah from the successful revival quickly faded away over a singular day less than a week following the season finale.

Social media worked to initiate the downfall of the *Roseanne* revival on May 29, 2018, when Roseanne Barr used her personal Twitter social media pages to distribute commentary

about former government official Valerie Jarrett that was universally deemed racist and highly insensitive (Fitzgerald, 2018). Within the hours that followed (Evans, 2018), and after extensive social media outcry, *Roseanne* co-executive producer Wanda Sykes resigned from the show, Harris actress Emma Kenney was working to disassociate herself from the series, streaming service Hulu removed all iterations of the series from its service, while cable syndicators of the show opted to boycott reruns of the series. In that time, Sara Gilbert, who portrayed Darlene in the series and put together the revival in her role as executive producer, utilized her own social media pages to distance herself and the revival series from the personal conduct of Barr. This culminated with ABC network president Channing Dungey denouncing Barr's commentary as being "abhorrent, repugnant, and inconsistent with our values," canceling the revival series as a result and pulling reruns from the network schedule (Gay, 2018; Evans, 2018). This worked to show the role of the consumer in deciding the fate of the show, with many contributing members of the show following. While Barr had used her Twitter social media accounts to display controversial messaging in the past, the series brought a renewed interest towards her social media presence, and thus led to the cancellation of the series.

Within the weeks that followed the infamous cancellation, the verbiage around the *Roseanne* series was shifted to reflect the positive messages the revival brought, and the ensemble nature of the series. This works in direct contrast to the previous messaging of the network, which intently highlighted and honored the impact of Roseanne Barr. Sara Gilbert and fellow executive producer Tom Werner worked to negotiate with ABC to get the series to return on-air for the upcoming television season. However, as reported by Daniel Holloway (2018) of *Variety*, "ABC insisted that the comic [Roseanne Barr] receive no financial benefit from a spinoff." A similar sentiment was echoed by Lesley Goldberg writing for *The Hollywood*

Reporter (2018) by stating that “Barr receiving any compensation for the new episodes is out of the question.” Revivals of situational comedies do have to consider what could happen if a main character does not return. In this case, because of the ensemble nature of the cast, the focus of the new show was able to evolve to accommodate this loss. Given that the *Roseanne* series was credited as being based on Barr’s character, she would have been obligated to receive financial gain on any spinoff or continuation of the series. To ensure job protection for her former cast and crew, who initially lost their job immediately at the cancellation, Barr ultimately signed over her financial and creative rights for a new show, and a new series titled *The Conners* was ordered at ABC to take the place of the cancelled *Roseanne* eleventh season.

In showcasing the impacts of social media, the series utilized it to share its successes, though the same platform caused its downfall. Intriguingly, the social media pages set up for the *Roseanne* revival were never utilized again, even when the premise shifted towards *The Conners*, which directly follows up from the previous series. It is important to realize the shift in narrative that ABC provided regarding the series, and the role of Roseanne Barr in it. Though the series highlighted Barr leading up to the series, it ultimately discarded her as another member of the ensemble and allowed for dismissal. Though revivals series work to utilize the nostalgia of viewers to bring back series, it inevitably can draw interest towards the show or individuals associated with it, providing them with a renewed platform. While Barr made similar comments prior to the resurrection of *Roseanne*, it seemingly did not become an issue until this specific Twitter post, thus adding to the argument that social media was a pivotal part of the *Roseanne* revival. While the series was able to continue as *The Conners*, it provided a mark on the long-running series, given the significant attention that was attracted towards Barr’s remarks.

ANALYZING *THE CONNERS* PREMIERE

Nearly five months following the cancelation of the *Roseanne* revival, and two days prior to the thirtieth anniversary of the original *Roseanne* premiere, *The Conners* began its broadcast run on ABC in October 2018. It was evident that the series had to adapt to stay relevant and had to evolve past its origins. The episode “Keep On Truckin’” (S1, E1) featured the fictional Conner family without their central matriarch. Taking place weeks after the funeral of the Roseanne Conner character, the series premiere sees the characters in mourning, and working to personally recover from the loss. The episode worked to reel viewers back in and re-introduce the characters of the Conner family. Given that the original *Roseanne* series was situated around the titular character, the characters had to be reoriented to show who they were independent of Roseanne Conner.

To maintain continuity, the series worked to address the absence of the Roseanne character and was forced to contend with the complexities of dealing with the character and not its namesake. Originally, the series introduced itself by claiming that the matriarch survived her successful knee surgery that was set up in the final episode of the previous revival (*Roseanne* S10, E9), though ultimately passed away from an apparent heart attack. Though, this assumption was countered when her sister Jackie receives a call from the coroner’s office saying she instead died of an opioid overdose that was enough to stop her breathing (S1, E1). Though Roseanne’s husband Dan is originally in disbelief, noting that he threw out her pills, he is then confronted by his daughters who found pills scattered throughout the house. The phrasing of this features Dan saying “this doesn’t make any sense. I got her knees fixed; I flushed all her pills” before finding out that one of the pill canisters were not prescribed to her, but rather to Marcy Bellinger (S1,

E1). Bellinger was an unseen character mentioned in the *Roseanne* revival (S10, E8) in which Dan finds Roseanne's stashed pills, providing a point of continuity between the two series.

The episode (S1, E1) did not work to intentionally vilify Barr, but instead showcases the grieving process for a monumental character. While each major cast member, minus Roseanne Barr, returned for the new series, it worked to redefine the characters and their purpose. For instance, the character of Jackie was shown within the episode struggling to find her place, as her primary role was being the sister of Roseanne Conner. The episode (S1, E1) ultimately showcased the characters embracing Jackie's character and solidifying her important role within both the family and the series. While the *Roseanne* revival featured their instrumental theme song at the beginning of each episode, *The Conners* theme song was not introduced until the closing of the episode, with the opening credits being shown over the family's first major dinner following Roseanne Conner's passing. While the original series always began and ended the theme song by showcasing Roseanne, highlighting her role within that series, the theme for *The Conners* instead features the characters of Dan and Darlene at the end, setting them up as the leads for the new iteration. With the two characters representing different generations of the fictional Conner family, the series was able to grow its storytelling past the inner circle of Roseanne Conner and towards the overall family dynamics. This showed the progression of the series past both the character of Roseanne Conner and the original *Roseanne* show.

PROGRESSION OF *THE CONNERS* AND CONNECTIONS WITH *ROSEANNE*

As *The Conners* progressed in episodes and seasons, it grew into its own story, and built on the history started with the *Roseanne* series. Despite being retitled, the series continued to exist on broadcast television as a de facto continuation of the *Roseanne* revival. In this sense, it continued and furthered the logic of *Roseanne* revival's usage of retconning the previous series

to allow it to tell its own story. As revealed by *The Conners* showrunner Bruce Helford in January 2020 (Ausiello, 2020), he stated that “we made a conscious decision that certain years were going to be part of the dream that was revealed at the end of the run of the original *Roseanne*.” While this does not contradict previously aired episodes of either revival iteration, minus the singular mention of youngest son Jerry Conner, it effectively retcons out of existence the original series run following the episode “A Stash from the Past” (*Roseanne* S6, E4) until the revival, consisting of almost four entire seasons. This shows that the series worked to continue evolving, though doing so in a way that was not forceful through the storyline.

Airing in linear format on a broadcast network, the series incorporated an overarching feeling of loss within its first two seasons, both directly and indirectly. A benefit of having the series exist in a linear format was that it had the ability to have their characters progress in real-time, and this was worked into the storyline of the series. Whereas a streaming series, such as that on Netflix, have all episodes release at once, thus causing a quick progression of storyline being consumed, *The Conners* benefitted by having the episodes release over the course of months, allowing for the characters and the viewing audience to adapt in real-time. Directly, this is shown with the character of Dan not processing the death of his late wife, while also needing to step up and take care of his family. However, this is indirectly shown through the rebellious actions of teenage Harris Conner, as she oftentimes acts out against her mother Darlene and resents her parenting style. While these rebellious and careless characteristics were shown in *Roseanne* season ten, as exemplified in the episode “Roseanne Gets the Chair” (*Roseanne* S10, E3) where Harris repeatedly talks back to adults, acts entitled, and refuses to accept direction, it also showed that the character of Roseanne Conner could keep her grounded. However, following the loss, the second episode (S1, E2) of *The Conners* features her character losing her

virginity, while the eighth episode (S1, E8) features her being brought home by the police twice for underage drinking. These rebellious actions ultimately lead to her prematurely moving out of the house in the second season (S2, E7) before ultimately returning home and toning down by the third season. By using linear storytelling with weekly releases, such as with *The New Leave it to Beaver* on cable, the series was able to grow in real-time, and not appear that the series rushed past the major shift in dynamic without the Roseanne character.

While *The Conners* works to establish that they are moving forward and progressing in its storylines, it also works to not ignore its heritage, as it consistently uses its storytelling to establish that it is in essence the same series as its predecessor. A pivotal example is exemplified in the episode “Slappy Holidays” (S2, E7) where Jackie is working to accept the death of her older sister, Roseanne. In the episode (S2, E7), a feud breaks out between Darlene and her aunt Jackie, with a drunk Jackie proclaiming to Darlene “you think you are the almighty decision maker around here? You think you can replace Roseanne as the mom of this family? What a joke!” before slapping her niece. The scene shows that the series simply does not betray the character of Roseanne simply because she has passed and that her loss meant something to the remaining characters.

A staple of broadcast television is its consistent nature, with episodes typically releasing on a weekly basis. This works to enforce the episodic nature of situational comedies, which are largely self-contained, though may feature connecting storylines, though usually through loose connections. With a large ensemble cast, *The Conners* oftentimes would drop characters for episodes without much explanation or showcase characters in significantly reduced roles. For instance, the character of D.J. played a minor role within the series, despite being billed as a main cast member, and was often depicted in the background without being given significant

storylines. In exemplifying the evolving nature of *The Conners*, the series does not harbor to nostalgia. This is shown in that the character of D.J., who was written out of the series, alongside the character's wife and daughter. In referencing the ever-changing Conner family, showrunner Bruce Helford (Halterman, 2024) notes that “we truly make an effort to have everybody evolve. They don't stay in statis. They're always growing and changing.” This works in sharp contrast to both *The New Leave it to Beaver* and *Fuller House* as both kept the same cast throughout its full run. While all three had ensemble casts consisting of legacy and new cast members, neither *Beaver* nor *Fuller* removed cast members following the start of the show. While the character of D.J. was a part of the original *Roseanne* series for its full run, *The Conners* opted to move past him to progress the story forward.

Given the long-running nature of *Roseanne* and the complex storylines each version of the franchise offers, *The Conners* benefits from using comprehensive storytelling, with the series able to utilize the storylines and character progression provided in each of the previous seasons – minus the retconned *Roseanne* seasons. In working through the storytelling, *The Conners* employs a largely episodic structure while providing serial elements throughout the series. This works as a blend of the storytelling methods of both *The New Leave it to Beaver* and *Fuller House*. While *Beaver* rarely featured serial storytelling methods within its run, *Fuller House* worked to tell a continuous serial story throughout its run. A major example of *The Conners* deals with the storyline regarding Becky's alcoholism. Though the first season of *The Conners* features her quickly giving up the substance during her pregnancy (S1, E5), she ultimately relapses from her sobriety by the third season (S3, E14) requiring her to deal with her alcoholism head-on. In her therapy sessions, she notes her chronic drinking was caused by her relationship with her late husband Mark and the frantic decisions she made to keep him in her life (S3, E17).

As her relationship with Mark was explored extensively throughout the original run of *Roseanne*, it allowed for audiences to connect to her experiences as they saw it first-hand. Meanwhile, the challenging relationship between Jackie and her mom Bev was explored in both *Roseanne* and *The Conners*. This allowed for *The Conners* to provide Bev a send-off within its sixth season (S6, E3), building upon the extensive history of the character.

In speaking about how the series can continue progressing forward, showrunner Bruce Helford stated is that ““even after 100 episodes, these characters are still finding out about each other. The relationships are still evolving, and that’s what makes it fun and rewarding”” (Halterman, 2024). By using the storylines of *The Conners* to progress past the original *Roseanne* series and the associated character, the revival greatly benefitted from the weekly release methods associated with linear television in telling its story. The series actively worked to have the characters progress forward throughout the series, and eventually moved past some of its previous characters to advance its storyline, as evidenced by the removal of the D.J. character from the series. Furthermore, the new iteration of the revival continued utilizing retroactive continuity to allow creative freedom in designing its story, separating itself from its preceding series. However, the series worked to establish that the characters remain the same ones from the *Roseanne* series in drawing from source material to tell their story, though altered the specific narrative plots associated with them.

MAKING THE CASE FOR *THE CONNERS*

Between the tenth season of *Roseanne* and *The Conners*, it is evident that the *Roseanne* revivals are important case studies for how the series was revitalized. The revival seasons of the show worked to progress the storylines of the original series and included comprehensive storytelling that allowed for natural character progression. Notably, the series was inceptioned for a

broadcast television network as opposed to a newer technological medium. This showed the progression of the revival as a concept, and how it has finally reached a mainstream market. Though specialty platforms including cable channels and streaming services are also long-reaching and can be considered mainstream, they also work to reach a niche audience. For cable, this means that the channel may be directed towards a specific target audience, whereas streaming services host numerous specialty audiences. However, broadcast television is directed towards a more general audience, and is free to access. The tenth season of *Roseanne* featured nine episodes, while the first five seasons broadcast for *The Conners* contained ninety-three episodes. The ongoing sixth season of *The Conners* was ordered for thirteen episodes (Shafiq, 2024), thus making a combined one-hundred-fifteen episodes for the revival, unheard of for the format.

Another factor that makes *The Conners* stand out is that the series is successful in its own capacity outside of *Roseanne*, and consistently is a highly rated comedy for the ABC network. Operating on a linear broadcast network, specifically the one that carried the originals series, the series further changes what it means to be a revival by its usage of continuous storytelling and technological affordances. The series has made use of contemporary technology and used it for creative storytelling. For example, the series had two episodes that were performed live within the first four seasons of the continuation show. The original live show, “Live from Lanford” (S2, E12) featured live coverage of the New Hampshire Democratic primary, meanwhile the fourth season premiere (S4, E1) was performed live for both coast broadcasts and showcased fans of the series calling into the show live (Turchiano, 2021).

While the original *Roseanne* series was heavily syndicated across cable channels and multicast broadcast networks, *The Conners* originally never re-aired its episodes, with the

content not appearing on the ABC-affiliated streaming platform Hulu – minus limited availability to recently aired episodes – thus becoming lost media in real-time. This changed within late 2023, where it was reported that the series' syndication rights were sold by Debmart Mercury (Littleton, 2024). As a result, following the one-hundredth episode released during its sixth season, *The Conners* will enter broadcast syndication with its first five seasons (Littleton, 2024). This will allow for *The Conners* to reach national audiences in reruns, following in the footsteps of its predecessor series. This proves that *The Conners* is working to break the mold regarding limited access typically afforded to some television revivals.

Concurrently, the series is also breaking ground for the evolving television industry, by having reruns of the series air on the CW major broadcast network, a lower-rated competitor to original broadcaster ABC (Andreeva, 2023). A separate deal from the fall 2024 syndication deal, this expands the reach of *The Conners* while the series remains on the air with new episodes. The episodes also receive a limited-time release on the CW App, a free ad-supported streaming service (FAST) app moderated by the network. Finally, the series will also be available on the streaming platform Netflix beginning on March 27, 2024 (Schwartz, 2024). It is also worth noting that the revived tenth season of *Roseanne* is available to watch on the Peacock platform and on multicast broadcast network Cozi TV, both owned by NBCUniversal and listed with the original series. With the technological affordances utilized by *The Conners*, the series became a new standard for television revivals, and will be continuously evaluated for its role as a contemporary and ongoing television sitcom revival.

CHAPTER V

THESIS FINALE: REMARKS AND FUTURE STUDY

The role of television and how it is consumed continues to evolve, and this is especially true in embarking the third act of television character Dr. Frasier Crane. Introduced in the long-running sitcom *Cheers* (1982-1993), the character received his own spinoff series, *Frasier* (1993-2004) focusing on his family and daily life; both series ran for eleven seasons. While both series ran an impressive run, thus allowing the television character significant longevity, the character recently returned to the television screen with the same-named revival series *Frasier* (2023-Present). While this series continues the concept of revivals that were previously evaluated including *The New Leave it to Beaver* (1983-1989), *Fuller House* (2016-2020), and *The Conners* (2018-Present), it also provides a new perspective to evaluate this continuing trend.

THE WIDENING AND EVOLVING TELEVISION LANDSCAPE

While *The New Leave it to Beaver* and *Fuller House* utilized the new technological affordances of cable television and streaming services to bring about their runs, *The Conners* instead returned to linear broadcast television. These work to show both the evolution of the television revival concept and the television landscape itself. However, *Frasier* (2023) provides a unique perspective in that it is a streaming show on Paramount Plus, though also featured its first two episodes on the CBS broadcast network and the Pluto TV free ad-supported television (FAST) service (Richardson, 2023). By returning to broadcast television, even if only for a brief time, it shows the value of broadcast television and that wide audience that comes with it. Being that the series only aired its first couple episodes, it did not have to worry as much about attracting a returning audience and could set its sights more broadly on utilizing numerous

avenues in its debut. Furthermore, an intriguing point is that unlike *The Conners* that returned to its original broadcast network for its run, *Frasier* (2023) instead showed its premiere on the CBS network, whereas the original series aired on NBC. The reasoning for this was because CBS is a corporate sibling of Paramount Plus, though this further highlights another shifting dynamic in television, that of increasing corporate synergy.

The new *Frasier* series also utilized the Pluto TV service in showing its debut, with a limited release of the revival on the platform, showing the entry of the FAST medium into a larger media landscape. Though the usage of a FAST service may not be considered notable in this case, given it largely worked in this case to promote the *Frasier* (2023) series on Pluto TV's sister service, Paramount Plus, it does provide a new medium within the overall television landscape that was not previously discussed. Like the advent of cable television and more traditional streaming services, FAST (Valory, 2023) also works to provide more options to consumers for how to use television. However, a major contrast to those services, especially traditional streaming services, is that they can be used without direct payment from the end-user, typically relying on commercial advertisements placed on content to generate a revenue. This makes the concept of streaming more accessible and allows for further consumer choice in the television medium. Though *Frasier's* (2023) time on the FAST channels may have been for a limited time and was not an emphasized method for viewing the series, it nevertheless is noteworthy that the series made an appearance there as it may permit FAST platforms to play a larger role for future revivals.

In contrasting the approach of the revived *Frasier* series to that of fellow streaming series *Fuller House*, the former series featured weekly releases as opposed to the full-season releases found on the Netflix platform. One of the major benefits of linear television, such as experienced

with broadcast television and cable, is that series can tell their story over an extended period. This allows for character growth to become more evident, and for the series to adapt its storytelling methods more-easily. Showing that *Frasier* (2023) has weekly releases indicates that the streaming platforms are adapting and are becoming more like the broadcast networks that they compete with. However, by being located on a streaming platform, the consumer has full control in how they watch the series, and they are not locked down to which device they use to access the series. This also affords the users the ability to watch the series at their own will. For instance, while *The Conners* features a weekly release on the ABC broadcast network, it is confined to a half-hour window, requiring for consumers to tune into their affiliate station during that time. However, Paramount Plus users can simply log in at any time following the release window and view episodes of *Frasier* (2023), and they may also easily rewatch the episodes.

By indicating that the new *Frasier* series aired concurrently on the Paramount Plus streaming service, the Pluto TV FAST platform, and the CBS television network, it showed that the television market is rapidly expanding. While *Fuller House* and *The Conners* both began their respective runs less than ten years prior to the beginning of the *Frasier* revival, the television market has already expanded by having numerous competing mediums coexisting. With these changes occurring in the television landscape, the series adapted by featuring numerous initial release locations, while ultimately utilizing the Paramount Plus streaming service as its home. Another notable shift in television was the return of weekly releases for streaming. When the *Fuller House* series aired on Netflix, it featured a singular release window for its seasons, while Paramount Plus instead aired their *Frasier* (2023) episodes episodically. This indicates that the series was able to adapt to technological change and the interests of the consumers.

THE CHANGES TO STORYTELLING

Outside of the technological affordances of streaming television, the revival of *Frasier* works to tell a separate story from both the original same-named series and its predecessor, *Cheers*. However, the revival series does work to pay homage to both while also keeping a considerable distance from them. Dubbed the “third act” for the titular character, the series moves the setting of the original series home of Seattle to the *Cheers* location of Boston, and leaves behind the previous characters as well. However, despite returning to Boston, it does not return to the setting of *Cheers*, and instead works to create its own story. This serves as a significant contrast to the three studies in that they each return to the previous setting, more-specifically the previously depicted home, with the same cast of characters. A further evaluation of those past revivals features the previous children of the original series returning home. This proves not to be the case with *Frasier* (2023), in that it works to create a separate chapter for the character’s life, leaving the previous two series behind.

Given that the *Frasier* revival is following up a long-running series, it does recognize its previous iteration, though does so by utilizing methods established in *The New Leave it to Beaver*. For instance, while *The New Leave it to Beaver* carried connections with its preceding series, it did so in the form of Easter eggs, minor acknowledgements that are not drawn attention to. While *The New Leave it to Beaver* featured many returning cast members in guest roles, it generally did not draw attention to them. Instead, it simply featured them in a supporting role like a traditional guest, though viewers may be aware of the larger connection. As for *Frasier* (2023), there were two instances in the first season of the revival that featured a returning cast member. The revival took a similar approach to *Beaver* in that it did not dwell on their history, though they took it a step further by the series briefly recognizing their significance to the show,

but not going into detail that would require for the viewing of the previous show. For example, in the tenth episode (S1, E10), the character of Roz returns from the original *Frasier* series, though is simply explained as an old coworker and friend of Frasier Crane, thus providing enough background to show her relevance though not grounding the new series in the past.

While the new *Frasier* series works to provide its own story outside of the original series, it does include the concept of comprehensive storytelling found in *The Conners*. In the Paramount Plus revival, the character of Frasier Crane is the only regular returning character, while the remaining cast of characters are introduced for the new series. This allows for new stories to be made without the baggage of previous storylines and continuity. Despite that, the character of Frasier Crane is shown as more sophisticated and wiser following the events of the previous series, though the new revival does not have to explain it, as it is simply understood. Similarly, *The Conners* works to tell its own story separate from that on the *Roseanne* series it is based on, though the characters do draw on the previous history highlighted within the show. However, it is important to note the characters are not without connections to the Frasier character or the previous series. For instance, much of the series is situated around the relationship between Frasier and his son, Freddy. While the character previously existed, it was not a significant role, and it was recast for this new version. Similarly, the character of David was born at the conclusion of the previous series, and thus the new series is the first to depict him. Thus, the revival works to incorporate its existing history to create a new series that can follow up from the previous one.

In discussing the two *Frasier* iterations, it is noteworthy that the series premiere of the revival does work to replicate the first episode of the previous series. The original *Frasier* series (S1, E1; 1993) starts by having Frasier's father move into his home unexpectedly, setting the

dynamic to the previous series. Meanwhile, the new series premiere (S1, E1; 2023) has the character of Frasier unexpectedly moving in with his son. Likewise, the two episodes share a similar naming convention, “The Good Son” (1993) and “The Good Father” (2023), respectively. In this sense, it replicates the strategy of *Fuller House* (“Our Very First Show, Again”) in recreating the original premise (*Full House* “Our Very First Show”) to begin a sequel. However, in a major contrast, while *Fuller House* uses its premiere to exclaim this similarity, the *Frasier* revival largely does not acknowledge the similarities outside of brief remarks. This exemplifies the difference in how both streaming series use nostalgia in that *Fuller House* explicitly calls out connections it has with its predecessor series, while the newer *Frasier* largely focuses on starting a new chapter.

By highlighting the changes in storytelling between *Frasier* (2023) and the previous case studies, it shows a change of pace for the revival concept and exemplifies that there is more than one way to return to a series. By working to craft its own path, the *Frasier* revival learns from preceding sitcom revivals in allowing for the series to exist on its own. While nostalgia plays a significant factor in returning a series, it is important to not draw on it as the only defining quality of the show, but rather allow for progress to be made. Despite the new series recreated the premise of the original *Frasier* (1993) run to initiate the storyline, it did so in a way that began a new chapter for the franchise as opposed to returning to the previous status quo.

GOALS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The revival series *Frasier* demonstrates the value of this study, demonstrating the way technological affordances and narrative evolution define the sitcom revival’s place within the past, present, and future of the television industry. The television industry is continuing to grow and evolve, with new services and mediums being introduced to allow for further consumer

control in their viewing habits. By observing the successful television sitcom revivals throughout television history, and how it interacts with technological affordances, it becomes evident that the format is continuing to mature as the industry continues to grow. While broadcast television is not as popular as it was in 1957 when the original *Leave it to Beaver* series debuted, it nevertheless continues to play a significant role in television viewing. Though the revival series of *The New Leave it to Beaver* and *Fuller House* were revived on non-traditional platforms of its time, cable television and streaming, respectively, their original runs began on broadcast television. By observing that *The Conners* returned to the medium in 2018, it indicates that the media market is expanding further than just broadcast television, and not necessarily away from it. Only time will tell how the next major television revival will utilize technological affordances, though with *Frasier* (2023) being renewed for a second season (Schneider, 2024), the answer may come sooner than we anticipate, and new revivals will create new opportunities to understand these parallel trajectories in future research.

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Master of Arts Degree in Lifespan and Digital Communication

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Select Work Experience:

February 2022 – Present **Live Stream Operator**, Hidenwood Presbyterian Church
Operates pan-tilt-zoom (PTZ) camera and live stream operations for church services

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Remote production director; audio technician; camera operator
Live Stream Coordinator for productions
Operates social media pages for the station
Assists with college-credit video production courses

Summer 2022 **External Relations Specialist Intern**, Virginia Spaceport Authority
Selected by the Virginia Space Grant Consortium's CSIIP Program
Worked to create online content plan for MARS Spaceport at NASA Wallops

Summer 2021; Summer 2022 **VESSS Summer Academy Intern**, Virginia Space Grant Consortium
Helped manage NASA affiliated program at online and at NASA Langley
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Spring 2024 **Graduate Teaching Assistant Instructor**, Old Dominion University
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