Focusing on Reality TV:
Exploring Women's Participation in
Talent-based Competition Shows

by

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Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the

Department of Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

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SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

Spring 2013

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Degree:	**Doctor of Philosophy (Women's Studies)**
Title of Thesis:	***Focusing on Reality TV:*** ***Exploring Women's Participation in*** ***Talent-based Competition Shows***

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Abstract

Reality TV has become a source of entertainment as well as scorn for North American audiences and critics. While American reality TV and their contestants have received much attention in media studies, very little has been written about Canadian reality show participants, despite the popularity of this type of programming in Canada. Women on both sides of the border who participate on reality TV are particularly scrutinized and those with high public profiles have faced an overwhelmingly negative backlash. Using a feminist cultural studies framework, this dissertation examines Canadian women's motivations and understanding of the reality TV process, from audition to post-show life. A total of 14 women from across Canada, who competed in such shows as *Canada's Next Top Model, Canadian Idol, Project Runway Canada, So You Think You Can Dance Canada, Rock Star: INXS*, and *Popstars: Boy Meets Girl*, were interviewed using a combination of online and in-person interviews.

The women's narratives of reality TV participation reflect and extend contemporary scholarly concerns and debates about women and celebrity culture, media power, television audiences, and new media technologies. Specifically, the interviews complicate current assertions and assumptions about women's participation as either 'empowering' or 'victimizing' by illustrating how such participation cannot be isolated from economic factors and gender dynamics at play in contemporary models of television production. While the women have little to no control over how they are represented in these shows, they find ways to assert their agency that disrupts (but does not stop) the production process, while simultaneously 'domesticating' the space of reality TV in order to make it a habitable and liveable place.

Finally, this dissertation makes two major methodological interventions into the study of television. Firstly, using a cultural studies approach to television research, the author understands reality show contestants as a distinct category of research respondents who challenge and blur rigid divisions between audience and text, and audience and producer. Secondly, the author draws on the tradition of self-reflexivity in feminist research in order to examine and theorize to what extent the interview process may position the researcher as a 'scholar-fan'.

Keywords: reality TV; contestants; women; audiences; celebrity culture; feminist research methods

To everyone who supported me along the way,
and didn't let me give up.
This would not have been possible without you.
Thank you.

Acknowledgements

I want to thank my senior supervisor Dr. Cindy Patton for all of her support, encouragement, and patience over the years, and for giving me 'tough love' when I needed it the most. We have had so many wonderful and engaging conversations over the years, and I always left our meetings with a renewed sense of understanding and purpose. More than anything, she has modelled for me through her actions and words, the kind of scholar that I want to be, showing me that indeed, a working-class kid can, and does, have a place in academia. I am eternally grateful to her for seeing something in me, as a Masters student, and for believing in my abilities and potential, and I look forward to having a life-long friendship with her. The chick is finally fleeing the coop!

I also want to thank my other supervising committee members Dr. Helen Leung and Dr. Zoë Druick. I have learned so much from both of them over the years, and I have enjoyed our conversations about gender and popular culture. Thank you for your insightful comments and feedback on my dissertation drafts. You always ask tough but fair questions!

Finally, many special thanks to my external examiners, Dr. Brian Burtch and Dr. Su Holmes for their excellent comments and questions. I appreciate the time they took to read through my work in such a careful manner, and for helping to make the defense an enjoyable experience.

To my friends and family - you will never know how much you helped me get through my PhD! I want to send a big, big thank you to my best friend of almost 19 years, Lisa Clark. We have shared so much over the years, and have been there for each other through the good and the bad. She has always been one of my biggest cheerleaders and greatest confidantes, and our endless conversations about feminism, popular culture, academia, and politics is one of the things that I always look forward to. Despite the distance between us now, I know that we will continue to love and support each other, and I am so thankful to have such an amazing woman in my life. To another 19 years of friendship!

Much love to my Aunt Dale, who has been there for me every step of the way, loving me unconditionally, and becoming an 'other mother' to me in the process. I am thankful for

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Introduction:

Making Room for Reality TV

Re-presenting 'Real' Women on TV

In the fall 2004 issue of *Ms. magazine*, media critic Jennifer Pozner took reality TV to task, arguing it was nothing more than a stylish repackaging of backlash rhetoric, reproduced through images of warped "fairytales". Even more pressing, was the author's concern that these "misogynistic spectacles" would be viewed "uncritically" by young girls and women everywhere. According to Pozner, this translates into the idea that, "only the most stereotypically beautiful, least independent women with the lowest-carb diets will be rewarded with love, financial security and the ultimate prize of male validation." More recently feminist scholar Susan Douglas used reality TV to illustrate her concept of "enlightened sexism" with its depictions of post-feminist women and girls who willingly embrace retro-sexism under the guise of 'ironic viewing'. According to Dougles, these "fantasies of distraction" serve no other purpose than to persuade female viewers that equality and empowerment are intricately linked with consumption and hyper-sexuality. Elizabeth Johnston, along the same lines, argues that ultimately "'reality' works to maintain the status quo, to secure patriarchal privilege, to underpin the capitalist drive" (129). However, at times, these criticisms take an almost conspiratorial tone, as in Jessica Bennett's journalistic piece in the popular online website *The Daily Beast*, suggesting that reality shows like *The Bachelor* or *America's Next Top Model*

serve to undermine the advances made by 'real' women working in politics or business for instance.[1]

There is no question that the images of women occupying the reality TV landscape pose a challenge for feminist scholars seeking to find some redeeming qualities in this so-called trashy genre. Yet, much of this journalistic criticism tends to fall precariously close to invoking the 'cultural dupe' model of audience viewership, and that by offering their astute insights, feminist critics can reveal the 'truth' about reality TV to unsuspecting female audiences. This rather cynical view also dismisses the symbolic and complex relationships female audiences develop with reality show contestants; media criticism tends to portray this process as very homogenous and passive. Moreover, reducing women on reality TV to victims of the misogynistic commercial TV industry fails to acknowledge the ways in which reality TV has altered text-audience relations, primarily through its production methods. Audiences, more than ever, are encouraged to become a part of the process, to become the content in ways that exceed previous generations or eras, where participation was limited to certain genres such as game shows and the news. At the same time, there is ample research and evidence to suggest that audience participation via reality TV is far from a utopian ideal, or the realized promise of a democratic public media sphere.

It is here that I find myself in an unsettled position as feminist, researcher and fan of reality TV, a genre that I have found intensely fascinating since I first saw *The Real World* (in the early 90s) and later, the American version of *Big Brother*. Watching the first season of *The Real World* in high school, I was intrigued by the coming together of a seemingly eclectic mix of people with differing life experiences. This entertaining 'social experiment' left a lasting imprint on me as a viewer providing me as well with insights into the American way of life however framed, thus part of the attraction for me has always included this cultural dimension. As a Canadian viewer the plethora of over-the-

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[1] The persistence of such attitudes and approaches in mainstream TV criticism speaks to its roots in both the academy and the mainstream second wave feminist movement. During the 1970s and 80s – inspired by the media reform campaigns of American feminist organizations such as N.O.W (National Organization for Women) (Perlman), as well as emerging academic movements, namely (British) Cultural Studies – feminist scholars from various disciplinary backgrounds turned their attention to the role of women in, and on, network television.

top American television content has always been directly countered by our seemingly restrained Canadian programming. Moreover, the voyeuristic elements of these early reality shows were not lost on me even if I was not able to contextualize its significance at the time. The way in which *Big Brother* fore-grounded surveillance made me feel self-conscious or hyper-aware of my position as a viewer due to its staging of reality in such an unusual way for television (at that time) and yet, as a viewer it was hard to turn away despite the discomfort. After the novelty of these early reality shows wore off, my interest was reignited and cemented with the introduction of game-doc shows like *Survivor* and *America's Next Top Model* which combined the social experiment aspect with competition-based challenges and rewards. In these programs, participants are competing for the chance to be the best – model, racer, survivor – with the hopes of parlaying that winning title into many more successful ventures. All the while, media and scholarly debates raged on, dissecting and arguing over the genre's 'merits' or lack thereof.

Early public reception of reality TV was often defined by moral panic discourses focusing on: its use of surveillance technology and by extension, its reliance on the pleasures of viewers' voyeurism; its loose association with realism; the questionable ethical treatment of participants, or lack thereof, and finally, its (supposed) assault on the 'privileged genre of the real': documentary. This last cultural anxiety has been particularly salient in Canada where documentary film has always been closely linked with the cultural and historical formation of Canada and its national identity. Within recent years, the Canadian television industry has become more receptive to the production of unscripted or lifestyle programming due to its relatively cheap production and labour costs, and quick development time. In turn, these benefits have helped local producers deal with the 2008 economic crisis which affected film and TV production in

key locations such as Vancouver and Toronto.[2] While reality TV is increasingly alluring for Canadian production companies and networks looking for content for their niche cable channels, there has been a decline in the development/funding of traditional 'one-off' television documentaries despite the growing popularity of the genre with the public (Lederman n. pag.).[3] The threat posed by reality TV is a complicated matter though, marked by a number of external factors and technological and economic changes that made it viable. Indeed, these moralistic concerns have repeatedly erupted upon the introduction of new media and technology into mainstream society (i.e., the internet, personal recording devices). As Patrice Petro has shown, similar moral panics occurred with the introduction of film, and were later reproduced during the postwar period when television was mass produced for domestic consumption.

Despite beliefs to the contrary, reality TV does very well with Canadian audiences, especially long-running programs such as *Survivor and Amazing Race* whose numbers have remained consistent relative to the overall population while

[2] A recent online article in 'BC Business' features an in-depth exploration of Vancouver's burgeoning reality-industry, becoming one of the main production sites for the development, production and distribution of Canadian lifestyle programming (Gold). With the loss of its 'Hollywood North' crown after the economic downturn scared away American producers, industry professionals turned to the production of other kinds of 'in-house' productions. Emerging and established companies such as Lark Productions and Paperny Entertainment are responsible for adapting popular American franchises such as 'The Real Housewives' series while also developing original series such as the popular food show 'Eat St 'and the Vancouver-based docu-series *Gastown Gamble*. In some ways communications scholar Serra Tinic foreshadowed this when she researched the Vancouver film industry in her book *On Location: Canada's Industry in a Global Market*, illustrating how cross-cultural productions led to professional opportunities to adopt a unique set of skills that blend together Canadian and American approaches to film and TV production. Indeed, the acquisition and knowledge of these styles have made Vancouver an attractive go-to locale now for reality TV producers, which can been seen in the high production values of newer programs such as the aforementioned *Gastown Gamble* and *The Real Housewives of Vancouver*.

[3] In Canada, these concerns are compounded by the fact that some reality programming qualifies for funding through government-supported bodies such as the Canadian Media Fund (previously the Canadian Television Fund). This exacerbates and ignites the negative backlash revealing the perception that reality TV, with its trashy reputation, is diametrically opposed to the high cultural values privileged by arts organizations and concerned citizens. As David Paperny, of Vancouver-based Paperny Entertainment, commented for a *Vancouver Sun* article, "I think we get confused about what a reality show is and what it isn't. For some of us it's a dirty word. It comes down to exploitation, humiliation, sensationalism. Not all reality shows do that, or are based on having to embarrass or manipulate the subject" (November 2009, http://www.canada.com/vancouversun/news/westcoastnews/story.html?id=69fc4f8d-73e4-4ab7-bdad-fd7c0a6522fd).

viewership for these shows has steadily declined in America which is much more 'reality-saturated' (Adams; Strachal). This seeming dearth of broadly appealing reality shows on Canadian networks has led some critics like the *Huffington Post's* Brian Cormier to argue for *more* reality programming. However, Canadian programmers have faced challenges bringing programs to Canada despite some limited success, and a number of the programs that have since been cancelled or placed on 'indefinite hiatus'.[4]

Therefore, on the one hand, the rapid growth of reality TV has created more opportunities for the 'ordinary' woman to participate in television culture, as well as bringing everyday concerns such as love, motherhood, and work, to primetime television. One of the most interesting aspects of reality TV programming has been its expansive documentation of ordinary women's lives, allowing viewers to watch women interact in artificially created social worlds (i.e. *America's Next Top Model*) and in their own communities (i.e., *The Real Housewives of Orange County*, *Laguna Beach*). In the (regrettably) short lived series *The Comeback*, progressive cable channel HBO took up the codes and conventions of reality TV as a way to dissect and reflect upon one woman's negotiation of celebrity, age, and femininity in an industry which is mostly hostile towards aging actresses. Moreover, the global distribution and sale of reality formats has spawned localized versions of popular reality programs (i.e., *Canada's Next Top Model*), providing opportunities for Canadian women to participate whom otherwise could not, and for viewers it's a chance to watch 'themselves' rather than their '(cultural) others'.

On the other hand, the proliferation of gendered reality programming has opened women up to *even more* humiliation, public scrutiny, and surveillance; as if most women are not already subjected to this in their everyday lives. But, as Catherine Lumby suggests, "Rather than exemplifying the 'dumbing down' of media audiences and the increasingly degraded nature of popular culture, reality television might be understood as a forum in which so-called ordinary people are able to participate, if only partially, in the process of quite literally representing themselves" (23). Indeed, changing

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[4]   As reported by *Vancouver Observer* writer Robyn Ludwig, *Canada's Next Top Model* and *Canadian Idol* were not in production at the time of writing in 2011, and neither has been on-air since 2009. Global cancelled *Project Runway Canada* in 2010, after two seasons, and CTV recently cancelled *So You Think You Can Dance Canada*.

representations of women in popular culture can reflect, or offer up, changing common sense ideas about women (Hollows and Moseley). But as a part of that understanding, we must keep in mind that the women we watch on-screen are different from professional performers thus their articulations of femininity and womanhood in contemporary society demonstrate the ongoing tensions between representation and reality. However, in order to gain a better grasp of reality TV participation, and the changing nature of television audiences, an examination of the formation of what has come to be known as, reality TV, is in order.

Birth of a 'Post-Documentary' Genre: Making Sense of Reality TV

Discussing the growing prominence of 'docu-dramas' in British television in the late 1960s, British cultural critic Raymond Williams eerily predicted the future success of reality-based programming when he wrote that the genre, which blurred boundaries between fact and fiction, "may prove to be one of the most significant innovations in contemporary culture" (72). He also posited the success of such boundary blurring genres would be facilitated by new technologies which would allow individuals to create their own media, thus enacting a kind of viewer emancipation; cultural power would be transferred to audiences, allowing them greater control over the production of images, resulting in more realistic representations.

Twenty some odd years into reality-based television programming, most critics would agree that Williams' vision of a democratized media revolution has not exactly come to fruition. While the advent of the home video recorder and the internet have certainly aided in the creation of "first person media" (Dovey), a total overthrow of the culture industries, particularly television, has not occurred. There seems to be little resistance to the industry's continued control over representation and ideology, even as

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alternative media communities have sprung up on the internet, such as YouTube.[5] As some scholars have suggested, personalized media technologies have been incorporated into the televisual landscape with the sole purpose of creating a type of programming that markets the surveillance of ordinary people as a form of entertainment which in turn reifies the cultural power of programmers over audiences (Andrejevic). In this way, while not without its challenges, Williams' vision of 'viewer emancipation' has been at least partially realized. With the advent of numerous media technologies, and the spread of the Internet as a domesticated medium, audiences now have unlimited access to the tools of representation. Both scholars and journalists have championed the 'produser', a new kind of media audience that "represent[s] the merging of the producer and consumer in an interactive environment" (Bird, "Are we all" 502). The produser signifies the shifting relationship between audiences/users and producers in this particular moment, reminiscent of the Cultural Studies active audience theory. Reality TV, as a part of this trend or cultural shift, engages audiences on multiple levels both on and off-screen. But what has troubled critics the most, and what would have no doubt disappointed Williams, is how despite the incorporation of audiences and ordinary people into the flow of cultural production, the power of the industry has not been thwarted. In this way, reality TV is less a genre illustrative of a massive reordering of the distribution of power between audiences and producers than it is "a genre that encourages us to actively reflect on media representations – it is television about making television; television which puts 'ordinary' people on the other side of the screen; television that focuses on how the presence of cameras affects people's behaviours" (Lumby 12).

Economic and Political Realities

While much attention has been paid to the cultural and social ramifications of reality TV, no understanding of the genre can be developed without contextualizing the

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[5]   In a 2006 corporate takeover, YouTube was bought out by Google for $1.6 billion. The founders of YouTube, Chad Hurley and Steve Chen, envisioned it as a "self-organizing, radically democratic community for sharing clip culture" but as John McMurria has pointed out, these idealized notions of 'democracy', 'community', and 'inclusiveness' are just as stratified along race, gender, and class lines as those found in 'old media'. For more see, "The YouTube Community," available at: http://flowtv.org/2006/10/the-youtube-community-2/.

economic and institutional changes that precipitated its birth. During the 1980s, all facets of the American TV industry underwent massive economic changes resulting from network mergers, changing tax laws, the growth of cable channels and the global format industry, and niche audience marketing (Magder; Raphael). These changes led to a 'multi-channel universe' which provided increasingly fragmented audiences with a broader range of programming aimed at their specific demographic. At the same time, the industry was trying to create programming to fill up these new channels which would incur the quickest and best return with the least amount of risk. Reality-based, or unscripted, formats fit the bill quite nicely, offering industry executives a much cheaper way of producing television, as they no longer needed to rely on high-priced talent from the various entertainment unions. Indeed, one of the unfortunate and problematic drawbacks of reality programming is its short-sighted reliance on non-unionized labour, on and off-screen. This has created much controversy within the entertainment industry as evidenced in the number of public scandals and strikes held over the past several years,[6] and the Writers Guild of America (WGA) even attempted to address these issues but has been met with few successes or changes.[7] As Ted Magder comments, "Reality TV may have captured the attention of audiences, but it also looks good on the books and balance sheets of those whose business is television" (138). In addition to reality TV this new business model for television production encouraged the growth of a number of formats which emphasized the 'everyday', the 'ordinary' and the 'extraordinary', namely talk shows, tabloid shows, and lifestyle programming.

Scholars Laurie Ouellette and James Hay argue that reality TV is illustrative of how TV more generally has become "a technology for constructing the rules or 'constitutions' of everyday life" (9). Drawing on Michel Foucault's development of the term 'governmentality', they show how reality TV 'governs from a distance' by managing "social subjects and problems" using "specific devices, skills, techniques, regimens, and technologies" (Ouellette and Hay 9). This governing function of reality TV, as they

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[6] For instance, the writers for *America's Next Top Model*, went on strike in the summer of 2006, only to end in the elimination of their jobs later that year. Subsequently, the Writers Guild of America released a report that looked at the working conditions faced by reality show writers, titled *Harsh Reality*.

[7] See Daniel Blau, "The WGA already lost round 1." *Los Angeles Times*. (November 20, 2007). Available at: http://articles.latimes.com/2007/nov/20/news/OE-BLAU20

contend, is a reflection of a changing economic and political context which leans favourably towards neoliberalism, a market-based logic that celebrates hyper-individualism and entrepreneurialism and disparages citizens' reliance on the welfare state. Thus the declining role of the welfare state, and the growing privatization of all services and programs traditionally under its purview, is all emblematic of this transformation or movement towards personal responsibility. This requires individuals to manage and care for themselves, in the belief that citizens will not achieve self-actualization "through 'society' or collectively, but through their choices in the privatized spheres of lifestyle, domesticity, and consumption" (Ouellette and Hay 12). Indeed, reality shows seem to lend themselves to neoliberal readings especially law and order, and makeover programs which emphasize a model of citizenship that places responsibility for one's failures and successes solely on the shoulder(s) of individual citizens. Thus, within the logic of much reality TV programming, good citizens/participants are defined by their ability or willingness to employ risk management in order to make 'correct' life decisions/choices which in turn enable self-sufficiency, taking the burden of care off the state's shoulders. Conversely, those who do not (or are unable to) make correct life choices are portrayed as irresponsible, lacking in self-discipline and therefore deserving of whatever struggles or failures come their way. The key weakness of the neoliberal logic is that it refuses to acknowledge the role that structural inequalities play in society, and this cynicism often frames audience engagement with reality TV, as we are invited to judge and ridicule participants for failing to achieve this 'new norm' in classed, gendered, and racialized ways.

> The rise of the 'ordinary' celebrity has tapped into narratives about media-driven social mobility for the working class while their ridicule and denigration in the media indicates that they are not really part of the meritocracy: their fame is based on luck, not talent, and this figure holds up a mirror to (particulary female) ordinary working-class people which alludes to their place or potential place in public culture. (Williamson 120)

The Trash Factor

Culturally, reality TV is often lumped in with other television genres that are deemed trashy, such as talk shows, soap operas, and entertainment news shows (Grindstaff). Designating these programs as trashy is also tied to their degraded cultural status; they are marked as 'low culture'. As feminist critics of mass culture have shown,

gendered discourses are often used to distinguish differences between 'high' and 'low' cultural forms (Bennett; Huyssen; Modleski; Petro). Lower cultural forms are associated with the feminine, while higher forms are gendered masculine. Feminine cultural forms are characterized by their mass (re)production, content, and consumption, such as romance novels and soaps. The process of consumption is further feminized as a subject position marked by irrationality, passivity, desire and emotion. Masculine cultural forms are associated with oppositional tastes (i.e., the aficionado) and the masculine consumer is rational, objective, critical, and constantly 'resisting' the 'seductive' allure of mass culture and its attendant forms.

These categories of high and low, masculine and feminine, have also been applied to television programming, and in fact, traditional ideas about gender, particularly the family, were instrumental in constructing television and its viewership since its inception. The early years of television broadcasting were premised on the postwar nuclear aspirational family model of the white, middle-class, male breadwinner and the female homemaker, living in the suburbs with their kids. Television producers scheduled programs appealing to stay-at-home wives and mothers during the day, such as soaps and game shows, while during the evening, or primetime, more family-oriented and/or masculine genres aired. This was further exacerbated by the idea that the private sphere, while primarily defined as a space of reproduction (i.e., cooking and child rearing) for women, was idealized as a space of leisure for the male breadwinner. Such a heterosexist, racist, and classist model of family life completely overlooked women who were part of the paid labour force, as well as populations of minority viewers who were neither white nor heterosexual (Spigel).

While many changes have since challenged this traditional broadcasting model (i.e., second wave feminism, civil rights), cultural disparities between high/masculine and low/feminine cultural forms still persist. Evidence of this was most recently expressed in critical debates over the perceived threat of reality TV to documentary filmmaking. Documentary, the privileged genre of the real was long ago established as a higher cultural form because of its so-called ability to reveal truths about the human condition. Documentary's historical ties to an educational, informative and scientific mandate, secured through institutional support (i.e., the Griersonian tradition), helped to further entrench it within discourses of 'quality' because, unlike trashy cultural forms, it is viewed

as contributing to the public good. Reality TV takes up the codes and conventions of documentary filmmaking but in a way that subverts and plays with its realist conventions, blurring the boundaries between fact and fiction, and entertainment and information. The use of direct cinema and cinema verite filmmaking techniques raises important questions about the surveillance of non-actors in artificially constructed private spaces created for public consumption (i.e., *Big Brother*), as well as the camera's ability to capture (unmediated) truth. The biggest concerns hone in on reality TV's use of documentary techniques with the sole purpose of entertaining audiences rather than educating or informing the citizenry. Moreover, Anita Biressi and Heather Nunn write that the "'feminisation' of factual programming threatens objective factual reporting/programming with its emphasis on emotional, personal, confessional performances" ("Reality TV" 146). John Corner describes the shift from 'serious' documentary to 'documentary as diversion' as 'postdocumentary culture' to highlight the changing cultural and economic setting within which audiences and critics receive the genre, and how the development of reality TV has both impacted, and been influenced by documentary. Keith Beattie suggests that, "[t]he forms and styles of popular factual entertainment demonstrate that 'documentary' is not a unified category but rather a continuum which involves both information and entertainment" (203). The use of these codes and conventions have been played with, drawing on other generic staples of television to create a variety of reality programming, some deemed more trashy than others.

Reality TV's evolution has also been construed as a response to the mass social movements of the 1970s and their focus on identity politics, Indeed, in an era marked by the extremely conservative politics and policies of the Reagan administration, reality-based programming brought more visibility to minority groups as well as publicizing issues that were often deemed 'personal matters' (Toslon 19). In many ways the criticisms hurled at talk shows foreshadowed how the public would respond to reality TV, even as it laid the groundwork for familiarizing audiences with its 'raw emotion and confession' (Biressi and Nunn "Reality TV" 7). Indeed, the emphasis on personal experience and emotions was often at the heart of much of the negative criticism, suggesting that there are still cultural and political lines drawn around what constitutes acceptable and respectable public debate, as well as who should have access to the mechanisms of representation. This kind of backlash is still prevalent, especially in how

the public often responds to reality show participants. These often contradictory and ambivalent positions speak to the "paradoxes of visibility" as these types of programs are "both democratizing, yet exploitative, normalizing yet freaky" (Gamson *Freaks* 19). Or to put it another way, "we find ourselves caught between the promise of an empowering form of interactivity and the potential of an increasingly exploitative one" (Andrejevic 7). The breadth and depth of reality TV criticism is also a reflection of its seemingly never ending generic permutations but there are a number of formats that have become staples in the TV schedule.

Ordinary Folks on TV

"Reality TV" has become an umbrella term for all unscripted or reality-based programming, and in this section, I map out some of the more well-known genres to have emerged out of the aforementioned changing industrial and audience practices, before settling on the competition show as the focus of this study (and where participants where drawn from).[8] Of course, given the tendency of reality TV to blur boundaries, these subgenres are not set in stone but rather, are dependent upon audiences tastes and preferences, and 'genre mixing'. As media scholar Jason Mittell writes, "Genres are always partial and contingent, emerging out of specific cultural relations, rather than abstract textual ideals" (23). Therefore, while reality TV speaks to a particular moment in television 'genre mixing', it is also important to consider the specific textual elements of different kinds of programming, and how this prompts different kinds of audience address and interaction, encouraging multiple and even contradictory readings in the process (Mittell 5).

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[8] Jason Mittell notes that the generic category 'reality TV' allows "us to make sense of these programs and their cultural associations" (197), and has become the most commonly used term in media and scholarly criticism. Thus, the term has become cultural shorthand for a rather wide and diverse group of different formats that share textual properties with other television genres such as soap operas and game shows. Moreover, the cultural cache of reality TV as a generic category is reflective of our interest in, and fascination with the genre, as its popularity ignited much public debate about the crisis of representation in contemporary media. However, how each kind of program deals with this, or invites such questions are neither homogenous nor static. The prevalence of reality TV has certainly pushed us to consider the unstable relationship between genre and texts, and how external forces contribute to, and shape our understanding of genre as a cultural category.

Reality Crime

Emerging in the 1980s, crime-based or law and order reality shows were one of the earliest types of unscripted programs to hit the small screen. Early programs like *America's Most Wanted* and *Rescue 911* were often branded as 'infotainment' due to their use of filming techniques similar to that of the docudrama. Critics often linked early reality crime shows to tabloid journalism with their focus on spectacles of violence and tragedy (Cavender and Fishman; Doyle). These programs also serve a double function through its law and order address; by warning audiences what will happen to them if they engage in criminal behaviour and also encouraging them to engage in forms of surveillance by phoning in 'tips' or information on suspected criminals.

Probably one of the most popular reality crime shows has been the FOX series *Cops* which has been on air since 1989. This program signalled a move away from a law and order approach to focus exclusively on crime, giving the illusion that crime is both everywhere, and the problem of racially and economically marginalized communities. The longevity of *Cops* illustrates the popularity of this narrative with TV audiences. Later formats focused on the courtroom/prosecution with programs like *The People's Court* and *Judge Judy* where the judge dispensed his/her brand of neoliberalism, often blaming the victim for their 'poor life choices' which as Ouellette has shown, was often aimed at women who did not live up to a particular neoliberal gender ideology. Thus the construction of gender on crime shows has been criticized for representing women problematically and for ignoring the larger socioeconomic factors contributing to crime (Cavender, Bond-Maupin, and Jurik).

Docu-soaps

The next development in reality TV is marked by the emergence of the 'docu-soap'; a character-driven format with multiple storylines revolving around a familial unit. As the name suggests, the 'docu-soap' combines cinema verité with the melodramatic conventions associated with soap operas, focusing on personal relationships and emotions. The ongoing series *The Real World* is regarded as the first 'docu-soap' which

appeared on MTV in 1992.[9] Critics argue that the docu-soap's precursor was the 1973 PBS documentary series, *An American Family*, which followed the lives of the Loud family over a 6 month period in 1971.[10] In Canada, the release of Allan King's documentary film *A Married Couple* in 1969 also foreshadowed the public's interest in the 'everyday lives' of 'ordinary people' and their struggles with marriage, love, work, and parenting.[11] Most game-docs borrow elements of the docu-soap in order to create a narrative structure that audiences can relate to, as they get to know the personalities and personal stories of competitors.

Celebrity Programs

A subset of the docu-soap, the celebrity reality show focuses on the lives of celebrities and their families like *The Osbournes* or *Hogan Knows Best*. Other programs feature celebrities interacting with 'ordinary' people like *The Simple Life*. Programs like *Celebrity Fit Club*, *The Surreal Life*, and *Celebrity Rehab* draw on the labour of celebrities who were once 'A-list' but who are now struggling to remain in the public eye/maintain a career due to mental health or drug issues; evidence of the 'dark side' of celebrity culture. More and more, public figures utilize the reality format as part of a public relations strategy to rebuild their brands or gain exposure (once again) such as *The Two Coreys* or *Denise Richards: It's Complicated*. Some shows have catapulted semi-famous people to full-fledged celebrity such as *Keeping Up With the Kardashians*

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[9] For criticism of this seminal docu-soap see: George Bagley, "A Mixed Bag: Negotiating Claims in MTV's *The Real World*," *Journal of Film and Video* (Summer/Fall 2001) 53. 2/3; Jon Kraszewski, "Country Hicks and Urban Cliques: Mediating race, reality, and liberalism on MTV's *The Real World*," *Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture*. (New York and London: NYU Press, 2004); Danielle Stern, "Consuming the Fractured Female: Lessons from MTV's *The Real World*," *The Communication Review* (2009) 12; Hugh Curnutt, "'A Fan Crashing the Party': Exploring Reality-celebrity in MTV's *Real World* Franchise," *Television & New Media* (May 2009) 10.3.

[10] For more on the legacy of this docu-series see: Jeffrey Ruoff, *An American Family: A Televised Life*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002. In 2011, HBO released a fictionalized version of the production, titled *Cinema Verité*, which explored the various relationships between the filmmakers and family members, as well as the role that the station, PBS, played in shaping both the director's vision and audience reception. The film raises interesting questions about the ethics of documentary film practice and the impact it can have on participants both during production and post-wrap up.

[11] For a detailed analysis of this Canadian documentary classic see: Zoë Druick, *Allan King's* A Married Couple, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010.

and *Kathy Griffin: My Life on the D-list*. One of the most popular reality shows on television is the celebrity dancing competition program, *Dancing with the Stars*.

Celebrity reality TV taps into our culturally-driven fascination with celebrity by providing 'back-stage' access to the lives of celebrities which on some level shows how they are 'just like us' but also feeds into the constant need for entertainment news. Moreover, reality TV has become another vehicle for celebrities to develop their 'brand image' and offers them an opportunity to engage with their fans.

Makeover Shows

More recently, the 'makeover show' has been identified as a distinct subgenre. While most reality genres in some way emphasize transformations of the self, the makeover show revolves entirely around the process of becoming and transformation which is followed by the 'big reveal', or 'moneyshot', [12] where a new body or new house are presented to the audience and participants. Examples of the makeover show include *What Not to Wear*, *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*, and the cosmetic surgery shows *Extreme Makeover* and *The Swan*.[13]

Docu-Show/Lifestyle Programming

Referencing John Corner, scholar Keith Beattie also identified the 'docushow' - a program which is hosted by a presenter (could be a celebrity) who presents the factual information (cooking, gardening shows shot on location). These kinds of shows might also be dubbed 'lifestyle' programs due to their niche audience appeal, and many of

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[12] Feminist television scholar Laura Grindstaff uses the term 'the money shot' to illustrate 'authentic' or 'breakthrough' moments in television talk shows.

[13] In recent years a number of articles and books have been published focusing on 'makeover culture' especially within the American context: Dana Heller (ed), *Makeover television: realities remodelled* (I. B. Tauris, 2007); Micki McGee, *Self-Help, Inc.: makeover culture in American life* (Oxford University Press, 2005); Toby Miller, *Makeover nation: the United States of reinvention* (The Ohio State University Press, 2008); Brenda R. Weber, *Makeover TV: selfhood, citizenship, and celebrity* (Duke University Press, 2009); Jayne Raisborough, *Lifestyle media and the formation of the self* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Angela McRobbie, "Notes on 'what not to wear' and post-feminist symbolic violence," *Feminism after Bourdieu* (Blackwell, 2004); Martin Roberts, "The Fashion Police: Governing the Self in *What Not to Wear*," *Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture* (Duke University Press, 2007).

them include travel programs as well. Cable channels that specialize in this type of programming include *HGTV, The Food Network*, and the *Discovery Channel.* Extensive criticisms of lifestyle reality programming can be found within feminist scholarship, with an emphasis on how cooking shows in particular offer women post-feminist pleasures, as they in some way reclaim the 'domestic arts' albeit in rather limited and highly commodified scope.[14]

Game-docs/Competition Shows

One of the most popular reality TV formats to emerge after the docu-soap has been the 'gamedoc', or competition show. The game-doc is most commonly linked to the popular international reality franchise *Big Brother* but really took off with audiences with American hits like *Survivor, Amazing Race,* and *America's Next Top Model,* all of which are still in production. Programmers are constantly reworking the format to keep audiences tuned in, and a number of programs have developed celebrity versions such as *Celebrity Big Brother* and *The Celebrity Apprentice* or brought back fan-favourites to compete against each such as *Survivor: All-Stars* and *America's Next Top Model: All-*

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[14] For instance see: Charlotte Brunsdon, "Feminism, Postfeminism, Martha, Martha, and Nigella," *Cinema Journal* (Winter 2005) 44.2; Emma Casey and Lydia Martens (eds.),*Gender and Consumption: Domestic Cultures and the Commercialisation of Everyday Life* (Ashgate, 2007); Stacey Gillis and Joanne Hollows (eds.), *Feminism, Domesticity and Popular Culture* (Routledge, 2009); Ann Mason and Marian Myers, "Living with Martha Stewart Media: Chosen Domesticity in the Experience of Fans," *Journal of Communication* (Dec. 2001) 51.4; Elizabeth Nathanson, "As Easy as Pie: Cooking Shows, Domestic Efficiency, and Postfeminist Temporality," *Television & New Media* (July 2009) 10.4.

Stars. Other 'hybrid' programs that combine the competition format with the docu-soap are dating shows such as *The Bachelor* and *The Bachelorette*.[15]

Competition-based reality programming is a unique format which incorporates aspects of the competitive game show (often coded as masculine) and the emotional, therapeutic dimensions of the daytime talk show (coded as feminine), with a documentary look. Biressi and Nunn note that the competition show "often takes place around two axes rooted in economic and social capital – that of material goods…and that of less tangible phenomena such as popularity" (*Reality TV* 152). Indeed, contestants are not only evaluated on their skills of course but on how well they ascribe to a show's "reality values" which consist of "authentic self-expression, overcoming adversity, personal growth during the series, eye candy, coping with tests and with the competitive dynamics and dramas of the groups, and willingness to confess the self" (Hartley 138).

Competition shows also promote the myth of meritocracy; the belief that we all have a level playing field when it comes to achievement and success. Tied to the notion of the American Dream, the myth of meritocracy does not acknowledge how race, class, and gender influences the types of opportunities available to individuals and in turn how these factors can conversely put someone at a systemic disadvantage. The allure of the competition show for participants is the belief that those from working class backgrounds can transcend class and ordinariness through the acquisition of wealth and celebrity via their participation. As the season one winner Adrienne Curry commented in the *E! True Hollywood Story: America's Next Top Model*, she only had two options or life choices: "I

15   There is a plethora of literature on game-docs or competition shows within the reality TV literature, however most of it focuses on textual analysis. For example see Matthew J. Smith and Andrew F. Wood (eds.), *Survivor Lessons: Essays on Communication and Reality Television* (McFarland & Company, 2003); Ernest Mathijis and Janet Jones (eds.), *Big Brother International: Formats, Critics and Publics* (Wallflower Press, 2004); Jonathan Bignell, *Big Brother: reality TV in the twenty-first century* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Derek Foster, "'Jump in the pool': The competitive culture of *Survivor* fan networks," *Understanding Reality Television* (Routledge, 2004); Rachel Dubrofsky, "*The Bachelor*: Whiteness in the Harem," *Critical Studies in Communication* (Jan. 2006) 23.1; Amy Adele Hasinoff, "Fashioning Race for the Free Market on *America's Next Top Model*," *Critical Studies in Communication* (August 2008) 25.3; Lindsay Palmer, "Gender as the Next Top Model of Global Consumer-Citizenship, *Genders* (2010) 51; Emily Drew, "Pretending to be "postracial": The Spectacularization of Race in Reality TV's *Survivor*," *Television & New Media* (2011) 12.4.

was either going to remain in the Midwest, get married to my boyfriend at the time, live in a trailer and pop 80 kids, and ya know, be on welfare, or, I could have had ya know, a chance at life." However, not all women see their options in such either/or terms but seek out reality competition shows to expose their creativity and talents to a larger audience, as well as utilizing their participation and the access this brings with it, to expand their networks.

In recent years, scholars have argued that reality TV and the competition format in particular, embodies the free-market, individualistic spirit and morals of neoliberalism and the myth of meritocracy which is reflected in the format's cut-throat competitive environment where contestants are faced with impossible tasks and deadlines, and encouraged to view their co-competitors as an obstacle on the path to success (Grazian; Jost; Ouellette and Hay; Redden; Windle). It is not so surprising then, that these shows often take place within the creative sectors – dancing, music, cooking, and fashion – which tend to attract young, artistically inclined men and women seeking a 'cool' and/or 'glamorous' career, when in actuality, they will spend most of their post-graduate years, working for low (or no) pay, in contract-based positions.[16]

Celebrity reality competition shows definitely try to amp up the appeal and glamour of this work/lifestyle such as *Bromance, Paris Hilton's My New BFF* or *I Want to Work for Diddy*, where 'ordinary' folks vie for the chance to become an assistant or 'friend' of a celebrity, or become a corporate executive like in Donald Trump's *The Apprentice* (Grazian). Angela McRobbie refers to this as the 'Hollywoodization' of the cultural labour markets, which idealizes the individualist pursuit of one's dream, and where young people's 'passion' for what they do enables them to endure horrible work conditions in order to achieve personal success.

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[16] Interestingly, women have become symbols of this entrepreneurial, internship-based economy, acting as mentors and role models for young men and women wishing to make a name for themselves in the creative sector; often becoming celebrities in their own right. For instance, see: *Kell on Earth* (Bravo, 2010), *The Rachel Zoe Project* (Bravo, 2008-). Other programmes follow women entrepreneurs as they attempt to build their 'brands' such as: *Ashley Paige: Bikini or Bust* (TLC, 2008), *Bethenny Ever After* (Bravo, 2011-2012), *Pregnant in Heels* (Bravo, 2011-). Finally, other programmes focus on young women who aspire to get jobs in these creative fields like, *Gallery Girls* (Bravo, 2012-), *The City* (MTV, 2008-2010), *The Hills* (MTV, 2006-2010), and *Running in Heels* (Style Network, 2009).

Most competition shows offer rewards in the form of the potential to turn one's winnings into a professional career such as 'Idol', *Project Runway* or 'Top Model' where the winner will enter into a contract with a corporate sponsor (i.e., recording contract, modeling campaign) in addition to receiving some kind of cash prize. However, given that there can only ever be one winner, we know that the majority of contestants will lose, and yet, audiences are constantly encouraged to ridicule and judge the contestants while larger social and economic inequalities and structural constraints are glossed over and flat out ignored.[17] Consequently, competition shows have desensitized many of us to the harsh treatment inflicted on contestants; take for instance Gordon Ramsay of *Hell's Kitchen* who routinely chastises and belittles contestants in aggressive and hurtful ways, especially those deemed ungrateful or undeserving. Thus these narrative conventions also function as a kind of cautionary tale for workers, seeking employment in the neoliberal marketplace, where workers should feel 'lucky' just to have a job regardless of deplorable, unsafe, or discriminatory workplace conditions.

Consuming Television

A key aspect of making sense of reality TV has been to focus on how audiences receive and engage with the format and its myriad 'texts'. Cultural Studies has made significant contributions to our understanding of audience-text relations which in turn shaped feminist television criticism, wherein feminist scholars re-evaluated many of the assumptions and arguments circulating at a time when feminist activists and scholars were extremely critical of television. Television, as part of a commercial media system of communication owned and operated predominantly by white men, was viewed as an

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[17] Of course, the adoption of such discourses run deep, and are embedded within the format's production structure, as reality TV is produced on the backs of non-unionized media labour.

extension or reflection of the interests of our capitalist-patriarchal society, which 'injected' women with its harmful sexist imagery.[18]

However, feminist critics working within the field of Cultural Studies have redefined the debate, moving away from research that attempted to prove that television is bad for women and instead addresses how and why television matters to women in the contexts of their everyday lives.[19] Much of this was also rooted in a desire to reposition women as active agents or subjects who held complex feelings and thoughts about the cultural texts that they consumed rather than characterizing them as victims or dupes of the television industry as so much earlier work had done. This paradigmatic shift signalled an important moment, as it also carved out a space within the academy to take seriously women's cultural consumption. It is within this tradition of feminist criticism that I situate my own work but with the aim of expanding the current framework to consider women's growing presence *on* television as reality show participants rather than simply as viewers. The recent changes in the production and circulation of television via reality TV, poses interesting challenges for feminist television scholars which I hope to address through studying women's participation in this popular format.

One of the key contributions of feminist cultural studies was its focus on women's consumption of cultural texts, especially within the private sphere. Scholars focused on magazines, music, and most importantly the domestic medium of television which had come to hold an important socio-cultural role as it relayed ideologically coded messages

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[18] Early second wave feminist criticisms of television, especially in the US are often compared to the "effects tradition" of the American-based field of Communications. This school of thought understands media as a one-way process of message and receiver – television "injects" the viewer with its message which the viewer "passively" accepts and internalizes. Much second wave feminist analyses of television utilized communications-based methods such as content analysis to study the "harmful effects" of television on women. They categorize these images into "positive" and "negative" which has led to a somewhat problematic perception of negative images as those tied to representations of women as mothers and wives, while "positive" images have become associated with depictions of the single, working woman in an upscale profession. This "positive-negative" binary continues to influence and underpin media research undertaken by long-standing feminist organizations such as N.O.W.

[19] Of course, there is substantial evidence and research that illustrate how the television industry continues to lag in terms of racial, gender, and sexual diversity both on and off screen. However, my primary concern is with how women, first as audiences, and now as realty TV participants, continue to be marginalized in problematic ways, especially in popular culture.

to viewers (Hollows 2000). Feminist cultural studies researchers were especially concerned with how television reflected the beliefs and values of the dominant culture but also how the technology itself was gendered within the home. David Morley's research in *Family Television*, which expanded on the work he and Dorothy Hobson did for the *Nationwide* study, is an excellent example of the kind of research cultural studies produced on television audiences, combining as he did questions around family and gender, in conjunction with class issues. By emphasizing the importance of social contexts, his research showed how television viewing is not isolated to texts and subjects, but takes place in particular spaces and at certain times, what Annette Kuhn emphasised as the 'social audience'.[20] While his research is limited in its generalizability (his participants fit neatly into the nuclear family ideal – white, heterosexual), his data on gender differences in television viewing has proven invaluable to feminist researchers. Specifically, they wanted to know what women watched, how they watched and why they watched what they did, and how these 'choices' might be a reflection of their subordinated position in a capitalist-patriarchal society.[21] Thus, one of the central concerns within feminist cultural studies has been women's reception of 'women's

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[20]   Kuhn delineates, importantly, that there is a distinction between "spectators" and "social audiences" with the latter acknowledging the external conditions that construct us as 'audiences' while the former tends to ignore this in favour of emphasizing "the relationship between the spectator and text" (150).

[21]   For instance, early Cultural Studies works published by the Birmingham School's Women's Studies Group explored a broad range of topics from culture of working class housewives and girls, to women's cultural consumption, to feminist critiques of various academic/disciplinary discourses on gender and sex. Moreover, these works also challenged the male-centric focus of the earlier subcultural studies and look at the role of institutions, discourses, leisure and consumption in mediating the experience of adolescence, or growing up for both boys and girls. This exploration of the 'ordinary' lives of girls and boys destabilized the earlier privileging, or what Angela McRobbie deemed the tendency to 'romanticize' (white) male subcultural practices as the epitome of cultural resistance.

genres', as there was a concerted effort by television scholars to legitimate the study of these 'low culture' texts.[22]

Audience Studies and 'The Ethnographic Turn'

In order to explore the question of 'the audience', feminist cultural scholars often combine textual analysis with ethnographic methods in order to understand the social contexts of women's consumption and viewing practices. As James Hay writes, "Cultural Studies found in ethnography a way to combine empirical and textual study while arguing that traditional audience research was too empirical and textual study too detached and disinterested in texts' relation to popular struggles and contexts" (2). This methodological move is often referred to as the 'ethnographic turn' in Cultural Studies. Ethnography, while deriving from anthropology, was appropriated by Cultural Studies researchers to study cultural processes; rather than turning the ethnographic gaze on the exotic cultural 'other', practitioners instead turned the gaze upon themselves, and

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[22] Interestingly, the 'origins' of Cultural Studies itself was rooted in a critical and political response to the intellectual confines of the British academic tradition which seemed at odds with a growing popular culture post World War II. Using literary studies to explore the role of popular culture proved unenlightening though because of the long tradition of work which only focused on 'high culture' (associated with the upper classes), which gave little insight into the 'culture' of the working and emerging middle classes. These elitist debates characterized popular culture as degrading and threatening to the 'organic' way of life in the English countryside (Turner *British*). So in order to understand the social significance of popular forms of art, an expanded notion of 'culture' needed to be developed which could account for their mass appeal. While Raymond Williams' early formulation of culture was described as 'a whole way of life', E. P. Thompson contended that culture is a struggle *between* ways of life (Turner *British*). Indeed, 'struggle' implies the possibility of resistance, an idea that would become very important to Cultural Studies.

upon their own culture(s).[23] Utilizing ethnographic methods like participant observation and interviews, researchers found a way to explore more fully how audiences make meanings of texts, how and if they resist its ideological messages, and what function they hold in people's everyday lives.[24] Feminist cultural studies scholars identified a number of reading strategies employed by women, each indicating their own particular theoretical heritages, such as the "progressive text" (Tasker 90), the "negotiated" reading (Hall "Cultural Studies"; Gledhill), and even "resistant reading."

(Inter)Active Audiences and Reality TV

One of the key theoretical endeavours with regards to television audience research within Cultural Studies has been the notion of 'active audiences'. Active audience theory has been integral to the Cultural Studies political project, and has paved the way for feminist scholars to argue that women's viewing practices are far from passive but act to subvert patriarchal ideologies encoded in the media, illustrating one of the ways in which marginalized groups are able to resist the dominant culture. Through textual analysis and ethnographic research, feminists found that what was originally perceived to be negative or harmful for women could be reread as a process of

[23] Early on, Cultural Studies practitioners studied various working-class youth subcultures which they perceived as sites of resistance to the dominant culture and its hegemonic power. For them, youth became a metaphor for social change. In particular Paul Willis's study of male subcultures, hippies and bikers, provides important insights into two very different, yet similar communities. His work showed how subcultures can easily coexist with the dominant culture by producing imaginary relations; that is they function as if things have changed when in actuality the dominant culture remains intact. Moreover, while these groups tend not to pursue political change at the social level, their consumption practices illustrate cultural politics in play, as they resignify the meanings associated with cultural artifacts. For instance, Cultural Studies scholar Dick Hebdige argued that subcultures create their own oppositional meaning systems and identities through the act of 'bricolage' – a creative form of cultural 'cut and pasting' in which items from the dominant culture are used in a way not originally intended, usually to subvert the cultural hegemony. It was this early ethnographic work on subcultures that also laid the groundwork for emerging studies on television audiences.

[24] Louis Althusser's notion of 'Ideology' and Antonio Gramsci's concept of 'Hegemony' played crucial roles in shaping the early interpretations of cultural resistance within Cultural Studies, especially Stuart Hall's groundbreaking essay 'Encoding/Decoding'. Ideology as Althusser uses it addresses the role of institutions in shaping our consciousness, which often reproduces the dominant culture's views in such a way that we take them for granted. Hegemony, developed by Gramsci, challenged Marx's contention that the dominant groups impose their will on the people, instead arguing that "cultural domination/leadership is not achieved by force or coercion, but is secured through the consent of those it will ultimately subordinate" (Turner *British* 66).

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negotiation, wherein women viewers constantly vacillate between feelings of pleasure and discomfort, and between complacency and resistance. So, on the one hand, women may use cultural products for escapist fantasy, but on the other hand they might be engaged in a complex process of identity formation. However, one of the lingering criticisms of this scholarship has been the repetitiveness of such arguments which become so 'banal' that the researcher's own positionality gets subsumed rather than looking at how the researcher herself acts as a mediator or translator of the audience being studied (Morris 22). Moreover, we must be wary that all interpretations of cultural texts can be reduced to 'pleasure' or 'resistance' without considering some of the external constraints placed upon viewers' reception. Such celebratory framings of television reception also tend to downplay or overlook questions of 'power' and how this shapes ongoing power struggles between audiences and producers. Similarly such formulaic approaches do not acknowledge how the medium of television is itself not static but constantly changes and adapts to stay competitive and attractive to audiences.

However, much of this scholarship flourished at a time when the concept of reality TV was but a blip on our scholarly radar and even then it took some time for scholars to take it seriously, as many believed early on it was but a 'flash in the pan' that would not last. Indeed, its immense popularity with audiences has made it hard to ignore, leading scholars to attempt to account for its appeal, as well as the challenges it poses for television researchers and some of the more conventional methods. Feminist television scholarship in particular is now tasked with the job of not only analysing and critiquing the content of such programming but also to try and understand the impact of women's participation as reality show contestants. This growing migration of audiences onto the television screen asks that we re-evaluate some of the early approaches to studying the relationship between audiences and texts given the way in which reality TV has blurred such distinctions. As Andrea Press and Sonia Livingstone suggest, audience studies tend to focus on *either* 'media-as-text' *or* 'media-as-object' when what is needed is a more integrated approach that weaves together the audience's use of the text, as well as its social context. Shaun Moores echoes this as well calling for ethnographies that "contextualize audience responses in relation to a further range of social activities, artifacts and interpretations" (117). Moreover, the formation of new interactive media technologies and formats asks researchers to rethink the 'audience/text/everyday life

problematic', because audiences are no longer making meaning of texts, but are actually becoming active members in their construction/transformation which is certainly the case with reality TV. As Ann Gray so poignantly notes,

> Such studies recognize the false distinctions between micro and macro, between text and the contexts of its production and consumption, and demonstrate how discourses flow in and out of constructions of identity, self, private and public, local and global. Boundaries, thus, are permeable, unstable and uneasy, demanding a new way of thinking and looking at the 'audience', the user, the text and the complexity of relations and discourses that surround and are part of it. (*Research Practice* 142-3)

Therefore, my own research on reality TV show participants, while indebted to feminist cultural studies, especially active audience theory and ethnography, employs a more flexible methodological approach which allows me to move away from the 'dupe/resistance' model of television audience research in favour of analyses that attempt to contextualize the sociocultural contexts of women's reality TV participation. I am particularly interested in the relationship between research methods and knowledge production, especially in a moment when many of these categories have been called into question, and have become fairly unstable. Thus, reality TV itself becomes a site for asking reflexive questions about the research process, and academic knowledge formation.

There are some recent works on reality TV that illustrate this by using reality TV to rethink the aforementioned 'audience/text/everyday life problematic' that pushes television scholarship into exciting avenues. For instance, Estella Ticknell and Parvati Raghuram, using *Big Brother* as a case study, explore how reality television has both challenged and reconfigured the relationship between audience and television text. They bring together all of the various sites which aid in the production of the *Big Brother* 'text', from the internet, the television broadcast, fan discourse and so on, showing how all of these 'extra-textual' elements contribute to the discursive formation of the show. Part of this illustrates the *inter*active role that audiences play in constructing the text, quite literally, through online voting which allows them to determine the outcome of the competition. For Ticknell and Raghuram this means that focusing on a single text becomes problematic when researching reality TV. Instead, researchers need to access the multiple sites which contribute to the audience's understanding of the reality TV text.

They are careful to note however, that shows like *Big Brother* have made little impact on the power relations between audiences and producers, because while they have more input, what they see on screen is still primarily determined by the corporate interests of the television industry (Ticknell and Raghuram 214). Their article illustrates the importance of considering how 'extra-texts' shape our understanding of a single television text. A key aspect of this is taking stock of how those involved in shaping such content – reality show contestants – make sense of, or interpret their involvement in reality TV, and how their knowledge as audience members comes to bear on this process. Moreover, their stories as contestants circulate within broader public discourses about reality TV and its cultural impact which in turn shapes the audience's understanding of reality TV participation in a variety of ways such as a cautionary tale or evidence of 'fame democracy' in action. Finally, the modes of participation on offer to reality TV audiences challenges preconceived theories about "active" audiences with the current adoption (and celebration) of buzz words like "interactivity."[25] However, we must be careful not to lose sight of how these terms are also imbued with or speak to power relations between audiences and producers.

Cultural Studies scholar Su Holmes ,who has written extensively on reality TV, has commented that the concept of the interactive audience, with its blurred boundaries between text and audience suggests the importance of keeping the 'TV text' for analytic purposes. Holmes argues that this positioning of the audience *in* the text keeps questions about the power relations between text and audience central to our analyses; given reality TV's self-reflexive and self-conscious attitude which invites audiences to think about questions of performance and authenticity. Similarly, Holmes calls for a critical approach that parallels the permeable boundaries of the reality TV text itself, meaning the research must reflect this by blurring textual analysis and insights from viewers, something which my study attempts to grapple with. Throughout the course of this study, I return again and again, to consider how the methodologies I utilize informs my understanding of reality TV and its contestants, and how this impacts the research process, and my position as researcher.

[25]   Su Holmes explains that interactivity "is generally seen to imply some form of transformative relationship between viewer/user and media form, a process in which content is modified upon reception" ("The viewers have" 15).

Finally, research on reality TV tends to be global in scope, signalling the ways in which the format's production has become a cross-cultural affair. Indeed, while it is tempting to construct a study of reality TV that focuses on the 'broad strokes', feminist television criticism is increasingly cognizant of how these larger forces work as constraints, on what audiences consume at the local level. As renowned feminist TV scholars Charlotte Brunsdon and Lynn Spigel write, "Much of feminist television criticism is an attempt to understand the multiple pressures put on texts by the industry, by writers and producers, by the people who interpret them, by censorship or regulation, and by the larger discursive and social context in which programmes circulate" (12). Thus this study also considers the ways in which reality show participants draw on cultural discourses as an interpretive framework for understanding their place within this cultural phenomenon. For example, Anne-Marie Kinahan suggests that utilizing a Cultural Studies framework is useful in considering our cultural 'Other', the US, and its role in the construction of Canada's cultural policies and audience consumption. These seemingly divergent but interconnected fields have enabled me to move beyond merely reproducing a (celebratory) study about 'resistant female audiences' but to consider more carefully the socio-cultural contexts in which women's reality TV participation takes place in Canada, and how this limits the types of exposure they receive, compared to reality show contestants in larger television markets like the UK and America. Such details illustrate how problematic broad or sweeping generalizations about the 'effects' or impact of reality TV participation can be, and it is only through conducting a participant ethnography that such subtleties came to light.

The Audience Method

While many advances were made in this field of study, early feminist audience studies were often criticized for reproducing problematic relations between the feminist researcher and the ordinary female viewer/reader, and that this is a symptom of feminists attempting to thread together textual analysis and empirical research. Charlotte Brunsdon has explored this issue at length, arguing that when textual analyses are placed alongside ethnographic research, the feminist researcher's 'expert' and 'authoritative' readings tend to overshadow the opinions and thoughts of her 'ordinary' female participants. These problems arise most often when the researcher fails to implement a self-reflexive research practice, requiring the researcher to critically reflect

on, interrogate, and question the research process along the way. For instance, in "Media Figures in Identity Construction," feminist media scholar Joke Hermes critiqued Janice Radway, in her study of romance readers, for failing to reflect on the research process. According to Hermes, this 'absence' enabled Radway to utilize only those research results which supported her argument, and constructed her as the all-knowing, 'good feminist' against her un-knowing 'ordinary readers'. Hermes encourages feminist researchers to actively engage with data results that might challenge or contradict their initial research questions, creating a discursive space to consider the power relations between researcher and subject; as well as how we 'construct' the feminine research subject in our work. Feminist scholar Judith Stacey posits that these methodological quandaries are inherent to the project of 'feminist ethnography' arguing that negotiating (unequal) power relations will always be a concern when conducting empirical research.

However, other feminist researchers have called into question the research techniques used by Cultural Studies practitioners, arguing that they are not in line with 'proper ethnography'. For instance Press and Livingstone cite Ien Ang's cross-cultural study of Danish Dallas viewers as one example of an 'improper' ethnographic project. Ang used letters she received from participants, whom she solicited through a Danish women's magazine, as the basis for her study, rather than employing traditional ethnographic methods like participant observation. Instead, her research relied heavily on 'texts' in order to explore the role that pleasure plays in cross-cultural television reception. Press and Livingstone contend that relying solely on these textual accounts with no face-to-face contact render participants largely invisible members of an 'imagined community' rather than researching audiences in their 'natural setting'. They also criticize Ang for her small sample size which consisted of forty-two letters from men and women, arguing that this makes any kind of generalizations about the research very difficult. In their rigid view, 'proper' ethnographic studies should take place over long periods of time and use large sample sizes (i.e., whole communities over years). Thus, they call for a more anthropological approach to contextualize audience research even if the topic under study might require more flexibility and/or not lend itself to some of the aforementioned methods.

Moreover, debate over what constitutes 'proper ethnography' overlooks the contributions and concerns of Cultural Studies research. As Ann Gray points out in her

book, *Research Practice for Cultural Studies*, practitioners tend to focus on smaller but more in-depth studies, because they are concerned with the everyday in a much more *immediate* way. With regards to audience studies in particular, this also assumes that researchers, who conduct large-scale, longitudinal studies, are somehow better positioned to know or reveal truths about TV (audiences) in the first place. Similar to Judith Stacey's assertion that there can only ever be 'partial' feminist ethnographies; we could also argue that there can only ever be 'partial' audience studies which similarly require the researcher to take stock of the challenges faced in representing the Other. Indeed, feminist scholars recognize that "problems are endemic to all ethnographic work – feminist and not – but also that no one method can do everything that feminists might want to do methodologically" (Clarke 345). Consequently feminist audience researchers should be cautious about implementing a research approach that reproduces universalistic truths about women and culture (Lury). Thus it is important for feminist audience researchers to contextualize 'women's' cultural practices, across time and space, and to consider how these changing conceptualizations inform our understandings of these categories.

Recent scholarship on new media, like the internet, and especially reality TV, illustrates the importance of adapting methodology to fit the requirements posed by developing technologies and the changing televisual landscape. As Amanda Lotz and Sharon Ross have shown, research emerging on the use of the internet to conduct audience research has reignited debates about what constitutes 'good' methodological practice and whether the current approaches are easily translated in the virtual world. Further, the internet has come to play a crucial role in the facilitation and management of audiences, as genres such as reality TV incorporate the internet into its very structure both as a marketing tool and to engage television audiences beyond the TV text/program (i.e., *Big Brother*). Researching audiences on the Internet is seen by some as a cheaper and more anonymous alternative to more expensive face-to-face audience research, though it poses its own ethical dilemmas, raising questions about privacy, informed consent and data accessibility (Lotz and Ross 510). Lotz and Ross suggest that this can be dealt with by applying feminist research principles which require the researcher to be self-reflexive throughout the research process to ensure that they have done everything possible to ensure participant privacy and safety. They also contend

that internet research should not replace face-to-face research of television audiences, but should be used to enhance the data.[26] Thus, research methods must always be at the top of the researcher's mind, in order to not only produce thoughtful scholarship that contributes to the field but also to ensure that the researcher herself remains visible in the process.

Approaching Women's Reality TV Participation: The Study

This study approaches this evolving relationship between audience and text, and audience and producer by focusing on reality show contestants, and the ways in which they make sense of their television participation. The immersion of ordinary people into the televisual landscape via reality TV has been heralded by some as evidence that media culture has become increasingly democratic. Alternatively, it has been suggested that:

> Hierarchy doesn't disappear just because ordinary people are now invited to play the game. Television is not and never has been a forum for expressing the interests and urgencies of ordinary people as such since the conditions that subtend their entry into the discourse always transforms them into something else – and this "something else" typically reinscribes preexisting inequalities. (Grindstaff "Just be yourself" 82)

Arguably, reality TV contributes to this reinscription of inequality through its problematic depictions of female contestants and participants. The bulk of feminist criticism on reality TV focuses on analysing and interpreting specific shows and genres, or else attempts to account for women's reception of these shows (as audiences) (Cavender, Bond-Maupin, and Jurik; Engstron; Hasinoff; Johnston; Maher; Matheson). Yet, these studies all exclude the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of the very women who help construct these shows: the contestants. Regardless of any 'preexisting inequalities', women are *choosing* to audition for these programs in record numbers, presumably for a myriad of reasons; further, each woman will have interpreted,

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[26] They refer to this as "multi-sited ethnography" which "uses multiple data sites and methods–to gain a more comprehensive understanding" (Lotz and Ross 510).

experienced, and made sense of her participation differently. And while my work flirts with production studies and political economy, the overarching concern in this study remains a methodological one above all else (i.e., how do we study television 'audiences' in the reality TV era?). This became very clear as the project unfolded itself, and in many ways reflects the changing nature of feminist television research in an increasingly fragmented, technologically driven media landscape; and where scholars are increasingly implicated in the research process where they least expect it.[27]

In many ways, this project also morphed into a study of 'celebrities'; of how we approach the study of celebrities, and the kinds of problems this type of scholarly work poses for media academics. There are reasons why scholars do not often attend to this type of research, something which I did not consider until well into the study. It is difficult to make contact of course, but it also raises questions about the celebrity interview as 'evidence'. How does the scholar work with this data when an integral part of 'celebrity work' is being interviewed by various people in news media? They are adept at the art of self-promotion after all, and yet, I believe we need to be careful not to group all celebrities into one category. As I argue later on, reality show contestants acquire a kind of celebrity that is specific to the contexts of reality TV, illustrating how they often straddle the line between ordinary and celebrity which is revealed through their narratives of participation in a particular socio-cultural context. They are both 'like' professional celebrities, if you will, and different from them, even as some former contestants have become full-fledged professional TV performers.

Therefore, my study sets out to explore these issues, by addressing three main *questions*:

1) How do women make sense of, and understand their participation in reality TV competition shows?

2) What methodological tools are at our disposal to study reality show contestants, and what are the limitations?

[27] Indeed, such concerns mean that other intersecting questions about say, the economic implications of reality TV participation, have been bracketed but are no less worthy of study. Future projects will revisit the data to address these other mitigating concerns but are not the primary focus of what I see, for all intents and purposes, as a foundational study upon which other works will emerge.

3) What can women's participation in reality TV competition shows tell us about the shifting relationship between audiences, producers, and texts in the contemporary television landscape?

These three questions speak to the *goals* of this study:

1) To evaluate and consider the ways in which we approach the study of 'audiences' in the era of reality TV
2) To provide insight into women's motivations and decision-making processes with regards to their participation on reality TV
3) To contribute knowledge about women and media within contemporary society

Underpinning my interest in this topic is the feminist belief that women's experiences and knowledge are valuable and that their contributions can help feminist researchers build knowledge about women, and that those experiences reveal something about how society functions as a whole (Hesse-Biber). In conjunction with my feminist politics, is a much more basic fascination with the power of media in our everyday lives, particularly television. To borrow from renowned feminist media scholar Bonnie J. Dow: "I study television because I think it's important, because I think it could be better, and because I want people to take it seriously. I also study it because I like it" (xiii). Indeed, my decision to focus on the experiences of female reality TV contestants is also inspired by my long-time viewership of such programs. Out of this viewership grew a desire to understand what compels women to choose to nominate themselves and audition for these competition/talent shows which so often seem to vilify, make fun of, and distort who they are. In the same way that women are not 'cultural dupes' but *actively negotiate* with the cultural landscape in ways that make sense to them, I also believe that women have agency when it comes to their participation in reality competitions shows. They might have little control over the production process but they do have a say over how, why, and when they make the choice to enter into that world. Of course, learning about the conditions under which they make those decisions might reveal important insights into the decision-making process. Moreover, understanding the long-term effects of the women's participation is also crucial, in terms of their sense of self, their identity, and their (overall) relationship to the social world. Thus, due to the nature of my intellectual concerns and queries, I am invested in a feminist research practice and approach which seeks to legitimate, value, and build knowledge about

women's experiences via an investigation of their participation in reality TV. What follows is a breakdown of the dissertation chapters which outlines key areas of the study.

In Chapter 1 I discuss the various methods I used to facilitate my research interviews paying particular attention to the blending of traditional in-person interviews with online interviews, an increasingly common feature of qualitative research. I explore some of the challenges that I faced implementing my research design, with suggestions on how other researchers might avoid some of these pitfalls. In particular, I look at the difficulties I faced generating interview respondents. In many respects this is due to the women's particular position as former reality show contestants which I argue qualifies them as a kind of 'elite' interview figure. While there is slim literature on elite interviews (although it is starting to grow), I claim that the current conceptualization of the 'elite' interview figure be expanded to consider the challenges posed by researchers conducting qualitative media research on celebrities. Given the growing interest in researching all facets of the entertainment industry this kind of research will become more common-place as more and more 'ordinary folks' find themselves the content of television.

In Chapter 2, the reader is introduced to do the process of "becoming" a reality show competitor using a chronological framework from 'pre-production', 'production' to 'judging and elimination'. Throughout, the women's voices 'speak' to the popular and scholarly perceptions of reality show contestants. As one might expect they represent a variety of perspectives and feelings, which both challenge and support some of the prevailing views/knowledge we have about the process already.

In Chapter 3 I consider the ways in which the production space of reality TV, as a kind of 'living space', constructs public and private boundaries, and how these work as constraints on the women's sense of self. The struggles over defining such boundaries illustrates the ways in which reality show contestants attempt to construct 'reality TV space' in familiar ways despite the producers best efforts to make the competition environment as 'foreign' or 'defamilarized' as possible.

In Chapter 4 I explore the production of 'reality-celebrity' from the women's perspectives, as they provide insights into what it means to be a celebrity in the age of

reality TV. Their stories reveal the changing nature of fandom and the role of social media and the Internet in shaping fan-encounters. Significantly their reflections on reality-celebrity suggest that it is dependent on a number of structures – economic, technological, and cultural – revealing the need for further examination and exploration of this growing phenomenon. Of particular interest is how through exploring the women's understanding of reality-celebrity, we see the limitations of scholarship that tends to take a rather broad and ethnocentric approach to the study of celebrity (i.e., as primarily American). Thus this aspect of my research shows that there is greater need to contextualize celebrity culturally, especially within Canada.

I conclude my dissertation with a closer examination and exploration of the profound impact that the research process had on my scholar-fan identity. In particular I focus on how interviewing the 'objects' of my reality fandom became an emotional *as well as* an intellectual enterprise. The process of self-reflexivity, while leading me at times into very uncomfortable terrain, revealed in significant ways how the subject positions occupied by both the researcher and respondent are constantly in-flux, refuting any notion that these identities are fixed. Moreover, I begin to unpack what my particular experiences might have to say about the concept of the 'scholar-fan' especially within feminist television criticism and whether the research process itself can be construed as a site for fan activity/productivity, which brings with it both pleasure and discontent as both the reality celebrities and the researcher engage in a form of co-creation of new texts for consumption albeit within an academic setting.

Chapter 1.

Interviewing (Extra)Ordinary Women:
An Overview of Qualitative Methods

Qualitative interviewing has undergone a number of changes with the rapid growth and accessibility of technologies, particularly the Internet, providing researchers with a variety of tools and sites to conduct interviews. Previously, researchers were limited to telephone, in-person or mail to conduct interviews which depending on the size and length of a project could become very costly and time consuming. With the advent of the Internet, researchers are no longer bound by geographical or time constraints, making it possible to reliably interview people across local, national and international borders. Moreover, researchers can use the internet to research and locate potential respondents, and can schedule interviews and answer questions in a timely, if not immediate manner.

I made use of many of the technologies available in order to locate respondents and conduct a large swath of my interviews. I was primarily driven by practical concerns however I learned a lot from utilizing different interview formats, combining more traditional in-person meetings with online interviews. As with most academic studies, I faced a number of challenges but also surprises as a result of the research design choices I made, which will be explored. Namely, I will review and compare the different interview formats highlighting key issues along with suggestions for others who might be contemplating qualitative interviews, especially online ones. The question of methods is an important one for feminist researchers who are concerned with the broad impact those technological changes have had on media culture and its constantly evolving contexts. We also need to consider the impact that our choices might have on respondents and/or prospective ones, especially with the growing role that technology and the internet have come to occupy in our everyday lives, and how we might be inadvertently be excluding some women from participating due to external constraints

such as socioeconomic status, lack of access or knowledge. At the same time, interview researchers can play an important role in helping to facilitate participation through guidance and support, and where necessary by providing access to the tools. Regardless of these issues, researchers need to remain flexible and be able to adapt to hiccups in the interview process, at all stages.

As part of a discussion about the different interview formats, I consider the classification of the reality show contestant as a kind of 'elite figure', a subgroup identified by researchers as posing a number of distinct issues for interviewers. While there is scant (but growing) research or literature on interviewing media figures, I contend that the current understanding of elite interviews needs to be expanded to include individuals with ties to the media world. I found that my experience interviewing former reality show contestants mirrored many of the issues discussed in the literature suggesting that their transition from audience to contestant constructed them as a different kind of research respondent than simply 'audience member'. As I demonstrate throughout this dissertation, reality show contestants have become celebrities in their own right, catapulting them from an 'ordinary' life to receiving (inter)national recognition. This was an important consideration during the early stages of research design and will be discussed more closely in the following pages.

Interview Research Design

My decision to use qualitative interviews was a key component in data collection and informed the number and length of interviews that I hoped to obtain. I aimed to conduct 15-20 interviews using both in-person and online formats. In the end, I interviewed 14 former contestants who had competed on *Canada's Next Top Model, Project Runway Canada, Canadian Idol, So You Think You Can Dance Canada, Popstars: Boy Meets Girl* and *Rock Star: INXS.*[28]

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[28] The breakdown as follows: *Project Runway Canada* (4), *Canada's Next Top Model* (4), *Canadian Idol* (2), *Rock Stars: INXS* (2), *Popstars* (1), and *So You Think You Can Dance Canada* (1). The women ranged in age from late teens to mid 30s, and resided primarily in Metro Vancouver, Toronto/Ontario.

Moreover, I sought to gain a thick and detailed description of the women's experiences, so my sample size was smaller but more focused.[29] It should also be noted that I received Ethics approval for my research study which was required before I could make any contact with potential candidates. My study satisfied/complies with all requirements as determined by Simon Fraser University's Office of Research Ethics. Given the nature of my study, research participants faced very minimal risks; at most they might have experienced some discomfort talking about certain events or people. Part of the consent process requires that I maintain the women's privacy, and while I gave them the choice whether to use their real names or a pseudonym, I do not explicitly link them to their programmes as a way to ensure some degree of anonymity, especially where their comments reveal show secrets or discuss sensitive issues.

Generating Respondent Rata, Facebook and 'First Contact'

Once my ethics application was approved, I continued compiling information to begin the long process of locating the women I hoped to interview. My pool of respondents was drawn from an 'existing sample frame' as the criteria for participation were quite specific and applicable to a very narrow demographic: Canadian citizen, 19 years of age or over, and a contestant on a competition or talent-based reality show. I conducted an intense web search, compiling information of all former female contestants that appeared on popular Canadian competition/talent shows. I easily accessed basic information, such as full name, via the Internet using sites such as Wikipedia and tv.com which provided detailed episode lists and show details. I then cross-referenced all of the gathered information with that posted on official network websites (or personal/professional websites), as they usually contain detailed profiles about contestants that sometimes even included their age and general location (i.e., city, province).[30] I used the information to help create and organize an extensive list of

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[29]   I am not concerned with *how many* women participate in these programs, nor am I attempting to account for, or make generalizations about *all* women's experiences of participating on reality TV.

[30]   This strategy did not work as well for programmes that had been off-air for some time and/or predated the heavy use of the Internet in television promotion. Network sites also tend to provide information on the most recent season of a show, which means that older information is removed and/or very limited.

potential contacts grouped by location (where that information was available) as I planned on contacting women who lived in Metro Vancouver first.[31]

Once this initial stage of information gathering was completed, I conducted a second search using Facebook. Founded in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg, Facebook is a popular social networking site (SNS) that allows people to connect with each other using their personal profiles. Users determine how much personal information to reveal on their profile such as pictures and biographical information, and a share function allows the quick transmission of links to websites and so on. Indeed, much has been made of Facebook's mass/ global appeal with the number of users still growing; it is available in over 70 languages. According to Facebook's most recent numbers (at the time of writing), there are 901 million monthly active users, and approximately 18 million Canadian users.[32] The social media statistics site Social Bakers reports that the average Canadian Facebook user is female (53%) and 25-34 years old, with the next largest demographic falling in the 18-24 age brackets.[33] Moreover, the company reported in 2009 that users have an average of 120 'friends', illustrating the great potential for Facebook in conducting academic research.[34]

The use of SNSs for scholarly purposes presents researchers with some ethical dilemmas, and as argued by Danah Boyd, the space of Facebook is a 'gray area' due to its collapsing of public and private boundaries.[35] To use the site, a person must create an account and log in with each visit thus there is an expectation that the site is

[31]   This refers to the municipalities outside (and including) the city of Vancouver such as Burnaby, Langley, New Westminster, North Vancouver, Surrey, Richmond, and Coquitlam. For a complete list see: http://www.metrovancouver.org/Pages/default.aspx

[32]   Drawn from the most recent data, posted under the Facebook 'Newsroom' subheading, "Key Facts." Available at: http://newsroom.fb.com/content/default.aspx?NewsAreaId=22

[33]   See: http://www.socialbakers.com/facebook-statistics/canada

[34]   As reported by the Facebook data team: http://www.facebook.com/note.php?note_id=55257228858

[35]   These methodological debates can be viewed as part of a broader and ongoing discussion within academic circles about the ethical concerns posed by 'web-based research' as the internet has become such a significant site for the production of 'texts', providing researchers with an expansive and limitless source of existing or 'raw' data. However, as television scholars Amanda Lotz and Sharon Ross argue, researchers must apply the same principles that guide more traditional non-web-based research in order to ensure that they are "protecting participants from harm as the guiding factor in making methodological decisions" (504).

somewhat semi-private. However, once a person has registered and created a profile they can use the search function to locate other users with the option to send them messages or friend requests. To complicate matters, individual users decide how public or private to make their personal information (although all names are searchable in the Facebook directory), such that, some users choose to make their profiles fully accessible via web search engines like Google, while others choose to place restrictions on public searches, or even altering individual settings to limit the amount of information available to 'friends' (i.e., making a photo album available to a select number of people). Thus the semi-public space(s) of Facebook might lead a researcher to assume that the more public a person makes themselves on Facebook, the less concerned they are with privacy however, this is not always the case, and researchers need to consider how users might still perceive this space, or spaces within the site as private even if it seems to conflict with our own understandings or perceptions of what constitutes public and private space. Facebook's blurring of public and private boundaries contributes to such contradictions, suggesting that even those users who appear to be rather open and forthcoming with their cyber-friends could very well perceive an invitation to participate in a research study as a form of intrusion. Indeed, the growing number of recent news stories about Facebook and 'privacy issues' suggesting that the site's 'gray area' status is an ongoing source of conflict and debate amongst users, employers, and the legal community over defining public and private boundaries in the Internet era. While I certainly acknowledge the ethical issues posed by SNSs like Facebook, I argue that such sites can be used in ethical ways that limits the amount of harm or intrusion to users such as adhering to a strict schedule of communication and maintaining high levels of professionalism at all times (i.e., I never sent 'friend requests', always used formal writing).

The current literature on Facebook as a research tool or site while slim (but growing) reveals how researchers are using it to locate 'hidden populations' – those individuals who often go out of their way to remain invisible and/or are transitory (Bhutta; Balter and Brunet). In my research however, there is somewhat more ambiguity given that my selected participant demographic started out relatively unknown or 'invisible', became very visible, then returned to a less public life (for the most part). No doubt there are those reality show contestants who retreat into a more private life once they finish

filming, choosing not to engage with the public or their fans. Yet, SNSs like Facebook have become an important tool in the cultivation and production of celebrity and are often a key element in creating publicity about reality show contestants. Indeed, while conducting my Facebook search, I came across a number of 'fan pages' for former competitors in addition to personal profiles. To complicate matters, many women had profiles prior to their television appearance but after becoming a public figure found themselves bombarded with messages from fans, many of whom also sent friend requests, finding themselves highly visible and public in the gray space of Facebook. For instance, I already had an established Facebook relationship with one of my research participants (prior to conducting the interviews), and I often marvelled at the way in which she used her Facebook profile, completely blurring the boundaries between friends and fans, the personal and the professional, and the ordinary and celebrity. She accepts fan 'friend requests' with little hesitation and uses her profile to promote her music and other ventures, and fans tag her in pictures from concerts and other sightings which she often responds to. However, some of our mutual friends have expressed frustration with this, as Facebook provides a constant newsfeed of updates thus subjecting them to her celebrity work something which they do not relate to, for the most part. Thus, a Facebook user's celebrity status can similarly alter the way we understand these semi-private spaces whether as friends or researchers who are figuring out 'best practices' for SNSs in their research.

Interestingly, searching for former reality show contestants on Facebook was not as straightforward as one might anticipate. Along the way I encountered some obstacles such as name duplications, fake profiles (usually fan-generated), as well as the possibility that some of the women used variations on their names such as nicknames, abbreviations or a married surname. Faced with these complications, I had to narrow my search, using other qualifiers such as location or other spellings. In order to confirm that the profiles were legitimate and not fake or fan-generated, I also cross-referenced the names whenever possible by sifting through other contestants' 'friend lists' (as members have the option of making this information available only to people in their friend network). As the interviews unfolded, I relied on this strategy to extend my pool of potential candidates especially as a few of the women recommended this, thus giving me permission to peruse their social network information.

Once I felt satisfied that the information I had was useful and legitimate, I began sending invitations/calls for participants using Facebook's 'message' function. Unlike, general calls posted on a message board, I was able to personalize my call by addressing it directly to the potential respondent. As per the requirements of SFU's ethics review board, I had to identify myself – full name, contact information, university affiliation – along with details outlining the purpose of my study and participant criteria. The first 'wave' of calls was addressed to women who were known to reside in and around Vancouver, as I wanted to schedule in-person interviews first before moving online. In some cases, where I was unable to locate a former contestant on Facebook, I sent personal invitations via other means such as personal websites using the contact information provided, or webpage submission form, using my university email address to lend credibility to my position and purpose. This approach led to the scheduling and completion of two interviews, and in both instances, I received immediate responses, asking for follow-up information and/or to schedule an interview.

However, relying primarily on Facebook to make 'first contact' did pose some limitations (Baltar and Brunet 70). First, just because somebody has a profile does not mean that they access it regularly, especially after the novelty wears off; indeed, it is not unheard of for some users to basically abandon their account, rather than deactivate it. In my case, this was exacerbated by the fact that many of the women received large volumes of messages on a regular basis, and more so for those women who had recently appeared on television. This issue was brought to my attention during one interview through the following exchange:

PI: what was it like dealing with instant popularity after the show?

R: well, it was nice, it was definitely nice. I liked uh…people were, people would come up to me and say very pleasant things about how they liked me the best, they thought I was like a real character, that I was their favourite, they really wanted me to win. I was like, thank you, I really appreciate that. Um, I never really got any hostility at all. Um, my Facebook inbox is completely full. *You're actually the only person who emailed me, saying anything, and I've replied back. I figured you had like a legitimate thing to do so I was like, ya, I'm gonna help you.* I've had a lot of other people calling me or like, not calling me but like messaging me on Facebook or wanting to add me, like 77 people on Facebook right now who want to be my friend and I don't know what to do with it. It's pretty overwhelming sometimes. I

have the other people from the show, all the other girls on, and I get friendship requests from people and the only thing in common is this person. Like, some random person from Massachusetts will be adding me and I'm like I have no idea who you are and then I look at the friends in common and it's E from Canada's [Next Top Model]. I don't even know if E knows you so I'm not going to add you, sorry.[36] (emphasis added)

As R's comments illustrate, this can make logging into Facebook a daunting and overwhelming experience, as the women must sift through the messages, deciding for themselves who is 'saying something' which leads to the second limitation. Due to the large number of messages that the women received, my calls for participants might have been construed as "spam." Interview researchers using social media must consider this carefully because bombarding users with multiple messages or posts could very well get the researcher blocked thus cutting off contact altogether (Baltar and Brunet 69). I dealt with this by spacing out the participant calls over two weeks in case they were overlooked the first time, for whatever reason. If I did not receive a response within two weeks of the second call I considered this a 'no' reply and crossed the person off my list. I found that the response rate following the second call was much lower than after the first one although in a few cases I did receive a response although they did not pan out after follow-up replies and emails.

In an attempt to overcome some of these limitations, I also relaxed some of the privacy settings on my personal Facebook profile (as I used it to contact prospective participants) assuming that many of them would be curious to find out who I was (if they were not already 'Googling' me). I hoped that linking my researcher self to my personal social media profile would help personalize the communication a bit, something which is not possible with other, more anonymous forms of contact such as a flyer. Giving potential respondents some access to your personal information is also a gesture of reciprocity, as they can suss you out a bit before making a decision, especially if they are hesitant about participating.

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[36] All references to other persons made by the respondents have been changed.

The third limitation, depending on one's perspective, is just the sheer amount of time one must spend on Facebook during the research and recruitment phase. Social media's 'boundarylessness' makes it difficult to ignore but also tempts us to respond to friends and family members posts and so forth, even if it cuts into work time. As Boyd argues, in this age of 'social convergence' Facebook is a prime example of how the internet collapses "disparate social contexts…into one" (18) forcing users to manage multiple audiences (i.e., work, family, friends, strangers) "without a social script" (16). All social media users are faced with this predicament, as we must learn how to juggle all of our various audiences, and make decisions about whom to invite into our cyber life, and whom to exclude. Yet, it is important to stay on top of all communication and to reply to queries and comments as quickly as possible – you do not want to take so long that the person reconsiders or changes their mind about participating in the study. Moreover, as became clear to me with my particular group of respondents, timing was everything as their window of availability was indeed rather small.

For all of these reasons (and probably others not listed here), interview researchers recommend that Facebook be used primarily in the recruitment stage rather than the final destination, or interview site, making it the jumping off point for the next stage of communication whether proper email, telephone or an interview (Baltar and Brunet 70). This was how I approached the use of Facebook in my study; as a useful tool for locating and contacting a predetermined list of potential research participants that would then (hopefully) lead to qualitative research interviews. The use of social networking sites like Facebook are useful and accessible tools for making the first contact, helping to establish rapport with interested candidates, and allows the researcher to set out the parameters of the study from the start such as expectations, time limits and so forth. Again, the researcher should expect that this might not always happen, and be prepared to use social networking as the main communication tool, as this might be what is most comfortable or familiar for a prospective participant. For instance, one participant ignored my repeated suggestions to email me at my university address, and instead, I spent more than five weeks exchanging messages with her over Facebook, as she seemed reluctant to commit to an interview date which was compounded by her child's schedule. Thankfully, my persistence and patience paid off, and the interview eventually happened but in another similar exchange the respondent

made it clear from the start that she had privacy concerns and needed some time to consider her decision. After a number of exchanges that took place over a few weeks, responding to her questions and concerns at-length, she halted communication, and after a couple of gentle follow-up prompts informed me that she was unable to go through with the interview. Moreover, even when researchers achieve 'first contact', anything can change, such was the case with a few women who, after expressing enthusiastic interest in their initial responses, did not respond to my follow-up emails. Indeed, working with human subjects requires a lot of patience and perseverance.

Snowballing and getting Referrals

Interview researchers understand the importance of maximizing any and all pre-existing contacts in one's social network to recruit suitable research participants whether by identifying or else contacting someone who might be able to put you in contact with a potential interviewee. This process, commonly referred to as snowballing, is one of the best tools in the interview researcher's arsenal and I employed it at two stages in the research process: pre-contact and once the interviews were underway. Given reality TV's popularity and management of large numbers of show participants, we might assume that the snowballing technique would be prosperous and self-evident as, "one is now more likely to be someone, or to know someone who has been on television" (Redmond 28). Certainly, when I was preparing my interview materials, I already had the names of two women whom I hoped to interview; women that I had met through mutual friends, and one I had become friendly with.[37] In both cases, I approached my social contact first to get a feeling for whether they thought they would agree to be interviewed, and also as a courtesy to them, in case there were any personal issues I was unaware of, and which might interfere with their willingness to approach them on my behalf. One friend let me know soon after that I had the go ahead to initiate contact and provided me with the woman's email address. The other lead took a bit longer to negotiate, as she was my partner's childhood friend and he was concerned that asking something of her

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[37] This does not include knowledge of other people who have appeared on television, whether as show hosts, or contestants on other reality shows but who did not fit the criteria for my particular study. Moreover, when talking with strangers about my work, I almost always met a few people who also knew of someone who had appeared on TV.

might have adverse effects on their relationship given that her growing celebrity and success in the years following her TV appearance had negatively altered some of her other friendships. I decided to broach the topic in a neutral, friendly setting, bringing up my impending research in a casual manner to friends at a social gathering where she was in attendance. She expressed great enthusiasm for my work and offered to help out by being interviewed. This laid back approach was very useful as it took the responsibility off his shoulders, and placed it squarely on mine, suggesting that interview researchers also need to consider the impact that snowballing might have on their personal relationships, when they start asking friends, family members or even romantic partners for help recruiting respondents. However, researchers should also be prepared to have their requests denied.

For instance, while researching interview candidates on Facebook, I discovered by chance that one of the women I wanted to interview was 'friends' with an academic acquaintance. I decided to message my acquaintance first, with the hope that she would be able to, at the very least give me a good referral. However, her reply hinted that it was unlikely her friend would agree to participate in my study, due to her negative experience as a contestant but she agreed to ask her for my sake. In the end, her assumptions were confirmed, as she conveyed to me that her friend was still too upset to talk about the show and not willing to discuss it with me. Of course, as a researcher, these are precisely the kinds of respondents you *want* to interview because of their strong feelings and opinions, and I really wanted to speak with at least one former contestant who was viewed as a controversial figure. In reality TV such figures tend to be labelled as 'villains' or 'bitches' usually reserved for outspoken or assertive women who refuse to play nice. While this example proves how social networks do not always produce the desired results, researchers still glean something, even if only a tiny insight, into the particular community or demographic being studied.

In addition to making use of pre-existing contacts, interview researchers usually ask respondents for referrals to expand their interview base. Referrals allow interview researchers to bypass the call for participants hurdle, as the benefits to having someone be able to speak on your behalf is invaluable. Two of the more enthusiastic respondents did not need much convincing, and were more than happy to reach out to some of their co-competitors. This tended to work best where the contestant had established

meaningful relationships with other contestants and so felt comfortable asking people they considered their friends. In both cases, the respondent contacted a couple of people on my behalf, and then contacted me to let me know who was willing to speak with me and how to contact them. However, referrals may take a different form. For instance, upon concluding the first interview, the respondent gave me permission, without provocation, to use her name when contacting other women from her show season although, this did not result in any additional interviews.[38] Despite these successes, I found that I had to be discerning when asking respondents for referrals. For instance, one particularly chatty respondent spoke at length about a friendship that she had developed during the competition but when I asked for a referral at the end of the interview, she seemed reluctant to help me, implying that her friend would not want to participate which surprised me as I felt the interview had gone well. Sometimes this happens, as some respondents think they are protecting their friends. While this may have been the case, I also wondered whether her ego might have led to her *evasive* response as she has achieved some industry success post-show.[39] Other respondents were more *direct* with me when I asked for referrals, typically commenting that they had not maintained contact with their co-competitors and presumably did not feel comfortable approaching them after all this time. Similarly so much time had passed for one respondent since her competition show aired that it would have been next to impossible for her to help me. In another example, I attempted to get a referral after an interview by sending a follow-up email asking for assistance (she had signed the section of the consent form giving me permission to do so) but I never received a response, supporting

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[38] I did receive one response from that season's winner but she informed me that she was unable to participate due to legal documents she signed preventing her from discussing it with anyone. This particular contestant's post-show struggles were well-documented in the Canadian press, including an eating disorder (which was totally glossed over on the programme). She has since left the modeling industry and for the most part, lives a 'private' life.

[39] Moreover, she seemed to enjoy talking at length about the ways in which her 'new life' gave her access to other celebrities, especially when they recognized her.

the recommendation that interview researchers ask in-person and immediately after the interview has taken place, if possible.[40]

In a couple of instances, where interview respondents revealed conflicted and ambivalent feelings about their co-competitors, I chose not to ask for referrals. These critically framed comments tended to emanate from feelings of Otherness; because they found it difficult to make personal connections with other contestants or else took a more distanced strategy, placing the game component of the competition as the primary goal, not friend-making' For these reasons, interview referrals must be constantly negotiated and never assumed. However, this process of negotiation might also have been complicated by feelings of 'intimidation' and my position as an emerging researcher but through the process I have come to the understanding that when interviewing, the best approach is to be pushy *without* appearing as such. Significantly, the referral process illustrates how the relationships between reality show contestants are just as complicated, emotionally charged, and politically motivated as other kinds of social relations. On some level, I think I assumed, rather optimistically and naively, that despite any personal differences that the experience of competition and filming would create some kind of lasting bond but I learned quickly that this was far from the case.

A Note on Recruitment: Respondent Challenges

One of the things that surprised me at this stage of the research process was how difficult it was to get women to participate in my study – I contacted a total of 83 women – and my response rate was very low, less than 20%. Earlier on in the research design phase, I contacted an Australian PhD candidate who also interviewed reality show contestants for her dissertation, querying about her interview techniques. In response, she supportively replied that I would have "no problem" finding participants.[41] As I later learned though, her experience recruiting research participants was vastly different from mine; describing in her methodology chapter (which she generously shared with me) how she "had more people willing to be interviewed than I require[d]"

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[40] Interestingly, a number of the women I interviewed also travelled quite a bit for work, or were in the process of relocating for work purposes, suggesting that in some cases, no replies could be attributed to a hectic schedule.

[41] Personal email communication, May 20, 2010.

and that "very few people I approached declined to take part in [the] study." However, she worked previously as a journalist, and had interviewed some of the people she later recruited for her study, thus giving her an advantage from the start.

In order to overcome this particular challenge, qualitative researchers Herbert Rubin and Irene Rubin suggest that researchers should spend some time participating in the community they wish to study, referred to as participant observation (79). However, this assumes fairly easy access to the community being studied, without acknowledging the ways in which certain spaces are inaccessible or privatized such as the corporate media spaces of television production thus, in order to become a participant-observer, I would have to become a contestant on one of the reality shows that my respondents appeared on, which was very impractical and impossible, as I am neither qualified nor skilled to do so. So, were my lack of pre-existing contacts, and inability to directly participate in the community I was studying to blame for the low response rate? Indeed, it was difficult not to feel like a failure when I realized I was just shy of meeting my minimum of 15 interviews, and that those had taken almost 6 months to achieve.

While I do not have much in the way of definitive answers, I can offer something in the way of informed speculation. During the process of writing this dissertation, I kept coming back to a conversation I had with a woman who produces Canadian reality TV shows, at a women and media conference held in Vancouver which took place during the latter stage of interviewing. We had an engaging discussion about my work and reality TV in general, and I shared with her my struggles finding research respondents. Much to my surprise, *she* did not seemed surprised, and proceeded to share with me her difficulties finding Canadian participants for the programmes that she produced! In comparison, she noted how Americans were far more willing to participate in her programmes, regardless of their profession, leading her to conclude that Canadians are much more 'private' and guarded than Americans. Of course, my intent is not to make broad generalizations about either Canadians or Americans but rather, her observations say something about the importance of cultural traditions and practices in our valuation of media experience(s) which may in turn inform our desire (or lack thereof) to speak about them. Common perceptions hold that US culture is more grounded in 'the popular', and that the commercial entertainment/media industries play a much more central role in the everyday lives of Americans as opposed to Canadians, who are far less invested but

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gladly consume what entertainment goods the US has to offer. Moreover, if we look at reality TV specifically, it has become far more accepted and 'normalized' in American popular culture; indeed some might argue it is the quintessential American TV genre. Comparatively, the idea of Canadian reality TV is still fairly new to television audiences, with many viewers criticizing Canadian shows for lacking originality (i.e., an adaptation of a popular US brand) or high production values. Therefore, on some level Canadian audiences, and even former reality show contestants might hold the belief that these shows are inferior and therefore unworthy of serious discussion. Perhaps then, on some level, Canadian audiences or former reality show contestants might not see the value in sharing their thoughts, feelings, and insights on the genre in a national or local context, despite Rubin and Rubin's assertion: "Once contact has been made, most people like to talk about themselves; they enjoy the sociability and sense of accomplishment and are pleased that somebody is interested in what they have to say" (78).[42]

Interview Tools and Formats: Review and Comparison

In this section I review the types of interviews held, and some of the issues that came up, and offer some practical tips on how best to deal with them.

In-person (Synchronous)

As noted earlier in the chapter, the first round of interviews was held with former contestants who still resided in Metro Vancouver, and of those interviews, four took place in Vancouver, one was held in Burnaby, and one in Coquitlam. One other interview was held in Vancouver while a respondent was in the city for work, and I felt it was best to arrange for in-person meetings wherever possible. These interviews were either held in a public location or a participant's home, both of which posed unique benefits and drawbacks, as I gave respondents input on the interview setting as I wanted them to be comfortable, and to feel that they had some control over the events.

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[42]   Notably, qualitative researcher Carole Warren prefaces her use of this Rubin and Rubin quote with, "at least in the American context" (90).

Most interview textbooks discourage researchers from holding interviews in public spaces such as coffee shops, as they are prone to high levels of background noise which can diminish the quality of the interview recording. As mentioned already, I felt that I had to be very accommodating, given my interview respondents' media savviness but also their reticence about the interview process itself. For instance, my very first interview respondent asked to speak with me via phone before committing to an interview date; as if she was 'pre-screening' me. Moreover, given their busy schedules, I wanted to make the interview location as convenient as possible for them, so if that meant a coffee shop was closest to them, or their place of work, then that is where we met. In one such situation, I travelled an hour outside of the city to meet a woman, as she had to find childcare yet was clearly not comfortable inviting me to her home, therefore coming to her seemed like the best option (even though I had to arrange my own travel, as it was not easy to get to her by public transit). Returning to the issue of recording quality, I found no major issues with the digital recorder that I used, so long as it was placed close to the respondent and/or halfway between us. On the occasion when the recording picked up background noises such as loud voices or cars, transcribing was indeed more labourious and most time-consuming when background voices overlapped with the respondent's making it almost impossible to distinguish between them. However, these issues were not limited to in-person interviews but also impact online interviews which I will look at in more detail in the next section.

To avoid some of these interviewing pitfalls, researchers recommend meeting in more private settings such as a home or office, and on two other occasions, I was invited to hold interviews in the respondent's home, with one respondent generously picking me up and dropping me off at public transit! I was both surprised and grateful that these women felt comfortable enough to invite a complete stranger into their homes but perhaps the comfort and convenience of holding the interview on their 'turf' outweighed any potential risks. For the researcher, holding an interview in the respondent's "own environment" gives you privileged access to their world, providing "additional insights into the participants' setting" (Mikecz 488). One of the key benefits is the ability to curb many of the noises and distractions of 'public' interviews but again, while this was definitely the case with the one interview – we sat in a very quiet room with very minimal noise – in the other interview I found there to be a number of disruptions, some of which

seemed to distract the respondent. During the interview, her boyfriend came home and was momentarily a part of the conversation, then the neighbours came by, and her dog would bark occasionally due to the outside noise. With every distraction she seemed to become less focused but thankfully the distractions coincided with the wrap-up phase of the interview. Therefore, domestic interviews have their drawbacks as there is less distance between the interview respondent and the space of the interview (and if you've ever worked from home you understand this); or to put it another way, when you meet someone in a more neutral setting such as a coffee shop, it is easier to shut out external distractions whereas this is less easily accomplished when you are at home, where the boundaries between work and leisure are becoming increasingly blurred, and where you are constantly juggling many demands and people. Thus, interview researchers should take stock of, and reflect on, the ways in which the changing work-life balance affects conceptions of 'public'and 'private' interview settings.

In conjunction with this last point, I want to briefly address some of the particularities of conducting an interview on the researcher's 'turf'. As previously revealed, I knew one of my respondents fairly well prior to conducting my study, and our mutual comfort with each other meant that holding her interview at my place was a viable option. While on the one hand, this was a major convenience for me, cutting down on travel time and costs, on the other hand, hosting the interview also posed some challenges. One of the advantages, was that I felt comfortable and relaxed interviewing her, and unlike many of the other interviews, I believed this interview would unfold more like a conversation, with less concern about time constraints. Indeed, she seemed very intent on giving me as much information as possible, as she seemed excited to help with my study. As I expected, this particular interview ended up being one of my longest, at about 3 hours, however, upon her request, we did take a couple of breaks where she needed a moment to get a drink or to collect her thoughts. There were ramifications to conducting the interview in such an intimate and personal setting, for while we had gotten to know each other over the years, I still only really knew this person from a distance with most of our time together spent socializing with mutual friends. Therefore, the interview process added an emotional depth or dimension to our relationship that did not previously exist, as I learned things about her that I did not know or only had second hand knowledge of, leaving me with a sense of closeness or bonding (even if only on my

part). For these reasons, researchers are no doubt cautious about interviewing people that they are close with or already know, as this could (falsely) lead to feelings that blur the line between friend and researcher, or cause the researcher to treat the respondent differently (i.e., take advantage of their time). Researchers must resist this though, and be attentive to indirect cues such as fatigue and boredom (i.e., checking their cell phone) signalling that it is time to wrap up, as some respondents whether friends or not, might be too polite to request this. The social space of the interview does matter and can shape or influence the outcome of the data, or may even impact the interviewer-respondent relationship. Finally, researchers should bear in mind that respondents, especially those from marginalized or minority communities might take a myriad of factors into consideration when deciding on an interview location such as personal safety, cost, and time, especially if they have dependents. Online interviews, while useful for a number of reasons, also resolve some of these aforementioned concerns, allowing both parties to participate in a location of their choosing.

Online/Skype (Synchronous)

Online interviews have become an increasingly common feature of qualitative research, especially as they allow researchers to overcome some hurdles that might otherwise prevent interviews from happening altogether. As a graduate student with very limited funds, it was neither economically feasible nor realistic for me to fly all over the country to conduct interviews, thus having technologies at my disposal that resolved such geographical barriers was immensely helpful and crucial to the completion of this stage of the research.

More than half of my interviews were conducted using Skype which is a second generation, voice over internet protocol (VoIP) system that replicates the telephone for registered users. The use of Skype as a research tool has been lauded by researchers like Paul Hanna and Robin Cooper as an effective way to replace face-to-face interviews, especially in situations where it might not be possible or desired. Unlike the traditional telephone, users are not limited to voice-only communication but have the option to add a web camera, which adds a visual dimension, thus mimicking very well conventional face-to-face communication. As part of the consent process, I gave online interview respondents the option of participating either with or without the camera.

Electronic consent is also tricky because online research tools/sites can severely minimize face-to-face contact especially email, chat rooms, message boards, and internet messaging applications, making it difficult to confirm a respondent's identity. However, I had little trouble confirming the identity of my respondents given their public profiles and previous television appearances, and in all but a few cases where a camera could not be accessed, respondents chose to interview with the camera (and I informed them that I was only recording the audio, not the video). While there are a number of web-recording programs now in existence that allow you to record the audio using an internal program (i.e., Skype has developed their own recording application), I chose to record all interviews using an external digital recorder which was placed close to the speakers as I was more comfortable with this method.

The internet as a research site has become a growing concern for researchers (as well as university research ethics boards) who have a legal, ethical, and professional obligation to ensure the privacy and safety of their research participants regardless of setting. With face-to-face interviews, participants are given a copy of the consent form to read, sign, and discuss before proceeding, and promptly given a copy for their own records after signing the form. However, this is not possible with online interviews so what are the options? For my study, I chose to read out loud a copy of the consent form verbatim prior to the interview after which I solicited any questions or calls for clarification, and once satisfied, the respondent then gave me verbal consent in lieu of a written signature. Immediately following the interview I filled out an electronic copy of the consent form with the applicable information and emailed it to the respondent to ensure that they had a copy for their personal records.

So while I chose to conduct all of the Skype interviews from home using my personal computer (to minimize noise and ensure privacy), interview respondents chose to participate in the places where they felt most comfortable. For instance, one respondent spoke to me using her laptop and earphones while sitting at a busy Toronto coffee shop while another woman held the interview from her place of work in New York. Another respondent spoke to me from her laptop while sitting at her family's kitchen table. I found that some of these interviews replicated the same issues that I dealt with in the face-to-face interviews. A coffee shop is busy for obvious reasons – it is a popular gathering place for people – and similarly the domestic space of the kitchen is a hub of

family activity and socializing such that, during this particular interview, the respondent's parents came home, briefly interrupting the interview in a very amusing way. The respondent took the opportunity to introduce me to her father, who appeared rather curious about what was happening and temporarily appeared within the camera's frame, looking directly into the camera (and at me), at which time we exchanged pleasantries before he left the room to let us attend to our business. I found this interesting for two reasons: 1) I suspect that her parents encouraged her to hold the interview in a more 'public' space, perhaps for safety reasons and to make sure I was credible, and 2) how the web camera acts as a tool of representation and mediation within qualitative interviews, as it frames the subject for the researcher and vice versa. Of course, this issue was raised as the respondents in the remaining online interviews typically spoke to me from the comfort of their home or apartment, usually while sitting on a couch, and unlike face-to-face interviews, the web camera determines the framing or interview context for the researcher, thus limiting access to clues about the respondent's "own environment" (Mikecz 488). Yet, web cameras offer the promise of "spectatorial closeness to otherwise distant terrain and bodies" (White "Too close to see" 11). There is something 'distant but also intimate' about web cameras and this deserves more attention by interview researchers, especially when reflecting on how our chosen research tools influence, shape, and construct the researcher-researched relationship.[43]

Some Practical Considerations for Online Interviewing

While programs like Skype offer a relatively cheap and user-friendly solution to long-distance interviewing, researchers must bear in mind that the digital divide is very much a reality for many individuals who lack the disposable income necessary to keep up with the latest (and constantly changing) computer technologies. Therefore, researchers should be prepared to offer another mode of communication for instance, one of my respondents informed me that her laptop was out of commission, so I accommodated her by holding the interview using Skype-to-cell phone. For a relatively

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[43] As Michele White writes: "Academic and popular narratives make it seem as if the internet offers live experiences and access to living individuals and that the technologies are alive" ("Television and Internet Differences" 345). Instead, White suggests that the 'naturalness' and 'liveness' of the Internet is socially constructed and enabled by technological settings, and does not offer unmediated access to 'the real'.

low service fee, Skype allows you to make VoIP calls to landlines or cell phones; I simply opened a temporary account for the duration of the online interviewing phase so I could make long distance calls at little cost (as I no longer maintain a 'landline'). Additionally, researchers should be prepared to offer basic instruction and/or tech support, as respondents will typically have varying levels of knowledge and familiarity with computer software. Luckily, I found that all but one of the respondents was already familiar and comfortable using Skype and the one respondent who was new adjusted quickly and we did not encounter any major issues during the interview.

Based on my personal experiences with Skype, I was able to anticipate and prepare for the problem of 'dropped calls' which can happen if there is a high volume of activity or somebody has a bad connection. Fortunately, I only encountered this problem during one Skype interview, where the call was dropped numerous times as we started but after reconnecting a few times the call took and we finished the interview with no further technological glitches. To minimize the likelihood of 'dropped calls', prior to each interview I checked the Internet connection using Skype's practice call test(s) to ensure that everything was in working order. I also sent a quick chat message to the participant just before calling, but sometimes they messaged first, notifying me that they were ready, or needed to get a drink, etc.

Finally, the recording quality, or lack thereof serves as a gentle reminder that there is always something out of your control. As noted previously, I did not make visual recordings of the interviews, however, a poor quality web camera (and those built into laptops are generally not that great) led to choppy visuals which proved distracting at times. The use of 'Wi-Fi' which allows users to access the Internet without the use of wires and plugs also contributed to inconsistent visuals, and even interfered with the quality of the recording by cutting off the sound, making their words indecipherable at times. I dealt with this by asking respondents to repeat what they said and/or ask for clarification.

Email (Asynchronous)

Although the majority of my interviews were conducted either in-person or online, one of the interviews took place asynchronously (non-real time) via email. This particular

respondent, referred to me by another respondent who also happens to be a personal acquaintance, seemed very reluctant to speak with me by telephone or Skype due to a busy schedule but I sensed there was another underlying reason such as shyness. In our email communication, I offered to schedule the interview when she was less preoccupied but she gently inferred that I might be waiting awhile so rather than risk losing her participation altogether, I compromised by offering to email her the interview questions. As Irving Seidman states:"[I]t is not a perfect world. It is almost always better to conduct an interview under less than ideal conditions than not conduct one at all" (22). She agreed to this and I sent her an electronic copy of the consent form for her to read and fill out. Once she returned it to me with the necessary information I emailed the interview questions as a separate document – a revised version of the interview guide sheet that I used for all of the interviews – which included a 'reply by' deadline of a week from the sent date. To my surprise, she returned the questions with her responses within 24 hours followed by another email a day later with some additional comments that she wanted to add. However, I found the quality of the interview responses to be less in-depth than the Skype or in-person interviews even though I included follow-up questions in the document. She conveyed through her interview transcript a very sensitive and private persona and seemed reluctant to say anything critical about her time on the show (compared to the interview with her co-competitor). However, I was left wondering whether email interviews are worse or whether their effectiveness is study-dependent.

According to recent books by social science researchers Nalita James and Hugh Busher, and Janet Salmons, the use of emails to conduct research interviews occurs as part of a series of interviews with a single participant, or else during the recruitment phase as a way to communicate with prospective candidates in order to build rapport with them pre-interview. I certainly relied on email in the early stages of communication, in order to field pre-interview questions, or to send pertinent documents and other relevant information. Attaching your name to a professional email address such as your university email also helps to give the researcher more credibility. But for my purposes, the use of email as the primary tool to conduct an interview achieved disappointing results. A lot of the cues that are conveyed through other forms of interviewing such as tone, intonation, facial expressions, or even eye contact are missing, and those cues are vitally important for researchers as they help to assess the respondent's mood, level of

interest, and also provide insight into the individual's personality. Michelle M. Kazmer and Bo Xie note that respondents do make attempts to personalize their thoughts by using "emotional indicators" through the use of capitals, italics, exclamation points and emoticons (i.e., smiley face) (272). This particular respondent did employ such strategies in addition to using 'all-caps' in order to differentiate her responses from the interview questions.[44] In addition to the use of all-caps, she used a different font colour to distinguish some follow-up comments that she submitted afterward. However, as Kazmer and Xie contend, despite the limitations of email interviews, respondents "have more control over how their thoughts are represented and how the data appear in analysis and subsequent publication" (Kazmer and Xie 271). Thus, perhaps part of my disappointment with the results reflects this loss of control over the interview process as the respondent determined the length and depth of her responses, and in what format they would appear (i.e., all-caps).[45] Again, researchers need to consider carefully the strengths and weaknesses of different interview formats as well as the kinds of data that they procure, recognizing that there is no 'one size fits all' solution but a process of experimentation, adaptability, and learning.

Reality Show Contestants as 'Elite' Interview Figures

Much of what has been discussed here, and the way in which I approached and experienced the interview process was determined by my research subjects' particular status. Working my way through studies on television audiences and feminist research methods debates, I often felt dissatisfied with the prevailing definitions and categories used in relation to interview participants. The women I interviewed were *more than* audience members and yet, it would be hard to classify them as media *producers* but they are also not recognized as workers (and did not refer to themselves in this way

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[44]   'All-caps' refers to the use of capital letters in electronic communication. This is generally perceived to be inciting aggression or intense forms of excitement. However, in this particular case, it did seem that the respondent simply wanted to differentiate her response from the interview questions.

[45]   Of course, another benefit to email interviews is that they save time on transcribing but I did not mind this process, as it added yet another layer of contact with the respondents that I found pleasing and intimate.

either) so where then, does that leave the reality show contestant? I argue that the slim but growing literature on 'elite interviews' offers the best roadmap to future conceptualizations of research subjects that have intimate ties to, and knowledge of, the media world but do not easily adhere to traditional notions of media figures (i.e., producer). Indeed, current scholarly conceptions of interviewing 'elites' tends to characterize them as 'professional figures with the ability to exert significant (social, political, economic) influence' (Harvey 433). Similarly media elites are defined as "influential, prominent, and/or well-informed in an organization or community; they are selected for interviews on the basis of their expertise in areas relevant to the research" (Marshall and Rossman 105). William Harvey contends that this limited understanding of 'elites' as leaders or heads of organizations ignores the ways in which 'elite status' can also be achieved through access to "important social net-works, *social capital* and strategic positions within social structures" (433, emphasis added). Moreover, this social label is flexible "with people gaining and losing their status over time" (Harvey ibid). Thus, Harvey concludes that there "is no clear-cut definition of the term 'elite'" (432) allowing researchers to shape their definition of the term to fit within the scope of their research.

Within feminist empiricist circles, 'interviewing elites' are reflected in discussions about research on the powerful, or what is often referred to as 'researching up'. Responding to critiques that feminist research only utilizes interviews with the aim of empowering marginalized or oppressed women to share their stories, thoughts, and experiences such studies focus on the lives of powerful women who are more "accustomed to speaking and being heard" (Reinharz and Chase 226). Indeed, women who have competed on reality shows find themselves in an interesting position for they might not be 'powerful' in the way that Shulamith Reinharz and Susan E. Chase seem to imply – as women with considerable decision-making powers or significant social influence – yet their unique experience and acquired knowledge of the media world is something that most television audiences only fantasize about. Moreover, their immersion in the media world brings them that much closer to 'celebrity status' whereby they acquire a level of symbolic or cultural capital that they can then parlay into other opportunities and ventures. Thus, we need a term within qualitative research that can adequately speak to the particular cultural positions and contexts of reality show

contestants who are in some respects elite yet ordinary, privileged yet marginalized, and powerful yet disempowered but who in all instances by virtue of their public transformation become known or classified as media figures. Feminist cultural studies scholar Joke Hermes has noted that feminist researchers must account for such celebratory figures to advance knowledge about women and media culture, as well as the role(s) that they play in our everyday lives: "Media figures are important if we want to know how the media come to have meaning" ("Media Figures" 82).

Finally, many of the issues or challenges outlined in the literature on interviewing elites were mirrored in my research study, further fuelling my call for an expanded and flexible understanding of elites within the ever-changing media culture landscape. For one, it can be difficult to make the initial contact, and oftentimes, elites are already media savvy, much more than the 'average person' which means they could try to take control of the interview and/or try to direct the kinds of questions that are asked (Marshall and Rossman 106). Due to these kinds of power struggles, interview researchers believe that "elites often respond well to inquiries about broad areas of content and open-ended questions that allow them the freedom to use their knowledge and imagination" (Marshall and Rossman 106). Similarly, women who are familiar or comfortable with public speaking or being in the public eye "may not find the interview experience psychologically empowering or therapeutic" (Reinharz and Chase 226). I felt that semi-structured interviews would work best in my study; I created a template that mapped out the areas/topics that I wanted to address which were grouped into three main stages: pre-show, filming, and post-show.[46] I felt this would allow me to gather as much insight into the women's reasons and motivations but would also allow me to consider how their experience of competing on a reality show affected their life afterward, as well as a broader exploration of how competing influenced their understanding/perception of reality TV and the television industry generally. However, depending on the person, I found that I did not have to refer to the guide all that much during the interview; rather, I returned to it when there was a lull in the conversation or else when time was starting to run out, and to make sure I hadn't overlooked any key areas. Moreover, keeping the interview format somewhat loose allows for some flexibility in the kinds of questions and

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[46]   See Appendix A for a copy of the interview guide.

topics addressed, with the hope that this would encourage the respondent to make the most of her knowledge and expertise as she is ultimately the expert on her life. This did not prevent some of these problems from creeping up in my interviews though.

I have already described and discussed the difficulties I encountered when trying to make first contact and my low response rate, especially amongst past competition winners (who are presumably still under contract with corporate sponsors). Reality show contestants, through the process of their participation, become learned in the art of media interviews (even if they do not receive any formal training during production) and I found in some of the interviews that the women would frame their anecdotes in media-speak or talking points, especially for questions that they had probably answered in other contexts. However, my job as a researcher is to encourage respondents to push beyond the easily digestible sound bite often found in entertainment journalism. I also found evidence that some of the women tried to control the flow of the interview usually by talking a lot for long stretches at a time, leaving me fewer opportunities to interject or ask a follow-up question (when trying to make sure we covered all interview topics), and in a way that emphasized their personal achievements or greatness. Another respondent seemed intent on conveying to me that she was equally 'intellectual' and educated by asking me questions during the interview process about my work and making sure to remind me that she 'could' do a PhD in her educational field, if she wanted.

This chapter has explored in detail how I approached qualitative interviewing, with special attention paid to the interview format, the use of Facebook as a research tool for participant recruitment, and the classification of reality show contestants as subgroup of 'media elites'. I situate this discussion within larger and ongoing scholarly debates, especially in the social sciences, about the changing contexts of qualitative interviewing in an increasingly technologically reliant/driven culture. There are a plethora of technologies at our disposal now, due to the domestication of the internet, and researchers should be open to incorporating them for data collection purposes. However, every tool comes with both advantages and disadvantages and these need to be considered before, during and after research has taken place. While certain protocols have been put in place to minimize the amount of harm to research participants, the rapidly changing nature of technology will require university boards and individual researchers to constantly adapt their policies to ensure the highest ethical standards.

Chapter 2.

Becoming a Reality TV Competitor

Much of the popular discourse surrounding reality show participation reduces contestants' experiences to the same categories of heroine and villain, victim and exploiter, used by the producers of the shows. While some aspects of their experiences are shaped by common activities or processes that are fundamental to the reality show production processes, how individual women make sense of these processes and events is framed by their pre-existing social beliefs, attitudes and values and identities. In this chapter I hope to identify the tropes used in the critiques of reality television, and then show how participants take up and rework these ideas, as well as introducing discourses of participation that they bring from their own contexts. The chapter is divided into three main sections which sheds light on their journey from the application process, competing and then elimination. As we will see, some of the women's reflections complicate certain assumptions about female reality show contestants, illustrating that

other social and cultural factors play a role in shaping their aspirations to compete on national television.[47]

Early Framing of Reality TV Participation

As discussed in the Introduction, early criticisms of reality TV participation tended to fall into one of three camps: one, that participants are exploited by the media industry for entertainment and profit; two, that it holds much democratic potential because audiences were no longer passive consumers but actively engaged in the construction of television texts, such as deciding the outcome of a competition show. More recently, popular discourses shaped by neoliberalism, frame reality show participants as 'manipulating' or 'taking advantage' of reality TV to serve their own ends, usually a career in entertainment. No doubt, there are participants who seek out reality TV as a viable course for career advancement and exposure because, well, it *is*, as evidenced in the development of this new band of celebrities.

The UK report *Consenting Adults?* offers some compelling insights into audience perceptions of TV participants, revealing how there is indeed a discrepancy between the

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[47] These narratives of participation only marginally address issues of race and class, due in part, to the demographics of my interview respondents, and because my call for participants did not target a particular sub-group of contestants, aside from a shared gender identity. The majority of the women were Caucasian; one woman was Chinese Canadian; one woman was a Canadian Aborginal; one woman identified as biracial while another was Black Canadian; and one of the Caucasian women identified as lesbian. Only a couple of the women framed their motivation as part of a desire to bring visibility to their particular ethnic or racial heritage. Indeed, the ways in which the narratives unfolded did not elicit these themes in great detail which on the one hand, might be attributed to the beliefs we hold as Canadians about multiculturalism. This is not to suggest that within the shows themselves that these issues are not foregrounded, but amongst this particular group of former contestants, race and class were not highlighted as key concerns, aside from the few examples discussed. Moreover, much of the current literature tends to link these concerns with the ways in which marginalized participants might use their participation as economic leverage in an inherently unequal (and increasingly neoliberalized) system; in which participating in this new celebrity economy becomes a viable route to economic and personal prosperity. However, as will become clear further on, Canadian reality show contestants are far less likely to reach such levels of celebrity as evidenced in other cultural contexts like the US and the UK. Thus, we need to consider how this lack of opportunity, if you will, might impact the participants reasons for participating, especially when most of the women I interviewed have consciously chosen not to remain in the public eye.

audiences and the participants viewpoints on the reasons or motivations for appearing on factual television (this includes reality TV). This report was helpful in situating the women's reasons along this continuum of debate and speculation about reality show contestants and their motivations. For one, the researchers found that adiences most often cited "to be famous" followed by 'showing-off' and 'for money' as the key motivations influencing an individual's decision to appear on factual television (Broadcasting Standards Commission 27). This is very much in line with my previous comment about the current perception of reality show contestants as primarily 'fame-seekers' when these kinds of participants are less common than we might believe, as evidenced in my study. Indeed, consider for a moment just how many 'reality' – unscripted, lifestyle, factual – programs air on North American television each and every day, and then consider how many of those people become *lucratively* famous. There are far more 'failures' than 'successes'.

In contrast, other viewers believe participants are motivated by a desire to share their story of a particular experience with audiences, "whether illuminating, traumatising, cathartic or life-changing" (Broadcasting Standards Commission 53). Certainly, even reality show contestants can offer their unique life experiences as a way for audiences to identify with them and their struggles, even if that was not their intention when filming started. They may be cast for their skills and talents but producers are also looking for someone with a unique identity or personality, or a 'story' that viewers can relate to. In this way, there is a therapeutic dimension to media participation that speaks to our emotional desire to connect with strangers and communities, and in our current society, television has become the ideal platform for sharing or diseminating one's story. However, as participants pointed out in the study, seeking help via a public forum, or sharing one's personal stories of tragedy or even triumph did not necessarily change their situations in any significant way (Broadcasting Standards Commission 53).

Another key reason for participation was identified as "the desire to seize the opportunity to correct misrepresentations of themselves as individuals or as members of a group to which they belonged" (Broadcasting Standards Commission 54). This was supported in a couple of my interviews where the respondents noted how their participation either became the catalyst for publicly identifying with a particular minority

group and/or that losing the competition was not only a personal disappointment but experienced as failing of one's community.

Within the media sphere, such nuanced understandings of reality show participation are often reframed as narcissistic and pathological, which Nick Couldry (2000) argues is part of the backlash experienced by 'ordinary' people (i.e., non-professionals) who dare to impose themselves or try to stake a claim in the 'media world'. Indeed, the more famous and wealthy some reality show participants become – i.e., Snookie from *Jersey Shore* or any of the Kardashians – the more vitriolic and venomous the press coverage. Far from such simplistic reasonings, reality television participation occurs within a larger web of power relations in which producers ultimately have more control – economic, legal, and cultural – than the participants. However, the goal of this chapter is not to contest the existence of these hierarchal relations but rather to consider what motivated this particular group of women to put themselves through the audition and competition process, becoming another voice in the public forum that is popular culture.

Starting at the Beginning: Applications and Auditions

Contrary to the image we get from the media accounts of women calculating their chances of fame, few of the women applied to the shows in order to specifically seek fame as a reality TV star even though they became celebrities in the process (discussed in Chapter 4). For contestants like Sandra, the competition show represented an opportunity to pursure her career goals and gain some exposure while others like Natalie, needed prompting.

> I wasn't as 'into' reality TV shows then, as I am now. I had watched *American Idol*, but that was about it. Since it was a show about singing 'rock' I thought it was a great opportunity. (Sandra)

> All my friends told me I had to apply. And I was like, "no, no, no you guys, I can't. You remember? Like, I got sent home from Italy, I got sent home from New York, I got sent home from London, I got sent home from Japan. I can't model, I'm too big." They're like, "no, you have to apply, apply, just apply, just apply." So I got annoyed…ended up applying. (Natalie)

As we might expect though, many of the women were already familiar with the concept of reality TV, if not the programmes they auditioned for, while a few of the women waited for the arrival of Canadian versions of American franchises.[48] Existing social networks also played a role, where coworkers or teachers were privy to information about upcoming auditions before any official announcements were made to the public. Access to the American versions act as a kind of 'para-text' for Canadian reality show applicants, as these shows map out for audiences the process and structure of the competition, enabling applicants to become competitive in the casting process.

> When I was graduating from school we had kind of heard about someone wanting to bring [the show] and it was probably gonna happen in about 2 years or so. And then, two years later it, it did come out and we got an email, like we got emails through our technical advisor from school like to alumni. Um, so she had sent out a message saying, [the show] is casting for the first season, blah, blah, blah so I was like, "oh yeah, hell yes I'm gonna try out for this!" (Jessica)

Similarly, some of the women were already preparing for their chance to audition, as television audiences have come to expect the production of local adaptations of popular American reality TV shows in Canada (much to the chagrin of some audiences).

> I sort of decided like, well watching the show before, while it was in the US version, I decided that you know wherever I was at that point I would try it even if I wasn't you know maybe in the best position to do so. And so, the opportunity arose and I um decided to drive to Montreal to audition for the show. And ya, I was a student at the time and not completely in the right mindset but I thought I'd give it a try anyways. (LL)

These snapshots reveal that the decision-making process was influenced by a number of factors, reflecting where the women were at in their lives with regards to age, education and professional experience. Significantly, at least half of the women were students or recent graduates at the time that they decided to audition. Given the dismal employment prospects for young people, as reported in the news, it is not so surprising

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[48] Consequently because of the relative newness of these more popular reality brands in the Canadian television market, many women commented how they felt like 'guinea pigs' on their programmes especially for those who competed on the inaugural seasons and not surprisingly led to unfavourable comparisons to the American renditions.

that they might view reality competition shows are yet another venue to showcase their skills in an increasingly competitive job market. Moreover, only one of the women I interviewed identified herself as a mother, suggesting that the process of applying and auditioning is not very family-friendly due to the amount of time lost to travelling, loss of income, and time away from loved ones. Aside from this one exception then, all of the women conformed more closely to contemporary models of female creative workers rooted in postfeminist discourses of the 'career gal' uprooted from traditionalist ideas about family and marriage, which women are increasingly putting off until they complete their educational training and start their career.

Starting the Process: Reality Contract

The application process consisted of numerous stages, and while there was some variation in procedures depending on the type of competition programme, most followed a similar pattern: long paper application involving many personal questions, a video submission, and some kind of interview stage whether by phone or in-person (sometimes both) which usually included showcasing their talents/skills (in addition to a portfolio if required). For the singers and dancers this step also required multiple auditions/performances; first in front of producers who decided which contestants went on to perform in front of the expert judges.[49] Contestants were also subject to a criminal background check and usually a meeting with a mental health professional typically a psychologist to determine their suitability for the programme. For instance, a copy of the 2008-09 application for *Canada's Next Top Model* states that contestants must "undergo a mental health examination"; in addition there is a medical section on the application form which asks questions about alcohol use, former or current mental health issues and bodily injuries.[50] *The Reality TV Handbook*, a useful albeit amusing guide for potential reality show contestants notes that contestants may also be subject to a medical check-up and even blood tests (Saade and Borgenicht 36-37).

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[49] This second round of auditions is filmed, and becomes what the audiences sees, and not the initial casting phase.
[50] See Appendix B for a sample application form.

Contestants, who successfully jump through these hoops, are then invited to become a finalist, at which time they are asked to sign a contractual agreement. In recent years, more attention has been paid to the tactics employed by producers, usually the ways in which they pressure contestants to make quick decisions. In the UK, the Broadcasting Standards Commission found that some participants who had appeared on factual programming "were given very little time to consider whether they wanted to take part" noting that some talk shows gave guests "less than 12 hours' notice before appearing on the programme" (49). *Salon* reporter Eric Olsen found that *American Idol* contestants were pressured to accept the terms of their contracts which were "presented on a 'take it or leave it basis'" with some contestants only receiving "a couple of hours to make a decision." As former contestant LL noted, there was "no negotiating"; you either accepted the network's offer or not. To add to the pressure, reality TV contestants must contend with a huge legal contract which many of the women referred to as "the bible" due to its size and level of detail.

Mention of this dreaded document seemed to mark an important turning point in their narratives, signifying the seriousness and reality of their impending participation. The women conveyed a myriad of feelings about 'the bible'; from ambivalence or indifference to fear and worry. Their thoughtful reflections challenge the popular perception that participants will sign almost anything and/or do not consider the consequences of agreeing to the terms because they only care about becoming famous. Only one woman admitted to me that she did not really take the document seriously (i.e., breaking some of the 'rules' about confidentiality/non-disclosure). Instead, most of the women expressed how they were initially scared of 'the bible', and worried about the legal ramifications that could ensue if they breached any of the rules.

> As you're going through it you're like okay, this is serious business. If my mother opens her mouth she can be sued for a million dollars and anybody that's signed that. (Franke)

> I don't understand this language. <laughs> Like what are they talking about? All the legal mumble jumble. Um they tell you, "you might wanna get a lawyer to help you with this" and stuff like that but um, the biggest thing was, you could get sued for a million dollars for disclosing anything confidential about the show and I'm like, a million dollars? That kind of scared me. (Linsay)

Linsay's comment speaks to the ways in which many reality TV contestants are poorly supported by networks and producers. However, one might assume that it is only 'common-sense' to seek out the advice of a legal professional but many reality show participants are often quite young, lacking the knowledge or understanding of how entertainment contracts might work. In addition, the dominant discourse about reality show contestants constructs them as 'non-professionals', therefore deeming them less entitled to certain 'rights' or protections extended to traditional TV performers. Moreover, such tactics teach contestants that to be subordinate is preferable to empowerment. Forcing reality show contestants to participate on the show's terms, or not at all, producers and networks are able to firmly establish their position which actually reveals just how *un*democratic the process really is. Indeed, some of the women bereft of a strong support system or union, and lacking the finances to consult a lawyer, ended up signing the document without seeking the services of a legal professional (this does not mean that they did not read the contracts though). The *Consenting Adults* report recommends that in order for a consent form "to work effectively as a safeguard not only for the producer but also for the participant, it should be written in plain English and its contents explained to the participant if necessary" (Broadcasting Standards Commission 59). Similarly, they found that tight production schedules, typical of most reality TV shows, impeded the facilitation of any kind of process of information sharing and support.

Through their reflections of the legal aspects of competing the women displayed a keen understanding of the powerful positions held by the producers and networks, and how little control they had over much of anything. They addressed the kinds of rights that reality producers held once they signed the contract; namely rights to all content produced for the show, promotional material, and also rights to the creative works they produce while filming (i.e., songs, clothes). Indeed, "[r]eality television has created a new group of celebrities who do not own their public image and cannot independently control its use" (Halbert 42). Many of the women commented on how the producers could basically 'do whatever they wanted' because they have "legal immunity from retrospective disagreements with participants about how contributions have been or are being used" (Broadcasting Standards Commission 58). In response to the looming 'threat' of legal action and the loss of control over their public image, the women tended

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to focus on what they *could* control during production like their personal behaviour in front of the camera. Ultimately though the producers and networks do own their reality show image in perpetuity and are at liberty to use their image in other productions for other purposes. As Suzie commented upon learning about during a legal consultation:

> I got a lawyer to go over it and you're selling all of it [...] One of the things I had signed away was rights to my life story. Isn't that funny? So they could make like, you know, a bio of me and put whatever they wanted in it. ‹laughs›

These types of legal controls are even included in application forms, as I discovered reading through the aforementioned form for *Canada's Next Top Model*. In order to be even considered for the competition, applicants must sign over the image rights to their *application* packages, allowing the producers to use the participants' image and likeness across a variety of media platforms with no compensation for as long as they want. Moreover, the contracts often set out for the participant who they can speak with after their appearance and what they can (or can't) say. In a few cases, respondents informed me that they wanted to consult with the document first, before agreeing to the interview, to make sure they were not in breach of anything (as there is usually a period of time after filming where they are not allowed to speak with anyone about their experience).[51] This aspect of becoming a reality show contestant seems to contradict the popular discourse on reality-participation which tends to assume rather simplistically that reality competitors are manipulating and exploiting the system for their own gains. Instead, this so-called "'participatory' genre includes remarkably tight control over how people participate" (Redden 135).

Given the strict legal controls enforced by producers and networks over contestants, we might speculate why somebody would sign these contracts in the first place. There are a myriad of reasons – misinformation, legal ignorance, excitement, celebrity, pressure – none of which is any less legitimate than the other (Halbert 46). The *Consenting Adults* study found that the motivations cited by participants who appeared on factual TV differed significantly from the public's perception, and more importantly,

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[51] One of the women I contacted – a former winner who has since left the modelling industry – declined my invitation to participate noting that she was restrained contractually from speaking with anyone about her experience (even though I offered her full anonymity).

very few if any noted "fame" or "money" as a key reason although this may have changed since the publication given how prevalent reality TV celebrities have become in the US and the UK. More commonly, participants' motivations were driven by "a number of different factors, including socio-educational background, professional attachments and views of the way television operates" (Broadcasting Standards Commission 52). Given how pervasive reality TV has become, individuals are keenly aware of which shows offer the best opportunities for career advancement and media exposure. But also because of this, many of the women were well aware that there is no shortage of people eagerly waiting for their chance to compete placing even more pressure on them to make a quick decision in light of any legal ramifications or consequences. In this way, as argued by Sue Collins, show participants are 'disposable'; representing a kind of surplus labour because there are always more people willing to participate than there are spots available. There is also the possibility that audiences have internalized some of the popular discourses surrounding reality TV participation which frames it as a 'privilege' or 'unique opportunity' that should not be 'taken for granted'.[52]

Disappearing from Real Life: Non-Disclosure Aspects of the Contract

Yet, signing the contract involves other considerations. For instance how do you tell your friends and family, who are not privy to your whereabouts for the next few weeks or longer, that you will be absent for a while?[53] All contracts place limits on the number of people who can know your whereabouts which ranged from 2-5 in my study's participants, leaving contestants with no choice but to make difficult decisions about who to tell. This aspect of the decision-making process was a sensitive one, as the contestants have to decide who will, and should, have access to this information. Most of

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[52]   Indeed, audiences are often very critical and judgmental of contestants who 'opt out' for personal reasons, change their mind, or are forced to leave due to circumstances out of their control such a physical injury. Reality TV invites us to view them as 'weak' or 'ungrateful' which is very much in line with neoliberal discourses of 'personal responsibility' and 'self-reliance'.

[53]   Live-competition shows are obviously less secretive about the location of filming, and contestants often invite family members or friends to their live performances, with limited off-site access. In the case of one contestant who was an underage competitor, the producers were required to put up the parents as well, in a nearby location.

the women chose to tell the people closest to them in their lives: parents/siblings, best friends, employers, roommates, and romantic partners. However, there were a few instances where some of the women decided not to tell certain family members and/or friends either for personal reasons or due to the limitations placed upon them contractually. For instance, one former contestant described how she was only allowed to tell two people and she was unable to have her immediate family – parents and siblings – count as "one." In some cases, their decisions had negative ramifications; contending with upset family members or being absent from important life events, as one woman told me how she missed the birth of her best friend's baby (who also was not privy to her whereabouts). Moreover, many of the women felt burdened by these decisions because chosen family and friends also had to sign confidentiality agreements and can be held liable if they leak information about the competition and/or individual competitors.

Once the contracts were signed and finances put in order and so forth,contestants have to construct believable 'alibis' to explain prolonged absences from work and school. Some of the women equated this process with a form of 'deception'; placing them in an uncomfortable position.

> I was supposed to go to New York to study in the fall anyway so I sent out an email to everyone saying, "Oh you know I'm going to do this internship thing in New York for the summer and you're not going to be able to contact me." You know, trying to send something to all my friends and family so they would understand. So that was really like, weird and freaky you know, and leave your job on such a short notice. (MG)

> I couldn't tell them where I was going but I didn't want my friends to worry. So I shut down my like Facebook wall and everything to make sure like no one could write anything, and um I just basically told all my friends I was going to visit my aunt in Nova Scotia...so no one really had any idea. (HD)

HD's comments illustrate how part of the alibi-making process also means ensuring that all social media profiles are temporarily suspended so as not to invite further questioning from curious friends and family. Reality show contestants develop strategies for dealing with the privacy requirements placed upon them as a condition of their participation. It is interesting how programmers place so much importance on protecting the privacy of contestants during the filming process, for pre-recorded shows, as this privacy is

stripped away from them once the show airs. Moreover, reality TV is premised on the notion that the boundaries between public and private can be played with, deconstructed and reconstructed for entertainment purposes.

In addition to preparing alibis, some contestants described the steps they took to prepare for the show by doing research, as not all reality show competitors self-identify as 'fans' (as noted earlier).

> I never watched [the show] before I applied so when I applied the girl I was working with said, "Oh my god you have to check those videos. You have to know how it works. You have to know…" And I was just like, I didn't even know who Iman was, so it's really weird you know what I mean? It was like crazy that I didn't even know, so I had to watch like a couple of [the show] videos from the USA before I went on the show just to figure it out a little bit. (MG)

Conversely some of the women took a different approach, choosing instead to enter the competition with what pre-existing knowledge they already had; a kind of 'winging it' approach:

> The funny thing is, I didn't do my research on this. Like, I didn't know anything. It was such a rush and it wasn't like – it's weird to say but I wasn't really that into like, figuring it all out. I was just kind of going ok, like, I've gotta go and play now like I gotta do this. It wasn't like, oh, let's make sure I know everything that's going on…I didn't take any kind of precautionary research prep. (Carlie)

Thus, familiarizing one's self with the programme could be viewed as a necessary strategy that helps competitors prepare for what lies ahead. However, regardless of how much "precautionary research prep" a contestant takes, they can never fully be prepared for what happens once the competition starts. Thus, the viewing of media texts will only ever provide them with partial insights such as show conventions but as we will see, much of what they discussed with me is not part of the 'official' show discourse.

The Production Stage: Filming 'Reality'

The next crucial stage of becoming a reality show contestant is filming. Despite preparing for the competition in what ways they could, many of the women were unprepared for what happened once they arrived at the pre-filming site, such as the hotel or other dwelling where they stayed before moving to the official competition residence. They consistently described how once at the hotel, they were often secluded and subjected to a form of interrogation where producers went through their personal belongings to ensure that they had not broken any of the competition rules (i.e., packing banned tools). Any brands/products that conflicted with the show's sponsors were also removed and stored away, to be retrieved once the contestant was done filming. At this point most of them had their personal identification (ID) and cell phones taken away as well:

> It was very strange. It was like being in a James Bond movie. So you get there and then they check you in. They're like, "Okay we'll put you up in this room." So they put you in a room and you're just sitting there. You don't know what to do. They're like, "You can't leave the room." So you're just sitting there and that just set the tone for the whole show because you never knew what was happening next. So, just sitting there and then someone comes in and they wanna go through all your outfits and to pick something to wear for the opening. They shoot the opening. Then they take your passport and your ID, everything from you, and go through your entire luggage. They search your luggage, make sure you didn't bring anything. If you brought anything they said you couldn't use like you couldn't use a pattern book or --- they would take that away um and then they took all your money. They take all your money and calculate all the pennies and write it down on a sheet, separate it, and put it in a Ziploc and take that. So they strip you of all, anything, so you can't even run and use a payphone or get in a taxi, take off, because you have no ID. You're nobody at that point. (Franke)

Franke's particularly vivid description of events reads eerily like a prisoner entering a penitentiary, however such descriptions were not uncommon, raising ethical questions about the treatment of reality show contestants and whether these kinds of practices and procedures are too invasive. Upon entering the 'reality machine' contestants are, to borrow from Franke, "stripped" of all identifying documents leaving contestants with a sense of 'identity-less-ness'. Indeed, some of the women noted how the filming locations were often kept a secret, and some locations chosen specifically for their remoteness.

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Throughout the competition, contestants will continue to experience varying degrees of 'identity-less-ness' as producers purposefully keep certain information from them, ensuring that there is always an 'element of surprise'.[54] However, not all reality shows employ such covert or secretive tactics. Some programs like *Canadian Idol* include a live telecast which means that competitors are not sequestered as they are on shows like *Project Runway Canada* and *Canada's Next Top Model* which are filmed in their entirety before airing.

Competing

Regardless of the competition format or structure, all of the women had to figure out how to live with their competitors, who were essentially strangers, in a constructed environment all the while being filmed. Living the 'competition-life' affected the women in profound and deeply personal ways which is itself a result of reality TV's "own production process" as "it does not simply take a pre-existing reality and transform or alter it; rather, the various activities, practices, and technologies of production actively construct *for real* what participants experience" (Grindstaff 49, emphasis added). Specifically, they spoke of the competition in the following ways: how it affected their competitor identity, their relationships with other contestants, their understanding/definitions of 'competing' and the role that TV plays in shaping our understanding of 'competition'.

As many women noted, due to the nonstop 'go, go, go' mentality of the reality competition format, there was not much time for self-reflection during filming. Instead, many of these insights could only be garnered and processed post-filming. This lack of self-time seemed to contribute to contestants making some poor and questionable decisions, in addition to dealing with the physical, emotional and psychological ravages of reality-competing. Competing seemed more challenging for those contestants whose personal values and beliefs butted up against the hyper-individualistic, 'winner-take-all' approach of reality competiton shows. This led to many internal conflicts and struggles over how to negotiate what kind of competitor they *wanted* to be versus what the

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[54] So while contestants are aware of certain regularly scheduled activities (i.e., judging/elimination, reward challenge) they do not necessarily know what awaits them each day, or what will happen hour-by-hour.

programme encouraged. Such ideological battles made it difficult to relate to fellow contestants, for instance, some of the women were bothered by other people's competitiveness.

> What I really didn't like was how everyone was a little bit like, they really didn't want to try and be your friend sometimes. It was a competition but it's not a competition where the contestants have any say in the outcome so I don't think we should have to be so harsh towards each other --- You know, it just seemed like a lot of the things that happened were unnecessary to get drama happening so people would watch. (Rebeccah)

Rebeccah's understanding of competing conflicted with some of the other women's competition styles hinting at some of the gendered ways in which women manipulate stereotypes about women as catty and competitive by playing up certain (negative) qualities or characteristics in order to distinguish themselves from other competitors (with the aim of getting more 'air time').

These conflicting competitive modes or styles also make socializing or friendships problematic at times as the cut-throat approach makes it difficult for competitors to discern who is being 'authentic' within the competition. A common (rationalizing) strategy used by contestants is to declare 'I'm not here to make friends' in an attempt to illustrate one's intention to 'play the game' without concern for the social aspects or feelings. For instance, only one woman admitted that she entered the competition with this intention; even as she socialized with the other contestants, even growing to like some of them, she seemed intent on drawing a line between competing and friendship. For many though, the line between the two was much blurrier, and they had to find ways to balance these 'rationalizing' and 'emotional discourses without the help of friends and family.

> We did talk to each other and there was couches [sic] and like, there was spaces but if you wanted to be alone to talk to your family there was the confessional. But then again, you know, everyone's waiting. I know there was a lot of drama with that, like people yelling, "get off the phone!" and "I want my turn!" and all that. So I just kind of stayed out of that. So I think it was hard for the girls who did need someone to talk to at home. Like if you need that support, I think that would have been very hard. (HD)

Thus contestants respond in different ways to the 'pressure cooker' environment, as another woman recalled, the competition felt "isolating" and "lonely" at times, which speaks to forms of exclusion. Unfortunately, contestants who have more trouble adjusting to this intense situation are not given 'special treatment' (i.e., more phone calls) and to make matters worse, they are not able to discuss anything directly related to the competition while filming. Therefore, even when they get the chance to speak with their loved ones they must downplay or mask their feelings or else risk losing this privilege.[55]

Contestants, even when they manage to develop friendships are constantly sensitive to the fact that these relationships are tentative at best, as someone could get eliminated at any time, and it was very difficult for some contestants to deal with this loss when it happened.

> We were all in this together, you know? Like when my buddy got voted off I'm crying right. I'm not happy at all. That part really did bug me about the whole thing (that even though I'm going through the whole process and I'm trying to keep an open mind) that this shouldn't even be a competition you know what I mean? So I had all these conflicting views about it, the whole process and the whole idea even, the concept of it. (Suzi)

Again, we see how contestants, on the one hand, *rationally* understand that the competition format supercedes any budding friendships, on the other hand, emotions, in all their messiness, are ever-present and difficult to ignore. In this way the reality competition show offers insights into how we cope with and navigate the 'work-life' balance, as these tensions play out at the level of the individual and the social realm.

One competitor adopted an altogether different competitive style that allowed her to avoid some of these issues with other competitors whereby pleasure in the competition *process* becomes the focus rather than winning. These kinds of contestants are more interested in the creative, social, and professional opportunities presented to them, such as working with successful people in their field, or focusing on how the competition

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[55] It should be noted that these restrictions appeared to be applicable only to some reality competition shows whereas former *Canadian Idol* and *So You Think You Can Dance Canada* competitors did not have to abide by the same rules because their program was aired live.

challenged them artistically, in ways that few people in their field experience on a day-to-day basis.

> It's important for anyone I think, on a talent-reality TV show, to not take yourself too seriously...because there were no expectations for me I was in a really good place and I didn't feel like I had to compete with anyone. I was really just competing with myself because I wanted to be better and better every week, so every week I just saw as a new challenge that I had to overcome and it was for myself. It wasn't because I was trying to be better than this girl or than this guy you know? The idea of the actual competition was never you know, uh never really crossed my mind like that. It never occupied my thoughts so much that I needed to win. (Steffi)

Steffi, as one of the younger women that I interviewed, was only 16 when she competed which may contribute to her attitude and beliefs about winning.[56] Indeed, her comments invoke a discourse of gratitude which parallels popular perceptions of 'good' or 'respectable' reality show contestants who are 'thankful' for the privilege of competing.

> Sometimes, contestants became so immersed in the competition that they become a different kind of competitor as it wears on; in a way that makes them more, not less, confident and more focused on achieving their goal.

> There was so much emotion involved in [competing]. You're sooo tunnel vision. I mean that's like the biggest word that I can, the most important word in all of this, for that experience because it was so, so tunnel vision. Like I didn't even care to win really, like I like [the band], they're alright, but I'd rather get TV exposure. But by the end of that show, all I wanted to do was win, like they make you, because there's nothing else in your life. It just makes you so tunnel vision about this thing and all the emphasis is put on it... (Suzie)

This focus on winning seemed to correlate to how far a contestant went in the competition which is not so surprising given that the fewer people there are to socialize with, the more time contestants can devote to thinking about, and working on becoming the winner.

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[56]   Steffi shared with me how as a 'minor', by law, her parents had to be accessible and they were put up in nearby accommodations during filming.

However, the intense competitive styles displayed by other contestants could also have an adverse impact on a contestant, causing them to doubt or question their passion, especially if they had any hesitations about the long term implications of becoming a reality show winner.

> Sometimes I would watch the other girls and like, I liked it but I don't know. Just seeing how much they wanted it and maybe I had wanted it when I was younger. I don't know if it's because of that, so I almost felt kind of like it wasn't fair that if I wasn't a hundred percent sure I wanted it that I shouldn't be trying because they wanted it more I guess. But looking back on that like who's to say... (HD)

Unlike Steffi's conforming discourse of competing, HD's comments reveal once again how difficult it is for reality show contestants to voice their concerns because they are always cognizant of the ways in which self-doubts or introspection are framed as a poor reflection on the ungrateful, and thus undeserving contestant. Reality competition shows (and their audiences) tend to 'punish' those competitors for failing to live up to an imagined ideal of what competitiveness looks like.

Mental and Physical Effects

The competition took a toll on the women as well, mentally and physically, forcing them to face certain 'bodily limits', as it is not only a competition of skill or talent, but also one based on endurance – who can handle or endure the chaotic production schedule – and producers in some cases, clearly make an attempt to take some precautionary measures to maintain participants' health.

> It was definitely draining. They had those like emergency packets. They had all those like cases of them free...because you will get sick from being so drained and stuff. They had Cold-FX. All that kind of stuff. If you felt anything coming on you're like pumping all this stuff into yourself. (Suzi)

However, these physical and mental challenges at some point, will impede on the contestants creativity, and the fast-paced environment does not afford them any time to 'catch up'.

> I understood why [I got voted off]. It was because I lost my mind and I'd had no sleep you know, like basically my creative juices were gone. I was

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> sucked dry like I didn't have anything else in my brain. I had a design, I was gonna do it and like, it didn't work out. And like, I understand now watching like the American ones why it gets so bad near the end. Like the designs are just not that great and like, I understand why. Because you just get so exhausted like um, emotionally, and physically and like all your design powers are going. Your brain's dead basically. (Carlie)

Thus, another interesting tension is revealed in the competition format; the producers need for entertaining footage versus the competitors' desire to 'create' something they can be proud of. Ironically, such obstacles are rarely if ever acknowledged during the judging rounds, once again reinforcing the notion that the best will rise to the top when in actuality no one can predict these side-effects of competing. Moreover, given the ways in which the competition affects otherwise healthy contestants, it is not surprising that over the years, many contestants have had to drop out due to pre-existing health conditions that make it difficult to compete at the same rate.[57]

Judgement and Elimination

As outlined elsewhere, the reality competition show is constructed around a process of 'judgement and elimination' where every few days or once a week contestants are given a challenge which could involve performing a song or a dance number or designing a piece of clothing. Contestants are then given a chance to present their creations or performances after which they receive feedback from a panel of judges. The judging panel is typically comprised of former professionals or experts in the field who are generally well-known public figures. Live competition shows usually delay the next stage of elimination until the following day or week, because audiences are given a chance to cast a vote via the internet or mobile phone whereas pre-recorded shows hold judgment and elimination on the same day. Regardless of format, contestants are then told the judges/audiences decisions/vote results where one person (or sometimes two) is eliminated from the competition.

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[57] During my interview with Jessica, she shared with me how during the first week of the competition, two people had to leave the competition due to health issues.

Throughout the competition, contestants receive feedback from the judges and other guests, to help them improve their skills, and to offer support and advice. However, as many of the women made clear, there was no contact or socializing with the judges outside the official competition. Fraternizing was strictly prohibited in order to ensure objective and fair decision-making, and avoid favouritism. There was disagreement amongst the women though, about the *quality* of the feedback that they received, as well as the judge's *treatment* of some of the contestants during the show.

Indeed, the 'personalities' of some reality show judges can compete with the competitors. For instance, Simon Cowell, the former *American Idol* judge was well-known for his acerbic rapport with contestants, a trait that many audiences found amusing yet repulsive but nonetheless kept them tuning in. The competition judges function, then, as a point of identification for audiences, representing a range of viewpoints or styles of criticism (i.e., the 'supportive' judge vs. the 'tell it like it is' judge). This became a problem for one former contestant, who found that the judges' personalities or celebrity often overshadowed their ability or willingness to provide *constructive* feedback on the contestants' performances because they also wanted to appeal to viewers.

> I would say that I was disappointed with the feedback. I felt like that part of it wasn't very accurate and was a little bit put-on. I just felt like they were in a position to influence young dancers and you know, educate the audience a lot more than they did. I found that the comments were not very useful and I found that they were not very consistent. (LL)

LL's comments point out how the judges' often failed to provide objective evaluations because the judges are not only 'educating' audiences but also acting as sources of pleasure or entertainment. For LL, the dancing competition should authentically and accurately portray the dancing profession rather than exaggerate it for entertainment purposes, illustrating once again how the contestants' perception or understanding of 'the competition' is at odds with the producers need to construct an entertainment program. As a long-time fan of the American program *So You Think You Can Dance*, I have found that the judges have become much more partisan over the seasons, and now openly declare their favourites, sometimes even changing their minds mid-episode

which in turn could influence how the audience votes thus giving some contestants an unfair advantage.[58]

LL was not the only woman to pick up on such judging inconsistencies, as another former contestant similarly noted how she became suspicious of the decision-making process as the competition wore on. She too doubted the objectivity of some of the judgements which caused her to question the integrity of the whole process.

> It was always arranged I felt, who is gonna go before even seeing the garment you know? You feel that in a way because you know, one of the girls, she was terrible and they kept keeping her and keeping her on the show. And we were all like freaking out but because she was the biggest drama on the show, she was crying all the time, screaming, she was a bitch. And they kept keeping her and we were like so upset but that's what they wanted you know? So all of that was kind of arranged in a way I felt. But I definitely felt when we were final four I was like okay, it's not gonna be a big surprise if I'm part of the top three because it just makes sense gender wise which is a weird thing but I guess it makes sense in a way. (MG)

For MG, the judge's decision to keep an inferior contestant – somebody who, in her view lacked talent' could not adjust, and had a hidden agenda to gain as much TV exposure as possible – contradicted the purpose of the competition. However, she keenly observes how the entertainment values of the program creep into, and conflict with, the idea of a 'pure' competition. This observation also led her to conclude that the producers/judges always intended to have a gender diverse group of finalists, raising questions about fairness and ability.[59]

Objective critique is made more problematic when we consider the subjective nature of most creative professions for instance, most of the design competitors commented on this, noting that fashion is a matter of personal taste. However, contestants are judged on their technical skills, as well as their aesthetic tastes,

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[58] Interestingly, discussions with other 'fan-friends' reveals that many viewers are also critical of the feedback on 'Dance Canada', and often compare it to the 'quality' feedback of the American 'Dance'. It seems that we cannot escape these discourses of quality TV!

[59] Certainly, anyone familiar with reality competition shows has queried some of the judges decisions, leading one to wonder if there are any 'factors' or influences involved in the process. None of the women admitted any knowledge to this effect, but clearly some of them had their suspicions.

suggesting that there is an element of objectivity in terms of meeting the standards of a particular genre or field. This notion of 'subjectivity' allowed some of the women to discard or shrug off the judges negative comments because they perceived it as "just one person's opinion." Although multiple and/or consistant negative feedback did cause some anxiety, especially for those contestants who already had a clientele or business. For live-competition contestants, this could negatively influence the audience's view of them, turning into a vicious cycle of almost being eliminated which in turn took a toll on their confidence.

Due to some of these concerns by the contestants, many of them were rather ambivalent about the judges' comments and decisions. This ambivalence is rooted in the uncomfortable recognition that the competition is not necessarily based on a system of meritocracy and fairness, but is subject to a number of forces both internal and external, that make this difficult to achieve/implement. This perspective challenges the neoliberal discourses embedded in most reality competition shows, where contestants are viewed as either failures or successes, and only have themselves to blame for not succeeding regardless of any structural obstacles or challenges (here the possibility of questionable ethical practices). However, I do not wish to insinuate that the women are victims of the production process but rather they are competing within a number of constraints that they have little control over.

The Blue Room

The judgment and elimination process was often very long and exhausting, and riddled with anxiety as the contestants waited, sometimes for many hours, for the judges to make their final decisions, or results to be revealed which is usually a drawn out affair on live-tapings. Several women described this part of the judging process as a lot of "sitting and waiting." Competitors on pre-taped shows shared how, after receiving the initial feedback, they were often placed in a 'blue room' where they waited to be called back out for the final elimination. During the interviews, I often followed-up their discussion of the blue room by asking them how they felt about the space, and whether it gave them a moment to relax.

> The blue room was just like this, little concrete room and they put blue
> construction paper on the walls and like there was a couple couches and a rug
> and we all just had to sit there and read fashion magazines. And that's what
> drove me crazy because I brought books to read and so did a lot of the
> other girls I knew and we weren't allowed to use those books because if we
> didn't get any permission from the author they could sue or something like
> that. (Natalie)

So the blue room, as described by women like Natalie, was merely an extension of the competition, as controlled as every other aspect. Other contestants found ways to make use of the blue room that did not conflict with copyright restrictions or interfere with filming such as getting ready – dressing, applying make-up – for the judging sessions. Thus the blue room was yet another production site where contestants were constantly reminded of their status, even as they waited to hear their fate.

The 'Safe House'

> When a girl was eliminated, our good-byes, like you see on TV, is [sic] like our
> real good-byes. We don't see them again...we don't see them again. They go
> to like a safe house, a house where they stay until the competition's over.
> (Linsay)

Often, eliminated contestants are moved into a temporary residence located away from the official competition site for a short period of time until the producers decide that they can return home; what is commonly referred to as the 'safe house' (noted by Linsay above). However, not all reality show contestants reported being sent to the safe house, as contestants who made it to the finales were sent home to complete the final task in the competition such as designing a collection, or else the finale was filmed and then all contestants sent home immediately after. Moreover, live competition programs like *Canadian Idol* and *So You Think You Can Dance* typically send eliminated contestants home immediately.

For those women who experienced the safe house, they described how there is secrecy surrounding the location, leaving contestants unsure of their whereabouts. There is usually a house chaperone on hand who accompanies conestants on public outings, as they are not allowed to leave the house unattended, although some exceptions were noted. Based on the information I received, there were only ever a

handful of former contestants in the safe house at one time before they were sent home. One woman shared her first impressions of the safe house, describing how she found herself alone which was upsetting and disruptive, after living the hectic pace of the reality competition, what I refer to as the 'post-reality hangover'.

> I was there, I think, four or five days. I forget now. And uh, for the first couple I was by myself or with like you know, safe house gatekeeper. <laughs> So it was so weird like I just cried the first day, the second day I blogged the whole time um, and then, like I basically wrote a love letter and I blogged to everyone that was involved with the show, like all the contestants and stuff like that. And then, the third and fourth day um, M joined me because she got voted off after me and it was kind of like, dun, dun, dun cuz it was like, my arch nemesis <laughs> who I'm now friends with so it's weird you know, and then she's going to see everything. So I basically like, when she got there, I told her everything. I was like, "Look, you're going to see some nasty shit." It didn't end up being that bad - like I said a lot worse but they didn't show, um - and she's like, "Ya, I totally understand. Like it's just the way it is while we're there." Like, you know, I'm sure she said some bad things too but they probably didn't show that but you know, we all probably said really horrible things. So we were cool after that. And then, the fifth day, they told us we were going on a plane in like a couple hours. So I was like, ok, we're going home. This is so weird, I haven't been home in like a month and then now, we're back into civilization. So weird. (Carlie)

Here we see how the safe house functions as a transitional debriefing space, where eliminated contestants are given the chance to socialize with their co-competitors outside the game environment, without the constant intrusion of cameras. Eliminated contestants also are given some privacy to reflect on the competition and all of the ensuing emotions, as they begin to grapple with their new post-competition reality. Moreover, the safe house is often the first opportunity for contestants to reflect on the process, and the possible consequences of their actions, as well as thinking about their loss. The safe house also represented the beginning of reintegration back into their old life, where they once again have access to their personal belongings and ID, and where they are able to connect with the 'outside world'.

'I'm not a Loser': Dealing with Negative Feelings

With the exception of the competition winners, all contestants will experience the feelings associated with 'losing' and being removed from the competitive environment. For those women who displayed a strong competitive spirit, losing was especially hard, invoking feelings of embarrassment and failure; that they had let down their loved ones, who had supported them in their professional pursuits.

> So, to get second, I was of course really upset cuz you want it, you know, you don't go into a competition hoping to lose so I was really upset. I felt like I failed. I felt like I let my family down. I felt like you know a failure. And then, it's so funny because when I got home, it's like my family, they're the ones who made me realize like you made it top 2 out of 14,000. Like there were 14,000 girls who would love to even be where you were. They're like, "That's not a failure. It's an accomplishment." So they made me realize after, that it was an accomplishment and something to be proud of, and stuff like that. But um, at the time, when I was there, oh yeah, of course, I was like super upset about it. (Linsay)

Linsay's feelings seemed compounded by her desire to become the first Aboriginal woman to win a reality competition show in Canada. As noted at the beginning of this chapter, one of the motivations behind the media participation of ordinary folks is to 'correct' representational inequalities or stereotypes (Broadcasting Standards Commission 54). Certainly, Linsay took great pride in her cultural heritage and believed it was important for her to be a positive role model for young women in her community, thus her career aspirations were intertwined with her reasons for competing. Once again, this demonstrates how the motivations of contestants are complex and deeply personal, not just a symptom of narcissism, exhibitionism or egotistical self-interest but also influenced by a sense of community and representational politics.

For others, 'losing' was followed by feelings of relief, at no longer having to function daily in such a high-stress environment.

> The day that I got kicked off I was...you know afterwards you're like I wish I had spoken up and said more. Or I wish I had um you know protested more. Then I was kind of relieved from exhaustion like, thank god I can't do this anymore kind of thing, and then it's like what are people going to say? What are your friends going to say? What are my parents going to say? Are they

> going to be disappointed because...why did you get so far? Like how do you explain to people it's TV? (Franke)

However, feelings of relief are quickly following by regret, as Franke's comments suggest; that perhaps if they had only done some things differently maybe the outcome would have been different. Again, we see how in neoliberal fashion, contestants often believe that the outcome was somehow in their control, leaving them to feel personally responsible for their loss, and left to bear the burden of letting down one's family or community.

In other situations, contestants felt genuinely surprised by their elimination, as if the rug has been pulled out from under them. This was especially difficult for one of the shyer contestants, who felt that she was just starting to come into her own when she was ejected.

> I honestly had no clue that that would be my last day. I had a great performance that week and didn't feel that it was 'my time.' I was shocked and very sad...I had just gotten close and comfortable with the people in the house. As well, I knew the longer you stay the better chance you have to make an impact as an artist, gain fans and recognition, better for the career. (Sandra)

Once the initial shock of leaving the competition had subsided though, most of the women were left wondering how the show would present them as characters. By that point, they were also dealing with the media exposure, and contemplating their next move, post-show. Before we address these external issues, I want to examine more closely some of the internal themes and issues that emerged from the interviews, especially with regards to the ongoing debates about reality TV's blurring of boundaries.

Chapter 3.

Public/Private Boundaries Redux:
Negotiating Reality TV Space(s)

One of the key arguments made about reality TV is that it has played a critical role in blurring the boundaries between public/private and audiences/producers, which in turn has weakened or narrowed the gap between the media world and the ordinary world. The weakening of such boundaries also contribute to the construction of the reality TV production space, what we might describe as 'back-stage' or 'off-stage' moments. Television scholar Su Holmes, referencing Goffman, talks about the "back region or backstage as a space in which the impression 'fostered by the performance [at the front] is knowingly contradicted as a matter of course'" ("The viewers have" 18). Referencing *Big Brother*, Holmes focuses on how the back-stage spaces such as video diary rooms operate *within* the reality show environment. However, I argue that these 'back-stage' moments also speak to the daily minutiae of 'reality TV living' such as getting dressed or eating breakfast, dealing with the crew; the things that, as one contestant was quoted as saying in the last chapter, are considered "not pertinent" to 'filming reality'.[60] Exploring these mundane or 'ordinary' aspects of reality TV competing are integral to contemporary debates about media participation, and help to give voice to women's experiences of this cultural phenomenon, for the shifting of the divisions between 'private' and 'public' similarly speak to changing conceptions of domesticity and work, reproduction and production. Popular culture celebrates the loosening of these

[60] 'Filming reality' is the production term used by producers and crew to indicate "footage of reality show contestants going about their business, generally in their natural habitat" with the hopes of capturing "spontaneous interactions, conversations, machinations, and expressions of the contestants" (Arnovitz). However, far less of this banal footage makes it to air due to "the producers' fear of airing 'dead time' (time in which 'nothing happens')" (Kavka and West 143). This illustrates that even within the space of reality TV there are lines drawn around what constitutes 'interesting' and 'boring' and most often that which is interesting is defined against the ordinary/the everyday.

traditional divides, and yet the women I spoke with reveal the ways in which these changing conceptions become mapped onto and worked through in the production space of reality TV. As Dominique Mehl has argued, exploring television's construction of public and private boundaries reveals that these distinctions have "not vanished" despite arguments to the contrary; rather these distinctions are constituted by the individual who "defines the limits of his or her private world" (89). As we will see, reality show contestants' negotiation of private and public spaces within the media space(s) of reality TV is shaped by their personal conceptions of privacy (bodily, spatial) which becomes the epistemological framework through which they make sense of the unfamiliar space of reality TV.

Regulating Communication and Mobility

As discussed in Chapter 2, in order to maintain show secrets, constraints are placed on the contestants' access to information, and ability to communicate with the 'outside world' (save for the few people who also signed confidentiality agreements). Even those contestants who have off-site privileges are still limited in how much communication they can have with family and friends, and are subject to curfews and monitoring. Thus, this everyday activity – calling friends and family – becomes an emotionally charged event in the reality TV environment, especially as all communication is recorded and any deviation from show policy will be 'punished'.

> We weren't allowed to call our families obviously um, but we, they gave us um, well the time that I was there, I was allowed to talk to my family once um, and it was like, a five minute phone call that was recorded. So they wanted to, they obviously have to record it so I'm not saying anything, like divulging secrets um but ya, the whole time I didn't know what to talk about. What is there to talk about? Because I left like, you know, say two weeks ago, and you know what happened two weeks ago and then, two weeks since then, I can't tell you anything about it! So, it's all just kind of like, "Ok, how are you? You doing good? Ok, are you eating? You know, are they feeding you?" "Ya." "Ok." You know, it's kind of like that. (Carlie)

Here, we see how 'everyday communication' becomes an uncomfortable activity within the space of reality TV, as participants must learn how to adjust their language to satisfy the programmer's privacy requirements. Admittedly, I found these discussions rather

incredible, as I tried to imagine what it would be like to speak with a loved one without being able to talk about the very thing that has become the focus of your temporary life. Clearly, Carlie's comments reveal the level of frustration that such 'talk' conjures, as in a sense they are disconnected from their support systems, for the very people that they would normally turn to in dealing with life struggles or challenges (here the competition and being on TV) are there in name only, more of a gesture to, or form of symbolic support. This leaves contestants in a position where they internalize or suppress what they are going through, or else confide in strangers who are also their competition. Therefore these prospects led some women to refrain from communicating with family and friends altogether, or very sparingly.

> I didn't want to call anyone in general because I wanted to stay concentrated and that was not going to help or change anything in a way. Like some people were talking with their boyfriend or ... be like crying after because they miss them or whatever and I was like there's no point for me to do that. It's only like a month or two of a show you know? So I just called once my flatmate but I got the answering machine and I left a message in French, and the camera guy was looking at me, and the director was like, "You can't speak in French"...I'm like, "I'm not gonna leave her a message in English." It's like when you call you're not allowed to say certain things you know? You're not really allowed to speak about like what's happening and I understand because they were probably not able to understand blah, blah, blah but that was the only phone call I did. That was the only one. (MG)

In addition to general communication constraints, bilingual contestants must tend with language constraints, illustrating another key way in which reality show's strip contestants of aspects of their identity for the duration of filming, and alienating them even further from the other contestants, and even their own family and friends. For MG, this also reveals a bias in favour of English-speaking audiences and content, despite the fact that French is Canada's other official language.

Sabotaging Reality: Participant-Crew Relations

Moving from regulations that constricted the flow of 'outside' information and communication that entered the reality TV space, contestants dealt with internal constraints that shaped the women's relationships with producers and crew, and

especially the camera*men*. [61] The camera crew's job is to film the participants without interfering with the participants or influencing their behaviour in any way. As one woman noted "the camera guys, who were around us twenty-four-seven, like *literally* twenty-four-seven, we didn't even know their names" (emphasis added). This one-sided relationship meant that the women knew very little about the people filming them, while the crew knew intimate details about them, as they monitored them around the clock thus having access to contestants' most private moments and activities.

Due to the filming techniques employed by reality TV producers, contestants have very minimal engagement with the crew, who (are supposed to) remain anonymous figures who co-exist with the participants, sharing living space but who remain outside the official representational boundaries of 'reality space'. This contributes to the illusion that reality TV is authentic and truthful in its depictions of 'the real' and that the camera is merely an instrument in mediating this 'reality'. Except for the rare occurrence, camera people almost always remain outside the camera's frame or else edited out of footage. Therefore, for TV viewers, camera people remain out of sight, out of mind. However, this is not such an easy task for realty show participants, as they are forced to co-exist with the camera crew for as long as they are in the competition. They are often the first people contestants see in the morning and the last ones they see before they go to sleep which raises the question of how likely it is that these boundaries would never be crossed, or at least tested.

In the case of former *Canada's Next Top Model* contestants, this certainly came to fruition which seems inevitable when we consider how the social space was comprised of 10-plus women in their late teens to mid-20s and predominantly male camera operators. As one former contestant alluded, this gender composition provoked some of the women to attempt to transgress the boundaries in playful ways.

> Some girls would be, "Hey, hi, like I'm so and so" and the camera guy'd be
> like <pause to indicate silence> and then the producers would call that person
> over and be like "Hey, like you can't talk to them."

[61]   I purposefully use gendered language because most of the camera operators were identified as male by my respondents which supports Canadian statistical research that men far outnumber women as (film and TV) camera operators.

Another former contestant framed these attempts at communication as "flirting" suggesting that the camera crew were objects of interest and curiosity. Participants can draw on gendered and heteronormative strategies such as 'flirting' as a way to test those boundaries which seek to separate contestants and media workers. Thus to some extent, their disregard for such rules is a testament to their desire to make social connections within the space of reality TV.

Subverting the Camera's Gaze

Sometimes the cameramen became the focus of the women's frustrations over being the subject of the camera's constant gaze. On the one hand they recognized that the camera crew were just 'doing their job' but on the other hand, they had few outlets to vent their feelings:

> I got mad a lot of the time like, if the camera was following me around and I'd just swear at the camera, like I'd just swear at it cuz then I knew they couldn't use that footage, right? Um but then afterwards I'd apologize to the cameraman like, "I'm not swearing at you, I'm swearing at the cameras. It's not you, I'm sorry!" <laughs> (Natalie)

Yet, these moves could be very calculated on the part of the contestant, as the women used their knowledge of the production rules to subvert the camera's invasive gaze. Swearing at, or looking directly into the camera, was one way for the women to assert some form of control over the filming process, as they purposefully broke this rule to 'sabotage' the footage, particularly footage that they did not want to be aired, as the following exchange illustrates:

> Suzie: no you can't [look into the camera]. They won't use it. I did on purpose but then they'll never use it and that was after actually like, I think I was smoking a bit, and like if I didn't want someone to know, I was like, "You can't use that footage." And I knew they wouldn't of cuz I looked in the camera. They won't use it. So it's a good way of...
>
> NP: the little techniques...
>
> Suzie: ya you learn your ways of sabotaging the footage. <laughs>

These 'diversionary tactics' show how participants become what I am dubbing, 'reality saboteurs' as a way to challenge the power structures that frame reality TV space. By 'sabotaging' the footage, reality show participants intercept and disrupt the production flow of filming by asserting their agency, which further undermines the exploitation argument that they are powerless dupes. At the same time, 'reality saboteurs' are not necessarily motivated by the desire for exposure, for examples like this point to an altogether different drive for privacy and to *not* be filmed, even if only for a moment. Instead, they are active participants in the reality TV process, making decisions along the way that both conform and challenge the spatial constraints placed upon them. Michel de Certeau's concept of 'la perruque' further illuminates such actions, by emphasizing how 'workers' may utilize the work space to engage "work that is free, creative, and precisely not directed toward profit" (25). Here, the worker uses time in pleasurable ways that can build a sense of community with others, as well as asserting their agency.

There has been some writing on the ways in which reality show contestants have attempted to 'resist' the control of producers, by attempting to influence the outcome of a competition (i.e., *Big Brother*), or how audiences have attempted to work with contestants in more direct ways. Yet, little has been said about how reality show contestants, as demonstrated here, also work to usurp the power of producers and networks *within* the production space of reality TV.

Negotiating Spatial Boundaries

While the women learned how to manage various social relationships during filming, they also demonstrated savviness when it came to adapting to the spatial boundaries placed upon them during filming. The spaces of the reality TV competition realm orbit primarily around distinctions between the media and ordinary world, and public and private spaces, especially within the domestic realm. At the macro level, this total immersion in the reality competition environment symbolizes a complete collapse of the media/ordinary worlds, however, there are many examples provided by the women that show how certain distinctions still exist at the micro level, especially when they are confronted with the 'ordinary' during filming and how this impedes upon or disrupts their

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involvement in the media world. For instance, one former contestant recalled an interesting moment that temporarily jarred her out of competition mode:

> I remember bumping into another designer in the fabric store and I'm like, "I can't talk to you, I can't talk to you." He's like, "Oh are you shooting that thing?" So that was kind of weird. And then I remember one day we had to go fabric shopping and the guy that got kicked off first just happened to like walk down the street and we were like, "Oh my god that's him!" So it was kind of weird.(Franke)

These slippages between production and 'real life' are unsettling moments for reality-contestants as they must contend with and straddle two seemingly opposed worlds and in Franke's case, these encounters caused her surroundings to become defamiliarized. This is accomplished by displacing otherwise familiar settings, places and spaces such as the fabric store that Franke has been to many times before but in that moment it was no longer 'just' a fabric store as it had been transformed into a production site. Therefore, turning everyday places and spaces into production sites alters the meanings that we attach to them.

Claiming Spaces: The Bathroom

Interestingly, the bathroom emerged as another key point of contestation for the women, signifying a site of power struggle between them and the producers and crew. Struggles over this space also speak to the ways in which reality-participants actively attempt to create counter-spaces through the construction of boundaries as a result of the desire for privacy, despite the fact that they had immersed themselves in a 'boundary-less' space. Importantly, the women's narratives reveal how they often challenged the restrictions imposed on them by the producers and crew, which led them to use the bathroom in interesting and creative ways.

Most of us take for granted that the bathroom, especially in the domestic sphere, is a private space where we can engage in daily rituals such as personal hygiene routines and so forth. Moreover, the bathroom takes on added significance for many women; as a site for the reproduction of femininity through engagement with certain practices and routines. This was implied in my conversations with the women as they noted the various ways in which the bathroom posed a problem for them and others

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during filming. However, for those contestants being filmed around the clock, where the lines between 'on-stage' and 'off stage' often overlap, the concept of privacy is called into question, taking on different meanings.

One of the first patterns that emerged spoke to the strict filming rules with regards to the bathroom. According to some of the women, the producers could not film when a single person occupied the bathroom (presumably because they were using the facilities), and so they were permitted to close and lock the door. However, this rule was waived if multiple people occupied the space; in these instances contestants could not close the door and would be filmed. As one woman pointed out though, this was a nuisance when multiple contestants were trying to get ready at the same time, i.e., one woman might be showering while another was applying her makeup or getting dressed. Ironically, the scheduling often did not leave the women much time to prepare thus sharing the space would have been necessary; however this provided the producers with ample opportunity to capture more footage, perhaps with the intention to catch the women engaging in stereotypical gendered behaviour such as arguing over domestic resources (similar to the house fights over telephone access; a common feature on the *Top Model* series), also known in popular culture as the 'catfight'.

Sometimes, the bathroom was used by multiple contestants as a space to get away from the competition; to vent or deal with their emotions in a private manner. This illustrates how the contestants sought to construct boundaries when they did not want to be filmed, and given that the bathroom was one of the few (if not the only) spaces where they were permitted some degree of privacy, it is not so surprising that the bathroom was transformed at times into a 'safe space'. As Suzie commented:

> ...bathrooms became the like safe haven and if you were going through something with someone you know, you'd go into the bathroom and do this, but it became so much so that they had to take the locks off the bathrooms. Cuz we'd lock it and not let the camera crew in and there'd be stuff happening in there, so they, they took the locks.

The contestants' desire for a 'safe haven' at times ran counter to the producers' industrial logic, to capture entertaining footage. And we see how the contestants' persistence challenged to subvert this logic; the more the contestants sought to

construct some semblance of social privacy, the harder the producers fought back, eventually removing the locks altogether, thus reasserting their power and control over the means of production. It seems then that in reality competition shows, bathroom space is a privilege that must be negotiated and earned.

Some of the women took a different approach, learning quickly how to manipulate the rules governing the space for individual use:

> I would oftentimes say, "I'm going to the bathroom" and I'd grab my book and I'd run, and then shut the door and lock it, and sit on the floor and read my book for ten minutes. (Natalie)

Rather than using it as a space for socializing and peer support, Natalie converted the bathroom into a space of leisure and comfort, and as a temporary retreat from the pressures of the competition. Her anecdote also speaks to the contestants desire to continue to participate in everyday activities that they find relaxing such as reading which, as noted elsewhere, was difficult as they were often not permitted to consume magazines or newspapers. These restrictions extended to other media such as television and radio but sometimes the contestants found ways to get around this:

> ...we weren't allowed to read the paper, we didn't have papers. We weren't allowed to listen to music um, watch TV obviously, read magazines, um, any kind of outside influence that may potentially you know, influence what we make.. Ya, we would sneak the radio every once in awhile like, um, one of the three rooms that we had, had a clock radio underneath the bed and we discovered this <laughs> but later on we discovered this. It was like awesome. But um, ya we weren't allowed at all. (Carlie)

From the programmer's perspective the "construction of an isolated environment...can force out 'true' selves in the 'pure' environment of [a] house... [un]touched by the media world" (Holmes "The viewers have" 19). As was the case with one contestant this media embargo can also be used to shield participants from seeing news or entertainment coverage of them while the competition is happening (for live-performance programs), but also to prevent them from referencing news events that could 'date' the program because, as argued by Misha Kavka and Amy West, reality TV is 'ahistorical'. Moreover, being cut off from the public social world forces them to weave themselves more easily into the fabric of the competition. However, as Carlie's comment suggests contestants

find creative ways around this, in their desire to retain some kind of connection with the 'outside world' that provided comfort and familiarity.

In addition to turning the bathroom into a space of leisure and safety, there was the personal matter of how to deal with one's microphone when using the facilities such as the toilet. As stated previously, contestants are not filmed while using the bathroom yet they are still required to wear their microphones which caused discomfort and embarrassment for some of the women, despite the crew's assertions that they turned down the mics. So, many of the women noted that they went ahead and unplugged their mics to ensure some degree of privacy:

> I would unplug my mic if I was in the washroom but they can tell when you unplug your mic. I guess your light goes off or something. So by the time you got outside someone was outside the door going, "Plug your mic back in." They're like, "Oh we turn it down when you go the washroom." But like, how do you know? Like really, do you have the time to turn the mic down? So I'm just going to take my precaution and unplug my mic to go the washroom. So um, so it was things like that, that were real invasion of your person. Or they would get on people's nerves by filming so close... (Franke)

Franke's comments illustrate a certain level of uncertainty and mistrust in the production process despite the producer's reassurances that they did adhere to some ethical boundaries. However, Franke's belief that this action constituted a "real invasion of person" suggests that there was no way to make the situation 'ethical' so long as she was placed in a compromising position. Contestants also turned off their mics, or in some cases took them off altogether, when they wanted to discuss something in private but the producers usually caught wind of this and the mics would be turned back on. Thus contestants are in a constant process of boundary negotiation as they attempt to retain some semblance of selfhood that hinges on the need for privacy.

Losing Boundaries: The Bedroom

Yet there is some evidence to suggest that other spaces in the reality house were not ascribed 'safe haven' status as some of the women questioned the invasiveness of the filming techniques:

> *...in the beginning we weren't sure if there were cameras in the apartment,*
> *hidden, so like Carlie and I shared a bedroom, and we would change in the*
> *closet in the dark just in case there's cameras around you know... (Franke)*

Here the seemingly simple daily routine of getting dressed becomes redefined as a complex process of negotiation and underpinned by a current of anxiety over the loss of all private boundaries. Indeed, the act of dressing/undressing in this context becomes defamiliarized, causing the women to become extra vigilant and self-conscious about the lack of a clear boundary between private and public space. Interestingly, this seems to contradict the current prevailing discourse that we are living in a postfeminist and technologically driven surveillance culture that is supposedly sexually permissive and therefore empowering for all women. Another contestant also commented on this loss of bodily privacy:

> *There were cameras in the rooms, so if you're changing like you can be seen*
> *which is part of the contract that we signed, so you'd just try and like turn*
> *around when you're taking your shirt off. (Suzie)*

Interestingly, she points out that their participation rested partly on their willingness to expose themselves on camera in various ways, not just emotionally but also bodily and given this they had to find ways to adapt to the situation. However, their comments also speak to the ways in which gender relations structured the women's responses to the invasive camerawork, for many of them noted how most, usually all of the camera operators were male, further fuelling concerns about safety, privacy and the bodily integrity of female contestants.[62] These examples illustrate how some of the women desired to construct bodily boundaries that allowed them to perform certain routines away from the all encompassing gaze of the camera.

> *They had um, movie, you know, movie lights in our rooms, so that the rooms*
> *were like in a normal house but then they had all these crazy extra lights*
> *stuck over your beds and everywhere, so like, you were woken up, boom, with*
> *a light and a camera. Yeah. That was fun. (Natalie)*

[62] Concerns over bodily privacy were not addressed by the former modelling contestants, which speaks to professional differences as models are generally more accustomed to undressing in semi-public spaces as a precondition for the work they do. For others not used to this degree of invasion, it took some getting used to.

Again, we see how another domestic space (the bedroom) is defamiliarized through transforming it into a production site. It is at once where the women live, where they reside and yet it is a TV set so to speak. There is no separation between public and private for the contestants as even professional performers get to leave the set and return home each day.

Adjusting to a Boundary-Less Space

But with this subgenre of the reality competition show, the media world and ordinary world temporarily collide and for reality show contestants, they are thrust into this world which they constantly referred to as 'surreal', 'weird', and so forth, in an attempt to define the unspeakable, because they were prevented from engaging in discourse about their surroundings as they unfolded. Indeed as the following reflection suggests, the women find themselves occupying an in-between-space where they are simultaneously insiders and outsiders to the production process, as they find themselves fully immersed in this 'other' world.

> [...] it's very weird to think about how like they tried to get these people at the house to have a very organic conversation but then, there's these cameras everywhere. If I were to do it again, I think I'd try to be a bit more natural because the whole time I'm walking around, going "this is sooo weird." And you try not to think about it but it's all you can think about and you're not allowed to talk about it because they wanna have it as natural as possible. But they don't want the audience to realize, that it's all fake but it's not fake, that it's like a reality show. I guess they don't want no one to bring up the cameras and that's all we could talk about sometimes, like how we'd have a conversation about these guys with giant cameras on their shoulders looking at us and we're like, "Yeah, don't look at the cameras." (Rebeccah)

Further, Rebeccah's comments suggest how reality show contestants attempt to grapple with and make sense of this boundary collapse and yet they are not afforded the ability to do so. In fact, they are actively discouraged from doing so. Yet, who would not want to engage in a discussion about the cameras if they were constantly being filmed? The women, through transitioning from audience member to on-screen personality, must contend with a total upset of these various boundaries, and few of us would have a

framework for dealing with such a life-change. Moreover, talking about the imposition of the cameras with the others was probably an important coping mechanism – something that they all shared and could commiserate on. However, reality TV seeks to construct a version of reality that is premised upon authenticity and familiarity even as it requires its practitioners – the contestants – to perform a version of this for the cameras. Ironically, entering the reality environment creates the conditions for these interesting conversations to take place because the production process works to defamiliarize otherwise familiar settings, places and spaces for contestants due to boundary slippages. This calls to mind Franke's earlier comment about seeing someone she knew in a fabric store that she had visited many times before, but in that moment it had been transformed into a production site. Turning everyday places and spaces into production sites alters their meaning which again, returns us to the previous discussion about the bathroom. Even 'ordinary' places become more than ordinary as they are redefined as media spaces due to their contextualization. As another former contestant so provocatively suggests, even the defamiliarized or unfamiliar becomes familiar at some point:

> After awhile it just becomes normal you know? And that's very strange to be like, you get up in the morning, like I named my mic pack Fernando. I was like, "Let's do this. Get Fernando on, let's go!" And they were like, "It's really random that you do stuff like that" and I'm like," Well that's just kind of the random kid that I am." And they're like, "no it's good." And the crew would be like, "It's time for 'Fernando'." Like they would just... I was like a real person to them because I didn't really give them a hard time. Like some people were like, "I don't wanna wear this" or "I don't wanna go where you're telling me to go." I was like, "dude, it's a show just do what they tell you, like obviously they can't get what they need from us if you don't go there so just, why are you fighting, and it causes all of us to wait, like I don't have time for your shit. You're older than I am and you're acting like a child, like pull it together!" Like, I just didn't have the patience for that because I knew what the end result was supposed to be. So I was like, "If we have to wait here for an hour then we wait here for an hour. This is what we're supposed to do. It sucks but what else are you supposed to be doing? We've come to the conclusion, this is our life for the next five weeks if you're lucky to make it for that five weeks so just calm down and do what they're asking you to do." (Jessica)

Unlike some of the women I spoke with who expressed contradictory feelings about the filming process, Jessica asserted that she welcomed the changes with open arms. What is most intriguing about her comment here is how rather than take an adversarial or oppositional stance with regards to filming 'reality' she decided that it was better to embrace it. However I am hesitant to characterize her decision or response to the competition environment as submitting to or being complacent per se but rather that she developed strategies which enabled her to negotiate this strange and unfamiliar setting into one that she could be comfortable with as evidenced in her decision to playfully name her mic pack Fernando, making the unusual circumstances bearable, almost like a game. Naming the mic pack also enabled her to develop a relationship with the crew in a way that did not compromise the rules but provided them with a way to connect to her through the mic pack, as the mic became an extension of the self, of Jessica. Thus, this 'domestication' of the mic pack was a way to make the experience of filming somewhat ordinary in that putting it on every morning was a part of the 'routine' of reality TV filming which in turn made inhabiting the subject position of 'reality show contestant' possible . She positioned her response as a counterpoint to those contestants that were perceived to be fighting the inevitable and not looking at the big picture which was to compete and win the grand prize. In her comments then is a level of respect for the media workers but also a sense that everyone has a part to play in the process.

By the third or fourth day you're like, okay these guys are trained in psychological warfare. They know how to exhaust you, how to manipulate you. You're up all the time and remember, the crew gets a shift. We don't get a shift. We're on as subject matter all day. So they would, say they're coming for you at 6 [am] they're showing up at like 5 [am] so you're waking up and there's a cameramen already in your room filming. Remember we didn't have the keys to our apartment and there was always somebody sitting outside the apartment overnight. So there would be someone sitting there with their books and their blankets because they'd be there all night because once you're in your apartment you can't leave and if you're leaving you're on a uh - they'll signal...Say you wanted to go to another apartment with other designers they'd be like, "designer travelling, designer travelling." So by the time you got off the elevator there'd be someone there and you couldn't like - so they would know where you were going at all times. So they can come in and out of the apartment all the time you know? By the time you finish in the cutting room... and the rooms they have on the wall backdrop and lit so it looks like windows. So you feel like you're up all the time but when you...say

when people go for a cigarette break outside then you realize it's like 10
o'clock at night but it's lit so that you're like...it's not fluorescent but it's
lit so it's like sunlight all the time so that you're awake all the time right.
(Franke)

Again, we see evidence of how the women are conscious of the differences between them and the media workers with Franke's self-reflexive comment that she is "subject matter." Implying that in this regard there are no boundaries that separate her-self from her reality TV self. Further to my earlier point, she also perceives that there is a distinction between the work that reality crew do, and the work that contestants do, which is non-stop and under constant surveillance. The crew get to go home after a shift while she has to "be on" all day long. But implicit in her statement is also an interesting commentary on the changing evolution of television production itself, similarly commented on by Suzie:

One great memory I have is, it reminded me so much of The Truman Show.
Like we were waiting, we were hanging out late and it, we were like smoking
or something on like the balcony and then we were like," What time is it?"
Someone else is like, "I don't know. What time is it?" "I don't know." And I
think it was J who was like - and the courtyard was empty but they had like
big lights you know even at night because they needed their footage - and J
yelled out, "What time is it?" And there's like no one there but all of a
sudden you'd hear like, "3:20!" It was just like wow, there's always someone
there, there's always, it was just like, it was totally like the Truman Show,
especially at that moment like, you just yell out to the yard and the yard
answers.

These two comments in addition to some of the other ones also illustrate how the production process manipulates time which further helps to defamiliarize space and place in reality TV participation. By masking the actual time or day, the women are further shut off from the 'ordinary world' which might be very disorienting for some, especially when you consider how this works in tandem with other tactics used by the producers such as no access to external media like magazines and radio. Part of this is done to control the show's discourse – so that they can create for the viewers a time-less show that can be easily aired over and over again without becoming too dated. Of course it is very telling that she parallels her experience of being on reality TV to that of the 1998 film *The Truman Show* starring Jim Carrey, in which a man lives his life

unaware that he is the focus of a long-running television show. However, as the film progresses cracks start to appear the facade and he eventually uncovers the 'truth' – that the life he was living was manufactured for entertainment purposes. Although, in Suzie's case she is aware of the situation but her comment speaks to the sense that 'there's always someone there' watching you, monitoring your every move but also that the presence of "big lights" indicates to the contestants how these spaces have been transformed into production sites or filming locales.

Managing Reality Space

Sometimes, the contestants expressed a desire to escape the competition space altogether, usually as a temporary measure to recuperate mentally or physically. The spatial and regulatory constraints placed upon reality show participants' forces them to develop strategies to deal with the high-intensity, high-stress competitive environment. One of the ways this unfolded was through the adoption of stress-reliever behaviours some of which, like smoking cigarettes, were not regular 'go-to' activities but seemed justified within the competition context.

> It was a way of escaping I guess. You know, just a little moment and you're probably always going to smoke a cigarette with somebody else so you can actually speak to somebody else as well. And only the contestants from the show were never, ever allowed to speak to anyone else of the contestants. So you know, I guess it was a way of like coping with the stress and be able to just, to talk to someone about the way you're feeling helps a lot especially when you're in this crazy environment.(MG)

Given how few outlets they had for dealing with the competition it is not surprising that contestants would engage in undesirable activities as a way to cope with their stress. As noted previously they were not allowed to speak openly about their experience with loved ones nor could they speak excessively about it during filming thus they sought out collective spaces where they could grapple with what was happening, in the process carving out spaces for themselves that served to keep them somewhat grounded and/or allowed them some degree of freedom from filming even if only temporarily or sporadically. Importantly MG's comment also highlights the need to create alternative *non-competitive* social relations with other contestants; that in many ways, regardless of how competitive you are, to some degree a reality-participant's success

also rests on their ability to be, if nothing else, amicable with other contestants. Further, the act of smoking was one way for competitors to step away from the action and more importantly, was a way for them to momentarily debrief and communicate with each other away from the constant surveillance.[63] These moments seemed crucial for the mental health and well-being of the competitors.

In addition to the smoking, MG and other cast members from her show's season also revealed that the parking lot also acted as a stress reliever. As Franke noted, "We started walking in the parking lot" because there was so little time to do any kind of physical exercise due to the non-stop production schedule, that walking around the parking lot at the design set [where they filmed the competition – i.e., making clothes, runway shows] was another way to relieve some of the stress through physical activity. These tend to be the moments that do not make it to air yet these spatial narratives are vitally important to our understanding of contemporary media culture and more crucially audience-producer relations.

'The Escape Story'

At other times, reality-participants sought to flee the filming site altogether, in an attempt to physically remove themselves from the competition. This was the case with one particular contestant, Suzie, who discussed at length not only her 'escape story' but also provided other examples of how other contestants also tried to temporarily leave the residence. Importantly, Suzie's story reaffirms how reality contestants do not always want to leave the competition permanently (although some do and are typically framed in the show as giving up or unable to handle the pressure) but that they respond in complex ways to the restrictions placed upon them as physically but also internally. Suzie's desire to escape was precipitated by a need to transgress the boundaries of the reality competition environment, to enact her subjectivity in a less controlled space, aka the real world. Moreover, her story describes two such attempts even though she was ultimately unsuccessful:

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[63] I was left with the impression that they were rarely filmed while smoking, or at least, the producers make a conscious decision not to air such footage.

...the night I tried to, I was hanging out with H and I think I was drunk but I was like," I'm tired of being in here." And I was like," I've never seen LA, like take me to a club. Is there something open?" He was talking about this awesome jazz club, and I was like, "Right on." So this was hilarious. I got like a scarf, like a big pashmina scarf, black, wrapped it around my head, my blonde hair still like sticking out. And...when people came out to the parties, they would have to park down, like, so I know where this is sort of now but, they'd have to park lower in the hills and then get shuttled up cuz there was no parking space and maybe for security reasons too. So then, for them to leave they had to get in a van shuttle, and there are people that open the doors and stuff, and security, and then get driven down to their car. So me and H and the keyboard player, the music director in the band (in the house band), and his wife were all getting into a car, and then someone like opened the door and was like, "Alright, get in, get in". I'm all nervous, my heart's beating and then they shut the door. And then he looked in, he was like, "Suzie you wanna get out or am I gonna have to come get you?" Like, he just knew the whole time. I'm like damn! So I didn't get out and then I think H had left by this point and I think it was, yeah, it was still at night and I think I was feeling like just extra courageous. So I ran down the hill. I just started running, and all around this property is like bush cuz it's like LA bush where it's not like forest, a bit drier, and I was running through that, running through that like scraping my legs. It's totally like going down, like having to run, run, run like jail and then, at the very bottom, I finally got to the fence and it was like an eight feet drop, or more, like a ten foot drop. I would've totally broken my legs. It was freaking Alcatraz.

This narrative reveals interesting insight into the tensions that seem to be always simmering just below the surface of reality-participation. First, feelings of boredom and a curiosity about the production location led Suzie to transgress the boundaries of the filming location. As has been shown throughout this study, there are a variety of restrictions placed upon sequestered contestants and an emerging theme in the work has been that of likening their reality-participation to incarceration. The secrecy surrounding the exact location of the reality residence in addition to not being familiar with her surroundings contribute to this understanding of reality TV as a kind of 'jail' or 'Alcatraz'. Interestingly, Suzie was one of the savviest women I interviewed with regards to her knowledge and experience working in the entertainment industry, as she has always wanted a career as a singer/performer, and yet her story reveals that every contestant has their own personal limitations when it comes to competing in such an intense environment. The house she resided in during filming seemed to serve as the

antithesis of what a typical domestic space is supposed to symbolize. Rather than try to re-domesticate this space, Suzie made an in-the-moment decision to try and flee it.

Inhabiting a Televisual 'Reality' Life

This discussion contributes to larger debates about the ways in which the media, here television specifically, is able to codify the terms of our participation through the construction of public/private boundaries. Specifically, I focused on how the women negotiated the slippage of these distinctions and how they often struggled to create their own boundaries in an attempt to assert their agency. This chapter has shown that despite arguments to the contrary, these distinctions still matter and that the women played with these boundaries as a way to contest the constraints placed upon them during filming. Moreover, the examples discussed here reveal the ways in which these boundaries continue to be defined along gender, class and racial lines even if implicitly. Significantly, it was two of the racialized (non-modelling) women I interviewed that made a point of noting their discomfort with undressing in front of the cameras. This is important given that so much of the feminist scholarship on television and the public/private sphere focuses on the positive aspects of this for female audiences, as private matters, once shunned by critics are now openly discussed and debated, thus extending the notion of a public to include the marginalized and oppressed. No longer relegated to the invisible domain of the private sphere, women's stories are now included in the regular TV schedule. However, what these women's narratives suggest is that not everything is open for public consumption and that even as we are quick to celebrate the blurring of these boundaries, we are still clearly invested in upholding certain boundaries when they infringe on a sense of personhood or personal safety.

My research suggests that television, as a media institution, is able to reassert its power through its organization and management of audience via reality-participants which supports arguments made by Graeme Turner and Nick Couldry that the current media culture is far from democratic but a system built upon the reproduction of hierarchy, power and privilege. Indeed, rather than levelling the playing field between audiences and producers, reality TV competition shows illustrate how this new model of television production works to reinscribe/entrench inequality even further as reality TV

producers act as gate-keepers of the media world; they get to decide who enters and under what conditions: "By controlling access to knowledge and resources through the control of space, the dominant group's ability to retain and reinforce its position is enhanced" (Spain 16). Indeed, feminist scholarship on gendered spaces has contributed greatly to our understanding of how women have historically been restricted from accessing certain spaces while being confined to others; we should also consider how the media also function as a social institution that constructs problematic spatial boundaries. Given the pervasiveness of reality TV as a regular feature of television production, media scholars will need to consider more carefully this dimension of sociality as we edge closer and closer to living semi-public lives. For many their journeys were just beginning though, as they would soon become objects of intense media scrutiny and audience adoration, thus catapulting them into the system of reality-celebrity.

Chapter 4.

The Cultural Production of Reality-Celebrity

> I do remember on the first day being like let's do this. They walked into my
> room to put the mic pack on, I was like okay let's go. Let's make me famous
> and they quoted me on that later on in the show. (Jessica)

In many ways, reality TV has become synonymous with "celebrity culture" as illustrated by the opening quote. Even when reality show contestants are not seeking fame per se, they understand that it is a by-product of their participation and find ways to manage television's construction of a public personality or self. The proliferation of reality TV in the West has reignited debates in the academy and popular culture about the cultural and even economic importance of celebrities and celebrity culture, and more specifically has raised important questions about media power, ethics, and the self in late-capitalism. Moreover, rapidly changing technologies have narrowed the gap between audiences and celebrities, as we now have constant access to them through social media such as Twitter and online gossip websites; technologies which have become increasingly integral to our self-branding and presentation in the on-line world (Marshall 2010). This flattening of the space between audiences, producers and celebrities has been heralded by some critics as evidence of reality TV's democratizing effect; yet there is a downside to this kind of exposure, whether time and wages lost due to participation

or the public ridicule that often accompanies being thrust into the spotlight.[64] As shown in the work of Sue Collins and Su Holmes, more often than not, reality TV contestants have become the poster children for the more negative changes associated with the changing celebrity landscape, as the 'brand' of celebrity attached to their 'disposable' stars is devalued and often ridiculed by the press and audiences. However, the notion of celebrity as a by-product of a capitalist industrial society has always been fraught with cultural baggage, becoming "a term that announced a vulgar sense of notoriety" (Marshall *Celebrity and Power* 5) but that also "implies a particular connection to the historical evolution of public visibility, and its relations with the mass media and changing notions of achievement" (Holmes and Redmond 11). Moreover, the evolution of reality TV celebrities reflects the changing discourse of celebrity as a 'special' individual with 'innate talent' to a more self-enterprising model whereby the average person has access to the tools and technologies to manufacture their own media hype. Celebrity is no longer something that only happens to movie stars, professional athletes, or politicians but rather has seeped into the 'everyday' suggesting that celebrity has become 'ordinary' in some way (Bennett and Holmes 77).[65] Ordinary people have a variety of tools at their disposal now that allow them to become self-enterprising brands; we can create our own celebrity. Yet, as other scholars have suggested there is something distinct about the kind of celebrity that is cultivated by reality TV and so "the value associated with its participants' fame must be understood in the broader context of commercial television's

[64]   There have been a number of articles in recent years that reveal the impact that reality TV participation can have on contestants during filming and postproduction. In a 2007 article, *New York Times* journalist Abby Ellin wrote about the time and money potential contestants spend just to have a shot at appearing on reality TV, ranging from creating their video applications to the money spent on travel costs to auditions. Other times this can take the form of money spent on classes to hone one's craft, in preparation of the audition. Reality show contestants also lose wages due to their participation due to taking time off work; it is not uncommon for contestants to reveal that they have either quit their jobs or else been fired (due to their appearance). A recent article in *The Vancouver Sun* points to the ways in which the short term gains, in terms of exposure and celebrity, do not result in long term career success, as a survey of the post-competition careers of several singers revealed. Writer ChrisTalbott notes that "prospects for non-winners have dropped so much that [in 2012], 'Idol' stopped offering second-place finishers a guaranteed recording contract."

[65]   Milly Williamson has shown how negative valuations of the 'ordinary celebrity' are often framed within gendered, racial and classed discourses, identifying the cultural 'threat' as one posed by the 'trashy' female reality star such as Snookie of *The Jersey Shore*, and in the process reproducing the 'feminization of mass culture' debates.

changing landscape" (Curnutt 253) even as the production of reality-celebrity must also be understood in its local or national contexts.

With these transformations in mind, I set out to explore in this chapter the relationship between reality TV, celebrity, and audiences from the perspective of former contestants whose insights offer a unique opportunity to think about the cultural production of reality TV celebrity from 'the inside'. Indeed, one of the key themes that I set out to explore in this study was celebrity, given that much of the early criticism of reality TV participants was dominated by negative discourses of celebrity (i.e., 'fame-whores'), and often targeted at women. The women's stories provide a window into how reality show participants make sense of their new-found fame, revealing complex forms of negotiation and self-management which extends beyond filming. Within the context of my study, this can be traced from reflections on the differences between American and Canadian culture, TV and film celebrities, domestic television audiences and fandom, and (Canadian) reality TV performance. Thus, this chapter is an attempt to parse out what this changing celebrity landscape, as cultivated by reality TV participation, means to/for contestants, and how their self-understanding resonates with some of the current literature but also reveals critical gaps that need to be addressed such as the need for more localized or 'micro' studies of celebrity that account for ways in which nation, gender, race, and class, intersect with the construction of celebrities cross-culturally.

Reality TV Celebrity

Common perceptions of reality TV celebrity hold that very little 'talent' or 'work' is required of contestants because they are 'just being themselves'. While programs like *The Real World* or *Big Brother* primarily revolve around the cultivation of a 'winning' persona twenty-four-seven, the competition or talent show is very labour-intensive; contestants are constantly battling to upstage and outlast their co-competitors, pushing their skills and knowledge to its breaking point. James Bennett and Su Holmes note, competition-based reality shows "seek to distance themselves from the concept of 'easy' or 'arbitrary' celebrity by combining an emphasis on manufacture and image production with more traditional ideologies of fame (which suggest that talent and stardom is 'innate' and not simply acquired)" (75). Part of this rests upon the contestants' willingness to

participate in the promotion of show sponsors, which is a key component of modern day celebrity. During filming, this may take the form of performing promotional sketches as one former contestant noted, "We put on these little skits, all the Idols sitting around eating Kraft Dinner." Reality show contestants are also expected to make this promotional work appear 'natural' and 'ordinary' within the show's narrative such as using the products in 'positive' ways .

> They made us do things like, multiple times. Like, they wouldn't do it a lot, and they didn't air any of them but like, we came home one day and there was like a surprise present of like shaving cream or razors or something really cheap --- in the bathroom – "oh, that's cool. That's awesome!" And then, they put, the cameraman missed it so they repackaged it like, can you guys re-find this again, and then the cameraman's going to film you, and we're like, "really?" and so we went in and we're like, "oh yay!" So, it was kind of staged. And then, they made us do a lot of weird walking things. Like, they made us walk up stairs and we'd walk up the stairs and we'd come back down, walk up the stairs again. (Natalie)

This 'staging' of consumption is definitely an economic reality of filming reality TV in Canada, as one reality show producer told me, these programmes are costly to produce despite arguments to the contrary.[66] As Natalie's comments reveal, the staging of everyday activities like walking and opening doors are another aspect of the performative nature of reality TV participation, as producers need 'b-roll' footage for show continuity.

Aside from promoting the show's corporate sponsors, reality show contestants take on a variety of other performing duties which often take place daily. One of the activities identified by the women was the 'candid interview' – a common feature of competition shows like 'Top Model' and 'Project Runway' – which gives the appearance

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[66] The economic cost/benefit of producing unscripted programming will vary depending on the type of program, length, number of celebrity guests or judges, and production values. Moreover the economic debates about reality TV as being 'cheap' need to consider more carefully how financial considerations might be culturally specific. Canada's TV industry is far less developed economically speaking than America's privatized commercial system, with a much smaller population to support it through consumption. Thus, as many critics of Canadian reality TV like to point out, our reality competition shows, especially adaptations of popular US franchises tend to have lower production values and a much stronger corporate presence through the use of sponsors.

that the participant is speaking directly to the audience. This production strategy gives the appearance of 'talking heads', when in actuality the contestants are being asked questions by the producer or other crew (who exist outside the show's frame), creating a sense of familiarity, authenticity and intimacy with viewers.

> ...we'd be doing something, filming something, waiting, and filming some more and waiting and then we do a photo shoot and afterward we'd be interviewed by the producer and do all those little candid things. --- they'd ask you a question but you can't answer it in a question because the audience isn't supposed to know that there's anyone else there. So if they asked you, "What's your favourite colour?" you can't say purple, you have to say, "My favourite colour is purple." ...so they can edit it and it would be the person saying, "I like purple." So they could ask a lot of specific questions. (Rebeccah)

This interviewing style allows producers to cultivate a variety of footage which can be used later in order to construct the show's narrative or a particular contestant's story arc. As audiences are well aware, reality shows only air a fraction of the footage that they produce, which often leads to out-of-context quotes, commonly referred to as "frankenbites" (Arnovitz). This process usually "splices together several disparate strands or an interview, or even multiple interviews, into a single clip" which reduces the interview to a "seemingly blunt, revealing confession or argument" in order to manipulate[e] viewer perception of a contestant" (ibid).[67] However, the contractual agreements signed by participants prevent them from taking any legal action if they are unhappy with the way in which the footage is used. Instead, reality show participants, in exchange for media representation, must bear the burden of becoming a 'celebrity-commodity'.

Performing for the Camera

Of course, a key aspect of reality TV participation is that it requires a certain level of performing from all contestants. These 'ordinary performers' are subject to critique for

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[67] This also speaks to Kavka and West's argument about the 'unlocated' or 'ahistorical' time of reality TV. Through the "stage-manage[ment] of emotional events [reality TV] create[s] a moveable present in which event, emotional display and audience reception collide" (Kavka and West 151). Thus, the use of various filming techniques allows programmers to construct or replicate television's key functions: liveness, familiarity and intimacy.

their lack of professional skills but they are also championed precisely for existing in the margins of TV performance. As Karen Lury writes, this places ordinary performers in both a "constrained and liberated" position because on the one hand they are "more likely to be intimidated by technology and the mechanics of 'being' on television" while on the other hand their novice status makes them more unpredictable which can be exciting for viewers (124). Part of that excitement might be premised around the contestants' amateurish attempts at performing on television, as one woman commented, it was her "first try at acting." Thus on some level reality show participants recognize that the lines between 'being yourself 'and 'acting' become very blurry, especially as the competition wears on, and they become knowledgeable in the programmers expectations.

> We would put on more of a show when they'd [producers] be around so we'd talk more philosophically, more people would try and get a word in edge wise and, it's almost like talk-acting. But um, we didn't do that at the beginning and they weren't always around. That was the other thing. They listened more to what you were saying and so sometimes, like we'd be sitting here and they'd be like in the corner of your room, a camera guy sitting there and then he'd hear in his ear, ok, start filming cuz they'd hear that we'd be getting into something ... cuz they you know, a lot of it was boring footage but is very audio-driven, where oh someone's talking about the show or something. If we were talking about families, like I don't know whatever, other things that they didn't feel were pertinent. So it was like normal talking, normal talking and then the cameras are all of a sudden here and it's more like everyone's voice is raised a little bit <raises voice, laughing> and it sounds more animated.

This illustrates how reality show participants learn how to manipulate the amount of exposure they receive during filming by playing up certain characteristics or even 'acting' in a way that gives the illusion that something "important" is happening. Through the course of the competition, participants acquire a repertoire of skills that they can use to help create and/or construct their televisual personality. Moreover, even these ordinary performances must be exaggerated (or 'animated' as Suzie says), in order to create excitement or interest which speaks to criticisms of reality TV as reflecting a constructed version of social reality rather than operating as reflection of 'objective truth'. Indeed, some of the women were disappointed to discover that 'being yourself' was not enough:

> I guess too like, to do well on those shows you kind of have to always be performing and if I had realized that maybe I would've but I kind of went in - I think I was a little naive you know? I don't know, I'll just be me, it'll be fine, like they'll see, well no. (HD)

This is a common rhetorical move used in reality competitions shows, where contestants are often accused of not being themselves or muting their personalities (sometimes this is given as a reason for elimination). Contests who acquiesce to this 'reality rule' are often rewarded while those who resist are often eliminated like HD. This reveals an interesting paradox embedded within the conventions of the format where producers and hosts say "be yourself" but what they really mean is "do what we tell you to do" (Jost 37). Indeed, the implication here is that producers and judges somehow know the contestants better than they, or their loved ones, know them! Sometimes this backfires though, as it did with Suzie; early on, the producers tried to construct her as the show's 'bitchy' character but when her follow-up actions did not support this, they were forced to abandon this stereotypical move.[68] Contestants like Suzie, recognize these demands and make a conscious decision to 'amp up' their personalities in exaggerated ways (and she is already a very outgoing person) whereas more reserved or subtle personality types are faced with the challenge of expressing themselves in ways that do not leave them feeling like they are 'faking it' or *not* being their 'ordinary' self. Thus there seems to be a distinction here between the person and the personality for a contestant can be perfectly pleasant and collegial but not loud or outgoing, as Lury writes, "television more than cinema, tends to cast according to 'type'" ("Television Performance" 119). In her piece on *America's Next Top Model*, media scholar Amy Hasinoff notes that the production of reality-celebrity speaks to a complex array of forces that rely on the problematic perpetuation of gender, race and class stereotypes in conjunction with institutional and economic requirements, that enable producers to commodify and sell identity and 'difference' to television audiences.

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[68] I experienced this from the other side of the screen, as my partner and I watched the programme when it aired and he commented on this, predicting that this tactic would fail because he knew she wasn't like that in 'real life'.

"I saw you on TV": Fan-Encounters

Of course, fans play an important role in the construction of reality TV contestants as celebrities through the consumption of 'para-texts' such as entertainment magazines, or other program appearances. Fans also become consumers of their products like music albums, clothing, or patronizing their businesses such as a restaurant.

But unlike other celebrities, reality show participants seem more accessible to audiences because of their perceived 'ordinariness' and 'authenticity'.[69] In this way, reality-celebrity shares much in common with critical formulations of TV celebrity which is in one way, a by-product of the medium's specificity; the 'immediacy' and 'liveness' associated with television creates a sense of familiarity that is different from say film.[70] Television creates characters that are generally more 'ordinary' and 'familiar' in that they enter our homes on a regular basis (often weekly or even daily), contributing to a collapse of boundaries between the performer and the role that they are playing which in turn constructs a more 'intimate' relationship with audiences (Ellis 96). But unlike the 'specialness' or 'iconic status' attached to film stars, TV celebrity is often perceived to be short-lived, and while there is some truth to this, as borne out in my research interviews, I contend that contemporary changes in celebrity culture has diminished the film star's 'power' while TV celebrities are proliferating (at least in certain national contexts).

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[69] Although as many celebrity scholars have pointed out, the challenges or 'threats' posed by reality-celebrities has forced many celebrities to make themselves more available to audiences and fans. Reality TV has definitely changed the fame game.

[70] Scholars have debated at-length the differences between film and TV celebrity, often reproducing a cultural hierarchy that tends to privilege film stars. However, Su Holmes has shown how many of the early assumptions or frameworks, such as the film star as both ordinary and extraordinary compared to the TV personality do not hold up in the current celebrity landscape, where this binary has been mapped onto the reality TV phenomenon. Deborah Jermyn argues, using TV actress Sarah Jessica Parker as a case study, that some TV stars are able to successfully brand themselves across a number of platforms by carefully constructing an off-screen persona that is *just different enough* from their TV character. Jermyn identifies how Parker distances herself in gendered ways by publicly positioning herself as a 'respectable' woman (i.e., domestic, married, devoted mother, wealthy patron) against her character's postfeminist , single-gal, sex-positive identity. Importantly, it should be noted that her analysis positions the 'successful' TV star firmly within a discourse of 'quality TV'.

Ironically, within the realm of celebrity, reality TV contestants' 'ordinariness' is often held against them, as evidence of the cultural denigration of the celebrity system. Moreover, unlike 'us', reality TV celebrities received a 'backstage pass' and now hold privileged information about the 'TV world' marking them as a group of TV ambassadors, who are able to serve a pedagogical function by answering questions about 'what it was like' to be on TV. They function as the bridge between the media world and our 'ordinary' world and through sharing their feelings and experiences with friends, family and fans alike, they in turn shape our understanding and knowledge of TV. Reality-participants then, hold a unique and valuable form of knowledge that is not accessible to everyone, thus illustrating that despite the importance and prominence of TV in our everyday lives there is still some mystique surrounding its form, function and power.

Confronting Fans: Reluctant TV Celebrities

While the participants might not be 'ready' to deal with the public exposure, they nevertheless find themselves confronting the ways in which celebrity spills out into and shapes everyday social interactions. They must contend with stares, whispers and smiles of recognition as they go about their daily routines, all signs that they have an audience for whom they have become a source of entertainment and object of fascination. When they engage with their fans in public spaces, they are also reminded that there are people who – based on their TV-based knowledge of contestants – *think* that they know them. Social scientists refer to these one-sided relationships as 'parasocial' whereby audiences, come to feel that they know the participants intimately. Indeed, "the audience is invited to feel part of the celebrity's life sphere and persona in ways which are everyday, ordinary and *familiar* – much as in the ways television's celebrity function has been conceived" (Bennett and Holmes 77, original emphasis). The self-consciousness displayed by some of the respondents also speaks to popular understandings about celebrity and celebrities as existing in some kind of alternate social reality, outside the realm of our everyday experience. Because of this lack of first-hand knowledge or experience of being a celebrity, most of the women felt unprepared for what came after they made their small screen début. Indeed, they are not professional celebrities who are managed by a team of people committed to their 'brand' but instead are left to fumble their way through the celebrity maze with little guidance or support.

Significantly, many of the women framed their understanding of the audience's interest in them as *different from* the kind of attention paid to 'legitimate' celebrities. Indeed, many of them went out of their way to clarify this distinction by declaring, "I'm no Angelina Jolie" or "I'm no Brad Pitt" – two names which came up frequently in the interviews. Such distinctions imply that we are still heavily invested in a cultural hierarchy that privileges certain kinds of celebrity and celebrities, and even more, that TV celebrity is notably absent, as not one respondent compared their experience to another TV performer while examples were drawn from film and music. These stubborn distinctions shape the popular discourses about reality TV stars and the ongoing debates about whether they can even be classified as celebrities. The assumption here is that the celebrity produced by reality TV is culturally worthless and of little value which is telling, given the ways in which television has traditionally been gendered a 'feminized' communication medium in relationship to film, as demonstrated in the work Patrice Petro and feminist media historian Lynn Spigel. Yet, through these public engagements with fans, reality show contestants are able to experience, on some level, what it's like to be these 'A-list' celebrities.

> But it was always weird like, "why do you want my photo? I just live up the road and I came to the grocery store, and I was going to get four things but I could only afford three, um you sure you want my picture? Really? Alright."
> So, it was just weird and I really got the world, in that like 15 minutes I got how intense you know, movie stars' lives must be with that.

Thus, Natalie seems to recognize how on the one hand, she 'shares' something with the 'Pitts' and 'Jolies' of the celebrity world but on the other hand, she will always be an 'oustider' existing in the margins; somewhere between the 'media world' and the 'ordinary world'. Moreover, there is self-awareness on the contestants' part that they will only ever marginally or temporarily inhabit the same social space occupied by 'real' celebrities. Yet, as Gareth Palmer and Sue Collins have argued, such accounts fail to acknowledge how the production of reality-celebrity relies on alternative mechanisms that operate economically outside of, and alongside the Hollywood machine creating a 'class' of celebrities that props up the traditional system of celebrity. Thus, reality TV celebrities symbolize a new form of celebrity that is the result of specific changes – economic and institutional – to television's mode(s) of production that has become a necessary component or ingredient in the ever expanding commercial media sphere.

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Engaging with Fans via the Internet/ Social Media

In addition to these face-to-face encounters with fans, one of the primary modes for celebrity-fan interaction is the Internet which can be accessed across various delivery platforms from laptops to smart phones along with more traditional forms such as entertainment magazines. Developing social media technologies have become particularly popular with audiences and celebrities alike and while reality TV producers were at the forefront of this integration – building modes of fandom into its very format – the entertainment industry has quickly seized upon them in order to create more 'brand awareness' for celebrities by facilitating closer and more 'intimate' fan-relations.[71] Indeed, the Internet has had a profound effect on contemporary culture by breaking down, reconstituting and blurring the line(s) between the public and the private (spheres), and between audiences and production. The importance of social media in fan-management and communication was reiterated in the interviews, typically during production (as participants are often required to post contestant blogs/diaries on the program websites, and post-show, as a way to interact with audiences through both 'official' channels and via their personal accounts).

The internet can pose some challenges for reality contestants who are not used to being in the public eye and the attention that comes with it; for as many positive words of support and encouragement that are written, there will be just as many negative (anti-fan) comments making fun of, or putting down contestants. Indeed, one of the downsides of social media is how it has become a receptacle for negativity, as posters/users feel 'empowered' to engage in personal attacks commonly referred to now as 'cyber-bullying' or 'flaming'. Reality show participants are certainly not immune from this, and often find themselves the target of negative comments which can be very unsettling and upsetting. Many women commented on this drawback of public exposure,

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[71] P. David Marshall outlines four features of Reality TV which illustrate its use of, and intersection with, new media forms: 1) reinvigorates the role of the audience by creating a televisual form of interactivity, 2) creates an immersive quality in production and reception; audiences are given ample opportunity to become totally immersed and involved with the 'reality world', 3) levels out participation and value; Reality TV suggests that anyone can become cultural producers and/or celebrities, and finally 4) its representations highlight the "will-to-produce" which he argues is one of the key components of the cultural production thesis ("New Media Cultures" 99-100).

and they quickly learned to limit or even cut off altogether engagement with certain virtual spaces such as message boards or blogs due to the sheer number of anonymous comments that appeared to have no other purpose than to cause shame or hurt.

> I couldn't keep myself from reading the [show] forums. You know there's the CTV forums for [the show] and you can speak- you know anyone can log in and kind of talk about the contestants and the performances that week and a lot of us unfortunately read them and some of them were really nasty. So you know it was, it would you know have an effect on some of us sometimes. They would vote online who they thought was going to go that week or you know so it becomes a huge pheno- it's such a phenomenon that - and it allows people to really comment and judge really harshly on um whatever they think of a contestant and you know it's uncensored so anyone could really post anything about anyone. (Steffi)

Steffi's recollection of fandom in the internet age is a testament to how the boundaries between celebrities and audiences are breaking down, and becoming more flexible. Fans now feel entitled to express their opinions about celebrities, often in very public and direct ways (i.e., on Twitter) signalling that they are no longer revered in the same way but are now just "characters to judge and deride" (Fairclough para. 3). This is a departure from the early Hollywood studio system which acted as a 'gatekeeper' for performers; holding a high degree of control over the reproduction and distribution of a star's image and thus how it would be received.[72] The traditional role of the media was to flatter the celebrity through fairly favourable coverage, usually in exchange for access to celebrities. However, as the entertainment industry continued to flourish – enabled by technological changes and the growth of sub-industries to support celebrity – the harder it became to control the public discourse on celebrities. Joshua Gamson has shown how these developments, often in the service of catering to and keeping audiences, created a savvy viewership that has become accustomed to having access to the "system for

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[72] Indeed, there was a major attempt to make sure that the star's off-screen persona conformed to normative postwar nuclear family ideals, such that any 'deviations' were kept out of the public discourse, as it was believed it would harm their commodity value.

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celebrity-creation" ("Assembly Line" 142).[73] Thus, contemporary media discourse on celebrities now includes discussions and debates about the *production* of celebrity/celebrities (alongside images and texts), often in an ironic or mocking tone.

This is reflected in the turn towards 'celebrity bashing' which "taps into feelings of anger, resentment and frustration [but] also functions as a means of interrogating and debating the social inequality embedded within celebrity culture" (Patterson and Sears para. 27). Moreover, the proliferation of nasty celebrity commentary also reaffirms the subject position of the 'anti-fan'. As media scholar Jonathan Gray writes, "Behind dislike, after all, there are always expectations – of what a text should be like, of what is a waste of media time and space, of what morality or aesthetic texts should adopt, and of what we would like to see others watch and read" (73). Perhaps 'bashing' reality-celebrities is the audiences' way of expressing their expectations for the contestants in addition to feelings of resentment or jealousy that they have been given access to the 'media world'; a world that we think is "somehow better than our ordinary, everyday lives" (Couldry *Place of Media Power* 354). Indeed, some of the women I spoke with were equally perplexed by this 'love/hate' reception:

> I don't know the psychology behind it but I assume it's because it's kind of like being a rat in the cage. Like, they can see you but you, on TV, don't know anything about them so it's like, they know everything about you because you come into their life every week for like an hour and they get to know you. You know, maybe it's not the real you but they get to know you. So I think they just develop some kind of emotional connection to you and I don't know like, I don't really understand it. Ya, I don't know, but definitely like online, people have like, they feel the security and they you know, they're more likely to rat you out. Like they'll never say it to your face but you know they'll say mean things if they don't have to write their name on it. (Carlie)

Despite the overwhelming feeling that the internet provides fans and anti-fans with an anonymous forum to criticize celebrities, this constant flow of negativity is also

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[73] Competition shows aid in this demystification process by showing or giving audiences access to how the image-making industry works (i.e., PR, media training, stylists etc), and sometimes even offers explicit instruction on how the 'ordinary' person can utilize this knowledge to create their own brand, which was the theme of one of the more recent cycles of *America's Next Top Model*. At the same time, certain elements of the reality show process remain cloaked in secrecy which is an interesting paradox.

what makes it possible for former contestants like Carlie to disregard it, as ultimately they have very little control over how viewers respond to them once the show airs. We do see though, from the participants' perspective, how audiences respond intensely to reality show contestants, and will continue to do so, so long as there are debates about their legitimacy as celebrities. Moreover, the ways in which contestants respond to audiences reveals a deep ambivalence and/or contradictory mode of reception that relies on discourses of 'authenticity' (even as reality TV begs us to question notions of truth and objectivity). Certainly, part of the pleasure of watching reality TV is seeking out those moments of truth or 'realness' – those cracks or fissures in the text that promise to show us the 'real' person behind the 'character'. In this regard, reality TV celebrity shares many similarities with other forms of 'status' celebrity; at the heart of which are ongoing debates about on-screen and off-screen personas.

> [T]he ultimate irony of celebrity of course, is that fans can never know the celebrity through any of these celebrity media texts, as they are just as constructed as a celebrity's public performance. No one media source, not even the one most associated with the celebrity, gives us a full understanding of the complexity and tensions inherent in celebrity personas" (Meyers 893-4).

However, other cultural contexts also shape how participants and audiences make sense of this phenomenon, something which became clearer to me after the interviews were completed.

Reality-Celebrity in Local/Canadian Contexts: 'Temporary' Fame

Current debates about celebrity culture within Cultural Studies are attentive to the ways in which the 'flows' of celebrity are shaped by local-global contexts. To date, there is a slim but steadily growing body of scholarship that addresses the relationship between reality TV and celebrity culture but mostly within an American or European framework.[74] Admittedly, this was not a focus of my research when I set out to conduct

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[74]   See the work of: Alexander Dhoest, Jennifer Gillian, Laura Grindstaff, Su Holmes, Derek Kompare, Ruth McElroy and Rebecca Williams, Gareth Palmer, and Graeme Turner.

the interviews but through the course of the conversations, and the post-interview process of transcribing and coding, it became clear that these cultural discourses became a frame of reference for the women as a way to help them make sense of their celebrity/public exposure. Specifically, they drew on commonly held assumptions about the cultural differences between Canada and America in their descriptions and explanations of how they were affected by reality-celebrity, suggesting that more critical attention be paid to the national contexts of celebrity culture.[75]

Much of the literature to date that addresses reality-celebrity has failed to adequately attend to this cultural dimension especially within the Canadian context. Historically, Canadian culture has tended to define itself in an oppositional manner; it is that which is not American. Yet this notion that we have somehow maintained a 'pure' Canadian culture untainted by a 'vulgar' American one is a myth, given that most Canadians share more geographically and culturally with Americans than other Canadians (given the vastness of the country). Our shared cultural proximity with America has meant that we have been able to enjoy and consume the entertainment products produced by their cultural industries from a safe distance across the border. We can take pleasure too in knowing that while we may enjoy their cultural offerings we are somehow different or even better than them because such degraded forms of culture do not define us, as Canadians.

However, reality TV has in many respects altered this perception, once again bringing to the surface cultural anxieties and fears about an American cultural invasion

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[75] James Bennett and Su Holmes, in an article on the relationship between celebrity and TV studies, illustrate how national and historical contexts play an important role in conceptions of TV celebrity. For instance, they argue that early US-based scholarly conceptions of TV celebrity do not 'translate' well into the British context given that the national TV body, the BBC, had a mandate geared towards 'public service' which is similar to the model used by Canada whereby television's purpose was to education the citizenry. However, as David Hogarth has shown, these public service ideals often butted up against audience engagement and enjoyment of 'entertainment' formats much to the chagrin of politicians and concerned citizens.

via the domestic importation and adaptation of reality formats for Canadian audiences.[76] Early reception of 'Canadianized' reality show franchises was less than stellar and many journalists criticized these 'local' versions for failing to live up to the glamour and quality associated with American reality shows, especially popular brands like *America's Next Top Model*.[77]

In *Canadian Television Today*, scholars Bart Beaty and Rebecca Sullivan were also concerned that Canadian television was 'giving up' on creating Canadian content by creating reality shows on the cheap in the hopes of staying competitive in the global television market. Yet, my research subjects illustrated how despite our rather ambivalent stance towards American popular culture, Canadians are just as willing to put themselves in the public eye, to live publicly for short periods of time on television, and the more prestige or notoriety a reality show brand has, the more eager people are to become a participant. Moreover, given that this kind of participation is not as extensive within Canadian television, it's no wonder that many Canadians would be thrilled at the prospect to have their own shot at competing for various rewards and to gain some kind of public recognition.

Celebrity appears to be a double-edged sword for Canadian reality show participants. On the one hand they are vaulted into a system of celebrity that is usually closed-off to Canadians and/or only made accessible to those willing to seek out a career in the US. On the other hand, with the adaptation of American reality show formats for Canadian audiences, Canada has not only jumped on the reality show

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[76] In media studies, this often referred to as the 'cultural imperialist' argument which generalizes that America is an evil force out to colonize everyone else's culture, and the media is one way to 'export' and thus impose their cultural values and beliefs on the rest of the world. While I do not dismiss the power that America wields over the international TV industry, this argument fails to acknowledge the ability of audiences to negotiate and resist the American media juggernaut. As Albert Moran comments: "Domestic readings will be multiple, diverse, even contradictory, sometimes even reading programs as a-national" (147).

[77] As Tyee writer Elaine Corden commented on the first season of *Canada's Next Top Model*: "The whole thing – bland contestants, wilderness locale, low-budget sets and graphics, has a certain je ne sais fierceness that amounts to mind-numbing, nation embarrassing television. CNTM lacks all the elements that make ANTM so addictively watchable: sweet and civil Tricia has nothing on the hilariously self-important Tyra; Victoria, B.C. and a cabin in the wilderness are no New York City; ten contestants from three provinces does not amount to a 'nationwide search'."

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bandwagon as a cost-cutting measure to produce lots of television content cheaply and quickly, but in doing so, has also embraced/imported an American-style system of television production that has found a way to commodify 'ordinariness' profitably by drawing on the talents and labour of participants (aka, non-professionals) with the aim of manufacturing celebrities who then become spokespeople for the program (Baltruschat 46). Thus, this American style of celebrity has found its way into Canadian culture through reality TV competition shows with mixed results for contestants.[78] Yet, there are challenges to implementing this system of celebrity, as Canada does not have the infrastructure, never mind the sheer numbers in terms of audiences/population needed to sustain a financially lucrative, long-lasting career in the public eye. This is supported when we look at the audience ratings for Canadian franchises of popular American programs, despite the seemingly high viewership numbers. For instance, it was reported that in 2003, the finale of *Canadian Idol* drew 3.6 million viewers becoming one of the "highest ratings in Canada's history" (Baltruschat 48).[79] Compare this with the most recent season of *American Idol*, which has been reported as its 'worst season', averaging 19.7 million viewers weekly (Collins "American Idol"). It is hardly a fair comparison and illustrates that the potential for reality-celebrity in Canada is somewhat determined by structural constraints outside the contestants' control. Contestants are working within a set of limitations right from the start.

Moreover, reality-celebrity, while always precarious and temporary, seems to be even more so in the Canadian context where even fewer winners and former competitors have been able to achieve anything close to the level of fame and success

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[78] I would argue that this also happens at the textual level, reinforcing the blurry boundaries between Canadian and American celebrity. For example, while the first season of *Canada's Next Top Model* used recognizable Canadian personalities such as Jeanne Beker and host Tricia Helfer, the second season blurred the boundaries between the two shows, by bringing on *ANTM* alum (and Canadian) Jay Manuel as executive producer and host, along with guest appearances by other show regulars Nole Marin and Jay Alexander ('Miss Jay'). Thus, the show was able to capitalize on the celebrity tied to the American format as a promotional tool to garner more audiences and thus be more attractive to potential contestants. Indeed, as one of my respondents commented, she was 'thankful' not to be associated with that first season of the show which is viewed as far less successful than the following 2 seasons.

[79] Contrast this for instance, with season 1 and 2 of *Canada's Next Top Model* which failed to make the top 20 nationally watched shows during the summer 2006, and summer 2007. However, at the regional level, the show cracked the top 30 most watched shows in Vancouver and Toronto (BBM).

of some former American reality TV contestants (Agrell), and where most Canadian franchises often fail to match the longevity of their American counterparts (Vlessing). Indeed, I suspect that Canadian viewers are more familiar with the names of past winners of American reality shows than Canadian ones, and in this regard celebrity does not seem to matter the way it does in America. As suggested by John Ellis, TV celebrity does not usually last as long as the fame attached to film stars, and is most visible during the television performance, something which seems especially applicable to reality show contestants who often lack the resources and capital necessary to extend one's celebrity post-show. This is even more difficult considering that they must compete with 'legitimate' TV stars that are able to support a team of representatives that can help them to become successful international brands. Feminist TV scholar Deborah Jermyn refers to these performers as 'quality American TV stars' who "emanate from a particular kind of television, drawn from a particular national context" (Jermyn 82). Moreover, the notion that Canadian celebrities are more 'ordinary' and less 'extraordinary' also speaks to the cultural distance perhaps necessary to creating the 'aura' surrounding US performers. "US TV [has] greater international syndication, offering its actors the promise of greater media presence, [and] for non-US audiences the programmes' geographical distance feeds in to a sense of their stars being less immediately ordinary and familiar, and perhaps most particularly 'desirable'" (Jermyn 81). Thus, there are many factors to consider when trying to understand the 'flows' of Canadian reality-celebrity, and how Canada's media culture may also structure or shape the temporariness associated with reality-celebrity.

There was a sense from some of the former contestants that the temporariness associated with reality-celebrity is par for the course on Canadian competition programs. As one woman commented:

> It's a very temporary type of fame as opposed to perhaps the United States. Um I think the fame there from American Idol has lasted much longer and today you know there's a lot of Canadian Idols you know who won the show who you haven't heard of for a long time now. So I think you know that's the whole thing that makes it more of a game I guess but you know I kind of understood that after I was eliminated. It's a very temporary thing.

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Her comment reveals the illusory nature of Canadian celebrity; that it is far more difficult to achieve and sustain in Canada compared to the US, and that perhaps, contestants should lower their expectations or else expect disappointment (thus the "game" comment). Indeed, many of the women I spoke with noted how their reality-celebrity began to wane after awhile but few seemed to lament this.[80] In their study of reality show participants in Wales, scholars Ruth McElroy and Rebecca Williams note how it is often more difficult for "localebrities" to achieve the same level of visibility afforded to reality celebrities from bigger nations (199).[81] Moreover, smaller nations (geographically and population-wise) typically do not house "the technologies of celebrity attribution" such as major tabloids or gossip magazines that are required to facilitate or construct the reality show participant's celebrity thus the "localebrity" is more likely to be featured in local publications or newscasts (McElroy and Williams 199). Thus, reality TV celebrities often find themselves struggling to retain public visibility, even as they will be recognizable to people in their own communities.

Notions of Canadianness also butt up against, and inform audience reception of reality show competitors as Canadian celebrities because "determining Canadianness often takes precedence over star quality because of the regional loyalties of at least part of the voting audience" (Byers 71). When this happens, reality-participants get caught in the middle of a tug-of-war between judges and audiences, as was the case for one of the interview respondents, describing how she repeatedly found herself in the bottom three despite consistently receiving positive feedback from the judges on her performances.[82]

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[80] Most of the women were focused on building their respective 'post-reality' careers as counsellors and teachers for instance; or busy pursuing post-secondary education while others had managed to achieve moderate levels of success in the entertainment industry, or running their own businesses and building clientele.

[81] McElroy and Williams developed the term "localebrity" to show how reality celebrity intersects with "the local personality or 'character'" which enables a more thorough examination of "the cultural and theoretical specificity of local/national celebrity" (197). Moreover, "localebrities" are "figures who are known only to those within a very specific geographic national or local area" (ibid).

[82] This also calls to mind a photograph that one of the other women posted on their Facebook profile, which depicted a small piece of paper with the words "Queen of the bottom three" written on it; a reference poking fun at her repeated 'close-calls' as she faced the possibility of elimination multiple times.

As Michelle Byers discusses in her piece analyzing the construction of national identity on *Canadian Idol*, contestants that do not conform to a preconceived notion of Canadianness often do not make it to the finale. In particular, she found that racialized, ethnic and urban identities become less visible as the competition goes on, and that the audiences (and judges) voting decisions enable them to play out and reproduce an 'unproblematic Canadian identity' – usually through crowning a white, rural, male as the winner.[83] Contestants that fail to live up to this imagined 'Canadian idolness' also find themselves subject to negative audience reception, as alluded to previously, illustrating that there is also a gender and class dimension to this process of 'othering'. For this former contestant, it became increasingly and painfully clear that she was not likely to win the competition because of her 'outsider' status which she attributed to her theatrical singing background:

> ...it was difficult because not being a cookie cutter you know pop star it definitely made my life on the show more difficult I would say because it's not you know what Canada was looking for in a Canadian Idol...

Other remarks made by her illustrate how the judges, despite their high praise, also framed her as an 'outsider' during the competition, as they continuously referred to her as "unique," "different," and "quirky" further contributing to the perception that she was not a "cookie cutter pop star" and therefore undesirable as a celebrity figure. The respondent's musical theatre background combined with a "quirky" persona implies that she did not embody the 'right' kind of femininity typically associated with female pop stars. She represented neither the rebellious, hyper-sexualized popstar (i.e., Rihanna or Madonna) nor the conservative, typically attractive girl-next-door popstar (i.e., Jessica Simpson, early Britney). Instead, the 'queer sensibility' implied by her musical training/choices (although Glee has since made musical theatre 'cool') positioned her as a 'problematic identity' that did not conform to the audiences ideal perception of

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[83] Boulou Ebanda de B'béri and Ruth Middlebrook contend that certain production practices also contribute to a narrow representation of Canadian identity on *Canadian Idol*. For instance, they describe how during the 2006 audition process, auditions were held in a "limited number of pre-selected cities" and that the celebrity judges failed to travel to remote locations such as Yellowknife (30). Such actions reinforce the notion that certain regions in Canada are more important than others, despite the image of national unity embedded in the show's logic.

'Canadianness' and she was eventually voted off. Presumably, her fans embraced her 'difference' and voted for her because she perhaps challenged the hegemonic model of 'Canadian idolness' embedded in the show which Byers can only characterise as "bland". During the interview, the respondent seemed very self-aware that her 'otherness' was a source of internal and external conflict for the audiences and judges; yet she made it clear to me that she embraces her 'difference' and indeed, she has carved out a successful career for herself in musical theatre. However, her narrative also reminds us that reality-celebrity is hardly a meritocracy, where anyone can become famous for 'just being themselves' because we still cling to "mythic fictions" about Canadian identity (Byers 71).

Fandom and the Global 'Flows' of Canadian Reality-Celebrity

These circulating discourses about 'Canadianness' also underpinned the women's feelings about reality TV fans. For instance, 'Carlie's' dealings with fans led her to perceive or identify differences between Canadian and American fans; a difference rooted in cultural stereotypes about Canadians as more 'polite' and 'reserved' when it comes to interacting with celebrities:

> Canada, like people aren't that crazy but like you know, reality TV shows in America like people go crazy over them for sure. Ya, people here like, they're not that crazy. And when this show was on TV for the first time, it was on Slice network and it was a cable show so like not everyone had it. The second season was on Global and everyone had it but the first, ya, our season was on Slice so not everyone saw it.

Carlie's remarks also tell us something else about the production of reality-celebrity in the current television marketplace in Canada. Interestingly, she notes how the first season of the competition show aired on Slice network which is a subscriber cable channel meaning that it is not generally offered in a regular or basic cable package which would limit the audience base right from the start. However, the second season aired on Global, one of the 'big three' Canadian national broadcasters, which would have

brought the show to far more Canadian households.[84] More specifically, the channel or network, can act as a form of branding, as audiences make assumptions about the 'quality' of a programme based on how closely (or not) a channel conforms or aligns with their particular tastes which are often gendered. Slice network is a cable channel specializing in 'lifestyle programming' which "promotes itself as 'guilty pleasure viewing' for women" (Matheson 162). Therefore, their decision to openly brand themselves as a channel catering to 'women's interests' invites critical commentary from audiences and pundits who conflate 'women's interests' with 'trashy' programming such as reality TV (Matheson 163).

However, external factors such as the trade and distribution of reality formats in the global television market also contribute to the celebrification of Canadian reality show contestants. Indeed, format franchising has become a key component of TV program development as popular program concepts are commonly adapted for global markets with relatively low risk (Baltruschat 41).[85] Taped shows are also sold and aired in other countries, usually once they have aired in the domestic market, making it likely that reality show contestants will find themselves garnering the attention of fans from across the globe. Former contestant Jessica shared a story that exemplifies well the global circuit of reality-celebrity:

> ...ya I'm used to signing autographs and I'm used to doing that. It's kind of strange for me to say but I am used to it because it's been happening for two years now but I can tell when the show's been re-aired because more people are like staring or coming up and approaching me and stuff. So, and it

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[84]   It is also interesting to note that when researching the broadcast history of the competition shows my respondents appeared on, a number of them did not have a secure 'home' but moved from one network or channel to another, further suggesting the difficulties Canadian producers have with successfully importing American reality show franchises.

[85]   When TV companies purchase a format, they must pay a fee, which consists of a percentage of the show's budget to the license holder; for example, in the case of *Canada's Next Top Model*, Temple Street Productions would pay CBS/Paramount a fee for the right to use their format. It is also common for licensees to pay for show consultants to fly out, to help with producing the local version (Prashad A18). Finally, purchasing a format license entitles licensees to information about show specifics and 'trade secrets'– i.e., how to find and cast "characters". The reality format is supposed to allow producers enough flexibility that they can adapt shows for Canadian audiences – though it is important to keep in mind that formats come with limitations, thus their flexibility is somewhat predetermined and controlled through intellectual copyright laws.

just aired in Portugal which was like, I'm half Portuguese so my mom was like, "I got a call from Portugal, apparently the show is on there." I was like I've been wondering why I've been getting so many emails from Portuguese (sic)...

Reality-celebrity then is 'continuously temporary' if you will; it might start to wane but can be resuscitated as the program is sold into syndication for global consumption.

Regional Differences

Yet, respondents were also sensitive or attentive to differences amongst Canadian fans, especially what were perceived as regional distinctions. For instance, 'MG', a French-speaking Canadian who grew up in a small town in the Maritimes, was living in Montreal at the time when she became a public figure. Ruminating on her post-show celebrity, 'MG' infers that reality-celebrity is more heavily consumed or adopted by Anglophones especially in the nation's multicultural hub of Toronto and Canadian Francophones are not as fanatic about American-style celebrity and therefore more resistant to its charms and pleasures.

Um at first I was so blessed because I was living in Montreal and they're Francophones and did not all watch you know what I mean? So they did not all watch it so often. Anglophones on the street would like come up to me and talk about it but at some point people started to talk about it you know and like some Francophones got into the show, but at first I was happy I was living in Montreal basically because Toronto people are crazy. Like that's all they do is watch reality TV show you know?

Thus, she seems to imply that Montreal acted somewhat as a shield from the temporary pandemonium that ensued once the programme aired in Canada, and she would later recall some intense fan-encounters while shooting the finale in Toronto. This difference in regional consumption could be attributed however, to smaller audiences in Quebec for English-speaking television programmes and cable channels; as well, Quebec viewers, historically speaking, have always been very strong supporters of local productions,

even reality TV programming.[86] Returning to the initial point about the relationship between reality-celebrity, fans and 'Canadianness'; reality show competitors draw on their repertoire of knowledge about Canadian and American culture in order to make sense of their newfound celebrity, further making the case for more localized studies of celebrity.

Preparing for Celebrity: The Case for Training/Support

Through all of this, questions and concerns about the need for training and support, especially in how to deal with becoming a public figure became a reoccurring theme in the interviews. The growing number of 'where are they now?' stories about former reality show contestants illustrates the difficulties facing participants who wish to extend their celebrity beyond the show. My interview respondents were no different in this regard, as they offered a variety of perspectives and comments on this facet of reality-celebrity. Moreover, while some respondents received some form of media training, much of what has been discussed here with regards to the women's self-understanding of their celebrity points to the emotional /economic impact of reality show participation which can't always be anticipated or accounted for – that in some ways there will always be aspects of reality-celebrity that are felt on very deep, personal, emotional levels, and the less a respondent feels ready or prepared for this life-change, the more likely they are to feel 'disposable' which given the critique of scholars like Gareth Palmer and Sue Collins, is in many ways an appropriate reaction/response to what might be perceived as structural weaknesses or inequalities underpinning the very system of TV celebrity (the idea that these new celebrities do not actually challenge the hierarchy – not democratizing but actually work to prop up the celebrity system, reaffirming that there are those who are 'deserving' of fame while others will always be 'wannabes'). I should also clarify that when I speak of support and training, as it was

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[86]   In a 2006 article by *The Ottawa Citizen*, much was made of the province's move towards reality programming such as *Loft Story* (adapted from a programme originally shown in France) which drew an audience of 1.3 million for its finale, "more than half of Quebec's francophones." Moreover, the article notes that the "Quebec television industry is huge and churns out 2 ½ times as many series per capita as America's networks. The top 30 shows are all made here for a home audience."

conveyed to me by the women, takes many forms; there is professional, economic and emotional support. Professional support refers to the contestants access to experts, mentors working in the industry that they wish to work in, as well as legal support that provides information on their rights as reality show contestants and industry workers; economic support refers to the monetary issues related to reality show participation so this can refer to the amount of money they receive (or don't) to compete on television, or post show opportunities that offer financial remuneration such as a contract; and emotional support speaks to the relational or personal dimension of reality show participation and this may refer to participant relations, relationships between participants and producers/crew. The emotional sphere of reality show participation seems to play as crucial a role as the others, and is probably most vital during production and immediately after the show. No doubt this is why many competition shows offer some form of post-show counselling however, as one respondent alluded, these sessions are usually a one-off and there is no attempt to provide follow-up sessions once the contestant leaves, with little regard for the long-term or life-long consequences of participation on an individual's emotional/mental well-being. [87] In many ways, what reality competition shows do is not only give participants temporary access to, or insight into what a 'successful career' looks like for them in their chosen profession, but what a *celebrity version* of that life would be, something that very few people, even working in those professions might ever experience. It is not only being a fashion designer, but having celebrity clients, or working with designers who have achieved a kind of celebrity status – thus it is not only being good at what you do, but *being recognized by the right people* for what you do. It is no coincidence that many Western governments are turning to these creative fields as *the* model for *all* work in a post-welfare, neoliberal society, what McRobbie refers to as the "talent-led economy" ("From Holloway" 100).[88] The lines between work and leisure have become increasingly blurred, with one's professional life viewed more and more as a kind of 'lifestyle' seeping into all facets of a person's life.

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[87] Earlier stories about the 'safe house' illustrate this point well; contestants being left alone, still secluded immediately after being voted off of a programme, with no one to talk to.

[88] According to McRobbie, "What the talent-led economy means in reality is a deeply individualized dream of affluence based on sheer effort and without the resources of welfare. For 'talent' read 'looking out for and after the self'" ('From Holloway' 109).

Reality competition shows in the US and Canada have become very adept at blurring the boundaries between celebrity, branding, work and leisure, exploiting contestants' passion for their work in exchange for television content. One participant described at length the seemingly odd circumstances surrounding her feelings about her growing celebrity and competing on live television.

> ...the reason why that messed us up so badly is because with Survivor, you go into it, you have your experience and then, you can watch it with the rest of the world and you can sort of see yourself become a celebrity or become whatever it is for you. This way, I went into that show, you know, singing still but I didn't have a manager, I didn't have a lawyer, I didn't have a team behind me, I didn't you know, that's just one aspect. I was just Suzie from Toronto, that's another aspect. You leave these shows and you're famous and you didn't get to watch it happen so it, it messes you up. Like you're ejected into the world and people can recognize you and you don't even, you feel like the same, the humility, the humble thing inside, it like, it didn't register for me which actually affected I think, all of us but it affected a lot of my choices too. Cuz if I had really known to what capacity I was known out there and what I could've done, perfect example, I could've gone to any producer, at least in North America and said, "I just got off this show, do you wanna work with me?" I could've hustled way more and I would've gotten anything I wanted but I didn't 'get it' inside. It's really interesting.

Suzie's account reveals the 'loss of autonomy' that 'ordinary people' feel upon being thrust into the public eye, which can be made worse when contestants do not feel supported in the way I outlined above. The production of reality-celebrity tends to happen outside 'official channels' leaving contestants to navigate the celebrity world with little support. None of the women I interviewed had a clear understanding or sense of how their reality-participation would impact their lives and transform them, even those who took pleasure in the media visibility promised by reality TV like Jessica. They enter the 'reality world' with only a cursory understanding of celebrity based on popular media discourses and representations, and given how 'celebrity' as a form of 'lived experience' is so far removed from our everyday lives, it is no wonder that reality show participants have trouble grasping or comprehending it until they are faced with it head on. Suzie's comments also reveal the sheer powerlessness that reality show participants feel in these situations, reaffirming the unequal power relations between producers and contestants.

Thus, it did not come as much of a surprise when broaching the topic of support for reality show contestants, that Suzie took a firm position on this issue.

> You know there should be some kind of training or at least one hour, one little seminar when you get involved in this, of like this is what to expect. Number one, you are not going to get any help. You're gonna get eliminated from the show and that's it. That's all the help you're gonna get which is zero. Don't expect any producer to call you afterward. Don't expect any kind of record label to be set up, or whatever your show is. Don't expect a thing and you need to do it all for yourself after, you don't know that. They don't teach you that, and I was very resentful of all the production people because they had tons of um contacts and I was naive enough to think there was something there waiting for me, and there wasn't, and all of us had that, definitely all of us had that.

Interestingly in the follow-up response, Suzie is actually making the case for forms of professional support that would help a contestant take the next step in her post-show career, by capitalizing on media exposure and a newly acquired fan-base whereas, in her previous comments she focuses more on the emotional impact of reality-celebrity. Thus, reality show contestants are not the only ones conflicted when it comes to questions about the duties and responsibilities of reality show producers to show competitors. Graeme Turner argues in his book, *Ordinary People and the Media*, that the social function of the media has shifted from simply serving the broader interests of other social institutions to becoming more of an independent player whose primary mandate is to produce profitable entertainment above and beyond anything else. This changing function of the media is occurring at the same moment when we are celebrating the ever-growing numbers of 'ordinary people' who are interacting with and becoming co-creators in media. Yet, the idea that we have entered a more 'democratic' phase of media engagement is somewhat illusory for the more interaction we have with the media, especially as participants, the more we are exposed to negative consequences and 'risks' (Turner *Ordinary People* 171). Specifically "[w]hat has declined is the media's acknowledgment that they are, in some way, accountable to the community and, conversely, what has also declined is the power of those regulatory structures which might enable the community to call the media to account" (Ibid167). It certainly seems like reality TV producers and the networks are more concerned with the short term gains to be had from the format than the long term consequences for its

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participants, while (in neoliberal fashion) simultaneously shifting the burden of responsibility onto participants.

However, not all of the women felt that it was the producers' responsibility to provide professional training or support, as a few of them received some practical information about what they were 'getting into'. As one former *Canadian Idol* contestant explained:

> ...we had an entertainment lawyer who kind of explained how everything was going to go down and everything that was going to happen and you know they explained, they were like "honestly you guys are gonna become household names you know because of this show." And people are huge fans and they made T-shirts for us, like each contestant had a personalized T-shirt that fans could buy, and um, you know people - I know that my parents at home were working really hard putting up posters saying to vote for me and you know wearing the T-shirts and all that stuff.

The two former *Canadian Idol* contestants that I interviewed both spoke about the additional media training that they received during the competition, such as how to handle being interviewed by entertainment journalists, as well as 'practical experience' such as signing autographs and engaging with fans. Of course, all of this preparation is in service of the reality franchise brand, as much as it is about turning reality show contestants into self-enterprising commodities (even if these acquired skills and knowledge help them post-show).

Indeed, the absence of any kind of support for reality show contestants can lead to what Turner refers to as the 'negative consequences and risks' associated with 'ordinary' people's media participation. For instance, one woman revealed how a record deal coming off of *Canadian Idol* led nowhere and by the time her label dropped her, she had no band or money left, and no legal rights over the material she had recorded.[89]

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[89] In 2002, Salon writer Eric Olsen published an exposé on the contracts that *American Idol* contestants must sign as a precondition for their participation, revealing how the documents effectively give the programmers and record labels associated with the show complete control over the artist's career. For instance, "each of the 10 finalists was required to enter into agreements exclusively with 19 Recordings as recording artist; 19 Merchandising for advertising, endorsements, sponsorships and merchandising; and 19 Management for the management of his or her career" (Olsen).

Similarly Carlie experienced first-hand how reality-celebrity can attract the attention of people whose only purpose is to manipulate and/or take advantage of show contestants.

> I don't know how you can prepare for it but you have to be very strong mentally, like you can't think that any of this means anything. Especially like afterwards um, when people, in the industry started knowing who I was, people started wanting things from me. You know like, that's, that you definitely have to watch out for like, if you're young, if you're like, inexperienced in the industry you're gonna think that people wanna help you. Some of them do genuinely, but most of the time there's an ulterior motive right? So you know, I had to weed out a lot of um, you know, I've gotten tricked a few times but definitely like, a lot of people, they seem to want to help you and all this stuff but really they want something from you. If someone's that eager to help you, they want something from you. If someone won't give you the time of day, they're probably worth talking to you know, it's kind of like those things you kind of have to learn after um being in the spotlight like that, you know.

Over the years, a number of news stories have been published detailing this seedier side of reality TV participation and celebrity, leaving some critics calling for broader changes to the industry. [90] In the wake of a number of tragedies that rocked the reality TV community in recent years, NPR writer Linda Holmes proposed a "Reality TV Code of Ethics" which programmers would have to comply with as a measure to minimize harm to reality show participants. She makes a number of valid suggestions such as abolishing gag rules, providing extended counselling services, publication of all show contracts, and placing limits on how many post-show obligations or appearances participants are expected to do; as well as enforcing some requirements such as minimum number of sleeping hours, and limits on alcohol consumption. However, some

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[90] During the course of writing this dissertation, these ethical concerns have once again taken center stage as critics question the production practices of reality TV. In 2009, Ryan Alexander Jenkins, a contestant who appeared on two VH1 reality shows, was charged with murdering his ex-wife in California, calling into question how reality shows make casting decisions despite their assertions that they always conduct background checks on participants. In 2011, Russell Armstrong, husband of Taylor Armstrong of *The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills*, committed suicide, sending shockwaves throughout the community. Critics questioned what role the programmers played in this, as the extremely popular series put an intense spotlight on the couple who had a history of marital issues and reports of domestic violence. For more on these see: "Death in the glare of a reality show," *LA Times* (http://articles.latimes.com/2011/aug/17/entertainment/la-et-russell-armstrong-20110817); and "Jenkins case raises reality TV concerns," *CBC* (http://www.cbc.ca/news/arts/media/story/2009/08/22/jenkins-killing-realitytv-casting.html)

of her proposals may not be easily instituted outside of the US depending on the policies and regulations of different countries and their media industry. Nevertheless, these public debates will continue to evolve so long as national television systems continue to profit from reality TV and the production of 'localebrities'. Cultural studies scholar Graeme Turner, who has written extensively about celebrity culture, contends that becoming a celebrity-commodity "can carry quite severe personal consequences" as "it involves a framework of behaviour over which the individual has little control" ("Economy of Celebrity" 196). My study supports the idea that becoming a reality show contestant certainly requires participants to give up their autonomy temporarily, in exchange for media representation. Perhaps, as one reality show producer suggested to me, reality participants might need an advocacy group that can help them prepare for those aspects of reality-celebrity that are often overlooked or dismissed, especially the professional and emotional dimensions discussed here.

"15 Minutes of Fame" (and even more)

Despite any of the perceived pitfalls or consequences of reality-celebrity, most of the women experienced their "15 minutes" as mostly positive, and were very self-reflexive about the temporariness associated with this kind of fame. For those still very much in the public eye like Jessica and Suzie, they have had to become savvy fame-practitioners by learning how to manage their 'brand' and fans. Thus the work of reality-celebrity is highly involved and never-ending; one has to 'work at' maintaining a public profile if they want to build on their previous successes. Yet this is not typically the end goal for most reality show contestants, despite assertions to the contrary. Instead, they return to school, to parenting, to other jobs, while others use their public exposure to do charitable work or become role models in their communities, inspiring other young women to pursue their dreams. Yet the global flows of Canadian reality television means that they might not ever fully return to a 'regular life' for these programmes are exported to other markets which in turn extends the 'celebrity-life' of reality show participants as new audiences are generated. Significantly, and for the purposes of this chapter, none of the women clearly framed their participation as work, at least not on par with that of professional performers like actors. This particular group of reality show contestants

perceived their participation as a stop along the way to achieving their long term professional goals of fashion designer, singer, dancer and so forth. However, for a few of the women their participation helped them to come to decisions about a potential future career in the industry. This seems most pertinent for those commercial fields that are 'youth-centered' such as modelling and singing, thus many of the younger women I spoke with (late teens/early 20s) were already having to make these kinds of decisions. Indeed, as feminist scholars Angela McRobbie, Rosalind Gill, and Ann Gray have shown, the post-industrial work-life trajectory has shifted, especially for young women. In the wake of second wave feminism, Western women are expected to acquire an education and seek a professional life, in addition to embracing the traditional roles of wife and mother under the guise of post-feminist discourses of empowerment and choice. However, reality competition shows, with their emphasis on 'glamorous' creative professions, make clear distinctions between celebrity, work and leisure more and more murky.

In many respects reality TV has helped to normalize the concept of a 'life lived publicly' – something which most of us are already doing to some degree every time we share personal information about ourselves on Facebook or upload personal videos to YouTube. Moreover, celebrity has become the expected outcome of reality show participation and as Franke commented in her interview: "It's sort of what you have to go through and people are willing to be a spectacle". While this has certainly become the trend or the expectation of reality show participation we should be wary of how neoliberal discourses of blame and responsibility let television producers off the hook for their questionable filming techniques and pressure tactics. Proclaiming "let's make me famous!" is not a license to exploit or manipulate reality show participants. They have been placed in the unfortunate position of being symbols of a 'democratized' celebrity culture and yet, their stories reveal more often than not that "celebrity remains a hierarchical and exclusive phenomenon – no matter how much it proliferates" (Turner, qtd. in Holmes "Reality TV" 268).

Conclusion:

Unsettled Relations

In response to much of the popular cultural criticism of female reality show contestants, this project has documented the experiences of former reality show contestants in order to broadly contextualize and assess the changing relationship between television audiences and producers. Importantly, my work situates these changes within broader socio-cultural shifts in North American culture that emphasize self-regulation and monitoring, hyper-individualism, celebrity culture, and lifestyle consumption, as illustrated in reality TV. In particular, my study contributes to the slim but growing research area about how reality show contestants make sense of their television participation, by drawing on qualitative feminist interview research methods. This empirical work examines the process of becoming a reality show contestant, and how this process both speaks to and contests currently held assumptions about reality show contestants in media/public discourses. Next, I address the ways in which the reality TV space, as constructed via the production process, positions the women in a tenuous position, where they are constantly negotiating the line between 'public' and 'private'. Significantly, these demarcations play a crucial role in how they negotiate these boundaries as a way to 'domesticate' the unfamiliar space of reality TV. Finally, I analysed the ways in which reality show contestants make sense of their reality TV celebrity, contributing unique insights into how this sense-making process is shaped by cultural discourses steeped in long-held beliefs and assumptions about the differences between Canadian and American culture.

A reoccurring theme in my work has been the so-called 'democratizing' effects of reality TV on the media/ordinary life hierarchy. Through my research, I conclude that the growth 'ordinary' participants on television has far from revolutionized the relationship between audiences and producers, especially when examining the process that participants must endure to become reality show contestants/celebrities. Yet, I am

hesitant to reduce the women who shared their stories with me, to that of dupes as I believe that does a disservice to them and denies their ageny in the decision-making process. Rather, the problem lies with how television programmers structure and define the limits of their participation in such narrow and litigious ways. As we've seen, the movement towards 'interactive' and 'participatory' modes of audience engagement with television has not diminished or usurped the power hierarchy that has always been in place. Moreover, throughout the course of researching and writing my dissertation I have become concerned with the ways in which reality show contestants have been pitted against professional performers; indeed it seems that the 'ordinary' person has become the official scapegoat in many ways, of the economic and regulatory restructuring of the television industry which created the (favourable) conditions in which unscripted, lifestyle programming – reality TV – was made possible. I have seen first-hand how, in the Canadian context, reality TV participation tends to be framed as an economic imposition, threatening the livelihood of 'proper' performers. Ironically, this notion that they are taking away 'jobs' from professional performers fails to recognize how we undervalue the 'work' that reality show participants perform.[91]

Study Limitations

In many ways, I feel that I have only scratched the surface of this topic. As such, I recognize that there are limitations to my study, for instance, my sample size is small and the women I interviewed represent a very small percentage of the overall female

[91] This stems from a brief conversation I had with Stephen Simpson, the CRTC regional commissioner for British Columbia and the Yukon, after he gave a guest talk in a course on the Cultural Industries in Canada at Simon Fraser University (October 18, 2011). I took the opportunity to ask him if there were any regulatory issues with regards to reality TV. He replied that the CRTC's main focus was with the marginalization of writers and actors due to the growth of 'unscripted' programming thus sidestepping the issue of non-professionals altogether. I got the impression that they are more concerned with protecting the rights of media workers and industry professionals than they are with the notion that 'ordinary people' might also need some form of protection. These attitudes are further reflected in the CRTC's description of reality television under Category 11(b): "This type of programming involves *passively* following individuals as they go about their daily personal and professional activities" (my emphasis). This description woefully minimizes the role that the programmer plays in provoking performances from the participants and the long-term, if not immediate impact that reality show participation has on the contestants' lives. This also ignores how programmers also create the conditions through which we watch individuals going about their "daily personal and professional activities" especially with regards to the competition format. For more see: <http://www.crtc.gc.ca/canrec/eng/tvcat.htm>

reality TV demographic. However, making grand or universal claims about 'women's reality show participation' was never my goal. Rather my research offers a snapshot into a particular television 'community', setting the groundwork for future studies. Similarly, I did not take a multi-methodological approach; instead I chose to immerse myself in the interviewing process. In hindsight, I would have incorporated some form of participant observation such as attending public casting calls to observe the early stage of the audition process but much of what I sought to understand – what happens 'behind the scenes' – could only be elicited via interviewing. Finally, I recognize that my findings speak to a particular moment in television, where audiences are now an 'ordinary' and regular feature in the programming schedule, and yet one of the surprising (and exciting) outcomes of interviewing is the realization that this area of study is ripe for exploration and analysis in Canada, and would make a vital contribution to the expansion of Canadian television studies.

This process of participation is marked by an ongoing struggle between audiences and producers revealing just how contentious these power relations continue to be. Thus, there is a need for sustained analyses that address the place of power in shaping and informing these relations. This is especially pertinent for feminist criticism given women's continued marginalization within the industry. Indeed, women are still severely underrepresented in key decision-making roles in commercial film and television production. Thus, the influx of 'ordinary women' in some ways has not resulted in a major upset of the gender imbalance but perhaps works to maintain this discrepancy by defining women's participation in such limited/limiting ways.

Emotional Aftermaths:
Negotiating Identity in Feminist TV Research

One of the key struggles I encountered throughout the research process was how to manage the researcher-researched relationship. As I stated from the outset of this dissertation, I do not subscribe to the belief that women are dupes or passive receivers of culture; at the same time, I also understand that the process of television participation is highly circumscribed and imbued with power. Thus, I struggled to find a way to balance the feminist urge to become an advocate for the women while also being

cognizant of reducing their stories to essentialized accounts as each woman understands and interprets her experience in individualized ways, even as it is reflective of a shared socio-cultural phenomenon. Part of this critical process involved coming to the conclusion that my researcher positionality, and more specifically my 'scholar-fandom', helped shape my feelings and approach to interviewing the women.

Throughout this dissertation, I have self-identified as a 'fan' of reality TV but throughout the course of researching and writing I found myself faced with a number of unsettling moments that speak to the challenges of conducting feminist qualitative research, and what it means to conduct such research as a feminist-scholar-fan. I can see now how I was rather unprepared for the *emotional impact* that interviewing would have on my fan subjectivity and how it would alter my own viewing practices. I believed rather naively that I could just put aside those fan feelings, especially when I was interviewing women whose narratives or personalities I was particularly drawn to as a fan. However, rather than suppressing or ignoring these feelings, I want to bring this to bear on my final discussion, to weave together all of these threads into a reflection on my shifting positionality, especially as the interviews forced me to rethink my scholar-fan identity. In turn this raises larger questions about the ways in which scholars conceptualize the relationship between scholar/fan, researcher/respondent but also scholar-fan/audience/participant/celebrity. While there is little exploration of these particular dynamics in the existing literature this area shows great promise for future criticism. Interrogating these subject positions also contributes to feminist debates about self-reflexivity and supports the contention that the 'self' and the 'autobiographical' have a place in academic work.

> A feminist methodology of social science requires that [a] rationale of research be described and discussed not only in feminist research but in social science research in general. It requires, further, that the mythology of 'hygienic' research with its accompanying mystification of the researcher and the researched as objective instruments of data production be replaced by the recognition that personal involvement is more than dangerous bias – it is the condition under which people come to know each other and to admit others into their lives. (Oakley 58)

As this quote by feminist researcher Ann Oakley suggests, there is a need for all research, not just feminist scholarship, to take stock of the messiness that sometimes

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accompanies academic empirical research, especially human subjects are involved. Thus, the idea that there can be "hygienic" social scientific research is indeed a 'fantasy' propelled by a tradition/belief in (quantifiable) objectivity and truth. These research premises have certainly come under critical scrutiny over the last 40 years or so, propelled by the development of critical feminist and cultural theory as well as paradigmatic shifts in how the qualitative interview is used. Contemporary approaches to qualitative interviewing emphasize 'active' and 'cooperative' relationships between the researcher and respondent, and are self-conscious and reflexive about the ways in which the researcher plays a role in helping to construct meaning in the interview process; a mutual meaning-making relationship. As noted by Jaber F. Gurbrium and James A. Holstein, this marks a movement away from earlier formulations of the interview process that understood it much more as a one-way process whereby the respondent was viewed as a 'passive repository of information and truth' that could be accessed by the researcher in an objective, neutral setting; and by asking the 'right' questions with very minimal engagement on the researcher's part which was believed to tamper with or spoil the data.

Feminist research practitioners are especially attentive to the power dynamics at play between the researcher and respondent, and make a conscious effort throughout the research process to reflect on this integral relationship. Feminist researchers understand that these relationships are as political as other kinds of social relations, and therefore deserving of moral and ethical considerations. This means that the feminist researcher must constantly take stock of her own position in relation to her research and the researched. Reflexivity is the process through which a researcher recognizes, examines, and understands how his or her social background and assumptions can intervene in the research process. Like the researched or respondent, the researcher is a product of his or her society's social structures and institutions (Hesse-Biber 129).

This process of self-reflexivity, often found in autoethnographic scholarship, takes the researcher out of her comfort zone, and asks her to contemplate and take account of personal biases, judgments, belief/value systems and how these intersect/inform her academic subjectivity. For me this intersected with my fan subjectivity which often positioned me in a rather unsettling and uncomfortable place however, it is important to recognize how such discomfort offers up possibilities for

multiple and often overlapping avenues for critical inquiry. Thus my work follows in the tradition of feminist research where the researcher uses her "personal reactions to the interview process as a source of knowledge about the topic under study" (Reinharz and Chase 227).

Early 'feminist research' was an attempt to bridge the political and activist work of women within an academic framework in an attempt to challenge the dominance of androcentric scholarship and to empower women outside of the institution. However, feminist researchers like Joyce Nielsen found that the research 'tools' they had acquired in their training were not always sufficient or conducive to facilitating their research. For instance, Joyce Nielsen notes how in Oakley's work, respondents would ask her questions during interviews, seeking advice on life matters but "textbook advice" often encourages researchers to maintain a distance between themselves and the respondent. In my own review of the literature I came across a number of recent articles where authors *still* recommend minimal engagement even going so far as to say that 'appropriate' responses in interviews include 'ahs' and 'mhms'! Thus such 'advice' can be confusing and frankly misleading, especially when respondents ask you direct questions. As Nielsen comments, "It would be obviously rude to evade or dodge...questions and then turn around and ask the respondents to answer similarly personal and matter-of-fact questions" (6). Thus, early practitioners of feminist research revealed how oftentimes researchers "get involved" (Nielsen 6) challenging the belief that researchers can remain resolutely 'distant' and therefore objective during the research process.

One of the key contributions made by feminist researchers is the notion that 'feelings' and 'emotions' are woven into these politics and play a role in shaping how we relate to, and build relations with the women we are researching. Indeed, early research practitioners, such as the opening quote by Oakley, made a point of using their feelings and emotional responses to the research process to help facilitate their analyses. However, as Sherryl Kleinman and Martha A. Copp suggest, the negotiation of research emotions and feelings is not a straightforward process for this kind of research is not accepted in all disciplines, or has taken longer to become an accepted practice. Consequently, feminist scholars run the risk of being stereotyped as 'emotional researchers' thus some women may downplay their emotions as a strategy to be viewed

as more 'professional' or 'academic'. Moreover, researchers may be selective about which emotions and feelings they share in their research. For instance, according to Diane Wolf, and Kleinman and Copp, it is not common for researchers to share in-depth negative feelings (i.e., disappointment, dislike, disgust) about their respondents as researchers generally go into the field wanting and hoping to like the people they are researching. Conversely, researchers might be hesitant or embarrassed to share feelings of *intense* identification although the early literature suggests that developing close relationships with respondents was considered part of the feminist process of activism and solidarity building.[92] I know I agonized a great deal over an early draft of this work which was presented at a sociology conference, as I was starting to grapple with and work through many of the intense feelings that I experienced while interviewing. I felt vulnerable and exposed but I also did not want to shy away from exploring this avenue of inquiry just because I felt uncomfortable talking about it in front of a room filled with other academics. Indeed, many feminist researchers call for an approach that "focuses on process...that uses rather than denies one's intuition, feelings, and viewpoint as part of the research relationship and process" (Wolf 5). Thus there is a move towards demystifying, in a sense, the production of knowledge, by including and emphasizing the 'emotion work' that goes into developing the 'end product'.

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[92] This approach has been criticized extensively for downplaying power relations between researcher and respondent in the belief that these relations can be non-hierarchical and egalitarian. Feminist scholars like Judith Stacey have argued that this can cause more harm to the respondent than a purely disinterested approach because it crosses ethical boundaries and ultimately changes the very nature of the relationship which can lead to manipulation and exploitation. Rather, Reinharz as referenced in Wolf, "contends that feminist scholars' striving for empathy and intimacy should not be confused with friendship" (20) suggesting that these qualities can be mobilized in order to build rapport with participants within the researcher-respondent relationship but friendship should not be a goal or aim itself. I agree with this position; despite the positive feelings I experienced interviewing many of the women. Indeed during at least a couple of the interviews I thought "I would totally like to hang out with this person!" I kept such thoughts to myself and instead focused on making the most of what time I had with them. Conversely, unlike other researchers, none of the women have attempted to keep in contact with me although my time in 'the field' was only a fraction compared to more extensive and long-term ethnographic studies which seems more conducive to bonding and intimacy. One respondent has since connected with me via the professional site LinkedIn but has not reached out beyond that. I have wondered whether the women's previous experience appearing on television, and experience with interviewing enabled them to be more 'distant' than perhaps other kinds of respondents. Perhaps they viewed their interview with me as another extension of their 'work' as a (former) reality show contestant.

'Good' vs. 'Bad' Emotions

Much feminist criticism stems from the desire to change the objectivist paradigm for conducting research and that conceptualizations of the researcher-researched relationship was "simply a reflection of male forms of interpersonal dynamics-distant, 'rational,' uninvolved, hierarchical and unrelated" (Wolf 4). Or, to put it another way "objectivity is simply a form of male subjectivity" (ibid). This intellectual approach was also, as argued by feminists, bound up with Western belief systems that defined emotions as irrational and subjective (and therefore not 'scientific'), and were viewed "with suspicion and hostility" (Jagger as cited in Gilbert 10). Because of their unpredictability, emotions must be suppressed and controlled at all times. Thus the incorporation and acknowledgement of the role that feelings and emotions play in the research process could be conceived as a way to carve out a space for the 'feminine' within the academy, and as a way to reject and challenge these masculine intellectual paradigms. However, as already noted, emotion and feeling are not embraced with open arms in all academic spaces and sometimes it takes an unexpected event to remind you of that something which I experienced a couple of years ago at a media studies conference. I sat in awe as a conference presenter, an up and coming TV scholar, began his presentation with a powerfully emotional memory of a lost loved one and the impact his grief had on his work. As he spoke he began to get choked up and had to pause a couple of times, apologizing to the audience. I felt deeply empathetic, having experienced such grief myself just a few years before, but what amazed me most was his courage in being open about his feelings and their impact on his work. I felt very uncomfortable not because of his emotions but because of how the audience responded (especially as I was trying to subdue my own tears), and looking around I saw mostly controlled, non-expressive responses. This is not to say that everyone should have started crying too but that clearly there is still some unspoken taboo around the public display of certain emotions in Western cultures, and that certain emotions do not have a place in rationalized or professional spaces of work. Moreover, this scholar also disrupted the gender stereotype that 'boys don't cry' thus challenging symbols of hegemonic masculinity that confine emotions and feelings to the feminine sphere.

All of this is to illustrate how, in spite of the work that feminists have done in advancing a more holistic approach to qualitative research, there are many other

external and even internal forces at play that can interfere with expressing one's emotions and feeling openly and honestly. "Emotions are culturally defined and socially constrained. They are more than psychological sensations, but are often experienced in this way. They guide our interpretations of what we experience and are shaped by our life experience" (Gilbert 10). So even though on some level the display of emotion and feeling has become more culturally accepted, there are a number of factors that must be taken into consideration when deciding when it is 'ok' or feels 'safe' to reveal our emotional selves. My own internal conflicts with trying to navigate my experience of 'good' and 'bad' feelings during interviewing, as well as the range of contradictory feelings I had *about the feelings* I was experiencing (Was I entitled to feel this way? Was I feeling 'too much'? Do all qualitative researchers feel what I'm feeling at some point in the research process?), became evidence of how researchers bring their own baggage to the research process, and that some of this baggage may very well conflict with their academic training (what they believe on a rational plain).[93]

Emotions 'happen'

Contemporary writing on the place of emotions in fieldwork tends to offer/outline useful strategies for contending with the messiness of feelings that might be encountered during the research process. Thus some of the debate has moved beyond a defence of the emotional within research (that some emotions are 'good' others 'bad') and towards thinking about how we as researchers can grapple with them and most importantly that we *do*. Thus there is a growing expectation, signalling a paradigm shift, that researchers across a number of disciplines (not just Women's Studies) will discuss, incorporate, contextualize and even analyse their feelings in addition to their respondent data. Moreover, researchers are more attentive to the ways in which we experience multiple emotions simultaneously, and how emotions or feelings can change about participants over time. For instance, an interviewer might find herself experiencing

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[93] Gilbert notes that graduate students, conducting qualitative research for the first time, are less likely to be prepared for the impact of emotions and therefore they are especially in need of guidance and support, as opposed to more seasoned researchers who have developed their own strategies for dealing with their baggage at all stages of the research process. Admittedly, I was rather relieved when I came across this piece, as it helped to ease some of my anxieties.

boredom, interest, sadness, and dislike all within the course of one interview. Most importantly, processing one's emotions is not only crucial to propelling analysis and data collection, as questioning one's feelings can lead to new research questions and paths of inquiry. However, and just as important, researcher's who do not demonstrate "emotional intelligence"[94] may negatively impact the research process "because their private affective meanings may cloud understanding of the participants' construction of meaning and eventually complicate the research relationship" (Gilbert 12). Emotions play a role in building rapport with respondents, something which I admit, I undervalued/underestimated when I set out to do my interviews. Before I began my research, I spent a lot of time thinking about what kind of impact the interviews might have on the women I was interviewing, with less time devoted to my own emotional 'baggage'. This is not to say that I never thought about my positionality as a PhD candidate and 'novice' feminist researcher of mixed race descent from a working class background who was fortunate enough to be studying a topic she is very passionate about (as an avid reality TV viewer and self-described fan). I acknowledged all of these things. But as I soon learned, there is a huge difference between understanding something intellectually, rationally, and putting into action your praxis. It wasn't even so much that I was shocked by the *emotional imprint* that the interviews left on me – part of the excitement of interviewing is that there is a level of unpredictability and curiosity about the respondents, especially those that are complete strangers to you – it was the scope of it and how it seeped into places I had not anticipated, some deeply personal and some that I had not even considered upon entering the field, were in fact, deeply felt. A key site for my changing and evolving researcher-self was a direct outcome of the interview process which brought to the fore unexpected feelings attached to my scholar-fan identity. My emotional response to the interviews was very much intertwined with my own thoughts and feelings about reality TV, media participation, scholar-fandom (and the concept of 'the fan' more generally). Moreover, the interview process acted as a contradictory site for the production of "a lack of clarity or 'fuzziness' in boundaries" (Gilbert 12) giving me pause to reconsider how I constructed the researcher and

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[94]   Gilbert, referencing Goleman, defines this as "the ability to know and manage one's own emotions, to recognize emotions in others, and to handle relationships (i.e., handle emotions in others)...not avoidance of emotions... [and] it is an awareness and intelligent use of our emotions that benefits the research process" (11).

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respondent roles and how this relationship spoke to and informed other distinctive positions as I experienced them during the interviews namely scholar-fan/celebrity, audience/reality contestant, and feminist/'ordinary' woman.

Interrogating the 'Scholar-Fan'

These reflections – autobiographical and often emotional in content – led me to critically interrogate the subject position of the 'scholar-fan' and how working with human subjects problematizes it in a way that the current literature with its focus on textual criticism cannot adequately account for. Scholar-fan literature typically approaches the study of fandom through textual analysis of particular texts/fan objects or else by conducting ethnographic studies of fan communities/subcultures. However, what of the researcher who, due to the nature of her work, crosses the fan/celebrity boundary and gets close access to the 'object' of her fandom? I did not set out to do fan-research per se; however, I have been open from the start about my reality TV fandom, with the belief that it is important to recognize "the impossibility of separating the scholar's academic desires from their fan-related pleasures..." (Monaco 131). Yet, as I previously noted, I was unprepared for the emotional and intellectual impact that interviewing former reality show contestants would have on this cultural identity. The research process has brought to the fore many deep-seated anxieties that I hold about my scholar-fan identity, given my propensity for being drawn to 'bad' cultural objects (reality TV, horror film). Indeed, in order to conduct my research professionally and ethically I felt I had to temporarily suspend my fan investments, at least for the duration of the interviews, suggesting that on some level I view 'academia' and 'fandom' as oppositional positions, even as both categories prop up and inform the other.

As fan studies scholar Matt Hills has suggested though, this is more about the internalization of certain discourses and ideals about how we think others perceive us, and less about what we actually *do* (*Fan Cultures* 8). Thus part of this journey has involved taking stock of some of these internalized discourses which are informed by gender, race and class, and how all of these have converged to inform my understanding of the fan subject as an imaginary other to my academic self. Indeed, much of this is further complicated by the internalization of academic discourses that

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reproduce problematic distinctions between fans as 'productive' and consumers as 'non-productive'. However, as feminist cultural criticism has shown, these distinctions are defined through a gendered lens which negatively aligns consumption with femininity which is devalued, while production belongs to the masculine realm (see Lury "rights and wrongs"; Huyssen).

However, I also contend that at many moments in the research process the boundaries between scholar and fan have been blurred, and it felt at times that I lost sight of the difference between the two. This was most pronounced when I realized the impact that the interviews were having on my television viewing practices. As well, I had to admit to myself that conducting the interviews was not always a purely professional experience for me, as I often took some liminal pleasure in interviewing women whose person-characters I was particularly fond of or rooted for.[95] Thus I also query whether the research process itself can be interpreted as a kind of 'fan-experience' for the scholar fan, as the interview process allowed me privileged access to additional texts co-constructed by the respondent and also in a more general sense, allowed me to transcend the fan/celebrity boundary.[96] Indeed, my scholar-fan identity was (and continues to be) in a constant process of deconstruction and reconstruction, constantly in flux and under critical scrutiny. However, the struggles and challenges I have encountered through the course of my research should not be downplayed but considered an important aspect of the research process, even as I might not be able to abolish all power relations between myself and the respondents, feminist standpoint epistemology provides me with a theoretical framework to think through my own biases and how they might affect the research process, as well as my status as 'insider/outsider' in relation to the respondents. Finally, the process of interviewing while

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[95] Media scholar Alison Hearn, quoting Bellafonte (2009), uses the term "person-character" to illustrate how reality TV shows have blended together "'self' and 'actor,' working and living" as the participants represent the "model' self-brand'" (61-62).

[96] Kathleen Rowe hints at this complex process when describing how she felt "greater warmth" toward the comedic actress Roseanne after interviewing her, even as she was concerned with how "the effect [her] increased enthusiasm for her as a fan would have on [her] supposed disinterest as a scholar"(58). Rowe posits that her conflicting, albeit positive feelings post-interview illustrate the important role that scholars play in the researcher-respondent relationship, and that they must be mindful of "their responsibilities" (ibid).

it impacted my scholar-fan identity also demonstrates how this struggle is not relegated to my particular positionality but speaks more broadly to the politics of feminist research.

Fandom Inside and Outside the Academy

> Fans are no longer considered to be the pale-skinned geeks living in their mothers' basements, hunched over their mint-condition comic books and day-old empty pizza boxes. Fans are everyone, everywhere. They are business men, they are career women, they have families and children. They are writers and artists themselves. They are editors, filmmakers, and webmasters. They are scholars. They are us. (Coker and Benefiel)

Indeed, as this quote suggests, fans have become part of the mainstream, no longer confined to the margins of society as social or psychological deviants, fans are now a coveted and sought after niche audience within marketing due to their loyalty to particular texts. This mainstreaming has also been facilitated by the rapid expansion of technologies and new media namely the Internet which has become an important component in how cultural texts are targeted at audiences, becoming a key tool in fan communication.[97]

The growing social acceptance of 'fandom' as a legitimate cultural practice or form of engagement has similarly found its way into the academy. Indeed, we can credit much of the current popularity or visibility of fandom within popular culture to the work of cultural studies scholars Henry Jenkins whose work challenged the prevailing (negative) conceptions of fans.[98] But beyond challenging these assumptions about fans, Jenkins

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[97] Fan 'talk' or criticism has exploded on the Internet with social media sites like Twitter and Facebook playing important roles in engaging fans on a constant basis (even when shows are in between seasons or episodes). Moreover social media has enabled more direct and instant communication with industry professionals such as actors or showrunners who increasingly are expected to engage with fans across a number of platforms. Websites have also popped up devoted to the deconstruction and critique of popular or critically-acclaimed TV shows and films such as the Onion AV Club and Television Without Pity, while fans create websites and blogs devoted to their favourite shows. Thus there are numerous virtual outlets for fans to watch, study, and discuss their adored cultural texts on their own or with a community of people who share their interests. The internet has also spawned communities of 'anti-fans' who take pleasure in posting negative comments about shows that they don't like, what is often referred to as 'hate-watching' which seems akin to a kind of ironic or distant viewing.

[98] See *Textual Poachers: Television fans and participatory culture,* and *Fans, bloggers, and gamers: Exploring participatory culture.*

made his fan-identifications a part of the research process, and in turn dubbed the term 'aca-fan' to illustrate how scholars can also be fans of popular culture, bringing legitimacy to the study of fandom in academia. The aca-fan or my preferred term scholar-fan[99] also challenges cultural distinctions that place scholars and fans in a hierarchy of taste and knowledge. Moreover, Jenkins' research helped legitimate the study of fandom and inspired other scholars to 'come out of the fan closet' in order for them to draw on their own identifications and participation in a self-reflexive manner in order to generate cultural criticism.

However, not everyone was quick to embrace the idea of fan studies, especially the concept of the aca-fan, and much of the early work was criticized for being 'too personal' or 'autobiographical' and therefore not 'academic enough'. Hills illustrates how scholars working in the field responded to these criticisms by defining fans as active and productive and therefore different from the average consumer or audience. This focus on the productivity of fans drew on their cultural output through the creation of extra-texts such as songs (filking), fanzines, fan fiction (slash), and their participation in conventions and role-playing.[100] Moreover, being a fan requires an intense level of engagement and depth of knowledge about one's favoured text which itself requires a lot of time and energy. Fans' cultural productivity/creativity was theorized by scholars like Jenkins as a form of cultural resistance, whereby fans respond to the dominant culture and its ideologies throught the disassembling and reassembling of cultural texts, creating new and alternative meanings and representations in the process. Hills goes on to discuss how this intense focus on fan productivity and resistance was not a purely objective argument but also spoke to the scholar-fan's need to justify and legitimate their own position within the academy. In turn this is premised on an internalization of what

[99] Matt Hills defines the 'scholar-fan' as "those scholars who are also self-identified fans of what they study" ("Media Academics" 40).

[100] Indeed much of these early works focused on women's fan practices especially within science-fiction fan cultures, as evidence of how audiences reinterpret and resist cultural hegemony. For more on this aspect see: Constance Penley, "Feminism, psychoanalysis and the study of popular culture." *Cultural Studies*, Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula Treichler, eds. London: Routledge, 1992; Camille Bacon-Smith, *Enterprising Women: Television Fandom and Creation of Popular Myth*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992; Cheryl Harris and Alison Alexander, eds. *Theorizing Fandom: Fans, Subculture, and Identity*. NJ: Hampton Press, 1998 which includes the oft-cited and taught essay by Henry and Cynthia Jenkins titled, "Normal Female Interest in Men Bonking."

constitutes "the *good* academic subject" which is defined as "rational, [and] devoted to argumentation and persuasion" (Hills *Fan Cultures* 3; emphasis added). In contrast, the fan is imagined as a "'threat' or a 'pollutant', tainting the 'good' academic subject" (ibid 4). These seemingly opposed values become internalized, arousing anxieties and guilt in the scholar-fan who must constantly negotiate these subject positions in their work, something which I felt acutely during the research process which led me to query Hill's contention that the scholar-fan has become less stigmatized within the academy. Given the growth of 'fan studies' as a subfield within media and cultural studies for instance, this does not mean that scholars no longer grapple with claiming this identity within the space of academia and/or that they no longer have to contend with comments or bias from other scholars or friends and family who think that their work is 'frivolous' or not 'serious enough'. As someone who studies and writes about one of her fan objects, reality TV, I have encountered a variety of opinions over the years, some supportive and interested but others clearly less so for instance, upon hearing about my work, more than one person has commented, usually in a surprised tone, "You can *do* that?" This was particularly awkward when a border security guard exclaimed this to me while on my way to a television conference in the US. Such statements are often judgmental in tone, placing me in a position where I feel I have to defend what I do. Although, when I reveal that I am a student of Women's Studies, most people assume that I have a very antagonistic relationship to my object of study even if I convey a more nuanced position on the topic. Conversely, people who like to watch reality TV might be a little reticent to share this with me until they know where I'm coming from. Therefore, I am constantly negotiating my fan-scholar identity at all times, especially as it intersects with other parts of my identity such as gender, race, and class.

Indeed, I take issue with the way in which Hills comes to his conclusions about the place of scholar-fans within the academy because it places them all on equal footing when some may already find themselves in marginalized academic spaces whether through their discipline or because their gender, sexuality or race positions them outside a homogenous academic subject. Hills does not address how other identities intersect with the scholar-fan subject. One only has to look at the 'fan objects' that have become canonized within the academy such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Star Trek*, the *Alien* franchise just to name a few, to see that these cultural texts are dominated by whiteness

which is not so different from the dominant image of the 'fanboy' found in popular culture. My increasing discomfort with my own scholar-fan identity during the interviews has led me to raise a number of questions.

My Scholar-Fan-Self

The concept of the 'scholar-fan' has not only given me a useful term for thinking about my own relationship to fandom, but has given me a language that, when combined with my feminist training and research work, provides me with a framework for critical self-reflection and how the research process has accelerated this process. At the beginning of the section I began with a discussion of how fans are "no longer geeks" and yet I find that I still find that my scholar-fan identity is marked by a sense of 'in-between-ness', compounded by my interdisciplinary location within the academy. The very pop culture that tells me that fans have acquired a certain level of cultural caché, do so within a very narrow set of prescribed traits, working to effectively place limits on who is included and excluded via the 'fanboy' figure who has become more visible with shows like *Big Bang Theory* and the reality show *Comic Book Men* that venerate the 'geeky fan' as a kind of cool (post-feminist) masculinity, deeming it okay for such guys to be sexist and ignorant because they do not conform to hegemonic symbols of (heterosexual, white) masculinity. Moreover, shows like *Comic Book Men* reinforce and privilege fanboy (re: masculine) identifications as the 'proper' ones, while those deemed 'improper' are denigrated and ridiculed.[101] Therefore, I am frustrated with a popular culture that persists on marginalizing 'fangirls' or to put it another way, women who identify as fans, to the sidelines, and yet, I also recognize the ways in which I am complicit with this when I roll my eyes at hearing about another *Twilight* film being released (even as I noted earlier, I have experienced my own version of eye rolling about reality TV).[102] All of this is to

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[101] For instance, in one episode a fan collector attempts to sell a Xena doll to the shop owners who proceed to make fun of him for having such questionable fan tastes (re: feminine), questioning his masculinity in the process.

[102] This marginalization obfuscates how women's participation in fandom has been growing, and how they have always been a presence in particular subcultures. Moreover, it appears that women's growing participation coincides with an increase in the hyper-sexualisation of women thus reinforcing strict gender roles and identities for fans, which in turn places problematic constraints on women who do not conform to the hegemonic feminine script, especially those women who have traditionally found solace or community in fan cultures.

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suggest that there is no 'homogenous' fan culture but a number of fan *cultures* that are engaged in their own power struggles over cultural distinction and authority.

My own fandom has been shaped by a number of factors and experiences stemming from childhood. Growing up in a somewhat conservative working-class home I was taught from an early age that femininity belonged to women and masculinity to men, and I was witness to how such naturalized gender differences shaped my family's cultural consumption which in turn influenced my own cultural tastes. Spending time with my mother meant watching talk shows and soap operas, while leisure time with my father meant watching action and science fiction shows like *Dr. Who* (I am still haunted by the theme music to this day!) which later led to an interest in horror fiction (as a child bookworm I would pick up almost anything to read), all of which I still carry with me to this day. However, in my journey to adulthood I became increasingly removed from these childhood pleasures, and when I 'discovered' feminism in high school via 'Riot Grrl', I adopted a cynical and critical view of these genres, lumping them together as trash or sexist, opting for feminist punk rock music, and feminist writers like Naomi Wolf and Gloria Steinem instead. Thus I opted out of participating in these gendered activities and replaced them with 'feminist' ones (I will return to this problematic later).[103] Upon entering academia I found my academic training in women's studies and cultural studies gave me a language to make sense of my place in the culture as a woman of a mixed-race, working class background trying to eke out a political and intellectual identity as an undergraduate student. Ironically, part of this knowledge formation contributed to an identity crisis because on the one hand, I was introduced to a body of scholarship that challenged the cultural dupe model of consumption, especially in relationship to the 'women's genre' but on the other hand, I was also exposed to a field of criticism that was extremely critical of pop culture and women's place within it, and that the only solution was complete resistance and rejection, and the creation of a 'feminist culture'. As these perspectives were swirling around in my head, I found myself once again drawn to 'bad cultural objects' such as horror and talk shows but within an academic context thus

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[103] My early formulation of 'feminism' as an identity separate from 'femininity' and 'masculinity' reflected my growing discomfort and rejection of the norms prescribed by these terms within the dominant culture, as I came to believe that 'femininity' was harmful to women and 'masculinity' caused harm to women.

suggesting that academia can inspire and help facilitate fan attachments, and moreover, as a young feminist, providing me with access to a (scholar-fan) community that I might not have been able to penetrate (!) otherwise.

Thus adopting a 'scholar-fan' identity seemed like a way for me to have my cake and eat it too, yoking together two areas of my life that I feel passionate about: intellectual thought/criticism and popular culture. But it wasn't until the interviews were underway that I was faced with an uncomfortable truth; that my scholar-fan identity was far from a whole but rather fragmented and at odds with itself. This was revealed to me through the interview process as I felt my positionality shifting, and my evolving emotions were merely a symptom of this.

Disavowing my Fandom

In order to present myself as a respectable academic subject, I consciously downplayed my consumption of reality TV in an attempt to convey professionalism and competence. I worried that if I was too forthcoming about my personal interest in reality TV that this would hamper rapport during the interview process. Within the social science tradition, this manoeuvre is referred to as "bracketing" where the researcher temporarily "suspend[s] their own subjectivity" in order to remain "'objective' about the subjectivity of others" (Nielsen 8). However, I learned rather quickly that I could not easily compartmentalize my fandom – to be put away for the duration of my fieldwork – as the respondents showed varying degrees of interest in my knowledge of the genre, especially the shows that they competed on. At the time, this invoked anxious feelings, as in those moments, the tables seemed temporarily turned, as I was the one being queried.

As researchers have noted, it is not uncommon for respondents to test interviewers as part of the rapport building process, as a way for them to check you out, see what you're all about – just as the interviewer is keen to find out and learn from the people they interview so too are respondents curious about the people interviewing them. One of the ways in which respondents tested my familiarity with the genre, was to ask me directly, usually in the midst of talking about something else: "have you seen the show?" But typically it was more subtle, placed within an off-hand comment such as "I

don't know if you've seen the show..." These little probes suggest that some of the respondents were curious about my relationship to the topic, that learning this small piece of information helped them to construct a picture of me as a researcher (although I do not know if this would have helped or hindered their perceptions). So while I typically did not initiate discussion of my personal viewing habits, I was open and honest with respondents when and if they asked me. These occasions tended to take place at the end of the interview, when I would ask the respondent if she had any other questions or any comments. Sometimes they took this opportunity to engage in a conversation with me about my interest in reality TV, what I hoped to achieve with my research. Other times the topic was broached when I asked respondents how their participation shaped their understanding of reality TV. Of course, how the women responded to this question seemed dependent on their pre-existing knowledge or familiarity with the genre. Most of the women were at least aware of, or had watched the program that they appeared on (if not its American precursor). Often, these discussions progressed into broader discussions about reality TV, with some women sharing their favourite 'guilty pleasure' programmes that they keep watching despite their acquired behind-the-scenes knowledge. In one particular interview with a very exuberant and optimistic young woman, I found that our discussion of our mutual enjoyment of reality TV became a point of identification for me as our shared cultural interest was a point of commonality despite other differences in age, race, education, talents and so forth. In this moment, we transgressed the researcher-respondent relationship and instead communicated as fans, providing us both with a mutual kind of support for her initiation of fandom allayed some of my own anxieties about the place of my scholar-fan identity in the research process; and my subsequent confession of consumption perhaps challenged her pre-existing concept of 'feminist' and 'scholar' (and indeed she was one of the respondents who seemed concerned that I was approaching the interview looking for an 'angle').

Thus this illustrates how, at times, it can be appropriate for the researcher to share her fandom and that this need not 'taint' the data or diminish her professional role as researcher. This assertion departs markedly from earlier feminist TV criticism whereby the "researcher must prove herself not too competent within the sphere of popular culture to retain credibility within the sphere of analysis" (Brunsdon "Identity" 314). Displaying too much competence with popular culture then is assumed to signal a

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kind of intellectual weakness and given women's historical struggles to enter academia, it is not surprising that they would also internalize its values which at one time widely and openly denigrated popular culture. However, I argue that there is much to be gained from positioning the self within the matrix of research and analysis, especially as researchers "enact a variety of social identities in the field" (Kleinman and Copp 10). When researchers ignore how these social identities come into play during the research process, because they believe that is how objectivity is maintained, they miss out on an important opportunity to critically interrogate those identities that can lead to exciting insights and questions. Therefore, even though the women's queries made me uncomfortable and anxious, my decision to honestly disclose my familiarity/ engagement with reality TV helped to build rapport in some cases, and further illustrated how there was indeed space for me to enact not just my feminist/scholar identity in the interviews, but also my fan identity, and moreover, that the two are not easily compartmentalized but are intertwined in complex ways.

Moreover, I think that displaying in moderation some level of competence of the object being studied, not just in an academic context, can have a positive impact on the interview process. The key is to find a way to appease their queries without overpowering the discussion and unduly influencing or shaping their opinions, or worse shutting down the dialogue altogether. I did worry that my excitement or genuine enthusiasm, especially in those interviews where rapport seemed easy, had caused me to talk more than perhaps I should have, or felt comfortable doing. A learning lesson for the uninitiated for sure. However, 'chattiness' was also a useful tool in interviews with women who were more reserved at the beginning, and my displays of comfort and knowledge with the topic I believe helped to quell some of their hesitations about me.

But in choosing to interview former reality show contestants, I perhaps unwittingly took a leap – I moved from audience/fan to researcher of reality TV – a process that brought the women into my lives in a way that was distinct from the ways in which I viewed them on television, and because of my previous knowledge and interests, I brought along my fan baggage. Indeed after one particularly difficult interview, emotionally speaking, I started to question the whole premise of what I was doing:

I remember getting into the car – she had already left and I waited for my partner to come back and get me. I got into the car and felt the heaviest weight on my shoulders like I had never felt before…I literally wanted to cry and for some reason felt the need to restrain myself from getting overly emotional although I don't know why I felt it necessary to hide these feelings from my partner, from the participant of course but even in that moment I felt the need to present myself in a 'professional' manner and I apparently equated that with rationality and self-(bodily) control. I tried to express my feelings to him and he was as sympathetic as he could be in that situation, for this was not his world. I was living with the women's stories, day in and day out – thinking about them and their words constantly, from interview to interview. However, my sadness was also compounded by a deep sense of guilt – how could I have taken so much pleasure in these programmes? Were all those cultural pessimists right after all? Was I just taking pleasure and enjoyment in the humiliation and pain of these women? Was I a cultural deviant? Was I a bad feminist? Was this research a way of absolving or trying to legitimate my own cultural investments, my own location as a scholar-fan (at the expense of 'real' people)? I was in a moment of crisis for it was then that I realized the privileged position I held…that these women had given me access to their lives and to their stories and memories to be re-presented in a PhD dissertation. Due to my own naiveté I was in crisis mode and I didn't know what I was doing anymore or why. I started to ask myself panicky questions: how could I ever hope to 'properly' represent these women? What did that even mean? I felt powerless, vulnerable, anxious, doubtful…how did this happen?

This passage conveys how once the interviews were underway, I became increasingly self-conscious about my fandom as feelings of guilt mounted causing me to question *why* I was a fan and perhaps most crucially, how I identified/constructed my fan identity, and whether this had a place in academia at all.

Sandvoss argues that fandom should be viewed as an extension of the self rather than in relation to the self: "the object of fandom [...] is intrinsically interwoven with our sense of self, with who we are, would like to be, and think we are" (98). In addition, fandom is not simply a reflection of the fan's relationship to their environment but that the fan's own relationship to their object of fascination is the basis for 'narcissistic self-reflection' (ibid). Our fan choices then – the objects or people that we are drawn to 'fan over' – say as much about us and our desires, dreams, self-perceptions, and that we use these 'objects of fascination' as a way to work through and grapple with our identities. Thus, the aforementioned passage reflecting on a particularly 'difficult'

interview, emotionally speaking, caused not only 'sadness' for the participant but a partial sadness predicated on my own evolving and increasingly guilt-induced fandom – my object of fandom had given me pause for critical self-reflection. Whether I liked it not, "I" was present in the process. So as I became increasingly 'affected' by the participants and their stories, the less I made time to view some of my most beloved programmes for watching the shows in the process of conducting my fieldwork, even though they were no longer on them, somehow felt like a betrayal (I do not know how else to describe it); a betrayal marked by overwhelming feelings of sympathy. As I noted at one point during the interview process: "I'm finding it increasingly difficult to watch these shows...knowing what these women have gone through, it just makes me so uncomfortable. [...] I used to take so much pleasure in the competition show, and now, now I just feel so much sympathy for them…I have a much greater respect too for them." These sentiments appeared again in my notes about a month later: "I find myself feeling sympathetic towards them…and almost desiring to over-identify with their experiences. It's hard sometimes to remain objective." Reflecting on these early notes, I am taken with some of my word choices, especially the discourse of sympathy that emerges. What exactly invoked this feeling? What could the sympathy be signifying? On some level this word seems carefully chosen because as I was reminded of at different points throughout the interviews, I have never been a reality show contestant so while I certainly felt for them at times, especially when they shared some of the struggles they had endured as a result of their participation, I have no emotional frame of reference to draw on, even as I did my best to understand where they were coming from, or perhaps I felt I was not entitled to that. This also shows how *I positioned myself* as an 'outsider' to the women; it wasn't just that they 'othered' me during the interview process.

Moreover, I query what that "what" is; what exactly made me feel so "uncomfortable"? Was it the totality of their stories? Was it the 'negative' emotions that emerged in some of the interviews? Was it the interview process itself? Additionally, why/how is 'sympathy' attached to "respect" and my fandom? As the notes make clear, there was a correlation between my diminished viewing habits and my growing emotional connection to them. Did this signal that I was developing a relationship with the women that conflicted with my televisual one, even as I would characterize both as existing on an emotional plane? *What makes the emotions experienced during the*

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research process different from the ones I felt as a TV viewer? On some level my discomfort also signalled a disruption in my investment of reality TV as a genre and that subconsciously part of the pleasure I I derive from the genre is its preoccupation with 'ordinary people' who are unpredictable and yet relatable. So the interview process disrupted something else on a much more fundamental level, forcing me to take a position and requiring me to utilize a different set of skills and behaviours that aren't compatible with fandom, suggesting that there is something different about the two. Perhaps it is not so easy to hybridize these identities after all or is it that the process brought to my attention that I had done a better job of compartmentalizing my fandom and scholar identity than I previously thought. How to bring the two together, if at all? It seems that by *bringing my fandom to life*, in a very literal sense, beyond the neat and tidy borders of the text and its attendant criticism, invoked in me a crisis of subjectivity...

This speaks to a related concern about how the interviews shed light on how the women very likely held preconceived ideas about feminism, women's studies, and academia more broadly ranging from positive and supportive to negative and dismissive. Indeed, I was forced to confront the fact that the women I was contacting might have different views. For instance, early on in my research when I was contacting the women, I received a very negative response (thankfully the only one!) which called into question my motivations as well as my right to pursue this topic. In response to my invitation to participate in the research study, this former contestant replied:

No thank you.

A PH.D and this is what you're focusing on? With all the horrible shit going on, on this planet?

God bless you.
Sincerely, [former contestant]

Rationally, I understood and anticipated 'no' but emotionally I was unprepared for such an explicit response.[104] For she not only questioned what I was doing, but *why*; why did I think this was worthy of study? Also implicit in her response is a negative valuation of her reality show participation; that it is not worth the time that it is of no social or cultural significance. This also speaks to the ways in which research participants are invested in their own ideas and images of what constitutes 'the researcher' and acceptable kinds of research and I clearly did not fit within her particular construct. This particular person's statements imply that academic research on reality TV is frivolous, positioned firmly outside research that addresses 'serious' social problems. Although a rather limited and narrow understanding of the scope and reach of academic research, this woman's comment served as a critical moment for me, as a I was faced with the reality of doing scholarly work. So while on the one hand, it is tempting write this off as a loss, on the other hand, these examples can reveal important insights into the researcher-researched relationship. No matter what one does, your identity as a professional or as a feminist researcher will always be under interrogation and/or called into question by those who hold different beliefs and values about what constitutes proper knowledge production within the academy.

Empathy, 'Over-Identification', or 'Going Native'?

In addition to experiencing feelings of guilt and anxiety about my fandom as a consequence of the interview process, I also went through a period where I felt very 'protective' of the respondents, especially towards 'outsiders'. For instance, while talking to friends or colleagues about my research or reality TV in general, I grew increasingly

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[104] This event did provoke a number of thoughts and feelings brought to the fore some internal biases that I clearly held on some level about reality show participants. For while I enjoyed watching a variety of reality shows, particularly competition programs, I have held that I would never participate myself. For one, I don't possess any of the talents currently championed on most competition programs and I have no desire or interest to appear on non-competition programs such as 'docusoaps'. I am more comfortable being an audience member where I can watch from a safe distance, engaging in a kind of participant-observation, and not accountable to any one for my opinions or thoughts within the privacy of my living room. For years, I was a faithful viewer of reality competition game shows like *America's Next Top Model* and *Survivor* and I took great pleasure and delight in them, often using them to build community by holding 'viewing parties' and taking to message boards to share my thoughts with other fans. I thought I had to come to a place where I no longer felt guilty about my 'passionate attachments'.

impatient and annoyed by comments or remarks that condescended to reality show contestants (even if they were talking about completely different programs or individuals, which they usually were as I did not share respondent names). However, my defensive response was not without justification as reality show contestants are often treated very negatively in the mainstream press, and especially by viewers.

This period of time suggests a complete immersion in the women's 'worlds' – their narratives and stories had become a part of me, and I was in the beginning stages of trying to make sense of it all and its meanings, trying to see things from their perspectives. While I was not 'out in the field' like a traditional ethnographer, who works closely with respondents over a long period of time – months or even years – I nevertheless experienced this lack of (emotional) distance as a result of my engagements with my interview respondents (albeit on a smaller scale). Ethnographers refer to this as 'over-rapport' or what was once described as 'going native', a derogatory term rooted in colonialist rhetoric meant to show the 'negative' impact that studying another culture could have on a researcher, with some never returning home or abandoning their research altogether which was more common "in the early days of fieldwork" (O'Reilly 87). As noted earlier, in my notes I referred to this as "over-identification" which suggested to me a complete collapse of the boundaries between scholar and fan, between self and other, and between feminist researcher and research participant; and that these confusing and awkward feelings were a symptom of this process of undoing and destabilizing the very categories that formed my approach to and understanding of the research process. My initial response to the emotional impact of over-identification took on negative connotations; that I was somehow crossing an emotional boundary that I shouldn't as a researcher but felt compelled nevertheless. Kleinman and Copp argue that over-identification is a good sign, as it marks the researcher's move toward empathy which they contend is necessary to build rapport with respondents although they are wary of the term because it implies there is a "right amount" of identification that a researcher should have with respondents (44). But who decides how much that is or where the boundary exists? Identification most likely shifts from respondent to respondent, and from project to project thus less focus should be placed upon how much or little a researcher responds to respondents emotionally and more about how they deal with it. As O'Reilly reminds us, the qualitative researcher is

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constantly straddling the line "between distance and empathy, insider and stranger" and this uncomfortable position – especially for 'new' researchers – can incite a need "to be accepted" (89). I definitely felt this with more urgency at the beginning of the interview process. I wanted the women to like me and I wanted to like them mostly because I felt that if they didn't they would not want to talk with me or worse, they might decide to discontinue the interview at any moment (which they were perfectly within their right to do as part of the consent process).

However, as a result of 'over-rapporting', and much to my surprise (as I did not anticipate this at all), I began to watch less and less reality TV, especially competition-based shows and definitely the programs that my respondents appeared on (of those that were still on-air). There seemed to be a correlation between how much I 'loved' a program before the interviews, and my complete disengagement with it during. Thus my altered viewing practices signalled how my fandom was beginning to shift as a result of the research process and while I have taken up watchingreality shows once again such as *Top Chef, So You Think You Can Dance,* and *Project Runway*, I do not watch the shows in the same way – I can't. Thus, breathing 'life' into my fandom has given me a new perspective on how I watch reality TV, adding another layer of complexity that did not exist before (despite all of my intellectual work but perhaps the research process intensified or heightened the theoretical), suggesting that I had indeed been listening all along, and that the respondents' insights became a form of knowledge that I was then able to incorporate into my repertoire of reading strategies. Indeed, many of them discussed at length how their reality-participation had similarly altered their understanding and viewing of reality TV. For some this meant that they no longer watched reality shows because of the emotional impact, while for others, they continue to watch their favourite programs. For a few others, their participation ignited an interest in the genre that did not exist prior to their participation and they now watch reality TV. In addition to my growing self-conscious fandom, I also started to see a connection between the interview process and my growing discomfort with some of the terminology commonly used in academic discussions about reality TV such as 'ordinary/extraordinary' which is further complicated by the (feminist) researcher-respondent relationship.

Specter of the 'Ordinary Woman'

During the interview process I became uncomfortably aware of how my fandom identifications positioned the women as Other, often in objectifying ways, despite the promise of unmediated subjectivity proffered by reality TV. This 'otherness', I suggest, is tied to a conception that the contestant moves from an 'ordinary' subject position to one of 'extraordinariness' which is a part of the reality TV narrative as they become successes or famous for 'being themselves'. Therefore I propose that one of the key pleasures derived from watching reality TV is being witness to the celebrification of an ordinary person, in addition to rooting for them to win and so forth.[105] However, how I make sense of that transition as a viewer, or even as a scholar, is not necessarily reflected in how the women, as reality show participants understand this process. In fact, many of them seemed very self-aware about the show's construction of them as 'characters'. In a very crude sense, this process of participant self-reflection forced me to step outside my fandom and to grapple with the ways in which I constructed them as characters or personalities upon which I projected my own desires, wishes, struggles, and so forth. I never had unmediated access to them; they were identifiable to me as ordinary and/or real only insofar as I (and the reality show) constructed them as such and yet by virtue of their appearance on television they were no longer ordinary. For instance as Carlie notes, engaging with her fans was a way to assert control over her image, and an attempt to convey her 'ordinariness':

> I made it a point to answer every email and I still do. ‹laughing› [...] I kind of felt like, I felt a personal responsibility to let these people know that I'm a person, you know what I mean? Like, because they seem to write with such high regard, like I'm this weird you know, higher entity and I'm like, "dude

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[105] Indeed one of the most fascinating aspects of *The Jersey Shore* has been how the producers have not completely tried to ignore the participants celebrity within the diegesis of the show, as every now and then they allow the celebrity to enter into the narrative with shots of people taking pictures of them while they're filming, and even using a 'super-fan' as part of a storyline. Conversely other reality shows like *The Hills* and *Keeping Up With the Kardashians* attempt to separate the 'ordinary' from 'celebrity' even as the participants have become staples of the gossip sites and shows thus contradicting the show's narrative. Meanwhile, other shows like *America's Next Top Model* have become rather explicit in the acknowledging reality TV's role in creating celebrities as the last two seasons have seem preoccupied with 'branding' contestants and teaching them how to become their own personal brand, not just how to be a super model.

I'm just, I'm just a person. I was plucked from life and put on the show like it's not, like don't talk to me like I'm royalty."

Thus, remarks such as this provoked in me a feeling of silliness for being so invested in their personalities and because maybe under certain circumstances I might have been one of those people that wrote to a reality show contestant, as a fan rather than a graduate researcher.

But Carlie's comments also present me with a conundrum for she expresses an explicit desire *not* to be read as "royalty," as "just a person" (presumably) who is not 'special' or 'extraordinary' and most important not *better than* the people writing to her, just because she was on a reality TV show. And yet, her appearance on television, still unique and not accessible to everyone, marks her at least, as *different from* other TV viewers myself included. Thus I would have been woefully naive to think that I was doing the women any kind of favours by interviewing them when they had already been given multiple platforms to have their voices heard, with some already holding name-recognition and successful businesses before reality TV. Moreover, interviewing the women was also an *intimidating* process at times due to the level of success that they had achieved combined with their new found celebrity. This was especially evident with some of the respondents who worked in the fashion industry, who were very articulate, assertive, and confident in their opinions. Even if they are no longer 'ordinary', there is still some bias towards reality show participants, as they are both criticized and celebrated for becoming 'extraordinary' due to their cross over into the media world.

In other interviews, though, the women shared stories with me that illustrated how they were indeed far from ordinary and that their experience of reality competing had placed them as an outsider in their own life – that the ordinary life they once lived was no longer possible as they began to experience an alternate social reality…as one respondent explained:

When I came home I would always be conscious of my mic pack that was not there. Like [if] people are in my peripherals I would completely ignore them because that's like where, like don't engage the crew, like if you weren't in front of me like I wouldn't pay attention to you. At work I was pretty much a write off for like the first couple of weeks I went back to work. My boss was like, "We need to figure out where to put you because you are out of

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> there, like you are not paying attention". I'm like, "I'm sorry but...5 weeks of
> a certain kind of life has changed me a little bit." (Jessica)

In some instances, the respondent, via her insider knowledge, constructed me as an obvious outsider, as I have never been a contestant on a reality show. For example, as "Jessica" subtly reminded me: "I can describe it until I'm blue in the face but no one's ever gonna understand it the way we understand it cuz we were there." Throughout this particular interview my 'outsider' status was acutely felt, as "Jessica" proceeded to describe the competition as a 'war-like' environment from which she emerged a 'veteran': "*Project Runway* was like my version of Vietnam cuz like when I came back I was a little bit weird."

Another former contestant "Suzie" conveyed similar feelings when describing her 'post-show' memories: "I have this perfect memory of walking through the Eaton Center [sic] and just being like, *I'm not this person anymore*. Like I've gone through this war of sorts, and I can't go back to this life and I left [my boyfriend] and moved to LA like to just try and work it out and stuff" (emphasis added). These examples point to the ways in which their narratives via the interview process constructed me as an Other, and as outside the realm of their particular experiences, feelings and memories; and that if I had any notions of hoping to capture or represent any kind of 'truth' about their experiences, I was wasting my time. For the interview process revealed through their reflections that they no longer saw themselves the same way – that the process of participation had forever changed them, transformed them.

Moreover, reflections like these function as a necessary reminder that the women are more than the objects of my fandom; they are subjects who contribute to and construct their own meanings and continue to do so beyond their televisual appearance. As feminist cultural studies scholar Beverley Skeggs writes, "ethnographies are more than just narratives. They relate to a reality that exists before and after the research" ("Situating" 87). Similarly, the women exist outside and beyond the narratives and characters contructed for them on reality television, as well as the research project. As the research process has prompted me to reflect on my own relationship to the dichotomies of self/other and inside/outside, their participation has also prompted them to engage in forms of self-reflection, enacting a dialogue with the self that upsets taken-

for-granted assumptions about who they are, what they know and what they want from life. This speaks to Turner's assertion that the media's "contemporary function is closer to that of a translator or even an author of identities" (*Ordinary People* 3), and my interactions with the women certainly suggest that the act or process of participation certainly had a hand in shaping their identities beyond tele-representation.

Another 'feeling indicator' that signaled how fan identifications were encroaching upon the interview process, was when I experienced feelings of disappointment, although only a few times, when a respondent did not quite fit my tele-perception of her; or to put it another way, the presence of such feelings forced me to contend with my preexisting biases, for unlike other kinds of interviews where you might not have any knowledge of the person – what they look like, act like – until the interview takes place, I was already familiar with many of these women, as 'person-characters' on reality TV, some of whom I really liked and rooted for! Indeed, while I was less surprised to find a respondent to be very assertive, opinionated, and charismatic (that seems to be the coveted personality for reality TV casting), I was somewhat surprised when they seemed less outgoing. Again, this disappointment was premised on an internal bias or expectation that all reality show contestants must be outgoing, loud exhibitionists of sorts suggesting how there can be a 'gap between a celebrity's public persona and the one presented to the researcher' (Rowe 58).[106]

To return to my initial concerns outlined in this section, placing reality show contestants within an ordinary/extraordinary framework becomes problematic when thinking about the researcher-respondent relationship, especially when we take into account feminist criticisms of these debates in feminist television audience ethnographies. Cultural studies scholar Charlotte Brunsdon has shown persuasively how feminist TV scholarship has produced a rather problematic distinction between 'the feminist researcher' and 'the ordinary female viewer' whereby the ordinary woman is usually code for 'feminine' or 'housewife'. At its most paternalistic, the evocation of this

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[106] Kathleen Rowe, in her reflection on interviewing the famous comedic actress Roseanne for her dissertation, notes how she was expecting to meet "the wise-cracking, smart-mouthed jokester" portrayed in television and reported on in the media (58). Instead, she was similarly forced to step back and question this expectation and how this spoke to her own internal biases about 'who' Roseanne was based on her pre-existing knowledge.

binary takes on a 'recruitist' tone (Brunsdon "Identity" 313) with the feminist researcher attempting to raise the feminist consciousness of the 'ordinary woman' based on an unexamined or unacknowledged internal biases and judgments. Brunsdon contends that part of this was the outcome of the institutionalization of feminist cultural criticism – a move from outside to inside the academy – and the (unconscious) desire to distinguish the feminist researcher from the women they were studying. As well, in an attempt to legitimate their own position as 'serious academics', they often employed a rhetorical move that carefully placed them outside the social sphere that the researched occupied.[107] However, postmodern and poststructuralist theory have thrown all of these categories into question, which Brunsdon identified as the third stream within feminist TV criticism; where the category 'woman' is deconstructed along with any notion of a global sisterhood of 'we'. Therefore, it is crucial that we resist the temptation to 'romanticize or stereotype' our relationships with respondents (Reinharz as qtd by Kleinman and Copp 35).

Post-fandom: Moving Forward

My study has opened up new critical pathways, setting the groundwork for future research projects. Exploring the cultural contexts of reality TV participation has led to an immediate interest in production studies of television, and I am particularly keen to expand my framework to include the voices of those working in the margins of television production, namely reality TV crew members. I want to gain a better understanding of the industrial contexts of reality TV production, and how workers (men and women) are affected by economic, social and cultural processes that tend to define the value of their work in negative terms (i.e., non-unionized labour with little job security or benefits), and what this reveals about the changing models of television production and content creation. One of the consistent criticisms of cultural studies television research, especially under the influence of postmodernism, was its reposition of the 'text' as central to its analyses of culture which downplayed or glossed over external socio-

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[107] Brunsdon provides excellent examples from other studies for instance, one academic went out of her way to position herself as 'not a fan'; while another described how she had to be taught 'how to read' soap opera because of course, she was not familiar with the genre.

cultural processes. However, production has always been an important aspect of the cultural studies model of cultural consumption, thus there is an ongoing need to study the industrial constraints placed upon those working/participating in the field of cultural production.[108] This is especially pertinent given the changing conceptions of work in North America, where the creative industries are now taken up by governments as the model by which workers should mould themselves to namely, as entrepreneurial, flexible, and contract-based work (see Deuze 2007). I am particularly interested in this given the plethora of scholarship that focuses on the neoliberalism of reality TV but also in light of recent feminist criticism that identifies how postfeminist discourses of self-empowerment, careerism, and independence are shaping popular representations about women's work.

In addition to questions about 'who' does the work of cultural production in the television industry, I have also become increasingly interested in 'where' such productions take place. A by-product of my study was becoming familiarized with the production of reality TV in Canada, and the Canadian television industry which is, as one would assume markedly different from the US but also similar. As noted elsewhere in this dissertation, through the course of researching and writing, many of the shows that the women competed on, were cancelled and/or placed in indefinite hiatus. Thus, I have lingering questions about the 'place' of reality TV within the Canadian television industry; why do so many shows 'fail' and what does this mean in the long-term for potential future contestants? There is no shortage of home, food and garden programmes on Canadian cable channels but the big competition franchises have not been very successful. Even as I write this, I am aware that *Big Brother Canada* is currently casting, and Citytv recently aired the inaugural season of *The Bachelor Canada*. Moreover, as I mentioned in the Introduction, Vancouver has recently become a 'hotbed' for reality TV production, for example, local production company Lark Productions developed the first Canadian version of the 'Real Houswives' franchise for local audiences becoming Slice network's highest rated premiere ever (Wright). The image of Vancouver conveyed in

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[108] For instance see, Vicki Mayer, *Below the Line: Producers and Production Studies in the New Television Economy* (Duke University Press, 2011); Mayer et al.(eds.), *Production Studies: Cultural Studies of Media Industries* (Routledge, 2009); and John Caldwell, *Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television* (Duke University Press, 2008).

this show is vastly different from that depicted in their other docu-series *Gastown Gamble*, which focuses on a local restauranteur's journey to re-open a landmark business in the Downtown Eastside. This smaller, more personal project will draw on the works of other notable Canadian scholars like Serra Tinic who has contributed significant insights into Vancouver's particular place within Canadian production culture.

Finally, my research project has left room for further investigations of the role that technology, especially social media, plays in facilitating both academic research and television criticism. For one, I want to pursue questions about the connection between academia and the 'interview society', and to continue to experiement with, and find ways to make use of the digital tools at our disposal in ways that enhance the field of feminist qualitative research. The role that social media plays in the interview society, is of particular interest to me. Indeed, my own participation in social media has raised a number of questions about television's continued presence; in some ways reinforcing its importance and centrality to all revolving 'para-texts'. Over the years, many people questioned my interest in reality TV for surely it was a fad; and numerous debates have tried to predict the demise of reality television but none of it has come to pass. Television continues to be a dominant media form in our culture, and I can't wait to see what comes next.

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Appendices

Appendix A.

Women and Reality TV Project: Interview Guide

I would like to interview you today as part of a larger project exploring women's experiences of participating in reality competition/talent TV shows. I would like to hear some of your memories and experiences. I'm particularly interested in hearing your thoughts on all aspects of the experience, in addition to the television appearance, and to reflect on how your experience might relate to other female contestants of RTV.

Maybe we can start with you telling me how and when you first decided to audition for a reality show.

PROMPTS – Experience:

How would you describe your time on the show?

How did your friends and family react to your television appearance? Were they supportive?

Have you shared your experience with many people? Why or why not?

PROMPTS – Benefits/Outcomes:

Did your appearance help you achieve your goals?

Has your appearance afforded you any opportunities that you would not have had otherwise?

Do people recognize you as a former contestant? If so, describe what that feels like.

PROMPTS – Women and Reality TV:

Do you have any thoughts on why people continue to find reality talent and competition shows so appealing (as there seems to be no shortage of applicants)?

There has been a lot of debate about how Reality TV portrays women and reality contestants more generally. What are your thoughts on this? Did you feel 'fairly' represented?

Has your experience changed the way you think about television/the entertainment industry in any way?

Appendix B.

Sample Application (English)

CANADA'S NEXT TOP MODEL

(the "Program")

APPLICATION RULES – 2008 – 2009

(THE "APPLICATION RULES")

THE FOLLOWING APPLICATION RULES CONTAIN CERTAIN CAPITALIZED TERMS WHICH ARE DEFINED THROUGHOUT THE APPLICATION RULES AND/OR UNDER THE HEADING "DEFINITIONS" BELOW

Entry Procedures to the Competition

1.1 The procedures for applying and participation in the Competition are subject to these Application Rules.

1.2 Since the Competition is designed to showcase and judge the talent of Canadians who have roughly the same level of experience and maturity, the Competition is open to females aged between 18 and 23 on Friday, January 30, 2009, who are Canadian citizens and/or permanent residents of Canada and who are at least five feet and eight inches [5'8"]/one hundred seventy-three centimetres [173 cm] in height. Applicants who are currently Minors must have their parent or legal guardian review, approve, and sign the Applicant's Release Form. You are a Minor if you are under the age of 19 and reside in British Columbia, New Brunswick, Yukon, Nunavut, Newfoundland and Labrador or the Northwest Territories or if you are under the age of 18 and reside in Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, Saskatchewan, or Prince Edward Island. Applicants who are Minors and who are submitting their materials online will be asked to provide contact information for their parent/guardian where and when required.

1.3 Applicants must not have had a substantial modelling career (as determined by Producer in its sole discretion) or have modelled in a national advertising campaign in the past five years.

1.4 Applicants cannot have a criminal record or pending criminal charges. Prior to choosing the Participants, the Producer intends to undertake background checks, including criminal background checks.

1.5 Individuals who are employees of, or are domiciled with an employee of, or are a parent, sibling or child of an employee of, the following entities are not eligible to participate in the Competition: the Producer; CBS Paramount International Television; CTVglobemedia Inc.; the Host; the Judges; their respective advertising and promotional agencies; any person or entity connected with the production, administration or judging of the auditions or the Program, affiliates, subsidiaries, agents or representatives of any of the above entities.

1.6 No Applicant will be considered without submitting to the Producer the following items (the "Application Package"):

   a)   a fully completed official Application;

   b)   a signed Applicant's Release Form. If you are applying online you will need to indicate your acceptance of the Applicant's Release Form when submitting your application; a recorded audition submitted on VHS, DVD or MiniDV or via our online submission website ("Recorded Audition") which should be no longer than five minutes. Please note that the production standard of the Recorded Audition will have no bearing on our decision.

   c)   • Tell us why you want: (a) to be on television and (b) to be a Top Model and let your personality shine through!
      • Tell us your name
      • your age
      • your height and measurements
      • your address and phone number
      • your email address
      • Include a full length (head to toe) runway shot: walk towards the camera, stop, turn and walk away from the camera
      • Include a full-length bikini swimsuit shot
      • Include a close-up of your face without makeup
      • Shoot your audition against a blank background this means no posters, photos, artwork, etc. Do not wear any clothing that has a logo, brand name or image on it
      • If you are mailing in your Recorded Audition, make sure it is clearly labelled with your name and phone number on the tape/DVD/disc itself (not the case)
      • Please check and double check that your Recorded Audition is complete and properly recorded;

   d)   your photograph:
      • Include a photograph of yourself, taken within the last six months

- Make sure photograph has your name and phone number on the back; and

e) valid proof of age and photo identification (such as a copy of your birth certificate and driver's license, or a copy of your passport). If you are applying online, please keep these documents on hand so that you may produce them in the event that you are contacted by the Producer. PLEASE DO NOT SEND ORIGINAL DOCUMENTS.

Please note that materials in the Application Package cannot be returned and will become the property of the Producer.

If you are submitting your application package online, please ensure that your application materials (photographs and video) meet the following requirements:
- Photos/Images: GIF, JPG, JPEG, PNG, PCT, TGA, TIFF
- Recorded Audition: Sorenson, MOV, DV, MPG, MPEG, WMV, AVI, DIVX, Cinepak, XVID, or Indeo5. For webcam applications, video may be 150 mb maximum file size.

1.7 ENTRIES MAY BE MAILED OR SUBMITTED ONLINE. ALL ENTRIES MUST BE RECEIVED BY 5:00 p.m. (E.S.T.), Monday, December 22nd, 2008.

If you are mailing your application package, please send it to:

Canada's Next Top Model Season 3
145 The West Mall
P.O. Box 5500
Etobicoke, Ontario
M9A 6T6

If you are submitting your application package online, you will need to create an account on our application website (www.model.ctv.ca) and you will need to be able to upload your audition video and photographs. If you are applying online and you are a Minor, we may need to contact your parent/legal guardian in order to confirm his or her consent – please ensure you include your parent/legal guardian's name and contact number.

2. **Telephone Contact**

2.1 The Producer plans to contact by phone all potential Finalists no later than 8:00 p.m. (E.S.T.) Friday, January 16, 2009. The Producer may at that time schedule a Regional Audition (as described further below) and/or conduct a telephone interview ("Telephone Interview"). The Telephone Interview, if conducted, will be recorded and may be used by the Producer in the Program. If a Telephone Interview is conducted, the Producer may schedule a Regional Audition during the Telephone Interview, or may not

schedule a Regional Audition during the Telephone Interview. If the Producer does not schedule a Regional Audition during the Telephone Interview, the Producer may subsequently contact the Applicant to schedule a Regional Audition.

2.2   If the Producer has not contacted an Applicant to schedule a Regional Audition on or before 8:00 p.m. (E.S.T), Friday, January 16, 2009, such Applicant has not been selected as a Finalist. The Producer shall not be obligated to notify unsuccessful Applicants. The Producer is not liable for any loss of opportunity as a result of the Producer not being able to contact an Applicant by phone.

3.   **Regional Auditions**

3.1   Regional auditions ("Regional Auditions") shall be held by the Producer in certain cities. The Producer will advise each Applicant who is invited to a Regional Audition (a "Finalist") of the specified location, date and time for the Regional Audition. The Producer is not liable for any loss of opportunity as a result of a Finalist not being able to attend the Regional Audition at the specified location on the specified date and time. Finalists are responsible for their own travel and accommodation expenses in attending the Regional Audition.

3.2   Finalists who attend at a Regional Audition will be interviewed by the Producer, and Producer's designated representatives, who may include a psychologist or other health professional, experts in the modelling industry, and/or the Host (and and all of the foregoing are referred to as "Producer's Designated Representatives"). Finalists may be asked to walk the "runway" and pose for photographs. The Regional Auditions will be taped and may be used in the Program. Any photographs or audio visual materials taken at the Regional Audition shall be the property of the Producer and may be used in the Program.

4.   **Selection of Participants**

4.1   No later than 8:00 p.m. (E.S.T.), Monday, February 2, 2009, the Producer will contact by phone 10 or more of the Finalists to invite them to be Participants in the Competition. The Producer shall not be obligated to notify unsuccessful Finalists. If any of the Finalists invited to be Participants chooses not to be a Participant, or is or becomes ineligible to be a Participant, the Producer may contact another Finalist to invite her to be a Participant. The invitation to be a Participant is nontransferable, nonexchangeable and has no cash value. NOTE: All of the above

mentioned dates may be modified by the Producer in its sole discretion if required as a result of production exigencies.

5. **The Competition**

5.1 The Competition is currently scheduled to be held in and around February/March 2009. Appropriate transportation and accommodation arrangements during the Competition will be organized and paid for by the Producer.

5.2 A Finalist who is invited by the Producer to be a Participant will be required to, among other things:

   a) read, approve and sign a release form provided by the Producer (the "Participant's Release Form"). If such Finalist is a Minor, have her parent or legal guardian read, approve and sign the Participant's Release Form. A Finalist who does not submit the Participant's Release Form signed by herself (and her parent or legal guardian if required) will not be permitted to participate in the Competition;

   b) read, approve and sign a confidentiality agreement provided by the Producer (the "Confidentiality Agreement") in which she will agree to keep any and all information regarding the Competition completely confidential and to not conduct any interviews or provide any comment or information to the public and the media without the consent of the Producer, including without limitation, information regarding the outcome of the Program, the performances of any Participant including her own performance and any and all comments of the Judges, Host, Producer and Producer's Designated Representatives. If such Finalist is a Minor, have her parent or legal guardian read, approve and sign the Confidentiality Agreement. A Finalist who does not submit the Confidentiality Agreement signed by herself (and her parent or legal guardian if required) will not be permitted to participate in the Competition;

   c) if a Finalist is currently represented by an agent or manager, such Finalist shall be required to terminate such representation and provide Producer with evidence satisfactory to Producer of such termination;

   d) provide to Producer additional personal, medical, and psychological information, including the results of a medical examination;

e) undergo a mental health examination; and

f) be available exclusively for up to five weeks (currently scheduled to commence midFebruary 2009, but subject to change in the Producer's discretion).

5.3 Participants will be chosen based upon their Application Packages, their Telephone Interview (if conducted), and their Regional Audition (if applicable), all of which will be assessed by the Producer, Producer's Designated Representatives, and/or CTVglobemedia Inc. The Producer, Producer's Designated Representatives, and/or CTVglobemedia Inc. will consider subjective factors including an Applicant's charisma, poise, personality, and appearance, with a view to choosing a cross-section of Applicants to be Participants. If at any time an Applicant cannot be contacted by phone, or if the Applicant does not meet the eligibility requirements, or if the Applicant's Application Package is not complete, such Applicant will not be eligible to be a Participant.

5.4 The Finalists chosen to be Participants will be publicly announced on or about May 1, 2009 in Toronto, Ontario.

6. **General Rules of the Competition**

6.1 The Producer reserves the right to change the structure of the Competition as it sees fit including, without limitation, adding or deleting Participants to the Competition and/or requesting additional materials from the Applicants and/or changing the anticipated production schedule. Producer reserves the right to cancel, terminate or suspend the Competition in whole or in part or to amend these Application Rules if for any reason the Competition is not capable of running as planned.

6.2 It is a condition of entry and participation in the Competition that Applicants abide by the terms and conditions of all applicable Release Forms and the rules, regulations, terms and conditions as devised from time to time by the Producer including but not by way of limitation these Application Rules. If an Applicant is chosen to be a Participant, the Producer may require such Applicant to participate in any online/interactive activity relating to the Program including without limitation recordings of webcasts, writing of blogs, interviews and participation in so-called 'chat-rooms' and to participate in various interviews, appearances, promotional, publicity, sponsorship and merchandising activities.

6.3 Each Applicant selected to participate as a Participant shall agree to restrictions on her ability to appear on television and other entertainment media and to model for a period of time prior to, during, and after the airing of the Program.

6.4   The decision of the Producer and Producer's Designated Representatives regarding the selection of the Participants from the Applicants is final and the Applicants acknowledge that the interests of the Program shall override those of any Applicant.

6.5   The Producer has the right at any time to require proof of identity and/or eligibility from an Applicant. Failure to provide such proof within a reasonable time could result in disqualification from the Competition. All personal details and information requested by and supplied to the Producer by each Applicant including but not by way of limitation information provided in the Application Package, must be truthful, accurate and in no way misleading. The Producer reserves the right to disqualify any Applicant from consideration as a Participant or disqualify any Participant from the Competition in its sole discretion, should the Applicant or Participant, as applicable, at any stage supply untruthful, inaccurate or misleading personal details and/or information or should the Applicant or Participant, as applicable, be ineligible for the Competition pursuant to these Application Rules.

6.6   The Producer will have no liability to an Applicant who provides incorrect contact information, an incomplete Application Package, whose Application Package is not received by 5:00 p.m. (E.S.T.), Monday, December 22nd , 2008, or who is unable to attend or take part in any part of the application process or the Competition for whatever reason, as determined by the Producer in its sole discretion.

6.7   Producer reserves the right to amend the Application Rules or terminate the Competition at any time without any liability to any Applicant or Participant. The Producer further reserves the right to replace at its discretion any Participant who for any reason fails or is disqualified from or unable to participate in any aspect of the Program and/or Competition, as determined by the Producer in its sole discretion, with another replacement Participant, notwithstanding that such replacement Participant may have been previously eliminated from the application process or the Competition.

6.8   There is no obligation on the part of the Producer to record or broadcast any Program in which an Applicant has appeared or any part of his/her contribution to a Program.

6.9   An Applicant selected to be a Participant must at all times behave appropriately when taking part in the Competition and observe these Application Rules and any other rules or regulations in force at the studios and/or locations. The Producer reserves the right in its absolute discretion to remove from the Competition, studio premises or location any Participant who breaks such rules and/or fails to behave appropriately and to disqualify such Participant.

6.10   All Applicants agree that the Producer and its agents can in connection
        with the Program, any subsequent seasons of the Program, and any
        ancillary or related productions, including "making-of" and "behind-the-
        scenes" productions (collectively, the "Series"), use, exploit and distribute,
        in any media whatsoever, now known or hereafter created, including
        without limitation the Internet, worldwide in perpetuity, the Applicant's
        Application Package (including the Applicant's audition tape and
        photographs), performances and appearances, the Applicant's comments
        and the Applicant's name, likeness, image or voice without any further
        consent or compensation of any nature or kind. All Applicants agree to
        waive any and all copyright interest, of any nature or kind, they may have
        in their comments, audition(s), performances and appearances, including
        without limitation any moral rights in the foregoing.

6.11   Applicants acknowledge that the Producer, CBS Paramount International
        Television; CTVglobemedia Inc., the Host, the Judges, the advertising
        agencies and any person or entity connected with the production,
        administration or judging of the auditions, the Competition or the Program,
        and any of their respective parent companies, affiliates, subsidiaries,
        agents or representatives, are not responsible for and are in no way liable
        for any injuries, loss or damages related to the Competition or the
        Program, including but not limited to injuries, loss or damage directly or
        indirectly caused by: (i) the administration (including scheduling) of the
        Competition including any failure of transportation or inability for any
        reason to appear before the judging panels; (ii) the Competitors or any
        third party's participation in the application process, or being selected or
        disqualified; (iii) as a result of the decisions of the Judges or Producers; or
        (iv) any printing, typographical or technological errors in any materials
        associated with the Competition.

6.12   In the event of any dispute concerning the operation of any element of the
        Competition or these Application Rules, the decision of the Producer will
        be final.

6.13   These Application Rules are additional to and do not supersede any and
        all Release Forms signed by the Applicant and in the event of any conflict
        between any Release Form and these Application Rules, the Release
        Form will prevail.

6.14   The application to the Competition by an Applicant is subject to all federal,
        provincial and local laws and regulations and is void where prohibited.

6.15   Personal information collected on the Competition will be used as
        described on these Application Rules and as otherwise described in the
        Application and Applicant's Release Form.

7. Definitions

"Applicant"	An individual who submits an Application Package to the Producer.
"Applicant's Release Form"	The release form that must be completed by the Applicant and included in the Applicant's Application Package in order for the Applicant to be considered for selection as a Participant.
"Application"	The application that must be completed by the Applicant and included in the Applicant's Application Package in order for the Applicant to be considered for selection as a Participant.
"Application Package"	The materials required to be submitted by an Applicant in order for the Applicant to be considered for selection as a Participant, as set out in Section 1.6 above.
"Competition"	The modelling competition comprised within the Program wherein Applicants will be chosen to be Participants and compete against one another for the title of "Canada's Next Top Model". The Participants will face daily tests that determine whether they can make the cut as a professional model. Participants will be required to demonstrate both inner and outer beauty as they learn to master complicated catwalks, intense physical fitness, fashion photo shoots and perfect publicity skills, all under 24-hour-a-day surveillance of cameras that chronicle every move. It is intended that the winner of the Competition will ultimately be selected by the Judges, the Host and the Producer based on a combination of factors, including the Participant's poise, stage presence, charisma, and physical beauty.
"Finalist"	An Applicant who is invited to participate in a Regional Audition.
"Host"	Such person(s) as the Producer may nominate from time to time to act as host of the Program.
"Judges"	Such person(s) as the Producer may nominate from time to time to act as judges of the Competition.
"Minor"	A person under the age of 19 who resides in British Columbia, New Brunswick, Yukon, Nunavut, Newfoundland and Labrador or the Northwest Territories or a person under the age of 18 who resides in Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, Saskatchewan, or Prince Edward Island.
"Participant"	An Applicant chosen by the Judges, the Host, and/or the Producer to participate in the Competition and who is eligible to participate.
"Producer"	Top Model III Productions Limited and its employees, licensees, assignees, parent, affiliated and subsidiary companies, and its authorized representatives.
"Producer's Designated Representative"	Those individuals designated by the Producer to represent the Producer in connection with the Competition. Such individuals may include the Host, an expert in the modelling industry, and a psychologist or other health professional.
"Program"	The television program currently titled "Canada's Next Top Model" incorporating the Competition.

"Regional Audition"	One of at least 5 regional auditions to be held by the Producer in at least 5 Canadian cities chosen by the Producer in its sole discretion.
"Release Form(s)"	Any release form supplied from time to time by the Producer which Applicants are required to sign in connection with the Program. These include, without limitation, the Applicant's Release Form and the Participant's Release Form.
"Series"	The Program, any subsequent seasons of the Program, and any ancillary or related productions, including "making-of" and "behind-the-scenes" productions.
"Telephone Interview"	A follow-up telephone interview between the Producer and an Applicant.

CANADA'S NEXT TOP MODEL

(the "Program")

APPLICANT'S RELEASE FORM

NOTE: YOU MUST PROVIDE A FULLY SIGNED COPY OF THIS RELEASE FORM WITH YOUR APPLICATION PACKAGE.

1. I represent and warrant that I am or will be between the ages of 18 and 23 as of January 30, 2009, and am a Canadian citizen and/or permanent resident of Canada. I am legally able to work in Canada and I do not have a criminal record or pending criminal charges that may interfere with my ability to travel freely around the world.

2. I further represent that I am not an employee of, or live with an employee of, or am a parent, sibling or child of an employee of, the following entities: Top Model III Productions Limited; CTVglobemedia Inc.; CBS Paramount International Television; the judges of the Program; the host of the Program; their respective advertising and promotional agencies; any other person or entity connected with the production, administration or judging of the application packages (including the application home videos) or the Program; and the parent companies, affiliates, subsidiaries, agents or representatives of any of the above entities.

3. I have read and agree to abide by the application rules (the "Application Rules") as revised from time to time by Top Model III Productions Limited and/or any of its licensees, parent companies, affiliates, subsidiaries, agents or representatives (collectively, the "Producer") and accept all decisions of the Producer with respect to the application process and the Program as final and hereby acknowledge that the interests of the Program shall override those of any Applicant.

4. I have answered all questions in the Application honestly and accurately and will answer all questions posed to me by the Producer honestly and accurately. If any of the information that I have provided or will provide is found to be false or incomplete,

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it may be grounds for the rejection of my Application, and/or my being dismissed as a Program participant (a "Participant"), if selected as a Participant. Even if I meet the eligibility requirements, the Producer has no obligation to conduct any initial and/or follow up interview with me, select me to attend at a regional audition, and/or select me as a Participant. Even if I am selected as a Participant, the Producer has no obligation to produce the Program and the Producer has no obligation to broadcast it, even if it is produced. All decisions by the Producer concerning selection of the Applicants as Participants are final and not subject to challenge or appeal. The Producer shall own and shall have no obligation to return or maintain any materials submitted by me as part of my application whether or not I am or am not selected as a Participant.

5. I hereby assign irrevocably to the Producer the entire copyright and all other rights of whatsoever nature in and to the application materials (including, but not limited to, my video audition tape, photographs and Application), any recorded telephone conversations between myself and the Producer or its representative, and my recorded regional audition, if any (collectively, the "Materials") and my voice (including without limitation, my speaking and singing voices), actions, likeness, name, appearance, biographical material, and any comments ascribed to me based on my Materials (collectively, "Likeness"), such that the Producer shall be entitled to use and exploit the Materials and my Likeness and may alter or modify my Likeness (regardless of whether or not I am recognizable) and license others to use and exploit such Materials and my Likeness in connection with the Program and alter or modify my Likeness (regardless of whether or not I am recognizable), in whole or in part, by all means and in all media and formats whether now known or hereafter invented throughout the Universe for the full term of copyright and thereafter insofar as is possible in perpetuity in connection with the Program, any subsequent seasons of the Program, and any ancillary or related productions, including "making-of" and "behind-the-scenes" productions (collectively, the "Series"). I acknowledge and understand that my Likeness and Materials may be distributed over the internet, through mobile networks and through other media in connection with the promotion and exploitation of the Program. Furthermore, I irrevocably waive any and all moral rights to the extent that they may be waived, including without limitation, the rights of integrity, attribution and association, to which I am now or may later become entitled in any part of the world, and grant any additional rights under the Canadian *Copyright Act* (and any amendment or re-enactment thereof) and under all similar or other laws in any part of the world that may create rights in the Material, including without limitation any and all personality and privacy rights, to enable the Producer to make fullest use of the Material without restriction in connection with the Program. For greater certainty, and not in limitation of the foregoing, I acknowledge and agree that Producer and its licensees can exploit and distribute my audition tape, regional audition and the rest of my Material via any media, including internet and mobile networks (for example, Producer and its licensees may post my audition tape and regional audition, as well as the rest of the Material, on the internet).

6. Producer may use and license others to use my Likeness and the Materials in connection with any promotion, publicity, marketing or advertisement for the Series or any exploitation of the Series of any kind. I grant the rights hereunder whether or not I am selected as a Participant.

7. I hereby release Producer from any and all liability arising out of its use of my Likeness and/or the Materials. I agree not to make any claim against Producer as a result of the recording or use of my Likeness and/or Materials (including, without limitation, any claim that such use invades any right of privacy and/or publicity and any claims based on defamation or libel or false light).

8. To the degree that the Materials include any musical or literary compositions in which I (partially or wholly) own, of to which I purport to (partially or wholly) own the copyright or any publishing rights, I hereby grant to the Producer, and have the complete, unfettered right to grant the Producer, an irrevocable, unlimited, perpetual, worldwide, royalty and payment-free license to use and reproduce such Materials in the Series and in connection with any promotion, publicity, marketing or advertisement for the Series or any exploitation of the Series of any kind, in any and all media now known or which may exist in the future. I understand that the Producer makes no representation that such Materials will or will not be used in anyway.

9. I understand that all information that I provide to the Producer in the Materials in order to qualify me for consideration as a Participant and, if selected as a Participant, for the opportunity to compete for the role of Canada's Next Top Model, will be used solely for the purpose of making casting and other similar decisions for the production (and public viewing) of the Series. This includes, in Producer's sole discretion, conducting background checks to verify my identity and stated history. By submitting my Materials I authorize Producer and/or its authorized agents to undertake a background investigation including, but not limited to, a criminal background check, a previous employment check, a references check, an education verification check and verification of any and all information I have provided to Producer and its authorized representatives, and I authorize all corporations, companies, educational institutions, persons, law enforcement agencies, criminal, civil and federal courts, and former employers to release information they may have about me to the Producer and its authorize representatives. I understand that in the course of these investigations, the Producer may be required to disclose to these entities personal information that I have provided to Producer or that Producer has obtained from third parties. In the event that Producer thinks, in its sole discretion, that disclosure to a third party is necessary to carry out any services Producer requires to produce the Program, I authorize Producer to disclose my personal information to these service providers. By submitting my application materials to the Producer I consent to the collection, use and disclosure of my personal information in the ways stated in this paragraph on the understanding that Producer will not use the Materials (including your home video audition tape, photographs or other personal information) for any other purpose not disclosed in this paragraph and the Application Rules without contacting me first for my permission to do so. I hereby release Producer from any and all liability arising out of its collection, use and disclosure of my personal information in the ways stated in the paragraph and agree not to make any claim against Producer in respect of such use (including, without limitation, any claim that such use invades any right of privacy and/or publicity and any claims based on defamation or libel or false light).

10. I acknowledge that no fees, royalties, residuals or other consideration will be payable to me in respect of any broadcast, subsequent rebroadcast or retransmission or any other use by the Producer (or any assignees or licensees) of the Series, the Materials or my Likeness or any part thereof in any manner or media now known or hereafter invented.

11. The Producer shall not be liable to me or my legal representative for any loss or damage to me or my property caused by or suffered during or in connection with Producer's use of the Materials and my Likeness, including without limitation, as a result of invasion of privacy, libel, defamation or infringement of copyright.

12. The Courts of Ontario shall have sole jurisdiction in relation to the terms and conditions of this release which shall be interpreted according to the laws of Ontario and the laws of Canada applicable therein, without regards to conflict of laws.

13. Any provision of this release that is invalid, illegal or unenforceable in any jurisdiction will, as to that jurisdiction, be ineffective only to the extent of such invalidity, illegality or unenforceability, without affecting in anyway the remaining provisions hereof in such jurisdiction or rendering that or any other provision of this release invalid, illegal or unenforceable in any other jurisdiction.

14. I understand and agree that no failure or delay of Producer in exercising its right, power or privilege hereunder shall operate as a waiver thereof, nor shall any single or partial exercise thereof preclude any other or further exercise thereof or the exercise of any right, power or privilege hereunder.

[SIGNATURES TO FOLLOW ON NEXT PAGE]

I have signed this release on the _____ day of _____, 2008.

Signature   Signature of

of Applicant: _____   Witness:_____

Name of   Name of

Applicant: _____ Witness:_____

   (Please print first and last name)   (Please print first and last name)

Date of Birth of Applicant: _____

Address of Applicant: _____

                    _____

                    _____

IMPORTANT-FOR COMPETITORS WHO ARE MINORS

If you are currently 17 years old, but will be 18 years old on January 30, 2009, regardless of where you reside, you MUST have this form signed below by your parent or legal guardian and their signature must be witnessed by someone at least 19 years old in order for us to consider your application. If you reside in British Columbia, New Brunswick, Nunavut, Northwest Territories, Nova Scotia, Yukon or Newfoundland & Labrador and are currently under the age of 19, you MUST have this form signed below by your parent or legal guardian and their signature must be witnessed by someone at least 19 years old in order for us to consider your application.

PARENT/GUARDIAN CONSENTS TO THE ABOVENAMED PERSON APPLYING TO BE CONSIDERED AS A PARTICIPANT IN THE PROGRAM UNDER THE TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF THIS RELEASE.

Signature of   Signature of

Parent/Guardian:_____ Witness:_____

Name of   Name of

Parent/Guardian:_____ Witness:_____

 (Please print first and last name)   (Please print first and last name)

Relationship to Competitor:_____

Address of   Telephone Number

Parent/Guardian:_____ of Parent/Guardian:_____

                    _____

Date signed by Parent/Guardian:_____

Canada's Next Top Model

APPLICATION

Please read the preceding Application Rules before completing this Application. The Application Rules contain important instructions regarding your recorded audition, photographs and other items, which must accompany any submitted Application, as well as submission guidelines for your Application Packages.

Remember, above all else, you must BE HONEST! Don't try to give us the answer that you think we want to hear – tell us who you really are, and give us your opinions. If you run out of room, write on the back of the page. THE PRODUCERS ARE LOOKING FOR A DYNAMIC GROUP OF INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE ARTICULATE, INTERESTING AND EXHIBIT ENTHUSIASM FOR THE SERIES AND WHO ARE WILLING TO SHARE THEIR MOST PRIVATE THOUGHTS IN AN OPEN FORUM OF STRANGERS. PARTICIPANTS MUST HAVE SUFFICIENT PHYSICAL, PSYCHOLOGICAL, AND MENTAL CAPACITY TO ENDURE OVER A MONTH IN A MONITORED HOUSE UNDER EXTRAORDINARY CONDITIONS.

PLEASE NOTE: All information that you provide to us in this Application in order to qualify you for consideration as a Participant in our competition and, if you are selected as a Participant, for the opportunity to compete for the role of Canada's Next Top Model, will be used solely for the purpose of making casting and other similar decisions for the production (and public viewing) of "Canada's Next Top Model" (the "Program"), and the information you provide may be incorporated into the Program and any subsequent seasons of the Program, and any ancillary or related productions, including "making-of" and "behind-the-scenes" productions (collectively, the "Series"). You agree that we may, in our sole discretion, conduct background checks to verify your identity and stated history. By submitting your Application Package you authorize us (i.e. Top Model III Productions Limited and CTVglobemedia Inc.) and/or our authorized agents to undertake a background investigation including, but not limited to, a criminal background check, a previous employment check, a references check, an education verification check and verification of any and all information you have provided, and you authorize all corporations, companies, educational institutions, persons, law enforcement agencies, criminal, civil and federal courts, and former employers to release information they may have about you. In the course of these investigations, we may be required to disclose to these entities personal information that you have provided to us or that we have obtained from third parties. In the event that we think, in our sole discretion, that disclosure to a third party is necessary to carry out any services we require to produce the show, you authorize us to disclose your personal information to these service providers. By submitting your Application Package to the address listed in the Application Rules, you consent to the collection, use and disclosure of your personal information in the ways stated in this paragraph. We will not use your Application Package (including your home video audition tape, photographs or other personal information) for any other purpose not disclosed in this paragraph, the Application Rules and/or the Applicant's Release Form without contacting you first for your permission to do so.

Section I: The Basics

1. First Name _____

Middle Name_____

Last Name_____

Social Insurance Number_____

Driver's License Number_____

Current Occupation_____

2. Have you ever, formally or otherwise, changed your name or used an alias or another name? If so, what other names and/or aliases have you used?

3. Date of Birth (Month/Day/Year):

Age as of today:

4. Height and Weight (PLEASE NOTE: You must be at least five feet and eight inches [5'8"]/one hundred seventy-three centimeters [173 cm] in height to be eligible. However the Producers are looking for a variety of models, including plus size models.)
Bust, hips, waist measurements:
Bust:
Hips:
Waist:

5. Are you a permanent resident of Canada? YES/NO
Do you have a current passport? YES/NO
If yes, expiration date

(PLEASE NOTE: Participants on the show may be required to travel internationally.)

6. Home Street Address
City
Province
Postal Code

7. Phone (Daytime)
Phone (Evening)
Cellular/Pager

8. Name and Phone number of an emergency contact, and relationship to you.

9. Email address (if you don't have one please tell us why!)

10. Do you have a website and/or do you belong to any online communities (Facebook, MySpace, friendster, etc.)? If so, what are your addresses (please list all):

11. Marital status (Circle one of (a) through (g) and answer each of the accompanying questions as applicable)
(a) SINGLE
(b) BOYFRIEND/GIRLFRIEND
How long?

(c) MARRIED
How long?
How many times?

(d) NOT MARRIED BUT LIVE WITH SIGNIFICANT OTHER
How long?

(e) SEPARATED
How long?

(f) DIVORCED
How Long?
How many times?

(g) WIDOWED
How long?

12. What is the highest level of education you've completed? Circle all that apply and provide details as indicated plus the name of the school(s) and city/province.
(a) HIGH SCHOOL
(b) COLLEGE DEGREE (specify Major/Minor)
(c) UNIVERSITY UNDERGRADUATE DEGREE (specify Major/Minor)
(d) MASTER'S DEGREE (specify area of study)
(e) PROFESSIONAL OR DOCTORAL DEGREE (specify area of study)
(f) OTHER TRAINING

Section II: Modeling Experience

13. Are you currently or have you ever been represented by an agent or manager? If so, please specify what the representation covers or covered (e.g., modeling or acting).

PLEASE NOTE: If you are currently represented by an agent or manager and are selected to be interviewed, you must furnish sufficient evidence to the Producers that you are able to terminate such representation in the event that you are selected to participate in the show. If selected to participate in the show, you must terminate, prior to your participation, any representation which conflicts with the terms of your participation.

14. If you currently have a modeling contract please list the name and address of the entity with which you currently have such a modeling contract.

15. If you don't have a modeling contract at the moment, have you in the past? If so, please list the name and address of the entity with which you had such a modeling contract.

16. Do you have any experience as a model OF ANY KIND? If so, please explain in detail, including when you modeled, what kind of work you did, etc.

PLEASE NOTE: You are not eligible if you have modeled in a national campaign within the last five (5) years.

17. Have you ever appeared in any magazines? If so, which magazine and in which issue? If possible, include a photocopy in your Application package.

If applying online, please be prepared to produce these items if requested.

18. Are you a member of any professional performing arts unions (e.g. ACTRA, SAG, or Equity)? If so, which one(s)?

Section III: Legal Matters

19. Have you ever been arrested? If so, tell us about it (including date, city and province).

PLEASE NOTE: We will be performing background checks.

20. If you were arrested, were you ever charged or convicted?

21. Have you ever had a restraining order issued against you? If so, tell us about it (include dates, city and province)

22. Have you ever had a restraining order issued against someone else? If so, without giving us the actual name of the person or persons against whom the restraining order was issued, explain the circumstances of the restraining order, including the date, city and province.

23. Are you involved in any pending litigation? If so, tell us about it (include dates).

Section IV: Medical

PLEASE NOTE: if you are chosen as a Finalist, you will be required to provide to Producer a letter from your family doctor confirming that you have had a general medical examination in the last 12 months and that your doctor believes that you are fit to undertake the level of activity and emotional stress required in connection with the Series.

24. Have you been treated for any serious physical illness or injury within the last five (5) years? (Circle one)
    (a) YES
    (b) NO

25. If you answered "yes" in question 24, please describe in detail, indicating dates, diagnoses and any ongoing treatments or difficulties.

26. Please list any allergies you have (medication, food, hay fever, dust, etc.) and your current treatment for them (if any).

27. Have you ever been diagnosed with, or treated for, alcoholism or any other drug-related addiction? If so, please provide more details, including how long you've been in recovery, if that's the case.

28. Do you suffer from, or have you suffered in the past from, depression, anxiety or any other emotional, psychological or mental health issues?

29. Have you been treated for any psychological, mental health or emotional issues?

30. Are you on any medication or other treatment for your psychological, mental health or emotional issues?

31. Do you smoke? If so, what do you smoke and how often?

32. Do you drink alcohol? If so, how often do you drink and how much (honestly).