



TV Job Feature

Cable Shows Dominate Emmys

By Allyson Parks

The recent release of this year’s Emmy nominations demonstrated a trend toward recognizing creative though little-watched cable programming as opposed to more mainstream, highly rated network shows.



The television drama with the most nominations was the little-watched but critically-praised AMC show *Mad Men*, which chronicles the 1960s Madison Avenue advertising industry. It earned nominations for best drama, best direction, best writing, best actor (Jon Hamm), best supporting actor (John Slattery), and best guest actor (Robert Morse).

nominations while NBC’s *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno* received none despite its high ratings.

According to a recent article in the *New York Times*, “The nominations for television’s biggest award, the Emmy, [add] more fuel to the argument that much of the best creative work in the medium is now being done on cable, and to the perception that shows do not necessarily need big audiences to be celebrated by the television academy.”

In addition to its nominations for *Mad Men*, AMC also did well with nominations for its drama *Breaking Bad*, as did Showtime, with nominations in comedy (Mary-Louise Parker for *Weeds*) and drama (*Dexter*), FX for its courtroom drama *Damages*, and TNT for dramas *The Closer* and *Saving Grace*.

Because basic cable is under less pressure for huge ratings since they draw some revenue from subscriptions and carriage deals, and because expectations are lower, basic-cable networks are more able to focus on establishing and expanding their brands, and awards play a key role in this.

Indeed, *Damages* and *Mad Men* made history as the first basic-cable series to garner Emmy nominations for best drama, beating out such favorites as *Grey’s Anatomy*, while AMC earned a record high of 20 nominations for its channel.

“Cable tends to be a little more patient because they are developing around their brand and an understanding of their audience,” said Charlie Collier, general manager of AMC, as reported by *Yahoo! News*.

Despite struggling with ratings, NBC’s *30 Rock* garnered more nominations than any other comedy series, including nominations for best comedy, best actress (Tina Fey), best actor (Alec Baldwin), best writing, best directing, and seven of the 11 nominations for best guest actress and actor.

The president and general manager of FX, John Landgraf, emphasized that cable networks have more creative freedom because they can focus on fewer shows targeted at a smaller audience.

HBO fared the best with 85 nominations, the most of any US network, reaffirming its reputation for quality programming. It earned nominations for its movies and mini-series, including 11 for *Recount* and 23 for *John Adams*, along with nods for its comedies *Curb Your Enthusiasm* and *Entourage*.

“The more sophisticated, bold programming that used to be done at 10 o’clock on broadcast television is now being done on cable,” Landgraf said. “The fact that we can define success with a smaller group of viewers means that we can be very specific and be the favorite show of a limited number of people.”

Cable also did well in the late-night category, with Comedy Central’s Stephen Colbert and Jon Stewart earning

The Primetime Emmys will be given out by the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences in Los Angeles on September 21.

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