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Selling Sonic Girlhood: Feminizing Indie Rock through Music
Supervision on MTV's *Awkward*

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ABSTRACT

This article examines indie rock musicians Bethany Cosentino's and Tegan and Sara Quin's work as guest music supervisors during seasons 2 and 3, respectively, of *Awkward* (MTV, 2011–2016), a dramedy about female adolescence. As recording industry professionals who were invited by MTV to participate in both sides of the licensing process for promotional purposes, Cosentino and the Quins negotiated several directives at once. They were selling their own material while promoting more obscure musicians within production practices that compress and subordinate songcraft to visual storytelling and within MTV's short-term programming and branding efforts to align female indie artists with teenage girlhood.

Music supervisors' responsibilities are often mysterious, especially for the musicians whose recordings are licensed to commercial media. For example, in 2012 and 2013, indie rockers Bethany Cosentino and Tegan and Sara Quin served as guest supervisors for individual episodes of MTV's *Awkward* (2011–2016), a dramedy about a teenage girl's social misadventures, during its second and third seasons, respectively. MTV aligned female indie rockers with the show's protagonist, Jenna Hamilton (Ashley Rickards), a smart, sexually curious high school student and blogger. For Cosentino, who was developing a following as the leader of Los Angeles duo Best Coast, the stint

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was a learning experience. Prior to her involvement, she did not recognize music supervision as “an actual profession. I just thought it [was] this cool thing where you get to pick your favorite songs.”¹ Tegan and Sara, an industrious sister act who broke out of Calgary’s punk scene in the mid-2000s with a few high-profile placements on *Grey’s Anatomy* (ABC, 2005–), only experienced supervision work as licensors. Furthermore, as lesbian artists who withstood the music industry’s sexism and homophobia, they were aware of “the profound impact that a good song and a good scene” could have on artists’ careers and approached their assignment as an opportunity to showcase lesser-known female talent.²

However, Cosentino’s and the Quins’ supervision work for *Awkward* was also an exercise in synergistic cross-promotion. By the time the episodes they supervised made it to air, they were concluding publicity cycles for albums that were turning points in their respective discographies. *The Only Place* (2012), Best Coast’s sophomore effort for Brooklyn independent label Mexican Summer, found Cosentino and partner Bobb Bruno capitalizing on the critical success of their breakthrough debut, *Crazy for You* (2010), by sweetening their lo-fi (low fidelity) power pop sound with bright harmonies and choruses. For *Heartthrob* (2013), Tegan and Sara’s seventh album and first co-production with Vapor Records and Warner Bros. Records, the pair became synthpop titans.

Rochelle Holguin, then Viacom’s head of creative music integration for MTV, VH1, and Logo, brought both acts into *Awkward*’s music department.³ Cosentino’s and the Quins’ indie credentials allowed MTV to appeal to young women at a time when many of their competitors aired popular female-led teen melodramas with hip soundtracks, such as the CW’s *Gossip Girl* (2007–2012) and ABC Family’s *Pretty Little Liars* (2010–2017). The musicians were also selected because of their “syncable” music.⁴ Television executives such as Holguin and Randy Dolnick, then MTV’s Music & Media Licensing department supervisor, were well acquainted with Cosentino and the Quins because their work had been heavily licensed to advertisers, television shows, and films, including several teen programs and other MTV projects. Like many contemporary indie rock success stories, they built their careers from needle drops, a descriptor for individual recordings’ integration into commercial narrative properties that connotes unimaginative

1 “Best Coast’s Bethany Cosentino Talks about Guest Music Supervising an Episode of MTV’s *Awkward*,” MTV.com, September 8, 2012, <http://soundtrack.mtv.com/post/best-coasts-bethany-cosentino-talks-about-guest-music-supervising-an-episode-of-mtvs-awkward/>.

2 “Tegan and Sara: Guest Music Supervisors,” MTV.com, May 7, 2013, <http://soundtrack.mtv.com/post/music-from-awkward-episode-5-season-3-tegan-and-sara-tapped-as-guest-music-supervisors-for-this-episode/>.

3 Urmila Ramakrishnan, “MTV Does TMI (Targeted Music Integration),” *Hispanic Executive*, January 1, 2015, <https://hispanicexecutive.com/2015/viacom-3/>.

4 In a feature profile with *Billboard* contributor Brian Garrity, music supervisor Alexandra Patsavas uses the term *syncable* to describe artists whose recordings can be seamlessly integrated into visual storytelling and whose style often lends residual coolness to a project’s sensibility or a channel’s brand identity. See Brian Garrity, “TV on the Radio? Chop Shop Rolls Dice on WMG Label,” *Billboard*, March 31, 2007, 9.

placements and DJs' curatorial acumen.⁵ Needle drops became increasingly commonplace in the early twenty-first century, especially for emerging or indie artists who could not break on radio, after the Telecommunications Act of 1996's cross-industrial consolidation, or on MTV after its pivot away from video exhibition. Indeed, a condition of Cosentino's and the Quins' participation on *Awkward* was the placement of their new songs—a stipulation both acts met with ambivalence.

Thus, this article analyzes *Awkward*'s soundtrack as a programming and branding strategy that illustrates how MTV used female indie musicians to appeal to girls and young women in the 2010s. First, it contextualizes MTV's use of feminized indie rock for girl-driven original programming in the early 2010s in an effort to keep up with contemporary musical trends in teen television and film that belied the channel's historical equivocation with feminine address and female viewership in its broader programming decisions. Then it analyzes *Awkward*'s production history and sonic aesthetic through Cosentino's and the Quins' experiences in order to interrogate the channel's struggle to foster relationships with female television and music professionals. As recording industry professionals who were invited by MTV to participate in both sides of the licensing process, Cosentino and the Quins negotiated several directives at once as guest music supervisors. They were selling their own material while promoting more obscure musicians as part of MTV's short-term efforts to align female indie artists with teenage girlhood.

SUPERVISION AND AUTHENTICITY'S FEMINIZING DISCOURSES

Cosentino likened music supervision to “making a really intense mixtape.”⁶ Such comparisons highlight multiple aspects of supervisory labor. It equates supervision with fandom by using specialized musical knowledge as authentic expressions of personal taste or communal bonds. Rob Drew describes the mixtape as an “eclectic, quirky collection of personal favorite songs.”⁷ His definition conjures images of compilations gathered from someone's library, sequenced at their whim, and packaged by their hand. However, Drew recognizes that the rise in commercial playlists from brands, celebrities, and consumers in the early 2000s, as the recording business shifted toward digital distribution, disaggregated songs from albums and commodified informal fan practices that challenged copyright law's notions of ownership.⁸ Therefore, Cosentino's comparison obscures music supervision's legal and economic dimensions, such as negotiating synchronization and master-use licenses for compositions and recordings with publishers and record labels, finding incidental music from libraries to offset expenses, stretching music

5 Tim Greiving, “And the Emmy Goes to . . . Music Supervisor,” *Washington Post*, September 1, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/music/and-the-emmy-goes-to-music-supervisor/2017/09/01/f4b745c6-8358-11e7-ab27-1a21a8e006ab_story.html; and Jon Burlingame and Chris Willman, “In One Era and Out the Other,” *Variety*, January 2, 2020, 124.

6 “Best Coast's Bethany Cosentino.”

7 Rob Drew, “Mixed Blessings: The Commercial Mix and the Future of Music Aggregation,” *Popular Music and Society* 28, no. 4 (October 2005): 534, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03007760500159088>.

8 Drew, 549.

budgets that make up to and often far less than 10 percent of a program's total cost, and producing a unified sonic aesthetic. Thus, to understand *Awkward's* supervision strategies, the promotional logic behind Cosentino's and the Quins' work must be contextualized within feminizing discourses surrounding music supervision and authenticity.

As a below-the-line profession, music supervision is often perceived as technical, skills based, and subordinate to film directors' and television showrunners' creative visions. For example, music supervisor Margot Core claimed that many filmmakers dismissed her "as little more than a clerk or administrative assistant, whose only task was to fulfill their will."⁹ Such attitudes contribute to the perception that supervisors "don't exactly *create* anything," especially compared to composers who write and arrange original music.¹⁰ These assumptions evoke the feminization of other below-the-line professions such as costuming, casting, and editing due to practitioners' presumed subordination to male above-the-line professionals, the specialized knowledges and emotional labor they perform, and demography.¹¹

To this last point, far more women work as music supervisors than as composers. In 2019, the Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film surveyed women's behind-the-scenes employment in the United States' top 250 domestic grossing films. The report covered music departments, including composers and supervisors, and found that 40 percent of the films were supervised by women.¹² By comparison, only 6 percent were scored by women.¹³

Such data contextualizes the multitude of male recording artists who work as composers. For example, Oingo Boingo founder Danny Elfman, Yellow Magic Orchestra keyboardist Ryuichi Sakamoto, and Devo leader Mark Mothersbaugh each reinvented themselves as composers during the 1980s. In 1989, after Mothersbaugh solidified his reputation for playful, synth-based scores as principal composer on *Pee-Wee's Playhouse* (CBS, 1986–1990),

9 Jeff Smith, "Taking Music Supervisors Seriously," in *Cinesonic: Experiencing the Soundtrack*, ed. Philip Brophy (Sydney: Australian Film Television and Radio School Publishing, 2001), 125.

10 Steve Chagollan, "Add a Song, Make a Movie," *New York Times*, February 27, 2013, <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/03/movies/music-supervisors-in-film-seek-mo-re-recognition.html>.

11 Miranda J. Banks, "Gender Below-the-Line: Defining Feminist Production Studies," in *Production Studies: Cultural Studies of Media Industries*, ed. Vicki Mayer, Miranda J. Banks, and John T. Caldwell (New York: Routledge, 2009), 87–98; Kristen J. Warner, *The Cultural Politics of Colorblind TV Casting* (New York: Routledge, 2015); Erin Hill, *Never Done: A History of Women's Work in Media Production* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2016); and David Meuel, *Women Film Editors: Unseen Artists of American Cinema* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2016).

12 Martha M. Lauzen, "The Celluloid Ceiling: Behind-the-Scenes Employment of Women on the Top 100, 250, and 500 Films of 2019," Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film, January 1, 2020, https://womenintvfilm.sdsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/2019_Celluloid_Ceiling_Report.pdf.

13 Unfortunately, the report did not examine television production. The absence of reliable data on gender and supervision in the US television industry is exacerbated by the Guild of Music Supervisors not sharing demographic information with the public. Because it is common for music supervisors to toggle between media, comparable representation of female music supervisors can be assumed for television. See Lauzen, 1–9.

Devo launched Mutato Muzika, a production company established to funnel mounting requests from studios and advertising firms.¹⁴ More recently, Nine Inch Nails' Trent Reznor plied his skills with delicate dissonance into composition work with Atticus Ross. They won a Best Original Score Academy Award for 2010's *The Social Network*, their first of multiple collaborations with David Fincher, and they capitalized on their success with several high-profile projects, including Netflix's *Bird Box* (Susanne Bier, 2018) and HBO's *Watchmen* (2019).¹⁵ In addition, artists such as David Byrne, Peter Gabriel, Daniel Lopatin, Ahmir "Questlove" Thompson, Chris Bear, and Raphael Saadiq have thriving careers as television and film composers. By comparison, only a handful of female recording artists enjoy long-term success in this field. Wendy Melvoin and Lisa Coleman, formerly of Prince's band, the Revolution, work as composers and won an Emmy in 2010 for *Nurse Jackie* (Showtime, 2009–2015).¹⁶ In 2017, Mica Levi became the fourth woman to receive a Best Original Score Oscar nomination, for *Jackie* (Pablo Larraín, 2016).¹⁷ Levi extends a lineage of female-identified electronic composers, like Moog pioneers Wendy Carlos and Suzanne Ciani, and post-punk innovators, like Art of Noise's Anne Dudley and Dead Can Dance's Lisa Gerrard. Merrill Garbus, Meshell Ndegeocello, and Liz Phair have each scored at least one film or television project. Nonetheless, male recording artists' ability to forge respected, sustainable secondary careers as composers far eclipses that of their female counterparts.

Despite the implied masculinist biases informing composers' preferential treatment as artists, music supervisors synthesize new works from preexisting recordings by overseeing a soundtrack's thematic, aesthetic, and legal demands. Jeff Smith surmises that music supervisors oversee "a song's overall concept" in relation to the story, participate "in scoring sessions, negotiat[e] licensing arrangements, and in some cases, even organiz[e] 'casting calls' for songwriters and performers."¹⁸ According to Natalie Lewandowski, supervisors constantly interact with talent across media, help with editing and other postproduction duties, and navigate precarious employment conditions.¹⁹ Thus, music supervision operates within material restraints. In his analysis of new queer cinema's soundtracks, Jack Curtis Dubowsky updates the "project triangle"—a management term that describes producers' goal of creating a good, fast, and cheap product that must prioritize two attributes at the third's

14 Michael Clark, "Sleeping Devo Lives on at Mutato," *Shoot*, February 11, 1994, 18.

15 Stacey Wilson Hunt, "Trent Reznor: 'I Am Truly Stunned' to Win an Oscar," *Hollywood Reporter*, February 27, 2011, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/trent-reznor-i-am-truly-162213>.

16 Stacey Wilson, "Show Me the Emmy!," *Hollywood Reporter*, August 23, 2010, 12–13.

17 Jon Burlingame, "'Jackie' Composer Mica Levi Joins Select Club of Female Scoring Oscar Nominees," *Variety*, February 15, 2017, <https://variety.com/2017/film/awards/jackie-mica-levi-oscar-female-composers-1201988634/>.

18 Jeff Smith, "Popular Songs and Comic Allusion in Contemporary Cinema," in *Soundtrack Available: Essays in Film and Popular Music*, ed. Pamela Robertson Wojcik and Arthur Knight (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 412–413.

19 Natalie Lewandowski, "Understanding Creative Roles in Entertainment: The Music Supervisor as Case Study," *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies* 24, no. 6 (2010): 865–875, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10304312.2010.510595>.

expense—by adding cachet, or “a quality of membership in, knowledge of, or significant resonance with a target audience.”²⁰

Group membership is often expressed through genre-based compilation soundtracks, which, Smith notes, helped *Saturday Night Fever* (John Badhan, 1977) mine disco’s commercial potential during the late 1970s and aligned Black-cast social and romantic melodramas such as *Boyz n the Hood* (John Singleton, 1991) and *Waiting to Exhale* (Forest Whitaker, 1995) with hip-hop and R&B throughout the 1990s.²¹ However, some supervisors saw eclecticism’s commercial potential by century’s end. Ben Aslinger argues that the *Clueless* (Amy Heckerling, 1995) soundtrack—a compilation curated by Capitol Records A&R vice presidents Karyn Rachtman and Tim Devine and writer-director Heckerling that combined alternative and hip-hop artists with new wave staples—“signaled an increased hybridization of teen listening tastes” that flourished in the next decade “with the rise of Napster, Spotify, and emerging music-discovery apps.”²² Furthermore, Rachtman oversaw Capitol and Interscope Records’ soundtracks divisions at a time when compilations did swift business for the music and film industries.²³ But despite Rachtman’s era-defining soundtracks for *Pulp Fiction* (Quentin Tarantino, 1994), *Boogie Nights* (Paul Thomas Anderson, 1997), *Romeo + Juliet* (Baz Luhrmann, 1996), and *Reality Bites* (Ben Stiller, 1994), her work is often attributed to their directors, illustrating how easily supervisors’ work is effaced by above-the-line talent. Similarly, while Tim Anderson applies the term “celebrity music supervisor” to people such as Alexandra Patsavas and Liza Richardson who have achieved “above-the-line consideration,” their status is still largely based on longtime partnerships with showrunners, such as Josh Schwartz, Shonda Rhimes, Jason Katims, and Damon Lindelof.²⁴

Though many scholars have analyzed film music supervision, pop music has always been one of television’s defining features and an integral part of the medium’s evolution. In particular, television’s sponsorship model and serialized storytelling creates unique challenges for music supervisors. Programming and advertising executives want to keep viewers tuned in for long periods of time by crafting a unified aesthetic around otherwise diffuse elements such as climaxes and advertisements, or what cultural studies scholar Raymond Williams defined as “flow.”²⁵ According to Kevin Donnelly, pop music’s “colonisation” of television by the end of the twentieth century facilitated product differentiation while “indicating the degree of industrial integration

20 Jack Curtis Dubowsky, *Intersecting Film, Music, and Queerness* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 55.

21 Jeff Smith, *The Sounds of Commerce: Marketing Popular Film Music* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 157, 215.

22 Ben Aslinger, “Clueless about Listening Formations?,” *Cinema Journal* 53, no. 3 (2014): 127, <https://doi.org/10.1353/cj.2014.0027>.

23 Jonny Coleman, “Catching Up with Karyn Rachtman, the Woman behind the Best Soundtracks of the ’90s,” *LA Weekly*, March 30, 2017, <https://www.laweekly.com/catching-up-with-karyn-rachtman-the-woman-behind-the-best-soundtracks-of-the-90s/>.

24 Tim J. Anderson, *Popular Music in a Digital Music Economy: Problems and Practices for an Emerging Service Industry* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 120.

25 Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*, rev. ed. (London: Routledge, 2004).

and collaboration between the television and music industries” and promoting recordings’ function as “sellable commodities in their own right.”²⁶

But television storytelling also requires hatching original, yet familiar, premises enlivened by interesting characters and developing serialized narratives across several seasons. Television music supervisors do not oversee one soundtrack. They curate ever-unfurling playlists. Donnelly identifies several conventions unique to television soundtracks, including seasonal compilations, montages and performances to boost ratings, and licensed recordings as theme music.²⁷ Additionally, Annette Davison claims that the rise in end credit music for serial melodramas in the early twenty-first century let storytellers connect an episode’s final scene to a program’s end credits and highlight its thematic objectives.²⁸ However, other scholars observe contemporary challenges to theme songs and postface music as time-shifting technologies allow viewers to skip credits and as programs replace theme songs with short bursts of licensed music or score over title cards.²⁹ These circumstances certainly applied to *Awkward*, which lacked a theme song and whose end credits often competed with bumpers promoting other MTV content.

From its launch in 1981, MTV helped redefine television’s relationship to pop music by advancing the music video, a medium that commodified recording artists through vivid images and kinetic editing, as a viable approach to commercial storytelling. Ron Rodman claims that narrative programs such as *Miami Vice* (NBC, 1984–1990) and *Twin Peaks* (ABC, 1990–1991) used music video aesthetics to spruce up evergreen genres including the procedural and the soap opera.³⁰ MTV’s pop sensibility was especially influential on teen television. Shows such as *Square Pegs* (CBS, 1982–1983) prominently featured new wave, a marketing term that executive Seymour Stein originally used to sell American punk acts to radio programmers.³¹ Showrunner Anne Beatts and music supervisor Stephen Elvis Smith associated new wave with its outcast teenage heroines by having the Waitresses record the theme song and including Devo and the B-52s in its soundtrack and diegesis. While *Square Pegs* only lasted one season, it built a cult following by aligning nerd-girl ennui with zippy new wave, a subgenre in heavy rotation on MTV. It also created a template for how teen programs used music supervision in subsequent decades. For example, Leslie M. Meier and Elissa Nelson posit that popular Fox melodramas *Beverly Hills, 90210* (1990–2000) and *The O.C.* (2003–2007) elicited their own effect by discovering alternative and

26 Kevin Donnelly, *The Spectre of Sound: Music in Film and Television* (London: BFI, 2005), 134, 143.

27 Donnelly, 134–149.

28 Annette Davison, “The End Is Nigh: Music Postfaces and End-Credit Sequences in Contemporary Television Serials,” *Music, Sound, and the Moving Image* 8, no. 2 (2014): 204.

29 Alyxandra Vesey, “Opening Statements: Theme Singing and Shifting Paradigms for Voicing Feminine Subjectivities as Television Music,” *Camera Obscura* 34, no. 3 (2019): 160, <https://doi.org/10.1215/02705346-7772431>.

30 Ron Rodman, *Tuning In: American Narrative Television Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 257–289.

31 Theo Cateforis, *Are We Not New Wave? Modern Pop at the Turn of the 1980s* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 25.

indie groups such as the Flaming Lips and Modest Mouse through staged performances and by releasing multiple eclectic compilation soundtracks.³²

Furthermore, Aslinger argues that the WB's inclusion of musical tags during end credits served as free publicity that "warranted license fee reductions, something newer artists and indie labels were most likely to go along with as radio further consolidated in the wake of the Telecommunications Act of 1996."³³ Such practices were arguably derived from MTV's crediting practices. The channel ran credits for videos' artists, song and album titles, record labels, and later video directors as free publicity that gave the channel cover from paying artists for programming their videos.³⁴ During the early twenty-first century, MTV began running chyrons for music cues that directed viewers to the channel's website to learn more about featured artists and download their music, as part of programs' licensing agreements.³⁵ According to Meier, licensing fees have experienced "a downward trend" across media, particularly for "independent and aspiring artists."³⁶ In the early twenty-first century, new and established talent could expect to fetch upwards of \$100,000 for a well-placed recording in a US network television program.³⁷ A decade later, tiered placement rates were set at \$500–\$2,000, \$5,000–\$15,000, and \$15,000–\$25,000.³⁸ Richardson rationalized such compensation practices by positing that if a production paid an unknown band \$2,000 to license their song, "by the time that gets divided up, it's not that much money going to the artist . . . but if an indie artist is getting Shazamed a lot, that can be huge."³⁹ Aslinger also notes that soundalikes, or compositions designed to mimic original recordings, were often used to minimize DVDs' licensing costs.⁴⁰ MTV expedited the DVD release of *Beavis and Butthead* (1993–1997, 2001), its spinoff *Daria* (1997–2002), and the sketch comedy program *The State* (1993–1995) by substituting individual cues with library and incidental music.⁴¹ When *Awkward* debuted in 2011, MTV competed with the CW and ABC Family's scripted teen programs and the *Twilight*

32 Leslie M. Meier, *Popular Music as Promotion: Music and Branding in the Digital Age* (New York: Wiley, 2017), 113; and Elissa H. Nelson, "From Selling Out to Savvy Strategy: How *The O.C.* Helped Change the Stigma around Licensing Indie Music," *Creative Industries Journal* 11, no. 1 (2018): 54–69, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17510694.2017.1419051>.

33 Ben Aslinger, "Rocking Prime Time: Gender, the WB, and Teen Culture," in *Teen Television: Essays on Programming and Fandom*, ed. Sharon Marie Ross and Louisa Ellen Stein (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008), 80–81.

34 Stephen M. Deusner, "Direct to Video," Pitchfork, October 3, 2005, <https://pitchfork.com/features/article/6158-direct-to-video/>; and Rob Tannenbaum and Craig Marks, *I Want My MTV: The Uncensored Story of the Music Video Revolution* (New York: Plume, 2012), 14–30.

35 Mike Shields, "MTV Goes into Overdrive," *Mediaweek*, April 11, 2005, 12.

36 Meier, *Popular Music as Promotion*, 113.

37 Meier, 113.

38 Meier, 113.

39 Joshua Alston, "The Leftovers' Music Supervisor Runs down the Songs in Season Two's Celestial Jukebox," A.V. Club, December 10, 2015, <https://www.avclub.com/article/leftovers-music-supervisor-runs-down-songs-season--229507>.

40 Aslinger, "Rocking Prime Time," 82.

41 David Lambert, "Daria: First Details Emerge about MTV's 'Complete Series' Plans," TV Shows on DVD, November 21, 2009, <https://www.tvshowsondvd.com/news/Daria-DVD-Plans/13010>.

franchise (2008-2012), which absorbed the channel's aesthetic and modified its licensing practices.

The recording industry's reliance on licensing as a distribution strategy in the streaming era has also challenged authenticity's utility as an ideological framework for rock music. Broadly speaking, authenticity is the ability to make someone's or something's perceived qualities of sincerity or originality legible to others. Branding's promotional function activates Sarah Banet-Weiser's claim that authenticity is a "cultural process . . . that marks the transformation of everyday, lived culture to brand culture" through narrative clusters that commodify identity formations.⁴² Branding also informs indie rock's shift from a business model to a commercial aesthetic at the turn of the twenty-first century and *Awkward*'s generic alignment with it. Michael Newman argues that indie rock became a "sensibility" co-opted by American cinema and advertisers during the late 1990s that simultaneously encompassed "an oppositional formation of outsiders that sees itself as the solution to an excessively homogenized, commercialized media, and on the other hand a form of expression that is itself commercial and that also serves to promote the interests of a class of sophisticated consumers."⁴³ This sophistication resonates as "cachet," which Dubowsky advances as an important aspect of soundtrack curation because of its ability to define a community ethos through sound.⁴⁴

Aslinger identifies the importance of cachet in his analysis of the WB's use of female singer-songwriters and post-riot grrrl rock bands for *Dawson's Creek* (1998–2003) and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997–2001; UPN, 2001–2003), which created opportunities for music supervisors to reinforce its onscreen representations of queer and girl adolescence.⁴⁵ Such sonic shorthand galvanized representations of queer community, as in *The L Word* (Showtime, 2004–2009), which uses feminist-identified riot grrrl, indie rock, and electronic acts to accompany stories about lesbians and non-binary folks' efforts to live outside of the heteropatriarchal order. *Looking* (HBO, 2014–2016) similarly relies on disco, modern rock, and electronic music to signpost gay male subjectivities. But licensing also authenticates a show's brand, creating tension between what Meier identifies as "the emergence of a cultural and economic condition marked by ubiquitous or ambient media whose *content* may be cultural, but whose *intent* is promotional."⁴⁶ This sensibility transformed music licensing as a form of distribution for the recording industry, which no longer relies on material sales and radio airplay as metrics for commercial success in the streaming era.

42 Sarah Banet-Weiser, *Authentic™: The Politics of Ambivalence in a Brand Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 5.

43 Michael Z. Newman, "Indie Culture: In Pursuit of the Authentic Autonomous Alternative," *Cinema Journal* 48, no. 3 (2009): 17, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20484466>.

44 Dubowsky, *Intersecting Film*, 55.

45 Aslinger, "Rocking Prime Time," 78–92.

46 Meier, "Promotional Ubiquitous Musics: Recording Artists, Brands, and 'Rendering Authenticity,'" *Popular Music and Society* 34, no. 4 (2011): 400, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03007766.2011.601569>. Italics in the original.

Indie rock's commodification also pressures emerging recording artists to make themselves amenable to supervision by undervaluing their catalogue. Thus, music supervision's practice of undervaluing labor is also complicated by *Awkward's* reliance upon female musicians, who are often culturally devalued within the music business, and the show's associations with indie rock, which is often devalued by its feminization. Tony Grajeda observes that indie rock bands such as Pavement received pushback from rock critics in the mid-1990s because their use of cheap analog equipment and home recording contributed to "the feminization of lo-fi."⁴⁷ Of course, there are historical precursors to indie rock's perceived "masculinity crisis." Norma Coates argues that rock music underwent a process of discursive masculinization during the late 1960s as music critics aligned the genre with white heteromascularity; reduced female participation to sexist archetypes; and feminized pop, television, and music videos as disreputable. According to Coates, "For rock and rock culture to be authentic, something had to be inauthentic. Television, television pop, and those who flocked to it were appropriate foils. Moreover, the exclusion of female teenyboppers from the discursive confines of rock authenticity gave rock an air of aesthetic exclusivity, justifying the examination of rock as 'serious' art."⁴⁸ Such limited definitions of rock authenticity overlook women's capacities as musicians and turn "realness" into a set of moving goalposts forever out of reach. They also inform much of the cultural anxiety surrounding indie rock's and femininity's associations with domestic space. Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber note that the private sphere's associations with femininity discredited girls' participation in rock culture because their fandom is often sequestered from public life in domestic spaces and dismissed as fickle consumerism relative to their male peers' supposedly deeper engagement.⁴⁹ Such devaluation also undermines women's participation as workers. The primarily female musical acts associated with *Awkward* are also associated with the domestic realm. They are textually associated with sites of feminine leisure, because these needle drops frequently accompany images of the show's protagonist, Jenna, in her bedroom. The soundtrack's episodic interaction with Jenna's voice-over narration is a sonic referent to her blogging, linking music by women to girls' use of written communication to construct their sense of self.⁵⁰ Furthermore, the bedroom as a discursive feminine space often reflects the songs' production contexts, as some of the cues were self-produced demos from unsigned artists who relied upon simple digital recording and editing software and uploaded their work to direct-support streaming services such as Bandcamp. These practices align with Mary Celeste Kearney's insistence

47 Tony Grajeda, "The 'Feminization' of Rock," in *Rock Over the Edge: Transformations in Popular Music Culture*, ed. Roger Beebe, Denise Fulbrook, and Ben Saunders (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 241.

48 Norma Coates, "Teenyboppers, Groupies, and Other Grotesques: Girls and Women and Rock Culture in the 1960s and Early 1970s," *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 15, no. 1 (June 2003): 77, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1533-1598.2003.tb00115.x>.

49 Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber, "Girls and Subcultures," in *Feminism and Youth Culture*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2000), 13.

50 Jessalynn Keller, *Girls' Feminist Blogging in a Postfeminist Age* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 18–47.

that bedrooms are thriving sites for girls and young women's media production.⁵¹ They also nod to the production contexts within which many of the female artists associated with *Awkward* worked in order to deepen the show's representation of female adolescence, a viewer category that MTV struggled to center in its programming practices.

MTV'S FEAR OF A FEMALE VIEWERSHIP

MTV's brand identity set the channel apart in the early 1980s, but the channel also hemorrhaged money. In September 1985, Viacom bought two-thirds of MTV from its original owners, Warner-Amex Satellite Entertainment Company, and incurred billions in debt.⁵² The buyout dovetailed with lowered ratings. The channel initially received music videos for free from record companies, with labels typically transferring production costs to their artists. But music videos were expensive for record companies to produce. Furthermore, there were only a finite number of music videos MTV could program, which resulted in the channel repeating the same cycle of clips that had limited hold on an audience's attention. As a result, many record labels anticipated diminishing interest in music videos and reduced the number of productions it financed. Out of necessity, MTV broadened its programming to include original content with low production costs and coherent, marketable narratives to appeal to advertisers.⁵³

Like many networks and channels, MTV used block programming to build loyalty. By the early 1990s, it had categorized music videos by genre and built programming blocks for its original scripted, reality, and animated programming.⁵⁴ In March 1997, MTV launched the "10 Spot," a prime-time lineup that included *Daria*, the short-lived variety program *The Jenny McCarthy Show* (1997), and Liam Lynch's puppet show *The Sifl and Olly Show* (1998–1999).⁵⁵ The 10 Spot greatly transformed MTV's brand identity by signaling its gradual prioritization of original reality and scripted programming over music videos. Yet it still frequently called upon the integration of recording industry labor. In 1998, programming executive Brian Graden released MTV's pilot slate to *Broadcasting & Cable* magazine and claimed it reflected MTV's commitment "to make music an integral part of everything we do, revolutionize the presentation of music videos, and continually showcase new artists."⁵⁶ Graden was recruited from his success as an executive producer for Comedy Central's breakout hit *South Park* (1997–). As MTV president Judy McGrath told *Variety*, "It's not just about music—we're not radio. We needed someone with a strong and varied TV background who has music in

51 Mary Celeste Kearney, *Girls Make Media* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 19–50.

52 Jack Banks, *Monopoly Television: MTV's Quest to Control the Music* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996), 121–122.

53 Banks, 123–127.

54 Melinda Newman, "MTV Making a Splash with New Block Programming," *Billboard*, June 22, 1991, 32; and Mark Hudis, "Heh-heh. Heh-heh. That's Cool," *Mediaweek*, August 2, 1993, 15.

55 Karen Benezra, "MTV Off-Net with 'Spot,'" *Brandweek*, March 3, 1997, 5; and John M. Higgins, "MTV Stuffs a Sock in It," *Broadcasting & Cable*, October 26, 1998, 50.

56 Donna Petrozzello, "Music Instrumental in MTV Pilots," *Broadcasting & Cable*, February 16, 1998, 36.

his blood.”⁵⁷ Graden focused on the 10 Spot, which had incremental ratings growth in 1998.⁵⁸

The 10 Spot was perceived as a way to stabilize MTV’s increasingly fragmented relationship with popular music. At the time, synching hip music cues to original programs gave the channel an edgy veneer. Throughout the 1990s, music was shoehorned into MTV’s original programming. For example, *The State* frequently included skits about musicians and prominently featured songs in heavy rotation on the channel because, according to cast member David Wain, executives “wanted us to do material that was referential to MTV, rock stars, or pop culture.”⁵⁹ Similar mandates were given to *Beavis and Butthead*, which replayed popular videos that reflected the animated duo’s tastes and stood in for the channel’s young, white, male target audience, and *Daria*, which featured an eclectic, femme-centric soundtrack. However, executives’ impulse to saturate original programming with of-the-moment syncs were undermined by their willingness to alter or remove individual cues for DVD release. According to Fox Music senior vice president Anton Monsted, audiences “know when something has been applied like wallpaper in a way that’s not thoughtful and not helping the story. And that’s reflected in the inverse when the job’s done skillfully.”⁶⁰ Thus, MTV executives’ careless licensing practices contributed to their programs’ devaluation and music supervision’s prioritization of quality over quantity by the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century.

Around the same time, MTV also began hiring musicians to collaborate on the channel’s original programming. In 2006, Dashboard Confessional frontman Chris Carrabba supervised an episode of *Laguna Beach* (MTV, 2004–2006) that capitalized on his associations with emo, an expressive rock subgenre that heightened the show’s idyllic locales and interpersonal drama.⁶¹ In 2011, executive Joe Cuello tapped Nathan Williams from the surf rock outfit Wavves to compose for *I Just Want My Pants Back* (MTV, 2011–2012), a short-lived sitcom about a group of post-collegiate Brooklyn hipsters.⁶² A few years later, Miguel helped supervise *Washington Heights* (MTV, 2013), a documentary series about a group of Dominican New Yorkers striving for fame that mirrored the R&B singer’s background.⁶³

By the 2010s, MTV attempted to modify its “wallpaper” approach by greenlighting original programs with unique musical aesthetics, such as *Awkward*, and using indie artists such as Cosentino and the Quins to shape its sound and strengthen its musical connections. *Awkward*’s greenlighting was also a response to the channel’s perceived need for more scripted content after

57 Jennifer Nix, “MTV’s Graden on an Upward Curve,” *Variety*, December 22, 1997, 28.

58 Jim Cooper, “Music Isn’t Everything,” *Mediaweek*, December 7, 1998, 9.

59 *The State: The Complete Series*, “Season 1, Episode 2 DVD Commentary” (1994; Hollywood, CA: MTV Networks, 2009), DVD.

60 Steve Chagollan, “Music Supervisors Strike Grace Notes,” *Variety*, August 12, 2014, 111.

61 Brian Garrity, “Stars Select Show’s Songs,” *Billboard*, October 7, 2006, 8.

62 Phil Gallo, “MTV Making Wavves,” *Billboard*, September 3, 2011, 35.

63 Philiana Ng, “Miguel Serving as Guest Music Supervisor on MTV Reality Series,” *Billboard*, January 31, 2013, <https://assets.billboard.com/articles//1537506/miguel-serving-as-guest-music-supervisor-on-mtv-reality-series>.

a decade of prioritizing reality programming. In February 2009, the channel hired programming executives Stephen Friedman and Tony DiSanto to combat the channel's 21 percent ratings dive and 23 percent drop in viewers between the ages of twelve and thirty-four years in the fourth quarter of 2008.⁶⁴ They responded by launching sixteen new unscripted series and a handful of animated and scripted programs, as well as developing Sunday night and weekday programming blocks.⁶⁵ As MTV's senior vice president of production, DiSanto had success with reality and variety programs such as *Made* (2003–2014), *Run's House* (2005–2009), *The Andy Milonakis Show* (2005–2007), and *Laguna Beach*. Graden wanted MTV's original programming "to focus less on loud and silly hooks and more on young people proving themselves. These are the themes that are consistent with the Obama generation."⁶⁶

By the late 2000s, MTV's executives and sponsors were concerned by a rise in female viewership. In 2008, women and girls between the ages of twelve and thirty-four years old were 48 percent of the channel's audience, while their male counterparts made up only 22 percent. Such numbers reflected MTV's success with *The Hills*, a popular reality program about a group of young, rich, white women working in Hollywood's fashion and entertainment industries. According to Amanda Ann Klein, the stars' aspirational wealth and conspicuous consumption allowed the channel to "model appropriate behaviors and consumption patterns for audiences who share the same racial, gender, and sexual characteristics".⁶⁷ Nonetheless, Friedman, DiSanto, and Graden viewed this concentration of female viewers as a liability. They believed that MTV's brand identity should be "broad" enough to attract male and female viewers. As Graden told *TelevisionWeek*, "We want women to watch MTV . . . but the brands shouldn't be identified by gender. There's a real blurring of the gender lines with this generation, so it's less clear that a particular show is geared to a particular gender."⁶⁸ Yet Friedman and DiSanto prioritized young men's tastes for "See You Sunday," a MTV prime-time block that included extreme sports programs such as *Rob Dyrdek's Fantasy Factory* (2009–2015) and *Nitro Circus* (2009), from Johnny Knoxville's Dickhouse Productions, and *The Daily Show*-esque (Comedy Central, 1996–) "fake news" programs such as *The CollegeHumor Show* (2009) and *How's Your News?* (2009), from *South Park* creators Matt Stone and Trey Parker. Despite their efforts to "get a much higher density of young guys," by year's end all but Dyrdek's show were canceled due to low ratings.⁶⁹ Furthermore, by the end of 2008, the 12–24 female viewership dropped 33 percent as top-rated shows such as *The Hills* (2006–2010) weathered a 26 percent loss in the 12–34 male and female viewership.⁷⁰

64 Daniel Frankel, "Television: MTV's Big Reality Check," *Variety*, December 22, 2008, 12–13; and Alex Weprin, "Can MTV Get Its Groove Back?," *Broadcasting & Cable*, December 22, 2009, 10–12.

65 Weprin, "Can MTV Get Its Groove Back?"

66 Frankel, "MTV's Big Reality Check," 12.

67 Amanda Ann Klein, *Millennials Killed the Video Star: MTV's Transition to Reality Programming* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021): 91.

68 Paula Bernstein, "Women Want Their MTV Too," *TelevisionWeek*, November 10, 2003, 26.

69 Weprin, "Can MTV Get Its Groove Back?"

70 Frankel, "MTV's Big Reality Check," 13.

Such poor ratings took their toll on MTV's executive team. DiSanto left, and the WB's former entertainment president David Janollari replaced him. As programming chief, Janollari prioritized scripted content to compete with networks' and channels' efforts to court young viewers, despite failing to generate returns that matched the estimated nine million viewers who tuned in to watch *Jersey Shore* (2009–2012). During MTV's annual advertisers' presentation in February 2011, Janollari exclaimed "our audience doesn't know we're in this game yet. They don't turn to us as a destination for scripted programming. We have to be in this for the long haul. We're at our best when our slate is diverse."⁷¹ Under Janollari's watch, MTV greenlit *I Just Want My Pants Back*, the animated series *Good Vibes* (2011), the zombie sitcom *Death Valley* (2011), and *This Is Awkward*, a dramedy about a teenage girl who is mistaken as suicidal by her peers when she survives a home accident after losing her virginity to an aloof popular boy. *Awkward* showrunner Lauren Iungerich cut her teeth as a staff writer on ABC Family's remake of *10 Things I Hate About You* (2009–2010) and created the web series *My Two Fans* (MySpaceTV, 2009), experience that taught her how to write, direct, produce, and edit episodic television on a \$35,000 budget.⁷² Iungerich developed *Awkward* while working on *10 Things I Hate About You* and signed a blind deal with CBS Productions before accepting MTV's offer.⁷³ She hired fellow *10 Things I Hate About You* staff writer Erin Ehrlich to share showrunner responsibilities during *Awkward*'s first season.⁷⁴ Iungerich modeled herself after teen television showrunners Kevin Williamson and Ryan Murphy and created an edgy dramedy around a flawed antiheroine that allowed MTV to position itself as a place for "quality" scripted programming.⁷⁵

Awkward premiered on Tuesday, July 19, 2011, and was picked up for a second season a month later.⁷⁶ An estimated 1.7 million viewers watched the pilot, and the show drew favorable comparisons to *Daria* and *My So-Called Life* (ABC, 1994–1995) for its sardonic female protagonist.⁷⁷ After its first season, *Awkward* generated more critical goodwill for its nuanced depictions of young women's conflicted attitudes toward female friendships, body image, and sexuality.⁷⁸ During the first season's preproduction, Iungerich's team conducted

71 Gary Levin, "At MTV, Hard Times for Scripted Series," *USA Today*, February 3, 2011, D3.

72 Lisa Rosen, "Suicide Is Painless, Kind Of," *Written By*, April/May 2013, 42–47.

73 Christina Radish, "Creator Lauren Iungerich Exclusive Interview AWKWARD," *Collider*, August 23, 2011, <https://collider.com/lauren-iungerich-awkward-interview/>; and Rosen, "Suicide Is Painless," 42–47.

74 Rosen, "Suicide Is Painless," 42–47.

75 Myles McNutt, "Cultural Interview: *Awkward*. Creator/Showrunner Lauren Iungerich [Part 1]," *Cultural Learnings*, June 26, 2012, <https://cultural-learnings.com/2012/06/26/cultural-interview-awkward-creatorshowrunner-lauren-iungerich-part-one/>.

76 Natalie Abrams, "MTV Renews Freshman Comedy *Awkward* for Season 2," *TV Guide*, August 15, 2011, <https://www.tvguide.com/news/mtv-renews-awkward-1036407/>.

77 Mike Hale, "High School, That Hilarious Minefield," *New York Times*, November 4, 2011, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/06/arts/television/awkward-teenage-sitcom-on-mtv.html>.

78 Rob Nelson, "Iungerich: Teen Travails Anything but 'Awkward,'" *Variety*, June 7, 2012, <https://variety.com/2012/scene/news/iungerich-teen-travails-anything-but-awkward-1118054791/>; and Amy Zimmerman, "In Praise of 'Awkward': OMFG MTV, Like, Really Gets High School," *Daily Beast*, June 20, 2014, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/in-praise-of-awkward-omfg-mtv-like-really-gets-high-school>.

focus groups with Los Angeles high school students in which “we asked them about everything—sex, drugs, everything, and took copious notes. Through it, we came up with a lot of language. . . . We tried to be truly authentic to how kids speak.”⁷⁹ Despite *Awkward*’s attention to teenagers’ lived experiences, its ratings significantly declined between its first two seasons due to cooled interest in its lead-in series, *Jersey Shore*, and outside competition.⁸⁰ But *Awkward* set itself apart from other MTV programs by foregrounding an explicitly feminine perspective. While Iungerich was reluctant to assign the show a feminine sensibility, its predominantly white female staff supplemented field notes with personal experiences.⁸¹ The soundtrack bolstered the program’s feminine address. According to *Awkward*’s music supervisor Ben Hochstein, the program “goes for the indie/electronic/singer-songwriter vibe . . . We try to find songs that will appeal to a wide audience, but something a little different and unique, a little edgy. Hopefully we are introducing artists they aren’t familiar with, but will grow to love.”⁸² For example, the first season’s soundtrack included multiple syncs from female-driven indie acts such as Yael Meyer, Oh Darling, Eux Autres, Uh Huh Her, and Grace Potter and the Nocturnals, many of who were fixtures in Los Angeles’s indie scene but were not household names. The third episode also featured one of Best Coast’s first placements. In seasons 2 and 3, Cosentino and the Quins, respectively, reinforced the channel’s alignment with female indie musicians while promoting *Awkward* to a “wide” audience by curating soundtracks that sought to universalize two narrative tropes of teen girlhood: journaling and sexual experimentation.

BETHANY COSENTINO UNDERSCORES JENNA’S LIFE-WRITING

In May 2012, Best Coast withstood a sophomore jinx as the pair’s second album, *The Only Place*, garnered mixed reviews. Many outlets lavished praise on the hazy distillation of stoner poetry, garage rock riffs, and girl group harmonies in Best Coast’s earlier recordings but worried that they had since gone corporate, following their decisions to work with celebrated producer Jon Brion, record at Hollywood landmark Capitol Studios, and pursue a more polished sound. Cosentino bore the brunt of these critiques. For example, *Pitchfork*’s Mark Richardson argued that Brion’s decision to peel back the layers of reverberation that defined the band’s earlier aesthetic “accentuate[d] Best Coast’s weakest quality: lyrics. In every instance where there’s an obvious choice to be made, one clearly dictated by the formula of a song structure or rhyme scheme, that’s the one Cosentino makes.”⁸³ Cosentino claimed to be striving for emotional directness on *The Only Place*: “I just want to write relatable, simple songs that girls and boys are going to listen to and be like

79 Radish, “Creator Lauren Iungerich.”

80 Jeanine Poggi, “Why Cable Has Become More Like Broadcast TV,” *Advertising Age*, May 14, 2012, 16.

81 Rosen, “Suicide Is Painless,” 42–47.

82 “Interview: Awkward. Music Supervisor,” MTV.com, September 17, 2011, <http://soundtrack.mtv.com/post/interview-awkward-music-supervisor/>.

83 Mark Richardson, “Best Coast: The Only Place,” *Pitchfork*, May 16, 2012, <https://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/16609-the-only-place/>.

‘I know exactly what she’s talking about.’”⁸⁴ She later likened her writing process to “when I journaled as a young girl,” which helped align Cosentino’s songwriting to Jenna’s blogging and reinforced *Awkward*’s dramatization of domestic space as a site for girls’ media production.⁸⁵

Furthermore, Cosentino may have streamlined her songwriting to catchy, high-impact verses and choruses about generalizable topics, such as romance, heartbreak, and anxiety, for placements. As she told *LA Weekly*, “Best Coast is a brand. I’m a businesswoman.”⁸⁶ What many critics overlooked was that Cosentino’s commercial ambitions were always integral to the band’s burgeoning success. In 2010, Mexican Summer gave Urban Outfitters exclusive streaming rights to their full-length debut album *Crazy for You*, which premiered on the retailer’s website a week before its release, and they released “Far Away” as a limited-edition vinyl single for Eskuché headphones.⁸⁷ The label also licensed multiple songs to premium-cable antiheroine vehicles, such as the medical drama *Nurse Jackie* and the hipster dramedy *Girls* (HBO, 2012–2017) as well as teen programs such as *90210* (The CW, 2008–2013), *Skins* (MTV, 2011), and *Awkward*. The title track from *Crazy for You* appeared in *Awkward*’s third episode, “The Way We Weren’t,” which developed Jenna’s tentative relationship with hotshot soccer player Matty McKibben (Beau Mirchoff). It was also the first time Cosentino heard a Best Coast song on television.⁸⁸ Mexican Summer pursued a similar promotional strategy for *The Only Place*. The title track received multiple placements, including a Microsoft ad that featured the band demoing the operating system, Windows 8, at a gig.⁸⁹ “Let’s Go Home” appeared in a JCPenney ad, per a licensing arrangement with promotions firm Terrorbird Media.⁹⁰ In August 2012, Cosentino reconnected with Urban Outfitters on a summer capsule collection that debuted online a month before her *Awkward* episode’s airdate.⁹¹ Hochstein placed three songs from the album—closer “Up All Night,” “No One Like You,” and “My Life”—in the second season’s fourth, sixth, and penultimate episodes.

Best Coast’s aural presence on television was due in part to the band’s resonance with young women. As Cosentino told the *Sydney Morning Herald*, “To have teenage girls look up to me is really special for me.”⁹² Furthermore,

84 Jonah Weiner, “Sunshine and Dread,” *Rolling Stone*, August 12, 2012, 53.

85 “Episode 48: Best Coast, ‘Feeling Okay,’” Song Exploder, August 27, 2015, <https://songexploder.net/best-coast>.

86 Kai Flanders, “The Branding of Best Coast,” *LA Weekly*, May 10, 2012, <https://www.laweekly.com/the-branding-of-best-coast/>.

87 Ryan Dombal, “Hear Best Coast’s Album in Full,” Pitchfork, July 12, 2010, <https://pitchfork.com/news/39425-hear-best-coasts-album-in-full/>; and Jason Lipshutz, “Riding a Wave of Buzz: Best Coast Taps Producer Jon Brion and Partners with Urban for Sophomore Release,” *Billboard* 124, no. 16 (2012): 27.

88 “Cosentino Talks.”

89 Michael Nelson, “Watch Best Coast’s Commercial for Microsoft Windows 8,” Stereogum, October 29, 2012, <https://www.stereogum.com/1185821/watch-best-coasts-commercial-for-microsoft-windows-8/video/>.

90 Andrew McMains, “JCPenney Returns to Lead Agency Model,” *Adweek*, April 24, 2013, <https://www.adweek.com/brand-marketing/jcpenney-returns-lead-agency-model-148872/>.

91 Phoebe Reilly, “Best Coast and Wavves: Feel Good, Inc.,” *Spin*, July 9, 2012, <https://www.spin.com/2012/07/best-coast-and-wavves-feel-good-inc/2/>.

92 Craig Mathieson, “Surf Pop’s New Wave,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, December 14, 2012,

much of Cosentino's identification with them evolved from her avid consumption of soundtracks for female-led, youth-oriented films such as *Clueless* and *10 Things I Hate About You* (Gil Junger, 1999) while coming of age in the mid-1990s, which influenced the commercial evolution of Best Coast's sound.⁹³ Both of these soundtracks were convergent media paratexts. *Clueless* was distributed by Paramount, which had recently been acquired by Viacom, and its soundtrack showcased Capitol Records' roster. *10 Things I Hate About You* was a Touchstone Pictures project, and its soundtrack, released by Disney subsidiary Hollywood Records, featured roster fodder, post-riot grrrl alternative rock, introspective folk, and cover songs. These films were also third-wave feminist adaptations of Jane Austen's *Emma* and William Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew* that featured bright, autonomous heroines negotiating hegemonic adolescent rituals and norms while figuring out what kind of women they wanted to be. The films used voice-over and stylized dialogue to demonstrate their protagonists' wit, and the soundtracks assigned singer-songwriters, such as Jill Sobule, and female-fronted groups, such as Letters to Cleo, as their sonic counterparts. Subsequently, Cosentino wanted to write pop anthems with booming choruses that distilled a song's central message into hummable thesis statements.

On *Awkward*, female-led choruses reinforced Jenna's voice-over narration and signposted her subjectivity. For "Once Upon a Blog," the episode Cosentino co-supervised, Jenna writes a series of alternative scenarios to work through her attraction to Matty and his best friend, Jake (Brett Davern). The penultimate episode was meant to gin up ratings before the second season finale by using Jenna's online readership as a proxy for fans' vocal investment in the show's central love triangle and by enabling the show's music department and MTV to capitalize on its associations with Best Coast. The episode begins with Jenna blogging through her frustration to Blouse's "Into Black," a gloomy track anchored by heavy drums that offset Charlie Hilton's yearning vocals. Cosentino felt the song's melodramatic style complemented the protagonist's creative expression: "I really love the intro to this song—it's kind of pensive and dark, but really dreamy. Jenna is in her bed blogging, and I felt like the mood of this song really captured the mood of being in bed writing in your diary about a boy."⁹⁴ Cosentino connected Ashley Rickards's irritated vocal performance and nonverbal gestures to the song's "darker, angstier feel."⁹⁵ Blouse's cavernous sound also set the tone for the episode's first fantasy sequence, a *Twilight*-inspired interlude in which Jenna fantasizes about Matty's brooding vampire and Jake's sensitive werewolf fighting over her in the gym. While the song creates a moody atmosphere for Jenna's romantic ennui, larger corporate machinations were at work in Blouse's needle drop. In 2013, the band signed a licensing deal with Omnian Music Group, an in-house venture that their label head, Captured Tracks' Mike Sniper, launched

<https://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/surf-pops-new-wave-20121213-2baqg.html>.

93 "Feeling Okay."

94 "Cosentino Talks."

95 "Cosentino Talks."

to expand his company.⁹⁶ Thus, while Cosentino is positioned as the song's intermediary, Terrorbird actually oversaw its placement.⁹⁷

After the show's title card, Best Coast's "My Life," a song from *The Only Place*, fades in and reasserts Cosentino's associations with the program. Unlike the album's title track and its follow-up "Why I Cry," "My Life" was not officially released as a single but was placed through MTV's licensing arrangement with Terrorbird.⁹⁸ The charging punk ballad foregrounds Cosentino's pensive vocals in its opening stanza, which describe the romantic angst she haunts her while she is out on tour.⁹⁹ Cosentino's struggle to balance love as a touring musician is recontextualized through Jenna's internal monologue, which emphasizes the importance of creative fiction as a resource to process her emotional ambivalence. However, Cosentino claimed no involvement in its selection, an admission that suggests her lack of oversight in the song's placement despite her promotional utility as the episode's supervisor.¹⁰⁰

Later in the episode, Cosentino placed "Bad Feeling" by Veronica Falls. The chiming, dramatic track is set off by Roxanne Clifford's exclamation that "Your face in the mirror / Is only getting clearer" to accompany Jenna and Matty's fight about renting a limousine for a school dance.¹⁰¹ Cosentino observed that "Jenna is being really demanding and acting like a brat. This song has a really girly and rock 'n' roll vibe to it, and I felt like it captured Jenna's mood perfectly."¹⁰² After conspiring with Jake, Matty leaves Jenna for another girl, and Jenna imagines being with Jake. Over Phantogram's "16 Years," which features Sarah Barthel's wispy vocals over a bed of heavily processed guitars, Jenna remembers the first time she kissed Jake and admitted it to Matty, and recognizes in hindsight their sexual incompatibility, through two montages that juxtapose Jenna's pleasure against Jake's discomfort. Cosentino scored the montages to Dum Dum Girls' "Bedroom Eyes," a girl group-influenced noise pop outfit. Cosentino noted that "[t]his song is very upbeat and summer-y, and it sounds like the soundtrack to kissing a boy in the backseat of his car in high school," but its distorted production suggests romantic infatuation's dark undertow.¹⁰³ In this example, Cosentino balanced sound and message to serve narrative exposition. Hochstein reinforced this expectation: "You love when the lyrics sort of relate to the scene, but it doesn't always happen. A lot of times you want sort

96 Harley Brown, "Captured Tracks Head Mike Sniper to Launch Omnia Music Group, Inspired by Beggars (Exclusive)," *Billboard*, June 30, 2014, <https://assets.billboard.com/articles//6141099/captured-tracks-head-mike-sniper-to-launch-omnia-music>.

97 "Recent Placements," Terrorbird Media, accessed July 20, 2020, <https://terrorbird.com/licensing>.

98 "Recent Placements."

99 "My Life," MP3 audio, track 4 on Best Coast, *The Only Place*, Mexican Summer, 2012.

100 "Cosentino Talks."

101 "Bad Feeling," MP3 audio, track 5 on Veronica Falls, *Veronica Falls*, Slumberland/Bella Union, 2011.

102 "Cosentino Talks."

103 Sierra Tishgart, "Bethany Cosentino of Best Coast on Her Guest Stint as *Awkward's* Music Supervisor," *Teen Vogue*, September 14, 2012, <https://www.teenvogue.com/gallery/bethany-cosentino-best-coast-mtv-awkward>.

of the vibe to be right and the lyrics aren't always the most important thing. But here, everything works."¹⁰⁴

For the episode's last act, Cosentino used "Chip a Tooth (Spoil a Smile)" by power pop outfit Spectrals to score a sequence in which Jenna envisions a future uncomplicated by romance. Cosentino explained that the song had "a super dreamy sound to it, and I was picturing a girl sitting in her bed listening to this song thinking about a boy, and maybe how it wouldn't work out with him . . . and since Jenna is writing a fiction piece, it seemed to work really well with that idea."¹⁰⁵ Frustrated by her inability to write her way out of her dilemma, Jenna invents another option: "I could pick Jake, or Matty, or no one."¹⁰⁶ She then imagines Jake and Matty holding hands in the hallway, a fantasy scenario that doubles as the writing team's nod to the cluster of Jake and Matty slash fiction circulating online from the show's fan community.

Cosentino technically chose four songs of the episode's fourteen music cues, which also featured several songs from unsigned acts and the studio library. These production decisions were obscured by Iungerich's designation of Cosentino's "special songs" in MTV's promotional featurette and by the channel's decision to only air chyrons of band names, song titles, and web-links for Cosentino's selections.¹⁰⁷ Iungerich claimed Cosentino's participation was "important to the show, the network" while plugging MTV's website as a place "where fans can know where to download that song."¹⁰⁸ Yet Cosentino also wanted to showcase bands she knew, like Spectrals, who previously opened for Best Coast.¹⁰⁹ The featurette further indicates that her participation occurred within a compressed time frame during postproduction. Her comments suggest that she was only on set for a week, and the decision to stage her interview in an editing bay suggests she was brought in after "Once Upon a Blog" was filmed. Though supervisors' integration into the production process varies between projects, they are usually hired at the beginning of a project's run, as Hochstein was for *Awkward*. Cosentino also had a deferential attitude toward Hochstein, to whom she directed her comments during the interview. And despite Iungerich's claim that music is "a character in the show," her description of it as "that final piece of the puzzle" subordinates *Awkward*'s soundtrack to narrative.¹¹⁰

Limiting Cosentino's participation to a handful of songs in an episode with over a dozen cues also distanced her from supervision's less savory financial realities. *Awkward*'s seasonal budget was around \$10 million.¹¹¹ Typically, 10 percent of a program's or film's budget goes toward music, which means that *Awkward* likely stretched \$1 million across a twelve-episode season with 154 different music cues.¹¹² Though MTV did not disclose Cosentino's rate,

104 "Cosentino Talks."

105 "Cosentino Talks."

106 *Awkward*, season 2, episode 11, "Once Upon a Blog," directed by Michael Blieden, written by Erin Ehrlich, aired on September 13, 2012.

107 "Cosentino Talks."

108 "Cosentino Talks."

109 "Cosentino Talks."

110 "Cosentino Talks."

111 Rosen, "Suicide Is Painless," 42–47.

112 Jonny Coleman, "Does Hollywood Understand What Music Supervision Is?," *LA*

she was likely compensated separately for her supervision services and *The Only Place* syncs, which MTV made available to stream on its website. Thus, Cosentino's supervisory work was managed by exploitative labor practices that financially benefited her, at least by comparison, and shaped the terms of Tegan and Sara's participation during season 3.

TEGAN AND SARA UNDERSCORE JENNA AND MATTY'S INTIMACIES

For *Awkward's* third season, MTV ordered twenty episodes and split the season into two parts, resulting in a 6 percent ratings spike that captured 1.8 million weekly viewers.¹¹³ This decision resembled Fox's release strategy for the teen musical *Glee* (2009–2015), which split its first few seasons to mirror the school year and seasonal adolescent rites of passage.¹¹⁴ For Iungerich, *Awkward* also had different thematic priorities. Whereas season 2 centered on Jenna's love triangle, season 3 mined drama from multiple characters' journeys of self-discovery and reinvention.¹¹⁵

Tegan and Sara helped promote the first installment of *Awkward's* third season by reinforcing its narrative motifs. By the time the pair signed on as guest supervisors, they were music industry veterans. In 1999, they signed with Neil Young's Vapor Records, and in their first decade, they developed beyond their devoted regional following by incorporating pop elements into their lo-fi punk sound. They also broadened their outreach for their fifth album, *The Con* (2007), through international distribution deals with Warner Bros. Records subsidiaries Sire Records and London Records. Yet they were often dismissed as "chick rock" musicians by sexist journalists and critics, stereotyping that they challenged in the press. Tegan mused in one interview, "[W]e started playing acoustic guitars not because we wanted to be like Ani DiFranco or Jewel, but because we loved the Violent Femmes and the Pixies, and they play acoustic instruments. . . . Do people think that because we're female and we have harmonies and we're lesbians?"¹¹⁶ But Tegan and Sara were always savvy businesswomen, as illustrated in an early *ROCKRGRRL* profile that detailed their experiences opening for Bryan Adams and negotiating a video's rotation strategy with MTV.¹¹⁷ In a 2010 *Advocate* feature, Sara observed that "[f]or the first half of our career, people rarely talked about our music. Things were so focused on who we were and what we did or didn't represent that we were sort of allowed to develop as songwriters without too much input on that front."¹¹⁸ They also used licensing to circumvent small-

Weekly, September 18, 2015, <https://www.laweekly.com/does-hollywood-understand-what-music-supervision-is/>.

113 Stuart Levine, "MTV Renewal Is 'Awkward,'" *Variety*, July 26, 2012, 8.

114 Michael Schneider, "'Glee' Co-creator Gets Big Fox Deal," *Variety*, December 1, 2009, <https://variety.com/2009/scene/markets-festivals/glee-co-creator-gets-big-fox-deal-1118012049/>.

115 Lesley Goldberg, "'Awkward' Showrunner on Love Triangles and Lessons from 'Friday Night Lights,'" *Hollywood Reporter*, June 28, 2012, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/tv/tv-news/awkward-season-2-lauren-iungerich-341864/>.

116 Michele Laudig, "Twin Lesbian Duo from Canada!!!!," *SF Weekly*, April 13, 2005, <https://archives.sfweekly.com/sanfrancisco/twin-lesbian-duo-from-canada/Content?oid=2155592>.

117 Michael Haley, "Twin Tones: Checking in with Tegan & Sara," *ROCKRGRRL*, Fall 2003, 32–33.

118 T. Cole Rachel, "Swing Out, Sisters," *The Advocate*, March 10, 2010, 46.

minded programmers and publications. After the group released 2004's *So Jealous*, their managers informed them about a television show “‘that’s going to be really big for the network’” that “ended up buying seven of [their] songs.”¹¹⁹ Over the next decade, they were placed on teen programs such as *Pretty Little Liars*; *Degrassi: The Next Generation* (CTV, 2001–2009; MuchMusic, 2010–2013; MTV Canada, 2013–2015); *One Tree Hill* (The WB, 2003–2006; The CW, 2006–2012); *90210*; *Veronica Mars* (UPN, 2004–2006; The CW, 2006–2007; Hulu, 2019); and *The Vampire Diaries* (The CW, 2009–2017).¹²⁰ They also appeared on *House Band* (2005–2006), mtvU’s indie-friendly web-concert series. In an interview for 2013’s *Heartthrob*, Sara surmised that while “we’re not a critic’s band . . . I think we’re good, business-minded people.”¹²¹

Tegan and Sara positioned *Heartthrob*, their first Warner Bros. release, as their pop turn. They developed a glossy synth-pop sound with producers Greg Kurstin, Rob Cavallo, and Mike Elizondo and promoted their transformation with shrewd networking. They opened for Katy Perry and performed *Heartthrob*’s lead single, “Closer,” with Taylor Swift during her *Red* world tour.¹²² They played Warner Bros.’ South by Southwest (SXSW) showcase and licensed “Shock to Your System” for electronic company JBL’s national campaign.¹²³ They also partnered with Lonely Island, Mark Mothersbaugh, and composer Shawn Patterson on “Everything Is Awesome,” the theme to Warner Bros.’ *The Lego Movie* (Phil Lord and Christopher Miller, 2014), which received an Oscar nomination for Best Original Song.¹²⁴

Heartthrob’s electropop bombast was shaped by the sisters’ ability to universalize their lesbianism through pop song form, which MTV capitalized on for *Awkward* during the album’s promotional cycle. Tegan and Sara supervised “Indecent Exposure,” season 3’s fifth episode, which featured the single “I Was a Fool” in a love scene between Jenna and Matty. Ben Hochstein also placed three more *Heartthrob* tracks—“Goodbye, Goodbye,” “Closer,” and “Drove Me Wild”—in multiple episodes that ran during season 3’s first half. The Quins attempted to use the soundtrack to voice multiple characters’ perspectives on “Indecent Exposure,” an episode in which Jenna struggles to live with Matty after his mother objects to their sexual relationship. However, they did not select the two songs licensed for the episode’s first act, “Fever” by Night Panther and “Saudade” by Bearcat, a solo artist represented by Work-

119 Given the timing, the show they most likely licensed their songs to was *Grey’s Anatomy*, which premiered on ABC in March 2005 as a midseason replacement and became a ratings juggernaut for the network. “Tegan and Sara.”

120 Jessica Hopper, “How Selling Out Saved Indie Rock,” *BuzzFeed*, November 10, 2013, <https://www.buzzfeed.com/jessicahopper/how-selling-out-saved-indie-rock#.su3NWAwm0>.

121 John J. Moser, “Interviewing Tegan and Sara: Twin Indie-Pop Duo Speaks before Levitt Pavilion SteelStacks Show in Bethlehem,” *Lehigh Valley Music*, June 22, 2014, <https://blogs.mcall.com/lehighvalleymusic/2014/06/tegan-and-sara-speak-before-levitt-pavilion-steelstacks-show-in-bethlehem.html>.

122 Andy Greenwald, “The Andy Greenwald Podcast: Tegan and Sara,” *Grantland*, February 17, 2014, <http://grantland.com/hollywood-prospectus/the-andy-greenwald-podcast-tegan-and-sara/>.

123 Andrew Hampp, “Selling at South By,” *Billboard*, March 16, 2013, 77–81; and Jessica Hopper, “How Selling Out Saved Indie Rock.”

124 Jason Lipshutz, “‘The Lego Movie’: Why Tegan & Sara Went Chirpy for ‘Everything Is Awesome’ (Video),” *Hollywood Reporter*, February 17, 2014, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/music-news/video-lego-movie-why-tegan-680761/>.

ing Group Artist Management, a licensing firm that specializes in placing unsigned artists.¹²⁵ Tegan explained, “It was a difficult spot to fill. I gave four or five suggestions and then Sara tried. In the end, we failed. Every song suggestion I made [competed] with the dialogue.”¹²⁶

While Tegan and Sara’s collaboration ultimately did not inform the tone of the episode’s inciting incident, their services were used to dramatize Jenna and Matty’s conflict. Unlike Cosentino, they were not filmed working on the production or interacting with the members of the show’s staff, perhaps due to the sisters’ bicoastal living arrangement or scheduling complications, and likely worked remotely on the episode. Furthermore, Cosentino chose four of her episode’s fourteen cues, whereas only three of the Quins’ selections were used out of the seven songs featured on “Indecent Exposure.” This comparative lack of music most likely stemmed from the show’s music department stretching its budget across twenty episodes instead of twelve. This included “Redefining Jenna,” season 3’s midseason finale, which featured twenty-five music cues to accompany a school art show. It may also reveal a lack of coordination between *Awkward* and MTV to have Tegan and Sara supervise an episode with little dramatic action, whereas Cosentino co-supervised a “what if?” episode before season 2’s finale. Nonetheless, the Quins hoped to turn MTV viewers on to new artists. As Tegan put it, “the part that I enjoyed the most was figuring out what artists we could pitch and I’d start to think really outside the box.”¹²⁷

Their desire to think outside the box required them to filter their personal experiences as queer teenage girls through the show’s “universal” depiction of heterosexual romance. The pair demonstrated this by using “90210,” a fast, bass-driven song by their cousin Jen Twynn Payne’s group, the Courtneys, as Matty and Jenna plan for an intimate evening alone at home. But their anticipated wild night of adult eroticism devolves into a disagreement over what kind of pornography to watch. Tegan and Sara chose to accompany this scene with “Perpetual Surrender,” a slinky electronic instrumental by Canadian indie dance trio DIANA. The song serves as ironic mood music for the couple’s divergent sexual expectations. Matty reveals an attraction to Asian girls that makes Jenna uncomfortable, while Jenna selects a *Harry Potter*-themed porn parody to hide her discomfort with hardcore that Matty mistakes as her way of avoiding intimacy. Sara claimed this scene was “not just about porn. I mean, there’s sort of like a wonderful . . . awkward intimacy that’s happening. Actually, I was amazed because I kept thinking, ‘Could I have this conversation with someone I was dating in high school?’”¹²⁸ While the pair’s ability to empathize with the scene was a job requirement, it also required them to universalize heterosexuality at queer specificity’s expense.

The final scene showcased *Heartthrob*’s power ballad, “I Was a Fool,” which was released as the album’s second single two weeks before the epi-

125 Working Management Group Artist Management, accessed July 20, 2020, <http://workinggroupmgmt.com>.

126 “Tegan and Sara.”

127 “Tegan and Sara.”

128 “Tegan and Sara.”

sode aired. Similar to Cosentino's admission that she did not choose one of her songs for the episode she supervised, Tegan surmised, "I think it fits . . . [but] I almost wanted to bump our song out of it. I like that one our songs was in there [but] we need to make room for other artists."¹²⁹ Her comment speaks to syncability's limits. As performers who used licensing to build their profile, the Quins wanted to promote lesser-known artists. But their recording catalogue was controlled by Warner Bros. and beholden to *Awkward* and MTV's publicity strategies. Thus, both Cosentino and the Quins' gendered bifurcation as licensees and licensors restricted their agency as they filtered their music through commercial practices that undervalue their labor for the promise of exposure. This conflict informed creator Iungerich's departure from *Awkward* after season 3. Although Iungerich framed her exit as a personal decision, it also telegraphed MTV's deprioritization of female-driven narrative programming in the second half of the 2010s. The channel's de-emphasis on teen girl storytelling impacted the licensing opportunities available to female indie artists who built an audience and made a living from syncing their music to commercial depictions of female adolescence.

SONIC GIRLHOOD'S COMMERCIAL AND CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS

Awkward's third season ended with Jenna taking herself to the prom and using the page to escape a boy's expectations. Her final essay, "Who I Want to Be," was a phrase the show's writing staff used to break the season's story. Through writing, Jenna observes her friends' and family's positive attributes and commits to being a more active participant in her own life. Iungerich saw this resolution as "an awesome statement . . . for girls who tuned into this show for the love triangle, as Jenna saying 'I love myself.' It's not narcissism, but rather self-preservation."¹³⁰ The montage was cut to Passion Pit's "Moth's Wings," which played over the climax of *Awkward*'s pilot, when Jenna relaunches her blog to dispel rumors about her mental health. Iungerich said that "when we got it into post, it was my husband [music coordinator Jamie Dooner] who said we should use [it], and it says it all: she's coming full circle."¹³¹

In June 2013, Iungerich announced she was leaving the show and would be replaced by Chris Alberghini and Mike Chessler.¹³² Though Iungerich never explained her departure, she aligned herself with Jenna by describing it as "a decision of self-preservation."¹³³ Iungerich's exit followed a wave of personnel changes during her five-year tenure at MTV. She outlasted many of its programming executives—including David Janollari, who greenlit

129 "Tegan and Sara."

130 Myles McNutt, "Cultural Interview: Lauren Iungerich on Writing Her *Awkward*. Finale [Part Two]," *Cultural Learnings*, December 17, 2013, <https://cultural-learnings.com/2013/12/17/cultural-interview-lauren-iungerich-on-writing-her-awkward-finale-part-two/>.

131 McNutt.

132 Lesley Goldberg, "MTV's 'Awkward' Creator Lauren Iungerich Exits," *Hollywood Reporter*, June 26, 2013, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/tv/tv-news/awkward-creator-lauren-iungerich-exits-575714/>.

133 Myles McNutt, "Cultural Interview: Lauren Iungerich on the End of Her *Awkward*. Journey [Part One]," *Cultural Learnings*, December 17, 2013, <https://cultural-learnings.com/2013/12/17/cultural-interview-lauren-iungerich-on-the-end-of-her-awkward-journey-part-one/>.

Awkward. Janollari was replaced by Susanne Daniels, who shepherded *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Dawson's Creek* for The WB.¹³⁴ While there may have not been a direct conflict between Daniels and Iungerich, Daniels's mandate to attract male viewership informed *Awkward*'s fourth season, which focused on Matty's search for his biological father.¹³⁵ The soundtrack reflected these decisions by assigning male-driven rock acts to Matty's perspective. Alberghini and Chessler oversaw *Awkward*'s fifth season. MTV declined to renew the series mid-way through season 5's broadcast run, and the show quietly concluded in May 2016.

By August 2015, Daniels had left MTV for YouTube. *Billboard*'s Robert Levine connected this maneuver to MTV's prime-time ratings' five-year 40 percent drop among twelve- to thirty-four-year-olds, who primarily streamed media content.¹³⁶ MTV Networks Music and Logo Group president Van Toffler did not renew his contract, and over two hundred MTV employees were fired.¹³⁷ The verdict was simple, according to a former unnamed executive: "The audience is going digital, reality TV is running dry, [and] there's more competition for scripted programs."¹³⁸ Compilation soundtracks' ubiquity in scripted content was a hallmark of MTV's influence and a liability.

Tegan and Sara extended *Heartthrob*'s commercial reach with placements on Netflix's *BoJack Horseman* (2014–2020) and HBO's *Girls*, and five songs from Best Coast's *The Only Place* were licensed for television. By the time *Awkward* wrapped, both acts followed up these albums. Best Coast released *California Nights* on Harvest Records in May 2015, and Tegan and Sara deepened their synth-pop sound with *Love You to Death* in June 2016, a month after *Awkward*'s series finale. Neither album's songs were licensed for the show. Although *Awkward*'s music department did not entirely abandon female indie artists, their diminished presence on the soundtrack revealed MTV's fickleness toward female indie musicians' syncability. But all musical artists' reliance on licensing has only become more commonplace since the Quins' and Cosentino's stints with *Awkward*, which intensify female artists' external pressure to be syncable. For example, the 2020 Grammys celebrated the arrival of Lizzo and Billie Eilish as streaming-era pop stars. Both are highly syncable. Lizzo, a singer-rapper who matriculated through Minneapolis's indie hip-hop scene before signing with Atlantic Records, has licensed her music to over a hundred television shows, films, and advertising campaigns. Eilish, an industry kid who recorded her breakthrough debut in her brother's home studio, first garnered attention when "Ocean Eyes," a bedroom recording she posted to SoundCloud, appeared on Netflix's *13 Reasons Why* (2017–2020).

In recent years, HBO borrowed some of MTV's promotional strategies to lend an air of indie authenticity to *Girls* and *Insecure* (2016–), two female-centered programs created by and starring Lena Dunham and Issa Rae, respectively. For *Girls*' fourth season, music supervisor Manish Raval

134 Lacey Rose, "Susanne Daniels," *Hollywood Reporter*, April 18, 2014, 24–25.

135 Rose.

136 Robert Levine, "MTV's New, New Reality," *Billboard*, July 25, 2015, 22–24.

137 Robert Levine, "More Turmoil at MTV," *Billboard*, August 8, 2015, 10.

138 Levine, 10.

placed exclusive songs from St. Vincent and Grimes.¹³⁹ St. Vincent's "Teenage Talk" was originally written during recording sessions for her self-titled fourth album, and it was placed over the end credits of the episode "Tad & Loreen & Avi & Shanaz." Loma Vista issued the single a month after the episode aired, and St. Vincent promoted its release on *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon* (NBC, 2014–). Grimes collaborated with producer Jack Antonoff on "Entropy," which played over a party scene at the end of "Daddy Issues." Contributions by St. Vincent and Grimes cohered with the show's musical aesthetic, which frequently underscored its characters' perspectives with recordings from female-identified indie folk, rock, and pop artists. The shows also helped St. Vincent and Grimes promote their work. For St. Vincent, the "Teenage Talk" placement concluded *St. Vincent's* (2014) year-long rollout. For Grimes, "Entropy" drew attention to *Art Angels*, her highly anticipated fourth album that 4AD released in November 2015. HBO also promoted Solange Knowles's consultant work on *Insecure's* first season, which premiered a month after Columbia Records released 2016's *A Seat at the Table*, even though music supervisor Kier Lehman claimed to oversee the soundtrack's "nuts and bolts."¹⁴⁰

Ultimately, music supervision's feminization of indie music creates an imperfect distribution outlet for female musicians at a time when festivals, radio, and streaming services overwhelmingly favor their male counterparts.¹⁴¹ For example, US modern rock radio minimizes commercial risk by privileging 1990s-era alternative, grunge, and new metal artists at the expense of programming contemporary acts, many of whom are female-identified or gender non-conforming. Rock radio's disregard for contemporary female rock musicians relies on the assumption that younger listeners favor digital platforms but primarily reflects middle-aged white men's overrepresentation as radio programmers and their personal biases. As a result, recent albums by St. Vincent and Grimes did not receive heavy rotation from modern rock stations. Neither have any of the artists featured in the *New York Times* fall 2017 feature on a new generation of "female and non-binary performers who work just below the surface of the mainstream" and were invigorating rock music just as "male-fronted indie bands have begun to feel rote or even parodic."¹⁴² The interactive feature included presentations, an

139 Shirley Halperin, "Exclusive: 'Girls' to Premiere New Tracks by St. Vincent, Grimes and Family of the Year," *Billboard*, January 16, 2015, <https://www.billboard.com/articles/news/6443571/exclusive-girls-premieres-new-tracks-st-vincent-grimes-family-of-the-year>.

140 Shea Lenniger, "Kier Lehman Talks Using Music to Compose the Vibe of Los Angeles in 'Insecure,'" *Billboard*, October 4, 2018, <https://www.billboard.com/articles/news/television/8477486/kier-lehman-insecure-music-supervisor-interview>.

141 Rob Mitchum and Diego Garcia-Olano, "Tracking the Gender Balance of This Year's Music Festival Lineups," Pitchfork, May 1, 2018, <https://pitchfork.com/features/festival-report/tracking-the-gender-balance-of-this-years-music-festival-lineups/>; Chris Payne, "Women Are Dominating Alternative Rock, So Why Aren't They Dominating Alternative Radio?" *Billboard*, April 19, 2018, <https://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/rock/8220767/women-alternative-rock-radio-alice-merton-kflay-st-vincent>; and Liz Pelly, "Sexism on Spotify," *The Baffler*, June 4, 2018, <https://thebaffler.com/latest/discover-weakly-pelly>.

142 Joe Coscarelli, "Rock's Not Dead, It's Ruled by Women: The Round-Table Conversation," *New York Times*, September 1, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/01/arts/music/rock-bands-women.html>.

interview with musical twins Allison and Katie Crutchfield, and a roundtable discussion.¹⁴³ None of the panelists considered radio a viable distributor and instead championed direct sales platforms such as Bandcamp. Licensing was also not brought up. Yet six of the eight participants—Snail Mail’s Lindsey Jordan, Soccer Mommy’s Sophie Allison, Vagabon’s Laetitia Tamko, Downtown Boys’ Victoria Ruiz, Speedy Ortiz’s Sadie Dupuis, and Diet Cig’s Alex Luciano—have licensed their songs to various media properties, particularly youth-oriented female-led programs such as *13 Reasons Why*, *Nancy Drew* (The CW, 2019–), and *Trinkets* (Netflix, 2019–2020). The cohort includes Clairo, Phoebe Bridgers, Mitski, and Angel Olsen, all of whom trade in intimately anthemic forms of feminine subjectivity that could have accompanied *Awkward*’s teenage feelings. Thus, these artists follow an uncertain path forged by Cosentino and the Quins—who also influenced many of these contemporary acts’ sticky melodies, bright harmonies, and introspective lyrics—by synchronizing music to picture in the hopes that some listeners will value their sonic art on its own terms.

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143 Joe Coscarelli, Caryn Ganz, Jon Caramanica, and Jon Pareles, “Women Are Making the Best Rock Music Today,” *New York Times*, September 5, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/09/05/arts/music/25-women-making-best-rock-music-today.html>; and Jon Caramanica, “Allison and Katie Crutchfield, D.I.Y. Punk’s Twin Elders,” *New York Times*, September 4, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/04/arts/music/allison-katie-crutchfield-interview.html>; and Coscarelli et al., “Rock’s Not Dead.”