



Personal Primetime

**An Exploration of Television Viewing Decisions
in an Era of Many Options**

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+ TV schedule? What TV schedule?

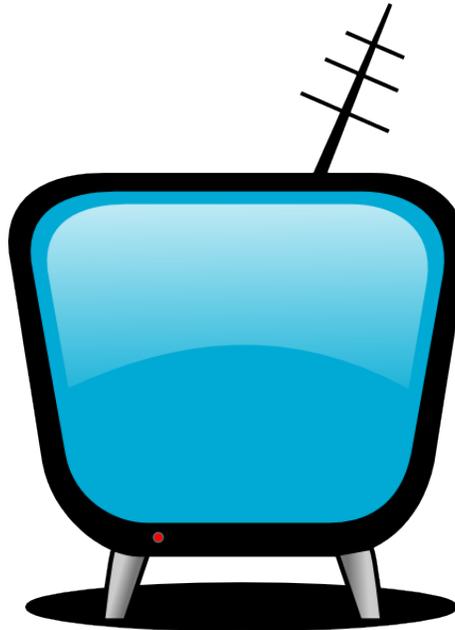


+ Americans watch more TV than ever.

- More channels

- More shows

- More flexibility



- More screens

- More technologies

- More decisions

How do viewers
experience “primetime”?

+ Television, conversation, connection

- Television was our “electronic hearth” (Tichi, 1992) and what we talked about around the watercooler
 - A physical place for families and friends to gather
 - A supplier of small-talk subjects
 - A marker of American cultural change
- Primetime shows have always mattered most
 - Audiences are believed to be the largest during those hours
- The TV schedule was once so routine, some thought it “programmed” viewers’ lives
 - Debate about whether viewers were active or passive
 - Questions about whether the actual shows even mattered

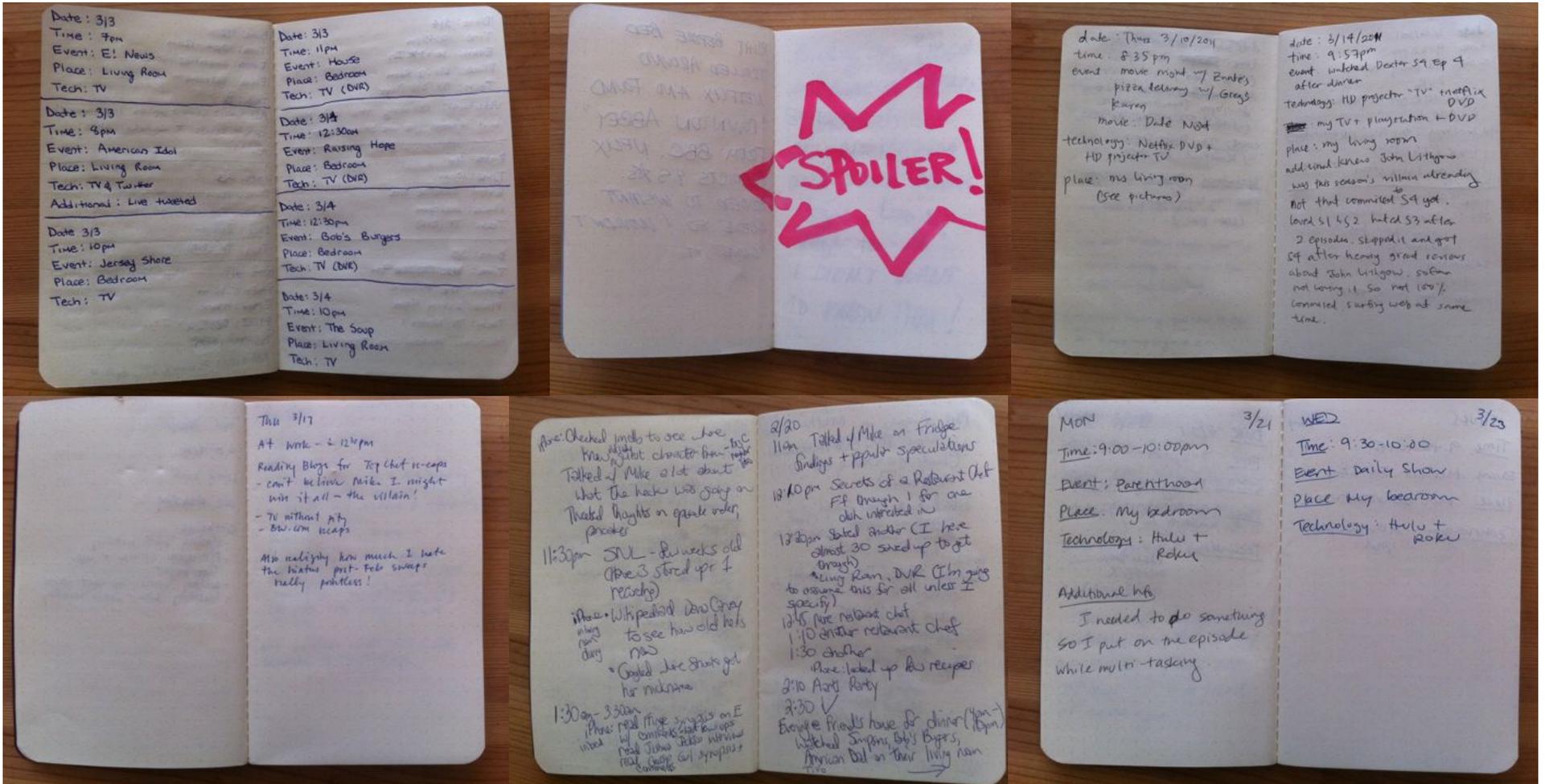
+ So, what happens now?



+ I took that question to TV viewers.

- Interview participants: 16 viewers around the country
 - Recruited via online survey and snowball sample
- Age range: early 20s to mid-40s
 - Television's key commercial demographic
- Geographic diversity
 - Eastern, Central, Pacific time zones
- Great variety in ways of watching television
 - Basic cable, no cable, premium cable
 - Watching everything live, nothing live, occasionally live
 - Watching alone, watching with friends, chatting online

+ Viewers also kept journals of a week's TV.



+ Several common themes emerged.





The TV broadcast schedule does still matter.

+

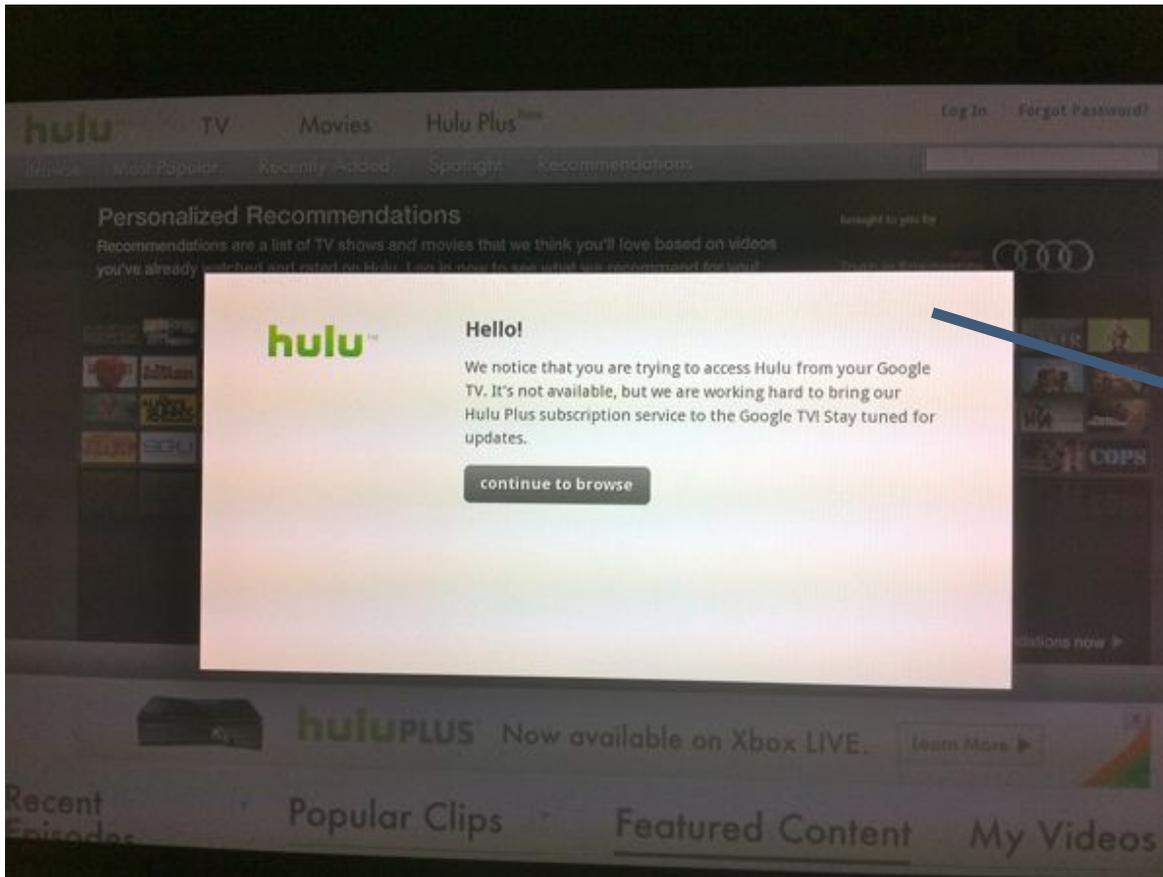
The TV broadcast schedule does still matter.

Sort of.



+ Three Major Influences on Personal TV Scheduling

+ Influence #1: Content Rights



“We notice that you are trying to access Hulu from your Google TV. It’s not available ...”

+ Influence #2: Social Sphere

- True “watercooler” shows were few and far between
 - A few that deserve mention: *Lost*, *Mad Men*, *Glee*
- But there were plenty of other ways that talking about television influenced personal TV schedules
 - Co-location: What can you watch (physically) together?
 - Talking with friends, in person or using technologies
 - Discussions online after a show — and even during
- Wanting to talk about a show = watching it sooner
 - This affects some types of shows more than others:
“You can avoid [results] for an hour or two, but not for days.”

+ Influence #3: The Desired Experience

- Programs serve specific purposes
 - “Multitasking shows” or “background shows”
 - Shows that get full attention
 - The most beloved shows don’t always get watched first
- Sitting in front of the TV is still a desired experience
 - “The computer is for work and the TV is for relaxing.”
 - “I just feel happy when I get to sit in front of the TV.”
- Shows have to prove their worth one-by-one
 - Each show has to earn its spot on a personal schedule



+ Where Does TV Go From Here?

+ Television could be designed for ...

■ Conversation

- Lots of work currently happening in this field
- More could be done to customize views, optimize search, be sensitive to viewers' privacy concerns

■ Control

- Stricter network/broadcaster oversight over show availability; clearer communication to viewers
- Risky: Could alienate viewers used to flexible scheduling

■ Personalization

- Release all programs at the same time each week; let viewers build their own schedules, with any show on any platform
- Would require rethinking television's revenue model

+ Thank you!

To read the paper, please visit:
<http://www.personalprimetime.com>